Brian Evenson

A movement from a position of faith to a position of unbelief[*]

LUCSoR

MA Thesis

Student: Isabelle Wagner

Studentnumber: 1573802

Supervisor: prof. dr. E.G.E. van der Wall

Second reader: dr. M.A. Davidsen

Date: 16 june 2016

[*] Evenson 2006, p. 221.

Table of content

Introduction

This MA-thesis aims to document how the development of faith can be seen in the literary work of a person who moved from belief and participation in a certain religion to skepticism and excommunication. In what follows the focus will be on Brian Evenson, author of Horror and Science Fiction, who was an active member of the Church of Latter Day Saints (LDS) until he asked for his excommunication in 2000 in order to pursue his art. Evenson's literary output ranges over a time when he was faithful, holding a church office as a lay bishop and working for the Mormon Brigham Young University until the present day, having become very critical towards specific aspects of the LDS church and of the concept of religion in general. His conflict with the church and his struggle with faith can be traced through specific recurring topoi in his stories and through the themes which dominate his writing. Furthermore, Evenson has repeatedly discussed in interviews, essays and epilogs of his books how his personal life influences his writing, thereby allowing one to draw a connection between his religious development and writing. He uses his fiction to pose moral questions, and, moreover, as a tool to express philosophical principles influenced by thinkers such as Heidegger, Zapffe, Deleuze and Guttari. Evenson's prose is driven by an obsession with language and the constant questioning of the validity of knowledge and reality, with an aim to deconstruct concepts and structures, which he supposes are not as fixed as humanity conceives them to be.[1]

In the beginning of his career Evenson was still arguing for the place his literature should take in the cannon of Mormon writing, to later give up on this struggle in order to liberate himself from the censorship he felt the church was imposing on his artistic freedom. Both are issues he directly addresses in his fiction. This change in Evenson's attitude can be seen through a shift in his writing and the way he depicts religion in his work. This thesis aims to map out a landscape of Evenson's changing beliefs through his written word and by identifying specific issues he picks up, giving an overarching view from his first publication to the present time. Evenson is a prolific writer, who has published 19 works of fiction up till today, additionally translating French literature and producing academic work. Especially in regard to his many short story collections this all-incorporating approach only allows a limited view on his work. The well-chosen composition of these story collections in regard to the narratives usually having a similarity in style, exploring one specific topic allows it to get a general sense through an exemplary look into one or two of their stories.

The structure of this thesis follows the publications in chronological order in order to give a general temporal guideline coinciding with Evenson's mental shift towards atheism, although this brings up a challenge with regard to the discrepancy between the times some of his works were written and published. A number of specific works will be discussed in more detail than others, as they mark

[1] See Evenson, Owen 2010.

cornerstones and major shifts in Evenson's life. This study does not have the capacity to provide an in-depth analysis of each piece of writing, in order to give an all-incorporating perspective. Many of the sources for this thesis are Internet based, in regard to the reviews and interviews, since Evenson's work is mostly discussed in the realm of the literary blog.

The thesis is structured as follows. Firstly Brian Evenson will be introduced, with a focus on his relationship to the LDS church. To fully understand the background of Evenson's writing, Mormon Literature and Literary Criticism will be discussed. Especially Mormon Literary Criticism is important, since it functions as a basis of defining Mormon Literature, setting the rules for a writer's acceptance. Furthermore the genre of Horror Literature will be looked at in its historical context, showing what position it has as a medium of social critique and as an integral part of American Literature. Thereby the two main categories into which Evenson's writing can be placed are introduced. His work will be divided into three different parts, to better track his development: (1) the writing published before his decision to leave the LDS church; (2) the book which was written alongside Evenson's choice to be excommunicated; and (3) everything written thereafter. In pursuit of the question, how Evenson's position to his religion and faith is displayed in all his writing a very particular focus is placed, drawing certain limitations. The approach is historical in the sense that his work will be regarded in light of the developments in his personal life. The same question will be posed to the different texts: how are the topics of religion, worldview, and faith portrayed in the narrative? By taking this angle many aspects of the text will not be discussed, and some books will be of lesser interest. However, every publication will be touched upon to get a sense of the dynamics displayed in Evenson's writing and in order to understand the position religion holds as a subject in his work. In the conclusion the major outline will be traced, displaying the attitude towards religion and faith, as it can be seen in Evenson's literary work.

1. Brian Evenson – Between Art and Religion

Brian Evenson is an internationally published writer and currently a Royce Professor of Teaching Excellence at Brown University's Literary Arts department. His writing is at home in the genres of Horror Fiction and Science Fiction, although he intentionally dilutes and destabilizes the genre boarders. Additionally he translates French literature, writes reviews and published two academic books, *Understanding Robert Coven*[2] and *Ed vs. Yummy Fur, or what happens when a serial comic becomes a graphic novel.*[3] Evenson was born in 1966 and grew up in the fold of the Mormon religion, in the so-called 'happy valley' Provo.[4] He served a two-year mission to proselytize for the LDS church in France, which is an important part of the Mormon religious practice. Evenson got his Bachelors degree at Brigham Young University and continued with his Masters and PhD at the University of Washington. While he was doing his PhD in Literature and Critical Theory he also held the office of Bishop in his Mormon ward. He started teaching at BYU and then went further to Oklahoma State University, Syracuse University, University of Denver, Brown University, and as from 2016 he is going to be employed at the California Institute of Arts.

In addition to his academic career Evenson has published 19 works of fiction, ranging from novels to novellas and short stories. He received a number of awards and award nominations, such as the fellowship the National Endowment for the Arts, an O. Henry Award, and the ALA/RUSA prize for Best Horror fiction. Evenson has been praised as one of the best current authors in American fiction writing[5] for his innovative techniques and outstanding use of the English language, put into the words of his fellow writer Peter Straub:

> *Whenever I try to describe the resonant and disturbing literature that Horror, whether acknowledged or not, lately has found itself capable of producing, I find myself alluding to Brian Evenson, along with Graham Joyce and a few others: of these splendid younger writers, Evenson places himself furthest out on the sheerest, least sheltered narrative precipice—narrative at the far edge of narrative possibility—where he can speak clearly and plainly of loss, violence, and pain.* The Open Curtain *is, very simply, a stunning book.*[6]

However, when Evenson's writing is being regarded through a Mormon lens he appears to be not so positively received. His choice of genre and topics has brought on a lot of controversy in the Mormon community, resulting in Evenson's departure from the LDS church. The difficulty of acceptance is

[2] Evenson 2003.
[3] Evenson 2014.
[4] See: Evenson, Toal 2009.
[5] See Raffel [no date].
[6] Straub 2006.

made clear by the Database for Mormon Literature not listing all of his publications.[7] Evenson's short story "Amparo the Bastard"[8] from 1989 is still named as a '*notable'* story of Mormon Literature in *Bright Angels and Familiars Contemporary Mormon Stories.*[9] Evenson also published academic work on Mormon Literary Criticism,[10] in both *Dialogue* and *Sunstone*, the biggest platforms for Mormon Literature and literary studies. He started his university career with a teaching position at the Mormon Brigham Young University, being at that point the only member of the English department who had published a book, *Altmann's Tongue*,[11] with a non-Utah publishing house. Evenson had strong relations to the church and a testimony, meaning a personal belief in God, as he professes in an interview with *Sunstone*:

> *I value my membership in the Church. I believe in God and have a testimony of the Book of Mormon and of Joseph Smith as a prophet. I am doing work that does not harm the Church and which many people see as frightening but valid. But in some circles, I've already been ostracized*.[12]

In the interview Evenson further mentions the struggles his writing might pose to Mormons,[13] an effect which turned into a difficult confrontation. The University notified him about a student's complaint concerning his violent fiction and told him to not further publish work like this. Evenson consequently chose leaving his teaching position at BYU and in doing so addressed his disapproval of the Universities policies in an open letter, pointing out the inhibiting conditions for writers and professors produced by the Church.[14] His following novel, *Father of Lies*,[15] was still reviewed in the Mormon magazine *Sunstone*,[16] although not very positively. Evenson used this novel to work through his experience of having his literary work criticized by the church and to address the issues of child abuse in church settings. Thereby he ventured harsh criticism towards his religion, further distancing himself from the church. The extreme violence his stories tend to display did not fit in with the wish for uplifting themes, still ringing with the old ideals of *Home Literature*[17] in the LDS Church. Evenson

---

7 See http://mormonlit.lib.byu.edu/lit_author.php?a_id=1468.
8 Evenson 1997a.
9 England 1992a.
10 Evenson 1996a.
11 Evenson 2002a.
12 Evenson, Asplund Campbell 1995, p. 73.
13 Ibid.
14 Evenson 1996b: "I would not be proud to remain at Brigham Young University. I am not proud of the negative reputation that the BYU English Department is gaining in the profession at large. I am not pleased with the way BYU treats its faculty. I feel that its current policies and attitudes do great damage not only to faculty but to students. For this reason, I am tendering my resignation as an assistant professor of Brigham Young University, effective immediately.".
15 Evenson 1998.
16 Austin 1999.
17 See chapter 3.

digs up the deceased prophet Ezra Benson in "The Prophets",[18] depicts in *The Father of Lies*[19] a pedophile bishop who is unjustly protected by the church, and portrays a Mormon serial killer in "Her Other Bodies: A Travelogue".[20] He shows Mormons who are far removed from God and/or have a distorted image of God that encourages their crimes.

Evenson holds an ambiguous stand, saying he is not a Mormon writer but a writer.[21] However he repeatedly argues for the position his writing should take in Mormonism. He states that he does not intend his writing solely for Mormons to read but that he aims at a public audience, however he mentions the individual message his work holds for Mormon readers. When talking about his fiction, Evenson identifies his characters to be Mormon, even if he does not mark them as such: "The characters in my stories I think of as having been Mormon. It's not obvious, but on a visceral level, I think of them as Mormon and often modeled them after people I knew growing up."[22] His last novel written as an official member of the Mormon Church, *The Open Curtain*,[23] was created alongside his further estrangement from church and final self-chosen excommunication. Evenson clearly states this in the afterword: "The book itself was an integral part of a movement from a position of faith to a position of unbelief, a movement that the book itself charts in a real and palpable way."[24] But despite his turning his back on the faith to better express himself artistically, religion remains to be a constant subject in his writing, especially referring to Mormonism.

The style of writing in his work is unique and transcends common boundaries between genres, explores new forms of storytelling, and bends language in unknown ways. He is often compared to Franz Kafka or Edgar Ellen Poe, as for example in a review of *Windeye*[25] by American literature professor Ralph Clare for *Literary Reviews*: "Brian Evenson's latest collection of stories recalls the psychological ambiguities of Poe, the dark humor of Kafka, and the radically uncertain entropic worlds of Samuel Beckett's later fiction".[26] He is praised for furthering the avantgarde of fiction. His stories question the perception of reality and knowledge; Evenson inquires about faith, human nature, decision-making, and authority. He uses Horror fiction as the carnivalesque[27] mirror it can be and holds it up to society. At times these challenging remarks directly address Mormon society, which is not necessarily pleased about the violent pictures employed to transport these critiques.

---

18 Evenson 2004a.
19 Evenson 1998.
20 Evenson 2002b.
21 Evenson, Asplund Campbell 1995: "I think of myself as a faithful Mormon who's proud of being Mormon, but do not consider myself a Mormon writer. I am a writer who's writing for national audience that knows something about contemporary fiction", p. 73.
22 Evenson, Asplund Campbell 1995, p. 73.
23 Evenson 2006.
24 Evenson 1998, p. 221.
25 Evenson 2012a.
26 Clare 2012.
27 See Wisker 2005, p. 160.

Despite this issue – regarding the wish of Mormon scholars for skillful writing combined with religious themes – Evenson has captured what a Mormon writer should do: create art which reflects his religion not just by telling a story about the average Mormon, but by weaving his religion into the context of a story that is produced for its aesthetic purpose. Evenson thereby creates mystical horror filled realities, through remarkable writing that open up moral questions relating to important aspects of Mormonism far better then most 'orthodox' and accepted religious writers do. He writes from a Mormon perspective but does not force the story to reveal itself as Mormon, a flaw Evenson sees in a lot of writing. His choice is to depict extreme violence without glorifying it and thereby letting it be condemned by itself, as Evenson explains in the previously quoted interview with *Sunstone*:

> *A story like "Killing Cats" can be read as being about how if one gives in on small issues, one eventually ends up getting sucked in completely. Much in Altmann's Tongue is like that. In "the Father, Unblinking," you start lying about what's happened to your daughter, and you can't stop lying. You start lying about something, and you feel that you have to go on with the lies – and even that you are justified in continuing to lie. The stories show the moral barrens into which such simple compromises eventually accumulate.*[28]

In Evenson we see an author who was Mormon and had a strong belief in his religion, one who chose to produce award-winning art with Mormon subjects, but who was forced to leave the church as a consequence of it. He even fought for the place his art should take in Mormon society, being aware of the fact that his writing is not for the Mormon mainstream, but pointing out that it reaches people, who would never read the 'normal' Mormon novel. The tightknit fold of the Mormon Church proved to be too restrained for his art. Evenson's body of literary work documents this struggle, both in an obvious and in an oblique way, as will be documented in the following chapters.

[28] Evenson, Asplund Campbell 1995, p. 73.

2. Mormon Literature – An Outline

Mormon Literature has a short and relatively straightforward history. Scholars writing about the achievements of Mormon Literature tend to produce apologetic texts, marking the rare fruits of literary quality produced by Mormons expressing a hope for a brighter future and declaring the importance of literature for the Mormon public whom are mostly described as just mildly interested in the subject. The two striking aspects about the genre are that there are only or mostly Mormon scholars engaging in the subject, publishing in Mormon magazines, and the essays and papers have a strong tendency to hold some personal faith related reflections about literature. The existing reference frame talking about Mormon Literature is not very large and consists mostly of essays and introductions to short story and poem collections. There is not a solid theoretical ground to depart from when writing about Mormon Literature, which makes the task quite difficult.

The genesis of Mormon Literature can be seen in *The Book of Mormon*, published in 1830,[29] although most believers would not consider it as literature, since in their eyes it is the revealed word of God. As Joseph Smith started a new and fast growing religion, he also created the possibility for a new category of a literary identity. The way Mormons express themselves through literature has changed greatly since the founding days when the consumption and production of fiction was rather discouraged.[30] This disapproving notion has survived until the present day, as literature may still be partially received as an idle hobby, a fact that literary critics comment on frequently. Nevertheless a constant stream of literature has been produced since the beginning, which will be shortly outlined here, following the historical categories as presented by Eugene England, professor of Mormon Literature, in his introduction to the essay collection *Tending the Garden, Essays on Mormon Literature.*[31]

The first period is labeled **Fundamentalism** (1830-1880), including, as mentioned earlier, Joseph Smith, although he is seldom seen as a literary figure. However, one can see the foundation of Mormon Literature in *The Book of Mormon*, *The Pearl of great Price*, and the fragmented records of Joseph Smith sermons.[32] Adding to that there is a collection of 800 sermons by the second prophet Brigham Young.[33] Furthermore there are many testimonies of the first followers of the Church of Latter-Day-Saints; namely members professing their new found faith,[34] thereby also documenting the events which took place in early Mormon history, such as the trail to Utah.[35] There has been creative

[29] See Sperry 1995.
[30] See England 1996, p. 6.
[31] Ibid.
[32] See Smith 1938.
[33] See Young 1987.
[34] See Bush 2004.
[35] See Snow 1995.

writing, such as the poetry by Eliza Snow,[36] but most of the writing corpus of this period consists of letters, diaries, sermons, and personal essays.

Home Literature is the next phase dated between 1880 and 1930. It was highly encouraged by the church leaders such as Orson Whitney and Emmeline Wells as an uplifting and faith-promoting form of writing. It consists mostly of poems and short stories, telling moralistic narratives professing the Mormon faith. Some of the novels published in that time are still popular[37] such as Nephi Anderson's *Added Upon.*[38] In general Home Literature was not a time of creating great literary works, but it was rather a form of writing that was closely guarded in religious orthodoxy. Home Literature is still part of the Mormon way to express faith, making up a big part of the communities literary output, being published in church magazines like *New Era* and *Ensign*.[39]

The **Lost Generation** (1930-1970) is a period in Mormon writing which has been named in reminiscence of the Lost Generation in US-American Literature.[40] It was the first emergence of nationally recognized quality literature, but it failed to get equal recognition from the broader Mormon community. Scholars have written a lot about the Mormon Lost Generation,[41] identifying which works would belong in the category and discussing the reasons why the Mormon audience did not take to the long-awaited emergence of good writing. It is mostly resumed that the Lost Generation lacked the uplifting and faith-centered themes. Therefore, despite the literary quality they were perceived as too far removed from the heart of religion, the critique being that Mormonism is used rather as a tool for aestheticism, not to express a spiritual experience.[42]

The **Faithful Realism** (1960-present) is described as a sort of coming into their own of Mormon writers. They have seen the limitations and advancements of the previous generations and use that knowledge to produce good literature. They write realistic novels, which proclaim their faith but do not shy away from critical moments. The writers express faith and show portrayals that have a religious intensity.[43]

These four categories are widely accepted by the world of Mormon scholars to organize and categorize different stages of Mormon Literature. They intercept and sometimes conflate, as some novels might express aspects of two different categories. Naturally there is also some counter positions about the clear-cut definitions that mark certain literature as "lost" and other literature as "faithful", thereby giving out stamps of approval and disapproval.[44] Especially since this can have a

---

[36] See Snow 2009.
[37] See Garr 2002, p. 39.
[38] Anderson, Nephi 2008.
[39] See England 1996, p. xxi.
[40] See Geary 1996.
[41] Further reading: England 1882, England 1988, Geary 1996, Bennion 1997a.
[42] See Burton, Kramer 1999, p. 3.
[43] See England 1996, pp. 8-10.
[44] See Hales 2013.

limiting influence on the output produced by current writers as literary scholar Scott Hales concludes in his article "A Way to think about 'Faithful Realism'".[45]

After the description of the different expressions in Mormon Literature England further mentions the New Mormon Fiction in his article: "[…] there is another, quite large group of faithful Mormon writers […] who are both published nationally and gained a growing audience of appreciative Mormon readers.".[46] Following this brief acknowledgment of new developments, England wrote the introduction of the short story collection *Bright Angels and Familiars*[47] with the title "New Mormon Literature."[48] Thereby marking certain stories chosen for the collection as being part of a new era in Mormon writing, explaining the criteria New Mormon Literature has to meet:

> *So I have chosen stories that are not only valuable because they are skillful, the product of natural gifts, careful training or apprenticeship, and good understanding of the traditions of classic short stories and contemporary innovations. They are also valuable because they are written by people with a recognizably Mormon background which leads them through their stories to express, reveal, develop, and challenge the shape of Mormon beliefs.*[49]

This New Mormon Literature ventures out and leaves the Faithful Realism behind, enters spheres of the surreal, disbelief, no longer needing to affirm and explain the Mormon faith. The new generation manages to let their Mormon identity flow into their art in a natural manner, deserting the need to explain Mormonism and themselves to anyone, and overcoming the shyness about expressing controversial topics and questions. A category as earlier mentioned, Eugene England places Brian Evenson into.

Scott Hales also elaborates on *New Mormon Literature* in his PhD thesis *Of Many Hearts and Many Minds: The Mormon Novel and the Post-Utopian Challenge of Assimilation.*[50] He refers to new literary works that have moved beyond the Faithful Realism; the New Mormon Literature does not strive to depict the LDS church in a positive light to outsiders any more.[51] The focus and interest of the current generation of writers have changed as Hales states in his thesis:

> *The New Mormon fiction is also interested in vignettes of fragment views of Mormon life, future Mormonisms and dystopias, and bizarre (often pop-culture-infused) encounters with the divine. Stylistically, they can be minimalist and maximalist, realistic and magically realistic. Collectively, these works comprise a Mormon fiction that emphasizes acts of discovery and recovery, creative production, and paradigm subversions – often to create disorientation that undermines assumptions about truth*

---

45 Ibid.
46 England 1996, p. xxvi.
47 England 1992a.
48 England 1992b.
49 Ibid., p. xviii.
50 Hales 2014.
51 See Ibid., p. 267.

and faith in the historical record and folk doctrine; foregrounds the fleeting, ephemeral quality of Mormon cultural life; recreates the often exhausting challenge of coming to terms with too much information: and forces readers to configure new "Mormon" realities.[52]

The New Mormon Literature appears to be a further development in quality and a broadening of acceptance. The authors are less scared to approach difficult subjects and have deserted the need for a happy ending. Yet as the literary scholar John Bennion states in his article "Renegotiating Scylla and Charybdis: Reading and the Distance between New York and Utah",[53] the Mormon reader is still reluctant to accept a certain form of ambiguity in narratives; rather feeling comfortable with clear statements and judgments and an absence of any sexual content.[54] To further understand what is regarded as Mormon Literature the next section will look at the discussions of Mormon Literary Criticism.

2.1 Mormon Literary Criticism

Gideon Burton and Neal Kramer, both literature professors at BUY, describe literary criticism as a "mediating force between books and people"[55] in their article "The State of Mormon Literature and Criticism".[56] Before this mediation can take place a selection has to be made, choosing 'worthy' literature, meaning that literature has to be evaluated by a set of predetermined criteria. In the development of Mormon Literary Criticism there has been an ongoing discussion on how these criteria should be set. The selection of these standards in Mormon Literature appears to be a mediation between the importance set on literary writing and the religiousness of the text. As we saw, there have been times when the faith-promoting aspect of writing was valued over the quality and other times when the quality made the pieces lack in faith.[57] Or to say it in the words of Eugene England: "Everyone wants literature that is uniquely Mormon, even "orthodox" – but which is also skillful and artful; the problem is that focusing too much on either orthodoxy or art seems to destroy the other."[58]

---

52 Ibid., p. 273.
53 Bennion 1997b.
54 Ibid.: "Despite the fact that this kind of moral ambiguity happens daily all across Utah, Mormon readers often feel that writers must make judgments, delineate sin clearly. Attempting to render all signifiers in a unitary manner would transform this into a text which would hardly disturb. It is not merely sexual content but ambiguous signification which offends, and it is not just Mormons who are offended by ambiguity.", p. 48.
55 Burton, Kramer 1999, p. 4.
56 Ibid.
57 See Austin 1994.
58 England 1996, p. xv.

Along this divide, which can be historically marked as the difference of Home Literature and the Lost Generation, the critics argue. Most prominently this can be seen in the different approaches of Richard Cracroft and Bruce Jorgensen, both former presidents of the Associations of Mormon Letters, an institution functioning as a platform for most of the Mormon literary discussions. Jorgensen argues in his presidential address of 1991, "To Tell and Hear Stories: Let the Stranger Say,"[59] that readers should be open to different forms of literature, also the works written by non-Mormons. He opens the door wide and states that every story has the capacity to teach and enrich the horizon of the Mormon reader. One year later Cracroft countered this approach and promoted an orthodox view on literature in his presidential address, "Attuning the Authentic Mormon Voice: Stemming the Sophic Tide in LDS Literature":[60]

> *We need, for a change, an alternative criticism, a Latter-day Saint criticism centered in the gospel, in Mormon faith, and not in the Sophic creeds of secularism. By "Faithful Criticism" I do not mean a criticism that shuts its eyes to falseness, to the lies of sentimentalism, or promotes tidy didacticism and deus ex machina conclusions.* […] *We need Faithful Critics who cultivate the presence of the Holy Ghost, who are themselves faithful Latter-day Saints who have been to the mountain, who understand the Mantic-Mormon paradigm of the world, who are willing to grant the donnée of faith and belief and the exciting spirit of expectation, the possibility of holiness, the eventuality of the Finger of the Lord enlivening the Latter-day Saint life, critics who will formulate a criticism that can deal honestly, authentically, and artistically with that kind of world view*.[61]

Burton brings these two views together, commenting that one needs to combine these approaches to be able to be a Mormon literary critic in his article "Should We Ask, 'Is This Mormon Literature?' Towards a Mormon Criticism."[62] Burton argues that there is a need to have a stable grounding in Mormonism following Cracroft's approach, but from there one should depart and encounter the stranger Jorgensen speaks of.[63] The secular and religious realm should engage and interact, to enable each other in understanding the opposing viewpoints, in the manner of Jorgensen.

The visibility of Mormon religion and the manner of how the faith is portrayed in writing seems to be the immanent question of critics. This describes a need for the author to be a believing Mormon, whatever that entails, and to somehow let that faith flow into his writing, as Cracroft states in his address:

> *[Mormon Literature] … is woven out of the stuff of Mormonism and spun across a Mormon world view interlaced with Mormon essences, those often ethereal but real, ineffable but inevitable spiritual*

---

59 Jorgensen 1991.
60 Cracroft 1993.
61 Ibid., p. 35.
62 Burton 1999.
63 Ibid.: "[…] Cracroft's and Jorgensen's seemingly disparate views actually frame the twin requirements for a Mormon criticism and literature.", p. 39.

> *analogues and correspondences that convey Mormon realities, and without a sense of which no literature could be essentially Mormon.*[64]

For a further understanding on how to define Mormon Literature the article "'Awaiting translation'. Timothy Liu, Identity Politics, and the Question of Religious Authenticity"[65] by associate professor of English and American literature Bryan Waterman is very helpful. Waterman chose to discuss an author who is on the fringes of what could be considered as Mormon Literature in Timothy Liu. His work has Mormon references and faith related subjects and Liu is a successful poet. He is, however, not closely affiliated with the Mormon Church any more and Liu is openly gay – homosexuality not being accepted in Mormonism. In Waterman's attempt to define how Mormon Literature could be understood, he seeks out other literary categories, such as African American Literature or Asian American Literature to find similarities, but regards it as difficult to equate these with Mormon Literature.[66] Waterman comes to the conclusion that Mormon Literature with its difficulties of definition and placement inside American Literature, is easiest to define if one draws on Gay Literature:

> […] *while I think the comparison to (non-white) ethic or (non-Mormon) religious literature may be helpful for understanding "Mormon" writing, Mormon identity may be more helpfully compared to sexual orientation – gayness in particular – which does not in itself prevent the individual from "passing" as a member of the dominant culture and which, as a category of identity, is also a product of the nineteenth century and still very much under construction*.[67]

This is a very helpful comparison, which shows how there are similar issues of definition and similar difficulties of belonging. Waterman proposes to follow the approach of definition used by critics of Gay Literature. To repurpose the definition Bonnie Zimmerman,[68] professor for Women's Studies, made about Lesbian Literature:[69] the term "Mormon" needs to be defined, this definition will influence the text that is supposed to be defined as Mormon. The critic needs to determine whether a Mormon text is one written by a Mormon (going hand in hand with the question, who is a Mormon), or about a Mormon (this could also be done by a non-Mormon), or expressing a Mormon "vision". This makes clear that there is a multiplicity in identity and it is the critics choice which one to acknowledge. It appears that the tendency of Mormon critics is to only regard mainstream LDS

---

64 Cracroft 1993, p. 51.
65 Waterman 1997.
66 Ibid.: "An important distinction between ethno-racial and religious identity, for example, is that the former is frequently determined by forces outside the individual, forces that categorize people based on skin color or sex or other physical characteristics.", p. 161.
67 Ibid., p. 162.
68 Zimmerman 1981, p. 459-460.
69 See Waterman 1997, p. 162.

members and topics as acceptable in the canon of Mormon Literature, thereby excluding someone like Timothy Liu for his homosexuality or Brian Evenson for choosing to write Horror fiction.[70]

[70] Brooks, Cannon, Seiter, Ziebarth 1997: "Our most prominent [Mormon] writers seem to flee from the center – Brian Evenson comes up against the boundaries of cultural acceptance […].", p. 153.

3. Horror Literature

Horror fiction and Mormon Literature have some interesting parallels; Horror fiction just like Mormon writing is mostly ignored by academics, and looked down on as lesser and unjustified form of entertainment by many people. Here Horror writers and Mormon writers share a common difficulty of recognition outside a dedicated circle, although Horror fiction has had a great impact on US American's culture,[71] while Mormon literature still lingers on the margins. The immanent question asked about Horror literature is why people find pleasure in this form of writing, with studies and research aiming to find an answer.[72] This inquiry about the aesthetics of the ugly or tragic is not a novelty, already puzzling philosophers such as Aristotle[73] or Moses Mendelssohn and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing.[74] With the question of how aesthetic perception functions, a psychological approach tends to partake in the analysis of Horror Literature, questioning the impact of violent narratives on the human condition, wondering why people find images of violence pleasing. The curiosity behind understanding the popularity of this genre hails partly from the negative image public debates have painted of Horror in its various forms. Video games, movies, and books, et al. are seen to encourage violent acts and are therefore a bad influence on people;[75] a position that is not supported by most research.

Nowadays what is understood as Horror fiction is a genre that evolved from Gothic fiction at the end of the 19th century. Horror essentially describes an emotion of being scared, shocked, or terrified, an effect utilized by many tales, going back to examples such as the epic of Gilgamesh,[76] Dante's Inferno,[77] or Grimm's fairytales.[78] Cultures have developed a multitude of scary stories, fairytales, ghost stories, or frightening epics as part of their oral and literary tradition, although the development of an entire literary genre, which defines itself by using these effects of shock and terror, started with Gothic fiction in the second half of the 18th century. The first Gothic novel, as most scholars agree, was *The Castle of Otranto*[79] published by Horace Walpole in 1768.[80] Gothicism is the darker more violent child of Romanticism, dwelling on the same notions of a longing for nature

---

71 See Crow 2009: "To understand American literature, and indeed America, one must understand the Gothic, which is, simply, the imaginative expression of the fears and forbidden desires of Americans. The Gothic has given voice to suppressed groups, and has provided an approach to taboo subjects such as miscegenation, incest and disease. The study of the Gothic offers a forum for discussing some of the key issues of American society, including gender and the nation's continuing drama of race.", p.1.

72 See Oliver, Sanders 2004; Hills 2005.

73 See Aristotle, Whalley 1997.

74 See Mendelssohn, Pollok 2011; Lessing, Mendelssohn, Nicolai, Petsch 1967.

75 See Beentjes, van der Voort 2013.

76 Schrott 2001.

77 Alighieri 1971.

78 Grimm, Grimm, 1994.

79 Walpole, 1966.

80 Although there have been earlier novels with Gothic elements; See Lloyd-Smith 2004, p. 3.

and past times.[81] The emergence of Gothic Literature is often explained as a counter-reaction to the scientific rationality of the Enlightenment.[82] The confinements of the hyper-rationalized human were cracked open by the fantastic, supernatural, and unexplainable phenomenon. The writers seek back to a time of ghost stories, to have the freedom of expression and inspiration they missed in the completely categorized, enlightened world. Some of the most prominent novels are *Frankenstein*[83] and *Dracula,*[84] reviving variations of ancient monsters, the Golem and Vlad III the Impaler, to be set into the modern day. When looking beyond the veil of the first shock, these stories are metaphors of social critique and expressions of societal anxieties, as the literature professor Tony Magistral and historian Michael A. Morrison state in their book *A Dark Night's Dreaming, Contemporary American Horror Fiction*:

> *At its most significant level of meaning, the art of terror is concerned with detailing the tragic consequences of social and personal disintegration – it is the essential aesthetic medium for our time. This fact alone helps, in part, to explain the genre's enormous popularity. To be understood properly, the best horror fiction must be viewed as contemporary social satire that reveals – and often critiques – the collective cultural fears and personal anxieties of everyday life*.[85]

The Gothic came to America with the immigrants and developed further, adapting to the unique new country. New themes arose to compensate for the lack of castles and old ruins, rather depicting the unforgiving and threatening nature, with its natural inhabitants.[86] The Gothic became an important part of the American literary expression through famous authors such as Edgar Ellen Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne. Furthermore the focus of the American Gothic Literature shifted, and it started to search inward for the monstrous, as Magistral and Morrison state in the introduction:

> *The physical trappings of the eighteenth-century English Gothic novel – the unnatural biology of walls, staircases, tunnels, corridors, and enclosed spaces where psychosexually obsessed hero-villains pursued chaste maidens-gradually evolved into an American fiction that emphasized psychological terror over*

---

81 See Crow 2009: "While the Gothic is often seen as a variant of Romanticism, or a subset within it. Some early Gothic masterpieces (like Walpole's) actually appear in the neoclassical period and precede the landmark works of early Romanticism. Perhaps it would be simplest to see all of the changes of the eighteenth an early nineteenth centuries as parts of one great tectonic shirt in Western thought, from which the modern world emerges.", p. 3.

82 Bienstock Anolik 2010: "The Gothic tendency to make the invisible visible can be explained in a number of ways. As the irrational counter to the rational Enlightenment, the intellectual movement whose categories remove the emotional and the irrational from the norm of human experience, the Gothic is committed to externalizing the internal and invisible human responses repressed by Enlightenment notions of human subjectivity.", p. 9.

83 Shelley 2003.

84 Stoker 1960.

85 Magistrale, Morrision 1996, p. 3.

86 See Lloyd-Smith 2004, pp. 65-132.

> *physiological fear. The haunted British bedchamber, in other words, gave way to the haunted American psyche;* […].[87]

Where the Gothic ends and the Horror begins is hard to define, as both terms are applied for an overlapping compendium of authors and works. Often the Horror is marked as a further escalation of violence and brutality. The Gothic and the Horror diverge at various points such as plotline, themes, and depiction. There are many definitions of what Horror is in relation to Gothic and how Horror can be defined on its own terms, as the English professor Holland-Toll does in the introduction to her book *As American as Mom, Baseball, and Apple Pie: Constructing Community in Contemporary American Horror Fiction*:

> […] *horror fiction will be handily defined as any text which has extreme or supernatural elements, induces (as its primary intention and/or effect) strong feelings of terror, horror, or revulsion in the reader, and generates a significant degree of unresolved dis/ease within society. The key definition employed is that of a significant degree of unresolved dis/ease or conflict significant enough that the reader who inhabits the society cannot simply gloss it over and return to business as usual. Spreading glossy white frosting over the burned and lumpy cake is not enough* […].[88]

And therein lays the power of the genre, that it inflicts an image that cannot be glossed over easily. Through these means it is capable of transporting a message, place a critique, make things visual with a lasting effect. It holds up a carnivalesque mirror to people and society, to shake us awake through its absurdity, to look deeper and question more. Despite Horror having the ability to be such a powerful tool it is constricted by the boundaries of genre, mostly being diminished to splatter movies and pulp fiction. In an article for *The Guardian* author and critic Stuart Kelly wonders why the Horror genre did not manage to break out of the 'genre' and became more literary such as other genres like Crime fiction or Science Fiction managed to do, properly employing the power it has.[89] In Evenson he sees the hope of 'new Horror', as he manages to elevate the Horror through his literary writing. A fact also US-American writer Maggie Nelson observes in her study about Cruelty in Art: "Unlike some writers whose work depends heavily on the visceral shock of ultraviolence […], Evenson is an intellectual, even conceptual, writer who is ready and willing to theorize about his work."[90]

[87] Magistral, Morrision 1996, p. 1.
[88] Holland-Toll 2001, p. 6.
[89] Kelly 2012.
[90] Nelson 2011, p. 193.

4. Evenson's Body of Work – pre-excommunication

The pre-excommunication period spans from Brian Evenson's first publication *Altmann's Tongue*[91] in 1994 to his first novel *Father of Lies*,[92] published in 1998. These two books are also the most outstanding publications for this time period, as they caused the strongest controversy in the LDS community and ruptured Evenson's relationship to the church. Further Evenson published various short story collections, which display his relationship to religion and faith on various levels. In his early work he already poses questions about the structure and doctrine of the Mormon Church, morals, and faith. He critiques authority and blind faith, but does so in a more comical way. Evenson has a strong fascination with language and he chooses his words with care and constructs his sentences in a meticulous way.[93] His style of writing is defined in its very unique expression and precise bareness. He builds a steady rhythm, which is capturing in a way that it can even overshadow the extreme violence it is used to express. In the introduction to *Altmann's Tongue*[94] his work is compared to the Japanese Haiku,[95] and in a review of *Dark Property*[96] his language is described as having a biblical ring to it. His sentence structure is sometimes unusual and he uses rare words, thereby slowing down the reading process further binding the attention. Evenson's early fiction is a mixture of extremely surreal and modern advances to storytelling. He conflates genres and deconstructs language and traditional forms of narrative. Fellow writer Straub describes Evenson's exceptionality in the introduction to *Last Days*:[97]

> *Evenson and Altmann's Tongue, though, seemed to me to operate on another level altogether. In these stories, stoniness, obduracy, harshness, madness, and violence take wing and fly, released into the air by a completely original imagination. The early Evenson stories tend to stop you in your tracks with flat, declarative reports of monstrosity*.[98]

The topics dominating the entire body of Evenson's work are already prevalent in the beginning; the constant struggle with reality, the questioning of identity, the challenging of morals, and the critique

---

91 Evenson 2002a.
92 Evenson 1998.
93 See Nelson 2011: "[…] Wittgenstein and Evenson have one thing in common: both take imprecision as their enemy, and hope to counter its effects by using language as precisely as possible. In Evenson's case, this urge sometimes comes off as a desire to fight fire with fire. For what lands Evenson's work in the genre of horror – and, at times, in the arena of camp – is that he gets so literal about this task: his writing doesn't just evoke the precision of slicing or cutting; his characters actually perform the deeds. When this literalness works, the work carries both visceral punch and intellectual heft.", p. 194.
94 Evenson 2002a.
95 See Lingis 2002, p. xv.
96 Evenson 2002c.
97 Evenson 2009a.
98 Straub 2009, loc 62.

of authority. These subjects are driven with a force and leave an imprint through the violent pictures Evenson employs.

4.1 Short Stories I – Altmann's Tongue (1994)

> *He awoke to find the hut gone, a beaver gnawing on the tip of his coccyx. "Affliction!" cried Job. The beaver scuttled back, watched from a distance, fled. "What are bones but sticks and stones? And what God if not the master builder? And what Job if not scrap lumber? Use me roughly, Lord, to fill the gaps, but discard me not. "And provide the axe," Job prayed. "Amen."*[99]

Altmann's Tongue[100] is a compilation of short stories written over a span of 10 years, some were previously published in magazines, others written explicitly for the book. The stories are tied together by a similarity in style and all of them depict or allude to an act of violence and cruelty. Each story enters into a different space, devoid of unnecessary descriptions, placing the focus completely on the actions of the characters. Evenson's writing never over-explains, he only describes the most essential necessities for the narrative, never giving more to the reader than what is needed. The space the stories are placed in is nearly anonymous, as Evenson does not refer to known locations; thereby keeping the reader close to the story without their imagination creating an individual image of a previously known place.[101] In this anonymous space the reader is close to the killer, sometimes seeing through the eye of the killer; thereby allowing the reader to identify with the characters. Evenson does not glamorize the violence, but wants it to be condemned by its sharp and cruel depiction. There are no explanations, there is no internal process, there is no background information to the situations and characters. The philosopher Alphonso Lingis describes Evenson's writing in the prologue of *Altmann's Tongue*[102] as follows:

> *The vision of killing in this book will be resistant: we readily object to Evenson's isolating the act from any socio-political context, stripping away all psychological motivation. But have not these generated delusive explanations, which have only served to cover up the strangeness of this act – how different the act of killing is from productive and purposive actions?*[103]

Evenson further refuses to resolve any of the situations he presents, the endings are unsatisfactory in their ambiguity and openness. Morality only partakes in these stories in its absolute absence. These Horror stories seem to be completely removed from the common Mormon framework; although

[99] Evenson 2002d, pp. 99-100.
[100] Evenson 2002a.
[101] See Erwin, Evenson 2012.
[102] Evenson 2002a.
[103] Lingis 2002, p. xv.

Evenson's interest in presenting violence in such a way comes from his Mormon upbringing, a setting, which is extremely focused on emphasizing only the positive aspects in life blending out any negative part of reality.[104] Further Evenson sees an issue in the Mormon community just accepting the readily presented moral judgments of the church. Mormons often do not question these pre-shaped opinions and just blindly follow authority in Evenson's experience. He detects therein a clear parallel to the society of Nazi-Germany;[105] a setting often chosen or alluded to in *Altmann's Tongue*;[106] through the Barbers of concentration camps,[107] in the name Altmann referring to the prominent Nazi Klaus Barbie,[108] or in the "Munich window"[109] set in post-war Germany. Brian Evenson wants to force the Mormon reader to judge the situation he presents; as a means to show them a darker, violent part of life often neglected by Mormonism and to shake them awake from just blindly accepting the moral doctrines of the church.

When searching for direct references to Mormonism, only an informed reader can detect the hints, which are given to identify some of the characters as Mormons; such as the serial killer in "Her Other Bodies: A Travelogue"[110] singing a LDS hymn. Evenson explained in an interview that for him all his characters are Mormon, but he feels no need to let the reader know.[111] Although, other stories as "Father, Unblinking"[112] originate from an explicitly Mormon context, they have no direct references to Mormonism and therefore cannot be perceived as such. Evenson explains the story developed out of the fact that Professors at BYU are not allowed to talk about their salary,[113] a practice of secrecy he transforms into a father not admitting to his wife that their daughter died. This shows how *Altmann's Tongue*[114] is a book written by an author with strong ties in the Mormon society, creating his stories out of a Mormon context.

In the controversy following a reading Evenson held about his book at BYU, he tried to explain several times how his writing should be considered as part of Mormon Literature.[115] He mentions the moral teachings that can be derived from it and repeatedly stressed the fact that his writings condemn violence. Evenson explains that *Altmann's Tongue*[116] is capable of reaching a readership,

---

[104] See Oppenheimer 2013.
[105] See Asplund-Campbell 1995.
[106] Evenson 2002a.
[107] See Evenson 2002e.
[108] See Hammerschmidt 2014.
[109] Evenson 2002f.
[110] Evenson 2002b.
[111] See Evenson, Asplund-Campbell 1995: "The characters in my stories I think of as having been Mormon. It's not obvious, but on a visceral level, I think of them as Mormon and often modeled them after people I knew growing up.", p. 73.
[112] Evenson 2002g.
[113] See Evenson, Asplund-Campbell 1995, p. 73.
[114] Evenson 2002a.
[115] See Ibid.; Evenson, Smith 1998; Evenson 2006.
[116] Evenson 2002a.

which would not pick up the standard Mormon novel[117] and thereby expands the reach of the religion. But on the other hand the book is incapable to reach the 'standard Mormon' due to the violence, but also because of the ambiguity as John Bennion explains in the previously mentioned article "Renegotiating Scylla and Charybdis: Reading and the Distance between New York and Utah."[118] Bennion tries to figure out the reason for Mormons to refuse certain books, and marks aspects influencing this decision:

> *Presence of excessive sexuality, irreverence, the grotesque, violence, inaccurate doctrine, incompatible politics might cause a reader to feel excessive dissonance with the known Mormon universe, causing him or her to disengage with text. Authority might, faith in what someone else has said about a text as happened with Whipple and apparently Evenson. In these cases the language of the text binds the reader with seriousness, renders him or her incapable of creative and flexible play with the text*.[119]

Altmann's Tongue,[120] clearly to be identified as a controversial piece of Mormon Literature, opened up a fierce discussion about academic freedom, and the churches power to hinder artists in their expression. Two camps arose in the Mormon community, one supporting Evenson's work and the other standing with the church's opinion, or rather formulating their independent critique. The Mormon scholars Bryan Watermann and Brian Kagel discuss this issue in detail in the book *The Lord's University, Freedom and Authority at BYU.*[121] Therein Evenson's case is chronicled,[122] next to many similar fates and general issues of academic freedom. BYU requires their Mormon faculty to have a temple recommendation,[123] be faithful believers and anticipate the overall limitations imposed on them by the church's standards.[124] This signifies how in the setting of a university, an institution which should be capable of understanding the various forms of aesthetics employed in literature, acts as an controlling entity of orthodox 'Mormonness'. Evenson was warned by the universities dean to not further publish work such as *Altmann's Tongue*[125] in order to remain employed. In Evenson's defense fellow teacher at BYU Scott Abbott presented a paper at the Sunstone symposium[126] on Evenson's work, trying to explain the intentions of the piece:

---

[117] See Evenson, Asplund-Campbell 1995, p 73.
[118] Bennion 1997b.
[119] Ibid., p. 51.
[120] Evenson 2002a.
[121] Kagel, Waterman 1998.
[122] See Kagel, Waterman 1998, pp. 302-367.
[123] The temple recommend is necessary to enter the sacred Mormon temples, therefore an individual has to be baptized and be interviewed by her bishop and stake president, answering questions about her faith, testimony, chastity, and way of life.
[124] See Anonymous 1996.
[125] Evenson 2002a.
[126] Asplund-Campbell 1995.

> *The controversy over Evenson's work grew public and I stepped in to explain to BYU President Rex Lee, former Solicitor General of the United States, that the character in the book's title story was Klaus Barbie, the Butcher of Lyon, who took the name Altmann when he fled his Nazi past. Altmann's Tongue, I argued, explores language and the violence that attends fascist truth claims. As little moved by my literary arguments as by the ones for academic freedom, Lee and others kept up the pressure* […].[127]

In order to write and publish on his own terms, Evenson decided to leave BYU. The signal send by the university was clear in what it was willing to accept and what kind of aesthetics stepped beyond that boundary of approval. Or to put it in Evenson's own words: "Aesthetics make people think, and thinking makes life a lot more dangerous. The more of a defined aesthetic that you have, the more potential challenge."[128]

4.1 Short Stories I – Din of Celestial Birds (1997)
Prophets and Brothers (1997)

> *In a holy vision the Lord came to me and told me to buy myself a shovel and employ it in a righteous use, so I went next door and borrowed one off Boyd Laswell and awaited further instructions. I took to pondering and praying, striving to divine what God might have me accomplish by means of a shovel.*[129]

Unfortunately I was not able to get the books *Din of Celestial Birds*[130] and *Prophets and Brothers*[131], since they are out of print and not available in European Libraries. *Din of Celestial Birds*[132] is set in Latin America and is a dark, mysterious tale of old shamanic rituals and myths. The book has not been reviewed very widely and does not seem to be placed among the notable works of Evenson by the retrospectives, which do mention it.[133]

Prophets and Brothers[134] is a collection of four short stories with evidently Mormon themes, and most of the stories are accessible through other publications. These stories, have a light tone to them, picking up comical moments; a man who is trying to give his dog a priesthood blessing,[135] a

---

[127] Abbott 2012.
[128] Evenson, Asplund-Campbell 1995, p. 72.
[129] Evenson 2004a, p. 155.
[130] Evenson 1997b.
[131] Evenson 1997c.
[132] Evenson 1997b.
[133] See Ehrenreich 2003: "It's a disappointing book, adrift in a murky magical realism, largely set in or near a fictional Latin American village, with an overlapping cast of characters, all of whom are reeling in one way of another from violence and its aftereffects. It is perhaps because the violence is here given context – a mythologized but still familiar setting of revolutionary conflict and bloodthirsty indigenous spirits – that these stories lack the painful impact he [Evenson] would later achieve.".
[134] Evenson 1997c.
[135] Evenson 1996c.

protagonist who digs up the former Mormon prophet Benson to reinstate the old values of the church,[136] or the woman in "Sanctified in the flesh"[137] who believes burglars to be the three Nephites.[138]

Evenson uses the genre of Horror to critique backwards thinking in the church, people that are overtly pious, or simply shows the helplessness of someone losing their beloved dog. However it is a mild critique, one that can be seen and received with a smile. Evenson plays with these religious themes in a tongue in cheek way, but does not critique the Mormon religion at its core. Each story shows Mormons braking out of a conventional understanding of religion, following their own conviction or the alleged commands God gives them. These narratives have a playfulness in their dealings with Mormon themes combined with a dark humor; however Evenson starts treading in more difficult fields with the novel he published after leaving BYU.

4.2 Father of Lies (1998)

> *God told me that where evil had made its mark, good must follow, burning evil out and purify the body. I told the boy to remove his pants and he eventually shucked them. I told the boy to remove his underwear and when he would not, I stripped those down myself. I could feel God endowing me with holy power. I reminded the boy that I was his spiritual leader and that obedience was the law upon which all other laws were predicated. If he didn't listen to what I said and obey me, he would go to hell. Not to hell, I said, but to the nothingness beyond hell, which would make hell look like a picnic. Then I told him to reach down and grab his ankles but to keep his legs as straight as he could. But he wouldn't do it, so I had to do it for him. I came up behind him and held one hand over his mouth, wrapping the other around his chest. Then where evil had been before I forced good in until he bled*.[139]

Evenson was already planning to write *Father of Lies*[140] while he was still employed at BYU and it was one of the factors driving him to leave his position, as he realized he would not be able to hold his job if he were to publish this work. *Father of Lies*[141] is about a pedophile priest who molests and kills children and adults. Clearly this book is working with much more controversial themes relating to the church than previous works of Evenson. The novel functions on two levels, on one side pointing out the issue of abuse in churches and on the other hand it questions blind obedience and authority in church structures, which can produce an environment allowing abuse. Additionally Evenson built in a critique addressing his situation at BYU.

---

[136] See Evenson 2004a.
[137] Evenson 1996d.
[138] The three Nephites are immortal disciples of Jesus mentioned in the Book of Mormon.
[139] Evenson 1998, pp. 29-30.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Ibid.

Evenson does not identify the church in his novel as Mormon but calls it 'Blood of the Lamb', alluding thereby to the violent nature he finds in Mormonism. Furthermore, the hierarchical structures described show strong parallels to the LDS church; for instance the main character holds a high rank lay position in the church. The title refers to the bible verse John 8:44,[142] where the devil is called 'father of lies'.

The main character of the story, Fochs, appears to be the perfect family father of three children, as a provost in the church he is highly esteemed by his community. Underneath this perfect facade he has schizophrenic hallucinations and is deeply disturbed, committing violent crimes, raping and murdering the minors in his care. The psychologist whom Fochs is forced to visit by his wife, realizes at one point that the disturbing dreams his patient is talking about, are actual crimes committed by him. But in trying to stop him the psychologist runs into the firm walls of the religious community, which protects their faithful member. When Fochs is accused of rape the church allows him to sit on the committee to evaluate the case, rather excommunicating the complaining mothers. The narrative of the novel switches in perspectives: it shows part of the story through the psychiatrist eyes and sometimes follows the protagonist's perspective; as the novel switches into the first person perspective of Fochs, we learn he is a narcissistic psychopath without any remorse. He is abided and sometimes controlled by an externalized persona of his evil tendencies, Bloody Head, whom he at one point falsely identifies as Jesus. Fochs creates his twisted version of religion, where blood atonement[143] and sodomising children can clean them from sin, as the introductory quote shows. The novel displays how hurtful blind obedience in a religion can become and hypocrisy encouraged through hierarchical structures. In the end of the novel the church finally realizes that Fochs actually committed the crimes he was accused of, however the officials further protect him to not lose their standing in face of the public. The novel ends on Fochs getting a new position in the church as a teacher after the church has convinced his latest rape victim to stay quiet, and him having a sexual relationship with his 12-year-old daughter after killing his wife.

Evenson displays different issues, as he shows how certain church structures and blind obedience can allow for someone like Fochs to commit violent acts under the protective shield of his position, and how untrained persons in the church system may handle these situations in an unproductive or worsening way,[144] thus giving a partial explanation for the issue of child abuse in churches and critiquing in a more general way the practices of church hierarchy. A hierarchy Evenson collided with

[142] KJV John 8:44: "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.".

[143] See Sanders 2010: "[…] blood atonement, which was based on an overly aggressive interpretation of the New Testament doctrine, "Almost all things are purified in blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no remission." [Hebrews 9:22]", p. 90.

[144] See Allred, Anderson 1996.

himself as he left his teaching position at BYU. In the character of the psychiatrist a reflection of this event is evident. The narrative starts with a series of letters exchanged by the psychiatrist and his superior. The psychiatrist is asked to reveal his patient records to the church and declines to do so. He is enraged by the request of the church meddling in his work without having any knowledge about his profession. Similarly Evenson attacked the church in his letter of resignation for censoring his writing without any knowledge about literature.[145] Evenson provides the reader with clear moral judgments throughout the book, often delivered through the character of the psychiatrist, unlike his approach in *Altmann's Tongue*.[146] Michael Austin, fellow Mormon English professor, reviewed *Father of Lies*[147] in the Mormon magazine *Sunstone* and marks this fact and the clearly visible anger towards the church as the weak point of the book:

> *The novel asks important questions, yes, but it also answers them so that rather than provoking us to think for ourselves, it merely provokes us to share in the author's anger. And while well-managed anger can certainly produce powerful literature, the anger evident on nearly every page or Father of Lies is not well managed; it is obvious, propagandistic, manipulative, and ultimately, disappointing*.[148]

In this analysis rings some truth. Evenson created a very clear and obvious cut, marking good and extreme evil in the novel, allowing no room for the reader's choice, although in his depiction of Fochs he maintains his approach of not glamorizing violence. The character of a complete manic who has created a universe for himself wherein his religion serves his perverted wishes is not made for the reader to identify or sympathies with. Evenson picked up a problematic issue to any religious community and used the Horror genre as a tool of critique, by peaking into the psychotic mind of a rapist, a mind rationalizing and finding reasoning behind the violent crimes committed.

4.3 Short Stories II – Contagion (2000)
The Wavering Knife: Stories (2004)

> *You shall know the fence and the fence shall make you free.*[149]

Contagion[150] is a short story collection, set mostly in the desert "crowded with polygamists, heretics, visionaries, self-proclaimed prophets, and killers of all stripes"[151] in the words of writer Ben

[145] See Evenson 1996b.
[146] Evenson 2002a.
[147] Evenson 1998.
[148] Austin 1999, p. 72.
[149] Evenson 2000a, pp. 92-93.
[150] Ibid.

Ehrenreich, thereby marking it for him as the most explicit Mormon work of Evenson's up to that point. The characters are deeply concerned with language, writing and testimony a common Mormon practice of maintaining faith.[152] This is an interesting connection to bear in mind in regards to Evenson's general obsession with language. Some stories such as "The polygamy of language"[153] have a Mormon character, but the title story "Contagion"[154] is the most interesting in the form through which it transmits a critique of religion. The story is about three men who have the task to follow a barbed wire fence and report on its condition; on their travel they encounter a spreading, deadly contagion. At the end of the fence they encounter a religious community, which has produced a cult with a belief system centered on the fence. The people follow a crazed religious leader spinning a truth out of metaphors derived from the fence. Evenson recreates the genesis of a different all-American religion in the pioneer time; which evolves around the item used to bring order to the bare land of the mid-west, the barbed wire that allowed control, order, and utilization of the land. Scott Abbott and Lynn Bennett analyzed "Contagion"[155] next to three other stories by American writers about barbed wire and point out the religious metaphor of the text:

> […] *Evenson joins Steinbeck in using barbed wire as a metaphor for the ideological and religious structures we create with our words and stories, social constructs as barbed and controlling as the original thorny fence.* […] *Evenson's story depicts a coercive sect that captivates its members, transforms barbed wire into metaphors that imprison their minds, and then binds them with real barbed wire as a cure for the contagion that may well be the barbed wire itself*.[156]

This religion is constructed of a prison of metaphors, which is represented through a literal border of a barbed wire. The report of the travelers, a mere description of the wire is regarded as a religious text, and one of the company man seen as a godly scribe. Thereby converting a technical report, probably one of the least religious texts into scripture, showing the power of interpretation.

Similarly Evenson's other story collection from 2004, *The Wavering Knife*,[157] explores the restrictions and structures people create to cope with life, winning the International Horror Guild award for best story collection. The book is composed of various previous publications going back to the 1990's and some new stories. The collection incorporates the previously mention story "Prophets"[158] and another satire of religion in the "Barcode Jesus".[159] In the later the protagonist is trying to proselytize Wal-Mart in rural America. However, more interesting are the stories not dealing with religion in

---

[151] Ehrenreich 2003.
[152] See Ibid.
[153] Evenson 2000b.
[154] Evenson 2000a.
[155] Ibid.
[156] Abbott, Bennett 2013, p. 26.
[157] Evenson 2004b.
[158] Evenson 2004a.
[159] Evenson 2004c.

such a direct fashion. Many narratives of the collection deal with the idea that rules are facilitated to construct reality, at times created by the individual other times being enforced form an outsider. These rules build patterns humans employ to navigate and comprehend their surrounding. Evenson explores what happens if these rules are broken, cannot be applied, or the surrounding starts reacting unexpectedly. This can be seen for example in the story "House Rules",[160] three men live in the ground flour of a house not knowing how they got there, with no way out. All they have as guidance is a set of rules they follow, this being enforced by one of the inhabitants and slowly rebelled against by the other: "'If the breaking of the rules goes unpunished,' suggests Thurm, 'are rules still rules?' 'I punish for them,' says Hatcher. 'I punish Horst.' 'Is this a volitional act on your part or is it the fulfillment of the will of those who control the house?'".[161] It is easy to see any form of religion being downscaled into these three men, one enforces the rules, one is brainlessly following them and the third is questioning the validity of rules that came from an unknown source.

In most of the stories in *The Wavering Knife*[162] the characters are stuck in a specific structure, feverishly searching for a way out, kept by the invisible walls of the rules being applied to them, or which they apply on themselves. They try to shake each other awake, as the girl in "The Ex-father",[163] who tries to force her father to accept his parental role. Evenson explores how rules and structures can be disabling, breaking them apart to explore what happens thereafter, or simply showcasing the prison they are. *The Wavering Knife*[164] plays with the deconstruction of known parameters and questions authority, religion, daily routines, or even academic writing as "Moran's Mexico: A Refutation, by C. Stelzmann".[165]

4.3 Short Stories II – Dark Property (2002)

> *"You have blood on your hands," he said.*
> *Kline said nothing.*
> *"Of multitudes," said the man.*
> *"I see nothing," said Kline.*
> *"You have lost your eyes."*
> *The man broke his gaze, broke his hold upon Kline's thumbs. He walked around the desk, sat, wrote.*
> *"I invite you to surrender your life," he said, without looking up.*
> *"I decline," said Kline.*
> *"If you do not, you sacrifice your eternal lot."*

[160] Evenson 2004d.
[161] Ibid., p. 149.
[162] Evenson 2004b.
[163] Evenson 2004e.
[164] Evenson 2004b.
[165] Evenson 2004f.

Kline shrugged, smiled. "I prefer eternal death."[166]

The novella *Dark Property*[167] is set in a dark and bare apocalyptic wasteland. Evenson uses language to its extremes, slowly parcelling out the narrative. He opens the novel with a quote from the bible and from Heidegger placed side by side; and writes in a language one could call 'neobiblical'.[168] The twisted narrative follows two people through the surreal landscape, a woman carrying a dead baby and a bounty hunter carrying an escaped sex worker whom he is mutilating on his way. Both are moving towards a compound of resurrectionists, who sew dead bodies back together and blow air into them, giving them a lifeless second life. Both characters are confronting this religious community on their own terms. The resurrectionist religion is submitted to by the woman as a means to revive her deceased child; whereas the man revolts against it by killing the different followers of the cult or possibly the same person repeatedly. The different parts of the book open up with lines of Hegel, Hamann, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Einstürzende Neubauten in German, adding a semi-philosophical context to the story, but also further distancing the reader (who is not a German speaker) from the text.[169] Reality is fleeing away and the story made hard to understand, the motivation for characters actions are rare glimpses, which are hard to detect in the dark narrative. Evenson, as he does with many stories captures philosophical principles in dark and horrific pictures, questions the claim of truth and reality. He creates a world that is not easy to comprehend, an effect produced through different writing techniques as Scott Abbott explains in his article "Affliction Fiction":

> *Like the woman, readers experience only fragments of a world that must be interpreted and reinterpreted and that yield tentative meaning at best. To create that experience, Evenson employs dozens of neologisms and otherwise obscure words: crevasion, off squin, sprent, runcated, stammel, benimous, flectubile, greave, spartled, corneous, flittern, flench, ribbard, and so on. The words make sense, more or less, in the context of their sentences; some of them, like frement, "to roar," are historical but obsolete. They remind readers that we see through the glass of language darkly, confront us with a slippery epistemological condition in which the clear, coherent world of habitual thought threatens to collapse*.[170]

The novel is the product of a play with linguistics creating a dead landscape haunted by corpses of forgotten language through a distorted narrative. Evenson explains how he used rare words from the 18th and 17th century and modified them to reincorporate them into language. In an interview he reflects how this process shaped the story: "For me, it was a way of trying to resurrect these dead, really intriguing words, and the story of the novella, which involves a resurrection cult and a very

[166] Evenson 2002c, p. 109.
[167] Ibid.
[168] DeBonis 2003.
[169] See Abbott 2012.
[170] Ibid.

permeable line between life and death, sprang from that. It's an extreme book, but I'm very happy with it."[171] The dark property in Abbott's interpretation is truth,[172] a truth that is not "imparted" but "inflicted".[173] The story shows the skillful approach Evenson has to language and shows the counter narrative he builds to Mormonism, with the philosophical thoughts that encase it.

4.3 Short Stories II – Brotherhood of Mutilation (2003)

> *Borchert smiled. "Knowledge is the most valuable of commodities," he said. "Shall we trade? I'll trade you knowledge for a limb."*[174]

The *Brotherhood of Mutilation*[175] is a novella published in 2003, as chapbook by Earthling Publications, later to be followed up with the extended publication *Last Days*.[176] In this story Evenson dilutes the genre borders and creates a twisted detective story in a Noir setting. The protagonist Kline is offered a job to investigate a crime in a secretive, religious community of ritually mutilated men. In his former job as a detective Kline had his hand cut off by 'the man with the cleaver', then self cauterized it to distract his opposite to be able to shoot him, thereby making Kline the only person whom the religious community would allow access. As the only viable candidate in the community's self imposed restricted requirements, Kline is dropped into the machinery of the religious system having to maneuver in the unknown, secretive territory. He learns that there is a strict hierarchy in place, giving more power to those who have amputated more body parts. Kline is supposed to investigate a murder, without a crime scene, dead body, or the possibility to interview people; since he, a one-time amputee, is not viable to talk to the high rank of the cult. After losing several toes and a night in the compounds strip club, Kline discovers the hidden plot he is involved in. He is to be framed for the murder of the prophet, "[…] a true visionary. Both arms lopped off at the shoulder, legs gone, penis severed, ears removed, eyes removed, lips peeled away, nipples sliced off, buttocks gone.",[177] by the second in command Borchert. Kline finally has to fight his way out of the communities compound in a brutal scene, managing to leave on the brink of death after being forced to further mutilate himself.

Evenson follows the lines of a typical detective novel, the anti-hero has to figure out a twisted plot of a crime; but, moreover Evenson places this scenario in a completely surreal setting. The matter of

[171] Evenson, Goodwin 2005.
[172] See Abbott 2012.
[173] Evenson 2002c, p. 109.
[174] Evenson 2009b, loc 1145.
[175] Ibid.
[176] Evenson 2009a.
[177] Evenson 2009b, loc 568.

fact tone of the novella creates a flow, which lets the reader just accept this manic community and its rules. The characters are flat in the fashion of a typical detective story, described to stand alone, without comparison as writer and English professor Matt Bell notes in his review of the book:

> *Notable among them is the choice to identify each character by a single name—Kline, Borchert, a whole slew of Pauls—or else by a single distinguishing characteristic, such as "Low Voice" or "Torn-Lip." Physical descriptions are equally sparse, often written without metaphor or simile. The men who populate this novel are not like anything. They simply are*.[178]

Evenson shows a fetishized and perverted religious community; blind obedience, secrecy, and a brutalized interpretation of the bible build the framework of this all male society. The importance placed by the individuals on the community is the driving force of the religion, as a place of belonging. The story exaggerates the negative aspects of religion driving them into visible and physical extremes. The genesis of the community's mutilation practice derives from Matthew 5:29-30[179] which states, if a body part offends you it ought to be taken off. This form of an extreme interpretation can also be found in Mormonism's blood atonement, a subject reappearing in Evenson's stories. The believers equate a suffering they inflict upon themselves through the number of body parts they take with connectedness to the divine. Larry Nolen, translator and critic of literature, states in his article about the book: "Mutilation is not simply the *loss* of an integral part, but rather the *separation* of parts that may run counter to the needs and goals of an immortal soul. This I believe lies at the heart of the narrative, or at least at the heart of 'The Brotherhood of Mutilation'."[180] These men are driven by a wish to become immortal through giving up, their personality, their identity and their bodies.

The hierarchy of the religion is built on the number of amputations, but this is a questionable system as the charters in the book discuss, a different possibility being that there should be a difference made between minor and major amputations.[181] The fear of schisms such as this discussion or the by Kline inspired practice of self-cauterization are a constant fear of the communities leaders, who want to maintain a clear and strict doctrine.[182] Evenson shows the irrationality of this strict system that only seems to work inside its own parameters. Kline maneuvers through a world ruled by a system he

---

[178] Bell 2009.

[179] KJV Matthew 5:29-30: "29. And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. 30. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.".

[180] Nolen 2012.

[181] See Evenson 2009b, loc 400.

[182] See Ibid.: "In any case, Mr. Kline despite my personal objections to you, now that you are here, I can't afford to let you go. Too much is at stake. I send you out of here without an investigation and we'll have a schism." "I'm not staying," said Kline. "You leave and I'll have to kill you, " said Borchert. "For the good of the faith. Nothing personal.", loc 555.

can only access by submission on his quest for truth; a truth caught up in the web constructed to organize the religious community. Kline first has to put on the uniform of the cult, grey trousers, a white shirt, and red clip on tie. Peter Straub identifies this in the introduction as the "anonymous white American drudge",[183] or possibly equally reminiscent of the Mormon missionary uniform. But, as Straub further notes, the fact is quickly forgotten, which is the exact point of the uniform. Later Kline's toes are taken in order to place him higher in the hierarchy, and finally he further amputates himself to gain release again. This journey of a level headed and analytical detective through the logic of this community which only functions inside the confinements of their compound is once again a critique of the hierarchical structures of religion, which are build on made up systems excluding and including people for achievements that seem grotesque for the onlooker. In the words of Straub: "It is difficult not to frame the sects in *Last Days*[184] as bleakly parodic versions of Mormonism, but to do so would be more than a little reductive. Sure, Mormonism is in there, but so is a great deal else."[185]

4.4 Concluding Remarks

Regarding this first period of Evenson's writing we can already see a shift happening in the manner he approaches religion and Mormonism. His early stories with explicit Mormon themes had a more humoristic approach, rather mocking certain oddities. But later he employs a sharp deep cutting critique; he picks up darker and more profound issues of religion and religious communities. Probably the experience in BYU and his struggle of having to justify his writing on various levels, towards the church officials, the anonymous complainer, his colleagues, and the broader Mormon audience, has made him more aware of the fact that he needs to choose what position he wants to take in regard to his religious community. And he chooses to pursue his art and not abandon the aesthetics he values. This conscious decision was made by a religious man, who has a testimony and is married, knowing that his writing might result in excommunication. Given that the Mormon religion has the concept of an eternal marriage which will continue in heaven, excommunication will mean the breaking of this alliance.

Writing *Altmann's Tongue*[186] it appears Evenson was unaware of the repercussions his work might have as it was not aiming at a specific Mormon audience and was not intended by him to be

[183] Straub 2009, loc 180.
[184] Evenson 2009a.
[185] Straub 2009, loc 204
[186] Evenson 2002a.

discussed in a LDS context or Mormon literary cycles. Evenson talks in an interview with literary blog bookslut about his experience of having to choose between art and religion:

> *There was a lot of local controversy surrounding my first collection, Altmann's Tongue, which cost me my job at Brigham Young University, a Mormon university I was working at the time. I talk about that in an afterword the paperback version of Altmann's Tongue -- it was very difficult, and ultimately precipitated the collapse of my marriage. But also, knowing that people might dramatically object to what I do made me think very carefully about what I was doing and made me very committed to it: knowing that my life could fall apart because of my fiction made me want to be certain of every word I put on the page. If it was going to destroy me, I wanted it to be worth it*.[187]

The wider Mormon community discarded Evenson after *Altmann's Tongue*[188] but he further participated in the Mormon literary community by publishing in *Sunstone* and *Dialogue*, presenting papers and readings at symposiums. In *Father of Lies*[189] Evenson still has a very distinguishable Mormon setting, whereas he moves to a more abstract and defamiliarized presentation of religion in *Contagion,*[190] *Dark Property,*[191] and *Brotherhood of Mutilation*.[192] *Father of Lies*[193] addresses the omnipresent issue of church officials using their statues for abuse. Here Evenson discusses a very specific issue putting it in very specific terms, thereby slightly losing the style which makes his work so unique. *Contagion*[194] and *Brotherhood of Mutilation*[195] both address religion in a further abstraction, by creating religious doctrine and communities, which are amplified and surreal in a magical realism. Therein Evenson still places references to Mormonism, such as the parallels to blood atonement, the genesis of an emergence of an 'American' religion, or the aspects of the workings of a very tight knight secretive community. *Dark Property*[196] on the other hand is nearly an excess of Evenson's linguistic obsession, it plays with language and creates a story by the means it uses language rather than the other way around. In that it further reflects and alludes to philosophical concepts which build the base for this work. This fictionalization of philosophy and worldviews is the counter narrative to religion. This builds up to his next novel, where Evenson manages to capture the surreal in a Mormon setting.

[187] Evenson, Goodwin 2005.
[188] Evenson 2002a.
[189] Evenson 1998.
[190] Evenson 2000a.
[191] Evenson 2002c.
[192] Evenson 2009b.
[193] Evenson 1998.
[194] Evenson 2000a.
[195] Evenson 2009b.
[196] Evenson 2002c.

5. Evenson's Body of Work – excommunication

Seeing how Evenson's way of addressing issues of religion grew sharper and gained in intensity it is especially interesting to look at *The Open Curtain*;[197] his second novel goes alongside the next step of his alienation from faith. In the epilogue of *The Open Curtain*[198] Evenson explains his personal journey throughout the writing process resulting in a self-chosen excommunication.[199] The book has been nominated for various prizes and won the Time Out New York Best of 2006 Choice and the Lilly Award, and is by many celebrated as his most outstanding work. After his struggle with the church and a fear of excommunication he finally chose to leave on his own terms; with an award-winning novel.

5.1 The Open Curtain (2006)

> *Rudd was smiling in a way that looked like he was about to go mad. "What's wrong?" she asked. "Nothing," he said. She straightened her apron, smoothed it over her belly. "You don't feel any different?" she asked. "Different?" he said. "Of course I feel different. I've just played God. That would have an effect on anyone."*[200]

The Open Curtain[201] is about a Salt Lake City teenage boy, Rudd, who grows up with his pious single mother after the religiously inspired suicide of his father. Coinciding, with Rudd finding old letters and books on blood atonement of his father, is a school project, which leads him to research the murder committed by the grandson of the second prophet Brigham Young. The letters reveal that he has a half brother, whom Rudd seeks out and befriends; however, towards the end of the novel it is revealed that he has only been a figment of the imagination. The research project and the books lead Rudd to obsess about the murder committed by William Hooper Young in 1902, a crime possibly driven by the concept of atonement. The obsession with blood atonement is further encouraged by his half brother Lael, who uses the arguments of the 19th century Mormon leaders[202] to convince Rudd of the beneficial cause of killing someone for their own salvation: "There were people, Lael claimed, who had sinned so greatly it was a mercy to kill them. Killing them did them a favor."[203]

---

197 Evenson 2006.
198 Ibid.
199 See Ibid., pp. 221-223.
200 Evenson 2006, p. 154.
201 Ibid.
202 See Sanders 2006, p.25.
203 Evenson 2006, p. 73.

The relationship between the two teenagers is dominated by power plays as Lael constantly tests his sibling's devotion through violent acts.[204] He defines brotherhood as a blind trust assured by the means of brutal experiences; similar to the 'bond' of the early Mormon Danite brotherhood.[205] As the story further develops Rudd's reality starts to slip and he experiences blackouts, not remembering longer periods of his daily life. At the end of the first part of the novel he is on a hill with his brother looking down upon a family camping, thereafter comes a break and the narration shifts.

In the second part of the novel Rudd is the only survivor in the murder that was committed on the camping family. From here on Lynn the daughter from the murdered family narrates. She lost everyone and tries to reestablish her life, thereby fixating on Rudd. She visits him in the hospital, even starts imagining him to be her boyfriend. When Rudd awakes they establish a friendship, and he later moves into her house. Rudd's behavior becomes more erratic and he isolates himself, locked up in his room or in the garden shed. Despite the difficulty of their relationship they decide to get married on the ground of them having no one but each other. Their marriage takes place in the temple, and since they are so young it is the first time they experience the temple rituals. These rituals are part of Mormon religion, which are restricted to church approved, righteous people, and it is prohibited to speak about them to outsiders; thereby Evenson commits a clear violation of a fundamental doctrine of the LDS church by depicting them in his novel.[206] In these rituals new names are given to the participants and a, by now no longer practiced, ritualized self-atonement is played out as part of the ceremony. These rituals distress both teenagers, as they are reminiscent of the family's murder. Evenson deems it important to show the rituals as they are an important aspect of the violence he perceives to be part of Mormonism. After the wedding Rudd's behavior gets worse and finally Lynn enters into Rudd's shed and realizes that he was the murderer of her parents and sister. Lynn wants to call the police but she is overpowered by Rudd. Now the narration unravels completely and drifts into a surreal chase between the Young murder and the ongoing murder of Lynn. Rudd is stuck between the two stories, when he is in Young's body he has Rudd's memory and the other way around. He repeatedly wakes up to the New York murder scene and is guided by another person on how to act by hints written on notepads. The book ends with the murder of Lynn,

[204] See Evenson 2006: "He saw Lael once a week after that. He knew immediately something was different, yet it took days for him to realize Lael had started making a game out of everything, testing him. Lael offered the oddest appeals to brotherhood, at the oddest possible moments. outside of these moments he did not mention their being brothers at all – as if brotherhood were kind of bond activated only in *extremis*.", p. 31.

[205] See Sanders 2010, p. 97.

[206] See Evenson 2006: "I have tried to limit my discussion of the ceremony largely to one chapter in the second section of the book, and have tried to signal it in such a way that Mormon readers who hold the temple ceremony sacred will be able to see it coming and will be able to avoid it if they so choose.", p. 222.

and a completely unraveled Rudd, being stuck between the different realities, of Young, the Imagined Lael, and himself.[207]

The *Open Curtain*[208] deals with the disharmony between the historical past of Mormonism and the current self-representation of the church. Evenson states in the epilogue of *The Open Curtain*[209] that he sees Mormonism as a religion with violent elements which are being denied and blended out, yet continue to be present until the current time: "I began to feel that the undercurrent of violence in Mormon culture really hasn't changed, that the conditions that made violence well up in earlier Mormon culture are still very much present today".[210] On the one hand the Mormon community only encourages happy narratives with an emphasis on the good in the world, and on the other hand there is a violent history and religious practices like blood atonement, which are trivialized or not spoken about. The confusion, which spreads in Rudd's mind, is triggered through these cracks in the Mormon narrative. The denial to talk about negative aspects, such as the affair of his father and the fact that he committed suicide, is the starting point of Rudd's obsession and split with reality; initially manifested through his imaginary brother being born out of this rejection of the past. The mental disintegration of Rudd is further enhanced through the culture of secrecy in Mormon religion, presented by the subject of blood atonement. Evenson thereby makes these issues manifest through the protagonist of his novel, the ignoring and misinterpreting of a negative past, which comes seeping into current Mormon culture. Fellow Literature Professor Aaron Sanders formulates this in his article about the subject of blood atonement in Mormon Literature:

> *The implication is clear: when an institution, in this case the Mormon religion disassociates itself with its past, that past rears its head in one way or the other – in this case, murders that attempt to replicate the buried doctrine.* […] *These conditions* [the undercut of violence in Mormon culture] *or situations as Jung calls them, activate the archetype that lays dormant in Mormon culture. Labute's*[211] *hero punishes the sinner in a gaggle of saints while Evenson's hero fights off history as it has travels down through temple rituals – both heroes commit murder."*.[212]

Evenson finalized the complete unraveling of his main character produced through the schizophrenic split between reality and the narrative presented by the church, with the epilogue explaining his own disconnection from the Mormon Church. Evenson chose to get his name removed from the church records as he states in the afterword of the book. This means he is disassociated from the church he grew up in and that he is distancing himself from his family and roots, additionally leading to a

[207] See Bell, Evenson 2014: "I hoped that I'd bring certain sorts of readers in with the early pages and then gradually complicate things so that they were entering into a very different literary space almost without knowing. That seems to have worked, since that book was a finalist for the Edgar Award.".
[208] Evenson 2006.
[209] Ibid.
[210] Ibid., pp. 221-222.
[211] See LaBute 1999.
[212] Sanders 2008, p. 28.

divorce.[213] Speaking at a Sunstone symposium[214] in 2006 Evenson states that in the beginning he could not have imagined that he might place his art over his religion, although his position changed as his writing advanced. Scott Hales reviewed *The Open Curtain*[215] on his blog, evaluating the story as a further expression of Evenson's anger towards the church:

> *While it's never stated directly in the afterword, it seems clear from the novel's focus on the 1903 murder and "Blood Atonement," as well as through Evenson's own commentary on the events that led to his loss of faith, that The Open Curtain is–at least partially–a response to Mormonism's rejection of Evenson's violent fiction. Violence and religion are both major themes in this novel, after all, and Evenson's narrative suggests that they are irrevocably intertwined in Mormonism*.[216]

I would suggest the analysis by Hale could hold true for *Father of Lies*,[217] but that *The Open Curtain*[218] displays an internal separation of Evenson from Mormonism rather than the wish to express anger at the long past situation at BYU; all the more so since he is not aiming for Mormons to accept his writing any longer. The proposition made by Evenson about violence in Mormon religion is a crass contrast to the way Mormonism reflects on itself and how it wants the outside world to perceive its adherents. This book can be seen as a highly difficult critique reviling core aspects of Mormonism even some of them forbidden for outsiders to know about.

[213] See Peck 2006.
[214] See Ibid.
[215] Evenson 2006.
[216] Hales 2011.
[217] Evenson 1998.
[218] Evenson 2006.

6. Evenson's Body of Work – post-excommunication

Evenson's works after leaving the LDS church have to be separated into two different categories, the Horror author Brian Evenson and the Science Fiction author B.K. Evenson. Brian Evenson has two pseudonyms used to channel different projects; one is Bjorn Verenson under which he published three texts and who appears in one of the short stories in *Fugue State*[219] "Ninety over Ninety";[220] a comical persona, who is producing titles[221] rather than real fiction. The other one is B.K. Evenson, under this name he is publishing commission based work, narrating computer games in the *Dead Space*[222] series and *Pariah,*[223] writing part of the Alien sequel, *Aliens: No Exit, Knowledge is the greatest danger of all,*[224] or the novel for the Rob Zombie movie *The Lords of Salem.*[225] In an interview with the literary blog Mourning Goats Evenson explains the usage of his different pseudonyms:

> *I think a kind of personality goes with each of those names, and with the name Brian Evenson as well. They're all related, of course--B. K. Evenson and Brian Evenson more closely to one another than to Bjorn Verenson--but for me there's a little bit different feel to each name. B. K. Evenson is more deeply and unrepentantly invested in video games than Brian Evenson, though they both learn from one another and Brian Evenson is coming around. B. K. Evenson can co-write a novel with Rob Zombie; Brian Evenson can only dream of doing that. Bjorn Verenson, on the other hand, is a little bit more obviously nuts and that can show sometimes (for instance his letter in Birkensnake #1).*[226]

Evenson uses the slight variation of B.K. Evenson to write more mainstream fiction for a broader public, something he wants to keep distinguishable from his 'normal' writing.[227] When he talks about his publications as B.K. Evenson he explains that he only takes these engagements which are restricted by certain rules, as they are set in an already established universe, if he feels that he can combine his style with the existing material.[228]

The books Evenson published since then under his full name are further parted into two categories one talking about his short stories and novellas, and the other talking about his latest novel

---

[219] Evenson 2009c.

[220] Evenson 2009d: "'Is Verenson even a legitimate Swedish name?' 'Doesn't matter,' said Anders. 'Nobody cares about that.' 'I care about that.' 'You got to stop caring, then. Remember: the three b's [Big-ass block buster]. So, a Swedish detective, phlegmatic but friendly, someone people can relate to and at the same time laugh at. A slight but pleasant accent. Now titles,' said Anders.", p. 97.

[221] See http://www.brianevenson.com/bjorn.html.

[222] Evenson 2010a, Evenson 2012b.

[223] Evenson 2009e.

[224] Evenson 2008.

[225] Evenson, Zombi 2013.

[226] Evenson, Mourning Goats 2012.

[227] Campbell, Evenson 2010.

[228] Ibid.

Immobility.[229] The short story collections show a similarity in their overarching themes, questioning knowledge and reality. Evenson slowly distances himself from the constant direct involvement with religion in his stories, but rather explores philosophical principles. Most interesting is the book *Immobility*[230] as it places these philosophical approaches and interests next to the religion of the past, thereby functioning very well as a conclusion of this thesis.

6.1 B.K. Evenson – Aliens: No Exit (2008)
Pariah in Halo Evolutions (2009)
Dead Space: Martyr (2010)
Dead Space: Catalyst (2012)
The Lords of Salem (2013)

> *"Briden, the maker is not a good thing. It means us harm," said Callie. "Don't be ridiculous," he said. "This is our salvation." Callie shook her head, laughing bitterly. "You're so obsessed, you can't see what's right in front of you," she said. "You want this to be a religious experience. It doesn't matter to you what evidence there is to the contrary or what it actually is. Evidence be damned, you've already decided what it is."*[231]

Evenson makes a clear distinction when choosing to use a different name for his Science Fiction projects, thereby distancing this work from his regular writing which aims at a different audience. B.K. Evenson has a simpler usage of language and does not experiment as much with new forms of fiction and narrative. Evenson sees his pseudonym B.K. Evenson as a tool to reach a wider audience, as he explains in an interview with HTMLGIANT:

> *I personally think there's a lot more connections between innovative fiction and the best stuff that's going on in genre fiction than most people think, and when Peter Straub edited the New Wave Fabulist issue of Conjunctions I suddenly realized that I had a lot to learn from people that I'd dismissed in advance, out of ignorance. It's caused me to do things like write video game novels and film tie-in novels since I feel that one place the battle for reading should be fought is there: getting people who sometimes read only a book or two a year to start believing in reading again. There's an ethics behind doing that that I believe in.*[232]

Evenson clearly states that he only takes on projects he feels fit to his style of writing and which have an interesting subject. Most of the books relate to one or more themes that are dominant in his

[229] Evenson 2012c.
[230] Ibid.
[231] Evenson 2012b, pp. 249-250.
[232] Evenson, Higgs 2011.

writing, the questioning of reality and knowledge, a search for identity and a critical view on religion and authority.

Probably most interesting is the *Dead Space*[233] series, as it deals with a religious movement which is centered around an evil object. The object is discovered in the deep sea and brought to the surface by a corporation, which wants to put it to some lucrative use. The object mutates humans into monsters, and delivers messages to people through visions of their dead relatives. The first book deals with the discovery of the object and the generation of a cult following around it. The second book plays in a distant future where the corporation is trying to replicate the object to use its power. Despite the evident evil entities of the object, people worship it and believe that there is some form of universal cleansing going to be generated by it. This 'cleansing' manifests in everyone going mad, committing suicide and homicide, to finally deform humans into violent monsters. Again we see a clear critique as Evenson displays the dark side of religion. The fatale consequences of blind faith into a violent system are explored through a pulp Science Fiction medium.

The *Halo*[234] short story and the *Aliens* story[235] rather question authority in a general sense and not in its explicit expression through a religious community. Furthermore they deal with identity, the question of belonging, and moral issues of, for example, patricide. Only *The Lords of Salem*[236] is completely removed from Evenson's typical topics and therefore not of interest to this study. Despite the fact that Evenson cannot choose his subject matter freely in these publications it is interesting to mention them for the reason that he chooses stories he can relate to and writes this fiction to encourage people to read more and get them engaged with literature.

6.2 Short Stories III – Last Days (2009)

> There's no reason to do it, *part of him kept saying as he went to fetch the cleaver.* Just shoot him in the head and be done with him. *But another part of him was saying*, Why not? What did it matter? *He had come here with the intention of killing Borchert:* why not kill him in this way? *And a third part of himself, the part that terrified him most, was saying,* What if Paul is right? What if I am God? There will always be three of me from now on, […].[237]

In 2009 Evenson wrote the second part for the *Brotherhood of Mutilation*,[238] which was published together with the first part and a foreword by fellow writer Peter Straub as *Last Days*.[239] After the

[233] Evenson 2010a.
[234] Evenson 2009e.
[235] Evenson 2008.
[236] Evenson 2013.
[237] Evenson 2009a, loc 2366.
[238] Ibid.

main character Kline escapes from the religious community of mutilated man he wakes up in the hospital being questioned about the happenings in the compound. He is unwilling to give any information to the police officer and immediately has to escape an attack on his life by the brotherhood of mutilation. Kline manages to flee by the help of another religious group we get to know as the Pauls. This schismatic strand of the brotherhood of mutilation nurses Kline back to health in their facility. Every person Kline encounters there looks identical, blond hair, right hand amputated, dressed the same, and introducing themselves as Paul. Kline escapes the Pauls' place as soon as he finds a possibility. On his way home he is captured by the brotherhood of mutilation again. When Kline gets transported back to the brotherhoods compound the Paul Doppelgängers rescue him yet again from his deadly fait.

The leader of the Pauls once a founding member of the brotherhood of mutilation explains to Kline that he is regarded as the messiah of the Pauls. They have turned his amputated body parts into relics and ask him to destroy the brotherhood of mutilation on their behalf. Kline obliges to the plan, since he sees this as the only way to be free from their prosecution. In a brutal massacre Kline beheads the entire top rank of the community. This tremendous act of cruelty makes Kline question his humanity and on the other hand makes him momentarily believe that he might be immortal just like Jesus: "*Besides*, he [Kline] told himself, *it doesn't matter which way I do it. I can't be killed*. […] *If I use only one clip*, he told himself, *maybe I can still come out of this human*."[240] In the final conversation with the leader of the brotherhood of mutilation Kline is again stopped by his curiosity and enters into a game of questions, through which he finds out that is fait with the Pauls will be crucifixion, in the footsteps of the previous messiah Jesus. From this knowledge Kline draws the consequence to burn the Pauls complex down.

This second novella as a continuation of *The Brotherhood of Mutilation*,[241] appears to take the satire of religion even further. After encountering a community of men who simultaneously fall into step after a crazy religious leader, we encounter a religion, which has mutated its followers into Doppelgängers completely stripped of their identity. At first glance they appear to be milder, as they only ask for one amputation and give Kline the option to leave after they nursed him back to health; however in the end they also have the goal of killing him, just coated with a different religious propose. This parody of religion plays out magnificently, when the different Pauls fall out of their roles or do not completely understand what they are supposed to do, or when they start treating everything Kline says as a sacred teaching. As Kline's world collides with the religious communities and he gets increasingly engaged in their dealings, the only way to escape them is by complete

[239] See Straub 2009.
[240] Evenson 2009a, loc 2167.
[241] Evenson 2009b.

destruction. In *Brotherhood of Mutilation*[242] Kline was bound by the religious system and victim to its scrutiny trying to maneuver on their terms; in *Last Days*[243] his position shifts to being the initiator of violence turning into an 'angle of revenge'. After enduring this helpless position Kline lashes out in an attempt to regain control, which can only be brought through the destruction of the uncontrollable system. In this act the reader is very close to Kline, accompanying his actions, wanting him to take these measures to liberate himself, or in the words of writer Matt Bell:

> *To read Last Days mindful of Evenson's goals—of his wish to "have something meaningful to say about the struggle to be yourself in the face of a group or hostile world" while "[giving] readers just enough to let their imaginations do the work . . . to take a dark inward turn"—is to understand that Evenson is unwilling (or unable) to impart his version of the truth to us. Instead, he uses the twin techniques of terror and horror to inflict upon us a reckoning between the good people we believe ourselves to be and our acceptance of—our desire for—Kline's murderous, vengeful final actions. If we side with Kline throughout his transformation into this "angel of death," do we then take on some of the responsibility for what he does? Do we too have to figure out "ways to pretend to be human again?"*[244]

Kline struggles to keep his humanity in the act of leaving the religion behind. A religion he suddenly finds himself engaged with never having chosen it for himself, as most people just get born into a specific religion. Similarly Kline needs time to understand this religion to make an informed decision that the religions destruction is his only way out.

6.2 Short Stories III – Fugue State (2009)
Windeye (2012)

> *"Another thing," said Barton. "If in dire straits, you should Jesus them and claim revelation from God." So as you see, it was not I myself who produced the idea of "Jesusing" them, but Barton. Am I to be blamed if I interpreted the verb in away other than intended? Perhaps he is to blame for his insufficiencies as an instructor*.[245]

The stories in *Fugue State*[246] experiment with the perception of reality, how different people evaluate the same event, people losing their grip on reality, language being lost to them, memories collapsing. The characters are held captive by their surroundings, by words, by incidents in the past, or by fear. They still have a free will and the capacity to make choices but no matter where they turn their situation seems unavoidable, inescapable. Evenson's writing is far removed from Literary Realism, his characters do not grow and change but get lost and confused. Rather than trying to bring

[242] Ibid.
[243] Evenson 2009a.
[244] Bell 2009.
[245] Evenson 2009f, p. 36.
[246] Evenson 2009c.

order to the world through writing, Evenson destabilizes concepts and perception. From the collection *Fugue State*[247] "An Accounting"[248] is the most interesting story for this study. The main character has to write a report on how he became the 'Midwestern Jesus'. It is a cruelly comical story, how he was send on a mission in a scarce apocalyptic wasteland and in an attempt to survive admits the starving population he accidentally founded a religion. The religion, due to the famine, had to incorporate cannibalism, which further led to a relics cult. The story with its gritty descriptions of all these events in retrospective has an innocent ring to it, of a person who committed a mistake but was unable to change the events he set in motion. Evenson, when asked if he wanted to show with the story how religion can 'quickly spiral out of control' in an interview with bookslut, shares his view on religious developments:

> *I think a lot of religions, especially at the beginning, either tend to spiral outward or tighten inward. They either quickly spiral out of control or they tighten in to become conventionalized and reified. In the first case they move quickly to chaos, in the second, they move toward bureaucracy. Neither is very good, but the first is definitely more interesting, at least for the writer. The trick is trying to strike a balance between those two, which is something very few religions ever manage*.[249]

In this creation of a new religion the main character is a victim to circumstance, incapable to escape his surrounding or change the situation he himself has created.

The short story collection *Windeye*[250] is very similar to *Fugue State*,[251] the characters are driven by the wish to understand and comprehend their surroundings, or certain events, but as they try to pin down a situation or an event the faster it slips from their grasp. However the focus is rather on the question of knowledge, how can we be sure of what we know, what gain can be had from further knowledge or what loss does it create. The story "Bon Scott: The choir years",[252] is probably one of the funniest in the collection. It imagines how Bon Scott, the singer of the popular rock band AC/DC, joined the Tabernacle choir and converted to the LDS church shortly before his death. These facts are presented by a journalist, who discovers the old records and recordings of this event and investigates it. He searches for fragments of a hidden knowledge, which are hard to attain, rather opening up more questions than answering them. Both these short stories from the two different collections have a ring of Evenson's *Prophet and Brother*,[253] which mock religion in a dark comical fashion. Evenson still searches for explanations, playing through possible scenarios, investigating religion and religiousness but he regained a lighter tone in doing so. He is not addressing specific personal issues

[247] Evenson 2009c.
[248] Evenson 2009f.
[249] Evenson, Toal 2009.
[250] Evenson 2012a.
[251] Evenson 2009c.
[252] Evenson 2012d.
[253] Evenson 1997c.

with Mormonism, rather religion appears in the flow next to other subjects posing specific questions concerning perception and reality.

6.3 Immobility (2012)

> *"That's the whole problem. Names, categories, divisions. Once you label something, you learn how to hate it. Human, not human. If you're not one, you're the other, and then you and the others can hate each other." He turned to look at Horkai. "You have to understand," he said, "that we're neither human nor not human." "What are we, then?" asked Horkai. "We just are," said Rykte. "Why can't that ever be enough?"*[254]

Evenson's latest novel is *Immobility,*[255] a story set in a post-apocalyptic Utah. The book developed from Evenson producing a fake synopsis for a book he would never write[256] for a blog, which resulted in him being asked by the publisher Tor[257] to actually pursue the novel. The story is dark and brutal, dealing with philosophical questions about the structures of our society. The main character, Joseph Horkai wakes up from an induced frozen coma, without memory of who he is and what happened to him. He is informed that he is some kind of fixer, who survived the extreme radiation, leaving him partially paralyzed but also indestructible. Horkai was woken up to help the community retrieve a stolen cylinder, a mission in need of his special skills and capacity to endure the radiation, which has destroyed most of humanity and polluted the world. Horkai has to accept the information presented to him, as he has nothing he can rely on, lacking a memory to help him decipher reality. Two identical men identified as mules, who have trained their entire life for this task, carry Horkai to his destination. Through conversations with them he discovers more about the community, which self-identifies has a hive:

> *"Like a beehive," said Qanik. "It is our symbol. A united order. Next to the welfare of the community, our own welfare is nothing. We each have a part to play and we must play it. We must consecrate our lives to the service of our whole. Each of us has our purpose and each of us must fulfill that purpose or the community shall suffer."*[258]

---

[254] Evenson 2012c, p. 190.

[255] Ibid.

[256] Evenson 2010b.

[257] See Evenson, Kinstler 2012: "My book Immobility was published with Tor, a science fiction press, and so gets seen as SF, but I also had the opportunity to publish it at a literary press, and if I had it probably would have been seen more in literary terms. But I liked the idea of seeing what would happen if I published it with Tor, the complication of that for certain readers who thought they knew my category. That's another thing my work is increasingly concerned with: the way in which genre works and the way that it can be toyed with.".

[258] Evenson 2012c, p.72.

The beehive is a strong image in the LDS culture, as Mormons see their community to be defined by the image of the hive and the angle. The hive symbolizes the tightknit earthly community, which works in unison for prosperity and the angle represents the heavenly part and connection to the divine.[259] The main character's mission is to retrieve a cylinder from a community self-identifying as angles. They live in a post-apocalyptic Noah's ark protecting seeds of all kinds, which have not been destroyed by the radiation. The men living there believe themselves to be some form of angels changed by the radiation, just like Horkai, in order to protect and revive humankind and constantly study the Mormon cannon. The place being the Mormon granite mountain vaults usually filled with genealogy,[260] to protect the records of the past generations. The man on watch takes Horkai in and offers him to join the guard of the seeds; but seeing the religious fanaticism of the community Horkai decides against it and rather steals the seeds. "*The problem with faith*, thought Horkai, *is that there's no arguing with it. Same problem*, he admitted to himself, *with lack of faith*."[261]

On their return from the mission the two men carrying the paralyzed Horkai die from being exposed to the radiation for such a long time. He is left to fend for himself in the apocalyptic wasteland and is found by a helpful stranger who gives him shelter. The two men live together for a couple of years, Horkai discovers that he was never paralyzed, suspecting the injury was inflicted on him by the hive community. This third station of his travels presents another understanding of society, which is based on the ideas of the philosopher Wessel Zapffe and Thomas Ligotti, whom Evenson dedicated the book to. Horkais new companion Rykte follows Zapffe's philosophical line of thought, namely that humans are born with the 'burden of awareness', which makes them crave a justification for life and death. Humanity has through that developed a need, nature is not capable of serving; therefore humans tragically try to be human which is a paradoxical action.[262] Thomas Ligotti went further in the questioning the need of a human society in his book *The Conspiracy against the human race.*[263] Resonating in the words of Rykte, humans feel the need to label everything, thereby creating imaginary borders, by means of nationalities, names, and religion; these borders are walls of separation, which lead to a deserved destruction. Rykte is an atheist and positions himself to stand

[259] See Mauss 1994: "In the center of Salt Lake City, on either side of Main Street, two important traditional Mormon symbols confront each other: the angle on the temple and the beehive atop the roof of the Hotel Utah. In its usage among Mormons, the beehive seems originally to have represented the word *deseret* from the Book of Mormon, but it has since come to be considered primarily as a symbol of worldly enterprise throughout the Mormon heartland. […] The angle, on the other hand, represents the other-worldly heritage of Mormonism, the spiritual and prophetic elements, the enduring ideals and remarkable doctrines revealed through the Prophet Joseph Smith and passed down as part of a unique and authentic Mormon heritage.", p. 3.

[260] See https://familysearch.org/about.

[261] Evenson 2012c, p. 122.

[262] See Tangenes 2004.

[263] Ligotti 2010.

apart from judging or rebuilding any form of society, which will inevitably bring some form of separation and destruction again.

Horkai never submits to any of the different worldviews, however he chooses to stay with Rykte. The hive community eventually finds Horkai, who is willing to hand over the cylinder, which contains fertilized human eggs, in order to be left alone. When Horkai returns he is trapped by his wish for more knowledge about his past and is forcefully put back into frozen sleep. Before losing consciousness Horkai is informed that this has been the hives' technic for decades; every time they need something from the outside they wake him and before they put him to sleep they remove his memory by shock therapy and drugs.

Immobility[264] employs an interesting trope by using a main character without memory, thereby allowing him to interpret his surroundings on the go without any pre-constructed notions to draw on. The other characters direct actions and words are judged only for what they are. Furthermore, the reader gets introduced to three different models of reorganizing society after the destruction of humanity through this amnesiac lens. Horkai questions the validity of each community and his ability and willingness to be part of it. He is irritated by the hyper-productive beehive, which has an absolute leader and requests complete submission from its members thereby negating individuality. Horkai cannot feel comfortable in the super religious community of angels, who lead a solitary life of studying the Mormon scripture in the need to find some meaning to their circumstances. He appears most comfortable with the lonesome stranger who has adapted an atheist position, condemning all forms of societal developments, which are resulting in labels of diversion.

Evenson does not just simply create two different variations of new formed communities but takes the two historically most important aspects of Mormon society, isolates them by means of an apocalypse and lets them be seen through the eyes of an impartial observer. Horkai being deprived of memory and uncertain about what he can believe to be real or not, is captured in a framework which only consists of the spoken word, language offered to him by his surrounding, and chose what new variation of society to associate himself with. Evenson presents again a very interesting critique of religion, this time taking on a different spin, as he dissected it and laid it bare in its extremes and placed it opposite a philosophical view of life.

6.4 Concluding remarks

Evenson spreads out his writing through the different pseudonyms and thereby explores genre fiction, pulp fiction, and then deliberately destroys these inhibiting borders, thereby broadening the

[264] Evenson 2012c.

accessibility of is writing to a wider audience. After Evenson's excommunication the topic of religion and Mormonism remain dominant themes in his writing and as he explains in an interview with literature professor Aaron Sanders religiosity is not the only part of being Mormon:

> *[…] like Judaism there is a high-cultural element to being Mormon and so even if one is no longer religiously Jewish one is still very much culturally Jewish. And I think the same is true of Mormonism. It's a very intense culture to grow up in. You grow up in a very particular way, you grow up thinking about the world in a way that is pretty unique and maybe even strange to a lot of people. So I guess that's what I would say about that. Religiously, I'm not Mormon anymore, I've made a real effort to separate myself out from that, but culturally all that went into my upbringing and went into it very intensely and I very actively tried to couple that with things from the larger world, the outside world, but that's still something that is very much part of me and that really even controls the way I think about language or the way in which I talk sometimes.*[265]

Evenson continues to explore the subject of religion through various narratives, ranging from highly abstract variations to explicit observations: from the genesis of religion to its destruction. Evenson describes his leaving the church as liberation from censorship that was not necessarily expressed openly but a constant bystander in his writing process. Now he does not have to fear excommunication as a consequence of publishing. Evenson has been extremely active and moved forward in writing about philosophical and political subjects as he elaborates in an interview about *Immobility*:[266]

> *I think of my own work as philosophically engaged, as trying to provide ways of approaching certain sorts of philosophical issues that I feel haunted by. But also as engaged in an assault on religious extremism and patriarchy, an assault which I think of as political. In some of my books, and in my forthcoming novel* Immobility *in particular, those two engagements merge. I think from any rational perspective it's hard not to think of humans as a very bad idea: the planet would be much better off without us; every other species would benefit from our destruction, except maybe cockroaches. Cockroaches would miss us. Pubic lice might miss us as well, but they'd probably eventually get along just fine. At the same time, as a human, and as a human who is generally pretty happy, I can only have those thoughts from within an embodied (lived) human body, and I recognize that if one is not careful they become a kind of luxury, a game with no stakes*.[267]

Evenson uses his art to explore reality and the individual's concept of it, which for him is linked to questioning knowledge. However he does not attempt to give answers but rather poses questions by deconstructing norms and supposedly stable concepts. In nearly all of his publications religion remains to be a subject, laid bare to the scrutiny of his language. The urgency just seems to have shifted from a position of a struggling believer coming to terms with a loss of faith, to an informed

[265] Evenson, Sanders 2016.
[266] Evenson 2012c.
[267] Evenson, Higgs 2011.

observer who can write a light comical story about religion or easily present destruction as the only logical way of dealing with unreasonable religions.

Conclusion

> *And I think, yeah, philosophy does provide me a structure and a way of thinking. Religion—like the religion I grew up with, Mormonism—also provides a way of thinking. And I think those two structures—one highly logical, the other anything but—are always part of my thought process as I'm putting together a story. You put those two things together—ways of formatting language and of formatting the world—and add to them the way in which we arrange language as a writer and the kind of care with which writers look at rhythm and syntax, and it ends up being this complicated negotiation between various different forces*.[268]

Exploring Evenson's work over the span of the last 20 years with a specific focus on his shift from belief to a self-chosen excommunication requires to draw a very close connection between the author and his work while drawing a broad overview. His first publication *Altmann's Tongue*[269] was written without the wish to provoke, but rather as an expression of his artistic values and an exploration of ethical and moral issues. The controversy growing out of his violent fiction in the LDS context spiralled into a public debate and Evenson's resignation as a teacher, forcing him to position himself as a writer within the Mormon community. Disregarding the churches recommendation to stay quiet and not further publish, he pursued his unique way of artistic expression. Knowing he would only be capable of further publications outside a Mormon work context, Evenson left BYU and promptly published the next controversial piece. *Father of Lies*,[270] is written more consciously, he is aware of touching on a difficult subject by writing about abuse inside a church environment. With this novel he clearly marked his position in regards to the LDS church, as he further published against their advice.

The next step was taken with the second novel *The Open Curtain*,[271] as Evenson explores what he views as the schizophrenic relationship between the Mormon Church and its past. Alongside writing this book he decided to get excommunicated from the church. A decision he takes to free himself of the censorship of the religion. Mormonism is a highly participatory community; Evenson went on a two year mission to proselytize in France, he was a Mormon lay bishop and teacher at a Mormon University. When talking about the development of Evenson, it is not a halfhearted decision taken by him to leave the church on behalf of his art. Throughout his work religion takes a dominant role as one of the major subjects he wishes to explore. He takes a scrutinizing look at religion from different angels in his short stories, and every single one of his novels has a specific Mormon setting, Mormon characters, and discusses aspects, issues, and problems of the Mormon society. The short stories, which do not touch directly on the subject of religion, tend to show the counterpart of the

[268] Bennett, Evenson 2015.
[269] Evenson 2002a.
[270] Evenson 1998.
[271] Evenson 2006.

involvement with the subject, as they play around with philosophical ideas and systems. One of the main topics in Evenson's writing is to question the validity of knowledge and reality, how can we know what is real and right. His work is influenced by philosophy and post- structuralism, ideas which are woven into his stories, something he elaborates on in an interview with the blog bookslut:

> *I'm fairly aware of philosophy and especially interested in questions of epistemology, particularly theories that suggest the impossibility of knowing. There's a philosophical thread in most of my work, and even some of the violence and cruelty is very much tied to, for instance, notions of transgression found in Bataille and others. But I have very little patience with fiction that seems to push a critical perspective, fiction that serves as a mouthpiece for a cultural critic or a post-structuralist's views. I'd rather just read the critical text than read the same thing watered down and simplified in fiction. I'd like to think my own stories are most interested in creating a narrative, creating too a certain mood or feeling, that whatever philosophy is there is integrated and sublimated*.[272]

Evenson seems to have chosen a worldview inspired by philosopher such as Zapffe and Deleuze over his former religion; just as Horkai did in the book *Immobility*.[273] In that sense *Immobility*[274] appears to draw some form of conclusion about Mormonism; it isolates the two main aspects of the Mormon religion, the community and spirituality through an apocalyptic scenario and questions their validity. His critique of religion is mostly directed at the hierarchical structures employed by religion, the tightly bound institutionalized system, which limits individuality. He attacks the way in which hierarchical structures in religion work through a system of exclusion as portrayed in *Brotherhood of Mutilation*,[275] or encourage hypocrisy as in *Father of Lies*,[276] or create contradictory doctrines as *The Open Curtain*[277] explores.

It appears that Evenson processes current issues and events in his life by means of his fiction. Religion has played a big part in the first half of his life and the lack thereof played a big part in the second half of his life. Where Evenson poses light comical critiques towards the Mormon religion in the beginning of his career, he quickly shifts towards a harsher critique conflated with philosophical thoughts. Especially *The Open Curtain*[278] and *Father of Lies*[279] seem to have served as a means to come to terms with certain events of distancing himself from the LDS Church. Thereafter religion still plays a role in Evenson's writing, though now he is capable to return to a humorous viewpoint in part, or a more direct and less personal critique on other occasions. Every publication made by Brian

[272] Evenson, Goodwin 2005.
[273] Evenson 2012c.
[274] Ibid.
[275] Evenson 2009b.
[276] Evenson 1998.
[277] Evenson 2006.
[278] Ibid.
[279] Evenson 1998.

Evenson allows to track the position he takes regarding religion and Mormonism in particular and enables one to understand Evenson's path from faith to unbelief.

With the high level of involvement requested by the LDS church, religion must have taken a big part in Evenson's life, which later was repurposed to his writing as he explains in an interview for *The Believer*; an explanation serving well as the concluding remark of this thesis:

> *Since I was literally put in a position where I had to choose between my writing and my religion, I think writing did come to feel like a sort of substitute for religion for me, the thing I had instead of it. I think what I said is still somewhat true, but I guess I'd argue that my work has become more about the inability of any system—logical, philosophical, religious—to make the world a stable place. My fiction is a place where all these ways of trying to apprehend reality and make sense of it are breaking down, falling apart. But there's something both meaningful and exhilarating about being able to recognize the weaknesses in the systems that you use as a framework to understand reality, to come to an understanding that you don't understand things as well as you might have thought. Which I guess means that I've given up the religion of the collapse of the ethical will and replaced it with a sort of anti-religion about the instability of reality, and that I do think it's possible to convert people to such a view*.[280]

[280] Bennett, Evenson 2015.

Bibliography

ABBOTT, BENNETT 2013:

Abbott, Scott, Bennett, Lyn, “Literary Barbed Wire: Reifying the metaphor”, *Steinbeck Review* 10,1 (2013), pp. 12-30.

ALIGHIERI 1971:

Alighieri, Dante, *Dante’s Inferno*, transl. by Mark Musa, Bloomington, 1971.

ALLRED, ANDERSON 1996:

Allred, Janice, Anderson, Lavina (ed.), *Case report of the Mormon Alliance: Vol. 1, 1995*, Salt Lake City, 1996.

ANDERSON, LAVINA 1984:

Anderson, Lavina, “Making the ‘Good’ Good for Something, A Direction for Mormon Literature”, *Mormon Letters Annual 1984*, Salt Lake City, 1984, pp. 150-64.

ANDERSON, NEPHI 2008:

Anderson, Nephi, *Added Upon*, Charleston, 2008.

ANONYMOUS 1996:

Anonymous, “’Clipped and Controlled’ a contemporary look at BYU”, *Sunstone* 20.1 (1996), pp. 61-72.

ARISTOTLE, WHALLEY 1997:

Aristotle, *Aristotle’s* Poetics, *translated and with commentary by George Whalley*, transl. George Whalley, London, 1997.

AUSTIN 1994:

Austin, Michael, “The function of Mormon Literary Criticism at the present time”, *Dialogue, A Journal of Mormon Thought* 28,4, 1994, pp. 131-144.

AUSTIN 1999:

Austin Michael, ”Review, Nothing Left to the Moral Imagination, Father of Lies by Brian Evenson”, *Sunstone* 22.2 (1999), pp. 70-72.

BEENTJES, VAN DER VOORT 2013:

Beentjes, Johannes, van der Voort, Tom, “Effects of Extremely Violent Audiovisual Products on Young People’s Aggressive Behavior and emotional reactions”, in: *New Horizons in Media Psychology*, ed. by Peter Winterhoff-Spurk, Tom van der Voort, Wiesbaden, 2013, pp. 87-104.

BENNION 1997a:

Bennion, John, "Popular and Literary Mormon Novels: Can Weyland and Whipple Dance Together in the House of Fiction?", *BYU Studies* 37.1 (1997), pp. 159-182.

BENNION 1997b:

Bennion, John, “Renegotiating Scylla and Charybdis: Reading and the Distance between New York and Utah”, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 30 (1997), pp. 37-55.

BIENSTOCK ANOLIK 2010:

Bienstock Anolik, Ruth, “Introduction: Diagnosing Demons: Creating and Disabling the Discourse of Difference in the Gothic Tale”, in: *Deamons of the Body and Mind*, ed. by Ruth Bienstock Anolik, Jefferson, 2010, pp. 1-19.

BROOKS, CANNON, SEITER, ZIEBARTH 1997:

Brooks, Joanna, Cannon, Sam, Seiter, David, Ziebarth, Sean, “Don’t Fence me in: A Conversation about Mormon fiction”, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* (1997) 30.1, pp. 153-158.

BURTON 1999:

Burton, Gideon, “Should We Ask, ‘Is This Mormon Literature?’ Towards a Mormon Criticism”, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 32.3 (1999), pp. 33-43.

BURTON, KRAMER 1999:

Burton, Gideon, Kramer, Neal, “The State of Mormon Literature and Criticism”, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 32.2 (1999), pp. 1-12.

BUSH 2004:

Bush, Laura, *Faithful transgressions in the American west, six twentieth-century Mormon women’s autobiographical acts*, Logan, 2004.

CLARE 2012:

Clare, Ralph, “Brian Evenson. *Windeye*.”, *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 32.3 (2012), pp. 131-132.

CRACROFT 1993:

Cracroft, Richard, “Attuning the Authentic Mormon Voice, Stemming the Sophic Tide in LDS Literature”, *Sunstone* 16.5 (1993), pp. 51-57.

CROW 2009:

Crow, Charles, *American Gothic*, Cardiff, 2009.

DEBONIS 2003:

DeBonis, Alex, “Brian Evenson. *Dark Property*.”, *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 23.2 (2003), pp. 140-141.

ENGLAND 1982:

England, Eugene. "The Dawning of a Brighter Day: Mormon Literature after 150 Years.", *BYU Studies* 22.2 (1982), pp. 131-160.

ENGLAND 1988:

England, Eugene, “Beyond ‘Jack Fiction’: Recent Achievements in the Mormon Novel”, *BYU Studies,* 28.2 (1988), pp. 97-109.

ENGLAND 1992a:

England, Eugene (ed.), *Bright Angels and Familiars, Contemporary Mormon Stories*, Salt Lake City, 1992.

ENGLAND 1992b:

England, Eugene, “New Mormon Literature”, in: *Bright Angels and Familiars, Contemporary Mormon Stories*, ed. by Eugene England, Salt Lake City, 1992, pp. xi-xx.

ENGLAND 1996:

England, Eugene, “One view of the garden”, in: *Tending the Garden, Essays on Mormon Literature*, ed. by Eugene England, Lavina Anderson, Salt Lake City, 1996, pp. xiii-xxx.

EVENSON 1996a:

Evenson, Brian, “The Struggle for Mormon Literature”, *Annual of the Association for Mormon Letters 1996*, Provo, 1996, pp. 127-137.

EVENSON 1996c:

Evenson, Brian, “Blessing the Dog”, *Dialogue: a journal of Mormon thought* 29.2 (1996), pp. 149-153.

EVENSON 1996d:

Evenson, Brian, “Sanctified in the Flesh”, *Dialogue: a journal of Mormon thought* 29.3 (1996), pp. 177-185.

EVENSON 1997a:

Evenson, Brian, “Amparo the Bastard”, in: *The din of celestial birds*, Oregon, 1997, pp. 39-50.

EVENSON 1997b:

Evenson, Brian, *The Din of Celestial Birds*, Oregon, 1997

EVENSON 1997c:

Evenson, Brian, *Prophets and Brothers*, Chicago, 1997.

EVENSON 1998:

Evenson, Brian, *Father of Lies*, New York, 1998.

EVENSON 2000a:

Evenson, Brian, *Contagion: and other stories*, La Grand Oregon, 2000.

EVENSON 2000b:

Evenson, Brian, “The Polygamy of Language”, in: *Contagion: and other stories*, La Grand Oregon, 2000, pp. 9-24.

EVENSON 2002a:

Evenson, Brian, *Altmann's Tongue : stories and a novella*, Lincoln, 2002.

EVENSON 2002b:

Evenson, Brian, "Her Other Bodies: A Travelogue", in: *Altmann's Tongue: stories and a novella*, Lincoln, 1994, pp. 145-166.

EVENSON 2002c:

Evenson, Brian, *Dark Property*, New York, 2002.

EVENSON 2002d:

Evenson, Brian, "Job eats them raw, with the dogs an Undoing", in: *Altmann's Tongue: stories and a novella*, Lincoln, 1994, pp. 95-108.

EVENSON 2002e:

Evenson, Brian, "The abbreviation and tragical history of The Auschwitz Barber", in: *Altmann's Tongue: stories and a novella*, Lincoln, 1994, p.72.

EVENSON 2002f:

Evenson, Brian, "Munich Window", in: *Altmann's Tongue: stories and a novella*, Lincoln, 1994, pp. 15-42.

EVENSON 2002g:

Evenson, Brian, "The Father, Unblinking", in: *Altmann's Tongue: stories and a novella*, Lincoln, 1994, pp. 3-8.

EVENSON 2003:

Evenson Brian, *Understanding Robert Coven*, Columbia, 2003.

EVENSON 2004a:

Evenson, Brian, "The Prophets", in: *The Wavering Knife*, Tallahassee, 2002, pp. 155-168.

EVENSON 2004b:

Evenson, Brian, *The Wavering Knife*, Tallahassee, 2002.

EVENSON 2004c:

Evenson, Brian, "Barcode Jesus", in: *The Wavering Knife*, Tallahassee, 2002, pp. 123-134.

EVENSON 2004d:

Evenson, Brian, "House Rules", in: *The Wavering Knife*, Tallahassee, 2002, pp. 143-154.

EVENSON 2004e:

Evenson, Brian, "The Ex-Father", in: *The Wavering Knife*, Tallahassee, 2002, pp. 21-30.

EVENSON 2004f:

Evenson, Brian, “Moran’s Mexico: A Refutation, by C. Stelzmann” *The Wavering Knife*, Tallahassee, 2002, pp. 65-79.

EVENSON 2006:
Evenson, Brian, *The Open Curtain*, Minneapolis, 2006.

EVENSON 2008:
Evenson, B.K., *Aliens no exit, Knowledge is the greatest danger of all*, Milwaukie, 2008.

EVENSON 2009a:
Evenson, Brian, *Last Days* (e-book), Portland, 2009.

EVENSON 2009b:
Evenson, Brian, “Brotherhood of Mutilation”, in: *Last Days* (e-book), Portland, 2009, loc 220-1215.

EVENSON 2009c:
Evenson, Brian, *Fugue State*, Minneapolis, 2009.

EVENSON 2009d:
Evenson, Brian, “Ninety over Ninety”, *Fugue State*, Minneapolis, 2009, pp. 84-108.

EVENSON 2009e:
Evenson, B.K., “Pariah”, in: *Halo Evolutions, essential tales of the Halo universe*, New York, 2009, pp. 13-57.

EVENSON 2009f:
Evenson, Brian, “An Accounting”, *Fugue State*, Minneapolis, 2009, pp. 35-45.

EVENSON 2010a:
Evenson, B.K., *Dead Space Martyr*, New York, 2010.

EVENSON 2012a:
Evenson, Brian, *Windeye*, Minneapolis, 2012.

EVENSON 2012b:
Evenosn, B.K., *Dead Space Catalyst*, New York, 2012.

EVENSON 2012c:
Evenson, Brian, *Immobility*, New York, 2012.

EVENSON 2012d:
Evenson, Brian, “Bon Scott: The Choir Years”, in: *Windeye*, Minneapolis, 2012.

EVENSON 2014:

Evenson, Brian, *Ed vs. Yummy Fur, or what happens when a serial comic becomes a graphic novel*, Minneapolis, 2014.

EVENSON, ASPLUND-CAMPBELL 1995:

Evenson, Brian, "Interview: Evenson's Tongue, A conversation with Brian Evenson", interviewed by Marni Asplund-Campbell, *Sunstone* 18.2 (1995), pp. 71-75.

EVENSON, ZOMBIE 2013:

Evenson, B.K., Zombie, Rob, *The Lords of Salem*, New York, 2013.

GARR 2002:

Garr, Arnold, "Which are the most important Mormon books?", *BYU Studies* 41.3 (2002), pp.35-47.

GEARY 1996:

Geary, Edward, "Mormondom's Lost Generation, The Novelists of the 1940s", in: *Tending the Garden, Essays on Mormon Literature*, ed, by Eugene England, Lavina Anderson, Salt Lake City, 1996, pp. 23-32.

GRIMM, GRIMM 1994:

Grimm, Jacob, Wilhelm Grimm, *Grimms' fairy tales*, transl. by George Cruikshank, London, 1994.

HALES 2014:

Hales, Scott, *Of Many Hearts and Many Minds: The Mormon Novel and the Post-Utopian Challenge of Assimilation,* Cincinnati, 2014.

HAMMERSCHMIDT 2014:

Hammerschmidt, Peter, *Deckname Adler, Klaus Barbie und die westlichen Geheimdienste*, Frankfurt a.M., 2014.

HILLS 2005:

Hills, Matt, *The Pleasure of Horror*, New York, 2005.

HOLLAND-TOLL 2001:

Holland-Toll, Linda, *As American as Mom, Baseball, and Apple Pie: constructing Community in contemporary American Horror Fiction*, Bowling Green, 2001.

KAGEL, WATERMAN 1998:

Kagel, Bryan, Waterman, Brian, *The Lord's University, Freedom and Authority at BYU*, Salt Lake City, 1998.

LABUTE 1999:

LaBute, Neil, *bash: three plays*, Woodstock, 1999.

LESSING, MENDELSSOHN, NICOLAI, PETSCH 1967:
Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim, Mendelssohn, Moses, Nicolai, Friedrich, *Lessings Briefwechsel mit Mendelssohn und Nicolai über das Trauerspiel*, ed. by Robert Petsch, Darmstadt, 1967.

LIGOTTI 2010:
Ligotti, Thomas, *The conspiracy against the human race*, New York, 2010.

LINGIS 2002:
Lingis, Alfonso, "The Eye of the Killer", in: *Altmann's Tongue, stories and a novella*, Lincoln, 2002, pp. xi-xix.

LLYOD-SMITH 2004:
Llyod-Smith, Allan, *American Gothic Fiction, An Introduction*, New York, 2004.

MAGISTRAL, MORRISON 1996:
Magistral, Toni, Morrison, Michael, *A Dark Night's Dreaming: Contemporary American Horror Fiction*, Columbia, 1996.

MAUSS 1994:
Mauss, Armand, *The Angle and the Beehive, The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation*, Chicago, 1994.

MENDELSSOHN, POLLOK 2011:
Mendelssohn, Moses, *Moses Mendelssohn Ästhetische Schriften*, ed. by Anne Pollok, Hamburg, 2011.

NELSON 2011:
Nelson, Maggie, *The Art of Cruelty, a reckoning*, New York, 2011.

OLIVER, SANDERS 2004:
Oliver, Beth, Sanders Meghan, "The Appeal of Horror and Suspense", in: *The Horror Film*, ed. by Stephen Prince, New Jersey, 2004, pp. 242-260.

PRATT 2008:
Pratt, Parley, *Dialogue Between Joseph Smith and the Devil*, Whitefish, 2008.

PUNTER 1996:
Punter, David, *The literature of Terror, volume 2, the modern gothic*, New York, 1996.

SANDERS 2008:
Sanders, Aaron, *Black Witness: Avenging Angels, Heroes and Apostates*, Connecticut, 2008.

SANDERS 2010:

Sanders, Aaron, “Avenging Angels, The Nephi Archetype and Blood Atonement in Neil LaBute, Brian Evenson, and Levi Peterson, and the Making of the Mormon American Writer”, in: *Peculiar portrayals, Mormons on the Page, Stage, and Screen*, ed. by Michael Austin, Mark Decker, Logan, 2010, pp. 87-112.

SCHROTT 2001:

Schrott, Raoul ed., *Gilgamesh: Epos*, Munich, 2001.

SHELLEY 2003:

Shelley, Mary, *Frankenstein or the modern Prometheus*, London, 2003.

SMITH 1938:

Smith, Joseph, *Teachings of the prophet Joseph Smith*, Salt Lake City, 1938.

SMITH 2007:

Smith, Andrew, *Gothic Literature*, Edinburgh, 2007.

SNOW 1995:

Snow, Eliza, *The personal writings of Eliza Roxcy Snow*, Salt Lake City, 1995.

SNOW 2009:

Snow, Eliza, *Eliza R. Snow the complete poetry*, Provo, 2009.

SPERRY 1995:

Sperry, Sidney, “The Book of Mormon as Literature”, *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 4.1 (1995), pp. 41-47.

STOKER 1960:

Stoker, Bram, *Dracula*, New York, 1960.

STRAUB 2006:

Straub, Peter, “Review of Evenson’s work”, in: *The Open Curtain*, by Brian Evenson, 2006, back cover.

STRAUB 2009:

Straub, Peter, “Introduction, What are you doing, where are you going, who are you?”, in: *Last Days* (e-book), by Brian Evenson, Portland, 2009, loc 50-215.

TANGENES 2004:

Tangenes, Gisle. "The View from Mount Zapffe", *Philosophy Now* 45 (2004), pp. 33-34.

WALPOLE 1966:

Walpole, Horace, *The castle of Otranto*, New York, 1966.

WATERMAN 1997:

Waterman, Bryan, "'Awaiting Translation', Timothy Liu, Identity Politics, and the Question of Religious Authenticity", *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 30.1 (1997), pp. 159-176.

WHITNEY 1974:

Whitney, Orson, "Home Literature," in: *A Believing People: Literature of the Latter-day Saints*, ed. by Richard H. Cracroft, Neal E. Lambert, Provo, 1974.

WISKER 2005:

Wisker, Gina, *Horror Fiction: An Introduction*, New York, 2005.

YOUNG 1987:

Young, Brigham, *The Teachings of President Brigham Young*, Salt Lake City, 1987.

ZIMMERMAN 1981:

Zimmerman, Bonnie, "Whatever has never been, an overview of lesbian feminist literary criticism", *Feminist Studies* 7.3 (1981), pp. 451-475.

Weblinks (last used 06.06.2016)

ABBOTT 2012:

Abbott, Scott, "Affliction Fiction", *Open Letters Monthly an Arts and Literature Review* (2012). http://www.openlettersmonthly.com/affliction-fiction/.

ASPLUND-CAMPBELL 1995:

Jorgensen, Bruce, Howe, Susen, Abbott, Scott, Evenson, Brian, Killing Cats: A Discussion of 'Altmann's Tongue' and when Mormon Literature Becomes 'Mormon', Marni Asplund-Campbell (chair), penal discussion conducted by the association of Mormon letters (1995). https://www.sunstonemagazine.com/killing-cats-a-discussion-of-altmanns-tongue-and-when-mormon-literature-becomes-mormon/.

BELL 2009:

Bell, Matt, "Confronting the Murmur in Brian Evenson's *Last Days*", *The Quarterly Conversation* (2009). http://quarterlyconversation.com/brian-evenson-last-days-the-open-curtain-dark-property.

DALTON-WOODBURY 2012:

Dalton-Woodbury, Kathleen, "Mormon Characters in Mormon Literature", *Dawning of a brighter day* (2012). http://associationmormonletters.org/blog/2012/07/mormon-characters-in-mormon-literature/.

EHRENREICH 2003:

Ehrenreich, Ben, “The bad Mormon”, *Believer* 11.4 (2003).
http://www.believermag.com/issues/200305/?read=article_ehrenreich.

EVENSON 1996b:

Evenson, Brian, *Letter of Resignation from BYU*, 1996.
http://www.lds-mormon.com/aaupevre.shtml.

EVENSON 2006:

Evenson, Brian, (2006) “Faithful to Whom–Art Or The Church? The Dilemma For Mormon Artists And Whether There’s A Way Out“ Sunstone session 2.21 (2006).
https://www.sunstonemagazine.com/faithful-to-whom-art-or-the-church-the-dilemma-for-mormon-artists-and-whether-theres-a-way-out/.

EVENSON 2010b:

Evenson, Brian, “Introduction”, *The Hypothetical Library* (05.04.2012).
http://hypolib.typepad.com/the-hypothetical-library/2010/04/brian-evenson.html.

BELL, EVENSON 2014:

Bell, Matt, Evenson, Brian, “5x5: Brian Evenson, Matt Bell in Conversation with Brian Evenson“, *The Believer* (06.10.2014).
http://logger.believermag.com/post/91365296664/5x5-brian-evenson.

EVENSON, BENNETT 2015:

Evenson, Brian, “Bennett, Hayden, 5x5: Brian Evenson, Hayden Bennett in conversation with Brian Evenson", *The Believer* (15.1.2015).
http://logger.believermag.com/post/108170090684/5x5-brian-evenson.

CAMPBELL, EVENSON 2010:

Evenson, Brian, “Making a space with Brian Evenson”, interviewed by Byron Alexander Campbell, *Black Clock* (2010).
http://blackclock.org/blog/interviews/2010/making-a-space-with-brian-evenson/.

ERWIN, EVENSON 2012:

Evenson, Brian, “The difficulty comes in knowing what is real and what is not: an interview with Brian Evenson”, interviewed by Andrew Erwin, *Tin House*, (14.05.2012).
http://www.tinhouse.com/blog/15092/the-difficulty-comes-in-knowing-what-is-real-and-what-is-not-an-interview-with-brian-evenson.html.

EVENSON, GOODWIN 2005:

Evenson, Brian, “An Interview with Brian Evenson”, interviewed by Geoffrey Goodwin, *Bookslut*, (February 2005).
http://www.bookslut.com/features/2005_02_004303.php.

EVENSON, HIGGS 2011:

Evenson, Brian, "What is Experimental Literature? {Five Questions: Brian Evenson}", interviewed by Christopher Higgs, in: *HTMLGIANT* (06.06.2011). http://htmlgiant.com/random/what-is-experimental-literature-five-questions-brian-evenson/.

EVENSON, KINSTLER 2013:

Evenson, Brian, "A Interview with Brian Evenson, Judge of BRW's 2013 Fiction/Prose Contest", interviewed by Jake Kinastler, *Black Warrior Review* (2013). http://bwr.ua.edu/an-interview-with-brian-evanson-judge-of-bwrs-2013-fictionprose-contest/.

EVENSON, MOURNING GOATS 2012:

Evenson, Brian, "20 Questions with Mourning Goats, Interview thirty six, Brian Evenson", interview by goat, *Mourning Goats* (15.04.2012). http://mourninggoats.blogspot.nl/2012/04/36-brian-evenson.html.

EVENSON, OWEN 2010:

Evenson, Brian, "Breaking Realism: An interview with Brian Evenson, Epistemological Terrorist", interviewed by Steve Owen, *Flatmancrooked* (05.07.2010). http://theliteraryunderground.org/flatmancrooked/?p=7385.

EVENSON, SANDERS 2016:

Evenson, Brian, "An interview with my favorite writer, Brian Evenson, ten years ago", interviewed by Aaron Sanders, *J. Aaron Sanders* (17.02.2016). http://jaaronsanders.com/an-interview-with-my-favorite-writer-brian-evenson/.

EVENSON, SMITH 1998:

Evenson, Brian, Smith, Jason Mathew, "But What Does It Mean?: Reading Between The Lines With Brian Evenson" Sunstone symposium session 2.2.5 session, 1998. https://www.sunstonemagazine.com/but-what-does-it-mean-reading-between-the-lines-with-brian-evenson/.

EVENSON, TOAL 2009:

Evenson, Brian, "An interview with Brian Evenson", interviewed by Drew Toal, *bookslut* (July 2009). http://www.bookslut.com/features/2009_07_014753.php.

HALES 2011:

Hales, Scott, "New 'Jack Fiction': a review of Brian Evenson's 'The Open Curtain'", *Artistic Preaching, Exploring Mormon Literature* (26.02.2011). https://artisticpreaching.wordpress.com/2011/02/26/new-jack-fiction-a-review-of-brian-evensons-the-open-curtain/.

HALES 2013:

Hales, Scott, "A Way to Think about 'Faithful Realism'", *Dawning of a brighter day* (2013). http://associationmormonletters.org/blog/2013/10/a-way-to-think-about-faithful-realism/.

JOREGENSEN 1991:

Jorgensen, Bruce, "To tell and hear stories: Let the stranger say", *Association of Mormon Letters* (1991). http://mldb.byu.edu/totell.htm.

KELLY 2012:

Kelly, Stuart, "Horror: a genre doomed to literal hell?", *The Guardian* (7.11.2012). http://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2012/nov/07/horror-genre-literary-hell.

NOLEN 2012:

Nolen, Larry, "Weirdfictionreview.com's 101 Weird Writers: #6 – Brian Evenson, Strange Salvation in "The Brotherhood of Mutilation"", *weird fiction review, your non-denominational source for the weird* (2012). http://weirdfictionreview.com/2012/04/weirdfictionreview-coms-101-weird-writers-6%E2%80%89-%E2%80%89brian-evenson/.

OPPENHEIMER 2013:

Oppenheimer, Mark, "Mormons offer cautionary lesson on sunny outlook vs. literary greatness", *New York Times* (8.11.2013). http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/09/us/mormons-offer-cautionary-lesson-on-sunny-outlook-vs-literary-greatness.html?_r=0.

PECK 2006:

Evenson, Brain, Labute, Neil, Dutcher, Richard, "Dissenting Opinions: Art From The Dark Side Of Happy Valley", Elbert Peck (chair), Sunstone Symposium 2006. https://www.sunstonemagazine.com/dissenting-opinions-art-from-the-dark-side-of-happy-valley/.

RAFFEL [no date]:

Raffel, Dawn, "23 Cotenmporary Writers you should have read by now", Reader's digest, [no date]. http://www.rd.com/culture/contemporary-writers-read/.

SIMONINI 2009:

Simonini, Ross, "'Fugue State' by Brian Evenson", *LA times* (26.06.2009). http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/la-ca-brian-evenson26-2009jul26-story.html.

http://www.brianevenson.com/bjorn.html.

https://familysearch.org/about.

http://mormonlit.lib.byu.edu/lit_author.php?a_id=1468.