

periarthritis nodosa and is treated with a new medicine called cortisone (Roueché's subject also receives a hormone called ACTH) which saves his life (indeed, brings about rapid improvement, enabling him to return to his work and his family) but causes psychological disturbances."

[BIGGER THAN LIFE, Thursday, November 10, 8:00PM]

GATTACA (letter of comment by Gary McGath):

In response to [Mark's comments on GATTACA](#) in the 10/21/22 issue of the MT VOID, Gary McGath writes:

[Mark writes,] "One wonders how so inaccurate a test could be accepted without question by a society, particularly after [an] age of civil rights and civil liberties advances."

I loved the movie and don't find it difficult to believe that a future society would find new things to fetishize. The society portrayed there didn't strike me as particularly strong on civil liberties. It appeared very conformist. [-gmg]

This Week's Reading (book comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

I am fascinated by forgeries and hoaxes. Many have made their way into movies; for example, HOAX (a narrative film about the Howard Hughes autobiography hoax), and TIM'S VERMEER (a documentary about copying a Vermeer).

One of the most documented forgery cases, involving hundreds of forgeries, was that of Mark Hofmann. Hofmann forged hundreds of signatures of historical personages such as Abraham Lincoln, Daniel Boone, Mark Twain, and Jack London. But his true masterpieces were (supposed) early Mormon documents such as the "Anthon Transcript", the "Salamander Letter" and the "Joseph Smith III Blessing"; a (supposed) first printing of "The Oath of a Freeman"; and a (supposed) previously undiscovered poem by Emily Dickinson. Hofmann also got money promising documents that he did not have or that did not even exist. But this was more than just forgery and deception. To cover his tracks, Hofmann killed two people (an almost killed himself when he accidentally set off his third bomb).

This is also one of the most written-about cases. Hofmann pled guilty on 7 January 1987. By 1988, there were already *three* books published about the case. I have read two of these books on the subject, and two others, and there are probably more.

SALAMANDER: THE STORY OF THE MORMON FORGERY MURDERS by Linda Sillitoe and Allen Roberts (31 May 1988, Signature Books, ISBN 978-0-941-21465-0) was first out of the gate (I believe). It was also the first I read. At 570 pages, including an index, it is probably also the most complete.

THE MORMON MURDERS: A TRUE STORY OF GREED, FORGERY, DECEIT, AND DEATH by Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith (30 June 1988, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 978-1-555-84064-8) is the one book I know of on the subject that I have not read.

A GATHERING OF SAINTS: A TRUE STORY OF MURDER, MONEY AND DECEIT by Robert Lindsey (15 September 1988, Simon and Schuster, ISBN 978-0-671-65112-1) is 400 pages, including an index. It covers pretty much the same ground as SALAMANDER, but not in the same level of detail.

VICTIMS: THE LDS CHURCH AND THE MARK HOFMANN CASE by Richard E. Turley, Jr., (1992, University of Illinois Press, ISBN 978-0-252-01885-5), not surprisingly, focuses less on Hofmann and more on the victims, in specific the LDS Church and various Mormons. The result is that little is said about other victims who purchased forged autographs of non-Mormon historical figures, or the Emily Dickinson poem. ("The Oath of a Freeman" is covered, but probably only because it was so central to the entire series of fraud.) Hofmann is really just a background figure. Parts of the story are told from the points of views of various victims, but none of Hofmann's activities are from his point of view. That is, Turley may say something like, "Jones became concerned about the loan," but he doesn't say, "Hofmann became concerned about the loan." The closest is having someone say, "When I talked to him, Hofmann seemed concerned about the loan." The closest he comes to getting inside Hofmann's head are the transcripts of the interviews with Hofmann, and it's known that not everything Hofmann said was the truth.

Turley is a Mormon, and in his introduction he says that while he is the managing director of the Historical Department of the LDS Church, and while there is a process for getting official approval for publications, Turley purposely did not put his book through that process. While he understandably wants to make his Church and its elders appear honest and virtuous, and describes a lot of the dealings that seemed questionable on the part of Church officials as being merely misunderstood, he does on the whole seem to have been honest in his narration. (It is difficult to judge, of course, because a lot of what he relies on are documents and conversations that other authors did not have access to, and the book as a whole can be read as a response to the two earlier books.) Sillitoe, Roberts, and Turley are all journalists, and Turley is not, which makes this an interesting contrast to the other books. Perhaps as befits his status as a historian, Turley has 160 pages of appendices, notes, and index in a 517-page book.

THE POET AND THE MURDERER: A TRUE STORY OF VERSE, VIOLENCE AND THE ART OF FORGERY by Simon Worrall (2002, Fourth Estate, ISBN 978-1-841-15586-9), while covering all of Hofmann's "career", has far more information about the Emily Dickinson forgery, with a lot of background information about the Jones Library's acquisition of the forgery and subsequent events involving it. In fact at least 80 of the 270 pages are dedicated to this one item. (It could be more--this book has no index.) Another large part is devoted to describing famous forgers and their techniques. Hofmann in some sense merely provided the inspiration for a book more about Dickinson on the one hand, and "the art of forgery" on the other. But for readers interested in Emily Dickinson, this will obviously have more appeal.

[All publication information is for the hardcover printing; many of these are now available in paperback and ebook formats as well.]

[-ec1]

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Quote of the Week:

Halloween was confusing. All my life my parents said,
"Never take candy from strangers." And then they dressed
me up and said, "Go beg for it." I didn't know what to
do! I'd knock on people's doors and go, "Trick or
treat." "No thank you."

--Rita Rudner

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