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What Vernacular Narratives Teach Us About Trauma:

An Analysis of Teton Dam Flood Narratives

by

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What Vernacular Narratives Teach us About Trauma: An Analysis of Teton Dam Flood  
Narratives

Dissertation Abstract—Idaho State University (2019)

Current critiques of the field of trauma studies argue that trauma scholars need more nuanced views of trauma that acknowledge the impact of history and culture on traumatic experience. This project offers such nuance by demonstrating a methodology that includes close narrative analysis in addition to identifying the cultural and historical meaning embedded in narratives. My findings demonstrate the following: the usefulness of John Miles Foley's immanent art theory and William Labov and Joshua Waletzky's framework of oral personal experience narrative in broadening our understanding of trauma narratives, the importance of close analysis of *vernacular* trauma narratives, the impact of the United States' history of reclaiming the West on a particular traumatic event, and the way cultural history affects the manner in which trauma survivors process an event. These findings are revealed through my analysis of the Teton Dam Oral History Collection, which recounts the experiences of those impacted by Idaho's Teton Dam Flood in 1976.

Chapter 2, "Narrative Structure, Register, and Performance Arena" elaborates on the connection between Foley and Labov and Waletzky's theories and the Teton Dam Flood narratives, by looking at a specific narrative and demonstrating the recurrent story pattern of warning, escape, return, and evaluation. Chapter 3, "Disaster as Progress and Beliefs about Water in the West," analyzes why many flood survivors saw the flood as a positive experience and supported immediately rebuilding the dam, reflecting cultural beliefs about the necessity and use of water in the West. Chapter 4, "Religious Words in the Teton Dam Flood Narratives," analyzes the recurrence of Words with significant cultural meaning for members of the Church

of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, which included a majority of the survivors. Chapter V, “The Case for Trauma Informed Pedagogy,” explores recent movements in education to teach potentially traumatic texts and topics in effective and ethical ways.

Key Words: Trauma Theory, Immanent Art, Framework of Oral Personal Experience, Vernacular Trauma Narratives, Disaster Narratives, Trauma Informed Pedagogy, Teton Dam Flood, Church of Jesus-Christ of Latter-Day Saints,

## Chapter I: Introduction

Oklahoma City. 9/11. Katrina. From terrorist attacks to natural disasters, American history of the past two decades is peppered with traumatic events, demonstrating the breadth of experience covered by the term “trauma” and indicating some of the challenges the field of trauma studies in the humanities faces in attempting to address this breadth. Trauma studies in the humanities originated in a “poststructuralist theorization of trauma in the 1990s,” but many critics today “call on [scholars] to nuance [their] notions of trauma” and to develop new “paradigms” for understanding trauma (Rothberg xii-xiii). Scholars from many different fields are acting on this call as they explore trauma from the perspective of history, psychology, and sociology, but I suggest that the humanities have untapped theories and methodologies which can “nuance our notions of trauma” in significant ways (Rothberg xii). Specifically, I argue that we should analyze first-person vernacular narratives of traumatic events using the methodologies of fields of orality and linguistics to expand our understanding of trauma. This will allow trauma studies in the humanities to expand beyond a narrowly defined “trauma aesthetic” which focuses on “canonical traumatic texts” (Gibbs 17).

Most scholarly work in the past two decades, especially in the humanities, acknowledges Cathy Caruth’s edited anthology, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, as a key to the explosion of interest in the field, and, as can be expected, subsequent scholars have challenged her original explanations and assumptions. Two recent works in trauma studies by literary scholars Michelle Balaev and Alan Gibbs critique Caruth’s views on trauma. Gibbs argues that Caruth’s interpretation of Freud’s theory of trauma is too rigid. For example, in the *Trauma* anthology, as Caruth explores the idea that most traumatic moments are experienced belatedly, she moves from

“hypothesizing to definitive statement, but with a missing logical argument bridging the two” (Gibbs 6). At one moment she states that “a response is sometimes delayed” to stating firmly that traumatic experience is “not experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly” (Gibbs 7). Statements such as these have been applied by subsequent critics in an unquestioning, rigid way. This rigid application of Caruth’s interpretation of trauma has given rise to what Gibbs calls a “trauma aesthetic” which identifies canonical trauma texts, such as Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, and insists that certain narrative techniques are the only acceptable way to portray trauma in literature: “Trauma in art and literature is considered by Caruthian theory to be unrepresentable, or only representable through the employment of radically fragmented and experimental forms” (Gibbs 14). Additionally, Belgian scholar Stef Craps agrees that “the founding texts of the field ... often favour or even prescribe a modernist aesthetic of fragmentation and aporia as uniquely suited to the task of bearing witness to trauma” (46). In humanities scholar Ruth Leys’ book, *Trauma: A Genealogy*, she claims that Cathy Caruth “uses the notion of trauma as a critical concept in order to support her performative theory of language” (275). To accomplish this, she performs altered and forced readings of Freud to support her theory, which Leys finds “flimsy” and “badly formulated” (274). While there is validity in Caruth’s theory, it is too narrowly focused to continue to be applied as the central theory in trauma studies.

In addition to fictional trauma texts, many of the original scholars in trauma studies focus on Holocaust accounts. In some cases, scholars use first-person accounts of traumatic events in their work, but they ignore the fact that there are key differences between written and oral stories and fictional narratives and non-fiction accounts. Fields of orality such as folklore and sociolinguistics have valuable insight to add to trauma studies because they are expert at contextualizing first-person narratives and analyzing genuine oral texts. These fields recognize

that a story has a narrator, an audience, and a larger social tradition in which it exists. Any attempts to analyze and make conclusions are made with these contexts firmly in mind and clearly expressed. When scholars in other fields leap from first person accounts to excerpts from novels with little explanation, it opens trauma theory up to apparent contradictions. For example, cultural theorists argue that trauma is inexpressible, and yet “trauma survivors continue to tell stories in which experience and narrative, are, in fact, very closely interwoven” (Robinett 290). Again, using the methodologies of fields of orality can address some of these contradictions and ground us in how people actually talk about traumatic events, as opposed to how novelists imagine people talk about traumatic events.

To demonstrate the usefulness of the methodologies of folklore and sociolinguistics, I will analyze a collection of vernacular trauma narratives. Specifically, I will explore a subgenre of trauma narrative, the disaster narrative. Fortunately, technological advances have made it easier to collect and analyze disaster narratives. For example, Hurricane Katrina, a serious disaster with long-term effects, prompted the creation of multiple databases such as *Alive in Truth* and *The Great Deluge Oral History Project*, which feature oral histories from Katrina survivors. These collections not only preserve memories of the disaster, but also provide material for scholars and researchers to explore. My project offers a methodology for examining these collections. Sociologist E.L. Quarantelli defines disasters as “relatively sudden occasions when, because of perceived threats, the routines of collective social units are seriously disrupted and when unplanned courses of action have to be undertaken to cope with the crisis” (682). Psychologist Gilbert Reyes explains that approaches to studying the psychosocial effects of disasters can be divided into clinical and community-focused studies. Clinical studies “examine just those people who exhibit extreme reactions or who seek treatment for enduring

psychological disturbances, whereas community-focused studies examine populations of people affected by a given disaster” (Reyes 507). My project allows us to look at trauma from a community-focused perspective, rather than the clinical focus that Caruth’s theory is based in, thus expanding the breadth of trauma research in useful ways. Again, this community-focused approach will fill a recognized gap in trauma studies. In exploring this type of trauma I acknowledge that traumatic experience exists on a continuum of severity. For example, Holocaust experiences would be instances of extreme trauma, whereas the disaster trauma that I explore is largely a milder experience of trauma, with little loss of human life, and damage mostly affecting homes and possessions.

The collection I will analyze is the Teton Dam Flood Oral History project. These narratives were collected from flood survivors in 1977, a year after Idaho’s Teton Dam disaster in the Upper Snake River Valley. The narratives recount the experiences of those affected by the failure of the Teton Dam, an \$80 million project constructed by the Bureau of Reclamation. Upon its completion in June 1976, engineers began to fill the dam. A heavy spring run-off and the lack of a functioning spillway led the dam to fill much faster than expected. Engineers began to notice leaks in the dam on June 4, 1976 and worked throughout the night and following morning to try to fill and compact holes. Unfortunately, their efforts were futile and the Teton Dam broke at 11:57 a.m. on June 5, 1976. When the north side of the earthwork dam collapsed, an estimated 80 billion gallons of water flooded the Upper Snake River Valley, causing major damage to local communities (McDonald 42). The water reached the town of Wilford, 8.4 miles away, at 12:20 p.m., completely devastating the small community. At 12:30 it flooded some portions of the small town of Teton, reaching Sugar City soon after. It reached the larger city of Rexburg at 2:30 p.m. and reached Roberts at 9:00 p.m. At 1:00 a.m. on Sunday, June 7, the water

passed through Idaho Falls following the course of the Snake River. It passed through portions of Shelley at 2:00 a.m. and Blackfoot at 10:00 a.m. The flood ended when the remaining water emptied into the American Falls Reservoir at 12:30 a.m. on Monday, June 7, 36.5 hours from the time of the initial break (Brown 2C-4C). The total land covered by the flood was about 300 square miles. Damages were estimated at \$2 billion, or \$8 billion in today's dollars (Ramseth and Clark). Nearly 4,000 homes were damaged or destroyed and 350 businesses were lost. Eleven people died from flood-related causes, and roughly 20,000 cattle were killed in the flood. Later studies of the dam determined that the cause of failure was a combination of geological factors and poor design decisions.

As mentioned, oral histories were collected from survivors from June to September of 1977, a year after the flood occurred. The Teton Dam Oral History Project was a joint project of the history departments of Utah State University and Ricks College (predecessor to Brigham Young University-Idaho), and the Idaho State Historical Society. The purpose was to gather and preserve information for historical and scholarly use concerning the disaster; however, aside from local, book-length, historical projects, which tend to be filiopietistic, and articles which analyze the engineering of the dam, there is little scholarly work published on this event. Historian Dylan J. McDonald, a former archivist for the Idaho State Historical Society who studies water use in the American West, argues that "it is time that this event stopped begging for the attention it deserves" (8). Additionally, my own interest stems from having survived the Teton Dam Flood as a five-year-old Sugar City resident.

My analysis of these vernacular narratives will offer evidence that trauma survivors are able to express their stories and that doing so is healing and empowering, as opposed to the aesthetic focus on speechlessness that prior trauma studies have emphasized. Holocaust scholar

Dori Laub explains that “when one can articulate and transmit the story, literally transfer it to another outside oneself and then take it back again, inside” the teller can reassert “the hegemony of reality and ...reexternaliz[e] ...the evil that affected and contaminated the trauma victim” (Felman and Laub 69). For example, in Shoshanna Felman and Laub’s book *Testimony*, they share the experience of a man who had been a child during the Holocaust and survived the camps. As an adult, he continued to suffer with anxiety, sleeplessness, and nightmares, until he shared his story with a Holocaust video archive, which freed him from these oppressive memories of the past. The moment was “a liberation which allows him for the first time to experience feelings both of mourning and of hope” (Felman and Laub 46). Similar effects are evident in the experience of Clarie Browning, a Teton Dam Flood survivor, and her family. Clarie’s father owned a honey business that was devastated by the flood. After the flood, he was “nervous and mixed up,” avoiding group meetings, sending her instead to hear directions or instructions for clean-up (10). Initially, he also refused to let anyone come onto his property to help clean up. Finally, he allowed a group of volunteers from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints to come help with clean-up efforts. Browning states,

They were so kind to my parents who were still experiencing shock. The one bishop<sup>1</sup> seemed to make a difference to my father. He came to me and said, “Where is your father?” I said he was behind the warehouse, and wouldn’t come out in groups of people. He said, “Well, I’ll go back and talk to him.” It had been about eight days since the flood and my father still couldn’t come out where groups of people were. This man went back and spent nearly two hours before I ever saw him again. When he came back, he brought my father with him. It was the first time he came into a group of people and he had my father take him around and show him all the property and everything that had been lost.

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<sup>1</sup> A bishop is the leader of a congregation of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

This was a turning point for my father because after that he seemed to feel a lot better. But this man spent all of his time and I think he really knew where he was needed the most because he spent all that time talking with my father. My mother couldn't stop talking. His next chore was when he got her to take him all around and show him everything. She was calm again. I really felt grateful to him for the time he spent with them. That was a turning point for them both, emotionally. (10-11)

This experience illustrates that trauma survivors can be both empowered and healed by telling their stories and that they are able to tell their stories. They are not forever locked into the speechlessness that Caruth describes, but can move past that to a coherent narrative which heals and empowers. As mentioned, exploring these types of survivor narratives offers an expanded view of trauma narrative and the narrative characteristics of trauma that moves beyond the Freudian, clinically focused view of extreme trauma portrayed in many canonical trauma texts.

This project will intersect with several fields within the humanities, as the following literature reviews indicate: first, the field of trauma studies; second, the field of folklore and orality studies; and third, the field of sociolinguistics.

Trauma studies in the humanities essentially began with Cathy Caruth's edited book *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* in 1995, although earlier works by Pierre Nora, Yosef Yerushalmi, Michel Foucault, and Ian Hacking were influential (Buelens et al. 2). Caruth's work responded to the criticism that deconstruction theory was too text-oriented and did not address real-world issues (Eaglestone 12). Caruth's theory became a "critical-theoretical way of attending to and addressing the representation of human suffering" (Eaglestone 12). Early work in the field tied closely to literature of the Holocaust. Since then it has largely concerned itself with "survivor narratives, responses to persecution and prejudice, and to the Holocaust and other

acts of mass atrocity and genocide” (Buelens et al. 1). Trauma studies also span a variety of fields. European scholars Gert Buelens, Sam Durrant, and Robert Eaglestone state that trauma theory is “perhaps less a field or a methodology than a coming together of concerns and disciplines” (3). For example, work in the field draws on “literary and cultural studies, history, politics, sociology, psychology and philosophy” (Buelens et al. 3).

Caruth’s initial definition of trauma became foundational in trauma studies, although scholars inside and outside the humanities have since challenged it. Caruth states in the introduction to *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* that she is not interested so much in defining trauma as in “attempting to understand its surprising impact: to examine how trauma unsettles and forces us to rethink our notions of experience, and of communication, in therapy, in the classroom, and in literature, as well as in psychoanalytic theory” (4). Whether she intended it or not, Caruth’s definition of trauma in the introduction to her 1995 anthology became a touchstone and is oft-cited and challenged. She states that trauma “consists in the structure of its experience or reception: the event is not assimilated fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it” (*Trauma* 4-5). In other words, when a traumatic event occurs, the person experiencing the trauma is numbed to its full impact, which they begin to manifest later through post-traumatic stress symptoms. Caruth’s definition grows largely out of a Freudian understanding of trauma; she interprets Freud’s writings as saying that the traumatic event is too sudden and violent to be fully realized at the time, and thus “imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivors” as a means of comprehending (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 4). Freud’s theories contributed significantly to psychology’s current definition of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) which is “an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event

occurs in the often uncontrolled, repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena” (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 57-58). This is where Reyes’ distinction between clinical and community focused studies is important. Because Caruth draws her definition of trauma from Freud, a clinical psychologist, it, by nature, focuses on people who have had “extreme reactions” to traumatic events. Conversely, community studies and current medical views of trauma indicate that someone can experience a traumatic event and not necessarily experience PTSD. The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-IV* describes a traumatic event as one in which a person experiences or witnesses an event in which they are threatened with death, injury, or other physical harm and cannot resist. The resulting emotional state can include fear, helplessness, and horror (Robinett 293). As Jane Robinett, another literary scholar, argues, traumatic experience is *not* beyond expression and inaccessible to the survivor. She argues that survivors tell coherent stories and that, through doing so, they are able to integrate the traumatic experience into their psyche and gain empowerment (Robinett 296). While it *can* include fear, helplessness, and horror, those reactions are not uniform. Many who experience traumatic events are able to recover and process the event in a relatively healthy way. As Quarantelli indicates, “disasters seldom produce new psychoses or severe mental illness ... they often generate short-lived and self-remitting reactions, such as loss of appetite, sleeplessness, and anxiety” (684). However, Caruth seems most interested in examining narratives in which the traumatized person has not processed the event and is in some way stuck or trapped within silence or a recurring experience of the trauma. While this is an important area of focus, it is just one aspect of trauma and can be limiting if applied to all cases. There is much to be learned from a larger analysis of the way a trauma has influenced an entire community, and this is where I hope to add insight.

Other critics feel that the scope of trauma studies is too narrow and that its lack of an effective interdisciplinarity can be a weakness. Belgian literary scholar Stef Craps claims that trauma studies has been too Eurocentric and needs to rethink its premises so that it can be applied globally. It has also, to date, mostly examined modernist texts (Craps 46). Michael Rothberg also argues that trauma studies must become less Eurocentric and work with other fields to address social issues such as labor and climate change (xv). There are researchers moving to answer these critiques. For example, Ananya Kabir has turned her attention to trauma studies in the realm of the black Atlantic and Cambodia; Nouri Gana explores post-civil war Lebanon; and Lyndsey Stonebridge explores refugee camps in Australia. Others criticize trauma studies' interdisciplinary nature. Wulf Kansteiner claims that trauma theory's "interdisciplinary research trajectory has gone astray" arguing that trauma theory provides an "aestheticized, morally and politically imprecise concept of cultural trauma, which provides little insight into the social and cultural repercussions of historical traumata" (194). He also argues that Caruth and other theorists are "less interested in the particular histories of a traumatic event, and more interested in using that event to demonstrate their view of language itself" (Kansteiner 203). In other words, he sees a need for an approach less grounded in literary and language theory. Eaglestone counters Kansteiner's critique, arguing that deconstruction is more effective than the "bland positivism of other approaches" which are not suited to "engage with the profound questions that a serious consideration of trauma asks" (13). Whether one agrees with Kansteiner about the limitations of literary approaches to trauma analysis or not, his critique verifies that there is room for more methodologies to fill the perceived inadequacy of current approaches.

While there is still a healthy amount of work being done in the field of trauma studies, most of these more recent projects do little to address the concerns of these critics. A review of the MLA Bibliography from 2016-2019 reveals studies within the field which include exploring specific literary texts through the lens of trauma theory (including classic texts, such as those by Shakespeare), linking trauma theory with feminist and postcolonial theory, and exploring trauma theory's relationship to political situations such as those in South Africa and Rwanda. Aside from the studies in Africa, most of these projects continue to work within the parameters that trauma theory has already set. My project attempts to address some of the limitations of trauma theory critics have addressed and to take trauma studies in a new direction.

In spite of the lack of research connecting trauma studies and folklore and linguistics, it is logical to use methodologies found in folklore studies, since most non-literary survivor narratives are vernacular stories. The *Encyclopedia of American Folklore* states that folk narratives, which include oral histories, offer “a great deal of information for the folklore scholar,” including “insights into cultural traditions, values, assumptions, and ideals” (Watts 282). Additionally, as Sandra Dolby states, the place of personal experience narrative in folklore has only “become more solidly assured” since its introduction into the field in the late 1970s (xii). Specifically, John Miles Foley's theory of Immanent Art provides a useful methodology for reviewing trauma narratives. This theory builds on the Oral-Formulaic Theory, also known as the Parry-Lord theory, which seeks to identify the “building blocks of oral traditional narrative” (Foley, *How to Read an Oral Poem*, 109). Parry and Lord argue that there is an inventory of phrases, scenes, and patterns from which oral storytellers within a particular cultural group draw. Foley's theory then attempts to understand the “idiomatic implications” of these building blocks (109). While Foley's initial analysis focused on oral epic poems he “advocate[s] applying the

theory . . . to specific works from a variety of oral traditions and to specific oral-derived texts” (*Immanent Art*, 247). In my project, Foley’s theory is useful to apply to trauma narratives because they too seem to follow a certain inventory of formulas. Indeed, those who initially studied survivor stories from the Buffalo Creek Flood, which occurred in West Virginia in 1972, when a makeshift dam full of mining waste broke and flooded the valley below, were struck by the similarity of the stories. Other trauma victims, such as refugees, seem to tell similar stories as well (see Shuman and Bohmer). In fact, Foley directly addresses the inadequacy of literary theory in assessing oral-derived texts, stating that his approach “allows access to the . . . immanence of the tradition that informs each performance or text, the silent partner that our literary training has prevented us from fully appreciating” (*Immanent Art*, xv).

The research within folkloristics that most closely relates to trauma studies is the Hurricane Katrina study by folklorist Carl Lindahl, which finds that media portrayal of Hurricane Katrina privileged some narratives over others, usually at the expense of the victims. Projects such as *Surviving Katrina and Rita in Houston (SKRH)* allow survivors to tell their stories in their own terms and demonstrate the psychological value of allowing survivors to tell their stories. Additionally, Dan Hetherington’s dissertation on the Buffalo Creek survivors finds that trauma was evident in the characteristics of the narrative in a way that the tellers of the stories did not perceive. He then links these characteristics to psychological theories to look for explanations. While his work has a clear similarity to my project, he is more interested in the psychological implications of the study than the textual and cultural.

Although there is little in the field of sociolinguistics which explicitly unites trauma and narrative, linguists’ research into the structure of narrative offers valuable insight. Linguist William Labov never used the term trauma narrative, but in his research he often asked people

“When has your life been in danger?” and he would then record their stories. These danger narratives would clearly qualify as trauma narratives according to the definitions we have established thus far. Labov then used his findings to identify a narrative structure which has provided the “analytical apparatus” which linguists have built on for decades (DeFina and Georgakopoulou 39). Labov’s theory of narrative structure, which is elaborated in the Methods section below, spans what has been the “gulf between literary and vernacular storytelling” and accounts for the affective impact of storytelling by identifying an evaluative stage in the structure of narrative (DeFina and Georgakopoulou 46). Critics of Labov argue that the stories he analyzed are mostly presented as monologues, while ignoring the interactive nature of storytelling through context, audience, or interview (DeFina and Georgakopoulou 44). These perceived weaknesses have been addressed by linguists using ethnopoetics and conversation analysis and are directly addressed by Foley as well. Of particular value to this project is the work on conversation analysis. In this approach, Harvey Sacks, Emanuel A. Schegloff, and Gail Jefferson look at narrative structure as “talk-in-interaction” and focus closely on the “turn-taking system” which takes place when someone tells a story (DeFina and Georgakopoulou 54; see Sacks et al.). While conversation analysis is credited for acknowledging that “structure is not independent of context,” DeFina and Georgakopoulou feel it is limited because it “refuses to consider the existence of any underlying structure for narrative” (DeFina and Georgakopoulou 60). Labov’s work is useful to this project because it identifies the basic structure of danger or trauma narratives. Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson’s work is useful because the narratives I examine are told in an interview format, and exploring the way the interviewer impacts the telling of the story is important.

In summary, the review of literature in these three fields demonstrates that while literary studies have helped launch the interest in trauma narratives in the humanities, there is ample room for the fields of orality to offer valuable methodologies for deepening our understanding of vernacular accounts of trauma and how people react to trauma.

## **Methods**

The Teton Dam oral history collection contains 258 oral histories. I have reviewed the transcripts and available recordings of these interviews. The majority of the collection is housed in BYU-Idaho Special Collections with the remainder found in Utah State University Special Collections. While the Idaho Historical Society was involved in the project, they currently only have one of the transcripts in their facility in Boise. For this project, I read the entire collection to get the most thorough data possible.<sup>2</sup>

My primary method for analyzing the trauma narratives is to apply John Miles Foley's Immanent Art methodology. Immanent Art focuses on identifying "recurrent phrases and scenes and story-patterns ...as indexes of more-than-literal meaning, as special signs that point toward encoded traditional meanings" (Foley, *How to Read an Oral Poem*, 109). Immanent Art asks what these "Words"<sup>3</sup> are in a particular tradition and how they create meaning. Meaning can be discovered by asking, "What ideas do [the Words] stimulate in an audience or readership fluent in this specialized meaning?" (Foley, *How to Read an Oral Poem*, 113). He explains that this type of meaning is generated through "metonymy ... a mode of signification wherein the part stands for the whole" (Foley, *Immanent Art*, 7). He states, "When we 'read' any traditional performance or text with attention to the inherent meaning, the traditional work will lean much

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<sup>2</sup> The collection is designated for public use and release forms were obtained from the subjects at the time of the interviews. Ralph Baergen, Chair of the Human Subjects Committee at Idaho State University has indicated that the project will not require any submission to or approval by the Human Subjects Committee

<sup>3</sup> I will capitalize the term "Word/s" throughout the dissertation when I am referring to Foley's specialized usage for these units of meaning.

more heavily on encoding and expression through inherently meaningful forms. That is to say, its ‘how’ will involve not only the inscribed [and] textual, . . . but much more tellingly the immanent, extratextual, and metonymically implied” (Foley, *Immanent Art*, 8). In other words, the meaning of a narrative will not only include the “sum of [the Words’] individual denotations and connotations” (Foley, *Immanent Art*, 33) but also the “shared body of knowledge” which the society in which it originated draws upon to understand these Words (*Immanent Art*, 45). Foley’s Words are meaningful chunks which can exist as words, phrases, or scenes. To get to this meaning, *Immanent Art* uses three concepts: register, performance arena, and communicative economy.

*Register* in Foley’s theory means the same thing as it does in other linguistic or rhetorical settings: it is the type of speech which the speaker deems appropriate for a specific situation. Determining register is important because it, as Foley says, “unlocks the wordhoard” (*How to Read an Oral Poem*, 116). Because registers are “highly coded,” exploring the language associated with a register allows the researcher to determine how the Words “resonate with traditional implications” (*How to Read an Oral Poem*, 116). Register is closely related to the *performance arena*. This is not, as it may imply, the time and place where the speaker tells their story. It is a figurative place, where the speaker and audience “transact their traditional business” (*How to Read an Oral Poem*, 116). Essentially, it is the “signal” that indicates that the rules for a specific register should “lock into place” (*How to Read an Oral Poem*, 116). For example, when someone says “once upon a time,” the arena is set for a fairy tale, whether you are in a car, by a bedside, or walking down the street. Once the register and performance arena are set, the speaker can proceed with *communicative economy* or “highly efficient expression” (*How to Read an Oral Poem*, 117). Communicative economy is the use of Words in the register which the

audience will be familiar with and for which they will automatically know the background without the speaker needing to explain.

Foley explains that his theory of Immanent Art is particularly indebted to Parry and Lord's Oral-Formulaic Theory, which looks at the recurrent structure found in oral genres. Once a formula is identified, researchers interpret what they have found. Following this pattern, I will first look at the structure of the Teton Dam Flood narratives, identifying recurrent story-patterns and comparing them to the narrative patterns of oral personal experience narratives previously identified by Labov and Waletzky. All of the Teton Dam Flood narratives include these specific scenes: receiving the news of the dam breaking, locating safe ground, returning to the home site, and evaluating the experience. We could list these as the following story-pattern: Warning (W)—Escape (E)—Return (R)—Evaluation (E). This story-pattern falls neatly within the narrative framework identified by Labov and Waletzky.

In 1967, Labov and Waletzky identified a basic framework for oral personal experience narrative which begins with an *orientation* stage where the speaker explains who is involved, the where and when of the story, and any other important orientation. The second stage is a series of events they term the *complication* or *complicating action*, which ends in a result (Labov and Waletzky 27-28). The *evaluation* stage is vital to the narrative because it explains significance. It is often merged with the *result* (Labov and Waletzky 30). The *resolution* follows the evaluation, and there is often an additional *coda*, which brings the audience back to the present moment (Labov and Waletzky 35). In 2013, Labov published his book *The Language of Life and Death: The Transformation of Experience in Oral Narrative*. This book elaborates on the framework he established in 1967 and focuses on narratives that are “all matters of life and death” and how the stories are presented in a way that “maximizes the moral position of the narrator” (7). The oral

narratives that Labov focuses on in his recent work all follow the framework he first identified in 1967 using this story-pattern: Orientation (O)—Complication (C)—Result (R)—Evaluation (E)—Resolution (R)—Coda (C). Because they focus on matters of life and death, his findings suggest a connection to trauma narratives.

The story-pattern found in the Teton Dam narratives fall within Labov’s framework. The accounts of where the speakers were when they received warning of the dam breaking fall within the orientation phase. Their attempts to escape and find safe ground fall within the complication stage, and their return home is the result. Finally, their views on the impact of the flood, including their view of it as a positive or negative experience, their view of who was to blame, and the future of their personal lives and the lives of those in the community, match the characteristics of Labov’s evaluation stage.

While the examples Labov offers focus on very brief narratives with little interaction from an interviewer, the Teton Dam narratives are each thirty minutes to an hour and include frequent questions and responses from the interviewer. Some scholars have faulted Labov’s focus on narratives that clearly follow his pattern and his failure to acknowledge the impact of interviewers in the narratives. Alexandra Georgakopoulou observes that Labov only deals with what he calls “prototypical” stories (223). Rather than selecting a random sample of stories or a typical account, he highlights “the most interesting and effective narratives” in the domain he is focusing on (223). Georgakopoulou argues that Labov and other narrative scholars have focused on narratives that neatly match Labov’s narration pattern, claiming that more attention should be paid to narratives that do not clearly follow that pattern, including the role that interviewers play in co-authoring narratives. While Labov counters concerns like Georgakopoulou’s with the argument that most people will tell stories “in ways that are not far from the basic narrative

organization” he has identified, ignoring the nuances Georgakopoulou identifies leaves a wealth of unexplored information (7). As narratives told to an interviewer, the Teton Dam narratives are the types of narratives that Georgakopoulou feels should be studied. Because the Teton Dam Flood narratives are told in an interview setting, the interviewer co-constructs the narrative and, although the narratives loosely follow Labov’s stages, they do not always fall in a neat order. For this reason, I will examine the ways the speaker claims ownership of the narrative by back-tracking to include information that he or she did not want to leave out before coming back to a narrator’s question.

Next, I will identify the register and the performance arena of these narratives. In particular, I will analyze how the interviewer cues the speaker to switch registers. For example, the majority of those who experienced the Teton Dam flood were members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. While most of the stories begin as if they are being told to an outside audience unfamiliar with their religion, if the interviewer cues a different register by using jargon or language specific to the church, many speakers code switch to an insider language, which assumes the audience does not need certain words explained. In addition, the narrator then assumes a different audience and purpose for the narrative, which may affect content. Noting these kinds of switches in the narratives will offer insight into the role of interviewers in cuing register and creating performance arena for the narrator.

While Labov and Waletzky have been challenged because they only examine narratives which fall neatly into the stages they have identified, the Teton Dam narratives as a whole seem to fall logically within Labov and Waletzky’s model of orientation, complicating action, result, and evaluation. While some of these stages are prompted by the interviewer asking the survivor a direct question, such as “Where were you when you heard the news that the dam had broken?” it

is likely that the narratives would have fallen into this pattern regardless. Additionally, the Teton Dam narratives are much longer than those used by Labov and Waletzky. In the flood narratives, the complicating action is more elaborate, and the result, when people come back to their property and see the damage, is often included with several pages of cataloguing damages. Because the flood narratives differ in scale, they model an application of Labov and Waletzky's theory to more complex narratives.

Finally, I will identify evidence of communicative economy in the narratives as related to specific topics or Words. I will identify the frequently used Words that arise in the narratives and then explore the traditional meaning of these Words in specific chapters on progress and religion. In Chapter Three, I explore two Words that emerge in the narratives. First, is the idea that the area and residents were somehow "better" for the disaster, an attitude that is evident not only in this disaster but in the response to earlier American disasters such as the Chicago Fire and the San Francisco earthquake, suggesting that this attitude toward disaster is something of an American cultural tradition. Second, I explore the surprising theme that just under half of the people affected by the flood favored rebuilding the dam due to their perception that the community needs water, which grows from deep-seated beliefs about water in the West that originated with the earliest Westering Americans. In Chapter Four, I explore Words related to the culture of members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, often called the Mormon Church. Because the Upper Snake River Valley was settled by Mormons in 1883 and the cities hardest hit by the Teton Dam Flood were originally Mormon settlements, it is inevitable that Words unique to that faith tradition emerge in the narratives. As mentioned, while the Teton Dam Flood narratives include the common scenes found in other trauma narratives, the Words which emerge are unique to this particular disaster. The Words tying to the local faith

tradition were “the Church” as a shorthand for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints; “the prophet” as a shorthand for president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, who at that time was Spencer W. Kimball; “genealogy” as shorthand for the family history records typically kept by members of the church; and “food storage,” referencing the church’s program of providing for the physical needs of its members in times of hardship. The use of the Word “the Church” throughout the narratives indicates not only its dominance in the region but also the belief of survivors that the organization would respond proactively to the dilemma. References to “the prophet” in the narratives indicates narrators’ beliefs that they could look to the leader’s remarks as a means of interpreting the significance of the event and how best to respond to it. Many survivors frequently cited the loss or destruction of genealogical records as one of the most significant losses in the flood. This reflects a concern with family, as well as a religious belief that the records were needed to ensure that ancestors had received necessary rites for salvation in the afterlife. Finally, references to “food storage” indicate survivors’ belief in the importance of following the counsel of the leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in having food storage for times of need or disaster.

Foley’s theory is useful in allowing an empirical review and interpretation of a collection of narratives to identify recurring cultural ideas, beliefs, and values. Simply reviewing a handful of narratives from an event might not place these Words in such a striking light, but reviewed as a whole, they become obvious. This is useful because while all trauma narratives might fall roughly into Labov’s stages, Foley’s theory can highlight the unique elements of narrative that reveal a community’s identity and shared values. As disasters and traumatic events increase, these theories will continue to be useful for scholars who see the significance of these events for our nation and world. As mentioned, as traumatic events continue in our world, we have the

methodology available to capture and analyze these events from direct, vernacular accounts of the survivors, which provide valuable information for future scholars, survivors, and responders to traumatic events.

## Chapter II: Narrative Structure, Register, and Performance Arena

The purpose of my project is to demonstrate that examining a collection of vernacular trauma narratives with methodology from fields of orality will allow for the portrayal of trauma in community settings, providing a perspective that has been absent in the dominant Freudian, clinically-focused trauma theory inspired by Cathy Caruth. This analysis will demonstrate that trauma survivors are not speechless and that the stories they tell are not fragmented, but follow established patterns of vernacular narrative. Instead, trauma is primarily manifested in the narratives by a switch to second person pronouns and acknowledgment of symptoms such as disorientation, anger, fear, vomiting, and sleeplessness. Finally, trauma exposes pre-existing tensions and survivors will tell their stories in a way that establishes internal beliefs and experiences. My primary method for analyzing the trauma narratives is John Miles Foley's theory of Immanent Art. In this theory, Foley examines the repetition of meaningful words, phrases, scenes, and themes. To understand the meaning of these Words, Immanent Art uses three concepts: register, performance arena, and communicative economy.

In this chapter, I will analyze the narrative structure, register and performance arena of the Teton Dam Oral History collection. First, I analyze the dialogic nature of these narratives when told in a question-and-answer interview. To determine the degree to which the interviewer shapes the narrative, I explore narrators' responses to leading questions from an interviewer. Next, I explore examples in which the interviewees seem to ignore the questions posed by the interviewers to allow them to focus on significant elements of their experiences that the interviewer seems to skip. Finally, I compare the different register and performance arena found in oral and written accounts when the audience and mode of delivery have changed.

I then focus on the dominant story-pattern found in the flood narratives, clearly reflects William Labov and Joshua Waletzky’s narrative framework. To illustrate, I analyze the accounts of Brent and Arlene Romrell, residents of Wilford, Idaho who lived at the mouth of Teton Canyon and experienced the most severe impact of the floodwaters. Following this analysis, I catalog the unique motifs found in different geographic locations, because people in the same geographic area typically experienced the same force and impact of the flood, and this shapes their narratives in important ways.

Before analyzing the Teton Dam Oral History collection, let’s consider its demographics. The collection includes 258 histories. In Figure 1, these are represented by geographical area and by sex of the narrator. The category Other represents interviews with recovery support personnel who discussed their support efforts rather than sharing personal accounts of the flood. This chart indicates that Rexburg accounts (158 total) outnumber other accounts, and that more men were interviewed than women: 157 men and 101 women.

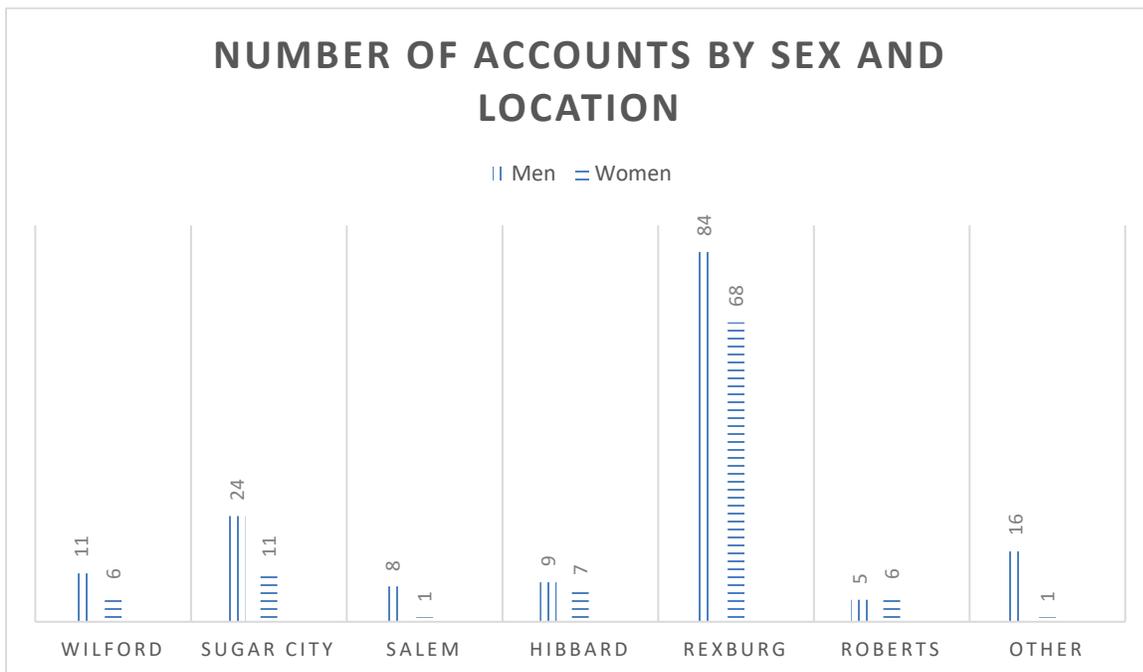


Figure 1. Number of Accounts by Sex and Location

Looking strictly at population, the number of Rexburg accounts is somewhat proportional to its higher population, according to the 1970 census data, as indicated in Figure 2. Salem and Hibbard are not cities, but populated areas, and are represented in the Rexburg statistics. However, only a portion of Rexburg was affected by the flood and less severely than other cities, so the fact that these accounts outnumber those of harder hit communities, such as Wilford, may downplay the severity of the flood's impact.

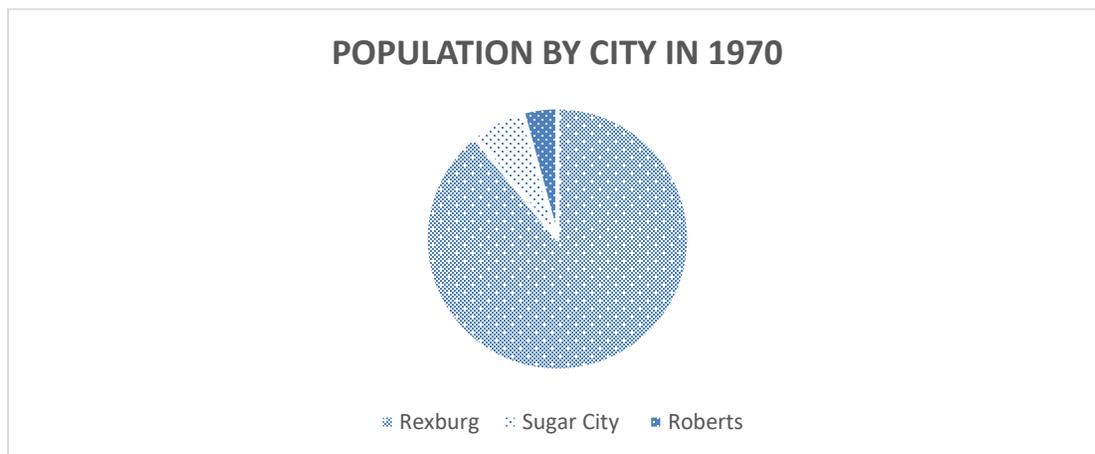


Figure 2. Population by City in 1970

In summary, the collection offers a slight bias toward men's accounts, with their accounts making up 61% of the collection, and toward Rexburg citizens' stories, which make up 61% of the collection. Any conclusions drawn in this analysis of the collection will keep these biases in mind.

Another key characteristic of the narratives is that they are research or interview narratives. British sociolinguist Alexandra Georgakopolou describes this type of narrative as a "short-range narrative that gives an account of a certain landmark or key event or experience that is considered to be pivotal in the formation of the interviewee's sense of self" (Georgakopolou 236). These narratives "emanate" from the "research interview" which "casts the interviewer in the role of elicitor of a story but it also generates asymmetrical and [distant] interpersonal

dynamics” (237). This means that the “role of the interviewer is by no means negligible in the shaping of the story” and that “interviewees may resist or recast [their] roles” (237). There is some debate about the extent to which interviewers influence the resulting narrative. While some scholars consider such narratives to be essentially “co-authored” and “inextricably bound up in the context of occurrence,” others, such as Labov, disagree (Georgakopoulou 237). Donald Polkinghorne argues that “told stories are affected by the audience to whom they are communicated. . . The resulting story is no longer the exclusive product of the teller alone, but can be said to be co-authored” (366). This argument suggests that a deep analysis of a collection of narratives should also take into consideration the interviewers’ impact on the collected narratives. Conversely, sociolinguist William Labov insists, “though [oral narratives] are fitted to some extent to the situation and often to a question posed by the interviewer, they are essentially monologues and show a degree of decontextualization” (239). By decontextualization, he means that the stories will be told similarly regardless of the telling’s setting and the audience.

Still, German scholars Gabriele Lucius-Hoene and Arnulf Deppermann contend that too often research drawn from autobiographical interviews is treated as a “monological narrative” yet it is a “dialogic, pragmatic activity” (199). They further argue that any conclusions about the identity of the speaker in a “short-range narrative” which “concentrate[s] on limited topics and [is] induced by situationally motivated tasks like explaining, entertaining, or giving an account of certain situation or experience” is “limited” and its generality seems “doubtful” (201). In other words, “the resulting story cannot be considered a self-contained product that mirrors a private psychological reality or something like a mental representation of narrative identity, and thus it cannot be divided from its social origin in the interview situation” (205). Therefore, any narrative

should be viewed as one version of an individual's experience rather than as an unchanging final version of events.

Elaborating on the impact of the interviewer, Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann claim that there are two ways the "listener participates as co-author" (213). First, the activities of the interviewer, such as eye-contact and other non-verbal reactions as well as the questions they ask essentially "provide the backdrops against which the narrator's stories are to be heard as answers" (213). Second, the way the narrator perceives the listener and their "expectations, beliefs, and evaluations concerning" the narrator will affect the resulting narrative (214). Thus, the act of telling the story becomes an instance of "*doing* identity," meaning the narrator has actively created new meanings in the process of sharing their story (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 220).

Labov is not ignorant of these dynamics and he acknowledges some of these elements in his recent book *The Language of Life and Death*. He observes that when interviewees were placed in front of a microphone "the speech that emerged was more compressed, more guarded and less interesting. People said what they thought you wanted to hear, and said it in a way that they thought you wanted it to be said" (2). However, when people were asked to share personal narratives Labov "noticed that the level of formality was distinctly reduced" (3). Again, Labov holds to the idea that these personal narratives will maintain a high degree of autonomy in spite of the interviewer because they are integral to the speaker's experience and less likely to be altered for the sake of the audience.

Foley might argue that these debates are still too focused on authorship, and that the audience-narrator dynamic is obvious in oral storytelling, such that "any single performance merely instances an unexpressed, and inexpressible, whole, a larger story that will forever remain

beyond . . . reach” (Foley, *Immanent Art*, xv). He would say that the interviewee or audience for the narrative will inevitably influence the register, and that register will vary with each telling. This truth in no way negates the reliability of that specific telling of the narrative. Further, Michael Bamberg argues that a storyteller positions themselves on three levels when narrating an event. The first level is how they present themselves as a character in the story, the second level is how they position themselves in relation to the interviewer, and the third level is how they position themselves in relation to “cultural models of personhood that circulate in their environments” (qtd. in Johnstone 552). Bamberg’s inclusive view of positioning acknowledges the points of all of the previous theorists, without making his claim an either/or proposition.

With this debate in mind, there are several ways to analyze the dynamics between the interviewers and interviewees in the Teton Dam collection. First, we can look for evidence of leading questions from the interviewers and evaluate the reaction of the interviewees. Second, we can look for moments when the narrators seem to take charge of the narratives by not answering directly an interviewer’s question. Finally, we can compare the oral narratives with written accounts provided by the same person to see if the stories vary to any degree with the changed mode and audience.

In total, twenty-seven interviewers collected the Teton Dam histories. Of those twenty-seven, three collected fifty percent of the histories: Alyn Andrus, 53, Christina Sorenson, 53, and Richard Stallings<sup>4</sup>, 40. Andrus and Stallings were professors at Ricks College in the History Department, while Sorenson was an amateur historian. Reviews of the transcripts indicate that the interviewers ask similar questions, although recent communication with Stallings indicates that they were not working from a preset list of questions. In addition, some interviewers, such as

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<sup>4</sup> Stallings was later elected to Congress from 1985-1993.

Andrus, seem more comfortable following up on the interviewees' stories and letting the accounts cover whatever topics the narrator desired.

An example of a narrative where the narrator at first tries to confirm and later contradicts what appears to be a leading question on the part of the interviewer is found in an interview with Grace Forsyth of Sugar City. In this interview, interviewer Christina Sorenson asks, "Did you notice any difference in the reaction to the disaster between LDS people and non-LDS people, people in the community, or between active and inactive members of the church?" (Forsyth). It is likely that Forsyth would interpret this question as a chance to claim that active LDS members reacted to the flood in a more positive way than less active members or people of other faiths. This bias is likely because both Sorenson and Forsyth are members of the LDS church, the dominant religion in the area, which spearheaded flood recovery efforts. Forsyth tries to confirm what the interviewer says and then ends by not confirming it. She initially responds, "I can't think of any specific examples right now, but I am sure the active people accept things like this better than the inactive" (Forsyth). Since she does not have evidence to back up her claim, this statement seems like an attempt to appease Sorenson. Forsyth later states, "We have some real good non-member friends and neighbors that lived close and I visited with some of them and I felt like they were just as determined to build back and be strong as we were. Even though they don't belong to the LDS church" (Forsyth). After having time to consider, Forsyth revises her statements because her experience confirms that others are just as strong and determined as LDS church members are. She may have been swayed to state otherwise initially to provide a desired response implied by the question, thus positively positioning herself in relation to the interviewee, as Bamberg explains. On the other hand, she later feels comfortable contradicting her earlier statement and responding with what feels more accurate to her, so in the end her

personal beliefs and perceptions are expressed. If we were to draw a conclusion from this example, it might be that although interviewees will be inclined to follow leading questions it is likely that there will be contradictory remarks later in the narrative if the narrator disagrees with the interviewer.

In another interview, Sorenson asks Sharyn Niederer a close-ended question about her feelings during the clean-up after the flood. Sorenson asks, “Did you ever feel, during this time, just totally hopeless or numb?” (12). Sorenson, having interviewed many survivors, is suggesting that these feelings are common and inviting Niederer to agree that she felt the same. Instead, Niederer disagrees: “I wouldn’t say totally hopeless” (12). She acknowledges that she and her husband were uncertain whether to rebuild or move to a different area, and at times thought “What’s the use?” but states, “We felt kind of an obligation to put a home back here on this lot and just to kind of build up Rexburg. That is what we wanted to do and we felt good about it. We never did really feel totally despaired because I would say just belonging to the church and going to church and being with the rest of the people kept our morale up” (12). Although Niederer had moments of feeling a kind of hopelessness, when she thought “what’s the use?” her feelings were more complex than that and so she did not agree with Sorenson’s leading statement, because it did not reflect the complexity of what she felt after the flood.

Ramon Widdison, another interviewer, restates narrators’ sentiments throughout the interviews, which draws them into a subtle interplay that could influence the content of the narrative. For example, when interviewing Zeruah Moon, a Sugar City resident and wife of the Sugar City mayor, his initial questions simply invite her to share her experience. As they get further into evaluating the experience, he begins restating and affirming her comments. For example, Moon says that although people might think it would be fun to get a large sum of

money all at once and be able to buy new belongings, it wasn't. "Normally people don't do things that way, they don't get to have a new house and new furniture all in one wack and spend all that money all at once. Everything you do is contrary to that. So it really isn't fun. In fact, it's a big pain" (10). Widdison affirms her statement by saying, "I have talked to people that have said it has just been a dream to spend money that fast until they actually had to come in and do it, then it is a nightmare" (10). Moon than agrees, "Right, that is just what it is" (10). This exchange leads to moments in the narrative where Moon repeats Widdison's statements word for word. For example, Widdison asks, "Has he (her husband) felt like the city received help from the government? Have they been good to be working with them on things?" (11). Moon then replies, "The government has been good with working on things for the city," using some of his exact wording for her reply. Next he says, "You need all new pipes and roads and etc." (12). Again, Moon picks up his prompt by saying, "The roads have to be done yet" (12). It appears that Widdison begins to play a larger role in constructing the narrative at this point. However, as with the previous examples, Moon is still able to contradict him when he asks something that doesn't match her experience. Widdison asks about living in the groupings of HUD trailers in Sugar City: "In living in such close quarters here in the HUD villages like this, did you find that helped or was it very disturbing to you to have everybody so cramped up?" (14). Moon answers, "I don't think it was really disturbing. I think it was better to be together, however, we are a little close. You have to be careful that you don't yell too loud" (14). This demonstrates that even after she has been apparently allowing his responses to construct her narrative, she is still able to contradict him if the implied conclusions do not match her experience.

Another way that narrators maintain authority over there narrative is in ignoring the interviewers' questions in favor of structuring their story the way they desire. For example, in an

interview with Margaret Bake, of Rexburg, Sorenson asks, “Now where did you stay for the next few days? And when were you personally first able to go back to your home? What did you find there, and how did you feel about that?” (5). Here, Sorenson is inviting Bake to follow a straight chronology in recounting her experience. Instead, Bake says, “Maybe before I answer that question, I should go back to the other one. About watching the flood water” (5). After this, she gives more detail about the events of Saturday afternoon, not directly answering Sorenson’s question until a page later in the transcript. This is because her family’s attempts to find a place to stay for that night were thwarted and the family ended up sleeping some of the night in her husband’s office in the library at Ricks College. Clearly, for Bake that was a significant part of the account because she was worried about what to do with her children, stating, “The children were my biggest concern. I felt like I just had to get them out when it was obvious that there was a flood and that it was very serious and our house had been hit. I knew that the children just needed to be away from it if I could get them out” (6). Instead of simply answering Sorenson’s question by saying, “We stayed that night in the library,” she wanted to emphasize the difficulty of finding adequate housing for herself and the children. This demonstrates that while interviewers may suggest a direction for the narratives with their questions, narrators frequently find ways to reframe or delay answering the questions until they are able to include personally significant parts of their experience.

Another example where the narrator ignores the interviewer’s question is found in Mark G. Ricks’s account. Mary Ann Beck, the interviewer asks, “Did you see the flood?” and Ricks responds, “Yes ma’am, I sure did” (3). She then follows up with the question, “Would you like to describe it?” (3). Instead of describing his view of the flood, Ricks talks about going up on the hill and then going back down to help a widow out of her home. He then explains that returned to

his home to check on his sons. Ricks then recounts that as his sons were trying to return to Rexburg from Teton Valley, someone asked them to help Hal Ricks, a man who lived along the Teton River, get out of his home. Mark Ricks then gives a detailed account of his son's view of the flood, saying that his son saw the flood hit a house within a quarter of a mile of Hal Ricks' home and that the home "just blew up" from the force of the water (3). Ricks's divergence from Beck's question seems to be influenced by a desire to tell the story chronologically and also by his sense that his son's account was more dramatic and interesting than his own might have been. Ricks starts to answer the question by saying that they went up on the hill, where most Rexburg residents were when the floodwaters entered the city. But instead of describing what he saw up from the hill, he remembers that they went down to help a neighbor and then he diverges to his son's more interesting account. From these two examples we can see that narrators might ignore interviewers' questions to emphasize something important to them, to maintain the chronological detail of their experience, or simply to include what to them seems more reportable and interesting.

Another way to examine the narratives is to compare the oral narratives with written accounts to evaluate the significance of register and performance arena. Foley's register and performance arena work hand-in-hand. The performance arena is actually established in moment when a signal is given that "applicable rules for composition and reception lock into place and participants begin using the designated register" (Foley, *How To Read an Oral Poem*, 116). Therefore, performance arena is an apt time and place for the particular kind of performance and register is a mode. Register includes elements such as level of formality, "assumed attitudes and knowledge on the part of the audience," word choice, rhetoric, gestures, intonation, and so on (Foley 115). To illustrate, I compare two vernacular accounts from the Teton Dam Flood

collection with written accounts from these same narrators, published in a local anthology of flood stories. The book *That Day in June* was compiled by Relief Society<sup>5</sup> members in the Rexburg area and published by Ricks College Press. Its preface states that “this is a partial answer to the many outsiders who have queried why it is that these people of the Upper Snake River Valley could react as they did—with optimism, hard work and courage in the face of such utter destruction” (Thomas et al. v). The editors suggest that the reason for the strength is the community’s Mormon pioneer ancestors: “Many of the people in the Upper Snake River Valley are direct descendants of those hardy souls who faced one problem after another in their search for a place to worship, and eventually migrated to the Rocky Mountains” (Thomas et al. v). The preface then states, “this then is their story—a story of people helping each other regardless of station or religious affiliation” (Thomas et al. v). In comparing the accounts found in this book with the oral histories, we find that written accounts are more likely to contain description, reflection, and interpretation. On the other hand, the oral histories qualify as vernacular narratives, with “vernacular” defined as “occurring in the everyday language of a place and regarded as native or natural to it” (“Vernacular”). It is also related to what in rhetorical terms is called the “plain” style (“Vernacular”). “Plain” is a term for “direct and unambiguous language” and was first defined in classical rhetoric (“Plain”). Classical rhetoric defined three levels of style: low (plain), middle, and high. The low style uses “current speech and conversational manner” and uses little figurative language and rhetorical figures (“Style”). The middle style avoids colloquialisms, uses “elevated” diction, and uses more rhetorical and figurative language (“Style”). The oral histories manifest a plain style, with little figurative language, description, or

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<sup>5</sup> The Relief Society is the women’s organization in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

effort to teach a lesson, while the written accounts use more figurative language, description, and are more didactic.

For example, Ruth Barrus, a resident of Sugar City, was traveling back to Idaho from a trip to Ohio when she heard the news. In the oral history her account reads as follows: “We were just getting on a plane in Salt Lake City. We were returning from visiting our children in Minnesota and Ohio.” Her account in *That Day in June* reads, “It was a beautiful Saturday morning as we boarded the plane in Dayton, Ohio, for our return to our Sugar City, Idaho home June 5, 1976” (Thomas et al. 79). In contrast with her oral history account, she describes the day as “beautiful” and is more precise about the flight details. In the oral history, she says simply that “we were returning from visiting our children” (2). In the written account she states, “We felt a kind of special strength in us, both spiritual and physical, enriched by the love and care of children and grandchildren; and we felt we could meet the challenge of another rigorous summer on the farm” (Thomas et al. 79). Her written style includes many modifying prepositional phrases that seem to obscure the action of the story. In her written account she also mentions that the visit strengthened them to face the challenges of farming for the rest of the summer while there is no mention of this in the oral history.

Further, even when discussing spiritual events, such as the visit of then president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Spencer W. Kimball (called “the prophet” by church members), several days after the flood, Barrus’s oral history is straightforward: “We knew exactly what he was going to tell us. Not one word came as a surprise to us. ... We felt strengthened by his counsel and his faith. It was a great experience having him here” (6-7). In the written account, she states, “We sat in reverence and profound appreciation for the leadership in our church and for the Gospel and the hope and courage it offers. We understood with our

minds and hearts what the prophet was telling us, and we silently dedicated ourselves to following his counsel” (Thomas et al. 88). In the oral history she acknowledges that the prophet’s visit was strengthening, but downplays his counsel a bit when she states that “we knew exactly what he was going to tell us. Not one word came as a surprise” (6). The written account seems to imply that the counsel given was more significant, when she states, “we understood with our minds and hearts” and “silently dedicated ourselves to following counsel” (Thomas et al. 88). From this example, we might conclude that oral histories will tend to be more straightforward with less description and reflection than oral accounts. The difference in Barrus’s accounts could also be due to her perceived understanding of the purpose of the book her story was published in.

Another example from *That Day in June* illustrates that at times the spiritual content is completely stripped from the oral histories. In her oral history, Lynette Muir, a Rexburg resident, describes watching the water approach her home from her position on a hill in Rexburg. When the interviewer asks what the feeling was among the people there with her on the hill, she states that it was “pretty calm, just kinda like they didn’t believe it was all happening. We were all kinda just stunned you know, just not really believing what we were seeing” (4). In the written account in *That Day in June*, she describes an interaction with another woman who is nearby as Muir’s home is hit by the floodwaters:

As the water hit our home, a sweet sister came over to me and, seeing the tears in my eyes, put her arm around me and said, ‘We have our lives and the Lord will take care of us and bless us.’ It helped to be reaffirmed. A few minutes later the water hit her home, and again we consoled each other. (Thomas et al. 142)

By identifying the woman as a “sweet sister” she clarifies that she is a fellow member of the LDS church, who address one another as “brother” and “sister” in church contexts. Because of this shared faith, Muir is open to the woman reminding her that if their lives are intact they can rely on God to care for and bless them in the recovery. She sees her comments as affirming, and relates to her when the woman also loses her home. It is interesting that Muir leaves this account completely out of her oral history, when the interview question left ample opportunity for her to include it if she desired. Again, like Barrus, she seemed to sense that spiritual experiences or reflections were less appropriate in the oral histories because of the assumed audience.

Comparing Judy Nelson’s oral and written accounts demonstrates that there is also a tendency to delete events that would paint the narrator or their family in an unpleasant light in the written account. Nelson’s oral history is unusually reflective, perhaps the most expressive of personal feelings and reactions of the entire Teton Dam oral history collection. She is particularly detailed about how she felt when she returned to her home the day after the flood to begin cleaning. She expresses frustration that her husband’s large family focused on helping his parents clean up their home and left her and her husband alone to clean their home with no food or water. When they reunited with the family later in the day she says, “I was just screaming and yelling that they just left us over there all day with nothing to drink, nothing to eat and they didn’t care. I can’t remember, all I know I just screamed and yelled you know. His mom started screaming and yelling back. His dad was screaming and yelling back and it got quite heated” (14). She also expresses disappointment in her father-in-law, whom she had looked to as a father figure and spiritual leader. On the day of the flood, she had asked him, “Dad, should we have a family prayer?” and he refused. “It was then that I realized, I just kind of crushed my built-up image of him. In the face of disaster like that and yet he wouldn’t bring his family around him to

have a prayer before we were separated” (9). In Nelson’s written account in *That Day in June*, she compresses the entire experience of the flood into a few short sentences: “The day the flood hit, we were more or less in a state of shock. Everything we owned was gone. We didn’t know where to turn or where to go next. We were so lost. . . . We felt we were a burden to Creig’s folks and were in the same position we were, the only difference being they owned property and we didn’t” (Thomas et al. 156). Here Nelson hints at some negative feelings by saying they felt like a burden, but she does not elaborate on the frustrations and anger simmering in the family. The rest of her account in the book focuses on their attempts to figure out what to do next as a young couple with one small baby. She talks about deciding whether or not her husband should re-enlist in the Air Force. The climax of the narrative she shares in the book is when Creig’s father tells them that he has spent the night praying for them and that “for now they were to stay and not go back into the military” (Thomas et al. 157). In this account, Nelson emphasizes her father-in-law’s spiritual leadership in their lives, saying “his words seemed loud enough to pierce my soul” (157). This view of her father-in-law is very different from the disappointment and disillusionment she felt about him during the flood itself. It is interesting to see what Nelson chose to edit from the written account, suggesting, again, that the written accounts are more formal and heavily edited and more likely to emphasize positive spiritual experiences as opposed to negative ones.

What can we conclude from these comparisons? Clearly, register and performance arena alter people’s accounts. In these examples, survivors felt more comfortable reflecting on their experiences in the written version, and they seemed to speak in vernacular language in the oral histories and to be less inclined to reflect on or draw conclusions about what they experienced. Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann might argue that this proves what they claim—that when

interviewing subjects “the resulting story cannot be considered a self-contained product that mirrors a private psychological reality” (205). In other words, we should not consider one account the final formulation of a person’s experience or identity. However, the more spare style, or vernacular prose, found in the oral histories also indicates that in some ways it may be more authentic. Labov certainly feels so. As stated earlier, he claims that when people were talking about significant personal experiences, “the level of formality dropped” (2). To Labov, that is a positive: “There is one style of speech that is superior to all others—from the linguistic point of view—which we call the *vernacular*. It is the form of language first learned, most perfectly acquired” (3). From this we can infer that Labov would favor the oral history Teton Dam Flood accounts over the written accounts. Further, because of the obvious variations between the two, we should be wary of looking at one account as the definitive account of an experience. Doing so while also ignoring the dynamics of the interview or audience is also flawed. However, with these variations in mind, examining an entire collection of narratives about the same subject can produce valuable information worthy of our examination. Moreover, basing our conclusions not on a handful of accounts, but on an entire collection should increase the veracity of the analysis. This is where Labov and Waletzky’s theory can meet Foley’s in a fruitful way.

In Foley’s book *Immanent Art*, he models his methodology by analyzing oral epic, such as *The Odyssey*. His approach is to first identify recurrent story-patterns, then explore recurring phrases, motifs, and themes. Foley uses these terms in *Immanent Art*, but does not give concrete definitions for them; however, we can infer definitions from the ways he uses these terms in analysis. A story-pattern is a recurring sequence of events identified in a collection of oral narratives. For example, Albert Lord identified a Return Song story-pattern as Absence, Devastation, Return, Retribution, and Wedding (Foley 65). A phrase is a recurring sequence of

words that is consistent throughout a collection. For example, Foley analyzes the phrase “And he jumped from the ground to his feet” (83). Finally, a motif is an idea which runs through a narrative, such as “blood brotherhood” (Foley 109). Other reference works define a motif as a broader concept which can include “a situation, incident, idea, image, or character-type” or “any element of a work that is elaborated into a more general theme” (“Motif”). By this definition, patterns and phrases could also function as motifs. For my purposes, I refer to story-pattern as the recurring sequence of events in the flood narratives. Scenes are the specific units within a story pattern. Motifs are recurring ideas that arise in a significant number of the flood narratives and which invite analysis. While each of these elements qualify as Words, I distinguish motifs as similar ideas that are not always expressed using identical language. Following Foley’s method in this chapter, I first identify the recurring story-pattern in the Teton Dam Flood narratives and then analyze motifs distinct to the specific geographic areas struck by the flood. In epic tradition, there is a “repertoire of typical scenes that var[y] within limits, portraying the same actions from instance to instance but shape-shifting to suit the particular environment of the individual situation” (Foley, *How to Read an Oral Poem*, 111). Typical scenes in epic poetry include “the arming of the hero, or assembly, or caparisoning a horse, or traveling to a destination” (Foley, *How to Read an Oral Poem*, 111). Similarly, all of the Teton Dam survivors tell their story following this pattern: receiving the news of the dam breaking, locating safe ground (for those in the Upper Snake River Valley), returning to the home site, and evaluating the experience. To simplify we could designate the following story-pattern: Warning (W)—Escape (E)—Return (R)—Evaluation (E).

This story-pattern bears similarities to Labov and Waletzky’s narrative framework. To quickly review their framework, in the orientation stage the speaker explains who is involved,

the where and when of the story, and any other important information. The second stage is a series of events they term the complication or complicating action, which ends in a result (Labov and Waletzky 27). The evaluation stage is vital to the narrative because it explains significance and is often merged with the result (Labov and Waletzky 30). The resolution often merges with the evaluation, and there is often an additional coda, which brings the audience back to the present moment (Labov and Waletzky 35). The relationship between these stages and Foley's Words is that the stages can be expressed through use of Words in a variety of ways, as we will see in the examples that follow.

In the Teton Dam Flood narratives, the accounts of where the speakers were when they heard about the dam breaking share characteristics with the *orientation* phase. Their attempts to find safe ground qualify as *complication*, and their return home is the *result* or resolution, a "place where the complication has reached a maximum" (Labov and Waletzky 30). The resolution stage is often "fused" with the evaluation (Labov 30). Finally, narrators' views on the impact of the flood, including their view of it as a positive or negative experience, their view of who was to blame, and their expectations for the future, mirror Labov and Waletzky's *evaluation* stage. Labov and Waletzky explain, "The resolution of the narrative is that portion of the narrative sequence which follows the evaluation. If the evaluation section is the last element, then the resolution section coincides with the evaluation" (Labov and Waletzky 35). Finally, the coda is "a functional device for returning the verbal perspective to the present moment" (Labov and Waletzky 35) sometimes using words such as "that, there, those" such as "that was that" (Labov and Waletzky 36) The *resolution* and *coda* are less distinct in the Teton Dam Flood narratives, seeming to merge with the Evaluation, so I will not address them as distinct stages.

While each Teton Dam Flood narrative includes this story-pattern, as Foley mentions in his examples from epic poetry, these patterns vary within limits (Foley, *How to Read an Oral Poem*, 111). Depending on where the survivors lived, their experience of the flood differed due to the variations in geography. For example, the city of Wilford sat at the mouth of Teton Canyon, giving the residents only twenty-three minutes from the time the dam broke to get out and the flood waters were over thirty feet high at some points as they went through the community. The force of the water was so intense that it stripped much of the farmland in the area down to bedrock, completely removing topsoil. On the other hand, Roberts, which was the last community to be thoroughly inundated by the floodwaters,<sup>6</sup> sits in a bowl, so the water flowed in and sat for two weeks, as people attempted to get enough pumps to drain their town. This means that for each area, recovery was a slightly different experience. While Rexburg had a large number of homes damaged, many of the families were able to return to their homes within hours of the flood, with the majority of damage in the basements. For these people, most clean-up was completed within a few months. Others, in places like Sugar City, were still waiting to get into their new homes a year later. Because of these differences, after analyzing a representative narrative to point out the story-pattern, I will discuss the varying motifs for each geographic area.

Another way the narratives vary within limits is in their chronology due to prompting from the interviewer or a personal desire to express an opinion or idea. While most follow Labov and Waletzky's framework, there are occasions when the narrative will jump forward and back in chronology<sup>7</sup>. For example, in the Romrells' narratives, they interrupt the chronology of the complication stage to talk about how they lost their cattle and tried to locate and retrieve them in

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<sup>6</sup> Firth and Blackfoot received minor flooding but there are no oral histories recorded from these areas.

<sup>7</sup> Labov and Waletzky themselves state that "The overall structure of the narratives that we have examined is not uniform; there are considerable differences in the degree of complexity, in the number of structural elements present, and how various functions are carried out" (37).

the days following the flood. This interruption is prompted by Alyn Andrus, the interviewer, asking if they had time to let the cattle out when they left their home. When they say they didn't have time, he asks if they found any of their cattle after the flood, which prompts a fairly lengthy discussion about the cattle. Andrus then reorients and returns to the chronology with the question, "You were telling how you found Mrs. Romrell after the flood. Now would you pick up the story and tell about what happened after that on the first day?" (8). Later in the narrative, when they are discussing the effectiveness of the Bureau of Reclamation in filing claims, Mrs. Romrell diverts from the topic. She begins by commenting on the fact that they felt that their claim with the Bureau of Reclamation was unfair, but quickly diverges to complaining in general about the lack of help, specifically from the LDS church: "I feel like we got the raw end of the deal. We were on this end where there was no help. We got the big batch of water, but that's all we got. When it came to help being sent in and fun and games for all the wards in Rexburg or being invited out to other wards we didn't have any of that" (15). In this case, Andrus quickly redirects by saying, "We were talking about your dealings with the Bureau and about people who filed fraudulent claims" (15). Later in the interview, when they are talking about the trailer they received from Housing and Urban Development, Andrus encourages them to jump back in the narrative: "Okay, let's go back now to the first few weeks after the flood. Now you said that both you and Mrs. Romrell came out and viewed the destruction of your property. Now, is there anything you would like to say about what you did after that?" They then talk at length about looking for belongings and reactions to their losses. Andrus possibly chose to encourage them to go back in their narrative because he sensed they had more to say on that topic. With this in mind, for the sake of analysis here, I will present the Romrells' narratives chronologically, moving tangential information to the stage it corresponds with.

## Warning

The first scene in the story-pattern is the Warning, which corresponds with Labov and Waletzky's orientation stage. Labov explains the orientation as a stage in which the speaker "provides information on the time, the place and the actors involved in the narrative" (25). Labov posits that the orientation only begins after the speaker has mentally completed a narrative reconstruction, in which he or she determines the most reportable event and then works backward through the events that led up to it, ending at the triggering event (24). In our sample narrative, Brent and Arlene Romrell, of Wilford, told their story together to interviewer Alyn Andrus. In this narrative, Andrus elicits some of the orienting information through direct questioning about their family, work, and whether they favored the dam's construction. Brent worked for the Forest Service and Arlene had a beauty shop in her home. They indicate that they were in favor of the dam for flood control on the Teton River, recounting different years that the Teton River flooded and they helped sandbag their neighbor's house. Arlene indicates that she always worried about what would happen if the dam broke, although she didn't necessarily have a premonition of it breaking.

Labov explains that a narrative is motivated by a triggering event (24). In the Romrells' stories, Andrus had already determined the event that should start the story and signals that in his question, "Now, Mrs. Romrell, would you tell about where you and your family were when the dam broke that day in June?"<sup>8</sup> Arlene was home on the morning of June 5, working in her beauty shop and Brent was away working on a reforestation project. Their older boys were working on the farm and her younger son had just arrived home on his bicycle. Andrus then asks her "After you heard about the dam breaking, would you tell what you did then, and just tell your

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<sup>8</sup> Throughout my project, I quote from nearly a third of the collection of oral histories. Some of the transcripts include pagination and others do not. When pagination is available, I cite page numbers, if not I will not indicate page numbers.

story about what you did and what happened that day in as much detail as you'd like to?" At this point, Arlene narrates her story with little further interruption from the interviewer.

She begins by saying, "I was vacuuming in the living room" when her brother-in-law, Max, stopped by. Interestingly, she never states that she heard the dam had broken. She simply says that she opened the door and then said, "Well, what do we do?" Romrells' lack of acknowledgement of the dam breaking may be because prior to this portion of the story the interviewer stated, "After you heard about the dam breaking, would you tell us what you did then?" Since the dam breaking is stated in the question, she chooses to eliminate it from the narrative. Her brother-in-law, Max, did not think the flood would be significant and said "Oh, just leave. It won't be anything. Just leave; we'll come back." Max's disbelief in the seriousness of the dam breaking was a common attitude in the Teton Dam narratives, partially because people were used to the Teton River flooding and thought the amount of water would be similar to past flooding and also because most people did not realize how full the dam was, due to heavy spring run-off.

The purpose of this initial scene, in addition to sharing basic information such as time, setting, and characters, is to warn us that something is about to change. Specifically here, to warn that their lives and belongings are in danger. The disbelief expressed by Arlene's brother-in-law, Max Romrell, increases the tension, as the audience knows that the flood is very serious and that the Romrells will risk their lives if they do not act quickly. Most disaster narratives, in general, involve some degree of tension, as narrators at the outset of the disaster are ignorant as to the seriousness of the situation. In addition, traumatic events by their very nature involve the victims' helplessness to prevent the events, which the orienting scene highlights. While a moment before, life was normal and in their control, within seconds, everything has changed.

Additionally, disaster narratives are not so different from classical views of narrative, which include Aristotle's concept of peripeteia or reversal of fortune. Kevin Rozario comments, "A peripeteia is required to move the narrative forward. Without it, we have stasis. We have no story" (33). In that sense, disaster narratives, in addition to following Labov and Waletzky's pattern, align with broader theories of narrative.

### **Escape**

The Escape scene, which parallels Labov and Waletzky's complication phase, is the main body of the narrative, a "chain of complicating action" leading to the most reportable event (Labov 24). In the case of Arlene and Brent Romrell the most reportable event is the Teton Dam breaking and washing away their home and belongings. The series of events which ensue from the time Arlene begins to prepare to leave her home until she returns the next day and sees the damage caused by the flood qualify as complicating action. Labov and Waletzky state that "a long string of events may actually consist of several cycles of simple narrative, with many complication sections" (27). This applies to the Teton Dam narratives, most of which are quite long. Personal danger is another strong element in this stage, especially in narratives from residents of Wilford, which was hit with the least amount of warning when the water was at its highest and most powerful. Further, Labov and Waletzky found that "most narratives are so designed to emphasize the strange and unusual character of the situation" (30). This is evident in the Romrells' account of the miraculous set of car keys, as follows.

After her brother-in-law left, Arlene immediately got on the phone to call her mother, but the lines were all busy. Arlene contacted an operator and told her she was in Wilford just below the Teton Dam, to which the operator replied, "You haven't got time to talk on the telephone, get out of there." Arlene, who was crying at the time, said, "But I have to talk to my mother." She

eventually reached her mother after which her parents, who lived nearby, came over with a pick-up and helped her load a few items. Arlene instructed her three boys to grab their bedding, and then she loaded her organ, baby books, microwave, and television. Her mother reminded her to grab any money she had in her in-home beauty shop, and she found \$300. Everyone left in different cars, leaving Arlene and her brother, Jimmy, the last to leave. He suggested that they go open the pastures so that the cattle could escape. Arlene relates, “Just as I got partway across the pasture I looked up and the water was coming over the top of the trees.” Describing it, she states, “A big gush of water was coming over the top of the trees, rolling sprinkler wheels and logs.” They immediately ran to their vehicles. Her brother later told her, “by the time we got down the road, the garage had hit the house and the house exploded,” meaning the water had picked up the garage and pushed it into the house, the force of which basically exploded the structure. Arlene also remarks, “I never did worry about not having time to get in and drive off. I don’t know whether I thought it [the flood wave] would just stay there, but I never worried about not having time.” Her brother later told her that the water was on their bumpers as they pulled out. As she said earlier in the interview, “I never did look back to see if my little brother was behind me. I kept having this feeling that if I looked back, I would turn into a block of salt like Lot’s wife. I kept thinking, ‘You’ve got to keep going and not look.’” She drove through Wilford, past her parents’ house and felt bad because “everything I had was in the back of my folks’ pick-up and they couldn’t save anything of theirs.” Although the radio was telling people to go to the college hill<sup>9</sup> in Rexburg, her dad said, “That’s ridiculous. We are not going to try to get to the college hill. If it’s already gone by your place, we could get caught between the two branches of the Teton River.” Instead, they went north to the St. Anthony Sand Dunes, where many residents of

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<sup>9</sup> The hill where Ricks College, a private two-year college owned by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, was located.

the Salem area were also gathering. As Arlene waited at the Sand Dunes, she tried to convince people how serious the flood was. While many insisted it would be only three or four feet of water, she maintained that she had seen it coming over the top of the trees on their property, which were about thirty feet high.

Next, Brent Romrell gives his account of where he was when he heard the news. As mentioned, he worked for the Forest Service and was planting trees on Black Mountain. Around 8:00 a.m. he reached in his pocket and “pulled out the only set of pickup keys that [the family] had, other than the one we had hidden under the hood.” Romrell realized that the pickup was the only vehicle available to his wife and now she wouldn’t be able to drive it, because he had the keys. At 12:30, when the crew stopped for lunch, he overheard some other men talking about setting their cattle loose and wondered why they’d do that. Then Romrell received notice over the radio that “the Teton Dam has busted.” As the crew quickly headed back toward Wilford, he asked someone at the Forest Service to call his wife and check on her, but the Forest Service employee said the line was busy and then dead, so Romrell worried about the safety of his wife and children. He and his friend theorized that the water might be “five or six inches deep inside the house.” They reached St. Anthony at 1:30 p.m. He tried to get to Wilford but there were road blocks and he states, “By that time I began to get frantic because no one had seen my wife.” For the next few hours, he drove to different locations where he thought Arlene and the children might be, one of which was the LDS Stake Center<sup>10</sup> in St. Anthony. Finally, around 5:00 p.m., he and Arlene found each other there. The first thing he asked her was, “How did you get that pickup out of there without those keys?” She then handed him “the keys to the pickup that I had had in my pocket that morning. To this day I don’t know how they got there, but I swear on a stack of Bibles that they were in my pocket that morning, and when I got down there, she handed

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<sup>10</sup> A meetinghouse for members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

me the keys.” The interviewer questions Brent for a moment about this miraculous account, asking if he had checked his pocket when she handed him her set of keys to see if the keys were there and Brent said, yes, he had, but his pocket was empty. When Andrus questions Arlene, she simply says that she does not remember looking for the keys; she just jumped in the pickup when the water was about one hundred feet away and the keys were in the pickup.

They stayed that night with a cousin in the St. Anthony area, although they tried to go back to their house that night, but there was still too much water across the roadways. The next morning, Brent headed for the house, but was worried about getting through the roadblocks without a pass. Fortunately, he was still in his Forest Service uniform, and the Forest Service was helping with some of the security, so he was able to get through to his home. After driving as far as he could, he walked the rest of the way in.

The Escape or complication stage here demonstrates common concerns found in all of the Teton Dam Flood narratives. A primary concern for most was to find and be reunited with their family. While in some cases, family members were together when they heard about the flood, many were in different locations with no means of warning one another or getting to each other before they needed to evacuate. The next common concern was to get to safety, which meant getting to higher ground. Obviously, in Wilford this would be a matter of life-or-death. In Sugar City, a few people stayed in their homes either because they did not get the warning, did not have time to escape, or felt that they would be safe in their homes in spite of the water. Since many had not experienced a flood of this magnitude before, they failed to realize that by the time the floodwaters reached them, they were more solid than liquid, carrying dead animals, debris from houses, logs, and chunks of road which acted as battering rams as they flowed into various structures. While some houses avoided any major damage from the debris, it was fairly risky to

try to remain in a house throughout the flood. Finally, any unusual experiences in escaping are revealed in this stage of the narrative, as with the miracle of the car keys. Another Wilford resident, Gloria Greenhalgh, was home alone with her small children with no car. She claims that she climbed into an old car that they rarely drove and prayed that it would start. The car drove her to safe ground and then quit, never to start again. In general, most disaster narratives will share these characteristics of finding and being reunited with loved ones and getting to safety and will stress any difficulty in accomplishing these two goals.

### **Return**

Return scenes correlate with Labov and Waletzky's result or resolution stage, which is the climax of the complication stage. In the narratives of the Teton Dam survivors, this is the moment they come back to their land and see the damage to their homes and belongings. It is the stage of most extreme shock and one place in the narratives where it is easiest to detect trauma. Nearly all of the survivors, when explaining what they saw when they returned to their homes, slip into second person pronouns. While there is no research to explain the significance of this pattern, there are psychological studies in which trauma treatment has included having victims tell their stories first in first person, then in second person, and finally in third person, which enables the victim to gain psychological distance from the traumatic event (Chang et al.). Chang et al.'s study suggests that there is some connection between pronoun usage and emotional state. It seems that switching into second person is a coping mechanism that allows narrators to distance themselves from the experience. For example, Brent states, "We dug around in the sand and *you* found like a record or a sheet off of one of the kid's beds ... just little things like that *you* passed as *you* came out" (emphasis added).

Brent describes his reaction to seeing his property for the first time: “I really kind of expected to see the house still standing, but when I walked over the hill and saw nothing but sand, it was really a sad sight.” He says that all of the trees which had surrounded his home were washed away and that the water had not only taken his home but washed out two of the walls on the foundation. He noticed track marks from his house, which had “just drug right down through the field and into my brother’s house.” He headed back to Ashton, met up with Arlene, and took her back to see the house. Arlene was disoriented as they headed to the house because all of the trees and homes were washed away. She kept saying, “Are we to our house?” She describes arriving at the site and seeing only the foundation: “I could see that there was nothing, but I had the nerve to believe that when I got here, I would walk in and that house would be there. I walked up those steps and fell on the other side. There was no door when I went to open it. I just, I don’t know, if you’ve ever felt like nothing, it was nothing.” After seventeen years of marriage, they “didn’t have a knife or fork or spoon to our name.” Another loss was their cattle, which they tried to locate about a week later. They went to a local corral where stray livestock was being held until its owners were located, and it was difficult to convince the brand inspector to let them take their cattle because they were not branded.

The Romrells stayed with their cousins for several days and then found a place to rent in St. Anthony until July when Housing and Urban Development [HUD] delivered a trailer to their property and hooked it up. They were the first in Wilford to move back to their property, and Brent indicated that it was “eerie” because there were no lights. He says, “I think it felt worse than the time of the pioneers because there just weren’t any lights or nothing, not even a lantern.” Arlene adds that she was also scared because there was so much talk about looting that she was wary of outsiders, stating, “There was all kinds of trashy people in here. I mean everyday this

road was like Grand Central Station.” Somehow, people who had no valid reason for entering the flood area had gotten through the roadblocks which were set up to keep people out.

Brent took administrative leave from the Forest Service, but claims that “those first two weeks we wandered around lost.” They wandered the fields, looking for any items from their home that might have settled in the ground. Arlene had a collection of fifty-nine salt and pepper shakers and they found some “here and there.” They later found some items from her beauty shop, their nightstand, with items still in it, and Arlene’s cedar chest. What they hoped to find, but never did, was Arlene’s wedding rings. Arlene says, after they found the nightstand, it “seemed like it just made a drive in me that I couldn’t stand not to go look.” They also lost all of their pictures, although she had saved the baby books when she first left the house. Arlene remembers how thrilled their kids were when, two weeks later, they located their dog, which they thought had died in the flood; however, the dog was so traumatized by the flood it would run away if it was not on a chain. Arlene indicates, “I don’t think he thought this was home.” Andrus then asks Arlene if she is happy to be back in Wilford. She says, “No, I wish we had never come back here.” She says that with all of the trees gone, “it’s not pretty here now and it’s going to be a lot of years before it will ever be pretty.” Arlene then recounts that after their days and days of looking for remains of their belongings she would come home and throw up all night. Eventually, she ended up in the hospital. The Romrells purchased and moved into a double wide mobile home by the end of August, making them some of the earliest to get back into their homes. When Andrus asks them if they are happy with their new home, Arlene states, “It’s a house, it’s not a home.” Brent then explains that he and his wife had built their original home by themselves, through their “sweat and blood” while the trailer they replaced it with they bought in

a week while still in a “daze” from the flood. While in other communities, some ended up with nicer homes and essentially benefited from the flood, the Romrells did not feel that way.

The Return or Result stage focuses on returning home to find things altered in some way. For some, these changes were overwhelming, as with the Romrells, while others simply faced a flooded basement, as many in Rexburg experienced. This is the stage at which trauma is most likely to manifest itself. Prior to this stage, people are in a state of numbness or shock. They can't quite comprehend the seriousness of what is happening. When they return home, reality strikes. As seen in the Romrells' accounts, their disbelief was intense. Although they logically knew the house would not be there, they somehow still expected it to be there. Next, a cataloging of damages and an explanation of looking for missing items is common across all of the narratives and can be quite lengthy. Additionally, this is a common stage for narrators to express symptoms of trauma such as disorientation, confusion, and even fear and suspicion, as we see with their mention of outsiders coming through like it was “Grand Central Station.” In the Warning scene, disaster narratives alert the audience that a threat is going to change things. In the Escape scene, the focus is on finding loved ones and getting to safety. The Return scene is where we see the extent to which things have changed and how difficult recovery will be.

### **Evaluation**

The Evaluation scene corresponds with Labov and Waletzky's evaluation stage which answers the “so what?” of the narrative (Labov 30). It indicates significance, which is often “established by comparing [the events] with a series of events parallel to, but distinct from, those that actually did occur” (Labov 30). The parallel events are signaled with words such as “would, might, could.” For example, when reflecting on the flood, many Teton Dam survivors ask, “What would have happened if the dam broke in the middle of the night?” or “What if the dam

had broken in the winter?” Interviewees then follow through with that line of reasoning to indicate that there would have been a greater loss of life and much more difficulty in recovery efforts; therefore, they should be grateful for the way events unfolded. Brent and Arlene both acknowledge this to some degree in their account.

Andrus, the interviewer, then walks the Romrells through a lengthy evaluation, asking for their opinion of the effectiveness of various organizations who helped with the recovery. One purpose of evaluation, according to Labov, is “to assign moral responsibility for the events, assigning praise and blame to the actors involved” (35). The Romrells are positive about the help of government organizations, and grudgingly, at least for Arlene, acknowledge God’s help in protecting their lives and the lives of their sons, but they are disappointed about the performance of the LDS church in their area.

When asked if they were happy with the services of HUD, Brent states that the organization did the best they could:

I think the thing that really surprised the HUD people so much was the people in this community were willing to get back into their own places. They had already started the motion of doing these things. They told me that when they go back to these other floods and stuff like this that it might be two or three weeks and people are still sitting there waiting for help.

Then he recounts some of the trouble they had placing the trailer and getting electricity and water hooked up. While he is complimenting HUD, he is also taking pride in the community’s self-sufficiency in responding to the flood.

The Romrells felt that their work with the Bureau of Reclamation [BOR] was difficult because the agent challenged them on most of the items they had listed on their claim, ultimately

cutting their claim by \$17,000. Their claim was more complex because they had land, a house, a beauty shop, and farm machinery. In addition, their teen-age boys had a lot of sports equipment which they had purchased with the money they earned moving sprinkler pipe. Arlene comments that if the BOR rebuilds the dam, they will move. Brent states that the dam did much more damage than the flooding of the Teton often did. He states that the engineers didn't account for higher volume of water from spring run-off, which caused the dam to fill too fast and prompted the break. They then discuss the soil which was used in the building of the dam and why it is not stable soil. Arlene comments that after the flood, even driving near the Palisades<sup>11</sup> dam and reservoir made her nervous. Brent then states that he blames the disaster on the government,<sup>12</sup> but also on the "environmentalists that fought it so much . . . because the government tried to hurry and get it done before it cost more money." He claims that the builders were going to use soil from the bottom of the canyon, but the environmentalists fought it and "made them get it off the top" which wasn't good soil for building a dam. This comment demonstrates that praise and blame will likely reflect prior opinions and beliefs. Many area farmers were suspicious of environmentalists in general, because they challenged their autonomy in managing their land the way they desired. In this case, Romrell faults environmentalists more than the actual organization that designed and constructed the dam, although there is no evidence to support his claim.

Brent felt that God had a hand in preserving lives with the time of day that it broke; otherwise, if it had broken at night, with no warning, the residents of Wilford would "probably have been wiped out for the most part." Arlene, when asked if God intervened to save her life, states, "If he did, he decided I needed some more punishment . . . For a lot of days I wished we

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<sup>11</sup> The Palisades Dam is an earth-fill dam on the Snake River in Bonneville County.

<sup>12</sup> We can assume that by "government" he means the Bureau of Reclamation, since they were responsible for the dam's construction.

had gone right with it and hadn't to be here to pick up the mess and the baloney that they put us through." She then agrees that the time of day definitely saved her sons' lives, since they were on the river earlier in the morning. Arlene's hesitance about thanking God for their preservation seems linked to her feeling that their church, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, had not supported them as she had wished. Brent states that the church "really let us down in not coming out and seeing to our needs like they did for some of the other wards." He then shares how when his father asked for help, the stake president called and questioned if he "really needed the help." Then they heard accounts of people who had sent supplies to Wilford that never arrived, or people volunteering trucks and equipment, but the church leaders would not talk to them to help coordinate their efforts. Then, when the church was planning to rebuild their meetinghouse, they were told that if they got 65% attendance<sup>13</sup> at church for three months, they could get the church built with a gymnasium. They met the requirement, but Brent states, "Now I bet there isn't about 30% going because they said, 'Well that wasn't right. That guy didn't have the right to say that.'" He also comments that the church helped those who had been hit the first week, but since many of the leaders weren't affected themselves, they lost interest in helping. Moreover, those who weren't affected commented that survivors were "lucky" to have all of their new stuff, when the survivors would have preferred to have their old stuff. Arlene agreed that people were disappointed and "quit" the church, because the LDS church had yet to begin building the new chapel at the time of the interview. She says, if "they would just simply start building something out there right now it would give people something to hang on to, something to look forward to, and something to pull us back together." She shares that when she was hospitalized during the clean-up the only visitor she had was "an interfaith lady" who "came and

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<sup>13</sup> At the time, the practice for building LDS chapels was to evaluate attendance statistics before church headquarters built a chapel. Here, some are feeling angry that even after a disaster they were holding the church members to the same standard without making exceptions.

sat on the side of my bed and she came and brought me a flower and sat and talked to me” while “we never saw a thing of the bishopric.”<sup>14</sup>

They appreciated the National Guard providing meals for the first ten to fifteen days, in conjunction with the Red Cross. Arlene also shares that she has been seeing a psychiatrist for six months and says, “I guess I’ve learned a lot about me, which I probably wouldn’t have done if I hadn’t been through what I went through and got sick like I did.” The Romrells did not see any positive benefits for their family, saying that the experience had upset their children, who were “nervous” anyway. Arlene finishes by stating, “You probably think I’m real bitter and I am.”

In this scene, the Romrells attempt to determine the significance of the disaster in their personal lives, while assigning praise and blame to various groups. They are positive about government groups, such as HUD and the Red Cross, which provided for essential needs such as food, shelter, and mental health. They are fairly neutral about the Bureau of Reclamation, resenting that their claim was cut by \$17,000 but opting to emphasize the fault of environmental groups rather than elaborating on the BOR’s culpability with regard to the dam’s construction and failure. They are somewhat grateful to God for preserving them, but their praise is countered with resentment about how the LDS church responded to the event. This is complicated by the fact that local congregations are run by a lay ministry, men and women who have other means of providing for their livelihood and who serve in the church on a voluntary basis. Most of the evidence the Romrells offer about how the church let them down was due to local members not following through on help offered from places outside of Wilford or not personally checking on them to see if they were all right. So, essentially, aside from disappointment in the church’s building policy, the Romrells are disappointed in their neighbors.

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<sup>14</sup> A bishopric is composed of three men: a bishop and two counselors. Each bishopric leads one ward.

In summary, with the Romrells' narratives I have demonstrated the common story-pattern in the Teton Dam Flood collection, which synchronizes nicely with Labov and Waletzky's framework of narrative structure. This pattern is useful in trauma studies by defining a sub-genre of trauma narrative, the disaster narrative. It is likely that this pattern would emerge in the telling of any disaster because it follows the structure of almost all story, which focuses on some reversal of fortune and the resulting consequences. What we have learned about trauma from this analysis is that victims depict themselves as numb in the Warning and Escape scenes, focusing mostly on getting to safety and locating loved ones. Most of the detail in these scenes focuses on accomplishing these goals—safety for self and loved ones. If anything unusual or out of the ordinary occurs in these scenes, it will be emphasized in the narrative. The Return phase is the moment where trauma manifests itself, not in the speechlessness described in many fictional trauma narratives, but in distancing through a change in personal pronouns; descriptions of symptoms of trauma such as disorientation, anger, fear; or depictions of physical reactions such as vomiting and sleeplessness. Finally, in the Evaluation scene, we see that praise and blame will likely reflect the narrator's previously held beliefs and attitudes, even when there is little evidence to support those interpretations. In this sense, traumatic events are likely to expose pre-existing tensions and resentments and bring them to the surface.

The Words identified in the Romrells' accounts bear similarity to those found in accounts from the Buffalo Creek Flood in West Virginia which occurred in 1972. On February 26, tragedy struck this West Virginian mining community when several days of intense rain weakened a shoddily made dam that housed waste from the mining operation to the amount of 132 million gallons of black water. While mining officials saw that the soil of the dam seemed to be saturated and becoming "real soggy" there was no attempt to alert the people living below the dam

(Erikson 28). Then, around 8:00 a.m., the structure simply seemed to dissolve, releasing the millions of gallons of water on the valley below. After demolishing several small communities, the water eventually reached the bottom of the valley and emptied into the Guyandotte River (Erikson 41). The flood left 125 people dead, with seven other bodies never located. It also left 4,000 of the valley's 5,000 inhabitants homeless (Erikson 40).

Accounts from survivors of the Buffalo Creek flood parallel Teton Dam accounts in several ways. First, the narratives all sound similar to one another. As with the Teton Dam narratives, the Buffalo Creek survivor accounts sound nearly identical to one another. Kai Erikson, a sociologist, remarks, "I was surprised and even a little suspicious during my early visits to the hollow by the remarkable uniformity of the complaints" and "those complaints were expressed in such similar ways that they almost sounded rehearsed" (136). Erikson concludes that these are the only accounts available to tell, and they bear similarity to some of the Wilford accounts.

Other similarities include the initial dazed reaction upon returning to their homes and seeing the destruction, the fear of outsiders, and the loss of identity connected to losing belongings. The initial reaction to the Buffalo Creek flood is similar to that described by the Romrells, with survivors beginning to "drift in slow dazed circles, looking for missing relatives, seeking shelter . . . and trying to comprehend the sheer enormity of what had happened" (41). Those whose homes were intact, "came down off the hillside to survey the damage and begin the exhausting job of restoring a little order to their lives" (42). As outsiders came to assist the residents of Buffalo Creek, there were rampant tales of people "rooting among the wreckage" to loot valuables (43). As people recalled the loss of their homes and belongings, they found that "the inner contents of a home matter as much as the outer structure. They are an 'extension of

self, a source of identity” (Erikson, “Prologue” n.p.). Seeing their belongings destroyed was “like watching part of themselves die” (Erikson, “Prologue” n.p.). Even though they were able to rebuild or move into temporary trailers, “it is a house, it is not a home. Before, I had a home” (175). As Erikson states, “to lose a home or the sum of one’s belongings is to lose evidence as to who one is and where one belongs in the world” (177). The people of Buffalo Creek felt that they were living in a “strange land” or “distant place” even though they were “within yards of their original homes” (Erikson, “Prologue” n.p.). Each of these comments echoes sentiments found in the Romrells’ accounts.

Aside from these commonalities among trauma narratives, interesting variations in the collection are apparent. As mentioned earlier, because floods are phenomena shaped by geography, location plays a key role in determining victims’ flood experiences. Because of this, variations in narratives correlate with the location of the victims and certain motifs had a higher concentration in specific locations. That is not to say that these motifs did not also arise in accounts from other locations, but there is a higher concentration in the locations indicated. In Wilford, motifs of premonitions, loss of geographical and personal identity, and disappointment in the LDS church are common. In Sugar City, narratives of these victims show a higher concentration of references to impact from trauma, a concern for the effect of the flood on children, many references to LDS church leader President Kimball’s visit and counsel, and concern about overbuilding in the wake of the flood. In Rexburg, the most distinctive motifs are mention of the volunteer help that arrived from outside the area and concern about outsiders. In Salem, there is an acknowledgment of pioneer ancestors. Finally, in Roberts, there is an acknowledgment of the conflict between the LDS church and the community and a feeling of frustration that local agencies seemed to forget that Roberts had been hit by the flood.

## **Wilford**

The Romrells' stories, while more dramatic than most, are still typical of the experience of most of those affected by the Teton Dam break. Other accounts from Wilford residents echo the Romrell's experiences. Compared with other accounts in the Teton Dam oral history collection, the accounts in the city of Wilford are perhaps the most dramatic. As Alan Nyborg said, "we didn't have minutes to get out, we had seconds" (6). Five of the eleven deaths caused by the flood occurred in Wilford. While descriptions of the water in other communities was that it was a slow-moving, thick mud, in Wilford it was more terrifying. Harold Bischoff states, "Unless you saw it, you can hardly believe how high it was" (13). When noting its power, Vernon Jenkins said, "Hog Hollow was bared right down to the lava rock" (5). There were also more accounts of premonitions in the narratives from this area. Paul Birch mentioned that his wife had a dream (2). Harold Bischoff said his wife was always afraid that it would break. Nyborg and Stevens both state that they always had a "bad feeling" when thinking about the dam.

Due to the power of the water, the land was stripped of recognizable landmarks. As people came back in to see the damage to their homes, Paul Birch explains that their "home and land was unrecognizable." Nyborg states that he "couldn't find the house" and "couldn't recognize landmarks" (10). As Romrell says, "where I knew homes had been, where I knew things were, there was nothing....like seeing a wilderness" (13). The Wilford accounts also equate this loss of geographical landmarks with a loss of history and identity. Gloria Greenhalgh says that after the flood, "Most of us felt that we had no past. You felt that you were living in somebody else's home, wearing somebody else's clothes" (5). Nyborg states, "Neighbors have gone and the whole country has changed" (20) Meservy agrees that "it will never be Wilford

any more. It's just a different place now" (7). Looking at it more positively, Paul Birch says, "I guess we just don't have records of our past, we'll just have to live for the future."

While other areas, such as Rexburg, praised the LDS church for their recovery assistance, there was a sense in Wilford that the church had let them down. Brent Romrell observes, "We never did receive help from the big groups that came into Rexburg and Sugar City" (25). Aside from faulting the church directly, others seemed to feel that it had harmed the relationships within their communities and wards. Paul Birch comments, "there's a lot of bitterness and hurt feelings. [The flood] brought out the goodness in people and it brought a lot of the bad in people" even "causing enviousness right here in this ward" (23, 26). Those feelings stemmed from the belief that some people received more money on their claims than others did and seemed to come out better in the rebuilding. While some in Rexburg argue the positive side of the experience, those in Wilford insist, "I don't think the flood helped us any" (Meservy 12).

### **Sugar City**

Sugar City was the next city hit by the flood. The narratives of these victims show a highest concentration of references to trauma than the other flood-affect areas, a concern for the effect of the flood on children, many references to LDS church leader President Kimball's visit and counsel, and concern about overbuilding in the wake of the flood.

Although the inhabitants of Wilford doubtless suffered the most traumatic experiences, there is more discussion of trauma in the Sugar City accounts. Although Ferron Sonderegger, the stake president in Sugar City and one of the key figures in the recovery efforts for the town, claimed that the city residents didn't need the group of three hundred psychiatrists that the government had provided, accounts indicate that many were suffering trauma. Sonderegger may have stated that the psychiatrists were not needed because people were hesitant to admit that they

needed help. For example, Ruth Barrus, at one point praises the “almost total unity and cooperation” (7) associated with the clean-up efforts, while later stating, that the community was “kind of disunited by flood” (9) and that she’d “never felt more isolated in my whole life” (11). This type of conflicting or contradictory feeling is normal for survivors of traumatic events and indicates that they were indeed suffering trauma. Several of the Sugar City women said that they had a tendency toward depression after the flood, a common manifestation of trauma. Gayle Brown states that she was “more depressed than she would usually be” (22), while Marilyn Schofield, Shanna Ricks and Glenda Bagley share that they were depressed and cried a lot. One man acknowledged that he would “see things and kind of shake and shudder and relive things” (Nicholls 10). The men were more likely to express frustration, irritability, or violence as symptoms of trauma. Norman Gage states of the engineer of the dam, “I’d have as soon as shot him as look at him” (17). Another explained that people from the state were coming around insisting that people throw away their bottled fruit due to contamination. Wilson Walker stated that he’d “have killed them in cold blood before I’d have let them have the fruit” (12). Harold Kunz, a young adult at the time, stated that he “became very irritable and short-tempered at this time” (9) and became “a little more aloof and independent from family” (18).

Many survivors comment on the impact of the flood on their children specifically or the children of the town in general. Marilyn Sonderegger says that there were “a lot of tears from kids who didn’t know what was going on” (8, 21). Children also felt ignored by their parents since so much of their energy was spent in cleaning up their homes and businesses. As Marilyn Schofield, owner of the town grocery store, acknowledges, “our little girl, 8 years old, cried a lot and felt we were only concerned with the store” (23). Ken Howell observed that the events of the flood had led some children to “struggle in school” (17). While the flood was likely to have

impacted any children associated with it, most of Sugar City was completely devastated, meaning the entire community was in clean-up mode for a year and longer. That length of disruption to normal routines takes a toll on children's psyches.

A significant number of Sugar City residents mentioned LDS Church President Kimball's visit after the flood either directly or by referencing his counsel and how it helped them determine their actions in recovery. Many simply spoke of the comfort they received from seeing him and feeling of his concern. Zeruah Moon, wife of the mayor of Sugar City, states, "it seems like when the prophet is concerned enough about you, that he will come in person, then you know that he is concerned. He is quite old to do these things and I thought that was really something" (16). Others referenced President Kimball's visit as a means of interpreting the events. Howell states that "having the authorities of the church was a spiritual experience" (10), and Worrell acknowledges that Elder Boyd K. Packer, an LDS apostle traveling with President Kimball, said that "God didn't cause it to collapse but intervened when it broke" (10). Dale Nicholls used Kimball's words as a means of interpreting the event: "When President Kimball came he said that we are not being punished for anything" (7).

Many mentioned the advice that President Kimball gave to "rebuild and build better" (Kinghorn 24). This helped them justify their own response to the flood and led to one of the key conflicts in Sugar City, which was a concern about overbuilding. Because most of the homes in Sugar City were a complete loss, an entire community was rebuilding at the same time. Ferron Sonderegger reveals that government officials thought that the loss was so big that no one would rebuild and Sugar City would, in essence, die (7). Instead, people rebuilt, and, as they believed the prophet had advised, they built bigger and better homes, which led to some negative reactions from local citizens and from those outside of Sugar City. Some were concerned that

people who overbuilt would face higher property taxes (Bills 21); others felt that this “higher class of neighborhood” (Kunz 20) was changing the overall feeling of Sugar City. Glenda Bagley explains that she “moved away from Sugar . . . because everyone was building elaborate” (14). Kenneth Howell summed the problem up: “If you have an entire community discussing who gained this and who lost this, who is coming out better than the other one, this tends to have a great negative effect on the morale of the community” (12). Because much of the money was coming from the government, “some who weren’t in the flood feel like they are paying for those who were in the flood” (Steiner 13). This led some to say sarcastically, “I wish I could go through a flood to get a new home” (Marilyn Sonderegger 15) or “look at what the government built for them” (Ferron Sonderegger 22). Some concluded, “Well, Sugar City isn’t like it used to be. The people have lost the antique feeling of Sugar City. Many of the older people have left now and they didn’t come back” (Bird 17). Ken Howell stated “if you liked Sugar City the way it was before, then it [the flood] has had a detrimental effect” (14).

### **Rexburg**

The most distinctive quality of the Rexburg survivor stories is the mention of the volunteer help that arrived from outside the area and concern about outsiders and looters. The references to volunteers is more prevalent possibly because Rexburg received more man hours of labor than outlying areas. This is partially because some of the outlying areas like Wilford were harder to reach due to poor road conditions and lack of a central location from which to organize efforts. Because Rexburg and Ricks College were the base of operations for the recovery effort, it was easy to send volunteer groups around the city to help Rexburg citizens.

Rex Bennion, a Rexburg resident and Ricks College administrator, calculated that in total the area received one million man hours of service (10). In fact, Mack Shirley, another Ricks

College employee, kept track and says that he had “100 names of people who helped me personally” (9). James F Wood, 21, states that the “volunteers saved the town and helped them recover.” Larry Saunders, a math professor at Ricks College said, “Any community that got the tremendous number of hours of work donated by people would have done just as well” (11). Norman C. Ricks, another employee of Ricks College, said that “the volunteers were like a transfusion” to the spirits of those affected by the flood (12). Pat Hepworth, a Rexburg resident, said that every time she’d see a busload of volunteers pull into town she’d “sit and cry” with gratitude (14). The collection includes several interviews with volunteers. Remington Brooks, a 27-year-old man from Sugar House, Utah heard about the opportunity to serve while attending his university LDS branch<sup>15</sup> and spent the day cleaning drainage ditches and helping a widow clean out her hedge, which he said contained “lots of weird things” (6). He felt it was a good experience to serve.

On the other hand, the disaster brought many outside companies who offered to help clean up not as volunteers but to make money. There is an overall negative, suspicious tone in the narratives when mentioning these outsiders. Darrell Lewis claims, “we’re getting different kinds of people in here” (6). Some contractors offered to rebuild or remodel homes and then took off with the money, not doing the promised work, such as was the case with Mae Searle Widdison. Donald Rydalch complains, “There was a lot of money wasted on fly by night contractors” (7).

Finally, there is a common Word referring to the prevalence of looters. While some claim that the looters were just other Rexburg residents, others feel that it was outsiders. It’s logical that this was a larger problem in Rexburg because places such as Wilford and Sugar City were

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<sup>15</sup> A term denoting an LDS congregation smaller than a ward.

nearly a complete loss and many things could not be salvaged. In Rexburg, most homes were mainly affected in the basement, so homeowners spent weeks carrying things out to their lawns to clean and restore them. Because of this, there were many items left outside overnight, making theft easy. On a humorous note, Rama Drury Griffeth complained that someone had stolen 98 quarts of fruit, but she was most upset that “they didn’t return the bottles” (7). Michael B. Kennedy, a lawyer for the city, said, “some people in good faith thought they could take” items because they thought they were left out as garbage (9). On the other hand, he did mention capturing a gang of young adults who made organized runs each night to gather valuable items. They were caught one night in an apartment with a picture of the Last Supper hanging on the wall overlooking where they “divided the spoils of their plunder” (18). The city took the looting seriously. Phil Harmon, who worked as a volunteer police officer, was told that when faced with a looter, “we don’t want to kill anyone if we can help it, but you do what needs to be done” (10). He said that some looters came in the city quickly, before roadblocks were set up and “were able to get away with quite a bit, whole truckloads of valuable furniture, appliances, and get out of the city before they could be apprehended” (14). Sociologist Kai T. Erikson explains that rumors of looting are very common in catastrophic events because they bring so many people in from outside, many for the valid reason of helping to clean up the disaster. Although these outsiders may not act suspiciously, they are seen as suspicious “because they *are* outsiders, strangers, and on that account not to be trusted” (Erikson, “Prologue” n.p.). He goes on to say that the rumors of looting are almost always exaggerated.

### **Hibbard/Salem**

The accounts from Hibbard and Salem, both farming communities outside of Rexburg, had a higher concentration of references to the pioneer past of the Upper Snake River Valley, a theme

that resonates with their rural location. Many of these narratives make a comparison between the efforts of pioneers to settle and farm the area to their efforts to recover from the disaster. Gwili Saurey said “it taught us what our forefathers went through and our pioneer ancestors” (9). Brent Bell said that the experience helped show that the people in these communities are “built out of the kind of stuff it takes to rebuild an area” (11). Emmeli Sommer found herself singing the Mormon pioneer anthem, “Come, Come Ye Saints”<sup>16</sup> to lift her spirits and insists “the pioneers had it much worse” (3-4). George Willmore states that most people “are right back here rebuilding, re-doing kind of pioneer work, putting this country back into shape” (5). Brad Dalling, of Salem, states that “roots are deep here. The people are independent, pioneer stock” (15). It’s possible that these references are more common in the Hibbard and Salem area because many of these people had continued a rural farming tradition established by their ancestors.

This allusion to pioneer ancestors is also evident in the *Salem 2<sup>nd</sup> Ward History* which was kept by members of the ward. In it, LDS Bishop Bruce Shirley says that there was an older couple in the ward who had a mission call and were supposed to report to Salt Lake City within a few weeks of the flood. When the Bishop suggested they postpone their mission, the couple refused, saying “he and his wife had a call to serve the Lord and they would accept that mission call, and they would be on time” (184). The Bishop then makes a connection between his attitude and that of earlier Latter-Day Saints who “when they were driven from their homes and had very little” still “supported the callings of the church to serve” (184).

## **Roberts**

Roberts, a town which sits west of the Menan buttes, was the last town inundated by the water. One prominent Word in the Roberts narratives was the sense that the flood was a unifying

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<sup>16</sup> A Mormon hymn composed by William Clayton during the trek West which memorializes Mormon pioneer devotion and sacrifice. “It was a rule in the camp that whenever anybody started singing this hymn all in the camp should join” (Davidson 59).

event which helped to overcome religious divides between LDS members and followers of other religions (Stevenson 18). Ray Holm, the LDS bishop at the time of the flood, said, “the flood may have been worth it because we had some real problems in our community” (9). The antagonism toward the LDS community is evidenced in some narratives. For example, the mayor claimed, “the first looter was a Utah station wagon loading up 2x4s” with the implication being that a Utah station wagon would likely be an LDS church member because they carry larger families and LDS families were thought to be larger than usual (Larid 15). Others felt that the unity was short-lived. Vernel Hilterbrand observed, “everybody came right down to earth and they were just the way God intended for us to be...then started all this grabbing for everything they could” (10).

Another common Word was the belief that Roberts was overlooked by government agencies and media and did not receive the help they needed to recover (Jenson 7). After the initial warnings given by government officials, Jay Lamb states that “the state police didn’t come back for four to five days” (4). The local LDS congregation and other religious groups fed the entire town for two weeks straight with little outside assistance (Robinson 10). Elaine Robinson, the LDS Relief Society president in Roberts complained, “there we were trying to feed 500 people on nothing and still at this time nobody knew that Roberts was hit” (6).

In conclusion, the general pattern of scenes in the flood narratives has been outlined here, with further detail on motifs found in narratives from specific geographical locations. What this teaches us about trauma is that most survivors are not speechless in the wake of trauma and that their narratives follow established patterns of narrative. Thus, the prominent portrayal of trauma in novels through fragmented narratives is misleading. One might argue that the Teton Dam disaster was not severe enough to prompt the kind of fragmentation found in other trauma

narratives. But consider the narrative of Darryl Wayne Grigg. Grigg and his friend David Benson were fishing near the dam when it broke and were carried on the thirty foot wave for several miles. Benson drowned, but Grigg managed to climb into a tree and wait for rescue with five broken ribs and a punctured lung. Grigg's experience is traumatic in anyone's estimation, yet he is still able to tell his story in a clear fashion, with no fragmentation. While he alludes to symptoms of trauma such as sleeplessness, nightmares, and depression, it does not interfere with his narrative. He acknowledges that he has been interviewed many times about his experience and while it does not bother him, he states, "I have a hard time finding things to say," suggesting that it is difficult to talk about, but not impossible (10). Trauma is primarily manifest in the narratives by a switch to second person pronouns and acknowledgment of symptoms such as disorientation, anger, fear, vomiting, and sleeplessness.

Further, the variations in motifs found in the different towns hit by the flood emphasize the significance of geography. Although all of the oral histories have common scenes and Words, the very landscape of these communities caused the floodwater to hit in different ways, making each community's experience subtly unique. Scholar Michelle Balaev sees the connection between landscape and trauma, stating that place is an important aspect of trauma because it "provides a conceptual framework in which emotional responses occur" (xv). Although her work focuses on fictional representations of trauma, her statements have obvious truth for the Teton Dam Flood narratives. She further states, "it is the geographic location, cultural influence, and historical moment that merge to define the value of trauma for the individual and community" (xv). "The physical environment offers the opportunity to examine both the personal and cultural histories imbedded in landscapes that define the character's identity and the meaning of the traumatic experience" (38). Her statements are verified by the nuances in story and theme found

in the communities above. It also explains the comments of survivors that with the loss of their homes and belongings they felt a loss of identity. In the next chapter, I further explore cultural influences in determining the meaning of traumatic experience.

### Chapter III: Disaster as Progress and Beliefs about Water in the West

In the previous chapter, I established the story-pattern common to the collection of flood narratives, using the stories of Brent and Arlene Romrell as an example. Further, I examined motifs found in the narratives from specific cities and communities. From this analysis, I identified characteristics that I theorize would be common to all disaster narratives, and contribute to trauma studies at large. In this chapter, I explore Words which emerge in the evaluation stage of the narratives revealing deep-seated beliefs about seeing disaster in a positive light, the necessity of water in the West, and an unwillingness to assign blame for the Teton Dam's failure.

Labov and Waletzky posit that a narrative which does not include an evaluation of the experience “lacks significance” or “has no point” (28). While the evaluation can often be simply a phrase that is fused with the final action, or result, of the story, it still serves an important purpose (Labov and Waletzky 30). The evaluation stage “reveals the attitude of the narrator toward the narrative” (Labov and Waletzky 32). One way an evaluation can be achieved is through “judgment of a third person” which involves reporting the narrative “to a person who was not present at the narrative” (Labov and Waletzky 33). Labov explains that in a narrative “a major task is to assign moral responsibility for the events, assigning praise and blame to the actors involved” (Labov 35). While some narratives clearly present protagonists and antagonists, others “minimiz[e] and obscure[e] the assignment of blame” (Labov 35). Because the Teton Dam flood narratives were gathered as oral histories, the survivors are naturally incorporate an evaluative stage, because they are telling their stories to a third person. Further, this evaluation is prompted by the interviewers consistently asking questions such as, “Do you feel that the flood was a divine punishment, a natural disaster, or a man-made disaster?” or “How has the Teton

Dam Disaster changed your life?” The cumulative responses to these questions reveal two consistent Words: “better” and “we need water.” Finally, there is minimal assignment of blame in most of the Teton Dam narratives.

One example of the Word “better” is found in the narrative of Trudy Clements, a young married woman of 22 who had lived in Rexburg her whole life and still had many family members living in the area. In her narrative, Clements uses the word “better” six times. The first two uses of the term are when she is talking about the usefulness of the Teton Dam project, because the dam would allow people to “control that water a little better and that there wouldn't be as much flooding and there would be a better use for the water” (2). In the third instance, she indicates that members of the LDS church are “trying to build back a little better, little more, taking a little more care of their yard and things like that” (10-11). She uses it twice in evaluating how the disaster has impacted the city.

I think the looks of the downtown area, especially, if the older buildings were left because they didn't need to be torn down, it seems like they've done some remodeling on them and painted them and putting the fronts on them. Or it's looking like that. It's just improving the looks so much and then the new buildings that are coming in are so, you know, they look really nice. I think that they are really trying to build back a **better** community as far as looks and things. I've noticed the people for the most part are taking a little more pride in the way their yards look. (11)

She then seeks to generalize her evaluation by stating, “If you took a poll of the people, most people would say they were **better** off now than they were before the flood, as far as experience and the material things” (13). Clements' final use of the term refers to how the flood has

improved her sensitivity to the needs of others: “Because of the breaking of the dam, I feel like I try to understand people a little **better** of their needs” (14).

The third, fourth, and fifth use of the term “better” are of specific interest in examining the attitudes of survivors on the impact of the disaster. First, Clements refers to the work of individuals, specifically members of the LDS church, in trying to “build back a little better” (10). In this case, she is talking about their intentions during the clean-up efforts. The next two uses of the term focus on city-wide efforts in improving things such as remodeling old buildings, and bringing in new buildings, which, in her opinion, is making “a better community as far as looks and things” (11). Finally, she suggests that this feeling about the community now being better is shared and that “if you took a poll” most would agree they “were better off now than they were before the flood” (11). Therefore, in Clements’ narrative we see evidence of people trying to build back better and also agreeing that they are better off not just materially, but that the experience itself has somehow made them better.

This Word also shows up in other narratives. Mary Ann Beck, a Rexburg resident, speaks metaphorically when she says, “I think that Rexburg has come out of this Teton disaster smelling like a rose. They are better off than they were before. I think that the new buildings and the money they have got appropriated for them was great” (7). Don Ellis, a local radio announcer famed for announcing the Teton Dam break as it unfolded, also agreed that the city was improved because of the flood. Ellis is prompted somewhat by a question from interviewer Alyn Andrus, who asks, “How do you feel about the flood, the business and about your way of life now? Is it a little better than a year after this took place?” (17). Though the Word may have been prompted by Andrus, Ellis then uses the Word seven times in a sweeping evaluation of the impact of the flood on the area.

I honestly believe that as of today, the area is now a **better** area than it was prior to the flood. I honestly believe this. There are small areas like the Wilford area, where there is so much land damage that it will probably never be used again. I sincerely believe by the percentage that the area is a **better** area than it was before. Not only because of the business climate, but because the business community has mostly all new facilities. I have a new facility; I'm in **better** shape now than I was prior to the flood. I have new equipment. The economy couldn't be **better**. I mean after all, you can't drop 155 million dollars into Madison and Fremont counties, which is how much has been paid through the Bureau of Reclamation to claimants up to this time, without some dividends. . . . The dam was a tragic, terrible thing, People lost their lives. This is something you cannot really accept. Discounting some of the things I mentioned, the mental anguish of the people, I think that the area is a **better** one. Some people think that's a little strange but I honestly believe that. I think a lot of people understand each other a little **better**. I think the person-to-person relationships in the area have been improved. Tragedy like this tends to bring people a little closer together afterwards. In these ways I think the area has profited. . . . Look at the areas of Rexburg and Sugar City, they're practically back to normal with a few exceptions. I think the area's in **better** shape. (17-18, emphasis added)

Ellis agrees with Clements when he claims that the area is in better shape because of new facilities, a better business climate, and the amount of money being used to stimulate economic growth. He also mentions that the citizens are better interpersonally, being more attuned to one another's needs, as was mentioned by Clements. This Word is also found in Hurricane Katrina narratives. Many in evaluating the event use phrases incorporating the Word "better" such as "Now, New Orleans is fighting back to become a bigger and better city than before!"

(Duplantis). Prudence Grissom states “Sometimes, it feels like we can do anything, like we can rebuild, better than before.”

Many other Teton Dam flood survivors echo these same sentiments using other positive terms indicating progress. They express the belief that disaster prompts progress, seeing the flood as a chance to update and beautify the affected cities. Larry Thompson, an English professor at Ricks College, explained his mixed emotions: “You lose your home and after you have sweated your guts out and all of the mud is gone and you have lived through the eight months in a mobile home and the winter is over and you are in your new home and you've forgotten all that, you have to admit to yourself that you are better off” (14). He then explains the idea of progress in religious terms:

The city has been baptized, it has been purged out, all the old buildings are gone and you root for a few old ones to go that haven't been condemned yet. That creates, at the same moment, a certain amount of guilt. You think, well what am I thinking here. Am I saying that disaster breeds progress? . . . To turn around and say, “Hey, look, acts of God or man-made disasters breed progress. They clean up old cities.” (14)

On one hand, Thompson feels guilty that he has benefitted from the disaster. On the other, describing the change as a “baptism” implies that the city is now purified and reborn, a positive connotation. He speaks of “purging” old buildings, almost as if they are an impurity or infection in the city and hopes for some buildings that are still standing to be condemned. It is unclear whether, in his opinion, the buildings need to go because they are old or because they have been damaged by the flood. Overall, the implication is that newer is better.

Researchers have found that in other large-scale disasters in North America there was a similar inclination to view the disaster as a chance to progress and make the affected cities better.

In Kevin Rozario's view, there are three reasons for framing the disaster in positive ways: to support the capitalist impulse to rebuild bigger and better, to feel the therapeutic benefit of telling the story in positive terms, and to conform to societal pressure to see the disaster in positive ways. Rozario, in his article "Making Progress: Disaster Narratives and the Art of Optimism in Modern America," shares that in disasters such as the San Francisco earthquake and fire of 1906 and the Great Chicago Fire of 1871 "the survivors ...tended to agree that these particular disasters were 'blessings'" (Rozario 31). Rozario theorizes that one contributing factor to this positive view of the disasters is the capitalistic American culture which sees "ruination" as a necessity to remove "obsolete products" and make way "for the innovation and streamlining" which will promote growth (31). Rozario further states that telling the story of the disasters in positive terms was "a therapeutic act, helping victims to cope with the trauma by reassuring them that any devastation was sure to be fleeting" (32). These sentiments are certainly evident in Thompson's comments. This inclination is also found in Arthur W. Frank's work regarding restitution narratives told by those who are ill. Frank argues that one of the dominant stories told by people when they are sick is the restitution narrative, which follows this pattern: "I was healthy, today I'm sick, tomorrow I'll be healthy again" (Frank 77). Those who are ill tell these stories for their own benefit and also because "other people want to hear restitution stories" (77). If we look at trauma as a type of illness, then survivors' attempts to tell their story with a positive ending fall within the restitution narrative pattern.

Further, the public narratives, such as news articles, told about disaster are a key part of recovery. Rozario explores the relationship between "the rebuilding of cities with mortar and bricks and the rebuilding of cultural environments with words and images in the aftermath of great urban disasters" (27). This cultural rebuilding is often accomplished through "the stories

we hear and tell about disasters” (27). Further, these narratives are influenced by the very plot structure identified by Aristotle, which requires “a reversal of fortune or a moment of adversity that throws the hero or protagonist into turmoil” (33). In these disasters, positive narratives in the wake of disasters worked as “self-fulfilling prophecies” that “inspired a faith in betterment that generated the energy and will . . . that made reconstruction viable” (40). One place where these positive narratives can be found is newspapers. Since newspapers often act as the voice of a community, the way an event is reported and narrated will not only report how community members feel about an event, but also take a hand in shaping public beliefs.

The power of public discourse and narrative are evident in the oral history of Roger O. Porter, a publisher of the *Rexburg Standard* newspaper. While he shares his personal experiences with the dam break in his oral history, he also offers valuable insight into the role he saw himself and the newspaper playing in the aftermath of the disaster. At the outset of his interview, he admits that while he didn’t have strong opinions about the dam, he “tended to side with those who opposed the dam. Not so much from the environmental point-of-view, but from the cost benefit ratio point-of-view.” On the day of the break, he was working in his yard and had gone to the store to get some weed killer. When he heard about the dam break, he thought at first that it was only a leak, but he decided they should get some pictures of it for the paper. When he couldn’t reach the paper’s photographer through the telephone, he got his own camera equipment and asked a pilot, Marvin McCulloch, to fly him to the dam to take a look. He states,

We flew over the bench toward the dam. We couldn’t believe it had broken because we kept getting closer and we could still see the south side of the dam. The north side was still blocked. We both said, “It hasn’t broken.” Then we came over the hill and we could

see it was incredible. That whole canyon below the dam was a torrent of water through there. We made some low passes over it. We got a lot of pictures.

They stayed in the air for a couple of hours, and Porter got as many pictures as he could. While it was a “sort of euphoric kind of feeling” to be able to report the event, he hadn’t thought in terms of the damage it could potentially do to his business. When they later flew over the city of Rexburg he could see that the newspaper building was “under five or six feet of water.” Because of difficulty in finding a place to land the plane, he was not able to get back to Rexburg until later that evening. “As soon as I got back on the ground and got home I jumped in the car and drove downtown. . . . That was the first time it struck me what the dam had done. From the air you could see the damage, but until you got right up next to it, it didn’t hit. The impact of it didn’t sink in until you walked right up and looked at it. Our offices were in shambles.”

At the time, Porter didn’t stop to think about the problems he faced rebuilding the newspaper: “I suppose if I had to go through it again I would shut the door. We didn’t have time to be frustrated or worry about anything in those days. We were so busy rebuilding that all we could do was do it. I don’t know whether I could go through all that again.” Further, he offers insight into the way the flood allowed the newspaper to update their equipment and production process: “It’s forced changes on us that would have taken ten years. . . . From a business point-of-view it’s been beneficial, but at the same time we have to work so much harder now. Life was a lot more enjoyable before the flood. In terms of dollars and cents, there’s a lot more money floating around and we are making a lot more money. I’m not sure whether it’s worth it or not.” Although Porter has mixed feelings about the changes, he confirms Rozario’s findings that disaster helped remove old products and make way for improvement, explaining that the flood forced the

newspaper to update their processes and that there was a lot of available money which was “creating a momentum that can’t be stopped.”

The next day, his father and he discussed how to print an issue of the newspaper as soon as possible. His father said, “‘People around here are really shook up and we have got to start getting a newspaper out so that they will think that we . . . know there’s hope.’ If the newspaper is coming out life is going on.” They put the newspaper together in their home in the next few days, using some resources from Ricks College and printing it in Blackfoot. Porter says, “We got interviews with as many public officials as we could trying to emphasize the positive that we are not going to give up.” Since they had lost all of their mailing lists, the postmaster agreed to send a copy out to everyone in the county.

Porter then reflects on his motivation for writing his column for the front page of the newspaper:

I remember the column that I wrote in the first issue after the flood about being positive about everything. It’s a mess, but we have an opportunity to rebuild our community and eliminate some of the mistakes that we made over the years. People would now be working with each other. Rexburg has traditionally been a very independent community and outside the church—most people are involved in the church—it’s a very personal community. I thought this would be a time for everybody to get together and work together as a community. It hasn’t been done for some time. The people out here would pull together and it would eliminate the spirit of competitiveness between communities. Sugar City and Rexburg would no longer be as competitive as they were. The whole flood zone would identify more as a total community instead of a number of smaller

communities. To one extent that happened, but at the time I didn't have much concern for the future of the city. I thought everything would be rosy.

Porter's narrative demonstrates an innate belief in the importance of the newspaper in the psyche of the community. In spite of their own business losses, he and his father felt compelled to get an issue of the newspaper out to help people know that "life is going on." He states that he hoped his first editorial would help people look at the disaster positively and pull together as a community to rebuild and, while rebuilding, to fix problems that existed before the flood.

Many of Rozario's arguments are supported by the editorial Porter wrote in the first newspaper issued after the flood. He starts the editorial by acknowledging the loss of life, homes, businesses, and livestock. He quickly counters this with "But through all, the courage of the folks of the Upper Snake River Valley has been incredible. Folks who normally don't take time to speak to their neighbor down the road or down the street are standing shoulder to shoulder with acquaintances or complete strangers, lending a hand where needed" (Porter A1). In this statement is praise for the courage of the flood survivors along with a subtle acknowledgement that people haven't been in the practice of visiting with their neighbors. This may represent some of Porter's own conflicted feelings as a citizen of the community. First, this might be a reference to the underlying tension between Mormon and non-Mormon inhabitants of Rexburg. As he states in his narrative, "Rexburg has traditionally been a very independent community and outside the church—most people are involved in the church—it's a very personal community" (A1). While he acknowledges that most people are involved in the church, and therefore, friendly with one another, they are less likely to reach out to their neighbors who are not active in or members of the church. Since a vast majority of citizens were associated with the church, one could infer that the majority of people are quite friendly with one another, but

what he is actually emphasizing is that the flood might be a chance for people to reach out to other people who might feel uncomfortable or unwelcome for not being associated with the church. He personally acknowledges such sentiments later in his narrative, stating that although he was born into the church, he was not active, so in some ways these comments in the editorial represent Porter's personal feelings as a non-participating Mormon.

Other comments in Porter's oral history further indicate his belief that local citizens are not friendly to outsiders. In his oral history interview, when he is asked if he is aware of anyone filing fraudulent claims after the flood, he says no. The interviewer reminds him that the paper had reported on a couple who were found guilty. Porter then responds, "Yes, that was a token prosecution to scare everybody to death. As you noticed, they picked on a couple of old evil aliens<sup>17</sup> to do that." Cumulatively, his comments throughout his oral history suggest that Porter was conflicted about his role in the community. As a reporter and producer of the local paper, he felt that he was a key part of local society, yet as a less-active Mormon he was sensitive to being left out or ignored and noticed how others were also not welcomed or treated fairly, like the "evil aliens" that the city had chosen to prosecute. In summary, he felt that locals were not friendly to outsiders, be they religious or ethnic. So, along with the usual determination to recover and rebuild, the traumatic event brought to the surface pre-existing tensions and problems.

The editorial goes on, "Few if any are talking about giving up. They're all digging in, trying to pick up the pieces of their shattered dreams and start from wherever they find themselves a week, a month or a year after the flood" (A1). Then he states his belief that the disaster will ultimately lead to a better version of their community:

There's a long way to go, but we're starting immediately, just as are a lot of others. And that kind of feeling found throughout the area is what I think will ultimately make for a

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<sup>17</sup> Aliens is a term used often in the 1970s to refer to migrant workers from Mexico.

better sense of community in this region than before. The future is just as bright as you and I and all of us want to make it. And it can be brighter than we ever hoped. . . . As bad as things are today we can accept what's happened and rebuild into a better, stronger community than before. (A1)

Porter's innate positivity in the face of disaster is similar to that of other reporters writing about disasters. For example, George Harvey, editor of *Harper's* during the San Francisco earthquake of 1906, wrote after the event that the city was "certain to arise quickly from its ashes, greater and more beautiful than ever" (qtd. in Rozario 31). Rozario attributes this faith in a "happy ending" to early American colonial sermons which sought to explain disasters in the belief that "disasters possessed some benevolent purpose" (34). He argues that by the 1800s, "many Americans were practically conditioned to view disasters" as the reversal of fortune found in most dramas which ultimately led to change and a happy ending (34). In this sense, Porter is acting in a typical manner, using the newspaper as a means of communicating hopeful messages about the future. And, as Rozario argues, those messages were necessary to "inspire a faith in betterment that generated the energy and will . . . that made reconstruction viable" (40).

For all the talk of progress, some felt that the rebuilt city of Rexburg did not do all it could to improve. Hal Hunter, a professor of anthropology at Ricks College, said he had hoped that they might make innovations to the city to accommodate for the flood plain:

We've had the opportunity to make our town almost what we wanted to make of it. After the flood, I was ready to abandon the town. I dreamed of a new town being built on the hill up here out of the flood plain. I saw what an opportunity that was as they did back in the Midwest in a place or two. I imagined parks along the river and golf courses and that

sort of thing that can tolerate flooding. I had a dream of a new town, but I think we've done a remarkable job of reclaiming the old one. (11)

While Hunter acknowledges the positive recovery, he regrets that locals were not a bit more ambitious in making dramatic changes to the city plan. In this reaction, Rexburg is similar to other places that have suffered disasters. Researchers have found that in the wake of disasters, “[m]itigation measures are given little priority even in disaster-prone localities; and social change is seldom an outcome of most disasters” (“Disaster Research” 686). Further, the culture and religion of a region can stop communities from making changes that would prevent future disasters (Webb 284). In this case, it is unlikely that people would be willing to give up the land that they had farmed on for generations in order to rebuild in a more flood-safe way. So, in the wake of disasters, while recovery may be rapid and ambitious, it is rarely revolutionary.

Another Word found in the survivor narratives is the phrase that the Teton Dam should be rebuilt because “we need water.” It seems surprising that just under 50% of people heavily impacted by the flood were in favor of rebuilding the dam. One might assume that the number would be much lower, however, when questioned by interviewers about how they would feel about rebuilding the dam, most simply agreed that it should be rebuilt because “we need the water.” In many cases, the support for rebuilding a dam was not based in any kind of scientific evidence, but simply in years of tradition as a farming community reliant on irrigation. The simplicity of their view is perhaps reflected in the comments of Garr Widdison of Salem, who said he thought they should “rebuild the dam, but this time I hope they put a farmer in charge that knows something about building” (8).

In the narrative of David Archibald, an 88-year-old Rexburg citizen and a farmer of fifty years, these attitudes are evident. At the time of the flood, Archibald was a retired farmer, living

in a retirement center. He uses the term “water” thirteen times in his narrative. Eleven of these references are simply used to explain the details of the flood. In the other two uses, Archibald offers his perspective on the necessity of water and the quality of the dam. “For fifty years before the construction of it, being a farmer, I knew the need for the reservoir and I supported it. I think that it should be rebuilt in the future because the valley needs the water” (2). Here, he mentions that as a farmer, he’d always felt the need for a reservoir, although he doesn’t explain why. He also explains that he thinks that it should be rebuilt because “the valley needs the water” (2). The implication is that the needs of the valley will always be such that a reservoir of water is a necessity. Next, he acknowledges the engineering mistakes that led to the dam’s collapse: “I didn’t realize how much water was stored behind that dam. Today, I can’t figure why those engineers would permit that much water to fill up against an unproven dam. It’s poor judgment” (4). In spite of these errors in judgment, he is still in favor of rebuilding the dam because of the ongoing need for water that exists in the area. The needs go beyond the typical amount of water that any farmer would have needed. A unique element of farming in the Upper Snake River Valley is that the volcanic soil causes water to drain too quickly, requiring ten feet of water annually (Reisner 384). Hence, the common statement in the Teton Dam flood narratives--“We need water.”

Other farmers, including Garth Victor Hall, a farmer east of the Menan buttes, share Archibald’s feelings. Hall states,

I support the Teton Dam and I feel the necessity of dams because water is the lifeblood of America. We have the richest, fertile soil in the world. I have been around the world and when you can produce crops like we can produce them in this short period of time, we have the choicest spot on the earth. These beautiful mountains, these trees that formulate

these watersheds, the canyons which are the natural places to build dams and reservoirs, I definitely feel we must consider redoing the construction again.

Here he implies that the land itself is designed to support dams and reservoirs, that reconstruction is almost divinely mandated. Further, by calling water the lifeblood of America, he implies that any attempt to restrict a water supply would essentially be killing America. He also connects the water with the fertile crops in the area and the high yield for an area with a relatively short growing season; however, Hall doesn't acknowledge that the mountain West is a fairly challenging place to grow crops, compared with other areas with a more moderate climate and longer growing seasons. So, in spite of the damage done to his own fields, Hall's beliefs about the necessity of dams for the success of farming in the area remain unchanged.

Not all flood survivors viewed the land and water in the poetic terms of Hall. While Alan J. Nyborg, a Wilford farmer on the banks of the Teton River, said "I never had any fear of the Teton River. I always felt that it was a friend," less positive characterizations of the floodwaters were found in other narratives (7). Jerald Jay Lowe, a Hibbard resident, said the water "was so muddy and thick that it gave you the creeps" (5). Arthur Hubscher, also of Rexburg, called the floodwaters "a slow grade moving hell pass[ing] through the town of Rexburg" (4). Orville McCulloch referred to the waters as "raging" as they overtook the buildings in town, while Randall Porter went further, saying that the waters were "raping everything that we had, violating it" (11). This characterization was typical of the descriptions Buffalo Creek survivors used to describe the floodwaters. Some in Buffalo Creek described the water as "a living creature . . . coming after us to get us all" (Erikson, "Prologue" n.p.). Others described it as "the demon itself" (Erikson 30). While all of them anthropomorphize the river and water to some degree,

those who are describing the floodwater tend to describe it with words with heavily negative connotations, such as a creepy hell which raged through and raped the community.

Beyond discussing some locals' attitudes about land, water, and the necessity of irrigation, to understand fully some flood survivors' eagerness to rebuild the dam, we must explore some important aspects of settlement in the West. It was the Mormons who first chose to settle the Great Basin area, not because it provided ideal geography for settlement, but because it provided safety. Marc Reisner, an environmentalist and author of the book *Cadillac Desert*, is correct when he humorously says, "early Mormons found a place attractive in exact proportion to its ability to repel anyone else" (384). This desire for isolation was in response to the trouble they had faced in prior locations where locals resented the influx of Mormons to their area. Their belief was that if they found land far enough away from others, they would find peace. Scholars Jeanne Kay and Craig J. Brown explain that "at times they actually praised the barrenness and isolation of Utah, for they believed the land's intrinsic undesirability would keep 'outsiders' away from Utah" (261). Of course, those first Mormon settlers also found quickly that "in the West lack of water is the central fact of existence" (Reisner 4). But the settlers were not deterred, inspired by their belief in God's desire for them to settle the land and in their belief in the power of irrigation.

Because early Mormon settlers believed that God had led them to settle in the Salt Lake Valley, they felt that he would ensure their success in settling there. They drew this conclusion from several *Old Testament* scriptures. Aaron R. Kelson argues that Latter-Day Saints believed in the promises God made in Leviticus when the Israelites settled Canaan. In Leviticus chapter 26 God promises that if the Israelites are obedient they will have "rain in due season [and] a land that yielded its fruits" (Kelson). Conversely, if they were disobedient God "would make the land

desolate” (Kelson). Early Mormons saw parallels between themselves and ancient Israel, often referring to their journey to the West as an “exodus,” and “believed that promises such as these were part of gospel culture and that they would be fulfilled through their faithful efforts in the Great Basin” (Kelson).

Mormons were further encouraged by Isaiah’s promise that the “desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose” (35.1). They felt that their settlement in Utah would be one fulfillment of this Biblical promise. Kay and Brown argue that this was reinforced by church leaders such as then apostle and later church president, John Taylor, who, in 1865 said, “We can remember the time when we could not raise peaches to eat, and it was a doubt whether an apple tree would grow or not. Now go and look at your orchards; there is not a better peach growing country in the world than this” (256). He then states that if the saints left the area, it would return to its “wilderness condition” because the Lord “blessed the land for our sakes” (256). Brigham Young similarly warned settlers in northern Utah in 1873 that if they did not pay their tithing, “this people will be cursed” (qtd. in Kay and Brown 256) and that God could easily make the land “as dry as the Holy Land today” (256). He later affirmed this belief that their success in settling the area was a direct blessing from God when he stated “[w]e prayed over the land, and dedicated it and the water, air, and everything pertaining to them unto the Lord, and the smile of Heaven rested on the land and it became productive” (qtd. in Kelson).

With their faith encouraged by scripture, Mormon pioneers immediately turned to irrigation as a means of developing the land. Marc Reisner says, “within hours of ending their ordeal [their 1300 mile trek from Nauvoo, Illinois to Utah], the Mormons were digging shovels into the earth beside the streams draining the Wasatch Range, leading canals into the surrounding desert which they would convert to fields to nourish them” (2). Kay and Brown argue that the

“Mormon development of irrigation was interpreted almost as divine revelation” (258). Mormon irrigation systems diverted creeks from the Wasatch Mountains and then used canals of no more than five-miles to support communities of farms that were 30 acres or less. This method was followed by later pioneer settlers (Billington et al. 22).

Evidence of how closely theology and water were woven in Mormon consciousness is found in Virginia Sorenson’s memoir, *Where Nothing is Long Ago: Memoirs of a Mormon Childhood*. In 1921, when she was a nine-year-old living in Utah, she recalls a neighbor killing another neighbor who had “turned [the] water off his fields in the night” (Sorenson 8). In a fit of anger, Tolsen had hit the offending neighbor in the head with a shovel, killing him. Sorenson recounts that the attitude toward water stealing seemed to indicate that it was a worse crime than murder and that Tolsen was justified in his action. When Tolsen went to trial, his lawyer argued, “Is it not true that he who steals water is stealing life itself?” (14). Consequently, Tolsen was acquitted of any wrong-doing. Further, Sorenson recalls her friend, Bishop Peterson, an immigrant from Denmark, telling her that “to leave the lovely land of Denmark one had to be very certain it was to God’s Kingdom he was coming. He himself had been sure of it when he heard about the mountain water, so pure, so shining, so cold, so free. . . . It was to him, next to the Gospel itself, the unmistakable sign of the Kingdom” (Sorenson 7). This account demonstrates that Mormon settlers recognized that water was very much a life or death requirement for existence in the West. This view of water manifested itself in the troubling belief that murdering someone to defend one’s own water supply was justified. Further, the bishop’s view of the water as “pure, shining, cold, and free” demonstrates the idealistic, Edenic view many settlers chose to maintain about their life in the mountain desert, describing the landscape

in positive terms which perhaps ignored some of the more difficult realities of their daily lives (Sorenson 7).

Many residents of the Upper Snake River Valley viewed the landscape in a romanticized way. For example, in her account of the flood experience in the book *That Day in June*, Ruth Barrus reflects fondly on prior summers in Idaho, where her husband worked with her grandsons on the farm. “Our 560 acre farm had been made beautiful and fertile by the labor of three generations of Barruses. . . For centuries [the fields] had been enriched by the winding Teton River which threaded itself in and out of our farm. On hot summer days the Teton River was a haven for swimmers and fishermen, and it was perfect for nature walks” (80). Barrus’s description suggests an idyllic, lush Eden being prepared for centuries by the nurturing Teton River. This romanticization of the West is common. As Thomas J. Lyon, a scholar in Western American Literature, observes, most Americans think of the West with “a certain dreaminess. The region seems to be a natural repository for fantasy” (1). He argues that this view of the West is due to it coming “into our consciousness just when romance and individualism were flowering, and thus it became the dominant iconic frontier for an entire culture” (Lyon 1). This also draws on beliefs brought by the earliest European colonists of the American continent, where they harbored visions which glorified “rural life and the . . . belief that men and women living in intimacy with the land can dwell in harmony with one another” (Hedges and Hedges 1). Further, some argue that “the dream or myth of America is basically tied to the land, to nature, to the continent, particularly to the West, where vastness, plenitude, and immensity have inspired a virtually mystic awe. . . . Rural or agrarian life, defined as a life lived close to the land, on a farm of one’s own, and usually as part of a small, harmonious community of such land cultivators became the ideal” (Hedges and Hedges 3). Thus, Teton Dam Flood survivors often described

their view of the land in keeping with larger cultural beliefs that have permeated our thought and literature for generations.

While the first Mormon settlers enjoyed relative isolation for several years, more Americans and immigrants became motivated to move West with developments such as the California Gold Rush, the Homestead Act, and the completion of a transcontinental railroad in 1869. In fact, the railroad companies were key figures in encouraging people to settle in the West. Of course, there were those who insisted that settling the West was not a good idea. Walter Prescott Webb said the West was too dry to convert, and that “the greatest national folly we could commit . . . would be to exhaust the Treasury trying to make over the West in the image of Illinois” (Reisner 5). People’s reactions to Webb’s statement were quite hostile, illustrating that they were led less by logic than emotion. John Wesley Powell, who knew the geography of the West better than anyone, “advocate[ed] cooperation, reason, science, [and] an equitable sharing of the natural wealth . . . He wanted the West settled slowly, cautiously, in a manner that would work” (Reisner 48). Of course, he knew the necessity of water and argued that state boundaries were nonsensical; the only thing that made sense was that “states should logically be formed around watersheds” (Reisner 48). Unfortunately, Powell’s advice was ignored and the settlement of the West seemed driven mostly by greed and self-interest, with little thought for pragmatic issues such as water.

But lack of water was not off-putting to eager settlers who had a zeal similar to that of earlier Mormon settlers. In the place of the religious idea that the desert would blossom as a rose was the belief that “rain follows the plow.” As people moved West, it coincided with an increase in moisture in the 1870s which led to the saying “rain follows the plow,” espoused by Cyrus Thomas, a climatologist of the time, who had any number of explanations for the change

(Reisner 35). “Plowing the land exposed the soil’s moisture to the sky. Newly planted trees enhanced the rainfall. The smoke from trains caused it. Vibrations in the air caused by all the commotion helped clouds to form” (Reisner 36). While it was true that “westward expansion into the American desert happened simultaneously with one of the wettest cycles the area has seen” (Handley) and that people such as Cyrus Thomas believed that “this increase is of a permanent nature,” it did not last (Reisner 36). For Mormon settlers, after initial abundance, “the ecological health of the Great Basin region began to decline. As the number of inhabitants in the area grew, pressure on natural resources intensified” (Kelson).

Eventually the federal government took steps to try to address the need for water. Unfortunately, these steps were short-sighted in many ways. Donald Pisani argues, “Water law evolved slowly in both California and the West, constructed piece by piece, like a quilt, rather than from whole cloth. The courts and legislatures rarely looked beyond immediate economic needs” in determining water rights (Billington et al.). In 1877, Congress passed the Desert Lands Act which required settlers to show proof of irrigation to claim land (Reisner 42). “In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, insufficient rainfall caused western settlers in the United States to use irrigation for farming, and pressure escalated for the federal government to create and manage irrigation and reservoir storage projects” (Paradise 181). In 1902 Congress “passed the Reclamation Act, which required that water users repay construction costs from which they received benefits” (Paradise 181). The first dam built under this act was Arizona’s Roosevelt Dam in 1903 (182). In 1907 the Reclamation Service separated from the Department of the Interior and in 1923 it was renamed the Bureau of Reclamation (182). One year later, the Hoover Dam was authorized and the age of dam building commenced in the 1930s.

This era of large-scale water projects began with many members of the Mormon Church leading the way (Rupp and Kjelgren). As Reisner explains, “in 1902 the United States government launched its own irrigation program, based on Mormon experience, guided by Mormon laws, run largely by Mormons” (2). Later, “most commissioners of Reclamation were dull, pious Mormons” (Reisner 231). Larry Rupp and Roger Kjelgren, horticulturists, argue, “With the advent of federally subsidized water projects, what had been community efforts became public works. With this broadening and federalization, the real cost of water has become obscured and the attitude of entitlement is even further entrenched in our society.” Mormons were thought by some to be some of the most entitled. Some found it ironic that Mormons were so involved in these projects, since they claimed to preach self-reliance and to refuse government assistance. Russell Brown, a critic of the Teton Dam project, said, “Mormons get burned up when they read about someone buying a bottle of mouthwash with food stamps. But they love the big water projects. They only object to nickel-and-dime welfare. They love it in the great big jobs” (qtd. in Reisner 386). Another example from Utah governor George Dewey Clyde was his desire for the Bureau “to build as many dams as there were sites in his state, but he wanted private utilities to be able to sell the power” (Reisner 231). In Reisner’s view, “The Bureau of Reclamation set out to help the small farmers of the West but ended up making a lot of rich farmers wealthier at the small farmer’s expense” (486).

Because irrigation was such an integral part of their beginnings, it was still going strong in the 1970s when a handful of Idaho farmers saw the need for a dam on the Teton River. Jerry Jayne of the Idaho Environmental Council, who argued against the Teton Dam said, “I don’t know what it is about these Mormon irrigation farmers. They’re not reasonable. They don’t listen. They’re true believers” (Reisner 389). Irrigating with water from the Teton River was

started immediately when Rexburg was settled in 1883, and within one year the Rexburg Irrigation Company formed. Canals were necessary because of the arid climate and Mormons worked together to pay for and construct the canals. By 1910, there were over a hundred canals operating in the area (Coates et al. 62). After the arrival of the railroad, Rexburg's extensive canal system allowed the city to advertise itself as having "productive soil and abundant water" to prospective buyers (Miller 566).

Idaho farmers proposed a dam on the Teton River throughout the 40s and 50s but in the 60s they had a drought followed by a flood. "In the West, . . . a drought and a flood together set off a strong Pavlovian response. The first thing that enters anyone's mind is a dam" (Reisner 385). As we know, a site was chosen, and in spite of pressure from environmental groups, work began. When Robert Curry, a geologist who did consulting work for the Sierra Club, "got his first look at a cross section of the Teton damsite, his reaction was . . . . 'What a terrible site for a dam!' By then, however, the dam was already one-quarter completed" (Reisner 383). In spite of many problems in the construction and warning signs as grout failed to fill caverns in the canyon walls, the dam was completed and broke before it had filled for the first time. Ironically, "more land was destroyed . . . than would have been opened to irrigation by the dam" and the farmers who most wanted the dam were located on an elevated bench and not hit by the flood at all (Reisner 408). After the dam broke, those who advocated for the dam insisted that the water the dam provided was only meant to be supplemental, so "this same supplemental water—a life or death matter three days before—had suddenly become something they could do without" (Reisner 408). To complete the irony, just six months after the Teton Dam disaster, "on December 10, 1976, the Idaho Water Users Association issued a resolution calling for a 'safe' Teton Dam to be rebuilt at or near the same site" (Reisner 408).

Although the dam was never rebuilt, the idea of the dam on the Teton River still appeals to many. As recently as 2009, the Idaho Legislature approved money “to study rebuilding the Teton Dam” even though there are “better, cheaper ways to supply water to the Teton Basin” (“Time to be Blunt: The Teton Dam Won’t be Rebuilt”). What’s more, “the last major construction projects” by the Bureau of Reclamation were completed in the 1960s. Due to “America’s growing environmental movement,” among other forces, in the 1980s the Bureau stated “the arid West essentially has been reclaimed” (Paradise 182).

Although a majority of residents of the Snake River Valley favored the dam, some locals saw the Teton Dam project in the same negative light that Reisner sheds in *Cadillac Desert*. Theo Charles Fullmer, a sixty-five year old man who had been raised on farms in Salem, Sugar City, and Rexburg never favored the dam:

I opposed it all the time. I never was in favor of it because the government turned it down two or three times and said it wasn't economical, that there wasn't enough good that would come out of it for the expense that it would take and it was a poor location. They didn't think it was a good location. People who were in favor of it kept going back and going back, trying to persuade them to build the dam because we needed it mostly for flood control. That was the big thing that started them to get the dam built here. One man that put the most effort into getting the dam built in the first place was Willis Walker. He wasn't satisfied with the way that the river ran through his place so he straightened the river out and tried to make straighter land and a better farm. He took all the willows off and the brush and things that ordinarily was there to keep the water from washing. He removed all that brush and all the curves in the river. When he did that, the river kept washing his farm. It wouldn't run straight because it was running too fast. That was the

way it slowed itself was to make the turns. It kept washing into his corrals and into his outbuildings and into his farm in several different places. You could see that he wasn't going to be able to hold it and it was doing actually more damage to his farm than it ever did before. He was the biggest instigator in trying to get the dam built for that reason. Nearly every spring it flooded and it did bring damage through here, especially where they had straightened the rivers out and took the brush away. (2-3)

Here, Fullmer demonstrates that he fully understood the limitations of the project and he does not mind pointing the finger at Willis Walker for bringing the dam into being. This is unusual in the narratives, because most people are hesitant to lay blame on anyone for the failure of the dam. Further, Fullmer understands Walker's interest so intimately because he was his home teacher, a person assigned in the LDS church to serve and help a particular family. In this sense, it is interesting that he does not feel a greater sense of loyalty to Walker to paint him in a more positive light. Finally, as a fellow farmer, he seems to criticize Walker's aggressive treatment of his farmland in attempting to straighten the river and clear the brush. By his account, it seems that the whole Teton Dam disaster was due to one man's petty irritation with his own plot of land.

David Dewayne Wilding, another lifetime resident, supports Fullmer's opinion. He states, I guess I can be called an environmentalist. I think that any American that can't be called an environmentalist should be ashamed of himself. But the values of the Teton Dam were completely exaggerated. I think the benefits in irrigation would go to about 100 people in all and the benefits were so exaggerated in proportion to the costs--the things that we would lose by the construction of the Teton Dam, I think were completely out of

proportion. I've lived on that river now for about 65 years, so I know a little bit about it from experience. ...I don't think the Teton Dam should ever be rebuilt. (23)

As we have explored, the Word that the dam needs to be rebuilt because “we need the water” is a shorthand for deeply-held beliefs about the land and water use in the West, some of which comes from the religious views of Mormon pioneers. Additionally, these mistaken views regarding water in the West were carried by many of the settlers in the West. These beliefs were then reinforced by political and capitalistic forces, which pushed for the development of dams and the manipulations of Western rivers, in spite of the fact that building the dam didn't make good sense from an economic point of view.

One last curious element of the evaluation of the Teton Dam flood is the minimal placing of blame. Fullmer was unusual in naming Willis Walker as primarily responsible for pushing the dam. But further, most survivors did not blame the federal government or the engineers either. In their view, it was simply something that happened. One could theorize that the willingness of the government to financially recoup their losses contributed to this benevolence in placing blame. The Disaster Relief Act of 1970 “offered generous assistance for the reconstruction of public facilities, authorizing 100% federal financing” (“Disaster Relief” 469). “In July [of 1976], President Ford signed into law a two hundred million dollar compensation for flood victims” and in September, he raised that amount to “whatever amount would be needed for the claims” (Crowder 270). If financial aid had not been forthcoming, it seems more likely that people might have had a negative view of the experience. In comparison, survivors of the Buffalo Creek Flood felt that the disaster “had been the work of fellow humans and not a whim of nature or an act of God” (Erikson, “Prologue” n.p.). But, especially since no one was keen to take responsibility for the Buffalo Creek disaster, the result was that citizens of the area felt that “local institutions can

no longer be relied on, that human governments can no longer be relied on, and even that the ways of nature should be understood as unreliable if not even somewhat malevolent” (Erikson, “Prologue” n.p.). This feeling on the part of Buffalo Creek flood survivors is in stark contrast with the Teton Dam survivors’ overall positive feeling toward the government, the dominant church in the area, and the feeling that rebuilding the dam would be a feasible idea.

Another possible reason for not placing blame is a desire to reinforce pre-existing community norms. As Labov has said, one important element of narrative is “to assign moral responsibility for the events, assigning praise and blame to the actors involved” (35). He further states that often the protagonist of the story “is an active agent for the implementation of community norms, while the antagonist consistently violates these norms” (35). One example of this is found in the account of Brent and Arlene Romrell, in Chapter Two. When the interviewer asks the Romrells if “God wanted to punish the people in this valley,” Brent Romrell immediately says, “No, I don’t feel that” (19). So, he does not feel comfortable blaming God. Next, he states, “I feel just like that was man’s mistake, just faulty building of the dam” (19). Here he seems ready to point the finger at the engineers of the dam. Next, he says “I partially blame it on the government” (19). His move to broaden the blame perhaps acknowledges that the individuals who built the dam were often guided and constrained by larger forces. Unable to determine who exactly might be to blame, he simply uses the general term “government” (19). However, in an interesting twist, Romrell states in the next sentence, “I really feel that the environmentalists that fought it so much caused a lot of it” (19). This seems to be a prime example of a move to make the protagonists agents who “implement[t] ...community norms,” while the antagonist “violates those norms” (Labov 35). While in one breath Romrell seems ready to place the blame on the government instead he puts the blame on environmentalists. He

is uncomfortable blaming the government because the building of dams supports the community-held belief in the necessity of dams and irrigation, so he instead puts the blame on environmentalists, seen by locals as outsiders who try to tell individuals what they can and cannot do with their land. He explains that because the environmentalists attempted to stop the building of the dam,

the government tried to hurry and get it done before it los[t] more money. They were going to use the better soil that would have been in the river bottom for the building of the dam and the environmentalists fought it . . . and made them get it off the top, instead of in the bottom. I think that gumbo in the bottom would have been a lot better soil than that up on the top. I feel the environmentalists had a lot to do with it. I don't know about half, but I put part of the blame on the environmentalists. (19)

While Romrell is correct that the type of soil was a factor in the breaking of the dam, it is interesting to watch his mental gymnastics as he tries to determine whom to blame. While he acknowledges that the environmentalists are not entirely to blame, he still elaborates on their guilt, indicating that he is less comfortable dwelling on how individuals and government entities might be culpable than he is in criticizing environmentalists.

The narrative of Glenn Embree, a geology professor at Ricks College, also reflects a hesitation to place blame. He states,

I have no personal bitterness towards anybody on the thing. I think that the engineers involved may have made some bad judgments and they have made some errors, but I make errors like that every day. Fortunate for me, I guess, mine don't affect lives. . . . I don't agree with many politicians, particularly the Secretary of the Interior, that the individuals concerned should be punished or terminated from their positions . . .because

Senator Church and Governor Andrus at the time were in favor of it and they had information and they are every bit as responsible. (12)

In Embree's narrative, he is more willing to name names, but only to suggest that everyone is equally culpable. He also seems willing to admit his own fallibility. He insists, "I make errors like that every day" and earlier hints that as a geologist, he may have felt a little sheepish that he had not looked more closely at the dam from a scientific perspective: "This summer I spent a lot of time in the Teton Canyon. From a geologist's standpoint, it was not a good site selection for a dam. The more I have looked at it the more concerned I am about the talk of rebuilding the dam. . . . I guess I should have been aware of that before" (12). Embree's acknowledgment of his own failure to truly educate himself about the dam prior to it being built possibly reflects the feelings of many members of the community. In this sense, the failure of many flood victims to assign blame comes from their subconscious acknowledgment that they were all partially to blame for supporting the project without doing any true research into its viability.

The Words explored in this chapter focus on flood survivors' perceptions about the impact of the Teton Dam flood on their community. Within these narratives are Words which reflect the belief that the flood has made the community "better" and that the Teton Dam should be rebuilt because "we need water." The origin of these Words ties deeply into not only Mormon values but also American cultural beliefs about disaster, progress, and the West. As John Miles Foley found in *Immanent Art*, the "phrase or scene or tale as a whole commands its meaning by synecdoche," where the Word stands for a larger whole that is implied by the narrator but not fully explained (8). For example, narrators for the most part don't elaborate on why the area needs water, feeling that the reason will be obvious to the audience. In analyzing these flood narratives, I've tried to read them "with attention to the inherent meaning [they]

summon” in the audience and thus to “recontextualize” and “reaffirm [their] contiguity” with the “ever-immanent tradition itself” (Foley 9).

To broaden the application of my findings, it is likely that most disaster narratives will reflect the narrator’s desire to see the experience in a positive light. Not only is there social pressure to do so, but an innate desire to find wholeness and healing through seeing themselves as better for the experience. Beyond that, survivors’ beliefs about how the community should be rebuilt will reflect immanent attitudes and concerns in the community. It is likely that existing tensions will rise to the surface and that rebuilding efforts, while embracing new innovations, will not aggressively seek to solve the problems that led to the disaster in the first place. In the next chapter, I examine Words unique to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saint that arise consistently in the Teton Dam flood collection and attempt to analyze their immanent meaning for residents of the Upper Snake River Valley.

#### Chapter IV: Religious Words in the Teton Dam Flood Narratives

As mentioned in the introduction, Words are a concept tied to Parry and Lord's Oral-Formulaic theory which is a theory developed in the attempt to "elucidate the structure of oral poetry" such as *The Odyssey* (Foley, *How To Read an Oral Poem*, 109). Foley builds on this theory with his own concept of Immanent Art which explores "how that structure means" (Foley, *How To Read an Oral Poem*, 109). Once Words are identified, he "seeks to understand the idiomatic implications" of these formulaic units (Foley, *How To Read an Oral Poem*, 109). He finds that these Words then function as signs of "encoded traditional meaning" in the culture in which they are used (Foley, *How To Read an Oral Poem*, 109). For example, in *The Odyssey*, at Hermes' birth, he is called "Hermes, the mighty slayer of Argos" (Foley, *How To Read an Oral Poem*, 113). Since the baby has just been born and his slaying of Argos is far in the future, the description does not refer to an event happening in the narrative at that time. Instead, the "special name" or Word, refers to his traditional history, to his fuller identity outside this or any other moment"; thus it evokes in the reader an understanding of Hermes in his "larger mythic presence" (Foley, *How To Read an Oral Poem*, 114). In this chapter, I identify Words with encoded traditional meanings in the The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. As previously mentioned, Immanent Art focuses on the "recurrent phrases and scenes and story-patterns ...as indexes of more-than-literal meaning, as special signs that point toward encoded traditional meanings" (Foley, *How To Read an Oral Poem*, 109). Immanent Art seeks to determine the Words' meanings. For example, "What ideas do they stimulate in an audience or readership fluent in this specialized meaning?" (Foley, *How To Read an Oral Poem*, 113). Four religious Words evident throughout the Teton Dam Oral History collection are "the Church," "the prophet," "genealogy," and "food storage." In LDS culture, these four terms, through

communicative economy, allude to encoded traditional meanings, which I will explore and contextualize through scriptural, historical, and scholarly texts and demonstrate how they were employed in the traumatic context of the flood.

### **The Church**

The term “the Church” in these oral histories is shorthand for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints often referred to as the LDS Church or the Mormon Church. It is termed the Church of Jesus Christ to emphasize that “his gospel, teaching, and divine authority constitute the fundamental basis of the church” (Porter 277). The term *latter-day* distinguishes the church from the church formed when Jesus Christ lived on the earth, and *saints* “connotes a member of the covenant group<sup>18</sup>” (Porter 277). Joseph Smith founded this Christian church in 1830 in New England. As the church grew, the body of the church migrated first to Kirtland, Ohio; then to Independence, Missouri; Nauvoo, Illinois; and finally, in 1847, to the Salt Lake Valley in what was then Mexico. Once they settled in the Salt Lake Valley, Brigham Young assigned groups of church members to form settlements extending from Canada to the farthest southern reach of Mexico. One group of Mormon settlers from Utah established the city of Rexburg, Idaho in the spring of 1883. While they had the village incorporated into Fremont County, “public works projects were organized and executed under the direction of Church leaders” (Clemens and Forbush 34). From its founding, Rexburg’s church leaders often doubled as political leaders, embedding the influence of the religion into the local culture even more. Analysis of the Teton Dam oral histories demonstrates that the term “the Church” is a shorthand term which can evoke in the audience encoded traditional meaning regarding the history of the Church, historical

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<sup>18</sup> The covenant group indicates those who have been baptized into The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

conflicts with local and national government, attitudes towards those who are not members, and expectations of behavior in its individual members.

In Ruth Barrus's oral history she refers to "the LDS church" twice, "the Church" six times, and "our church" three times. Use of the term "the church," in the narratives is often prompted by the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee. For example, Ruth Barrus's interview with Ramon Widdison demonstrates the "fluency in specialized meaning" which Foley indicates will be shared by those within an oral tradition (Foley, *How to Read an Oral Poem*, 113). Barrus begins by referring to "the LDS church," but switches when the interviewer uses the term "the Church" in one of his questions. Barrus's interviewer, Widdison, triggers a different register when he uses "the Church," in a question: "Do you think when the church authorities came up and talked to everybody at the college, their admonition for everyone to dig in helped the mental situation?" (Barrus). After this question, Barrus does not resume using the term "LDS church" because Widdison has indicated that he does not need her to specify which church. Later, he makes his own perspective and experiences clear when he states, "I think it goes to show that no matter what happens in our lives the church is the stable center point to pull everyone together" (Barrus). As the immediate audience for Barrus's interview, he encourages her use of this Word because he clearly understands what she means by it and because it accesses shared context.

These shifts in terminology also reflect Barrus's shifting perception of the audience for the interview. At the outset, Barrus has a clear awareness of an audience outside of the geographical area who may listen to the recording in the future. This shifts to a more relaxed conversation with the interviewer himself where they share specialized meaning. Barrus never returns to referring to the "LDS church," but when she tries to explain the functions and beliefs

of the Church, as if to an outside audience, she begins calling it “our church” perhaps implying that she now includes the interviewer in the group identity of the church. For example, in one section she begins, “*The* church is the most important thing to me,” but as she continues to explain why, she says, “*Our* church has been the means of keeping us united marvelously” (Barrus, emphasis added). This demonstrates a dynamic sense of audience, which is sometimes broader and sometimes narrower, which influences the tone and content of her remarks throughout the interview.

One aspect of the “coded traditional meanings” associated with “the Church” is its history of conflict with the local and national government (Foley 109). While the term “the Church” indicates the dominance of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in the Upper Snake River Valley, there are other religions in the valley, and some are referred to in these interviews, but always by their proper names. Referring to the church as “the Church” implies “the dominant Church in this area” and a belief that listeners will know which church is being referred to without the full title. That very dominance embodies an underlying tension between the Church and the local and state government and their citizens, which becomes evident in these narratives.

Some of the interviewers’ questions imply a tension between the two entities. In Barrus’s interview, five questions deal with the coordination of relief efforts among local, state, and Church organizations. For example, Widdison asks, “You mentioned the LDS church came in and helped. Did any of the government agencies come in to help out?” (Barrus). Later he states, “They’ve been able to see the government and the church work hand-in-hand” (Barrus). In Grace Forsyth’s interview, her interviewer asks her four different questions regarding these groups. One asks, “In your dealings over the next few weeks and months with various organizations such

as the Red Cross, the LDS Church, and the government, how do you think that they operated? Do you think that they were effective? How did you feel about your involvement?” (Forsyth). While it is normal to inquire about relief efforts, the repetition is interesting. Is there a distrust that the government groups will not fulfill their requirements or that the two will not work well together? Or, perhaps there is an innate sense of competition between the two, a pride in believing that the church’s response to the disaster was superior to the government’s efforts.

The interview of County Commissioner W. Keith Walker further demonstrates some of the tension between church members and the government. Walker represents an interesting overlap between local and church government as he was the county commissioner and a stake president. He observes that two days after the event, he began attending meetings at 6:00 a.m. to coordinate relief efforts. The meetings consisted of an assortment of LDS church leaders and government officials. Walker comments, “The government agencies seemingly couldn’t understand the organization of the Church and how it helped our operations” (Walker). A significant example occurred when a representative from Housing and Urban Development stated that they would need four to six months to determine who needed housing and where to put it. Walker replied that they could have the information within a couple of days, because “Our Stake Presidents<sup>19</sup> met with our Bishops and the Bishops with their counselors, called their High Priest leaders and their Elders Quorum Presidents, and they called their home teachers, and they just contacted each person” (Walker). This refers to the different levels of organization typical in an LDS ward, in which each family in the ward has assigned home teachers, a pair of men who, ideally, visit the family once a month and see to their spiritual and physical needs. If the home teachers see any specific needs, they relay that information to the Elder’s Quorum President, who

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<sup>19</sup> A stake is “several wards together, usually no more than ten” led by a stake president “called from among the members of the stake” (Porter 279). The term stake is “linked to Old Testament imagery of Zion as a great tent upheld by lengthened cords and stakes” (Porter 279).

then shares that information with the Bishop of the ward. Especially in the city of Rexburg, it was easy to assess the needs of those affected by the flood because ward boundaries encompassed a small geographical area due the heavy concentration of LDS people in the Rexburg area. Thus, a ward would probably cover no more than a city block or two, making it easy for people to see and check on their neighbors and ward members and to relay that information to the Bishop of the ward.<sup>20</sup> After many similar experiences where the system of church organization appeared to allow for quicker action, General Brooks, the Adjutant General for the State of Idaho, said that they should let him know if they needed anything, but he was “happy to let the correlation group run things” (Walker). This experience was also recounted by Henry B. Eyring, then president of Ricks College, a two-year college in Rexburg owned and operated by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Eyring, who is now a counselor in the First Presidency of the LDS church, shared his impressions of the meeting Walker discussed in a recent General Conference<sup>21</sup>:

As the meeting began, the representative from the federal disaster agency stood and began to say with the voice of authority what needed to be done. After he listed each of the five or six tasks he said were essential, the stake president responded quietly, “We’ve already done that.”

After a few minutes, the man from the federal disaster agency said, “I think that I will just sit down and watch for a while.” He and his deputies then listened as bishops and elders quorum presidents reported what they had done. They described what direction they had received and followed from their leaders. They talked as well about

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<sup>20</sup> “A ward is a congregation of Saints, usually numbering between 200 and 600 members. Wards are usually organized according to geographical boundaries, and all members living within those boundaries belong to the same ward” (Porter 279).

<sup>21</sup> General Conference is a meeting of the worldwide membership of the church held every six months in Salt Lake City and broadcast throughout the world.

what they had been inspired to do as they carried out the instructions to find families and to help them. The stake president gave a few final directions to the bishops, and then he announced a time for the next report meeting, early the following morning.

The next morning the leader of the federal team arrived 20 minutes before the report and assignment meeting was scheduled to begin. I stood nearby. I heard him say quietly to the stake president, “President, what would you like me and the members of my team to do?”

Although local church leaders weren’t averse to working with government officials, Walker’s history and Eyring’s account demonstrate their belief that the Church organization managed recovery efforts more effectively than the government could in this case. This led Walker to say a few weeks later, when meeting with a large group of other government leaders in Idaho Falls that while he appreciated their interest, “We want to do it by ourselves. We never saw anyone from that huge assembly after that, not a one” (Walker).

Nelson Hostetter, National Director of Mennonite Disaster Relief, confirms Walker and Eyring’s accounts of the helpfulness of the church organization, stating that “this area responded as quickly as any I have ever seen. It moved quicker to rehabilitation on their own than any other community that has ever been hit” (4). Marvin Eld, the Director of the Teton Interfaith Disaster Task Force also says that “the LDS organization was doing a beautiful job, immediately about relief response” (3). So, the perception shared by Walker and Eyring was corroborated by other groups that, at least in the Rexburg area where the church infrastructure was intact, the church functioned effectively in addressing the disaster. While Walker expressed a willingness to respect and work with state and national government entities, there was also a sense that, if necessary, the Church would be able to manage on its own. Of course, as we’ve already seen, the praised organizational structure of the church was not functioning seamlessly. Some

communities, such as Wilford, felt let down by the church's response to the disaster. Therefore, since there was still a large, functioning infrastructure, things went smoothly in Rexburg, but outlying areas were not as effective.

A possible explanation for this distrust of government could be intergenerational trauma defined as "traumatic experience transhistorically passed across generational gaps, primarily through verbal or written acts of remembering" (Balaev 152). The receivers of these stories experience the trauma vicariously and integrate it as part of their cultural identity (Balaev 152). Applying the concept of intergenerational trauma to this collection, we can say that as stories of government conflict have been conveyed from generation to generation via journals, oral stories, and references in public Church discourses, consecutive generations have integrated the concept of Church/government conflict and adopted those attitudes themselves, even though their individual lived experience has not necessarily involved direct governmental conflict.

Early LDS church history, from 1830 to 1847, saw the church members slowly migrating west as an organized group. When the church settled in Missouri and Illinois, what began peacefully ended with mobs, abetted by government, forcibly driving church groups out of the United States. In simple terms, the antagonism toward the LDS church grew largely out of a fear of their numbers and distaste for their beliefs and practices. With new members joining their ranks every day, LDS settlements soon outnumbered the original settlers and caused concern about their impact on local economic and political issues. An extreme example of this hostility toward the LDS church is embodied in Missouri Governor Lillburn Boggs' extermination order, which stated that "Mormons are to be driven from the state and if necessary, exterminated" (Whitman 308). A majority of church members and leaders ultimately fled to present-day Utah

in hopes of escaping persecution, which had been unimpeded and often encouraged by government entities.

The impact of this tumultuous time in church history is memorialized in cultural events such as Pioneer Day held on July 24, which may be a factor in modern-day church members integrating this forced migration into their identities. Church leaders encourage members to embrace this pioneer heritage each July with Pioneer Day celebrations that commemorate the arrival of the first Mormon settlers in the Salt Lake Valley. The importance of this trek is indicated in the hymn “Come, Come Ye Saints” which states: “We’ll find the place, which God for us prepared, far away in the West. Where none shall come to hurt or make afraid; There the Saints will be blessed” (Clayton 30). This celebration extends beyond Utah and Idaho, as members of the church throughout the world plan “pioneer treks” which re-enact the events of the migration to Utah, again encouraging an inter-generational internalization of experience.

Nevertheless, along with mistrust of government, dwelt a deep-seated patriotism. The first Pioneer Day was celebrated in 1849, two years after the arrival in the Salt Lake Valley (Eliason 143). This first celebration highlighted the “complex relationship between Mormons and the United States government” (Eliason 143). The folklorist Eric A. Eliason states, “Despite the grave hardships Mormons suffered at the hands of the federal government in the latter half of the nineteenth century, celebrating their identity as Americans and what they saw as the ideals of Americanism have been inextricably linked to and have shaped Pioneer Day celebrations since their inception” (145). For example, at the first celebration, a procession included a brass band, bishops from each of the organized wards, and youth carrying copies of the Bible and Book of Mormon. One man carried copies of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, which he presented to Brigham Young. “Later, one of the apostles read the Declaration of

Independence out loud to the crowd” (Eliason 147). “The Mormon’s sense of their Americanness and their association of the first Pioneer Day with Independence Day can be seen in Richard Ballantyne’s calling the festivities a ‘celebration of our Independence’” (Eliason 148). Mormons saw their “unpopular beliefs and practices” as being protected by “uniquely American Constitutional liberties” (Eliason 149). At the celebration, Elder Phineas Richards stated,

Brethren and friends, we who have lived to three-score years, have beheld the government of the United States in its glory, and know that the outrageous cruelties we have suffered proceeded from a corrupted and degenerate administration, while the pure principles of our boasted Constitution remain unchanged. [...] As we have inherited the spirit of liberty and the fire of patriotism from our fathers, so let them descend [unchanged] to our posterity. (Packer)

At sixty years of age, Richards was born in 1789, just eight years after the Revolutionary War ended. Indeed, the church was founded in New York and many of its early members were descendants of those who fought in the Revolutionary War. Although their religion at times found them at odds with government, they did not give up their patriotism and, as Richards expresses, their expectation that constitutional guarantees would be honored.

This complicated view of government entities can be traced through Idaho Mormon history as well. When Brigham Young led Mormons West, he still had not determined a location for settlement, “telling various people they were either going to ‘the Great Salt Lake or Bear River Valley’” (Coates et al. 48). Because of conflicting reports regarding the Bear River Valley, they ultimately pushed on to the Salt Lake Valley. In 1860, Mormons settled Franklin and in 1863, when Idaho Territory was established, Franklin ended up in Idaho (Coates et al. 50). Franklin was then used as a base for more Mormons to colonize Idaho. Others migrated to the

area when a railroad was built through the area on its way to Montana mines (Coates et al. 52-53). In 1878, railroad employee John R. Poole reported good farmland near the Menan Buttes, which led to the establishment of many farming communities including Rexburg, Salem, and Wilford, all towns which would be later impacted by the Teton Dam Flood (Coates et al. 53).

Eager to achieve statehood, other Idaho residents saw Mormons as an impediment due to their ties to the Democratic party. The railroad brought more non-Mormon settlers to the area, and in some communities, Mormons were no longer a majority. Settlers became frustrated by the “large concentration of Mormons,” which impeded their desire to achieve statehood (Coates et al. 58). Since Mormons tended to be Democrats, they would “jeopardize statehood since the Republican party controlled both houses of Congress after the elections of 1888” (60). When the Edmunds Tucker Act, which disenfranchised polygamists, was passed, many in the Idaho territory saw this as an opportunity to sway the politics in the area in their favor (58). The Idaho Legislature passed the Test Oath in 1884, which “disenfranchis[ed] all voters who believed in plural marriage, practiced it, or belonged to an organization teaching this doctrine” (58). Further, Federal Marshal Fred T. DuBois led the efforts to imprison practicing polygamists, jailing 418 Mormons between 1885-1888.

Tensions were also intensified by the Mormon practice of polygamy. Rexburg historians Louis J. Clements and Harold S. Forbush comment on the “considerable anti-Mormon feeling in the state at that time” which intensified when the “Edmunds Law [outlawing polygamy] put all members of the Mormon church on the wrong side of the law” (47-48). In 1843, Joseph Smith had revealed the practice of polygamy, which was practiced until 1890, when President Wilford Woodruff repealed the practice. While not all church members practiced polygamy, many living in Rexburg did. Marshal Dubois was “determined to arrest as many as possible and end the

practice of plural marriage in the Territory of Idaho” (48). In one instance, the marshal rode toward Rexburg with his men, but operators of the Snake River ferry crossing near the Menan Buttes stalled them while a young boy rode to Rexburg to warn residents. Because of the delay the wanted men had gone into hiding by the time the posse reached Rexburg (49).

Historian Douglas Alder explains that the confrontation with the federal government over the Mormon practice of polygamy came to a head in 1890 “and led Mormonism into a transformation instead of demise” (64). In addition to stopping the practice of polygamy, the church as a whole began “a long process of extricating the church from secular affairs” (65). Alder sees this process as an attempt to evolve from Mormon villages to making the Mormon ward a key organizational unit, which would allow Mormons to coexist more peacefully with non-Mormon neighbors. The ward had its origins in the Mormon town of Nauvoo, Illinois when a city planner “appropriated [political] wards for the temporal functions within their welfare-minded religion” (66). Bishops were called to oversee these wards with a primary function being to “seek out the poor” in these units and “provide for their needs” (66). Brigham Young used this same unit of organization as he led the church to Utah. “Salt Lake City was divided into wards in February 1849” and the wards “serve[d] as both political and religious units” (67). Since then, the ward has served as a community “in which Mormons sustain and transmit their values through expressions of belief, rites, rituals, and symbols which reinforce values among ward members” (71). As smaller Mormon settlements spread throughout Utah and Idaho, many remained “one-ward” towns for decades (Alder). “In such settings the ward and village were the same institution; temporal and ecclesiastical affairs of the community were intermingled. . . . Bishops served as a probate judge—the chief civic office—as well as the spiritual leader” (67). Rexburg at the time of the flood was not a one-ward town, but was still predominantly LDS,

which led to some tension with non-LDS community members. However, in the case of the flood, it also allowed for quick response to the disaster.

As mentioned, for many members the church's effective response to the disaster was a matter of pride. This pride can be traced in some of the narratives as one interviewer, Christina Sorenson, asks whether the people feel that LDS people have responded to the disaster more effectively than non-LDS people. Sorenson asks a similar question when interviewing Michael Shaw, a Presbyterian minister in Rexburg. When he restates her question and asks, "Are you saying LDS people recovered better than non-LDS?" she alters her statement slightly saying, "any faith," to which he responds, "Christian faith makes a tremendous difference" and that there was an effective "pulling together across religious lines" during the flood, whereas in the past he had seen "problems with LDS being such a majority here" (10-11). As Shaw states, many people turn to religion for strength during disastrous events. In fact, some have studied the impact of religion on trauma victims. Peres et al. find that people who have a high "sense of coherence" seem "more resilient under stress" (346). Since religion and spirituality offer "cornerstones in reframing perception," they can help survivors process stressful situations by offering the coherence that they need (346). Further, research by Smith et al. confirms that religion can give individuals the strength to handle situations in which they feel a loss of control and are deeply vulnerable (Smith et al. 171). The positive nature of many flood accounts aligns with these findings.

Is the LDS church truly unique in its response to this disaster? Disaster research indicates that much of the unity and helpfulness Teton Dam flood survivors recount is common to individuals and groups who have experienced traumatic events. On the other hand, it does appear the church's structure, where still intact, did allow for an unusually quick response to immediate

problems. Disaster research has found that the initial reaction to disaster is positive, with individuals “not paralyzed by a threat but actively seek[ing] relevant information and attempt[ing] to do what they can in the emergency” (Quarantelli 684). Most immediate needs are met by family and friends, which also occurred for most Teton Dam flood survivors (684). While the military functions under the belief that disasters will encourage anti-social behaviors, which the military or others will need to suppress, research shows just the opposite. Disaster research has “challenged and even undermined the military’s model of crisis behavior, rather than affirming or validating it” (Webb 280). Many of the flood survivor’s stories echo beliefs similar to the military’s in which there will be looting and dangerous outsiders coming in to take advantage of the situation; however, research and the experience of those interviewed illustrates that it is more common for disasters to bring out the best in people.

While religious belief acted as a strength for many, in some cases, church leaders may have implied that poor coping or emotional distress illustrated a lack of faith, leading some to not seek out the psychological help they needed. This attitude is reflected in Keith Walker’s comments about President Kimball’s visit to the local members of the Church. He describes the “glazed look in their eyes and stunned appearance” (Walker). He then expresses disappointment in the way the people responded to the Prophet’s remarks: “They didn’t respond one way to the Prophet or to anyone who was speaking to them. You know it kind of offended me and hurt me just a little bit you know because ... I didn’t see any response of any kind” (Walker). As shared previously, Kimball’s visit was obviously significant to the survivors, since many mentioned it in their accounts of the flood, but Walker seems impatient that the people would show any signs of shock or distress, as if it demonstrated faithlessness. He doesn’t recognize that while shock would be normal at this point, it did not mean that the event was not significant to people,

although they were incapable of expressing it in their non-verbal behavior that day. This demonstrates a lack of understanding of trauma in some LDS leaders, which may have put undue pressure on people to cover up feelings of shock or trauma. Further, since LDS leaders shared the same cultural beliefs that other members did, they were influenced by these factors to insist that members did not need the help.

Additionally, leaders and members were hesitant to go to outside sources for help. Mark G. Ricks, another stake president in Rexburg, felt that they didn't need the psychologists brought in by the government because, "we had people in our own ranks who could handle the trauma of the people involved here" (Ricks). He said,

Oh, there's been a few isolated cases where people have had some emotional problems, but by and large, they've been very, very few. And we had a committee set up here to handle these kinds of problems headed by Brother Jay Risenmay and then he had a crew of people that he would call on if a need arose. But he told me many, many times that it just seemed like that the people didn't need their services. (Ricks 28)

Wood Miller, director of housing at Ricks College said, "We had people here from the Boise Mental Health that got permission to contact the people in the dorms, to see if they could help them cope with whatever situation that was bothering them. After about two days, one of them came into the office and said, 'Hell, they don't need me, I need them.' That was the calibre of these people that we were housing in the dorms" (Miller). While his observations may have been true, it is also true that there may have been a reticence in admitting that they needed help from outsiders or perhaps a stigma in seeking mental help. Marilyn Hybels, a volunteer from the Christian Reform Relief committee, said that many insisted they didn't need help because she was an outsider:

When I first came here and started meeting some of the people, some would ask if I belong to the Mormon Church and I told them I didn't and I think they were threatened by that. They would say right away that they didn't need any help and that they could do it themselves. The first time was the hardest time to go in any place, at any house and after the second time when they would really realize that I really wanted to help them and wanted to be friends with them and talk with them, then it got easier and easier and now there are so many neat people that I just love to go visit them.

Several other oral histories illustrate similar struggles between religious faith and obvious trauma. Bettie Fullmer, who owned a Rexburg hotel with her husband, agreed that “the government wasn’t as well-organized as the Church was,” but implies that some resented the apparent pressure to put a positive, religious spin on the event (12). Although she indicates this sentiment by conveying someone else’s story, which may be a way of distancing herself from uncomfortable feelings, she says her bishop’s mother complained after a sacrament meeting, “If they call the damn flood a blessing once more I’m going to jump up and scream.” Later, expressing obvious symptoms of trauma, Bettie says, “I feel mixed up, I feel like I’m not who I am any more” (23). These statements show that while she feels comforted by the presence of the church in assisting with the disaster, she still experiences reactions to trauma that any disaster victim would and she does not want to feel pressured to dismiss her feelings in favor of looking at the flood as a “blessing.”

As this analysis indicates, the Word “the Church,” is layered with profound social, religious, and political meaning in the Upper Snake River Valley, and elements of these meanings are evident in narratives of this experience. As Foley explains, these Words become “special signs that point toward encoded traditional meanings” (Foley 109). In this example, the

term “the Church” can call up in the mind of the speaker or audience the history of the Church, historical conflicts with local and national government, attitudes towards those who are not members, and expectations of behavior in its individual members.

### **The Prophet**

Another Word prominent in the narratives is “the Prophet.” In this case, the survivors are referring to Spencer W. Kimball, the leader who is also understood to be a prophet by members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. In 1976, worldwide church membership totaled just under four million. While seeing to the worldwide needs of the church, President Kimball, although located nearby in Salt Lake City, Utah, would not have visited the Rexburg area very often. Therefore, his visit one week after the events of the flood stood out in many people’s minds and this is reflected in their narratives. President Kimball was accompanied by Boyd K. Packer, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

In the *News of the Church* release for August of 1976, President Kimball’s statements are summarized as focusing on the blessing that so few lives were lost, trying to quickly re-establish family routines for the children, emulating the pioneers’ ability to remain happy during trying experiences, and being cautious about accepting government handouts. Boyd K. Packer’s remarks address the question of why the disaster happened: “Elder Packer said that he had heard someone ask, ‘What did we do wrong to deserve such a disaster?’ ‘The answer is,’ he said, ‘probably nothing. If you attach tragedy or suffering or disaster to sin only, how do you explain the suffering of Christ? Fine people, living worthily, can be subject to disasters such as you have faced here. The difference will be in how you face it.’” He also indicates that there will be worse trials ahead and this is a preparation for such.

As we will see in the following example, for many, Kimball's address was key in how they evaluated and interpreted the flood. In the oral history of Darrell Lewis, a 33-year-old man from Rexburg, we see mention of this Word in the evaluation scene of the narrative. When asked if the flood was a divine punishment or a manmade disaster, Lewis replies, "It was a man-made disaster and of course my feelings have been guided by President Kimball, the Prophet of our Church. He said that it's not anything that anybody has done. The Lord put his hand in the way of that flood, it could have happened in the middle of the night. He protected the people of this area. He had mercy upon them. This is what Spencer W. Kimball said, who is a Prophet" (10). Lewis' first mention of the prophet is by the title President Kimball. This was the name commonly used among members when referring to him. Then, as if realizing that he needs to explain who President Kimball is to an outside audience, he states, "the Prophet of our Church" (10). He then recounts Kimball's statement that the Lord had shown mercy in the timing of the flood so that few lives were lost. Lewis then restates the prophet's name, Spencer W. Kimball, and finishes his response with "who is a Prophet" (10). This implies an authority that gives Kimball's view of the disaster special weight. Lewis does not explicitly state that for LDS members being "a Prophet," means that he has special insight on events through revelation from God, but that is implied by his statement. So, although he seems to be aware of an outside audience that might eventually access his interview, he is still speaking with communicative economy, which requires more information on the meaningfulness of this term to residents of the area. This is similar to the term "hero" which is explored by Foley in *Immanent Art*. Foley states, "the tradition presents the whole of the character by metonymy, with the designated part standing for the immanent whole" (19). For example, in *The Odyssey* when the hero is introduced with a traditional epithet, it "amounts to the epithet's institutional relationship to a hero's traditional

identity, an identity that comprises the innumerable separate moments of that character's existence in oral traditional story. . . .the referential background that endows each and every occurrence . . . with a richness greater than any single instance of the simple form" (141). Similarly, when LDS members reference "the prophet," they are not simply alluding to their experiences with the current prophet, who at that time was Spencer W. Kimball, but to all the prophets since Joseph Smith's establishment of the LDS church, and earlier Biblical prophets as well.

Many other survivors of the Teton Dam flood, like Lewis, seemed to take President Kimball's address as the authoritative interpretation of the event. As Rexburg resident William Carter said, "President Kimball said we didn't do anything to deserve what happened" (6). Further, Norman C. Ricks, another Rexburg resident, indicated that Boyd K. Packer said "God didn't do it" but that he "showed mercy" in the timing of the event—mid-day on Saturday in summer when most families were at home and able to flee together, rather than in the middle of the night when there would have been no warning, or in the winter, when the weather might have offered more of a threat to people's lives. In fact, when most of the residents are asked in the oral history interviews whether they see the flood as an act of God or a manmade disaster, almost unanimously they indicate that it was a manmade disaster, and that God's only role was in the timing of the event to mitigate loss of life. It is impossible to prove a connection between President Kimball's interpretation of events and the similarity of these people's assurances that God helped with the timing of the event, but it is a contributing factor.

Other survivors referenced President Kimball's advice to clean up their homes as justification for their clean-up and rebuilding efforts. Kimball's advice for members to clean up their homes did not actually take place during his visit to Rexburg, but in a General Conference

address in April of 1976, two months prior to the disaster. He stated, “keep in good repair and beautify your homes, your yards, farms, and businesses. Repair the fences. Clean up and paint where needed. Keep your lawns and your gardens well-groomed. Whatever your circumstance, let your premises reflect orderliness, beauty, and happiness” (Kimball). Obviously many who survived the flood felt this counsel was timely. Terry Hepworth indicates that “we were told by the prophet to clean up our homes” (13), and Lehi and Elsie Keppner state “we were advised by our beloved President Kimball to clean up our premises” (11). Arlene Klingler says, “President Kimball asked us to beautify our yards and homes” (2). These statements seem almost humorous because people would doubtless clean up their homes and yards whether the prophet had told them to or not, but others interpreted the prophet’s message as encouragement to build bigger and better after the flood. Brent Kinghorn of Sugar City says, “we were counseled to rebuild and to build better” (24). In fact, President Kimball’s counsel seemed for many to justify building nicer homes than they previously had, particularly in areas like Sugar City, where most of the homes hit by the flood had to be completely rebuilt. Interestingly enough, the transcript of what the prophet said during his visit to Rexburg shows that he never said to “rebuild and to build better.” He said, “Now we will move forward and build for the future. We’ll build our houses well. We will use them properly” (Kimball). People’s interpretation of the prophet’s advice seems to be a merging of his statement and that of Elder Boyd K. Packer, who said, “It’s going to take years to put everything back better than it ever was before, and it will come out better than it was before, because we’ll come off and have passed a test” (Packer). The contrast between what people heard and what was actually said can possibly be attributed to their emotional state at the time and the inability to access the actual printed version of the talks. Because of this, people were left to interpret his advice based on their memory of the meeting. Additionally, there was

probably an oral process at work as people discussed and shared the event, which consolidated and winnowed down the official statement. Accurate or not, it seemed to offer motivation and justification for the actions they took in the rebuilding process and to encapsulate an idea that was motivating for them.

Why was the prophet's counsel so significant to these flood survivors? In the LDS church the prophet fills a role similar to that of Old Testament prophets such as Moses. The idea of having a "living" prophet has always been key to members of the LDS church, beginning with the church's founder, Joseph Smith. The story of Joseph Smith's call as a prophet, officially accepted by the church, is included as a book in the *Doctrine and Covenants*, a book of scripture in the LDS faith. In this book, titled *Joseph Smith History*, Smith reflects on his reaction to the religious awakening he experienced in upstate New York in 1820. Preachers from many faiths were canvassing the area holding tent meetings and encouraging people to join their churches and be saved. Confused by the varying claims, Smith eventually went to a grove of trees to pray and ask for God's direction on which church he should join.

God's response to Joseph's plea was the opening of what LDS people term, "a new dispensation." God revealed to Joseph that none of the current churches had his true and complete gospel and that Joseph was to restore the church following the same organization established by Jesus Christ in his ministry on the earth. Over ten years later, Smith officially established the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints with thirty founding members. While there have been sixteen prophets since Joseph Smith, his time as prophet was unique in the history of the Church because he translated and published *The Book of Mormon* which was then and is now used as a primary tool for missionaries throughout the world and from which LDS members draw their designation by many as "Mormons." He also received and recorded many

revelations from God regarding the establishment of the church and these revelations make up the book of scripture known as *The Doctrine and Covenants*. Of its 138 sections, all but three were received by Joseph Smith.

Joseph Smith also established in the minds of LDS members the significance of having a prophet who receives current revelation from God and the importance of obeying the prophet. In the first section of the *Doctrine and Covenants*, verse 38 indicates that when members of the church hear counsel from the prophet, they are to treat it as if it was directly from God's mouth: "though the heavens and the earth pass away, my word shall not pass away, but shall all be fulfilled, whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same" (D & C 1.38). This passage and other teachings throughout the history of the church cemented for many members the importance of heeding the prophet's counsel. For example, President Wilford Woodruff, prophet and president of the church from 1889 to 1898, declared in an oft-repeated statement,

The Lord will never permit me or any other man who stands as President of this Church to lead you astray. It is not in the programme. It is not in the mind of God. If I were to attempt that, the Lord would remove me out of my place, and so He will any other man who attempts to lead the children of men astray from the oracles of God and from their duty. ("Official Declaration 1, Excerpts from Three Addresses by President Wilford Woodruff Regarding the Manifesto" 292).

These same sentiments were expressed one year prior to the Teton Dam flood, when Ezra T. Benson, an apostle at the time and later prophet and president of the church, advised, "A good way to measure your standing with the Lord is to see how you feel about, and act upon, the inspired words of his earthly representative, the prophet-president. The inspired words of the

president are not to be trifled with.” Clearly, from church documents and the histories of these disaster survivors, the role of the prophet was key to feeling spiritually safe and to interpreting the event and explains the frequent references to his address. Of course, that did not stop some from speaking candidly, as did Ina Snell of Rexburg: “President Kimball said count it as a blessing, that’s going to be hard to do” (17).

Survivors’ reliance on Kimball’s counsel reflects a desire to rely on a religious framework for strength in a challenging time. Survivors specifically use Kimball’s words as a means of interpreting the significance of the event and justifying their efforts to rebuild and build better. They give Kimball’s counsel such weight because of doctrinal teachings throughout the church’s history that assured them that the prophet would not lead them astray and that they could measure their own religious standing by their willingness to listen to and apply the prophet’s teachings. While one could argue that survivors could easily have taken the same steps in rebuilding without any direction from the prophet, for many, being able to cite his authority gave them extra confidence and motivation to proceed.

### **Genealogy**

Another Word found in the disaster narratives is “genealogy.” This term is often paired with references to Books of Remembrance, which were the binders in which LDS members kept their genealogical research. While many homes preserve family records in a family Bible or in some other document, for LDS members, genealogy has an added significance owing to their belief in salvation for the dead. Because of this significance, when interviewers asked what possession they had lost that was most valuable to them, many survivors mentioned, along with photographs and other family mementos, losing their genealogy.

In the history of Gaylen Bagley, a 24-year-old man from Sugar City, he talks about these items. When the interviewer, Richard Stallings, asks what he lost in the disaster, he states, “Everything that we had” but then goes on quickly to state, “The thing that was the hardest to replace was the pictures and things of that sort. Genealogy, Book of Remembrances. That was the thing that now after a year or so we are still missing the most. Most of the other stuff has been replaced. You forgot about it. Every once in awhile, you will remember and go look. You don't have it and then you remember that the flood took it” (9). Later in the interview, Bagley brings up the Book of Remembrance again, although he seems to be talking about an unrelated topic. He mentions that his neighbor found remnants of their trailer on his property. “We walked down that way and . . . one of his kids had found our Book of Remembrance and had it sitting on the front porch. . . . That was kind of interesting. It had our births and blessing certificates and the death certificate of the child that we lost” (11). The importance of these records is shown when Bagley quickly moves from stating that he and his family lost all of their possessions to saying that the things they missed the most were pictures, genealogy, and Books of Remembrance. While it is understandable that pictures might be irreplaceable, especially in those pre-digital days, it may be unclear to audiences why genealogy would be so important and the term Book of Remembrance would be completely unfamiliar to non-LDS audiences. Audiences might infer the content of these books, when Bagley states that a neighbor retrieved one of their books and that it still contained birth and death certificates. Bagley might have had an especially strong attachment to the book because it held the death certificate of one of their children, and therefore would hold stronger emotional weight. Although Bagley does not mention that it is miraculous that the book was saved, he did think it was significant enough to mention in the narrative, and with the ability of water to destroy paper, perhaps it is implied that it is somewhat

miraculous that it would still be in good shape when they retrieved it. Other survivors expressed sentiments similar to those of Bagley. Sandra Price, also of Rexburg, explains it clearly: “I think very few people came in to see if their TV was all right. I think they came in to find out if their baby books were still okay, and their genealogy versus their toaster, this kind of thing. I think that when they knew they were going to lose maybe they would have just as soon lost material things over things that are of sentimental value.”

Of course, many managed to save their records. For example, Albert Pieper of Rexburg lost his genealogy, but “the year before, I had had all our genealogy sheets Xeroxed and gave everybody in the family, each one of my brothers and sisters, a Xeroxed copy of what I had so we were able to get that back again.” Stephanie Anderson alludes to the preservation of these records as being miraculous: “I suppose about the most miraculous thing about the flood is that we took our genealogy with us to Portland when we went on vacation. Otherwise, it would have been lost during the flood.” Some had experiences such as Wanda Lou Peterson, whose records were in the water, but were still preserved. She was looking through her storage room and noticed a box that she had kept genealogical records in “sitting up on a pipe.” It had floated near the pipe and then lodged there. When she opened it, the box “nearly crumbled in her hands,” but the papers were preserved, except for a few which had gotten damp but “nothing too drastic.” Others simply had the records stored in a higher area of the house, so that the floodwaters did not reach it. Sam F. Brewster says, “We were lucky because all of our genealogy, family records, and tax records were upstairs and were not destroyed in the flood.” Others, such as Irma Camp thought to grab her genealogy as she left the house: “My first reaction to save, was our genealogy because we have so very little of it. What I have would be hard for me to replace it.

Many of the people I have gotten my genealogy from have long since passed away. I would definitely have to go back to records and with our family the records are very difficult to find.”

Clearly, these survivors hold the preservation of these records as important in a way that a non-Mormon might not. For example, most would find it unusual to take their family records with them on vacation, as Anderson did. Arlene Klingler, whose records were soaked and covered in mud, discussed her plans to go through the papers and scrape off the mud to try to read the information and recopy it by hand onto new record sheets. She stated, “That’s a big project I’ve got ahead of me is trying to recopy and hopefully save, you know, some of that. I can’t save it but I can recopy it and I certainly wish it had been in a different place. ... If I had taken time to get it out I’d be a lot happier today.” To understand why these flood victims speak of these records in this way, we need to explore LDS doctrine on this topic.

Church members see “redeeming the dead” as one of the key missions of the church (Porter 277). By redeeming the dead, they mean offering essential ordinances, such as baptism, to those who have died without hearing the gospel or having the chance to be baptized: “This work is accomplished by proxy ordinances performed in the temples of the Church. It leads to Church encouragement of family history research” (Porter 277). The history of this doctrine is commonly attributed to Joseph Smith’s curiosity about a passage in the New Testament in 1 Corinthians 15.29, which reads, “Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead?” Smith was curious about the reference to baptisms for the dead and sought insight from God on the subject. In subsequent revelations, Joseph Smith was instructed that members should seek to perform baptisms for their ancestors who had died without baptism. Also, a record of these baptisms should be kept, from which the dead would be judged, as indicated in the book of Revelation: “And I saw the dead,

small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works” (Rev. 20.12). In other words, these proxy baptisms performed on earth would count as a literal baptism for these souls in the resurrection. Joseph Smith further urged, “that these principles in relation to the dead cannot be lightly passed over, as pertaining to our salvation. For their salvation is necessary and essential to our salvation, as Paul says concerning the fathers—that they without us cannot be made perfect—neither can we without our dead be made perfect” (Doctrine and Covenants 128.15). He then alludes to the *Old Testament* prophet Malachi, who says the hearts of the children must turn to their fathers, lest the earth be smitten with a curse. Joseph Smith explains, “the earth will be smitten with a curse unless there is welding link of some kind or other between the fathers and the children” from the present back to the “days of Adam” and that welding link is the ordinances, rituals such as baptism, which are performed for the dead (Doctrine and Covenants 128.18).

Another prophet, Wilford Woodruff, further explains this doctrine. In 1894, prophet Wilford Woodruff said, “We want the Latter Day Saints from this time to trace their genealogies as far as they can, and to be sealed to their fathers and mothers. Have children sealed to their parents, and run this chain through as far as you can get it . . . This is the will of the Lord to his people” (qtd. in Pratt 493). The term “sealing” references marriage in an LDS temple which effectively “seals” or ensures that the union of the couple and family will last into the millennial world and eternity.

The carrying out of this counsel, which began with Joseph Smith, was still significant in the minds of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century flood victims. Most LDS homes would have what is often referred to as a Book of Remembrance, the name of which comes from another book of scripture called

The Pearl of Great Price, which consists of books which elaborate upon the early books of the Old Testament, such as Genesis and Exodus. In the Book of Moses, chapter six, verse five, it states that Adam kept a “book of remembrance.” That term was adopted and binders labeled Book of Remembrance were produced by the church for members to keep and maintain their genealogical records and records of work for the dead. Although today genealogical records are available digitally, in the 1970s most were hand-typed forms known as family group sheets. These would list family groups, birth, marriage and death dates, as well as a record of church rituals such as baptism and temple marriage. While some of these records could be found by researching at the LDS church’s genealogy library in Salt Lake City, many of these details were collected by members through their own family research, interviews with relatives, and visits to cemeteries to find birth and death dates. For many it was painstaking work, which took years of effort.

The importance of the work was instilled in children from a young age, as evidenced in the song “Genealogy—I Am Doing It” written in 1982, six years after the flood. The song was taught to LDS children ages three to twelve and tries to impress the essentials of LDS doctrine on the subject:

Genealogy, I am doing it, my genealogy.

And the reason why I am doing it is very sweet to me.

I learn stories of my progenitors; I write their history,

I keep records of my loves ones on my own family tree.

Family living now and the ones who’ve died can all be sealed to me,

And someday I’ll meet every one of them, I’m sure as I can be.

Oh what joy we’ll have when they say to me, ‘We’re all a family. I am

Yours and you are mine now, through all eternity.’ (Lawler)

As recently as 2017, the events of the flood were used as a cautionary tale regarding the preservation of genealogical records. In a column in the *Deseret News*, Twila Van Leer shares the experience of Reba Bauer. Bauer was a resident of Wilford who shares her experience fleeing the floodwaters. Bauer was in the car with her granddaughter, ready to leave her home, when she remembered her genealogical records. In dramatic terms, Van Leer says, “As the flood relentlessly raced down the valley, she grabbed several volumes of records and hurried back to the car, which was threatening to die at any moment.” In the days following the flood, people reached out to Bauer when they found Books of Remembrance among the debris, which allowed her to “salvage vital information” (Van Leer). Bauer mentions her hopes for the miraculous: “I still had hopes that someone would call and say the table and my genealogy books were found somewhere high in a tree, on top of someone’s roof, on top of someone’s barn, on top of some bridge, on top of the American Falls dam” (Van Leer). Bauer’s statement here reflects a hope that God might intervene and preserve her records because of their spiritual importance. Van Leer ends her column with the following advice: “Lesson learned: If possible, keep your family history records where they can be quickly retrieved if necessary.” Van Leer’s advice is somewhat surprising given the fact that most genealogical records are now digital and can be easily reprinted if necessary. But the fact that Van Leer finds this story worthy of repetition even forty years later indicates the ongoing value associated with genealogical records for LDS members.

Genealogical records are frequently listed among survivors’ most significant losses due to their beliefs in the records’ significance in reuniting families in the afterlife. Just as the flood triggered a concern for immediate family’s physical safety and efforts to be united as a family,

for LDS members genealogy is a means of keeping family safe in the afterlife, and explains the prominence of this Word in the accounts.

### **Welfare and Food Storage**

References to the LDS church's welfare program and food storage are the final Words I will consider. Many of the flood survivors mention the state of their home food storage because LDS church members are encouraged by leaders to have food storage for times of need. "In their homes, members are encouraged to have food storage sufficient for a year and other essentials of emergency preparedness: clothing, bedding, fuel (where possible), and the like" (Blake 246). President Spencer W. Kimball said, "preparing for emergencies is more akin to saving for a 'rainy day' than surviving 'doomsday'" (qtd. in Blake 246). Members are encouraged to have a year's supply of food and water, in case of disaster or food shortage. This food supply was usually made up of canned and bottled goods and large supplies of wheat, beans, etc. Many survivors' accounts reference the destruction of their food storage and the added difficulty it created during cleanup.

Carolyn Thompson, a 35-year-old woman from Rexburg, references the welfare program twice and food storage four times in her narrative. In using the term "welfare" she is actually quoting Barbara Smith, who at the time was the General Relief Society President for the church worldwide. Smith traveled to Rexburg with President Kimball and also spoke to the flood survivors. Thompson states,

I remember, she mentioned, if I can say it correctly, she had never been through a disaster like this and here she was the Relief Society President of the Church world-wide and she had never actually been through this herself and she said the *welfare* program had not really been tested like it would be in this situation. She said, "I like to think that maybe

the Lord had something to do with this and there would be no better place to test His *welfare* program than right here.” That was her opinion, of course, and I feel the same way too, because it was a test and we were able to experiment and see where we were short--what personal things we needed, who needed more training and what supplies we needed. I think it was a real eye-opener to all of us. (18, emphasis added)

Smith’s sentiments are interesting, implying that God “had something to do with this” in order to “test His welfare program right here” (18). This begs the question of why the program would need to be tested. What is the welfare program for? The traditional meaning that is embedded in the Word *welfare* is the idea that members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints need to be prepared for disastrous events and to be able to provide for themselves without government assistance if necessary. As already shown in this chapter, some of this meaning is drawn from historical events, when the church found themselves at odds with the government. It also subtly alludes to beliefs about the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, which members believe will be preceded by war, disaster, and chaos. Further, it is interesting that Thompson embraces Smith’s interpretation of events. Instead of feeling resentful that God would feel that a flood would somehow be good for the residents of the Upper Snake River Valley, she seems to accept the fact that they are being tested, and perhaps being found unprepared for these events.

Thompson elaborates on this theme by discussing her food storage, which she references four times. The first two times, Thompson discusses the practicalities of how much they lost in the flood and how they had built the storage up over time. In the last two references she reflects on the purpose behind food storage. In cataloguing her losses, she states, “But we lost, oh I would say 80% of our food storage, which hurt because it had taken us a long time to get it. We never did have enough money to go down and buy a whole lot at one time and we had just

gradually built that up” (9). She later explains that when she and her husband had chosen to buy a double-wide trailer rather than a house one of the reasons was so they would have extra money to invest in food storage. “I thought that we were really smart because we would pay it off soon, and then have the money for food storage and for our family and I know one of the real estate agents in town told us that we were foolish” (14). These first references demonstrate how important the food storage was to her. She had been thinking about it and slowly gathering it for years, in an attempt to follow the church’s counsel to have food storage.

Later in her narrative, she explains what she feels the events of the Teton Dam Flood taught her about food storage:

I think for many years now, of course, we have heard we are supposed to have *food storage*, that's what the church has told us, and we've all been a little lax. Some of us have had it and some didn't. But I think this showed us exactly what could happen, because the people up on the hill who were dry, furnished a lot of their excess *food storage* the first few days . . . and we were so grateful that they could do something like this and-I think maybe it was a test that way. So maybe I am philosophizing that it could have been divine.

First, Thompson mentions that the church has told members to get food storage and she claims that many have been lax about following this counsel, although it would be surprising if she includes herself in this group since her concern about obtaining food storage is evident in her narrative. Her further comments about people not affected by the flood sharing their food storage offers an interesting perspective on the usefulness of the food storage. If we simply read the survivor narratives, it seems that people’s food storage was not helpful, because most of it was destroyed. Further, in many cases it was very difficult to clean up and made the recovery process

more difficult. But as Thompson said, many in Rexburg still look back at the flood as an example of the usefulness of food storage, because those who were not affected contributed their food to feed people for the remainder of the summer. This sharing of food storage is not as clear in the collections of narratives because only those who were hit by the flood were interviewed, so those who simply offered help to their neighbors did not share their stories, yet this sharing of food is still commented on by citizens of Rexburg over forty years later.

To demonstrate the added difficulty that food storage created for many survivors, consider the account of Arthur Porter, mayor of Rexburg. Porter explains that his food storage room was next to an indoor swimming pool, so the floodwaters swept foods such as soybeans and wheat into the pool, which sat below the sewer line, so it would not naturally drain. He eventually had to employ a team of workers to haul the food storage out by buckets and dump it on the lawn. The resulting smell and mess was so intense that he hired a loader to dig up the entire lawn. In another narrative, Irma Camp humorously recounts that after several days the wheat spread in her basement had begun to sprout. Her son states that “he didn’t know whether we should harvest the wheat or clean up the basement.”

Some, such as John Zirker, attempted to save their food storage by carrying it out of the basement, but since no one was certain how high the water might be if it entered their homes, often the movement was for naught. He says, “Because we got 6 feet of water. It turned everything over in the house. Food storage was all ruined with exception of a few 50 pound bags of sugar which happened to be on the bed and the bed floated. Box springs and mattresses floated long enough to keep it dry.” While none of the survivors expresses resentment at the original counsel to obtain food storage, it is clear that in the disaster zone the food storage created more difficulty in clean up.

To elaborate more on the encoded traditional meaning of welfare and food storage for church members, we must look at the related doctrine and history. The church's welfare program and encouragement of food storage evolved over time, but had its roots in the doctrines of tithing and consecration. In 1838, Joseph Smith received a revelation on tithing that indicated that church members should pay "one tenth of all their interest annually and this shall be a standing law unto them forever" (D&C 119:4). Earlier, in 1831, saints had attempted to live what was termed the law of consecration, in which members basically gave all of their wealth and belongings to the church and then received back "sufficient for [themselves] and [their] famil[ies]" (D&C 42:32). The surplus was then kept in a "storehouse, to administer to the poor and the needy" (D&C 42:35). The term storehouse was drawn from the *Old Testament* scripture in *Malachi* 3:10, which stated, "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." Members used the term "*bishop's* storehouse" because bishops were responsible for dispersing this surplus to those in need. First begun during Joseph Smith's lifetime, these structures continued to be built in the Utah, Idaho, and Arizona settlements since many members payed their tithing in kind, or in other words, with goods rather than money (Rudd 4). Historian Frank W. Hirschi says,

[i]mplementation of consecration was difficult for the early Latter-day Saints and occurred only intermittently. The impoverished Missouri Saints were driven and persecuted by mobs, and repeatedly lost personal possessions, lands, and crops. Church property was often taken or destroyed . . . After these early failures, the Lord adapted the

requirements of the law of consecration to the capacities of the Saints and revealed the law of tithing as a practice to follow. (HC 3:44; D&C 119)

Giving tithing for over a century, as the Saints proved their ability to live this commandment, prepared them to accept also the Welfare program, introduced in 1936 by Church President Heber J. Grant (Hirschi).

The Church's welfare program grew during the Great Depression, as the government was unable to meet the needs of many Americans. President Joseph F. Smith, a nephew of Joseph Smith, states, "It has always been the cardinal teaching with the Latter-day Saints, that religion which has not the power to save the people temporally and make them prosperous and happy here cannot be depended upon to save them spiritually, and exalt them in the life to come" (qtd. in Mangum 1554). Additionally, the church sent relief to the victims of the San Francisco earthquake and European LDS church members after World War I (Blumell 94). The welfare program was also prompted by a continued distrust of the government and outside organizations. Around 1917, Joseph F. Smith encouraged Relief Society members to receive training from the Red Cross. "He was disturbed about the involvement of outside social welfare agencies with LDS cases" (96). Stephen L. Richards also warned, "if we are not the leaders in the social work in our communities, strangers come in and take up the work" (96). It is unclear from these sources what Smith was specifically worried about from these outside sources, but it is likely an attitude carried over from earlier government conflict. Church welfare services have grown since then, and today church members in need are urged to turn first to their families, then to the church, and lastly to the government, when in need. In 2010 there were 138 Bishop's Storehouses throughout the world, where church members and others in need can receive food

and other commodities. These storehouses are often paired with home storage centers that sell bulk foods which members can purchase and in some cases provide canning facilities.

But further, the church has chosen in recent decades to expand its humanitarian efforts to help those in disasters, LDS and non-LDS alike, similar to the Teton Dam Flood. When Relief Society President Barbara Smith called the flood a test of the welfare program, it seemed that the primary concern was how the program could meet the needs of members of the church in desperate circumstances. However, in addition to this, it demonstrated how the organization of the church made it possible to respond to disasters in a timely way. Since then, the Mormon Helping Hands organization has been a highly visible group on-site in many disasters, with members of the church volunteering time in house-to-house clean up and the church supplying food, money, and often opening church buildings to house those displaced from their homes. Perhaps the germ of this outreach program was inspired by the events of the Teton Dam Flood and the busloads of volunteers that were key in helping survivors recover.

In summary, the Words “welfare” and “food storage” reference a doctrinal belief that the church as an organization should be prepared to address members’ physical and spiritual needs. The system designed to provide for these needs is the church’s welfare program, a portion of which consists of members maintaining a year’s supply of food. Survivors feel comfortable in seeing the flood as a possible test of this system and do not express resentment in the fact that most of their food storage was destroyed and complicated clean-up efforts, focusing instead on the ability of members not affected by the flood to help provide for their needs. The system may have grown out of a distrust in government’s ability or willingness to provide for their needs, but has grown to an outreach program which seeks to help all people in need, particularly those in disasters. This outreach may have had its origins in the Teton Dam Flood experience.

In conclusion, one unique attribute of the Teton Dam Flood narratives is the high concentration of LDS people hit by the flood. While their narratives follow the scenes typical of other trauma narratives, they include unique references to church culture and belief. The fact that these Words recur in a majority of the accounts indicates their significance to the flood survivors, offering insight into the community and how it found meaning in the flood. In this way, using Foley's immanent art theory catches nuances of culture and delves into their meaning, offering a richer understanding of the event. The most prominent Words unique to the LDS culture were "the Church," "the Prophet," "genealogy," "welfare," and "food storage." Perhaps the reason for the concentration of these Words relates to the findings of Peres et al. As mentioned, Peres et al. found that since religion and spirituality offer "cornerstones in reframing perception," they can help survivors process stressful situations (346). Further, research by Smith et al. confirms that religion can "uniquely equip individuals to respond to situations in which they come face-to-face with the limits of human power and control and are confronted with their vulnerability and finitude" (Pargament qtd. in Smith et al. 171). These specific Words may have been key in the way survivors reframed their perception.

The frequent mentions of the Church not only reflect its dominance in the area, but also survivors' belief that the Church would respond proactively to the dilemma. This explains the disappointment found in many of the Wilford narratives, where church members felt that the Church did not meet the expectations they had for support. Further, survivors frequently cited President Kimball's remarks at his visit in which he indicated that they had done nothing wrong to deserve this disaster. It was as if they were waiting for someone in authority to reassure them of their innocence. The keen interest in the preservation or loss of the genealogical records reflects the immediate concern for family that almost all disasters trigger in victims. While the

records had little to do with the physical safety of victims' families, LDS beliefs in the afterlife and the eternal nature of family units tie directly to genealogical records. Perhaps that explains their unusual concern for preserving these records. Finally, the emphasis on welfare and food storage reflects a belief that the church as an organization will not just see to members' spiritual needs but will also help them meet physical needs when necessary. As Smith et al. find, as victims were "confronted with their vulnerability" they clung to the organization and teachings of the LDS church as a means of reestablishing their lives and self-concept.

What this chapter demonstrates is that using Foley's method to carefully explore Words encoded with traditional meaning will reveal cultural history and belief, which might be missed in the more general similarities of trauma narratives. It is likely that in any geographic area hit by a disaster, cultural history--be it racism, classism, or religious differences--will emerge in the narratives and offer valuable insight for those investigating the event.

## Chapter V: The Case for Trauma-Informed Pedagogy

Educators' opinions about trauma pedagogy range from those with the sincere desire to practice trauma-informed pedagogy to those that feel that taking trauma into consideration in constructing courses is no better than “bubble wrap[ping]” snowflake millennials who don't want to be challenged (“Warning”). Regardless of varying opinions on what is appropriate classroom policy, with 85% of college students reporting having experienced a traumatic event in their lifetime and 21% experiencing trauma in college, higher education teachers cannot afford to ignore this growing trend (Cless and Goff 26). Rhetoric scholars Peter and Maureen Goggin identify three types of trauma: national, natural, and personal (30-31). National traumas are events such as 9/11 and the Oklahoma City Bombing, which have “transnational” effects which “ripple worldwide” (31). Natural traumas are created by floods, fire, and violent storms, and personal trauma can include rape, incest, home invasions, and so on (31). These definitions are useful in demonstrating the breadth of experience covered by the term “trauma” and some of the inherent challenges for teachers trying to be sensitive to such a wide array of experience.

In this chapter, I seek to synthesize current suggestions for trauma-informed teaching spurred by the ongoing debate in the United States with the suggestions of earlier scholars who have sought to teach traumatic topics and texts in ethically and psychologically responsible ways. Then, I explore how these strategies can inform my own courses. After reviewing recent discussions in higher education regarding trauma and trigger warnings, I review strategies that have shown to be ineffective in teaching traumatic texts. These ineffective strategies include a solely aesthetic consideration of the text, a focus on empathy, and attempts by the instructor to put the class into a place of crisis. Effective strategies include studying the context of the traumatic text and allowing ample exploratory writing. I then explore ways I would apply these

strategies in teaching Laurie Halse Anderson's novel *Speak*. Next, I review challenges that writing instructors face in responding to students' traumatic experiences in personal narrative writing. In addition to considering advice from seasoned writing instructors, I suggest a possible variation on the personal narrative assignment, which draws on my work in this project, and invites students to conduct their own oral history interviews and then to analyze the resulting narratives through Labov and Waletzky's narrative framework and through looking for the Words learned about in Foley's theory. This will allow students to explore potentially traumatic texts through an analytical lens and may help them process and understand the event more deeply. Finally, I discuss the movement in public schools to create trauma-sensitive schools and districts with the necessary resources to support teachers and student in addressing the growing issue of trauma.

Recent discussions of trauma in classrooms are usually coupled with discussions of trigger warnings and safe spaces, concepts which emerged from 20<sup>th</sup> century empowerment movements. Katie Byron, of Boston University, explains that the concept of safe spaces is rooted in feminist efforts of the 1960s and 70s, which sought spaces where women could speak to other women about issues without the presence of men (Byron 118). Michael Miller, a journalist with *The Washington Post*, claims that trigger warnings can be traced to "the treatment of Vietnam veterans in the 1980s" when psychologists noticed that certain "triggers" could "sen[d] vets spiraling into flashbacks of past traumas." In the 1990s, feminist Internet sites started using trigger warnings to "warn readers of content that could stir up painful or paralyzing memories of sexual assault" (Miller). From there, the term spread throughout various Internet sites until, in 2012, Choire Sicha, now an editor for *The New York Times*, claimed the term had "lost all of its

meaning” (qtd. in Miller). This might contribute to the skepticism many professors feel about its implementation.

The discussion of these issues in higher education was prompted by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights in 2011, when they released “additional guidance” for college campuses “concerning Title IX violations” (Byron 118). In response to this guidance, in 2012, the American Association of University Professors issued a statement on campus sexual assault policies and procedures. In this statement, they explain that “[f]aculty members may . . . find themselves in the role of ‘first responders’ to reports of sexual assault, yet few consider themselves adequately equipped for the role” (AAUP). In 2013, in response to the AAUP’s statement, Oberlin College offered guidelines to their faculty to help them understand their “reporting requirements” (Byron 118). Further, they recommended that faculty “understand triggers, avoid unnecessary triggers, and provide trigger warnings” (Byron 119). They went on to claim, “Triggers are not only relevant to sexual misconduct but also to anything that might cause trauma. Be aware of racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, cissexism, ableism and other issues of privilege and oppression. Realize that all forms of violence are traumatic” (“Warning College Students”). Further, in March 2014, the Student Senate at University of California Santa Barbara called for mandatory trigger warnings from professors in course syllabi (Morris 373). These events and the subsequent outcry they prompted led to an August 2014 report by the American Association of University Professors, which called trigger warnings “counterproductive to the educational experience” (Kafer 1). The organization feared that such warnings would work as a “censor’s tool” and “allow students to bypass material that challenges them” (Kafer 2). Mandatory trigger warnings would also put faculty in a vulnerable position, since they could not possibly anticipate all of the possible triggers, and the policy could open them to “student

complaint and the firestorm that can be created quickly online” (Morris 374). It could also lead to faculty self-censoring and avoiding potentially controversial topics and texts.

In April 2015, the debate continued, when Columbia students “voiced their concerns about a fellow student’s reaction to Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and the treatment of rape in the text” (Morris 373). The experience is recounted in this article from the Columbia’s student newspaper, the *Columbia Daily Spectator*:

During the week spent on Ovid's "Metamorphoses," the class was instructed to read the myths of Persephone and Daphne, both of which include vivid depictions of rape and sexual assault. As a survivor of sexual assault, the student described being triggered while reading such detailed accounts of rape throughout the work. However, the student said her professor focused on the beauty of the language and the splendor of the imagery when lecturing on the text. As a result, the student completely disengaged from the class discussion as a means of self-preservation. (Johnson, Lynch, Monroe, Wang)

The student also claims that when she tried to talk to the professor about her experience, she “was essentially dismissed” (Johnson et al.). The student authors of the article then call for professors to be trained on the inclusion of trigger warnings and sensitivity in teaching traumatic topics. They state, “Our vision for this training is not to infringe upon the instructors' academic freedom in teaching the material. Rather, it is a means of providing them with effective strategies to engage with potential conflicts and confrontations in the classroom, whether they are between students or in response to the material itself” (Johnson et al.). Students are not the only ones who see the need to address these difficult topics in literary texts. For example, regarding classical texts such as *Metamorphoses*, scholar Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz, of Hamilton College, acknowledges that “for quite some time feminists within the academy have been trying to

educate colleagues about the fact the traditional curriculum was, to put it bluntly, sexist” (6). Further, “students’ experiences outside the classroom are relevant factors in their learning” and “something more than hurt feelings is at stake in our classrooms and offices.” She believes we have a professional obligation to “address these issues instead of ignoring them” (Rabinowitz 9). While most campuses have refrained from requiring trigger warnings, debates continue about their necessity. Regardless of personal stances on trigger warnings, it cannot be denied that trauma is a real condition that affects many students and many scholars have offered ideas for ways to address this in our courses from syllabi to classroom strategies.

Several scholars explore ways that professors can address trauma in their course syllabi. Alison Kafer, of Southwestern University, recommends that one way professors can create a trauma-informed classroom is by including specific statements in the syllabi. Kafer shares a sample trigger warning from Margaret Price, of The Ohio State University and a disabilities activist: “As I discuss this very difficult subject matter, please do what you need [...] to take care of yourself. You may need to take up a different position, engage in some manual activity ...or you may simply need to leave. This is an accessible presentation, which means I’ll be doing things such as describing visual images and offering copies of the talk” (Kafer 2). Kafer claims that “Price carefully positions her statements as a matter of access rather than avoidance, incorporating elements of the ‘trigger warning’ in a larger and more familiar description of accessible presentations” (2). Accessible presentations, in this context, would “make room for people’s experience of trauma” the same way teachers would seek to make the course accessible to someone who was in a wheelchair or hearing-impaired (Mingus qtd. in Kafer). She goes on to remind us that teachers should “avoid the assumption that one must be either ‘for’ or ‘against’ trigger warnings rather than seeing such warnings, and the structural and individual violences

they index, as sites for continued critique” (Kefer 4). These scholars believe that when we teach trauma related material<sup>22</sup> we run the risk of creating “secondary traumatic stress” or “vicarious traumatization” (Cless and Goff 25). Scholars Jessica Cless and Briana Nelson Goff, both of Kansas State University, propose doing an assessment early in a course in which instructors invite students to share “how their personal background may ‘show up’ in the course” (29). It’s possible that some students will not feel comfortable revealing this information to a professor and therefore they should not be required to share; however, if they are comfortable sharing, this information can help teachers prepare for any potential challenges that may arise in the course. Because students’ reaction to trauma may vary, professors should seek to be flexible with class assessments and assignments to allow for the students to complete the course while acknowledging the trauma and still meeting the learning objectives of the course. If the professor feels that the adaptations the student needs would conflict with the learning objectives, they may have to suggest the student drop the course and work with administration to meet the requirements in another way.

While these scholars offer clear ideas for how to acknowledge trauma in course policies and procedures, what teaching strategies can professors adopt to practice trauma-informed pedagogy? In reviewing research from the past several years, I’ve discerned clear dos and don’ts which various scholars have advised in dealing with traumatic content. Scholars submit that when teaching traumatic content, such as Holocaust literature or narratives of abuse, it is not effective to focus on aesthetics, empathy, or creating crisis in the classroom.

Two women’s studies scholars, Alexandra DeSiato and Elaine O’Quinn, maintain that presenting traumatic texts as merely “aesthetic artifacts” is problematic (10). “Teachers who

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<sup>22</sup> Cless and Goff explain trauma-related material as “films, readings, video clips, and guest speaker lectures which contain elements of traumatic experiences that may or may not trigger the students’ own personal experiences” (26).

choose not to consider the emotional issues brought forward by texts that portray disturbing topics are guilty of subordinating questions and concerns that may lie at the very core of a text for some students” (10). This practice too often “disempowers by privileging stories as aesthetic artifacts without moral meanings and fixed entities that cannot be questioned, rather than as vehicles of exploration meant to interrogate social codes and individual belief systems” (10). For example, one of the authors participated in a course which explored the novel *Lolita*; however, when one female student argued that Lolita was a victim of abuse “she was subjected to eye-rolling, head-shaking, and verbal assault from male students in the classroom who knew others that ‘acted like Lolita’” (10). Unfortunately, the professor of the course did nothing to intervene and referred to the class meeting as “one of the best classes of the semester,” ignoring the fact that “some women ...felt denied, shut down, confused and even shamed by their” reactions to the text (11). DeSiato and O’Quinn go on to say that “pedagogical strategies that frown on emotional response and expression devalue student input [and] allow men to dominate class discussions at the exclusion of women” (11). These strategies need to be “scrutinized if teachers truly want to allow women equal voice in the classroom” (11). It is likely that this lopsided classroom dynamic might also impact those with different racial experiences and other experiences of difference in which the group with more power might assume interpretations which deny the lived experience of those less powerful.

Another problem found by scholars is the inadequacy of focusing simply on empathy when teaching traumatic texts. Liora Gubkin, of California State Bakersfield, discusses her approach to teaching the college course “The Holocaust and Its Impact.” She observes that it is common for teachers to use the approach of “empathetic understanding” in teaching subjects relating to the Holocaust, but she finds that it is problematic. In “empathetic understanding” the

student is encouraged to “imagine [them]selves in the position of the other” (104). While this strategy can be valuable in many cases, when asking students to “engage with traumatic knowledge” it comes up short. She claims that the gap between traumatic experience and the ability of language to accurately portray that experience poses an “epistemological challenge that requires careful attention to how we represent trauma” (107). Further, there is such a gulf between the life of an average student and those who experienced the trauma of the Holocaust that it can end up “trivializing” the other (108). Gubkin cites an example in which a student compares her experience of having to drive her grandfather around to his doctor appointments with the experience expressed by Elie Wiesel in his book *Night*, where he expresses shame that he felt angry at having to care for his father because it lessened his own chances of survival. Gubkin emphasizes that while the student’s response is trivial, the assignment may have been asking too much of her: “The student was expected, for a grade, to make a leap of identification, and she drew on the closest experience she had at her disposal” (108).

Further, although she is a groundbreaking figure in trauma pedagogy, Shoshana Felman has been criticized by many for her recommendation that classes should be put “into crisis” to enhance the impact of studying traumatic events such as the Holocaust (56). Felman, a trauma theorist, discovered her pedagogical approach while teaching a graduate course titled “Literature and Testimony” in the 1990s. In the course of the class, the students viewed interviews with Holocaust survivors. Based on the reaction of students, Felman realized that students were “in crisis” (49). She describes their initial speechlessness after the screening of the survivors’ testimonies, followed by many of them talking to her outside of class. She invited the class to write about their experience as witnesses of the testimony they viewed (54-55). She then collected these papers, synthesized their ideas, and read them back to the class. She felt that this

allowed them to work through their speechlessness and for her to “recontextualize the crisis and to put it back into perspective” (56). Since then, she has argued that “teaching must testify, make something happen” (56). To aid this she believes the teacher’s role is to present “information that is dissonant,” which essentially puts the class into crisis, and then to use the subsequent events in the class as a means of working through that dissonance (56). Critics question her desire to put the class in crisis. Martin Modlinger, a German studies scholar at the University of Bremen, argues, “the teacher’s placing of herself in the role of therapist and the class in the role of victims is questionable and dangerous” (29). For one thing, it assumes the teacher knows students well enough to know what will put them in a place of crisis. Further, it assumes that the teacher is comfortable acting as a therapist for the class. Finally, it assumes that reading about a traumatic experience is the same as experiencing it, which makes light of the victim’s experience. Modlinger feels that “we are not to share their pain but to be outraged by it” (30).

While these articles catalogue pedagogical strategies that aren’t effective in teaching traumatic texts, others offer approaches that work. Multiple scholars emphasize the need for contextual information and using exploratory writing via “access points” to help students process traumatic texts (Jarvie and Burke 85). For example, Gubkin encourages an approach that she titles “engaged witnessing” (109). While Gubkin’s approach draws on students’ emotional reaction to the information, it does not require that they attempt to make connections between their personal experience and those of trauma victims, thus avoiding the trivialization of these traumatic events that we saw in the earlier example. This approach includes four proposed strategies. First, students study the historical context so that they can “be grounded in an understanding of the historical circumstances that made the Holocaust possible” (110). Second, students explore multiple subject positions. This means that students would be required to read

accounts not only of victims of the Holocaust but also of resistance fighters, rescuers, and those who were required to aid the Nazis in murder. This helps students with the problem of “over-identification” with one point of view by allowing them to explore “multiple representations” (Gubkin 110). Third, she suggests that teachers “make issues of representation an explicit subject of the course” (112). This means that students would explore representations of the Holocaust in writing, film, art, and theatre and then analyze how the different media “complicate how and what they know” (113). Finally, students will “incorporate emotions as a source of knowledge” (113). Students complete reflective journaling throughout the course, because “students need spaces to acknowledge the emotional impact of what they are learning” and further that journaling “opens up space to mourn, and, ultimately to engage as an ethical witness with the traumatic knowledge brought by the Holocaust” (Gubkin 113).

Like Gubkin, scholar Julie Rak also sees the importance of creating context for traumatic texts. She encourages this approach as a means of “creating a reading context for the text” and an “interpretive community” (66). She emphasizes that teachers should let context be made “by those who are witnesses to the trauma,” not the teacher (65). She discovered this approach when teaching a particularly disturbing account of incest and she encountered the same speechlessness in her students that Felman found after studying the Holocaust. When she encouraged students to find what Kafalenos terms the “paratext” of the work, it helped students break out of their silence. Paratext is everything other than the primary text for which “the author or one of his associates accepts responsibility” such as interviews, blogs, speeches, and so on (104). When students came back to class with these materials, they “were able to move from their initial discussion about what [other] reader reactions there had been to a discussion about their own reactions to the text, and how the text critiques societal attitudes towards incest” (67). The

emphasis on paratext can also help the students to focus on the writers of their texts as actual writers rather than simply as victims. Andrea Nicki, a scholar, creative writer, and survivor of childhood incest states that in sharing trauma narratives, teachers should make it clear that the authors of these texts are “first and foremost writers and not healers.” Although writing their accounts can be healing, Nicki insists, “the amount of healing experienced can be quite limited.” Further, when these authors are presented primarily as victims of trauma, their further work as authors is often discounted and seen as unimportant: “When incest narratives are seen primarily as recovery narratives, there is no need or interest to explore ‘just another incest recovery story.’” Another problem is that these works are seldom introduced in the same way as canonical books, such as *Lolita*. When we categorize these narratives as therapeutic or feminist, we miss the insights that they offer (Nicki).

Alexandra DeSiato and Elaine O’Quinn offer writing-to-learn activities that can offer useful ways to interact with trauma texts. First, they recommend pre-reading strategies such as contextualizing the work by looking for examples of similar situations in popular culture, art, or other media. Further, students can participate in “simple journaling to short essay writing about the times in their lives when they have felt a loss of power, were frightened by events out of their hands, felt unprotected, isolated, or alone” (13). While reading the text, they can write “found poetry on some of the especially difficult passages ...or write in the voice of one of the characters” during a “difficult” scene (14).

Many other scholars emphasize identifying key passages or places in the text to stop and allow students to process their learning. Scott Jarvie, of Michigan State and Kevin Burke, of University of Georgia, reason that encouraging students to read challenging texts in our courses is worthwhile (80). They then explore teaching Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* in pursuit of this

difficult knowledge. Students engage with the materials by exploring questions which the teacher has generated as “access points to difficult content” (85). They insist that teachers should avoid steering students toward a tidy interpretation of the text or the teacher’s own interpretation of the text, but rather encourage students to explore through discussion and writing. For example, a teacher might share a passage from the text and invite students to “write around” the passage, exploring the how’s and why’s of the passage (86). This approach pairs well with Emily R. Johnston’s proposal for trauma-informed pedagogy. When teaching Alan Duff’s *Once Were Warriors*, a novel featuring the problems existing in the Maori community in New Zealand, Johnston poses the question “What pedagogical approaches do both *Once Were Warriors* and trauma theory call for that may differ from those used in other literature classrooms?” Like Jarvie and Burke, she believes that these types of texts “call for pedagogical approaches that disrupt conventional modes of reading texts: they subvert the colonial impulse to discover and conquer, to lay claims to particular readings and to construct arguments about what texts mean” (Johnston n. pag.). This is not to say that students wouldn’t still need to support their interpretation of a text with textual evidence, but that they would not be forced toward a standardized interpretation of the text. Johnston emphasizes that one way to appropriately approach these texts is to “create units around pairs of contrastive literary themes and traumatic symptoms: forgetting and remembrance; terror and safety; disconnection and commonality; captivity and reconnection.” To explore these themes, students would focus on “modes of reading that encourage investigation rather than mastery of texts in which readers dwell on interstices between what gets narrated and what is left unsaid.” To do this, she asks students to share their learning through discussion and exploratory writing at what she terms “learning milestones.” She frames these milestones as specific questions: “What is the relationship

between inside and outside in *Once Were Warriors?*”; “What is the relationship between beginning and ending in *Once Were Warriors?*” ; “What are our responsibilities and rights, as global citizens and university members, in studying colonial trauma in literature?” It should be acknowledged that Johnston’s focus on colonial trauma could include unique qualities outside of the more general consideration of trauma, but her strategies are useful nonetheless.

Finally, Rachel N. Spear advocates the approach of “wounded healer pedagogy.” She shares the way she structured a literary themes class titled “Trauma and Healing.” The course dealt with traumatic topics including “abuse and incest” (53), yet she specifically chose texts that emphasized healing and recovery such as *The Katrina Papers: A Journal of Trauma and Recovery* and *My Father’s House: A Memoir of Incest and Healing*. In describing her course she reflects frequently on Rak and Felman’s approaches to teaching traumatic texts. While Spear agrees that students can undergo “transformation” when reading traumatic texts, Spear believes that the focus should be on “the links among teaching, writing, trauma, and healing” (59). In essence, she says that the very act of writing the narrative is an act of healing for the author, and as witnesses to this trauma, both the teacher and the students in the course are healed as well. Spear draws on Henri M. Nouwen’s view of “wounded healers,” arguing that “wounded healer pedagogy does not try to fix the wounds, to remove the trauma, or to answer all questions. Rather, it uses the pain and the wounds in healing contexts to foster change and ‘new vision’ (as Nouwen names it), one that may reflect upon self, others, and even society as a whole” (73). Spear remains rather vague about what this new vision might look like in practical terms. She does anticipate critiques of her approach, saying that a course such as this might “prompt disclosure” of students’ personal stories and thus “alter the purpose of the course” by becoming too personal or veering into what might feel like a group therapy session. She insists that as long

as the instructor stays focused on “stressing course objectives, making thematic connections, encouraging argumentative claims, and creating assignments that both moved discussions forward and were appropriate in context” then they could address these potential problems. While she feels students’ personal stories are entirely appropriate for class discussion, they are not specifically required (71). Spear’s concerns highlight one recurring issue in discussions of trauma and pedagogy: a fear that the class will veer into the realm of therapy. On the other hand, others fear that instructors are too dismissive of these emotional responses. One of Marian MacCurdy’s students commented in a journal, “Many times we seem to resist letting our discussions become personal, whether personal means our personal reactions to what we are reading or our personal situations that can be compared to those we are reading about” (156). MacCurdy, of Ithaca College, then cites Jane Tompkins’ argument that the “depersonalization of academic prose is confining, frustrating, and ultimately a lie, because it forces scholars to pretend that they do not have personal contexts that color their scholarship” (176).

In this review of suggested pedagogy for teaching traumatic texts, some instructors may question the emphasis on trauma. Many of the scholars who offer suggestions are teaching thematic literature courses that specifically focus on traumatic events, such as the Holocaust. For these courses, addressing trauma is an obvious necessity. However, for many other instructors, who may be teaching a general education literature course or a literature survey, this emphasis on trauma may seem to veer from or even interfere with the learning objectives of the course. What can an instructor do when they are not teaching a trauma-themed course but rather a literature course in which some texts happen to touch on traumatic themes? First, some instructors may need to broaden their sense of what their class is meant to accomplish. In 2001, shortly after the 9/11 attacks, the National Council of Teachers of English shared a “Resolution for Teaching in

Time of Crisis,” which included their belief that teachers should see “literature and writing instruction as a means for understanding loss, anger, war, and difference.” This resolution indicates that, as a whole, English educators encourage one another to acknowledge traumatic events and contexts. This does not override the basic objectives of most literature classes. For example, the three stated objectives of the introductory literature class for English majors at BYU-Idaho are stated as follows:

1. Students will develop the ability to analyze a literary text closely.
2. Students will develop the skill to read a literary text via a critical theory.
3. Students will arrive at and defend valid interpretations of literary texts.

(“English Course Outcomes”)

It seems that these objectives could easily be met while still allowing students to acknowledge and discuss emotional reactions to texts or to make accommodations if a text triggers a traumatic reaction. In the articles just considered, many student complaints arise from instructors’ dismissal of their responses to a text, or insistence on only seeing a text in an aesthetic light. An instructor can make room for these responses while still expecting students to do the academic work of close reading, critical analysis, and defending their interpretations with textual evidence. If a particular text is triggering for an individual student, an instructor can offer an alternate text without expecting less intellectual work from the student.

These ideas offer concrete ways that I can make my own literature courses more trauma-informed. I regularly teach Young Adult Literature which has a primary learning objective of exploring the history of young adult literature which, some would argue, requires an acknowledgment of trauma. Children’s literature scholar Eric Tribunella has explored the role of trauma in the field. Although he defines trauma simply as loss, he argues that it is a key

component of children's literature and is used as a means of helping children move towards adulthood. Further, he cites texts such as *The Yearling* and *Old Yeller* that seem to indicate "that there remains a sense that children need trauma, or that trauma is useful, as a means of promoting or achieving mature adulthood" (xxvii). He sees this same type of experience in *The Outsiders*: "The knowingness that characterizes young adulthood in Hinton's work involves the loss of idealism and an understanding of the world as fundamentally and systematically flawed" (xxxiv). S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders*, first published in 1967, centers around three orphaned brothers and their gang of friends. Having already experienced the loss of their parents, the boys experience the death of two of their friends and a member of another gang in the course of the novel. This novel is a good starting point for tracing the way trauma ties in with the evolution of young adult realism.

*The Outsiders* opened the door to telling difficult stories in American young adult literature. The genre of these stories came to be known by terms such as new realism or the problem novel. New realism typically addresses social issues that are often considered by some to be too dark or intense for young adult fiction. Key features of the problem novel include imperfect characters, often in settings which include dysfunctional homes, an atmosphere with serious overtones and often tragic conclusions, the use of native language, and a style which can include verse novels, alternating perspectives, non-traditional chapter breaks, or multi-genre texts (Cole 102). Clearly, traumatic themes are likely to arise in teaching these novels.

For example, I often teach Laurie Halse Anderson's novel *Speak*, published in 1999, in my Young Adult Literature class. One participant stated in a private conversation with me that, statistically speaking, it was likely that a number of students would have experienced some sort of sexual abuse and he wondered what my plan was for addressing that in the class.

Unfortunately, I didn't have a clear plan for that event other than warning students that the novel focused on a 9<sup>th</sup> grade girl's experience of date rape and that if they anticipated any trouble with the book, they were welcome to chat with me. While no students ever asked to speak with me, it is likely that some had experienced a similar trauma and yet were uncomfortable talking about the issue with a professor. Now I can see specific ways that I can structure the course and assignments to help all students process the story in a meaningful way.

First, I would seek to make the class a safe space in several ways. In the syllabus, I would include statements such as those advised by Kafer, Price, Cless, and Goff which invite students to converse with me if they feel that they have any traumatic symptoms which might "show up" in the class and offer recommendations on how to access the material in a safe way. While I often begin the course with *Speak*, teaching the novel later in the semester would allow the dynamics of the class to develop and their comfort with me as an instructor to increase, so that they are more likely to come to me with concerns or problems. In those situations, I could then refer students to student support services on campus, such as the counseling center. In the past, I have invited counselors from the counseling center to come to class to address topics that fall within their training and expertise as a means of understanding the texts more deeply. Next, I would allow students to create context for the book by completing their literature circle role sheets. My usual practice in the course is to break the class into groups of five called literature circles. With each new novel, students meet with their assigned groups, each having completed a specific role for the day's discussion. These roles include a discussion leader, researcher, passage finder, and theme finder. While I usually allow students to complete these roles with little coaching, for this text I could suggest specific materials which might be useful. For example, Anderson has many published interviews and speeches regarding the book *Speak* that can be

accessed online. Further, she recently published the book *Shout: The True Story of a Survivor Who Refused to Be Silenced*, a memoir in which she recounts her own experience with rape, but also her experiences as the author of *Speak* and the role of spokesperson about sexual violence in which it has cast her. In the introduction she states, “Finding my courage to speak up twenty-five years after I was raped, writing *Speak*, and talking with countless survivors of sexual violence made me who I am today. This book shows how that happened” (1). I could refer them to the poem she composed from readers’ letters titled, “Listen,” with the following lines:

You write to us  
from Houston, Brooklyn, Peoria,  
Rye, NY,  
LA, DC, Everyanywhere USA to  
my mailbox, My  
Space Face  
Book  
A livejournal of bffs whispering  
Onehundredthousand whispers to  
Melinda and  
Me.  
You:  
I was raped, too  
sexually assaulted in seventh  
grade,  
tenth grade, the summer after

graduation,  
at a party  
i was 16  
i was 14  
i was 5 and he did it for three  
years  
i loved him  
i didn't even know him.  
He was my best friend's brother,  
my grandfather, father, mommy's  
boyfriend,  
my date  
my cousin  
my coach  
i met him for the first time that  
night and —  
four guys took turns, and —  
i'm a boy and this happened to  
me, and —  
... I got pregnant I gave up my  
daughter for adoption ...  
did it happen to you, too?  
U 2?

All of these resources work as context and paratext for the novel (Kafalenos 104). Allowing students to discuss these in literature circles would do what Julie Rak recommends in letting them create their own context as “witnesses to the trauma” (65). Some students dealing with trauma might prefer to sit in on the discussion circle without actively participating in the discussion, which would be easy to accommodate.

Once students complete the literature circle, I would use Johnston’s strategy of “creat[ing] units around pairs of contrastive literary themes and traumatic symptoms: forgetting and remembrance; terror and safety; disconnection and commonality; captivity and reconnection.” For example, in Anderson’s novel, Melinda does not state what happened to her until one hundred pages into the book. In the first part of the book we see her losing friends, becoming more and more emotionally unstable, and feeling unable to express herself. We see the results of the rape before she finally shares what happened. In class we can talk about the relationship of forgetting and remembering and why it was so difficult to express what happened to her. Discussions could also explore the role of art in giving her a voice for the pain and anger she felt. Beyond class discussion, I will allow for both in-class journaling and homework assignments which allow them to explore “times in their lives when they have felt a loss of power, were frightened by events out of their hands, felt unprotected, isolated, or alone” (DeSiato and O’Quinn 13). If they are less comfortable discussing personal events, they can further explore difficult passages in the text through creative writing such as found poetry, or writing in the voice of one of the characters in the text (DeSiato and O’Quinn 13). Finally, they can reconvene with their literature circles and think about actions or applications they can see regarding the content of the book. This could mean a group project where they explore social

issues or problems on campus or in larger society such as the #metoo movement, perpetuation of rape culture, and the connection between campus life and sexual violence.

A final activity could involve seeking to “explore multiple subject positions” as Gubkin advocated in her engaged witnessing approach (110). Occasionally I have asked students to read the novel *Inexcusable*, by Chris Lynch, as a partner novel with *Speak*, of which Laurie Halse Anderson said, “The world needs this story.” This novel is told from the point of view of Keir Sarafian, a high-school student who commits date rape. The book is told in flashback as Keir justifies his actions and explains how he’s “a good guy” and that he’s not responsible for his actions. The book is disturbing, but allows students to explore the role of rape culture, a boys will be boys mentality, and rationalization in perpetuating sexual crimes. As *Booklist* comments, “His very familiarity, combined with his slippery morality, violent actions, and shocking self-denial, will prompt many readers to question themselves, and their own decisions and accepted ways of talking and behaving with each other.” If teachers use *Inexcusable*, they should be prepared for the possibility that some students might over-sympathize with Keir, being less familiar with unreliable narrators. In this case, the teacher might need to demonstrate some close readings of passages where Keir is clearly lying to the audience.

Many times reading texts such as *Speak* prompts students to share their own traumatic experiences via their writing. Further, in writing courses, students’ traumatic experiences do not just influence students’ readings of texts, as in literature courses, but in fact become the texts themselves in the form of personal narratives. In writing pedagogy, much of the research has focused on how to handle student personal narratives that recount traumatic events such as abuse. While such accounts can put instructors in the uncomfortable position of therapist, most agree that the wrong response is simply to focus on writing matters without acknowledging the

trauma the students have shared. Some suggest that the simplest solution is to remove personal narrative assignments from the course. In the next section, I summarize strategies for addressing traumatic content in student writing and suggest that a possible addition to a composition course could be exploring oral narratives of trauma, similar to those I have explored in my dissertation.

One aspect of trauma-informed teaching that concerns educators is how to best respond when students share traumatic events in their writing. Teaching the personal essay form is particularly liable to “elicit meaningful trauma narrative” (Liu 57). For example, Rossina Zamora Liu, of the University of Maryland, led a community writing workshop in a transitional shelter which allowed participants to workshop papers about life events, which often resulted in stories of abuse (58). MacCurdy states that “individuals who experience trauma tend to recall only certain moments of the traumatic event. ...these moments surface as generic, imagistic fragments that are disconnected from meaning. With each subsequent draft, writers who are able to tie the snapshots together are also likely to arrive closer to a full, evocative narrative” (Liu 62). Liu finds that these narratives are likely to emerge in “layers” of unrelated anecdotes which may eventually be connected and reveal not only the events but the “emotional impact” of the stories (63-64). These layers emerged through regular workshop sessions in which the participants shared their drafts with each other and the instructor, often working through up to nine drafts. Speaking of one participant, she states that “the literary crafting process has enabled him a point of entry to unpack his painful past without necessarily forefronting his identity as the receiver of abuse” (68). Although an instructor of a typical semester-long college course is not likely to have the opportunity to work with a student through this many drafts, it still indicates that when faced with a traumatic personal narrative, multiple drafts will likely be necessary.

Many teachers argue that the most ethical response when students share traumatic events is to acknowledge the trauma rather than to overlook it in favor of addressing writing concerns. Wendy Bishop, of Florida State University, argues that “it is not surprising that students open up in writing classes” since teachers often “aim to develop community feelings” (508). However, most instructors opt “to emphasize craft [rather] than to encourage [emotional] discovery through writing” (504). They use this focus on craft as a way to “downplay the affective states student writers negotiate when they begin to explore and express themselves” (505). Instructor Dan Morgan expresses that when he reads a particularly troubling and traumatic narrative from a student he feels “a moral obligation” to respond to the content of the paper because “there [is] more at stake than fulfilling an assignment or earning a grade” (322). He advocates some ways to avoid these ethical dilemmas by stressing that students consider audience and purpose when selecting topics, that they get all topics approved prior to writing about them, or, as some have done, simply eliminate the personal narrative assignment (Morgan). Marilyn Valentino, former chair of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, states, “[t]he intimate nature of writing, itself, serves as both a stimulus and a catharsis for past experiences. When those feelings are expressed, the teacher cannot avoid or dismiss them. To do so would be negligent on our parts” (4). She advises acknowledging the pain, referring the student to campus resources, and asking the students what they would like us to do as teachers (7). She also reminds that referring students to campus resources may not immediately address the problem, since many resources are backed up and have a long wait list (11). As far as responding to the paper, she recommends “reflective statements rather than directive language” such as “I can hear your frustration. Is there someone you can talk to about this?” (12).

As an alternative to the traditional personal narrative assignment, which can take instructors into ethical areas that they may be uncomfortable with, instructors could explore narrative in a slightly different way. The prompt for this assignment could reflect that which William Labov uses in his narrative research: simply, “Were you ever in a situation where you thought you were in serious danger of being killed?” (Labov 1). It could also simply be a prompt to tell the story of a significant personal event. Since freshman composition students are typically young and inexperienced and may not feel that their life has ever been in danger, instructors could also offer the option to interview a family member or close friend. Students would then record an oral telling of the story, which they would later transcribe for analysis purposes. Once students had the story recorded, teachers could help them identify the different narrative elements that Labov discusses: abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution, and coda. After identifying elements in the story, students can begin to look for evidence of Foley’s Words in their stories, including analysis of how those Words mean in their native community and culture. The benefits of this assignment are many. First, students are gaining understanding of narrative structure in a way they typically do not in freshman composition. Second, while the assignment may deal with a traumatic personal event, since the parameters of the assignment are quite narrow, it is less likely to delve into intensely personal events for the individual student. Third, it can allow students the distance from traumatic events that enables them to analyze and see the motivation and cultural beliefs behind the way we tell stories and how we seek to position and present ourselves within stories. Finally, it can allow them to articulate aspects of the speech community that they may have only been subconsciously aware of prior to this event. While this assignment is not typical of a freshman writing course, it

broadens the focus of the course into both written and oral narrative which is in keeping with the multi-modality within which students live.

Beyond writing courses, as a teacher of English Education courses, I will certainly share the strategies explored in this chapter as effective ways for future teachers to approach reading and writing in a trauma-sensitive matter. Further, I must acknowledge the movement toward “trauma-sensitive” schools in public education at the school and district level. A move toward trauma-sensitive schools has been sponsored and nurtured by research at universities such as the University of Chicago and Harvard Law School (Cole et al.). The Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative, a partnership between Massachusetts Advocates for Children and Harvard Law School, began defining a “trauma sensitive” approach as early as 2005. They describe this type of teaching as being based on the belief that trauma is prevalent, that it impacts learning, and that we can create environments to counteract trauma in our schools and that we need to pursue this movement as a whole school effort, as well as pursue it as an aspect of larger-scale educational reform (Gregory). For example, traditional uses of suspension and expulsion increase the likelihood of a student not graduating and ending up in the juvenile justice system (Keels et al. 4). A psychologically aware approach to discipline will recognize that student misbehavior is often prompted by trauma, so rather than simply addressing the misbehavior, schools should address the trauma. Education scholar George Bear states that recent educational reform has “recognized the importance of supporting students in developing their self-regulation skills” through “school and classroom culture” (Keels et al. 5). More specifically, trauma-sensitive schools are those in which faculty and staff have a clear understanding of trauma, create a safe environment for students, and think of the students’ needs in a holistic way that is implemented through a team-based approach rather than leaving the primary responsibility with an individual

teacher (Keels et al. 26). Additionally, the Trauma Responsive Education Practices Project at the University of Chicago clarifies that often urban educators who teach “historically marginalized populations” respond to trauma-based negative student behavior with “punitive and exclusionary discipline” which often leads to a future in the juvenile justice system (Keels 1). Traditionally, schools have expected students to arrive in the school system with “strong self-regulation skills,” but due to trauma, many of the most vulnerable students will act out in ways that lead to “punitive” discipline (Keels 9). This means, “traumatized children are at risk of being routed, through the American education system, into an intergenerational cycle of continued poverty, violence, victimization, which perpetuates trauma into the next generation” (Keels 9).

Most articles regarding trauma in public education begin with statistics that prove the prevalence of trauma in this demographic. Journalist Aisha Sultan shares, “if a hypothetical classroom of 30 children was based on current demographics in the United States, this is how the students in that classroom would live: Seven would live in poverty; 11 would be non-white; six wouldn’t speak English as a first language; six wouldn’t be reared by their biological parents, and six would be victims of abuse.” This complexity often results in what is termed “adverse childhood experiences” [ACE] (Keels). Additionally, a National Survey on Children’s Health stated that “nearly 47 percent of all children in the United States have experienced at least one ...ACE, such as abuse or neglect, the death of a parent, or witnessing community violence in school or in the neighborhood. Nearly 22 percent of all children have two or more ACEs” (Price and Ellis). This trauma then “impacts a child’s brain and cognitive processes, making critical thinking and problem solving more difficult and emotional outbursts more likely” (Keels). In the article “Brains in Pain Cannot Learn” Lori Desautels states simply “the thinking lobes in the prefrontal cortex shut down when a brain is in pain.” Making teachers aware of this allows them

to better understand behaviors exhibited in the classroom. This allows them to “reframe” negative behaviors and “respond to the core issue rather than the issue itself” (Venet, “Helping Students Who Have Experienced Trauma”). For example, one teacher insists ““hypervigilance can masquerade as hyperactivity”” and ““fear can look like aggression”” (Venet, “The How and Why of Trauma-Informed Teaching”). As a victim of trauma and a successful student, Danni Bostick argues, “For much of the year, students spend more waking hours at school than they do at home. School can be a nurturing, positive, environment where students feel safe” (Bostick).

Fall-Hamilton Elementary in Nashville, Tennessee is an example of a trauma-informed school. Principal Mathew Portell claims that “this transformation is more about adults than it is kids. It’s about giving teachers the understanding and support to be able to meet the needs of the kids on a basic level” (“A Glimpse Inside the Transition to Trauma-Informed Practice”). Other elements of their school include a “trauma-informed practitioner trained in mental health” who helps train and assist teachers and student. This mental health training is combined with leadership curriculum and “revamped” classrooms “with an eye to creating a calming, pleasant atmosphere for learning” (“A Glimpse”). Each class has a “Peace Corner” where they can “have the time and space to calm down and practice the type of reflection required to build self-regulation skills” (“A Glimpse”). Another element is a daily “check-in/check-out system” where a student talks individually with an adult about their goals for the day and how it went (“A Glimpse”). Are these programs effective? One school in Portland, Oregon that moved toward trauma-informed approaches measured a “7 percent reduction in suspensions and a 7 percent increase in attendance for K-8 students across the board” (Price and Ellis).

With these developments in mind, I will introduce my education students to the terminology and the qualities of trauma-sensitive schools. Depending on where the students

decide to teach, this may actually be a large factor in dealing effectively with their student population. Further, they can demonstrate their understanding of this issue in two ways. As students apply for student teaching, they write an introduction letter that addresses their teaching philosophy. In my methods course, I ask them to write a draft of this letter as well as a Disclosure Document, which is typically required by schools as a document shared with the parents on the first day of the school year or semester. This document is shared with students and parents and they are often required to sign it to acknowledge that they understand the teacher's philosophy and requirements. As a professor, I can assess these documents for evidence that future teachers are envisioning their classroom in a way that aligns with current trauma-sensitive research. For example, are students' discipline policies in line with trauma research or are they more traditionally punitive? This is an opportunity for me to coach students into a more trauma-informed philosophy. Additionally, I can invite panels of principals, superintendents, and school psychologists and counselors to the class to explain further how they address these issues with students and what they expect from future teachers in working as a team to address student needs.

In conclusion, the time is ripe for a focus on trauma pedagogy. Scholars and teachers in the humanities are uniquely placed to model sound practices since the texts and issues we address in our classes often contain the "elements of traumatic experiences that may or may not trigger the students' own personal experiences" (Cless and Goff 26). To do this, we can draw on early pioneers in this area who began teaching Holocaust texts as well as research into current student needs and political trends. In this chapter, I've sought to synthesize distinct strategies which can inform humanities classrooms in a way that will help students become "engaged witness[es]" in the traumatic world in which they live (Gubkin 109).

## Chapter VI: Conclusion

Current critiques of the field of trauma studies argue that trauma scholars need to “nuance ... notions of trauma by revealing their cultural and historical specificity” (Rothberg xii). This project offers such nuance by demonstrating a methodology that includes close narrative analysis in addition to identifying the cultural and historical meaning embedded in narratives. My application of this theory demonstrates the following: the usefulness of Foley’s theory and Labov and Waletzky’s theory in broadening our understanding of trauma narratives, the importance of close analysis of *vernacular* trauma narratives, the impact of the United States’ history of reclaiming the West on a particular traumatic event, and the way cultural history affects the way trauma survivors process an event.

First, Foley’s theory of Immanent Art broadens our understanding of trauma narratives. To date, Cathy Caruth’s theories of trauma have dominated the field of trauma studies. Caruth seems most interested in examining narratives in which the traumatized person is in some way stuck or trapped within silence or a recurring experience of the trauma. While this is an important area of focus, there is much to be learned from a larger analysis of the way a trauma has influenced an entire community. Collections of first-person accounts of traumatic events demonstrate that many trauma survivors are able to speak of their experiences and that these stories follow a particular pattern. In his theory of Immanent Art, Foley examines the repetition of meaningful words, phrases, scenes, and themes in oral epic. Foley’s theory is useful for trauma narratives because they too seem to feature repeated words, phrases, and scenes. The story-pattern found in the Teton Dam narratives falls within William Labov and Joshua Waltezky’s narrative framework. The accounts of where the speakers were when they received warning of the dam breaking fall within the orientation phase. Their attempts to escape and find

safe ground falls within the complication stage, and their return home is the result. Finally, their views on the impact of the flood, including their view of it as a positive or negative experience, their view of who was to blame, and the future of their personal lives and the lives of those in the community, match Labov's evaluation stage. The resulting pattern can be expressed as the story pattern of warning, escape, return, and evaluation. Comparing this pattern with other accounts of flood disasters such as Kai Erikson's evaluation of the Buffalo Creek flood suggest that this same pattern will be found in other traumatic narratives, or more specifically, disaster narratives. These findings can be applied in further research of narratives of events such Hurricane Katrina and other disasters. These findings will then offer a counterpoint to Caruthian views of trauma and broaden understanding of trauma narrative.

Second, empirical analysis of vernacular accounts of traumatic experience offer authentic accounts of traumatic experience. As trauma scholars move beyond the study of Holocaust and modernist texts, I suggest that they also need to broaden their examination of texts to include vernacular narratives. For example, Lyndsey Stonebridge explores the trauma of refugees yet her analysis is still focused on texts such as poetry produced by refugees and published memoirs written by refugees. This suggests that the experience of those who have experienced trauma is only worth exploring through creative texts or published memoirs. This is problematic because in comparing the different register and performance arena found in oral and written accounts of trauma I found that narrators were more likely to include descriptive language and analysis of the story in the written accounts influenced by audience and perceived purpose of the account. In contrast, there seemed to be an attempt to be somewhat objective and factual in the oral accounts. This relative objectivity combined with examining an entire collection of vernacular narratives allows innate characteristics of trauma, history, and culture to gradually reveal themselves. For

example, in the Teton Dam collection, when the survivors describe returning to their property to observe the damage, they usually slip into second person to describe what they saw. While most survivors were never physically in danger from the flood waters, returning to their property in the days afterward was when reality hit, marking a switch to second-person narrative for several sentences, suggesting that for many this was the most traumatic moment of the experience. This is a nuanced characteristic of trauma narrative that might not reveal itself in the approaches currently used.

The implication of this finding is that scholars from fields of orality should enter the dialogue of trauma studies. While some folklore scholars have examined narratives from events such as Hurricane Katrina, there are a multitude of areas for research as traumatic events abound and technology makes the collection of oral histories relatively simple. While literature scholars are unlikely to abandon literary texts of trauma, as more scholars from the fields of orality offer insight, scholars in other fields are more likely to integrate their findings into the overall body of trauma research. Indeed, in one of Caruth's early anthologies of trauma studies, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, she includes an essay by Kai Erikson, "Notes on Trauma and Community," in which he shares insights gained from researching the Buffalo Creek Flood. Further, she argues that "a variety of disciplines can contribute to the ongoing work on trauma" and that this multi-disciplinarity is a "necessity" which will open "new opportunities for change" ("Preface" ix). I argue that fields of orality can play a vital role in expanding our understanding of trauma.

Third, my study illustrates the impact of historical patterns on a specific traumatic event. More specifically, The United States' history of reclaiming the West through water projects illustrates a type of "slow violence" through environmental damage that led to the Teton Dam

disaster (Rotheberg xv). The fact that many of the flood survivors felt that the Teton Dam should be immediately rebuilt after the disaster revealed deeply held beliefs about the necessity of dams. While no one would deny that water is essential to survival in the West, many question whether dams are the best way of providing the necessary water or if intense agriculture is best suited to the region. My review of dam building in the West reveals that in many cases water policies were created by greed or political ambition rather than sound science and analysis. Further, many of the survivors connected culturally with the landscape as descendants of Mormon pioneers who first settled and farmed the area. In this cultural history, the Snake River Valley and the West in general were believed to be handpicked by God as a safe place to settle and practice their religion and that irrigation was a God-revealed way to flourish in the West. By the 1970s, there was also a strong belief in capitalism as an economic system, which guided farmers' agricultural approaches and practices. This history of politics and ideology influenced the way inhabitants interacted with the land. The impact of land and geography further manifests itself in the narratives through motifs specific to different locations, such as people in Salem and Burton being more likely to reference their pioneer ancestors. These slight nuances in story and theme align with the stories of others within the same geographical area and confirm the idea that "[t]he physical environment offers the opportunity to examine both the personal and cultural histories imbedded in landscapes that define the character's identity and the meaning of the traumatic experience" (Balaev 38). These findings are useful to others studying environmental issues in the West, but also suggest that disaster narratives are likely to be shaped by geography and the history of a specific location. This can offer direction as scholars frame their analysis of future disasters.

Finally, cultural history will manifest itself in the way trauma survivors interpret an event. A unique attribute of the Teton Dam Flood narratives is the high concentration of LDS people hit by the flood. While their narratives follow the scenes typical of other trauma narratives, they include unique references to church culture and belief. The fact that these Words recur in a majority of the accounts indicates their significance to the flood survivors, offering insight into the community and its reliance on LDS shared values in coping with the flood. In this way, using Foley's immanent art theory catches nuances of culture and delves into their meaning, offering a richer understanding of the event's meaning. The Words in the narratives unique to the LDS culture were "the Church," "the Prophet," "genealogy," "welfare," and "food storage." Perhaps the reason for the concentration of these Words relates to the findings of Peres et al. that spirituality offers "cornerstones in reframing perception" in stressful situations (346). These specific Words may have been key in the way survivors reframed their perception. For example, the frequent mentions of the Church not only reflect its dominance in the area, but also survivors' belief that the Church would respond proactively to the dilemma. This explains the disappointment found in many of the Wilford narratives, where church members felt that the Church did not meet the expectations they had for support. Further, survivors frequently cited President Kimball's remarks at his visit in which he indicated that they had done nothing wrong to deserve this disaster, as if they were waiting for someone in authority to reassure them of their innocence. The keen interest in the preservation or loss of the genealogical records reflects the immediate concern for family that almost all disasters trigger in victims. LDS beliefs in the afterlife and the eternal nature of family units tie directly to genealogical records. Finally, the emphasis on welfare and food storage reflects a belief that the church as an organization will not just see to their spiritual needs but will also help them meet physical needs when necessary. As

Smith et al. find, as victims were “confronted with their vulnerability” they clung to the organization and teachings of the LDS church as a means of reestablishing their lives and self-concept. Again, this demonstrates that Foley’s theory allows cultural Words to reveal themselves through empirical review of narratives. My findings are of interest to scholars of Mormon history as well as offering a model for identifying and analyzing cultural references when reviewing other collections of trauma narratives.

With this project, I have demonstrated a methodology that can be used in trauma studies when researching the impact of community traumatic events, such as disasters. This allows researchers to empirically assess common characteristics of trauma and to analyze the culture and tradition of the community affected by the traumatic event. This will allow for a nuanced, careful reading of the event which can add a richness to trauma studies which has been lacking. As trauma studies seeks to expand its research trajectory into more politically significant events, this methodology will be a valuable tool for scholars. My findings can be built on in several ways. The Teton Dam collection itself bears further analysis. Exploration into the dynamics between interviewer and narrator could be carried out by cataloguing in greater detail different types of exchanges between interviewer and narrator in the oral histories, adding to scholarship on the degree to which interviewers co-author oral narratives. Next, since much of trauma theory explores the relationship between trauma and memory, scholars could conduct interviews with these same survivors and compare differences in their present and past narratives that are likely influenced by time, repetition, and public memory. Further, an anthology featuring different studies of disaster narratives, such as this, would define these types of narratives as a subset of trauma narrative. Another direction for research is to further explore the relationship between trauma and pedagogy as the field of humanities acknowledges the trauma in many classic texts

and finds ways of negotiating this potential tension in the classroom. On a structural scale, schools that seek to be trauma-sensitive in their structure and procedures continue to find ways to better address trauma in students. Indeed, trauma studies will continue to grow in new directions if the field does not confine itself within old frameworks that unduly narrow its focus.

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