

*Did Hugh Nibley really tether a goat to his front lawn so he wouldn't have to mow it?
Did Hugh and his friend scribble Book of Mormon passages in Egyptian in one of Utah's
red rock canyons? Would he walk home from work, forgetting he had driven that day?
What truths lurk behind these and other stories?*

TRUTH IS STRANGER THAN FOLKLORE: HUGH NIBLEY—THE MAN AND THE LEGEND

By Boyd Petersen

ONCE, SATAN APPEARED TO HUGH NIBLEY, announcing that he and his forces were about to close down the temple in Manti, Utah, and that there was nothing Hugh could do about it. Hugh responded that indeed he would do something, and so, teaming up with the Three Nephites, he went to the doors of the Manti Temple and holding back the forces of evil, allowed the temple to operate undisturbed.¹

This story is obviously not true. While I've heard speculation that Hugh Nibley himself is one of the Three Nephites (how else could someone know so much?) and have been unable to determine that claim's truthfulness, I know this story of Hugh's thwarting Satan is false. It was transferred to the body of Hugh Nibley lore from an experience attributed to Apostle Marriner Merrill, first president of the Logan Temple (serving from 1884–1906). According to Apostle Rudger Clawson, Elder Merrill noticed a group of strangers arrive at the temple, some walking and some on horseback. One man came forward, and Apostle Merrill asked him who he was and what he wanted. The person replied that he was Satan and then demanded that Merrill shut down the temple for he did not like what was going on there. Merrill commanded him to leave. Satan reluctantly obeyed but promised that he and his followers would whisper into everyone's ear "persuading them not to come to the temple." Logan Temple attendance did fall off dramatically for a long time afterward.² I suspect Clawson's tale about the temple president's encounter with Satan has entered the Nibley folklore cycle because of Hugh's status as one of the Church's preeminent explicators of temple rituals.



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"HOTTER THAN A FIRECRACKER"

*Preaching repentance to a cleaver-wielding woman
and calling down fire from heaven*

HUGH NIBLEY HAS achieved within the Mormon community the distinguished status of folk legend while still alive. Latter-day Saints, especially those who have attended BYU, love telling stories about Hugh.³ These narratives are shaped during the telling to accommodate the needs of the audience, and the fact that Hugh Nibley stories are told and the ways they are told really say more about our religious community than they do about the man himself.

Folklore is shaped, as Richard Dorson has argued, in two significant ways: "by variant tellings of a more or less verifiable incident, and by absorption of wandering tales that get attached to likely figures."⁴ And although many of the stories surrounding Hugh Winder Nibley, like the story of his defending the temple from Satan and his minions, are patently false, I have discovered that the origins of the "borrowed" narratives are much slipperier than I had assumed. For, as his biographer, I've had the unique opportunity to compare the legendary Nibley with the documented one and have found it not always easy to disentangle the embroidery from the core biographical facts. Often, I have discovered factual, historical elements behind these borrowed tales—something I hadn't expected. And this discovery has made me cautious about concluding a story is false simply because it is also told about another individual.

For example, one popular story is that while Hugh was serving a mission in Germany, his mission president instructed him to preach to the people that they must repent or be destroyed by fire. The story crescendos with a knowing nod to the fact that many German cities were destroyed by fire during World War II bombings.⁵

This is a great story. However, it is a story immediately recognizable as fitting within a popular folktale motif about Mormon missionaries in general. In his classic study of mis-

sonary folklore, William A. Wilson points out that many missions contain stories of how elders, after being mistreated and mocked by the people of a particular village, are “forced to bring the Lord in to fight the battle for them” by shaking the dust from their feet and pronouncing a curse on the townsfolk. The Lord validates these missionaries’ actions by destroying the city. Wilson offers numerous examples: “Towns are destroyed in South America by wind, in Chile by floods, in Costa Rica by a volcano, in Mexico by an earthquake, in Japan by a tidal wave, in Taiwan and Sweden by fire. In South Africa, a town’s mining industry fails, in Colorado a town’s land becomes infertile, and in Germany a town’s fishing industry folds.” Wilson also notes that in Norway, a city is destroyed by German shelling during World War II.⁶

So what are the facts? Hugh did serve his mission in Germany, and he did return to Germany after World War II. But the resemblance between Wilson’s unrepentant Norwegian city and Hugh’s German cities, both destroyed by military activities, would seem to make the Nibley story a classic fit within the larger body of missionary lore. However, just as I was about to cross this tale off my list of authentic Nibley stories, I discovered the following in Hugh’s missionary journal: “Tracting in Bruchsal. These people really have had a chance. These many testy attempts to dismiss the subject entirely are plainly the workings of a guilty conscience.”⁷ I then I found a letter written by Hugh to his friend, Paul Springer, immediately following World War II:

Having visited all the scenes of my missionary labors by jeep, and beheld the painfully literal justifications of the warning word to these foolish people 17 years ago, I speak with confidence of calamities to come. Everything has turned out exactly as I had imagined, so there is no reason to suppose that it won’t continue to do so.⁸

My assumption that I could always easily tell the difference between Hugh Nibley fact and folklore was shattered once and for all when I interviewed him in 1997, and he described himself as a very fiery missionary: “I was hotter than a firecracker in those days; I was preaching destruction and fire from heaven.”⁹ Apparently, as part of the blessing as Hugh received when he was set apart for his mission, Apostle Melvin J. Ballard admonished Hugh to warn the German people that unless they repent, “they will be destroyed by fire from heaven” as prophesied in the scriptures (e.g., D&C 63:34).¹⁰

Hey, did you hear the one about how when Hugh was a missionary he preached to the German people that they must repent or be destroyed by fire, and then, when they didn’t, the same cities were destroyed during World War II bombings?



*Master Sgt. Hugh Nibley, 1946
Heidelberg, Germany*

he had later discovered that her house had been destroyed by fire “from heaven” during the war. Rather than being a simple borrowing, as I first thought, the factual story has now been recast using the framework of the more common missionary folktale.

THE MARRIAGE OF HUGO

*Apostles, notecards, the Provo love-mart, and
a most delectable love in Phyllis*

THIS SAME SORT of blending of the factual and the mythic is easily seen in variants on the Hugh Nibley courtship story. The tale has many versions, but the truth is every bit as amazing as the folklore. Following his military service, Hugh got a job at the *Improvement Era*. There, he came to know Elder John A. Widtsoe, who encouraged him to teach at Brigham Young University. In May 1946, Hugh took the apostle’s advice and accepted a position as assistant professor of history and religion at BYU. Still, even as they encouraged him to come, Widtsoe and BYU administrators expressed some concern that Hugh was a thirty-six-year-old bachelor—a certified menace to society. Widtsoe, in particular, pressed Hugh to find a wife. Hugh described his encounter with Widtsoe as “the rising admonition of the brethren that I get me espoused.”¹¹ Hugh told Elder Widtsoe to work it out with the Lord and “I will marry the first girl I meet at BYU.”¹²

And, according to Hugh, on one occasion during his mission, he stopped at a butcher shop and spoke with the butcher’s wife. When he prophesied of fiery destruction to come, the woman got so angry that she chased Hugh away with a meat cleaver. In 1946, at the conclusion of the war, Hugh drove through this same town and came upon a door frame standing alone, the only portion of the house to survive the firebombs. He realized that it was the very butcher shop where the cleaver-wielding woman had chased him out.

Granted, important differences between the historical event and the folklore version remain. There is no evidence, for instance, that Hugh actually cursed any city or house during his mission, nor did he invoke “the Lord to fight his battle for him.” Nevertheless, the truth behind the lore is not too far removed: Hugh had been instructed by an apostle to warn the people of the wrath to come; he did so in the language of the scriptures (probably more zealously than the average missionary); he had been, in fact, threatened by the butcher’s wife; and

On 25 May 1946, one of his first days on campus, Hugh walked into the housing office, and the almost-twenty-year-old receptionist, Phyllis Draper was the first woman he met there. On the basis of that encounter, Hugh decided to marry her. As Phyllis later told the story, he “kept coming into the office every few days to ask for 3x5 notecards. And he wouldn’t take very many, just a few, which would get him through the next couple of days, and then he’d come and ask for another one.”¹³

In a letter written about 5 August, two weeks before he proposed, Hugh announced to his best friend his intentions to marry Phyllis:

Meantime all that the smartest pomades and the most lavish applications of Shinola can do to redeem the defects of nature [are] being thrown into the balance against the blandishments of youth, wealth and collegiate glamor to put the belated Hugo on a footing with some of the less dashing also-rans in the celebrated Provo love-mart. Wish me well, sweetling, and when we meet again, who knows . . .?¹⁴

Their first date was to a picnic Hugh’s cousin had invited him to. Thereafter, they took long walks, ate dinner together in the cafeteria, and had deep discussions. On 18 August, Hugh asked Phyllis, whom he later described to his mother as “delectable and ever-sensible,”¹⁵ to marry him.¹⁶ They were married four weeks later on 18 September 1946. About their whirlwind courtship, Hugh quips, “That’s why it’s called BYWoo, I guess.”¹⁷

Most folk versions of Hugh Nibley’s courtship are fairly faithful to the truth—except for exaggerating the speed of the courtship—and emphasize that Hugh made his marriage a matter of obedience to apostolic instruction rather than following more conventional feelings of romance. Two of the variants, however, show direct borrowing from other sources.

Here’s another one: Did you know that when Hugh was thirty-six and still unmarried, he told Elder Widtsoe to “work it out with the Lord, and I will marry the first girl I meet at BYU”?



*Hugh and Phyllis Nibley with their first child, Paul.
Inset: The “delectable and ever-sensible” Phyllis.*

In one, Hugh reportedly fasted for three days and then walked up Provo’s Rock Canyon where he patiently waited. Soon the woman whom the Lord intended for Hugh walked up the canyon.¹⁸ This narrative borrows heavily from Old Testament narratives in which a patriarch ascends a mountain to meet with God and obtain divine direction, and others in which a chosen prophet meets the woman who has been divinely selected for him, usually by a well. In a second version, “an angel came to him and told him to marry or he would cut off his head.”¹⁹ This story is an obvious borrowing from Joseph Smith’s report that he entered polygamy only after an angel with a drawn sword threatened him if he continued to delay.²⁰ In short, these storytellers are taking the essential elements of the true Hugh Nibley courtship story—admittedly already unconventional—and combining them with elements from other sources, with the purpose of highlighting and accentuating the ideals of obedience to divine command.

VARIATIONS ON A THEME

Nephi’s visit to Southern Utah, a safe landing, absent-mindedness, and what about that goat?

IN OTHER NIBLEY tales, the facts remain quite similar to the folklore. One story relates how Hugh took his colleague and former Egyptian teacher Klaus Baer hiking in Utah’s red rock country. At one point, they stopped and into the sandstone carved Egyptian characters that read, “Plate #1—I, Nephi, having been born of goodly parents. . . .”²¹ Although this story sounds wildly apocryphal, Hugh himself confirms that the story is largely true in a letter of condolence to Baer’s widow soon after Klaus’s death:

Once as we hiked through the depths of Chimney Rock Canyon, he would stop from time to time to scratch into the red walls such Egyptian graffiti as are

found left by travellers and pilgrims at Egyptian tombs or shrines, e.g., "NN visited this place and he found it to be like heaven."²²

The main difference between the folktale and the fact is that Baer did not carve a Mormon text on the stone.²³

In other folktales, the relationship between truth and folklore is quite difficult to untangle. A story that baffles me is the tale about Hugh's parachuting behind enemy lines during World War II:

During World War II at some point, Hugh Nibley was to parachute into Greece for some reason, you know, along with his [Military Intelligence] responsibilities or whatever. And as he was parachuting into Greece, he realized that there were people on the ground who could see him and could shoot at him and who were—at least, it appeared that they were—assuming that he was a bad guy instead of a good guy. He didn't know how to indicate to them that he was a good guy instead of a bad guy since he didn't speak any modern Greek. So what he did—at least this is the way the story goes—was that the only Greek he knew was ancient Greek and it was the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*. And so, to convince them that he was a good guy, he started shouting out, as loud as he could in ancient Greek, either the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey* to convince them that he was a good guy and not a bad guy. And they subsequently did not shoot at him and he was able to land successfully and carry out his mission.²⁴

While this story is significantly false—Hugh never parachuted into Greece during World War II—one element is accurate. Hugh *did* visit Greece after his mission, between November 1929 and early 1930, and was delighted that because of his skill in classical Greek, he could communicate effectively with at least some Greeks. While not nearly as exciting as the folktale, this episode does seem to be the basis for the World War II story. However, I don't know of a story involving another person from which the basic World War II setting and extensions might have been borrowed.

Even more difficult is separating fact from fiction in the many absent-minded professor stories told about Hugh. Richard Dorson has correctly pointed out that "every college and university in the land possesses some odd faculty member whose behavior makes legends."²⁵ Tales of such professors have been circulating for a long time. A story from ancient Greece tells of the presocratic philosopher Thales, who, as he was "gazing upwards while doing astronomy, fell into a well." According to tradition, many made fun of him "since he was eager to know the things in the heavens but failed to notice what was in front of him and right next to his feet."²⁶ Well, Hugh Nibley has been appointed as the Thales of BYU. He is the quintessential absent-minded professor—knowing volumes of esoterica but not being able to remember the mundane, like where he parked the car.²⁷

It is quite easy to find Hugh Nibley stories that are told about absent-minded or eccentric professors at other univer-

sities. In his essay "The Folklore of Academe," Barre Toelken relates a number of these tales, some of which have been attributed to Hugh Nibley. In one, the professor "concluded a mid-campus conversation with a student by asking, 'Which way was I going when we stopped?' and on being told, answered, 'Oh, then I *have* eaten lunch.'"²⁸ In another, the professor writes notes on the board with one hand and erases them with the other. (In the Nibley version, he uses his shirt or suit sleeve to erase the board.)²⁹

That these stories so easily stick to the Hugh Nibley legend is a testament not only to Hugh's absent-mindedness (which is absolutely true) but also to his amazing breadth of knowledge, which he sometimes assumes everyone shares. In one story, a student approaches Hugh after a lecture to ask a question. Hugh recommends a book to him and sends him off to the library. But the book is not in the library, so the student sends for it through inter-library loan. When the book arrives, the student discovers that it is in German and has not been translated. Back he goes to Hugh and tells him that he got the book "but I don't understand it; it's in German." Hugh replies, "So what? It's a small book."³⁰ In another tale, Hugh supposedly forgets what language to lecture in and without realizing it starts going off in a dead language.³¹

Another absent-mindedness story describes a time Hugh took one of his children, a baby at the time, to the grocery store. He pushed the baby around the store, went through the check stand, and loaded the groceries into the car. When he got home with the groceries he realized he had left the baby at the store.³² Phyllis assures me that Hugh never left a baby at the store, but once when the whole family went shopping, they accidentally left one of their eight children—much older than a baby—and didn't realize it until after they had returned home.

Many of the absent-minded professor stories have certainly been borrowed from the larger tradition of academic folklore. However, several contain a factual basis. Hugh *has* actually been caught wearing mismatched shoes or socks. And he *has*, in fact, walked home on numerous occasions when he had actually driven to the campus that day. Other stories are impossible to confirm but are plausibly consistent with Hugh's personality.

Hugh himself is not certain about some of these stories. According to one tale about his mission, a small congregation in Germany took up a collection to buy a new coat for one of the elders. Believing that, since the elder needed a new coat, he probably could also use a new pair of shoes, Hugh chipped in generously, only to discover later that *he* was the needy missionary.³³ This story seems probable. Hugh's first concern in dress has always been practicality, not fashion. He buys most of his clothes at thrift stores and has frequently worn jogging shoes with standard J.C. Penney (circa 1945) suits. However, when I asked Hugh about this particular story, he couldn't say whether it happened or not. "It could be true," he admitted. "It was a long time ago, and that sort of thing happened."³⁴

Perhaps Hugh has ulterior motives behind his dress. One story relates how one of his colleagues was walking across

campus one day with Hugh “in his mismatched socks and his old sport coat and his crumpled hat, and he looked at me with this sly grin and said, ‘They’ll never make me department chairman!’”³⁵

Hugh is also known for his numerous witty statements and outrageous comments, many of which have ended up in the folktales about him. For instance, Hugh reportedly once debated another BYU faculty member who, in an effort to butter him up, stated, “We at BYU lean on every word you say,” to which Hugh allegedly retorted, “If you do, you’re a damn fool.”³⁶ Hugh is also said to have told a class, “Why, I’d rather have a live cobra in my living room than a television.”³⁷ I’m inclined to believe these remarks are pretty reliable, especially when we consider that the most commonly repeated remark Hugh ever made is authentic and has changed little in the various folklore versions. When giving the opening prayer at the 1960 BYU convocation, Hugh did indeed state: “We have met here today clothed in the black robes of a false priesthood. . . .” Twenty-three years later, on 19 August 1983, Hugh explained this invocation when he was awarded an honorary doctorate. His stirring address was “Leaders to Managers: The Fatal Shift.”³⁸

Legends about Hugh Nibley’s eccentric behavior even spill over onto his own front yard in two folktales about his lawn. According to both stories, Hugh didn’t mow his lawn for a long time, and its disheveled appearance began to irritate his neighbors. One account claims that rather than just keep it mowed, Hugh bought a goat, and staked him to the center of his lawn, and let the goat take care of keeping his grass short.³⁹ In another account, Hugh simply pours gasoline over his lawn and sets it afire.⁴⁰ Both tales are false but based on an authentic Hugh Nibley characteristic: Hugh doesn’t think of keeping up his yard as a virtue. In one letter he wrote, “I have not the slightest intention of keeping up the yard in the conventional sense: it looks good to me and I am the guy it is supposed to please.”⁴¹

Hugh’s respect for the environment is also a factor in his apparently eccentric behavior; he dislikes the idea of trimming or cutting down any living thing. His early years in the lush green forests of Oregon while witnessing their destruction at the hands of his own grandfather helped etch this attitude into his psyche. Thus, the tale about Hugh’s pouring gasoline on his lawn is both untrue and inconsistent, not recognizing his great respect for nature.

Another story relates how Hugh was studying in his office late one evening when a broken pipe in the nearby rest room

Psst. Did you know that Hugh dresses the way he does on purpose so he’ll never be called to a leadership position?



Hugh with Robert Redford and former Salt Lake City mayor Ted Wilson during Wilson’s U.S. senate campaign, 1982.

caused a minor flood. Upon being warned, Hugh gathered the books and note cards arranged in tidy stacks around the floor, returned to his chair, put his feet on his desk and continued reading.⁴² Again, I have no idea whether or not this story is true, but it is consistent with Hugh’s obsession with learning. Before his retirement, he routinely took a book to most faculty meetings and still takes one to family functions. Furthermore, his ability to concentrate during the most chaotic disruptions is legendary and not overstated.

One story almost too frightening to be true is that Hugh would prop a book up on the steering wheel when he would drive the half-hour commute between his home in Glendale, California, and UCLA. This story is true, confirmed by two of his brothers, Sloan and Reid.⁴³

MYTHIC STATURE

“Pure” intellect and “pure” spirituality

WHILE LOOKING AT the truth behind the Nibley folklore can be fun, all folklore ultimately tells us more about the community in which it is told than about the subject of that lore. As William Wilson states:

The bulk of Mormon folklore functions to persuade church members that [their] beliefs are valid and that individuals must devote themselves valiantly to the cause—indeed, may suffer dire consequences if they fail to do so. In brief, this folklore falls into two broad categories: lore that shows how God protects the church in its battle with the world, and lore, remarkably like that of the early Puritans, that shows how God brings about conformity to church teachings by intervening directly in the lives of church members.⁴⁴

Much of the folklore told about Hugh Nibley certainly falls into these categories. It validates the faith and promotes conformity. Some Nibley folklore functions like the broader folklore told about academics in general. It helps us to justify the fact that although we aren’t quite as brilliant as the professors are, we do have a competency in various life skills that they lack.

Still, the fact that we tell stories about Hugh Nibley reflects our esteem for the man. Our culture needs someone who can stand as a combination of pure intellect and pure spirituality (“pure” meaning untainted by commercial exploitation, academic politics, groupie-ism, or trying to build a following), and Hugh not only fills that role but actually *is* that person.

It's not a mask. It's not a collusion between a performer and his public. He really is a person of mythic stature for Mormon folk.



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NOTES

1. Jeff Hovenier, interview with Boyd Petersen, 21 Apr. 1990. Transcript in my possession.

2. Quoted in N. B. Lundwall, *Temples of the Most High* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1947): 107–8; also in Joseph Heinerman, *Temple Manifestations* (Manti, Utah: Mountain Valley, 1974): 83.

3. In fact, the stories are so plentiful that one folklorist was able to write her English department master's thesis about the Hugh Nibley stories told just by BYU professors. See Jane D. Brady, *The Brigham Young University Folklore of Hugh Winder Nibley: Gifted Scholar, Eccentric Professor and Latter-day Saint Spiritual Guide*, master's thesis (Brigham Young University, 1996).

4. Cited in Richard M. Dorson, "J. Golden Kimball: Apostle and Folk Hero" (review of Thomas E. Cheney's *The Golden Legacy*), *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 8 (Autumn/Winter 1973): 166.

5. Benjamin Urrutia, letter to Boyd Petersen, 15 Feb. 1990.

6. William A. Wilson, "On Being Human: The Folklore of Mormon Missionaries," *SUNSTONE* (Jan./Feb. 1982): 39.

7. Hugh Nibley Journal, 25 Mar. 1929. Hugh Nibley journal currently in author's possession.

8. Hugh Nibley, letter to Paul Springer, late summer 1946.

9. Hugh Nibley, interview with Boyd Petersen, 9 Oct. 1997.

10. Hugh W. Nibley, *Teachings of the Book of Mormon, Semester 3, Transcripts of lectures presented to an Honors Book of Mormon Class at Brigham Young University, 1989 1990* (Provo: FARMS, n.d.), 123. I later discovered that Hugh had related the whole tale to this class.

11. Hugh Nibley, letter to Paul Springer, ca. 5 Aug. 1946.

12. Todd F. Maynes, "Nibleys: Pianist, Scholar, Brilliant But Different," *Daily Universe*, 1 Nov. 1982, 7.

13. Phyllis Draper Nibley, "Faith of an Observer," 421. Compilation of interviews, circa 1983–84, conducted for a video documentary of the same name that aired in 1985. Photocopy of typescript in my possession, pagination added.

14. Hugh Nibley, letter to Paul Springer, ca. 5 Aug. 1946. The term "sweetling" Hugh uses in reference to his long-time friend, Paul Springer, is just one of many playful terms of endearment the two used with each other during their many years of regular correspondence.

15. Hugh Nibley, letter to Agnes Sloan Nibley, 23 Aug. 1946.

16. Nibley, journal; Hugh Nibley, letter to Agnes Sloan Nibley, 19 Aug. 1946.

17. Maynes.

18. Collected by Liliane Zmolek in 1973. L. Tom Perry Special Collections, William A. Wilson Folklore Archives (hereafter WAWFA), FA4 3.5.2 L.

19. Gerald Smith, personal email to Boyd Petersen, 20 Jan. 1994.

20. The angel/sword story is reported in Zina Diantha Huntington Jacobs Smith Young, *Collected Discourses* ed. Brian Stuy. (Woodland Hills, Utah: BHS Publishing, 1992), 31–32; *History of Joseph Lee Robinson*, typescript, Utah State Historical Society, 13; Benjamin H. Johnson, *My Life's Review* (Independence, Mo.: Zion's, 1947): 95–96; Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner, 1905 Address, typescript, 1–2, Perry Archives, Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

21. Collected by John Baird in 1973. WAWFA, FA5 4.14.1.3.1.

22. Hugh Nibley, letter to Miriam Reitz Baer, June 1987.

23. In an interview, Hugh later confirmed that Baer did not engrave the "I, Nephi" text, but rather the traditional Egyptian text that he refers to in the letter to Baer's widow (Hugh Nibley, interview with Zina Petersen, 26 Jan. 2002).

24. Jeff Hovenier interview. A condensed version of the same narrative is told by Eric Eliason, personal email to Boyd Petersen, 27 Jan. 1994).

25. Richard Dorson, *American Folklore* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 255.

26. *Readings in Ancient Greek Philosophy: From Thales to Aristotle*, S. Marc Cohen, et al, eds. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995), 8.

27. Dorson., 256.

28. Cited in Jan Harold Brunvand, *The Study of American Folklore: An Introduction* (New York City: Norton, 1968), 321. The Nibley version of this tale was collected by Rick Skousen in 1989. WAWFA, FA5 4.14.1.8.1.



This Pat Bagley cartoon was commissioned by Sunstone and the framed original presented to the Nibleys during the banquet roast of Hugh at the 2002 Salt Lake Sunstone Symposium.

29. *Ibid.*, 323.

30. Johnna Benson Cornett, interview with Boyd Petersen, 30 June 1992. Transcript in my possession. Eric Eliason relates a similar story about a Greek book and when the student approaches Hugh he replies, "Don't be silly, everyone knows Greek," Eliason email.

31. Johnna Benson Cornett interview.

32. Collected by Susan Madsen in 1980. WAWFA, FA1 576.

33. Collected by Sondra Jones in 1971. WAWFA, FA1 286.

34. Hugh Nibley interview, 9 Oct. 1997.

35. Eugene England, interview with Boyd Petersen, 9 Apr. 1990. Transcript in my possession.

36. Story told to me by Alan Witt in 1984.

37. Marilyn Lindsay, interview with Boyd Petersen, summer 1989. Transcript in my possession. Benjamin Urrutia tells the same story, but says the snake was a python.

38. Hugh W. Nibley, *Brother Brigham Challenges the Saints*, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994), 491.

39. Collected by Kristi Bell in 1977. WAWFA, FA5 4.14.1.6.1.

40. Story told to me by Michael Fishbach, summer 1985.

41. Hugh Nibley, letter to Agnes Sloan Nibley, 28 Apr. 1950. Tom Nibley, the third eldest of Hugh's children, has reluctantly admitted to having started a small lawn fire when he was about eight years old. Perhaps a neighbor saw the smoke, and a new folktale was born.

42. Collected by John Baird in 1973. WAWFA, FA5 4.14.1.4.1. See also Hal Knight, "Behind the Legend, There's a Man," *Deseret News*, 1 Sept. 1976: B-1. A similar story relates how a janitor was repairing a leaky pipe in the library at night and found Hugh to be the only other person in the library. He asked Hugh to hold the flashlight for him while he worked but found it difficult to repair the pipe because Hugh would get absorbed in the book he was reading and forget to aim the flashlight. Collected by Liliane Zmolek in 1973. WAWFA, FA4 3.5.0).

43. Arnold J. Irvine, "Hugh Nibley: Always Studying, Always Learning, Always on the Go," *Deseret News Supplement*, 15 Apr. 1984: 4. For the brothers' versions of this story, see "Faith of an Observer," 478–79, 538.

44. Wilson, "Mormon Folklore," in *Handbook of American Folklore*, Richard M. Dorson, ed. (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1983), 157.