Millie Tullis. *These Saints are Stones.*
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My mother once taught me that if something truly needs to be done, you should find the busiest woman in your LDS ward. She will do it. I believe this without question. It seems to describe a certain ideal, a woman shaped by Christlike service, one who can be relied upon because she has learned how to carry more than her share. In my experience you will most often find this woman serving in your local Latter-day Saint Primary. But now, when I hear this platitude, another thought programmed by modern "self care" feminist philosophy comes to sit quietly beside it in my mind. Perhaps, these are also the women who have not learned, or have chosen not to exercise, the modern discipline (often heralded as a virtue) of saying no.

That distinction matters more than it appears. It is not that such women do not understand consent, boundaries, or personal cost. It is that many have already made a choice, one that remains largely invisible because it is rarely articulated. The women who continue to labor in the vineyard do so while interrupted by toddlers, by baptism talks using KitKats and teddy bears, by songs about Mother to teach to untrained children's choirs, by the small, constant demands that leave little room to reflect, let alone record. There is no time to write a journal about the delicate negotiation between consent, choice, and complicity that structures so much of faithful living. And so the record remains thin, not because there is nothing to say, but because the women who might say it are busy.

It is within this silence that Millie Tullis's book of poetry, *These Saints Are Stones*, situates itself. The collection attempts to reconstruct and reimagine a personal polygamist lineage, centering on a complex familial arrangement in which a mother and daughter become plural wives to the same man. Tullis approaches this history through poetry that blends archival fragments, personal memory, and speculative interiority. Her work forgoes historical certainty to explore the emotional and moral implications of what cannot be fully known.

At the core of the collection is a burden familiar to scholars of Latter-day Saint women's history. Our tradition, which does not canonize saints in the medieval sense, nevertheless elevates pioneer ancestors into figures of moral authority and identity formation. In poems such as "After" and the paired poems entitled "Pinto Cemetery," Tullis examines how names function within this framework. To bear the name of an ancestor is to inherit their story, though the narrative may be sanitized, incomplete, or unresolved. Of particular interest is one branch of her line that she struggles to understand: "No one is named for my grandfather's great grandmother."

The historical configuration Tullis examines is particularly charged. Alice, a widowed mother, marries David. Her daughter, Martha, later becomes his plural wife. The poems move between these figures, attempting to imagine their perspectives while acknowledging the limits of such imagination. Tullis resists offering a singular interpretation. Instead, she presents a series of possibilities, each shaped by the fragments available and the emotional lens she brings to them. She is limited by the historical record, and she explores the lack of primary sources and autobiography: "[Y]ou could not read or write, made sure your Martha could." Yet Martha does not write letters home, even during the prolonged separation of a mission.

One of the most striking aspects of the collection is its engagement with the question of consent. Tullis challenges inherited family explanations that frame plural marriage as purely a matter of obedience or divine mandate. At the same time, she does not fully resolve the question by casting her ancestors as victims. The poems remain suspended between these poles, seeking to account for both agency and compliance in the lives of polygamist women. This tension is further complicated by Tullis's incorporation of her own experiences as a survivor of sexual violence, most notably in "I Dream" and "I Do Not Know." These poems raise questions about the ways personal trauma may be mediated through historical inquiry, and about what remains unsaid even within a work explicitly concerned with giving voice to silence.

The collection culminates in a crisis of faith articulated in the poem, "What I Miss About Believing," where Tullis identifies the loss of communal belonging through the simple phrase "singing

with others." In the context of Latter-day Saint practice, communal singing is an expression of unity, a ritual that binds individuals into a shared spiritual identity. Its absence signals not only doctrinal doubt but social and emotional dislocation. In the most basic of Latter-day Saint doctrines, newly baptized members promise to join the unity in "bearing one another's burdens." But what happens when you are asked to bear a burden that violates the very moral compass that you understood and wanted to follow in a contract with God? Does God cease to be good when your example of Father ceases to look Heavenly? Tullis captures this loss of innocent obedience and allows the reader to feel the weight of what is no longer accessible. In this, I found the most emotional resonance. Belonging is Zion, and without it, we live in Babylon.

For all its attentiveness to rupture, *These Saints Are Stones* also gestures toward endurance. The recurring image of stones, particularly gravestones, functions as a counterpoint to more organic metaphors of growth and cultivation. Stones do not flourish or fade. They remain. In this sense, Tullis shifts the framework through which women's labor is understood. Rather than emphasizing productivity or visible outcomes, she foregrounds endurance, memory, and the capacity to bear unresolved histories.

This is where her work intersects, and at times diverges, from the lived realities of many contemporary Latter-day Saint women. The metaphor of tilling, which appears in her line, "a woman tills the earth forever. . . & nothing ever grows," suggests futility, an endless labor without visible fruit. There is truth in that image. But it is not the whole truth. There are forms of labor whose value is not measured in growth but in what they make possible. Soil is turned not only for planting but sometimes for burial. What is being prepared is not always a garden.

From a scholarly standpoint, Tullis's collection contributes to fresh feminist approaches to Mormon history that emphasize the limits of archival recovery and the necessity of imaginative reconstruction. Her work aligns with a growing body of literature that seeks to engage with narratives of early polygamy by foregrounding ambiguity and emotional depth. At the same time, it raises important methodological questions. How far can imagination extend before it begins to overwrite the past it seeks to honor?

What responsibilities accompany the act of giving voice to those who cannot speak for themselves?

These questions are not easily resolved, and Tullis does not attempt to resolve them. Instead, she embraces them. The result is a collection that is both evocative and unsettled, one that invites readers to engage with the hidden history it presents and with the interpretive processes it employs.

And yet, I find myself returning to the women who do not write—the ones who are still, even now, too busy. I think of my own younger self, heavy with my first child, trying to finish a degree while navigating a system that had no space for the realities of motherhood. My senior year at BYU, I read *Alas, Babylon* and wondered what a classic work like this would look like from a woman's perspective. But upon reflecting on the plot, I realized there was probably not much of a market for books about day after day of squeezing oranges into orange juice. The mystic meaning of the prosaic was not lost on me, since the previous semester, I had roomed with a girl who, for her senior art project, completed a twelve-work exhibit on the spiritual significance of oranges in her personal life. But that thought never found form in my youthful womanhood, obstructed by the mad dash to figure out who would watch the baby so I could complete my last final, which was scheduled at the same time as my husband's. I did pass the class despite the zero score from the professor who didn't feel that childcare was a legitimate excuse for missing such an important test. I was grateful, as I stood still bleeding from my surgical site in shame and silence with my two-week-old daughter, that I would graduate; I didn't revile my professor as he explained the importance of justice in the academic system. I understood this reality, and my husband received an A. It was enough for me then, and it is now. I would not have recorded it at all, but I was asked to try my hand at writing a book review, this one. I remember standing in a classroom, physically undone, silent in the face of a standard of justice that did not account for my life. No, I did not record it then. I would not have recorded it now, had I not been asked, because if you ask the busiest woman in your ward to do something, she will. I am the Primary President.

That is the tension I carry into Tullis's work. She fills gaps with imagination, and there is value in that. But there is also a kind of

knowledge that does not easily translate into narrative, that resists being shaped into poetry or theory. It is held instead in the body, in repetition, in the quiet endurance of daily obligations that leave little trace. If there are stones, they are not always the ones we choose. Sometimes they are simply what remains.

Perhaps that is where I ultimately depart from Tullis. It is not that I don't appreciate her project exactly as it is. But I wonder what her writing will become with time, with the added weight of a life lived more fully in the interruptions she gestures toward but has not yet fully inhabited. As she strives to find a foundation or touchstone to her own life, she backtracks into others' recollections, her own memories and horrors and imaginations, and finally ends with her newly-found belief in ghosts in the concluding poem "Dream." This poem is the final of ten poems with "Dream" in the title. Tullis feeds her own baby and indicates that she will remain haunted by her imaginings of her family history. What might she see if she stood, years from now, at the graves she describes, after having tilled her own ground long enough to understand its purpose differently? A young mother is still full of possibilities and has the potential of an eternal garden of fruitful descendants in a never-ending Eden.

I do not fault her for writing when she did or how. We can only write when we find the space, the education, and the ability or desire to say "no" to a lifestyle that submits the privilege of complete thoughts to a kind of fully encompassing self-sacrifice that is sometimes called motherhood. But I suspect that the fullest understanding of these women who do define themselves by their silence, our ancestors and the quiet, undocumented Latter-day Saint polygamist wives, will not come from what we manage to record or reimagine. It will come from what we learn, slowly and often silently, to revere. Young Tullis seems still wrought with her search for individual identity that comes with being young. If I must critique her exploration and expose limitations, it is in identifying, as she explicitly does in "Faith," with only the daughter, not the mother.

I wonder if Millie Tullis, with age, will visit Pinto Cemetery. With the maturity that comes from a life interrupted by the sacrifice of motherhood, church service, and one's own flaws and mistakes, will she feel the peace that comes in the silence of visiting stones?

Will an older Tullis, closer to the end of life than the beginning, find peace and belonging in soil prepared for a final resting place in a life that will never fully be resolved? Are the ghosts a comfort or a condemnation? Will she find her own place in her family story? In her poem "Work," she chooses the hair color for an ancestor doll that she wishes for herself and notes that "there is no one alive that remembers the color of her hair, there is no one to correct me." Will she record her own hair color for future generations? She makes no mention of it in her poems.