

Samuel W. Taylor, "Peculiar People, Positive Thinkers, and the Prospect of Mormon Literature." *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Vol. 2 No. 2 (1967): 17–31.

Dialogue: A JOURNAL OF
MORMON THOUGHT

*PECULIAR PEOPLE,
POSITIVE THINKERS,*

*AND THE PROSPECT
OF MORMON LITERATURE*

Samuel W. Taylor

Continuing DIALOGUE's "Assessment of Mormon Culture," this essay examines Mormon writing in the twentieth century and paradoxically finds the greatest danger to the quality and public influence of that writing posed by certain attitudes of those within the Church most devoted to building its public image. Samuel Taylor, the author of many articles, stories, and books, including FAMILY KINGDOM, speaks from long experience as a "Mormon writer."

As a Mormon writer, I have long been concerned that most of the books and magazine articles published nationally about the Mormons are written by Jews and Gentiles rather than my own people. In show business we have one smash hit, the Tabernacle Choir, yet in the many years since this act was developed, what else have we done? There has never been a Mormon play on Broadway. The Mormon picture, *Brigham Young*, was made by Gentiles long ago (and I like Ellis Craig's evaluation of it: "Mary Astor ran the Church").

The unproductiveness of Mormon writing appears strange on the face of things, because the story of the Mormon people is a veritable bonanza of rich literary and dramatic material which only we are equipped to mine properly. Of what incalculable value (for instance,

as public relations and as an indirect missionary effect) would be a Mormon stage show or motion picture comparable, say to *Friendly Persuasion* or *The Sound of Music*. At this point I sincerely wish it were possible to cry, "Mormon authors — *do it!*" But I am afraid that the depressed state of our creative efforts has resulted not from inertia, lack of talent, or inability to visualize the potentialities, but rather is a direct result of inherent circumstance; the Peculiar People have long faced a peculiar literary situation.

THE S-2 MENTALITY

It might be best to illustrate my thesis by explaining the somewhat parallel circumstances I encountered during World War II at London headquarters of the Air Force Public Relations Office. On the ground floor of our old mansion at 28 Grosvenor Square were the censors of Intelligence, who combed everything we wrote for "policy and security" (and how those two words could be stretched). While the war between the Allies and Germany was the big one, the struggle between PRO and S-2 was just as real. We were dedicated to the job of telling the simple truth about the air war in Europe, while S-2 actually wanted to say nothing. We met somewhere in between. My greatest personal victory was publishing a top-secret map as the front cover of *Yank* magazine, in color. But more typical was the fate of a delightful human interest story about a GI who had upon three occasions, when his plane was in trouble, leaped out without a parachute, with nary a scratch. The story was stopped by S-2 because "It is not Air Force policy to encourage the leaping from aircraft without a parachute."

We accepted *selection* of fact; in any story there simply isn't space for telling everything. An example is my story of the first photo-reconnaissance flight over Berlin, which was an article in a national magazine, a chapter of a book, and made the pilot a hero who went on a War Bond tour. A fact I omitted from this story was that on his historic flight the pilot was off course. He *did* go to Berlin, and there was no point in mentioning that he was *supposed* to go to Hamburg, for that wouldn't have passed the censors anyhow. We felt the story was honest because of the genuine achievement of the pilot, whether achieved accidentally or on purpose.

However, when our Air Force lost more than 300 heavy bombers in a single air attack, trying to knock out the ball bearing factories at Schweinfurt, at PRO we insisted that complete honesty was required. A great factor in civilian morale (and we called PRO a morale factory) is trust in the veracity of official communiques. If you tamper

with essential truth it will inevitably leak, people will begin doubting their government's honesty, and there is then no check on wild rumor. Such was our stand, but our office was overruled by positive-thinkers from above, and the Schweinfurt losses were pro-rated among a number of subsequent air attacks. The tendency of buried truth to rise to haunt you came home to me more than twenty years later when a college student, on learning of my Air Force background, said with curled lip, "You lied about Schweinfurt, didn't you?"

THE RISE OF POSITIVE THINKING

The state of Mormon literature today, and the plight of the Mormon creative writer, stem from a combination of the S-2 attitude toward control of the press plus a positive-thinking approach that equates a publicity handout with creative literature.

Now, these are hard words, and before quoting chapter and verse perhaps I'd better define my terms. By "creative" writing I do not mean the usual writing done by an historian, a newspaperman, nor one employed in public relations or advertising. While such people employ the same tools — words — and may qualify as creative writers *outside* their daily jobs, their professional work is in entirely separate fields involving different skills and, more importantly, an entirely different attitude toward writing. (And should I add hastily at this point that some of my best friends are historians, newspapermen, public relations and advertising people? And as a matter of fact my sisters *have* married them.) Nor is a creative writer merely a person with a facility with words. (Some of our very worst writing comes from the cleverest craftsmen, as anyone satiated with television commercials must agree.) No, such a writer is someone ridden and driven by a consuming passion that has been called the divine discontent. He is not a reporter but an interpreter; he is eternally a crusader; he is a non-conformist and a dissenter who cries out the faults of his world in his attempt to make a better one. His integrity demands that he search his environment honestly, whether he writes of the contemporary scene or of an historical setting. His drive compels him to present the essence of things as they are and were and not as positive-thinking apologists have decided they should be. He is abrasive to the organization man because no organization is perfect; most good and great creative writing is basically the literature of protest.

During the persecution and pioneer periods of Mormon history, the overwhelming onrush of events left scant time for fine writing; yet what we have of it has, in my opinion, a wonderful vitality born of the passion of battle. It was a handful of Mormons against the

whole wide world; our writers didn't have to search for a cause nor an enemy to attack. (When the Salt Lake *Tribune* and *Deseret News* were slugging it out in every issue, the *News* editor, Charles Penrose, was asked gently, after writing a particularly virulent editorial, "But, Brother Penrose, aren't we suppose to *love* our enemies?" Penrose barked, "I *do*, damn 'em!")

Then, following World War I, we found ourselves for the first time at peace with the outside world. The Church had at long last settled its own war. Then was the time for Mormon writers to enter a new era — as they began examining and interpreting their history and environment, to lay the foundation for a great Mormon literature.

Unfortunately, however, this never happened. With some oversimplification I will list three reasons:

1. As we became accepted by the outside world, little wonder that the sweet wine of praise, after decades of villification and ridicule, addicted us quickly. More, more, more! We went to work busily on a new public image, replacing the polygamous rebel with the gentle Saint who didn't use coffee. Typical of parvenus, we let nothing detract from the heady flattery of our new station, discarding our embarrassing heritage and rejecting everything that did not improve the idealized image of the modern, homogenized Mormon who looked exactly like our new-found friends (the garments didn't show, and we kept all mention of them taboo).

2. In fostering the modern era of peace and friendship the positive-thinkers among us rode higher and higher in the saddle. (By "positive-thinkers" I mean Mormons with S-2 mentality, who want nothing said that isn't forward-looking, progressive, and happy — even if we have to fudge on the facts a bit.) For the sake of a cherished public image and the sweet wine of praise they concocted a never-never land of Mormonism that presented a lovely (if unreal) façade for the outside world to admire and converts to embrace. In doing this, let us admit that they have had the highest motives. People of many faiths have encrusted their holy places with gold and jewels; since we didn't practice that, we encrusted our history and public image with gilded myth and glittering distortion. This meant a warping of our heritage in many ways large and small: The history of polygamy was rejected entirely, while pioneer attitudes toward such things as the Word of Wisdom and the United Order retroactively underwent radical alteration. (Published figures over a period of time from forward-looking sources regarding the percentage involved in polygamy indicate its deliberate phase-out. I can remember when it was 10%, and now it is only 1%. At this rate by 1984 the only

polygamists left will be Brigham Young and a few cohorts — which, incidentally, is exactly what the Reorganized Church has claimed from the beginning.)

3. Caught in the intellectual hinge of this change was the Mormon writer, who could find no outlet for his strongest creative drives. He could no longer attack the Gentiles, who now were kissing-cousins, while among his own people it was impossible to write honestly about his environment or heritage. The Mormon attitude toward literature remained unchanged from the persecution period; a writer was entirely for us or was of the enemy; there was no middle ground for objective writing. Then came the inevitable: Without the stimulation of external opposition and with internal discontent stifled, Mormon literature gradually softened in degeneration and decay, until it became the stuff of house organs and publicity handouts.

Perhaps I should define another term: a “house organ” is a publication issued by a company or organization for its employees, members, or customers. It is characterized by fulsome sweetness and light; it mentions no problems and pictures a world of perfect people. A General Motors house organ, for example, will never mention the alleged deficiencies of the Corvair rear axle, nor the lawsuits resulting from it; All is Always Well with General Motors, the Company without Fault nor Blemish! And so with our internal literature. All is always well with Zion. There are never any quarrels, no differences of opinion; nobody ever changes his mind; no one has faults. In the entire Church we don’t even have just one little old problem worth mentioning.

THE CASUALTIES OF A CONTROLLED PRESS

I think the present state of our internal literature was summed up inadvertently by the Mormon book publisher, Marvin Wallin, of Bookcraft, when he mentioned to me offhand and with no thought of criticism, “We have no recreational reading in the Church.” (I would use the term “creative” rather than “recreational.”) His own publication list, together with that of the big Church publisher, Deseret Book Company, displays the inevitable characteristics of a controlled press: Excellence is judged by propaganda content. Let me hasten to add at this point that I am heartily in accord with the objective of this literature, which is promotion of the faith; I simply think it is possible to do it a great deal better. But as night follows day, the divine discontent is blighted under a managed press. This is true whether it is controlled by S-2, the Communists, or our own positive-thinkers. Certainly Bookcraft and Deseret Book are in no way

responsible for the state of our internal literature, nor are periodicals such as the *Improvement Era* and *Relief Society Magazine*, whose contents are of the same genre. These publishers are simply supplying the needs of the only existing market. They did not make the market.

If, thwarted at home, the Mormon creative writer driven by the divine discontent publishes material about his people in the national press, he is in for severe shock. His path will be strewn with thorns and pitfalls that no one will believe without treading it. The late Ted Cannon, when head of the Church Information Service, told me in the presence of a Jewish editor, "No Mormon book published in New York has ever been approved in Utah." This was such a flatly astounding statement, particularly from a man in a position to know, that I questioned him on it. I cited, for example, John Henry Evans's *Joseph Smith, An American Prophet*. "No, it wasn't acceptable," he said. "I remember MacMillan sent two men here, but they couldn't straighten it out." (Perhaps I should add here that a number of "New York" books, including that of Evans and one of my own, *Family Kingdom*, have belatedly been taken into the bosom of the Mormon people; but this process generally requires about ten years of mellowing, at which time the book is out of print. Cannon was referring to the policy of quietly squelching a "New York" book in the Utah market at the critical period of its birth.) The fact that Cannon could make such a statement — even admitting that he was oversimplifying or was unaware of exceptions — is, I think, a devastating evaluation of the plight of Mormon literature. If for 130-odd years every one of our writers of good will and good spirit was rebuffed in publishing a "New York" book, the indictment is not against our authors but against an impossible standard of literary judgment.

What are these standards? Unfortunately, nobody knows. There is no Church censor with the power of approval. (At least when S-2 stamped a PRO manuscript it was cleared for publication, and nobody could come back at us for it; but in the Church there is no such protection for the writer.) The Church has no policy sheet. The nearest thing to an imprimatur is the customary preface of internal books stating that some Church official has glanced over the manuscript, but that the author assumes full responsibility.

This situation leaves Mormon writers in an atmosphere where they fear and tremble for the law, yet nobody knows what the law is. In effect, it gives a hunting license to a most eager and voracious pack of self-appointed Comstocks.

The Loss of Individual Talents

I know personally a number of writers of talent and good will who gave it the big try. They were blasted by nit-picking criticism, pressure was applied to curtail the sale of their books in Mormon country, and, embittered, they either left the Church or quit writing about it. I recently talked with one such man, who holds a responsible Church office, and when I mentioned writing he said between clenched teeth, "I'll never, *never* write anything about the Church again!" His was an exceptional talent, nipped in the bud. A quarter century after *Children of God* was finished I suggested to Vardis Fisher that he complete the Mormon saga by taking up at the Manifesto, where *Children* ended, and doing a novel on modern Mormonism. His lips tightened after all that time and he said tersely, "I've *written* my Mormon novel." I count among my friends a number of people whose fine talents lie fallow because they realize that the way to advancement or even acceptance in the Mormon Church is by wearing the smiling mask of the positive-thinker.

Distortion as a Convention

My good friend Frank C. Robertson, who has published more than a hundred Western novels, once complained that he was handicapped in writing Western stories because he was born in the West, had ridden the roundup, worked on ranches, and, at the time he published his first Western, was herding sheep. Editors and writers of Westerns were mostly New Yorkers who had concocted a never-never land with character stereotypes and dialogue strange to Robertson, and he had difficulty getting the hang of it.

As a Mormon writer I have a similar problem. What I know about my people is not what our parvenus want published about them. It is for this reason that a Gentile writer brought in to do a typical praise-piece can produce such a satisfactory job. He is told just what he should know (no more), steered to what he should see, and so is completely sincere in filling his work with half-truth and distortion, unaware that it contains history not as it happened but as we wish it had, and that the public image of the Mormons is not as we are but as forward-lookers wish us to be known. "I just wish we *were* like that," a stake president said to me wistfully when a confection of this type appeared.

We pride ourselves upon being the Peculiar People, but heaven help the writer who mentions the peculiarities. We passionately desire to be considered identical to all other business-suited, well-barbered, and positive-thinking people, our sole peculiarity being

obedience to the Word of Wisdom. The Gentiles have been so brainwashed with our dietary morality that a Mormon told me, "I never drink liquor with Gentiles; they just wouldn't understand. I break the Word of Wisdom only with Mormons in good standing." And it was a Catholic, Anthony Boucher, author and critic, who after a week of luncheons, dinners and cocktail parties in Utah said to me, bemused, "In all my life I have never heard anyone say, 'Yes, I'm a Catholic, but I eat meat on Friday.' "

Denial of Continual Revelation

As a Mormon, I am serene in the belief that my Church is led by Divine revelation. This is a veritable cornerstone of my faith, and with this big answer I can be completely untroubled by smaller things. And so I find myself continually baffled at the acute embarrassment displayed by our positive-thinkers at every single evidence of continuing revelation. Certainly it seems there would be no need for revelation if there was to be no occasion for a change. The Lord didn't tell Joseph Smith, "This is it and all of it; keep on and don't expect anything new." Nor would it seem that he whispers to succeeding prophets, "You're doing great; don't change a single thing." No; there was to be continual guidance, which was to provide for creative adaptation to changing circumstances. This is what a Mormon must believe if he believes anything at all; and yet our parvenus, in their version (which amounts to rejection) of our heritage, are horribly apologetic about every single change, large or small, in the practice of our faith or attitude toward it.

This was brought home to me when I attended the Utah Writers' Roundup in company with Rutherford Montgomery, the animal-book writer and Disney scripiter. On the final day I took him on the Temple Square tour, where we listened to the ten minute capsule of Mormon history and doctrine (not quite accurate, but what can you expect in the time allotted?), heard the dropping of the pin in the tabernacle, and so on. "Well, Monty, what do you think?" I asked expansively as we left the temple grounds. He wound up and hit me with all four feet. "Sam, I am ashamed of you and your people! I've been here a week, and every day from every side I've heard nothing but apology. Your people have had a great and unique history, and you should be proud of it." As a writer, he was sensitive to an attitude to which I was long accustomed.

Lost Opportunities

I do take deep pride in our heritage, but our positive-thinkers are having wonderful success in their fanatic determination to reject

it. Here lies the basic reason why our people haven't made a motion picture or produced a play: Any such project will meet a concerted pressure to jam the script into the house-organ mold. To yield to it kills all chance of public acceptance; to resist means that every possible influence will be employed to block the production.

Awhile ago I was half-way hoping to be the author of the first Mormon play on Broadway; at any rate the producer kept phoning me glowing reports from New York, at daytime rates. Then one day I got a friendly, unofficial call from Salt Lake. "Say, Sam, are you trying to put on a play about polygamy on Broadway?" "Sure; a musical. It was a long time ago, and as a period piece, in costume and with good music, it could be charming." "Well, nice talking with you, Sam." End of conversation; end of play. Since that day I haven't been able to contact the New York producer by phone, wire, or the U. S. mails.

Another time, I watched a Mormon Hollywood production wrecked on the opposite shoals — *cooperation* with our positive-thinkers. A professional script was completely gutted and made into a hash of house-organ propaganda, after which the project had of course absolutely no chance as a commercial venture.

The extent of the positive-thinkers' influence came home to me when I did a short story based on the handcart expeditions for a textbook to be used in the California school system. In relating the story to its environment I mentioned, between commas, that the leader of this particular expedition, a returning missionary, had two wives awaiting him at Salt Lake. The editor phoned me about the manuscript, extremely agitated. "Sam, if we leave in this polygamy stuff, we can't get our book adopted." "Okay," I said, "cut out the five words." I thought it significant that a Jewish editor should know that our status-builders have things so well in hand that just five words on a subject they disapprove would mean rejection of a book by the state of California.

Certainly our forward-lookers have learned one thing well: They know the power of protest. At a time when Utah was trying very hard to get its just share of the Colorado river water, I was invited by a national magazine to present the state's side of the controversy, while Wallace Stegner would present the opposition. Subsequently at Salt Lake I was told with considerable satisfaction that pressure in the right places had killed Stegner's article. However, my informants were shaken to learn that their pressure had also killed my own piece, scheduled for the same issue, which was their only chance of presenting Utah's side in a big-circulation magazine.

An Image as "Book-burners"

The sword cuts both ways, and I wonder how many good-will tours by the Tabernacle Choir would be required to repair the damage done to the Mormon image when *Playboy*, with its enormous circulation and impact on young people, published the fact that Mormon missionaries were engaged in a campaign of book-burning? The item was a letter from a librarian of Northampton, Mass., Lawrence Wikander, published first in the American Library Association's *Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom*, May, 1963, and subsequently reprinted in *Playboy*. Wikander told of two Elders arriving at his library to inspect the index of Mormon material. They offered a list of "more up-to-date material" and after delivering it made the following proposition:

Now that we had these books which told the truth about their religion, undoubtedly we would like to discard other books in the library which told lies about the Mormon Church. Other libraries, they said, had been glad to have this pointed out to them.

Following the exposé in *Playboy* a friend of mine tried to find out how extensive the missionary book-burning campaign had been. A number of returned missionaries from both domestic and foreign missions admitted that they had participated in it; but data as to when and how and by whom the project had been originated was, understandably, unavailable.

Self-appointed Comstocks among us have for years been dedicated to the unholy quest of seeking out and destroying books considered unfavorable. Reva Stanley, biographer of her grandfather, Parley Pratt, told me that her right of free access to the stacks at Bancroft Library at University of California was curtailed when certain ones were closed because of the disappearance of rare anti-Mormon books. My brother Raymond was approached by a zealot offering a number of rare Mormon books bearing library stamps; the devout Saint blandly admitted stealing them to protect the public, but said he was sure that Raymond, with his background of research and firm testimony, would not be harmed.

WHAT DOES IT MATTER?

I do not have answers, but I do know indications of unrest; among inactive (and active) intellectuals there is rebellion at what is considered thought control. When my brother asked a friend his opinion of a new "New York" book, the testy reply was, "Damn it, Raymond, you should know better than to ask what I think until I've been *told!*" — said only half in jest. At a visit to the Salt Lake

public library I was told that the fear of the faithful at being caught reading a "New York" book before knowing what to think about it caused some people to bring their own dust jackets so that apparently they would be carrying out *Tarzan of the Apes* or *Alice in Wonderland*. Tro Harper, the aggressive San Francisco book dealer, told me Fawn Brodie's book, *No Man Knows My History*, had a steady but strangely seasonal sale: It sold briskly in the summer but there were almost no sales in the winter. He thought this was because Mormon tourists bought it on vacation, being apprehensive of purchasing a disapproved book where they were known.

One thing the praise pieces never mention is the appalling erosion of our active Church membership. During my father's time he never tired of predicting that the day would come when we would become friends with the outside world, and then half the Church would fall away. Those who still remember, and possibly expected some great and dramatic apostacy, may be surprised to realize that every indication points to the fact that the prediction has been fulfilled, very quietly, without stirring a single ripple in our happy serenity, at this time when the Church apparently never was doing so well.

And as half the Church has quietly slipped away, have our writers filled our literature with this modern crisis? Have our books and periodicals rallied our greatest minds to this problem? As you well know, there has been absolute silence. Such Gentile writers as O'Dea and Turner have hinted at the situation without actually realizing its extent; but they are authors of "New York" books, to be ignored by all positive-thinkers. What we get from inside are progress reports of converts stampeding through the front door. The dead silence on the great unrest, voiceless and ignored, that has caused the flow out the back, is eloquent evidence of the complete smothering of the divine discontent among us.

The civil rights question is another example of silence from within. The crux of the matter is not that the Negro has been denied the priesthood, but that the entire national ferment during the past decade concerning the equality of man has been ignored. The only reference I have heard within the Church was when a speaker exhorted us not to waste our time with "civil rights agitation and in preoccupation with ethics," but to devote ourselves to "the gospel of Jesus Christ." Where is the Mormon writer to point out that human rights and ethics *are* part of the gospel of Jesus Christ?

A serious side effect of our praise literature is that it has pretified our early Church leaders into cardboard stereotypes. I must

confess that I personally never came to appreciate the full stature of our pioneer giants until I encountered anti-Mormon literature that gave them dimension; and I shudder to consider what must be the concept of our rising and cynical generation in this era of the praise-piece. Certainly I understand the love with which our people have prettified Joseph Smith; with the highest motives they have bit by bit chipped away his character, shaved the hair from his chest, drained the red blood, removed the warts, shortened the nose, widened the eyes, strengthened the jaw, plucked the eyebrows, disemboweled and deodorized and homogenized him. While I deeply deplore what has been done to the Prophet, I am not foolhardy enough to invite the wrath that would follow an honest attempt to correct it. However, when the beauticians begin doing a job on my grandfather, I am compelled to rise up and howl. Yes, he belongs to his Church, but he also belongs to his family. I like this tough character who stood on his two hind legs and roared defiance at the Supreme Court and the whole U. S. Government. He maintained integrity regardless of cost — and anyone familiar with events in the years prior to the Manifesto realizes the appalling cost — refusing to compromise his concept of the Law of God while spending the last year and a half of his life on the underground and dying with a price on his head. I know that John Taylor wouldn't want to be castrated, deodorized, perfumed, shaved, or prettified; I like him exactly the way he was, with warts and guts.

SIGNS OF CHANGE

If the predicament of the Mormon writer for the next half century appeared as bleak as the past, there might be small point in belaboring the issue. But, just as I believe that no outside force can ever conquer this Church, I am convinced that the broadening of our intellectual horizon and restoration of vitality to our creative talent can spring only from within, and it is happening. At the very time when our positive-thinkers rejoice in total victory, there is a cloud in their sky no bigger than a man's hand. The intellectual climate is changing, and mark this down. One promising sign is the existence of *Dialogue*, a periodical staffed by Mormons of good will and good standing, which is a breath of cool air in the stifling atmosphere of our internal literature. Its objective editorial policy would have been unthinkable ten years ago, and it would have been impossible, with only the controlled press available, to publish this very essay in a Mormon publication.

The Church itself is embarking on television and motion picture projects aimed not for internal consumption but at the world-

wide audience. These productions employ professional talent. To me the official recognition of the value of such projects is a giant step forward. With the Church leading the way through the cruel jungle of the professional arts, where to survive or perish depends upon the box office, can the renaissance of the divine discontent among our writers be far behind? In the jungle it is too precious a commodity to be neglected, for here the slightest whiff of house-organ writing brings instant death.

A heartening indication of change in the intellectual climate (which I hesitate to mention because of possible repercussions) can be seen by a casual stroll, while in Salt Lake, through the Deseret Book Store. On sale are Mormon books whose honesty of content would have caused an uproar a quarter century ago. Is the shock of the "New York" book wearing off? I certainly will not list specific titles to arouse our self-appointed Comstocks, except for one outstanding example — the 26-volume set of *Journal of Discourses*, for many years rare and so embarrassing to our parvenus that the splinter sects set to work reproducing it (I obtained the first six volumes one at a time from no less than four such groups as each began the project and ran out of funds). Then Deseret Book blossomed out with the breath-taking display of the complete set on public sale in the Church bookstore. Yes, things are changing.

With the above in mind, I recently re-read four books that caused uproars twenty-five years ago, Vardis Fisher's *Children of God*, Virginia Sorensen's *A Little Lower Than the Angels*, Maurine Whipple's *The Giant Joshua*, and Fawn Brodie's *No Man Knows My History*. In effect I drove a stake back there to see how far we've moved forward since that time. And I was utterly amazed. In fact I wondered if these books weren't mainly the victims of bad timing. If they were published for the first time today, I think that with a little luck they might find themselves upon the shelves at Deseret Book. Luck is necessary, because unfortunately if someone arises to denounce a book (apparently almost anyone will do), there seems no way as things now stand for people who care about such things to rally to its defense. Yet despite such recent examples as the deep-freeze put upon Paul Bailey's *For Time and All Eternity* (Bailey told me it resulted from the objections of one man to a single passage in the book), we are coming, however slowly, to appreciate the fact that literature for the outside world must be written objectively and not in the idiom of the missionary tract.

Today we might recognize Virginia Sorensen's lyric gift that could have made her into a modern Eliza R. Snow. Her sensitive

first book today reads for the most part like something the *Improvement Era* would love to serialize; and in fact her scene between Joseph Smith and Eliza R. Snow, in which the Prophet introduces the principle of plural marriage for the first time, is so romanticized (and, actually, contrary to fact), that I was disappointed, though it certainly proves her attempt to avoid offending anyone. Maurine Whipple's book was big and had tremendous strength and vitality; today I believe we just might be careful to nurture this talent rather than to stun its power. We might recognize that Fawn Brodie's book is far and away the best-written biography of Joseph Smith, even while not subscribing to her thesis regarding his sincerity. Today we might recognize Vardis Fisher as our greatest modern talent, much too valuable to lose, and evaluate the first 300 pages of *Children of God* as the best novel yet written about Joseph Smith, regardless of some points which, if changed, might amount to a half dozen pages of revision. In fact, I hope we are maturing to the point of evaluating a book as a whole rather than searching its seams, of judging it not upon its praise but its literary worth.

Today too many historians are digging out too much truth for myth and distortion to endure. This renaissance of Mormon scholarship is particularly heartening. A quarter century ago research into Church history was suspect, a pursuit to be followed in secret. I well remember the evening a man I had known ten years finally decided to trust me. He swore me to secrecy, then led me into his basement, where among a marvelous assortment of rare books he admitted to spending his spare hours and dollars on Mormon research. Today this sort of thing has gained respectability. It is still no easy task for a Mormon historian to tell the simple truth if he is beholden to the Church for livelihood or status, but, even so, many have evolved methods by which it is accomplished.

THE ENEMY WITHIN

While I cheer the approaching dawn, both as a writer and as a Mormon, I certainly have no illusions about it bursting upon us in full glory and right away. A free press and the renaissance of the divine discontent among us are goals to be achieved only by defeating the well-entrenched and most loyal opposition. But the battle must be joined, for in my sincere belief the honest and devout body of positive-thinkers constitute the enemy within the gates, who wish to strangle my Church with their tenacious grip of perverted love and, with the highest and most sacred motives, bring it to earth, with all flags flying, in dry rot. Perhaps this is why I

am a writer of "New York" material who has neither turned away from my Church nor quit writing about my people; it and they are mine, right or wrong. I believe the stakes of this battle are too vital to count costs.

And I stand on this: That truth needs no defense. That truth stands above the charge of "sensationalizing." That truth ignores the house-organ attitude, "Why don't we take a more positive approach?" That like the mountain whose very presence is the reason for climbing, truth is there for telling. And, finally, that no damage ever has been done by truth one-tenth as bad as by its attempted suppression.

When I was courting the girl who became my wife she gave me a leather-bound copy of the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*. In the margin of the stanza which says,

I wonder often what the Vintners buy
One half so precious as the stuff they sell,

she wrote "Or poets." And considering that most outside literature about us is written by Jews and Gentiles, that we have never put a Mormon play on Broadway nor a motion picture in national distribution, that no Mormon can write a "New York" book acceptable within Utah — considering this, and the price we have paid in the level of our internal literature with a managed press, I wonder often what our positive-thinkers have bought one-half so precious as that which they have sold out?