

active consent of both parties is essential to happiness. All successful marriages have one thing in common: there is give and take.

Moreover, there is much scripture to substantiate the conclusion that man is to be loved and revered for what he does and for what he becomes, not just because he is a man. Men who do not honor their priesthood or who do not honor themselves as sons of God do not merit the marital love of women. In her list of do's, Mrs. Andelin says to "revere your husband and honor his right to rule you and his children." But the Doctrine and Covenants makes it clear that man's authority is to be maintained by "persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned; by kindness, and pure knowledge, which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy and without guile. . . ." A woman may obey as she covenants in her marriage vows, but the enlargement of the feeling is dependent upon the man's growth as well as upon the woman's willingness. Serious studies of marriage suggest that no genuine solution to marital difficulties is possible without honesty between the partners and growth in which they *both* participate.

Improvements in a marriage, whether instigated by the man or the woman, are most likely to result from a perfectly honest giving of oneself. Mrs. Andelin frequently gives the impression of urging artifice and subterfuge, which cannot in the long run lead to success in human relationships. In the book's list of do's, women are counseled to learn to "express yourself when your husband mistreats you by childlike sauciness"; or "acquire a child-like manner"; or "include some childlike clothes in your wardrobe." To comment only on two of these, it would seem more genuine and in keeping with the scriptures to control anger completely, except under the most extreme provocation, and then true anger should be expressed.

While acknowledging the power and magic of little things in one's relationship to men, it seems important to recognize that human beings — whether men or women — are not to be manipulated. *Things* are to be manipulated and maneuvered. But not people. People share the divine spark of intelligence with God the Father and His Son, and they are created even in mortal existence "a little lower than the angels." People are to be taught, to be persuaded, to be loved, to be motivated, even to be suffered, to be endured, and to be cared for.

Women who are devoted to this book should evaluate its teachings in the light of gospel principles in order not to be misled. True loving is giving honestly all that one has and in marriage the expression of love requires women — and men — to go the second mile time and time again.

HYMNS TO THE GODS

Gary Stewart

The Mantle of the Prophet and Other Plays. By Clinton F. Larson. Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company, 1966. xii + 344 pp. \$3.50. Gary Stewart, who is working on his doctorate in drama at the University of Iowa, will begin teaching at the University of Massachusetts in the fall.

The publication by Deseret Book Company of the work of a serious Mormon poet or playwright is not an event to be dismissed lightly, if only because it happens so seldom. Clinton Larson is a Mormon who takes both his religion

and his poetry seriously, a man who considers both poetic statement and revealed statement as legitimate ways of interpreting and guiding human experience. The five plays in *The Mantle of the Prophet and Other Plays* are reflective of a considerable body of Larson's drama and poetry. But they are a good sampling, and the anthology includes some of his better dramatic writing.

Larson's plays take the form of dramatizations of scriptural or historical events crucial to Mormonism. *The Brother of Jared* unites the Bible and the Book of Mormon and concerns the people of Jared at the tower of Babel. Three of the plays have to do with the early Christian era: the annunciation to Mary (*Mary of Nazareth*), the visit of Christ to the Nephites (*Third Nephi*), and the conversion of Paul (*Saul of Tarsus*). The title play, probably Larson's most famous, dramatizes the transference of authority from Joseph Smith to his successor. The dramas are essentially rhetorical in that they are written from a firm commitment to an ideological point of view and their form and themes are determined by that point of view. In each of the five plays, Larson chooses a relatively brief but significant event and fleshes it out, bringing in themes, characters, conflicts, and poetic diction from his own resources to augment and enlarge the original. Each play centers about a conflict between good, or the spiritual, that which is of God, and evil, or those forces determined to destroy the good. The issue is always clear, and there is an ever-present dichotomy between the two forces. The respective points of view are represented in the personages of the play — in their actions, their moral choices, and in their direct arguments to other characters and their indirect ones to the audience.

In the remainder of this review, it seems to me that something needs to be said about Larson as dramatic craftsman, Larson as dramatic poet, and Larson as Mormon dramatist.

One of the responsibilities of a dramatic craftsman is to draw characters that respond to the needs of dramatic probability and necessity and are vital and interesting. As a result of the dominance of the good-evil dichotomy previously mentioned, Larson's characters tend to become types of one or the other rather than human figures seen reacting to great events and experiences. Sidney Rigdon, Enoch (in the Mary play), and Terah (in *The Brother of Jared*) are stereotyped villains with their most immediate dramatic predecessors in the melodramas of the nineteenth century and their spiritual predecessors in the likes of Cain, Judas, and John C. Bennett. Even so, however, a villain is always interesting to some degree. Larson's purely righteous figures are too often not even that. His Nephi, his Mahonri, and his Stephen are all ascetic, mystical figures who demonstrate little touch with the world about them. It is as if the ideal spiritual state removes men so thoroughly from the world of human action and reaction that there will be no traffic with ordinary men and events. Even if this is a valid spiritual claim (which I doubt), it is not a very interesting dramatic one. The dichotomy is apparent not only between characters but within certain characters as well. Two potentially exciting and interesting personages, Saul-Paul in *Saul of Tarsus* and Laceus in *Third Nephi*, are shown through much of their respective plays as evil doubters. They have, at these times, few if any redeeming qualities. But each is eventually converted in the play, and because of the extreme, one-dimensional

antagonism of the earlier person, the conversion is untenable. We see little of the later man in the earlier one or vice versa. The characters are more captives of their playwright's ideology than products of their own carefully constructed probability and necessity.

There are characters who come alive, however. And they do so when they are given more recognizably human characteristics and time to develop these characteristics in the course of the play. The most sensitive and extended character portrayals occur in the play *Mary of Nazareth*, which devotes a considerable portion of its time to letting us see the very human and natural reactions of Mary and Joseph to the visitations of Gabriel (an interesting angel with an appealing ability to laugh at human folly and at himself), to the members of Mary's family, who alternately help and interfere, and to the elders, who consistently interfere. The play dissolves into preachment and dichotomy at the end, but Larson demonstrates that he can write interesting and vital characters.

Mary of Nazareth shows that Larson not only can write dramatically sound characters, but that he can also sustain a dramatic narrative. The story of Mary and Joseph moves along simply and freely. Yet while this play seems to me to be the most consistent dramatic effort, there are vivid dramatic moments interspersed through all the plays. Much of the transfiguration scene in the last act of *The Mantle of the Prophet* is effective and illuminating. And the imaginative use of Oron the Fool in *Third Nephi* as counterpoint to the destruction of Zarahemla and the voice of God is one of the most striking uses of dramatic irony that I have seen. But far too often the plays are given over to poetic preachments and theological lyrics which contribute but little to their dramatic progression.

Before beginning the discussion of poetry, I want to make it clear that I am not unsympathetic to the phenomenon of poetic drama. Though ours is an age when prose drama dominates, there has been significant, even great, poetic drama in this century (Yeats, Thomas, Eliot). But while much of Clinton Larson's poetry is dramatically sound and while he has a demonstrated facility with poetic expression, his poetry often gets in the way of his drama. Part of the reason is that he too often places his poetry injudiciously. For example, at a time of intense activity, when Joseph Smith is being murdered just off stage, the characters who are on stage, instead of reacting as the occasion would seem to demand, are reciting a kind of static lyric poetry. Just after the shots are heard, Anderson says

Then I have waited and walked, talked and waited,
And Joseph is gone! Like a thin mist
I swirl about my words and they condemn me.
Joseph! (p. 6)

And the men remain and continue to recite in a similar manner. Often the playwright writes long and frequently arid stretches of poetic dialogue which hold up the dramatic movement. The final act of *Third Nephi* takes place after Christ has appeared and delivered his message, a naturally stunning climax which is used effectively in this play. Yet the final act is given over almost exclusively to the seemingly endless outpourings of Lacey. The play collapses into anti-climax and tedium.

While this kind of bad timing is certainly a primary weakness of Larson

as dramatic poet, there seems to me to be a more fundamental one. Marden Clark points out in his introduction to the plays that Larson relies heavily on "Old Testament language and rhythm. Even the metaphors have much in common with Old Testament poetry" (p. x). I think he is correct. Larson's conception of language is a grand one. His images and figures are vast in scope and attempt to encompass the entirety of the Mormon universe. And there are moments in the plays when he succeeds in projecting poetically the great Mormon vision. Yet too often in his search to find the grand and universal diction and imagery which can justify his subject matter, his language becomes overblown and vague. The imagery collapses. The diction is imprecise. There is too much use of the abstract and general and emotive and not enough of the concrete and specific and intellectual.

In an attempt to encompass the significance of the death of the Prophet, Larson puts the following into the mouth of William Clayton:

We have come to wail.
The centuries moulder on the shores of Africa;
Out of the pall of Europe the word of God came,
Saying here, here shall be the veil of Him
Through whom I speak, but now in the wide gaze
Of the sky, we whisper of prayer in the grove.
A hundred wings rise from the river and vanish
Beyond the plain, and the wagons wander
In Eden but find no home. (p. 17)

In his attempt to draw together so much, the poet loses the event he is attempting to clarify. The language becomes a bath of generalities and abstractions that diffuse rather than focus the martyrdom.

Larson makes it clear that he can write effective, even eloquent, poetic drama, yet he does so only intermittently. Perhaps the problem is that he wants discipline. A great or even a good play must demonstrate the perseverance of craftsmanship as well as the outpouring of inspiration; it must be the product of a careful workmanship consistently responsive to the demands of character portrayal, dramatic movement, and precise, appropriate language.

Final consideration must be given to Clinton Larson as Mormon dramatist. Larson has a very large vision of the place of poetry in the Church, and, I would guess, of himself as a poet in the Church. As a dramatist he works well within the accepted scriptural and traditional framework of Mormon thought and theology. His orientation is basically unaltered from that which we hear in Sunday School lessons or over the pulpit. Were Plato a Mormon, Clinton Larson would be acceptable to him as one who writes hymns to the gods. Larson is no inward-looking poet who questions premises or excites unrighteous passions or tells lies. Yet he does look upward and outward in attempting to expand the implications of scriptural and historical events. And he makes considerable progress toward poeticizing and welding together those traditions which Mormonism claims as its own. So while Larson is not entirely successful in writing dramatically viable plays, he does demonstrate considerable talent and an admirable vision. And, perhaps more importantly, he is laying important groundwork for later achievement, both by himself and others.