

and similar sections but their random grouping in various sections did not allow the genre the identity and attention it deserved.

But however "deserving," the personal essay was and continues to be largely neglected. Even in *Dialogue*, more attention has been paid to the scholarly article, poetry and fiction. This has not been because of editorial policy (cf. the introduction to Keller's "Every Soul Has Its South") but because of the simple reality that it has been difficult either to encourage or to acquire competent examples of personal essay. There may be many reasons for this but I suspect the seminal reason is a hybrid of provincialism and fear. Mormons, college-educated Mormons at least, have largely adopted the game-rules of academe and may feel safer relying on their "evidences" than their feelings. If this seems paradoxical in light of the Church's charismatic origins and continuing emphasis on the individual spiritual experience, it only serves to emphasize the need for the personal essay. But even when Latter-day Saints might be moved to serious investigation of themselves and their faith, there is an element of popular Mormonism which would legislate against them. We are so accustomed to "bearing witness," to "defending the faith," that it may seem near to apostasy to admit the doubts implicit in the man of faith—the man who "hopes" rather than "knows." Facing the beast can be a very dangerous business—not because the beast is dangerous, but be-

cause they who deny him are likely to deny you.

So, more often than not, our keener minds have devoted their serious efforts to the "objective" voice of scholarship or the "cosmic" voice of art, and the "personal" voice has been practically and politically defined as the province of the pulpit and the testimony meeting—places where only a certain "tone" of voice is acceptable.

But consistently (if not copiously) there have been those who have sought to broaden both the tone and the arena for personal expression and to make it responsible both to the specific demands of intellectual integrity and to the larger requests of spiritual life. Somewhat less than a dialogue, it is somewhat more than a meditation. Its voice is personal; its tone may be decided at any point across a broad range from despair to joy; its province is life and its terror; its subject is the soul; its end, insofar as it is Christian, is revelation of the beast who, after all, is no beast, but Christ. And if the doctrine be true, if Christ be real, to meet Him finally is to understand the terror and be no longer terrorized, but to drink of his cup and be filled—the cup of suffering and sorrow which, when one has participated, is revealed as the sacrament of joy. Christ himself participated at Calvary, and Joseph at Carthage, and each of us.

"Personal Voices" is a section devoted to the encouragement and publication of the Mormon personal essay. Contributions are invited.

## The Girl Who Danced with Butch Cassidy

EDWARD GEARY

... *le souvenir d'une certaine image n'est que le regret d'un certain instant...*

*Swan's Way*

MY EARLIEST MEMORY of Retty Mott is of hurrying past her house as I walked home from Primary. I hurried past because my cousins had told me that she chased people. Once she had leaped out

from behind a tree in her front yard and hit Max Peterson with a fire shovel. She had chased him clear to the end of the block, hitting him all the way with the fire shovel, or so my cousins said, and it did not occur to me to doubt their stories or even to wonder what Max Peterson had been doing in her yard. They told me that she was a bad woman as well as a fearsome one. On Saturday mornings, they said, she was always down on Main Street trying to hitch a ride to Price so that she could go to the liquor store. And so when I walked home from Primary, with the words still fresh in my mind about how "tea and coffee and tobacco we despise" (though my grandfather was somehow an exception to the tea part), "drink no liquor and we eat but a very little meat," I hurried apprehensively past Retty Mott's little white house where it stood under the tall locust trees (the very trees she had hidden behind when she caught Max Peterson, and what if she were lurking there now?).

Later, when I was as old as my cousins had been, I learned what they had known before: the pleasures of teasing Retty Mott. On summer nights after Mutual, when the drug store had closed but we didn't want to go home, we would drift in a group up the dark street toward her house. The trek began with laughter and loud talk, but as we drew nearer we grew more quiet until finally there was no sound but the occasional scraping of shoes on loose gravel. Then, when we were right in front and could see the low outline of the roof, came the electric instant when somebody (it was usually Ferd Nichols) suddenly screamed, "Retty Mott!" and the evening's fun was under way.

That first shout always caught us unprepared and sent us running away, to regroup on the next block. Now came the exciting part: the second assault with its element of danger. She might be waiting for us now, waiting behind a locust tree with her fire shovel, or even with her father's old Colt .45, which she was rumored to keep somewhere in the house. With mingled fear and eagerness we crept back toward the house, blood surging in our ears as we strained to hear any sound above the quiet chant of the crickets, our muscles tensed to break and run. When we could bear the tension no longer we shouted again, not a single voice this time but a rising chorus. "Retty Mott! Retty Mott!" We shouted her

name over and over. Then we proceeded to songs and chants:

Some like 'em hot,  
Some like 'em cold,  
But who wants Retty Mott  
Seventy years old?

If she was slow to respond we grew bolder. We would throw rocks at the roof, throwing them high in the air and waiting for the sound when they struck the weathered shingles and rattled down to the eaves. Or we tossed pebbles at the windows, but very carefully so as not to break them. We didn't want to cause any damage. The more daring boys would dart up onto the porch and hammer on the door with their fists then sprint back to the safety of the group. What we wanted was to see Retty Mott come rushing out of the house with her wrapper flapping around her legs and her mouth shrieking obscenities. Sometimes we were satisfied then and went on home. Sometimes we couldn't bear to end the fun, and we went back again and again.

We called it teasing Retty Mott, and we could see no harm in it because she had long twitching fingers and rolled her eyes when she talked and because she never came to Church, not even on Mother's Day when even the Jack-Mormons came to Sunday School and we had to use the extra sacrament trays. She was a tall, bony woman my grandmother's age but not like anybody's grandmother. The other old women in Helaman wore plain dresses or small, muted prints. They kept their hair neatly tucked in with tortoise-shell combs, and when they went to Church or to funerals they wore little black hats which they kept in place with hatpins. Retty Mott, summer and winter, wore a huge straw hat with a floppy brim and no crown, her coarse gray hair straggling out through the top, and she went down town dressed in a bright flowered wrapper beneath which, it was rumored, she wore no underclothing. She had been named Laretta by the mother she could not have remembered, and by the time I knew her she had been married twice, so Mott was probably not her legal name. But the childhood nickname she hated had become her only identity: Retty Mott, the two names indivisible, a label unalterable by her wishes or by the law, to which no husband's name could be added and no title affixed: not Miss Mott

or Mrs. Mott, and certainly not Sister Mott.

She was always an outsider in Helaman; yet she had been born just two miles away in a log house by the creek. Ezra Mott was one of the cattlemen who brought their herds into the valley in the 1870's, before the Mormon settlers came. The country was all open then, and by 1880 there were a dozen ranches strung along the creek, places where a little hay could be harvested from the bottomlands, stations on the trail between the summer meadows of the Wasatch Plateau and the winter range along the San Rafael River. When our people came, Bishop Pulsipher would not allow them to settle random-fashion on the creek. Instead, he laid out a square townsite on a flat to the south and distributed building lots in exchange for work on the canal. Bishop Pulsipher set the example by building two yellow brick houses, one for each of his families, on opposite corners of a town block, with his barn and corrals in between. Thus two different societies developed side by side, the village culture of Helaman, with everything square to the compass and in proper order, and the free and easy life of the ranchers on the creek and of the cowboys who drifted in and out to work the herds, carrying all they owned in their saddlebags. The cattlemen bought supplies and picked up their mail in Helaman. They patronized Silas Walker's store, where there was a lean-to back room for card games, while the Saints usually traded at Antone Peterson's. Sometimes men from the creek and men from the town would be seen passing the time of day together, squatting on their heels by a south wall. Sometimes Bishop Pulsipher was there trading stories in the same strong voice he used in the pulpit each Sunday. And when there were ward socials in the Relief Society Hall, the cowboys sometimes came and danced with the town girls while the town boys watched sullenly from the sidelines. But if there was a common life there were also sharp divisions. Once when a drunk cowboy drowned while trying to cross the creek during high water, the bishop refused to let him be buried in the town cemetery, for it was said that when he was warned against trying to cross the creek he had uttered a curse and defied the Lord.

The stranger's grave was still visible when I was a boy, just outside the cem-

etry fence, close to yet separated from the graves inside. The carved lettering on the gray plank set upright in the ground had long since eroded away. (Even the plank is gone now, and nothing remains to mark the place.) Sometimes on Decoration Day we would gather wildflowers from the hill and put them on the stranger's grave. We would look at the little bits of white and purple on the gray earth and shiver a little when we thought of the body lying there nameless and alone and the spirit an outcast too, waiting in Spirit Prison for the terrible accounting at the Last Judgment.

From the cemetery you can see the creek (a harmless trickle of tepid water in the summers when we used to go out there to fish for suckers or swim in the holes) and beyond the creek the old Mott place that was the stranger's destination, as it was the destination of most of the drifting cowboys who came through Helaman. The Mott place held a special fascination for us because according to local tradition it was there that Butch Cassidy and Elza Lay spent the winter of 1897 while they were planning the Castle Gate payroll robbery. Often when the fish weren't biting we would search in the brush along the creek for some evidence of the cabin where they had stayed. Once we found some flat rocks which might have been foundation piers, and another time Ernie Broadbent picked up a knife crusted with thick orange rust.

The day of the Castle Gate robbery, the twenty-first of April, 1897, was about the most exciting day there ever was in Helaman. On their escape the outlaws cut the telegraph line below Castle Gate and again south of Price. They rode west to Pinnacle Butte then south across the Washboard Flat, where they had stationed fresh horses taken from the Mott ranch, then on past Bull Hollow, around Cedar Mountain, and down Buckhorn Draw to the San Rafael, thence across the Sinbad country toward Robber's Roost on the wedge of rock between the Green River and the Dirty Devil. In Helaman the message was just coming through from Price when the line was cut. An hour later a posse rode eastward, at its head Bishop Pulsipher, who never carried any weapon but his righteous wrath, and Ezra Mott, armed with his long-barreled Colt .45. The Helaman posse reached Buckhorn Draw at dusk, just as another posse was riding in from

the south. In the dark gorge each group took the other for the outlaws, and before the mistake was discovered Ezra Mott's tough little mare had a bullet in her side. They say that Ezra Mott was furious, complaining that he had lost three horses and it was none of his damned affair to begin with. Bishop Pulsipher drew himself up and preached an impromptu sermon on obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law, and the posse disbanded.

It turned out that Ezra Mott's losses were not as great as he had claimed, for the two horses the outlaws had taken reappeared in his pasture a week or two later, giving rise to a suspicion in Helaman that he had known all along who his winter visitors were.

The episode thus ended, but it continued to generate new legends long afterwards. Down to my own day the boys of Helaman played Robbers Roost Gang, riding their horses helter-skelter out of a hundred Castle Gates in every hollow of the dry hills. Stories grew that the money was still buried somewhere in the desert, and we used to make elaborate plans on winter days for finding the treasure as soon as the weather broke up next spring.

It seems strange, when I think of it now, that the romance attached to Butch Cassidy and the Mott ranch and the stranger's grave never seemed to us to touch Retty Mott. And yet she was, in our own time, a living link to that lost time. She came to one of the ward socials that winter with Butch Cassidy and Elza Lay (who went by the names of Tom Gilbert and Bert Fowler while they were in Helaman) and danced with them all night. Retty Mott as a girl was as wild as an unbroken filly, Grandma used to say. She was a slim, wiry tomboy whose face and arms were suntanned when the other girls kept their skin milky white. Grandma used to tell how she would hitch her skirt up and ride a horse like a man, careless whether her legs were exposed clear to the knee. I saw a photograph once on a buffet in Retty Mott's front room (she had hailed me down as I was passing by one afternoon—"You-oo! You, Boy! Come here!"—to help her move a sofa; when we were through she pressed a dime into my hand), a photograph of a girl of perhaps sixteen with a mass of dark hair piled high on her head in the fashion of the eighteen-nineties and a look in her eyes that I still remem-

ber.

I remember the old Relief Society Hall in its last years, when it was used as a warehouse. It had a big coal stove in the center and at one end a raised platform where in the old days the Helaman Dramatic Society put on amateur theatricals. When I try to imagine the scene on that winter night it comes to me slowly, filling the decaying hall I knew with forms and faces that are strange to me, and I can't be sure whether I'm making it all up or remembering things my grandmother told me. I can see the awkward boys and the unasked girls sitting on benches on opposite sides of the hall, the girls in huddled conversations and the boys staring vacantly, gangly legs extended onto the dance floor. I see the dancers as they circle round and round the glowing stove. The face of Butch Cassidy emerges from the crowd, the pudgy face of the souvenir posters but more animated, and then I see the girl he is dancing with, her slim legs moving rapidly and with surprising grace beneath the long skirts, a strand of chestnut hair swinging across her face as she pivots.

Many things changed in Helaman in the years after the Castle Gate robbery. Bishop Pulsipher was released, after twenty years. Around the town the twenty-acre fields were combined to forty acres, then eighty and a hundred and sixty. No more big yellow brick houses were built on the corners of the blocks, no more trees planted to shade the deep lawns. Barns sagged and sometimes fell; sheds went unpainted; whole houses and barnyards were abandoned and stood vacant, when I was a boy, behind their overgrown shrubbery while owls and sparrowhawks nested in the decayed trees. For the cattlemen the changes were more rapid. The high country of the Wasatch Plateau was made a national forest, grazing limits were established, and the days of the open range were over. The big herds were broken up or moved out of the valley. Ezra Mott remained, however. He built a little clapboard house in town and began riding out to work his fields like the other farmers. But he was no farmer. Within a few years he had deteriorated into a slouching and unkempt old man whose days were spent in shuffling back and forth from his house to the pool hall. My father and his friends used to sing a derisive song to the tune of the "Chisholm Trail":