Ezra Mott stands on the street,
Tobacco juice dripping clear
down to his feet.
Come a ty-yi-yippy-yippy-yay,
yippy-yay. . . .

Retty Mott, at seventeen, ran away with a traveling man from Salt Lake. Then later, the story goes, she had another husband and lived in Denver. When she came back to Helaman she brought with her a little boy, but soon a lawman came from Colorado and took him away. It seems he was not her child but her husband's. Retty Mott was put in the county jail for a few weeks. My father and the other boys used to climb on one another's shoulders to get a look at her through the high barred window. I guess that was the start of teasing Retty Mott.

When old Ezra Mott finally died, Retty Mott lived on alone in the little clapboard house under the locust trees. When the deacons quorum chopped firewood or shoveled snow for the widows and old maids in town, it never occurred to us to chop her wood or shovel her walks, lacking as she did the dignity of a widow and the pathos of an old maid and being, as she was, antagonistic to the Church. But we thought of her, generations of us, on warm nights after Mutual, and year by year the legends grew, legends that we never tired of relating as we wandered home from our own pranks: the giant firecracker dropped down her chimney to explode inside the stovepipe and fill the house with soot; the outhouse overturned on Halloween with Retty Mott inside it; the clothesline rope strung between the pillars of her front porch to trip her as she came rushing out of the house.

One night, my last night of teasing Retty Mott, she had come out of the house before we expected her, scattering us wider than usual. I found myself with Ernie Broadbent around the corner, and gradually, carefully, we began to make our way back, less, I think, to assail the house again than to find our comrades. The night was especially silent, and we walked with scarcely a whisper. We were still fifty yards from the house when something rose from the ditch to our right. We were startled at first then relieved to think it must be one of the other boys. Then the form took shape in the darkness, tall, angular, with a long, loose robe. There was a metallic glint from something held in her hand, and just as we started to run there came a voice not loud or hysterical but low and steady and appalling.

"Someday," she said, "someday I'm going to kill me a little Mormon."

A Vision of Words

Clinton F. Larson

Inside, to the left, in King's College Chapel, Cambridge University, rests the great painting, "The Adoration of the Magi," by Peter Paul Rubens. To the right, the King's College Choir prepares to sing. The hinged panels to the left and right of the painting seem like large doors that have been opened to permit one to enter the manger in the company of the magi. An auburn glow suffuses the scene. The magi, in their gesturing, seem like a wave about to sweep toward the Christ child. But the radiance of the child and the solemnity of Mary keep them worshipful, at a distance. The auburn images have the fluidity of gems as lights might play over them, waver, and still. Far above the painting, in stained glass, is a depiction of Christ on the Cross. The stained glass the length of the Chapel has a clerestory luminescence.

The Chapel is full of students, fellows, and townsmen. The music begins. Bell-like voices muse over the text and vault to the ceiling that seems like lace thrown from arch to arch. The audience

listens devoutly. The music ends. The doors open, and the audience moves quietly out toward Churchill College and the Backs. They are circumspect. They are careful not to brush by each other. They do not wish to impose, nor to pass the time of day, and they go about their business efficiently, distant from each other.

So many people in Cambridge, and in England, who deal with each other efficiently in order to be considerate! Literature thrives among them because, in the absence of common religious belief, they yearn for statements that possess general, but personally meaningful, relevance. The people are stoical, but each to each quite alone. Then one recalls the unity and living luminescence of the Rubens.

The very literate and literary John Halloway, professor of modern literature at Cambridge University, writes:

A Poem for Breakfast

Look!
We have a great frost. An
Arrival of north.
And in the blue dark and bed,
Feeling it, I edged nearer and
You were southern.

Sparrows
Are the gay birds. We have them
Queing at the fronded panes
And we all share chatter and
bread.
But they have
No use for your beautiful
Coffee.

Cold, and well,
Yes, grief, are so alike, the
Wise man does not stay
To feel either but
Edges south to such
Climates as you
Magically provide; and
Look! Now we have the Land of
Talk.

Yet, wisewoman, consider also
The nature of magic:
Which resides
Also in the so
Happily, so hungrily
Enchanted. Therefore
Replenish my cup: from your
Shapely vessel and other
Morning abundances.

Literature, as with the finest photography, has the power to resolve experience into meaningful, accurate, and more generally understood detail. Man's desire for knowledge demands greater and greater resolution of psychic and physical meaning. With each space probe, he demands the recording equipment that will accomplish this objective. When he confronts events of great significance and magnitude—as, for example, the death of a world leader such as President Kennedy—he demands literary expression in order that his insights and feelings can be given adequate expression and fulfillment.

Each individual experiences momentous events which shape the meaning of life for him. As literary people show and as they propound, literature can provide meaningful comparative resolution of such events. There are those who say, justifiably, that religion or philosophy can provide such help. But religion or philosophy must be eclectic if they are to achieve higher resolution in the phenomenal world. Sir Phillip Sidney, I believe, provides for the achievement of such resolution in areas between the abstractness of philosophy on the one hand and the historical, empirical world on the other. He avers that literature takes from either and provides a golden world of experience that may provide amenable guidance for the individual as well as for people generally. It is the world of the parable in which the best lessons are learned.

In a time when literature seems recessive and lacking the evident meliorism of pragmatic philosophy, it is never more luminous and beautiful and true and necessary to life. In preparing the anthology *Modern Poetry of Western America*, William Stafford and I confronted the results of the pragmatism of Southern California. We could find very few creditable poets there, and some of those, like David Wright at Irvine, disavow any relationship with the area. But there are Ann Stanford of Beverly Hills, James McMichaels of Irvine and Kenneth Rexroth of Santa Barbara, who at their best are superb indeed. And of the five hundred people who attended the Royal Jubilee Conference on Arts and Communications in London, there were such literary people as the cultivated Chen Min-hwa of Taiwan, the ethnically-intense black poet Dennis Brustus of South Africa (now of Northwestern University), the brilliant Elizabeth M. Kerr of Mississippi, the melancholy, psychologically evanescent Werner Gapert of Danzig, who many years ago participated in

the Nazi assault on Stalingrad, and the mystical Loranee Senaratne of Sri Lanka. Whatever their social backgrounds, they emphasize and reiterate the need for literature throughout the world, especially in those societies that languish because of over-weening pragmatism or dehumanizing political philosophy.

Consider the population of Utah, one-sixtieth of that of Great Britain, though its land mass and that of Great Britain are about the same. Communication need not be efficient there because it is relatively sporadic. The inhabitants may be grateful for any communication at all and so may easily endure careless language as long as it meets pragmatic communal needs. But such a people may do well to deliberate on the need to make their language more literary in order to achieve greater resolution in the way they perceive and record experience. Their oral history and folklore may acquire some of the density and formalism that typify literature, but it devolves upon their literary people to resolve historical and current experience into the formal, memorable medium of literature. Though the hope for communal understanding among them is admirable indeed, it will remain tenuous and transitory unless they learn to compress the meaningful, formalized literature of the past into their own created literature. Literature is the principal way of consecrating experience and the literary scholars of society are its stewards. They must match the commitment—yes, the consecration—of the authors for whose work they act as stewards. And they should teach that what passes for humanism in much of the world today is not ultimately pragmatic, but a delusion—a delusion that is spiritually unsatisfying, tenuous and transitory. They need to remind themselves that the great literary humanists of the past kept God and religion close to them. Like Eliot, these humanists felt the presence of the masters of literary history and the marvellously liberating effects of the literary tradition they offer.

That tradition, now recessive in society, was never more fragile, but yet never so apparently eternal. As it grows hushed, it begins to resemble the still, small voice. But one may take its delicacy and let it breathe life into a language that is becoming as geometrical as a computer, and let words regain the richness of their history as they resonate in the spirit. What was thought to be so pragmatic becomes, under scrutiny, only an expedient, falsely objective, superficial. Literature, the language that requires the mind's complete engagement, can be presented as providing the ultimate pragmatism of a range of possibilities for spiritual and mental growth. We assume the meliorism of godly content and discern the high motives of the finest authors, even as in their work they pursue the negative capability and various personae in their attempts to make experience meaningful. We additionally assume the meliorism of literary forms as they are used to maintain sensibility—for example, incremental repetition, triads, the Miltonic line, synesthesia. Scripture shows the benefits of these forms, and of course many more. The synesthesia of apprehending light that is heard and sound that is seen is evidence of the presence of God's will. If ever spirituality is to be critically defined, for its presence is evident in many literary masterworks, the consideration of form, as well as content, will therefore be fundamental.

As I entered the octagon of Ely Cathedral in July, I saw a fellow in black robes headed toward the nave. I said, not wishing to be disrespectful, "Hold it right there. Are you the Vicar of Ely?"

"No," he said. "But I help him answer the questions of those who come here."

"May I ask one?" I said.

"Please go ahead," he said.

Looking up, I said, "Why was the great lantern created? According to this pamphlet, it rises 170 feet above the floor."

"Yes," he said, "and it weighs 400 tons. It is built mainly of triangulated oak beams and lead and was conceived by Alan of Walsingham in 1322. What was your question?"

"Why was it created?"

"Well, of course, to let in more light for the octagon. You see, it does have the effect of a lantern."

"Is that all?"

"Yes, as far as I know."

"Thank you," I said.

I went by Ovin's Stone, not quite satisfied. Then I noticed an old brass plate imbedded in the floor. On it was an engraved cross about three feet long. Scrutinizing it, I saw some small business was at the base of the cross. It was about two inches high and at first looked like a depiction of rubble. Practically kneel-

ing, I saw that it was really a miniature design of the Ely Cathedral itself! The engraved cross rose from its apex—that is, from the lantern. This depiction, it seemed to me, contained the spiritual purpose not only of the lantern but of the cathedral as well.

The lantern, as I have said, is 170 feet above the floor of the octagon. Looking up again, I saw that it held the base of the spiritual cross of the depiction I had just seen on the floor, for Ely an upright cross as well as the earth-bound cross of the transept and nave.

Consider this. If the lantern is thirty-five feet in diameter, then it would represent the base of the upright of the spiritual cross, and would be a rendering of the diameter of ten inches of the real cross, a scale of about one to forty-two. If the cross of Jesus was about fourteen feet high, and the spiritual cross of Ely were built to scale, it can be construed to be over one mile high! How glorious the lantern of Ely Cathedral was to those who conceived of it and built it and worshipped under it! What a magnificent commitment it represented! Looking up again, I felt the tremendous majesty, glory and gravity of Ely's spiritual cross. Then, in my mind's eye, I could see Ely Cathedral and its spiritual cross as they might be seen as one approaches them along the highway from Cambridge or London.

Because in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God, those who teach that spiritual essence and existence called literature have a magnificent work and responsibility. We must think of its proportion and meaning. Perhaps no esthetic and intellectual formulation, except the one in the mind of God, can do ultimate justice to the literature of England, America and the world. But a teacher can bring a student close to literary insight and can help provide the means by which he formulates his own, which will express the meaning and proportion of his own spirit in its relationship with Jesus of Nazareth, the savior who hung on a cross to achieve man's salvation, the image of whom is always in our mind's eye.

The following is from the poetry of Jean de la Ceppede, a Renaissance French poet:

O Phoenix, cherished bird of
 Arabia,
You are the symbol of Christ the
 Hero.
He, like you, lies unenslaved
 among the dead.
You die on a scented pyre;
He dies on a tree that offers
 heaven its perfume.
Your ashes are his marrow;
You bear your ashes to an altar in
 the burning desert.
Christ, so resurrected, against the
 azure sky
And the vaults of stars you raise
 your tree of light.

And finally:

Epistemology

Parchment gold and the blue
 wind:
A gust of radiance dwells
As tinge against the shading
 mauve
Where earth and mountain align
Horizons smooth as the curvature
Of space. Where the lode of
 diamond
Is, the tapestry of azure fades,
And nearly here, the sage is
 dusty
As the skies that opalesce
 earthward,
Browning into evening.
 Take this flower
Shimmering in the wind and see
The petals transform the pearl
And gauze of air into being!

Sun must course against the dark
To seek where it may stay.
Though it must meet the sills that
 play
Into its light, it settles, smalling
Into enlightenment to flare
Or flicker, rising into ambience
By degrees where the gauze of
 light
Whispers in the wind.

-Clinton F. Larson

The poem "O Phoenix ..." cited near the end of this essay is Dr. Larson's translation of a sonnet by Jean de la Ceppede, a Renaissance French poet; this translation appears with others by Dr. Larson in Harold Martin Pruit Renaissance and Baroque Lyrics (*Northwestern University Press, 1962*).