

FRUITLESS WAIT

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Watch for the Morning. By Elisabeth Macdonald. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1978. 270 p. \$9.95.

Kate and Mary Ann Hamilton, mother and daughter, are nineteenth-century Mormon women whose romantic dreams are serially shattered during the forty years spanned in this novel, a story, hopes its author, that "has something to say about all women, in all ages and circumstances."

Kate, an orphan scullery maid in an Anglican household in Liverpool, becomes a Mormon in 1850. Dismissed by her mistress for her blasphemous behavior, she seeks and finds consolation in Burns Hamilton, the local convert-elder who baptized her. Kate and Burns marry, emigrate to the Salt Lake Valley and then respond to church assignments that take them to Provo and St. George. Burns acquires three plural wives, property and church position, but as the family moves south, Kate—who had once cherished "the knowledge that she was Burns's true and only love"—moves inward. Mary Ann views her mother as one who over the years "closed herself in a shell," and by contrast this eldest daughter is care-free and outspoken, unwilling to conform to what she perceives as the mold for Mormon women. She swears, rides her horse astride, turns away suitors who woo her into plural marriage and falls passionately in love with her Indian foster brother. Her hopes too are disappointed, and the end of the novel finds mother and daughter alone together about to arise phoenix-like out of the ashen remains of their dreams.

Macdonald has placed her characters within a Mormon context that is, for the most part, well documented. One historical anachronism that detracts from the story's believability, however, is the missionary experience of Kate and Burns's oldest son

Brigham. In the early 1870s the nineteen-year-old elder leaves St. George for a two-year mission and is subsequently met in upstate New York by the mission president who within months issues him a dishonorable release, an unlikely event inasmuch as close supervision of missionaries by mission presidents was rare at the time. While Brigham Hamilton's succumbence to the temptations of the flesh is timeless, the trappings of the incident (which absorb some thirty pages) are at least twenty years out of the story's time frame. But this departure from historical accuracy is the exception in a novel whose author has obviously worked hard to verify names, events, times and places in order to make her story credibly Mormon.

But *Watch for the Morning* falls short of capturing the nineteenth-century Mormon experience. In attempting to reach "the core of truth, the reality behind the stereotype of the sturdy Mormon Pioneer" (as Macdonald proposes in a press release on the book), the author has appealed to non-Mormon, even anti-Mormon stereotypes of Latter-day Saints. Kate is a woman oppressed by polygamy and the Mormon Church. She is bright and her conversion is never to Mormonism per se, but to a man she dearly loves who eventually deceives her. Burns is the sometimes-lecherous polygamous husband, turned ambitious and self-seeking by the Church's power structure. Unlike Maurine Whipple who, in *The Giant Joshua*, develops one happy plural family as a definite contrast to her protagonist's marital experience, Macdonald shows only sorrow and perversion within the polygamous system of marriage. A young wife dies bearing a child conceived in horror rather than love. Two plural wives find satisfaction as lesbians. A son's oedipal relationship with his mother ends in suicide.