

FRUITLESS WAIT

JILL MULVAY DERR

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.

While Mary Ann finds her father "a source of pride to her," and Kate sees her marriage as "one long series of emotional estrangements and reconciliations," such phrasal glimpses of humanness do little to temper page after page of tear-jerking heartbreak in polygamy.

Kate Hamilton resigns herself to watching for the eternal morning of the life after death, but the novel affords us few if any convincing flickers of spiritual light. Mother and daughter find it difficult to pray; father's prayers are unfeeling and pietistic; brother's continual fasting and prayer only increase his melancholy. In no character is there a sense of religious conversion or commitment that is soul deep. In fact, most of the triumphant moments in the book (and there are some good ones, such as when Kate, who has managed her husband's St. George property, informs him that she holds the title and will not sell to his appointed buyer) come when a character subverts the Mormon system. Not that sorrow, subversion and sabotage were/are not part of the Mormon experience, but by carefully avoiding other aspects of nineteenth-century Mormon life, Macdonald seems to have replaced one set of stereotypes with another.

The plot itself tends to de-emphasize the characters' development. At times Kate and Mary Ann seem to move through the novel like tokens on a gameboard of nineteenth and twentieth-century dramatic clichés. The death of an innocent child,

attempted rape, young love lost and illicit sex are spaces where the characters stop at least once, and often twice. Upon a second reading of the novel, however, one is less encumbered by this melodrama and the characters emerge more clearly. Kate Hamilton is impenetrable. We know more of her dreams and their shattering than of her private struggles, but her inward-turning and her mounting bitterness make her a believable, though hauntingly unknowable woman. Mary Ann's candor and moldlessness bring her closer to the reader. Her relationships with others are healthy and she is accustomed to making her own way. Open to new experiences, she is the foreshadowed focus of the novel's revelatory denouement. Unfortunately, the subtle moment is overshadowed by the murder and suicide immediately preceding it.

In one sense, at least, *Watch for the Morning* is a story, as its author hoped, "not limited by time and place." Life is unfair and has "a way of exacting payments you never anticipated," just as Kate and Mary Ann proclaim. But we must guess at Macdonald's conclusion—"that fulfillment comes only from within oneself"—we don't experience it. There is little blending of outward circumstance with internal reconciliation—none of the sublime cathartic struggle of a woman for selfhood portrayed by Annie Clark Tanner's autobiography, for example. Like Kate, we are left watching for the light that seems never to dawn.

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THE HINCKLEY INSTITUTION

JOHN R. SILLITO

"I'd Rather Be Born Lucky Than Rich": The Autobiography of Robert H. Hinckley. By Robert H. Hinckley and JoAnn Jacobsen Wells. No. 7, Charles Redd Monographs in Western History. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1977. 160. pp., index, biblio, illus. \$4.95.

Robert Hinckley is clearly one of Utah's most distinguished sons. In a career spanning over a half century, both in Utah and on the national level, he has worn a number of different hats—politician, government official, businessman, rancher. Through all of his career, however, he has maintained