

ment of the discussion is the idea of an open canon. In the same way that Neusner's analysis of the tensions between the Pharisees and the early Christian community overturns a number of scholarly interpretations, his discussion of attaining Torah leads to the conclusion that canon is not really fixed and closed, but that new works are continually added

in virtue of what it means to master revelation.

Neusner's four lectures on *Talmud-Torah* provide both an excellent introduction to the critical study of Judaism in late antiquity and a review of many of the most important points in Neusner's own work for the more advanced student.

[Ed. Note: See *Brief Notices* for another opinion.]

Two Poets: Their Travels, Their Moods

Once in Israel. By Emma Lou Thyne. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1980. 80 pp. \$5.95.

Moods: Of Late. By Marden J. Clark. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1979. 81 pp. \$5.95.

Reviewed by MARY L. BRADFORD, editor of *Dialogue*.

The scene was just past the gate at summer's end. The pine trees brushed against the two-story mountain house. The poet's study, all windows, looked out over a luxuriant mountain range, yellow and purple with wildflowers. The poet invited me to sit on the porch and listen to an account of her trip to a writer's workshop, an intensive one for published poets, to which poets were invited to bring their work for discussion and revision. Emma Lou Thyne brought her finished book—the one just about to be set in type at BYU, one she had been working feverishly at ever since her trip to Israel two years before. But after the two-week workshop, she called the press and told them she had revised the entire volume. The excitement in her voice as she read me her revisions convinced me that process is as important to Emma Lou as the finished product. Her revisions reminded me of some of the best work of May Swenson, the accomplished imagist and devotee of the specific. All fat cut away, the redolent symbols of Israel were allowed to transcend the travelogue the reader would naturally expect from a

one-time visitor. Those of us who feel like adoptive Israelites can rejoice and enter into the imagination of this gifted Mormon poet who has extended herself back into scripture and forward into the teeming present.

Once In Israel alternates prose diary entries with poems describing an uncommon trip, made uncommon, as explained by the poet, through the leadership of Lowell Bennion, a man steeped in his subject and firmly implanted in the soil of it, a man accustomed to opening doors for others—doors that lead to renewed wonder and worship. Emma Lou Thyne, a disciple of his, was fully able to transcend her student status and tourist view of life and translate this trip into art. Many of these poems have been set to music. There is music in them always, some of it ancient music. Others speak with the spare voice of the modern poet. She switches easily from one voice to the other.

Her prose descriptions are often as good as the poems. She begins at Kennedy Airport where "we are bussed like bottled pickles and sit knee to chest across a football field leviathan . . . The meals on the flight are a kind of pre-digested Kosher for the benign captivity of bodies bent on being bodies!" The images in the prose are always true to the images of the poetry. (Pickles, leviathan, Kosher, etc.). Mundane descriptions give way to sharpened almost photographic images as in this description of a "perilous shopping trip": "Cinnamon and saf-

from are swaddled in the noises/of alleys. A ripe lamb hangs unwolly in its long/ sacrifice and giant cauliflowers stack their airs/like invisible smoke behind the blithe squalor/of black-eyed children playing the jump-the-rope of/home."

The title, *Once in Israel*, is perfect. Emma Lou was only once in Israel so she stays with her own perceptions and the kaleidoscope they produce. She does not present herself as expert. She is modestly amazed that after one trip she could return "with Israel inside me." This book is in itself a journey that asks the question, why? Why is the poet so taken with the place? She shows us by allowing the reader to go along with her. The Wailing Wall is there, the Mount of Beatitudes, the Golan Heights, the Moslems, the Bedouins, the gate of Jaffa. These are also shown in a fine collection of photographs by Don Thorpe in the middle of the book. I am glad the pictures are together in their own section because the poems do not need them. The poems are pictures in themselves.

At Emma Lou's mountain retreat that day, she read me a poem about an old Moslem in prayer that suggests May Swenson's work and shows also that Emma Lou Thayne has risen above the sentimentality that characterizes some of her earlier work. This poem was inspired by the fact that her husband had packed his bags to leave for Hebron and had kept out only two left shoes to wear. "So all day he's been going in uncalculated circles—to everyone's delight." In their travels that day, they see a synagogue in the corner of a mosque with a "squatting Moslem mouthing silences in his Holy of Holies above the rich Persian rugs" and the poet asks what is in his mind. It begins, "Feet. These are feet/This is a place/ to walk to. Toes./These are toes. They/go first. After, the heel./Toe. Heel. Into the/ shoe. Then heel. Toe/In the shoe that walks." Having set up this staccato rhythm, the poem proceeds to "Man. This is a man." and ends with a powerful prayer: "This is a man/praying:/Bless this broken and beloved world./Keep the mountains up/and the deserts down/and the river in its sides. Keep/our brothers passionate/and our women more than

safe/and our children's children full of dreams—/ and a way to walk." All this from a pair of mismatched shoes!

If you love Israel either because you have been there or you haven't; if you love Emma Lou Thayne or Lowell Bennion, or if you simply love good poems, buy this book. It is a labor of love and it will repay you.

Marden Clark is a wonderful poet. I said it and I'm glad. I have heard him read his poetry aloud and been moved by it. I have helped him edit some of it for *Dialogue* and been honored. The Brigham Young University Press has given his collection *Moods: Of Late* a respectable format, quality paper and plenty of white space. Marden Clark is a respected professor at BYU and so deserves it.

Marden Clark goes into his workshop where he keeps a goodly store of well-honed tools—images, vigorous verbs, well-wrought classical and modern forms—and he uses these tools to hammer out his experiences, to shape them into lasting word sculptures. Then he brings them out into the light so that readers too may look clear-eyed at facets of their own lives, lives made somehow more bearable and more beautiful because of these poems.

Marden Clark is a family man and he puts his family into his poems, but he does not abuse them. He is not a "Great Occasion" poet, but he uses specific occasions in the lives of his family and certain public occasions and celebrations to bring moods to life: Mother's Day and Father's Day, the marriage of a daughter, the calling of a missionary, the death of President Kennedy, the ordeal of Biafra. As he puts it in the introduction, "Most of the poems grow out of the tight interweaving of my family experiences and my Mormon experiences, reflecting the strong Mormon emphasis on family life."

I once read a whole collection of poems on the death of JFK, but none reached me as did this classical stanza from Marden Clark: "Dante rode Virgil's back down those mighty haunches/ Through the ice past zero gravity of being/And began the purgatorial climb./We might make the same journey/With inverted boots an empty

saddle/On a riderless black stallion—the same journey/Alongside seven whites marching with death.”

The Clark family seems to have suffered more than its share of illness and death. But Marden, the poet, does not flinch. What grandparent (or parent) has not thought, “Ah, if only grandparents had the power of proxy/Could suffer a little for a little child.” All family ties—parents to children, children to parents and grandparents, husbands to wives, all relationships inform Marden Clark’s poems and are given life through his mas-

tery of many forms. He is equally at home with the sonnet and certain modern verse. He closes the book with my favorite of the collection, one that must be seen to be believed because it shapes itself on the page like poems of the “concrete” school. Called “In a Word” it is an Easter poem and a creative play on words: “What’s in a name?/In a name/A single word/ and ending: ‘In a name/from a carpenter a gardener/from the Word/in a word/Mary!’ ”

All ye who love poetry, don’t stand there—go out and buy *Moods: Of Late*.

