

*“Herself Moving Beside Herself,
Out There Alone”:
The Shape of Mormon Belief
in Virginia Sorensen’s
The Evening and the Morning*

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*. . . the eternal human Self cannot escape from existence nor can it escape
from the awareness of its existence . . .*

—B. F. Cummings

THE MATTER AT LARGE: MORMON BELIEFS AND MORMON FICTION

WHAT DO THE PHRASES “Mormon novel” and “Mormon novelist” mean? Maybe in the first place we are incautious not to separate novel from novelist. Suppose a “Mormon novelist” in a quite strenuous sense: nominally and actively Mormon, a baptized member who accepts Mormon scripture as canonical, Mormon prophets as authoritative, Mormon doctrine (that is, “the gospel” at least as embodied in the scriptures) as a true and adequate, if not exhaustively complete, vision and interpretation of the world, of the human self and its sights and doings and of God; who both accepts and experiences Mormon ordinances as efficacious channels of God’s power; who cleaves to the covenants of baptism, sacrament, priesthood and temple; and who finally also writes the extended prose narratives we call novels. What kinds of novels might such a writer make? At one imaginable limit, he might write detective thrillers, or nihilistic science-fiction,¹ or maybe even pornography; for as James Faulconer once noted, writing is after all a vocation just as plumbing is, and we never seem to bother about whether we’ve called a Mormon plumber when the drain backs up—the question is simply, how good at his craft is this worker?² But of course near its limit the analogy sunders: a writer’s beliefs and commitments must influence his craft in ways that a plumber’s will not. And some of us, Mormon or not, might regard a writer’s very choice of tough-guy, SF, or porn as the kind of self-betrayal that calls in question the

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integrity of all the writer's professed beliefs. We hope that any serious writer's major and minor artistic choices will somehow accord with those life-commitments that lie close to the foundation of his personality and set the angle and force of all his intentions. This brings us near an opposite limit, then: the case where, as with Catholics like J. F. Powers and Flannery O'Connor, the religious life-commitments and the artistic choices seem deeply at one, novelist inseparable from novel.

But most writers and their books, alas or hurrah, fall somewhere between these limits, on muddled middle ground where we have to map and make our way with intelligent care. How "Christian," of whatever variety, are Jane Austen, Tolstoy before conversion, or Faulkner, Hemingway, Warren, Welty, Updike, Taylor Caldwell? How "Jewish" are Roth, Bellow, Malamud, Singer, Chaim Potok? How "Mormon" are Maurine Whipple, Richard Scowcroft, Virginia Sorensen, Douglas Thayer, Don Marshall, Bela Petsco, Shirley Sealy, and their novels and stories? Do Mormon characters, problems, and milieu, or even overt Mormon preachment, make a story "Mormon"? And does LDS membership, or the lack or lapse of it, make a writer "Mormon" or "non-Mormon" in his work? These are questions of "implicit vision," questions of how, other than by explicit statement, writers' beliefs can be "in" their work.

Some splendid critics have considered at length such questions about authors' beliefs and their fictions—Wayne Booth and Sheldon Sacks, to name only two recent Americans. I find Sacks's theoretical chapters (the first and sixth) in his *Fiction and the Shape of Belief* powerfully helpful in pursuing questions of Mormon belief in Mormon fiction. Sacks's most general thesis is that "The ethical beliefs, opinions, and prejudices of novelists do not shape their novels, but rather have a discernible and vital shape within those novels."³ Sacks first distinguishes three broad types of fiction: satire, apologue and represented action. He argues, cogently I think, that "coherent" instances of the types must be mutually exclusive, unless the "organizing principle" of the work is suspended by "digression" (our recognition of, say, a "satiric passage" in an otherwise realistic novel presupposes an apprehension of its coherence as a novel).

Sacks defines the "organizing principles" of the three types as follows:

A satire is a work organized so that it ridicules objects external to the fictional world created in it.

An apologue is a work organized as a fictional example of the truth of a formulable statement or a series of such statements.

An action is a work organized so that it introduces characters, about whose fates we are made to care, in unstable relationships which are then further complicated until the complication is finally resolved by the removal of the represented instability (p. 26).

Sacks reserves the term "novel" for only this third type. Examples of the three might be, respectively, *Gulliver's Travels*, *Rasselas* and *Emma*.

Sacks discerns important differences in the ways authors' beliefs may be inferred from different types of fictions. A satire allows direct access only to

the author's negative judgments, from which we might guess his positive beliefs only in narrow categories: "The positive shape of belief" in satire, Sacks writes, "is essentially limited to the negative pattern implicit in the selection of external objects" of ridicule (p. 49). In apologue, by contrast, "the writer . . . is called upon to reveal by fictional example his positive beliefs;" here "The shape of belief . . . is obviously defined mainly by the themes exemplified" (p. 60).

But a "represented action" or novel presents a harder case: "the shape of belief in actions cannot be the pattern of ridiculed objects peculiar to satire or the exemplified thematic statement of apologue" (p. 61). Here, Sacks suggests (and his main effort is to test and argue this hypothesis) "that the novelist's beliefs, opinions, and prejudices are expressed in the judgments he conveys of his characters, their actions, and their thoughts;" judgments "expressed as . . . signals—which persuade his readers to react to those characters, their acts, and their thoughts in a manner consonant with the artistic end to which all elements in his work are subordinate" (p. 66). Indeed, he argues, the artistic end of an author writing a novel is such that the writer inevitably will incorporate his beliefs this way, since the writer "not merely may but must subtly control our feelings about the characters, acts, and thoughts represented at each stage of the novel if it is to have a coherent effect" (p. 65).

Three readings of Sacks's close but lucid argument persuade me, over any quibbles I might raise in reference to specific and thus imperfect fictions as against his austere theoretical purities, that he is essentially right: the artistic end of making a coherent novel "exerts no pressure on a writer to make insincere judgments" (p. 250) of characters, actions, and thoughts.⁴ Thus, if we trust the writer's personal integrity, we may with reasonable confidence trace the shape of his belief in the myriad judgments he must express on every page, in almost every line, to make the novel work at all.

Though surprisingly at first sight, Sacks's argument means, too, that writers of novels (actions) will reveal far more of their beliefs than will writers of satires or apologues: "For the beliefs relevant to apologues are quite likely to be, in some sense, doctrinal and a writer is likely to reveal his long-range commitments only. The satirist, no matter how wide the scope of his satire, need only reveal the negative side of his beliefs . . .;" even "the virtues he describes have no necessary connection with his positive beliefs, since their job is to facilitate not ethical statements but ridicule of external objects." Sacks finds that "it is the novelist, ironically, from whom the greatest degree of ethical revelation is demanded It is not sufficient for him, as it is for the satirist, to show us what he does not like in the external world. And he may not limit what he reveals to the formulated ideas in which he consciously acquiesces" (p. 271).

The theoretical argument just sketched has some immediate implications for the historical and critical study of Mormon fiction. We seem to have had very little Mormon satire, though much Mormon humor pokes satirically at both Mormon and gentile folly as judged by Mormon standards; and maybe Richard Cracroft would make a case for Sam Taylor's *Heaven Knows Why* as

satire or as comic action mixed with satire.⁵ Clearly, the dominant popular and ecclesiastically supported tradition in Mormon fiction has been that of apologue, from *Added Upon* to *Beyond this Moment* and quite likely next month's *Ensign* and *New Era*. I suspect the tradition of apologue is indirectly but massively supported by the way most of us teach literature at BYU, with our emphasis on "theme" as governing principle even while we induct students into the intricate delights of form and style and tone. But the dominance of apologue may be largely accounted for simply by Church members' acceptance of the Church's general commitments to preach the gospel and to strengthen the faith of the already-converted: "If one has a message to deliver," wrote Nephi Anderson, "he puts it into a novel."⁶ This "package-message" aesthetic goes largely unchallenged, apparently because too few of us yet understand that fictions can be educative without being didactic, or that "moral purpose" is no less compatible with "action" than with "apologue."

The dominance of apologue, as a quasi-official aesthetic and as an expectation of Mormon readers, might also partly account for the difficulty of the first generation of serious Mormon novelists, the "lost generation" of the 1940s,⁷ had staying in the Church or feeling themselves integral with the Mormon community. Not being clearly apologues promoting the faith by overtly exemplifying the Church's long-range doctrinal commitments, their novels, I suspect, were often misread and more often mistrusted (though it is true that the novelists may in fact have been heretical and often earned this mistrust by their posture as superior artist-outcasts of backward, narrow villages). By the nature of the type, Sacks's argument suggests, a novel as "represented action" is unlikely to demonstrate unambiguously the truth of any formulable religious proposition; though also by its nature it will imply its writer's values and beliefs on every page. We might find, if we re-read some of the novels of the forties, that their implicit structures of value are sometimes more "Mormon" than either the authors or their Mormon audience then realized.

Could we say that a "Mormon novel"—that is, either a novel by a strenuously defined Mormon or a novel about Mormon characters—is "Mormon" to the extent that its implicit vision or structure of values accords with some more-or-less normative "Mormon vision" and "Mormon life-commitments?" From this angle, for instance, Halldór Laxness' *Paradise Reclaimed* is "Mormon" mainly in terms of its characters and the beliefs and customs they temporarily espouse; in terms of the author's implicit judgments, it might more properly be called a "humanist novel."⁸ Another significant consideration must be the provenance of the author's values: even if we find a Laxness making a judgment we would call "Mormon," still the values behind it might derive from other sources—Lutheran, Catholic, existentialist, even Buddhist.

This raises a large and obvious problem: a "Mormon vision" and "Mormon values" may not be as exclusive, as "peculiar," as capable of strenuous definition, as we sometimes tell ourselves. Most of our ethical standards (not our dietary ones, which we sometimes treat as if they were ethical), like honesty, chastity, benevolence, temperance, charity, have been widely shared in Western Christendom for centuries. And even if we define a "Mor-

mon vision" of experience in general, could we insist on its peculiarity at more than a few points?

To begin with, such a "vision," D&C 93:24 persuades me, ought to mean clear sight of "things as they are;" but this is the titled property of most realists. Further, it would include much of the trivial, tedious, vulgar, and evil as well as the "spiritual," "uplifting," exalted and good, if it were to be in any sense a version of "things as they are:" Pollyanna's "glad game" is not the gospel, unless in a terribly trivialized way; and being brought up on 2 Nephi 2 ought to have given Mormon writers and readers, if anything, a more rather than less acute sense of "opposition in all things." But conflict is the common pasture of all narrative fictions. Still, a "Mormon" or "gospel" map of human experience, as Terry Warner has suggested, will include features of the terrain that, say, Austen or Tolstoy or Chekhov or Hemingway might have overlooked.⁹ Such a "Mormon vision" might be less like "seeing the world through a paradisiacal glass, brightly," as Richard Cracroft and Neal Lambert put it,¹⁰ than like viewing an x-ray superimposed on a photograph: things as they look to honest sight, and something more.

Am I almost saying ain't no such critter as a "Mormon novel?" Well, at least that the critter may be harder to catch than we've supposed. We have to spot the "something more:" a "Mormon novel" by definition would have (and perhaps not without contrariety) an implicit vision distinguishably and at some points peculiarly Mormon, not merely in its characters or milieu but in its imaginative perspective, the set of proximate and ultimate judgments within which characters, their actions and their thoughts are placed. *Consonance* might be an apt name for this primary test: do the novel's implied beliefs accord with Mormon beliefs?

This leaves some sizeable problems yet. We may find novels that are only "Mormon in part;" still, such a discrimination may matter sometimes to some of us. Our judgments will be taxonomic rather than normative—to find a novel largely "Mormon" won't necessarily be to find it a good novel; still, to talk about "Mormon literature" at all, we need some taxonomic skill, some stricter definitions. And what of the theoretically possible "Mormon novel" with non-Mormon characters and non-Mormon milieu, with no Mormon references, and written by a non-Mormon novelist who has worked out his own vision and values that just happen to coincide with ours? Here a secondary test would apply—*provenance*, the probable source of the author's beliefs. I doubt my hypothetical limit case will plague us much, since all the "nons" make it unlikely that a reader would suspect "Mormon" values as the source of judgments in such a novel. Still, this negative limit may warn us that, with our usual and quite defensible biographical and historical inferences suspended, *Moby-Dick* or *The Scarlet Letter* or *Anna Karenina* might be found just as "Mormon" as *The Giant Joshua*.

But, skirting that mad abyss and allowing the usual contexts of character, milieu and author's biography, what we most often want to know is, how "Mormon" is this novel about Mormon characters by a Mormon or ex-Mormon or Mormon-watcher? Which brings me at last to

THE MATTER AT HAND: SORENSSEN'S *THE EVENING AND THE MORNING* AS A POSSIBLE MORMON NOVEL

At the time she wrote *The Evening and the Morning*, Virginia Sorensen apparently was not "Mormon" by the strenuous definition (how constantly are any of us?), and I would not presume to judge of her (nor of anyone) whether or to what degree she ever had been; she was, in Franklin Fisher's apt phrase, a "black sheep." We can even grant Dale Morgan's assertion in *Saturday Review* that "It is only by accident of her birth or theirs that the people she writes about are Mormons," and that "she is no writer of 'Mormon novels'" insofar as her characters' "problems are the problems of people everywhere who somehow must make good lives for themselves, each bringing order out of his individual chaos."¹¹ (I find the humanistic notion of "universality" here oddly yoked to an image that for me resonates with Joseph Smith's peculiar doctrine of creation; but let that pass.) Neither the author's biography or the common humanity of her characters' problems will fully settle the question: we must look to the "implied author" (in Wayne Booth's phrase),¹² the author's "second self" created in the novel, and to the judgments that "second self" makes.

It has been remarked of Hawthorne that he did not have to believe in Puritanism to write a great novel about it, but rather he had to understand it, which for a man of his time was harder. Similarly, Virginia Sorensen did not have to believe in Mormonism to write a good novel about it; she had to understand it, which for an expatriate might be both harder and easier—harder because she no longer believed certain things, easier because an expatriate's distance allowed a perspective that could matter for the kinds of judgments a novelist must make. Virginia Sorensen herself has described the novelist as a person "in the middle," standing somewhere between the poles of "for" and "against" so as to see a broad span and judge evenly.¹³ In our terms, it is the writer of apologue whose "second self" can and must make his long-range doctrinal allegiances clear; the "second self" of the novelist may not stand so close to the pole of "for." Thus, in a novel like *The Evening and the Morning*, it may not make much *novelistic* difference whether the actual writer believes the Joseph Smith story or not; she may represent a character for whom it makes a life-difference, and in her "second self" she may or may not endorse that character, but we ought not to read endorsement of the character as endorsement of the belief or disbelief; rather we must look to the implicit value by which the "second self" judges the character. It will not do, in estimating how "Mormon" *The Evening and the Morning* is, or in judging the beliefs of its implied author, to see simplistically that she generally supports the rebellious and adulterous Kate Alexander against a repressive Mormon village. We must see *why* and *how much* she endorses Kate, and how she makes subtler and often more important judgments of Kate as well as of other characters.

The Evening and the Morning is a technically and ethically complex novel that interweaves past and present during six days, Monday through Saturday, of the 24th of July week of 1922, which the widowed Kate Black Alexan-

der spends with the family of her daughter Deseret in Manti, Utah. Kate has come to get affidavits signed so she can collect the Federal pension due her deceased husband Karl as a Black Hawk War veteran. But her return is also an ambivalent re-immersion in a turbulent past, "good to remember but of course best to forget,"¹⁴ whose unresolved tensions and unconfessed wrongs still vibrate around Kate—in the estrangement between herself and Dessie, the discord between Dessie and her husband Ike Cluff, the adolescent joy, fear and guilt of her granddaughter Jean, and the sour vindictiveness of Marya Olgood, the surviving sister of Karl Alexander's first wife.

Genealogy is thick in this novel—thick and tangled as it can be without centrally involving polygamy—but the relationships among the families of three sisters should clarify it. In the novel's past, Marya Thugerson is married to Charles Olgood, her sister Helga to the fiddlemaker Peter Jansen, who lives in Nephi, and Christina ("Steen") to Karl Alexander. The Olgood children do not figure significantly in the novel, but Peter and Helga have a congenitally damaged daughter who is a painful, pathetic burden to them, and Karl and Steen have two children, Teena and Karlie. Three years after Steen dies, Karl, partly at Peter Jansen's instigation, marries sixteen-year-old Kate Black, and they beget four children, Mose, Tracy, Martha and Dick.

Whence Deseret? Thereby hangs the tale. For it is the introduction of "wild" Kate Black into this web of kinship that generates the novel's central conflicts. Well before reaching sixteen, Kate has become a rebel because her father "was hardly a father at all," a man who "came home only between journeys freighting and bringing immigrants, on his brief visits scattering a munificent seed intended to grow within and console his wives in his absence;" yet he is also a "gentle, kindly man," and Kate "must love him feeling at the same time bitterly deprived of him, and feeling it necessary to blame somebody else" (p. 19-20). The somebody else, of course, could only be "Brother Brigham," who was "forever sending messages which told her father what to do" (p. 20). So even as a child dressed in white and given a bouquet to toss in front of Brigham's carriage, Kate had thrown the flowers behind her and "stepped on them" (p. 21). And behind Brigham, predictably enough, Kate blames and rebels against the Church and disbelieves its teachings.

Notice how complicated, even in this small bit of antecedent action, are the judgments we make. We sympathize with Kate's bitter deprivation on the good Mormon and human ground that a child deeply needs a father's loving presence, and we condemn her father on that same ground, despite his kindness and his otherwise admirable devotion to the Church. But although we understand Kate's blaming Brother Brigham and by extension the Church, we are not asked to condone it: Kate's childish petulance is excessive and even selfish; and still less excusable is the maturing girl's failure to redress her emotional error and forgive both her mistaken father and Brother Brigham, whom the adult Kate can see as both a "smiling wealthy symbol of power" and ordinarily "hot and human" (p. 20). All these judgments are further complicated by the fact that the episode comes to us through Dessie's memory of Kate's telling, for the story has always given Dessie a "curious uncertainty"

(p. 20), has "always confused" her (p. 21), and thus is part of what has made her the anxious, overprotective woman she is. We see that Kate, in telling this story as self-justification (and much more in leaving Dessie when forced to move away from Manti after Karl's death), has committed a version of the same wrong she condemns her father for.

Almost any moment in the novel, I venture, would exact such delicate and multiple judgments from us; and I venture, too, that most of our judgments would refer finally to central ethical teachings of the gospel. These, of course, are not exclusively "Mormon," but their provenance for Virginia Sorensen must have been largely that. We may suppose, further, that the novel's "moral purpose," if Virginia Sorensen had one, was in part to urge us through such fictive experiences as this to judge more carefully and sympathetically, to attain the fullest measure of justice and mercy and the most delicate balance of their concordantly opposed claims.¹⁵ Our experience and the beliefs we profess demand no less of us.

This episode is also a resonant instance of a problem that runs deep in Christian and Mormon scripture alike: the turning away of the hearts of parents from children, children from parents. The standard by which we measure the pity and terror of this division is not exclusively Mormon, but a Mormon valuation of the family only sharpens the pain: these things should not be, but they are, and who will heal us?

At a level that concerns us more immediately, Kate's childish but fearfully consequential rebellion firmly establishes the most obvious conflict in the novel: the individual against the social order. Other than appearance vs. reality, this seems the most constant tension in the central tradition of realistic fiction: novels are about individuals in society, with society posing constraint even as it offers opportunity, and the individual either happily or painfully integrated or joyously or desperately escaping. So it should not surprise us to find a novelist treating Mormon material in such terms; nor should a black sheep protagonist disturb us, unless we expect apologue rather than represented action. One possible action for a novel about Mormons to represent is rebellion, which after all runs deep in the scriptures too. The question, again, is how does the implied author judge the rebel and the community?

The chief representatives of the community in *The Evening and the Morning* are the ward teachers and Marya Olgood. More types than characters, the teachers enter the first moments of the action as quintessential exponents of the Mormon village as socio-religious institution meeting their polar opposite in apostate Kate. The incident firmly establishes this level of conflict in the novel, but Sorensen's judgments of Kate and the teachers are anything but simplistic. To Kate, Brother Atchison and Brother Shumaker are "genial, harmless, elderly, homely men," "innocent tools" with "awkward joviality in their voices," as used to serving "in the name of Authority" as they are to the surrounding mountains that almost make one forget the stars beyond. But something of Kate's comfortably superior attitude quite discomforts the brethren, and her blunt honesty flusters both them and Dessie. Yet even as

she flatly declares her preference for California over her old home, Kate judges herself: "She folded coldness with truth into a small envelope of voice, and thought how foolish this was, and yet could not help it" (p. 8). The claims of "honesty" against "ease and manners and kindness" are never easily balanced, but Kate's small, self-justifying and self-excused failure of benevolence is clearly marked.

"Of all things Kate dreaded here" in Manti, "she knew she dreaded Marya most:" "Marya—she who had always been present, like a weed, since growth and time began" (p. 22). Kate's "weed" metaphor, even when we allow for dread and resentment, will shadow all we later learn of Marya; still, Kate's own later judgments are larger and subtler. A self-appointed nemesis, Marya has always mistrusted Kate for taking Steen's place; and after Karl's death, when she has gotten evidence from Karlie of Kate's sixteen-year love affair with Peter Jansen, Marya descends on Kate like an avenging angel: "*Kate Black . . . you are a low and wicked woman—with daughters and grown sons—I wouldn't be surprised if some of your children—and your poor husband, your poor dead husband—*" (p. 226).

So terrible is the moment to Kate that it flashes vividly across her memory each time a meeting with Marya impends (p. 146, 226). By a standard Kate has long since ceased to accept absolutely, Marya's judgment of course is right, but her vindictive cruelty is as excessive as Kate's childhood rebellion. More, when the episode is fully presented later in the novel, we see Marya's dominant motive as an ugly familial selfishness: she and her nephew Karlie have come to demand that Kate give up Karl's property, threatening to "prov[e] in court that Kate was not a responsible woman" (p. 288) if she does not accede to them. Karlie, whom Kate has realized a day or so earlier "would never have had such passion to give anything but property" (p. 287), has even gone so far as to blame her for Karl's death: though seriously ill, Karl had been still vigorous at fifty-four, yet Karlie says he had taken an overdose of sleeping powder because "He wanted to die, we all know that" (p. 287)—ostensibly because Karlie had accused Kate of adultery. But Karl does not seem to have believed his son's story, or if he did he refused to show Kate any condemnation, suspicion, or bitterness; also, Kate finally learns from the present druggist in Manti that "You could take a ton of that [sleeping powder] and not hurt yourself" (p. 296). So Karlie is not only selfish, cruel, vindictive and lacking genuine filial love, but a cunningly stupid liar as well. His and Marya's nearly solipsistic self-righteousness and vengefulness are further underscored by Dessie's having witnessed part of their attack on Kate while standing outside the screen door (p. 289); it is another incident that breeds a deep fear of life in Dessie's spirit.

The righteous by one standard, then, are adjudged unrighteous by other standards. Kate breaks one law, her tormentors another equally high law. The implied author of this novel will not let us rest with simplistic judgments. Even Kate, much as she has dreaded Marya, can go beyond a bitter judgment that "She was always one of the thin cold self-righteous kind," "deliberately

martyring herself for the neighbors to see" (p. 225), to a more empathetic realization that "Marya was a woman, after all, one of those who had expected nothing, watched for nobody, whose hands had hung open without guilt, whose eyes had never flickered at a secret love. One of the good women, untried, and immensely fortunate" (p. 319). Kate can never quite forgive Marya, but she does understand her, and at one moment, ironically, "enjoy[s] her in a way. She's the only one to whom I say anything really true. It was as if they were signalling the truth . . . from one high cold peak to another" (p. 155).

This moment occurs two days before Marya confronts Dessie's unorthodox but forthright and goodhearted husband Ike with the same old vindictive truth, hoping to prevent Kate and Jean, who carries Peter Jansen's iron-red hair "like a banner" (p. 5), from going to Nephi to see Peter. But in a surprising and satisfying reversal, Ike tells her, "You don't need to bother telling Dessie, Marya. I'll tell her myself. I can see it's high time she knows" (p. 300). The only way Ike sees to deal with Marya's kind—"God's spies" (p. 309) Kate calls them—"is by letting on to everything. With the truth" (p. 302). He turns out to be right: the revelation hurts Dessie, but like lancing and cauterizing an abscess it also heals: the "chasm" of estrangement between her and her mother can be bridged, and Dessie, orthodox as she is, can finally understand and try to forgive even the wrong she had not known (p. 310). "Now," Kate hopes, "it would be possible for them to speak later, to be women together as she had hoped. And this was enough" (p. 310). Even Marya's badness—the self-righteousness of a good, untried woman—works toward good in the intricate moral economy of experience envisioned in this novel.

But for her early rebellion, Kate herself might have become one of the good, untried kind, too, like Marya or like Steen, who "had been what her neighbors admiringly called an exceptional mother, and . . . had died of this virtue, apparently" (p. 25). As a young wife, Kate "had been like so many, securely nodding to the necessities of virtue and duty" (p. 42), pleased with the "undemanding love" of a decent, good, if unimaginative husband. Peter Jansen's insinuating whisper, "Katie—I keep wondering, I don't know why—are you flirtatious?" had made "furious happenings within [her] as if all the orderly arrangements of her body were being tossed about in confusion" (p. 31). Too much later, Kate realizes Peter at first probably intended no more than flirtation: "His life had been tight those days, with his only child an ill-begotten creature, helpless and sad, and Helga close-lipped and martyred with its care and terrified of bearing another such child. He had simply required relief, laughter, kisses. If she had been flirtatious to him, merely, it could have gone along with them a time and been forgotten" (p. 61). But the shock of Peter's words is fortuitously compounded by another shock when later the same evening Kate sees her husband Karl and her young sister Verna briefly embracing on the darkened porch. This, Kate later decides, really was no more than flirtation, but witnessing it is apocalyptic:

. . . Kate turned away, silently, paralysis broken and all her body suddenly possessed of terrible motion, livingness that seemed to tear her apart in all directions and then restore her again but into a vast trembling that made her teeth clatter. . . . there was a crawling upon her scalp as if myriads of small creatures had invaded the forest of her hair. (p. 39)

A word and a sight, both partly misconstrued, have reduced Kate's moral cosmos of secure virtue and duty to chaos; but the "long month following" later seems to her "the true beginning of herself as a woman" as she "began to build about the painful kernel of a new knowledge a smooth and rationalized rebellion" (p. 42).

Even so, it is a month before Peter asks his question again (p. 45), a month for Kate to brood upon "a possibility of joy, frightening at first and smothered with guilt" but coming "to her more and more freely and insistently" (p. 46), so that this second time, burdened too with the memory of Karl and Verna, Kate makes a bitter addition to her first answer that she is married: "A lot of us are married, Peter, and it doesn't seem to make any difference" (p. 47). This begins, then, "a love which grew gradually and deliberately, at first a frightened and amazed affection, desire at first merely troubling and then becoming turbulent and insistent", although "For a long time unrelieved, she began to suffer with him the terrible paralysis of his need against the obligation of his marriage to Helga and the decency of his friendship with Karl" (p. 48).

Sorensen probably lost a lot of her orthodox Mormon readers here: we cannot look upon adultery with the least degree of allowance. Yet what of the adulteress? If we are to be made to care enough about Kate to follow the action to its close, we cannot be allowed to flatly condemn and dismiss her at this point. Our resistance may be enormous, but it must be overcome and our care for Kate sustained. Especially if Mormons were part of her proposed audience, this may have been the most delicate rhetorical problem in the novel for Sorensen. Not that the form of the action forces her to make insincere judgments—the implied author's belief in the seventh commandment seems no more absolute than Kate's—but a novel creates its reader, too, and some readers, orthodox Mormons particularly, would resist becoming the readers the implied author requires here. Again we must look to less obvious judgments of Kate and her thoughts and actions than simple condemnation or acquittal. Sorensen's primary appeal for our appropriate care for Kate refers ultimately, I think, to distinctly Mormon judgments of the body, of its capacity for joy, and of individual selfhood; values sharable elsewhere, of course, but for Virginia Sorensen, I trust, first apprehended at home in Mormon country.

Kate healthily affirms the body, has "given her body most scrupulous care, always, respecting the materials of existence, the container of great joy" (p. 24). And though "joy" here surely includes sensuous delight, it is not

solely that, for when Dessie acknowledges her pregnancy Kate says, "'I'm glad, Dessie. I never see it in a woman but what I envy it.' She wished she might stand up and reach out and touch Dessie, but there was an embarrassment which troubled her." Laughing, Dessie says, "You can't envy *all* of it!" but Kate answers, "All of it" (p. 29). Kate affirms the body in its capacity for the full range of experience, then, its capacity for labor and sorrow as well as pleasure, its share in the wholeness of personal existence. Kate inherits this attitude from her own mother Martha, who had been "afraid to die. Not afraid of the afterward . . . but of breaking off. In all breaking away there is agony, and Martha had loved to live" (p. 21). With Joseph Smith, Kate would affirm that "happiness is the object and the design of our existence;"¹⁶ and she does affirm to Jean riding the train to Nephi near the end of the novel that happiness "happens right now if it happens at all," and ponders to herself:

It always had something to do with the senses . . . and with some sort of release; it had to do with experiencing well and freely and without fear.¹⁷ At once she thought of growing flowers and of making music and listening to it and of reading poetry and of exchanging ideas with friends and of bursting into laughter and of getting work done. She looked at Jean, who already possessed the art of being delighted with the world, now, at once. If she could keep it—or if it could be taught to those who did not have it—or if it could be shared, Kate thought, surely there would be less despair in the world. (p. 325)

Kate's lover Peter Jansen had affirmed metaphorically the same value, speaking to Karl and Kate about violins: "each instrument must contain the possibility" of great music, must have that "readiness," "the power to feel and to live" (p. 66).

But the happiness crucially at issue in *The Evening and the Morning* is more specific: it is sexual, "erotic" in the narrow sense. (To Freud as to the ancients, recall, *eros* was not just genital sexuality, was in fact what connects us with anything; its opposite, for Freud, was the impulse to disconnection that is finally death.¹⁸) To some, Sorensen has seemed sentimental about romantic love; here I think she is not, for while she sympathizes with Kate's rebellious pursuit of happiness, she also exposes the immediate and ultimate waste of anarchic eros. From Peter's earliest kiss, which to Kate seems "at first more misery than joy" (p. 48), Kate lives and moves in a tension between erotic joy and ethical guilt as powerful as any "opposition" I have seen in Mormon fiction. Much as Kate has disbelieved, she still finds, if more through Peter than herself, "that what should be simple and perfect between them must be complicated and troublesome and laden with consequences for this world and another" (p. 48-49). The hour, much after this discovery, when Kate finds herself "overwhelmed . . . with desire" for Peter is the same hour when "her true pity for Helga [begins], later to become an insistent and ever-present emotion" (p. 69). For months after their first physical consummation, Kate feels "that she is being destroyed by the battle of joy and guilt within her" (p. 77).

Yet she does find with Peter—and continues a long time to share—a personal erotic joy she has not known with Karl, an ecstatic wholeness like something she knew in girlhood “one hour when she stood in a creek and the motion of the water touching her gave her such ecstasy as she had never felt again, as if the water were many, many hands touching but outside herself” (p. 45). With Karl, Kate’s physical relationship was “lofty and almost solemn, like a sacrament. Like the mere act of drinking water from the sacrament cup it became not drinking and not water but an act of devotion and belief” (p. 45). But it lacked something, too, for Karl “came to her for comfort and release,” apparently regarding sex as “for a man simple relief with the reason plain enough, and for a woman the creation of a child” (p. 44).

When Karl is ill and dying, Kate remembers “that she had tried to alter their relationship, to bring something to it she had learned, even in the first few months she loved Peter, that she truly required”:

Even though one had been taught to distrust desire, it could not be discarded; so she had tried to engender it where it could be accepted. And now she recalled this, in what manner she had begged Karl to touch her, and how he had frozen and become far away as if her desire frightened and embarrassed him. And shame covered her because of this and she stammered: “Karl, I didn’t mean—” But she did not know what she had not meant, and they never spoke of it again. (p. 280)

It is a small catastrophe of marital understanding, a sad consequence of genteel Victorian sexual attitudes, but it is also central. For if, in Mormon belief, love is a thing “most joyous to the soul” and if only “spirit and element, inseparably connected, receive a fulness of joy,”¹⁹ then the sexual love, the erotic personal union, of husband and wife may well be the richest earthly symbol and foretaste of celestial beatitude, and men and women both rightly may and ought to seek and find it in marriage.

Kate seeks and finds it outside marriage, wrongly, and she can never long avoid judging herself for this. Even during her affair with Peter she feels “how blessed if love were in its rightful place, beneath rightful quilt upon honorable pillow” (p. 194); and in maturity, glad for Ike’s and Dessie’s renewed closeness after the truth of her past has been revealed, she reflects, “It was so good when the love happened to be right, . . . when it was there and remained, when the circle grew around it like fruit about a sound and perfect core. It wasn’t always so, but when it happened it was the greatest good fortune in the world, and troubles came and went and it was only strengthened” (p. 311). Looking back on her own love, she realizes “she must deliberately force herself to recall how quickly she had begun to doubt, to weigh the few moments against the many hours, forcing them into balance that she might not, even in her own eyes, be nothing but a fool. . . . she knew she was feeling it had to be worth it and it had not been” (p. 222). That Kate so judges herself, despite the high value she sets on erotic joy, is a measure of both her own and her author’s disciplined emotional and moral honesty.

Deeper than the opposition of eros and law or joy and guilt in this novel, I believe, is a tension (perhaps analogous to that of Freud's eros and death) between two fundamental attitudes toward personal experience itself which all of us know in varying proportion and balance: love and fear; the one a courageous openness that meets and embraces and rejoices in experience, the other a self-shielding and vitiating withdrawal from its disquieting abundance and complexity.²⁰ I lack space and time to analyze how the novel explores this opposition through its major subplots involving Dessie and Jean, but a complete description of *The Evening and the Morning* would have to include this.

At about the same thematic depth lies a last opposition, whose axis might be thought of as crossing that of love and fear at right angles: the opposition of autonomy and belonging, which the action of rebellion poses most sharply, and which touches on the deepest concept of selfhood in Joseph Smith's theology. The opposition is perhaps tragically problematic, for the autonomous existence of selves as eternally individual free agents seems, in Mormon theology, the very ground of any belonging or communion, yet belonging seems to entail the surrender or limitation of autonomy. The amateur Mormon philosopher B. F. Cummings, partly echoing the King Follett Discourse, wrote, "The self is insubordinate, wandering, imperially aloof, solitary, lonely, withdrawn, unvisited, impenetrable;" it "cannot escape from existence nor can it escape from the awareness of its existence" nor from the "inevitable sense of solitude" that is "born of the very fact of individuality," of "being an eternally identical one."²¹ The opposition maybe cannot be resolved theoretically, nor finally solved in experience either; it must be lived out, endured.

Kate Alexander endures it one way in the novel, and is finally judged in terms of it. At the beginning, Kate advocates "freedom" (p. 12) while Dessie in her fear and need of safety wonders, "Why did some people think it was good to be alone?" (p. 28). Yet throughout the book Kate bears the tension between her need for autonomy and her need to belong. She reflects, late the first night in Manti, that "it was independence one wanted, not any particular people or home" (p. 61); yet earlier she has felt nostalgia for the "shared . . . quiet life" of "common memories and . . . understanding to live with" (p. 15) that she and Karl might have had. To Dessie's insistence that Jean "has to learn to get along with other people," she replies that "it's harder to get along with yourself" and that "When it comes naturally, maybe we ought to call it a blessing" (p. 27); yet from Jean the next day she catches intimations of the bitter, secret terror of self-knowledge which she knows only too well (pp. 85, 90, 280). She still believes in the individual "pursuit of happiness" and "in justice too," which should make "one's own pursuit include as many others as possible," though balancing these claims becomes a "huge and intricate matter" that makes her feel "lost" (p. 98); yet when Peter and Helga's child died "she despised herself for the egotism of her love" (p. 116), and in a bad moment she thinks, "I did not deserve to be happy—I deserved that Karl should die" (p. 144).

The opposition of autonomy and belonging runs deep into Kate's loves. Waking on her second day with Jean snuggled at her back, she feels "complete well-being" and gratitude "to all those who had given the warmth of their flesh to her during her time," but in an instant, recalling Peter, she feels "stifled" (p. 81). She had idealistically believed that between her and Peter "everything could be understood and forgiven. . . . Each of them would speak aloud at least every single secret thing that had been locked in their own skins and had separated them from the world and every other one heretofore. . . ." (p. 60). Yet that was not actually possible, and while "a sudden thought of him" could make her feel "light and superior as if she floated alone in a secret and unfathomable sea," when she became aware again of others she would "feel smothered with unreasonable loneliness" (p. 61). Love was to be "a kind of atonement," meaning a "return to oneness and to belonging with others in the world where one happened to be, to erase the horror of being outside and alone"; yet strangely and bitterly the at-one-ment of lovers, if outside law, must be given up for the public atonement of confession and repentance (p. 148).

But Kate has never believed enough to want that. The words "outside" and "alone," brought together here in a charged context, have sounded an ominous minor chord almost from the beginning, and will be the last chord of the novel. Her first night, sitting on the porch after Dessie has gone in to bed, Kate feels "without boundaries in either time or space, a feeling she always had when traveling, the feeling of being neither one place nor another but between everywhere and everything and therefore nowhere at all" (p. 30). Her fifth night, sitting alone again, she feels "herself outside herself and seeking herself" (p. 311), and becomes "aware of her skeleton, of the grin of her jaw," even while the softness behind her earlobe seems "incredibly sensual." She thinks:

"I am lonely." And she looked up and the air was emptied out and the stars had moved farther away again; the sound of dripping became hollow also, as if each drop fell into a great drum and sent echoes in every direction. . . . Now perhaps she went to [Peter] . . . in the painful knowledge that time was running out in intolerable loneliness. (p. 312)

The loneliness is remitted somewhat by the next morning, which looks "like the first day ever made" (p. 315) so that verses from Genesis run in Kate's mind alongside fragments of Ute and Pahute creation-myths; it is lightened by Ike's complimenting her, knowing why she is "so carefully dressed," so that "it was as if her most secret and lonely thought had been thrust into the world outside and she stood in the light of knowledge but also in kindness and beautiful ease" (p. 316). But it returns on her as she nears Nephi and her final meeting with Peter, in her knowledge that "she was ill in all ways" and now knows it "better than before. Where the sickness was the

injury of her pride she had been most sick, and where it had been the injury of her conscience" (p. 327).

In Nephi, Peter signs the affidavit; he is polite, kind, but also the one who failed her, "frightened . . . weak . . . the man who looked behind him as if to find the devil at his shoulder" (p. 331). No longer making fiddles (though he promises to make a last one for Jean, who doesn't want it much), filling the empty spaces of his life with cabinet work and with serving as a Bishop, "making amends in some curious way for having been alive" (p. 335), Peter seems almost indistinguishable from the aging ward teachers who visited Dessie's the first night. Kate realizes "He did not even see that they had come a little way together. Even now it seemed sad if it must be true that she had, after all her joy, come even that way alone" (p. 335).

Returning on the train to Manti with Jean asleep on the seat, Kate comes to a kind of peace with all her memory and can echo the benediction of Genesis: "And behold, and behold, and behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day, morning after evening so one would never make the mistake of thinking anything ended without also being a new beginning" (p. 341).

But the last image is still to come, after Kate lowers the window to keep the cool wind from Jean and shuts out "the night . . . lovely, alive with stars":

Now in the glass of the window she could see the solemn oval of her own face. Like that other night [when, riding with her and Peter, Karl had fallen asleep leaving her alone with Peter], even to the sharp flash of reflected light which was the pin at her throat. She watched herself moving beside herself, out there alone. (p. 341)

Riding in the nowhere of in-between, Kate finally confronts, as a singular self in unavoidable self-awareness, an image of the solitude of the rebel angel projected on outer dark. I suspect the image has its fullest resonance only for a Mormon writer and reader.

I have described and analyzed *The Evening and the Morning* quite selectively and have not said much that should be said of it: of its apparent relation to Virginia Sorensen's own life, to her self-definition as an artist, and to her other work; of its seemingly uncritical endorsement of Kate's "liberal" ideas; of what I suspect is an insufficient treatment of Peter Jansen's lapse from rebellion into conformity (which may be the novel's one imaginative failure, though Sorensen keeps us from raising this problem acutely). But I have meant to show only that a sufficient part of the novel's implicit vision of experience and its structure of judgments seems distinguishably and distinctly Mormon—enough to warrant our considering it a "Mormon novel" in a fairly serious sense. From a novelistic standpoint, I doubt we can find a subtler or more searching instance of the Mormon novel, even if we must call it only partly Mormon. By kind if not by quality, it belongs to the major

tradition of moral realism. If Mormon writers and readers are ever to move much beyond the impoverished tradition of Mormon apologue, they should understand its achievement.

NOTES

¹At the Rocky Mountain Writers' Convention held at BYU in July 1979, Orson Scott Card, a Mormon science fiction writer, remarked that God cannot exist in science fiction, though he did not explain why. Of course, it has never been easy to get God into realistic fiction, either.

²Faulconer's analogy occurs in his essay, "The Difference Between a Mormon and an Artist," WYE (BYU), 30 (Spring 1972):1-3.

³Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964, p. 69. Subsequent references to Sacks in the next few pages, where context is unambiguous, will be given parenthetically by page number only.

⁴Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), would probably agree; see especially chapter V.

⁵See his essay, "Freshet in the Dearth: Samuel W. Taylor's *Heaven Knows Why* and Mormon Humor," *Proceedings of the Symposia of the Association for Mormon Letters* 1978-79, pp. 43-56; reprinted in *Sunstone*, 5, 3 (May-June 1980):31-37.

⁶"A Plea for Fiction," *Improvement Era*, 1 (1898):188.

⁷So called at least by myself in "Digging the Foundation: Making and Reading Mormon Literature," *Dialogue*, 9 (Winter 1974):58, and by Edward Geary in "Mormondom's Lost Generation: The Novelists of the 1940s," *BYU Studies*, 18 (Fall 1977):89-98.

⁸See George S. Tate's essay, "Halldór Laxness, the Mormons and the Promised Land," *Dialogue*, 11 (Summer 1978):25-37, and Franklin Fisher's remarks on Tate's essay in "Three Essays: A Commentary," *Dialogue*, 11 (Summer 1978):54.

⁹C. Terry Warner, "An Open Letter to Students: On Having Faith and Thinking for Yourself," *New Era*, November 1971.

¹⁰*A Believing People* (Provo: BYU Press, 1974), p. 5.

¹¹"Fruits of Rebellion," *Saturday Review*, 32 (23 April 1949):13.

¹²Booth, *Rhetoric of Fiction*, esp. pp. 70-75.

¹³"Is It True?—The Novelist and His Materials," *Western Humanities Review*, 7 (1953):285.

¹⁴Virginia Sorensen, *The Evening and the Morning* (New York: Harcourt, 1949), p. 4. Subsequent references to the novel will be cited parenthetically by page number.

¹⁵Perhaps the classic statement of such a purpose by a moral realist in the English novel is George Eliot's chapter 17 of *Adam Bede*.

¹⁶*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1976), pp. 255-56. The prophet goes on to say that happiness "will be the end" of our existence if we follow God's commandments. Kate disbelieves and violates that part of the counsel; the implied author of the novel, however, seems to invoke it in the ways the novel judges Kate and her rebellion.

¹⁷Ironically enough, Brigham Young had expressed almost the same sentiment—a wish that children might grow up "free and untrammelled in body and spirit"—in an 1853 sermon, "Organization and Development of Man;" see *Journal of Discourses*, 2:94.

¹⁸Freud's most succinct summary of his theory of opposed instincts occurs near the end of Lecture 32 of the *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (1932), where he uses the terms "Eros" and "aggression." For earlier developments of the concept, see *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), chapter V; *The Ego and the Id* (1923), chapters IV and V; and *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1929), chapter VI.

¹⁹See I Nephi 11:23 and D&C 93:33.

²⁰The late Scottish natural theologian John Macmurray treats love and fear as basic motives in personal existence in his *Persons in Relation* (London: Faber, 1961), chap. III, "The Discrimination of the Other," esp. pp. 66-75.

²¹*The Eternal Individual Self* (Salt Lake City, 1968), pp. 7, 69, 70; cf. Stan Larson, "The King Follett Discourse: A Newly Amalgamated Text," *BYU Studies*, 18 (Winter 1978): 203, 204, 205. I use "amateur" here in both important senses: the non-professional who does what he does for love of it; Cummings was surely that.



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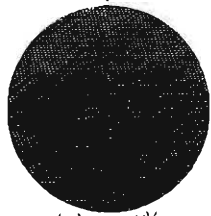
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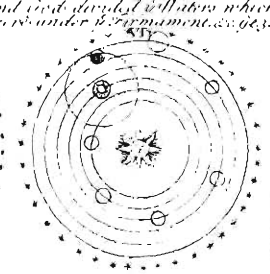
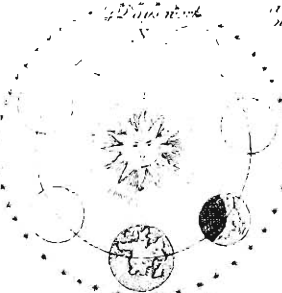
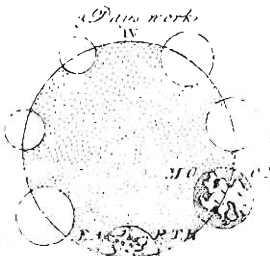
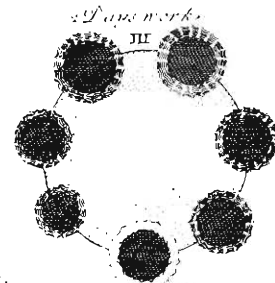
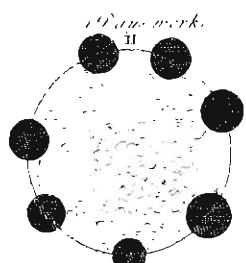
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of the sun



and Seven Planets



Let there be light, &c. Gen. 1. 3.
and God said let there
be light, &c. Gen. 1. 4.
and God said let there
be light, &c. Gen. 1. 5.

