

## NEW VOICES, NEW SONGS: CONTEMPORARY POEMS BY MORMON WOMEN

LINDA SILLITOE

Taking us by and large, we're a queer lot  
We women who write poetry. And when you think  
How few of us there've been, it's queerer still.  
I wonder what it is that makes us do it,  
Singles us out to scribble down, man-wise,  
The fragments of ourselves.<sup>1</sup>

The sensibility described by Amy Lowell—that there is something odd about women who write serious poetry—is still given substance today by the endangered state of the species. Even *I* will not waste time counting the few woman poets anthologized before Lowell's time; contemporary statistics suffice. One of my favorite modern anthologies, *The New Yorker Book of Poems*, includes some 900 poems by 221 men and fifty-five women. *New Poets of England and America: Second Selection* (frequently used in university classes) presents more than 300 poems by fifty-five men and eight women. In our smaller pond of Mormon Letters, things are somewhat more egalitarian, perhaps by necessity. *Dialogue*, which has published more quality poetry than any other Mormon publication in the last ten years, yields about 140 poems by sixty-three men and thirty-two women. *A Believing People*, an anthology of Mormon literature compiled by Richard Cracroft and Neal Lambert, includes twelve men and four women in the section of nineteenth

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LINDA SILLITOE is a free-lance writer in Salt Lake City who has published poems, short stories and articles in *Utah Holiday*, *Exponent II*, *Dialogue* and other publications. This paper was presented as part of a symposium of the Mormon Letters Association, Sept. 27, 1980.

century poetry, but sixteen men and thirteen women in the twentieth century selection. There are more reasons than there is time to explore for the imbalance which makes women poets such a minority. But the issue at hand is more significant than numbers, which, alone, would not persuade me to deal in this paper with only women's poems. "Myth," a poem by the nationally anthologized poet, Muriel Rukeyser (not a Mormon) may help us understand:

Long afterward, Oedipus, old and blinded, walked the roads. He smelled a familiar smell. It was the Sphinx. Oedipus said, "I want to ask one question. Why didn't I recognize my mother?" "You gave the wrong answer," said the Sphinx. "But that was what made everything possible," said Oedipus. "No," she said. "When I asked, What walks on four legs in the morning, two at noon, and three in the evening, you answered, Man. You didn't say anything about woman." "When you say Man," said Oedipus, "you include women too. Everyone knows that." She said, "That's what you think."<sup>2</sup>

It was Mary Bradford of Arlington, Virginia, editor of *Dialogue*, who returned to Utah several years ago to urge her sisters to write as women without the mask of maleness.<sup>3</sup> I was impressed and disturbed by her speech. Only once had I used a male persona in a poem; but, I remembered guiltily, one of the reasons I did so was because I was afraid that particular poem would not be taken seriously otherwise. And how many times had I fiercely scanned my typewritten pages a last time before sending them off to seek their fortunes with this question in mind: "Could this poem have been written by a man?"

Mary Bradford also urged us to write with individual voices, not representative voices; that we leave monuments and mountains to the past and write about things that concern and influence us now. "Reveal yourselves, sisters. Risk it! Risk it! I ask not for a striptease, but . . . a revelation of the human heart."

With these words in mind, I began sifting and sorting through recent poems by Mormon women. Have Mormon women begun to reveal their own hearts? To write as individuals, as women? If so, what has been revealed, has been made plain? What is still to be accomplished?

With only a month for my research, I sent a letter to women whose addresses were in my *Exponent II* file and to other poets I knew. I asked those women to spread the word. They did. I received dozens of poems and letters about writing; those, combined with the poems in the *Exponent II* file (both accepted and rejected for publication) and those published in books or journals, gave me considerable material.

I am grateful to those who responded. Every poem I have received or otherwise uncovered has been used toward the writing of this paper, even though I will be able to refer to only a few of them and to read even fewer. Certainly, I have not seen all that would be pertinent. My conclusions de-

pend on a careful reading, sorting and bringing together of every voice available to me. I thought when I began that I would read work only by poets who are not yet well known. Yet some of the most familiar voices are those which continue to sing new songs—a sign of true proficiency. Occasionally the poems of skilled and interesting poets (such as Sybil Johnston) were sorted repeatedly into the miscellaneous category; written on a wide variety of subjects, some poems were too diverse to be represented in a paper that must, necessarily, generalize.

My primary concern has been thematic. The bulk of the poems I have read are general, didactic and philosophical. The message is all-important and is too often either unconnected or loosely connected to image and form. The poems I will read are the most articulate examples of the themes and trends I discovered by analyzing the body of poems. That is not to say that few Mormon women are writing good poetry. I believe there are more fine poets than ever, and the numbers are growing. But, as always, there are even more who have something to say but have not yet developed the skills to speak through poetic form. *What* they are saying, with whatever skill they possess, was the object of my search.

My first discovery is this: the instinct that prompted me that something was happening with poetry and Mormon women has been confirmed. Mormon women (in America, and elsewhere) are writing poems and, frequently, meeting together in formal and informal groups to share their creations. Of course, groups such as the Utah Poetry Society have functioned for years. An informal group in a Virginia stake has met and performed off and on during the last few years, and Veneta Nielsen has led a stable and supportive group of Logan poets for years. Poetry reading is part of the format, I have found, in gatherings of Mormons for ERA in various parts of the country. Poems criss-cross the country via the mail. In several cases, women have sent me not their own poems, but the poems of their friends. The solitary act of poem-writing has become for many of these poets a communal act, that sense of community and sharing so common to both Mormons and poets.

Virginia Sorensen, Mormonism's most prolific and proficient novelist thus far, was told this by her grandmother: "There is a very old conspiracy against the woman of talent, and it owes its major power to the fact that women are kept ignorant of its existence. You will write in your spare time, which you will steal."<sup>4</sup>

That prediction, promise, curse echoes from virtually every letter in my file. Let me share just one example. This letter which came to me late last year concerns a poem soon to be printed in *Exponent II*. It concludes "I understand the thinking behind your other suggested changes, but I don't have the emotional energy to deal with them right now, so I guess we'd better leave things as they are. Our second baby was born October 12th, and between him, his big sister (age thirteen months), school, job hunting for next year, and my current part-time job I've had little time to give much thought to poetry—mine or anyone else's!"<sup>5</sup> A finished poem is, the letters from these authors confirm, not only a victory over cosmic blindness and muteness, but over one's own pocket planner as well!

Creation, physical and literary, is a frequent theme in the poetry by Mormon women. Many poems written to or about the author's own children fail as poems. "Why?" asked Mary Bradford several years ago. "Because the mothers in the poems take it upon themselves to represent all mothers everywhere; they see themselves as God's partner; they address God; they talk of cosmic happenings involving pre-existence and death in a way that ignores the individual human pain and joy of this experience."

Those pitfalls still remain and many are susceptible. But there are new developments as well. Two contrasting themes emerge in these poems, which I find fascinating: the relationship between mother and child, which may parallel the relationship between creator and creation—the painter and her canvas, the poet and her vision, and the more frequent theme—that of the child actually forming, or at very least, fulfilling the mother. The child becomes the teacher, the guide, the more holy, the creator. The poem is writing the poet, the canvas is painting the artist.

There is something to that, of course, as any artist can attest. The sense that the material has a mind of its own is a reality that does affect the artist, and of course, a child *does* have a mind of its own. But these poems about children—babies, usually—go far beyond that interaction. The reason for the excess lies, I believe, in the reality of the authors' lives. The child makes the woman a mother. Since motherhood is the most valued status women attain in our society, the child who achieves that for the mother is intrinsically powerful and valuable. The woman's worth is drawn from the child and is dependent on the child's future. No wonder there is such adulation of already endearing, eternal children. Again and again I read words to the effect, "You, child, give life to me."

A stark contrast—and almost a solitary one—is struck by Fae Swinyard's poem, "The Wax Baby." In this poem the author whimsically describes a tiny pink baby rolled from candle wax, magically alive. The wax baby is always malleable, it never grows into something else. A letter from Fae Swinyard compares a poem about massaging a friend with the poem about the wax baby and discusses the author's feeling for both in a way applicable to both physical and literary creation:

This poem describes the massage experience (or the pottery experience) and the two often become the same at table or wheel—gray to pink, dead to alive, hard to soft, incomplete to complete, fragment to whole. One of my favorite images is the wet pot (person?) finally done. At the birth of my children my first impression of them has been of new, wet pots. . . . I was one of the many women . . . who wanted a baby. Not the pregnancy, not the person who would become a family member, just the tiny, helpless newborn to nurture. The poem is how I resolved that conflict. Does she, you wonder, have a bit of wax up in her handkerchief drawer? Do others?<sup>6</sup>

Another theme in the poems about children are those concerned with the reproductive processes: pregnancy, sterility, childbirth and postpartum depression. These are usually described as difficult, dreary, often painful expe-

riences, although their intrinsic worth is not questioned. I believe that these poems begin to fulfill Mary Bradford's challenge. They have moved from the representative to the specific, from the ideal to the real. Though they seem largely negative, the tone does not reject motherhood. Only recently has it become acceptable to acknowledge the challenge or the trauma of such experiences, and that acceptability is downright seductive. Thus information once whispered at quilting bees is now a part of Mormon poetry, particularly in *Exponent II*, and it is given with the same tones of irony and triumph.

Yet virtually all the poems I have read that deal specifically with the body have been negative. The terrors and deprivations of aging are frequent themes as well as the stress of giving birth. The exuberance and sensuality of Emma Lou Thayne's love song to her own body is exceptional now, but I hope a harbinger of poems in the future.

### Love Song at the End of Summer

It is clear now, body. Every day can be late August,  
after the birth of babies, never quite cold.

But one must learn early what you are for forever.  
Good old leather tiger, half domesticated  
by paws in pans and shoulders hung too often with beaded fur,  
you may think I forget. But you do not let me.  
By now I know better. I come back.

Still, you never take me not surprised, faithful one,  
by how to arrive, and the pleasure of sweat,  
and how to shiver away the bee.  
You move to the song behind the dance.  
Even after a standard, plain white, unstriped day  
you ripple in our sleep and wait, mostly unperplexed.

And when no matter how faint, the music breathes  
behind the catcalls of too much to do, you muster  
almost without my inclining, potent as needing to dance,  
to pace off the house, the garden of weeds, the clogged creek,  
and the midnight clutch of vagrancies. You pad from some spring  
and, wild, except for my importuning, go. To do it all.

When we lie down, it will be like the squirrel there,  
unflagging in the last swift moving in the leaves  
August stashed in crisp piles above the dust.  
I may find no way at all without your sleek taking.

Under the wrinkles that tell you no, I can hear you now  
saying, "I still love you," and to time, "Leave her alone."<sup>7</sup>

I am reading more poems by women about women by both Mormon and gentile authors. There is Fae Swinyard's account of "Massaging a Friend After the Loss of Her Child"; Helen Cannon's poem to her spiritual sister, Virginia Woolf; Emma Lou Thayne's loving "To Marilyn at the Laetrile Clinic"; and several poems to Sonia Johnson at the time of her excommunication, one from a ten-year-old girl. There are poems for role models as well as for personal friends. Even the poems written to pioneer foremothers have become specific. "O Pioneer" has become a great-grandmother or an imagined woman with a name and personality; examples are Marilyn Brown's collection, *The Grandmother Tree*,<sup>8</sup> and Charlotte Teresa Reynolds' "Indian Grandmother" poem, which won first place in the Eliza R. Snow Poetry Contest in *The Ensign*. Some poems reach out to women of different cultures, most notably *Once in Israel*,<sup>9</sup> a new collection by Emma Lou Thayne. One of the most unusual of the poems to or about women uses three traditional images—a mother, a pioneer woman, and a star—with unusual results. Sonia Johnson was one of a group of women who participated in the creative session of a Mormon Letters symposium in Virginia in 1979. She wrote this poem at church only days after ceasing to be officially, a Mormon. (See p. 63.)

One question raised by Mary Bradford in her paper was why there are not more Mormon love poems. Since that time, she has published her own love poems in *Dialogue*, and poems by others have appeared here and there. Some are lovely. (I have been told by one Mormon woman that she writes quantities of torrid love poetry, but she refused to send me any of it.) It seems to me, however, that the love poems tend to be much more general than are those written about or to other women. The relationship is explored, the way it makes the author feel is rendered, but the loved one remains vague, faceless, unspecified. It seems that we have made little progress in this area.

What *has* changed, however, is the number of poems about marriage. These are not poems of nuptial bliss, most often, but poems of struggle. Some of them set up conflicts: one wonders why two opposite people believe they are "meant for each other" for all eternity; another questions Paul's theory that Christ is head of the Church as the man is head of the woman. Most such poems retreat to truisms such as "struggle makes us strong" or "sacrifice means progress" or even "If you, then, are the head, let's see your stuff!" This poem, however, meets the author's conflict head on:

#### Priesthood

My hands can bless, comfort, even create  
Without your rituals of anointing oil,  
And I can teach, exhort, and even talk to God.

I cannot support my child as she is buried  
In the waters of life, nor can I lead us  
All, or any part of us that counts you.

Rather, I am told, my womb gives me power,  
(Have you not seed?)  
My power is to support you,  
(Have you not strength?)  
That I must play your child,  
(Have you no posterity?)  
That I should develop some witchwomancraft  
To mold you to my bidding.  
(Have you not thoughts your own?)

The day may come  
When the power recognized in you  
May join in truth with the power I foresee  
Not yet ordained in me.<sup>10</sup>

Other poems speak of diminished closeness, a loneliness within the marital relationship. In a poem called "The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner," Helen Cannon describes the runner this way:

. . . Skin wet and glistening in morning sun  
Not alone in this marathon dream  
Your body embraces strain  
like love exhausting itself

The loneliness comes only after—  
As we lie together  
Each alone. . . .<sup>11</sup>

Writing from one's own heart does not, of course, always mean writing from one's own experience. (My own poem about divorce is written in first person, although the situation in the poem is vicarious.) In "The Candy Palace," Emma Lou Thayne assails the fortress of stereotypical marriage.

### The Candy Palace

She came to the throne because she thought  
it was time. The exact hour before the alarm.  
Born to the Kingdom, she had all the trimmings,  
certificates bounded in lace, exact replicas  
of how it was done. Of course he held

his scepter of having passed through, and knowing  
he should (or could) he promised to make her his  
Queen-for-a, well, forever. She, as the manuals suggest,  
fell in love with his promise. No one could anything  
but not see how there was no end

to the rings he began to leave in the tub.  
The thing was he had to hurry to get back to  
the pumpkin that was waiting to turn and never  
did. Still, she attended his table and served  
appreciative rolls. She kept the throne

sturdy as home grown tomatoes. This was good.  
The base of the throne, however, had a predisposition  
to lean. He could not sit squarely and she had lost  
her fixings. Night sickness, she began to think,  
could account for her yearning for nutmeg

and flour not out of the mill, this longing  
for something more common, a touch perhaps.  
She remembered in Primary playing Persephone  
not wanting to hold the wet hand of Pluto, even to march  
for the crowd. In the end of course, it was a renunciation  
for air, air.<sup>12</sup>

"Reveal yourselves," urged Mary Bradford. Now, along with the optimism and strength long exhibited in Mormon literature, is evident individual struggle, adjustment and aching.

"What we do is this," begins another poem. "We train ourselves to look away."<sup>13</sup>

If looking away was prevalent during the first 145 years of Mormon poetry, the last five years have begun to reverse that training. Rather than writing only in affirmation of the acceptable and uplifting elements in their lives, the new voices in Mormon poetry are beginning to notice and to call attention to the absences. All of us, I am sure, have read dozens of poems about Mary, about Sarah, about Sariah. I believe that every Mormon woman who has ever lifted a pen has written a poem about Eve! They range the gamut from Eve as temptress who cursed all women with submission, to Eve as liberated woman who caught on quickly and led Adam on to the future of humankind. A few scriptural role models have been immortalized time and again, perhaps because they are few. The novelty evident in recent years is that the examples have become more human, closer to us. It is now understandable why Sariah complained. Now we can wonder how Sarah really felt when she gave her handmaiden to her husband. As they become approachable, we allow ourselves more humanity. Their recent accessibility does not alter their scarcity, however, as perceived in this poem by Sonia Johnson:



Now Appearing

Enoch, Moses, Alma, Moroni —  
many of scripture's heroes never died  
as far as we know  
just disappeared  
which shouldn't be greatly wondered at  
since half the Hebrew population  
disappeared as soon as it was born  
female  
only a minute proportion  
living  
vicariously as a rule  
mass lives like the mothers of  
Helaman's striplings  
and the Lamanitish daughters  
raped by Noah's priests  
flash lives like Lot's wife  
nameless forever  
like King Lamoni's valiant queen  
who deserved better  
child lives like Esther's  
who had no thought but Mordecai's  
or disdained lives like  
Leah's whose anguish at being  
forever second best  
is never hinted at  
though out of her body burst  
the ten tribes.  
(Jacob, wombless and barren,  
but getting all the credit.)  
Women of biblical lineage  
have disappeared thus  
until now.

Welcome to the race, daughters of Sarah,  
human and to the finish.<sup>14</sup>

The search for presences among the caverns in scripture, ritual and history weaves throughout the poems. Links are made not only with foremothers and scriptural heroines, but also with present day temple workers performing initiatory ceremonies. After reading several poems set in the temple, I received this poem:

Their voices  
Bounce off mirrors  
Sachet through shearings  
Leap to lightning rods and  
Spiral there like gymnasts  
Exuberant and free.

Their chant is to him

Robed, they perform their  
Rituals at basins and mirrors  
Chattering holiness like ancient  
Priestesses in temples at rivertide  
Touched and touched  
Cleansed and guided  
Touched and touched  
They become beautified.

Their chant is of him

And should a child enter there  
She is accepted as a holy thing.  
Mooring her innocence  
Among the mirrors,  
They reach to her  
As a Princess reached  
For a babe in the Nile

Their chant is by him

And when they conclude their observance  
They depart from the sanctum of ease  
And return to him  
To whom they are wed  
By whom they are led  
Through whom they are said  
Beloved and Beloved

In his image they are created.<sup>15</sup>

The author of this poem, Kristine Barrett, was shocked to find that I thought the poem was about temple rites. I was shocked to discover that she had, in fact, written the poem after a visit to a beauty salon. Reading through the poem again, I saw the similarities—that the rites of becoming beautiful, inside or out, were directed toward the approval of a beloved lord, human or divine. Most jarring in that haunting imagery of women’s voices and hands, the basins and mirrors, is that the final reflected image is male.

A second poem uses a mirror to reflect a male image back to a female author. Patricia Hart Molen, short story writer and novelist, describes a lighter situation in her poem, “Afternoon Nap.” In this poem, the persona falls asleep and dreams that she has “sprouted fully grown” a moustache. Her lips beneath the moustache now speak “poems, theorems, postulates, some laws of physics and recipes for French patisseries.” The poem concludes

I looked like Major General  
George Armstrong  
“Yellow Hair”  
Custer,  
my hair flowing to my shoulders,  
not competing  
but enhanced.

I sat before a mirror,  
 twirled a corner  
 (reflectively)  
 never dreaming  
 I should not have it.<sup>16</sup>

Just as the women in these poems are created in the reflection of male images, so do women's poems sometimes suffer from male-identification. For instance, I once tried to convince a poet to remove erect images and male-connotative language from a poem to her Heavenly Mother. "I know the pillar is a holy symbol," I wrote to her, "but I think you should take it out. But don't," I added, horrified by an afterthought, "please don't replace it with a pedestal!" Like Oedipus, we find that our traditions and history tend to encompass womankind with mankind in ways that do not represent us all.

The rejection of that ancient dependency is represented in this poem:

#### Let My Sisters Do for Me

If we must preserve our differences,  
 Then let my sisters do for me.  
 Let my sister tear my last resistance  
 From my mother's womb, let her  
 Cradle me and give me my name,  
 Let her baptize me and call me forth  
 To receive the Spirit, let her  
 Teach me of the world, let her  
 Ordain me to womanhood, let her  
 (She does wash, anoint and clothe)  
 Be my god beyond the veil, let her  
 Heal my sickness, hold my baby, be my friend.  
 Let her dig my grave, let her robe me,  
 Let her bless my empty bones.  
 If you will not have me for your sister,  
 Then let my sisters do for me,  
 And let me greet my Mother on the far shore.<sup>17</sup>

There is anger in this poem, which was written three years ago. I have read more angry poems, particularly in the last year. Anger has become an acceptable emotion for women to experience, let alone display, only recently—if at all. It is rare in the poetry of Mormon women. In most of the angry poems I have seen, the anger is directed toward personal or institutional absences; the anger represents the rejection of rejection. In most cases (and this is always the peril of protest poems) the anger overwhelms the poem itself. One, written early in 1980 by Jan Tyler, is a tongue-twister of impacted words and pictures shaped to a furious jump-rope chant. It ends this way:

Dominion unrighteous, common occurrence,  
 control and power undercurrents,  
 earthly complex web is woven  
 claiming it comes straight from Heaven.

This is the one and True Church only—  
by *their* fruits, ye shall *not* know it!<sup>18</sup>

Another poem of enormous energy and ambition, "Down on My Knees" by Susan Hafen, uses a multitude of swirling, vibrant images. Here is one:

We have blood royal but slow-flowing, clotted and unclean  
a thick, dark mess to shame and curse our sex . . .

with heaven as its precedent; where is our mother?  
Our sire-king did slay the dragon, we have heard.  
He cast out trolls to make the kingdom safe  
for us to kneel in worship and in wonder of the Word—  
co-authored by the eldest, translated by our brothers,  
to give us Truth, to make us good, to keep us chaste. . . .<sup>19</sup>

The recognition of the missing pieces has converged for a great number of writers into that question asked by Susan Hafen: "Where is our mother?" I suspect that more poems to or about our Mother in Heaven have been written in the last year or so by Mormon women than in all the years since Eliza R. Snow penned "Our Eternal Mother and Father," later retitled "Oh My Father." There have been a few in between, such as Carol Lynn Pearson's "Children of Light" in her book *The Growing Season*, and she continues to write on that subject. *The Ensign* magazine and *Exponent II* have both received a number of Mother in Heaven poems of late which wonder, search, explore, plead and cry out for enlightenment. The Mormon belief in a Mother in Heaven was addressed in a historical setting at the recent Sunstone symposium by Catherine Albanesie and Linda Wilcox. Preceding that symposium, several Mother in Heaven poems appeared in *Exponent II* and my own appeared in *Dialogue*.

Margaret Munk, an adoptive mother who has recently written a short story about the search for "real" mothers, earthly and divine, approached the subject this way:

#### First Grief

Last night, my daughter—  
Mine by right of love and law,  
But not by birth—  
Cried for her "other mother."

Accountable  
And duly baptized she may be,  
But eight is young . . .  
For grown-up grief,  
The first I cannot mend  
With Bandaids,  
Easy words,  
Or promises.

I cannot tell her yet  
How often I have also cried

Sometimes at night  
 To one whose memory  
 My birth erased;  
 Who let me go  
 To other parents  
 Who could train and shape the soul  
 She had prepared,  
 Then hid her face from me.<sup>20</sup>

"Why are you silent, Mother?" asks Lisa Bolin Hawkins:

. . . How can I  
 Become a goddess when the patterns here  
 Are those of gods? I struggle, and I cry  
 To mold my womanself to something near  
 Their goodness. I need you, who gave me birth  
 In your own image, to reveal your ways: . . .  
 . . . My brothers question me,  
 And wonder why I seek this added light.  
 No one can answer all my pain but Thee.  
 Ordain me to my womanhood, and share  
 The light that Queens and Priestesses must bear.<sup>21</sup>

"I want to know your name," writes Kristine Barrett:

I know it is lovelier than Mary  
 or Sarah or Eve. Can you  
 please whisper it to me?  
 What is your name?<sup>22</sup>

Women everywhere are seeking for the feminine attributes of God, for a female model of godliness. I believe that these poems demonstrate that for Mormon women the search is even more urgent. That urgency is rooted in the Mormon concept of a personal God, an eternal *Father*, who is tangible and vitally concerned with the lives of His children. Mormons also center upon the unity and efficacy of the family. The sudden realization, which seems to be spreading rapidly, that we are all, for all intents and purposes, *motherless* brings with it—to women particularly it seems—unique pain. The implications for women here and in eternity are immense as the quality of the poetry attests.

The new voices in the poetry written by Mormon women question, wrestle, explore and affirm. Even in loneliness or anger, there is a determined note of survival; there is also irony, realism and affirmation. A unity of theme is evident as these poets seek to discover one another and the world, to build, link by link, a chain to heaven from mothers, sisters, grandmothers, scriptural and historical role models, temple priestesses and at last God, Herself. Are we to conclude then that these poems indicate a disinterest in romantic love or happy marriage? Have women ceased to desire children? Have they renounced their devotion to their Heavenly Father? I think such suppositions miss the mark. Jerrilyn Black writes:

There

Beyond the tenth pot  
the fourth drawer,  
the six loose buttons,  
lies that shiny drop;  
my new self,  
a self to be,  
a self for me.  
It rolls away  
as I move near,  
slips over the vegetables,  
disappears into the soup.  
We'll have it for supper.<sup>23</sup>

Where are the love songs, the songs of the pleasures of the body, of equal and productive marriage? Where are the songs that celebrate oneness with God and with the human world? Perhaps they are still in the soup we eat for supper.

In the anthology of contemporary women poets *No More Masks*, Florence Howe includes in the introduction of the book an analysis of the poetry of men:

Men, we know, write about women at least part of the time. They also write about themselves as artists, their (female) muse, their lust for fame. They write sometimes about their fathers, and occasionally their mothers; occasionally, too, their children. But on the whole, and in spite of their interest in the public world of affairs, men stand at the center of their poems. They create and re-create themselves, their feelings, in thought or in action.<sup>24</sup>

"I wonder what makes us do it," wondered Amy Lowell, "Singles us out to scribble down, man-wise, the fragments of ourselves." As long as women feel that the very act of writing a poem, of centering in oneself is "man-wise" we will have only "fragments of ourselves" to "scribble down." Creation and re-creation in poetry will become "woman-wise," I believe, when we, ourselves feel whole. The object is not to imitate what men seem to have achieved in writing poetry, but to create ourselves and thus our poetry in our own image. The poems of women are filled with isolation and fragmentation, the divided self, the undiscovered self, the renunciations. That is beginning to change, as a number of new anthologies by women demonstrate. But for Mormon women, the change is a little slower. Helen Cannon ends one poem this way:

Clocks measure out the wasted hours  
Mirrors reflect the wasted years  
While those I love  
Leave me to incessant tasks  
In this love affair with my enemy.<sup>25</sup>

The poems I have examined demonstrate that Mormon women have begun to write as individuals, as women. We have first recognized, quite

naturally, what is not in us, what is lacking in the world around us, what excludes or ignores us. We are beginning to voice our reactions to those things, as well as to affirm the positive presences in our lives and poems for years.

The songs of the self are still largely unlearned and unwritten, but the new songs in the poems by Mormon women are sung *by* selves which are moving closer to the center of their poems and, presumably, their own lives. A symphony of whole and joyful melodies is still a matter of hope and faith. Thus far there is the creak of growth in the forest, and above that the steady song of the Chinook wind that heralds the very beginning of a new season.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Amy Lowell, "Two Sisters," in *No More Masks! An Anthology of Poems By Women*, edited by Florence Howe and Ellen Bass (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1973), pp. 40-44.

<sup>2</sup>Muriel Rukeyser, "Myth," in *I Hear My Sisters Saying: Poems of Twentieth Century Women*, edited by Carol Konek and Dorothy Walters (New York: Thomas Crowell, 1976), p. 243.

<sup>3</sup>Mary Bradford, "The Secret Sharers: Utah Women Writers," paper delivered at the Utah Retrenchment Society meetings, April, 1976.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>5</sup>Lisa Bolin Hawkins to author, November 18, 1979.

<sup>6</sup>Fae Swinyard to author, August 21, 1980.

<sup>7</sup>Emma Lou Thayne, "Love Song at the End of Summer," *Exponent II* (Summer 1979), p. 16.

<sup>8</sup>Marilyn McMeen Miller Brown, *The Grandmother Tree* (Provo, Utah: Art Publishers, 1978).

<sup>9</sup>Emma Lou Thayne, *Once In Israel* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1980).

<sup>10</sup>Lisa Bolin Hawkins, "Priesthood," unpublished poem in possession of author.

<sup>11</sup>Helen Cannon, "The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner," unpublished poem in the possession of the author.

<sup>12</sup>Emma Lou Thayne, "The Candy Palace," unpublished poem in the possession of the author.

<sup>13</sup>Emma Lou Thayne, "Renunciation," unpublished poem in the possession of the author.

<sup>14</sup>Sonia Johnson, "Now Appearing," unpublished poem in the possession of the author.

<sup>15</sup>Kristine Barrett, "The Beauty Salon," unpublished poem in the possession of the author.

<sup>16</sup>Patricia Hart Molen, "Afternoon Nap," unpublished poem in the possession of the author.

<sup>17</sup>Lisa Bolin Hawkins, "Let My Sisters Do For Me," unpublished poem in the possession of the author.

<sup>18</sup>Jan Tyler, "The One and Only True Church," unpublished poem in the possession of the author.

<sup>19</sup>Susan Hafen, "Down On My Knees," unpublished poem in the possession of the author.

<sup>20</sup>Margaret Munk, "First Grief," *Exponent II* (Fall 1978), p. 6.

<sup>21</sup>Lisa Bolin Hawkins, "Another Prayer," *Exponent II* (Winter 1980), p. 5.

<sup>22</sup>Kristine Barrett, "To Mother," unpublished poem in the possession of the author.

<sup>23</sup>Jerrilyn Black, "There," unpublished poem in the possession of the author.

<sup>24</sup>Konek and Walters, *No More Masks*, p. xxviii.

<sup>25</sup>Helen Cannon, "Home," unpublished poem in the possession of the author.

