

A Feminist Looks at Polygamy

Real Property. By Sara Davidson. New York: Doubleday & Co., 1980. \$10.95.

Reviewed by KAREN LYNN, *associate professor of English, Brigham Young University.*

In an earlier best-seller, *Loose Change*, Sara Davidson documented the impact of the Sixties on her fictionalized self and two other intelligent females. *Real Property* moves on into the Seventies, but not in novel form. It is a collection of seventeen articles, nearly all of which have previously appeared in such magazines as *Ramparts* and *Esquire*. Some articles are based on interviews and observations of notable people: Jacqueline Susann, Richard Alpert (the Harvard psychologist who gave himself over to Indian mysticism and adopted the name of Baba Ram Dass), Mrs. Salvador Allende, a rock group called Rhinoceros. Other selections are more personal, describing Davidson's trip through the Sinai Desert or her arrest in Venice, California for growing marijuana.

Of perhaps the greatest interest for LDS readers is the article called "The Man With Ten Wives." Together with "The Nelsons" (yes—that's Ozzie, Harriet, Ricky, and David) this article comprises Chapter 4, "A Happy Family." Both the chapter title and the juxtaposition are ironic: her account of the Nelsons reveals longstanding discontent in a family that was once America's paradigm of happiness, and "The Man With Ten Wives" acknowledges that happiness does indeed appear to be possible under polygamy.

The "man with ten wives" is Alexander Joseph, who converted to Mormonism, left mainstream Mormonism for a fundamentalist polygamous group, and then set up his own polygamous establishment in the desert. The Joseph household received Sara Davidson as a visitor in 1975. "You know, Sara," one of the wives tells her, "if you stay much longer you'll have to stay forever. Us

wives do the recruiting." Davidson admits at the outset that her purpose was to "seek out the Josephs and find the flaw in their story." Her feminism—perhaps the closest thing to a single unifying thread holding the seventeen articles together—has not predisposed her kindly toward polygamy. And she in fact editorializes more explicitly about polygamy than about anything else in the book. Whereas she may simply describe for the reader's judgment Jacqueline Susann's questionable literary motives or the smug California commune dwellers who "are experimenting with herbs and Indian healing remedies to become free of manufactured medicinal drugs, but see no contradiction in continuing to swallow mind-altering chemicals," she is much more blunt in her reaction to the household in Glen Canyon. When she is flying in Joseph's private plane with Joseph and Carmen, a twenty-three-year-old wife who is a law student, the experience is finally overwhelming. She can contain neither her scorn nor her breakfast: "I have never been sick on a plane but it is happening now. This is too much to deal with. A thirty-nine-year-old phony Indian [Joseph] preserved in aspic from the Sixties and all these nubile, prim girls mouthing 'correct principles.'"

Yet she notes many things that intrigue her: Joseph's piercing voice, his pistol with the handle engraved "for Christ's sake," the wives' mutual helpfulness and their preoccupation with their responsibility for bearing children, and finally her realization that "the marriage works for these people . . . each wife adds a new dimension to the family." Her admiration for certain of the wives battles with her assumption that no emotionally healthy woman could elect to become a polygamous wife.

Davidson is unquestionably a skilled journalist, approaching her various tasks with frank curiosity and writing in an informal, inviting style. Her choice of sub-

jects plays into our natural curiosity—who among us would not *really* like to know what has become of the Nelsons, or what happens to a rock group that wants to eat in a fancy restaurant but on principle will not wear neckties, or what life was like behind the scenes of the Symbionese Liberation Army—and Davidson's articulate insights can give us at least as much excuse for reading her work as for watching a fine TV talk show. The

best of the popular magazines consistently duplicate the quality of her writing, but *Real Property* brings together the scattered articles of a single writer lets us view that one consciousness as it plays upon many different topics.

Anyone interested in reading "The Man With Ten Wives" without purchasing *Real Property* may find the original article in *Rolling Stone*, October 23, 1975, pp. 48–54.

Dear Diary . . .

Will I Ever Forget This Day? Excerpts from the Diaries of Carol Lynn Pearson, edited by Elouise M. Bell. Salt Lake City, Utah: Bookcraft, 1980. 130 pp. \$5.50.

Reviewed by MARY L. BRADFORD.

That last bastion of privacy—our personal diaries—has now been turned into a "program." From the pulpit, we are admonished to keep diaries; we are treated to snatches of personal diaries in sacrament meeting, we are urged to share our diaries in Relief Society, and our children are instructed in the rules and regulations of diary-keeping. I know whereof I speak, having been on the Diary Speaker circuit for several years now. My own diary-keeping goes back to my thirteenth year and is so extensive that I now have a large collection of beat-up loose-leaf notebooks, old ledgers, gold-tooled gift volumes, old school notebooks and fat folders full of typewritten entries. I have been keeping diaries for so many years that I have taken to organizing them under titles: Diet Diary, Dream Diary, Travel Diary, Dialogue Diary, Depression Diary, Poetry Diary, etc. Not content to keep my habit to myself, I have passed it on to my daughter, who began her diary when she was in fourth grade and continues it as a sophomore at BYU. She and I are known in some parts as a Mother-Daughter Diary Duo—traveling about with dramatic readings and witty presentations based on our

combined works. I must admit, however, that she has the advantage of me. She has read my teenage diaries, while I have never been allowed into hers, except as she chooses to quote them to me, always exclaiming "Mother! Listen to this! I can't believe I said this! Or thought this!"

Carol Lynn Pearson responded in much the same way when asked to publish her diary, started in her high school senior year and continuing to the present: "You're kidding. I said that? I did that? I felt that way?" Carol Lynn was persuaded to publish by her friend Elouise Bell, who as a teacher of college students and former member of the Young Women's Mutual Board, was charged with moving the diary program along. According to the introduction, when Elouise first approached Carol Lynn with the idea, Carol Lynn responded in her typically disarming way, "Just the fact that I have become somewhat well-known in Mormondom does not make the mundanities of my life any more significant than the mundanities of anybody else's life . . . In my mind I see an intelligent person picking up the book as she wanders through her local bookstore and saying: 'My gosh, her diaries now. Who does she think she is?'"

And that is about what I said when I was handed a copy of this attractive book. It is not that I was offended by another title from my friend Carol Lynn Pearson, but only that I was worried: How could a still living person publish