

acknowledges the desirability of sexuality, it is always in the most polite terms and only within a particular frame of reference.

This book was presented to every LDS bishop by the First Presidency and does

discuss and recognize some issues that have been sidestepped, even considered *verboten* for the LDS populace. Its accomplishment lies in the fact that it is a good first effort to discuss an important issue.

The New Mormon Poetry

The seventh day by Lewis Horne (Saskatoon, Saskatchewan: Thistle-down Press, 1982), 71 pp., \$16 (cloth); \$7.95 (paper).

Reviewed by Dennis Clark, a librarian at Orem Public Library and poetry editor of *Sunstone* magazine.

A NEW MORMON POETRY is beginning to emerge from the shadow of traditional, more bardic Mormon verse. Peeping about in the bright sun, blinking a bit and rubbing its eyes, it shows itself in poems not so word-driven, not so obsessed with wringing every nuance out of every key word, not so ponderous. It reads more in the contemporary American manner: casual diction, intimate tone, personal matter, informal prosody and a focus on the present. Whether Lewis Horne is a Mormon (or even American) poet I can't say: the only poem to make reference to the Church, "Vision of an Older Faith" (originally published in *DIALOGUE*, Winter 1974, here somewhat altered), refers to that faith as "my past belief." But he does exemplify the new Mormon (and American) poetry.

"The Windowcleaning" (pp. 24-25), one of the best poems in the book, exhibits, except in its formal prosody, the contemporary American manner. This is the whole poem. Read it aloud:

I

A swaying rope outside my window —
a ballast, a tail, a reference
to windowcleaners who have risen

upward on a slanting platform,
risen in the wind, the cooling air,
along the sunny wall, glowing like taffeta.

Behind them, puffballs of cloud slide
through a late September sky.
'They rise without apology,

rock music quaking, crotchety
and shrill through the static
of their small transistor radio.

They wipe off stains of dribble, the pale
transparent stubble of dirt. They open
up a straightaway for light

through panes that stand against the weather.

II

The manifestations of light — a streak
on water, the burning bush, the voice
from a blinding core of atmosphere.

Shaggy in spirit, touched by tinny
music fading as the pulley
draws them higher, I sit enameled

in the glow, myself the center
of these rays, the blinking, grateful
center, as though the sparks of angels'

wings ignite the lap of air,
grateful for small things cleanly drawn,
exercising shape and line —

theirs alone. I sit in a dazzle
of light, idling, wanting to rise
on its stream, straight — in dream — toward

the breathing altar of its source.

Two things make this poem the delight that it is: its regular structure, featuring a four-stress rhythm (broken only once, in the sixth line) reinforced by subtle rhyme (*dribble & stubble, apology & crotchety*); and, its progression toward an achieved end.

By itself alone, the first stanza would be little more than an interesting exercise

in description: the snapshot of a moment, entirely in present tense (a characteristic of contemporary American verse very irritating to traditionalists). It is itself a poem, as each section of a compound poem must be. The "panes that stand against the weather" are cleaned as a path for light; the cleaning, in early fall, admits more of the lessening light yet does not diminish the needed protection of the window. But without the second section, the poem would be as slight as that summary.

The poet introduces himself in the second section as "shaggy in spirit" yet "the center of these rays," and this is where the verse becomes poetry. His "wanting to rise" on the stream of light "toward the breathing altar of its source" voices the traditional American drive toward transcendence; but he wants to rise "in dream"—not in body, in mind, or even in spirit. In this he seems bound to the earth that contains "small things cleanly drawn, exercising shape and line—their alone." These share the light with him, although he is its center. His gratitude for them binds him to them, to their world. The tension between the two worlds—the one of light and air, music and puffball clouds, the other of the small things entire of themselves—is the source, it would seem, of his shagginess of spirit. That tension causes this poem. It is the matter that shapes it, knotted in the speaker's heart, keeping him in the present moment, bound with the language of our day, unable to rise but not therefore unhappy.

Not all the poems in the book are this good. Lacking the discipline of a regular prosody many of them slop about in the mouth, bland like Cream of Wheat with raisins and lumps intermingled (though not so nourishing). This sample, from "Rain and Berry-pickers" (p. 47) describes a storm:

When will the berry-pickers come?
Clouded aspen water air
in swelling wind, and sway—streaming,
tipsy with their sound.

These are two complete sentences. Until you realize that "water" is a verb, however,

the second sentence reads like bad impressionism, and its second verb, "sway," seems fanciful only, as in "to hold sway." Coming late in a poem otherwise clearly and cleanly grammatical, this confusion damages, rather than helps, the poem. It could be the result of an error in printing; the confusion in the poem rises from the omission of a definite article in this sentence: "Clouded aspen water *the* air. . . ." This tendency to omit function words (like articles), not for rhythm but to achieve compression on the page, mars much verse written in America today, clear evidence that its writers consider theirs a visual and not an aural art, to be read without moving the lips—roughly equivalent to eating without chewing.

There are other faults in the poems, like inappropriate metaphors ("clouds spread like old wallpaper on the sky" from "Mail Strike," p. 18) and one-word lines calling attention to weak words. They marred my pleasure but didn't ruin it. I enjoyed reading the poems. I found many of them worth rereading, like "Evenings Full of Fiddle," "In the Witch's Palace," and "Witch's World." The best of them combine a careful observation of nature with reflections on man's place therein, including the family and its relations. I especially liked "Winter Nights" and "After Putting My 14-year-old Daughter on the Train to Toronto." In these poems, by investing his subjects with careful attention, Horne escapes that sentimentality of modern sensibility which sees anything that catches one's notice as important.

Few of the poems force you to a second reading, and few sound better than careful prose. But most of them invite you to *feel* with the poet. They are fleet and enjoyable, displaying not great love of language so much as of living—but more substantial than most of what we read as "poetry" in our Mormon press. The best of them will germinate in your mind. They are well built for flight, like thistledown, for drifting across the window of your thought.