

have repeatedly affirmed the position of the Church in unalterably opposing all abortions, except [in] two rare instances: When conception is the result of rape and when competent medical counsel indicates that a mother's health would otherwise be seriously jeopardized." Marshaling the evidence, Wardle and Wood adopt Kimball's position and show how eminently reasonable it is. Their contradictory appeals to both authority and common consent and their peculiar amalgam of legalism and moralism are the familiar products of the Mormon habit of mind. What they fail to see is that the Supreme Court, in the language of the *Roe v. Wade* decision, could just as reasonably be supporting the same position.

If abortion is "the most significant civil rights issue of the last quarter of the twentieth century," as Wardle and Wood suggest, it deserves impartial analysis, not prooftexting. If they must begin (whether consciously or not) with the reasonable

dogma prescribed by authority, they should prove *each side* reasonable. By forcing us to stew in the quandary, they would elevate themselves and their opponents to their full humanity. If they had done this, readers would still agree that the court's trimester approach hasn't worked, that doctors have no control over their patients, and that without that professional safeguard the law allows abortion on demand. And readers would still accept their solution to the dilemma, but without feeling suspicious, led on, or cheated.

I am critical because *A Lawyer Looks at Abortion* comes so close, especially in the later chapters, to being the thorough and objective analysis so badly needed. Even with my reservations, I echo Thomas B. McAfee, writing in the *Missouri Law Review* (48:284): "Clearly, the book is the best overall summary of the present state of abortion law written for non-lawyers that I have seen."

Panorama, Drama, and PG At Last

A Woman of Destiny by Orson Scott Card (New York: Berkley Books, 1984), 713 pp., \$3.95.

Reviewed by Levi S. Peterson, a professor of English at Weber State College.

THIS NOVEL comes in glossy green and gold paperback with an embossed title and a blurb announcing it as "the epic saga of a woman who dared to search the world for love." Such commercial packaging is perhaps misleading, but certainly no real distraction. *A Woman of Destiny* traces a fictional English family, the Kirkhams—Anna and John and their children Robert, Charlie, and Dinah—in their struggle to survive and rise above poverty.

By the time they meet Mormon missionaries, Heber C. Kimball and Brigham Young, the slick popular romance has long been forgotten. The Kirkhams immigrate to Nauvoo without, however, Dinah's two children, who are wrested from her by her

embittered husband and her unconverted brother Robert. In Nauvoo, Dinah, whose spiritual gifts lead many to regard her as a prophetess, is reluctantly drawn into the secret practice of plural marriage. Charlie is later enlisted as well. From Dinah's perspective as one of Joseph Smith's wives, we see the tensions and tragedies afflicting Heber C. Kimball, Vilate Kimball, Emma Smith, and Joseph himself.

This work falls neatly into the genre of the historical novel, first defined by the late nineteenth-century works of Sir Walter Scott who forthrightly mingled fictional with historical events and persons in novels such as *The Heart of the Midlothian*, *Rob Roy*, and *Ivanhoe*. Mormon writers seem drawn to historical fiction, as if they find the stuff of fiction—the curious and inexplicable, the dangerous and adventurous, the heroic and tragic—only in the past. Perhaps this is because the present seems so certain, so guaranteed by a kindly provi-

dence, so clearly defined by the commandments that it is dull and uninteresting.

This novel is divided into fifty short chapters, grouped as ten books. Though the story revolves around Dinah, the words are those of a third person narrator. However, a statement by a first person narrator, O. Kirkham, precedes each book. In the initial "First Word," O. Kirkham claims his chief interest is his great-aunt, Dinah Kirkham, a character whom Card has roughly modeled on Eliza R. Snow. However, by the end of the first book we are much more aware of Anna, Robert, and Charlie than Dinah. In his next "First Word" the narrator explains. His idea had originally been to focus on his grandfather, Charlie. Some ninety pages into his narrative, he had found himself more interested in the charismatic, seductive personality of Dinah, and determined to let her dominate his story. "After all, Charlie's tragedy was that he always wanted greatness and had to settle for happiness instead; Dinah's tragedy was that she always wanted happiness and had to settle for power, fame, and adulation" (pp. 95-96).

Judging by page count and by the narrator's repeated assertions, Dinah is indeed the major figure of this novel. Yet in actual effect she remains one among several important characters, including Charlie and Joseph Smith. Had Card truly wished to spotlight Dinah, he might have adopted a central point of view presenting all events from her perspective. Instead, he chose a more omniscient, migrating point of view. He relates events from the perspectives of a variety of characters, some of them very minor (for example, Mr. Uray, Dinah's English employer, who disgraces her by attempting to rape her, and Matthew Handy, to whom Dinah is quickly wed as a consequence of this disgrace). Such shifting perspective, of course, has its technical advantages. It produces a panoramic effect by emphasizing not the concentrated experience of one early Mormon but rather the broad, multifarious experiences of many early Mormons.

Perhaps the narrator's insistence that Dinah Kirkham is his preoccupation merely demonstrates the perennial attempt of a novelist to get conscious control over a situation that his unconscious mind is spawning in an uncanny, unpredictable manner. Often authors do not sense the complete significance of their narratives, nor can they always nudge them in predetermined directions. Fortunately, that does not necessarily mean bad fiction. Certainly it does not in the case of this novel, which is abundant in detail and rich in drama.

Considering the unending flood of prudish and unrealistic G-rated Mormon novels, this work is to be commended for deserving, if not quite an R rating, at least a full-blown PG. In particular, Card deals candidly with sexual matters. For example, the scene in which Mr. Uray attempts to rape Dinah is frank and vivid. "He threw her skirt high over her head, hiding her face, and pulled down her drawers." Dinah saves herself by kicking him "harshly, and the boot he had not bothered to remove from her made a perfect fit, nesting his groin like a ball in the curve from toe to shin" (p. 125). In a far different scene, Joseph Smith and Dinah consummate their secret marriage. They have accepted its inevitability as God's will. They have not accepted the agonizing fact that they also desire each other passionately. Joseph makes love to her awkwardly and hesitantly. Then, still embracing her, he admits that "her body had been sweet and beautiful, her kisses fiery, and he loved her so much that he yearned for her even now, when he had just possessed her" (p. 471).

As the foregoing passage suggests, this novel makes a candid yet sympathetic study of Mormon polygamy in its initial stage, effectively setting forth the vast tensions and perplexities which it imposed upon the Saints. In a "First Word" essay, the narrator makes an eloquent apology:

They [the Saints called to practice it] did not accept polygamy out of lust or sexual repression — that is the obsession

of our post-Freudian times, and to interpret pre-Victorians in that light is to blind ourselves to who they really were. They had a deep-seated revulsion to adultery or anything that smacked of it. Brigham Young said that when he learned the law of plural marriages it was the only time in his life that he ever envied the dead (p. 554).

This novel also depicts the seamy side of polygamy through John C. Bennett, whom Card makes into the arch villain of the Nauvoo experience. Bennett is indispensable to Joseph Smith because of his rhetoric and connections, but he proves to be a treacherous ally — a corrupt, adulterous physician who performs abortions for prostitutes and instructs young Mormon women during their pre-marital check-ups that by God's law of "spiritual wifery" he is to secretly father their children.

In one of the most gripping scenes of the novel, Dinah Kirkham comes to the house of Joseph and Emma Smith intending to expose Bennett. Before she can do so, the fact of her marriage to Joseph is revealed to Emma, who pushes her down the stairs. Dinah suffers a miscarriage. (Much of this scene is based upon the apparently apocryphal story that Emma similarly caused Eliza R. Snow to miscarry Joseph's unborn child.) Later Bennett is exposed and excommunicated, but not before he attends the unconscious Dinah and performs a hysterectomy upon her, rendering her forever sterile.

In summary, this novel depicts the early Mormon experience of conversion and gathering with panoramic sweep and dramatic intensity. It is a competent, serious work, worthy of a place in the growing list of quality Mormon novels.

