

“A Profound Sense of Community”: Mormon Values in Wallace Stegner’s *Recapitulation*

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I

IN HIS CAREFULLY CRAFTED and distinguished novel *Recapitulation* (1979), Wallace Stegner, Iowa-born, Saskatchewan-reared, but Utah-formed, joins his protagonist Bruce Mason on a brief visit to Salt Lake City some forty-five years after leaving home. The seventy-ish Mason, now a successful lawyer, distinguished internationalist and former ambassador, returns to the city of his youth and young manhood to arrange for the burial of his Aunt Margaret. To his surprise, his Gentile return to Zion releases—through an outpouring of nostalgia, memories, dreams and fantasies—the ghosts of unresolved conflicts which have haunted him, consciously and subconsciously, from those early years.

It is evident to those familiar with Stegner’s life and works that Bruce Mason is a fictional rendering of the elemental Stegner, who, despite his frequent insistence that his work is not primarily autobiographical (Stegner and Etulain 1983, 81), has in fact been “pre-occupied, in much of his very best writing,” as Forrest G. Robinson has demonstrated, “with the intimate details of his own life” (1982, 102). It is a double welcome home, then, when Stegner returns in *Recapitulation* to the family saga of Harry (Bo) and Elsa Mason and their two sons, Chet and Bruce, whose story Stegner originally chronicled in his 1943 classic, *The Big Rock Candy Mountain*. For the most part a fictional recasting and examination of the lives of George and Hilda Stegner and their sons, Cecil and Wallace, the earlier novel is, Stegner admits, “family history reasonably straight” (Robinson and Robinson 1977, 18).

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In *The Big Rock Candy Mountain*, Stegner first evokes the theme to which he has since often returned: the elegaic celebration of the mythic West—symbolized in the Big Rock Candy Mountain itself—in contrast with the mundane, even ugly and vulgar realities of the sterile western present. Fictionally, this dichotomy is often embodied in the tension between what Stegner has called, in his essay “History, Myth, and the Western Writer,” the “man-wilderness and woman-civilization” theme, in which the “freedom-loving, roving man and the civilized woman” duel for power in a paradoxical conflict in which the winner must also lose something of value (1980, 195–96). Stegner embodies this conflict in the lives of Bo Mason—-independent, irresponsible, and restively energetic—and Elsa Mason—domestic, gentle, and cultivated—and portrays their struggle as a symbolic one, “a kind of template,” notes Robinson, “for the measurement and understanding of western American history” (Robinson 1982, 102).

This tension is underscored at the end of the novel as Bruce Mason reflects, standing at the grave of his suicide-murderer father, that

Perhaps it took several generations to make a man, perhaps it took several combinations and re-creations of his mother's gentleness and resilience, his father's enormous energy and appetite for the new, a subtle blending of masculine and feminine, selfish and selfless, stubborn and yielding, before a proper man could be fashioned.

He was the only one left to fulfill the contract and try to justify the labor and the harshness and the mistakes of his parents' lives, and that responsibility was . . . clearly his. (1943, 563)

In *Recapitulation*, published in Stegner's seventieth year, the author recapitulates how Bruce Mason, the survivor, impressively successful but symbolically sterile (unlike Stegner, Mason has, significantly, never married), returns to Salt Lake City and, at last, to the graves of his parents and brother to fulfill that contract.

As in most of his fiction, Stegner presents in *Recapitulation* and Bruce Mason his own “essential mind or spirit” (Stegner and Etulain 1983, 82), his own conservative and optimistic values, which he identifies as western and “square.” He artistically transforms the Mason family tensions into microcosmic reflections of what he has described as the central western paradox. To facilitate the reconciliation of this paradox, Stegner naturally and adroitly sets the novel in a region, in a city, and among adherents of a religion which represent for him and his persona, Mason, a culture and a society which have been more successful than most modern societies in resolving the paradox by bridging the gap between the attractive, mythic, pioneer past—with its classic values—and the real, urban and often ugly industrial present—with all of its chaos, relativism, and amorality.

Stegner and Mason believe, albeit grudgingly, that the Saints of Salt Lake City have, by maintaining and promoting family and community values, continued the unity and stability of the Settlement Era in the face of increasing secular opposition in the Urban West and have actually accomplished what regional writers have generally failed to accomplish fictively, in creating in the present (and in a culture no longer confined to the American West) what Stegner has called the "sense of a personal and *possessed* past" (1980, 199).

By setting the Mason family saga and Bruce Mason's own journey toward individuation in Salt Lake City, Stegner is free to evoke not only his own warm memories of growing up among the Mormons but also to recall the enduring conservative, optimistic, and moral values of his literal and spiritual hometown, values with which he has a life-long affinity. He thereby creates a frame of reference through which he and his fictional counterpart can better understand themselves and their origins, and against which both of them can measure their progress toward reconciliation of the tensions within their real and fictive families. He also sees in Mormon values and cohesive families possible patterns for regional and national resolution of the destructive western paradox.

II

"Why the hell put a book in Salt Lake?" asked Wallace Stegner's agent, on learning of his plan to write *Recapitulation*.

"I didn't see any reason why not," recalled Stegner in his 1980-81 interviews with Richard W. Etulain. "These actions and people *belonged* in Salt Lake City, not in New York City or Boston, or anywhere else." Indeed, Stegner seems to be right in claiming that, until *Recapitulation*, "Salt Lake has never, I suppose, been written about in fiction" (Stegner and Etulain 1983, 80-81). Of course, there are slight exceptions to this assertion, and Stegner himself had set part of *The Big Rock Candy Mountain* in a sketchily evoked Salt Lake City. It remained for the wandering and aging Bruce Mason, however, to use the "city of the Saints" as a rich and emotionally charged stimulus to memory, recapitulation, and even reconciliation in "the museum or diorama where early versions of him were preserved" (1979, 128). Salt Lake City was to become for Mason, as it had earlier become for Stegner, a kind of emotional Sacred Grove, a place for self-rediscovery, and both Mason and Stegner ride various waves of nostalgia which break with floods of insight into their emotionally chaotic earlier lives in the city, lives which contrast sharply with the security and stability which Salt Lake has come to mean for both of them.

Some years ago Stegner explored, in his essay "At Home in the Fields of the Lord," his assertion that "I have always envied people with a hometown" (1980, 157) and concluded that, despite his being "a Gentile in the New Jerusalem," his then recent visits to Salt Lake City, enriched by the distance of "years of absence from Zion," had taught him the truth that, no longer an Ishmael, "I am as rich in a hometown as anyone" (1980, 159).

Salt Lake City, where Stegner lived from 1921 through most of fifteen critical years of youth and early manhood, generates in him a pervasive "associational emotion" often "overlooked for years, and comprehended only in retrospect." He claims that "nostalgia, the recognition of old familiarity, is the surest way to recognize a hometown" (1980, 161) and illustrates his point that "any place deeply lived in . . . can fill the sensory attic with images enough for a lifetime of nostalgia" (p. 166) by sweeping through a spate of recollections of Salt Lake in the 1920s which recall the idyllic chapters in Mark Twain's *Autobiography*. He ranges nostalgically "from Murray to Beck's Hot Springs, and from Saltair to Brighton and Pinecrest," and "how it was, its weathers and its lights, is very clear to me" (p. 164); there are the canyons of memory to the east of the city: City Creek and Dry Canyon, Parley's and Mill Creek and Little Cottonwood; for, lying in the "lap of mountains" as it does, "knowing Salt Lake City means knowing its canyons" (p. 165); and knowing the city means knowing "the late-dusk smell of October on Second South and Twelfth East" with the "shine of the arc light on the split street tipping up the Second South hill"; it means, on later visits, being "all but skinless as I drive down Thirteenth East Street" (p. 166).

In *Recapitulation*, Stegner renders this nostalgic "all but skinlessness" in fiction, as Bruce Mason, late in May 1977, experiences Salt Lake City through every pore. Having rounded the Oquirrh, driven past "Black Rock and the ratty beaches" and the Saltair Pavilion, Mason enters the city, nods "gravely" to Brigham Young, "the figure with the outstretched hand" (pp. 8-9), and registers at the Hotel Utah (which he jarringly transposes as "Utah Hotel"), from whose familiar lobby and Roof Garden he sallies forth to find those "early versions" of himself in local color pregnant with remembrance. Mason enlivens landmarks which sweep readers from the Deseret Gym, the Temple Square Hotel, and an unnamed mortuary on East South Temple; to Brigham Street Pharmacy, the Avenues, the John R. Park Building and the Circle at the University of Utah; to the Victory Park tennis courts and some of the various Stegner/Mason family homes—across from Liberty Park on Seventh East, at Fifteenth East above East High School (where Miss Van Vliet teaches Latin in place of the real and legendary

Miss Van Pelt), on Ninth East and Fourth South, and Seventh South and Eleventh East, to cite a few. Driving slowly by many of these places during his two-day stay, his memories, says Mason, are made "instantly tangible" (p. 121), unfolding like a sego lily before his heated imagination.

Crossing the Emigration Canyon gully on Seventeenth South and Thirteenth East late on that first evening, Mason smells the hauntingly familiar breeze and insists, "When cottonwoods have been rattling at you all through your childhood, they mean *home*. . . . But one puff of wind through those trees in the gully is enough to tell me, not that I have come home, but that I never left" (p. 123). The houses, buildings, and streets of the present sweep him into such idyllic recollections as this description of the morning of his commencement from the University of Utah:

Walking along Thirteenth East Street on an absolutely perfect morning, a creation morning. Perhaps there was a shower during the night, but it feels as if prehistoric Lake Bonneville has risen silently in the dark, overflowing its old beach terraces one by one, flooding the Stansbury, then the Provo, on which this street is laid, then finally the Bonneville; filling the valley to overflowing, stretching a hundred miles westward into the desert, lapping against the Wasatch, pushing long fjords into the canyons, washing away all the winter smoke, softening the alluvial gravels, rinsing and freshening every leaf of every shrub and tree, greening every blade of grass; and then before daylight has withdrawn again into its salty remnant, leaving behind this universal sparkle and brightness.

It is such a morning as the old remember and only the young belong in. . . .

At the drugstore on the Second South corner he turns right, up the slope toward where the Park Building's white marble front overlooks the Circle and the treedotted lawn. . . . Ahead, the sun dazzles over the roof of the Park Building. . . . The mountains beyond are backlit and featureless. (pp. 162-63)

It is "dangerous to squeeze the tube of nostalgia," says Mason (p. 32), who soon realizes he is experiencing "some sort of historical jet lag" (p. 91) which will nudge him into some unsettling confrontations with his past. For Stegner, then, Salt Lake City becomes more than a warm and pleasant bath in nostalgia. The tender evocations of the city lead to long but differently focused retellings of the Mason/Stegner family saga — stories of his restless, bootlegging father, always one step ahead of the law, forcing his family to furtiveness and caution and frequent unstabilizing moves (wildness); of his gentle mother, who longs for self-respect, a home, neighbors, stability (civilization); of his unlucky brother, who dies an untimely death leaving a young bride and child; of Joe Mulder, Mason's friend and tennis partner; of first love and first jilting (Holly), and of his second passion (Nola) and their desultory drift into an unfulfilling sexual relationship gradually cooled when Mason attends law school in Minneapolis; of the lingering death

of his mother from cancer; of his father's suicide and simultaneous murder of a woman creditor.

These generally unsettling events take place against a background of an ordered, friendly city and thus underscore the contrast between the instability of the nomadic and rootless Mason family and the stable, solid benevolence of Salt Lake City, which is, for both Mason and Stegner, a sanctuary. "And it is as sanctuary," Stegner wrote earlier, in "At Home in the Fields of the Lord," "that [the city] persists even in my Gentile mind and insinuates itself as my veritable hometown" (1980, 167). Offering a "provincial security" (1979, 20), as Mason calls it, Salt Lake City and its desert and mountains "wrapped closer around the valley and around him their protective isolation" (p. 128) and accorded him a community solidarity, which he saw and felt all around him, a Mormon security to which he aspired for himself and his family. Joining the Boy Scouts, playing basketball in a hundred Mormon warehouses, discovering the public library, and negotiating the city's public transportation stirred in young Mason "the beginning of a wary confidence" (p. 82). Stegner, who likewise joined the Boy Scouts, where he earned the Eagle Scout badge by participating in Mormon and Episcopalian troops, and attended Mutual in various Mormon warehouses, also found in Salt Lake City a sense of belonging, of being "a member of a society, which was actually very good for me" (Stegner and Etulain 1983, 2). And Mason, like Stegner, though occasionally irritated at its wholesome ways and "good Mormon girls," and by its formal public pieties, admits his affection for the city and says gratefully, "Didn't Salt Lake, once, save him, or let him save himself?" (p. 35).

"I feel secure in Salt Lake City," Stegner writes; and "security," he insists elsewhere, showing his affinity with the conservative spirit of the city of his youth, "may be as great a social need as independence, stability as essential a commodity as change." Indeed, "except as we belong to a tradition and a community, we are nothing. We have no language, no history, no lore, no legend, no myth, no custom, no religion, no art, no species memory" (1980, 285). Thus, returning to Salt Lake City after many years' absence affords Stegner "a satisfactory literary experience," for "the present has power to evoke a more orderly version of the past" (1980, 168-69). Bruce Mason expands on this, noting that "memory, sometimes a preservative, sometimes a censor's stamp, could also be an art form" (p. 276), allowing the individual to shape the events of the past into an understandable present.

"Home," which for Stegner/Mason is Salt Lake City and all of the stability and security it represents amidst their respective family disarray, "is what you can take away with you." It is Salt Lake City

which provides for both of them "something real and good and satisfying, and the knowledge that, having had or been or lived these things," says Stegner, "I can never lose them again" (1980, 169).

III

The return of Bruce Mason and Wallace Stegner to Salt Lake City, however, also means a return to the city's Mormon inhabitants and thus to the mixed feelings which Stegner and Mason share about the Latter-day Saints. Salt Lake City, by which he means the Mormons, is "a divided concept, a complex idea," writes Stegner. "To the devout it is more than a place; it is a way of life, a corner of the materially realizable heaven; its soil is held together by the roots of the family and the cornerstones of the temple. In this sense," Stegner adds, "Salt Lake City is forever foreign to me, as to any non-Mormon" (1980, 159).

But Mormon values, the familial and communal stability of the Saints, are not foreign to Stegner; indeed, many of the values which he identifies as "Mormon" are values which the conservative Stegner evokes again and again in his biographies, his histories, and his fiction. It is through these familial and community values that he views, and assesses, and judges the world. It is these square and western values that he finds integral to the roots of Mormon culture and society.

Because he affirms these old verities and ideals and publicly admits to an appreciation of the Mormon people, who go far toward embodying such familial and community values, the Mormon people have embraced Stegner as one of their own, a "dry-land Mormon," "a local boy who made good," a Gentile, in Stegner's words, "who didn't turn out to be a Mormon-hater" (Stegner and Etulain 1983, 121). Because Stegner grew up among the Mormons in Salt Lake City, graduating from East High School and from the University of Utah where he would later teach, "I can talk to Mormons," he points out, "even though they know and I know that we don't talk exactly the same language. . . . They expect that I, as a gentile, will be understanding of their feeling and sympathetic with it. Indeed," he adds, "I am" (Stegner and Etulain 1983, 122).

This mutual affinity does not spring from Stegner's interest in Mormon theology, "which doesn't interest me that much," he admits, but from a youth spent in security among the Latter-day Saints, an affinity heightened by his later historical studies of Mormonism's "usable past," especially in his *Mormon Country* (1941) and *The Gathering of Zion: The Story of the Mormon Trail* (1964). Stegner's historical interest has been intensified by his seeing in Mormon culture, in everything from

polygamy (which he understands and even defends) and the trek, to the United Order and the organization of the modern ward, the embodiment not only of family and community values but also of the old western themes and paradoxes: of the pull between individual and community, between a mythically powerful rural and agrarian past and a confusing, urban and industrial present. He insists that the Mormons, in struggling to preserve and perpetuate the old verities and ideals in an atmosphere fraught with "pressures of the loose and ad lib society" (Stegner and Etulain 1983, 107), have "lost something that Brigham would have had them keep." Still, he continues, "they don't look so different from anybody else, and they do look, in some ways, more successful than anybody else" in preserving values and in retaining, in a modern society essentially inimical to transcendent and traditional western and Mormon values, their original cohesiveness and ability to endure the pressures from within and without (Stegner and Etulain 1983, 119).

He sees Mormons as attempting, then, with at least some success, to accomplish what western American writers seem incapable of accomplishing, despite the clear trumpet call which Stegner has sounded in his essays "Born a Square" and "History, Myth, and the Western Writer"—that is, building a sense of "a personal and *possessed* past." The idealistic values for present possessors of that possessed past, including the naive insistence on optimism and hope and faith and even a sense of Manifest Destiny, provide the continuity between that present sense of a mythic, possessed past and the actual western and Mormon present. Mormons are making a noble though perhaps ultimately futile attempt, in an America where such idealism and cohesiveness seem no longer possible, to fight a rear-guard effort in making Saints—crafting men and women who can stand with pragmatic feet firmly planted on the ground at the same time that their young men and women see visions and their old men and women, visions intact, dream dreams.

Stegner sees as key in this attempt to bridge the gap between the mythic and the actual, the real and the ideal, not only Mormon obedience, a Mormon sense of morality, and a Mormon sense of community and organization, but the family, center stake of the Mormon Zion. It is the Mormon family and its values which Stegner cheers. Writing in *The Gathering of Zion*, Stegner, after confessing his admiration for the tenacious cohesiveness of the Mormon family, insists that "the Kingdom is a more cohesive society even yet than most Americans know" (1964, 300). When asked by Richard Etulain what he meant in expressing admiration for "the everyday virtues of the Mormons," Stegner responds that he

had in mind . . . precisely what people have in mind when they speak of the New England virtues. The old-fashioned virtues, the virtues that have to do with hospitality, with family life, with the sort of welcome that strays have in a big family. In Utah, then [the 1920s], you could fall in with a family which had nine kids. You probably still can there more than anywhere else. They were big families, and they were warm and open families. *They had a lot of what I'd always missed*. . . . These people were so confident in their family life that they just threw open the doors in every direction. It [was] . . . but part of living their religion. (Stegner and Etulain 1983, 102; italics added)

Stegner points out that "the Mormon family and the beliefs that sanctify it are . . . sources of a profound sense of community. . . . These people belong to one another, to a place, to a faith" (1964, 300). Indeed, Stegner told Etulain, "The family is so important in Mormon religion that without it the religion would hardly exist." The virtues of Mormon family life are, he writes, "essentially virtues of hospitality and familial warmth, and also, quite commonly, a degree of community responsibility" (Stegner and Etulain 1983, 102).

Stegner's and Bruce Mason's admiration for the stability and cohesiveness of the Mormon family is directly linked to the virtual absence of those values in the real Stegner and fictitious Mason homes. In *Recapitulation*, Stegner, who admits that in creating Bo Mason he was exorcising his father (Stegner and Etulain 1983, 42), returns to a theme which he has evoked in a number of his novels—the "wounded and bitter sons" theme (Flora 1987, 982)—and recreates in Mason such a son who, reacting to events which closely parallel George Stegner's real-life conduct, is angry at Bo Mason's bootlegging, at his maintaining speakeasies in the Mason homes, at his treatment of Bruce's mother, at his unfaithfulness even during Elsa's final slide toward death, at his contemptible treatment of his brother and himself, at Bo's shoddy dissolution after Elsa's death, and, finally, at his humiliating murder-suicide.

Mason insists, as does Stegner, that the fictional and the real families each enjoyed a familial closeness (Stegner and Etulain 1983, 102; Stegner 1979, 96) only because, Mason says, "the internal strains that tore them apart also forced them together. Because they lived outside law and community, they had no one but themselves to share themselves with. They belonged to no neighborhood, church, profession, occupation, or club. . . . As a family, they shared nothing with anybody in Salt Lake" (1979, 97).

At one point, young Bruce, a sickly, small high school freshman who evoked only exclamations of disgust from his father, is shattered by an argument between his parents over Bo's illegal liquor trade and flees into the yard, where, looking across to the silence of Liberty Park, he feels, "as if they lived not merely at the edge of the park but

outside the boundaries of all human warmth, all love and companionship and neighborliness, all light and noise and activity, all law" (1979, 51).

In the summer of 1925, however, Elsa purchases for Bruce a second-hand tennis racket and a membership in the Salt Lake Tennis Club—and saves her son's life by introducing him to tennis and thus to Joe Mulder and, through Joe, to the values of the Mormon family. The Mulders, though a Jack-Mormon family, successfully undertake Bruce's permanent reconstruction by showing him the deep-rooted western and Mormon conservative values inherent in a loving, sharing, healing family. Mason recalls that, though the Mulders

did not tithes or go to meeting, . . . they kept the strenuous Mormon sense of stewardship. Having talents, one improved them. Having money or position, one tried to use it for the public good. Once Bruce had caught on to those attitudes, he had only one way to go. . . . He supposed he was their faith in self-improvement made manifest, the object of a Mormon proselytizing impulse not lost but only redirected. He corroborated their belief that anyone could take hold of himself and make himself into something better, happier, richer. *It was an American, especially a Western, as well as a Mormon notion. Mason had subscribed to it then, and sneakily still did.* (1979, 116; italics added)

In his essay "Born a Square," Stegner speaks up for the western naiveté that rejects the notion that "modern Man has quit" and proclaims that the "western naiveté of strenuousness, pragmatism, meliorism, optimism, and the stiff upper lip is our tradition" (1980, 184)—traits which sound akin to the characteristic values of the Mormon family.

These American, western and Mormon values, rooted in an essentially conservative world view, become part of Ambassador Mason's values, and of the values of many of Stegner's protagonists who, from Joe Alston in *All the Little Live Things* (1967) and *The Spectator Bird* (1976), to Lyman Ward in the Pulitzer Prize winning *Angle of Repose* (1971), to Larry Morgan in Stegner's most recent novel, *Crossing to Safety* (1987), mirror Stegner's own attitudes in their faulting of many modern ways and in their penchant for surveying the past for elucidation of the present. Thus Mason, in *Recapitulation*, admits to a woman friend that he in fact thinks that sex, if not "holy," "ought to be." "I'm that old-fashioned," he confesses. "[Sex is] Mystery, the profoundest agitation and self-sacrifice. Nothing to be cheapened or played with. Not just a jazzy incident on the pleasure circuit. Not the great god Orgasm" (1979, 220).

And when he laughs self-consciously on recalling that he had once told Nola, his date and future lover, that "you're some woman," Mason reveals a Joe Alston-Lyman Ward-like old-fashioned conservatism

(conservative even for the State Department) which would probably elicit (quiet) cheers from the majority of feminist-plagued LDS high priests: in reflecting on 1920s dating customs, Mason says that, "the females they went out with were women, even if they were hardly more than teenyboppers. I've got a date with a woman, they said; or, I'm taking my woman to the picture show."

They would all be told now, Mason thinks, that they needed their consciousness raised. The contemporary harpies who pass for women would probably spit on this sexism of deference, this disguised momism or whatever it was. But perhaps the boys knew something that the present has forgotten: that the only place one can first learn love is from a woman, that all tenderness, of any kind, derives from what is learned at the breast. Given a learner as insecure as young Bruce Mason, safety may well reside in some woman, mother, or lover or wife or whoever. Whether women have difficulty getting credit cards or not, it is not they who racket around through empty universes hunting for a place on which to rest. They are themselves such a place.

So it seemed to Bruce Mason then. So it seems to Mason now. (1979, 145)

But as Bruce Mason, age seventy, stands by his aunt's new grave in the Salt Lake Cemetery, he is still insecure, still bitter, still suffering from the newly reopened wounds inflicted by his father; he is "the last survivor of a star-crossed family" (1979, 284). Even Aunt Margaret, he learns, has "found a real security" in the rest home. "She was one of our family," the home's supervisor tells Mason, who feels no such sense of belonging. And though, he notes, the Mormon Church's Genealogical Library will order his family and incorporate their names into "its lists of everybody who ever lived on earth, even families as migrant and meaningless as Margaret's," Mason, drawing upon that old longing for Mulder- and Mormon-family stability, opts to order his own family remains and resolves to establish, on that hill in the secure sanctuary of the "city of the Saints," a Mormon kind of cohesiveness for his family, "a quasi-eternal territory for the family" (p. 286), a security, identity, and sense of belonging that they had not enjoyed in life. He orders, for Margaret, and, significantly, for his father's long unmarked grave, headstones to match the stones of his mother and brother, with "Father"—"That will say it," he tells the sexton (p. 267)—to be engraved on Bo's stone. This is Mason's acknowledgement of his willingness, prompted by his intensive recapitulation of the past two days, to take a first step toward effecting a posthumous reconciliation with his father.

IV

In *Recapitulation* Wallace Stegner has brought the familyless wanderer Bruce Mason into a fruitful confrontation with his past. Still

torn by the pull of the old paradoxes of the western land recalled in his own past and present, Mason recapitulates the past, and in his intensive recapitulation he reviews reels of recollection and confronts anew, this time from the vista of hindsight, the unsettling disorder of his earlier personal and family life. His own instability and insecurity, then and now, are heightened by contrast with the sense of stability rooted in his perceptions of Salt Lake City and of the cohesiveness of Mormon families.

Like Stegner, these values have become part of Mason, and he sees in these Mormon values the potential for the greening of the American West and the American nation, where such family and community values can provide a continuity of hope between the rejuvenating idealism of the mythic past and the pragmatic realities of the present, just as they have finally influenced Mason to begin to cleanse himself of the bitterness and insecurity which have so long festered within. In ordering the headstone for his father, Bruce Mason takes a firm step toward eventual reconciliation by donning the mantles of forgiveness and love and hope and optimism and meliorism and the stiff upper lip which are central to providing a healthy continuity and cohesiveness between his own past and present. Incurably melioristic, Mason and Stegner thus evoke the same values which can serve to fuse the Mormon and western past with the vitality of the present, and anticipate, in faith and hope, ultimate success in what Stegner has called "the New World's last chance to be something better, the only American society still malleable enough to be formed" (1980, 184).

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