

a valuable survey of those religious movements studied. Certainly, for readers of *DIALOGUE*, it is helpful to remember the parallels between Mormon history and the

histories of other religious movements organized by charismatic leaders in the last four hundred years.

Celebrations

Things Happen: Poems of Survival by Emma Lou Thayne (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1991), 80 pp., \$18.95.

Reviewed by Susan Elizabeth Howe, assistant professor of English and creative writing at Brigham Young University.

THE PUBLICATION OF A NEW BOOK of poetry is an occasion for celebration, particularly when the poetry is by such a generous and great-hearted soul as Emma Lou Thayne. But the title of this volume, *Things Happen: Poems of Survival*, suggests that these poems deal with tragic and painful human experiences; perhaps celebrating may seem inappropriate. Nevertheless, the poems themselves are celebrations, affirming life even as they explore some of its difficulties. In fact, almost all the poems are about belief, focusing on the imaginative re-creation of what is rich and rewarding in human experience as a stay against "what happens."

The volume's first poem, "Planting Wildflowers in September at the Cabin," is a metaphor for the entire book. As in most of these poems, the speaker here is Thayne herself. Planting requires her faith that "the moist seeds, webbed in the floss / of each other's company," will grow, and such faith provides an imaginative vision to sustain her through winter's bleakness. She says, "In winter dreams / I will return again and again" to the scene of planting, and affirms that "flowers / wild as Gentian and Indian Paint Brush, / will grow from my fingertips." The promise of generation, of blossoming, becomes a promise to her as well: "And I will rise with them / no matter where I am" (p. 13). As the wildflower seeds are a stay against winter, these poems, which also grow from Thayne's fingertips, are an imaginative stay against aging, pain, and loss.

The book has three sections. The first, "Come to Pass," includes poems that evoke several bitter and/or sweet incidents Thayne has experienced. She writes of the separation she feels as her children leave home. In "Last Child Going to Bed," her daughter's gleaming but empty bathroom becomes a metaphor for the loss of her constant, cherished association: "Without your running, / those tubs and sinks may toss up their porcelain / and disappear, faces unlined by tears or laughter" (p. 16). In "For My Child in Pain" (p. 25), Thayne creates a mother's anguish at her child's suffering and her desire to protect that child in any way possible. In "Margaret at 94 Refuses a Retirement Center," Margaret's own voice acknowledges what it is like to grow so old, "With my knees bone on bone, my legs parentheses, / My back the curve of meeting itself" (p. 18).

And yet, as these poems acknowledge difficulty, they affirm the value of living fully. Even as Thayne accepts her daughter's separation, she savors all their relationship has been, including the physical sensations of having her at home: "Long after I find where to sleep / the hushed taps will spill the taste of you / rushing like rain to the tang and glisten / of what is there" (p. 16). And despite her infirmities, Margaret refuses "to be serviced into non-being" and asserts, "I would still be a body lighted by love" (p. 18). She describes her approaching death as an awakening: "I would wake swaying, I swear, like a sapling / enough to please the sky, my skin, and me" (p. 20). About half the poems in this section ("Sailing at 54 with a Big Brother" and "Morning is my Time," for example) focus on the joyous experiences of life rather than the painful.

The second section of the book, called "The Map of the World," begins with a sequence of poems recounting Thayne's 1984 journey to Russia. The poems record the awe and wonder of travel into a totally unknown culture. Unsure of what awaits her as she journeys first to Moscow and then by train across Siberia, Thayne finds beauty in the land, goodness in the people, and openness and receptivity in herself. The poems are evocations of the variety of emotions Thayne experienced on this tour; they record less completely the specific scenes, the actual individual experiences.

The exception to that generalization is a poem about a later journey to Bucharest, "In the Cemetery of Heroes," which I think is the finest of the section. It recreates, in touching detail, Thayne's encounter with a mother who is visiting the grave of her son, a soldier killed at the age of twenty-one in the December 1989 revolt. As the poem opens, it addresses the young soldier, whose picture is embedded in the white marble cross of his headstone. Thayne says to him, "Your Adam's apple—a man's— / Belies the surprised eyes of a boy / Bare-headed and trying to smile—", perfectly evoking the youth and inexperience of this young man. His mother's actions are a powerful image of her grief: "She takes a wet cloth to the white edges / Of what is left, sponges away the new dirt / From this end to that of your marble grave" (p. 46). Thayne touches this woman's shoulder, speaks to her, and together they share the sorrow and immense loss mothers feel at the death of their children in war.

The arrangement of poems in this section is particularly effective. The first poems create the exhilaration of connecting with people of another culture, the genuine goodwill and enrichment that can be shared. Then the poem "Woman of Another World, I Am with You" is Thayne's affirmation of the efforts of women throughout the world to promote peace. The poem "In the Cemetery of Heroes" graphically portrays the devasta-

tion war brings to both women and their children; then the poems move to Thayne's personal reaction—as a mother, a grandmother, and a caring human being—to the beginning of the Gulf War one and a half years ago. The dramatic irony of this arrangement makes the reader ask why imaginary borders "invite the yours and the mine / of the quarrels, separate, kill" (p. 51) and whether war can ever be a satisfactory solution.

The book's third section, "Things Happen," begins with a poem of the same title describing the serious injury Thayne experienced a few years ago when a shaft of steel broke from a semi-trailer, flew through the windshield of her car, and shattered one side of her face. Thayne considered this a death experience (as the poem "When I Died" suggests), and one could wish for a longer sequence of poems exploring it because both the injury and the process leading to recovery must have been immensely significant to her.

That healing process, I think, is alluded to in "Meditations on the Heavens," a series of three pantoums that, when read in sequence, compare Thayne's vision of a comet in the night sky with Joseph Smith's vision of the Father and the Son. In the third pantoum, "The Comet Is Remembering," that vision becomes to Thayne a "small comet" in her mind, more real than Palmyra or the Sacred Grove where the vision occurred. The placement of these poems right after the poem "You Heal" suggests that Thayne's strong faith in God and in the healing powers of Christ must have played a considerable part in her recovery.

The rest of the poems again affirm the richness of experience—waterskiing at Lake Powell, writing poetry, rolling in a bathtub full of water and then shivering under a cold shower, waking up slowly and peacefully, and "Galloping Through Your Own Backyard." In the poem "I Am Delighted," Thayne says outright what all the other poems imply: "I am delighted. My life goes well. / I must say it as clearly as I can / before I'm gone." The poem

then goes on to catalogue some of the things she enjoys: "A new collapsible pair of glasses," the "Clean up window" on her new computer, "a young mare / and gelding frolicking like kittens," the sound of "the brook getting in with / the white swans at the black pond" (p. 66). The account of what pleases seems random and list-like—and those are qualities of many of the poems—but that very randomness can be attributed to Thayne's great powers of observation and her appreciation for every aspect of life it is humanly possible to enjoy.

The hopefulness of the poems is bal-

anced by an awareness of mortality. Aging or death is the background of many of the poems and the foreground of a few. But the eventuality of death serves, in fact, to make our human experiences all the more precious. As a whole, the poems of this volume are an affirmation of life. They celebrate sensory pleasure, the small touching gesture, physical and emotional contact with others, moments of variety and beauty in the natural world, and allege again and again how much of experience can be relished. In final analysis, one can learn from these poems not merely how to survive but how to flourish.

Unnatural History

Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place by Terry Tempest Williams (New York: Pantheon Books, 1991), 304 pp., \$21.

Reviewed by Helen B. Cannon, a member of the English department at Utah State University, a freelance writer, and an editorial associate for *DIALOGUE*.

SOMETIMES WHEN I GO to readings given by *Nature* writers, that new and popular set exploring their private, half-mystical genre, I think for a moment that I'm listening to LDS general conference talks—the histrionic intoning of truth on automatic pilot—the sincere, paternalistic, sing-song of lesson.

In the first paragraph of Chapter 1 of Terry Tempest Williams' *Refuge*, at first I thought I heard that familiar tone of sanctimony and awe, even when the words gave only geographic, not spiritual, directions:

When I reach Foothill Drive, I turn right, pass the University of Utah, and make another right, heading east [sic] until I meet South Temple, which requires a left-hand turn. I arrive a few miles later at Eagle Gate, a bronze arch that spans State Street. I turn right once more. One block later, I turn left on North Temple and pass the Mormon Tabernacle on Temple Square.

From here, I simply follow the gulls west, past the Salt Lake City International Airport.

These direction-giving words (the bane of geographic dyslexics, of whom I am one) came to me as a reverential reading about spiritual *landscape*, where "red-rocks . . . bleed" (Williams 1989, 16) when you cut them. Come on, Terry, I thought. This is too much "sense of place," as *Nature* writers call their orienting-on-earth penchant. This is too literal a cartography.

But I was wrong. *Refuge* is unquestionably not a formulaic book. It is, rather, a book where the author, in spite of herself, transcends the camp genre of nature writing and, for the most part, moves beyond the distraction of language calling attention to itself. Oh, nature is there all right, once we get past Temple Square and the freeway—not nature tooth and claw, nor nature as fey or awesome, but nature closely observed, drawn with a fine artistic, scientific, and personal precision. No tricks. No sentimentalizing. No histrionics.

Nature here is "bedrock," to use Williams' own choice of metaphor. "I could not separate the Bird Refuge from my family. . . . The landscape of my childhood and the landscape of my fam-