

Heart, Mind, and Soul: The Ethical Foundation of Mormon Letters¹

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WHEN I WAS IN MY EARLY TEENS—it seems like I was no older than fourteen—I received a special gift from my grandparents. They knew I liked to read. In fact, they knew that I read a lot. I was a regular patron of the local library, often rushing through two or three books on a long summer day. Of their twenty-seven grandchildren, therefore, I was singled out to receive a treasured possession, a copy of Orson F. Whitney's *Love and the Light*,² which my grandfather had given my grandmother shortly before they were married in 1926. The book was remarkable to me. It was the very first example of Mormon literature I had ever seen. In fact, I was amazed that Mormons actually wrote literature for other Mormons. I had thought that if we needed literature, we turned to the gentiles—or the *Reader's Digest Condensed Books* in the basement. I was not surprised to find, however, that Elder Whitney had written the poetic romance for the youth of the church. It was didactic literature designed to help young people struggling with intellectual challenges to their faith. In addition, it provided models for appropriate behavior. Whitney hoped to educate our conduct and believed literature was an appropriate vehicle to that

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2. Orson F. Whitney, *Love and the Light: An Idyl of the Westland* (Salt Lake City: n.p., 1918).

end. I am still pleased to have received that gift. It holds a prominent place today on my most important bookshelf. I also continue to ponder the idea that Mormon literature ought to use the power of its art to educate conduct.

The common place I have been describing, the power of literature to influence our conduct in deeply meaningful ways, has been under assault for over two hundred years. With the advent of modernism in poetry, painting, and fiction came a new commonplace. Art was valuable for its own sake—as something beautifully crafted—and not because it persuaded or moved us to become better ourselves. Both Gerald Graff³ and John Guillory,⁴ literary critics at the University of Chicago and John Hopkins University respectively, have recently noted that this new sensibility tended to minimize the social function of literature. That is, it tried to separate literature from its ethical and religious functions. Those functions had not necessarily been either overtly didactic or even sentimental. But new critical charges of didacticism and sentimentality, along with the effort to assign exclusively pejorative connotations to both terms, successfully changed the acceptable forms and purposes of serious literature in the twentieth century. Only recently has there been a slight resurgence of critical efforts to begin thinking anew about the relationship between literature, ethics, and social responsibility. Foremost among such critics have been the Marxists,⁵ on the one hand, and a small group of American critics, including J. Hillis Miller⁶ from Yale University and Wayne C. Booth⁷ from the University of Chicago. Both Miller and Booth published impressive books on the ethical influence of texts on readers during the 1980s. More recently, Roger Shattuck⁸ of Boston Uni-

3. Gerald Graff, *Professing Literature: An Institutional History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 145ff.

4. John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993). See especially chapter three, "Ideology and Canonical Form: The New Critical Canon," 134-175.

5. One thinks of critics like Theodor Adorno, Lucien Goldmann, Walter Benjamin, Raymond Williams, Frederic Jameson, and even Frank Lentricchia, who are always concerned with the relation between literature and social practice.

6. J. Hillis Miller, *The Ethics of Reading: Kant, de Man, Eliot, Trollope, and Benjamin* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987). Using a Kantian formulation of the moral, Miller looks at the works of various authors and raises questions about the moral significance of their writing.

7. Wayne C. Booth, *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988). Using Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* as a foundation, Booth constructs an elaborate system for evaluating the kinds of friendship books and authors offer readers. For a more extensive discussion of the book, see my review in *BYU Studies*, vol. 30, no. 1 (Winter 1990), 112-116.

8. Roger Shattuck, *Forbidden Knowledge: From Prometheus to Pornography* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996); *Candor and Perversion* (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Co., 1999). In both books, Shattuck "defends art's undeniable moral component."

versity has also entered the discussion, expanding the conversation to include previously taboo subjects like whether it is possible to suggest that certain books are better left unread. While it is not my concern here to try to construct a list of books none of us should read, I do hope to build on these earlier efforts in order to think about the possibility of an ethical criticism that carries with it significantly scriptural overtones. That is, I want to think about the classical notion of virtue, but with the help of the New Testament. And I hope to suggest a very simple framework that will allow us to begin thinking about literature, including Mormon literature, in those terms. In other words, I want to suggest some ways in which Mormon readers might think about the consequences for conduct suggested by the literature they choose to read.

In classical literature, writers often speak of the seat of virtue in human beings as the “heart.”⁹ Classical philosophy encourages us to think of virtue as achievable through rational study and careful consideration of practical wisdom.¹⁰ In other words, it urges us to consider the role of the intellect in the process of developing character. The New Testament suggests that the categories “heart” and “mind” make sense but also adds awareness of the spirit in the following passage: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.”¹¹ I like the possibilities for reflection suggested by the three categories.¹² To love God with heart, soul, and mind implies a high level of unity or integrity among the three. To love God with heart and soul, heart and mind, or any other partial combination of the three would be inadequate. The three may be separate entities, but they are also necessary to each other to complete a unit greater than any single one or even any pair. I would like to suggest that a good framework for evaluating powerful literature and its consequences for readers starts with thinking about these three concepts as parts of us—heart, soul, and mind—that are engaged, affected, and influenced by ethical literature.

I will begin by defining each category. In relatively simple terms, we can think of each as an essential human capacity: the heart is our capacity for affection; the mind is our capacity for reason; the soul is our capacity for inspiration. Let me also suggest that each of these capacities is associated with a number of qualities that we can call moral virtues, in

9. This is especially true in the great epics. *The Odyssey*, *The Iliad*, and *The Aeneid* consistently refer to the heart as the seat of virtue for Odysseus, Achilles, Hector, and Aeneas.

10. Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* is the most systematic of the classical works and introduces the very helpful concept of practical wisdom in Book II.

11. Matt. 22:37

12. I’m not certain that each of these names really describes separate faculties. On the other hand, I believe it makes rhetorical sense to expand the words we use to describe the seat of moral decision-making so that we can talk more freely and more specifically about the variety of virtues required to construct a good character.

the sense that the Greek philosopher, Aristotle, uses that phrase in *Nicomachean Ethics*. We can associate virtues like love, charity, courage, loyalty, and mercy with the heart; reasonableness, truth, justice, craftsmanship, and beauty with the mind; joy, awe, worship, and hope with the soul. We can see that these capacities are not innate, but that they need to be developed. The fact that they can be developed, however, also implies the possibility that they can be disfigured and distorted. Dallin H. Oaks explained how potential strengths or virtues can become weaknesses in these terms: "It may be just as dangerous to exceed orthodoxy as it is to fall short of it. The safety and happiness we are promised lie in keeping the commandments, not in discounting or multiplying them."¹³ The fact that we can, and do, "exceed" and "multiply" or "fall short" and "discount" our capacities explains much about how heart, soul, and mind function. Aristotle similarly uses the terms "excess" and "deficiency" to explain how virtues can become vices.¹⁴

Allow me to explore how the virtues of the heart, soul, and mind can become distorted through excess or deficiency as a means of suggesting a method for evaluating the ethical capacity of literature (see fig. 1). The virtues of heart are associated with affection that is honest, genuine, and sincere. Excess of heart is something different—technically it is no longer even heart but something else. Excess of heart, I suggest, must be associated with unbridled passion. Passion distorts the heart and moves us quickly beyond the bounds the Lord has set to rashness, lasciviousness, and wrath. Its consequences are damaging not only to ourselves but also to others. It is dangerous and threatening. Deficiency of heart, on the other hand, resembles something like sentimentality. Sentimentality is lazy. It produces emotions that are unearned, and it has no lasting effect. It is like the excitement that comes while you listen to a popular song but dissipates as soon as the last note dies. It has no lasting effect beyond tricking you into believing you have experienced the real thing. If you experience only sentimentality, your life will be devoid of genuine affection, of lasting relationships.

The virtues of mind are associated with the honest and humble search for truth. Its standard is reason, but reason that is familiar and comfortable with the ways of the heart and the soul. I suggest that excess of mind results in dogmatism. Dogmatism is dishonest certainty, knowing without effort that your truth is deeper and more profound than anyone else's and being willing to enforce it. It results in book banning, petty inquisitions, and fear of any claims to continuing revelation. Deficiency of mind, I think, can best be characterized as what the Lord calls "light-

13. Dallin H. Oaks, "Our Strengths Can Become Our Downfall," *The Ensign* (October 1994), 13.

14. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II.

mindedness."¹⁵ It consists mainly in trivializing things of great importance. It is also just plain silliness, the sort of thing that passes for entertainment on late-night television or daytime talk shows. It is the endless sharing of opinions on the radio without any effort to justify them. It is the attitude that nothing is sacred. I'm afraid it characterizes much of life in America today.

The virtues of soul are associated with inspiration from on high. They lead us to recognize, with Gerard Manley Hopkins,¹⁶ that the world is filled with the grandeur of God. They hasten the sudden feeling, on a crisp, winter morning with the sun shining brightly and the temperature hovering somewhere between freezing and zero, that Jesus is indeed the light and life of the world. They invite us to find meaning in our lives, to sense what the apostle Paul taught, that we are actually children of the living God. "That in him we live, and move, and have our being. . . . For we are also his offspring."¹⁷ Inspiration leads us upward, inviting us to understand not just who we are but who we may become. The excess of soul is asceticism, a belief that life is corrupting. It claims to lead us to God by having us despise our bodies, our social relations, our daily work. It claims that God demands our total and exclusive devotion and attention. It sees our service to God as adoration of him without service to our fellow beings. Deficiency of soul is materialism, trusting in the arm of flesh. For the materialist the world we see is all there is. The materialist focuses exclusively on the present. Materialism suggests that "every man fare[s] in this life according to the management of the creature; therefore every man prosper[s] according to his genius, and . . . every man conquer[s] according to his strength."¹⁸

Before we go on to discuss how these definitions help us to think more carefully about the consequences for conduct of reading literature, I need to say a little more about the relationship between heart, soul, and mind. It may seem that each one should serve as a corrective for the other if they fall out of balance. But that is not the case. A little dose of mind will not mend a distortion of the heart or soul. These capacities do not sit in uneasy balance with each other that can be easily upset or easily rectified. If that were so, a tepid moderation or mediocrity would be the ultimate virtue. We can compare the complete set of virtues

15. D&C 88:121.

16. "The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?"

W. H. Gardner and N. H. MacKenzie, eds., *The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 66.

17. Acts 17:28.

18. Alma 30:17.

associated with heart, mind, and soul, to a piano keyboard. When the piano is in tune and the notes are played in concert with one another, we experience integrity. The finest music comes from the integrated playing of the most keys. But a catchy tune using fewer keys can still be good. On the virtue keyboard, excess or extreme and defect or deficiency refer to states of quality (like a key that needs to be tuned) not quantity (hitting the wrong note). As we improve each separate capacity, we become better people. The best people will have developed all three capacities to a large degree and will have discovered how and where they overlap and thereby move toward a richer integrity.

How, then, ought we to think about heart, soul, and mind in relation to literature—poetry, drama, and fiction? I suggest that we think more carefully about how individual works of literature seek to influence each of these fundamental human capacities by asking a few questions. Does the work appeal to one capacity more than another? Which one? Does the appeal suggest a particular virtue or a collection of virtues associated with the capacity? Or does the work promote a deficient or extreme distortion of the capacity? What evidence from the text itself supports this interpretation?

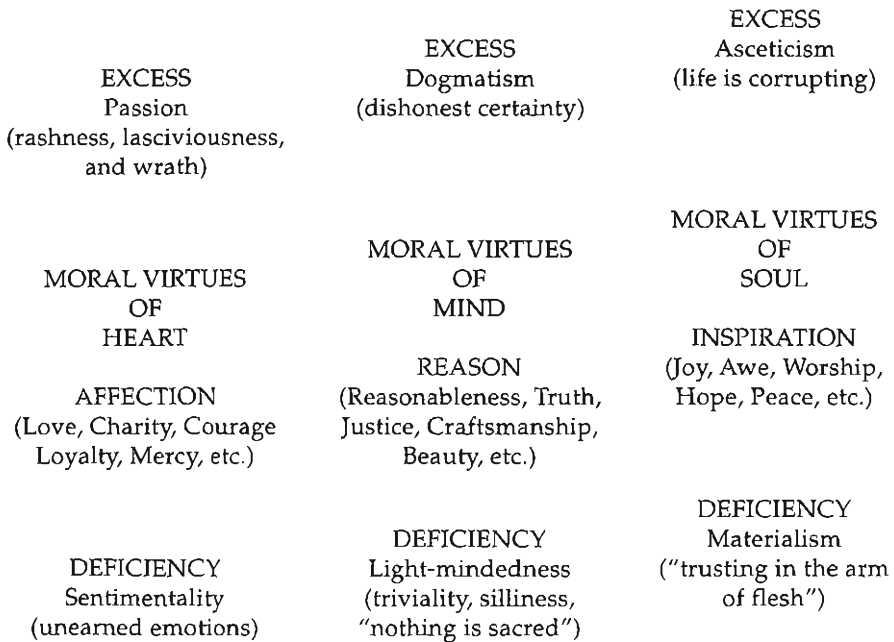


Figure 1

It is my contention that works of literature often reveal important ideas in crucial scenes that help to illuminate appeals to the capacities we've been considering. Careful scrutiny of such scenes or passages can help us understand the kinds of appeals that poems, plays, novels, television programs, and movies are making to heart, mind, and soul. The same kind of scrutiny can help us learn to adjust our taste—our desire to be entertained and instructed by certain kinds of literature. Our educated and spiritual tastes should lead us to literature that is aware of its persuasive power to influence conduct and that seeks to lead us upward, to expand our hearts, minds, and souls in the direction of righteousness, truth, and virtue. I fully realize that this makes our experience of literature more intellectual and more challenging. Anything less, I suspect, would diminish our awareness of ourselves as children of God. It would encourage us to allow ourselves to be entertained and unconsciously influenced by the heartless, the mindless, and the soul-less.

For the next few pages, then, I would like to present and examine some of these crucial scenes, scrutinizing their appeals and evaluating their influence. I suggest that we look first at the consequences of conduct of Jane Austen's *Emma*.

Emma is a story about love and romance set in England in the early nineteenth century. It is a quiet little book. But it is also very much about how we ought to conduct ourselves in our everyday relations with friends, neighbors, etc. I suggest that the village of Highbury in *Emma* is, in its own way, much like your home ward. It is peopled with individuals and families with little quirks, personality problems, family troubles, and other human failings. In the midst of this little community lives Emma Woodhouse. She is young and impetuous. She is also mildly arrogant, convinced of her superiority over the people around her. She loves to meddle. She especially loves to play matchmaker. But she is a very poor judge of human character, that of her friends certainly but more especially her own. These weaknesses are so apparent that Jane Austen reportedly said that Emma was a heroine "which no one but myself would like." I like the novel because it is a brilliant study of the subtleties of good character.

The most important scene in the novel takes place during a community outing, a picnic at Box Hill. Emma has been disappointed with how the day has gone. She senses that people are uneasy and hopes to bring some levity to the occasion by suggesting that they play a harmless game. Her frustration with her friends, however, intrudes in a sharply rude comment pointedly directed at an older lady who has seen much trouble in her life—the harmless Miss Bates. I'll let Jane Austen take over. Frank Churchill is speaking:

"Here are seven of you, besides myself (who, she is pleased to say, am very entertaining already), and she only demands from each of you either one thing very clever, be it prose or verse, original or repeated—or two things moderately clever—or three things very dull indeed, and she engages to laugh heartily at them all."

"Oh, very well," exclaimed Miss Bates, "then I need not be uneasy. 'Three things very dull indeed.' That will just do for me, you know, I shall be sure to say three dull things as soon as ever I open my mouth, shan't I?—(looking round with the most good-humoured dependence on every body's assent)—Do not you all think I shall?"

Emma could not resist.

"Ah! ma'am, but there may be a difficulty. Pardon me—but you will be limited as to number—only three at once."

Miss Bates, deceived by the mock ceremony of her manner, did not immediately catch her meaning; but, when it burst on her, it could not anger, though a slight blush showed that it could pain her.

"Ah!—well—to be sure. Yes, I see what she means (turning to Mr. Knightley), and I will try to hold my tongue. I must make myself very disagreeable, or she would not have said such a thing to an old friend."¹⁹

Austen leaves off right there, as another companion starts the game. Why dwell on the uneasiness introduced by Emma's cruel jibe or Miss Bates's painful recognition? If we were at a party and someone had carelessly insulted a guest, followed by the now infamous "just kidding," we all would try to move to something else as quickly as possible. Of course, that would also mean that another insult would be waiting to pop out, if not at our party then another. So Austen seems to let the moment pass. But she cares too much about Emma, and about her readers, to leave the matter there.

Not too long after the event, but when Emma is alone enough to be out of earshot of the others, her friend and confidant, Mr. Knightley, reminds her of what happened and explains how and why it was more painful to Miss Bates than Emma seems to know.

While waiting for the carriage, she found Mr. Knightley by her side. He looked around, as if to see that no one were near, and then said,

"Emma, I must once more speak to you as I have been used to do: a privilege rather endured than allowed, perhaps, but I must still use it. I cannot see you acting wrong, without a remonstrance. How could you be so un-

19. Jane Austen, *Emma* (London: Penguin, 1966, 1985), 364.

feeling to Miss Bates? How could you be so insolent in your wit to a woman of her character, age, and situation?—Emma, I had not thought it possible.”

Emma recollected, blushed, was sorry, but tried to laugh it off.

“Nay, how could I help saying what I did?—Nobody could have helped it. It was not so very bad. I dare say she did not understand me.”

“I assure you she did. She felt your full meaning. She has talked of it since. I wish you could have heard how she talked of it—with what candour and generosity. I wish you could have heard her honouring your forbearance, in being able to pay her such attentions, as she was for ever receiving from yourself and your father, when her society must be so irksome.”

“Oh!” cried Emma, “I know there is not a better creature in the world: but you must allow, that what is good and what is ridiculous are most unfortunately blended in her.”²⁰

At this point Emma certainly wishes to be absolved of any responsibility for what she said. While it may have inflicted a temporary hurt, she thinks it was just a simple statement of fact. But Knightley (and Austen) refuse to leave it there. They will not let Emma (or us) off the hook.

“They are blended,” said he, “I acknowledge; and, were she prosperous, I could allow much for the occasional prevalence of the ridiculous over the good. Were she a woman of fortune, I would leave every harmless absurdity to take its chance, I would not quarrel with you for any liberties of manner. Were she your equal in situation—but, Emma, consider how far this is from being the case. She is poor; she has sunk from the comforts she was born to; and, if she live to old age, must probably sink more. Her situation should secure your compassion. It was badly done, indeed!—You, whom she had known from an infant, whom she had seen grow up from a period when her notice was an honour, to have you now, in thoughtless spirits, and the pride of the moment, laugh at her, humble her—and before her niece, too—and before others, many of whom (certainly some,) would be entirely guided by your treatment of her.”²¹

Some may ask why I have chosen what many would call a very trivial example of bad conduct. This is really just a case of a single joke gone sour. We can’t afford to pay very much attention to it when there are so many worse things we have to combat. That attitude, of course, is the reason I included the example from *Emma*. Let’s apply the framework.

What sort of appeal does *Emma* make to the heart? For much of the novel, every single action seems to revolve around marriage and romance—an appeal to love and family life. They are, I think, the very core of

20. *Ibid.*, 367-8.

21. *Ibid.*, 368.

the virtues associated with heart. But the sections we just read make a crucial case for another kind of love. "Her situation should secure your compassion." Austen recognizes that compassion is not simply an abstract ideal, to be contemplated but never applied. Instead, she calls attention to our duty to be carefully aware of the circumstances of others and to act toward them with appropriate humanity: to do the right thing, in the right place, at the right time. I hope that daily compassion is not so trivial that we forget to strengthen the feeble knees. I freely admit that I find no passion in the example and am not persuaded that it is so trivial as to be sentimental.

What about mind? There may be a temptation here to become dogmatic about civility. But Knightley is careful not to push Emma herself beyond the limits of a certain degree of reasonableness. If Miss Bates were better able to defend herself, the insolence at Box Hill might have resulted in nothing more than a healthy laugh for all. But her weakness before Emma requires a different response. This passage could be accused of light-mindedness, with a slightly different twist. By assuming this to be an important example of moral conduct, we could be making it more compelling than it ought to be. Thus we wouldn't necessarily be belittling the sacred; rather, we would be sanctifying the frivolous. But I think Jane Austen is encouraging us to think carefully and well about the consequences of incivility toward the weak—physically, emotionally, spiritually, economically. A society that tolerates the brutality of incivility is in some danger of slipping toward accepting other forms of barbarity.

Does *Emma* appeal to soul? Does it inspire? If there is inspiration in the novel, it must be the kind of inspiration that characterizes everyday life, where God is in the details. While only indirectly, Knightley's awareness of the need to show respect for Miss Bates may also indicate some recognition that compassion is more than just an aristocratic responsibility. To show compassion may also be to acknowledge a slight spark of divinity in each person we meet. The world of Highbury is somewhat characterized by a version of materialism, but the sense of obligation toward the needy dilutes any ultimate reliance on the arm of flesh. And there is no asceticism to speak of in the novel.

How then ought we to characterize Jane Austen's *Emma*? Again, the previous analysis has been superficial, but we have been able to conclude that the novel speaks ably to heart and mind. Allow me also to suggest that it takes little away from the soul. It is subtly inspiring as it encourages us to enhance our understanding of others. And I am also willing to suggest that Jane Austen's current fashionableness comes from her ability to speak gently and subtly to heart, soul, and mind in a society where so much else that passes for literature refuses to. It is little wonder that so few people even remember the title of a *New York Times* best-seller of last year while many more continue to read Jane Austen's work nearly two hundred years after it was first published.

Austen's ethical subtlety and its important role in the success of her artistry suggest that we can use the framework to take a closer look at literature authored by Mormons. I believe that good Mormon writers try to find ways to engage these fundamental capacities, heart, mind, and soul, in profound and often challenging ways. I wish to take a closer look at three works which in 1998 won awards from the Association for Mormon Letters: Brady Udall's "Beautiful Places," a story from his collection, *Letting Loose the Hounds*;²² Susan Howe's poem "Mountain Psalm" from her collection, *Stone Spirits*;²³ and Eric Samuelsen's play *Gadianton*.²⁴ Each work addresses its audience with the idea of inviting further thought about identity, LDS and otherwise, but also about conduct. Each piece suggests dilemmas that good people may face and then probes how responses to the dilemmas become crucial to the further growth and definition of character. Allow me to examine each dilemma via the framework I've proposed. The results may surprise you.

Brady Udall's story, "Beautiful Places," exhibits many characteristics of the other stories in his collection, *Letting Loose the Hounds*: minimalist style, blue collar narrator, brisk sense of humor, fascination with western locations. This particular story is interesting to Mormon readers because of what the narrator discovers, by accident, after his used up Monte Carlo breaks down just outside of Logan, Utah, on an early spring Sunday afternoon. The narrator and his friend and traveling companion, Green, "a guy with long hair and a beard and missing his right hand,"²⁵ walk into town, only to find everything closed and the streets deserted. Green, who has been nervous since they've crossed the state line into Utah, breaks his usual silence to inform the narrator that nobody's there to help them because it's Sunday. They travel a little farther when they hear "singing so beautiful it could break your heart or make you sterile."²⁶ The narrator is drawn to the music and steps into the chapel, where he makes eye contact with Wade, "a kid with a crewcut who doesn't seem to be enjoying himself."²⁷ "He's got ears like frisbees and nice teeth. He wears a tie and cowboy boots. I've never seen anybody do that before."²⁸

Relieved at the chance to leave church, Wade offers to help the two stranded travelers. He allows them to wash his car for a little spending

22. Brady Udall, "Beautiful Places," *Letting Loose the Hounds* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1997), 178-189.

23. Susan Elizabeth Howe, "Mountain Psalm," *Stone Spirits* (Provo: The Charles Redd Center for Western Studies, 1997), 65-66.

24. Eric Samuelsen, *Gadianton* (unpublished typescript in possession of the author). This fine play was first produced at BYU in 1997.

25. Udall, 180.

26. *Ibid.*, 181.

27. *Ibid.*, 182.

28. *Ibid.*, 183.

money and then provides a picnic lunch along the shore of the Logan River. The conversation during lunch reveals that Green was once a Mormon. Like Wade, he was even involved with Boy Scouts. Once the secret is out, he and Wade seem to pour out their souls to one another. We learn that Green loves the music to hymns but can't remember the words. Wade is having trouble with social pressure designed to get him out on a mission. Soon their shared frustrations with aspects of Mormon culture have established a sort of bond. They notice that Wade's dog and the narrator are having a great time playing in the water and decide to join them. "Green's skin is so white it is almost blue. Wade comes up, water rolling off him, sputtering like a kid. He takes Green in a bear hug and dunks him under."²⁹ As they continue to frolic in the water, the narrator comments that "Green is free and easy, the happiest I've seen him for a long time and I can't help but be happy too."³⁰

Wade's last act of charity is to buy the dead Monte Carlo for forty dollars and drop the two travelers along the side of the highway, pointed in the direction of Salt Lake. A ride with an old couple gets them to Salt Lake, where they hook up with a trucker on his way to Phoenix, their final destination, the land of summer construction jobs. "The light is just coming up, turning the snow on the mountains purple and orange. The sky is opening sharp and clear. I can't be sure, but I think a place like this is just a little too beautiful for Green to stand."³¹

Let us ask a few questions of this interesting little story about two marginal insiders told from the perspective of an admiring, but perplexed, outsider. I like the story, in part, because it's sneaky. It speaks very differently to the insider and the outsider. The outsider sees the Sunday work and the romp in the river as pure charity, a day of rest stimulated by the good heart of a religious young man. The pharisaic insider, though, is tempted to see the same romp as guilty charity for Wade. He turns his back on his duty to listen to, and admire sermons and lessons on the Good Samaritan, as well as his obligation to channel his charitable impulses into culturally acceptable, conventional expressions of love. Instead, he plays religious hooky. He turns Sunday into a holiday. Or does he? For the insider, the knowing Mormon, that is the question.

Does this story, then, appeal to heart? I think so. Its humor and its point of view appeal to our generous nature. The point of view helps alleviate the cautious fear of strangers that keeps us from reaching out. Of course, I can't help but be nagged by my fear that strangers may just as likely be slasher drifters or X-file aliens as one-handed ex-Mormons. Does it appeal to the passionate extreme? I can't say that the story en-

29. *Ibid.*, 187.

30. *Ibid.*, 187.

31. *Ibid.*, 189.

courages letting go. The passionate extreme of generosity, a kind of spendthrift foolishness, doesn't come into play here at all. Does it appeal to sentimental deficiency? The danger to heart in this piece is its flirtation with sentimentality. "Beautiful Places" plays to the conventional critique of Utah Mormons as uptight, rigid zealots, with a limited capacity to serve beyond prescribed norms. Just as Mormon stories that celebrate this stereotype are often sentimental, so, too, the conventional critique. The story teeters on the edge of heavy-handed condemnation of active Mormons as parochial givers who look inward with ease and peace but seldom look outward to serve. It almost succumbs to the temptation to assert that only the marginally active have the freedom to be truly charitable. I would urge *caveat lector*—reader beware.

Does the story appeal to mind? Again, I think it does. It urges intellectual engagement not only with its well-crafted minimalist style, but also through the sneakiness I referred to before—its dual implied audience. It cares about language and is aware of its power. Does the story encourage dogmatism? Again I think the story is not intellectually extreme. Does the story, though, appeal to light-minded deficiency? As with heart, the story again teeters on the edge. I believe the story is ultimately more serious for the insider Mormon audience than it is for the broader national audience. We know what's going on. For us, some of the humor borders on light-mindedness—mockery of the sacred. This is a tried and true American way of telling stories, of course, from Mark Twain to Kurt Vonnegut, but Mormons do know that *something* is sacred. A romp in the river in just your underwear, even if accompanied by a dog named Robert, isn't really a baptism.

Does the story appeal to soul? Yes. The story urges us to see beyond the failure of its three characters. The narrator and Green are struggling drifters. They drink too much. They waste their money as fast as they earn it. But they are presented as likeable, even good, men. They present no danger to naive young Wade, who leaves the safety of church to help them out. There is no question that Wade is a better man for having spent the afternoon with them and then sent them on their way. And for all of his worries about pressure to serve a mission, Wade still reaches out. He is not self-centered, though he may have left the chapel for selfish reasons.

Does the story appeal to asceticism? No. The story is firmly about serving one's fellow beings. Does the story appeal to materialism? I think the story leans in the direction of trusting the arm of flesh. It glories in the feel of things: "the old car humming beneath your feet, the wind like a woman's fingers in your hair, bearing the smell of pine and fresh water and mint."³² "I spray Armor All on the tires and wipe the chrome so clean I can see the pores on my face in it. I try to keep my

32. *Ibid.*, 179.

mind on my work but girls in long dresses walk by and I am instantly distracted. When a breeze blows their skirts about their calves[,] I feel something flutter down the length of my spine."³³ But you can't escape the feeling that something more lies just beyond the limited perspective of the narrator. And that is why it feels so sad that Green has to move on so quickly, that "a place like this is just a little too beautiful for Green to stand."³⁴ Is our lovely Deseret just a little too lovely? That is a question worth asking, and Brady Udall asks it pretty well in "Beautiful Places."

Let us turn to Susan Howe's poem.

Mountain Psalm

We didn't come here to pray
 But snow and a brittle skim of ice
 Suggest otherwise. And to climb
 Is a form of worship: we accept
 Someone else's version of the way up;
 We trust and follow.

Of course questions, doubts: Why so slight
 An incline? all the doubling back
 When we might rise? Is a trail
 Best for some best for us?
 How to reconcile crystal-laden air
 With the consequence of sight?

We walk under pines, stiff as elders,
 Imposing answers all along our way.
 From beneath, they are a density
 Allowing now and then
 Dusts of brilliance, surprises of light.
 But the more we climb, the smaller
 They become, an aspect, a deeper green.

And then, the nature of treachery
 Or the treachery of nature. Considering
 Flaming peaks are tricks of light on ice,
 The way up is also the way down,
 And we don't transcend but climb,
 For what, then, should we pray? Balance,
 And the snowy grip of each footfall?

And sun, source of energy and vision,
 Metaphor for whom we seek and how.
 Father, Mother, give us distance

33. *Ibid.*, 184.

34. *Ibid.*, 189.

Through which to see our lives.
 Passage to this lookout and a blessing
 To perceive the extent and limits of our sight.

From this height, air streams down
 To the valley floor, refreshing
 The city as it struggles through its haze.
 But the city of our dwelling has become
 Its own reward, streets locked,
 All of the angles right. How rarely
 We prevail, vision cleared, above,
 Eating apples, bread, and cheese
 In the clean moment, on the legitimate rock.³⁵

If, as I suggest, Udall's story appeals primarily to the capacities of heart, it should be fairly apparent that Howe's poem appeals to capacities of mind. It is a meditation on spirituality, but it urges careful pondering as opposed to fervent response.

Writing a poem at the end of the twentieth century about communing with God in nature is a risky enterprise. Such poems have become so conventional, such sentiments so clichéd, that the poet is tempted to sound just like everybody else, just to chime in. By appealing to mind rather than heart, Howe avoids the cliché-ridden alternative. She even informs us in the first stanza that she knows and understands the risk. Thus, climbing the mountain becomes a metaphor for worship rather than an act of worship.

The poem becomes a meditation on perspective or point of view and its influence on faith, "To perceive the extent and limits of our sight." I will limit my interpretations to three images which explore the dynamic between point of view and faith. The first is "pines, stiff as elders, / Imposing answers all along our way." I take this to be an image of the rigidity of orthodoxy and those who uphold it. Their authority appears to be constraining, almost frightening, when seen up close. They hamper as much brilliance as they allow. And yet the image also shows that the most rigid tree, even when we stand directly in its shadow, does not so much "allow" "brilliance" or "surprises of light" as it is finally incapable of blocking them. A shift of perspective reveals the pines to be less menacing. They become only an "aspect" and not the essence of experience on the mountain.

The second image is the combination of "sun" and the allusion to "O, My Father" in stanza five. Here, Jesus is revealed as the object of our faithful search and the model for our seeking. While concerns with orthodoxy in the poem may be topical allusions to contemporary Mormonism, the invocation "Father, Mother" alludes to both past and present. Howe

35. Howe, 65-66.

here announces her desire for sisterhood with Eliza R. Snow as Mormon poet on the one hand and as Mormon feminist on the other. She suggests that we and Jesus have heavenly parents and invokes their help in expanding our perspective and increasing our faith.

The final image is the mountain top, "In the clean moment, on the legitimate rock." At this point, Howe has led us up the mountain, invited us to think more deeply about issues of faith and orthodoxy, and admonished us to look more urgently to Christ. This moment above trees and smog is "clean" because, however briefly, we are standing directly in the light. The rock is "legitimate" because of its permanence and solidity in relation to the light. To sit or stand on the rock is to be firmly enlightened, rightly inspired. And don't we all understand that Mormon mountain tops are temples of the Most High?

Does this poem appeal either to deficiency or excess of mind? Does it urge light-mindedness or dogmatism? Howe's poem does neither. Much Mormon feminism distorts itself into a dogmatic mirror image of the straw orthodoxy it opposes. Not so here. Rigid opposition to rigidity finds no place in it. And the poem does not descend into the light-minded sentiment that God is found only in nature, that Sunday worship is fulfilling only in the cathedral of the pines. I guess, finally, what I'm saying is that we need to claim Howe for the virtuous center. Her questions are too reasonable, her beliefs too humble, her gift too spiritual for us to reject her as a truly Mormon writer. Congratulations to Ed Geary, Bert Wilson, and the Redd Center at BYU for publishing this lovely book.

How does one do justice to Eric Samuelsen's *Gadianton* in just a few pages? The play is an extended study of the cancer of greed and the harm it does to individuals and communities. Space limitations will not allow me to sketch the plot. For me, the most important character in the play is McKay Todd, an LDS bishop who runs the mail room at Datafine, a large software firm located somewhere in the universe, but where large clusters of Mormons also dwell. Todd runs into a classic Book of Mormon dilemma. And that makes the audience very uncomfortable. Perhaps the hardest, and harshest, Christian critique of conduct is the attack on hypocrites who "strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel."³⁶ The Book of Mormon hearkens back to the Old Testament, as well, in its critique of people who, "because they are rich, they despise the poor"³⁷ and who "grind the faces of the poor."³⁸ The hypocrisy in the play consists of the rich characters acting as if they care for the poor, their employees, and neighbors until circumstances require them to choose between their neighbors and their money. The play condemns all who choose their profits over their neighbors.

36. Matt. 23:24.

37. 2 Ne. 9:30.

38. 2 Ne. 13:15; Isa. 3:15.

The crucial scene for Bishop Todd comes when he is forced to choose between support for members of his ward, who have relied on him for temporal and spiritual welfare, and his job. To keep his job when others are being laid off has the potential to push him toward selfish hypocrisy. To give up his job will place the welfare of his family, and maybe the strength of his marriage, in serious jeopardy. In this scene several contending voices speak to McKay Todd. The character most linked with Gandantoniism in the play, Fred Whitmore, confronts Todd with an impossible choice: Keep your job while a pregnant, single mother from the ward, who desperately needs health insurance, loses hers, or give up your job to save her, even though they may lay her off anyway. No guarantees. It is a pure sacrifice with no promise of reward. Whitmore speaks first.

Fred: Like we shouldn't lay her off. Like we should lay you off instead. Is that the kinda mistake we made? Is it?

Karen (McKay Todd's Wife): And another 318 for the car payment. 1170 for the house.

Brenda (the pregnant single mother): I want this baby, Bishop.

Karen: We need the money, McKay. This is no time for scruples.

Fred: Is it?

Brenda: I can feel her inside me, kicking and pushing . . . and I . . . I wanna hold her. In my arms.

Karen: 700 a month for the twins—.

Fred: IS IT?

Bishop Todd: Yes.

Karen: McKay?

Fred: Excuse me?

Bishop Todd: Yes. I'm saying that that's the kind of human mistake you made.

Fred: You're kidding.

Karen: You did what?

Fred: I didn't even mean it serious. Maybe I said it wrong, got you confused.

Bishop Todd: I understood.

Fred: She gets your job. You get the boot.

Bishop Todd: I know.

Karen: WHY?

Bishop Todd: Because I'm bishop of this ward, Karen. How could I work for a company that just laid off thirty of my ward members? Who I hired? How could I look at them each Sunday?

Karen: (A pause. Terrified.) But what are we going to do?

Bishop Todd: I don't know.³⁹

As you can tell from just one scene, this is an intense play. It emphasizes the hardness of the doctrine, and it stretches to unbearable limits the willingness of the audience to imagine correct conduct. The night I watched the play, I could sense the desire of the audience that Todd give up his job. But given a moment to consider what he had actually done, uneasiness settled over the crowd. Samuelsen sets up a dilemma that plays heart against mind. Bishop Todd's alternatives are unreasonable. He seems, therefore, required to make a choice based exclusively on emotion or simple sentiment. I suggest though, using the terms of our ethical framework, that Samuelsen hopes the paradox will be resolved by inspiration, the capacities of soul.

Let's quickly interrogate the scene. Does it appeal to heart? Most definitely. It emphasizes compassion and the courage that accompanies it. But the compassion called for has consequences that reach beyond our normal expectations. I love my bishop, and my ward expects a lot from him. But I don't think we require him to put his livelihood on the line to serve us. His calling should not require him to change employment. Bishop Todd, though, faces what seem to be unusual circumstances. For good men, work is an extension of family life. Their ability to make a living, to provide, is the measure of their commitment to wife and children. Bishops become bishops, in part, because they are good family men. Bishop Todd, however, is asked to place his family identity in some jeopardy in order to help the helpless. His decision requires faith in his ability to assess what the gospel requires of him. No one else in the play has shown any sign of believing that one should sacrifice temporal security for spiritual benefits. Bishop Todd, though, decides the gospel requires him to take the risk implied by Jesus' teachings. "Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? Or, What shall we drink? Or, Where-withal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."⁴⁰ So Todd's faith in God's promises must translate into courageous conviction. He must act on his beliefs, hoping that acting morally will not harm his more immediate

39. Samuelsen, 121-23.

40. Matt. 6:31-33.

family. He cannot know what the future will bring. He can only move with bold courage to help Brenda and her baby. Such moral courage, according to Samuelsen, is part of the antidote to Gadiantonism. And the play does not save us from the anguish brought on by what may simply be foolish. We don't get to see McKay Todd six months later, with a better job, a brand new car, and a very happy wife. That sort of *deus ex machina* isn't part of Samuelsen's dramatic universe.

Returning to our framework, does the scene also appeal to the mind? Yes. But within limits. Todd's choice certainly requires him to think hard. But the solution to his problems is not simply intellectual. If there were a calculus of charity and compassion, Todd's choice would be easy. Just find the most reasonably charitable alternative and take it. But Todd's choices are unreasonable. To choose one alternative over the other means limiting compassion toward someone. Compassion is also limited by Todd's three primary loyalties. He wears three hats: bishop, husband/father, and supervisor. The play never makes clear which priority takes ultimate precedence over the others. McKay Todd chooses, but with some uncertainty. Ask him to explain his choice, and he will have difficulty offering a rational justification for his decision.

But a rational temptation remains. By having Bishop Todd make a choice, and implying it is the right one, Samuelsen runs the risk of suggesting that bishops should always choose congregation over family, sacrifice over success. Rules of conduct are relatively easy to follow if one version of good conduct does not conflict with another. When categories conflict, the rational temptation is to reify categories and dogmatize the rules of right conduct. It is possible to interpret the play as urging all of us to reject the messy conflicts that arise between the very real worlds of business, neighborhood, and family by just leaving the business out. If we go that far, then we turn the play into an example of the virtues of mind taken to the extreme of dogmatism.

I believe the third aspect of the framework, soul, allows us to examine the play in its best light. The scene under discussion certainly appeals to soul. It invites us to think carefully about our relationship to God and how that relationship ought to define our conduct. Many of the conflicts in the play urge us not to forget that we are children of God. Brenda's desire to bear and raise a potentially handicapped child rather than have the abortion her doctor recommends brings out the best and the worst in her and her friends and neighbors. She seems to be acting selfishly. Her neighbors judge her. Her bishop helps her to seek God's help. If Brenda and her bishop are acting under inspiration, the choice to keep the child may also have wonderful consequences. For that to have any chance of occurring, though, Bishop Todd must be willing to accept the possibility that her keeping the child will require his losing his job. The play is constructed well enough that we in the audience take that possibility se-

riously. Todd's choice is not outlandish, but it is shocking. We are asked to consider whether such inspiration could come from a Heavenly Father who loves us. We are also challenged to test our own faith. Would we do what Bishop Todd does? Would our society be more like Zion if we did act as Bishop Todd does?

At the same time, some of the play's appeals to soul are less adequate. An understanding of our relationship with God must include some awareness of evil. The evil in this play runs the danger of being caricatured. It appears that Samuelsen would have us believe that all business practice is cursed to succumb to the logic of Korihor, that whatsoever a man did, as long as it made a profit, was no crime. Such a view makes evil seem much less complex than the good we've seen dissected in the scene under discussion. That may be so, but the play leaves us feeling that all endeavors whose primary motive is profit are finally evil. On this score, Samuelsen is at least partially supported by no less an authority than Hugh Nibley.⁴¹ But Bishop Todd's choice may imply that evil is just too powerful and must be succumbed to. What if Whitmore plays on Todd's good motives just to fire him? What if Brenda is fired tomorrow anyway? Has evil then triumphed? If the play is to work, genuine evil must be presented and countered. As it stands, the play leaves us hopeful that McKay Todd has made a choice that will be ratified by God, but we're still wondering about how this small act is turning back the tide of the evil corporation. Should we believe that such small acts of courage can combat Gadianonism? I personally hope so. Samuelsen has produced a well-crafted work of art that challenges the Mormon audience to consider the conduct of our society in the light of the doctrine of the gospel. That is good Mormon literature.

I believe that the best Mormon literature will accept the challenge of taking ethics seriously. At the same time, I hope that Mormon letters will reject extremes—dogmatism, asceticism, passion—especially if those extremes are only reactions against the obvious deficiencies of our popular culture—sentimentality, light-mindedness, materialism. But I fear the popular deficiencies will dominate, if only because deficiency is always easier than the virtuous alternative. I hope that the Association for Mormon Letters in the future will strive to find a way to clarify standards and challenge the culture to move toward moral virtue, that our criticism will not abdicate the responsibility to encourage right conduct and will honor literature that does just that.

41. Hugh W. Nibley, *Approaching Zion* (Salt Lake: Deseret Book/F.A.R.M.S., 1989). See especially chapters 7 through 9, "How to Get Rich," "Work We Must, but the Lunch is Free," and "But What Kind of Work?"