

weighs in, she chides Donna for neglecting to mention missionary work or food storage during her latest public appearance for Sinnamon. Sister Monson's relentless criticism under the guise of "helping" someone less savvy about public relations and the Outside World quickly becomes patronizing and evokes another appearance of Donna's lioness—and deservedly so.

At one point, Donna muses: "Is Sinnamon my product, or because I'm Mormon, am I supposed to be marketing the gospel along with it? If I decide to 'let my light so shine' and all that, do I have to screw in the public-image light bulb that Sister Monson wants? The one that says we don't throw spit wads at bishops or get tattoos? Or is it my own kind of light bulb that laughs and likes to think that God might be laughing with me?" (86)

While the story does touch on some weightier matters—such as identity issues and the obligations of Mormons in the spotlight—it generally stays out of heavy-handed, moralizing territory. It's a fun read and lends credibility to the idea that we peculiar people can poke fun at ourselves and survive a good-natured ribbing. And we may yet have Erma Bombecks of our own.

Saving the Germans from Themselves?

Alan Keele, *In Search of the Supernal: Pre-Existence, Eternal Marriage, and Apotheosis in German Literary, Operatic and Cinematic Texts* (Münster, Germany: Agenda Verlag, 2003), 347 pp.

Reviewed by Sandy Straubhaar, Germanic Studies Department, University of Texas at Austin

This engaging labor-of-love book is a pleasure to read even if one does not always agree with its arguments. In it, BYU German professor Alan Keele mines German literature and drama for what he calls the supernal: specifically, for narratives that echo LDS concepts of preexistence, eternal marriage and apotheosis—with some attention paid as well to a subgroup of related themes, including the hero-journey, metanoia (or repentance), the temple, and human community.

As Keele points out in his foreword, Germans have a particularly resonant history with these sorts of ideas, having produced a literary and philosophical tradition in which such ongoing leitmotifs are numerous. But, as he also notes, the concept of a divine potential in the human species posits also a diabolical potential: single-minded obsession with one's potential godhood can trigger a downward spiral into diabolical acts of hubris, as the history of Germany through the mid-twentieth century shows only too clearly. Keele puts it this way: "No national culture has fostered a richer tradition of supernal idealism than

the German, persistently proclaiming and celebrating the divinity and perfectability of the human race, only to discredit itself so damnably in the grim reality of its own history" (10).

I found the first sections of the book, devoted to the "Angel" films of Wim Wenders (*Der Himmel über Berlin*, 1987; *In weiter Ferne, so nah!*, 1993) to be the best, as well as the most accessible. Keele recounts the narratives of both films (released in the United States as *Wings of Desire* and *Far Away, So Close!*) engagingly, in a manner likely to send the reader out to the video store with the idea of replaying passages to see how Keele's interpretations match with one's own. These are movies, after all, where audience mileage can vary widely. Why, for instance, do Wenders's films sometimes incorporate unmistakably Nazi-tainted vocabulary and symbolism? Keele argues (as others also have) that scriptwriters Peter Handke and Wim Wenders did this deliberately, intending to purge and rehabilitate, thus making transcendental themes safe for Germans again. Keele traces the themes of the films through Wenders and Handke back to Rainer Maria Rilke's *Duino Elegies* (1923; coincidentally also translated by Keele, with Leslie Norris [Columbia, S.C.: Camden House, 1993]). In doing this he utilizes at all times, as elsewhere throughout the book, an overtly Mormon view of cosmos, time, and God.

It is, in fact, Keele's openly stated intent to address a bifurcated audience, one including both LDS readers and academic Germanists, that strikes me as particularly bold about this book, as well as thoughtfully executed. Where some LDS writers have a hard time separating themselves from LDS-specific vocabulary, Keele knows the trap and avoids it; he is fully bilingual in more than one way. Only a few odd words stood out for me, but one was *supernal*, which is not a common word in any vocabulary of today; if one googles for it, one gets not only the Mormon hymn "The Day Dawn Is Breaking," but also various websites for Gothic clothing and music, as well as links to the American pulp fantasists Clark Ashton Smith and H. P. Lovecraft—coincidentally, contemporaries of Rilke but hardly his tribal brothers.

After the Wenders sections, Keele looks at Mozart's opera *Die Zauberflöte* (1791); Beethoven's *Fidelio* (1805); the Grail-quest story of Parzival, the wise fool, both in its medieval (ca. 1210) and its nineteenth-century Wagnerian (1882) incarnations; and two operas by Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Richard Strauss, *Der Rosenkavalier* (1911) and *Die Frau ohne Schatten* (1919). In all of these, he finds the transcendental themes he seeks: progression, partnership (Tamino with Pamina, Parzival with Condwiramours, and so forth), sin and salvation, and community; and he backs up his discoveries with text. While these sections also made for intriguing reading, I was not as convinced as I was in the Wenders sections; but that does not mean that I think that these themes are not present in these works. Rather, I suspect that, like worst nightmares and favorite music, those narratives that strike us as most cosmic or transcendental are highly various and that they

vary as widely among us Mormons as they do throughout the human species at large.

For instance, I can't go where Keele goes with *Rosenkavalier*, although it is clear that he is far more familiar with it than I am. *Der Rosenkavalier* strikes me as the kind of thing that might happen if you let Oscar Wilde loose in Ruritania after a late night's reading of *Dangerous Liaisons*; I just can't get cosmic about it. *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, similarly, seems to me to hover generically somewhere between Strindberg's *Dream Play* (1901) and Maeterlinck's *Blue Bird* (1909). All of these are illustrious, mythic-archetypal-folkloric narratives to be sure, but I would not pick any of them as a master narrative for my own life's Jungian (or Campbellian) quest. And for a peace-making reconciliation of the Parzival story with reference to both (medieval poet) Wolfram and Wagner, my personal choice would be the remarkable modern novel *The Grail of Hearts* (1992) by New York Jewish stockbroker Susan Shwartz.

My failures to see what Alan Keele sees in some of the works he examines may stem from within, just as C. S. Lewis's "Uncle Andrew" in *The Magician's Nephew* hears only roaring when Aslan sings, or just as his dwarfs in *The Last Battle* are convinced they are eating cabbage leaves, old turnips, and water from a donkey trough when in fact they are seated in front of a rich feast. Or it may just be (I hope) that one's life's resonant narratives are an entirely individual matter, at best individually sought out. For instance, one of mine from undergraduate days in Keele's department at BYU was Novalis's *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (1802), with its mostly unpartnered hero. Since I seemed to myself unlikely to find a life partner when I first read Novalis, the (unattainable) quest for the Blue Flower seemed a perfect image: more or less solitary "eternal progression" (in LDS terms), without a specific point of arrival. I liked it immensely. Another, from outside Germanophone literature but certainly written with a knowledge of much of it, was the *Book of the New Sun* tetralogy (1980-83) by Chicago-based Catholic engineer Gene Wolfe.

And in fact, perhaps the one thing that I have enjoyed above all else, in reading Alan Keele's book, is the incentive that it excites: to revisit the narratives that have afforded its readers their most transcendental (or supernal) insights—even if those narratives do not match the narratives that Keele himself has chosen to examine.

CALL FOR PAPERS
ON INTERNATIONAL MORMONISM

During 2005 and 2006, *Dialogue* expects to publish a series of articles on the Mormon experience and identity outside the usual Anglo-American cultural realm.

Guest edited by Ethan Yorgason, this series will feature articles on a variety of topics from the perspective of various scholarly disciplines, including history, literature, and the social sciences. Each paper may focus in depth upon a particular cultural setting or offer cross-cultural comparisons among two or more settings.

As the Church continues to grow, cultural-geographic distinctions promise to assume greater significance in both doctrine and practice. We would therefore welcome papers that examine the following questions.

What are some of these possible distinctions?

How might the Church respond to an impetus toward varieties of Mormonism?

How do these distinctive varieties of Mormonism contribute to the relationship of Mormonism to the host society/culture?

We are also interested in the interpretations given Mormon history by both members and nonmembers within cultures beyond the Anglo-American sphere. Articles could also treat the level of historical "literacy" among Church members, the aspects of Church history that are best and least well known, the purposes to which historical knowledge is put, and the relationship between Mormon history and Mormon identity.

Submissions

Manuscripts for this series will be welcome until January 1, 2006. In formatting and documentation, submissions should follow the *Chicago Manual of Style* (15th ed.). Electronic submissions are preferred and should be sent as attachments in MS Word or WordPerfect to yorgasoe@byuh.edu. Please provide mailing address and phone number. Paper copies, if unavoidable, may be sent in triplicate to Ethan Yorgason, BYU-Hawaii, Box 1970, Laie, HI 96762. Manuscripts should be sent as soon as possible up to the deadline. Address queries to Yorgason at (808) 293-3617; fax: (808) 293-3888. For *Dialogue's* publication policy, please see <http://www.dialoguejournal.com/>.

CALL FOR PAPERS
ON THE PROSPECTS AND PROBLEMS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES
AMONG THE LATTER-DAY SAINTS

What relationships do the disabled negotiate with both the institutional Church and the Mormon folk? *Dialogue* invites responses to this question, which, as a member of our editorial board has observed, "has many interesting implications: from our definitions of personhood; to our views of connections between pre-earthly estate to the present and the afterlife; to the everyday struggles of 'enduring to the end.'"

To initiate this proposal, *Dialogue* sponsored two sessions on the disabled at the Salt Lake Sunstone Symposium of 2004. An essay from one of these sessions, treating the faith of a young woman severely disabled by cerebral palsy, appears in this issue. We will publish other accepted submissions in later issues.

Authors are particularly invited to submit articles and essays addressing aspects of these questions:

- Given that persons with disabilities and their caretakers are often sensitive, what terminology is appropriate?
- What different problems face the physically disabled and the mentally impaired?
- What are the theological implications of persons with disabilities? What are the moral implications?
- What programs and social services for persons with disabilities does the Church provide? Which seem successful and which less so? What is missing?
- What attitudes do Mormon folk show toward persons with disabilities?
- What is being done to improve the lot of persons with disabilities among the Mormons? What more could be done?

Submissions

Send articles and essays to the *Dialogue* Submissions Office. In formatting and documentation, submissions should follow the 15th edition of the *Chicago Manual of Style*. Electronic submissions are preferred. Send attachments in Word or WordPerfect to dialoguemss@aol.com. Please provide mailing address and phone number. Submissions may also be made in printed copy. Mail three copies to *Dialogue* Submissions Office, 704 228th Ave. NE, #723, Sammamish, WA 98074. Phone: (425) 898-9562. For *Dialogue's* publication policy, please see www.dialoguejournal.com.