

lovely narrative piece of an ugly time; and those unaware of the repression enforced on the union or think that rolling back the Wagner Act is a good idea should give it a look.

Several articles have a more ambiguous audience. James Adams's article on public schools provides an explanation of the so-called Utah paradox of high achievement and low per-student funding. Evidently, that paradox disappears and Utah students actually do worse than national averages when the data are controlled for race and income. But this discovery emerges only after slogging through descriptions of funding battles that only a labor lobbyist could love.

To return to the question that bedevils Utah history: Do Mormons make a difference? I'm not sure, but the twenty-first century has furthered the conundrum. The Salt Lake City Olympics may have been quintessentially American, but their image is already fading. The dominant vision of Utah (and an unexpected source of revenue) is rapidly becoming St. George's role as Albuquerque's stunt double in Disney's *High School Musical* series of movies. Why did the producers shoot in St. George? Because, as any fan of *So You Think You Can Dance* knows, the best dancers are in Utah. And why are the best dancers in Utah? Could it have anything to do with what a 1950s *Time* magazine reporter once called the "dancingest denomination"? It could be, or perhaps it's just cheaper labor costs and proximity to Los Angeles. I suppose the answer depends on whether you lean toward the "hell, no's" or the "heck, yeah's." After reading this volume, I'm still with the latter camp.

## Navigating Mortality

Angela Hallstrom, ed. *Dispensation: Latter-day Fiction*. Introduction by Margaret Blair Young. Provo, Utah: Zarahemla Books, 2010. 458 pp. Paperback: \$19.95. ISBN 978-0-9843603-0-7

*Reviewed by Myrna Dee Marler*

The cover of *Dispensation: Latter-day Fiction* shows clocks on long poles dipped into a blue lake surrounded by mountains. At first

glance, the image symbolically suggests that this is the last dispensation and that all the writers included in the collection are products of these latter days. On second glance, though, the clocks also appear to be thermometers. That symbolism is equally appropriate, as each of the stories included in this collection takes the temperature of a certain spot in the deep waters of worldwide Mormonism, and the temperature may change, given the shifting sands of everyday events and the unfathomable molten core beneath the surface.

Some of the stories have historical settings. Two examples are Doug Thayer's horrifying "Wolves" set during the Great Depression but focusing on the question of blood atonement and Phyllis Barber's "Bread for Gunnar," which addresses the challenge of polygamy. Others, however, are as current as today's newspaper. These stories take place in contemporary Utah, where modern Mormons struggle to find reason and meaning behind unexpected upheavals or even just the daily grind of raising children and living life. Notable examples are Margaret Blair Young's "Zoo Sounds" and Bruce Jorgensen's "Measures of Music."

In geographical contrast, two stories take place in contemporary Africa. In Paul Rawlins's "The Garden," a missionary runs for his life and hides in a poor black man's vegetable patch. In "Quietly" by Todd Robert Peterson, a new convert is asked to dedicate the grave of a man found killed by Hutus and hanging upside down in a tree.

All fiction, of course, deals with mortals trying to navigate the conditions of mortal life that are no more comprehensible for being universal. We are born, we age, we die. We are subject to pain, affliction, and temptation. We cannot know the minds and hearts of others except for what they tell us or what we sense. Conflict is inevitable. These stories ask whether being a Mormon can save you, anchor you, break you, make you crazy, or bring you unspeakable joy. The manifold answers have as much to do with varying faith, knowledge, thought, and personality as they have to do with the nature of Mormonism itself.

Each story seems to plumb the depths of what it means to come in contact with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, either regarding it as a peculiar feature of peculiar people, or embracing the complexities of faith and the hardship which

that faith sometimes brings in its wake. Some question policies of the past. "White Shell," by Arianne Cope, illustrates ways that the Indian Placement Program, instituted by well-meaning Mormons, affected many lives for better but also for worse. Darrell Spencer's "Blood Work" seems to say that being a Mormon can make you crazy. Brian Evensen's "The Care of the State" suggests that being a Mormon can anchor you, while allowing that we're all untethered in some way or other.

All the stories are thought-provoking, questioning, artistic, and eloquent; many transcend the confines of "Mormon" fiction. These are stories from mature writers who see the ambiguities and contradictions inherent in navigating the shoals of mortal life, whether their characters are clasp the iron rod or barely acknowledging its existence. Birth, death, divorce, conversion, living Mormon precepts, twisting them, relying upon them, or leaving them—all the conflicts of a Mormon's mortal life are here.

In her "Preface," Angela Hallstrom quotes Eugene England, to whom the book is dedicated, who said of his 1992 collection of Mormon short fiction, *Bright Angels and Familiars*: "Mormonism insists that divinity continues to reveal [truths] to prophets and further understanding of [these truths] to all people. One crucial way such insight can come, I believe, is through the telling of stories." These stories participate in that quest for revelatory storytelling, and invite thoughtful readers along for the journey.

## **LDS Youth in an Age of Transition**

Bruce A. Chadwick, Brent L. Top, and Richard J. McClendon. *Shield of Faith: The Power of Religion in the Lives of LDS Youth and Young Adults*. Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2010. 367 pp. Tables, figures, appendices, and index. Cloth: 24.99. ISBN: 0842527613

Christian Smith with Patricia Snell. *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. 355 pp. Tables, figures, appendices, and index. Cloth: 24.95. ISBN: 0195371798