

potent yet morally neutral, capable of justifying blasphemous tyranny or radical charity—*idolatry* or *idyllatry*. If pushed, it could lead to another phase in the unfolding, collective revelation called Mormonism.

To be ugly, but honest, I didn't like most of the poems in *Ephemerist* at first. It took some time sitting with the book's sashay-and-sway before I could internalize the rhythm at a level that felt natural. Thankfully, what I like and what I don't like is rather irrelevant. Instead, what matters is engagement of a fair and balanced sort. I still prefer Bickmore's last book over this one, but I consider both it and *Ephemerist* important enough to justify buying and reading everything she writes. I look forward to decades more of being haunted by her amiable ghost.



Gender Structures within *Seasons of Change: Stories of Transition*

Sandra Clark Jergensen and Shelah Mastny Miner, eds.
Seasons of Change: Stories of Transition. El Cerrito, Calif.:
Peculiar Press, 2017. 264 pp. Paper: \$19.99. ISBN: 978-
0991189281.

Reviewed by Mei Li Inouye

Aptly titled, *Seasons of Change: Stories of Transition* is a well-curated collection of prose and poetry featuring a specific demographic of Mormon women who read and contribute to the literary journal and blog *Segullah*. Eleven thoughtfully arranged categories containing fifty-eight voices capture a diversity of experiences that occasionally touch on issues of class,

sexual orientation, ability, race, and ethnicity,¹ but primarily plumb the life and death observations and gendered experiences of a middle-class swath of well-educated, able-bodied, heteronormative, married women from different age groups and North American geographies (their rare references to race or ethnicity also suggest racial homogeneity among them). A unique ethnographic case study for analyzing the boundaries, values, and negotiations of this specific demographic of Mormon women, this collection makes a valuable contribution in its exploration of what it means to be such a Mormon woman and how such women negotiate the gendered structures and roles containing them.

Three gendered structures that frame the social practice and performance of gender (see R.W. Connell and Judith Butler) give context to the threads of grief, joy, and realization woven throughout the collection. In the first structure (division of labor), reproduction, child-rearing, and domestic responsibilities that trump personal ambitions seem to be the primary labor of these women. Secondly, the structure of power—or the ability to define gender roles and the terms of existence—falls within the domain of patriarchal bodies external to women’s personal determinations. The third gendered structure or structure of “cathexis,” (emotionally charged social relations) is largely reflected in cis-gendered, heteronormative, sexually-driven, monogamous emotional attachments that reproduce the above two structures. More explicitly, in terms of labor, Lisa Rumsey Harris packs her prose into an Eliot-inspired epiphany that there will be time enough and more to learn, travel, write, and teach, but given the limitations of the moment, her most important labor is to usher a child into mortality (19). The imperative to be fruitful, to

1. See Jennifer Quist’s “Ice Cream with Superman and Kafka,” Tresa Brown Edmunds’s “How to Kill a Cocktail Party,” and Kylie Nielson Turley’s “Ears to Hear” on ability; Kel Purcill’s “Blue Polish” and Sherilyn Olsen’s “Because of Bob” on sexual orientation; Terresa Wellborn’s “Yá’át’ééh” and Elizabeth Cranford Garcia’s “To My Children, Who Will Be Asked What They Are” for race and ethnicity.

multiply and replenish the earth derives from an outside source and power and sets the terms of existence for these women. Julie Nelson's evocative poem aligns with this outside imperative by defining women in terms of reproduction, marriage, and sexuality (in that order), in the "ripening" and "budding" of "hips and lips / and damp seeds clustered to burst by moonlight" (21). Dependence on God, Heavenly Father, the Lord, and the Spirit to set the terms of existence for Mormon women appears in many narratives that rely on outside impressions and comfort to lead them through grief, divorce, miscarriage, and midlife crises. As for emotionally charged social relations (cathexis), the most prominent are those between marriage partners. Shelah Mastny Miner's tightly crafted narrative about the centrality of sex and privacy in her marriage provides such a narrative. Taken together, these three gender structures of division of labor, power, and cathexis support and reinforce what it means to be a Mormon woman and define the parameters in which these women exercise their agency.

These structural frameworks leave room for narratives to expose gaps and allow for the exercise of agency. Cozied between duvet covers and decorative pillows, pregnancies, and toddler's clapping hands, some narratives trouble the fulfillment and joy that reproduction, marriage, and domesticity assumedly bring; the site of self-definition and strength as coming from an external source; and the importance of sex within heterosexual marriages in establishing and maintaining relationships. Without challenging the structural framework of family, Sandra Clark Jergensen's trembling narrative captures the torment of waiting to have a child and of the equally tortuous gestational process of stretching skin and nausea, postpartum depression, and the obligation to have more children. Angela Hallstrom, a woman who runs away from home, children, and husband for a day and a night, highlights the frustration of giving oneself to the labor of childrearing and domestic housekeeping while wanting another form of fulfillment. Michelle Lehnardt interrogates the domestic duty and narrative of

“no one loves you like your mother” based on her own pain of feeling unloved by her mother (94–95). Emily Bishop Milner despairs at the entropic process of housekeeping and its corresponding value of domestic tranquility in her contemplation of suicide and clinical diagnosis of depression. While Lehnardt’s narrative turns to God and others for kinder voices and validation, Milner’s main comfort in this period derives from her deceased grandmother.

This turn to a female (though still external) source of power for peace and direction contrasts with reliance on male figures that dictate the terms of existence for women. Doubting “the ability of the LDS church to be an integral part of [her] relationship with God,” Emily Clyde Curtis challenges the authority of Church-led directives in her own life. Despite maintaining the importance of trust in the Lord—a source of power outside herself—through personal revelation, there are moments when she struggles to hear the voice of the Lord. In those moments, she turns to her own impressions and instincts to combat the perceived injustices she sees within Church organization. Likewise, the heartache of Kylie Nielson Turley after being diagnosed with cerebral palsy leads to angrily and loudly crying to God, “I don’t want Thy way.” After losing her voice and learning to scream again, she peers inward with the realization that when she is deaf she will “hear the truths [she has not wanted to hear before]”—truths that only surface while she is “slowly being undone” by memories, walls, helplessness, silence, and humiliations (132). This focus on personal autonomy and self-realization can be summed up in Claire Åkebrand’s well-rendered poem that presents the agency of Eve in the shadowy blues of darkness and falling, outside of her emotionally-charged relationship to Adam.

Åkebrand’s Eve, who makes decisions based on her own impressions and separate from a marital relationship, challenges the emotionally-charged social relationship of marriage that has traditionally defined a woman’s labor, feelings of self-worth, and ability to make her own decisions. Other narratives within the collection also challenge the

dominance of marriage as the main type of emotionally-charged social relation used to define women. Jes S. Curtis uses the parable of Ruth to explore what it means to be a divorcee and to lose the comfort and safety of the institutional norm of family. Jessie Christensen, in gracefully outlining the transition from a seemingly “normative” Mormon marriage to becoming a single mother with a gay ex-husband, discovers that the love she needs to sustain herself need not come from a partner but can extend from herself to others. Other examples of emotionally-charged social relations used to define Mormon women include stories of mothers, fathers, and daughters, siblings, cousins, and strangers. Though the majority of these relations fall within the institutional framework of a cis-gendered, heteronormative, monogamous family—an institutional structure that is difficult to separate from reproductive labor and male patriarchy—they offer up strains of struggle, clarity, grief, and wonder that culminate in a beauty and creativity made possible only by these very structures.

In conclusion, *Seasons of Change* both outlines and makes porous the institutional gender structures containing this demographic of Mormon women. It highlights the agency and creativity of these women in negotiating their own personal needs and desires, even when their desires are written in the language of their institution. However, to read this collection solely through the analytical framework of gender structures and agency neglects the multiplicity of ways one can read these narratives as well as their narrative absences. Organized in categories such as acceptance, hunger, grafting, and entropy, this collection is emotionally and intellectually compelling. Its individual narratives, often short but well-written, raise valuable questions for humans, Mormon and non-Mormon alike.

