

her." The *poem* indicates no such thing. What the biographer surely means to say is that the sunny optimism expressed in the poem is belied by other evidence. In another instance, Bushman refers gently and with some concern to the Robinsons' "marital practices" and says they were "carrying on their marital relationship," i.e., having sexual intercourse, while their eight-year-old son slept in the same room. After using these euphemisms (her own, not Harriet's), Bushman then says, "Harriet was too inhibited to write candidly of pregnancy in her diary!" As a historian, Bushman surely knows that virtually all of our ancestors were begotten while older siblings slept, or lay awake, in the common bedroom. But these are minor flyspecks in what is basically a solid, well-done book.

It would be illuminating for members of the Church to read, at some future date, just *how* Harriet Robinson's character figured into Claudia Bushman's working out of her own destiny. Bushman is, among other things, the mother of ten, the founder of *Exponent II*, a teacher of history and literature and the editor of a book significant in the history of twentieth-century Mormon feminism, *Mormon Sisters: Women in Early Utah* (1976). Countless Mormon women are trying to work out similar destinies, trying to combine the joys and duties of home, family and Church, with the not-to-be-denied yearnings for wider scope in the world at large. Bushman has told us how Harriet Robinson did it in the nineteenth century. Let us hope we don't have to wait for a biographer to tell us how Claudia Bushman did it in the twentieth.

Carefully Crafted Cocoon

Chrysalis. By Joyce Ellen Davis. Salt Lake City: Olympus Publishing Co., 1981. 170 pp.

Reviewed by MARGARET R. MUNK, freelance writer and member of *Dialogue's* editorial staff.

When I saw that Joyce Ellen Davis' newly published novel, *Chrysalis*, dealt with a young mother's experience with cancer, I was disappointed—but only temporarily. The theme seemed to be perhaps too obvious in its dramatic appeal and therefore overused: vibrant, life-loving young woman encounters forces beyond her control likely to bring about her death. Again.

To say that a theme has been used before, however, is not to say that every writer could handle it as skillfully as Mrs. Davis has done. It is not surprising that the Utah Arts Council judged her manuscript the grand prize winner in its annual literary competition for 1979 and awarded her a grant which made publication possible. This short, artistically written novel grasps the reader's attention quickly and

holds it throughout, making one admire the author, care about the central character and suspect that they are one and the same.

One of the book's greatest strengths is the skill with which it portrays in fine detail both the clinical aspects of treatment for a malignancy and the inner state of the patient. The more I read, the more certain I became that Mrs. Davis had a very personal reason for choosing her theme. Her publisher, Olympus Press, states that Mrs. Davis has described the work as "autobiographical fiction." It seems safe to assume that the author understood from personal experience the feelings of Jody Harper, the fictional mother who discovers, between the births of her fourth and fifth babies, that she has a malignant melanoma, that immediate surgery is necessary and that her chances for long survival are slim.

This much we learn in the first four pages of the book. The rest is a chronicle, in small, carefully crafted segments, of Jody's present thoughts and reflections on the past during the year that follows. The

principal message is the value and wonder of earthly life, down to its smallest details, which take on a new significance for one who knows that she may be experiencing them for the last time. As the book ends with the outcome still uncertain, Jody reflects, "I respect each hour. I have learned not to waste my time in futile lethargy. It's a good world and a good life. . . . I hold it as carefully as mortal fingers will allow."

There is also a lesson here in the meaning of suffering, probably as wise a lesson as can be drawn from the difficult puzzle of human experience. Having achieved a kind of mental and spiritual victory over physical circumstance, Jody concludes, "If I'd had a choice, I would have chosen not to host this hidden battle. I am a cowardly soldier, shy and unwarlike. But I know now that there is wisdom in tears. Pain does come from darkness, and it is pain. Sometimes it is also wisdom."

I enjoyed and appreciated *Chrysalis* for two important reasons: The style is beautiful, and the central character comes through with vivid appeal.

Each chapter, each segment, gives the impression of having been shaped and re-shaped. From the "fox-hunting, deer-stalking, big-game traffic" of the first paragraph to the children chasing each other "in and out of the forest of adult legs" on the Thanksgiving Day with which the book closes, one imaginative phrase follows another. Jody's free-flowing thoughts are occasionally sprinkled with interesting poetry, and it is not surprising to learn that Joyce Ellen Davis is a poet as well as a prose writer. She also imparts to Jody a wry sense of humor; this saves the book from becoming maudlin.

Jody comes across as a real person. Even to one who has not shared her experience, her thoughts and feelings and the changes through which they pass seem right and believable. She *did*, as does a person mourning the death of someone else, pass through a series of emotional stages—from angry denial, through depression and fear, to acceptance, hope and gratitude for what is good. There *were* days and moments when thoughts would ascend or descend

into other-worldly realms of light or darkness; others when, despite the gravity of the situation, she was forced to return to the realities of children's needs and household responsibilities. There *were* both deep love and occasional resentment toward the optimistic husband who determined to take it a day at a time and keep life as normal as possible, even to the point of expecting his shirts to be laundered and the checkbook balanced. Jody has strengths and weaknesses, doubt and faith, despair and hope. She is human enough to be endearing, but she possesses an unusual flair for living which one feels must have been hers even before her brush with death.

The other two principal characters—Jody's husband, Mark, and her closest friend, Jenny—also stand out as personalities, even though we see them only through Jody's eyes.

As a would-be writer intimately acquainted with the demands of a young family, I am somewhat incredulous when Jody, the mother of several small boys, seems to find considerable time to lie on the floor and listen to music, to write long letters, to read, to teach a writing workshop, to write a book. But I cannot quarrel with the evidence here in my hands that Joyce Ellen Davis, young mother of five sons, has indeed written a good book.

Chrysalis left me dissatisfied in only one respect, and it is a dissatisfaction which I do not think would be shared by a non-Mormon reader. Under circumstances which could call forth any religious ideas and feelings a person might have, Jody's religion, both personal and institutional, remains mostly a mystery to us. Mrs. Davis may have avoided identifying Jody's religious affiliation in the interest of appealing to a wider-than-Mormon readership; I am not sure the avoidance was necessary for that purpose. Occasional clues, however, lead a Mormon reader to understand that Jody has been reared a Saint. Yet there seem to be a number of inconsistencies in Jody on which religion should have a bearing and into which I would have enjoyed some insight.

We learn almost nothing of her childhood. We do not meet Jody's parents until

the final scene, and we learn very little about them from her mental flashbacks. We do learn that she had religious training and still goes to church; but her present stance toward God and afterlife is one of curiosity and hope rather than certainty. As an adult, she apparently has a warm relationship with her parents and at least a tolerance for her church, but some of the ideas she must have absorbed from both seem missing at a critical time in her life. The prospect that she may have to leave her husband and children much sooner than she had expected intensifies her love for them but does not seem to invoke the concept, even the question, of eternal family continuity which one would expect in someone of Mormon background.

We do see Jody, through flashbacks, as a young, unmarried woman, and there is much in her youth which is not typical of girls raised by kindly but religiously orthodox parents such as Jody's turn out to be. They do not appear to be the type who would either directly encourage their children to be mavericks or drive them to it by their own religious rigidity. There are indications of adolescent rebellion on Jody's part, but no enlightenment on the seeds from which her particular rebellion grew or the forces which apparently mellowed it with time. Jody had a brief career as a budding actress, and has formed her strongest and most lasting friendship with the warm-hearted, free-wheeling

Jenny. Her premarital sexual experience has left a residue of guilt and regret but does not seem at the time to have caused inner conflict of the magnitude likely in a strictly indoctrinated Mormon girl. Such girls may suffer occasional lapses in parked cars, but they do not generally slip away to shoddy Mexican hotels with rakish actors. Although we share some of Jody's and Mark's courtship, we never see how, psychologically speaking, Jody moved from her parents' home to that hotel and back again to a home of her own with five babies in rapid succession.

Certainly such inconsistencies are possible in human beings, especially during the growing up years; and Mrs. Davis is not obligated, having wisely chosen a stream-of-consciousness style, to present Jody's entire inner or outer history. But having become interested in Jody, and feeling I would understand her religious conflicts if allowed to see them, I was disappointed to be left doubtful about some important aspects of her life, mind and soul.

This objection aside, I find that *Chrysalis* easily passes two tests I apply to any piece of literature I have just met. The first is "Do I wish I had written it?" I do. The second I take from one writer's statement that a good book is a service performed for a stranger. I am a stranger to Joyce Ellen Davis, yet she has performed a valued service for me and for many others who will read her book.

The Animal Kingdom

Thy Kingdom Come, by Peter Bart. New York: The Linden Press/Simon & Schuster, 1981. 380 pp; \$13.95.

Reviewed by SAMUEL W. TAYLOR, beloved of Dialogue readers everywhere and a well-known novelist, biographer and autobiographer.

As every author knows, the blurb on the dust cover of a book is of vital importance, because many reviewers read nothing

else. I found the blurb of *Thy Kingdom Come* invaluable after reading every word of its 380 pages, because only the blurb tells what the book is about.

When I taught a course in the art of writing for the San Mateo adult education program, I stressed the importance of letting the reader know, as quickly as possible, what the story is about, after which, feeling oriented and comfortable in being acquainted with the situation, he can follow it through to see how things come out.