

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.

This is only Peter Bart's second book, and he hasn't learned about this basic rule of the craft. Matter of fact I found it extremely difficult to hammer the point across with some students of my class; one woman handed in chapters of a novel during the school year, and my comment each time was, "What's it about?" I was mean enough to bring her to tears, sobbing with her head on the desk, but she finished the book—which was well-written otherwise—without giving the reader a clue as to what the story was.

From the jacket blurb, I learned that *Thy Kingdom Come* was about "The Mormon nation, powerful, wealthy and obsessively secretive," this being

the focus of this sweeping and dynamic novel about power and its potential for corruption. At its heart is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, where all doubts are banished, all questions answered and no member need ever stand alone. Nurtured by its vast welfare system, which renounces federal support, and by a superbly run educational system, which zealously upholds the Church strictures against drinking, smoking, and premarital sex, it is an island of safety amid the maelstrom of American Society.

But then comes the teaser: "And yet, something is amiss," the blurb says. "Like the secrets of its history—a history of bizarre paradoxes—turmoil seethes just beneath its calm surface."

Dog-gone me, with a blurb like that the Mormon reader is hooked. Unfortunately, however, the book doesn't live up to the promise of the hype. The novel has no central character. There is no central theme. While there is much to-do about some complex business deal, it is so complicated that I was thrown off at a curve. And, whatever the book is about, there is no payoff.

It is, I believe, the first novel since Vardis Fisher's *Children of God* (1940) to deal with the highest echelons of the church hierarchy. Its characters (under fictitious names) include the First Presidency, Quorum of the Twelve, and other high-level movers and shakers of the

church bureaucracy. The antics of this cast provide shock value, if nothing else.

A major character is Tad, clean-cut, well-connected, who has married the right girl at the right place, the temple. Tad is a rising young executive in the church business enterprises, hard-working, hard-drinking, and foul-mouthed. When he was a young missionary in Tonga, he had attended booze-and-sex parties aboard a yacht. Now, with a model family in Salt Lake, he visits his mistress in Los Angeles, because his wife won't indulge in kinky sex and the girl friend knows all the tricks of turning a trick. All in all, Tad is just your typical returned missionary, rising through merit and nepotism in the church bureaucracy.

Tad's mother, Eliza, is head of the Church Relief Society, highest office held by a woman. She is a widow, and is having an affair with Turner, who is the head of the Church Public Communications Department.

Turner, in turn, is secretly supplying confidential information to Hiram and Gussie Cobb, who are publishing a *samizdat* periodical. We instantly recognize the Cobbs as Jerald and Sandra Tanner of Modern Microfilm, dedicated to exposing Mormonism as a fraud and delusion.

The Cobbs are secretly subsidized by, of all people, Cora Snow, matriarch of a popular singing family who have a motion picture studio at Provo and are producing a TV series featuring two family members doing a toothy brother and sister act. Guess who that could be?

Then there is a Howard Hughes-type billionaire, Dana Sloat. "As the novel opens," the blurb says,

the Mormon Apostles have convened and designated an industrialist named Dana Sloat to head the Church's vast financial and political activity. Only a few know that Sloat is a fanatic who believes the time has come for the Church to fulfill its own Manifest Destiny as the guiding force in American society and who has his own blueprint to achieve this end.

Dana Sloat becomes First Counselor in the Presidency. And how does he get the

office? Well, the First Counselor resigns, stepping down to make room for him. Dog-gone, for a Gentile Peter Bart really knows how the church is run, doesn't he?

But that's not all. Dana Sloat has a son who is head man of a Fundamentalist colony in the Arizona Strip patterned after Ervil LeBaron's group. Its male members are Danites who have a hit list. On the list is the *samizdat* publisher, Hiram Cobb, who is kidnapped and murdered while being tarred and feathered.

Finally the church hierarchy decides that Dana Sloat has got to go. But instead of just pulling the rug, the Church President calls the secret Council of Fifty to assemble in the temple and give Sloat the mitten, for reasons I can't fathom except that the author had to get the Council of Fifty into the book, if by the hair of the head.

Had enough? Well, there's more, if you're still with me, including some of the crudest four-letter dialogue you'll find in a Mormon book. Maybe high-level

church members talk that way. I dunno, because I'm merely a low-level member myself. In fact, I suspect my bishop gave me a job with an imposing title (titles don't cost anything) in a desperate attempt to activate me. Poor guy.

At last report, Peter Bart was trying to sell his book to Hollywood, and claiming that church pressure was keeping it off the screen and tube. If so, I wish the Church would back off. The book would be a marvelous companion piece to *Superman*, *Star Wars*, *Tarzan the Ape Man* and other fantasies. It has about the same basis of fact. I have written considerable fantasy myself, but never anything as wild as *Thy Kingdom Come*. I think Hollywood might change its mind if Bart could get Bo Derek to play the Relief Society President, with her boyfriend, Robert Redford, cast as the head of the Church Public Communications Department and Marie Osmond playing the kinky girlfriend of Tad. With such a cast, he'd be in like Flynn.

Weaving A Mexican Webb

Uncertain Sanctuary: A Story of Mormon Pioneering in Mexico. By Estelle Webb Thomas. Salt Lake City: Westwater Press, 1980. 146 pp. \$11.95.

Reviewed by PAUL B. DIXON, professor of foreign languages at Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana.

One of the strongest virtues of this volume is the modesty of its project. It does not claim to be the story of Mormon pioneering in Mexico, but simply a story of the same. It makes no attempt to duplicate or surpass the contributions of such fact-filled works as Thomas C. Romney's *The Mormon Colonies in Mexico* (1938), Nelle Spilsbury Hatch's *Colonia Díaz: An Intimate Account of a Mormon Village* (1938), or Annie Johnson's *Heartbeats of Colonia Díaz* (1972), each of which relies to a considerable extent upon documentary research and attempts a record for a

relatively large group of colonists. Rather than a product of research, *Uncertain Sanctuary* is more a Proustian "recherche," a highly personal collection of memories. Rather than presenting a view of community accomplishments, the book focuses upon those of a single family and its close associates. For its narrow field of view and its selection of particulars, the book is a good complement to histories already written, for it provides a sense of daily living and dying which the more collectively oriented accounts have sacrificed. Generically speaking, the work is a personal history, like a journal. This should by no means suggest that it has no value to the general reader; on the contrary, this is perhaps Mormonism's most universal and successful form of literature to date.

Uncertain Sanctuary records selected moments in the family life of Edward Milo Webb and his three wives, Ellen Ashman,