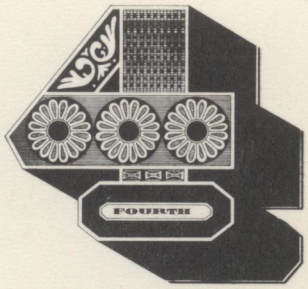
DIALOGUE

A JOURNAL OF MORMON THOUGHT



DIALOGUE
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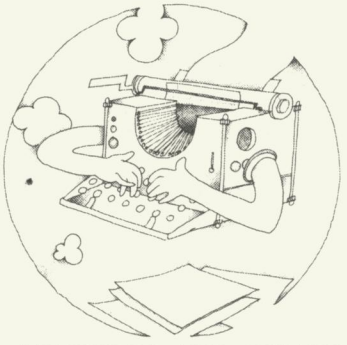
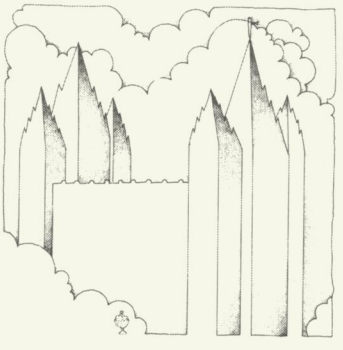
Volume IV Number 3
Autumn 1969

DIALOGUE: A Journal of Mormon Thought is an independent national quarterly established to express Mormon culture and examine the relevance of religion to secular life. It is edited by Latter-day Saints who wish to bring their faith into dialogue with human experience as a whole and to foster artistic and scholarly achievement based on their cultural heritage. The Journal encourages a variety of viewpoints; although every effort is made to insure accurate scholarship and responsible judgment, the views expressed are those of the individual authors and are not necessarily those of the Mormon Church or of the editors.

MORMONISM AND LITERATURE



ARTICLES AND ESSAYS



Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought is published by the Dialogue Foundation. Editorial Office and Subscription Department, P. O. Box 2350, Stanford, California 94305. Publication Office, 2180 E. 9th South, Salt Lake City, Utah 84108. *All communications should be sent to the Editorial Offices.* Dialogue has no official connection with any department of Stanford University or of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Second class postage paid at Salt Lake City, Utah. Printed by The Quality Press, Salt Lake City.

Guest Editors: KARL KELLER AND ROBERT A. REES

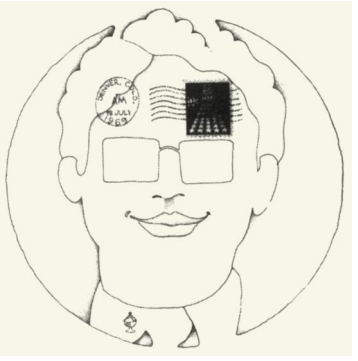
DIALOGUE: A Journal of Mormon Thought / Vol. IV, No. 3 / Autumn 1969

FICTION AND POETRY

REVIEWS

The cover design and all art in this issue were done especially for the issue by Kim Whitesides of New York City, whose work appears regularly in national publications, on television and billboards and who also does work under the name Sundae.

Dialogue is published quarterly in Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter issues. Subscription rate in the United States is $7 per year; $5 for students and missionaries, add $1 for foreign subscriptions. Single copies, $2, back issues, $2.50. Subscription and change of address requests should be sent to the Subscription Department, P. O. Box 2350, Stanford, California 94305. *Dialogue* welcomes articles, essays, stories, notes and comments, and art work. Manuscripts should be sent in duplicate to the Manuscript Editor, accompanied by return postage.



LETTERS TO THE EDITORS

Dear Sirs:

With all the rhetoric in and out of the Church about law and order, I think it wise to get perspective on our objectivity. Thusly, I offer for consideration this statement:

"The streets of our country are in turmoil. The universities are with students rebelling and rioting. Communists are seeking to destroy our country. Russia is threatening us with her might. And the republic is in danger. Yes, danger from within and without. We need law and order! Yes, without law and order, our nation cannot survive . . . . Elect us and we shall restore law and order." The significance of this is that it was made by Adolf Hitler at Hamburg, Germany, 1932.

Scott S. Smith
Thousand Oaks, Calif.

Dear Sirs:

In your Interview With Harvey Cox [Spring, 1968], the *Dialogue* interviewers displayed a definite lack of understanding of the function of the Relief Society (probably shared by a majority of men within the Church) when they implied that the Relief Society spends its time making quilts because it has nothing more important to do. The Relief Society has always made quilts and other craft items, to encourage creativity and to beautify our homes; but this is but a small part of the total program — only one meeting a month is ever spent on those items, and only a part of that meeting, with only a part of the membership participating, is devoted to quilting; and in some Wards quilting is never done at all.

Probably the main function of the Relief Society is educational. All four monthly meetings are devoted to educating in the four broad areas: Spiritual Living, Homemaking, Social Relations, and Cultural Refinement (literature mostly). The Visiting Teaching messages are designed to be inspirational as well as educational.

As far as the compassionate service function is concerned, there is still quite a need for help, even among our "affluent membership," and the Sisters are continually being encouraged to go outside our own group to give service. I have personally taught two lessons in the past six months that hit very hard on this very subject (in one we brought outside people to let the Sisters know just what agencies were functioning in our community in which volunteer help was needed). The Relief Society as an organization, however, is not permitted to work with other groups outside of the Church; but the members are certainly very strongly urged to do so on an individual basis, and many do.

(Mrs.) Carol Orgill
Fort Collins, Colorado

Dear Sirs:

My opinions of Rustin Kaufmann's review of *The Graduate* [Spring, 1969] coincide with many letters published in the Summer edition of *Dialogue*. I was encouraged to see such a forum.

However, I was puzzled by your response on p. 7.

a. If "Rexburg is a typographical error," why did you not take that opportunity to correct it by announcing the correct city.

b. In what sense is the published indignation of protestors of the review to be likened to "possible vigilante action by the aforementioned liberals." Do you possibly believe that liberals tolerate all ideas indifferently or are they supposed to have

a good reason for defending the publication and consideration (with subsequent vigorous examination) of all ideas.

Keep up the generally good work. I think you could have made a firmer response unless this is a continuing part of the joke.

O. Boyd Mathias
Stockton, California

Dear Sirs:

I suppose you've heard *Dialogue* called everything else, but perhaps not "entertaining." I refer to your section of "Letters to the Editors," of course. I look forward each issue with delight to another round of dragonmouth from the conservative membership — I'm thinking especially of the individual from Reno [Spring, 1969], who roared about the "honor" of a self-confessed apostate and about "guts" and then left his letter unsigned.

I think the best I've seen to date was the review of *The Graduate* by Dustin Hoffman — Oops, I mean Rustin Kaufmann; I'm glad to see that the editors have a sense of humor also: my compliments.

Jeff Wynn
Urbana, Illinois

Dear Sirs:

I called Rustin Kaufmann (?) of Rexburg (?) and he said he did not write the review (?).

Arch Egbert
Director, Institute of Religion
Tempe, Arizona

P.S. I vote for Joe Jeppson (?).

Kenneth W. Godfrey
Division Coordinator

[*You win — Ed.(?)*]

Dear Sirs:

Although unsigned letters are seldom if ever worthy of notice and comment I am glad you decided to publish the one you received from Reno [Spring, 1969] because it is characteristic of the oral criticism I have heard from time to time leveled against *Dialogue*.

I have enjoyed and profited from reading your magazine from the beginning. To my knowledge (and I have more than just browsed through every article and letter published by you) your contributors have never used your pages for purposes of "disparaging propaganda" and to discredit and tear down the Church and its leaders. True, you have at times caused one to raise eyebrows but that is all to the good. "Doubting Thomas," the Apostle, has been the scapegoat of "the first twelve" too long. If one will read carefully the story of Nicodemus who confronted Jesus with the question, "How can this be?" one will discover that Our Lord made very clear that doubt is quite often an open door to that very certainty one seeks. . . . Doubt is really but a negative expression of faith. That is to say, if there were no faith it is not likely that there would be any doubt.

I am glad that you saw fit to publish Reverend Wesley P. Walters' interesting paper "New Light On Mormon Origins." When I was a student at the LDSU prior to WWI and studied church history under the late John Henry Evans I believed that his "One Hundred Years of Mormonism" told the truth, the whole truth and 'nothing but the truth. Imagine my disenchantment when I gradually learned from other sources of historic facts that we adolescent youths had been spoon fed with only such background information as the Church Authorities felt we should be told! It is of course invariably more agreeable and certainly more comfortable to accept anything and everything put before us and to ask no questions. Truth is ever unafraid of light and one cannot keep it under cover for long. All honor then to those who have persevered in their researches in order to acquaint the world with ALL the facts regarding the history of the Mormon Church. It is all to the good to take the skeletons out of the closet and shake the dust out of them and let the light loose upon and through them.

Joseph Conrad Fehr
Rockville, Maryland

Dear Sirs:

If your job as editors is to edit, then please do! Spare us faithful readers such dubious oral disgorging as found in the recent harangue submitted by your former subscriber in Reno who understandably chooses to remain anonymous.

David Dalton
Bloomington, Indiana

Dear Sirs:

I am a recent convert (December, 1968) to Mormonism. At my age, which is 51, the completeness of my conversion is one of my strongest testimonies of the truth of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I have committed the remaining years of my life to the way of life espoused by the Church and feel that I have a dedication I would be proud to see my children have. This plan of life has necessarily created many changes in the life of a career banker and his family, including, but not limited to, financial matters, alcohol, tobacco, tea, etc.

To say that I was surprised and shocked when reading the Letters to the Editors in the Spring, 1969, issue is putting it mildly. I am referring to the revelation that the Church's Bonneville International Corporation, which owns several radio and TV stations, has been assisting in the sale of cigarettes through use of their advertising media. Is it possible that they also advertise alcohol, coffee and tea — or possibly some of the "peculiar" movies and/or plays now permeating the theatrical scene?

My reaction is exactly as expressed so well by Dr. Melvin Lloyd Kent of Mesa, Arizona, and certainly I can see myself in the situation so ably described by R. Garry Shirts of Del Mar, California. Please, dear Church, don't be associated with anything that reduces your stature in the eyes of your faithful and permits knowing smirks on the faces of the unbelieving.

E. M. Crosthwait, Jr.
Glendora, California

Dear Sirs:

This is intended as an open letter to those interested in the subject discussed in "Letters to the Editors" [Spring, 1969] by James Moss and Leonard Wald.

I felt that Wald's critique was rather kind considering the seriousness of the moral issue involved. James Moss' unnecessarily caustic reply to Mr. Wald is uninterestingly typical of the attitude of the con man for the moochers that infest our population. There is one variation of the theme, however, that I haven't heard before. Usually it comes across as "see these poor hungry people. Won't you please do something?" or perhaps as, "You will receive God's 'blessings' if you impart of your substance in behalf of the poor." This time it comes in a blunt, new form: "God has commanded economic sharing."

Mr. Moss indeed has reason to be concerned. If those who are intelligent and creative and therefore wealthy (I'm not talking about those who got wealthy in other ways) don't make it to (Moss' concept of) the "Celestial Kingdom," from whom will he then mooch? From the other beggars that make it, perhaps?

I don't know what Jehovah's Kingdom will be like. From what he wrote I'm convinced that Moss doesn't either. But if a man is not to be free to use the product of his mind and hands to his own benefit and as he sees fit, with the single proviso that this use not conflict in essence with that same right for others, then I want no part of it. I confess that Moss' attitude concerns me a bit too. I'm afraid that there may be those who are truly valuable people who might believe what he says or be sufficiently intimidated by it that they would refuse to seek citizenship in God's Kingdom.

The concept upon which the point I'm making is based is simple. It is not in the nature of an intelligent being to part with a valuable possession without receiving for it something of at least equal value. You may complain that this is the selfish or childish attitude of "sinful" man and claim that there is a "higher" law, but it is clear that that is a subjective observation based on your own immoral system of values. Besides that it has nothing to do with what I'm driving at. The fact is that man is an intelligent being and is as I have described.

Furthermore, for better or for worse, men are not created equal. In fact they are neither created nor equal. They are eternal and forever destined to be unequal. Those in favor of economic sharing recognize this. If there were no inequality in ability there would be no inequality in wealth or standard of living and hence no reason to "share." What the moochers have in mind is not sharing at all. What they really mean is that the people of one class are to be perpetually exploited in order to enforce an unrealistic equality. (Measured who knows how.)

Your beloved Nephites who tried out this stupid system for two hundred years failed in all that time to show evidence of a single worthwhile advance toward improving their standard of living. Contrast that with the last two hundred years of American history! At the end of their "prosperous" era they were still fighting battles with bows and arrows, swords, and cimitars. Only a few could afford "fine twined linen." This you call progress?!

You raised the question Mr. Moss. If you don't measure progress in terms of money (material value) influence and power, then (and please be specific) how do you measure it? In terms of happiness? The other day, on my way home from the library, I saw a dog lying in the shade of a tree. He certainly appeared contented. Has he progressed further than we? No, you can't measure progress by happiness or contentment unless you can first define happiness and then measure it.

I'm sure you will agree that God has progressed. Could it be that you recognize this because he has money (does he live in a hovel or in a mansion?), influence, and power? If not why else? And which is the politico-economic environment demonstrably most capable of encouraging or permitting the production of wealth, influence and power, a free enterprise capitalistic system which, though never achieved has been approximated in the United States, or by the socialistic system employed by the Nephites? Doesn't it appear more and more that Mormon's claim about the "happiness" of those people was the statement of an ignoramus? Happy they may have been, but only because they were so ignorant. What finally destroyed their impoverished utopia? Was it the greed of the rich who would no longer "share"? That's what Mormon seems to imply but that isn't how I read it. It was destroyed by the coveting, mooching, thieving poor and their con men which are the same influences that threaten to destroy the wealth and progress we now enjoy. (I'm aware that there are poor who are not offenders and rich who are. Pardon my stereotypes.)

Having to answer the questions raised implicitly and explicitly above should place the moochers in a bit of a dilemma. I suppose that they will react in their customary manner. They will simply close their minds to the problems inherent in their scheme, continue getting sarcastically indignant whenever anyone opposes them, and go on twisting scripture and quoting platitudes.

There is one redeeming fact lurking in the future, in which I suspect those on both sides of the question will take comfort. One cannot escape the natural consequences of his beliefs and the decisions based thereon, whether they are incorrect or otherwise.

Richard Davidson
Los Angeles, California

Dear Sirs:

In Leonard Arrington's article about intellectuals in the Spring, 1969, issue of *Dialogue*, he submitted Mr. Webster's definition of an intellectual, but there are those who call themselves intellectuals today who deserve a more complete definition than this. From observing what intellectuals today are doing and saying, aside from what they pretend to be doing and saying, I would like to submit a definition along with a solution to the problem of the intellectual in the world:

Between the naivete of youth and the senility of old age, we find a high-browed creature known as an Intellectual. He comes in assorted sizes, weights, and colors, but all Intellectuals have the same creed: change.

Intellectuals are found everywhere. They are found with their feet propped up on desks in classrooms, inside governments, climbing up and down social registers, swinging protest signs, running around with girls and jumping on to platforms. Mothers didn't love them, little girls use them, some people are overwhelmed by them, politicians tolerate them, conservatives hate them, nobody can ignore them and heaven sends the rain upon them as well as upon the common man.

An Intellectual can accept any ideas that are currently academic. He hopes to forsake any concept that is no longer current: yesterday the Monastery, today the new morality. He relishes any scholastic attack against the established order of things. He believes his B.A., his M.S., and his Ph.D. are shields from personal blunder as he marches bravely through life crusading for peace and progress.

When there is something important to be done, an Intellectual is an inconsiderate, bothersome, jangle of noise telling you it ought not to be done, such as fighting a war to win it, for instance. And if there is something idealistic that isn't the least practical of accomplishment, he intrudes with lengthy monologues about how its got to be done by 3 o'clock this afternoon. An instance being his advocacy of laws that will force the colored man into the mold of the white man's mores. He calls it integration.

Only an Intellectual could have thought of the tower of Babel or the Nicene Creed. He considers his greatest badge of merit to be the ability to squelch effectively anyone who offers contrary opinions to his own.

An Intellectual is a savage with a benign smile, a sadist with a rose in his hand, a lion offering honey to a lamb. An Intellectual has an appetite for profane literature with a moral, for dirty movies with a message, and he'll hate TV until it comes mature enough to be more truthful. To an Intellectual truth is sex expressed in four letter words.

An Intellectual cannot part the waters of the Red Sea, send manna from heaven, or heal the sick with a touch, so he knows God couldn't do it. He strongly suspects that God doesn't know anything he doesn't know, but for convenience sake (to prevent any competition) he has currently arranged for God's death. . . .

Nobody else in this present generation has gotten so much attention. Nobody else has been able to fool so many people into thinking that if they are not marching with him, they are standing still.

We live in a great country. You can't lock up men for ideas, but you can burn any book you want in your own fireplace. The law won't permit you to drown an Intellectual, but you don't have to vote for one. And when you need to pass an exam in college you may have to write the answer the way the Intellectual sees it, but you don't have to believe it.

Still you may come home at night gritting your teeth and clenching your fists, trying to figure a way to silence the Intellectual which is legal, democratic and Christian. Put your mind at rest. There is a way. Love and acceptance. Let the common man embrace him, accept the Intellectual as he is, and this will at once rob him of the luxury of alienation, his very life's blood. He will no doubt switch his entire philosophy in order to regain his lost status. But no matter how "way out" he gets, keep right on loving and accepting him until he is dizzy with switching and utterly confounded.

Loya Shields Beck
Toney, Alabama

Dear Sirs:

Congratulations on your selection of Mrs. Read's sermon "Lot's Wife in the Latter Days" for your Silver Award and Thank You for sharing it with us [Summer, 1969]. Surely few people, in the Church or out, who read and understand her message will come away unscathed. The most pious of us good Mormons will find ourselves trimmed down to the size that we really are.

Mrs. Read has demonstrated an understanding of the basic problems of our day far superior to the majority of experts who have spoken and written on them. Furthermore she has pointed the way, a very simple but difficult one, which if followed will bring peace to those brave enough to try it.

Fenton L. Williams
Sacramento, Calif.

Dear Sirs:

I was disappointed with David Hart's nonreview of the Romney book [Summer, 1969]. Several things suggest themselves:

First, Romney could not have had the Republican nomination with Abraham Lincoln as campaign manager, let alone Dr. Gaylord Parkinson. Romney's attitude towards the party in 1964 established that fact as certainly as political facts can be established.

Secondly, there is not the slightest indication that, had he by miracle obtained the nomination, he would have attracted more votes from the Democrats than he lost among Republicans. Someone else would be President now, that is certain. Romney would not be, and Hart suggests several reasons why not.

One which he does not mention is that despite the despair of Liberal Republicans,

the political drift of the country is Right, not Left. Nixon's Southern Strategy not only won him the Presidency in 1968, but as Kevin Phillips shows in *The Emerging Republican Majority*, the realignment Hart speaks longingly of has taken place. It is not the realignment Hart would have wished — or rather it is, it just leaves him in the minority — but it has taken place.

Finally, the last thing the Republican Party needs is the advice of Republicans of the stripe of the Ripon Society, whose grasp of the real world can be judged by their statement endorsing Mayor Lindsay of New York, which stated that as Mayor, Lindsay had "eased racial conflict, promoted fiscal stability and reversed environmental decay."

I firmly believe that Mormons have a contribution to make to American politics, but I do not believe that Romney made much of an attempt to capitalize on it. His campaign was marked by the same reliance on disproved programs and Liberal platitudes that has marked his wing of the Party since 1962. And that is the story of his failure to capture the nomination or to influence the nominee.

Gordon S. Jones
Arlington, Va.

Dear Sirs:

Presumably everyone has their favorite "hobby horse" and there are some who almost whip it to death, but it is refreshing when one finds that others have kindred hobby horses. "If Thou Wilt Be Perfect" by James R. Moss, published in the Winter 1969 issue of Dialogue was as a voice from the dust, and *Dialogue* is to be congratulated for publishing such a message, especially at a time when all is well in Zion, with the deification of free enterprise, capitalism, the John Birch Society and ancient Babylon. However, if Brother Moss is really serious with his 'socialistic and communistic' philosophy, his effective days in the Mormon Church are limited, for it is obvious that he is 'preaching' false doctrine and in league with old Lucifer himself.

Doesn't Brother Moss know that continuing and current revelation nullifies John the Baptist's concept of repentance? For "he answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none, and he that hath meat, let him do likewise" (St. Luke 3:11). Of course there must have been a mix-up in the translation of Brother John's homily; and we know that the translators were twisting the words of Christ when he said: "And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful" (Mark 4:19). Anyone who has studied elementary economics knows that it is the accumulation of riches, wealth and capital in the hands of capable managers, plus the lusting and desiring for better things that provides the life blood which has made this Nation fruitful, not unfruitful, and therefore "choice above all other lands". . . . Is not God telling us through his modern leaders and prophets to listen to the voice of Adam Smith rather than Joseph Smith, and that the invisible hand of God is leading the businessmen of this nation and of the world, if they will but follow the dictates of their own self-interest to best serve society, including Brother Moss and his kind?

The Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants with their numerous scriptures on equalitarian economics are now obsolete, archaic and superseded by a new dispensation that does not accept Alma's credibility, for:

> Behold, O God, they cry unto thee, and yet their hearts are swallowed up in their pride. Behold, O God, they cry unto thee with their mouths, while they are puffed up, even to greatness, with the vain things of the world. Behold, O my God, their costly apparel, and their ringlets, and their bracelets, and their ornaments of gold, and all their precious things which they are ornamented with; and behold their hearts are set upon them, and yet they cry unto thee and say — We thank thee, O God, for we are a chosen people unto thee, while others shall perish. (Alma 31:27-28)

Of course this doesn't apply to us — who wants gold when stock gains, dividends, and profits will do just as well, thank you?

Why do the liberals keep reading embarrassing scriptures from the Book of Mormon like those found in the 4th chapter of Alma, especially where Alma becomes upset about the people of the Church waxing proud because of their exceeding riches and their great successes? Why shouldn't they be

proud and why shouldn't we be proud today? Look at what we have done and what we are doing. We have very righteous Mormons in high places of the government; we have outstanding athletes, including one of the nation's best golfers, we have successful scholars, professional and businessmen. We build beautiful temples and look at the way the Church is growing. We even have Negroes joining the Church when they can't hold the Priesthood; and some Catholic priests and Jewish rabbis are joining the Church. We are a Church on the go, why shouldn't we be proud, with a

> . . . pride, even to exceed the pride of those who did not belong to the Church of God . . . and the wickedness of the church was a great stumbling block to those who did not belong to the church; and thus the church began to fall in its progress . . . Yea, he [Alma] saw great inequality among the people, some lifting themselves up with their pride, despising others, turning their backs upon the needy and the naked and those who were hungry, and those who were athirst, and those who were sick and afflicted.

But this does not apply to us for we pay our tithes, our fast offerings, and we have our great church welfare program. The liberal 4th chapter of Alma argument just doesn't hold water.

God in this new dispensation is not interested in economic equality, the United Order or the Law of Consecration, for we must all make money so we can reclaim Zion — beautiful Jackson County, Missouri. With the current word from God, it would not be fitting to quote from the 49th Section verse 20: "But it is not given that one man should possess that which is above another, wherefore the world lieth in sin." Such a concept might suggest that the Church lieth in sin.

In the light of current and modern revelation where we quote Adam Smith's self interest doctrine, it is in very poor taste to be digging up a revelation given to Joseph Smith way back in November of 1831, wherein Joseph apparently was not entirely in harmony with the current accepted philosophy of Adam Smith, for Joseph states: "Nevertheless, in our temporal things you shall be equal and this not grudgingly, otherwise the abundance of the manifestations of the spirit shall be withheld" (D & C 70:14).

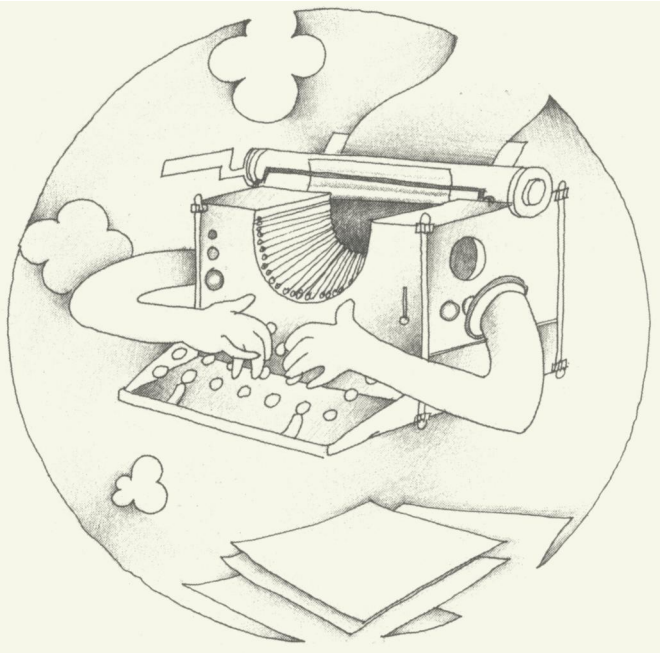
Of course Joseph Smith missed the boat here for it is common knowledge that revelation is being recorded on a continuous tape to be securely stored away in the caves of Cottonwood Canyon, and it is obvious that we *don't have* temporal equality, we *don't want* temporal equality, and the Lord *doesn't want* us to have temporal equality. If the Lord wanted us to be equal in temporal things, He would give our leaders and prophet an abundance of the manifestations of the Spirit, telling them to tell us to live a temporal equality. Until God directs the leaders to direct us to live a temporal equality and to cease our striving for wealth, vain glory, pride and power, you, Brother Moss, are barking up the proverbial wrong tree. . . .

But for those who feel that all is well in Zion, may I suggest Mormon 8:36-38 concerning the conditions and calamities of the latter days:

> For behold, ye do love money, and your substance, and your fine apparel, and the adorning of your churches more than ye love the poor and the needy, the sick and the afflicted. O ye pollutions, ye hypocrites, ye teachers, who sell yourselves for that which will canker, why have ye polluted the holy church of God?

Who is prepared to live in a modern city of Enoch? Am I? Are you? How many members of the Church, of their own volition and free exercise of agency, supported by the whisperings of the spirit, would be interested in living the Law of Consecration? How many readers of *Dialogue*? How many would be interested in the face of Church opposition? It is rather unlikely that there would be any more than Abraham found at Sodom and Gomorrah. Yet academic curiosity and a sincere interest in seeing a modern City of Enoch become a reality (for in trying times we need the "benefits of the abundance of the manifestations of the Spirit") prompts me to suggest that any interested parties are invited to write outlining their interest and any other pertinent information.

L. Mayland Parker
Tempe, Arizona



ARTICLES AND ESSAYS

INTRODUCTIONS

KARL KELLER

Karl Keller is Associate Professor of English at San Diego State College and a member of the Board of Editors of DIALOGUE. *He has written articles and a book on American literature and is currently at work on a book on the Puritan poet Edward Taylor. He is editing a collection,* THE BIBLE IN AMERICAN LITERATURE, *and a textbook,* BLACK LITERATURE: NEGRO WRITING IN AMERICA. *He leads music and sometimes teaches in the La Mesa Ward, writes poetry after midnight, and worries about literature in the Church.*

ROBERT REES

Robert Rees, a member of DIALOGUE'S *Board of Editors, is Assistant Professor of English at U.C.L.A. He is currently preparing a critical edition of Washington Irving's* CAPTAIN BONNEVILLE *and editing a collection of bibliographic essays on American authors. He teaches Sunday School in the Westwood II Ward, is the senior president of his Seventies Quorum, and worries about people who worry too much about literature in the Church.*

DALE L. MORGAN

Professor Morgan is a specialist on the staff of the Bancroft Library of the University of California at Berkeley and has distinguished himself with books and articles in the general field of Mormon and Western history. His most notable works are: THE HUMBOLDT, HIGHROAD OF THE WEST *(1943),* THE GREAT SALT LAKE *(1947),* JEDEDIAH SMITH AND THE OPENING OF THE WEST *(1953),* OVERLAND IN 1846: DIARIES AND LETTERS OF THE CALIFORNIA-OREGON TRAIL *(1963).*

SAMUEL W. TAYLOR

Samuel Taylor began publishing in national magazines during college days at Brigham Young University and has been a professional writer ever since. Three of his books have been on Mormon subjects and he is currently working on another of the same genre. His discussion of Mormon literature is in the form of a market report as is seen in magazines like THE WRITER *or* WRITER'S DIGEST *(to both of which he has contributed). Articles of this nature analyze the editorial requirements of a market for style, slant, type, taboos, what is used and what to avoid, and why. Through this format he takes a rather disturbed view of the Mormon literary scene as a writer's market.*

ROBERT E. NICHOLS, JR.

Robert Nichols is Associate Professor of English at Purdue University (Calumet campus) and is Sunday School Superintendent of the Chicago-South Stake. His specialized training is in medieval literature and he has written and published on that subject. "Though hard-pressed to merge Mormonism and medievalism," he writes, "I'd like to see the grappling take place. . . . I'd like to see the beginnings of a dialogue."

JOSEPH M. FLORA

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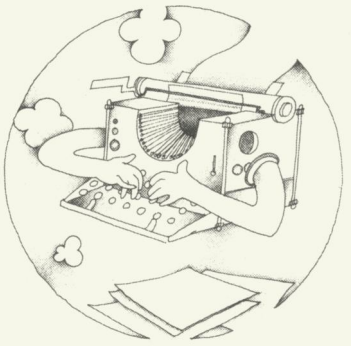

ON WORDS AND THE WORD OF GOD: THE DELUSIONS OF A MORMON LITERATURE

Karl Keller

"A poet, a painter, a musician, an architect: the man or woman who is not one of these is not a Christian." —William Blake

Observers of the Church must think it odd that for all the Church's emphasis on the spiritual worth of intelligence and knowledge and in spite of the Church's commandment to read "the best books," there is no literary tradition in the Church, no serious use of literature in the Church, and barely a sign of interest in the emergence of a Mormon literature. One of the mysteries of literary life in America is why Mormons have contributed so little to it. To make mention of a Mormon literature is to make a joke.

The conventional reasons for this poverty are unconvincing: that we have been too busy conquering the frontier; that we are too involved being our brothers' keepers; that we get our esthetic kicks in more spiritual ways; that we are literate but uneducated; that we lack a press and a public; that we have no critical experience and therefore no critical standards.

The real reason is that we have consistently denied to ourselves a literature. We have, for instance, always denied to Joseph Smith status as writer. In our hagiography, we learn to love the Word of God but not the words of Joseph Smith. This is unlike the Jews, to whom the words of the prophets were not only the Word of God but also the words of the prophets, making them in their love of The Word's words "the people of the book"; and one of the results is a supreme literacy and from Spinoza to Saul Bellow a long and lively literary tradition. Such a denial is also unlike the Catholics, to whom the Church Fathers were first of all writers, communicators, explicators, epistemologists of The Word, with a resulting literary tradition from Augustine to Flannery O'Connor. And our denial is unlike the Protestants, to whom special revelation has ceased and who are therefore free to write about The Word on their own, in an attempt to discover through meditation on words a place for themselves in the schemes of salvation; so from John Bunyan to William Faulkner literature has served the Protestant for self-examination and for revelation.

But Mormons, having revelation which ostensibly precludes inquiry and having a frame of belief that ostensibly excludes the esthetic, have been left without a very large body of literature. For all the verbiage that makes up the life of the Church, we do not seem to have much faith in words as a creative force, in writing as a creative act, in literature as a part of an on-

going creation. For all of our Bible literalism, we tend to mistrust words as experience. And for all of our hanging on every word that our modern prophets say, we tend to render expression as simple message. To us a phenomenon like the gift of tongues is instant Berlitz rather than the love of letters.

To be sure, we have an "unconscious" literature — folk tales, legends, journals, discourses, hymns: what William Mulder calls "the raw materials out of which pure letters rise"[1] — but little "conscious" literature, little *intended* literature. It is valuable to understand why.

Like many other religious groups in our society, we deny ourselves a literature largely on three conventional grounds: our puritanism, our paranoia, and our apocalypticism. And because we hold to the idea that literature should conform to the conventions of a society controlled by these Mormon tenets of morality and taste, we reduce the possibility of a body of Mormon literature.

For example, imaginative literature for the Puritans of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (the tradition out of which most early members of the Church came) was a concession to the flesh, an expedient of words required only because man's spiritual sense is still so imperfect. Though they loved words as perhaps no other group on this continent has, there was within them the fear that to delight in anything imaginative is to give oneself over to his senses, and of course one's senses could lead to sensuality, sexuality, sin. But where the Puritan writers overcame such fears, we haven't. With this puritanical suspicion of literature, the reading and writing of fiction, for example, was condemned in the early days of the Church:

> You do wrong in reading novels because you subject your purity of mind to a fearful trial. It is hard to discriminate between the good and the evil in novels. The novel appetite being once formed, it craves all. A hellish seduction characterizes this kind of reading. The unhappy being who takes the first steps becomes enamoured of the pleasure it affords. Other reading becomes dull and lifeless. Only one successful attempt has been made to write a novel in which woman is not a prominent character and lust one of the ingredients of the plot. . . . Human nature loves to coast along the borders of infamy and crime. Open vulgarity and obscenity are forbidden by reigning custom, but novel-writers, by means of honied words and artful plans, lead the mind just far enough to give it courage in its own imaginative powers and then leave it in the most dangerous situation. . . . Where the novel-writer leaves off, the devil commences, and instills far more polluting thoughts than the literal construction of the word implies.[2]

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[1]"Mormonism and Literature," *Western Humanities Review*, IX (Winter, 1954–55), 85–89. Mulder's is the best introduction to the paucity and possibilities of a Mormon literature, but also see G. Eugene England, "Modern Literature and Religious Experience," Salt Lake Institute of Religion Forum, April 4, 1969; Robert C. Elliott, "In the Realm of Literature," *The Improvement Era*, XXXIV (1931), 133–35; Samuel W. Taylor, "Peculiar People, Positive Thinkers and the Prospects of Mormon Literature," *Dialogue*, II (1967), 17–31.

[2]This is from *The Contributor* (1850). See Gean Clark's discussion, "A Survey of Early Mormon Fiction" (unp. thesis, BYU, 1935).

And in our own century, too, literature continues to be suspect in the Church on largely puritanical grounds:

> Along with the printing and circulation of good ideas, of course, there has also been the printing and circulation of bad ideas. Some of the things we see in print cause us to give thanks for the glory of God and the intelligence of man, and some of the things we see in print make us ashamed — ashamed of our own kind. Filth has been circulated in the name of realism. Vicious suggestion has been circulated in the name of liberalism. Too many have found it profitable to peddle pulp that has excited the imagination and poisoned the minds of our youth — to popularize a type of literature which is called "frank," but which is really rotten; which is called "realistic" but which is really immoral backwash.[3]

As with the Puritans, to us the real power of a piece of writing comes from the truth it contains and the divine efficacy of that truth, and not from sensuous involvement in worlds created by words.

In addition, our puritan condemnations have become a kind of paranoia about literature. Though the devil still appears to Mormons in isolated missionary situations and in rural Idaho, we have had the need to incarnate him in such visible places as Communism, college campuses, and literature and the arts. This is a cop-out, and it severely reduces the role literature can play in the Church. To us, literature has become one of the most effective tools of Satan. Thus paranoid about literature and the arts, we exclude almost all Gentile drama from our half-hearted stages, we domesticate the bawdy Shakespeare and the ambiguous Hawthorne and the skeptical Robert Frost in Relief Society discussions, and we eschew things seriously literary in our meetings and our homes. The devil lurks behind covers of books. But to worry about every "evil" idea that may touch one's mind from a book of essays by, say, Eldridge Cleaver or Ronald Laing, or to worry about every "evil" picture painted by the fiction of, say Henry Fielding or William Burroughs, or to worry about the "evil" words and characters in plays like *Volpone* or *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, is to live in constant fear of literature, of words, of The Word. All one can do after such fear in an effort to keep himself unspotted from the things of the world is to read only the antiseptic *Era* and the bowdlerized *Reader's Digest Condensed Books.*

This puritanism and paranoia in us culminate in a kind of apocalypticism in which we see the productions of the world (and literature and the arts in particular) as evidence of the final end of this dispensation of time. In their crudeness, their immorality, their attacks on the things of God, their attempts to undermine the lives of moral men, they show, after all, that things couldn't get much worse. So the end must surely be imminent. We therefore often watch with detached amusement the trashy torrent of periodicals in drugstores and bookstalls, the flood of profligate and perverse fiction that bestsells or sells underground, the stream of increasingly nude and crude shows from Broadway, Hollywood, and college campuses, knowing in our heart of

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[3]Richard L. Evans, "A Testimony in Print," *The Improvement Era*, XLVIII (1945), 265.

hearts that they all signal the end of an era and the coming of Christ to rescue those who have remained aloof and cleancut. And the worse the literature of our time gets, we seem to feel, the sooner the end. This militates against acceptance of the world, our lives in the world, the senses in us that lure us into a love of the world, and the art of literature that our sensuous love of the world naturally results in.

Thus for all of our pretensions to learning and culture in the Church, in our puritanic-paranoid-apocalyptic fundamentalism we have become reactionaries against literature rather than lovers of it. "We shall yet have Miltons and Shakespeares of our own," proclaimed Apostle Orson F. Whitney in 1888. "God's ammunition is not exhausted. His highest spirits are held in reserve for the latter times. In God's name and by His help we will build up a literature whose top shall touch heaven, though its foundation may now be low on earth."[4] "Could there be among us embryo poets and novelists like Goethe? . . . There may be many Goethes among us even today, waiting to be discovered. Inspired students will write great books and novels and biographies and plays. . . . For years I have been waiting for someone to do justice in recording in song and story and painting and sculpture the story of the restoration . . . ," exclaimed Apostle Spencer W. Kimball in 1967.[5] But the reactionary theology that has evolved in the Church has made such a hope unlikely.

Instead, we refuse to take literature seriously, especially the writing of it, under a series of greenhorn notions. We have for the most part confused literature with apologetics, as if literature ever had very much in the world to do with defense. Literature cannot be theological tracts, with dogma abstracted, ideas preached, salvation harped on. Apologetics makes religion trite, whereas literature asks us to read life naively, freshly, newly, brightly. The good writer is, after all, not a conveyor belt of authoritative ideas, not even an interpreter, but himself a creator of worlds — worlds which don't exist but to which one can nonetheless go. Literature is seldom written, and can be seldom written, in the service of religion. It is something else. But the fact that religion has no business in literature and that literature has no place in the Church does not invalidate either as a way of life and mind. They are simply two different kinds of life and mind.

Another delusion that prevents a valid Mormon literature is thinking of literature as communication. We seem to be unable to get beyond the idea that the primary function of a work of literature is to communicate something. If a work of literature doesn't carry "the Mormon message," we are tempted to judge it poor literature. But significantly, when thought of as having a message, a moral point, a communication to make, most literature is going to be thought of by the Church as being irrelevant, perverse, untrue, pornographic, for as a work explores personal experience or a personal point of view, it will naturally diverge from the authoritative doctrinal norms of

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[4]"Home Literature," *The Contributor*, IX (1888), 297.

[5]"Education for Eternity," *BYU Speeches*, Sept. 12, 1967.

the Church. Literature does *not* have meaning; rather it provides one with the Christian exercise of getting into someone else's skin, someone else's mind, someone else's life. That is why it can be largely irrelevant what a work says. What is more important is the new life the work creates in you.

A Latter-day Saint who has no tradition in literature, who gets no training in the reading of literature, who has no sense of the esthetic experience as a corollary to the Christian experience, will find perversion, distortion, untruth, absurdity in almost everything he reads.

Literature must be thought of not as the saving of others but as itself a kind of salvation. The poet, for instance, takes silence and fills it with structured sound. Just as God makes man a creator of his own life by remaining essentially silent, so man makes a creator out of himself when he discovers silence and fills it with delight. Put nothingness before the creative spirit and it will etch itself there. Likewise the novelist takes empty space and, with devices like narration, conflict, climax, he creates *time*. Just as God gave man the time of this life at his point in space, so the writer goes through the exercise of creating life by devising believable characters and moving them convincingly. By creating the way he does, the writer of fiction is affirming time, life, existence.

This is all imaginative, of course, but it is a process that is an exercise like the exercise of faith: in the absence of evidence, if we have faith, we imaginatively project a moral universe beyond our own senses. Working the way faith does, the esthetic experience of writing is in itself a spiritual exercise. A writer doesn't really need to worry about the "meaning" of his work, for no matter what it says, if the art of the work is good, the sensitive reader will regain his faith in man as creator and will regain his faith in the Creation. It is therefore not so important what a work of literature *says* as what it *does* to the reader.

In this sense, the greatest "religious" novel would then be one that (like the "immoral" *Tom Jones,* the "absurd" *Catch-22,* or the "bawdy" *Sot-Weed Factor)* can seduce me into living another's life. Because this exercise of *otherness* is a moral one, the greatest "religious" poetry would then be that which can involve me by means of shocking imagery and contorted syntax in the wrestling with one's soul (as I find in the poetry of Emily Dickinson), or which can involve me by means of sound in the creation of a fictive world where time dissolves into immortality (as I find in the poetry of Wallace Stevens), or which can involve me in the apocalyptic process of prophesying a new world (as I find in the poetry of Allen Ginsberg). And the greatest "religious" drama would be that which can include me imaginatively in another world where I can experience what others (imagined though they be) experience in their lives. Such fiction, poetry, and drama would be: not art filling a religious purpose, but *religion succeeding in an esthetic way.* The difference is an important one. Knowing it could have prevented the embarrassing present state of Mormon writings, and knowing it can help us begin to create a fine body of Mormon literature.

But concerned like all men with the primary world, the world in which

we conduct our empirical and practical lives, we find it difficult to accept and understand the secondary world, the world in which the imagination frames its own laws. Entry into this secondary world requires labor and thought and demands special skill. It is an experience, as W. H. Auden says, in which

> A sentence uttered makes a world appear
> Where all things happen as it says they do.

To be sure, we live in the empirical world, but with sensory evidence that is hard to refute; there is in every mundane life a treasure island.

The possession of these two worlds is not madness, but a happy state, unless of course each longs to kill the other. The two worlds live in peace in the balanced man; in the unbalanced life, one dominates over the other, a condition I think we have in the Church in our insistence on utility and message. The two worlds are fairly fixed in their independence, with ideas having their life in the primary world and images, tone, irony, forms, sound, performance, and a multitude of other effects in the secondary. Just as "The unspiritual man," according to Paul, "does not . . . understand [spiritual things] because they are spiritually discerned," so the merely practical man cannot read or write literature, for that is imaginatively discerned.

A final delusion that denies us a literature of our own is the insistence on sweetness and light in the things we read and the things we write. This delusion, more than any of the others, has been held by most editors and contributors to *The Improvement Era, The Relief Society Magazine,* and *The Instructor,* so that almost everything that is published in the Church is a non-literature, a non-entity, even (as literature) nonsense.

What is not understood, it seems to me, is that literature is essentially anarchic, rebellious, shocking, analytical and critical, deviant, absurd, subversive, destructive. It attempts to destroy institutions, it challenges individual settled faith, it will disrupt all of life. The meek and the mild should not read it. The strong will be upset and uprooted by it. But it provides the service of making surer the grounds of one's belief. This process of "destructiveness" often goes by such euphemisms as "soul-searching," "mind-expanding," "challenging," etc. As Gwendolyn Brooks puts it,

> Does man love Art? Man visits Art, but squirms.
> Art hurts. Art urges voyages —
> and it is easier to stay at home,
> the nice beer ready.

Because of this "destructive" feature of literature, I have to admit that I hate starting the study of a new novel, a new poem, a new play, because I know that one or another of my religious/moral/intellectual assumptions may be questioned, challenged, disproved, destroyed. To read sensitively is to come under serious attack. In wrestling with each new work of literature (like Jacob, who also got his reward!), I have to shift the grounds of my belief, and I find this painful — but productive. Challenged by art, I do not defend my faith, however, nor do I search for that which will keep it intact, but I let it come under constant re-examination, even risking its annihilation.

This process is faith-destroying, not faith-promoting, but the destruction of flabby assumptions is nonetheless a strengthening process. Writing is the process of self-examination/world-examination/existence-examination, the search for self, the persistence amid discovered meaninglessness, a "destructive" re-examination of the grounds of one's own belief. Likewise, the reader of literature is constantly re-examining his faith and learning where it is insubstantial and superficial.

The reading of literature of this nature is therefore a kind of sacrament of the Lord's supper in which one constantly renews his search for anything that is true and good. And one is inevitably humbled by the process, for, with his assumptions about his personal worth and his world's progress shattered, he is shocked into a recognition of the ultimacy of his dependence. (All of which affirms our paradoxical dictum, "Adam fell that men might be; and men are that they might have joy": in the reduced human condition of the Fall, man is in a hell of a world, a non-spiritual world, a world of the senses, where delight is possible and dependence on something/someone beyond the world an absolute necessity: this is joy.) Literature is a factor in the Fall of Man, it works to bring about his fall; but because the fall of man is a primary factor in man's salvation, literature is important to the process of salvation, if negatively valuable. And the more "destructive" the better: the more he is uprooted, challenged, hurt, subverted, the stronger he can become. Though a wounded man is not necessarily healthy, a spiritually healthy man is one who knows he is weak and knows where strength lies. Literature is in this way a builder of testimonies. But anyone who doesn't know how this is so will miss the point of it all. He will not write anything great, he will not read anything great.

In sum, a great work of *Mormon* literature will be like all great works of literature; it will be one that transports me into its fictive world, that gets me into the minds and skins of its characters, that shows me another style of life with me in it, that makes me (if only momentarily, though also possibly permanently) something *other* than I now am.

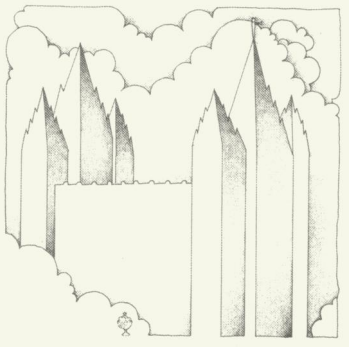
A great work of *Mormon* literature will be like all great works of literature; it will be one that affirms existence by showing its author working at playing the role of godlike creator so that I might have an example to follow in creating something godlike out of my own life; the example of skillful creation inspires the skillful creation of one's own life.

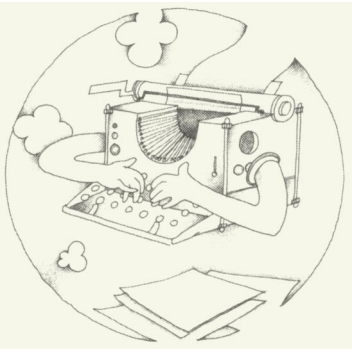
A great work of *Mormon* literature will be like all great works of literature; it will be one that makes me wrestle with my beliefs and which stimulates me by the example of the author's own effort to re-create my own life on surer grounds of belief. It will be one that doesn't program life for me, but leaves me free from constricting assumptions to wrestle, rebuild, and search for meaning.

Only a few of our writings, it seems to me, begin to meet these criteria, some of them represented in this issue of *Dialogue* and in issues to follow. But the list is small and tentative.

Perhaps when we realize that literature cannot be written or read in

the service of religion but that like religion it is an exercise in otherness, an exercise in faith, an exercise in renewing our grounds of belief, *then* we will have an important body of Mormon literature. But I think that by and large we have not yet grown up to this realization. We have not yet figured out how God could become The Word.





THE IMAGINATION'S NEW BEGINNING: THOUGHTS ON ESTHETICS AND RELIGION

Robert A. Rees

> . . . How cold the vacancy
> When the phantoms are gone and the shaken realist
> First sees reality. The mortal no
> Has its emptiness and tragic expirations.
> The tragedy, however, may have begun,
> Again, in the imagination's new beginning,
> In the yes of the realist spoken because he must
> Say yes, spoken because under every no
> Lay a passion for yes that had never been broken.
>
> —Wallace Stevens, *Esthétique du Mal*

> Unreal, give back to us what once you gave:
> The imagination that we spurned and crave.
>
> —Wallace Stevens, "To the One of Fictive Music"

While it is true that there has been no substantial literary tradition among the Mormons, there are indications that one is beginning. For the first time there is a sufficient number of Mormon scholars and critics who can help establish the climate for a legitimate literature and there are more and more creative writers who are turning their talents to Mormon subjects. Therefore, it is not my purpose to lament the fact that a Mormon literature does not now exist. Rather, I choose to discuss how the literary esthetic can serve religion and how a rebirth of the imagination can and should serve the Church today. For if anything would militate against acceptance of an emerging Mormon literature it would be our continued distrust of the imagination.

Perhaps the building of an empire and the securing of a faith required pragmatists and realists, who by their very natures were suspicious of the imagination. Those acquainted with the records of pioneer life in The Great Basin recognize that the spoken and written word had to be clear and direct in order that the kingdom even survive. Those few who were inclined to be literary often did not have the leisure to be so. As an editorial in the *Women's Exponent* for 1914 observed: "The hardships of pioneer life are not generally very conducive to the cultivation of the finer qualities of the mind and soul. The making of new homes and conquering desert wastes naturally calls forth all one's energy, and the tired work-worn body would

naturally require all the faculties of the mind to assist in providing life's necessities."

Those who were literary often found themselves in the uncomfortable position of having to justify themselves to suspicious and unsympathetic peers. An article in the *Women's Exponent* for 1884 gave a witty if impassioned answer to a criticism of literary women:

> [If] You must know the truth . . . these Pariahs [literary women] of society (like myself) have always known that while their associates looked down upon them and spoke sneeringly of them, they were their superiors mentally. But I think, too, like Carlyle's Sandy McPhearson, the associates can never be made to understand this solemn fact, and — that's where the shoe pinches (oh, excuse the slang).
>
> But I'd just like to tell these people what the term, "literary woman," means, in Utah, at least. It means a woman who has read a little and don't give herself up to such superstitious folly as giving fried mice to children with the whooping cough, and who struggles bravely against broken looking glasses and overturned salt. . . .
>
> The term includes women who mind their own business, and never have time to pick up their bonnet and run over to the neighbor's house to tell and be told everybody's business, and to say anything but their prayers.

The lack of interest in serious literature does not mean that the pioneers were not imaginative or creative; in certain ways they were marvelously so, as evidenced by their chapels, tabernacles, and temples. Nor were they as uncultured as they are sometimes depicted. For example, the 1855-56 dramatic season in Salt Lake City included such plays as *She Stoops To Conquer, Othello,* and *Richard III.*

Yet whatever interest there was in literature tended to be moral rather than esthetic. Even Susa Young Gates, who in some respects had sophisticated literary tastes, felt that novels with characters who lacked reverence, chastity and honesty were evil and to be avoided. With the exception of *Les Miserables* she dismissed the entire French fiction of her time. "French novels are so permeated with the unchaste atmosphere of the French people, that . . . one would gladly forego all knowledge of even their very names."[1]

Such standards of literary judgment did not vanish with the frontier. In the *Improvement Era* for 1917 Osborne J. P. Widtsoe made the following suggestion: "Read with the view and purpose of finding the message. . . . Read, then, I repeat again, to discover the author's message; find that above all things; and though I may perhaps get myself into trouble by saying this, I will venture it, that if you find a book on the reading course which does not have a message . . . report it to the chairman of the reading course committee, and let him correct the evil." Today women throughout the Church engaged in the study of serious literature are told that there is no such thing

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[1]"The Influence of Fiction on Education," *Young Woman's Journal,* XI (Nov., 1900), p. 499. I wish to thank Leonard Arrington for generously allowing me to use his files on Mormon literature.

as literature for literature's sake. This unfortunate deemphasis on esthetics tends to make literature lessons little different from Sunday School lessons.

I am not suggesting that literature cannot have a message or a moral. All art has meaning and that meaning is important. As Susanne Langer says, "There is nothing the matter with an ardent moral idea in poetry, provided the moral idea is used for poetic purposes."[2] But in finding the "message" of a work of literature we may come away content that we have understood everything about that work. In his essay "On Poetic Truth," Wallace Stevens says, "It would be fantastic to suggest that the overt meaning, what the poem seems to say, contributes little to the artistic significance and mĕrit of a poem. . . . The 'something said' is important, but it is important for the poem only insofar as the saying of that particular something in a special way is a revelation of reality."[3] To come away with only the message of a work of literature is to come away with partial meaning, is to come away with shadow instead of substance. To see only what is obvious is to see less of that which is spiritual and beautiful, or,

> . . . to see [only] what one sees,
> As if sight had not its own miraculous thrift,
> To hear only what one hears, one meaning alone,
> As if the paradise of meaning ceased
> To be paradise, it is this to be destitute.
> This is the sky divested of its fountains.[4]

The attitude that literature and life cannot (and indeed should not) be enjoyed on a purely esthetic level reflects an erroneous view not only of literature, but of the Gospel as well. The Prophet Joseph Smith stated that an article of our faith was a belief in seeking after things that are lovely, and of good report or praiseworthy. Ideally, beauty is not separated from truth. As we are told in I Chronicles 16:29, "Worship the Lord in the *beauty* of holiness." Father Lehi states that we exist *that* we might have joy. Sound in literature is intended for our joy as it is in music; form in literature is intended for our joy as it is in the graphic arts; movement in literature is intended for our joy as it is in dance. Poetry doesn't need a reason for being any more than does a flower; as Emerson said, "Beauty is its own excuse for being."

We have also lost (or perhaps never gained) an ability to use symbols. We wear symbols next to our bodies hardly aware of the meaning they hold; we repeat metaphorical and symbolic language in temple ceremonies unaware of the multiple meanings they contain. We are like those who Jesus said have eyes but don't see and ears but don't hear.

Somewhere along the way we have forgotten the kinship between the poetic imagination and religious experience. Perhaps this comes in part

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[2]*Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art* (New York, 1953), p. 233.

[3]*Opus Posthumous*, Samuel French Morse, ed. (New York, 1966), p. 237. No writer in the twentieth century has written as much or as eloquently on the poetic imagination as has Wallace Stevens.

[4]*Esthétique du Mal*, IX, in *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (New York, 1967), pp. 320–21.

from our neglect of the Scriptures and our refusal to give ourselves to their poetry and language. When Jeremiah speaks of his testimony, he uses a poetic metaphor: "His [God's] word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay." (20:9) We are struck here both by the beauty and the truth of Jeremiah's statement. All our attempts to say just what a testimony is fall short of this simple poetic statement.

When Nephi closes his testimony he does so in a way that pleases us both spiritually and esthetically:

> I glory in plainess;
> I glory in truth;
> I glory in my Jesus,
> for he hath redeemed my soul from hell.
> (II Nephi 33:6)

The parallel structure, the repetition, the use of the possessive ("*my* Jesus") speak to the eye and ear as well as to the spirit.

Not all such illustrations are found in the Scriptures, however. Take for example the following couplet by Robert Herrick:

> God's hands are round and smooth, that gifts may fall
> Freely from them, and hold back none at all.

Herrick engages our imagination in contemplating an object we might otherwise never have considered. The sound and the imagery (of "round" and "smooth") suggest something not only about God's hands, but about the quality of His love, something which is confirmed by our spiritual sense.

An additional example can be found in Gerard Manley Hopkins' sonnet, "God's Grandeur." After speaking in the octet about how a world "charged with the grandeur of God" has been soiled by man's sin and insensitivity, Hopkins concludes:

> And for all this, nature is never spent;
> There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
> And though the last lights off the black west went
> Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs —
> Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
> World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

Hopkins uses many devices to body forth his central poetic and religious idea. Alliteration and assonance are employed with such skill that we are scarcely aware of how totally Hopkins uses sound to convey sense. Alliterative pairs (nature-never, deep-down, last-lights, brown-brink, west-went) give way to combinations of words beginning with *b* or *w* (black-west, brink-east*ward*), which culminate in the almost totally alliterative last line.

The caesura, or pause, is used effectively in several key places (as with "morning" and "springs"), but especially in the last line — "with *ah!* bright wings" — as the poet sees the wings of the Holy Ghost reflecting the light of the sun (Son of God) to a darkened world. The "ah!" expresses wonderment

and surprise, as if the poet himself were unprepared for the vision which he sees.

Finally, Hopkins uses diction to expand the possibilities of his poetic expression and to make his meaning more concrete. Why a "bent world"? Undoubtedly, Hopkins intends two meanings here: the world is bent because it is round, partly in darkness, partly in light, but it is also bent morally because of man's callousness and his rejection of Christ (which are emphasized in the octet). "Broods" also has multiple meaning. Hopkins intends to convey not only the idea that the Holy Ghost solemnly ponders man's fate, but that he is like a bird (enforced by "warm breast" and "bright wings") hovering over its young. This further suggests Christ's metaphor of Himself as a mother hen who gathers her chickens under her wings. The Holy Ghost broods over the fallen children of God, nurturing and preparing them for Christ. Ultimately these devices work poetically to convey the idea that the real grandeur with which the world is charged is God's love and the love of His Son.

Although the esthetic and the spiritual are not the same, and although we can have one kind of experience without the other, there is a way in which they are similar. As Wallace Stevens says, "The wonder and mystery of art, as indeed of religion in the last resort, is the revelation of something 'wholly other' by which the inexpressible loneliness of thinking is broken and enriched. To know facts as facts in the ordinary way has, indeed, no particular power or worth. But a quickening of our awareness of the irrevocability by which a thing is what it is, has such power, and it is, I believe, the very soul of art." And, "The affinity of art and religion is most evident today" in that "both have to mediate for us a reality not ourselves."[5] Our need for affirming and ordering our lives is satisfied to a large extent by religion and art, ultimately and preferably as united and complementary forces.

When our awareness of things either terrestrial or celestial is quickened by the esthetic as well as by the spiritual imagination, we have what might be called a double witness, by which the truth is made more profound and more penetrating and our sympathies are both broadened and deepened. That art can do this suggests that it may be part of God's plan to draw us closer to one another and back to Him. If this is true then we should seek to multiply the number of times we are touched esthetically, just as we should seek to multiply the number of times we are touched spiritually.

For the imagination to have a new beginning in us, we must be willing to act on the faith that it can affect us in a significant way. We must also give our attention to those in our culture who are speaking to us about our religion through literature. If we give attention both to our imaginative capabilities and to those who speak to them, we may yet have a literature worthy of our religion.

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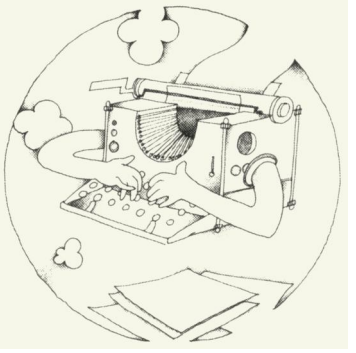
[5]"On Poetic Truth," *Opus Posthumous*, pp. 237–38.



LITERATURE IN THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH: THE IMPORTANCE OF INVOLVEMENT

Dale L. Morgan

Against my better judgment, I have been persuaded to discuss the place of literature in the history of the Mormon Church in the context of this special issue of *Dialogue*. That the topic is too large to be dealt with in small compass is evidenced by the views of the various writers who in these pages explore some of its aspects — including the fundamental question whether such a thing as Mormon literature even exists.

That there is *a* Mormon literature is beyond question, and it effectively begins with the Book of Mormon, which must be regarded as one of the curiosities of American literature. The Book of Mormon lives on because of its religious vitality, the emotions it evokes in believers, the sense of nearness to God they derive from it; not, it would seem, from any inherent literary values. I had better qualify that: Not from any literary values that non-believers can find in it. If beauty is in the eye of the beholder, the Book of Mormon is brimming over with literary values, as far as the Saints are concerned. Still, non-believers do not read the Book of Mormon as they read the Bible, for the profundity of its ideas, for the grace and power of its language, for its insights into the human condition. Its merits otherwise, whether as history or as fiction designed to be read as history, do not concern us here.

As with the Book of Mormon, so also with the other distinctively Mormon scriptures, the Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price. None of these works is now, or seems ever likely to become, a part of world "literature" short of that near-total conversion of the planet which is now, as it has always been, the Mormon dream.

The direct involvement of the Mormon people with these books is obvious, and I think that is a useful way of looking at all Mormon literature, by conceiving of it as a literature of involvement. A significant point of entry may be Mormon hymnody. Although historians have paid some attention to them, Mormon hymns have had relatively little attention from literary scholars thus far, and surely this is to be regretted.[1]

The literary values in the Mormon hymns are incontestible. They may be deficient as poetry, and they may concentrate and sentimentalize Mormon experience almost beyond recognition, especially as passing time robs them of immediacy (present-day Mormons do not have the gut-experience of blackface mobs or of expulsion and exodus common to those who wrote the hymns

or the congregations that first sang them), but they have great evocative power. Because of their very nature, however, no universal acceptance of these hymns is conceivable. Christian hymns, reflecting the whole spectrum of Christian experience, make up a considerable part of the Mormon hymn book, but there have been almost no reverse borrowings. Perhaps the only Mormon hymn that is sung outside the Mormon community is John M. Macfarlane's "Far, Far Away on Judea's Plains," and the reason for its broader acceptance is that it is a simple Christmas carol. Admit it, we are not likely at any very early date to find a Baptist congregation singing "Oh, How Lovely Was the Morning," George Manwaring's celebration of Joseph Smith's "First Vision," or to hear Methodists joyfully chorusing W. W. Phelps' "Praise to the Man Who Communed with Jehovah," or William Fowler's "We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet," to say nothing of Ruth May Fox's "MIA, We Hail Thee." The more distinctively Mormon the hymn, the less general its appeal. If we are to find universals in Mormon hymnody, we have to seek a different approach, finding keys to Mormon feeling and thinking, and relating these to what I regard as literature's primary concern, the terms on which men live, everywhere in space and time.

As a literary form, Mormon hymns belong to a classification all their own, because it is difficult to isolate the emotional impact of the lyrics from that of the music, even though some of the hymns have been sung to different tunes at different times, showing that textually they have their own survival qualities. Still, they are so participatory, both in the circumstances of their creation and in their continued existence, embracing and enlivening the community as does nothing else in Mormon literature, as to perfectly exemplify the involvement factor in that literature. That same involvement is found in the personal narratives and diaries, the journalism, the polemical works (including most of the histories), the poetry, and even the fiction.

But let us look at one of the poets. Eliza R. Snow, "the sweet singer of Israel," may serve as an interesting example. Eliza Snow did not limit herself to the writing of poetry, but as a literary figure on the Mormon cultural horizon, that is her role and her significance.

How accomplished a poet was she? Some time ago, I put this question to a friend, herself a gifted poet, and the answer I got was that Eliza was essentially a versifier, as might clearly be seen if she were compared with her contemporary, Emily Dickinson. I have thought since that it would be a genuine contribution to Mormon culture if someone would undertake a study of the lives of these two women — not just the poetry but the whole interaction of their lives with their times. Such a study would not necessarily improve our estimate of Eliza's poetry, but we might end by understanding

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[1]See D. Sterling Wheelwright's unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, "The Role of Hymnody in the Development of the Latter-day Saint Movement" (University of Maryland, 1943), and Howard Swan's "Music Among the Mormons" in his *Music in the Southwest, 1825–1850* (San Marino, Calif., 1952). Favorite hymns of the Utah Church have been studied by George D. Pyper (1939) and by J. Spencer Cornwall (1961), and a parallel work for the Reorganized Church is Roy A. Cheville's *They Sang of the Restoration* (Independence, 1955). None of these books takes a primarily literary approach.

it better. Because she was caught up quite early in the continental drama of Mormonism's turbulent early years, Eliza's was a life of social involvement, whereas Emily became essentially a recluse. How much does the social involvement count for (beyond its effect upon the poetry, the function demanded of the poetry)? At what point are life and literature separable? I doubt that students of Emily Dickinson would take much interest in the findings, but I think such a study would have a definite place in a cultural inventory of Mormonism.

The problem of social involvement and its effect upon literature is clearly seen in what is perhaps the most characteristic form taken by Mormon folk literature, the autobiography. Let no one dismiss Mormon autobiography as an inferior literary form; in the end, it may outweigh in value all the rest.

Autobiography is in any case a fascinating literary genre. It may be fiction as much as fact (and among the Mormons it may be the most distinctive kind of fiction), if only because no one can ever record an absolutely true account of his days. Even to record a single day defeats all of a man's ingenuity; everything thought and felt and done or not done from the rising to the setting of the sun — not a fraction of this can be got down on paper, as even James Joyce might have been disposed to agree. There is compression, suppression, and distortion; anxiety, yearning, wish-fulfillment, deprivation, realization; these and a thousand things more, the whole day through. How much more must this be the case then with autobiography, when a whole life must be summed up in the briefest of terms — brief even if the autobiography runs to many volumes.

Carlos Baker has Ernest Hemingway in view in a recently published biography, but what he says about Hemingway's nominally factual war correspondence of 1944 seems to me directly relevant to the point I have been making about autobiography:

> Virtually everything he wrote for *Collier's* that summer was a melange of personal observation and materials gleaned from a wide variety of other sources. None of his despatches was completely accurate. He seemed to be far more concerned with the feel of things than with the facts. As a lifelong purveyor of fiction, he could not resist the temptation to fictionalize. He invented dialogue like a novelist. As in his NANA despatches from Spain, he often omitted the names of his companions, leaving the impression that he was alone in feats of derring-do. He sometimes contrasted his own modest conduct with the infamous behavior of others. He was always compressing, foreshortening, overdramatizing. . . .

A remarkable passage in Parley P. Pratt's *Autobiography* comes to mind. The scene is Richmond Jail, in Missouri, in the winter of 1838–1839, Joseph Smith and his fellow prisoners having been subjected for hours to "the obscene jests, the horrid oaths, the dreadful blasphemies and filthy language of [the] guards. . . ." Pratt reports that:

> On a sudden [Joseph] arose to his feet, and spoke in a voice of thunder, or as the roaring lion, uttering, as near as I can recollect, the following words:

> *"SILENCE, ye fiends of the infernal pit. In the name of Jesus Christ I rebuke you, and command you to be still; I will not live another minute and hear such language. Cease such talk, or you or I die THIS INSTANT!"*
>
> He ceased to speak. He stood erect in terrible majesty. Chained, and without a weapon; calm, unruffled and dignified as an angel, he looked upon the quailing guards, whose weapons were lowered or dropped to the ground; whose knees smote together, and who, shrinking into a corner, or crouching at his feet, begged his pardon, and remained quiet till a change of guards.
>
> I have seen the ministers of justice, clothed in magisterial robes, and criminals arraigned before them, while life was suspended on a breath, in the Courts of England; I have witnessed a Congress in session to give laws to nations; I have tried to conceive of kings, of royal courts, of thrones and crowns; and of emperors assembled to decide the fate of kingdoms; but dignity and majesty have I seen but *once*, as it stood in chains, at midnight, in a dungeon in an obscure village of Missouri.

Beyond all doubt this is effective writing, making the reader sit up and pay attention, and burning an image into his mind; on such grounds, the passage must be accounted literature. Is it also history, the whole truth? Would any uninvolved onlooker have seen this happening in Pratt's terms? Did he himself see it in quite the same way at the time? These are more difficult questions.

Moreover, the literary side of Mormon history has scarcely begun to be studied yet; that is, the literary aspects of the formal written history, wherever found. The job should be undertaken; we will not really understand the history as history until we have had a look at some of the mechanics of the writing. It would certainly be instructive to have a close look at Joseph's own autobiography, the existing manuscripts studied for textual variations as Thomas Jefferson's are. The "facts" quite aside, we will not understand Joseph Smith himself very well until his literary aspects have been thoroughly assessed.

But I was commenting on Parley P. Pratt. His *Autobiography* received a discerning look from R. A. Christmas in the very first issue of *Dialogue* (Spring, 1966) and I would urge readers to reread Mr. Christmas's article in the light of what I have just been saying. Pratt is an interesting figure otherwise. Among the early Mormon writers, none exceeded him in sheer virtuosity, I suspect. From a study of his works, he emerges as the writer's writer, for he was always working at his job. Pratt did not write for the sake of writing, though; he wrote primarily for the sake of his message (our theme of involvement, again). He wrote tracts; he wrote a journalistic kind of history; he wrote autobiography and poems, hymns and theological disputations; he addressed proclamations to Queen Victoria and to the people of the Pacific; he wrote broad satires and letters (purportedly by non-Mormons, pseudonymously); and always with ingenuity and zest, enjoying what he was doing. I think we will understand Mormonism itself better when we gain a full understanding of Parley P. Pratt.

With so appealing a subject, it is easy to forget that I am primarily interested at the moment in Mormon autobiography as folk literature, as perhaps the most characteristic form of Mormon literary expression. (Many more Saints addressed themselves to their autobiography, their "journals," than ever tried their hand at hymn-writing or defenses of the Saints and the faith, for example.) Pratt's is a formal Autobiography, as formally published, and the passing years have brought the publication of many more, but one tends to think of them as manuscripts, written in old-fashioned ledger journals by the light of a candle, or perhaps a kerosene lantern. Some truly superb specimens of the genre have come to light, just how superb only a few have yet realized.

One of the best, I think, is Hosea Stout's, published in the *Utah Historical Quarterly* in 1962. This autobiography was never completed and principally describes Stout's boyhood and young manhood, down to the time he first met up with the Mormons. In its artlessness, it achieves the status of high art, as in its pages dealing with childhood in a Shaker community, or the impression made by the mid-western prairies on one brought up amid oak clearings.

Similarly, I do not think anyone can really understand the inwardness of the early Mormon experience, the texture of Mormon life, who has not read the reminiscences of the Thomsonian doctor, Priddy Meeks, published in the *Utah Historical Quarterly* in 1942. Stout and Meeks are prize exemplars of the Mormon experience as American experience.

Another jewel beyond price is Abner Blackburn's still-unpublished reminiscences. Blackburn brings to the Mormon literary and historical record an element that has been sadly lacking in it, what with human nature, in Wallace Stegner's phrase, wrapped in piety like sausages put up in lard. Blackburn recounts the initial march of the Mormon Battalion from Council Bluffs to Fort Leavenworth, to "fit out for the war," in these terms:

> their wear no provisions [at] the Bluffs and we had to beat our way partly to the fort of several days journey. no cooking utencils or convencies. The soldiers made dough and wrapt around sticks and held it over the fire to bake. the farmers along the rout thought we wear a rough sett. Chickens Ducks Pigs and all kinds of vegetables sufferd without price. some of those fellows would steal anny thing. one set of theives carried [off] several bee hives while the oners wear at dinner. one soldier drove off a cow and milked her to the fort and then sold her for whiskey. Arrived at the fort. made all preparation to goe. we had to be sworn into the service. the officer read the military law to us. it was death to desert and death for several other offences. their was a company of Misourians herd the law read. they said if the Mexecans did not get them the military law would sure. that was to much of a gammet for them to run. so they threw up the sponge and went home. Drew our arms and acouterments and bounty money layd in a suply of clothing and other neccessaries for the trip across the wide plains to Mexico and Montezumas Halls [and] started this 15 of August 1846. . . .
>
> [Eventually approaching the New Mexican settlements, the Battalion] Camped one afternoon about three o'clock. Presently there

rode up several Spainards. Amongst them was a Spanish Hidalgo and his daughter with their rich caprisoned horses and their jingeling uniform. The sinaretta lit off her horse like a nightengale.

The whole camp was there in a minute. Their gaudy dress and drapery attracted all eyes. The dress of the Senuretta is hard to describe. All the colors of the rainbow with ribbons and jewelry to match. She was the Rodope of the great American plains. We gave them presents and made them welcome to our camp and also to martial music as a greeting.

The damsel was struck with our drummer boy, Jesse Earl, and his violin. He played "the girl I left behind me." She could not contain herself and with her conpaneros started a dance and made the dance fit the tune.

She was beautiful, graceful and slender
Her saddle was spangled with gold
Whose gleam her eyes dark splender
Outshown a thousand fold

Upon the drum she took a seat
Her image made the fifer smile
She showed her pretty ivory feet
And slender ankles all the while

She took a fancy to our drummer boy. The attachment was mutual; but his admiration cooled off somewhat when she appropriated his handkerchief and pocketknife. After taking the whole camp in they made their departure for their beautiful hacienda. After this the camp was as dead as last years pancake.

Will anyone gainsay me? This is not merely history; it is literature of a high order. As far as the discovery of Mormonism is concerned, the best may be yet to come, as the buried folk literature slowly emerges into view.

Thus far I have restricted this discussion to autobiographies from the pioneer period. The restriction is not a necessary one, however. Perhaps it is for the valiance of her spirit and the sensitive reflection of a rare life, rather than for the distinction of the prose that I vividly remember, after almost thirty years, Annie Clark Tanner's *A Mormon Mother: An Autobiography* (Salt Lake City, 1941). This book has been closely held within the Tanner family; the only institutionally-owned copies I know of are those in the Church Historian's Office, the Brigham Young University Library, and the Salt Lake Public Library. This work may well be one of the monuments of Mormon literature, and thus far it is almost totally unknown in that literature. If by saying this much and no more, I persuade others to search out the book and savor its quality, I shall have done well.

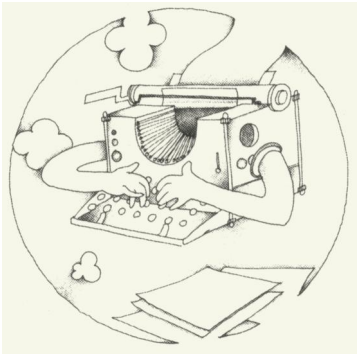
Another autobiography of genuine distinction is one written by that ornament to her sex, Juanita Brooks of St. George. Thus far she has pubblished it only in part, and in so unlooked-for a place as the *Journal of American Folklore,* but the three chapters relating some episodes of her girlhood at Bunkerville, Nevada, just after the turn of the century have lately been conveniently reprinted in John Greenway's *Folklore of the Great West* (Palo Alto, 1969). It would be hard to conceive of any writing more consist-

ently Mormon in its texture and its preoccupations than Mrs. Brooks' recollections; it is also personal history that fully attains to the dignity of literature.

My emphasis upon autobiography raises interesting questions about the future, the kind of literature the Mormon community can anticipate. There will be writing (and rewriting) of the past to answer present or developing need. How much will this be a literature of involvement? To the extent that accommodation succeeds conflict in Mormon life, some of the wellsprings of literature will run dry. As Bernard DeVoto remarked, the volcanic early stage of Mormonism is in many ways more interesting than the hardening and cooling stage which has followed. What might be some themes of the future? One constant is bound up with the Church's continuing sense of mission, the conversion of all the convertibles. Yet a lot of the urgency has gone out of this sense of mission as the millennial expectation has subsided and the powerful "gathering" phase of Mormon history has run its course. Most Church members accept the idea that these are "the last days," but there is not much immediacy about it; the end will not come a week from next Thursday, or before your daughter graduates from high school. Most certainly not before you have to settle with the bank for that money you borrowed.

There is still plenty of conflict, actual or potential, to be found in Mormon life. A fundamentalist might write a touching and disturbing autobiography, dealing with his sincere efforts to "live his religion" in nineteenth century terms amid the cross-currents of twentieth century Mormonism. Have we seen the last, or even the real beginning, of the struggle for racial equality within the Church? Or for that matter, for sex equality? These are merely the more obvious possibilities. Consider the problems that may beset members of a family-and-children-oriented church in an increasingly overpopulated world. And there is always The Bomb to make life more interesting in an uninteresting sort of way.

The point is, the raw stuff of literature is going to be around for a while. Mormon history, Mormon involvement with history, steadily secretes the stuff. There is going to be, as there is now, a Mormon literature, and on the whole, I think the best is yet to come.



LITTLE DID SHE REALIZE: WRITING FOR THE MORMON MARKET

Samuel W. Taylor

So you want to write a Mormon novel? Great! Here's a story for you:—

It's about a Mormon bishop and his family, see, so you can get in all the little inside details about the L.D.S. people. The bishop's wife is an extremely devoted mother of three children, two lovely daughters and a son who is a genius. The mother is so excessively devoted to her genius son that she drives him into a madhouse. But before he is locked up he has an incestuous affair with a sister which ruins her life, he causes his best friend's suicide and drives his other sister into an unhappy marriage with a Gentile. His own disintegration causes his father, the bishop, to die of a broken heart.

You've got to admit that this story has real drama. Also, it's brand new for the Mormon market. We've never seen a novel even remotely like it published in Utah.

You may point out that we never *will*, and that if the author of such a Mormon book got it published in New York it would be furiously denounced by the Saints and, most likely, its author would be un-Churched.

Just goes to show the difference between us and the Jews. If you change "bishop" to "rabbi" in the above story, you have the outline of *Chosen People*, by Bernice Rubens, a novel given a rave review by *Life* magazine, which says, "It belongs to the familiar genre in which the loving unkindness of Jewish family life is explored with horrified affection." In other words, there's nothing particularly new about the type; the book belongs to a familiar genre.

Another recent Jewish book, and a big best-seller, is *Portnoy's Complaint*, by Phillip Roth, which a reviewer for the San Francisco *Chronicle* called, "The dirtiest book I have ever read." Are the Jews up in arms about this sort of literature about their people? Apparently not; the *Chronicle* pointed out, in fact, that the Roth book was pushed into the best-seller class by the enthusiasm of influential Jews in the publishing and book reviewing fields. They loved it. And a great many Gentiles and Mormons are reading it, not just for the dirt. Dirt is dirt cheap; the book must have something else.

But what's wrong with the Jews? Don't they realize that they must never, never, *never* countenance a book that doesn't portray all Jews the way our own approved books depict Mormons — as cardboard stereotypes, perfect, flawless, sexless and gutless? Don't the Jews realize that to put real human

beings with real human problems into their books will destroy their public image? Apparently they're not as smart about such things as we are. They keep right on sponsoring and supporting realistic and honest Jewish books, short stories, stage plays, radio and TV shows, by the scores and by the hundreds.

And have you noticed a curious thing? — no people in this entire world have such a wonderful public image as the Jews. Their literature doesn't seem to have hurt it one bit. Matter of fact, if I weren't a Mormon who knew better because I've been told so a thousand times, I'd say an honest and realistic literature goes a long way to *build* a fine public image.

Remember the old cliché about publicity? — anything at all said about you is good; just spell the name right.

There have been so very few Mormon novels published by our internal press that it's difficult to give you market tips — particularly since every Mormon novel published in New York has been, so far as I am aware, frowned upon. The greatest one of all, Vardis Fisher's *Children of God*, has in fact become a Mormon touchstone: a good word for it brands a man as a negative thinker.

So while I can't help you much with market tips for the Mormon novel, because of lack of available data, I am on the other hand full of goodies about short fiction for the Saints. I had a refresher course as judge of the short stories submitted for the annual Round-Up of the League of Utah Writers. There were 53 stories, and by the time I'd read them all I was astounded. It might seem reasonable to expect that there would be a heavy preponderance of Mormon stories — regional literature — from the League of Utah Writers. Yet on the contrary these authors seemed to avoid their own environment.

In my opinion only one of those 53 stories was what could be classed as Mormon literature, a tale that grew out of the soil and the people. Incidentally, it made no mention of Mormons or the Church, as such; it was truly regional literature born of its environment and peopled by characters who can be found nowhere else on earth.

Some of the other stories gave a rather nervous nod to the locale by use of place names and geographical features; a character called "bishop" might hurry through with a one-line cliché of dialogue, or reference to "Relief Society" be made between commas. But leave these tags out — which would not alter the stories — and they might have happened anywhere.

The general level of the contest stories was high; a number of them were excellent, while a few, I felt, were jewels. But if only one out of 53 authors submitted a truly Mormon story that got inside the character of the Peculiar People and that could have happened nowhere else, then it seems evident that these writers were not searching their environment for its unique flavor but were deliberately avoiding it. Why? Well, the burned child avoids the stove. It was no coincidence that the author of the only truly Mormon story had not been able to find a market for it. The Saints simply do not want searching and truthful stories about the Peculiar People. They

want to be called peculiar while being exactly like everyone else.

Utah authors know that while we take such pride in Mormon cooperative effort — which performed miracles at Kirtland and Far West and Nauvoo and Winter Quarters and in the Great Basin and is seen today in the Welfare Plan — yet we bitterly resent any implication that there can't be united effort without united thinking. We boast of the results of our remarkable solidarity while denying the awesome facade — sometimes called the Zion Curtain — of uniform attitude reflected in the press, radio and television of Mormon country. Utah is a place where a person's status depends upon his underwear, yet it is taboo to mention it. All writing must have the flavor of the press agent handout.

Writers must be aware of the peculiar reading habits of the Peculiar People. We stress education, yet at Provo, home of Brigham Young University and intellectual center of Mormondom, there is no newsstand in town except for the miscellaneous racks at the supermarkets designed to entertain small-fry while mama shops. The bookstore situation is even more peculiar. Aside from the one at the university itself, the town affords only two specialty shops, one operated by the Seventies and the other by the John Birch Society. Where a literate citizen would buy a copy of *Portnoy's Complaint,* I just wouldn't know, except that he might get it at the same place he buys his whiskey (for entertaining Gentiles, of course), out of town where he isn't known.

The wise author will avoid the Word of Wisdom like the plague. I once talked with a man and wife who were anticipating with mixed feelings the return of their son from a mission. "We smoke," the wife said, "and things will be difficult, I'm afraid, until he's been back long enough to become human." Here is the basis for what could be a charming story, yet the housebroke Utah author wouldn't touch it with a ten-foot pole. I once wrote a book in which Mormons were passionately seeking a coffee substitute that had the exact taste they loved but wouldn't be forbidden. I intended it as humor, and at least the Gentiles found it amusing; yet word from above sent an embarrassed bishopric to my home on a formal visit to inquire about the status of my soul.

This brief mention of a few peculiarities is to warn Utah writers that they must avoid in-depth character work at all costs. Books on the technique of the short story tell you to write of what you know, to reach within yourself for universal truth, to use real characters with problems arising from their environment, to get inside these people and make human beings of them. But this, apparently, is for Gentile authors. Utah writers must carefully skirt a dominant factor of their environment; if they want to write for the local market, they must conform to what that market demands.

Among the 53 entries there were a considerable number of the "little did she realize" type. This would be surprising with stories intended for the professional market, because it is virtually impossible to sell a come-to-realize story there. However, Utah writers know that Church publications love it. So if you want to do a sure-fire Mormon story, here's one: —

Janice is a beautiful and talented girl, see, who takes drama at BYU and yearns to be a great actress. But her boy friend, Claude, wants her to stay home, marry him and have babies. Claude, however, runs a dairy farm, and Janice wants fame and glamour, not manure on her shoes. Well, Janice is in an MIA play and by an astounding coincidence a great Hollywood producer is in the audience (how he got there is *your* problem). Anyhow, the producer flips over Janice's talent and beauty. He's got to have her for the starring role in his new $50-million movie. So Janice's fondest dreams have come true. Everybody thinks it's a wonderful thing, and she's packing her bags when in comes Claude with hay in his hair and manure on his shoes (he heard the news while milking), and he says he's just come to say goodbye and gosh, honey, I'm going to miss you something terrible because, gee-whiz, I love you. At this moment Janice comes to realize that she doesn't want the tinsel and glitter of Hollywood; what she really wants is to be with Claude and have manure on her shoes, bear his babies and use her great talent as ward drama director of MIA. Fadeout.

Maybe you think this isn't much of a story because you've already read it a dozen times in the *Improvement Era* and *Relief Society Magazine*. Well, if you've only read it a dozen times, that shows how young you are. Utah editors *love* the come-to-realize story. Janice is sometimes a great writer, sometimes a great painter or singer or violinist (you've got all the arts and the instruments in the orchestra, see, before you run out of material) who comes to realize. Fadeout.

There are infinite variations to the come-to-realize story: Janice is an orphan girl whose foster parents don't love her; so she's going to run away, but then she comes to realize that they *do* love her. Fadeout. Janice is a little old lady who rebels at going into an old folks' home; but she comes to realize that that's what such homes are *for,* old folks like her. Fadeout. Janice is a housewife who can't have babies, so she takes in a foster child; but the child doesn't love her and she's going to take it back, when she comes to realize . . .

Trouble with the come-to-realize plot, my agent told me years ago in kicking back the only one of that type I ever sent him, is that there's no actual story-development; the only thing that happens is that Janice changes her mind. For the professional market, this won't do. But Utah editors can't get enough stories of Janice changing her mind, particularly the one where she comes to realize that manure on her shoes is better than pursuing the arts.

In this market the professional arts are a handy whipping-boy; your ready-made villain is the Hollywood producer luring Janice away from Claude and babies with the false tinsel and glitter. This literary convention is a bit difficult to understand in light of the adulation the Saints pay to financial success; apparently it is spiritual to make your pile in real estate, banking or insurance but not in creative pursuits. It also is a fact that a visit to the Hollywood Ward of the Church will reveal that a good share of its members are connected with the "industry," as show biz is called locally, while also having babies. But as a writer you won't quibble about market require-

ments; give the editor the stereotypes he demands.

Now that you've learned all you need to know about writing fiction for the Utah market, let's take a look at non-fiction, factual writing about our people and our history. This telling and retelling of the Mormon story comprises the great bulk of our literature. A close study of market requirements can be rewarding, for the Saints adore the well-known Mormon story; a successful retelling can mean book sales of 100,000 and more, which is a best-seller in any company.

The beauty of the Mormon story is that it *works* — it brings in thousands of converts and satisfies the great body of Saints who want their Mormonism simple, uncomplicated, sugar-coated.

It is fatal to success in this market to suppose that to write the Mormon story an author must do research in our history. David and Karla Martin found that out when recently launching a new quarterly, *Mormon History*. Their prospectus stated, "Our aim is to bring as much history as possible to as many people as possible, at the lowest possible cost. . . . The bulk of the contents will be made up of college theses on church history subjects, reprints of out-of-print books . . . and various early Mormon Church publications." Sounded great to me; but with the first issue came a letter admitting that "In spite of our heavy advertising and letter writing, response has been most disappointing. We have come to the conclusion that most members consider us a threat to orthodox Mormonism. Nothing could be further from the truth." Because of the reaction, they felt it necessary to bear their testimonies in the first number, as active Church members and former missionaries.

Inasmuch as they asked for comments, I sat down and wrote a letter of market advice:

> Regarding your editorial stand, I believe you will find out that the Mormons don't really want historical fact; they want the Mormon *story*. They want that story over and over again, as a child asks for the retelling of his favorite bedtime tale; and, like the child, they don't want changes. They don't want to be disturbed by the fact that in many respects the story does not coincide with history. Thus the very name of your magazine is a red flag to the ones who contrive the story and the happy throng who want it told again and again without change. For you to protest that you don't intend to be anti-Establishment will do no good at all. What you must do is fall in line, or else.
>
> You've already alerted the opposition with a phrase of my own, by saying that your publication won't be a "house organ." Thus by implication you are agreeing with my thesis that our internal literature is propaganda; and that attitude, folks, is the worst of all modern sins, negative thinking.

But when it was ready for mailing I peeled off the stamp and tore the letter in half. They didn't need me to tell them; they'd find out.

The best market advice I know of about how to write the Mormon story came from a man who'd made a lucrative career of it. When I published a piece about the Saints in *Holiday* magazine he criticized the tone, the anecdotes, and my attitude. So I asked this expert in the field what

rules should be followed, how an author knew what could be said and what couldn't. His reply, like all great truths, was remarkable for its simplicity.

"Let the spirit guide you," he advised.

To understand this in its full richness, let's look at another branch of arts among the Saints. The *Church News* printed a picture of a statue of Adam and Eve, to be placed in Temple Square, that fascinated me. I hadn't realized that there must have been a beauty parlor in the Garden of Eden to do Eve's hair or that Adam had mastered the science of metallurgy, for he was freshly shaved (was there also a barber shop?). Equally amazing was evidence that in their brief period on earth Adam and Eve had mastered the textile-making skills; they had spun and woven cloth, and had sewed it into handsome robes.

Here, I believe, is a commentary on our attitude toward historical accuracy. We are required to believe literally in the Bible; yet if Eve's bronze knee or bosom might excite lustful thoughts in the beholder, then cover her, regardless of whether it contradicts Genesis.

My purpose is not to point out the discrepancies between the Mormon story and facts of history — this is a separate study, with a voluminous literature of its own — but rather to help you meet the market that exists. Writers don't make the market, they simply fill its requirements.

In preparing yourself for this market you must work very hard to develop your adjectives of praise. Competition here is very tough. Our internal writers display an astounding talent for panegyric. When conducting a class in writing at a local Education Week, I read as a typical example a solid page and a half from a Mormon book, then asked the class what facts it contained. There was actually just one fact in 800 words, the man's name; all the rest was praise. If you think this is poor writing, just try it; here is a skill you'll learn only through hard work and application. But it is a must for the market. When in doubt, praise.

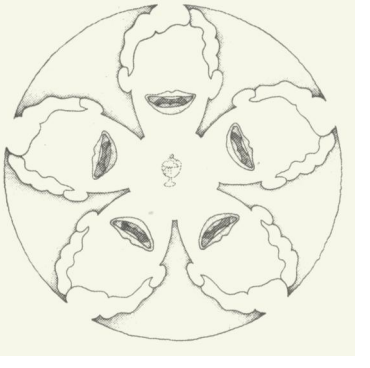
Controversial material can be used in this market only if you give it the positive approach. For example, it recently was announced that the Church TV and radio stations would phase out cigarette commercials. So now it's okay to boast about standing up for our principles. For the past forty years it was negative thinking to mention that we were beating the pulpit with one hand about the Word of Wisdom while taking money with the other for huckstering the forbidden. Now it is positive to boast about banning cigarette commercials, but it is still negative to mention that the Church stations continue to plug beer, wine, tea, and coffee. But if you wish to write about our great stand against cigarettes, do it fast, for past history would indicate a very short memory about such things, and presently it will be negative to mention that we *ever* took money for selling cigarettes. So strike while the market is hot.

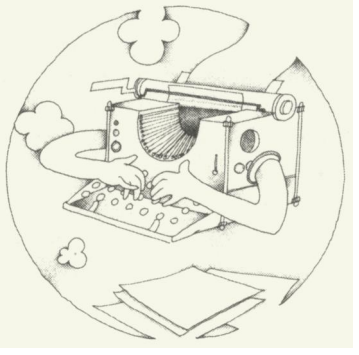
For authors who want to broaden their horizon by writing Mormon material for the national market, I must tell you flatly that New York editors will not buy Mormon propaganda. If you give *this* market what it demands — reasonable objectivity, accuracy and truth — you run a grave

risk of being accused of "sensationalizing" our history, selling out for gold (part of our mythology is that anti-Mormon books make millions, which isn't so). At the best you will be damned for negative thinking; while if you dig up enough fascinating truth that cuts too close to the bone, you may risk your Church membership for publishing it — not for printing lies, but for stepping on corns we insist must be avoided.

There does seem to be just one type of Mormon literature acceptable both in the national market and among the Saints. This is the memoir — life-with-father, how-dear-to-my-heart-is-the-old-nostalgia. I have no quarrel with this genre; it is Americana, and I like it. But certainly with the infinite richness of the material, there really ought to be a broader field. Matter of fact, I feel so strongly about this that I dug down and ponied up $100 as an award for regional writing, sponsored by the League of Utah Writers. At least I'm putting my money where my mouth is.

In conclusion, let me say that while I'm sure these tips will help you meet the Utah market, if you really have ambitions for writing professionally, for heaven's sake ignore everything I have said. Our ways are not the ways of the world. If you learn your trade by writing praise propaganda for a controlled press, you will by that very fact blight your career in a free one.





BEOWULF AND NEPHI: A LITERARY VIEW OF THE BOOK OF MORMON

Robert E. Nichols, Jr.

I

In all the wide world, past and present, there is no greater body of literature than that which we call English. And in all the annals of English literature, spanning thirteen centuries of impressive expression, no single matter has had greater impact on the creative genius than the life of Jesus Christ and the Biblical account of events surrounding that Life.

That matter, in Old English times, inspired the seventh-century *Hymn* by Caedmon, the first known English poet; it carried his school in the eighth century through Old Testament paraphrases to *Christ and Satan,* and triumphed in the ninth century with Cynewulf's *Dream of the Rood.* That matter suffused the Arthurian legendry of early Middle English, prodded the poet of *Piers Plowman* to social protest in the fourteenth century, and impelled the Wakefield Master to dramatic innovation in the fifteenth. That matter motivated such diverse figures as Bunyan and Milton during the English Renaissance, Addison and Blake during the Augustan and Romantic Ages and Melville and Eliot during modern times and on New World shores. Thirteen centuries, thousands of stylists, trillions of words in billions of lines of verse and prose — all influenced by a single written source, the Bible, itself little larger than a good-sized novel.

More than a millennium separates Caedmon and the coming forth of the Book of Mormon; more than a century separates us from the same event. Now one century assuredly is not ten, and the literary weight of a hundred years should not be expected to overbalance a thousand. But given a century of men and women still actuated in mind and heart and spirit by the Christ story and things Christian, and given a century of literary art still fundamentally influenced by the same materials, one might expect the Book of Mormon to have attained in its century-season a modicum of the role as source, analogue, and inspiration in the arts that the Vulgate and English Bible achieved in a millennium-season. After all, viewed as an addendum to Scripture, the latter-day narrative adds, at the very least, a provocative time-and-space dimension to Christian thought. Even viewed as an apocryphal tour de force, the work adds giant chunks of episodic adventure to Christian lore. Though one might expect a modicum, the expectation is unrewarded. Notwithstanding a century of world-engrossing interest in America and things

American, literature and literary scholarship rather ignore the existence of the Book of Mormon.[1]

It is tempting, of course, to redress the Book's limited literary impress by recourse to history, sociology, psychology, and demonology. It is tempting to say that a hundred and forty years in the literary marketplace is too limited a test for such a grand design — but entire literary movements, like the pre-Raphaelites, have come and gone in the same period. It is tempting to say that, with such a small membership, the Saints' religio-literary taste cannot achieve prominence in society — but in the past small groups, like the Lollards, have wrought a hearing in the larger community. It is tempting to say that the Saints' traditional emphases in agriculture, business, law and the like dissuade meaningful activity in the arts — but art and scholarship have ever been solitary ventures. And it is tempting to say that Satan never sleeps — but Richard Rolle documented the same plaint six hundred years ago.[2] It is tempting to say all these things, and all of them have been said — fruitlessly. Far sounder, for writer and commentator, to grapple with the text itself: to evaluate the Book's literary difficulties and learn to live with them, to assess the Book's literary strengths and proclaim them.

II

In any comprehensive literary examination of the Book of Mormon an immediate, pervasive, and lasting dilemma is the fact that the work offers itself as a translation, yet the source is not known to be extant. For the lay reader, this lacuna is incidental, as irrelevant as the inability to read Latin vis-a-vis the comprehension and appreciation of Sir Thomas More's englished *Utopia.* But for the scholar, this difficulty is a serious one: it denies him the very materials with which to evaluate the translated text. Because he cannot analyze the source of the text, the scholar faces the axiomatic question of, simply, the accuracy of the translation.

Worse, though thickest fogs shroud the scholar who tries to view no more than the mechanical accuracy of the Book of Mormon, virtual vapor-darkness itself obscures any investigation of the translation's stylistic probity. Accuracy, naturally, stands as a foremost requirement in any straightforward report of content. But, in a greater measure, stylistics, which approximates the linguistic overtones of the original document, engenders maximum total validity in the reproduction. In the pursuit of style the translator, in every line, weighs such decisions as discourse level, contextual intent, denotation and connotation, economy and prolixity, simplicity and complexity, each decision affecting the ultimate faithfulness of the translation. What is the relative mixture of literal and connotative translation in the Book of Mormon,

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[1]Somehow, the silence of a standard reference like the *Literary History of the United States,* ed. Robert E. Spiller *et al.* (New York, 1959), is preferable to Lyman P. Powell's chapter in vol. 3 of the old *Cambridge History of American Literature* (New York, 1921), wherein the Book of Mormon is said to describe "the hegira of an adventurous folk moving by successive stages from the East to the Salt Lake Valley."

[2]Implied in his fable, *The Bee and the Stork,* in Fernand Mossé, *A Handbook of Middle English* (Baltimore, 1952), pp. 231–32.

if any? When Lehi, convoluting a half-dozen pronouns in fair prolixity, is reported to exclaim, ". . . because thou art merciful, thou wilt not suffer those who come unto thee that they shall perish!" (I Nephi 1:14) how literally is it to be understood that "after this manner was the language of [Lehi]" (I Nephi 1:15)? The scholar cannot judge — unless he has a source.

Lacking Book of Mormon source material, the literary scholar would desire the primary transcript of the translation, or at least a portion of that transcript, for it could provide information on the translator's method from passage to passage, his apparent certainties and uncertainties, his well-pondered decisions and purposeful revisions, if any. Moreover, the transcript could help identify the role of the scribe from passage to passage, his relative importance in the translation, his relative influence in the decision-making process, his role in revisions of form or content, if any. Precisely how much of school teacher Oliver Cowdery was on those foolscap sheets that finally went to Grandin the printer? As Chaucer's *Wordes unto Adam* affirms, scribes can affect a text. Did the scribe of the Book of Mormon have any effect on the ultimate text? The primary transcript might suggest an answer — but no transcript survives.

The absence of an extant source and the lack of a translator's working transcript are, for the scholar, serious deficiencies in any complete examination of the work. And if these deficiencies have not proved so oppressive as to preclude other useful literary approaches to medieval literature, then, clearly, they need not prohibit similar approaches to early nineteeenth-century American literature. For, after all, the Book of Mormon does qualify as literature, on several fronts, not the least of which is the fact that it simply is there. Granted, the original text may have been Reformed Egyptian, but if exotic-language originals disqualify translations, then Pepys' coded *Diary* must surely leave the canon. Granted, the subject matter may be largely history, philosophy, and tract, but if that triumvirate must stand adumbrated by creative writing, then Alfred's *Orosius,* Browne's *Religio Medici,* and Paine's *Common Sense* must all go by the boards. Granted, the presentation may be largely abridgement, or abridgement of abridgement, but if précis is prohibited, then adieu to all the Old English glosses, many Middle English romances, most Renaissance theater records, and not a few Modern English journals.

And so, while, in an important sense, the substance of textual analysis is denied the Book of Mormon scholar, the opportunity for significant and provocative literary appreciation looms undiminished. Through character analysis, for instance — to name but one gateway — the literary analyst can appraise the text and attempt to advance fresh and penetrating views of the work as literature, as I now purpose to demonstrate in a close reading of I and II Nephi.

III

The analysis of character is a central feature of all studies in the humanities. In real life, as students of the humanities already know, human beings are complex. Identification of human traits, consideration of human

attitudes, examination of human communication, investigation of human interaction, comprehension of human motivations — these, and more, are the pursuits of the humanities. And they offer a legacy of understanding which can heighten one's esthetic enjoyment of the arts and can gird men and women to discern, and deal with, the social pragmatics of both this life and, one would presume, the life to come.

A clear route to unfolding the complexities of character in literature is a close reading of the text itself, contrasting revealing passages within the text proper and comparing them with similar events in life and other literature. Precisely what did the man say? When did he say it? Where did he say it? How did he say it? Why did he say it? Have others ever said the same thing? In the same way? In the same circumstances? For the same reasons? Such questions as these form the spine of literary appreciation. Yet perhaps due to didactic desires, they are questions put too infrequently to the Book of Mormon, and, as a result, on many an L.D.S. rack the Book of Mormon characters have been grievously blood-let. A sad fate: for life-blood must surge or the individual will die. A sad state: for the dramatis personae of I Nephi are alive and well and living in the desert.

Lehi, assuredly, is a prophet with a problem. He may be without honor in his own land, and elsewhere a Cassandra, but he is most certainly a patriarch with a domestic communications gap. Lehi simply does not speak the language of his older children or his wife. Nor does he ever learn.

There is that speaketh like the piercing of a sword: but the tongue of the wise is health. (Proverbs 12:18)

Lehi tends to expound his deeply-felt emotions with the rhetorician's flourish of metaphor, as in his Rod of Iron dream-vision, and with apostrophe, as in his exclamation, "Great and marvelous are thy works, O Lord God Almighty!" Metaphor and apostrophe are two devices he plies so unsuccessfully on his intransigent sons, Laman ("O that thou mightest be like unto this river, continually running into the fountain of all righteousness") and Lemuel ("O that thou mightest be like unto this valley, firm, and steadfast, and immoveable in keeping the commandments of the Lord"). Significantly, these two young men later protest, "Behold, we cannot understand the words which our father hath spoken. . . ." And it is their younger brother, not their father, who is brought to assume the role of interpreter and peace-maker in the disputation.

Children's children are the crown of old men; and the glory of children are their fathers. (Proverbs 17:6).

Lehi not only fails to engage effective language to counsel his older children, but in argumentative persuasion he is often, at critical times, simply unconvincing. He has obviously failed to convince Laman and Lemuel of the validity of his religious experience, for they complain that his actions depriving them of their accustomed society and anticipated inheritance are due to "the foolish imaginations of his heart." Perhaps as a result, Lehi abandons persuasion in dealing with these unyielding sons, instead "exhorting them to all diligence," preaching to them "with all the feeling of a

tender parent, that they would hearken to his words. . . ." Obtuse in persuasion and frustrated in exhortation, Lehi resorts to raw authority to exert his will, speaking to his disaffected offspring "until their frames did shake before him . . . confound[ing] them, that they durst not utter against him; wherefore they did do as he commanded them."

Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it. (Proverbs 22:6)

Lehi, caught in times of crisis in a credibility gap of illogicality, communicates little better with his wife. Sariah, thinking their sons slain because of her husband's dreaming, complains bitterly, sarcastically "telling him that he was a visionary man." Lehi's response altogether begs the question: "I know that I am a visionary man; [for, if not, I] had tarried at Jerusalem and had perished with my brethren." Jerusalem, however, had not yet fallen. So Lehi was, in essence, saying no more than "I know I am a visionary because I know I've had a vision" – a circuitous argument.

Ye have broken the hearts of your tender wives, and lost the confidence of your children, because of your bad examples before them. (Jacob 2:35)

Futhermore, Sariah has complained of leaving their home ("the land of our inheritance") to wander about in a desert ("we perish in the wilderness"). In formulating a reply Lehi equivocates with his wife's concepts "inheritance" and "wilderness," insisting that he and his wife are *not* in a wilderness, for he has "obtained a land of promise." Yet shortly, with curious irony, Lehi assures his wife that their sons will be delivered, brought down again to them "in the wilderness." "After this manner of language," says Nephi, "did my father Lehi comfort my mother Sariah. . . ." Really? Nephi's subsequent remark may be more accurate, in that, when the sons had returned, Sariah "was comforted."

Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things. (II Timothy 2:7)

Lehi is a very human character. He is, of course, as Hugh Nibley has demonstrated, a product of a Heroic Age.[3] But his human traits make him readily identifiable with the domestically beleaguered patriarch in the life and letters of any age. He is today's well-to-do former businessman who turns, in early retirement and semi-retrenchment, to the religious avocation, an enigma to his wife and older children, who knew him during the pressure years as a hard-driving merchant.

By contrast, Nephi, equally a product of the same Heroic Age, is perhaps most clearly approached as a Book of Mormon figure, not through modern parallels, but through comprehension of his conduct as hero in the epic tradition, a tradition which, in Old English remnants, preserves Continental motifs dating into the pre-Christian era.

In that tradition, the hero displays certain typical physical propensities. Beowulf, a prime example, can wear thirty sets of armor; Nephi, even though "exceeding young, nevertheless [is] large in stature," so large as to elicit com-

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[3] *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City, 1957).

ment twice in an abridgment. Beowulf is termed mankind's most powerful man, in his day; Nephi has "received much strength" and musters power to burst the bonds which bind his hands and feet, eluding destruction at the teeth of wild beasts. Beowulf possessess greater swimming endurance than any rival; Nephi, too, excels in the manly skills, such as hunting with the steel bow. Beowulf and Nephi both display undoubted personal courage, Beowulf in his combat with Grendel's Dam and Nephi in his daring impersonation of Laban. Both men are well-born, as genealogical references imply. And both are quintessentially men of action, humorlessly dedicated to the pursuit of a righteous cause.

As a further facet of this tradition, the hero, imbued with an unshakeable sense of purpose, delivers a *beot,* or boast, affirming his prowess and confirming his resolution as the fateful enterprise looms near. Beowulf, preparing to meet the fearsome Grendel, proclaims:

> I myself give no humbler tally in martial vigor than Grendel himself. Therefore, I will not kill him with sword, though I easily may. For, though he be renowned for battle, he knows not of such warfare as to strike against me, hewing my shield. But, if he dare seek hand-to-hand combat, tonight we two shall meet. And afterward the all-wise God, the holy Lord, will adjudge the glorious deed as He thinks proper, on whatever hand.

In a similar fashion Nephi, charged by Lehi to seek the Brass Plates of Laban, boldly announces:

> I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them.

Subsequently, Nephi, after some indecision, takes command of the band of brothers, strongly reminiscent of the Old English *dright,* or warrior band. Ever the intrepid individual, Nephi causes the band to "hide themselves without the walls," while he reconnoiters the city himself, a solitary emprise like the aged Beowulf's solo attack on the Dragon to shield his companions, though they too have a clear commitment. That commitment, in the Anglo-Saxon tradition, may be one of noble purpose — to support their captain in destroying the monster — but more frequently it is only the promise of gold, mercenary payment made by the *dright's* leader, their ring-giver. Nephi's band, ostensibly, undertakes their raid for a lofty cause — securing "the records which were engraven upon the plates of brass" — but before ever trying for the plates, they "gather together [their] gold, and [their] silver, and [their] precious things." Ancient battle poems show that neither gold nor lofty cause could keep a *dright's* courage at the sticking point: The warriors needed to be harangued into perseverance, reminded of their obligations to the ring-giver and their ultimate rewards. In such a vein Nephi, facing his band's defection, harangues, "As the Lord liveth, and as we live, we will not go down unto our father in the wilderness, until we have accomplished the thing which the Lord hath commanded us." He reminds

them of their debt to the Lord, the waiting treasure, the coming destruction of the city, and the wisdom of their cause. Emboldened by the harangue, though not without certain further backslidings, Nephi's *dright* see their mission through.

Nephi is well cast for the heroic mantle — he's built of the appropriate materials in the correct proportions, he has developed enviable capacities in the proper skills, and he does things when they need to be done. However, he is far more complex than most of his counterparts in the epics. As early as the Plates of Laban Affair, for instance, Nephi reveals himself to be a logician of the first water. A typical young champion like Wiglaf may try to spur Beowulf's *dright* by reminding them of their debts and shouting, "Let us press on." But when the young Nephi makes the same exhortation, "Let us go up again unto Jerusalem," he supplies a triad of illustrations to *prove* that the *dright* should advance and to demonstrate that they will achieve victory *unharmed.* And with rhetorical insight, he thrice calls for action, utilizing the power of incremental repetition, and "they did follow [him] up until [they] came without the walls of Jerusalem." It is this same logician's demeanor (which later safeguards Nephi from his mutinous brothers) with which he "said many things unto [his] brethren, insomuch that they were confounded, and could not contend against [him]; neither durst they lay their hands upon [him], nor touch [him] with their fingers, even for the space of many days."

Such a bent of mind, such a capacity for confounding and converting opposition through logic and reason and appeal to emotion, strongly differentiates Nephi as a personality from Lehi his father: Nephi is a persuader of the foremost magnitude. In the entrapment of Zoram, for example, Nephi displays discrimination of action and reflection, mastery at merging the physical man with the philosophical man, sagacity in selecting the deed or symbol of the deed. Seizing Zoram and holding him, "that he should not flee," Nephi, who reemphasizes his physical advantage, could have dispatched the servant as easily as he had the master. Instead, Nephi "spake with him . . . [saying] that if he would hearken unto our words, we would spare his life," adding the surety of an oath and the mystery of a riddle. Nephi, like Marlowe's Tamburlaine, grasps the fine distinction between the word and the sword.[4] And Zoram surrenders, even as Theridamas to Tamburlaine — "Won with thy words, and conquered with thy looks." It is undoubtedly this same persuasive acumen which softens "the heart of Ishmael, and also his household," bringing Ishmael's daughters into the wilderness as the brothers' wives. For in the young Nephi persuasion is "the fulness of [his] intent." And it remained ever thus, as witnessed in the old Nephi, who, looking back on his life's work a half-century later, concludes that "it persuadeth [men] to do good" (II Nephi 33:4).

Indeed, it is Nephi's search for a more persuasive personality which seems to mark a progression in his character as he ages. As a green youth,

[4]For the view of Tamburlaine I am indebted to my good friend Prof. Thomas Burton of Weber State.

wearing brotherly concern almost like a badge, Nephi *says,* "Being grieved because of the hardness of their hearts, I cried unto the Lord for them." As a maturing young man, he *sorrows* in frustration: "My soul is rent with anguish because of you, and my heart is pained." And as an old man he *grieves* for his people, the badge turned suit of hair: "For I pray continually for them by day, and mine eyes water my pillow by night, because of them; and I cry unto my God in faith . . . ." At the end of his days, he mourns that he is not "mighty in writing, like unto speaking," for the speech, with the Spirit, can carry his message "unto the hearts of the children of men."

Nephi's disclaimer rebuts its own author and closes his work on the note of light irony which often marks a writer's deathbed retractions.[5] His impatience with the weak esteem accorded the written word (II Nephi 33:2) is the sort one would expect from a man, like Nephi, who remains, at heart, closer to the active life than to the contemplative. Yet in his farewell he writes with rhetorical strength, capturing in the written word the moving quality of incremental repetition that had marked the spoken words of his long-ago harangue outside the walls of Jerusalem. In some measure, consciously yet unconsciously, he *has* bridged his imagined chasm between writing and speech:

> *I glory in* plainness;
> *I glory in* truth;
> *I glory in* my Jesus,
> For he hath redeemed my soul from hell.
> *I have charity for* my people
> And great faith in Christ
> That I shall meet many souls
> Spotless at his judgment-seat.
> *I have charity for* the Jew;
> I say Jew, because I mean them from whence I came.
> *I also have charity for* the Gentiles. —
> But behold,
> For none of these can I hope,
> Except they shall be reconciled unto Christ,
> *And enter into* the narrow gate,
> *And walk in* the straight path, which leads to life,
> *And continue in* the path
> Until the end of the day of probation.[6]

The Book of Mormon is, as I have suggested, part of a great literary tradition, yet a part, for all its uniqueness, which has still not achieved primacy, neither in its own right nor in its influence on the arts. It is, without question, a work whose singular origins thwart many of the traditional approaches to literature. Yet it is, as I have tried to demonstrate, a work laden with promise for the literary analyst. Indeed, after navigating through more than a century of generally inconclusive encounters, the Book of Mormon remains a challenging critical prize, undoubtedly the major prize of nineteenth-century Americana, perhaps the chief prize of the literature we call English.

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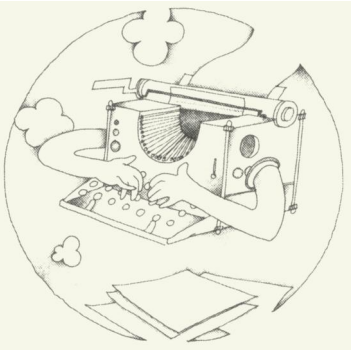
[5]Chaucer, for instance, in his *Retractions* apologizes for his "ignorance" and says he "most willingly would have written better if [he] had had the skill."

[6]II Nephi 33:6–9. Italics and arrangement mine, both for illustrative purposes.



VARDIS FISHER AND THE MORMONS

Joseph M. Flora

The *New York Times* article reporting the death of Vardis Fisher in 1968 said, predictably, that Fisher was "perhaps most widely known as the author of *Children of God,* a historical novel about the Mormons."[1] None of Fisher's works, except possibly the Vridar Hunter tetralogy of the thirties, has received the attention of the 1939 Harper prize-winning *Children of God.* No other work of literature has presented the Mormon story more forcefully to the non-Mormon world.

Not surprisingly, however, Mormons have never made a cult of Vardis Fisher. Reared a Mormon, Fisher at age eighteen had already abandoned the church of his fathers to go his independent way. Yet Fisher's Mormonism ran deep. It was not merely something that Fisher revolted against; it was also something that helped form his life style and code. Church members may sometimes find Fisher unpleasant reading, but the Mormon apostate is clearly on the Mormon side in *Children of God.* In a fundamental way, he was on their side throughout his life. Fisher's whole approach to life was religious. It was not idle fancy that caused him to embark in mid-life on his *Testament of Man* novels, a series of twelve novels which traces the path of Western man's moral consciousness from the earliest times to Fisher's own. Fisher defined his religious position as agnostic and sometimes as atheistic, though I doubt he ever wore that label easily.

William York Tindall is fond of calling the renegade James Joyce the great Roman Catholic novelist. Certainly Catholicism and Ireland formed the axle around which Joyce's autobiographical hero turned, and Joyce never wrote a non-Irish, non-"Catholic" book. We might similarly call Vardis Fisher the great Mormon novelist. To the end of his life Fisher was a maverick whom the Mormon ought to be able to understand and to sympathize with. Fisher is to Mormonism as Joyce is to Catholicism. A thematic and stylistic gulf separates the two writers. Joyce's work is pervaded by old world fatigue and paralysis. Fisher is all energy and impatience. He insists on solutions and the possibility of a better world. Joyce believed in neither and could therefore devote himself to perfecting his craft. Fisher, although his writing is frequently forceful and moving, retained throughout his career the rough edges that mar his structure and style.

Shortly before his death, Fisher and his wife published a non-fiction book on Western mining life. In *Gold Rushes and Mining Camps of the*

Early American West (1968), the old pioneer is, typically, not reluctant to present the reader with his moral convictions. Indeed, he is frequently a quite vigorous preacher. For example, he addresses himself to the question of Calamity Jane's morals: "If she yielded because she liked to, or to please them [soldiers and teamsters], or for any other reasons besides pay, she was no more a whore than the men who asked her to, and not half the whore that a lot of Hollywood characters are, whom Madison Avenue elevates to the level of national heroines" (pp. 223–34).

Incidentally, Fisher's views on proper conduct were in most regards conservative, even Puritanical. Despite the fact that the autobiographical Vridar Hunter frequently harangues against the Puritans in *We Are Betrayed* and *No Villain Need Be,* Fisher believed increasingly in the old virtues. He praised his parents often as he grew older — and for the old virtues. In his tetralogy, Fisher presented prostitutes as more sinned against than sinning. Vridar called for the sexually obsessed person to think sex, to talk sex, to act sex — to get the obsession out of his system and find some healthy attitudes. There is none of this glibness in the revised tetralogy, *Orphans in Gethsemane.* Vridar's mother (symbol of Puritanism in the tetralogy) would hardly have been more disgusted with the sexual license of our time than Fisher was in *Gold Rushes and Mining Camps* in which he holds a whore a whore. No less than George Romney, Fisher might be called a square, a straight arrow.

Gold Rushes presents the part of the West that was settled by those who were little concerned with the Kingdom of God. Shelley wrote: "Gold is a living god, and rules in scorn / All earthly things but virtues." The Fishers' book — as well as Vardis' novel of Virginia City, *City of Illusion* (1941), which though inferior to *Children of God* should be viewed as a companion novel to it — catches the zest with which many Americans pursued this god. As these "pilgrims" sought their riches, they paused along the way in the Salt Lake Valley to stare at the Mormons, the queer sect of which they had heard so many bizarre tales.

Fisher takes no other note of the Mormons in his last book. But, of course, he had in his *Children of God* presented an inside picture of just what the discovery of gold in California meant to the Mormons. The Mormons had gone to the desert to remove themselves from the gentiles in the East, who had persecuted them almost incessantly. With the gold discoveries came the gentile multitudes. The gold and silver discoveries in the West, following so closely the great Mormon migration, might suggest that a master dramatist was at work to emphasize the bifurcation of the American soul. The hordes missed the irony though the Saints did not.

I think for large numbers of Americans the Mormons have remained what they were to many of the gold seekers and adventurers (of whom Mark Twain is the classic example) — a curiosity of our history and not in the main stream. Twain missed some truths of the Mormon story that we might have expected the famed defender of the underdog to find. It remained for the

[1]The *New York Times,* July 12, 1968.

son of Mormons, Vardis Fisher, to give our literature the essentials Twain missed. Rereading *Children of God,* I am newly impressed with its force and timeliness, with the justness of Fisher's subtitle "An American Epic." The book is grandly American in its portrayal of the best of the American dream and in its portrayal of the realities that mocked the dream.

Fisher himself disparaged *Children of God* and said it was one of his weaker novels.[2] Novelists have been notoriously poor judges of their own works, and Old Irascible, as Fisher has sometimes been called, may be especially suspect on the matter. Hadn't the public been wrong about him all along? Surely in this instance, too . . . etc. And Fisher loved to outrage. If he were to rewrite *Children of God,* he later said, he would show Joseph Smith as a scheming fraud and nothing else. Such declarations require the proverbial grain of salt, for at the time when Fisher was steeped in his Mormon researches he did not so hold the Prophet. True, there is something of the fraud in Fisher's Joseph Smith, but there is a good deal that is other.

A portrait of the Prophet is not easy, and Fisher's is mainly sympathetic. Fisher obviously held Brigham Young a greater man, partly because he found so much of himself in Joseph Smith. As the compelling autobiographical novel *In Tragic Life* (1932) attests, Fisher had an early and rather lengthy identification with him. In that novel, Vridar Hunter is born with a caul, a sure sign, his relatives said — and Vridar believed — that he would become a prophet. Vridar has trances such as the Prophet has in *Children of God.* He acts out many of the Old Testament stories in his daily play. Fisher, speaking in his own voice in 1953, wrote:

> I was an abnormally terrified, serious, and studious child. Living far from human settlements and not entering school until I was about twelve, I learned to read at a very early age, and read everything that our impoverished home afforded, including the Bible. I read that book at least two or three times before I reached adolescence. Looking back, I'd say that it frightened more than it edified me, abashed more than it filled. . . . In our copy were illustrations — of Samson tearing down the pillars, of David slaying the giant, of Noah offering thanksgiving; and though the physical feats caught my fancy, the deepest impression on me was made by the faces of the great prophets, admonishing, exhorting, or denouncing their people. They were fearful faces to look at (and are in many of the celebrated paintings of them), the faces of very strong and very angry men, invoking the wrath of God upon the wickedness of his children.
>
> After reading in the book a day or two, I would suffer nightmares. If ever a child thought he was doomed, that child was I, listening while lying awake at night to the awful fury of a great river, hurling its forces against the stone walls of its deep gorge, and seeing almost as plain as if he stood before me the angry face of a prophet, as with clenched hands and enraged eyes he denounced the evils among his people.[3]

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[2]See my *Vardis Fisher* (New York, 1965), p. 132, and Vardis Fisher, *God or Caesar?* (Caldwell, Idaho, 1953), pp. 241–42.

[3]"My Bible Heritage," *Thomas Wolfe as I Knew Him and Other Essays* (Denver, 1963), p. 161. First published in *The American Zionist,* November 5, 1953.

Fisher even gives to Joseph Smith some of Vridar's agonizings over masturbation. Several of Fisher's *Testament of Man* novels (especially *The Divine Passion* and *Peace Like a River)* confirm the judgment that Fisher was accustomed to empathizing with a prophet.

Fisher's ideas of the Bible and Mormonism may have been different had his family been less isolated and his reading of the Bible supplemented with regular instruction. Doubtless, Fisher's life pattern would have been different. But I am struck by the quite exclusive Old Testament flavor of Fisher's and Vridar's Biblical experiences. The comfort of the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world never mellowed Vridar's or Fisher's agonies. Fisher puzzled over Jesus; the reader should see especially his *A Goat for Azazel* (1956) in this connection. But emotionally Fisher's identification was with the Old Testament.

Mormonism in *Children of God* emerges as a religion that owes more to the Old Testament than to the New. The recovered books that Joseph presented to his followers support the accuracy of Fisher's presentation. The Methodists, the Baptists, and the Presbyterians more habitually interpreted the Old Testament in light of the New. The New Testament may not have exactly replaced the Old, but it certainly took precedence. The Protestant denominations tended to be metaphorical in their view of much of the Old Testament, at least as it pertained to Christian times. The Mormons were literalists. The defense of Blood Atonement as it is presented in *Children of God* (pp. 477–79) is fiercely of the Old Testament. Plural wives could be accepted only by a people who believed that the Old Testament order had not been replaced. Then, too, the Mormons had cause enough for special identification with the Israelites. Their history is epical in ways that call for numerous comparisons with the children of Israel. They had marched through the wilderness to find a promised land. God had given them prophets in the literal Old Testament manner. The new church of Joseph Smith was a restoration of Old Testament orientation. Or, as Mormons would say, the whole gospel was restored to man.

Three of the *Testament of Man* novels treat the ancient Hebrew people. Fisher has been challenged on the propriety of giving the Hebrews this much attention as well as giving four novels to the Christian world. Fisher admitted that his proportions might be wrong; but if he exaggerated the Bible's influence in the Western world, he did so because of the book's profound influence on him. Probably he did not exaggerate the Bible's influence on America.

As Fisher explored Biblical scholarship for his *Testament of Man,* he became increasingly impressed with "the deep and abiding moral earnestness of the Hebrew people, or at least of their religious leaders." He found their moral earnestness "without parallel and apparently without precedent" and called it "one of the riddles of history." He concluded that the great gift of the Hebrews to the western world lay in its intense stress on personality: "It is that intense stress on personality, on the dignity of the individual before God, on free will and moral choice, that has modified the fundamental dif-

ference in outlook [from Eastern peoples.]"[4] Therein Fisher also placed one of the deepest influences of the Bible on him.

Of course, this deep influence came to him with a marked Mormon coloring. And as Fisher talks of the Hebrew people in his essay "My Bible Heritage," the reader of *Children of God* cannot help reading *Mormon* for *Hebrew*; for example:

> The Hebrews were indeed, if not a unique at least a singular and peculiar people. Their spiritual leaders were solemnly and tirelessly preoccupied, not only with the relations of man to man which absorbed the interest of most peoples, but also with the relations of man to the universe. They were preoccupied with the thing called evil, when evil was not even a word in the vocabulary of some peoples. They were preoccupied with what they called righteousness, which, though sometimes suffocated in its elaborate apparatus of ritual, meant essentially good deeds. In defense of what they took to be the right way of life they had a capacity for suffering and self-immolation that has been quite without parallel.[5]

In this light Fisher presented his Mormon heritage in *Children of God.*

No matter what the specific nature of Joseph Smith's visions, the people who followed him came to have an increasingly moral earnestness. The earnestness was heightened after Brigham Young became leader, and it is in such terms that Fisher made a defense of plural marriages. One of Fisher's chief means of portraying the earnestness is through creation of a three-generation Mormon family, the McBrides. The McBrides admirably sum up the best qualities of the Mormons as they seek to serve God; through focusing on them in the final third of the novel Fisher impresses on his readers the undaunted faith of the true Mormon.

As a peculiar people, the Mormons were exercising freedoms they thought were theirs in a country that prided itself on being a free society, an open society. Fisher examines plural marriages from a rational point of view. He suggests certain neurotic impulses in Joseph Smith that accounted for the peculiar Mormon institution; he indicates practical reasons for it in a frontier society with many women; and he portrays it as a very burdensome institution for the Mormons to live with. But he is completely sympathetic with the right of conscience that the Mormons claimed. On trial for violations of the Edmunds Act, Nephi McBride of *Children of God* (the third generation of the faith) declares before Governor West: "May I remind you that the Constitution of this country guarantees to us freedom of conscience?"[6] At the end of *Children of God* the McBrides migrate to Mexico rather than become part of a capitulation to the federal government. Vardis Fisher, with the McBrides, is saddened by the fate of Zion. For him they were not, in this crisis, enough like the Jews. Nephi ponders: "Would the Mormons, like the Jews, become a wandering and outcast people; or would they mix with the gentiles and yield their principles and traditions one by one until their

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[4]*Ibid.*, p. 163.

[5]*Ibid.*, p. 165.

[6]*Children of God* (New York, 1939), p. 736; page numbers refer to this edition.

church was only another abomination in the sight of God?" Fisher answers: "He did not know – or perhaps deep in his heart he knew too well" (p. 739).

The Mormon story in *Children of God* is so pointedly an American epic because it challenges us precisely at the point of freedom of conscience. The Mormons claim only the religious freedom an "open" society professes to offer. Put to the test, the society is fearfully closed. The Mormons are accused of treason and are persecuted across a continent. Under their great leader, the Mormons seek to establish a freer, more righteous society than they left. They seek, in fact, the American ideal of a free society. Fisher says that Brigham

> was impelled by a great vision. He felt that this journey fed from the eager and searching millenniums in the remote background of human striving: it was more than desperate flight from enemies: it was a pilgrimage toward freedom, toward a fuller and richer destiny for the entire human race. In all its suffering and patience and courage, it was a mighty symbol of that struggle for perfection and peace that had been the heritage of humanity for centuries. He was fighting for a society that would be charitable and righteous and free. (p. 427)

Vardis Fisher has been impelled by the same vision. Through his many books he also "was fighting for a society that would be charitable and righteous and free." Like the Biblical prophets and the Mormon prophets, he zealously cried out against those who would deny this ideal.

Fisher has sometimes been criticized for having too strong a social emphasis in his works. Young Vridar Hunter is greatly concerned with social justice. The Mormons had been very practical about many of the things that bothered Vridar. The United Orders had their high moments of success. On a tour of Mormon settlements, Brigham Young finds "no social caste or arrogant pride, no attempt on the part of any man to exploit the labor of another" (p. 593). Fisher held no stock in socialism after he passed his teens, but he found much to admire in the cooperative efforts of the Mormons. This people learned to work together. Controversy over the causes for and solutions to poverty presently reverberates throughout America. Fisher wrote frequently on the topic in his lively newspaper columns. His position remained the one espoused by his Brigham Young:

> An individualist himself, he believed in personal initiative and competitive practice; but he also believed in collective community enterprises. He was aware of the wide range in human intelligence, talent and ambition: there could never be a utopian society in which everyone could share equally; but there could be an order in which none needed to starve. The old, the sick and the poor must be taken care of. Above all, every person should have the right to work and to find work to do. (pp. 587–88)

Fisher stresses the nobility of labor throughout *Children of God.* Neither Brigham Young nor he believed in the dole. Brigham tells a wife: "It was poverty . . . that produced most of the ills of the world; it was a want of pride, a sense of meaninglessness, of futility, that drove men to crime" (p. 594).

Men need work that they can take pride in, Brigham feels. From his Mormon parents the work ethic passed wholesale to Fisher. He was no defender of the New Deal! Like the early Mormons, Fisher had an abiding distrust of federal intervention. He found obvious pleasure in identifying with the Mormon individuality.

While the latter sections of *Children of God* will likely cause contemporary readers to reflect on the present turmoil over poverty, the earlier sections have a special timeliness because of the current rhetoric over "Law and Order." The Mormons heard much of it long ago. On the day that a major from the United States Army asks Brigham Young and John Taylor in Nauvoo how long they intend to resist the majesty of law, Taylor explodes:

> "Talk about law! Sir, I stand before you, a victim of law! I have seen my best friends shot down! Was I not shot down too in the Carthage jail when two hundred murderers came upon us? Where is our governor, where are our generals, our judges? What are all these men but a pack of scoundrels? Are we beasts? I tell you, sir, hereafter I will protect myself, law or no law, judges or no judges, governor or no governor! I will not be murdered by scoundrels; and if I have to sell my life, I'll sell it for all I can! If you put me in jail, you will put me there dead!" (p. 324)

As Brigham observes, Nauvoo itself was a monument to the Mormons' "patriotism, industry, uprightness of purpose and integrity of heart, and as a living testimony of the falsehood and wickedness of those who charge us with disloyalty to the Constitution of our country!" (p. 325).

When Fisher wrote *Children of God* he felt himself back into our history. Thirty years later, most of it has a very relevant ring. The streak in Fisher that was a mountain man could view the arrival of the Mormons in the far West as a sign of the ending of the life of intense individuality and freedom that the mountain man represented for him. But while Sam Minard of his last novel, *Mountain Man,* is writ larger than life, Vardis identified also with the manly Brigham Young and understood his rage for order. If Fisher's first choice of the free life would be that of the mountain man, it is by no means inconceivable that he might have made his second choice a part in the great Mormon pilgrimage. Hear the twentieth century renegade, for he had not rejected all of his religious heritage:

> We should, I think we must, accept the Bible humbly as the noblest effort of our ancient forebears to come to terms with the problem of evil and to overthrow it; and in the present, when the same old problem threatens to overturn our world, many of its pages and many of its beautiful parables still speak to us with a clear strong voice if we would only listen. For when we reject those parts no longer applicable we do not discredit those truths which, if not eternal, are still as eternal as any that man has uttered.[7]

Vardis Fisher celebrated his Mormon forebears as he celebrated the ancient Hebrews. The Mormons enacted on American soil what Fisher saw

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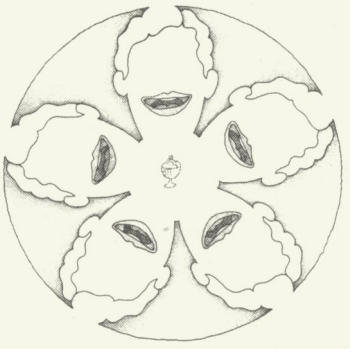
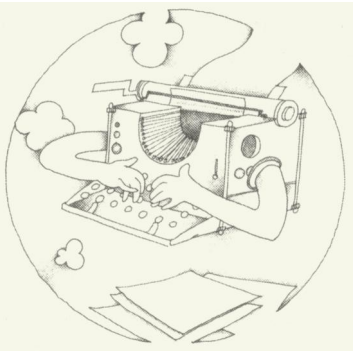
[7]"My Bible Heritage," p. 166.

as the essential of the Hebrew experience. He found in both peoples heroic fortitude in the drive for individual freedom in a free society — a society that also concerned itself with a secure life for all its people. And Fisher not only wrote about these brave people, he also strove to mold his own life on their highest ideals. He wanted no compromise with himself. He was unmerciful with himself for evasions and hypocrisies he might catch himself at. And he was scornful of the weaknesses of those he thought intelligent enough to know better than to take refuge in easy self-delusions. Having looked so penetratingly into himself (and I think few persons have looked as hard at themselves as has Fisher), he could usually see through the defenses of others. He was also sympathetic with the weak and sought to protect them from the scheming around them. Like the Hebrew and Mormon leaders, Fisher was driven by a fierce opposition to evil. Like them he was intensely individual. He wanted above all free choice and a free society. Few have more bravely sounded a determined personal declaration of independence. He is one of the most genuine individualists of our time. Austin Warren has canonized some Americans in his book *New England Saints* (1956). It is time to add a Westerner to the company of American saints. Vardis Fisher, of course. For he more than any other has defined in his life and works the Western style of that breed.





VIRGINIA SORENSEN: A SAVING REMNANT

Mary L. Bradford

I

Nearly fifteen years have passed since I, in looking around for a thesis topic, began to read "Mormon novels." It seems odd to remember how electrifying were the "forbidden" Vardis Fisher and others I hadn't heard of: Scowcroft, Whipple, Robertson, Blanche Cannon, even Samuel Taylor. It must be a clue to our culture that a girl could get through graduate school without such an awakening, especially when many of those writers seem so bland today that I wonder along with Sam Taylor "if most of them weren't mainly victims of bad timing." What my awakening really consisted of was a refreshing realization that some of those giants from our past were really human beings after all ("saints by adoption").

I finally chose Virginia Sorensen because she had been more diligent and productive than other "Mormon" writers, she was alive and still working, and much of what she wrote made me wish I'd thought of it. I called my little work "Virginia Sorensen: An Introduction."

It seems strange that now, several years later, she should still need an introduction. Many Mormon friends who read have not read her, though she is translated into many other languages. It is true that when she began to write, there was no *Dialogue* to give her an appreciative audience. But the basic reason for her neglect stems, I think, from a misunderstanding many Mormons share about the purpose of fiction. We have not always understood that fiction has been and must always be about sinners and their struggles, those struggles between good and evil which Dostoyevsky described as joined on the battleground of the human heart. We have not always understood that fiction writers must stand aside from that which most engages their personal lives, looking to a deeper engagement with their art. Even if this hurts those most engaged with *their* own lives, it may lead to a deeper understanding of that which must engage us all in the end.

At any rate, I take up my task again, with some changes in outlook, and perhaps with less objectivity. For the years have brought me a friendship with Virginia Sorensen, one which no doubt will exclude me, at least this time, from the company of the New Critics.

A Western Mormon is a many-layered thing: a layer of history, a layer of geography, above all a layer of culture preserved by old stories told

by old people with charm, humor, humanity. Some of these layers are peeling off and disappearing, lost through quick conversions (and Puritanical notions from other religions); through a devastating urbanization which is changing the faces of all cities, including Mormon ones; and through the commercial, ambitious materialism of all lives, including Mormon ones. Mormons of this generation tend to be ashamed of the stories told by old people, even of the old people themselves. New members seldom hear the stories at all except in sanitized versions. Having discovered Hector Lee's delightful imitation of that late folk hero J. Golden Kimball, I played the record for a group of Mormons. "He didn't say all those things," someone cried, while another pronounced it unfit for children. It was obvious that we were already ashamed of that great character so recently with us. In a few years will all our "characters" be lost?

In *Many Heavens,* Virginia Sorensen describes "Old Brother Madsen so old and bent his beard fairly reached his toes when he walked. Some folks objected to his sitting like a bum all day . . . but he always replied, 'I helped lay out this town and I'll sit in it where I damn well please.' "

Virginia Sorensen represents a saving remnant of a remnant that should be saved. She writes of her ancestors, her grandparents, her parents, and herself in a way that preserves something of every Western Mormon's personal history. In her works we have a special innocence, part of the fading murals which Mormon historians must rush to save before the zealous whitewashers have rubbed them all away. As Wallace Stegner claims in his book, *The Sound of Mountain Water,* we are losing our connections between past and present:

> In the old days, in blizzardy weather, we used to tie a string of lariats from house to barn so as to make it from shelter to responsibility and back again. With personal, family and cultural chores to do, I think we had better rig up such a line between past and present.

That many may not have read Virginia because of her penchant for reproducing people who actually suffer, sin, and die a little, seems, especially in today's world, nothing short of blind anachronism. Any Mormon should appreciate her strong sense of history and of place, her domestic love of the hearth, her celebration of love between man and woman, her rendering of the patterns of her background, with sympathy for those who must occasionally break the patterns to find themselves. But along with that, the childlike quality (in the biblical sense) of much of her work has won her two important awards in Children's Literature (The Child Study Award and the Newberry Medal), and has permeated her adult novels so that her most recent — *Kingdom Come* (1960) and *Where Nothing Is Long Ago* (1963) — might well be called children's books for adults.

Where Nothing Is Long Ago is subtitled "Memories of a Mormon Childhood." It seems important to preserve some of the values of a childhood now lost — mine and Virginia's — so different from that of my children. Virginia has worked to preserve these qualities and others of those layers that make a Mormon.

II

"How priceless it is," said Goethe, "when a human brain can reproduce what is mirrored in it." Virginia Sorensen began early to assimilate experience, storing it for good use. She began early to set her thoughts on paper. Her mother remembered that as soon as she could hold a pencil, she began to write "because she had to." Her Manti novels — *On This Star* (1946) and *The Evening and the Morning* (1949) — attest to her ability to utilize the memories of her hometown. She lived in Manti until her high-school years, dividing her reading and writing time between the "22-ounce apple" tree in her front yard and the "house of my own" under the stairs in the Eggertsen home.

Even though her father was an inactive Mormon — a "Jack-Mormon" as she describes him in one of her stories — and her mother not a member at all, she was baptized and attended Church meetings with friends, listening to the old people and their stories until they became a part of her memory. Her novels carry a load of these stories, gleaned not only from memory, but from later reading of diaries and journals.

The title story of *Where Nothing Is Long Ago* recalls a home-town killing over water rights. This same incident, somewhat changed, provides the climax to her Colorado novel, *The Neighbors* (1947). "People out west," she says, "remember when things were settled violently and they remember the dry wastes before the mountain water was captured and put to use."

Some characters appear and reappear. An apostate grandmother, described in *Where Nothing Is Long Ago,* all her life a rebellious feminist, insists on dying with her temple garments on. She is also the spirited heroine of *The Evening and the Morning,* Kate Alexander. An aunt who was once struck by lightning, is recalled in *The Neighbors* and then given a story of her own in "The Teacher." Virginia describes her aunt's reaction to this story:

> . . . when she saw it, she nodded and said, "It's all right, but so little. It's not one hundredth the way it really was." Which I thought a very good description of fiction in general. Lightning seldom strikes in words.

Virginia's first novel, *A Little Lower Than the Angels* (1942), elaborates the life of an ancestor who settled Nauvoo and died before the trek west. It also carries a romanticized version of Joseph Smith's love affair with Eliza R. Snow. A few years later she read excerpts from a history of Scandinavian Mormon immigrants being prepared by William Mulder and wrote him a letter:

> Your article in the *Utah Historical Quarterly* was so exciting that I immediately began getting ideas of how I must somehow do better. For years and years I have believed — for what reason I wonder, since I never really lived in the houses where the true tradition was but could only visit awhile, and listen, and pause always by the gate where I could hear and see it — that I was the one to tell this story you speak of. Almost I have heard the Call.

It was this call that sent her to Denmark to study the journals and the geography of her Danish ancestors, leading to that most missionary-minded of all books – *Kingdom Come.*

Sometimes she savors her stories too much, allowing them to interfere with her narrative, but in *Many Heavens* (1956), set in a small northern Utah town just after the Manifesto, she seems to blend her best themes: scenery with history and personality, physical love with spiritual love, the excitement of learning with the simple, domestic truths, the certainty of religious faith with the complexities of doubt. This book seems best to blend Virginia's own peculiar people with her own particular art. Here is her feeling for the small towns of her youth:

> this valley . . . . set like a particular jewel in the State of Deseret and that State in the Union and the Union in the great world flowed together . . . , and a man, and his family, past, present, future flowed together too.

Here is her feeling for her Church as symbolized by the Tabernacle:

> . . . all of these people were my people, the church my church, the huge vaulted roof over me a kind of personal possession, along with the golden wonder of the organ.

And her love of particular customs, such as "Conference":

> All the faces I saw seemed eager and glad and proud; people met with a hard Mormon handshaking, with splendid laughter, and so many warm greetings that the whole was like an immense overgrown church supper, . . . for the missionaries had made Utah a gathering place from everywhere. It had its own peculiar melting in the great American pot. . . . As Neils always says, Conference is a tremendous portrait of the people at their best.

And always through this book, and all her books, there are the beloved old people – like Billy Huckabee, who votes against the Bishop every year for six straight years and plays "Kathleen Mavourneen" for the sacrament music. She speaks of the "invisible freight of the immigrant, brought with them in their minds and their hearts and their ways of doing." She laments the dying of the old ones who took "all their lovely queerness" with them and left the valley the poorer.

She celebrates Mormon domesticity: "I needed the feeling of order in Leah's house, the washedness of her linen, the savory homelike tastes and smells that kept eating important in that house and so kept all the senses important along with it."

Virginia herself has always refused to hire a housekeeper because

> . . . there is a time with any project, large or small, when one becomes discouraged and quite certain it is all in vain and useless. At any rate, that always happens to me. Just now I'm housecleaning (which precious digging into corners and splashing suds to the elbows I would not give to any scrubwoman on earth, for it clarifies my immortal soul).

All of her books mirror her life – her growing up in Sanpete County, Utah, attendance at Brigham Young University, and her marriage, which led her to many parts of the country. She has had Guggenheim Fellowships to Mexico and Denmark. She has also moved away from activity in the Church, but as she moved "outside," her books gradually became more "inside," so that the recent ones are much closer to those "faith-promoters" we all know. This is as one who leaves his home forever, but looks back in pleasant nostalgia, as she puts it in her dedication to *Where Nothing Is Long Ago*, to a "dream dreamed out of memory."

To that question often asked, "Are you a defender of the faith?" she answers, "How could I be anything else? When we write of the things we know and love best, we cannot but be defending it to the world." To the whitewashers and to those who object to some of her portraits, she would probably say with her Doctor Neils in *Many Heavens*: "Too many of us in this country expect to know just the sweet side of everything. . . . We bury half the truth of life in the privies back of the house. Under the ashes."

And to those who think her *too sweet*, she could say with Zina: "If I am sentimental, then, all right, I am." The titles of her books seem to attest to her aspirations: *A Little Lower Than the Angels, On This Star, The Evening and the Morning, Many Heavens, Kingdom Come, The Proper Gods.*

III

In *The Sound of Mountain Water,* Wallace Stegner describes western novels (with a small *w*) as historical and rural by definition, sharing certain tribal qualities, and containing a nostalgia inherited from Fenimore Cooper. Virginia Sorensen is no exception, but she has tried to find in her tradition a "web of significance":

> For writers, what is the lesson? The necessity for creating freely, certainly, but something more, the responsibility of preserving some web of significance men can live by. And this too is only a part – for it demands not only freedom within a tradition, but an ever-widening tolerance for the traditional values of others.[1]

What is this web? She sees it in the conflict of old and new, of sacred and profane, adjustment and estrangement, love and rebellion. Most of her characters must face inevitable conflicts without sacrificing their traditions. The Mormon culture seems to provide the best framework for characters growing up in a protected society, growing out into an unprotected and confusing world. As Zina says, "Not only had my mountains protected me, but had hidden much of the world from me, with its endless beauties and wonders."

Her non-Mormon novels and her children's books are thematically similar. Adan, of *The Proper Gods* (1951), must return to his own protected Yaqui culture to reconcile new-found philosophies with his ancient heritage.

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[1]Virginia Sorensen, "Is It True? The Novelist and His Materials," *Western Humanities Review*, VII (1953), 283.

The little Amish Esther, in *Plain Girl* (1955), overcomes her envy for her well-dressed friend from the outside world to reaffirm not only that friendship but her own values. Many of Virginia's characters seem to say with Anne Morrow Lindbergh: "I mean to lead a simple life, to choose a simple shell I can carry easily — like the hermit crab. But I do not. I find my frame of life does not foster simplicity."

Mercy Baker, heroine of *The Angels,* is forever asking why. She accepts her husband's religion, not because she deeply believes it, but because she deeply loves her husband. In her heart she rebels against what she feels is the smug faith of simple believers and must face the frustration of polygamy. Chel Bowen, heroine of *On This Star,* has grown up with a strong faith, asking no questions, until she meets Eric, whose desires work against her simplicity. Kate, of *The Evening and the Morning,* rebels early against her implacable surroundings, but discovers that rebellion can bring heartbreak:

"It had sometimes come to her that she had lost God too early, when she still needed the sustenance of her belief, and she had given her love the reverence she must give to something."

Zina, the nurse-midwife of *Many Heavens,* though never actively rebellious, finds her life shaken out of its pattern by a strange love for a married man. The ingenious solution to her problem echoes Emerson's statement, "Heaven is large and affords space to all modes of love and fortitude."

John, of *The Neighbors,* has rebelled against narrow modes of living. He believes in one thing: his right to think. He breaks away from the "self-conscious authority" in the mountains of Utah only to find the same insulated narrow-mindedness among the mountains of Colorado. The Yaqui young man, Adan, rebels against his ceremonious life because it never changes. "I know it will be better to leave," he tells his sweetheart, "because I could never learn to accept everything." In the end, however, he reconciles the things he does not accept with the things he does.

The Mormon society, the Yaqui society, and the Amish have preserved their extreme individualism and their isolation only through the severest of tests. It is natural that such a struggle should give rise to groups of smug believers who refuse to see validity in other ways of living. In Mormon society, some feel that literature must express nothing but the highest and purest in an ideal culture. (In reviewing Virginia's first book, John A. Widtsoe praised her gifts, but deplored what he called "unlovely" incidents — as if all books must be "lovely.") [2]

Virginia Sorensen characterizes smug believers with tolerance, sympathy, and insight. In most of her stories guilty ones usually reach at least a partial realization of their mistakes. Zina (in *Many Heavens*) vividly paints the self-righteous Stanley Widdeman, who "knew his proper spot in the great triangle with God at the top and the people at the bottom, the Word pouring downward to him through the authorities of Church and State, and his own Word pouring downward to the members and the officers below him. He

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[2]John A. Widtsoe, "On the Book Rack," *The Improvement Era,* XLV (1942), 380.

was loving and benign to the good child in his house . . . and quick to punish wrongdoing, so it would never get out of hand." How wrongdoing does get out of hand precisely because of his one-man crusade against sin provides an exciting denouement. Widdeman himself lives to repent of his blindness.

In *The Neighbors,* John, in a scene with his relatives from Utah, states his belief in the universality of human suffering. His father-in-law agrees, but adds that "there is nothing we can do until Christ comes." Whereupon John, losing his temper, expresses contempt for religions whose "dependency on old prophecy" prevents people from doing their duty.

Most of Virginia's characters must give us their innocence, their sense of belonging, and then must somehow regain them in altered forms. In fact, characters in the Mormon novels are sometimes converted because the faith seems to offer a unity they once felt. Mercy's Simon finds happiness in the doctrines surrounding "family life, eternal family, the first family of God" wherein each would someday "achieve glory through this endless process of growing in his children." Even Erik, who has pulled away from his roots, loves the songs of the Church, "so familiar, so changeless, so incredibly, sweetly the same." The Yaquis feel this too, and Adan is finally able to reconcile himself to it, to feel himself at one with the earth, like a tree, which gives him "a swelling of energy that made work good."

Some characters, however, find a knowledge of complexity which brings an extreme consciousness of the boundaries between people. Of all Virginia's characters, Mercy Baker is most afflicted. The feeling of estrangement becomes most difficult when, through hard work and childbearing, she begins to lose both her beauty and her capacity for work:

> It had occurred to Mercy in the first fear and uncontrollable anguish of knowing that she was caught within a body that refused to give her any longer what she desired from it, that perhaps she was old already, and that perhaps there was no real difference between sickness and age.

Zina Johnson, all youth and reaching-out, discovers early that ambition can bring loneliness. She describes it as "an unreasonable strangeness in the midst of familiar things" and adds, "I longed to do great, unselfish, beautiful things with my life, but what things?"

The most painful estrangement comes through rebellion, and Kate Alexander is Virginia's greatest rebel. Though characters in other books rebel in many ways, Kate rebels in all ways. And for this she reaps suffering:

> If you were a woman and a rebel the only thing you could tear to pieces was your own life. So you turned upon yourself. There was no institution you could rend except at the place where it touched you; and so always you were the thing to be cut apart.

Erik is possessed by a bitterness continually stoked by smug members of his family who must fit everything into the pattern. When Chel accuses him of being a doubting Thomas, he explains that it is "simply that when you go away, you find a lot of beautiful places with a lot of different myths

attached to them. You get some different ideas about your own myths." Virginia often presents rebellion as a real result of growing up and fitting into a mature society. She seems to think it normal, but seems to believe it should fade when the rebel discovers his own purpose in the world.

IV

Dale Morgan, reviewing *On This Star,* said, "One who feels [that] Mrs. Sorensen has larger capacity than the purveying of love stories closes the book with a feeling of sharp disappointment." Others have accused her of undue sentimentality. I must occasionally side with them but in the end assert that not only could one do worse than purvey love stories but that the theme of love between men and women perfectly suits Virginia's background and tastes. Through love stories she can write of women and their domestic problems, a theme she understands intimately. She has often used the theme of polygamy because it embodies so much of what is complex and simple about love. Polygamy, originally meant to simplify problems of men and women, was to give opportunity to all. Women might fulfill their purpose on earth, arrest the waste of character, avoid prostitution. Men could learn unselfishness and responsibility. But it was difficult to change the shape of pride. Kate explains it to her daughter:

> You know how much of it is pride. If you change the things you are proud of, you change practically all your feelings about everything. The women who had the beginning of polygamy . . . they were the ones who had the worst of it, of course. The objections of Emma Smith made perfect sense to me. She knew people didn't understand, and she had to face them somehow.

When Zina decides to resolve her love problem in terms of polygamy, she does it after years of suffering. Mette, the first wife, explains that when a man loves two women and cannot have both, one will always be afraid and the other alone. Her decision comes clear: "Why should all of us go on suffering so much?"

Before such conclusions may be reached, however, love must go through many stages. The first is the feeling of absolute privacy and oneness expressed by Eliza R. Snow at Joseph Smith's first kiss:

> Then he took her and kissed her mouth with a passion that flowed into her and she knew for the first time the exquisite merging of herself with another. Nothing remained in her brain except the memory of all this and awareness of herself and of all the beauty in the world, rushing upon her in one terrible, beautiful wave. Stiffness left her and she began to flow like water, a movement in time.

This scene is repeated many times over, with only slightly different words, in several other novels.

Virginia's view of love is typically Mormon and patriarchal. Almost without exception her women love their men as they love their God, looking for guidance, obeying "in righteousness," quite often mixing up the loving with the worshipping. This is expressed by a character in *Kingdom Come* who describes his marriage: "Every time I go back to Hansine, it's better.

Nothing but perfect communion with God himself can be compared to it, but I wondered if that was blasphemous when I first said it, but she told me sometime afterward I knew was true. 'God is there,' she said. 'And He is there, Svend – in a good, true love. It's a kind of trinity – for creation.' "

Though some of these love scenes may sound adolescent and diffuse to the modern reader, Mormons should recognize some symbols of their religion in them. Wallace Stegner's description of the western writer applies: "He had only a little to say about sex, which in his innocence he had confused with love, but until now he had thought that little was definitely good stuff; one big scene had made it exciting."

If the women in the novels see their men as gods, the men in her books see their women as one with their surroundings, celebrating a love of place. Adan describes his Yaqui sweetheart: "Michaela belonged here in all ways, and he sometimes felt that her walk was beautiful because the street was familiar, every stone and the whole village and the people she met." Erik realizes that Chel turns "to the contours of the land like the sunshine itself." And John describes his wife in these words: "The pride of plain people was in Paulie; maxims made sense to her; children came easily from her body." Svend, the Danish missionary, hesitates to remove his sweetheart from her natural habitat: "She belonged where she was, bowing her head on the communion rail with her braids shining like metal, sipping wine in reverent silence from a silver cup, taking the Host from the white hands of a cassocked pastor in the reverent silence of an old church. She was right that if he loved her, he must belong in the same place."

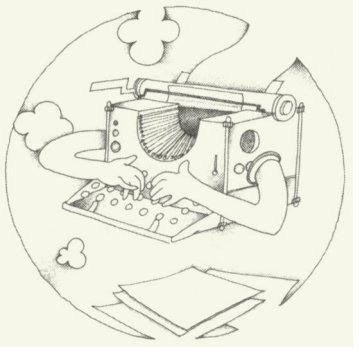
The need to belong, the sense of belonging in a church, in a place, in a heart, are all important to Virginia's love stories.

When I first introduced Virginia Sorensen, I meant to emphasize her universality, her realism, denying her importance as a regionalist, and emphasizing her objectivity. I do not make these points today. I see her now as a defender of the faith; of all the stories told by our people, hers have an inescapable dedication to a place and a history.

She represents much of the Mormonism I was taught in my youth: a Mormonism that recognizes the "human condition," that accepts "different ways of looking," that places people before ideas; a Mormonism that recognizes that true religion is not so much unity of opinion, as unity of action. I admit to her womanly sentimentality, her love of particular places; I affirm her, using Wallace Stegner's phrase, as a Western writer "incorrigibly wholesome and life acceptant."

I think she is probably speaking for herself through her character, Zina, when she writes:

> I've got less and less religious in the organized sense over the years, but to this day I can't think about the notion of sharing, about people who go out into it for whatever reason, the doctor, the missionary, priest, elder – anybody, without getting a feeling as wide and deep as a woman my size can hold. The really great ones got the fartherest out, reaching more and sharing with more. And the Greatest One was a friend to them all, born and unborn.



LITERATURE, MORMON WRITERS, AND THE POWERS THAT BE

Wayne Carver

The true business of literature, as of all intellect, critical or creative, is to remind the powers that be, simple and corrupt as they are, of the turbulence they have to control. There is a disorder vital to the individual which is fatal to society. And the other way round is also true.

R. P. Blackmur, "The Politics of Human Power"

I — A DIGRESSION

For the better part of a month, I was with a group of young Mormons bent on giving the Church a vigorous expression in all the arts. We were not very clear as to just what we would do. We would do something. We felt the Church deserved this. It was such a fine Church, everything considered. And it deserved us. Not in its (then) present state, maybe; but we had faith that it could puff up to us. There was the son of an official sculptor, a yearning scientist from Alberta, two or three others who do not congeal into identities in the twenty-three-year-old mist I am looking into; and there was me, an ink-stained veteran of a year of writing C to C-plus freshman themes at Weber College. We all met near the end of our term at Biarritz American University in the south of France, the winter after one of the wars had ended.

We talked a lot, especially the sculptor's son and I. We decided to take our discharges when they came along, even though we had seen Paris, and go forth seeking anything virtuous, lovely, and of good report, and thus give the Church some high culture to put alongside the Tabernacle Choir, the Singing Mothers, and trombone solos of "Abide with Me" at missionary farewells. So we all went home again (we had never heard of the heresy that you can't go), but though some of us saw each other at BYU, we were never very close; and somehow what seemed so important along the rocky, storm-sprayed coast of Biarritz didn't make much difference in the autumnal softness of the foothills of Provo.

All in all, I think it is just as well. There have been plenty of other things to do, like keeping alive; and whatever the conditions are that create fine works of art — and that's what we really were talking about, you might as well know — to be fully alive is the fundamental one. Not the only one, of course. Programs by groups of even angry young men are tacit admission that the young men think they may already be three parts iced over and are

thinking of blasting out. The problem right after the war was not to make a high culture, but to find for the life that the war both threatened and made precious a channel to flow in.

At any rate, after that brief romance with the idea of promoting a literature (those C-pluses made me the literary one of the cabal), I never paid much attention to whether there is, ought to be, or will be a Mormon literature that is any good. It was adventure enough in the late 40's and early 50's (and still is) to try to learn something about literature and writing besides how to juice up a talk for sacrament meeting with quotations from the best books and out of context. But something of that brief time at Biarrtiz stayed with me, clinging to my bones the way my Mormonism does, barely letting me know it is there but inseparable from whatever it is that props me up each morning and lays me down to sleep each night. For better or worse, I have *Dialogue* to thank for reminding me of this.

Like a lot of boys around Ogden, I imagine, I had, even before the war, been personally flattered to learn that one like us — well, not *quite* like us — had attacked Ogden and the Church in national magazines, and had first learned to lisp "paranoia" from his essays on the Prophet. But DeVoto was the only writer I knew of then who had written that way, or in any other way about us. Later, in the company day room at Fort Jackson, I found a copy of Stegner's *Mormon Country* and devoured it whole, out of total homesickness, the same way and for the same reason that I bought James Whitcomb Riley's *Songs of Summer*: to escape (while building timber trestle bridges in Gill Creek) to the scenes of Mutual evenings, priesthood outings, Saturday baseball games, cottonwood trees along canal banks, the sound of water lapping over a headgate and through a gap in the ditch, and the deep smell of cut hay, clover blossoms, and wilting burdock — to be knee-deep in June and Utah instead of up to my waist in clay-colored water with a slung M-1 and a hammer I never did learn how to use.

Much later, I think at Biarritz, I learned that Stegner had written a novel that was set for part of the time in Salt Lake City, that *another* Ogden boy had publically committed *Children of the Covenant,* and that a mere slip of a girl from Huntsville who had actually taught at Weber had dropped at least two degrees of glory by marrying a Jew and writing *No Man Knows My History* in that order. Toward the end of the two months at Biarritz, I gave my writing teacher (a very good one from Dartmouth) an essay entitled "Literature and the Mormons," a hysterically unequivocal shriek of protest about the quality of literature about the Church, an ejaculation that received its force from my definitive ignorance of what I was talking about.

When I came back to the States, I took my discharge at Fort Dix, went into New York, and at a Doubleday bookstore bought *Children of the Covenant* and *No Man Knows My History*. By the time my train reached Ogden, I had read them both. When I reached Plain City, I gave Mrs. Brodie's book to a maiden aunt who claimed she always voted for Norman Thomas. I never saw it again. A few years later, I gave Richard Scowcroft's book to a friend whose politics I have forgotten. But I lost the book. Not long after I came

home, I bought Hugh Nibley's *No Ma'am, That's Not History* from another friend who was unruffledly working his way through a Ph.D. in science by selling Church books. I read it, yawned, and put out of my mind the whole matter of Mormon literature and the way the Church responds to what is written about it and its people. Then a couple years ago I read in *Dialogue* Samuel W. Taylor's "Peculiar People, Positive Thinkers, and the Prospects of Mormon Literature" (Vol. II, No. 2, Summer, 1967). My first reaction was to hunt up my old essay from Biarritz. To find it required considerable archaeological digging in my files, and when I found it, it helped not at all.* I just put all the blame on the Church, or so I think I did. The piece is a mere diffusion of rhetoric, a mist so obscure that it really lacks even the virtue of error. But at the bottom of the last sheet, the Professor's usual chill had condensed the high humidity of the essay: "You, your Church, and its writers are just provincial," he wrote, in the only clear statement on the page. And, I think he had — and has — something there.

*Because it is unlikely that I shall ever want to devote a separate work to the subject of the relationship of research to professional and personal growth, I want to relate here that in my two months' search for this yellowing paper, I discovered additional evidence that research is necessary and that every teacher should be required to post a bibliography of his publications on his office door next to his office hours. In the course of searching for this old essay in storage files, drawers, bookshelves, under the cushions of sofas, in abandoned canisters, discarded briefcases, and my wife's handbag, I found five books I had accepted for review, the earliest marked 1956; two stacks of unread students' papers from the spring term of 1958, which, because of the lilacs, was a particularly bad one for me, I remember; a pair of keys belonging to Tithonus, a *struldbrugian* Pontiac we retired to brood in 1961; the note cards for a speech I gave at an Ogden ward in 1943 on "Was Joseph Smith the Greatest American?"; my file of notes, with bibliography, on the Morrisite War; and the recipe for Uncle John's Salve, a black magical unguent of universal healing properties concocted from olive oil, red lead, and camphor gum by the Aunt who assimilated the Brodie book. She also made hand lotion out of glycerine and quinces. By insisting that teachers publish, do research, we not only help them reclaim the past, but they tidy up the house and office, as well. I even noticed that part of my basement wall, over in a far corner, is crumbling in. Some of my files are down there, now that we have a de-humidifier.

II — A HUMBLE REMONSTRANCE

> *. . . she impressed on me that for the last ten years she had wanted to do something artistic, something as to which she was prepared not to care a rap whether or no it should sell. . . . She yearned to be . . . but of course only once, an exquisite failure.*
>
> James, "The Next Time"

I was going to talk some about provincialness and sophistication, but I've changed my mind while I was finding more paper. I'll just assert the truism that sophistication is not necessarily a virtue and provincialism not necessarily a vice. But I do think Mr. Taylor is provincial to the point of darkness, in the sense that a provincial seeks easy explanations outside himself for complex personal responses, when he puts the blame for the lack of "a great Mormon literature" on the repressiveness of the Church. He contends that the Church represses writers in the Church, and outside it if they write on Mormon subjects, by insisting (and by having the means to enforce

the insistence) that this "peculiar people" be depicted as "positive thinkers"; by maintaining a controlled press, and by controlling the publication — or in the instance of drama, the production — of other works when it can; and by eliminating the market for such works within the Church when it cannot.

The tales he tells in support of his contentions are indeed sad to read. But they are irrelevant to the question of why there is no great Mormon literature. (Actually, I think there are some very good novels — no poems or plays that I know of — by and about Mormons; but a few good books do not make a literature. Nor do a lot of bad ones.)

The fact is that Mr. Taylor seems to be two different men who, somehow, have not managed to get to know each other very well. There is Sam Taylor, an accomplished commercial writer, who has to sell his writing to live. He knows his market and writes for it. Sometimes he writes about his Church, and his family within the Church. He is a pleasant man of considerable talent; but he is Good Neighbor Sam, too. Good churchman Sam. He "deeply deplores" what the Church is doing to prettify Joseph Smith, but he is "not foolish enough to invite the wrath that would follow an honest attempt to correct it." He believes the function of literature is "promotion of the faith; [he] simply think[s] it is possible to do it a good deal better." He is "serene in the belief" that the Church "is led by Divine revelation." In a letter replying to his critics (*Dialogue*, Winter, 1967) he is sympathetic with writers within the Church who are pressed into "happy conformity" and "deliberate distortion." ". . . They are simply meeting their market, as every writer must. If a managed press requires distorted myths, they must either conform or quit writing. But certainly my critics would find it enlightening to sit in on shop-talk among Mormon writers, as I have, while they frankly discussed the truths which they never would dream of putting into their works."

This Sam Taylor is cut from the same goods as J. P. Marquand's disenchanted characters who whore all day in the advertising cribs and renew their virginity every afternoon with martinis before catching the train to Scarsdale.

But there is a Samuel W. Taylor, a "creative writer . . . ridden and driven by a consuming passion that has been called the divine discontent, . . . an interpreter; he is eternally a crusader; he is a non-conformist and a dissenter who cries out the faults of his world in an attempt to make a better one. . . . His drive compels him to present the essence of things as they are and were and not as positive-thinking apologists have decided they should be. . . . Most good and great creative writing is basically the literature of protest."

Samuel W. Taylor, the "creative writer," is a meld of Zola and Shelley. And despite the rather grand rhetoric, it is impossible not to like and respect him, and to wish him well. But what has he to do with Sam, the conforming friend of deliberate liars? One wonders if it is the Church or Sam that holds Samuel W. in bondage. And can "divine discontent" make no headway against either?

The impression I have of Mr. Taylor as he faces the outrages he complains of is of a nebbish-like character, frail, kind of tired, slumping down on

a chair and ruefully eyeing a great towering dowager in ostentatious silks and pearls: "I'm ridden and driven by the divine discontent," he says, "and if you wouldn't always get so mad, I'd protest against something."

Just what he would protest, in the happy event that what bothers him went away, is not clear. But though his language is a little too transcendental for my taste, I agree with him that great writers and great literature have the power deeply to disturb the complacent, myopic, arrogant certainties of men and the world men create. But these certainties, these men, and this world are not abstractions; their form and substance does not have to be incanted out of the deep abyss before they work in the world and before we can deal with them. They are in our families, our professional organizations, our churches, our state. They are in the hearts of every man and in the stuff of everything man creates. If Mr. Taylor finds them in his Church, why doesn't he use that formidable array of powers that he says writers possess to help root them out? His attempt, successful or not, might create the very literature he says is lacking. But, instead, he simply drops a signed complaint in the suggestion box.

Because he does seem to be two writers, neither one uncomfortable enough with the other to want to be free of him, Mr. Taylor wants too many things that do not, I'm afraid, come together. He wants to tell the truth, to write for a commercial market, to promote his faith, to be a mover and shaker of the status quo, and all the time to remain in the bosom of the Church. In wanting all this (and merely complaining that the Church won't give it to him), he avoids the excruciating necessity of choosing exactly what he will do, of working his own line, and then living with the consequences of his choice. If he wants to sound like Shelley — "the trumpets which sing to battle, and feel not what they inspire" — and to identify the source of writing as a "divine discontent," he must go all the way and say that the result of such writing is to be misunderstood and lonely.

One must choose. Which is the more "divine," one's discontent with folly and repression or one's understandable desire to conform to a Church based on "Divine revelation" that is, apparently, foolishly repressive?

One must choose, but it is an agonizing choice. Some have made it. In the classroom, we call this kind of dilemma a "tragic choice." One must choose, but the occasion is one of sorrow, not anger. One must choose, but either way, the cost is very great.

III — A MODEST PROPOSAL

> *. . . I have only to endure. I am here to be worked upon. . . .*
> *Are any or all of the institutions so valuable as to be lied for?*
> Emerson

My only point that bears in any way upon Mr. Taylor's personal circumstances is this: his dilemma is the very stuff that great literature is made of, not the reason it is not made. Serious imaginative writers, if they do not inherit such dilemmas, have to go around finding or inventing them. Mr. Taylor's eloquent appeals for the Church to — in effect — stop persecuting

him and other writers within the Chuch deserves the strongest support we can give them. But his appeals have nothing to do with literature, unless he will make literature out of them. Otherwise, they refer to matters of ecclesiastical polity, quasi-doctrinal dogmatics, cultural lag, and to an agonizing personal situation.

I do not want to give the impression that the dilemma so starkly posed by Mr. Taylor is an easy one to avoid (and despite its potential for literature, only a fool would welcome such difficulties because he could then write about them) or, having not avoided it, to resolve. It is, in fact, as I have suggested earlier, not amenable to resolution at all in the terms he proposes. According to Mr. Taylor and the subjects of his anecdotes, they want to write the truth about their experience as members of the Church; but, unfortunately, one of the truths about the Church is that it will not let its members write truly. And there, as James' characters would say, we are!

The creative writer is the one that suffers from this situation. It is not so with the composer, whose non-representational sounds protect him; nor the sculptor, whose marble, bronze, burlap, and twisted tin is probably doctrinally and ecclesiastically mute; nor the historian, if he doesn't go in for vivid writing; nor the anthologist, if he tends to his prefaces; nor the political scientist, who can always say "behavioral studies" and let his passions and other testimonies speak through charts, graphs, and tables; not even the folklorist, if he just collects and avoids newfangledness; and certainly not the writer of dissertations, who by definition avoids everything.

These intellectual workers may or may not be believers, though they may or may not go to church. But unless they go out of their way, to see that their work betrays them, it is not likely to. But a fiction writer, putting down and publishing to the world an honest and recognizable account of some of the anxieties faced by a returning missionary, would he not in 1969 still be greeted as John A. Widtsoe greeted Richard Scowcroft in 1945?

> Scowcroft will win fame in the boggy field of literature if he will view life as a whole and not confine himself, as here done, to hospital wards. And there are healthy, red-blooded episodes within "Mormonism" to fill many a coming book. . . . Readers are heartily tired of books that caricature and malign the good people who wrested civilization from the western deserts. Especially is there a revulsion of feeling when this is done by descendants of the pioneers.

I prefaced this quotation with what I intended as a rhetorical question, in the Van Wyck Brooks manner, but maybe it is not. Mr. Taylor himself says that if some of the books that caused a stir in the Church — and in me in that day room, at Biarritz, and on that homeward-bound train — were published now, "they might find themselves upon the shelves at Deseret Book," a sure sign that the Church is willing to let the authors be heard — or browsed among.

I have my doubts that imaginative writing about Mormonism and Mormondom is about to escape from the Deseret News Press and Bookcraft and enter literature. The hired hands will continue to write what and as they

are told, and the free lancers will continue to show their freedom by meeting the "demands of their market." I suppose from time to time someone — neither hired, sold out, nor buying in — will write a true and good fiction; and if he is a faithful member of the Church, the day he does may be the saddest day of his life. I think it probably will be.

For there remains, I think, that awful, threatening power of mimetic writing to disturb the complacency of The Powers That Be, even as that writing is most fully realizing its social function of reminding those powers "of the turbulence they have to control." There is a covert disorder in powerful images, just as there is an overt order. It is not, ostensibly at least, the madness or the "fine frenzy" of writers that our official custodians are afraid of. They can handle madness. Where everything outside the sanctioned institutions is thought to be an asylum filled with recalcitrant sociopaths, dealing with madness is simply a matter of defining terms, attaching labels, and marking the exits. And against frenzy, fine or gross, the Grandgrinds and other Guardians can marshal all the "arts of measuring and numbering and weighing," checking enthusiasm with quantifications in the name of understanding. Rather, what scares The Powers That Be is the taut plasticity of the images in a work — or the image of a work — the possibility, terrible and blasphemous, that when emotion is both concentrated and released in images of high intensity, the resulting sense of life may overflow the social forms consecrated to domesticating it. Every icon in literature is potentially Caesar's mantle.

"Art is an envisagement of feeling, . . ." says Susanne K. Langer, formulated and expressed in what she calls a symbol and I am here calling an image. But I think few people who have been strongly moved by works of art would deny that the visage of the work creates, also, the feelings therein envisaged. That is why James was right to insist to H. G. Wells that "It is art that *makes* life, makes interest, makes importance , . . ." and it is precisely this sense of life, interest, and importance in their constituencies that ecclesiastical, governmental, educational, and familial Powers That Be are afraid of — and rightly so. Picasso refused to join Stuart Davis and Jacques Lipchitz in protesting the "serious wave of animosity towards free expression in painting and sculpture mounting in American Press and museums . . ." and pointed out that which Mr. Taylor and all The Powers That Be must never forget: that "art is something subversive. . . . If it is ever given the keys to the city, it will be because it is . . . watered down . . . impotent. . . ."

The Powers That Be have much greater regard for the latent power in artistic images than have writers like the other part of Mr. Taylor, who are asking to be rendered even more domestic and safe than they are.

But perhaps just as an experiment to test a cultural condition we could find out whether the Church is ready to, if not bless, at least endure with a sigh, some truthful work of literature about it and its people. Mr. Taylor says, "I cheer the approaching dawn [though] I have no illusions about it bursting upon us in full glory and right away."

I'm sure it won't. I have even said that I don't think it matters. But if the coming of the "full glory" means the coming of a great literature — and

not the Church's giving its consent for one to be created — I think that glory will never dawn if the unsticking of the sun depends upon "a play about Polygamy on Broadway, . . . a musical." Mr. Taylor says such a play of his (". . . in costume and with good music, it could be charming") was prevented by the Church from being performed. Even Davy Crockett needed rendered-out bear grease to get the sun unfrozen, not a pink and white confection from the pastry shop. A word from Salt Lake City to New York stopped that play, says Mr. Taylor. But one bad review might have stopped it in a week. And what is a musical, a period piece in costume and with charming music, going to say about polygamy, the Church, human problems, the fates, anyway? But there is this about a book. Once it is published, it is there. And even if it is very good, it will find some readers. It can be sent through the mails. It can be reviewed all over the country, not by just three daily papers and *Time*. If it is troublesome to The Powers That Be, the Powers can let the fact be known. If it moves and shakes someone, he knows it and talks about it. Such a book would accurately test the present receptivity of the Church to truthful writing about it.

I have not been a careful student of the literature written about the Church, as I tried to say. And I probably have missed some recent books. But while I see histories and studies rolling off the presses, I haven't seen any novels for quite a while; and I don't know of anybody who is writing one. Mr. Taylor, who ought to be, is confecting period pieces. The intellectuals in the universities are collecting folklore, editing source books, worrying about the Papyrus manscripts, and trying to force a marriage of group therapy to fireside meetings. The most talented writer with a Church background whom I know, or know of, writes books of extraordinary beauty and strength about the court of Louis XIV.

So where is all the literature that is struggling to be born? Or where, even, is there a poor little repressed novel, scratching with twitching hands its humped and hairy back? We cannot measure the extent our Church and its culture has moved away from the narrow, puckering fears of its pioneering period if nothing of considerable power does not come along to challenge it to a response.

I propose that before we all begin to keen about the repressions of the Church, somebody write a novel about the Mormons, create a genuine work of literature that is true to himself and its subject and without a thought of what the response of the Church authorities will be. In other words, write out of the only attitude that can create "a literature," if that's what we really want, as opposed to just a bunch of books, which is the attitude that James' narrator in "The Figure in the Carpet" intimated when he said that "literature was a game of skill, and skill meant courage, and courage meant honour, and honour meant passion, meant life."

Or, without worrying about divine discontent and non-conformity or how ridden or driven you might be, would somebody out there please put down with great care and love and regard for the truth of your feelings, the story that everyone growing up in the Church has within him? It needs to be

done, though the risks may be great, just as the skill to do it must be bitterly learned. That's my proposal. No more laments.

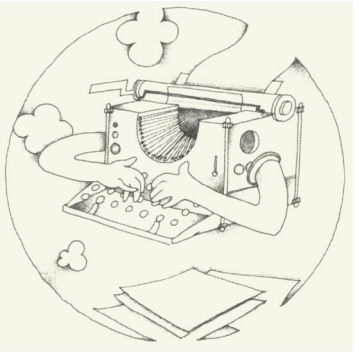
In 1945 Bernard DeVoto let Ray B. West, Jr. publish in the autumn issue of *The Rocky Mountain Review* a letter he had written to a friend in Ogden. *The Improvement Era* reprinted a tenderly abridged version of it in March, 1946, without saying it was changed. Even that long ago, DeVoto agreed in part with Mr. Taylor that the positive thinking in Utah (DeVoto called it "The booster state of mind") was diminishing. But, he went on,

> . . . it is true . . . that Utah, and especially the Mormon culture, is extremely sensitive and intolerant to criticism and even to difference of opinion in which there is no criticism whatever. . . . It is lugubriously true that the orthodox Mormon mind cannot tolerate any objective treatment of Mormon history whatever. All treatment of the Mormons must completely accept the Mormon doctrinal, metaphysical and supernatural assumptions. . . . All Mormon actions have always been pure and sanitary, all criticism of them has always been evil and mendacious. . . . Yet it is perfectly possible for any writer to handle any other religion in America objectively and to be answered objectively in turn. It is not possible of the Mormons, and that is further evidence of their cultural lag.

In the first part of the letter, DeVoto admits that his two early articles on Utah "were absolutely in the [*American*] *Mercury* mood of illegitimate and dishonest attack." They were, indeed, and that's probably why, at eighteen, I liked them. But having said that, he insists that his *Year of Decision: 1846* "contains the most sympathetic treatment of the Mormons ever published by a gentile." Yet he continued to receive nothing but abuse from his home state. He concludes:

> When one is young and idiotic there may be some ambition to be known as a final authority, an important writer, a man of distinction and publicity or even fame. It doesn't last: one matures. One comes to understand that what counts is the honesty and thoroughness of the work. I should find it hard to state exactly what my ambition as a mature man is. It would run something like this: to do good work, to do work in which I may take some satisfaction and my friends some pleasure, at the utmost, as Frost once said of Robinson, to put something on the record that will not easily be dislodged.

Where are the writers, saturated in Mormon life but not in fief to it, who will put true pictures of that life on the record? A Mormon literature of enduring sensitivity and vigor, one that will not be stopped by a few phone calls, is possible if men of talent will "be generous," very courageous, "and pursue the prize." But they will have to assume the risks of telling what they know to be true. Nobody has ever said that that is a snap. But somewhere, sometime, along the line, you have to choose.



A CONVERSATION WITH CLINTON F. LARSON

Clinton Larson is a Mormon poet and playwright. His works include a collection of poems, THE LORD OF EXPERIENCE *(second ed. 1969), and plays,* THE MANTLE OF THE PROPHET AND OTHER PLAYS *(1966). Because he is one of the most distinguished writers in the Church and because of his experience with young Mormon writers as director of the creative writing program at Brigham Young University,* DIALOGUE *invited him to comment upon the advantages and difficulties of the poet in the Mormon community. The interview was conducted by Edward Geary, a colleague on the English faculty at BYU and* DIALOGUE'S *Book Review Editor.*

Dialogue: Perhaps we could begin with some information about your own background. What do you feel has made you a poet?

Larson: My origins are clearly defined. Initially, I want to give credit to President Hugh B. Brown, who was my mission president. He gave me, certainly, a real interest in words, or he was able to convey to me impressions which made the Church and the love of language consonant. I regard President Brown as one of the great orators of this century. He loves words, and he uses them beautifully in his discussions of the gospel. Secondly, I give credit to Professor Brewster Ghiselin of the University of Utah, who is not a Mormon, but who has lived in Salt Lake Valley most of his life. He was a student of D. H. Lawrence, and because of that relationship and because of his own sensitivity and fine ear for verbal music, he conveyed to me a love of language from a literary craftsman's point of view. Taking classes from Brewster was a privilege; being a fine poet himself, he enlightened me about the possibilities of modern poetry.

In addition, I think that I look to some of the prophets for guidance in the problem of Mormon literary art. Take, for example, the great prophet-poet Nephi, who in Second Nephi indicates his great love of books. He claims that he is a poor writer, but to my mind he is a fine symbolist poet. He used the branch of the olive tree as a viable figure of speech. He had the same vision that his father Lehi had, a vision which involved profound metaphors and the affective interpretation of metaphors. Nephi's expression was, of course, for the benefit of Laman and Lemuel and the whole family. But Nephi repeats the metaphors again and again to convert Laman and Lemuel to the truth, which is the method of the artist. And I think it is marvelous how he ends Second Nephi. He says farewell; the

spirit of the Lord tells him to speak no more — no more will he be stirred to poetic expression. In his humility, he claims that what he has spoken is not poetic, but it is, with the substantive qualities of the best literature. Nephi's farewell is particularly poignant because his great desire to communicate spiritually through symbolic language has failed, and because of Laman's and Lemuel's intransigence regarding the Lord's will. What Nephi is trying to do is to cause his brothers to flex their minds and spirits so that they can accommodate greater and greater truths.

I think that as we look back to Joseph Smith, we see a man of tremendous capability, a great prophet and poet in every sense of the word. I am concerned that we do not lose that tradition of love of language and the great verbal ability, you see, that was invested in the early brethren of the Church. Not that this ability has been completely lost, but sometimes we adopt opinions that seem to negate its importance. We get doctrinaire rather than affective in our use of language. Mormons should cease sounding like medieval schoolmen, to whom religion became an abstract adjustment to religious theories; rather, we should leave most doctrinal matters to the latter-day oracles and then convey testimony and religion into the actualities of art and life.

Dialogue: You have identified poetry closely with visions and prophecy. Would you go so far as to say that poetry is the language of the spirit?

Larson: It seems to me that without question poetry is the principal language of the spirit. And I think this is generally agreed upon by the modern poets. There is plenty of precedent for this view: for example, the Apocalypse and Isaiah. In the Bible the tradition of poetry is a spiritual matter. In the Church we should be able to accommodate this perspective more easily than we do. The Church should not be completely devoted to functional prose. We must use, among others, the traditional poetic modes of literature of the Near East. One has merely to go to the Near East today to observe a culture which regards the poetic spirit as a means of spiritual communication.

Dialogue: Can you identify the moment when you first perceived the possibilities of poetry in relation to the gospel?

Larson: In 1936 I wrote a poem about the Crucifixion — about Golgotha, the Cross, and the nails — in which I gave these inanimate objects a responsive voice. My love of language, my interest in symbolic literature, I am sure, began then. When I came home from my mission, in 1941, I saw an inspiring scene. I had done a little writing for the Church publications — the *Liahona,* for example, and the New England missionary publication — but, really, my literary purpose with respect to the Church had not crystallized. But when I saw Salt Lake Valley from Parley's Canyon, I was deeply stirred. I realized what the pioneers felt when they saw the valley, and I remembered, of course, that Brigham Young had followed Joseph's inspiration that the people should move west. He said frequently that he loved Joseph, and this also stirred me. So I said to myself, "How can I best express this?" I knew that I could not use the language of Brigham Young; he was too succinct. What

I wanted to do was to interpret, in baroque style, what Brigham felt about Joseph. So I wrote *The Mantle of the Prophet,* my first poetry drama. In Act Two, Brigham Young addresses the casket of Joseph Smith in Nauvoo:

> We are as straws together in a swirl of wind;
> We pass over the land until the wind puts us down.

The style and tenor of this passage seemed appropriate and effective for me. The wind, of course, is the Holy Ghost, and it means simply that Brigham Young receives the influence of the Holy Ghost in his interpretation of his mission and Joseph's mission. Further:

> Joseph, the Twelve remain, and the ache
> Of your vision is with us and must be fulfilled.
> I have stumbled in your presence, wondering
> How to serve you and whom you served.
> My hard hands have taken yours, inquiring.
> How can I be of use? I have looked into your eyes
> And have seen the far horizons of the West,
> The wagons and the prairies white and golden
> Under a summer day. I have seen the cleavage
> Of land from the mountains. In the depths
> Of my heart I wander there, where the gulls
> Ride above a silver sea and the sky
> Like a veil hangs over a great valley.
> How can I know where this may be,
> Except as I remember you in my stride
> That brings me west? I have come from the East
> To find you, and I have found you only here.
> As you are carried in death, so I must find you
> Beyond the river, along the trail
> To Laramie, or if not there, westward still
> Where the people may gather, where
> The mountains decline with the sun.
> I have seen the inland sea in the silence
> Of your eyes.

We now understand, through research, that Brigham Young did have visits from Joseph Smith as he crossed the plains. It is my purpose in this play to show the close connection between heaven and earth. That is to say, the possibility of using a baroque style — the style that relates the realities of earth to the realities of heaven — is exciting to me because it seems allied with spiritual truth.

But I see the possibilities of a range of contrasting styles that can be used for expression of Mormon ideas. For example, S. Dilworth Young has a kind of sinewy, pioneer-like style; it is somewhat hard-bitten and stoical, and I think he does very well to capture this aspect of pioneer life, of Mormon life. But I think there are other avenues that can be explored stylistically, with the idea of creating a flexibility in the Mormon spirit as it is today. In other words, we should not be hide-bound by one prosaic or poetic style in the Church. We must have different voices, and these must be individual voices, it seems to me, particularly from among the writers of the Church.

For the artist, this individuality comprises the stewardship of his talent as it applies to the Law of Consecration.

Dialogue: It seems, then, that you find poetic resources in the L.D.S. faith — in the possibilities of language, in the spiritual significance of metaphor, and in the subject matter it provides.

Larson: This is one of the great advantages of having the Mormon tradition. There is a whole galaxy of new mythic subjects. You see, many contemporary writers are somewhat at a loss because they cannot find a significant tradition to which they can attach themselves.

Dialogue: And you feel that Mormonism provides you with a significant tradition?

Larson: Yes. The history of the Church, the Book of Mormon, and our milieu are magnificent material, substantive material, for literature.

Dialogue: Is there any tendency in the Church to try to restrict the acceptable modes of expression of our beliefs and traditions?

Larson: The restrictions which members of the Church impose on writers, I think, arise from the proprietary interest that these people have in the Church — and I think it's perfectly appropriate for them to have a proprietary interest in the Church — but, you see, our cultural values are really not protected too well, particularly in the area of literature, which is highly individualistic. Collectivistic culture is dominant. But reality is manifold and surprising, and will not be contained by social policies. Certain people want to repress writing in the Church, and I think do so quite effectively, because they simply don't understand that a variety of styles can be used to express the truth. Consider the many effective styles that can be found in literary history. These styles, you see, can be used — and should be used — to help Mormons understand other people. If we fail to accommodate different voices we are going to lose a lot of people.

The doctrinaire teaching characteristic of the Church is simply inappropriate for certain kinds of people; chief among these are the artists. Artists ordinarily do not respond to doctrinal discussions. They respond to spirituality when it is artistically conveyed. They are temperamental, antithetical people. You cannot expect them to alter their personalities so that they can accommodate the doctrinaire style exclusively. It is axiomatic that the Church reach out with compassion to all men, not simply to a single middle-class stratum.

Dialogue: Have you encountered other obstacles to getting your plays before a Mormon audience?

Larson: Yes, I should say. Many people in the Church don't understand that literature deals with the totality of life, and that in life there is "opposition in all things." It's an amazing thing that people in the Church do not accept this dictum in art as they do in experience. Often Mormons are distressed by the negative elements in my work. For example, in *The Mantle of the Prophet,* Sidney Rigdon challenges Brigham Young. But to portray opposition to the Quorum of the Twelve apparently causes concern in some quarters. Sidney Rigdon presented one of the most dangerous challenges to

authority that the Church has ever seen, and you have to portray him in this light. Again, there are negative elements in my play *Mary of Nazareth.* Mary is challenged by the elders in her neighborhood: "Who is the father of your child?" That dramatic situation has caused just a little concern. But we must recognize that anyone who questions the divinity of Jesus is questioning the virtue of Mary — drama or not. Through "opposition in all things" — even in drama — the beautiful spirituality of Mary and Elizabeth and Joseph are enhanced, made clear and valuable. The negative aspect is as necessary in literature as it is in life.

Dialogue: How can artists more effectively reach the membership of the Church?

Larson: For a number of reasons it is very difficult for the artist to reach the members of the Church. Of course we are all very interested in trying to make the Church function the way it ought to. But we have many problems. The chief one is that too much power is vested in committees. Committees are able to perform only in certain ways. Whenever a committee gets together and decides something, there is a compromising of creative intent in favor of democratic purpose. The committee by its very nature is antithetical to the nature of art, which has to do with the aristocracy of talent. And in the Church we have, as you know, a great many committees that decide on cultural matters. Everyone has his voice, and as a result the significance of the artistic work or performance is minimized or negated, along with individuality, artistic distinction, and style. The negative aspect is almost always minimized by a committee. They seem afraid of it, not realizing the value of the individual integrity of a work of art. Committees ought to extend a spirit of trust to artists and accept them as conveyors of individualistic truth. But the inclination of our people is to accept the artistic individuality of our artists only if they have first received distinction in the world.

Brigham Young University is or should be committed to liberality and professionalism in the arts. I think there is a real attempt at BYU to permit the individual artistic voice, to give it birth, to give it an audience. For example, Merrill Bradshaw's music is often dissonant and excitingly contemporary, and BYU provides an audience and an opportunity for him. As for me, particularly, BYU enables me to relate my creative activity to my teaching.

Dialogue: Would you advise the young Mormon artist to seek channels outside the official structure of the Church?

Larson: He should do what he can inside the Church, but he should not let the individuality of his talent be directed by a committee. The artistic work is *his* gift and witness; only the General Authorities have the power to speak for the whole Church. These positions should not be confused. If an artist's style is not acceptable in the Church, he should do what he can to achieve a proper audience elsewhere. My musical play *Snow White and the Mirror,* which is about the Spirit of the Lord, has been accepted more readily in the professional theater than in the Church. The fact that I've never been able to get any of my work published in the *Improvement Era* does not

dismay me. There are several fine literary magazines that publish my work — *Dialogue,* for example. *Dialogue* is concerned about a variety of opinions, about the need for spiritual flexibility. In many ways it "justifies" the culture of the Mormon people (and I use the more scientific meaning of the word *justifies).* Perhaps young writers can publish in *Dialogue* or *BYU Studies* if they can't publish in the *Relief Society Magazine* or *The Instructor* or the *Improvement Era.* Each magazine has its particular function, you see, and certain personalities are consonant with particular functions.

Dialogue: Would you tell us something about how you work?

Larson: I mull over subjects and experiences. Art results from a psychological balance. You feel a certain thing, you get in a certain attitude, you feel a kind of push to create. It is an exciting process. *Musa* is the Spanish word for it — the moment of artistic creation, the drive or predisposition to create I enjoy this feeling and work very rapidly. I can write a play in three or four days. I wrote *The Mantle of the Prophet* in three and a half days. I rearranged some of the dramatic effects, but substantially the play is as it was when I first wrote it. Generally I write very rapidly. However, some ideas or insights seem to be miscast from the beginning. And even though I write the poem or piece rapidly, sometimes I find myself going over and over it, trying to get the correct perspective, trying to find out what I wanted to do, because I didn't have it quite right in the beginning. I have one poem in my portfolio that I have revised again and again and again. And I use snatches of it in various works, but it was wrong from the start. But most things come easily — "To a Dying Girl" and Part II of "Homestead in Idaho," for instance.

Let me tell you about "Homestead in Idaho." At first I thought that it was a short story, and I tried to write that story. I worked on it six weeks, and it wouldn't come off. It was pretentious and dry. I didn't know what to do. Then one day I noticed that some lines could be scanned. I cut out the parts that did not have the quality of poetry, and the first section of the poem came into being very quickly. Then I felt obliged to record the voice of the poet. And so I wrote the second part in twenty or twenty-five minutes, in its final form.

Dialogue: Does the Mormon artist face any other peculiar problems besides those you have mentioned?

Larson: One thing that stands against the development of art in the Church is populism. Populism is the idea that if a lot of people agree that the work is good then it must be good. It is the use of *consensus genitum* as a critical criterion. Only in the long historical view does this position have value. The thing that is popular in the football stadium, in other words, may not be the best work of art. On the other hand, I support the modernists whose work — it can be substantiated — is enduring and in the long run as popular as any fad. The *carpe diem* attitude does not fundamentally apply to works of art. A fine work of art comes into existence quietly and gathers reputation steadily.

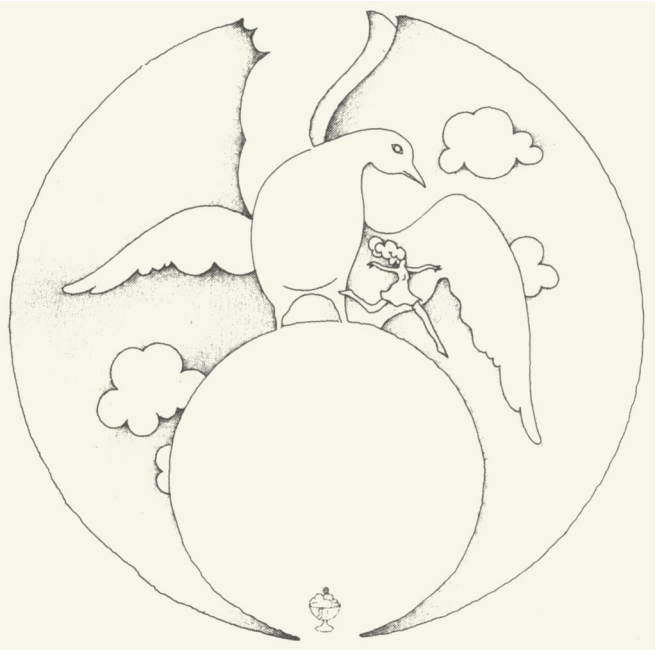
I think that the idea of "enduring to the end" is consonant with the idea of modernism and antithetical to populism. Populism begins with sentimentalism, and sentimentalism is the backwash of the nineteenth century and should be abandoned. We should demand of any writer the soundest sensibility and education; it is not enough simply to render the thing sentimentally. And it would seem to me that particularly in the area of drama our society is lending itself to the defects of sentimentalism. Approval of sentimentality is like the doctrine of extreme unction. It is not enough to save, or even qualify, a work of art.

Dialogue: What would you say is the future of poetry in the Church?

Larson: All is not well in Zion. Part of the spiritual record that must be kept is the poetry of the people. In a sense, a people who do not have a body of significant and enduring poetry do not, in fact, exist. The dearth of poetry in the Church indicates, I think, a tendency for Mormons not to live their religion, but to live for it. This condition, however sentimentally commendable, is narrowing and spiritually erosive.

The future of poetry in the Church is in the hands of a small group of people — the General Authorities and the few people in the Church who can qualify as poets. If the General Authorities support art and poetry as expressions of individual testimonies or as prayerful activity — which, indeed, they are — and not as general statements of doctrine or the expression of oracles, then the Church will acquire the perspective that will cause art and poetry to flourish, even with the negative elements that characterize them. If the artists — literary artists, particularly, in this context — take their work as seriously as they should, and by "seriously" I mean that they become professionally responsible, then a significant and coherent literary movement can begin.

But there seem to be only a few serious literary artists. How they use their abilities is supremely important. Art is intrinsically powerful and audacious, and talent can be so easily misused. But the right people are beginning to appear. Eugene England, Karl Keller, and Robert Christmas are, for example, skillful and discriminating. If they insist in Mormon society that their writing is *what they are,* Mormon society can hardly reject them or refuse to take them seriously. The future of literary art in the Church, then, depends on how willing the writers are to believe in themselves, stand their ground, and work for their objectives. The Church will then learn to see them accurately. The Church is of course obliged to support sensibility, integrity, and good intentions. Specifically, the gift of the Holy Ghost in poets will enable them to achieve an authentic new voice and to aid the cause of the Church in richly significant ways. I deeply hope that the Church and its poets can seize upon and fulfill the literary promise of our believing people.



FICTION AND POETRY

INTRODUCTIONS

DOUGLAS THAYER
Douglas Thayer has degrees in writing from Brigham Young University, Stanford, and the University of Iowa. He teaches at Brigham Young but is now on leave to write full-time. "The Redtail Hawk" is a winner of the DIALOGUE *prize for imaginative literature for 1969.*

CLINTON F. LARSON
Professor Larson is a widely read poet and playwright in the Church. He has written and produced over twenty-one plays, the most notable of which is THE MANTLE OF THE PROPHET *(1966), and has published a collection of his poems,* THE LORD OF EXPERIENCE *(1967), now in its second edition. He is Professor of English and Chairman of the Creative Writing Program at Brigham Young University.*

ARTHUR HENRY KING

Arthur King was educated at Cambridge and Lund (Sweden) and holds a Doctor of Literature in stylistics. He has been an official in the British Council since 1943, serving in Europe, Persia, and Pakistan; currently he is Assistant Director-General in charge of Education. The principal influences on his poetry are I. A. Richards, T. S. Eliot, Yeats, Laura Riding, Rilke, and, above all, Andrew Marvell. He says that a principal reason for his recent conversion to Mormonism was Joseph Smith's plain style.

ROBERT A. CHRISTMAS

Robert Christmas holds degrees from Stanford, the University of California at Berkeley, and the University of Southern California. He has taught at Idaho State, USC, San Jose State, and is now chairman of the English Department at Southern Utah State College. He has appeared previously in DIALOGUE *as poet, critic, and translator. He has recently finished his first novel, which will deal with "Mormon hangups in the contemporary world."*

MAY SWENSON

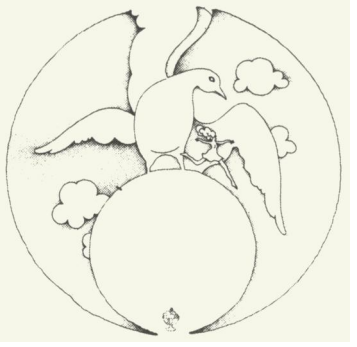
May Swenson is the most famous of American poets with a Mormon background. She was born in Logan and educated at Utah State, and has made her home in New York. She has published very widely in the most prestigious periodicals and anthologies and has gathered her poems in several collections — ANOTHER ANIMAL *(1954),* A CAGE OF SPINES *(1958),* TO MIX WITH TIME *(1963),* HALF SUN HALF SLEEP *(1966),* POEMS TO SOLVE *(1968). Of May Swenson, Louis Untermeyer wrote, "This is the kind of poetry Emily Dickinson might have written had she read D. H. Lawrence." And the poet Robert Lowell wrote of her, "Miss Swenson's quick-eyed poems should be hung with permanent fresh paint signs."*

STANLEY ANDERSEN

Stanley Andersen started writing under the guidance of Professor Moyle Rice at Utah State University and continued under Lew Sarette at Northwestern University and Leonard Unger at the University of Minnesota. He has taught writing and literature at Minnesota, Utah State, the University of Helsinki, and San Francisco State College, where he is presently Professor of English and Humanities. He says, "I regard myself as a Californian. But as my poem shows, Utah still exerts a powerful pull on my imagination. One thing I've found about writing poetry is that you have to create someone to speak to. That's the primary metaphor. What you say unfolds from it. The problem is to be honest, whether you're Buddhist, Catholic, or Mormon."

ROBERT PACK BROWNING

Robert Browning is a doctoral student in English at Berkeley. He has published poetry and critical reviews in ENCOUNTER *and* WESTERN AMERICAN LITERATURE *and has written the libretto for Samuel Barber's "Easter Chorale." The convergence of Mormonism and modern poetry is a special interest.*



THE RED TAIL HAWK

Douglas Thayer

I remember how icy the alarm clock was that morning when I grabbed it and fumbled under the covers for the button. I didn't want my mother to hear it and get up too, because she would make me eat a cooked breakfast, fix me a big lunch. She would tell me again I shouldn't kill birds, insist how dangerous the river was for me alone, especially in winter, even if I was fifteen. I listened. Then, glad when I couldn't hear her door down the hall, I put the clock back and pulled my Levis and shirt under the covers to warm. I was going after geese, ducks too, but mostly geese, Canada geese. Standing in the south field after chores, I had seen them twice that week coming up off the lake to feed in the fields. The great grey Canada birds were fantastic, huge almost, wild and free, with a clamorous gabbling that made me shiver. Yet I had never killed one.

"Let me go with you."

I turned to face Glade, the oldest of my three younger brothers, his head just raised off his pillow. How I hated to sleep with him, feel his warmth beside me in the bed, hear him breathe, wake in the night to find him touching me. "No, you can't go. I told you last night."

"Please. I've got some shells."

"No. Shut up and go back to sleep."

His face pale in the dim light from the frosted windows, he stared at me, then lowered his head and turned to the wall. Glade followed me everywhere, swimming in the summer, fishing, hunting, on hikes. My mother made me let him go, said I should want him to go, that we were brothers. We fought at night. Straddling him I held my pillow over his face, him bucking and twisting, sucking for air; or I jabbed him savagely under the covers until he cried, when my two youngest brothers would holler from their bed that we were fighting. I could hear my father coming. He cuffed me, threatened to lick me, said, "You're not too big yet for a damned good licking." And I hated him for that, for grabbing me by the collar, for kicking me in the butt hard, for always shouting I was a fool. But I never cried. He couldn't make me.

I wanted to be left alone, wanted that fiercely, didn't want anybody around me, touching me. I wanted to be alone like the birds. Birds were alone. I loved birds. I took a taxidermy course, two dollars for each mailed

lesson, my haying money, and out in the barn I skinned the birds I killed and made their cotton bodies. I hung them from the barn rafters on long wires, suspended them in flight, meadow larks, robins, magpies, crows, ducks, hawks, and hanging from the ceiling in my room on a wire, a large redtail hawk, wings spread, soaring. Birds could fly wherever they wanted, could be alone. Nothing touched them but the air.

At night, Glade asleep, I would sneak off my pajamas and curl tight under the blankets but not really feel them in the darkness because they were warm like my skin, like air. And that summer often I lay on top of the covers spread out, stared up at the hawk, lifted my naked arms. I fell asleep like that once, and Glade woke before I did. "You're going to go crazy with that stuff!" my father yelled at me. "What the hell's got into you lately anyway?" But it wasn't sex, not that kind. I wasn't innocent, for no farm boy could be. But I didn't know girls then, not at fifteen and away from town, and my loins and heart would not freeze then as they would two years later, although even at fifteen I dreamed and woke in the darkness, my sleep become frantic with a boy's passion. But mostly I dreamed other dreams, dreams of flying, soaring, lifting away from the earth, being an eagle or a hawk, vanishing into the yellow sun.

My Levis and shirt got warm. Feet curled against the cold linoleum, I dressed. Kneeling to feel for my heavy wool boot-socks, I looked up at the redtail. "The Albatross — Six Foot Wing Span," a sailplane I built, had hung there first. Proud of me for once, my father said I should enter it in the county fair. But I didn't. Carrying the five-foot wings, Glade the body because I couldn't carry both, I climbed into the hot summer cliffs, where I sailed it into the afternoon thermals, watched it soar to disappear into the sun. Then I stepped to the very edge, raised my arms. Glade screamed. "You trying to kill yourself, you little fool?" my father yelled at me that night, called me a fool again for losing the plane. Younger, I let my kites go, held them until the ten-cent ball of string ended, then let them go, watched the wind carry them.

Careful not to let my drawer squeak, I got my shotgun shells. More than anything else I wanted a room of my own where I could lock the door, be alone, sleep alone, not hear anybody at night, be touched. And I would have my birds in my room, the soaring hawks and eagles, and the giant grey-white Canada geese. Hanging above me, it would be as if they were flying, and I could lie there looking up at them in the moonlight from the windows or use my flashlight, and perhaps the summer breeze through the open windows would stir them. I would be in a flock of birds.

I remember how I crept down the dark hall, my hand flat against the wall. I closed the hall door and walked through the cold front room past the Christmas tree and into the kitchen. After I ate a bowl of cornflakes I fixed me a sandwich and got my shotgun and other gear. It was three days before Christmas. I hated that too, hated the glittering tree, the music, everybody laughing. But most I hated the presents, getting them, people handing me things, putting their arms around me, patting me on the back,

wanting something in return. I cringed, wanted to jerk away, run. I wanted the tree down, the ornaments, lights and Christmas music put away in the cupboard. I wanted the house silent.

I did not dress warm against the cold, although the evening paper had said a storm was due that afternoon. I wasn't afraid of the cold. I pulled on my hip boots, put my brown canvas hunting coat on over my sweater, fitted my scarf. I didn't build the kitchen fire or turn up the oil heater in the front room. My mother might wake up and change her mind about me going alone, make me take Glade. Through my cotton gloves I felt the cold metal of my shotgun, a double-barrel. I didn't care if they all woke up to a cold house. My father was on graveyard shift at the dairy, but my mother would be up long before he got home a little after 8 o'clock.

Closing the back door, I walked down the porch steps, my breath rising in plumes in the icy air. Over the west mountains the moon was a yellow glow behind the clouds. To the east the sky grew white over the mountains. I stopped at the fence at the end of the second field, the crusted snow a foot deep where I stood. My father's small farm was on a bench. Below me were the river bottoms, narrow, then wider where the river neared the lake five miles to the west. Black against the snow, a wide band of cottonwood trees lined the river, a high clump at the swimming hole a mile above Spring Creek. In the summer the bottoms were all planted to wheat, oats, sugar beets, and hay, the houses and barns all a mile or two back from the river because of the spring high water. It was another ten years before they built the dam in the canyon.

I loved that belt of trees and willows, the river. The school, church, my father's house were all alien to me, prisons. I lived my real life there in the bottoms, fished, swam, climbed in the high trees, embraced limbs, sometimes ran naked and alone through the green willows, lay spread-eagled under the sun, soared on the great rope swing, hunted the birds, killed them. I was always hiding from Glade and the others, the sheriff when he came down to see if we wore swimsuits, always driven, reaching out for something infinite, not knowing what it was, but feeling myself drawn to it, some final feeling beyond the earth in the yellow sun.

One set of car lights moved along the bottom road, but I knew I would be the only hunter so late in the season. Those who still hunted had boats and decoys and hunted the open holes on the lake. I climbed between the frosted fence wires and started down the slope. The cattle gathered into the feed lots near the road; all day I would see only the few starved-out horses left in the fields to winter. Sometimes the horses died, froze icy, the legs sticking straight out as if the horses were dusting. When the snow melted, the magpies flocked out of the willows to feed on them.

I would jumpshoot Spring Creek to the river and then blind up on a sandbar and wait for the storm to push the geese and big ducks off the lake. Strung out for a mile in the new light, a flock of crows was already coming off the roost. Cawing, black against the snow when they dipped down, a thousand of them maybe, they headed for the corn fields on the bench.

Already my hands were cold in the thin gloves, but I shoved only my right hand under my coat. I liked the cold. It was clean and kept people inside. In April and May I swam in the cold river. I liked storms.

I climbed through the last fence and came around a clump of willows. A blue Ford pick-up was parked off the lane near the wooden tractor bridge over Spring Creek. I cursed, the words steady and half silent, like a hiss. A flat sneak boat with two men in it drifted into the first bend as I stepped on the bridge. I watched it vanish into the vapor, the creek just wide enough for it, the voices coming back to me on the water. I cursed them again, loud now, cursed them for the ducks, for being there, for not letting me have it alone, cursed them for their voices and their noise. Then I heard shooting, and I cursed them for that too, even as I loaded my own gun.

I hoped for stragglers out of the small flocks of ducks I saw rise over the willows just ahead of where the boat must have been. But none came. One or two would fall out of the flock, I would hear the dull boom of the shotgun, but no ducks flew close enough for me. I saw no geese. A mile from the tractor bridge I stopped to warm my hands. Too high for a shot, a magpie flew over me and dropped in with a dozen others and some crows across the creek near the partially covered skeletons of three cows killed by lightning that summer. Because it was swampy the farmer hadn't been able to drag them out. We walked up from the swimming hole to see them the day after. For a month, if the wind was right, you could smell the heavy watery stink a mile off. What little flesh was left was frozen hard or covered with snow. The magpies and crows watched me pass.

I hunted on down the creek. Magpies were smart. I killed very few of them with my shotgun. I killed them in the early summer with my .22 rifle when, just out of the nest, the young birds couldn't fly far. Tired of swimming, the extra shells brassy in my mouth, I sneaked from tree to tree, shot the young birds, watched them fall in puffs of feathers from the high limbs, the screeching old birds too smart to light. Then, because I knew what my mother would say if I brought too many birds home, I tied them with pieces of wire to the fences or climbed to wedge them back in the trees.

The sneak boat was tied up where Spring Creek joined the river. The two men sat drinking coffee, the ducks piled on the bow. I sneaked closer through the willows. "How about that triple, Fred, wasn't that great," one said, "three mallards dead before they hit the water." I aimed first at him, centering the bead on his head. A little closer, I could have blown big holes in the boat the same way I blew holes in sheds and wooden fences. "Best shooting I ever saw you do," the other one answered. I clicked my safety back on, turned and started down the river. Later I heard their motor and knew they had gone back up Spring Creek, knew they had limited out, knew then too I was on the river alone.

There was no trail in the snow. I broke my own, cut in and out to the river bank, but jumped nothing close enough for a shot. Nothing was flying. The wind hadn't really started, wasn't strong enough yet to force the ducks off the lake, keep them low. I stopped often to look for geese against the

black mountains and dark clouds, watched until my eyes watered, listened, strained for a sound I could not hear. I knew the storm would bring them. A few crows flew and solitary hawks. Sandbars fed out into the river from the steep banks, but the channel was still full. I had been first across the swimming hole that April, Glade shouting for me to come back, not to try it, that it was too cold, too swift. They had to lift me out, build a fire for me. I vomited, blacked out, but I had been first across. I told Glade what I would do to him if he said anything.

I shot a crow that flew over and it fell into the river. It beat its water-heavy wings and kept lifting its head, but the slow current took it. I liked to touch the birds I killed. A marsh hawk flew by but not close enough. I watched for the wind in the tops of the trees. Finally, stomping my feet against the numbness, I turned back up the river and built a blind on a sandbar where earlier I had seen goose tracks and droppings on the edge ice. Warming one hand at a time in my crotch, I ate my lunch and watched the river. A few yellow willow leaves drifted slowly by. In the summer, hiding, my suit hidden under a rock, I liked to stand in the willows and let the fluttering green leaves touch me. Rifle in hand, I hunted for hours unseen, alone, naked, sometimes shouts drifting to me from the swimming hole. When a thunderstorm came over the west mountains and the farmers, afraid, left the fields, I sneaked out to stand in the belly-high green wheat, watch the lightning, hear the roar and rumble of thunder, feel the wind. Or I climbed high in the bending trees, wrapped my arms and legs around the limbs, squeezed until the rough bark hurt, rode them. I loved trees.

And if I tired of hunting birds I shot the surfacing carp, watched them fade into the deep grey water, followed them, walked slowly into the river from the sandbars until the water was over my head and the slow summer current carried me. I spread my arms and legs to touch the flesh-warm water, became nothing, only part of the water. Eyes open I sank down from the grey-blue to the green and then the black, the light disappearing above me, completely alone, touched the cold bottom mud, then rose back again into the light. And I kept doing that until the vomit stung in my throat and I got dizzy. Then I lay in the yellow sun, looked at it through the cracks between my fingers, tried to see what it was. When Glade hollered that he had my clothes, that it was time for chores, I wouldn't answer. Days later I saw the carp near the edge of the water, bleached yellow-white and pecked by magpies.

Small flocks of teal kept flying up-river, but I didn't shoot, didn't want the small ducks. A lone greenhead mallard came up. Watching it through the piled brush, I stood, shot, dropping it dead, ragged, where I could drag it out with a stick, glad it didn't float away out of reach. Sitting again, I arranged the feathers, stroked them, touched the velvet green head. It was a big Northern with bright orange feet. The winter before I had killed a mallard banded in Alaska. I made a ring out of the aluminum band, which I touched in school, in church, took off, read. Ducks could fly wherever they wanted to, up above everything, just in the air with nothing else around

them, never touched by anything except water and air.

It was colder. Blowing across the river from the northeast, the beginning wind scattered a few leaves out of the willows and onto the rippled water. I stomped my feet, rubbed my numb fingers, remembered the story of the hunter who tried to kill his dog, put his hands in the warm guts to keep them from freezing; but the dog wouldn't come close enough and the hunter had lost his rifle. Finally I decided to move farther up-river, run part of the way, get warm and blind up again. The wind hit me when I left the willows and I heard shooting from toward the lake. A few ducks flew against the black clouds; the growing wind would force them down. I heard geese once, pushed back into the willows, saw them off to the south, big, black, five of them, high, their gabbling faint. I remember how I spoke to them, "Turn, turn," I said, but, heart slamming, had to watch them vanish, just stand there.

I already knew I would stay until dark, knew it before I left the house that morning. I didn't care about my father; maybe he would be asleep, wouldn't be waiting for me. My mother would just worry, not cuff me, not shout, just look at me, shake her head, talk, her eyes maybe filling up with slow tears, tell me it was Christmas time. The geese would come if I waited long enough. In my mind I saw them, five or six maybe, coming up the river, the great moving wings, necks out, the gabbling louder and louder. And I would kill one, maybe two, bring them crashing down with perfect head shots, the great wings all ragged in the air.

I crossed Spring Creek where a wax sandwich paper from the sneak boat had blown up the creek and caught in the weeds. Three times I cut back in to check the river but jumped nothing, the last time walked through the little stand of six-foot blue spruce. Twice my father had asked me, "Can't you get us a Christmas tree down on the river this year, save me buying one."

"No," I said, "there aren't any."

"You sure? There used to be a few in the willows if you kept your eyes open."

"No," I said, all the time staring at Glade.

I didn't want to cut a tree, drag it up to the house, hang it with tinsel and lights, didn't want the smell of it in the house away from the river, didn't want to watch it turn brown. A hundred yards back from the spruces, under the snow, were the bones of a little spike buck I had killed a year earlier in August. He had followed the river out of the canyon. I shot him through the eye, watched him until he was quiet, and then turned him over so he didn't look hurt. I went back three times that day, squatted down by him, brushed off the ants. The second day the magpies were on him.

Except for a few horse tracks the snow was clean and I broke my own trail. Way ahead where the river curved I saw the high cottonwoods at the swimming hole. It took five boys just to reach around the biggest tree, the rope tree. It was an old rope, two inches thick and frayed. We had boards nailed in the other trees to swing from, but I liked to climb higher, up into the green leaves. The others watched me, faces up-turned, Glade shouting

for me not to go any higher, maybe bawling. Sometimes, standing on a limb, I let go and stood just on one foot to have the feeling, then grabbed the overhead branch again when I tipped. I liked the feeling, the shiver.

Holding the rope, chest tight, I lifted up, and it was like in my dreams when I flew over houses and trees with just my arms outspread. The warm air rushing against me, the trees blurred, I waited until just before I hit the top of the sweep before I let go. And for that one moment I flew, saw everything below me, soared, hovered. Then I dropped, felt the tingling in my crotch, felt the air, the rushing heavier water. And I stayed under until they all thought I had drowned. I was both bird and fish. If anybody climbed as high as I had, I climbed higher, swinging again and again, falling until my nose bled, and I let the blood fall on my naked chest and stomach so that I looked wounded. The letting go, the soaring, was the very best part. I wanted to feel like that forever.

I built another blind halfway between the swimming hole and Spring Creek. The wind made the cold worse. I couldn't see my breath anymore. I kept my hands under my armpits, stamped my feet on the packed snow. Walking home I would be facing into the wind all of the way. I knew that it was nearly four o'clock, that I should have been at least back to the tractor bridge. The steady shooting from toward the lake meant more birds were flying. Teal kept slipping up the river in easy range, but I didn't shoot. I dropped a hen mallard out of a flock of five on the second shot. She was easy to reach. She was big, an orange-footed Northerner, and I decided I would mount her too when I did the goose, put her near a big greenhead I had hanging in the barn, make a pair. I liked the wind. I liked to go out in the barn on windy days, leave the door open and watch the birds move.

Later I climbed the bank to look for geese. Under the low heavy clouds everything was almost black, even the snow. Willows clicked. Lower now, the ducks came in against the wind in singles and doubles and small flocks. Dipping down, wings whistling when they flew over, they came on, the wind forcing them lower. I saw two small flocks of geese, strained to hear them above the wind, stared them out of sight, hoping all the time they would turn, come my way, talked to them. But they kept on, drawn to some other place, left me empty. And below them, white points of light burned in the houses along the bench. My mother would be pushing back the curtain at the kitchen window to look out. But I didn't care. In front of me, black against the grey snow, stood a starved-out old horse, head down, tail to the wind. Beyond the horse, only a black dot, was the big haystack at the end of Miller's lane. The horse was the only thing in the fields I could see alive. Swaying the tops of the trees, the wind brought the first scattered flakes of snow.

Just after I got back in my blind two big greenhead mallards flew by in easy range, but I didn't shoot. More big ducks came. But I was waiting for geese, only geese. They liked to rest in the shallows along the sandbars, leave their sign. But they came late, and I, afraid of my father, had never dared stay. They would come though, I knew, if only I waited long enough.

I listened against the wind, strained my watery eyes to watch down the river, watched, stomped my feet only when I couldn't stand the numbness, pounded my gloved hands against my knees, sure the geese would come, absolutely sure.

The big haystack at the end of Miller's lane was where we left our bicycles when we went down to swim. August was very hot, and I remember one night how I got up, dressed and climbed out the window. I intended only to ride my bicycle up and down the road in front of the house to get cool, but I turned off on the bottom road and then onto Miller's lane, parked my bicycle. At first I took off only my shirt, but then my shoes and socks, and then I was running stark naked down the sandy path, leaping, watching my legs flash in the moonlight. I wanted to scream and yell, run through the fields of ripe August wheat, but I didn't because I knew a farmer might have a late water turn or I might cut my feet. The cows and horses did not shy as I ran past them.

The cottonwood trees shaded the moonlight from the swimming hole. The joined, dark air and water suspended, enveloped me, and I floated, tried not to move, be water, air and darkness. When I climbed the trees the leaves were like hands. One night in a wind I rode the trees, the high limbs, heard a million leaves, screamed into the sound. And when I swung on the rope it was fantastic because I couldn't see where the water started. The tingling went clear to my skull, and I reached out to a world I had never known, something inviting me, as in my dreams.

I left the house four times at night, until on the fourth morning at three o'clock my father was waiting for me in the yard. "What the hell you doing out at this hour," he said, spun me around, felt my damp hair. "You young fool, you trying to commit suicide down there swimming alone at night?" I didn't answer. He back-handed me, told me what it was like to drown, shouted, said he'd beat me next time. I had to stay on the place for a week. "Fool," he said. "I'll send the sheriff after you if you try it again." At breakfast Glade kept snickering.

More ducks flew up the river, flocks. I knew it would soon be dark. And then I heard them, that gabbling, the sound at first like the wind. I listened, already reaching for my shotgun, as if by instinct I knew the sound was geese. They were on the river. My breath caught. Heavy loads already chambered, I crouched on the snow, pushed the safety off, smothered the sound with my glove, tightened my legs. Low, gabbling, three great Canada geese flew out of the greyness below me, shadows, but then blacker, coming right at me in good range. Big, bigger than I had ever thought, beautiful, somebody pounding me over the heart. I watched through a hole in the blind. "Wait, wait," whispering, "not too soon, not too soon. Big. Wait, wait." The gabbling grew louder — marvelous the wings, the long necks, the rhythmic birds.

Just as they came abreast I stood up. Flaring, they lifted with the wind, moving away. I shot, missed, shot again and the lead goose turned completely over and fell, broken-winged, crashing into the water. Even as he hit I was

out of the blind, mindless of the other geese, ready to dance and scream. Uprighted, trailing the wing, the goose swam toward the far side. Cramming in a shell, I aimed carefully on the head and fired. The long neck collapsed and the head pushed forward into the water under the force of the shot. The pounding in my chest died. The wind and the slow current moved him. He was too far out.

I didn't hesitate. I set my gun on my coat. When I pulled off my Levis the cold wind stung my bare legs. Puffs of mud rose around my feet when I stepped into the river past the edge ice, the water colder than the wind. I swam sidestroke, the goose bobbing ahead of me on the waves I made. I wasn't afraid, though I knew I could cramp, sink, fade down into the grey water and yellow leaves. It didn't seem strange, not unreal, not dangerous. I reached out and took the goose by the neck, glad, wanting to shout, the feathers warm. And then, not feeling my body under the water, paralytic, I turned back. When I touched the mud under me, I stumbled out and dropped the goose. Yellow, the broken wing bone stuck out through the feathers. I picked up the goose again and hugged it to me, felt the still warm body against my numb skin.

The wind had blown my shirt and left glove into the water. My body was white. My head buzzed. I kept gasping for breath, and acid vomit rose in my throat as I tried to dry myself with my undershirt. When I tried to pull on my Levis I stumbled, covering my feet with the white snow. Dressed, I put the stiffening wet clothes into the rear game pocket with the ducks, picked up the heavy goose, my shotgun, and struggled up the bank. The wind hit me square, blew the snow straight into my eyes, took my breath.

After ten minutes, fumbling, I stopped to wrap my scarf around my face. Still my face slowly stiffened and it was hard to open my mouth. My forehead ached. I carried the goose over my shoulder, my left hand metal. Everything was black, even the sky, the only light coming from the grey snow under me. At first when I stumbled the snow was colder than the wind, but only at first. When I came to Spring Creek I didn't try to cross but turned up along it. Many ducks were flying; once I heard geese. The cold was like pressing naked against ice. Startled, a magpie rose screeching from a bush. I remember how the wind whipped it away.

I pushed on and on against the wind and snow until I could not feel myself walking. I seemed not even to breathe. After another half a mile I seemed to float, leave the ground, rise, hover, and it was a sensation I had never known before. I expected to see the fences, willows and trees vanish under me. I was becoming something beyond myself. I felt no limits, nothing stopping, nothing touching me, as if I were rising alone into light, rising, never falling back, the sensation never dying.

I stumbled a last time, fell forward into the soft snow, where I lay on my side not caring, the snow not cold anymore. Relaxed, sleepy almost, I stared at the white snow falling on my coat, saw then the horn and half head of one of the summer lightning-killed cows. I raised my head, saw behind me the mound I had stumbled over. I crawled. Mechanically with my lower

arm and dead hand I pushed back the snow from the horn, saw the black empty eye socket, the bone skull. I lay back. Catching in the wrinkles of my coat, the snow was turning me white. All summer the cows had been vanishing, the hanging birds too, the carp, the little buck. And I had no name for it, only vanishing, knew only that it was not swimming, not running naked in the moonlight, not embracing trees, not soaring. It was not feeling. I grew whiter, saw myself vanishing. Then slowly, like beginning pain, the terror seeped into me, the knowing. I struggled up, abandoned my shotgun, the goose, fled.

But I could not run, could not feel the ground through my feet to balance myself. When I fell I got up, pushed with my elbows, feeling no pain, only the numbness in my arms and legs. I found low places in the fences and fell forward, the wire tearing my clothes. I thought the posts and bushes were people rushing up to help me. When I got to the tractor bridge I could only see, not smell, hear, even my tongue cold in my mouth. And I wanted to raise my arms around my head to keep it warm so I could go on seeing, for I was afraid my eyes would freeze and I would just stand there until I fell down to be covered with snow. But I couldn't raise my arms.

When I first saw the lights flashing through the falling snow I thought the car was on the main bottom road, but when they flashed again I knew the car was coming down the lane. I waited. They came slowly, dipping, vanishing, a spotlight sweeping the fields. When the spotlight hit me a red light started blinking; the car came ahead faster and then stopped. The falling snow flashed through the shafts of light. Pulling his broad-brimmed hat tight against the wind, the sheriff got out. His open sheepskin coat flapped.

He stopped. He asked me my name. "Judas, kid, you've got your mother all upset. Your old man's out tromping the fields with a neighbor, madder than blazes too, I can tell you that."

The sheriff blocked out the lights.

Again he asked me my name. "What's wrong with you, kid, can't you talk?" He played the flashlight up and down me. "Where's your gun?" He stepped closer. "Where's your glove?" He shined the light into my eyes, and I couldn't close them. "Good hell, kid, we better get you in where it's warm." I felt him take my arm, grip it tight.

I was in the hospital three weeks. The surgeon cut off all of the fingers on my left hand, my hand a white ball raised on a wire frame, and I had pneumonia. The oxygen tent was like being under water. When I rose up out of the blackness those first nights, I saw my mother or my father, sometimes both. My father sat in a chair and slept with his forehead resting on my bed. Then I would sink back down into the blackness again, spiral down into the not-knowing, vanish. I was terrified of sleep. When I was out of the oxygen tent and could talk again, I told the doctor my hand didn't hurt so he would stop the shots for that. At first he said no, but later he told the nurse. The pain wouldn't let me sleep too long. I cried sometimes at night because of the pain, but it was better than sleep. Across from me

was an old man with yellow skin who slept all of the time. At night I listened to him breathe, his mouth a black hole in the dim light. The nurses kept putting his thin yellow arms and legs back under the covers. The nurse hurried to put a screen around my bed the night he died, but through the cracks I saw what they did. Later after the nurse took the screen away I watched the women turn over the mattress and put on all fresh bedding. They whispered back and forth across the bed and looked at me. The nurse made me take a sleeping pill.

When the doctor released me my father wrapped me in a blanket and carried me from the door to the car in his arms, the corner of the blanket over my face. It was late afternoon when we got home. The whole family came out as we pulled in: my brothers were dressed in their Sunday clothes; my mother wiped her eyes with the bottom edge of her apron. My father carried me into the warm house that smelled of roast turkey and put me on the couch in the front room. Blazing in the corner was the Christmas tree with everybody's presents under it. They had saved Christmas for me, which I hadn't known. I bit my lip and turned away. Glade wanted to know what was wrong. "Nothing," I said. It was a different tree.

Several neighbors came by, then we had supper, and after that, Christmas. My little brothers brought me my presents, helped me with the ribbons, stacked them for me. Later my mother said that I'd had enough excitement and needed to rest, so my father carried me down the hall to the bedroom. The bedroom was warm from a new oil heater. Warm under the covers in my heavy flannel pajamas, I lay and listened to my brothers playing in the front room. Above me the redtail hawk still hovered, the tail fanned, the wings spread to hold the air, beak wide for screaming. The yellow glass eyes looked down, the bird motionless, suspended from a wire, dusty. Out in the barn the hanging birds were dusty too, some of them splotched with pigeon droppings.

That night Glade was supposed to sleep on the couch in the front room, where I would be during the day, but I didn't want him to. I told my mother he wouldn't hurt my hand, that we could change sides, so she let him. Later, just before he went on graveyard shift, my father came and stood in the doorway, the hall light behind him. He could see I was still awake, everybody else asleep.

"You all right, son?" he asked, quietly.

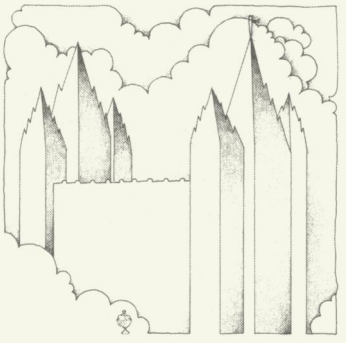
"I guess so," I said.

That was all he said. He stood there for a moment then, leaving the door half open, turned and walked down the hall. He didn't turn the hall light off.

My presents were stacked on the dresser in front of the mirror. Over the sound of the heater I heard the wind outside. It was snowing. I raised my arm to turn the white ball of my blunt hand in the light from the hall. I hadn't seen my hand yet. When I did I cried like a baby in the doctor's office. At school I kept my hand hidden in my pocket, wore the same sweater every day because it had front pockets, and I quit gym. I couldn't

stand being dressed in a gym uniform, my arms bare, couldn't stand it in the showers naked, without even a towel to cover my hand, couldn't stand the other boys seeing me. Clutching my hand I prayed at night, even out loud, promised God everything, then woke in the early morning afraid to look. But my father made me start gym again. "You can't hide; you have to live with it," he said. "That's life." And he made me do my chores, no matter how hard, no matter how many things I broke or spilled, and although he shouted at me sometimes, swore, he never again hit me.

Green, blue, white, red — the colored Christmas boxes and wrappings glinted on the dresser in the shaft of light from the half-open door. I stared up at the hawk. It was indistinct now, black, a hovering silhouette, a dark still shadow above me. I moved closer to Glade, touched him. The dresser mirror reflected the boxes and packages. I had received the most presents.



Clinton F. Larson

A LETTER FROM ISRAEL WHITON, 1851

A crest of wind runs and rustles through the pinons
Below the butte, and it is evening; the moss-green shade
Glimmers with lancets and gems of the afternoon sun;
The fields beyond glow yellow-gold; and the overcast
Of azure dims pale and like powder in the air
Fails away into the recesses of light and time.
I sit before a candle that tips its flame
From the door, and I write . . .

Dear Mother:
I received a letter from you the 8 of May.
I was very glad to hear from you but I had to wet
The letter with tears. You are a good Mother to me.
Their was a letter came from Father too.

I crease them at the edge of the desk, splinters
Shifting the pages awry . . .

I and Eliza have not forgot what you told us
Before we started our journey, If we was faithful
In the Gospel of the Priesthood, we should be instrumental
In the hands of God, of turning the hearts of the Children
To the Fathers. My health has been good every day
Since I left home; I am tough and herty, enjoying
Good health and this I am thankful for as usal.

There in New Haven, the bank of pillows and the skin
Like the river sand beyond the sheeting water
That subtly rises and fails, drawing grains
In the tumult of recession, and the eyes sudden
To see me near, from sleep, and my going away
Beyond the doors that she sees closing.

Eliza kept all my clothes in good order,
She was a good woman to take care of things.
I do not know what I should have done to travel
Without her; we had a team of our own, one yoke
Of oxen and 2 yoke of cows.

Over the plains from Laramie, west, the bow of mountains
Far to the south, and I write as if there, receding
Into the blue and golden undulations of distance,
Away from home and farther still to the great Divide
Of the land, and down the reaches of the far slope,
The canyons appearing between the walls and towers
Of rock and the high vales of the wind and the wisps
Of cirri against the high flanges of stone . . .

We took in Sister Snow and her little boy
To carry through to the vally for 75 dollars,
When we got about 300 miles she died
With the Cholery. Her husband was to the gold
Minds and was a coming to meet her to the vally
In the fall, but I heard from him; he has been sick
In the Sutters' gold minds and has not come yet.
By having Sister Snows things in my wagon
I had to by another yoke of oxen when I got
To Fort Carny where I got my cattle, because
She was foot sore and could not go, for 55 dollars.

The oxen before me, I watch the rhythm of the wagons
Tipping and heaving, and the finite dust
Settles in our wake, paling the sage on either
Side, and after. I am the measure of that journey,
Never to return, and here where the soundless sky
Drifts from the still clouds, and where it goes
I see the quiet periods of stars and the sleek
Heaven of that other certainty . . .

It was very bad for Eliza to have sickness
And death in her wagon on such a journey.
We see thousands and thousands of bufalows
Moving in great heards; we kill some and had
All the meat we wanted and it was as good
As dried beef. We kill some antaloope, in animal
As big as sheep; they was as good as mutton.
Manly Barrows kill a good many rabits because
He had a shot gun; I shot some sage hens
With Manly's gun. We see some raddle snake;
A young man got bite by one, but got well,
Very early one morning there was one run under
Our wagon and they kill it. We see Indians
In droves without number; one rode up to my wagon
And give my Eliza some blake Cherrys
And she gave him two crackers. They all ride
Horses and have long slim poles fastened
To there horses to carry there game.

From the plain I see the declivity to the stream
Then as we brake the wagon with poles, to the water's edge,
Then easily into the cold, the oxen threshing for footing
On the stony bed; I steady the wagon, reaching
From my horse to the buckboard, but over it goes
Like a vane against the current and the rills
Of cold, and Eliza sinks there before I catch her,
Her skirts the mantles of darkness, laden with water.

And she gazes wildly at me when I right her
And help her to the bank. She shivers as I right
The wagon from my saddle, and in the evening
I touch the question in her, of the exposure and cold
Of September, and the wind. She shivers again, trying
Against the cold . . .

We got to the Vally about the middle of October.
I work one yoke of my cattle, the old brindle some.
A cold storm come and one died. We have
Some brown sugar that we brought from St. Louis.
Wheat is worth 3 dollars a bushel, beef 10 dollars
A hundred and maybe potatoes 1 dollar a bushel.
There is grist mills and saw mills in the Valley a plenty.
The wheat on the ground bids fair for a good crop;
They raise from 40 to 60 bushels to acre;
After harvest they plow in the old stuble
And next summer get a great crop of wheat
Without sowing and this they can follow up
Year after year.

Eliza, you lie there, under the window, the last sunlight
Over your hands, and I cannot see where you
Must see, the pinons flickering like lashes
Over your eyes, the fire of embers waiting in the ash
White powdering over them . . . You lie there,
Tucked in the quilt you made for us in New Haven,
Still as the evening before the crest of wind . . .

Mr. Hunter finds teem and seeds and tools and land
And I have one half of the crop and give him
The other half in the shock. I have 18 acres of wheat
On the ground, Mother, it looks fine up to my knees.
We have good meetings every Sunday. Eliza is . . .
The Vally is 100 miles long and about 20 wide
With the river running through the middle, called
The River Jordan and Mountains all around
The Vally higher than the clouds.

But Eliza is still as I write, and I must only
Listen. I, Israel Whiton of the Salt Lake Valley,
Write this letter to you, Mother, from the canyons
And the butte above my land; it is a leaf
From the spring before we came, as both you and Eliza
Know, unanswerable except in the signs that come,
That I cannot seek. So I give it to the wind
From the tips of pinons or the butte, and it lifts
Away, and I try to see it as it diminishes
Away, then vanishing though I know it is there,
As you know better than I, Mother . . . And it will rise
Beyond the golden seal and touch the white hand
In the cirri pluming the Oquirrh crest west
Over the sunset, and it is as if I take a veil
Full in my hand as I write, as if to let it yield
To the days consecrated to the journey west
That holds me aloof from all I have ever known,
The East and the cities of my common being,
As I am here, in Zion, wondering about you
Who cannot respond except in the barest hints
Of being that lift over me and show me the way
To yield and rise into the Kingdom, the sky
And the land like the white silver spirit
That we know but is fathomless before us
And indefinite as the planes of God rising
Into the sun . . .

With love,
Your son Israel

Arthur Henry King

HOT WEATHER IN TUCSON

Glimpsed askance through leaves, the sky
looks lapis and ivory;
confronted, blinds and is blinded by
the sun's incandescence.
Through the thick shadow of a mulberry
a white-wing dove may flute a cool blue call
continuo; and Christ,
white-robed as priest,
direct a blue gaze from the print on the wall.
But, to face the Father's or Jehovah's embodied essence,
must I prepare my own eyes
for longer than I know
and further than surprise
can go?
Have I to arrive beyond surprise or wonder,
simply to accept Sinai, lightning and thunder,
and the intense
presence
of the Gods' incorporate power and light?
Joseph was not surprised: he saw his sight.

In the thin shadow of the tamarisk and
mesquitë, the cicadas draw
a relentless buzz-saw.
I dare not plant my bare sole on the sand.
I have my free agency;
but I can act only on things as they are,
freedom being interpretable as willing obedience
to — rather than mere recognition of — necessity,
like radiance
from the ineluctable path of a star.
Hence, it may be, Their
exceeding light
that I cannot yet bear,
though it has driven out "Chaos and old night."

Meanwhile, the white-wing dove may call
in fluted blue from the mulberry;
seen through the leaves, the sky look ivory
and lapis-lazuli;
and Christ stand in snow and azure on the wall.
I am grateful for the diversity by limitation
— through the sense, the plain sense —
of incarnation;
and hope for deliverance
into a still more gifted body of flesh and bone,
yes, like that of the Father and of the Son.

July, 1969.

Arthur Henry King

VISIT TO A CATHEDRAL AFTER A TRIP AROUND THE WORLD

In the west door for kings alone swung wide,
the leather-padded wicket, left behind me
stifling a gasp, expired.

No more fresh air:
I had entered the dim, mouldy, hollow hush
of a dead church — the silence of the 'grave
and reverend' sirs ghosting it in their gowns —
to penetrate the nave, transgress the transept,
stumble the steps up, dive through a cervical rood-screen,
steal past the vacant Gibbonsry and across
more steps, and teeter at the altar. No
postern, no thoroughfare;
no lady-chapel, paradise ovarian,
or cloister to produce an Easter egg
fusible with a faltering tongue of fire
for second reformation: only a stone
apse with a roof of stone; and no way out
but birth or rebirth by return.

Return?
Why send yourself to Coventry? They dispence
a 'longing, lingering,' backward, westward, modern
conspective trick, a summary pastiche
unrealized as you wander up their nave:
your history and mankind's all out of date

But, though not through the body of a cathedral,
I found an eastward way out west, a western
route back east, in time or place, travelling
from the past-future's predeterminate tense
to a future through a past, from the Levant
of Greeks, Jews, Muslims, India, Japan,
to a temple between the desert and the Rockies,
the route of the great trek, the site of Eden,
the wood south of Palmyra where by faith
a fourteen-year-old lad saw Father and Son,
the white board farmhouse in whose upper room
Joseph translated and in the room below
my church was founded; and the Susquehanna
whence, on a mid-May morning, from the swirling
water the priesthood once again returned
to earth, as the river blazed with prophecy,
the leaves rejoiced, blessed, and a pima dove
quietly in this east of the New World,
orient in occident, end with beginning,
alighted.

May/June, 1969

Arthur Henry King

THE RIGHT SIZE

A landscape lies under the open sky . . .
(Open? The sky's the limit,
the daylight veil over the illimitable,
withdrawn for revelation from the darkness
beyond of Adam's first — and longest — nightmare
trying to count quastars telstars from pulstars.
Nth grandson Blaise, a rodent of nocturnal
habit, was apprehensive of a white
owl that at times would swoop — but Blaise would hoot —
in from the eternal silence of those infinite
spaces on Blaise forlornly nibbling at
predestination and incomprehensible
grace. And his terror's now old Adam's *tedium*
sed non laudamus infinitum . . .)

Grace?
Oh yes, it's day again! All landscapes lie
under a veiling sky. Each one embraces
ten views, each view a hundred sights, each sight
a thousand shapes, each separate shape a million
discriminations made from inward darkness
by instrument, and every single one
some apprehension of infinitude . . .

Leave "lesser fleas," and take a landscape's grace!
Bigger than bugs, it's not the animal
a thousand miles in length that Aristotle
so startlingly invented for rejection.
How big's the *Ding an Sich*? *Ansicht*? The size
to have a face that we can see as one?

Tired of the burden of things too large or small
or many for the eye, let us confine ourselves
to eyescope. Take the landscape! *Te Deum*
Incarnatum laudamus, flesh and bone
standing veiled yet revealed through a column of light
shafted more candid down amid the shadow —
smooth boles of ash or beech than this clear morning
of early spring in this glade in this grove,
and with Jehovah, Thy beloved Son;
Who made it all according to Thy Word,
being Himself the Word by which He made it
a garden in a landscape in a world
created to man's measure for his pleasure.
And yet our landscape lies under a sky
close blue by day but open black at night.

May, 1969.

Robert A. Christmas

ADAM

Let's see. This morning – since you've been gone –
I've taken a walk on the beach, naming
And naming and naming, until I can name no more.
Comber, anemone, crab. Will these do?

I talk to myself now – so I've found –
As never before, when he'd leave me, often
Now, and now you. I guess I'll get used
To the feeling. But it's funny – the way I get thinking

I mean – like imagining things as more
Or less than they are, because when he's here I
Know him; but gone, he almost vanishes twice
Into all, or nothing – I have to urge

Myself back to that presence, that voice, or hassle
With a vacancy when I fail. And so with you.
Like today – I'm imagining you by turns as either a goddess
Or my servant, or as just another creature

To name, and everything in between, except
What I feel you really must be when you're here,
And I'm worn out, before noon, when I used to be able
To name – name all day – with scarcely a pause.

But what shall I call it – both of you gone?
To name what I can't see is going to be harder.
When you're back I'll try to explain what I mean;
But with you here, in a way, it might be hard.

But at least you can come and sit beside me on the sand,
And listen to the waves – right now
They're small, making little exhausted crashes;
The animals romping or lolling, and the sky

Is a light – a difficult – blue, and no clouds.
I'm just trying to see things as they are, if I can.
My unicorn poking that surf, for example;
And with nothing at all to do with my hands

I've drawn you these words – on a slope of sand,
In those parallel lines you love so much
(I can hardly make them, God knows, when you're here) –
But I forgot (it looks like) to account for the tide.

If you're back in time, I'll teach you to read this.

Robert A. Christmas

Leaves and fruit were falling
And I only wanted to know
Why this, of all the trees,
Kept alternating greens
And browns and why it dropped
Those ugly pods and stems—
I only wanted to know
Of the roots, the crazy clutch
That broke the ground, the branches
Elbowing into the sun,
The netted leaves, the shoots,
Buds, blossoms, scars — I had
To know this motion I
Could almost see, I felt
Its harboring of life
That somehow is not life,
Of life alive against
Itself! I felt I must
Know why the struggle, why
That little piece of bark
Was flaking off — I touched!
And a branch dropped at my feet

And spoke yes spoke to me
Moving and speaking — oh Gods!
And then it gently twined
My leg and ran its head
Up up my thigh and asked
If I were pleased or if
I understood I said
I did not but I wished
To understand the tree
It said to know you must
Partake I did I knew
The tree I was the tree
The branch went in the tree
Again I was the branch
The branch was I I could
Not tell which was the branch!
But I could see! I saw
A country in the mist
Beyond the stream, this garden
Has an end, come eat!
Come see where the river runs
Into a sea of sand!

Robert A. Christmas

AT MOUNTAIN MEADOWS: FOR JUANITA BROOKS

The mass grave here is set with stones
Piled low inside a low rock wall,
And marked for travelers by a sign
That tells us briefly of the murder
Of six score emigrants, whose bones
Lay here and there once — on the plain,
In the gulley — left to the weather
Of almost a century where they fell —

Like so many others, screaming, shot,
Robbed and left naked in the dust;
A few of the millions underneath,
And killed for something, like the rest
That we remember and forget
In stone and plaque — our modern shrines,
A casual pilgrimage of death
For tourists in the summertime

Who cannot kneel to sift for those yet
Ungathered pieces of the dead
That wash out here in summer floods
Like parts of broken animals,
But choose a few things to take home,
A twig, a name, then pass adept
As visitors around low walls,
Inspecting what they must disown;

Forgetting that such ways will end
When these bones, bursting to rebirth,
Pick through the meadows for debris
We did not number, and the Earth
Burns to a glass in which we see
Ourselves as we are seen, wherein
We read, as guilt and innocence,
The record of our ignorance.

May Swenson

THE BEAM

How things really are
we would like to know.
Does Time flow,

or is it atomized
in instants hammered
around the clock's face?

And Space,
is it what we find
around us in our place,

or "a symbol, suitably haunted,
of the mind?"
The mind: a beam,

fitfully focused, then
dragged on . . .
so all material in its ken

is lit,
consistent, tranquil as far
as that Visitation lasts . . .

When it
is withdrawn
when all we think

and know
"goes out," where does it go?
Into a blind

sink? No.
Moving by Mind's light, which
is slow,

mind must move,
to warm the groove
of being,

and drag into
its circle particles
for another Seeing.

Stan Andersen

FROM UTAH POEMS: TO ELIAS

I

I brought my daughters to your grave
There in the river's bend
Not far from where, their age,
I watched you dedicate the monument
To Jim Bridger: trapper, river-searcher.

You lay deep in Utah's summer
So still they couldn't imagine
This was their grandfather,
Yourself a monument now
To probing dry country.

Would you have known them?
They're coastal girls
Full of mysteries:
Dancers to new music,
Long-limbed, smooth-haired
Swimmers from beaches.

I thought of you swimming.
In this same river bending around us
You could plunge in and not come up
Until you were under the willows
On the far side. You frightened me
With that miracle, as a boy.

I thought of you as having
Plunged and never come up.

II

I see our farm a raft we poled
Through many a shallow and deep,
Many a bend and straight.

No masted ship there in the mountains,
Not so perilous a journey
As our ancestors made. Yet the raft
Was buoyant, moved through time.
We tied up, seasons, below the sandbars,
Watched the beavers, raised crops,
Built warm fires at Thanksgivings.
I've learned since (maybe you knew)
We were other Jews on another journey.
At Sukkoth a house of branches is built
And a feast eaten. It's nothing
Without knowing you're going on together.

We saw our desolate stretches too:
Times the river was barren of fish,
No berries on the banks for the girls
To gather. Worms stripped the country
Of green one summer. Remember?
Only the mountains kept us.

I thought the raft had made itself.
But you'd found timbers, hewed
And tied them, you, your brother,
The others. The land was desert
When you came. Little wild antelope
Leaping through sagebrush, you told me.
No sure forms but the Indian camps
You more than others came to love.

I marvel now you got the farm
Afloat. Apple and cherry trees,
Sweet clover, grass, sugar beets, barley—
Hard-won raft of richness.

Was it mine to go on poling
After you dived?

III

The sea gulls came in spring:
That slow dance of gray and white,
Those wails behind our plows.

I wondered what they meant. God's birds?
They'd come that century ago
To stop the crickets. Now they came
Asking tribute. Yet none stayed,
None took wheat I threw. Some signal
Given I could not name, their wings
Would lift them off, white discs.

Propellers were like that, I saw
When the war came. Whirls of white
Lifted me on vibrant wings into the air.

At seaports, waiting for clear weather
Eastward, I watched gulls wheel and shriek
For fish heads. Scavengers, they fought
For scraps, hurled taunts, turned circles
Tight as watchsprings. Birds of clangor.

I lay, though, listening to them,
Mornings in softer ports,
My own flesh washed by love
As by their raspy cries—
A song alive in me alive despite
The blading wings, the clanking shells.
I heard them cry out what I longed for.

You heard them cry in Trondheim,
That harbor your mission took you to
Before the wars. I thought of that
As I lay dreaming sea gulls.

When I came back, the raft was small.
You saw me sorrowing for friends
Gone down. I wept as well
For Europe like a close-knit quilt
We tore with bombs,
For enemies we killed,
For Jews lost in the camps.

Between me and the fields stood images
Too bright to bear: bomb-sheltered
Mothers feeding children. Cathedrals
Turning air to colored breath.
Girls leaning back on English dunes,
Friends younger still than I

Climbing into aircraft,
And the inscrutable long slow
Turns above the sea.

With you I wrapped the farm around me
Like a coat of greeny air, and knew
The sea gull's painful cry
Was finding home in homelessness.

IV

The Utah roads are changed.
They're wide and straight where
You knew narrow windings, crossings,
Dips we coasted through
To reach a town.

Cars ran off those old roads,
Missed bridges, slid off curves.
Wouldn't you know—beside me
Once when I was learning?

The roads are safer now
At sixty, seventy, eighty—
Smooth rafting!

Even the canyons are straightened:
Blind turns past cliffs cut off,
The dizzy grades reduced.
You hardly know you're probing hills
Before you're dropping down again.
Last year, at night,
I thought I'd lost my way
And struck another state.

It's easier to leave now.
Kids born since the war
Go farther, sooner. Your grandson
Heads for California in winter,
The Great Lakes in summer.

But returning's not so hard
As once I think it was.
Beyond the band of deserts
In glittering cities races clash,
The generations squabble. Love's
Not simpler than in Utah. Roads back
Are tempting too. An airline
Takes you there in an hour's patience.

You find a clear calm atmosphere
Between you and the mountains still.
I suppose they were that way
An age ago, as well as when
We poled our raft.
They stand relating green
To granite.

You think: They'll last. They'll
Slowly forest, keep water cold,
Await millennium.

V

The landmarks fade. I never thought
They would. Jim Bridger's monument
Is off the highway now
Sunk in fields. The farm itself
Is minutes out of Brigham.
I'm not sure I know the turn-off.

But there are searchers yet in Utah
Who know their way,
Like you, like me. They range
Through valleys finding places
To look out from.

Unconsciously they say
What the strong old prophet said,
Choosing Utah in the beginning:
A place, a possibility,
To make green, to make blossom.

All the world's a desert really.
We only live to bring
Communal beauty to it.

We build our rafts, some large,
Some small. They hold or break.
Others come after. The sea gulls cry.
The world is crowded.

Rest easy.

Robert Pack Browning

AN EXIT FROM UTAH

"This is the place." B. Young, 1847

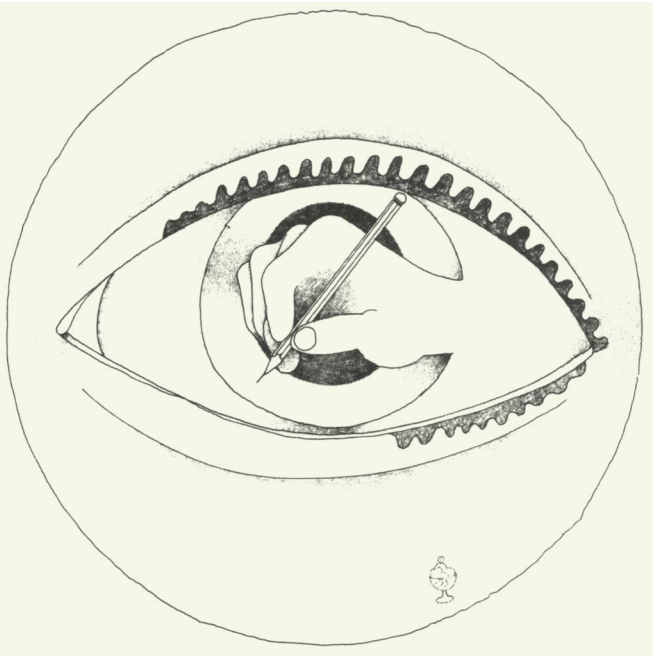
My knot, my clot, my Utah,
Good gouty wrinkled nurse
Turned dear disease, insufferable
Sweet scurf, my bloat, my fever,
You're all the pain I am.
And I'll prescribe our health:

Take roads, take all these pesky
Limbs, wrenched or lopped off,
Take valleys, our gawking wounds,
And string them, stretch them, love,
Splay them out here on the long
Salt rack toward Nevada.

The bleach, the healing eye
That sears, the poisonous sweet
Action of this wind will rinse
Our oily blood, will conspire
Against my kissing face
To sting the light into me:

At ninety miles an hour
The blood's old coils
And convoluted pains of heart
And head unwind, stretching
Clean as chrome on the long
Salt rack toward Nevada;

Under me the quick engine,
Steady like prayer, is purring
To this vacancy of wind, the land
Resolved to space and speed,
"This is the place," the slicing
Light, the atomizing seas
Of liquid sage, "This
Is the place; this is the place."



REVIEWS

INTRODUCTIONS

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Kenneth Hunsaker is Associate Professor of English at Utah State University. His review-essay is based in part on his Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Pennsylvania, "The Twentieth Century Mormon Novel" (1968). He is currently serving as Ward Clerk of the Logan Nineteenth Ward.

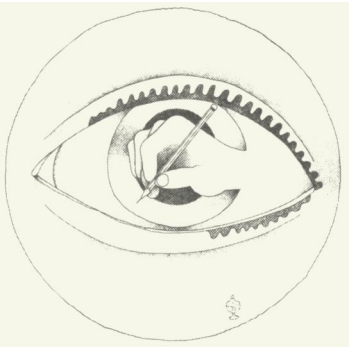
T. LEONARD ROWLEY
Leonard Rowley is chairman of the Department of Theatre Arts at Weber State College. He holds degrees from B.Y.U. and the University of Minnesota. His doctoral dissertation, "A Critical and Comparative Analysis of Latter-day Saint Drama" (1967), is the source of most of the material in this review-essay. Formerly Bishop of the North Ogden Third and North Ogden Sixth Wards, Dr. Rowley now serves on the high council of the Ben Lomond Stake.

CHERRY SILVER

Cherry Silver is a housewife and Stake Relief Society President in Denver. She has studied English and American literature at the University of Utah, Boston University, and Radcliffe College of Harvard University. She has traveled widely in the United States and the Orient where she has been able to observe literature at work in the Relief Societies. She says she believes that "literature must be lived in as well as analyzed, but that it can most fully be enjoyed when it has been critically explored."

CLAUDIA L. BUSHMAN

Claudia Bushman currently serves as President of the YWMIA of the Cambridge Ward in the Boston Stake. She holds degrees in literature from Wellesley College and B.Y.U. and plans to continue her studies at Boston University this fall.



MID CENTURY MORMON NOVELS

Kenneth B. Hunsaker

One general statement can be made about the Mormon novels published since 1940: they are as varied as the attitudes about Mormonism and the philosophies about literature. There are books which pretend to be novels but which are really treatises, such as Otto Schrag's *The Locusts* (1943), O. F. Ursenbach's *The Quest* (1945), and Roy Lambert's *High Uintas — Hi!* (1964). There are biographies and historical novels and an informal combination of the two which amounts to a kind of family memoir novel. Samuel W. Taylor's *Family Kingdom* (1951) is the best biography; *The Fancher Train* (1958) by Amelia Bean is a well-written historical novel; and John D. Fitzgerald's *Papa Married a Mormon* (1955) and *Mamma's Boarding House* (1958), along with Rodello Hunter's *A House of Many Rooms* (1965), best represent the family memoir novels. Then there are the traditional persecution-pioneering-polygamy novels, but in the middle of the twentieth century these are almost completely pro-Mormon. The anti-Mormon novels of the nineteenth and early twentieth century have now become more objective and less obviously propagandistic, and the novels written in deprecation of Mormons and Mormonism are those which have been written primarily by disgruntled or apostate members. In the traditional pattern are novels such as Elinor Pryor's *And Never Yield* (1942) and Ezra J. Poulsen's *Birthright* (1950). Vardis Fisher, Paul Bailey, and Virginia Sorensen — probably the most prominent writers of Mormon novels — have described the universality of the personal problems of individual Mormons, and other novelists have supported their attitude that Mormons must be described as people first and as Mormons second. Maurine Whipple does that in *The Giant Joshua* (1941) and to a lesser extent so does Richard Scowcroft in *Children of the Covenant* (1955), but the best treatment of Mormons as people is by Samuel W. Taylor in *Heaven Knows Why* (1948). Finally, Mormons are used as major characters in Alan Drury's *Advise and Consent* (1959) and in Mark Harris' *Wake Up, Stupid* (1959), but neither the religion of the Mormons nor their way of life is of prime importance in these novels.

Since Fisher, Bailey, and Sorensen are major authors and since Fisher and Sorensen are treated in separate essays in this issue, I have decided not to discuss them here, but I shall survey others whose novels are representative

of the variety of mid-century Mormon fiction. Maureen Whipple is one of these.

In *The Giant Joshua* she tells the story of Mormon life in Southern Utah from 1860 to 1886, but specifically it is the story of Clorinda (Clory) McIntyre and her Mormon sisters in polygamy. Miss Whipple created the same kind of protagonist that Virginia Sorensen did: a girl who was intelligent enough to know what was happening around her but who was helpless to do anything that would remove her from that unpleasant situation. The novel is naturalistic in the presentation of forces which control Clory's life. She is a victim of both heredity and environment, since she was born a Mormon and was trapped in the isolated area of Southern Utah where she lived for years in a mud dugout. The other characters do not seem to be victims of anything except the author's pen. They are types. Abijah is the typical zealous patriarch who is both bigoted and arbitrary; Sheba, his first wife, is a domineering hypocrite; and Willie, the second wife, is an indecisive sheep who merely follows the flock. The problems of survival in Southern Utah are complex and the Mormon farmers give so much of themselves to the land that when the opportunity to leave presents itself, they find it difficult to go. But such problems, accented by the combined forces of nature and the Church, are standard fare in Mormon novels. Nevertheless, they are both emphasized and personalized in *The Giant Joshua* by their specific effects upon Clory.

Richard Scowcroft's *Children of the Covenant* is cataloged in the Church Historian's library as an anti-Mormon novel, but it is written with much greater understanding of Mormon life than the anti-Mormon novels of the nineteenth century. The power of *Children of the Covenant* lies in Scowcroft's ability to describe in almost painfully accurate detail the Mormon way of life. His protagonist, Burton Curtis, is a returned missionary who has "re-entry" problems. On the train that brought Burton home from his mission he shaved off his missionary mustache because he was afraid to let his mother know that he had grown one and because he was afraid of being called a typical missionary by his less religious friends. Scowcroft used Burton Curtis as the representative of the modern Mormons who want to believe and who want to conform but who want also to be free.

Children of the Covenant is very definitely an anti-Mormon novel, but it is just as definitely a credible and well-written novel. The major characters represent certain types of Mormons, but they are also fully developed as individuals in the story itself. The weakness of Scowcroft's novel is that it lacks universality. Persons not intimately familiar with the special circumstances of the modern Utah Mormons — as opposed to Mormons of the past or Mormons in outlying areas of the Church — would not be able fully to appreciate the grim humor in Scowcroft's accurate descriptions of the thoughts and emotions of the twentieth-century Mormon struggling to reconcile his religion and his desires. *Children of the Covenant* is the type of anti-Mormon novel that infuriates the staunch Mormon and amuses the non-Mormon but moves neither to action. It demands too much knowledge of Mormons and

Mormonism ever to have a wide audience, and since it offends the majority of those who do have that knowlege, its obscurity seems inevitable.

Samuel W. Taylor has written both fictionally, *Heaven Knows Why* (1948), and factually, *Family Kingdom* (1951), about Mormons. The former is a comic novel and is the most delightful of all Mormon novels. The latter is the biography of John W. Taylor, the author's father. Comedy is outstandingly absent in most Mormon novels; there are some amusing scenes in a few, but none is completely devoted to humor. *Heaven Knows Why* is the exception, and it is a welcome one indeed. The novel is about Jackson Skinner Whitetop, a young man recently discharged from the army and living alone in the rundown cabin of his dead grandfather, Moroni. This modern angel Moroni becomes upset at his grandson's lackadaisical attitude, visits the earth, and commands Whitetop to marry Bishop Waldo Jensen's daughter, Katie. The events which follow are highly humorous and fully entertaining. The entire book is filled with Mormon humor: problems with coffee, tobacco, and hard cider are abundant; Bishop Jensen's first counsellor, Henry Brown, is a crook whose schemes backfire; two apostates add local color; all of the Smith girls are married with the help of a 30-30 carbine; and the good Mormons argue about where their chapel should be built, with the result being that they continue to hold meetings in the school.

The characters speak in the Utah idiom — clichés and bad grammar — and they have trouble with the Word of Wisdom. In other words, they are real people. Even though this is an exaggerated comedy, there is no other Mormon novel as true to life as this, and it is refreshing to see a healthy comic novel after so many "thesis" types concerning the hardships of pioneering, the hardships of polygamy, and the struggles of individual Mormons coming to terms with their religion. This book has none of that. The Mormons here crave coffee and sneak a cigarette now and then when the Bishop is not around. And when Bishop Jensen catches Whitetop brewing coffee, Whitetop says that it is an old recipe of his mother's for "coffee-near." He gives the Bishop a cup.

But there is more to *Heaven Knows Why* than simple comedy. Taylor draws a parallel between his protagonist, Jackson Skinner Whitetop, and Joseph Smith. Whitetop is the common name for a pesky, noxious weed (*Lepidium draba*) found throughout the Western States; Joseph Smith was looked upon by his opponents with the same kind of distaste for something unpleasant that Mormon farmers feel when they see patches of whitetop in their fields, and Taylor's protagonist is equally unpopular in his community. His middle name is a trade name, as is Smith. Jack is a common first name and so is Joseph, and there is not much difference between Jack-son and Joseph-junior. By combining the initials of Joseph Smith and Jackson Skinner Whitetop, we can see the parallel more clearly: J. S. (Whitetop) receives a visitation from an angel (grandfather) named Moroni. This angel tells J. S. (W) to organize a new religion — that is, to convert the followers (daughters) of the clergymen (Bishop) of the area. J. S. (W) tells a local minister (Bishop) about his visitation and the minister (Bishop) reacts negatively.

The hiding place of J. S. (W)'s gold (grandfather's money) is sought but no one finds anything. And the parallel continues.

In *Heaven Knows Why* Taylor succeeded in writing a Mormon novel that is different from all other Mormon novels. It is a story about modern Mormons and the characters are real enough that one might expect to see them on the streets of any small town in Utah. It is the kind of comedy which effectively amuses the reader while holding his interest, and it furnishes a parallel with the story of Joseph Smith. In other words, it is the kind of novel that one is compelled to read without interruption.

Ardyth Kennelly has written two novels that must be examined together, *The Peaceable Kingdom* (1949) and its sequel *Up Home* (1955). These novels tell about Linnea Ecklund's life in Utah as a plural wife. The author uses the technique of the short-story writer to give charm to the individual anecdotes which make up the novels. Each chapter of the novels is a short story and could be separated from the other chapters easily. In fact there is very little to hold the chapters together except for the fact that Linnea is involved one way or another in each one. She is a coarse, jealous, poorly educated woman who uses bad grammar and keeps a messy house. *The Peaceable Kingdom* moves too slowly to maintain reader interest and the style is distracting. Kennelly fills passages with parenthetical asides which are usually pedantic and boring. On the other hand, *Up Home* has a more carefully controlled style and the result is a better book but not an impressive one. Kennelly tightened her style by cutting down the number of asides, but *Up Home,* like *The Peaceable Kingdom,* is still a collection of anecdotes. Although some chapters have conflict and climax, others are sermons; still others just pass the time of day.

John D. Fitzgerald's *Papa Married a Mormon* (1955) and *Mamma's Boarding House* (1958) are family memoir novels. In the first Fitzgerald tells the story of his father's life and the varied experiences of Mormons and others in a Utah mining town. Papa runs the local newspaper and marries a Mormon, and Uncle Will owns a gambling hall and marries a prostitute. There is woman trouble, gambling trouble, and trouble with nature — the mine runs out and a flash flood destroys the town — but it is a satisfying life. *Papa Married a Mormon* concludes with Papa's death; *Mamma's Boarding House* begins at a point just after that death. It follows the pattern set by *Papa Married a Mormon* in uniting a series of stories; however, *Mamma's Boarding House* is not as tightly controlled as the first book. These two works are interesting reading, but as family memoirs they are little more than romanticized biography with a touch here and there of general history.

A more specifically historical work appeared in 1958 with the publication of *The Fancher Train* by Amelia Bean. The subject of the novel carries reader-interest by itself: the Mountain Meadows Massacre. Mrs. Bean was generally accurate as far as historical events are concerned, but she was also telling a story and she yielded to the fictional need for a hero and a heroine. She built sympathy for the protagonists, Jed and Melissa, early in the novel, and all the way through one hopes that at least these two will escape the massacre.

Then when that romantic desire is granted, one feels both relief and irritation because although the escape of Jed and Melissa is plausible, it is also contrived.

Along with the conventional and unconventional Mormon novels written during the middle twenty years of the twentieth century, there have been some novels which either use Mormon characters or discuss Mormonism or do both, but which are not Mormon novels because they are not primarily about Mormons or Mormonism. Such works use Mormon subject matter only incidentally. Wallace Stegner's *The Preacher and the Slave* (1950) is an example. This book is about the activities of Joe Hill (Joseph Hillstrom) in the IWW and the events which led to his conviction and subsequent execution for murder, but while this story is a notorious part of the history of labor unions in the United States, Stegner made it clear that his book was fiction. It happened that Joe Hill was tried and executed in Utah, so Utah is the setting for the latter half of the book. The Utah courts are presented as somewhat less than objective, and the "system" — the copper industry, the Mormons with their anti-labor feelings, and Utah business in general — is attacked by Joe and his friends, but Mormons and Mormonism are not attacked *per se*. Nor are they defended. The people of Utah and the major religion of the state are simply a part of the setting; the focus is upon Joe Hill.

Another recent use of Mormons and Mormonism in a non-Mormon novel is that of Robert Lewis Taylor in *The Travels of Jaimie McPheeters* (1958). About eighty pages of this 535-page novel are devoted to Jaimie's adventures with the Mormons. This section of the book is anti-Mormon in tone yet it is also sympathetic since it is a Mormon who helps Jaimie escape from the vengeance of the Mormon secret police — the Danites. The Mormon subject in *The Travels of Jaimie McPheeters* serves merely as another adventure in a book filled with a great variety of adventures.

Allen Drury's *Advise and Consent* (1959) has a Mormon as a major character, Senator Brigham Anderson. But his Mormonism is not at all a part of the story; in fact, Drury was especially careless about Brigham Anderson's religion, saying that Anderson did not want to "make the church his life's work" because his brother had decided to enter that profession. Drury was obviously not concerned about Mormonism or Mormons. He simply chose to make one of his characters a senator from Utah, and Utah senators must be Mormons. He might have been able to make the senator's homosexuality and his suicide more poignant had he shown the strong religious factors that would have been present in such a situation, but he didn't.

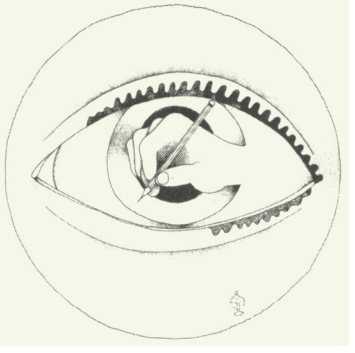
Finally, Mark Harris' *Wake Up, Stupid* (1959) completes the picture of this casual use of Mormon subject matter in modern American fiction. The protagonist of this novel is Lee Youngdahl, a college professor and recently excommunicated Mormon. The story is about Youngdahl's many adventures but it is not about his religion. With this novel one sees the Mormon heritage used as any other part of American life might be used in any other novel. It is part of the background of the main character and it is important in

that respect (and Harris is much more informed about the Mormons than was Drury) but that is all.

Perhaps novels such as these are a sign that regionalistic Mormon literature is out of date. Certainly Mormons have become more sophisticated as they have spread across the continent. As knowledge of the Mormons has spread, acceptance of them as individuals has also spread. In fiction this acceptance is shown by the inclusion of Mormons in works which have nothing to do with religion or pioneering or polgamy.

However, there are still writers who elect to write about Mormons in the traditional manner; Rodello Hunter is one. *A House of Many Rooms* (1965) is subtitled "A Family Memoir" and that it is. There is no climactic plot structure, but there is instead a series of anecdotes that highlight the history of the Woodrow family. Hunter relates the experiences that often occur in a large house in a small Utah town. The family is blessed with numerous progeny and there are several "borrowed" children but it is not a polygamous family. The homey anecdotes that make up the book are the kind that appeal primarily to those who have been acquainted with families such as the Woodrows. Thus it is representative of the kind of nostalgic reminiscing that many Mormons enjoy.

In summary, modern authors have written Mormon novels of a wide variety: propagandistic treatises, historical novels, biographical novels, family memoirs, traditional nineteenth century novels, and novels which treat Mormons and Mormonism only incidentally. Most of the mid-century authors have portrayed their Mormon characters as types rather than as individuals, but some authors, notably Samuel W. Taylor, Richard Scowcroft, and Mark Harris, have emphasized human nature first and Mormon characteristics second or not at all.



THE CHURCH'S DRAMATIC LITERATURE

T. Leonard Rowley

At the time of the organization of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1830, the religious world generally was antagonistic to the idea of leisure time being spent in any way other than worship or profitable social activity. The theatre was considered one particularly evil means of wasting time, money, and talent. In contrast, the L.D.S. Church, from its inception, not only tolerated the arts, but encouraged and incorporated them into its basic doctrinal philosophies. The theatre was no exception. From the formation of the Nauvoo Dramatic Company by Joseph Smith to the appointment of the Church Drama Committee which now supervises dramatic activity throughout the Church, Mormons have been actively engaged in the theatre.

Original plays have been considered an important contribution to the cultural growth of the Church membership since pioneer times. Various contests and incentive programs have encouraged the native playwright. Most of these plans have been Church-sponsored. The M.I.A. became the agent through which original manuscripts found their way into production throughout the Church. Eventually, original works became abundant enough for the Church to publish an anthology of plays expressly written for the Church drama program.

I

Within the past twenty-five years, more than 65 plays have been written for the Church drama program, written almost exclusively by Mormon playwrights to be performed almost exclusively by Mormon participants. As this new dramaturgy has developed, some interesting questions have emerged. Upon what standards may these plays be judged as a peculiar dramaturgy? How do these plays compare with secular plays on similar themes? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the Latter-day Saint drama program as it emerges as a significant contributor to the dramatic literature of the United States?

In attempting to evaluate works such as these, one quickly comes to the realization that art cannot be reduced to "scientific" measurement or subjugated to completely objective treatment, even in an authoritarian society like the Church. This becomes evident as one becomes aware of the variety of points of view from which dramatic criticism is launched and the lack of agreement among critics from generation to generation and even within a

given period. Most artists and scholars probably would not be willing to agree upon an arbitrary standard. Hence, the one meaningful standard by which these plays may be judged is that set up by the Church itself. A careful examination of Church publications reveals a set of standards developed as the drama program grew. These standards fall into two general categories: *Ethical Standards* and *Artistic Standards.*

The *Ethical Standards* include general philosophical concepts which, in the last analysis, must be left to individual interpretation on the basis of good taste, and specific standards of conduct on the stage which are acceptable or unacceptable to L.D.S. leaders. In this area, official Church publications instruct that (1) evil must never triumph; (2) that which belittles the race, color, or creed of others is unacceptable; (3) while scenes which refer to the use of tea, coffee, liquor, or tobacco may be necessary to the fabric of the play, they are never to be portrayed on the stage, but only referred to; (4) death is to be treated tastefully, and may never be without direct bearing on the play; (5) vulgar, obscene, or suggestive language, costumes, or actions are to be avoided.

Suicide and divorce were originally forbidden subjects, and, although they are not mentioned in most recent statements, they are implicitly included in the statement that "evil must never triumph." Also included in this category is the implied qualification that, if possible, Church drama should teach as it fulfills its other responsibilities.

The second category includes the *Artistic Standards* applicable to L.D.S. drama. According to these standards, a good play should (1) be entertaining; (2) provide insight and understanding of humanity, both local and distant; (3) provide food for thought and a widening of intellectual horizons; (4) be expressed in language that is pleasing and challenging esthetically; (5) contain the dramatic elements of *action, conflict, variety and contrast, strong dramatic structure,* and *carefully defined characterization.*

Naturally, there is no formula to indicate the proportional relationship among these various elements. That one quality may be more evident in one play than another and that some elements may be almost entirely absent from some plays does not necessarily indicate failure. Certainly the achievement of excellence in all areas would indicate a superior work.

In examining the plays written over the past quarter of a century for the Church drama program, certain artistic standards seem to achieve more prominence. One of the most often and most strongly stressed qualifications for an acceptable play is that it be entertaining. Taken in its broadest definition, this quality becomes the most universal in the plays of the past 25 years. The vast majority have elements of entertainment in them and several are handled with a degree of skill which seems to make them outstanding in this respect. A few appear to hold entertainment value for only the least discriminating theatre patron. Crude characterization, thin ideas spread across vast space, and outlandish situations which stretch the imagination beyond belief are the chief offenders in this area. Yet, compared to plays available through acknowledged publishing firms, the number of L.D.S. plays which resort to cheap entertainment seems minimal.

Under the definition of entertainment implied by Albert O. Mitchell when he says that a play should provide "entertainment values, not mere amusement only," the number of significant plays becomes appreciably smaller. Many seem to be frankly oriented toward amusement, written to allow the actor and the audience to forget the work-a-day world in an hour of inconsequential fun. This may be the result of a prevalent attitude within the Church, reflected even in official publications, that drama is a part of a recreational program. To the average Latter-day Saint, drama is thought of categorically in connection with sports events, athletics, dance, speech, and certain kinds of music, all of which are considered recreational activities. Until drama in the Church comes to be considered art rather than recreation, the quality of its entertainment is likely to remain at the amusement level rather than rising to the level of culture.[1]

Another factor which may serve as a leveling force in the quality of L.D.S. dramatic entertainment is the mass-participation concept. Drama is thought of as an activity for all, and, in the M.I.A. program, hardly a person reaches maturity without participating in at least one play. With this kind of democratic participation policy, it seems inevitable that the dramatic vehicle provided must sacrifice quality to numbers. The official attitude of the Church has varied from a highly selective point of view, in which the quality of the product became the criterion of success, to the democratically inclusive point of view, in which the degree of participation took precedence over the production. With the rise of the latter point of view came a rash of "family" plays in which the playwrights show concern for the average person and his domestic difficulties rather than for figurative giants grappling with the universal. This point of view is prevalent at present and seems to be one influence on the preponderance of inconsequential entertainment in current Mormon dramaturgy.

Far more L.D.S. plays seem to achieve the objective of entertainment than the goal of insight into the basic human condition or "understanding of universal humanity, near and distant." One of the greatest dulling influences to this kind of understanding is the straining for a happy ending. In some cases, the happy ending comes with such great effort as to destroy the impact of the suffering within the play. In others, the assurance that all will be well is so implicit within the action as to destroy the comprehension of the enormity of the threat. At best, the constant striving for the happy ending leaves many of the plays only innocuously pleasant rather than profoundly moving.

More serious seems to be the distortion of the understanding of basic human relations or human nature because of superficial treatment or lack of recognition of elements germane to the problem. This is particularly evident in those plays which purport to deal with psychological situations. In these plays, deep-seated problems are solved easily and promptly by the removal of the symptoms without probing into real causes. This creates a cer-

[1]Morris M. Clinger, "A History of Theatre in Mormon Colleges and Universities" (unpublished dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1963).

tain fundamental dishonesty of treatment which seems to destroy rather than enhance our understanding of humanity. This same kind of spot-blindness seems to apply to antagonistic characters. Rarely do we find such a character handled with more than minute understanding and hardly any sympathy. Most of them emerge as totally and self-consciously evil, while the characters with whom we are meant to identify emerge as equally absolute and self-consciously good. This kind of categorization occurs most noticeably in those plays which attempt to convey an understanding of the historical heritage of Mormons. The enemies of the Church are almost universally portrayed as totally evil and depraved, leaving little if any justification, beyond demonic possession, for their actions. The Indian, too, generally becomes an ignorant savage until he is incorporated into settlement life and then he becomes an orthodox, albeit quaint, member of the community. It seems strange that these historical plays, otherwise among the finest produced in the quarter-century under consideration, should allow themselves almost without exception to be weakened by this kind of categorical classification.

In some of the plays, Providence seems to reward foolish behavior, or to operate for the particular well-being of an individual. This seems to oppose both Christian history and Latter-day Saint experience in which the righteous were often abused and, in many cases, sacrificed for their convictions.

Most plays seem to deny the real celebration of pain. The characters are allowed to touch pain, but are rarely allowed to embrace it; we hear them talk about it, but rarely see them experience it. Yet one of the fundamental tenets of Mormonism is that man cannot know pleasure without pain, light without dark, good without evil.

Most of the plays attempting to achieve insight into past generations seem to be content with providing the furnishings of a distant time or place. They seem to be content with presenting a sort of mass-produced "print" of a standardized idea of the times. Only a few succeed in bridging the gap between our own generation and its ancestors, bringing the past to vivid and stirring life. Yet if only one or two plays achieve this one moment of understanding, it is possible that the entire project could be deemed successful and worthwhile.

Three "pioneer" plays[2] seem to have achieved a sense of sympathetic understanding for a past generation, as well as offering a more profound insight into the nature of human life and its interrelationships without fixing these elements of human existence in time. These plays seem to illustrate certain human values which remain as acceptable and worthwhile in our own generation as they were in that of our pioneer forefathers. This gives them a universality which seems to be rare among the plays discussed so far. These plays also demonstrate a skill in construction which allows a mounting sense of suspense, a fabric of valid, convincing action executed by a group of vivid and colorful characters.

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[2]*In Time of Harvest* by Martin C. Nalder, *C Is for Courage* by Klea Evans Worsley, and *What Doth It Profit?* by Ruth and Nathan Hale.

Universal understanding, however, is deferred in most of the plays in favor of isolated personal incident. These incidents are interesting, but few offer, or even attempt, universally significant experience. Some plays hint at the need of man to know himself, but the general cry, when a cry is made, is for conformity, generally toward what seem to be Victorian standards. This need for conformity in Latter-day Saint drama is understandable in light of the theocratic organization of the Church. Yet equally integral to Church doctrine are the two principles that man is entitled to personal revelation in relation to his own life and that man has the sacred obligation to discover for himself as much as possible of the universal truth governing his life. This struggle to know and understand seems to be a main-spring of most great drama, yet remains virtually untouched in Mormon writing.

Although one of the stated standards for quality Latter-day Saint drama is that it provide food for thought and opportunity to broaden intellectual horizons, the vast majority of L.D.S. plays seem to be confined to the limited world in which the average person lives. Most of them are domestic plays, and even those without this emphasis rely largely on domesticity for stability.

In spite of the avowed wish of the leaders in the Church drama program to "grapple with truth" and "probe into the riddle of the universe," all of the plays seem cautious about questioning standard cultural or theological views. Only a few attempt abstract or symbolic treatment, and these are conservative in their imagery.

For the most part, the playwrights seem content to provide the standard answers, often in platitudes. They seem to want to touch, but do not dare to probe such vastly significant areas as adult-to-youth, man-to-man, man-to-himself, and man-to-God relationships. Perhaps the framework of religious thought in which the playwrights operate makes such exploration heretical, or at least questionable. Let us hope that the right of censorship of the central drama committee or the general board does not intimidate such writing.

A latent distrust of the theatre as anything more than a source of fleeting relaxation seems to manifest itself both in the official publications of the Church and in the text of certain plays. Serious and dedicated drama seems to pose some sort of threat to the orthodoxy of the participant. The serious theatre may be looked upon as a competing source of illumination or as a tool for the forces that would debase fundamental values.

The general trend in the plays examined seems to be toward involvement of the individual, rather than with the profundity of the idea with which the individual becomes involved. Although the official literature of the Church pays lip service to dedicated intellectual drama, the search for an L.D.S. play which might lay claim to profundity of idea or significant exploration of thought is difficult if not futile.

Another requirement of acceptable L.D.S. drama is that it be expressed in "pleasing language." For the most part, the language of the plays seems to rise to meet the subject-matter. In relation to one another, a few plays seem to be outstanding; but when compared to recognized works of literary

merit, they still seem to be merely "attempts" at effective language.

Several of the plays (such as Blanch Kendall McKey's *Proud Brother* and Luacine Clark Fox's *The Stars Hung Low*) have moments of highly effective dialogue before drifting back to only adequate language. It would seem that, with a little more experience and some careful study, several of these playwrights could achieve a high level of artistry in the use of dramatic language.

One of the most apparent weaknesses in the handling of the dialogue is the intrusion of the playwright into his work without adopting a dramatic form which allows this sort of intrusion. Pedantic and moralistic passages are inserted into a number of plays, particularly those dealing with doctrinal or historic materials. Often there is a sense of the action halting while such passages are directed at the audience. An over-abundance of narration adds to this sense of playwright manipulation. This often comes as a result of the epic proportions of the material chosen for development. Although this is especially true of the historic and scriptural plays, it is also common in many of the others, including a number of family-life plays.

Many of the plays seem to use language to expand a one-act play idea into a full-length play. This leaves a multiplicity of words in which to clothe a slight idea. Others seem to attempt to compress a full-length play into short play form, giving an abruptness that creates a shock-effect and does not allow for the action to build.

Although there are weaknesses in the language of these plays, precluding their soaring to the heights reached by certain secular works, the dialogue is generally above average and quite well suited to the subject-matter.

II

The dramatic elements of action, conflict, variety and contrast, strong dramatic structure, and effectiveness of characterization have been listed in official L.D.S. publications as essential to the preparation of an effective play.

Action — In most of the plays, the action seems effective. Two general weaknesses, however, are recurrent. Many of the plays attempt to incorporate too much action. This results in a kind of diffusion of concentration that invites the danger of a confused audience failing to grasp the significance of any of the varied threads. In several others, there seems to be too much talk about action that is never brought on stage. This invites the danger of an audience that leaves the theatre frustrated because anticipation has never been fulfilled. A few allow the action to become awkward and obscure, and a rare few plays select and direct the action toward a clean, clear focus with adequate development and without extraneous sequences. The majority of the plays provide a satisfactory pattern of action.

Conflict — Latter-day Saint plays of the past twenty-five years seem to abound in conflict. In the majority, the conflict seems central to the development of the action, yet in a number of plays (about one-third) the conflict seems superficial, contrived, or otherwise poorly handled. Generally the conflict is limited to the personal, and there is little that allows us universal reflection or profound contemplation.

Variety and Contrast — As with the element of action, these plays seem to abound in variety within the individual play. Considered as a group, however, they present a series of patterns that seem repetitive and monotonous. The central figure is most often a young woman; in the overwhelming majority of plays, there is a young man as gallant and honest as she is pure. In those plays in which villains are appropriate, they are almost universally crude and self-consciously evil. In the plays of family life, which make up the vast majority, the family is usually threatened by a circumstance rather than a person, although a person is usually involved in the circumstance. And the pattern of the family structure is fairly standard. There is generally an older teenage child (usually a daughter) and a younger teenage child (also a daughter). Generally, there is a pre-teen son, who is categorically a "pest." To complete the group of children, there is usually a small child who is really charming but who contributes to many of the family difficulties. Of course, the family is presided over by middle-class, understanding, though not-too-bright parents who learn about as much from their children as they teach them. There are, naturally, variations in the family pattern, but these variations generally consist of the substitution of a male child for a female, or the exchange of a cousin for a sibling. Compared to proved works which have internal excitement plus experience and characters not found in the everyday dramatic market, most L.D.S. plays are bland.

Dramatic Structure — A few plays achieve artistry in their structure. These plays are given a form that grows in meaning as the play matures. As the action progresses, the form begins to be fulfilled, and becomes apparent. Most of these better plays seem to be written as "realistic" plays in which the events grow out of the relationship of characters in a set of circumstances. These events are so selected that a totality of experience is allowed the audience through the dramatic structure.

More than a dozen of the plays, however, are noticeably lacking in structure. In some, sprawling action becomes entangling; in others, a multiplicity of action-threads leaves either a sense of incomplete action or requires a tedious tying together; in others, the structure is strained by the inclusion into or the tacking onto the play of a message; in still others, incidents which are interesting but irrelevant are crammed into an already full dramatic form; and in others, the structure becomes cluttered by an over-abundance of subject-matter.

This leaves in the majority of plays a structure that seems recognizable and workable for the play, but of no great artistic significance.

Characterization — The characters seem to be overwhelmingly lacking in dimension. Generally, the sympathetic characters are developed as totally virtuous, while the unsympathetic characters are either villainously evil or absurdly grotesque. Many of the comic characters have a grotesqueness about them also which moves them into the realm of caricature rather than portrait or even cartoon.

The family-life plays present such a standard set of characters that it seems possible to exchange a character from one play for one from another

play without damage to either the character or the play.

Compared to recognized commercial dramatic works, the vast majority of characters in L.D.S. plays have very little personality. Those plays which attempt to arrive at psychological insight deal with surface manifestations and are satisfied with superficial solutions. These plays pull heavily at the heartstrings without truly coming to grips with the basic problems involved, finding their essential concern with removing unsatisfactory behavior. Some, in what seems to be an attempt to explore human relationships, drag us through sordid or abnormal situations without allowing us to arrive at what could be considered genuine insight. This leaves the plays essentially sensational rather than profound and flamboyant rather than impressive. Even in the best works, no real probing depth of character is achieved.

Only one play attempts symbolistic representation similar to modern avant-garde drama, in which the character becomes important not as an individual but as a symbol of a kind of humanity. *Beyond the Typha* by Richard M. Rowley presents an effective symbolic representation of the Mormon point of view of human existence, yet the characterization in this play is carefully integrated into the philosophical framework of Mormon theology.

One morality play in which characters become personifications is effective.[3] This is not true of the other fantasies, however, which are destroyed with inept handling of characters.

In the historical plays, which make up the strongest group of plays considered, most of the characters are surrounded by a barrier of space and time which causes them to lack verity. This increases the impression of fable characters rather than allowing a bridging of time and space to provide a genuine understanding.

Several plays are successful in providing vivid, effective characters, but even these lack the depth to let them qualify as significant studies in human personality.

Although more difficult to categorize than the artistic standards for drama, the Church standards of conduct and behavior seem to have an influence on the dramaturgy produced by and for members of the faith.

III

Latter-day Saint drama is noticeably lacking in what is considered "avant-garde" and "absurd" drama. It is possible that this is the normal lag between the professional theatre and the Church drama. As an institution, the Church tends to resist change and to adopt innovations slowly. Hence, it has been as much as fifty years behind current trends in art and culture. It may be that the L.D.S. writers simply have not become aware enough or adept enough in the modern style to produce a work of sufficient merit for publication. More probably, the reason for this lack is the basic philosophical difference between the doctrines of the Church and the principles of existentialism

[3]In *The Silver Chest*, Olive F. Woolley Burt has written a beautiful little play in which children learn the truth about life. Not to be taken literally, the play is highly effective as the concrete embodiment of an abstract point of view.

upon which much of the current avant-garde theatre, and especially the "theatre of the absurd," is based. Mormonism seems more closely identified with an idealism modified by experimentation than to other philosophical concepts. Most of the tenets of existentialism are foreign to if not directly opposed to the teachings of the Church. Thus, it seems probable that the neglect of avant-garde drama in Latter-day Saint writing represents a philosophical rejection rather than an indication of cultural lag.

The present attitude of the leaders of the Church seems to be that the drama is for the entire Church population. This point of view leads away from the concept of drama as an exceptional experience and moves it toward the mediocre. This point of view is difficult to harmonize with the doctrine that all things within the Church lead to perfection. If talent is truly a gift of God, those to whom the gift has been given should be allowed to develop it fully rather than being submerged in a sea of mediocrity and allowed to develop only so far as those around them can develop. This seems to be a concern of the present central drama committee which is now encouraging special productions for the gifted Church member. Hopefully, this may encourage the writing of special plays to be used in these productions.

These Church standards undoubtedly contribute to several other trends in the dramaturgy of the Church. The idea of mass participation, for instance, has made the "road show" popular at the expense of truly significant drama. The concept of absolute truth with the resulting understanding of "ultimate good" and "ultimate evil" helps to keep the perspective narrow and the possibility of magnificent opposition limited. The attitude that on-stage conduct of the character influences the off-stage thoughts and actions of the participant tends to further restrict the Church dramaturgy. This probably accounts for the lack of plays which genuinely come to grips with ideas which may be a threat to the security of the members' faith and for the lack of drama which experiments with ideas beyond the doctrinal limitations of the Church.

Restrictions on the conduct of characters within a play seem to have an influence on the development of a Latter-day Saint dramaturgy. Least troublesome of these restrictions are those related to the Word of Wisdom. Since the restrictions of the Word of Wisdom deal essentially with the use of tea, coffee, tobacco, and liquor on the stage, playwrights apparently have little difficulty in satisfying this requirement. These actions can easily be omitted from most plays without harm. When they cannot be omitted, they can generally be replaced; and when they cannot be replaced, the action can generally be carried off-stage and only receive on-stage reference.

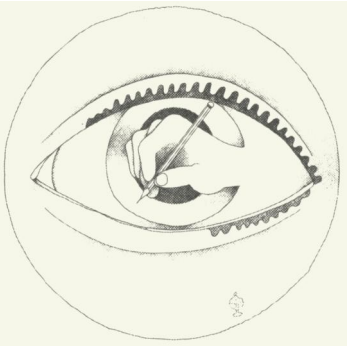
In comparing L.D.S. plays with the works written for publication outside the Church, only *What Doth It Profit?* by Ruth and Nathan Hale bears favorable comparison to what might be considered a major work of significance, Eugene O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms.* Although the two plays merit comparison in many ways, it is doubtful that the L.D.S. play has reached the stature of the O'Neill work. Several plays compare favorably with works which have proved popular but which seem to be temporary in their impact.

The majority of the works are like those plays which are of little or no real significance, except for their entertainment value.

Many of these works are clumsy and fumbling but they do represent a beginning. And when we consider the hundreds of plays written for the commercial theatre in proportion to the number accepted for publication, much less those which attain a certain stature, it is not surprising that the vast majority of the L.D.S. plays do not rise above the average. This is true of the dramatic literature of any time or of any people. We find vast numbers of attempts in proportion to each great work. It may be that there is no Jean Racine or William Shakespeare or Henrik Ibsen among the L.D.S. playwrights; but there may be an Alexandre Hardy or a Thomas Kyd or an Emile Zola. It is possible that none of the works of the past quarter century will achieve lasting stature, even within the Church, but it is possible that they may inspire a great work or that one of them might be rewritten into a significant work. And if only one significant dramatic work emerges from the L.D.S. Church drama program, it may be that its creative movement can be justified as an important contributor to dramatic literature.

Perhaps it is not within the M.I.A. that the Church drama program will make its most significant contribution. A number of Church members are now writing plays not intended for submission to the Church drama committee. Many of these playwrights received their first theatrical experience through the Church drama program and have developed an interest born there into a creativity which may yield a significant dramatic work to the American theatre.

Evidence indicates that Latter-day Saint drama is still adolescent. Most of the flaws in the dramaturgy of the Church stem from this adolescence. Like most other movements in the theatre, the effectiveness of the L.D.S. Church drama program will be proved through time and use. As this drama moves from adolescence to maturity, it is probable that it will continue to yield a host of average or mediocre plays, with a number of poor works, and an occasional outstanding one. It is possible that through a process of constant self-evaluation and self-improvement, this program could yield a great playwright and perhaps even make a significant contribution to contemporary religious drama.



OUT OF THE BEST BOOKS

Cherry B. Silver

The five volume series in world literature edited for the Relief Society by Professors Bruce B. Clark and Robert K. Thomas of Brigham Young University is a landmark production. Not only does *Out of the Best Books* represent the first literary text edited by Church members for a Church auxiliary, but it contains a serious approach to works of literature for Relief Society women; however, as I will attempt to show, it is one that might be more strictly literary than it is.

The authors group selections according to topics and ambitiously propose to study literature for its own merit rather than the lives of authors or historical background, as has too often been the custom in Relief Society lessons. Such a proposal leads one to expect an emphasis on the aesthetic qualities of literature; and that expectation is further raised by Dr. Thomas' introduction to the first volume in which he lays a fourfold critical basis for making valid judgments — Platonic morality, Aristotelian esthetics, Longinian authority, and Horatian durability. All of these give reason for discussing literary worth on grounds other than personal taste.

Unfortunately the editorial comments in the first volume, which are written entirely by Dr. Clark, for the most part avoid the critical issues in Thomas' introduction and illustrate instead a statement Clark later made in the June 1967 *Relief Society Magazine* (pp. 474–75) that "at its best, literature is concerned with building faith and championing spiritual values — and with exposing and opposing selfishness, materialism, shallowness, and all things harmful to human personality or destructive in human relationships." Such questions of character and morality are about all that his essays stress; and while such essays lead to lively discussions, by ignoring the creative process and structural values in individual works, they change the nature of the course from a study of literature to one of character with illustrative stories, poems and sermonettes.

When Dr. Clark does respond to Thomas' Introduction, he identifies his critical approach as primarily Platonic and Aristotelian but argues that to continually label his method would be "artificial" (I, 24). I heartily agree with his condemnation of labels and suspect that Thomas' main purpose in defining four approaches so simplistically is to break his readers loose from their prisons of personal taste and give them a foothold in

objective criticism. When Dr. Thomas writes commentaries in the second and subsequent volumes, he demonstrates that the study of poetry or prose as an organic whole (in which meaning is revealed through form and is not separate from it) proves more profitable than categorizing and dissecting. For instance, his description of Walt Whitman's developing maturity between an early version of "A Noiseless, Patient Spider" and the one published in *Leaves of Grass* provides a concrete demonstration of the tightening of thought that follows reshaping the same theme in different language.

Professor Clark seems to find difficulty synthesizing meaning and method. By examining the "form" of Wordsworth's "Intimations of Immortality . . . ," he means describing its stanza pattern (I, 62). And by an "aesthetic response" he means listening to the musical flow of language in a poem read aloud. Yet in the very essay in which he separates "beauty of form" from "significance of content" he explicates Hopkins' "The Windhover: To Christ Our Lord" with profound sensitivity to the interweaving of images and word play and rhythm with the author's feeling for the glory of Christ (I, 98). In most of his essays, however, the need to select one viewpoint rather than give an extended analysis forces Professor Clark to concentrate on his "primary concern . . . [,] meaning rather than aesthetics" (I, 323), and this may well be what the Relief Society General Board desired him to do. Only in a section called "Appreciation of Beauty" in volume four, does he quote works like Keats' "Autumn" and Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" to "illustrate artistic excellence, the sheer beauty of language in the creative hands of one of the great word masters" (IV, 173) without pressing for a moral message.

Because of this emphasis on meaning, *Out of The Best Books* speaks for many Latter-day Saints who want a clear connection made between their reading and their concept of truth. Women have been responsive to this series because it invites discussion of human values — faith, serenity, patience, perseverance, courtesy, beauty, and so forth. The prefaces written by Dr. Clark stress that literature leads to insight into life's ideals, and many of his commentaries include questions so that women will become involved — not so much with literature itself as with the ideas it suggests.

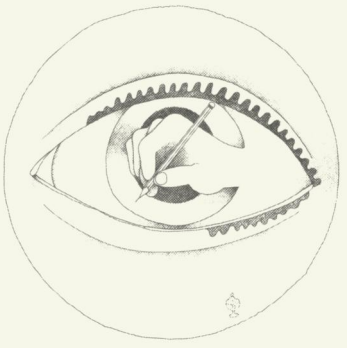
As a survey, the series purports to represent world literature, yet the selections are strongly English and American, from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Bias toward Victorian and Romantic writings perhaps occurs because writers in these periods most strongly reflect Mormon truths and moral standards. More than likely, however, these are works familiar to the editors from their own teaching experience, and they avoid the difficulties of unfamiliar language patterns that earlier classics present. At the same time, contemporary poetry and short stories and essays have also been slighted; their authors are notable, they focus upon the problems of our day, problems of nuclear warfare, fading idealism, race relations, youth-age gaps. It remains to be seen whether the new Volume Five (scheduled for fall publication) with an emphasis on community relations will carry updated selections. The first lesson comes as far as a Walter Lippmann essay and George Orwell's *Animal Farm.*

It is commendable that the editors have introduced translations from world literature, many of which may be unfamiliar to American readers. There are short stories by Scandinavians Selma Lagerlöf and Carl Ewald, by the modern Czechoslovakian Peter Balga, as well as by standard Russian writers Leo Tolstoi, Anton Chekhov, and Maxim Gorky, and by the Italian Luigi Pirandello.

Of interest to Latter-day Saints will be the championing of Mormon writers. Seven of Eliza R. Snow's lesser known poems are included, plus poems by contemporary Carol Lynn Pearson and an excerpt on Zion's Camp from *The Long Road* by S. Dilworth Young. Two Brigham Young University professors are represented by Edward L. Hart's perceptive poem "To Utah" and in excerpts from Clinton F. Larson's verse play *The Mantle of the Prophet.* There is a selection from Albert R. Lyman's novel of southern Utah, *Man to Man,* a fine short story by Eileen Gibbons Kump, "Bread and Milk," and another by Brian Kelly, "A Run of Grey." Such inclusions help correct the notion that Mormon literature must be either parochial or sentimental. Instead this writing is characterized by skillful techniques as well as sharp insight into character and felicitous descriptions of Mormon customs and country.

My objections to the series lie not in what is included but what is excluded — more purely literary interpretations and a wider range of authors and periods of time. If the commentaries sometimes read like supplements to the Family Home Evening Manual, one must remember that the program is called "cultural refinement" now instead of "literature." The General Board, too, is concerned with involvement and, if one oft-published Relief Society poetess is correct, with relating all literature to personal improvement.

As a consequence, in my experience the lessons have not been taught as well as the quality of the text makes one think they should. Really thoughtful discussions of literary worth have been rare. Instead, with our religious orientation leaning toward the practical and didactic, we tend to be satisfied when we have stated the theme of a poem or story and neglect to measure our reactions against the objective standards Dr. Thomas proposes from the history of literary criticism. We especially tend to forget the Aristotelian contention that literature has its own justification and aims. It does not need to be related to psychology or theology, to social theory or intellectual history, or to other arts in order to influence us. "Great art impels as well as illustrates. Great poetry persuades as well as informs," Thomas argues (IV, vii). With all its limitations, this program can hopefully "sharpen our sensitivity, enlarge our sympathy, and refine our perception" for literature as well as for life (*Relief Society Magazine,* June 1966, p. 469).



FOR THE CHILDREN OF THE PROMISE

Claudia L. Bushman

There must be nearly one hundred separate works interpreting the L.D.S. Church for children. A good number of writers, illustrators and publishers turn out these books, and so, while they all aim at teaching the gospel and building testimonies, the results are diverse. I have not seen them all, but I have read many these last months and would like to offer some personal reactions.

I enjoyed many of these books very much. I have five bright children who did not. The three readers read several books and parts of others under some duress. The two pre-readers were soon saying at bedtime, "Read me a story, not a Church story." I put out a convenient tableful of Church books in the living room, but no one came to browse or borrow. Why should this be?

For one thing, the books lack visual stimulation. Almost every book needs more and better pictures. Other powerful visual media compete for our children's attention, and our books look like poor relations next to the gloriously illustrated productions we find at the library and bookstore. Colorful exceptions are the big *Prayer* and *Tithing* picture books by Karen Dixon Merrell which delighted our younger children. A few of the newer books are featuring these full color, full page illustrations, but most tend to be drab and colorless.

By contrast, *The Children's Friend* has been displaying some lively and colorful art work since the early sixties. At that time it moved overnight from a matronly demeanor to a bright, contemporary style. The metamorphosis was too swift for some faithful primary workers, and after a few sprightly issues, a compromise between the two styles was achieved. Gradually the color and inventiveness of the illustrations have increased so that the total effect now compares to some of those first experimental issues. I particularly like Eleanor Shull's covers, and the more vital and lively children of Virginia Sargent and Dorothy Wagstaff. *The Children's Friend* appeals to all the children in our family, and everybody reads something.

The contents have changed remarkably little, although the editors no longer take the underwear ads that used to fill the pages. One of my children prefers the stories of twenty years ago when the appeal was a little more for the older reader, but the magazine still features the same pleasantly moralistic

and mildly adventurous stories we have seen for many years. In fact, a timeless quality pervades. Current events and fashions are ignored. When an article in 1951 suggested that many readers had probably first seen a harp on a recent TV program, I was shaken to have the magazine squarely placed in time and space. It had always seemed to move in another dimension.

I was struck by the great variety of features, few of which appeared regularly. Exceptions are the ubiquitous "Our Own Page" of readers' artistic contributions and, for a long while, the venerable cartoon characters Zippo Zip and Barnaby Bumbleberry, the paper doll, Frieda Friendly, and the puzzle page "Children's Friendsy." Otherwise a great variety of stories, games, recipes, retold classics, culture pieces, nature pieces and poems appear in a different mix each month. I would like to see more serious nature study and more art features. Some nice old features that might be revived are excerpts from diaries of long ago, reports on "What I Read as a Boy," written by General Authorities, and "Pastimes from Past Times," which demonstrated among other things the making of hollyhock dolls. I seem to lean towards the old days.

Another surprise on reviewing the magazine was the comparatively small number of specifically Church features, an average of three or four of thirty or so items per issue. These include scriptural and Church history stories, pioneer stories, poems and illustrated games, and recently the "Shining Moments" series, a collection of faith promoting incidents. *A Hero to Follow,* a lively biography of Joseph Smith, is currently appearing as a serial and will probably be published in hard cover in a few years. Still, this official Church publication carries a light load of doctrine.

I would like to see more religious content in the magazine, not in the historical fields which I think are covered very well, but in the features about contemporary Mormon life (a recent illustration of a daddy in a hard hat with a lunch pail shows an artistic response to the current social scene). Much of the fiction does not seem to pay its own way in terms of gospel or even real life information. How about some clues that these nice children belong to the Church, and that it makes some difference, or some foreign stories that tell specifically what it's like to be a Finnish or Peruvian Primary child.

In the past the Church celebrated its own provinciality, and Saints abroad deplored the scheduling of July 4th fetes, and I in San Francisco resented singing "O Ye Mountains High." Now as an international Church those localisms have been filtered out. But I think that making story backgrounds so blah that they could be any children anywhere goes too far in the other direction. I think children would enjoy knowing how Church members with other life styles go about their business.

One other personal bias: Stories in which animals are portrayed as people and in which their observable characters are perverted seem unnecessarily coy and cute. It would be no loss if the phony Chatty Chipmunk and Beverly Bunny types never appeared again.

The Children's Friend compares favorably to other children's magazines on the market. Appealing enough that it is actually read, it cannot help

but benefit the children of the Church and their friends. Visually attractive and intelligently put together, at $2.50 a year it is the best bargain in children's periodicals.

The books for children shake down into several loose groups. The Scriptures retold in simpler form and L.D.S. Church history, including biographies of the prophets and pioneer accounts, dominate the field. A large and generally weaker group includes fiction written around doctrinal subjects. Smaller groups are adventure stories, manners and morals, and story collections.

About the Scriptures: Ideally a child should learn his Bible stories and Church history at his mother's knee while she shells peas or darns socks. When he can read the originals he should be encouraged to go at it straight. Failing that, here are some books to remind the mothers of the facts or to ease the children into the real thing. Emma Marr Petersen, a pioneer in L.D.S. children's books, has prepared volumes of stories from both the Bible and the Book of Mormon as well as the *Story of our Church for Young Latter-day Saints.* Sister Petersen writes well and clearly, and while she does not fictionalize, the stories have a definite L.D.S. point of view. She provides neat stopping places between the many short stories (116 from the Bible), making them convenient bedtime fare. The Church history derives mostly from Joseph Smith's writings, but has some later information on foreign missions and Mary Fielding Smith. Milton Swensen has done color illustrations for each volume.

In *The Book of Mormon Story,* Mary Pratt Parrish abridges the actual scriptures to capture more action per page and maybe more young attention. Ronald Crosby paints and draws memorable pictures in the muscle man school of scriptural heroes. This book is one of the handsomest published by Deseret Book.

Deta Petersen Neeley holds the record for the number of published titles, having written countless small books, some with her husband Nathan Glen Neeley, on the Scriptures and Church history. Sister Neeley is an educator and levels the vocabulary for fourth grade readers. In her book *Jesus of Nazareth* she bases the text very closely on the Scriptures, harmonizing the Gospels, and introducing some explanatory historical background, but using, as she says, great effort to keep the story free from personal interpretation. She fleshes out the spare events a little: " 'I have come, John, to be baptized by you,' said Jesus, smiling pleasantly." Each of the volumes has one illustration by Everett Thorpe.

Of Sister Neeley's biographies of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, I preferred the former. Based closely on Joseph's writings, the story moves quickly as long as there is action. It sinks into stilted and mannered dialogue in the imagined scenes. In fact, the events speak best for themselves and need little garnishing. Any reader would be moved by the story of the Church's early days when spiritual experiences were sandwiched with treachery and false starts.

In the Brigham Young book there is also much unreal dialogue with

all characters speaking in the same unctuous voice. The book presents a good chronology of the Saints' early Utah days and would be useful as a source book, but the romantic emotions imposed on the characters undercut the reality. The author avoids mentioning polygamy, and only Brigham's short-lived first wife and Mary Ann Angell are named. Obviously, Brigham Young transcends this book.

The Making of A Prophet by Lindsay R. Curtis tells Joseph's life from birth to the organization of the Church. The book invites young readers in with one or two lively paragraphs per page, as well as charming and imaginative illustrations by Paul Farber. He draws some marvelous bad guys and is always true to Joseph's nose.

Another worthwhile book is *The Coming of the Mormons* by Jim Kjelgaard in Random House's "Landmark" series. This book by a sympathetic outsider concentrates on the westward trek and the founding of Salt Lake City. In language suitable for grade schoolers, the gentility, resourcefulness, and devotion of the Saints are stressed. My children admitted these books interested them.

Another enjoyable book is *Our Utah Pioneers* by Mabel Harmer. Using diaries and letters as well as official histories, she piles up specific details on a variety of subjects: clothes, communications, schools, Indian affairs, and so on. The narrative is not dramatized, but mature young people will discover such delightful facts as: one early Salt Lake dentist filled teeth with alum and borax covered over with beeswax; Brigham Young drove in the golden spike with a special mallet inscribed, "Holiness to the Lord"; a stagecoach ride from Kansas City to Salt Lake City in 1860's cost $250.

For children from three to seven, Jane Lund has written *Stories of Jesus for L.D.S. Children.* She has conceived two-part chapters on general gospel subjects — prayer, baptism, and so on. The first part tells a scriptural story and the second half relates the scripture to the child's life. The Sabbath section is especially impressive, filled with good specific activities for the child's Sunday. The book is illustrated rebus style by the author with many tiny pictures representing individual words.

These books would all make excellent gifts and be useful for preparing talks and lessons, some even for school work. I am less sure how many will be chosen from the shelves for recreational reading.

In writing these books based on Scripture and Church history, the authors take no great risks, and their works are, therefore, for the most part safely acceptable. The closer they stick to the originals the better they are. The writers that set out to write fiction loosely based on gospel truths attempt more. They may wish only to build testimonies, but they must also be judged as writers of fiction. As I began to work on this review, I was prepared to defend these works, to say that teaching the gospel justified their existence and that judging them as literature was unfair and irrelevant. After reading many books, I can see that they will only succeed in teaching if they are good fiction.

I prefer the understated soft-sell and find a heavy burden of piety op-

pressive. How easy it is to skip over the preachy parts, slightly diluted with dialogue, and get back to the action. How heavy with doctrine the latter parts of the chapters can be. How foreign to my own experience are the pleasant parents and agreeable children. When the fiction can be so easily dismissed, it is not likely that the freight of morals and doctrine will be remembered.

Among the books I found interesting was *About Baptism* by Emma Marr Petersen, the story of an orphaned Danish boy who comes to live with his cousin in Utah. Although doctrinally heavy towards the end, it treats real life in charming detail.

Jane Lund and Nancy Menlove have written *The Story of Life for L.D.S. Children.* My little children enjoyed the story of Tommy, the not quite too good boy who visits his grandparents while his mother gives birth to a new baby. The authors honestly face up to conception and death.

When He Comes Again by Mirla Greenwood Thayne, a long poem, answers the request of a little boy who wants his mother to tell the Christmas story "with me in it," giving a "You Are There" quality to the familiar events. Extravagant full color pictures appear on every page showing fantastically romantic children with curly hair, immense long-lashed eyes and little round limbs. This might be a memorable book for some children.

In *Young Brigham Young,* S. Dilworth Young cleaves to the true chronology and characters of Brigham's life and constructs fictional events that might have occurred before his conversion. He details much pioneer lore: how to build a log cabin, harvest maple sugar, and trap animals. The book is illustrated by Brother Young's own pen and ink sketches of candle molds, sap basins and such. The style is simple with balanced and measured sentences that make Brother Young one of the most eloquent of our Churchmen. But there are moments of high drama as when the starving boy shoots the first robin of spring for his supper. My boys liked this one.

As to some of the others, I do not think we need to work as hard as some of these writers do at teaching the gospel. If we are not so explicit in telling all, we give children a chance to ask questions. What they ask, they remember. The most convincing teaching assumes rather than asserts, and believing in the gospel as I do, I think we can use more attractive means of interesting our children in the Church. I would like to see more engrossing stories that speak about the gospel rather than teach it. Can't we be sure enough of our beliefs to present them undefended?

Let us also have an unaffected portrayal of Mormon life that speaks truly to our experience, such as some of those in the *Family Home Evening Manual.* The poems of Virginia Maughan Kammeyer recently printed in *The Improvement Era* say a great deal about being a contemporary Mormon. Children have a good ear for the actual. If they are given stories about children who never feel defiant and never do anything worse than break grandmother's prized cream pitcher, they may either dismiss the stories out of hand, or feel guilty and inadequate because they do not measure up.

When writers write their own lives, when they create from their own

experiences rather than from whole cloth, and the bones of their own learning show through, we listen. We could use some memoirs that tell how it was or is. Virginia Sorenson's *Where Nothing Is Long Ago,* specifically subtitled *Memories of a Mormon Childhood,* gets through. While hardly a reverent book, it recreates the tone of a small Utah town (Manti) of several decades ago through the eyes of a believing child. And when one good brother bashes in the head of another who was stealing his water, and when the murderer arrives at the funeral and has his hand shaken by everyone standing in front, then I know that's just how it was. Sermonizing on the weakness of men and their willingness to help their troubled brothers would detract from the effect. Just describing the life is powerful.

Adventure stories as well as memoirs have unlimited appeal. When the frozen limbs are amputated and the wolves rip out entrails, classes sit up and listen in delighted horror. Preston Nibley has compiled several books of stories from L.D.S. publications, and they make good reading, though some have such strong supernatural overtones and faith promoting qualities that I doubt they would be published in this rational day. Too bad. I like spiritual experiences and think we should have more.

Let us have some rollicking verse that bypasses the singsongy iambs. Few of our pious poems are memorable. Could religious subjects be treated in new forms and fresh images? The Church has some experienced poets who could write better children's poetry.

Another book I would like to see for children is a lavishly illustrated book on temples. The best manifestation of the skill and sacrifice of the Saints, temples naturally appeal to the mystical and imaginative qualities of children. Pictures of interesting details and murals should be included along with standard views.

Mormons have a rich cultural heritage. To help our children to be true believers and good members, we should teach them to tie into that past in all its abundance and accept it as their own. Like happiness, a testimony is best sought by indirection, and those who range widely in their reading will become stronger than those who learn selected truths. Those who know our history as it really was are more likely to tolerate weaknesses and be unshaken by unfortunate incidents.

MORMON HISTORY ASSOCIATION

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To the Editors of *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*

Balanced objectivity, honesty, and fairness to diverse viewpoints is a difficult road to follow and it may not always be possible. The Mormon History Association, through its Awards Committee, believes that the editors of *Dialogue* have sought and come close to that ideal, and for their efforts the Association makes this Special Citation award. The forthright presentation of researches in articles, the expression of frank viewpoints in Round Tables, letters to the editor and bibliographical notes represent a significant contribution to Mormon society and thought. For these contributions the community of Latter-day Saint scholars, and so many persons interested in Mormon studies are grateful. The Mormon History Association congratulates you on your contributions and wishes you well in your sincere efforts to present articles of integrity, balance, scholarship, and enduring quality.

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26 August 1969

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(Act of October 23 1962; Section 4369, Title 39, United States Code)

1. Date of filing: December 2, 1969

2. Title of publication: *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought.*

3. Frequency of issue: Quarterly (4 times each year)

4. Location of known office of publication: 2180 E. 9th So., Salt Lake City, Utah 84108.

5. Location of the headquarters or general business offices of the publishers: P. O. Box 2350, Stanford, California 94305.

6. Names and addresses of publisher, editor, and managing editor: Publisher: Paul G. Salisbury, 2180 E. 9th So., Salt Lake City, Utah. Editor: G. Eugene England, 1400 Waverly, Palo Alto, California. Managing Editor: G. Wesley Johnson, 3429 Bryant, Palo Alto, California.

7. Owner: Name: Dialogue Foundation, 2180 E. 9th South, Salt Lake City, Utah (a non-profit Utah Corporation); Trustees: J. H. Jeppson, 2509 Diericx Dr., Mt. View, Calif.; Paul G. Salisbury (see above); G. Eugene England (see above); G. Wesley Johnson (see above); Frances Menlove, Los Alamos, N.M.

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9. (Not applicable).

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	Avg. No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Mos.	*Single issue nearest Filing Date*
A. Total No. Copies Printed..	8,068	8,059
B. Paid Circulation:		
1. Sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors and counter sales	525	450
2. Mail subscriptions	5,575	5,284
C. Total paid circulation	6,100	5,724
D. Free distribution *(including samples)* by mail, carrier or other means	75	75
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F. Office use, left-over, unaccounted, spoiled after printing	1,893	2,260
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