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DIALOGUE: *A Journal of Mormon Thought* is an independent quarterly established to express Mormon culture and to 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 ensure 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.

Contents

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR		4
PROCEEDINGS OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR MORMON LETTERS		
INTRODUCTION	<i>Maureen Ursenbach Beecher</i>	12
THE POETICS OF PROVINCIALISM: MORMON REGIONAL FICTION	<i>Edward A. Geary</i>	15
HALLDÓR LAXNESS, THE MORMONS AND THE PROMISED LAND	<i>George S. Tate</i>	25
THE VOCATION OF DAVID WRIGHT: AN ESSAY IN ANALYTIC BIOGRAPHY	<i>Bruce W. Jorgensen</i>	38
THREE ESSAYS: A COMMENTARY	<i>Franklin Fisher</i>	53
EXCAVATING MYSELF	<i>Herbert Harker</i>	56
THE REPRESENTATION OF REALITY IN NINETEENTH CENTURY MORMON AUTOBIOGRAPHY	<i>Neal Lambert</i>	63
LITERARY DIMENSIONS OF MORMON AUTOBIOGRAPHY	<i>Steven P. Sondrup</i>	75
I, EYE, AYE: A PERSONAL ESSAY ON PERSONAL ESSAYS	<i>Mary L. Bradford</i>	81
INSIGHTS FROM THE OUTSIDE: FROM A COMMENTATOR'S NOTE PAD	<i>Candadai Seshachari</i>	90
GUEST ARTIST	<i>Marilyn R Miller</i>	93
POETRY		
A STUDY OF ORANGES	<i>Steven Goldsberry</i>	94
A TRAPPER DREAMS OF SILVER DEER	<i>Steven Goldsberry</i>	95
AMONG THE MORMONS		
A SURVEY OF CURRENT LITERATURE	<i>Edited by Stephen W. Stathis</i>	96
NOTES AND COMMENTS		
ZEAL WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE	<i>Hugh W. Nibley</i>	101
THE TABLES TURNED: AN EXERCISE IN CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING		113
SENATOR EDWARD W. BROOKE AT BYU		119

DIALOGUE: A Journal of Mormon Thought Vol. XI, No. 2, Summer 1978

BOOK REVIEWS

- EXPLORING THE MORMON PAST *Donald R. Moorman* 121
Guide to Mormon Diaries and Autobiographies
Edited by Davis Bitton
- A CLASH OF INTERESTS *Richard A. Bartlett* 122
A Clash of Interests: Interior Department and the
Mountain West 1863-96 *by Thomas G. Alexander*
- MORMONISM AND LABOR *John S. McCormick* 123
Deseret's Sons of Toil, A History of the Worker Movements
of Territorial Utah, 1852-1896 *by J. Kenneth Davies*
- A TRACTABLE TRACT *Lavina Fielding Anderson* 125
Elders and Sisters *by Gladys Clark Farmer*
- A VIBRANT, VERTICAL TOWN *Lou Ann Stoker Dickson* 127
Upstairs to a Mine *by Violet Boyce and Mabel Harmer*
- WE ARE WHAT WE REMEMBER *Stephen L. Tanner* 128
Frost in the Orchard *by Donald Marshall*
- EVERYTHING THAT GLITTERS *Dennis Clark* 131
Betrayed by F. Scott Fitzgerald *by Ron Carlson*
- BRIEF NOTICES *Gene A. Sessions* 132

ART CREDITS

- Print used on the cover
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- Illustrations, pages 5, 7, 8, 13, 55, 62,
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Proceedings

of

The Association for
Mormon Letters

MAUREEN URSENBACH BEECHER

Guest Editor

Letters to the Editor

Since reading the last issue of *Dialogue*, ibid not feeling too good. I think I'm sic. I figure maybe it's the cf, so idem tell my wife I'm going to see the doc. But she says my symptoms are the exact op cit. Trouble is too much *Dialogue*, she says, so she takes the magazine and loc cit away with her mad money.

Anyhow, I stand in awe of the new scholarship. When an article requires from 50 to 100 footnotes, I wonder how B.H. Roberts got by with not more than two dozen in the 457 pages of his *Rise and Fall of Nauvoo*. And what a relief it was to read K-Lynn Paul's "Passive Aggression and the Believer," without breaking the train of thought 99 times with footnotes. I doubt that this means he doesn't know what he's talking about. Otherwise, your mag is the greatest.

Samuel W. Taylor
Redwood City, California

Editor's Note: Actually, there is a small groundswell (started, we believe, by the National Footnote Society of America) in favor of converting to the Footnote style throughout the entire journal. That way, dedicated do-it-yourself scholars could provide their own text!

The Autumn issue is terrific! It was worth the wait to have the articles on Spalding to complement the Book of Mormon pieces which made it timely and topical. K-Lynn Paul's brief piece was first rate, Hugh Nibley's "Bird Island" priceless, and Margaret Munk's "Caridad" sensitive and engaging. Good luck with the next one.

Fred Esplin
Hershey, Pennsylvania

As one serving on a full-time mission I find *Dialogue* a refreshing change. Though I find very little within *Dialogue* that I can utilize while proselyting, nevertheless, it is a stimulant to my mind which allows me to "meditate upon the deeper things" occasionally.

Thank you for a very informative issue (Vol. X no. 4) which answered my

questions regarding the so-called "Spalding Theory."

Sure love you folks!

Elder Alan Schapel

I am writing you to express my delight at the new issue of *Dialogue*. The issue was impressive. It was thick. It was, while not artistic or creative, at least a solid visual success (absent were the annoying design errors of some previous issues). And best of all, it was interesting. Somehow you managed to gather significant scholarly articles that were surprisingly readable—I was positively dragged into Walker's "Liberal Institue" article: History made savory for history-haters! Well, you have at last shown me that you can really do it. This is *Dialogue* in the tradition of Volume I. All I can say is, production schedules be damned! Give us a *Dialogue* like this as erratically as you wish—it is worth the wait!

Gene Hurst
Provo, Utah

Congratulations on the Book of Mormon issue. I would say this is one of the issues of the highest quality yet produced in the ten years.

Lester Bush has done his usual superb job. Margaret Munk's piece was one of the most affecting in some time. All of the articles and reviews were substantial and tasteful. As for "Among the Mormons," Bro. Stathis has done an outstanding job with his listing. I'll pass on another compliment which probably will not reach you directly, this from a friend in the Midwest: "The worth of the latest issue of *Dialogue* runs the gamut from the tears and laughter of "Caridad" and "Bird Island" to the thought-provoking, even revolutionary articles of Stan Larsen, Edna Bush, and others . . . If this keeps up, \$20.00 per year may be entirely reasonable. The number of subscribers may even increase!"

John L. Sorenson
Provo, Utah

The Book of Mormon issue is very good,

although I find it impossible to get worked up over Spalding. Sorenson's article interested me very much—that's a field I'd like to know more about. Nibley's "Bird Island" is wonderful, wonderful! I laughed aloud all the way through. The RLDS "reader's edition" of the Book of Mormon sounds like a fine idea—why don't we do something like that? Munk's "Caridad" was so painful, it is almost a misnomer to say I enjoyed it, but I did. All in all, I enjoyed this issue very much.

Robin Hammond
Massachusetts

I can't say enough good about the last issue of *Dialogue*. The articles were such a nice mixture of tone and content. Hurrah and three cheers to you all.

Judi McConkie
Salt Lake City, Utah

While I am in agreement with everything that *Dialogue* says in the few issues that I have read, I don't agree that it should be written in magazine form, available to anyone who wishes to purchase it or has it given by well meaning friends. Paul was perfectly right when he said that milk must be given before meat and some new as well as old members are not at this stage of digestion in their testimony. To these people, the magazine is no help and in my opinion could do a lot to shake testimonies that are in the process of being strengthened by careful handling. I feel that one can't look at it from an intellectual point of view only (and I must admit that it is fascinating reading). One can't always "say it all." I personally have made the same mistakes that I think *Dialogue* makes and I've suffered the consequences of upsetting good but shallow thinking people. I have now grown older and I hope wiser and I hold my tongue unless talking to a friend.

Lola Smibert
Frankston, Australia

kudos for wordsmiths

I thank *Dialogue* for its exemplary courtesy, which I wish other publications would copy.

An essay of mine was submitted to *Dialogue*, not by me, but by my brother-in-law. He wanted to submit it, and I consented then put the matter out of my mind. But *Dialogue* returned the essay at

its own expense (unheard of, I assure you!) along with specific criticisms by assigned readers. A law school professor and a biological scientist, independently of each other, read the essay and made comments on an excellently devised form *Dialogue* uses to evaluate submitted materials. Although your readers did not understand the aim of the essay—how could they have known the author had not submitted it? Their criticisms have proved helpful in predicting public response and irritation.

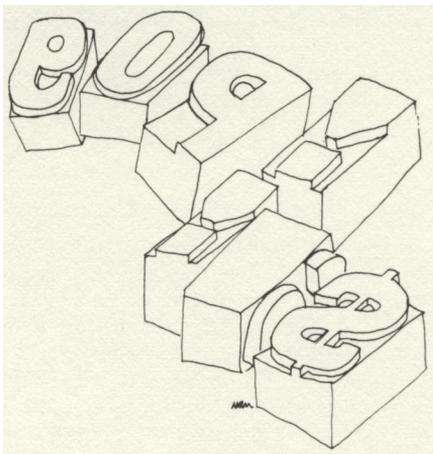
Dialogue's professionalism shows clearly at every step of this adventure. Larger magazines are haughtier magazines, and this loses them more capable writers than they will ever know. It also damages their subscribers. *Dialogue* makes a superb effort to obtain the services and loyalty of wordsmiths, and this fact, were it only more widely known, would bring them in in droves.

Thos. Wingate
Salt Lake City, Utah

anniversary thoughts

Dialogue has sustained us for the past 10 years. One article which we returned to again and again is Richard Poll's, "What the Church means to People Like Me," in which he categorizes active church members into two types. The first are the Iron Rodders who see the gospel as a handrail to the kingdom which defines each step of the way. The second are the "Liahona" Mormons who see the gospel as a general guide in making their own decisions.

Our experience living in certain unnamed places suggests a third category, best exemplified by the word *steel*. If one recalls the properties of steel—it is



harder and more rigid than iron—the connotation is clear. These are the people for whom the word of the Lord is not sufficient, so they add to it to make it more rigid and harder to live. These people generally view themselves as “stainless,” hence the new category—Stainless Steel Rodders!

K-Lynn Paul
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

I cannot let your tenth anniversary pass without thanking the hundreds of persons for the thousands (millions?) of people-hours that have been lovingly donated to bring *Dialogue* to life and keep it going. My eternal thanks to Wes Johnson and Eugene England for having the courage to found the journal, and to Bob Rees for his unerring leadership. And now, Mary Bradford, you have delighted my feminist soul by successfully moving the operation east and assuming the reins. Only those of us who have regularly nursed publications to life, agonizing over the deadlines and then exulting (privately) over the finished product, can truly appreciate the investment of self each issue represents.

A personal footnote: I think the reason that the continued existence of *Dialogue* is so important to me is that it *is* no longer crucial to my existence as a Mormon. But ten years ago it was—the fact that there were other members of the Church like me out there somewhere, plus dozens more who are much more highly educated and sophisticated, was much-needed reassurance that there was indeed room in the Church for a girl like me. Ten years later, faith carries me through some spots where intellect wears thin (as well as vice-versa!), but I keep thinking of that next generation of Mormon youth, my own offspring among them, who need to know that *thinking* and *questioning* is okay. So carry on! I know that the work is worth doing.

Mary Ellen Romney MacArthur
Pasadena, California

I believe that I am accurate in remembering that Vol. I, No. 1 was published in 1966. That means according to your subscription flyer that it's taken 12 years for *Dialogue* to get through its first decade. I would like to subscribe to *Dialogue*, to invest \$15 or \$20 in it. I would even have given gift contributions to it of \$30 or \$50, as have been periodically

requested, but I don't have faith in *Dialogue*. In the intervening years since 1966, the summer number may come out in December, or be bypassed, or rushed to a hasty and inferior publication, because the periodical seems to be sloppy in reaching its deadline dates for copy submission, press, or publication—or all three.

You have a good magazine. I've enjoyed its insights, fine articles, and even found the letters to the editor which at least for a time in *Dialogue's* history was an amusing forum into which rabid Mormons and axe-to-grind Mormons would release their venom and see their “brilliant” diatribes in print.

Your move from California to Virginia—perhaps it has corrected the situation; perhaps there are new editors, better businessmen at its head. But I need to be convinced and I wish to be convinced. Please convince me.

Randall V. Douglass
Eugene, Oregon

Editor's Note: *We have sent Brother Douglass what we hope is a convincing show of strength—the last three issues.*

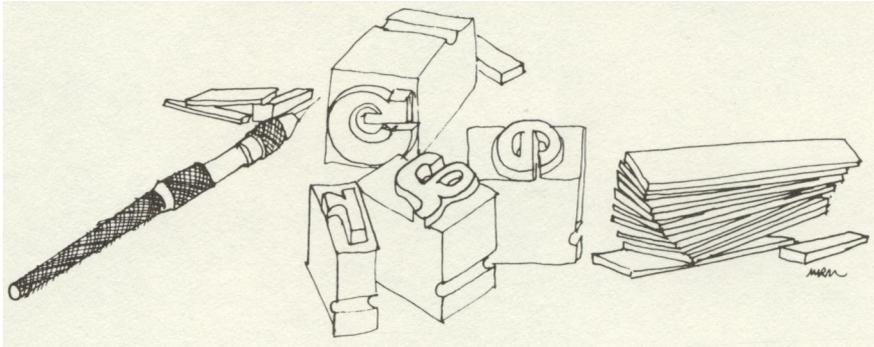
iwY in new york

The obvious underhandedness and bias of the leaders of the New York International Women's Year (IWY) conference was felt by most of the women in attendance who didn't happen to be in support of ERA passage, abortion and homosexual rights. Some of my Mormon sisters and the rest of the more conservative sector of the conference participants felt “picked on” and excluded from the real “meat” of the conference. The real learning for me, however, was in observing how the Latter-day Saints at the conference involved themselves with and responded to the rest of the conference participants.

The first time I heard of the New York IWY Conference in Albany was a week before the conference in Sunday morning Relief Society. Our bishop indicated to the sisters that the Stake President and Regional Representative had just recently become aware of the conference and felt the necessity of urging all able sisters to make arrangements to attend the conference in Albany the following weekend. The same invitation was extended to the priesthood brethren since both male and female residents of

New York could register as voting participants. I am still confused as to why no one in the ward knew about the conference until a week beforehand. At any rate, the bishop's invitation was so strong, that although only New York residents with valid drivers licenses were allowed to register as voting participants, I felt compelled to borrow one of the member's license who would not be able to attend herself. The bishop indicated that while those of us who went to the conference were not going as represent-

"Women and the Family" and listened to the presentation and discussion, I was quickly made aware of the diversity of background and experience in the individuals attending. For the Mormon women in attendance, family life and the relationships created therein are heavenly, sacred, and the means whereby happiness and joy are obtained in this life and the life to come. A good many other women attending the workshop were supporting and proposing federal government intervention in family life



atives from the Church but as New York citizens, arrangements had been made for LDS conference participants to stay with members of the Albany Ward while attending the conference. Other LDS groups attending the conference, on similar short notice, were explicitly instructed not to mention our affiliation with the Church while attending the conference. The Church was there, however, organized under the direction of the Regional Representative. Arrangements had been made for LDS groups to have a general meeting place in the office of the Citizen's Review Committee located in one of the buildings on the Capital Mall in Albany where we received housing assignments, information as to where we were to be at all times during the conference and a schedule of general meetings as an LDS group while attending the conference.

During these scheduled meetings a daily schedule was distributed and we were given instructions as to where we should be throughout the day. In some cases, small groups with similar views were invited to join us. Of special concern were the Saturday seminars where, in many cases, changes proposed by the conference were discussed and voted on. We were urged to attend certain seminars. As I sat in the first workshop, called

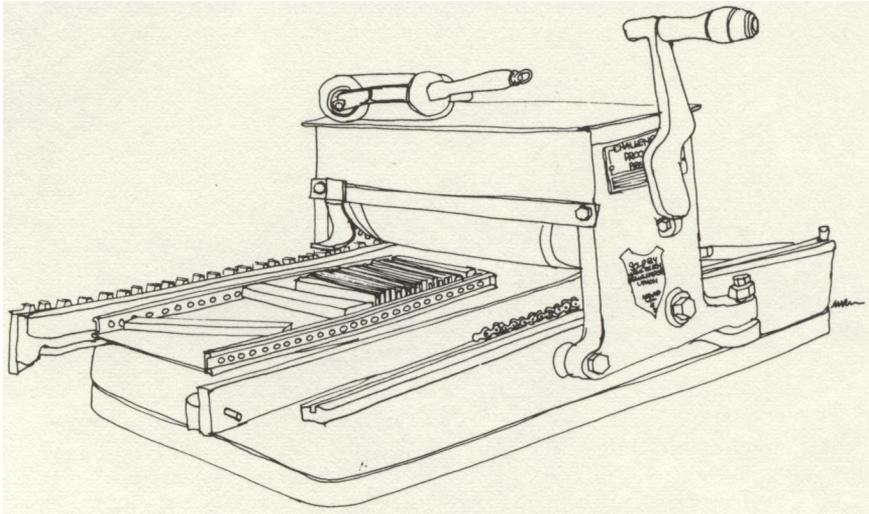
(such things as requiring husbands to pay their housewives one-third of their salary, and government supported child care centers). To them, family life had been a living hell characterized by severe financial problems, unruly children and, in some cases emotionally and/or physically abusive husbands. The presentations by Phyllis Chesler, the controversial feminist writer, and Judith T. Younger, professor of law, were offensive to the sector of Mormon women, who took advantage of the somewhat rude manners prevailing at the conference so far, and booted the presentations, with the result that Ms. Younger stormed out of the room. After the presentations, the workshop was open for discussion. Mormon women defended the proper role of the family in more of a testimonial, disregarding the fact that they were addressing their remarks to women who were not LDS, might not have a workable relationship with their husbands regarding home management, and who might sincerely believe that the only hope for the continuation of the family was through federal government intervention.

A second workshop I attended, called, "The Legal System and How It Affects Women" was recommended by the Regional Representative and his steering

committee in hopes that the ERA would be discussed and voted on. Two attorneys presented their views (Kathleen Peratis, in support of the ERA and Monrad Paulson, opposing the ERA) and then the floor was open for discussion. While most of the female participants from the floor expressed their views in support of the ERA, about five LDS men "representing their wives" spoke out against

when no one from our group would admit to being affiliated with any organization.

I also questioned the involvement of the priesthood in the conference. In the organizational approach the Church chose to take in the conference, I feel that it should have been the Relief Society's responsibility to organize and assist the sisters as they attended the confer-



the amendment. In spite of the discussion, no vote was taken as to whether or not the ERA should be passed.

While my eyes were certainly open to the obvious underhandedness of the conference leaders in attempting to thwart the efforts to any group opposing the changes proposed, I found myself questioning the Church's proper role in such a large-scale crusade; the role of the priesthood in the conference, and the causes of the seeming ineffectiveness of the Mormon women.

With respect to the Church's role at the conference, I found it hard to reconcile the discrepancy between the individual role we were told to play before leaving for the conference and the role as Church members we actually played at the conference. Perhaps a tightly organized group was the most effective means of offsetting the numerous opposing feminist groups who were obviously organized and in control of the conference, but I found myself resenting the fact that I had to relinquish my individual concerns upon arriving at the conference in favor of a restrictive group role. Outsiders must have been suspicious

ence under the direction of the Regional Representative. I can only speculate as to why the priesthood lead, instructed, and spoke for the women attending the conference. Perhaps it was felt that there was too little time to organize the group under the leadership of the Relief Society. Perhaps the brethren saw this conference as a threat to the traditional status of women in general and allowed their protective instincts to take over. Perhaps some of the women felt more comfortable in a follower's role. In any case, I felt that the effectiveness of our group as LDS women was hindered by the extensive role the priesthood chose to take. I keenly felt this when LDS men (instead of their wives) spoke out on certain issues during the course of the conference.

Although the conference was clearly more than a mere local event, many of the tendencies we express as LDS women in community involvement became apparent. Not only did we come to the conference unprepared to discuss the issues logically, resulting all too frequently in emotional subjectivism, but there seemed to be little desire to acquire appropriate knowledge on the issues. Many

of the LDS women seemed content to accept church policy and had little desire to back it up with solid argument. It was refreshing to hear a registered nurse with five years experience in an abortion clinic give medical reasons as to why abortion was not a sound or safe alternative.

Our tendency to be a rather closed, comfortable society, together with this general lack of knowledge makes it nearly impossible for us to effectively deal with problems generally foreign to our Mormon culture. This disability frequently leads to swift and inaccurate judgment of others. This ostensibly benign ignorance, stemming from sheer indolence, compounded by the Church's failure until recently to emphasize the necessity of such community involvement, has frequently inhibited LDS women in their efforts to make a valuable contribution to their communities.

As an individual, I found the conference enlightening and discouraging at the same time. On the bus headed back to New York City, I resolved to no longer use church involvement and the general business of living as my excuse for ignorance when it came to community affairs, but I had to fight the desire to find a nice quiet retreat in the mountains, void of any such community.

Elizabeth B. Ricks
Arlington, Virginia

on contributors

Why not reinstitute the practice of including a brief section providing some biographical information on the authors in each issue. I have had three people talk with me about this last issue and all of them asked questions about one or more of the authors. I am trying to keep people apprised of Dialogue and urge them to subscribe.

M. Gerald Bradford
Santa Barbara, California

Please let us know a little about *who* is writing the articles. I thought the "Notes on Contributors" section was worth the pages devoted to it.

Rick Sharp
Gardena, California

Editor's Note: *"By our fruits ye shall know us," seems to be the motto of most of our contributors. Even when they are willing to furnish us with interesting facts about themselves, these facts are*

often out of date by presstime. We are still keeping the option open, however, and if any of our readers wish to correspond with any of our writers, we shall be happy to bring them together.

mormon leadership study

The Institute of Religious Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara is pleased to announce the formation of a long-range study entitled, "Mormon Secular Leaders."

G. Wesley Johnson of the History department at UCSB will direct the project, assisted by M. Gerald Bradford of the Religious Studies department at UCSB. We wish to bring this study to the attention of interested scholars, particularly LDS scholars.

Those desiring additional information can write to the investigators in care of the Institute of Religious Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara, California 93106.

Walter H. Capps, Director
Institute of Religious Studies
University of California,
Santa Barbara

corrigendum

One correction is essential to the article "Common Beginnings, Divergent Beliefs." In the submitted manuscript a key concluding sentence read, "Should Joseph Smith's direct descendants die out, the RLDS will *not* likely turn to the Hyrum Smith line. . . ." Somehow, in the editing process, that sentence became, "Should Joseph Smith's direct descendants die out, the RLDS will probably turn to the Hyrum Smith line." The omission of one word was a grave error, in my estimation, specifically because the authors intended to quash the somewhat uninformed predictions of some "Utah Mormons" who like to think that the RLDS have no other options than to turn to unification through the Hyrum Smith line. It is our considered opinion that that will *not* occur.

Douglas D. Alder
Logan, Utah



Introduction

MAUREEN URSENBACH BEECHER

BOB REES CALLED IT a “summit meeting of the Mormon literati,” the group which gathered April 20, 1976, in the conference room of the Church’s Historical Department. Actually it was just a group of people with interest in the question of the literary merit, if any, of the diaries and journals, letters and autobiographies of the Latter-day Saints.

The meeting was to have lasted two hours. It was hoped that at the end of this time each participant, imbued with a sense of the importance of the material, would leave determined to study pieces of Mormon personal literature from his or her own particular point of view. But one hour into the afternoon it became apparent that there was too much to be done in the study of Mormon letters generally. Discussion of diary-as-literature broke down; instead, an organization was generated, an organization whose purpose would be to foster scholarly and creative work in Mormon letters and to promote fellowship among scholars and writers of Mormon literature. They named it the Association for Mormon Letters.

The Association for Mormon Letters was not the first serious attempt to call scholarly attention to imaginative writings of and about Mormons. Voices had long cried out from the pages of regional journals being read by a few of the devoted. In its first issue, *Dialogue* carried a piece dealing with the *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, which acknowledged that there exists “a reasonably distinguished tradition of Mormon literature.” The author pled with scholars to find those “works of real power”; to “find them, study them, and criticize them honestly, in the hope that readers . . . will begin paying a little more attention.”

Dialogue accepted this challenge by publishing not only occasional pieces of literary criticism, but also two literary issues, a roundtable, and, most significantly, a rich collection of imaginative works.

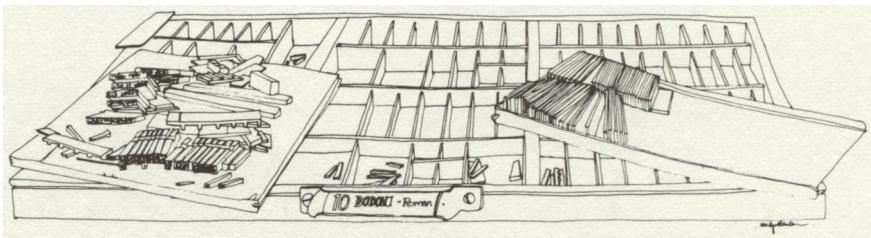
MAUREEN URSENBACH BEECHER is senior research historian at the LDS Church Historical Department, past president of the Association for Mormon Letters and guest editor of this special section.

It is appropriate, then, that when the second annual meeting of the Association for Mormon Letters, October 8, 1977, produced a day-full of papers on the study of Mormon literature, *Dialogue* agreed to collaborate with the Association by sharing those papers with a wider audience than the seventy or so members who were near enough to attend the meeting.

To those who attended the sessions in the University of Utah's Marriott Library auditorium, the day was an unfolding. The first paper, Ed Geary's study of Mormon writers of the 1940s set us in our Mormon context with reminders of the didactic literary efforts of our antecedents, the "home literature" movement among late nineteenth century Latter-day Saints. He led us through the varied responses of the twentieth century writers—Fisher, Sorensen, Whipple, all comfortably familiar names—with their uncomfortable reminder that all is not always well in Zion. His paper ended with an appropriate warning that our present imaginative outpouring, and the critical response which follows, is just as likely to be as dated soon as was that of the 1880s and the 1940s.

On that jarring reminder of our fallibility, we listened to the literary comment on our earlier selves by a Nobel Prize winner. In his paper on Haldor Laxness, Icelandic author of *Paradise Reclaimed*, George Tate combed the entire corpus of Laxness' writings to fill in his picture of the Mormons: "ourselves as others see us." The audience was reminded that there are dimensions of Mormon faith and practice which we insiders might ignore—the similarities between the Mormons in their handcart crossings and the Chinese in their revolution, for instance—which reflect us as we might otherwise not be seen.

Seasoned by the preceding papers in accepting views of the Mormon experience apart from usual patterns, we heard the final paper of the morning—an intellectual, spiritual and literary biography of a Latter-day Saint writer too soon dead. David Wright was presented with compassion and understanding by Bruce Jorgensen who perceived in Wright a gifted young man of eloquent if sparse output.



After the morning's three papers, it was not unreasonable that Franklin Fisher would summarize by commenting that there was indeed a Mormon fiction, but that "only non-Mormons and black sheep have so far written it." We nodded agreement.

The luncheon speaker, however, gave the lie to a too-easy assent. Herbert Harker, very much in the faith, spoke in a personal as well as a general sense of the literary unearthing of the Mormon unconscious that is the stuff of Latter-day literature. His second novel, *Turn Again Home*, then just recently published, had led him, he reported, through a reverse hegira back to Mormon Utah in search of his traces in the past, towards a discovery of

that which is unique and that which is shared.

The frontier experience, shared by Mormons with all such pioneering people, expanded to archetypal significance in the afternoon session as Elaine Burnham, assisted by the recorded voice of her grandfather, retold the tales her great-great grandfather told to his grandson. The oral presentation—a happening which duplication in print could not but demean—was a lively equivalent of the written genre with which the Association had originally concerned itself, the life experiences of the Latter-day Saints.

That most unique Latter-day Saint literature, the personal journal or autobiography of the common Mormon, was treated in the afternoon. Steven Sondrup reviewed some literary dimensions of three published autobiographies in a beginning look. Not at the symposium itself, but under Association for Mormon Letters auspices at a subsequent meeting of the Rocky Mountain Modern Languages Association, Neal Lambert continued the investigation by looking at published and unpublished personal writings of Latter-day Saints to sift out “conscious virtuosity” from “self-conscious artifice,” “unconscious brilliance” from “dull-minded monotony.” The long quotations in his paper, used there to illustrate the author’s literary observations, doubly justified their space: in them we saw both the uniqueness and the universality of the Mormon past; in them we saw our Mormon makings.

And in Mary Bradford’s look at the personal essay among contemporary Latter-day Saints, there we were: Gene England, Becky Cornwall, Ed Geary, Clif Jolley—we listened to our reflections reflected back and found ourselves.

Candadai Seshachari said it for all of us at the end. Through his beautifully tutored East Indian accent, we heard echoes of universality—that the honest literature of a people—any people—is the mirror of mankind.

The underlying question is put to rest. There is a Mormon literature. The term may still be in the process of defining itself, Humpty Dumpty-like, as meaning “what [the critics] choose it to mean,” but October’s symposium, and its repetition in this issue of *Dialogue*, suggest the breadth and depth of the study. The investigation, well begun, continues.

The Association for Mormon Letters, now in its third year, sends its newsletter to members more than half of whom live beyond the Wasatch Front. Wherever possible, small groups gather under AML auspices to hear readings from local poets or comments from nearby scholars. Beginning this year the Association offers two substantial prizes, one for a critical work and one for an imaginative work. And the symposium, now an annual event, is next scheduled for October 7, 1978, again in Salt Lake City. Papers have already been selected, but there will soon be a call for next year’s contributions. Readers may become members by addressing The Association for Mormon Letters, 1346 South 1800 East, Salt Lake City, Utah 84108. Membership costs \$4.00 annually.

The Poetics of Provincialism: Mormon Regional Fiction

EDWARD A. GEARY

THE LATTER-DAY SAINTS have been a source of sensationalistic subject matter for popular novelists almost since the beginning of the Church. But the Mormon novel as a treatment of Mormon materials from a Mormon point of view has come from two main wellsprings. The first was the "home literature" movement of the 1880s, the goal of which, according to Orson F. Whitney, was to produce a "pure and powerful literature" as an instrument for spreading the gospel, a literature which, "like all else with which we have to do, must be made subservient to the building up of Zion."¹ Even though its early practitioners are little read today—Nephi Anderson is the chief exception—the influence of home literature remains strong. It provides the guiding principles by which fiction and poetry are selected for the official church magazines, and it is also reflected in such popular works in Mormondom as *Saturday's Warrior* and *Beyond This Moment*. However, home literature has not had the impact on the world that Brother Whitney hoped for. It has not led to the development of "Miltons and Shakespeares of our own."² Good fiction is seldom written to ideological specifications. It is one thing to ask the artist to put his religious duties before his literary vocation or to write from his deepest convictions. It is quite another to insist that he create from a base in dogma rather than a base in experience. Good fiction, as Virginia Sorensen has said, is "one person's honest report upon life,"³ and in home literature the report usually fails to ring true. It is not a powerful literature artistically, nor is it pure. In most cases its distinctive Mormon characteristics are only skin deep, masking an underlying vision which is as foreign to the gospel as it is to real life. The early home literature borrowed the techniques of popular sentimental fiction and the values of the genteel tradition with a superficial adaptation to Mormon themes, and this practice continues only slightly modified.

The second major movement in Mormon fiction rose from different motives and it employed different models. The second quarter of this century, and especially the 1940s, saw the emergence of a group of Mormon

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regionalists whose goal was not to create an altogether new literature or an art subservient to the building up of Zion but to capture in their fiction the life of their region as the New England and Midwestern regional writers had done and as the Southern writers were beginning to do. The Mormon regionalists produced a few good novels and many undistinguished ones. Their achievement is less significant than that of those other regional literatures, but they nevertheless deserve more attention than they have received, not only for their intrinsic merit but also because both their successes and their failures can tell us something about the possibilities of a Mormon fiction.

The Epic Strain

When the term epic is applied to a novel it is usually used somewhat loosely to indicate a certain breadth of scope rather than a strict imitation of epic conventions. Such is the case with Vardis Fisher's *Children of God: An American Epic* (1939), which is the best known of several novels that attempt to treat the whole sweep of the Mormon story. Several months before Fisher's novel was published, Bernard DeVoto had warned of the perils in trying to deal with Mormons in fiction. DeVoto outlined an epic story, beginning with Joseph Smith, "that man gone mad on deity," and continuing through persecutions and migrations until at last "Israel . . . joins hands with the destiny of the America which it hates, which has tried to exterminate it, and walks into the sunset for America's future."⁴ It was, he declared, "a good book, by far the best book I am never going to write."⁵ DeVoto's point is that the story is too big and the reality-too severely strains credibility for it to be workable material for the novelist. "God, the best story-teller, has made a better story out of Joseph Smith and the Mormon wandering than fiction will ever equal."⁶

Fisher's novel bears out DeVoto's views. For Fisher, as for DeVoto, the Mormon epic ends with Brigham Young, but even so it is too big to be dealt with in a single novel. Fisher has a wide-ranging mind and considerable skill as a writer, but both his imagination and his technical resources are inadequate to his scheme in *Children of God*. He attempts to give his novel both an epic stature—by focusing on Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, Mormonism's two great culture heroes—and a panoramic sweep—by viewing major events through the eyes of a number of different characters. As a result, the novel suffers a serious break in continuity when Joseph Smith is killed and one central character is replaced by another. Moreover, in choosing to treat historical figures from inside, Fisher is forced to attribute motives, to tell us what they thought as well as what they said and did. This poses special problems in the case of Joseph Smith, as I will point out later, and it also leads to some trouble with Brigham Young.

Brigham is heroic, for Fisher, mainly because he is a man of strong common sense and decisive action. Yet with his Freudian insights, Fisher shows Brigham as inwardly more self-doubting and unsure of his direction than he appears outwardly. Consequently there are two Brigham Youngs in the novel, and they are never satisfactorily reconciled. Fisher's panoramic technique is also unsatisfactory, leading to serious fragmentation. The reader is frustrated again and again as a character whose insights he has come to depend on drops out of sight for no apparent reason or comes to be viewed

only from outside. On the other hand, because the McBrides are to become the central characters in the last part of the novel, Fisher must periodically take them out of their box and parade them before the reader in the earlier sections, even though most of their appearances are gratuitous. This sketchiness in the handling of point of view is a constant problem in *Children of God*, one forced upon Fisher by his epic scheme.

Fisher's failure is not simply of narrative technique, however. *Children of God* also shows an uncertain imaginative grasp of materials. Fisher cannot quite make up his mind about the story he is telling. With the exception of Brigham Young he is unsympathetic toward his characters. Joseph Smith is portrayed as a creative mystic whose dreamy idealism and inaptitude for practical affairs would surely have destroyed the Church had he lived much longer than he did. The early converts are emotionally unstable zealots or cynical opportunists or, strangely, both. The pioneers are weaklings who succumb to panic whenever Brigham Young is not there to take care of them. The church leaders who succeed Brigham are at one and the same time impotent weaklings and clever, self-serving schemers. The men are repeatedly given "cruel mouths" and "crafty eyes." The women are stupid, slatternly or shrewish. Seldom indeed has such a collection of hard-bitten, unappealing characters been gathered into a single volume. And yet at the conclusion we are apparently supposed to feel that a heroic era has come to an end. Fisher has neglected to establish the values he expects the reader to appreciate.

Fisher's main problem, then, is his inability to resolve his own ambivalence toward Mormonism or to achieve an aesthetic detachment from it. However, it would be a mistake to think that a more positive *Children of God* would be the great Mormon novel. DeVoto was right. Attempts at a Mormon epic will always be "mere vulgarizations of a great story."⁷ It takes a Tolstoy to get the Napoleonic Wars into a novel, and even he did not try to put the reader inside Napoleon's mind to any significant extent.

Of course it is possible to avoid some of the problems Fisher encounters by treating the Mormon epic more modestly. George Snell's *Root, Hog, and Die* (1936) covers almost the same time span as *Children of God* but achieves greater unity by rendering the story through the experiences of three generations in a single family. Paul Bailey, in *For This My Glory* (1940), follows a single character from the 1830s to the 1880s. Samuel Taylor, in *Nightfall at Nauvoo* (1971), restricts the time span, developing a panoramic picture of the rise and fall of Nauvoo. Yet these books also suffer from their epic pretensions. None of them evokes Mormon history as poignantly as does, for example, Virginia Sorensen's *A Little Lower Than the Angels* (1942). Though Sorensen's first novel is by no means her best, lacking the toughness of *The Evening and the Morning*, it nonetheless succeeds in rendering a part of the Mormon epic by not trying to be "epic" at all but by simply showing a single, rather ordinary family trying to live a normal life at Nauvoo while a great human upheaval is taking place around them. Sorensen's example reminds us that the novel as a form is not well suited to epic themes. The novel's great tradition is in its treatment of the private life. Since it is in the private life that religious experience takes place, the Mormon novel ought to turn this way instead of outward to big public events.

Peculiar People, Peculiar Institutions

Mormons, as we love to point out, are different. And although we may not be quite as different as we like to think, we are different enough to pose some special problems for the writer of fiction. The problem begins with Joseph Smith, who made some rather definite claims which must be either true or false. If they are true, he was a prophet of God and the Church is the only valid instrument of divine purpose on earth. If his claims are false, then he was either a self-deluded fanatic or a deliberate fraud, a confidence man on a large scale. Whichever position a writer takes, he encounters difficulties. At best Mormons who hold that Joseph Smith was a true prophet have a difficult time making themselves understood by non-Mormon readers and at worst, descend into cheap hagiolatry when they write about Joseph Smith. The Mormon writer's task might be easier if Joseph himself had been a confessional or devotional writer, but most of his writings have a "public" character and reveal little of his inner life. We have only imperfect notions of just what a prophet is and how his mind works. Nevertheless, only as a true prophet can Joseph Smith be an authentic hero. Joseph Smith as a fraud must be an anti-hero, a rogue adventurer. And Joseph Smith as a deluded fanatic can only be pathetic.

It is possible to take yet another position regarding Joseph Smith, the position that it is impossible to be certain whether or not he was "for real." This position can be maintained as long as a writer treats him only from outside, but any inside view must proceed from an interpretation of his character which will necessarily incline toward one or another of the alternatives I have mentioned. Because Samuel Taylor in *Nightfall at Nauvoo* limits us to viewing Joseph through the eyes of others he comes as close as anyone has to an objective presentation. Yet many Mormon readers are dissatisfied with Taylor's treatment.⁸ George Snell also presents Joseph Smith through the eyes of others, but near the end of his novel he introduces a spokesman for what seem to be the author's views, that Joseph was "a special kind of enthusiast with tremendous imagination" but "something a little wrong with his mind. . . . Those 'visions' he had must have been results of epilepsy, for I understand there was a strain of it in the family."⁹

Clearly it is difficult to write about Joseph Smith without taking a stand. Vardis Fisher attempts the impossible when he tries to go inside Joseph's mind without directly facing the validity of his claims. *Children of God* begins with the Joseph Smith story as all Mormons know it but with just a few crucial changes. Young Joseph is perplexed by the clashing creeds of the Burnt-over District and is searching for some sure path to truth, but for Fisher he is further moved by the guilt of masturbation—a foreshadowing of the sexual appetite which, for Fisher, eventually leads him into polygamy.

When Joseph goes to the grove, he does not try to pray immediately, but he loses himself for an hour in daydreams during which he keeps repeating the verse from James. The suggestion is that perhaps a kind of self-hypnosis takes place. When he prays it is with a sense of detachment from himself: "He was obscurely aware of his trembling body and the strange deep passion of his voice; but his prayer, filled with biblical phrases and archaic terms, seemed not to be his at all. He listened as if to another voice and was moved to deep astonishment."¹⁰ The sense of an oppressive, destroying power

which Joseph Smith referred to in his own official story is suggestively imaged in *Children of God* as the onset of some kind of seizure, though Fisher carefully keeps it only a suggestion. After the vision, Joseph “came to his senses.”¹¹ Fisher seems to be deliberately ambiguous here. He holds closely enough to the standard account that it is possible to interpret the scene in those terms, but for the reader disinclined to see Joseph Smith’s experience as authentic the scene can suggest a particularly vivid daydream, or some kind of self-induced hallucination, or even perhaps an epileptic seizure. However, it is difficult to maintain so wide a range of interpretive options for very long, and when he is compelled to choose, Fisher tends to choose the naturalistic explanations. For example, when Joseph tells his family about finding the golden plates Hyrum asks whether he had seen them “With your mortal eyes,” and Fisher takes an explicit interpretive position:

Joseph hesitated. The incredulity in his brother’s voice impelled him to make one of the gravest mistakes of his life. He knew well that he had seen the plates only in a vision, but he felt nobody would believe that. If he had said he saw them in a vision and if he had added that he would translate them while the power of God was upon him, but without ever actually seeing them or holding them in his mortal hands, he would have avoided what was to become his most serious problem. But he did not in this moment foresee the difficulties. The only thought in his mind was this, that nobody would believe in golden plates if they were not tangible objects that could be measured and weighed. . . .

“With your own eyes?” Hyrum asked again.

“Yes.”¹²

This is Fisher’s approach throughout. He nowhere rules out the possibility that Joseph Smith’s claims could have some valid basis, but he suggests repeatedly that Joseph’s visions are simply projections of his own desires. For the most part Joseph seems to be taken in by his own dreams, but occasionally, as in the passage given above, there is a suggestion of fraud. Fisher is disingenuous in his treatment of Joseph Smith because he pretends to leave the basic question open when in fact he is stacking the evidence against the prophet. He also fails to confront the full implication of his position. He admires Brigham Young in large part because “there was none of the mystic” in him.¹³ His hero is not Brigham the prophet but Brigham the colonizer. Is it really possible to choose one or the other? Can Brigham Young be worthy of the respect Fisher gives him if he was the devoted follower of a deluded fanatic or a fraud? Can an author treat Mormon characters honestly and sympathetically if he finds their beliefs absurd?

It is easiest to approach “the peculiar people” in fiction by way of ordinary Mormons, whose personal struggles of faith and doubt do not so insistently raise historical questions. Maurine Whipple points the way when she says in the Preface to *The Giant Joshua*, “These people of whom I write are my people and I love them, but I believe that what they did becomes even greater when we face the fact that they were human beings by birth and only saints by adoption.”¹⁴ Even so, the problem cannot be altogether avoided. It makes a significant difference, when Clory MacIntyre dies from the hardships of the Dixie Mission, whether she gave up her life for a humbug. The author’s inability to make up her mind on that question is one

source of the weakness at the end of *The Giant Joshua*.

Whoever writes about the Mormons must deal not only with their religious claims but also with their distinctive social institutions, most obviously polygamy and the United Order. Polygamy is a topic of perennial interest, but the United Order seems to have received the most attention in the novels written in the 1930s or shortly thereafter. Especially in George Snell and Vardis Fisher, the economic and political ideas of the 1930s are imposed upon the earlier period in which their novels are set. Explicitly in Snell and implicitly in Fisher, the Church's attempts to establish a communal society are interpreted in terms of a struggle between socialism and capitalism.

Snell's *Root, Hog, and Die* begins with Jim Brent, a poor, illiterate boy who is literally sitting in a pigsty when a Mormon missionary finds him. The Church gives direction to his life, stimulating an enterprise which eventually makes him rich. His son Zeke had certain idealistic longings in his youth but is drawn into the family wealth and becomes an instrument of it as he grows up. Zeke's son Mark, however, has a 1930s social consciousness (even though the book is set in the 1890s) and attempts to revise the economic order to make it more just. He is killed while trying to end a strike at the family's mine. At several points in the novel, Snell presents his economic ideas explicitly. Although Jim Brent knows that agriculture is "the root and foundation of all prosperity," he, like other prominent men in the Church, realizes that industrialism is the way to wealth: "Farming was fine in an isolated community that had no need or desire for class distinction, but where a factory or a machine could be harnessed by a man, that man had his hands on potential power that lifted him economically many stages above his neighbor."¹⁵ Using a young Jewish intellectual as his spokesman, Snell declares that the one really admirable thing about the Church was its early communitarianism. That was "one facet of a fine idealism, apart from every religious dogma that we may deplore now." Then he goes on:

But has it lasted? I'm afraid not. Look at your family, Mark. You're wealthy, and at the expense of the hundreds who work for you. I'll bet there are dozens of miners, millworkers, factory-hands, beet-diggers, and growers, who make starvation wages in your family's enterprises, and yet I suppose most of them, probably all of them, are just as "good" Mormons as your grandfather or your father. . . . That's what's become of your idealism. The Church itself is the worst offender because it's the biggest capitalist in the Territory Your people started with true economic ideals, and these have degenerated; your people started with false religious ideals but these will vanish in some later day, and I don't know what will be left.¹⁶

Similarly for Fisher, Joseph Smith's most admirable characteristic was his social idealism: "Nothing was closer to the prophet's heart than his dream of a society without avarice, poverty or wealth, distinctions of caste and position, meanness and bigotry and greed."¹⁷ Brigham Young cannot believe fully in Joseph's utopian ideal, but he too embraces the principle of the United Order, hoping by means of it to "weld his people into one invulnerable unit."¹⁸ In Brigham's mind,

There could never be a utopia in this world. But there could be united effort, with every person serving in the common plan; and there could be an abundance of goods for all. The selfish and the greedy, vain for

power, hungry for more than they needed, would have to be restrained; and the timid and inefficient would have to be encouraged.¹⁹

For Fisher, as for Snell, the modern Church has betrayed that dream. At the end of *Children of God* the fiery Nephi McBride predicts that in the future (after 1890)

This church that was to establish a new gospel of brotherhood on earth will have bigger banks and factories, its millionaires and beggars. Some will own factories—and some will own nothing but their self-respect. There will be the same wealth and poverty, luxury and starvation, snobbery and humility that are found all over the world. And our church, the one that began in a cabin in Palmyra and was driven across a continent, will be no different from churches everywhere.²⁰

Relevance is a double-edged sword. What probably seemed to be the most timely aspect of Snell's and Fisher's novels when they were published now seems rather dated. A novel that wears better is Lorene Pearson's *The Harvest Waits*, published in 1940 and written, no doubt, by one who was just as aware of contemporary social issues as Snell or Fisher. But Pearson treats the United Order on something more like its own terms. It is a finely balanced view. She shows not only the idealism but also the zeal and injustice that can accompany the communitarian experiment, and she generates sympathy for those who are unwilling to consecrate their possessions to the Order. Throughout her novel she shows the experiment as doomed and yet as achieving something of real value. Though she says less about the idealism involved, the reader can get a better feeling for the true idealism from *The Harvest Waits* than from Fisher or Snell, who cannot resist the temptation at times to turn fiction into political tract.

In the minds of many, polygamy is the most peculiar of Mormonism's peculiar institutions. It is an inescapable fact of Mormon history and theology, and virtually everyone who has written fiction about the Mormons has treated it in one way or another. Outside writers have usually exploited the sensationalism of the topic, conjuring up visions of exotic harems and maidens seduced by goatish Mormon elders. Within Mormondom polygamy is a divisive fact. Fundamentalist groups hold ardently to "the principle" as a symbol of the fullness of the gospel. Modern church leaders seem embarrassed by polygamy, preferring that it not be mentioned. For the serious Mormon novelist, especially if he chooses to treat historical themes, it is a topic which must be dealt with, but he is caught between three forces: the sensationalistic expectations of the outside audience; the resistance within the Church to open discussion; and the strangeness of the practice itself which makes it difficult to understand even for those whose grandparents were engaged in it. Considering these difficulties, the Mormon regional novelists have been remarkably balanced and sensitive in their treatment of polygamy, although not uniformly successful.

The most difficult aspect of polygamy to treat is its origin. As with Joseph Smith himself, so with the doctrines he propounded, the writer is usually compelled to take some position as to their divine or human origin. Usually, in those novels which deal with the beginnings of polygamy, it is seen as originating in Joseph Smith's sexual appetites. This pattern is worked out

most fully in Fisher where even as a youth Joseph is portrayed as having a strong sex drive. Then when Emma turns out to be frigid and shrewish, as Fisher portrays her, Joseph's appetites must find some other outlet. Snell also adopts this view, and so, with a little more sympathy, does Virginia Sorensen in *A Little Lower Than the Angels*. Samuel Taylor is somewhat ambivalent, but his Joseph Smith clearly has an eye for the ladies. Such a view is damaging to Mormon religious claims, of course, but is workable in fiction if maintained consistently. However, both Fisher and Snell are inconsistent. They depict the beginning of polygamy as an aberration and its practice as a burden and a failure. Yet to give the practice up, they suggest, was somehow even worse, a betrayal of the central tradition of the Church. One can hardly have it both ways.

Polygamy is treated most successfully in those novels which do not concern themselves directly with its origins but simply explore the human effects of an established practice. The best treatment is probably Maurine Whipple's *The Giant Joshua* (1941), whose protagonist is a third wife. John A. Widtsoe complained that Whipple's book was "unfair" because she portrayed "a life defeated because of polygamy" while in fact "Proportionately, there were fewer unhappy marriages under 'Mormon' polygamy than under monogamy."²¹ Elder Widtsoe gives no evidence for his interesting claim about the relative success of polygamous marriages, and I suspect that solid statistical evidence would be difficult to find. In the personal accounts which have come down to us there are some suggesting that polygamous marriages could be happy but also some indicating that the problems Whipple explores—unequal matches, jealousy, favoritism, irresponsibility—were by no means unknown. In any case, the validity of a work of fiction does not depend on its adherence to a statistically accurate representation of reality but on its conveying a genuine sense of human possibilities and on the coherence and comprehensiveness of the created fictional world. *The Giant Joshua* despite its faults has that validity and is a powerful and moving novel which is accessible to both Mormons and non-Mormons.

This is a crucial point, for if the peculiarity of Mormon traditions and institutions is such as to cut off access to a wider audience then the possibilities of Mormon literature are limited indeed. Virginia Sorensen has stated the problem in these terms:

Whenever you write about a "peculiar people" you will find yourself under the necessity of holding up the action of your stories, in a way most frowned-upon by the technicians, while you explain how your characters feel about heaven and hell, and why; how they are married and to how many different people and how this happened to happen; how they feel about food and drink; how many of their relationships are complicated, or sometimes enhanced, by the notion that they go on and on forever.²²

Sorensen also points to the answer to this problem when she goes on to say, "I have always felt that a novel is seldom an explanation, but rather an exploration." There is no good reason why Mormons should be harder to present to a wide audience than, for example, I. B. Singer's Polish Jews, and Singer rarely interrupts his stories to explain the folkways. Sorensen's own novel *Many Heavens* (1954) is a fascinating treatment of the polygamy theme presented with considerable technical skill. She treats polygamy in psychological rather than doctrinal or historical terms and makes a unique

application of the peculiar principle to one of the commonest themes of popular fiction: Polygamy solves a love triangle. Not even Elder Widtsoe would have claimed that for it!

Enlightenment

The Mormon regional novel was mainly the product of a single generation, the first generation formed by the twentieth century. Its members grew up when regional isolation was breaking down and rural Mormondom was experiencing widespread depopulation. Consequently it is not surprising that many of them saw the Church as failing, the Mormon experiment as essentially concluded. They were or saw themselves as being the first really educated generation of Mormons. As a result many of them convey a rather self-conscious sophistication. Knowing the real intellectual currents of the modern world as they do, they can look with some amusement upon the naivete of Mormon thought. They have been liberated from both a narrow and provincial society and an incredible dogma, though they retain a nostalgic attachment for a vanishing way of life. Because of these general attitudes, it is virtually impossible to find a Mormon regional novel that does not to some degree patronize its subject. At the same time, the novels themselves invite patronizing because their sophistication is both naive and tardy. It took the Mormon regionalists until the 1930s and 1940s to discover what Joyce had known in 1916 or Sinclair Lewis in 1920.

In some novels the sense of superiority is so strong as to reduce the story to caricature. Jean Woodman's *Glory Spent* (1940) is perhaps the most adolescent, but Richard Scowcroft's *Children of the Covenant* (1945) and Blanche Cannon's *Nothing Ever Happens Sunday Morning* (1948) are written in the same spirit, though with greater skill. Maurine Whipple and Virginia Sorensen treat their heritage much more sympathetically, but they too patronize their subjects. *The Giant Joshua* is filled with the sense that real life is elsewhere: in Salt Lake or in Philadelphia or beyond the Joshua tree forests in California, not in the hard pioneering of Utah's Dixie. And when Whipple does try to justify the struggle of pioneering, it is not really in Mormon terms but rather in a fuzzy combination of humanism and Transcendentalism (shown most obviously in her tendency to capitalize such words as "Dream," "Idea," and, for God, the "Great Smile"). The patronizing tone grows stronger in Whipple's second book, *This Is the Place: Utah* (1945).

Almost all of Virginia Sorensen's sympathetic characters are those who have freed themselves from the credulity of their neighbors, who are, like their author, "'in the middle'—incapable of severe orthodoxies"²³. Mercy Baker, in *A Little Lower Than the Angels*, whose kind and skeptical father has made her proof against the enthusiasm which fires her husband and the other residents of Nauvoo; Erik Eriksen, in *On This Star* (1946), emotionally tied to Sanpete Valley but intellectually liberated by his years of semi-bohemian life in New York and Europe; Kate Alexander, in *The Evening and the Morning* (1949), a free-thinking feminist and social worker; Niels Nielsen, in *Many Heavens*, Vienna-trained in the best medical knowledge but drawn home to Cache Valley by his love for the people whose faith he has left behind.

There is a pervasive view in these writers that Mormonism is something

to be outgrown. Most of them have a three-generation view of Mormon history. The first generation were the zealots, strange, driven men and women with absurd ideas yet a dedication and fervor that gives them a kind of heroism. The second generation are the provincials, formed in the mold of Mormonism but lacking the true spark, having neither the burning faith of their fathers nor the enlightenment of their children. The third generation (with which the authors identify themselves) is enlightened and liberated and able to put the whole picture of Mormonism into the correct perspective. There is little sign, in these novels, that there will be a fourth generation. From the viewpoint of the present, expansionist period in Mormon history, the dead-end vision of thirty or forty years ago seems rather quaint, but it remains as a warning. Perhaps each generation has its own provinciality. The views of the writers of the 1940s now seem as naive to us as those of their parents seemed to them. And there is little reason to think that it is we who have finally arrived at a true and definitive vision. Therefore, though we may regret the persistent note of condescension and wish for a Mormon Eudora Welty who would never make her characters the victims of her opinions, we should not judge these novelists too harshly. The best work of the Mormon regionalists is still impressive: the fine artistry of Sorensen's *The Evening and the Morning*; the imaginative power of Whipple's *The Giant Joshua*. These are novels to compare with better known works in the mainstream tradition of American literature. In any case, they are the best Mormon novels we have, and we are not likely to get better ones until we learn what they have to teach.

NOTES

¹ Orson F. Whitney, "Home Literature," first published in the *Contributor*, July 1888; reprinted in Richard H. Cracroft and Neal E. Lambert, *A Believing People: Literature of the Latter-day Saints* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1974), pp. 204, 205.

² *Ibid.*, p. 206.

³ Virginia Sorensen, "Is It True?—The Novelist and His Materials," *Western Humanities Review* 7 (1953): 283.

⁴ Bernard DeVoto, "Vacation," *Harper's* 177 (1938): 560.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 559.

⁸ For example, Neal Lambert complains that Taylor's Joseph Smith is "less a wonder or even an enigma than he is a conglomeration of stereotypes." Review in *Brigham Young University Studies* 12 (1972): 334.

⁹ George Dixon Snell, *Root, Hog, and Die* (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton, 1936), p. 380.

¹⁰ Vardis Fisher, *Children of God: An American Epic* (New York and London: Harper, 1939), p. 7.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

¹⁴ Maurine Whipple, *The Giant Joshua* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1941), p. xi.

¹⁵ Snell, p. 265.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 381-382.

¹⁷ Fisher, p. 152.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 555.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 556.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 764.

²¹ John A. Widtsoe, "On the Bookshelf," *Improvement Era* 44 (1941): 93.

²² Sorensen, "Is It True?" pp. 290-291.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 285.

Halldór Laxness, the Mormons and the Promised Land

GEORGE S. TATE

WHEN THE ALL-SEEING EYE on the facade of Zion's Mercantile winked at him, beckoning him with its self-assured commingling of matter and spirit to write a novel about the Promised Land, Halldór Laxness had already received the Nobel Prize for Literature. The Icelander's own quest for a Promised Land—a notion that had tugged persistently at his sleeve since early in his career—had led him from country to country, from Catholicism to socialism and finally to renunciation.¹ As a young convert to Catholicism, he had entered a Benedictine monastery in Luxemburg where for five years he wrestled to reconcile enormous spiritual and intellectual tensions—a struggle that characterizes his first major novel, *The Great Weaver from Kashmir* (1927).² Shortly after this flamboyant "Catholic" novel appeared, Laxness traveled to the United States where he became an ardent socialist, saved from deportation only through the intervention of his friend Upton Sinclair. After an enthusiastic visit to the Soviet Union, he returned to Iceland, profoundly committed to social causes and with fresh appreciation for his native literary heritage. Whereas in Luxemburg he had rejected the Icelandic sagas ("Heu mihi, I have nothing to learn from them"),³ he now imitated, assimilated and revitalized their laconic prose, transforming it with his prolific pen into a weapon against social injustice. His stark masterpieces *Salka Valka* (1931-32), *Independent People* (1934) and *World Light* (1937-40) depict the plight of defenseless and abject people struggling indomitably against indifferent nature and predatory exploitation.

Much to the sorrow of leftists who had claimed him as a hero, Laxness' social radicalism mellowed after he received the Nobel Prize in 1955 at the age of fifty-three and became a kind of cultural ambassador. In the years

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that followed, he disparaged Russian communism, which he had formerly praised, and increasingly refused (and continues to refuse) identification with any ideological position. It was in 1960, during this period of renunciation, that Laxness published *Paradise Reclaimed* (*Paradísarheimt*), in Europe at least, the best known Mormon novel ever written.⁴ The novel, which has enjoyed wide critical acclaim, has been translated into Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, English, French, Dutch, German, Finnish and Serbo-Croatian. Preliminary arrangements for a film production have also been made.

Paradise Reclaimed tells of a simple Icelandic farmer, Steinar, who dreams of obtaining the Promised Land for his children. Recalling tales of the generosity of Viking kings, he first hopes to purchase it by giving a wonder-pony, symbol of his children's sense of the marvelous, to the Danish prince when the royalty visit Iceland in 1874. But he is invited instead to the royal palace in Copenhagen where he receives, not a kingdom, but autographed photographs which he later trades for four cobbler's needles. At the assurance of Bishop Didrik (Þjóðrekur), a Mormon missionary, that the Promised Land has been established in Utah, Steinar sets out on a second quest and remains in Utah, only partly assimilated into the Mormon community, awaiting the arrival of his wife and children who, in his absence, have been physically and economically exploited. His wife dies aboard the ship; he feels estranged from his children who arrive having thought him dead. With unarticulated disappointment, he returns to Iceland as a missionary, eventually making his way back to the old farm whence he began his quest.

While doing research toward *Paradise Reclaimed* and for two years or so after its publication, Laxness made many public statements about the Mormons. These took the form of interviews, parts of addresses, letters to editors and two major articles, both of which have been translated into other Scandinavian languages and anthologized several times.⁵ One of these, "An American Revelation" (published in the Danish newspaper *Politiken*), is a review-article of Ray B. West's *Kingdom of the Saints*. In this article, Laxness discusses Joseph Smith's revelation in the context of an array of others (ranging from the reading of tea-leaves to the visions of St. Paul), and explores the relationship between the novelist's craft and religious revelation:

A novelist is perhaps in his daily life no greater mythomaniac than most people, but at the moment of writing he believes in his fiction totally and absolutely. Herein lies also one of the main reasons why others accept his story as credible. A novelist works under a continuing "revelation" throughout the genesis of his work; not exactly like second-sight in relation to a transcendent world, but something closely akin to it just the same: a world which does not exist in the prevalent understanding of things. And if a reader comes inquiring to what extent an episode in the book corresponds to reality, it seems to the author that the man is stupid. For a writer occupied with the genesis of his work, the fictive world is the only reality that is valid.⁶

The article ends with admiration for West's book and for the Mormons in general:

Ray West's book enables contemplative readers to perceive that Joseph Smith's revelation is equally as good as many other historical revelations—perhaps even better than most if, in this matter, anything may be deduced from the results. The book describes how the Mor-

mons were gathered and firmly led by revelation to a promised land, one of the few really such places here on earth. Through revelation they were virtually commanded to build up their remarkable "kingdom" in Utah, a society which has achieved a status that makes the Mormons one of the most sterling and exemplary of America's many prominent ethnic groups. If one has this fact about the Mormons in mind, the often-repeated charge that Joseph Smith's revelation was not "genuine" seems a little beside the point.⁷

The second major piece is an illustrated two-part feature article, "Tale of the Promised Land," published in successive issues of *Samvinnan*, an Icelandic *Life* magazine. The first part of this article recounts the history of the Mormons; the second (and more interesting) part is an account of Laxness' travel experiences and observations about Utah. Within this piece and other shorter statements about the Mormons several recurrent themes are evident, all of which are treated in *Paradise Reclaimed*.

The first of these themes is Laxness' consternation at his countrymen's response to the Mormon missionaries in the nineteenth century. In "Tale of the Promised Land" he writes:

Unfortunately, the reaction of the Icelanders to the revelation of the Mormons is by no means a patch of sunshine in the religious history of Iceland. Our indolent countrymen, who have distinguished themselves least of all as heroes of the faith—and as far as one can tell have contributed nothing to the religions of the world except an occasional heartless assent to a foreign faith—now reacted against the Mormons with a vehemence unprecedented in our religious history. Ecclesiastical as well as secular authorities, learned as well as uneducated, opposed this sect with intensity. Something must have been inherent in the Mormon doctrine which was capable of upsetting the peace of mind of a people so religiously infertile as the Icelanders. . . . The Mormons who came here as missionaries were persecuted and reviled more than any other advocates of religious views in Iceland before or since.⁸

In Iceland, as elsewhere, some of this persecution focused on polygamy. In response to an interviewer's question whether he found polygamy exemplary, Laxness answered that it is treated in the novel "with perfect sympathy and understanding"—though not, I might add, with the uniformity suggested by one Mormon reader's characterization of this treatment as "nothing but our pro-polygamy propoganda given flesh."⁹ Laxness continued, with a chuckle:

On the other hand, it was amusing when I went to America for the first time while in my twenties. I had to fill out large questionnaires from the emigration office. One of the questions was, "Are you a polygamist?" I, of course, answered this "No," and most others did likewise, since those who answered in the affirmative would certainly have been in jail rather than on their way westward across the ocean. Then I read the next question, which presented me for the first time with great difficulty: "Are you in sympathy with polygamists?" To this day I haven't been able to solve this difficulty.¹⁰

Laxness seems not to have a particularly sound understanding of or interest in Mormon doctrine per se. While describing a Brigham Young University devotional assembly at which President David O. McKay spoke, he writes: "The valiantly well-equipped yet unaffected young people, who

appeared to be possessed of all the qualities that make men men, listened with solemn attention to some sort of Christian or semi-Christian wisdom which could have been anything but was, without doubt, genuine Mormonism."¹¹ Although he appears to see the doctrine as an eclectic amalgam, his real interest is in the material and social results of commitment to a transcendent ideal mediated through revelation. He discusses with humor his amazement at the Church's wealth and the standard of living in Utah:

[The Mormons] have an ecclesiastical economic administration unparalleled in Western religions, if the Catholic church is excepted. The greater part of the land's wealth is church property in Utah. In addition, the church is the promoter of disparate kinds of industries and is a great employer of workers. This is not state capitalism but church capitalism. As I drove along with Bishop Bearson, he often pointed to some unexpected thing and said, "The church owns this." It often reminded me of Kannytverstan in the German tale.¹² He pointed up to mountains and plateaus where what appeared to be government-type buildings were going up and said, "The church owns this." We went into a cafe to buy some lemonade—"The church owns this" (both the restaurant and the lemonade factory). Below the mountain slopes stand enormous iron foundries—the church again. In the middle of Salt Lake City we drove into a parking lot and paid 25¢—"The church owns this parking lot. . . ." In few places in America is one confronted with such well-rooted prosperity totally void of slums. . . . I am forced to admit that the average man in the Mormon state enjoys a higher standard of living than the average man in almost any other place I know of, and, although I am ashamed to admit it, it would please me to discover convincing reports of poverty and destitution, depravity and debauchery in the state of Utah. I find it slightly discomfiting to have to admit that a group whose ideas of how to achieve happiness differ so widely from my own brings forth such good fruit—better, even, than I would have dared dream.¹³

And in a paper written in Bombay just after his visit to China in 1957, Laxness praises Mao for clothing, feeding and finding work for his people, and he sees economic hope for the Chinese as he compares them to the Mormons:

The Chinese are at the handcart stage of the Mormons crossing the desert of the Middle West in 1846. The human being is still pre-eminently the beast of burden in China as was the case with the Mormons in the days of the settlers. Both have behind them their Long March. Both believe that truth and their special destiny is the same thing, written on golden tablets. In both cases the handcart-pushers know in which direction to go, determined to reach the Promised Land. There is no reason to think that the Marxist belief which London has given China will prove itself a less bountiful fulfiller of promise than the Golden Tablets of Joseph Smith which, although never put on display, palpably have made the Mormons one of the most prosperous and sympathetic communities of the United States.¹⁴

Laxness is by no means blind to quirks and foibles of Mormon society in Utah. He assures the readers of *Samvinnan* that "most of the doings of the Mormons are in some way unusual"¹⁵ and that their "manner of speech is knowledgeable, 'uplifting,' but rather tedious just the same."¹⁶ He jokes about the material proof of truth evident when a non smoker drives a Cadillac, whereas a smoker drives a Chevrolet.¹⁷ And in one of the most

delightful parts of “Tale of the Promised Land” he deals with another aspect of the Word of Wisdom:

I wouldn't like to say that I was very given to cocktails, but I would prefer a cocktail to an abundance of lemonade with prayers. One particular event sticks in my mind. I drove with Bishop Bearnson to visit his mother-in-law the day after arriving in Utah from the eastern states. I was thirsty and asked the good lady for a drink. She hurried into the kitchen and fetched me some cold water from the tap. Naturally enough, out of courtesy, I instantly thanked God for finally receiving a sip of cold water after having been to two or three cocktail parties a day for more than a month in the eastern states. Just as I had begun to explain this, however, the good lady broke in and said, “Would you mind if I recited a little poem I've composed about the cocktail?” Now commenced a fantastic epic in which first came the creation of the world and the Fall, followed by an enumeration of all the principal disasters, self-made hells, and other misfortunes which have befallen mankind from the beginning to the present day. Even the apes were used as a comparison with man with the undeviating proviso that man always came off worse in the comparison. This great decline in mankind's fortune culminated in the ill-starred discovery of the cocktail, and the poem went on to prove that this drink was the climax of all the disasters, stupidity, and misfortunes on earth. That was indeed the longest poem I have heard in all my travels around the world.¹⁸

In a more serious vein, Laxness composed a letter to the Catholic journal *Wort und Wahrheit* in which he chides a Viennese priest for his bigoted invective in condemning a school of thought different from his own. He writes:

It has sometimes made me sad to listen to my friends the Mormons and the Adventists or other militant sectarians explain how Roman Catholic people would all be damned unless some special act of divine grace interfere with justice and save a few of them. Despite this intolerance, according to my experience the average Mormon or Adventist [is] just as good, if not a better man than the average Catholic.¹⁹

Despite such comments, Laxness' overall appraisal of the Mormons is very positive. Early in his novel *The Fish Can Sing*, published (as *Brekkukotsannáll*) in 1957 while he was researching *Paradise Reclaimed*, Laxness has the narrator say: “Then one day, so I have been told, it happened that a young woman arrived at a place from somewhere in the west, or north, or perhaps even east. This woman was on her way to America, abandoned and destitute, fleeing from those who ruled Iceland. I have heard that her passage was paid for by the Mormons. . . .” And then he adds, “and indeed I know for a fact that amongst them are to be found some of the finest people in America.”²⁰ This sentence cannot help but strike the reader as gratuitous in the voice of the narrator who simply has not the experience with America to make such a statement, but it is typical of Laxness' tendency during this period to go out of his way to praise the Mormon achievement.

When an interviewer for *Morgunblaðið* asked him in 1960, “What do you yourself think of the truth of the Mormons, Halldór?” Laxness replied, “If it is true that the truth is concealed in living well, then the Mormons have come closer to the truth than most men. They lead exceptionally beautiful and healthy lives, not only in a moral sense, but in general. They

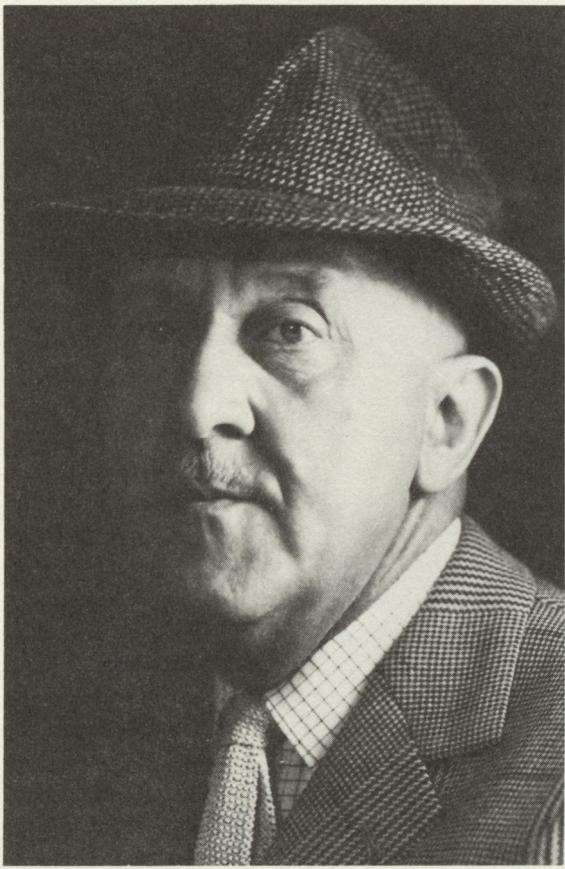
live in a very agreeable society."²¹ And in another interview as late as 1970, while discussing various moral issues with Randi Bratteli, wife of the Norwegian prime minister, Laxness said, "I was once interested in the Mormons and traveled twice to Utah. I have also written a book about them called *Paradise Reclaimed*. . . . Unfortunately there are no Mormons in Iceland; I would gladly have supported them."²²

Statements of this kind accord well with parts of *Paradise Reclaimed*, especially with the well-known passage in which Bishop Didrik tells Steinar "Only the man who sacrifices everything can be a Mormon" and goes on to portray in poignant detail the pioneer experience.²³ But many Mormon readers, including literary readers, have been disappointed and even incensed at satiric aspects of the portrait of the Promised Land—Bishop Didrik's habit of wrapping his hat in wax paper, the bizarre baptism of a child in a rushing river, the all-seeing eye on the facade of Zion's Mercantile, the sewing machine as proof of the victory of the All-Wisdom ("it needs a great deal of philosophy to match a sewing machine"),²⁴ the wives' marching off to defend polygamy. But although such details led one French critic to describe the novel as an "excellente satire du fanatisme et de intolérance,"²⁵ Laxness' intentions lay in a different direction. On several occasions—in letters to Karl Keller, Ray C. Johnson (mission president in Norway) and to me in an interview—he has expressed disappointment at the reception of the novel by the Mormon community.²⁶ When *Paradise Reclaimed* appeared in English in 1962, Laxness wrote: "I want to express my gratitude to [my Utah friends] with my apologies for what to them must look like childish superficiality in recording things with which they are conversant. All the same I hope that not only the Mormons, but also other readers who in their fashion believe in the Promised Land, and might even have found it, shall not be doubtful of my intentions."²⁷ I believe he should be taken at his word.

But certain difficulties do confront the Mormon reader unaware of the background of the novel and its position in Laxness' literary output, and it is in an effort to overcome these that I would like, by way of apologia for the novel, to make four points. The first is that Laxness' humor is an enigmatic and puzzling feature of virtually all his fiction. His creative energy thrives on tension between humor and satire on the one hand and melancholy pathos on the other. Critics frequently refer to his "twofold vision" and puzzle over the sometimes delicate, sometimes strained balance between the comic and the tragic—a balance maintained right to the end and still not tipped (as is so often the case) in either direction. Thus Peter Hallberg, perhaps Laxness' best critic, writes of the conclusion of *Independent People*, "when all is taken into account, it is hard to say whether, from the point of view of its creator, [the novel] may be thought to end happily or unhappily."²⁸ All of his novels are perplexing in this regard.

Laxness admired Maxim Gorky for striking "the most sacred and sensitive chords in the reader's heart" by looking "into people's destinies, however contemptible they may seem to be, until he has sympathy with them"²⁹ and Charlie Chaplin for his way of expressing a "melancholy sense of life" through bold contrasting effects "with blending pathos and comedy, with a smile smiled through tears."³⁰ An ironist with a keen eye for incongruities, Laxness lets nothing, however sacred—not the sagas, not Christianity, not socialism, certainly not himself—escape this "twofold vision" of sympathy

and satire. As Hallberg says, "good natured irony . . . frequently produces its cloven hoof."³¹ Laxness' subtlety lies within what Wayne Booth describes as a "vision that encompasses ironies but is itself not finally undercut with irony,"³² but the intertwining of tenderness and irony, lyricism and satire, makes it difficult to assess tone. Perhaps the most illuminating statement on the function of humor in *Paradise Reclaimed* is in the novel itself, when Steinar (now Stone P. Stanford, brickmaker in Zion) investigates the crumbling house of a woman who has been ostracized by some of her more zealous neighbors because her daughter had a liaison with a Lutheran. After a brief conversation in which Steinar observes—in words symbolic beyond his perception and which adumbrate the final scene of the novel—that the house is certainly in need of repair, but that it "is not so obvious where one should make a start when faced with a fallen wall," Laxness writes,



Halldór Laxness

"The woman made no reply but looked at him from the remoteness of the soul in that huge, deep, tear-filled silence of human life that nothing can break except laughter."³³ Mormon readers who are offended at the satiric aspects of Laxness' por-

trait of Zion should understand that irony and satire are common to all his fiction, regardless of subject or setting, and are not simply marshalled out to undercut the Mormons. Like Chaplin and Gorky, Laxness has warm sympathy for the human condition.

Secondly, in several of his novels Laxness draws heavily but imaginatively on the writings of obscure figures whose lives are nevertheless well-documented. Thus the overall plot of the tetralogy *World Light* and many features of its hero Ólafur Kárason are adapted from the unpublished autobiography and diaries of the Icelandic folk-poet Magnús Hjaltason. The same is true of *Paradise Reclaimed*. The Mormon reader should realize that the larger outline of the plot and many details are drawn from the writings of Eiríkur á Brúnum (1832-1900), a colorful figure and rather well-known

writer of naive travel books and other autobiographical pieces.³⁴

In his first travel book, this farmer from southern Iceland tells how he sold a horse to the prince of Denmark during the millennial celebration of the settlement of Iceland in 1874, and he recounts in tedious detail how he went to Denmark two years later and was well received by the royalty who gave him autographed photographs of themselves. In 1879 Eiríkur settled in Mossfellssveit (where Laxness grew up) and there became a Mormon, convinced initially by Þórður Diðoriksson's adaptation of Parley P. Pratt's *A Voice of Warning* (which he bought for a bottle of cheap brandy and called "the best and most needful purchase I ever made")³⁵ and was finally moved to join the church by "the unjustified hatred heaped upon the Mormons."³⁶

He and his family traveled to Utah in 1881 (his wife died in North Platte on the way); he stayed for eight years, filling one mission to Iceland, before leaving the Church and returning to Iceland for good in 1889. His second travel book and several shorter pieces document these experiences. The point I want to make here is that if Steinar is, like Eiríkur on whom he is modeled, to retrace his footsteps back to Iceland, this must be motivated within the novel itself. Steinar's vague, negative experience provides this motivation, but it is left unexplored. He returns to Iceland as a missionary, not as an apostate.

Thirdly, if Laxness had intended, as he assures us he did not, to satirize Mormon beliefs or society, Eiríkur's writings could have provided him much ammunition. Although Eiríkur does not make a point of slandering the society with which he has become disillusioned, he does mention such things as the occasional rejection of an older wife upon the arrival of a younger one.³⁷ He tells of a Danish convert whom he knew to be a "well-behaved and sensible man" who was so appalled at his first visit to the temple (Eiríkur never went) that he not only walked out of the building but out of the Church as well.³⁸ Perhaps the best of this ammunition would have been Eiríkur's account of his reasons for breaking with the Mormons.

He tells of how perplexed he was when he first learned, late in 1888 through a newspaper article, of the Adam-God teaching. He sought the counsel of another Icelander, a high priest named Magnús, and he recounts their conversation. Magnús read to him from Brigham Young, testifying that he indeed believed Adam was God and that it was he who gave Moses the commandments, whom Stephen saw at the right hand of God, and who fathered Jesus in the flesh. Eiríkur thanked him for his candor and claimed that Magnús was later severely rebuked for having disclosed this information in detail. He writes:

Now I went home and it seemed to me that I no longer fit very well with the Latterday Saints, as they call themselves, and I began to attend church less frequently because it seemed to me to have lost in radiance.

Sometime later I was home in my house and knew nothing until two high priests came to me with greetings and a message from the bishop of Spanish Fork, George Snill (or something like that), concerning whether he should strike my name from the records or leave it in. I had ceased going to church, and they had heard it said that I had become an apostate from their faith. This nearly floored me, but I said, "Does the bishop believe the book by Brigham Young, *Adam Father and God* published in 1852 in Salt Lake City?" They answered, "Yes." "Do you believe it?" Answer: "Yes." I had the Bible and the New

Testament on the table beside me. I took one in each hand, held them up and said, "I have believed in these books literally, cover-to-cover, ever since I've had understanding, and I intend to believe in them, with God's help, until I die, and you can tell the bishop that he should strike my name from the records of the church and the tithing records because I don't want to have dealings with men who tear down these holy books as you do with your false doctrine." One priest flushed red but said nothing, the other jabbered a little unintelligibly and then they left.

Dear countrymen, there you see set forth the reasons for my parting ways with the Mormon faith, whether they seem to you great or small. I joined them with eagerness of heart, but I left them with equal courage when I perceived their error.³⁹

This is a famous scene in Icelandic popular literature, a kind of people's Martin Luther—"Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise"—but Laxness ignores it as he does all overt criticism of the Mormons in Eiríkur's writings. He relegates Adam-God, much tamed, to a brief exchange in a larger theological debate between a Lutheran and the feisty Pastor Runolf, a tenuous Mormon at best.⁴⁰ While Eiríkur is vocal both about his conversion and his renunciation of the Church, Steinar says nothing. Indeed, one senses that his disillusionment runs too deep and is too dimly perceived to be articulated. But it is not disillusionment with the doctrine or even with the society.

The final and most important point of this apologia has to do with the relationship of the novel to Laxness himself. Peter Hallberg finds it tempting to interpret Steinar's journey to Copenhagen (with a "soul-casket" after having given his "soul-horse" to the prince) as corresponding to Laxness' early immersion in Catholicism, Steinar's quest for a material paradise for his family in Utah as representing Laxness' socialist stage, and the final resignation as characterizing his own present refusal to be identified with any ideology.⁴¹

Hallberg rightly cautions that such topical equation would be too pat, but it does seem important that the Mormon reader understand that Laxness is not writing a biography of Eiríkur á Brúnum or a story specifically about the Mormons. *Paradise Reclaimed* is at once personal and universal. There is something of Laxness in Steinar, something of his own spiritual or ideological odyssey that has taken him from monasticism, to socialism, to his present renunciation and mistrust of ideologies and dogmas. From the standpoint of its overall treatment of a quest for truth and utopia, *Paradise Reclaimed* is perhaps Laxness' most nearly autobiographical novel.⁴²

Despite his resignation and disillusionment, Laxness can look on this personal odyssey with humor: rather than an epic mode, he chooses as the paradigm for Steinar's quest the "Lucky Hans" folktale in which a simple-minded peasant sets out to market with a horse, barter continually (for sheep, a dog, and so forth), is easily persuaded to foolish decisions and, returning home with only a couple of cobbler's needles for his efforts, loses these while fording a stream.⁴³ Steinar's cultivated habit of never saying yes or no reflects Laxness' ideological neutrality. Characteristic of Laxness' renunciation is his loss of interest in truth per se. In an interview in which he was asked "Has your consideration of the life of the Mormons brought you closer to the truth yourself?" he responded, "I am not so much concerned with truth as with facts. The truth is to me such a philosophical notion. But

those men who have sacrificed the facts for their system and have emersed themselves in their truth obtain a viable position in the world. I don't personally believe in the revelation of Joseph Smith, but it may well be valid for all that."⁴⁴

In an essay written in English entitled "The Origins of *Paradise Reclaimed*," Laxness tells how the notion of a promised land, "perhaps one of the fundamental ideas inborn in humanity" and maybe even in birds and fish, did not leave him in peace for over thirty years from the time he first stood before the temple and tabernacle in Salt Lake City in 1927 and recalled his childhood reading of Eiríkur's travel books, "the story of the long peregrinations of the little man through the kingdoms of the world in search of the Promised Land." Although he "tried again and again to contain the . . . story within a reasonable volume," the "real thing, the Promised Land of God, did not get into focus," and for years he gave up. Laxness then illuminates for us his own relationship to the theme of the novel:

The truth is that to write successfully about the Promised Land you must have sought and found it in your own life with all that is implied in the concept. You must have made the pilgrimage yourself; figuratively speaking you must have crossed the ocean holding the rank of cattle, walked across the Big Desert on foot, fought within and outside yourself the continuous battles for your Land over the years. In your young pilgrim days while still struggling along, you can only bear witness to your Lord and praise Him. But He leaves it to yourself to find the Way.

You go groping along through a jungle of ideas, which it would take volumes to describe, sometimes you get into blind alleys, at other times you are stuck in bottomless quicksand and saved by a miracle—until finally you find yourself in a small place, in a little enclosure which, it seems to you, has a sort of familiar look, a place that somehow looks like the old home. Was it the same garden from which you started? It seems so, but it is not. A wise man has said: He who goes away will never come back; it means that when he returns he is a different kind of person. Between the garden from which you set out and the garden to which you return lie not only the many kingdoms, but also the big oceans and the big deserts of the world—and the Promised Land itself as well.⁴⁵

Laxness translated *Candide* (as *Birtíngur*) into Icelandic in 1945, and it is instructive to compare the endings of Voltaire's work and *Paradise Reclaimed* and to relate them to this statement. Pangloss, feeling that his theory required unceasing exertions of ingenuity,

seized every occasion to say to Candide, "All the events in this best of all possible worlds are admirably connected. If a single link in the great chain were omitted, the harmony of the entire universe would be destroyed. If you had not been expelled from that beautiful castle, with those cruel kicks, for your love of Miss Cunegonde; if you had not been imprisoned by the inquisition; if you had not travelled over a great portion of America on foot [as did the Mormon pioneers]; if you had not plunged your sword through the baron; if you had not lost all the sheep [related to the 'Lucky Hans' tale?] you brought from that fine country Eldorado, together with the riches with which they were laden, you would not be here today, eating preserved citrons, and pistachio nuts."

"That's very well said, and may all be true," said Candide, "but let's cultivate our garden."⁴⁶

When Steinar, after returning to Iceland as a missionary and being received with cordial indifference rather than persecution, wanders out to the site of his old farm and notices that stones have rolled down knocking over the stone fences,

he laid down his knapsack . . . , slipped off his jacket and took off his hat; then he began to gather stones to make a few repairs to the wall. There was a lot of work waiting for one man here; walls like these, in fact, take a man with them if they are to stand.

A passer-by saw that a stranger had started to potter with the dykes of this derelict croft. "Who are you?" asked the traveller. The other replied, "I am the man who reclaimed Paradise after it had been lost, and gave it to his children."

"What is such a man doing here?" asked the passer-by.

"I have found the truth, and the land that it lives in," said the wall-builder, correcting himself. "And that is assuredly very important. But now the most important thing is to build up this wall again."

And with that, Steinar of Hlidar went on just as if nothing had happened, laying stone against stone in these ancient walls, until the sun went down on Hlidar in Steinahlidar.⁴⁷

After long and arduous journeys through kingdoms, across oceans and deserts, and after a sojourn in a "promised land"—be it Eldorado or Zion—both of these optimists arrive at a garden.

But the tone of *Paradise Reclaimed* differs from that of *Candide*. The novel is informed by a deep melancholia at lost innocence and the passage of time—relieved, yet paradoxically augmented, by the puzzling humor that plays through the work. Though not a romantic, Laxness seems to see the proximity of paradise as a vision experienced in childhood; as Steinar says, "The whole point is, my dear fellow, that when the world ceases to be miraculous in the eyes of our children, then there is very little left."⁴⁸ The novel suggests that man's seemingly futile quest for paradise is not, as he so often supposes, a forward journey to a material promised land, a wedding of "a dream to geography and its truth to facts,"⁴⁹ but an unaware attempt to retrace his steps. The mellow tone becomes more poignant as time progresses in the fictive world Laxness creates and as Steinar senses that he left to find what he lost by leaving. In Eliot's words:

. . . the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.⁵⁰

His wife dead, his family separated and estranged, his children's sense of the marvelous and their innocence lost—Steinar's final insight, sensed in complete simplicity, has very nearly cost him everything. "'Only the man who sacrifices everything can be a Mormon,' said the bishop. 'No one will bring the promised land to you.'"⁵¹

NOTES

¹ Much of this brief biographical sketch depends on Peter Hallberg's excellent study *Halldór Laxness*, trans. R. McTurk (New York, 1971) and his fuller discussion of the period after 1955 "Laxness, Konstnærskapet, Ideologierna: Något om hans senare Diktning," *Nordisk Tidskrift* (1967), pp. 65-102.

² Titles are given in English, but dates refer to publication of the original.

³ Letter of April 17, 1923 to Einar Ól. Sveinsson, quoted by Hallberg in *Halldór Laxness*, p. 45.

⁴ The term "Mormon novel" is here used broadly; in a letter to me (February 16, 1972), Laxness refers to *Paradísarheimt* as "probably the most well-known Mormon novel ever written."

⁵ "En amerisk Åbenbaring," *Politiken* (Copenhagen), 2 June 1958, reprinted in Laxness, *Gjörningabók* (Reykjavík, 1959), pp. 218-25 (I cite this edition) and in *De islandske Sagaer og andre Essays*, ed. Erik Sønnerholm (Copenhagen, 1963), pp. 129-36; the essay appears in Norwegian in Laxness, *Egil Skallagrimsson og Fjernsynet* (Oslo, 1964), pp. 118-26, and in Swedish in Laxness, *Utsaga*, ed. and trans. Peter Hallberg (Stockholm, 1959), pp. 214-21. Æventýri um fyrirheitna Landið," *Samvinnan*, Part 1, May 1958, pp. 4-7, Part 2, June 1958, pp. 4-7, 27; the article is reprinted in Laxness, *Gjörningabók*, pp. 110-27, and appears in Swedish in Laxness, *Utsaga*, pp. 196-213. Translations of these and the shorter statements concerning the Mormons are my own.

⁶ "En amerisk Åbenbaring," p. 224.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

⁸ "Æventýri um fyrirheitna Landið" 2:4.

⁹ Laurel T. Ulrich, "Fictional Sisters," in *Mormon Sisters*, ed. Claudia L. Bushman (Cambridge, Mass., 1976), p. 258.

¹⁰ *Morgunblaðið* (Reykjavík), 23 July 1960, p. 9.

¹¹ "Æventýri um fyrirheitna Landið" 2:7.

¹² The reference is to Johann Peter Hebel's tale in *Schatzkästlein des rheinischen Hausfreundes* (1811) in which a German bumpkin visiting Amsterdam thinks each time he asks "Who owns this house?" etc., and receives the reply "Kannitverstan" (I don't understand) that the owner's name is meant. See Hebel's *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. H. Rupp and R. M. Kully (Gütersloh, 1966), pp. 135-37.

¹³ "Æventýri um fyrirheitna Landið" 2: 6, 7, 27.

¹⁴ Printed in Laxness, *Gjörningabók*, pp. 203-4; the English is Laxness'.

¹⁵ "Æventýri um fyrirheitna Landið," 2: 6.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Letter of 15 August 1958, printed in *Gjörningabók*, p. 229; Laxness writes in English in response to Fr. Abendroth's "Status Confessionis," *Wort und Wahrheit* 6 (1958).

²⁰ *The Fish Can Sing*, trans. Magnus Magnusson (London, 1966), p. 8.

²¹ *Morgunblaðið*, p. 9.

²² *Arbeiderbladet* (Oslo), 28 February 1970.

²³ *Paradise Reclaimed*, trans. Magnus Magnusson (New York, 1962), p. 49; *Paradísarheimt* (Reykjavík, 1960), pp. 55-56.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 142; p. 163

²⁵ R. Hilleret on the jacket of his translation (from English) *Le Paradis Retrouvé* (Paris, 1966).

²⁶ See the letter to Keller (July 13, 1971) in his "The Witty and Witless Saints of a Noble Prize Winner," *Dialogue* 6 (1971): 52; the letter to Johnson (March 24, 1970) is in the files of the servicemen's branch at Keflavík.

²⁷ "The Origins of *Paradise Reclaimed*," a pamphlet published by Thomas W. Crowell Co. in conjunction with the appearance of *Paradise Reclaimed* in 1962, p. 8.

²⁸ Hallberg, *Halldór Laxness*, p. 107.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 88; see also Magnus Magnusson's preface to his translation of *World Light* (Madison, 1969), p. viii.

³² *A Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago, 1974), p. 240.

³³ *Paradise Reclaimed*, pp. 239–40; *Paradísarheimt*, p. 283.

³⁴ His collected works are edited by Vilhjálmur Þ. Gíslason, *Eiríkur á Brúnum: Ferðasögur, Sagnabættir, Mormónarit* (Reykjavík, 1946). Important for *Paradise Reclaimed* are *Litla Ferðasaga*, *Önnur litla Ferðasaga*, "Tólf Manna Árás," and various short pieces grouped as *Mormónarit*. Laxness also used details from Eiríkur's writings in his portrait of the farmer Jón Hreggviðsson in *Íslandsklukkan* (*Bell of Iceland*, 1943); see Hallberg, "Laxness, Konstnærskapet," p. 88.

³⁵ *Eiríkur á Brúnum*, p. 90; Diðriksson's tract is entitled *Aðvórunar og Sannleiksraust um Hófuðatriði Trúar Jesu Kristi K irkju af sið ustu Daga Heilögum* (Copenhagen, 1879).

³⁶ *Eiríkur á Brúnum*, p. 102.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 223.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 229–30; the translation is my own.

⁴⁰ *Paradise Reclaimed*, p. 164; *Paradísarheimt*, pp. 191–92.

⁴¹ Hallberg, "Laxness, Konstnærskapet," p. 96; for other appraisals of *Paradise Reclaimed* and its relationship to Laxness' renunciation see Ólafur Jónsson, "Um *Paradísarheimt*," *Tíminn*, 24 December 1960, pp. 19, 27, and Tryggvi Gíslason, "Paradís í *Paradísarheimt*," *Skírnir*, 146 (1972): 48–55.

⁴² Laxness' stylized autobiography of his youth *Heiman ek fór* (From Home I Went), written in 1924, published in 1952 is not a novel.

⁴³ This tale, Type 1415 (Grimm, no. 83), is widely disseminated; an Icelandic version is printed by Jón Árnason in *Íslenzkar Þjóðsögur og Æventýri*, rev. Á. Böðvarsson and B. Vilhjálmsson (Reykjavík, 1954–61), II: 504–5.

⁴⁴ *Morgunblaðið*, p. 9.

⁴⁵ "Origins," pp. 6–7.

⁴⁶ *The Complete Romances of Voltaire* (New York, 1927), pp. 184–85.

⁴⁷ *Paradise Reclaimed*, pp. 253–54, *Paradísarheimt*, pp. 301–2.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 17; pp. 18–19.

⁴⁹ Laxness, "Origins," pp. 3–4.

⁵⁰ T. S. Eliot, "Little Gidding," 5, lines 27–29 in *Collected Poems 1909–1962* (New York, 1963), p. 208.

⁵¹ *Paradise Reclaimed*, p. 49; *Paradísarheimt*, p. 55.

A creative writer is someone ridden and driven by a consuming passion that has been called the divine discontent. He is not a reporter but an interpreter; he is eternally a crusader; he is a non-conformist and a dissenter who cries out the faults of his world in his attempt to make a better one. His integrity demands that he search his environment honestly, whether he writes of the contemporary scene or of an historical setting. 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. He is abrasive to the organization man because no organization is perfect; most good and great creative writing is basically the literature of protest.

–SAMUEL W. TAYLOR
Vol. II, No. 2, p. 19

The Vocation of David Wright: An Essay in Analytic Biography¹

BRUCE W. JORGENSEN

DAVID L. WRIGHT DID NOT BEGIN to exist for me until more than a year after his death—in 1968 when I saw his play, *Still the Mountain Wind*. For other portions of the Mormon audience, Wright began to exist in 1970, when *Dialogue* enthusiastically published sections of his poem-cycle “River Saints,” and most recently, in 1976, when *Sunstone* published his story, “A Summer in the Country.”² One of the sad ironies of Wright’s career as a Mormon writer is that most of us did not know him as one of us until after it was over.

Wright was born in the Bear Lake Valley town of Bennington, Idaho, on May 22, 1929, the fourth of five children and the third and youngest son in his family. After public schools in Bennington and Montpelier, Idaho, he attended Utah State Agricultural College in Logan, receiving in 1950 a bachelor’s degree in English and a teaching certificate. In Rexburg, Idaho, his strong disagreements with school officials and his marriage to a student in October of that year brought on a crisis that may have permanently disaffected Wright from the LDS Church, though he never renounced nominal membership and always felt deeply bound to his family and to Bennington. The Rexburg crisis also may have helped to turn him away from teaching toward the two careers he pursued for the rest of his life—one in the Air Force, the other as a writer. In the first, he attained the rank of Major and received, in 1966, the Bronze Star for meritorious service in Vietnam. In the second, he wrote in 1955 the play, *Still the Mountain Wind*, which was produced in places as wide apart as Milford, Utah, and Cambridge, Massachusetts; in literary quarterlies in 1960–61 he published five short stories, one of which, a redaction of his play entitled “A Summer in the Country,” drew praise from several critics and was reprinted in *Best*

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Articles and Stories and cited in the "Honor Roll" in *Best American Short Stories 1961*; in 1964 he received an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Iowa and, during a two-week visit to Bennington, began writing the poems that would comprise the posthumous cycle "River Saints." In 1967, after his separation from his wife, Wright's health failed, and he died of a heart attack in June of that year. He left behind numerous letters, journals, an autobiography, and manuscripts of unpublished stories, plays, novels, and poems, most of which are now deposited in the Merrill Library at Utah State University.³

Such was David Wright's external career. But what most interests me is the internal one, "where the meanings are" in Emily Dickinson's phrase—the emergence of David Wright's vocation as a writer out of his family heritage, his early experience, his religious beliefs, his education, his friendships, in the years up to 1950.⁴

"I might be envied by a king, for I am a Mormon boy," sings the autobiographical young Alvin Simmons in Wright's story "Speak Ye Tenderly of Kings," and to two unsettlingly glamorous "Outside World people" he boasts of his pioneer ancestor who is honored with a "big statue" that "You must of seen . . . when you come through Paris," Idaho. On both sides of his family David Wright descended from strong Bear Lake Valley Mormon pioneer stock. His mother, Lenore Booth Rich, who still lives in Montpelier, is the great-granddaughter of Charles Coulson Rich, who might be regarded as second only to Brigham Young as a Mormon colonizer, having settled both San Bernardino and the Bear Lake Valley. David Wright's father, Conover Wright, was the son of Amos Wright, who might be regarded as second only to Charles C. Rich in the colonizing of the Bear Lake region. At a time of deep disillusionment for Amos Wright, Charles C. Rich had befriended him, and Wright later testified that Rich "influenced me at the turning point of my life." Wright then went on to convert some 300 Indians, including Chief Washakie; and David Wright later recalled how even in his childhood the Indians still addressed Conover Wright as "Great White Man's Son."⁵

In the summer of 1946, between high school and college, listening to old people talk of old days and feeling a desire to collect his grandfather Wright's experiences and copy them down, David Wright recorded in his journal, begun just the preceding February, his father's story of "the time when Grandfather Wright administered to Great Grandma":

My father . . . said Grandfather turned white and his forehead was mopped in sweat and hardship stood out in his face. . . . Several men had tried to [administer to her] but lacked the power and the inspiration of God to do so. As he finished this divine plea, he sank into a chair still very white. The here-to-fore unconscious woman, who had not risen from her bed in several weeks, rose up out of her bed and spoke in a loud clear voice. "I want all of you children here to know that Brother Wright is a man of God." Whereupon she retired to bed and died within a very few hours.⁶

One influential presence at a turning point of David Wright's own life, then, was that of his pioneer ancestry, their faith and spiritual power alive in family memory and talk.

The lines of Charles C. Rich and Amos Wright converged in the marriage

of Conover Wright and Lenore Rich in 1918; and while their lives show none of the outward greatness of those progenitors, they were honest, hardworking, pious, just, and charitable people. They were also strict. L. L. Burdick, a neighbor and family friend in Bennington since 1915, remarks that "They wouldn't have a magazine in the house if it had ads for cigarettes or liquor in it."⁷ Though David Wright later rebelled against what he saw as narrowness and bigotry among small-town Mormons, he never rejected his parents. Even at the moment of his deep embitterment in Rexburg in the fall of 1950, he wrote to James Miller that he could never renounce his membership in the Church "because of the great injustice and thanklessness it would entail toward my great father. . . . He is the biggest man I know—he believes the same as these other dogs, but is not narrow. Oh, he is as great as Christ [or] Socrates!" Wright's autobiography, written in 1950–51, calls his father a "great moral shadow" in David's life. In the same autobiography Wright also recalled "the feelings of peace and love" he felt when praying at his mother's knee, and elsewhere he wrote of "the beauty and power of [his parents'] simple lives." The first volume of his journal ends with "the eternal prayer of [his] heart": "Give to Conover Wright and Lenore Rich Wright all the celestial glory and happiness in the plan of God. Preserve their righteous spirit through the eternity. Bless them with every possible blessing and let me be unconscious to their death—dreaded hour!"⁸

In October 1946, as part of that last entry in his first journal, David Wright was planning to compile a scrapbook covering his life, divided into three sections, from 1929 to 1936, 1936 to 1941, and 1941 to 1946. That first dividing year, 1936, marks the single most significant and determining crisis in Wright's life and vocation. As Wright moved toward and through the lesser crisis of transition from high school to college, the "pre-'36 period," as he called it, seemed to him a "golden" time of personal and familial wholeness whose "beauty" and "power" he had "felt somehow" as an infant and which he longed to recover or return to. For a lonely high school graduate working for the summer in a Salt Lake City ice house, it was a source of sustaining and consoling memory:

To me the most beautiful sound in the world is the rushing song of the leaves as the wind rushes through them down at the old house. I long to be there now, when the wind is at rest and the soul is peaceful, all is quiet and the symphony of the leaves soothes the sorrows of your life. . . . Although my friends are few, my reputation bad, my enemies many, those little walks, my deep thoughts, my moods, feelings, desires will forever hold me to the place I love. . . .

The home his parents had made in a small house behind a row of lombardy poplars in Bennington, Idaho, became for David Wright the one still point in the turning world. And at that center stood the figure to which "almost all" of Wright's wonderful and "tearful memories" were linked, "the 'prince' of the world I lived in, my brother, Rich."⁹

His eldest brother, who died July 4, 1936, one day past his fifteenth birthday, was for David Wright "the exact personification of good, the complete paragon of all beauty." In college David looked back on Rich as "a boy who came closer to immortal divinity than any person I have ever

known": "If ever there lived a being who lived in heaven, while on earth, and felt at home, it is he."¹⁰ David's own potent nostalgia must have partly shaped and shaded this near-deified figure, yet other witnesses tend to agree. L. L. Burdick, who drove the bus to carry Bennington students to school in Montpelier, recalls Rich as a boy who never gave him any trouble: "He was always a peacemaker," trying to stop fights and keep older kids from bullying little ones; he wiped the runny noses and kissed the dirty faces of children from one of the town's poorer families; "if there was ever anybody ready for the highest glory," Mr. Burdick says, "it was that boy."¹¹ Even the Montpelier high school principal, A. J. Winters, who appears in Wright's letters and journals as quite stern and stinting of praise, remembered "Rich Wright as a very fine youngster and a good school citizen."¹²

In his autobiography Wright describes Rich singing: "There was no indication of forcing. . . . The notes tumbled easily from the very soul of him." So besides being the emblem of human goodness, Rich also comes to symbolize, and perhaps symbolized even in David's childhood, a sort of poet of untrammelled utterance. Yet even in this passage an emphasis falls on wholeness, with Rich as its center: "All singing we merged together at the table where he sat," a "smiling young god."¹³

In the summer of 1936 Rich was working on neighbors' farms to help offset the \$200 expense of putting running water in the family home, long days of man's work that wearied him until he "seemed old" to David when he came home in the evenings. He had a girl friend, and he planned to outrun Sakamoto, who had beaten him in the Fourth of July race in 1935. Then he suffered severe abdominal pains, he was hospitalized, his appendix ruptured and he died. Visiting him in the hospital, David knew "the awful feeling that he [was] not my brother at all"; he saw Rich as "trying to plunge back into life with a sudden final effort that would erase the mistake of his illness," saw him "in a moment of consciousness beg something to me with a movement of his eyes, a strain of a frown, beg something from a depth of great desperation."¹⁴

Of course this retrospective description owes much to David Wright's later encounter with Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel*,¹⁵ but Wolfe's impassioned chapters on a brother's death might not have meant so much to Wright if he had not known the experience himself. Whatever that "movement of his eyes," remembered or imagined, begged of David—pity, useless help, completion of the life un-lived, simple witness, the grace of turning away—the experience of his brother's death locked David Wright, bewildered, hungry, terrified, wondering, into a long wrestle with an angel whose name and errand he could never entirely discern.

Of the touch of Rich's death on him Wright said, "I was . . . torn apart." At the same time, as Rich "sank deep into the death of himself," David felt that "the still unfathomable something . . . had broken our material brotherhood even as it was knitting a spiritual brotherhood that would live with me forever," and he found himself, momentarily, "at peace with my wonder."¹⁶

"Hmm . . . my gracious, but it's hard to understand the ways of the lord," says Stake President Wright in the autobiography.¹⁷ The standard Latter-day Saint consolations were available, and David Wright administered them to himself not a few times over the next fourteen years, but grief would not



David Wright

down. If Eudora Welty is right to say that “there is only one way of depriving the ones you love—taking your living presence away from theirs,”¹⁸ then we all work that deprivation, that wrong and harm, despite our best will, in dying. For David Wright the longing for his brother’s living presence would not cease, nor the wrong be forgiven, nor the hurt heal, in this world. When Rich, “the personification of wholesomeness, kindness, health, smiling cheer—all the good and innocent things of the earth,” was “suddenly a big dead doll,” for David “It was unbelievable.” And beyond that, in the “awful

leisure” Emily Dickinson said was given “Belief to regulate,” David began to find “something foul, twisted up in this death of someone good.” A fragment possibly written in the winter of 1947 posed the problem harshly: “Blood, pain, brutality, violence, death contradicted the earth’s vast loveliness”; death was a “black hooded wasp.”¹⁹

One year to the day from his brother’s death, David Wright was baptized a member of the LDS Church—symbolically, perhaps, baptized into his brother’s immortality, sealed in that “spiritual brotherhood.” But the death itself had baptized him experientially into the cruel irony of the problem of natural evil. For fourteen years Wright earnestly wrestled in his childhood faith against that irony, but in the autobiography of 1950–51 he would attribute to his dying brother his own feelings “that the tragedy of this leaving [his family and home place] was suffocating, that the God-promise of coming back in glory was insufficient and unreal; that the only reality was the tragedy of going, and insufferable humiliation of non-existence.”²⁰

In a fragment possibly written about 1945–46, Wright reveals another dimension of Rich’s death for him: “with the passing of my bro. in 1936, a new era started slowly to creep upon me. Without his companionship, I was lost & drifted into the ways of evilness.”²¹ What those ways were in his earlier years, Wright never specifies, but the statement typifies the estrangement and guilt Wright felt through most of his teens, intensifying near the transition from high school to college. The guilt may stem in part from David’s sense or suspicion that he wished Rich’s death: Alvin in *Still the Mountain Wind* kicks his brother’s stomach and calls him a “bad bastard,” then feels guilty about it after Rich dies.²² Such a reaction to a sibling’s death may not be uncommon; Freud wrote of his own guilt over an infant brother’s death.²³ Some of David’s hostility toward Rich, the root of his guilt, might in turn derive from his being the third son and feeling, as the 1950–51 autobiography suggests, excluded by Rich and Warren from the close companionship and love of their father.²⁴

Perhaps the primary form of David’s estrangement was an almost inescapable sense of his inner turmoil contrasted with others’ outward tranquility: “How could” his father, David asked, “be so untormented and righteous when I was so tormented and bad?” The autobiography mentions two rare moments when David overcame his isolation from his father. Once in 1942 Conover read his father Amos’s patriarchal blessing and cried, and David “felt close to Dad that day, felt like I was his son then for the first time . . . the same flesh and blood. He had shown emotion like I had so that made us basically alike.” Earlier, in Logan in 1938, after David witnessed a “nightmare” episode of two brothers fiercely fighting on a ditchbank, his father slept with him in Grandmother Wright’s house: “He put his big honest arm around me and patted my shoulder with his hand. I felt that oneness surge through me, and love and protection.”²⁵ Fraternal conflict and the need of paternal care and at-onement: even after he had rejected the institutional church and many of its beliefs, those very Mormon themes would still charge David Wright’s imagination.

Besides Wright’s feelings, his outward behavior tended to estrange him. Often rebellious, bullheaded, acting as if he thought only David was right,

he repeatedly ran afoul of teachers and school officials; he dropped out of the first three weeks of high school in 1944, apparently after an argument with principal Winters. It is hardly surprising that as a high-school senior Wright felt "warped and old in spirit and discouraged and hopelessly lost . . ." that he felt his "real self" as a college freshman to be "terrible mental torture."²⁶

Between 1936 and 1946, David Wright's most nearly unalloyed happiness came from sports. By 1942 he had filled "7 scrapbooks" with "about 15,000 pict." of baseball players, and by 1945 he had published statistics and three articles in baseball fan magazines. In May 1944 he won the Idaho state championship in the high jump; in 1945 he was named "outstanding player of the year" in Montpelier High football. In April 1946 he wrote Roy Partee of the Red Sox, "I am at the crossroads of life and I'm taking the baseball route. . . ." He never did take that route, though he did attend three years of college on an athletic scholarship, participating in track and baseball, lettering in football at the uncommonly light weight of 145 pounds, and writing sports news and publicity for the college teams.²⁷

Yet long before he dropped out of sports so he could concentrate his senior year on literature and writing, David Wright saw that his final identity was not The Athlete. Perhaps in some sense all David's athletic endeavor acted out a wish to resurrect the athlete Rich had been, as Alvin in the last scene of the play reminds his dead brother that "Daddy said Sakamoto would win this year" and begs, "Jump the fence again, Rich." Thus also, as Rich had been a singer, so David would be: as a junior he had the lead in a high-school operetta, and later in college, he occasionally sang, once on a radio program. But in comparison with his talented cousin Patsy Judd he felt he had, "alas, no ability," "no talent that the world begs of. My future is nill. My life saturated by wrong doings. My mind warped and eaten into by an evil influence. I am as a beaten, torn, wrinkled, old man compared to a small, sin free, happy beautiful child." At the time of this journal entry, July 22, 1946, Patsy was fifteen, the same age as Rich at his death, so David's despairing comparison may refer obliquely to the good and beautiful brother whose death a decade earlier David had recently commemorated in his journal.²⁸

"It's hell to be no good and want to be some good!" he wrote three months later; and through this time sickened by "the blood of hate, hate for himself," Wright strove to be good by the light of his Mormon faith. On April 10, 1946, for instance, he warns himself, "I have to take very good care of my mind lest it wander into prejudice and hate"; and in the same entry, "Oft times when alone I find sweet contentment in the thought of and knowledge that God was once a boy like me." Pieces of fervent apologetics and testimony occur often among Wright's early writings. In a letter of March 3, 1945, to a baseball player, he declared, "I have a sincere testamony in my heart, that the LDS Church is the *only true church in the world.*" An essay dated March 18, 1945, asserts that "the *one* big mistake that mankind has made thus far has been discarding of religion" and foresees, after the war, "an almost unbelievable increase" in LDS Church membership.²⁹ In such writings David Wright sounds like a typical Mormon seminary student,

entirely sincere if somewhat naive, enthused by the vision of a dynamic church.

With equal sincerity, Wright tried once and for all, as a Christmas present to his mother in 1946 (at her suggestion), to give up smoking, and he promised her, "If you want me to go on a mission, I will and if you want me to quit athletics and concentrate on some other profession, I will." "I am glad," he wrote, "I am free of my former self at last. Now my mind will not be in agony & my conscience will not haunt me." Yet the essential self of David Wright was not as malleable to his mother's wishes as even David wished it to be, and the next two sentences of the letter hint that his rebellious "former self" might not have been entirely put off, might never be: "The only reason I was not completely taken over by my habits and my mind was not completely saturated is because I always kept in my mind the right principles you taught me and finally they came to the fore and conquered the wrong. Perhaps not completely yet but pray that it may be so."³⁰

Wright worked hard to make it so. On December 26 he set up in his journal a twenty-six-point plan for self-reform, based on Benjamin Franklin's "Project of Moral Perfection," and for at least a while he audited himself fairly regularly, finding among other things that he could maintain sexual purity but had difficulty with daily prayer. He quite earnestly believed at this time that the gospel of Christ as taught by the LDS Church would give him salvation from the "terrible ordeal" of his life. In an attempt at stating his "complete religious philosophy" in his journal on January 14, 1947, he wrote: "I am not afraid of any arising condition if I can once find the key to God's house."³¹

The arising conditions of college education and a deepening commitment to writing would gradually change much of this, but from 1945 to 1949 Wright's religious hunger for wholeness, his nostalgia for his lost brother, his increasing need to write, and his increasing satisfaction in writing all seem aspects of a single motive, the one intention of the self Wright was beginning to discover. Thus, what he thought of, in fact, as "the first time I have ever attempted to write anything of real importance" was an attempt, through written introspection, to "straighten [him]self out": "I realize," he wrote on February 22, 1945, "that I have made a complete failure of my life so far," so "I have decided to make a complete analysis of my life." Complete failure—despite the state highjump championship, the outstanding player award in football, the publications in baseball magazines. The sense of failure came largely from self-comparison with Rich: "My most treasured thought of the past is the thought of my brother who died in 1936, at the age of 15." At this writing, David himself was not yet sixteen, and he saw himself as "exactly opposite from Rich in almost every respect." This piece did not attempt to recover Rich, yet Rich seems its center of gravity. From this point on, most of the writing that had "real importance" to David Wright would have that same center, piece after piece an attempt to seize the brother back from death, to unite with him in "perpetual consciousness."³² This nostalgia would be the source of Wright's genuinely prodigious energy as a writer, and perhaps of his most corrosive weaknesses as a writer

and as a man.

"I am alone in everything I do. . . . I just have to enjoy my own company," Wright wrote to a pen pal in the summer of 1945. What he had to enjoy in his own company were mainly his memories, and his concentration on the past mainly intensified his solitude. In that same summer he wrote to Patsy Judd of a visit to his childhood home, of the "unexplainable" emotions he felt there, and of his frustrated yearning to express these in music, in painting, in writing. "So many things," he told her, "remind me of my dead bro." He wrote of his feeling "good & sentimental" and occasionally choking up during his midnight walks at the "old place," and asked, "Do you understand, Pat? Do you? You're the only one I have told this and I would feel so good if I knew you understood how I feel." He needed some kind of utterance, some kind of sharing of those feelings that meant so much to him that, as he wrote the following year, he would "rather have a dozen pasts than one tomorrow."³³

Just after starting college in September 1946, Wright read H. G. Wells' story "The Time Machine," and noted in his journal, "I wish it was within my power to write so powerfully. . . . I feel within myself the strong urge to write something great or even express myself simply—but when pen is in hand, all is lost in the haze of ignorance." Yet despite the haze, from this time on Wright felt an increasing need to excavate his childhood, which was "as layers of rock," and an increasing sense of purpose in his writing. His quest for lost time took on Wolfean or Proustian dimensions: "I am going to try to come as close as possible," he wrote on December 20, 1946, "to recording every event in my life (and thought) as anyone ever did." This was written at the same time as his letter to his mother promising he would give up smoking and try to be whatever she wished him to be. He felt this winter solstice to be "an eventful turning point of [his] life," and as he examined himself he found that "the one thing, and I believe it to be a good virtue, that has been the sum of my life is the intense desire to record past events. A historian or a geneologist." At midnight on Christmas Eve he wrote that God "gives me a clear mind that is desirous of attaining good and whereas if the plans pertaining to historical happenings are carried out, a mind that will be of service to future generations thusly fulfilling God's wishes pertaining to histories of his people."³⁴

Wright was developing a sense of mission. On January 26, 1947, on returning home from Priesthood meeting, he "told mother of my plan to write my life and she was well pleased." "I strongly feel," he wrote in his journal two days later, "that there is purpose in my writings." And on February 16, in a passage recalling the "pre-'36 period" and the "prince" of that world, he wrote what seems in retrospect almost a covenant:

. . . I want as any reward that I may earn on earth to *view* my entire life in its *entirety* and *fullness* and find and know and realize the satisfaction of the aches and deep, days [*sic*] desires of my heart which are many and mysterious and unusual. By the power of faith and prayer my goals shall be attained and my pleasure will be great and I will find satisfaction to my soul!

Wright's "mission" in writing became so all-absorbing that he felt he lived "in a haze to the outside world." By the summer of 1947 he was planning to

write a book about Rich, had spent \$25 on pictures of him, and was announcing to friends his intention to build a cabin in Joe's Gap, his favorite gorge in the mountains southeast of Bennington, where he could live by himself and write books and stories.³⁵

Yet if he had begun to desire solitude for writing, he had also begun to feel lonelier, to wish for "at least one *real* friend" to share his inner world. "I haven't any 'you,'" he had written in November 1946, and amid his plans for a canyon hermitage in the summer of 1947 he wrote to his brother Warren's new bride, Donna, that he was happy in writing but needed "a companion to understand and help me achieve." Framed by such statements, his melodramatic rededication to nostalgic writing, probably written also in August 1947, sounds ironic and even foreboding:

It is the solemn duty of every person to conjugate, in formal style, and reverent intent, the memories of past existences.

I must keep from earthly pursuits to complete this sacred task of writing of the past & its glory. It is necessary to never subjugate myself to human eccentricities to achieve this purpose. I must know none of the merry-go-round of human fallaciousness. I must ride the horse apart from the machine & trot alone down the road—to the hallowed past.³⁶

Along with Wright's one increasing purpose and his self-imposed loneliness runs a current of growing religious anxiety and uncertainty, though in 1947 it surfaces only occasionally—for instance, in journal entries during March mentioning his reading of Fawn Brodie's *No Man Knows My History* and Vardis Fisher's *Children of God* and responding to them with orthodox but somewhat shrill apologetics. There are also the personal audits in which he admits he does not pray daily, and ominous entries in which he says that his "sould seems puzzled" or that, though religion is his "fondest hope," "I wander but know not my resting place!" His notes for a "Speech to be given August 10, 1947," apparently to an MIA fireside or other similar group, suggest that he was holding to belief by main force, for one sentence admits the "fragility by which the evidence of Mormonism [*sic*] doctrine hinges" before going on to declare unshakeable faith.³⁷

"—Then he met one like him," says a fragment possibly written in the winter of 1947, "immortal friend, salvation!" The "one" was Jim Miller, who became Wright's "inner world" friend and to whom Wright would dedicate his autobiography—"the Lodestar of my creative life." Wright met Miller, a year older and already dedicated to writing, in October 1947 and soon described him to friends and family as another boy "that hears music in the trees" and "a genius born 200 years too soon."³⁸ As the disillusioned Amos, Wright had found in Charles C. Rich the man who decisively turned his life, so in Jim Miller David Wright found the friend who shared his enthusiasm for writing and writers, especially romantics, and who confirmed his vocation.

And for a time Jim strengthened David's religious life as well. Though not a Mormon, Miller had been so deeply impressed by Wright's parents during visits at Thanksgiving 1947 and the next winter and spring, that in

the summer of 1948 he was trying to bolster David's faith, contrasting the atheistic Mormon-baiting teacher Moyle Q. Rice unfavorably with a simple and devout Mormon patriarch. Miller's baptism on November 16, 1948, marked a spiritual high point in Wright's life. "God bless Mormonism!" he wrote ecstatically to his parents; "Tonite [Jim and I] shook hands in the name of eternal brotherhood." And the letter goes on to imagine "another town in heaven whose name might be Bennington. And I cry for joy when I feel that dear Rich, who died so young and has left such a memory for me, will be there with us in eternity. And I am thankful that Jim Miller has joined the church, so that he can enjoy our eternity with us." Eternity meant, at that moment, "all our blessed family in a world of happiness that will even exceed the joy we knew at the old place. . . ." That, Wright exclaimed, "is my fondest dream. And it must come true!"³⁹

Wright was likely true to his feelings at that moment, but his nostalgia for the mortal joy of the old place was stronger than his hunger for eternity and his dream of the Celestial Kingdom. In the dedication of his autobiography, Wright was to announce his choice of the dream of art: "It is from witnessing [Jim Miller's] unflinching self-devotion to create from his heart the Beautiful, the Good, and the Significant that I have found the desire to forge the shape of my dream."⁴⁰

There is little more to tell of this phase of Wright's career. Like any active Mormon youth who reached the age of twenty at that time, in the spring of 1949 Wright seriously considered going on a mission, but by September, after AFROTC summer camp, perhaps influenced by Jim Miller's similar decision, he had decided to finish school and certify to teach English. But even in the spring of 1949 Wright knew himself to be seriously uncentered. His mother had written him May 10, 1949, "Dad says to plan to be here Sun. as the Stake Presidency want to interview & ordain you," but apparently the ordination never took place. An English theme dated May, 1949 and marked "ungradable," perhaps for its visionary and solipsistic incoherence, presents David and his father as more or less allegorical figures for "the difference between faith & disbelief." Near its end occurs a poignant fragment, "—but no key, no key to it all."⁴¹

A letter of April 19, 1949, to Wright from his childhood hero Ralph Maughan closes with the admonition, "always have faith in God and do only what *you* think is right." But the two halves of that counsel had already frighteningly pulled apart in Wright's mind. By February 1950, his father would warn him about the "difference between knowledge and intelligence" in orthodox terms, and E. L. Romney would remind him "that there was one fellow at the College that at least solved and understood certain problems and had a high degree of loyalty to his beliefs. It was Dave Wright!" Wright's own letters from this time are not among the papers at USU, and his journals for the same period are still restricted, but two letters he received hint at some of the problems he had not solved.

The first, from George Albert Smith and dated March 25, 1950, replies to a letter of Wright's received March 15, with a single-spaced page and a half of orthodox *credo*. One paragraph near its end seems to answer a direct question: "I have not seen the Father or the Son, neither have I heard their voices in an audible way, but I have felt their presence and have enjoyed the whispering of the Still Small Voice that comes from them, the result of

which has given me a testimony of the truth." President Smith closes with the affirmation that if Wright "will be humble and prayerful, searching the scriptures, [he] too may know which is the Church that our Heavenly Father recognizes. . ."⁴²

But Wright was already finding more trouble than reassurance in the scriptures, as the second letter suggests. It is from his father, dated April 14, 1950, and replies to a letter David wrote on April 6, the 120th anniversary of the organization of the Church. Apparently responding to problems David is having with the creation, the fall, Cain and Abel, the flood, etc., the letter concedes "that the Bible is not very clear on some things, there are the mysteries of life and many things we do not understand." One passage in the six single-spaced pages suggests that, perhaps more than anything else, what Wright could not get over or around was Rich's death: his father quotes D&C 29:46, "little children are redeemed from the foundation of the world through mine Only Begotten," and continues, "God was not unkind in permitting Rich's death, I am sure he knows what is best."⁴³

Not unkind to the good and innocent Rich, but what of David? For David Wright loved his brother and yearned for his living presence to the point of idolatry. In a strange, long imaginary dialogue between himself and Rich, possibly written about 1948, David asks that his "interrogative soul . . . be satisfied," and Rich's voice gives the standard consolations. David tries to resign himself: "Perhaps it is unaligned with the laws of eternal progression to have faith in and pray for, the turning back of relentless time; that we may live mortally in the happiness which we once knew together"; "I must remove the obstinacy of my too-mortal mind and say it is good." But in the last line, as Rich ascends into heaven, David cries out: "*If God were you I would love him more!*"⁴⁴

" . . . as God created man and woman, so too He fashioned the hero and the poet or orator," writes Soren Kierkegaard in his "Panegyric upon Abraham."⁴⁵ David Wright, like Kierkegaard's poet, was a "genius of recollection," "jealous of the intrusted treasure" of his hero's memory, who followed "the option of his heart," striving against "the cunning of oblivion," through the impotence of memory to its transfiguration in works of literary art. But there sounds an ominous undertone here, as in Wright's life, for us who try to search out the foundations of art and religion or who would make one life of art and belief. The hero of Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* is Abraham, the "knight of faith," and the poet is Johannes de Silentio, who admits, "For my part I can well describe the movements of faith, but I cannot make them."⁴⁶ There seems, in spite of this, no necessity that the poet not be able to make the motions of faith, and we have in the Church today several writers belonging either to Wright's chronological or to his literary generation who seem to have mastered the difficulty. But David Wright, too, however problematically, is one of us, and the shape of his life is part of our "intrusted treasure"—in its question, its disquiet.

NOTES

¹ I wish to acknowledge a travel grant from the Brigham Young University College of Humanities Professional Development Fund which supported the research for this essay; the courteous, efficient assistance of A. J. Simmonds and his staff in the Utah State University Archives; the generous and quiet hospitality of my aunt and uncle, Dr. and Mrs. Arden Frandsen, during two of my visits to Logan; and the companionable help of my wife Donna in reading and taking notes on some of the Wright and Miller papers.

² *Dialogue* V (Summer 1970): 86–94, and V (Autumn 1970): 81–91. *Sunstone* I (Fall 1976): 60–76; ostensibly a reprint of the 1960 *Mutiny* text of the story, the *Sunstone* “Summer in the Country” is a later version, probably the one Wright included in his Iowa M.F.A. thesis (1964), and it is bowdlerized to the extent that all of Wright’s uses of the word “bastard” are silently emended to “name” or some other innocuous and thematically empty substitute.

³ Biographical details summarized here are drawn from the Conover Wright genealogy (copies on microfilm in the Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University), from James C. Miller, “Discovering a Mormon Writer: David L. Wright 1929–1967,” *Dialogue* V (Summer 1970): 79–84, from Norman Mechem, “David Lane Wright,” *Sunstone* I (Fall 1976): 56–59, and from portions of the Wright papers cited more specifically below. Mechem’s essay relies heavily on a brief autobiographical sketch Wright submitted as part of his application for admission to the Iowa Writers’ Workshop.

Wright’s published stories are:

“Speak Ye Tenderly of Kings,” *Inland* III (Spring 1960): 23–33.

“A Measure of Contentment,” *The Humanist* XX (July–August 1960): 219–224.

“A Summer in the Country,” *Mutiny* III (Autumn 1960): 61–78; reprinted in *Best Articles and Stories*, March 1961, pp. 29–35.

“The Hawk,” *Arizona Quarterly* XVI (Winter 1960): 332–338.

“Mice Men and Principles,” *Mutiny* IV (Fall–Winter 1961–62): 97–101.

After Wright’s death, James Miller compiled and edited the poems of the “River Saints” cycle together with a version of “A Summer in the Country,” printed them on offset press, and bound them as *River Saints: A Mormon Chronicle* (Logan, 1969?).

A partial production record of *Still the Mountain Wind* is included in a typescript copy of the play recently sent me by Robert Rees, the former editor of *Dialogue*.

In 1973, partly at the urging of Robert Rees, Wright’s surviving children deposited in the Utah State University Archives all of Wright’s papers in their possession. In 1976 the archives acquired the papers of James C. Miller, Wright’s closest friend, from Miller’s widow. More recently, a second gift of Wright’s papers, previously held by his brother Warren Wright in Montpelier, Idaho, was deposited in the archives. Still restricted, this collection includes important journals.

In subsequent references to the Papers of David Lane Wright, Utah State University Manuscript Collection 2, I will identify and, where possible, give the date of the document and the page cited, followed by a parenthesis giving the box and folder numbers decimally; thus (7.4) means that the document cited is in box 7, folder 4 of the Wright papers. I will cite the Papers of James C. Miller, Utah State University Manuscript Collection 35, in the same way, but adding the designation MS35. Wherever possible, I will preserve the spelling of the originals.

To reduce the number of footnotes, wherever convenient I will consolidate all the references in a paragraph, listing the sources in the order in which the paragraph uses them.

⁴ Emily Dickinson, [“There’s a certain Slant of light”] (J258) in Thomas H. Johnson, ed., *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1960). My question here is a version or an aspect of the question Leon Edel suggests is central to any literary biography; see his *Literary Biography* (Bloomington: Indiana U. Press, 1973), esp. pp. xiv, 29. Edel’s book has been my principal *vade mecum* throughout my work on Wright.

⁵ “Speak Ye Tenderly of Kings,” pp. 23, 25–26, 27. Rich and Wright genealogical records on microfilm, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University. Charles Coulson Rich, whose bust stands on a pedestal next to the Tabernacle in Paris, Idaho, is the subject of biographies by John Henry Evans (New York: Macmillan, 1936) and Leonard J. Arrington (Provo: B.Y.U. Press, 1974). The details on C. C. Rich and Amos Wright are from Evans, pp. 367–69. *DLW*, Journal, 14 July 1946 (7.3).

⁶ Journal, 14 July 1946 (7.3).

⁷ Interview by Bruce W. Jorgensen in Bennington, Idaho, 20 August 1977.

⁸ *DLW* to James Miller, 5 September 1950 and 12 September 1950 (MS 35, 2.12). Autobiography 1950–51, pp. 18–19, 35 (7.5). Journal, 27 October 1946 (7.3).

⁹ Journal, 27 October 1946 (7.3); 16 February 1947 (7.4). DLW to Patsy Judd, 24 August 1945 (1.1). Autobiography 1950–51, p. 26 (7.5). Journal, 13 June 1946 (7.3); 16 February 1947 (7.4).

¹⁰ Conover Wright genealogy. "Itinerary" for Journal IV, included in Journal II (7.4). Notebook, c. 1947 (7.13).

¹¹ Interview, Bennington, Idaho, 20 August 1977.

¹² Letter to DLW, 2 December 1948 (2.4).

¹³ Autobiography 1950–51, pp. 69–70 (7.5).

¹⁴ Autobiography 1950–51, pp. 75, 77, 83, 84, 94, 98–99 (7.5).

¹⁵ DLW to James Miller, 30 June 1951 (MS35, 1.3).

¹⁶ Autobiography 1950–51, pp. 100, 105 (7.5).

¹⁷ Autobiography 1950–51, p. 108 (7.5).

¹⁸ *Losing Battles* (New York: Random House, 1970), p. 362.

¹⁹ Autobiography 1950–51, pp. 13, 17–18 (7.5). Holograph leaf describing winter scenes [1947?] (7.7). Emily Dickinson, ["The last Night that She lived"] (J1100).

²⁰ Wright genealogy. Autobiography 1950–51, pp. 89–90 (7.5).

²¹ Holograph on personalized lavender stationery, sheet 4 (7.7).

²² *Still the Mountain Wind* typescript, pp. 7, 8, 11 (copy in my possession); cf. "A Summer in the Country," *Mutiny* version, pp. 61, 62, 63; the *Sunstone* emendations of "bastard" weaken the theme of fraternal conflict in the story.

²³ Freud is alluded to by Joanne Koch in "When Children Meet Death," *Psychology Today* XI (August 1977): 79. Recent studies in the psychology of bereavement might prove quite useful in understanding David Wright.

²⁴ Autobiography 1950–51, p. 20 (7.5).

²⁵ Autobiography 1950–51, pp. 21, 22–25 (7.5).

²⁶ DLW, holograph note in margin of letter from Lucile Hall, 26 September 1944 (2.3); Warren Wright to DLW, 3 September 1944 and 1 November 1944 (3.1); cf. Journal, 15 and 19 February 1946 (7.3). Journal, 24 February 1946 and 8 September 1946 (7.3).

²⁷ DLW to Ralph Maughan, 2 June 1942; to Pete Craig, 19 January 1944; to Fred Schaefer, 9 April 1945; to Pete [Craig?], 3 July 1945 (1.1). DLW to John [?], 28 May 1944; to Betty [Jane Ellis], 15 July 1945 (1.1). DLW to Roy [Partee], 21 April 1946 (1.2).

Wright's athletic scholarship and activity in sports and sports writing are mentioned in letters to Legrande Humphreys, 8 August 1946 (1.2), to E. L. Romney, 12 August 1946 (1.2), to Conover Wright, 1 March 1948 (1.3), from E. L. Romney, 1946–1950 (2.8, 9), and from Joe Whitesides, 1946–1950 (2.13); Wright's weight, in E. L. Romney to Les Goates (*Deseret News*), 1 June 1950 (2.9).

²⁸ Autobiographical Sketch, 15 April 1962 (7.6). *Still the Mountain Wind* typescript, pp. 40–41; cf. "A Summer in the Country," *Mutiny*, p. 77, and *Sunstone*, p. 76. DLW to Betty [Jane Ellis], 15 July 1945 (1.1); Carol Green to DLW, 2 September 1947 and 18 September 1947 (2.3); DLW to Patsy Judd, 24 August 1945 (1.1); Journal, 22 July 1946, 25 June 1946, 3 July 1946 (7.3).

²⁹ Journal, 20 October 1946, 12 March 1946, 10 April 1946 (7.3); DLW to Irving Young, 3 March 1945 (1.1); pencil holograph essay, 18 March 1945 (7.7); cf. holograph on personalized stationery, 25 March 1945 (7.7).

³⁰ Lenore Wright to DLW, undated [fall 1946] (3.4); DLW to Lenore Wright, 19 December 1946 (1.2); cf. Journal, 12 November 1946 (7.4), and Walley Teuscher to DLW, 31 March 1947 and 18 April 1947 with holograph annotation by DLW (2.11).

³¹ Journal, 26 December 1946, 1 February 1947, 16 March 1947, 4 January 1947, 14 January 1947 (7.4).

³² Typescript, 22 February 1945, pp. 1, 2 (7.7); "Sketches of the Past" (7.9).

³³ DLW to Betty [Jane Ellis?], [Summer 1945] (1.1); to Patsy Judd, 24 August 1945 (1.1); Journal, 3 August 1946 (7.3).

³⁴ Journal, 17 September 1946; cf. 8 September 1946 ("I have always wished to turn back time"); 13 October 1946 (7.3). Journal, 20 December 1946 (7.4). "Christmas Eve—1946—12:00

P.M.," p. 2 (7.7).

³⁵ Journal, 26 January 1947, 28 January 1947, 16 February 1947, 2 March 1947, 5 March 1947, 30 March 1947 (7.4). DLW to Betty [], 2 August 1947 (7.9); letters from Verne F. Hunter, 15 July 1947 (2.3), Carol Green, 2 September 1947 (2.3), Doris Taylor, 23 September 1947 (2.12), Betty Peterson, 26 October 1947 (2.7); cf. creative writing notes, Winter 1948 (8.6).

³⁶ Journal, 22 January 1947, 12 November 1946 (7.4); DLW to Donna Wright, 1 August 1947 (7.9). Blue Notebook (7.13).

³⁷ Journal, 2 March 1947, 5 March 1947; 1 February 1947, 16 March 1947; 11 March 1947, 30 March 1947 (7.4). "Speech to be given August 10, 1947" (7.9).

³⁸ Undated holograph describing winter loneliness (7.7); the Journal for 20 October 1946 (7.3) mentions plans for an essay about "thoughts on a typical winters morning in Bennington," which may refer to this fragment or to another fragment, in holograph and typescript, about "Alvin's" loneliness in winter (7.7). "Itinerary" for Journal IV, in Journal II (7.4); Autobiography 1950-51, dedication (7.5). Betty Peterson to DLW, 9 November 1947 (2.7); Lenore Wright to DLW, 10 November 1947 (3.4).

³⁹ James Miller to DLW, undated [summer 1948] and 1 August 1948 (2.5). DLW to Conover and Lenore Wright, 16 November 1948 (1.3).

⁴⁰ Autobiography 1950-51, dedication (7.5).

⁴¹ Conover Wright to DLW, 8 March 1948 (3.2); Lenore Wright to DLW, 14 September 1948 (3.4); DLW to Conover and Lenore Wright, 2 February 1949 and 16 July 1949 (1.3); Doris Taylor to DLW, 9 March 1949 and 20 July 1949 (2.12); Joe Whitesides to DLW, 27 June 1949 (forwarded with note from Conover Wright, "tell Joe the mission is indefinite") and 12 July 1949 (2.13); Ralph Maughan to DLW, 5 July 1949 (2.4); E. L. Romney to DLW, 29 September 1949 (2.8). Lenore Wright to DLW, 10 May 1949 (3.4). English theme, May 1949 (7.8).

⁴² Ralph Maughan to DLW, 19 April 1949 (2.4). Conover Wright to DLW, 2 February 1950 (3.2); E. L. Romney to DLW, 21 February 1950 (2.9). George Albert Smith to DLW, 25 March 1950 (2.10).

⁴³ Conover Wright to DLW, 14 April 1950 (3.2).

⁴⁴ Undated typescript dialogue ("You, my own brother"), pp. 4, 5, 6 (7.8).

⁴⁵ Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling and The Sickness Unto Death*, tr. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton U. Press, 1968), p. 30.

⁴⁶ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, p. 48.

I demand this freedom for myself, the freedom to view the world in its entirety, and I feel sad when I see my fellow Mormons (or my Baptist friends) reject great experiences in drama or in any of the arts, because of isolated offensive details.

-RONALD WILCOX
Vol. II, No. 1, p. 23

Three Essays: A Commentary

FRANKLIN FISHER

MORMONS ARE PERHAPS not as interesting to other people as they think they are. True, we have our history of strange practices and our epic migration to recommend us to the wider community, but the rationale for those practices and that migration, the uniquely Mormon, nuts-and-bolts doctrines such as endowments, eternal progression, prospective Godhood, and so forth, have never engaged the popular imagination in the same way. It's useful to be reminded occasionally that the story of the vision and the gold plates is, to many people, not only implausible but banal. I mention this at the beginning of the commentary because it seems central to the question all three papers deal with, which is whether Mormonism is capable of generating an art that is interesting or intelligible to anyone but Mormons?

Edward Geary points out that the novels written during the 1880s and thereafter and meant for home consumption were not very good novels, but that the novels written by a later generation of Mormon writers and meant for a wider audience have not been entirely successful either. One is tempted to wonder if the reasons might not be basically the same. Professor Geary indicates that the best of the Mormon regional novels are flawed by technical and conceptual problems: *Children of God* because Fisher can't decide whether to depict Joseph Smith as a prophet or a charlatan; *The Giant Joshua* because Whipple reduces Mormonism's supernatural basis to a humanistic one; Virginia Sorenson's novels because the author's ambivalence toward the Church allows a deadly sentimentality to creep in. It is suggested that these flaws are built into the material

itself, that the relationship of even marginal Latter-day Saints (which the regionalists all seem to be) to their peculiar subject matter, and the subject matter itself, makes aesthetic weaknesses inevitable. Peculiar beliefs create peculiar motives and anxieties, and when these occur in fiction, the result can be as specialized and therefore as limited as the results of dramatized orthodoxy in the doctrinaire novels. A character who rejects, say, the doctrine of sealing in the temple, leaves the church and suffers withdrawal symptoms the rest of his life, is as inaccessible to a reader who has never shared these beliefs as a character in a Nephi Anderson novel who meets and marries an old friend from the pre-existence.

Professor Geary confronts the question of accessibility with commendable directness and suggests that there is no reason why Mormon characters should be any more arcane than Jewish characters in Isaac Bashevis Singer's stories: Treat the characters and the issues peculiar to them in psychological rather than doctrinal or historical terms and the problem will be solved. Possibly, but to that wider audience the grip on a character's mind of the endowment ceremony, for instance, may seem more idiosyncratic and more arbitrary than the folkways of Polish Jews, and therefore of no more than passing interest; the doctrine and the psychology shaped by the doctrine are not easily separated.

Still, he may be right, and if so, the regional novelists, Mormon writers to one extent or another disaffected with Mormonism and thus forced to see it in a context wider than itself, may be the only writers capable of making the Mor-

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mon novel something more than a coterie literature. There is a winsome irony in that.

George Tate's paper involves that wider audience and raises the question of how Mormonism might be taken seriously by a novelist who knows little of the doctrine and who doesn't believe it matters very much whether Joseph Smith's vision was real or not. Although it strikes me that to call *Paradise Reclaimed* a Mormon novel is a little like calling *Ulysses* a Jewish one, the designation is Laxness', not Tate's. In any event, it is useful to see how Mormonism, as a cultural phenomenon if not a doctrinal one, feeds the imaginative purposes of an artist who does not have to come to terms with it emotionally. Predictably, it is the social structure of the Church—its most visible outward aspect—that Laxness finds most interesting. That this social structure with its material prosperity had a visionary source enhances it, one gathers, in the same way other utopian programs are enhanced if their founders have a tinge of personal mysticism.

Laxness uses the Mormon mythos in a way that it is hard to imagine a Mormon writer using it, as a metaphor for something else, and it is possible to say that for this reason he has not quite got it right. Apparently he found in the Mormon story a literal acting-out of the idea of a spiritual odyssey, a quest for an ideological promised land; Mormonism happened to supply an ideology whose results he found attractive, irrespective of its metaphysical claims. His way of accommodating the ambiguity of Joseph Smith is also characteristic of a non-Mormon writer with nothing at stake. By construing him as an artist and the vision as a creative act analogous to the writing of a novel, Laxness has tempered the meaning of "vision." Novelists believe in the reality of the fiction they are creating; likewise visionaries in their schemes and programs. In this way and not on its literalness should the validity of Joseph Smith's vision be judged. The question of fraudulence is not an issue at all. The successful outcome of Mormonism as a social system vindicates everything. A resolution of this sort will be less than satisfactory to readers more aware than Laxness is of the implications of doubt in the Mormon psyche. But perhaps that

very ignorance, Laxness' and that of most of his readers, makes the specialized topic accessible in a way that is closed to the regionalists. It is possible, one suspects, to know too much.

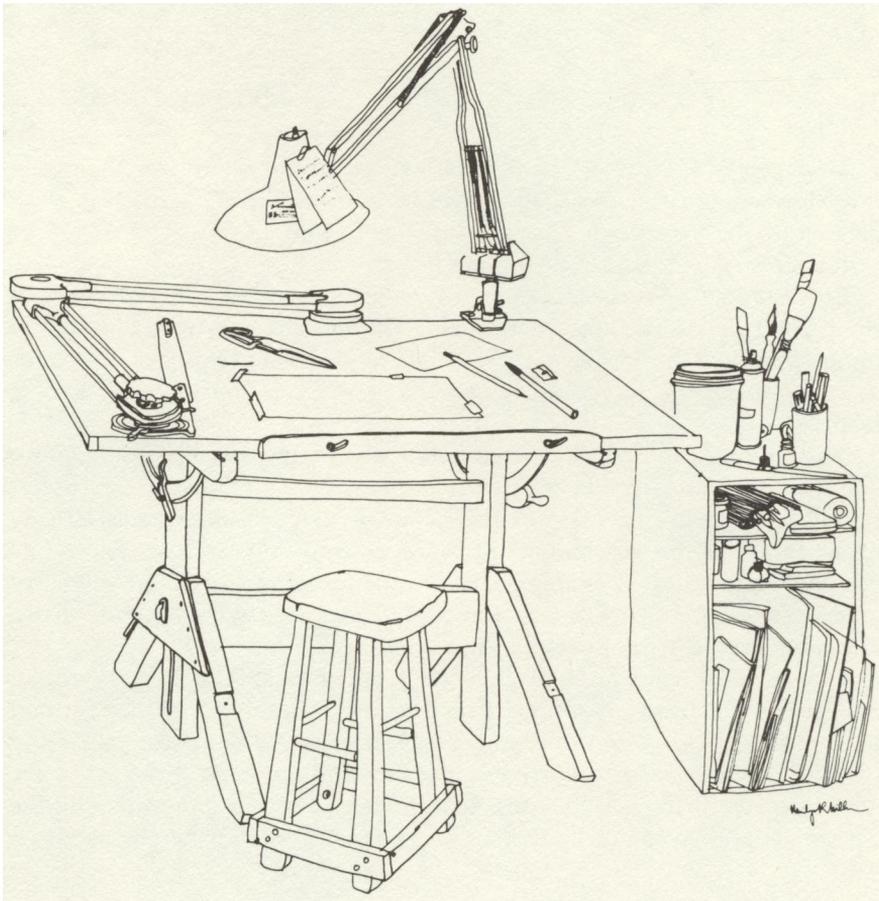
Bruce Jorgensen's paper is in some ways the most personally interesting of the three. It throws into sharp relief one of the themes in Edward Geary's paper—that of the writer who cannot live with the Church but cannot leave it alone either. If I have a fault to find with the essay, it is that—knowing no more of David Wright than Jorgensen tells me—I can't discover in his quotations, admittedly restricted to his juvenilia, anything that suggests why he should be considered a remarkable writer. But apart from the quality of his work, which a wider sampling might improve, Wright as an emblem is both fascinating and illuminating in what he reveals about the whole question of a Mormon art. An event that embitters the artist—in this case the death of a brother—drives him from the Church that would palliate that bitterness and precipitates a career spent in documenting the separation. The paper could have been titled "The Vocation of a Black Sheep."

Wright's compulsion to "excavate his childhood" and remake it in words can be called something besides self-indulgence, though it is certainly self-indulgence. It is the creation of a self in the image the artist wants to be perceived by others, that is by readers. In Wright's case that self—that character in a self-perpetuating fiction—is a Mormon boy in the process of losing the faith, and the loss is what makes the story. Jorgensen suggests that there is no good reason why a writer can't also keep the faith, which may be true enough; but it seems clear from the evidence he has adduced that Wright's resistance to the Church—the long process of separation from it—has provided not only the subject matter of his work but also the pretext for it. To judge from the paper, if he had been able to "keep the motions of faith," he wouldn't have written at all.

All three papers supply an answer, however tentatively, to the question of whether there is a genre of literature that can be called Mormon fiction, apart from the exhortatory novels and stories of the

home literature movement. The answer seems to be that yes there is, but that only non-Mormons and black sheep have so far written it. It is probably not surprising that the best novels were the ones written by "third-generation" Mormons, whose relationship to the Church is problematical, or, as Geary puts it, for whom Mormonism was something to be outgrown. Conflict is one of the conditions of any art, and perhaps the supreme condition of the novel. For Mormon writers, the conflict most immediately at hand is the attempt to reconcile belief with a widening experience. That the heritage is "something to be outgrown" seems to be the premise on which these novelists chose to write at all. Though it

bends the term somewhat to speak of Laxness' book as a "Mormon novel," it may well serve as an example of what the Mormon novel must do to reach the audience outside its own community. Fewer people than we might think find it terribly important to take a stand on whether Joseph Smith really saw God or was visited by an angel. But a Mormon novel is by definition about people who do find it important and whose behavior is determined by which way they decide. How to make such people intelligible to anyone else remains the dilemma of the Mormon novelist, and perhaps Laxness has shown us that to do it one must be first a novelist and only then, if at all, a Mormon.



Excavating Myself

HERBERT HARKER

SOMEWHERE A BOOK IS WAITING to be written—somewhere, deepburied in the Mormon unconscious, and all we Mormon writers are hard at work digging up the back yards of our past trying to find it.

It isn't easy.

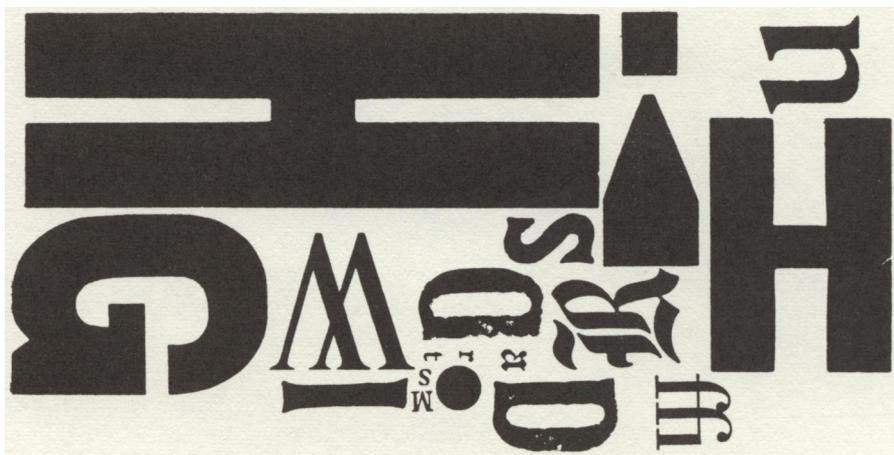
But that's all right, because when it comes to writing, difficulties are at the root of the work. Ross Macdonald told me once that when he has an impossible problem in his story, he sits and gloats for two days. Problems do not impede the story; rather, it is in their resolution that the story is made.

The nature of the problem itself is not always obvious. For example, we may feel that the selection of story material is only a matter of choice, but this is not usually the case for the fiction writer. His material is already inside him, like ore in a mountain. His work is to find, excavate and refine it. Some have said that among Mormons the job of prospecting for literary gold is especially difficult. I'm sure it is never easy, but I do agree that a "peculiar people" writer does have peculiar problems.

One such difficulty arises from a confusion of loyalties between spiritual obligations and artistic yearnings. I am thinking, for example, of the Mormon precept that my goal is to become a god. It is an awesome thought, truly sublime, yet a thought that strikes more terror to my heart than joy. I have little stomach for power. I confess to a hidden wish that somewhere on the backroads of the cosmos there may be a sunny meadow where gods create

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not new worlds but works of fancy to amuse their fellows. You know the kind of people I mean—minstrels, jesters, story-tellers—so they won't have to send down to the terrestrial kingdom for someone to entertain at the Pioneer Day picnic. I do not mean to be irreverent. I hope it is not blasphemous to think that there may be a heaven for Whitman as well as for Caesar, and that some level of such a heaven may hold a place even for me. (Considering my progress to date, eternity won't be a moment too long to perfect my writing skills, along with the rest of me.)



There are three things, among others, that can be helpful to a writer: a sense of place, a community of which he feels a part and a tradition, for out of a long past there develops a consensus on the forces that have shaped us.

A Mormon writer should have no trouble with a sense of place. It was bred in him—at his mother's knee he listened to the stories of Zion. As he grew older he struggled with the same land his father did—a land strong, primitive, variable, yet redolent of life-sustaining wealth. And though later he may have moved away, that sense of place is preserved for him in letters from home, family reunions, histories, the speeches he hears and even the songs he sings—"Oh, ye mountains high . . ."

When I was a child in Canada, I spent long days in the fields with my father's sheep. The wind that blew on me then still blows—I feel it every time I go back, and hear its moan, like a voice out of my past. It whispers half-forgotten tales of empty plains, and people grown hard and tough as the land itself.

And the power of this land is doubled for us by the manner in which it came to be ours—given us by the Lord, a New Caanan, a land of promise.

In a brief essay on the writer's sense of place, Ross Macdonald concludes,

We writers never leave the places where our first lasting memories begin and have names put to them. Together with our culture and our genes, both of which are in some sense the outgrowth of place, these places seem to constitute our fate. Our whole lives move along their ancient trails; but even when we are standing neck-deep in the open graves of our past we scan the horizon for new places, new possibilities. And as the final shovelfull plops down in our faces we taste in the dirt that chokes our mouths the spores of another promised land. . . .¹

must search for the truth. Truth is the artist's principal stock in trade—his vision of truth, sometimes the hidden, dark, repressed truth that we, his audience, have been unwilling, or unable to face. He is the spiritual astronaut who gives us a picture of our dark side, which like the dark side of the moon had never been seen before.

It is in his tradition that the Mormon writer is most crippled, not because his past lacks richness, but because it is so brief. His canvas is flat. He must work in two dimensions, as it were. The present, before it can have any depth, must echo resonances from the past. And until these resonances become widely familiar, they are ineffectual; they do not create a response in the reader. If anyone is to produce a significant work that is uniquely Mormon, then it must sound uniquely Mormon echoes that are nevertheless intelligible to the ear of anyone.

More than the conviction of the words and the thought expressed, the real power in writing is the vision which it evokes in the mind of the reader. If to him the words have no more than their surface meaning, their effect will be slight however lofty their thought. But the crudest words, should they summon images of the reader's own, may work a miracle in him—may even drive him to go out and buy your next book.

As William Butler Yeats says,

All sounds, all colors, all forms, either because of their pre-ordained energies, or because of long association, evoke indefinable, and yet precise emotions . . . The more various the elements that have flowed into [a work of art's] perfection, the more powerful will be the emotion, the power, the god it calls among us. . . .

Our towns are copied fragments from our breast;
And all man's Babylons strive but to impart
The grandeurs of his Babylonian heart.²

The artist attempts to identify the things that move us, and give them expression, not in an overt way—scarcely more directly than does nature herself; gradually bringing us closer to an understanding of our time, our place, our people.

Meaningful symbols are not turned out to order, like kewpie dolls. They're no use, really, until they've been properly aged, like eggs that are such a delicacy in China after they've lain in the ground for a hundred years. A hundred years seems a long time to wait for an egg, but in moulding human awareness it is no time at all.

D. H. Lawrence says,

Many ages of accumulated experience still throb in a symbol. And we throb in response. It takes centuries to create a really significant symbol: even the symbol of the Cross, or of the horseshoe, or the horns. No man can invent symbols. He can invent an emblem, made up of images . . . but not symbols. Some images, in the course of many generations of men, become symbols, embedded in the soul and ready to start alive when touched, carried on in the human consciousness for centuries.³

The symbol of the cross, which Lawrence refers to, has been two thousand

years in development, yet we have rejected it because to us it signifies Christ's despair, not his triumph. But if we reject the cross, what shall we put in its place? Where is our Mormon star of David?

William Carlos Williams suggests, and he is surely not alone, that Edgar Allan Poe was the earliest writer with an original American voice.

He [speaking of Poe] was the first to realize that the hard, sardonic, truculent mass of the New World, hot, angry—was, in fact, not a thing to paint over, to smear, to destroy—for it would not be destroyed, it was too powerful. . . .

Poe conceived the possibility, the sullen, volcanic inevitability of the *place*. He was willing to go down and wrestle with its conditions, using every tool France, England, Greece could give him—but to use them to original purpose. . . .

His greatness is in that he turned his back and faced inland, to originality, with the identical gesture of a Boone. . . .⁴

As Williams makes clear, Poe's method, and indeed his genius, was in stripping his work of the ornaments of the New World, and plunging straight to its heart. There are no Indians in Poe, no mountains, forests, rivers that we recognize. And when he stripped those away, what was left? Terror, isolation and strange, inhuman forces.

But we cannot rest with Poe's vision. We Mormon writers must continue seeking for the original Mormon voice, working with images born, or reborn to human consciousness only a hundred and forty years ago. Oh, for a different milieu—some ancient, frothing confusion of a heritage. . . . If only I had been born a Jew I could write novels like Saul Bellow.

Apart from the youth of our images is the problem of their weight. God and angels make heavy freight for the fiction writer.

Eudora Welty reminds us that

. . . symbols are failing in their purpose when they don't keep to proportion in the story. However alive they are, they should never call for an emphasis greater than the emotional reality they serve, in their moment, to illuminate. One way of looking at *Moby Dick* is that his task as a symbol was so big and strenuous that he *had* to be a whale.⁵

How can we produce a work scaled to the proportion of these symbols which we have inherited? God and the devil; divine flesh and blood in a crumb of bread and a cup of wine; baptism by water and by fire; the power alive in men today, by which the worlds are and were created?

Of course the writer will not think of these things consciously as he works. But he is aware of the force they exert, and must strive to give that force purpose and direction. Consciously, he sets his characters in motion—the bishop, the primary teacher, the maverick, the apostate—and then as Matthew records, “. . . out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh, a good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things; and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.”

When I first thought about it, it seemed to me that the reason a person writes is to explain—to explain, for example what it was like to be the

grandson of a polygamist, living on a farm in Canada during the depression. I know now that my impulse rises from a deeper source; I write not so much to explain as to understand:

—to understand Joseph; how would it feel for a boy to look up and find himself face to face with the Lord?

—to understand what it was like for Hyrum to kiss his little boy goodbye, and ride away with his brother, knowing he'd never see his son again;

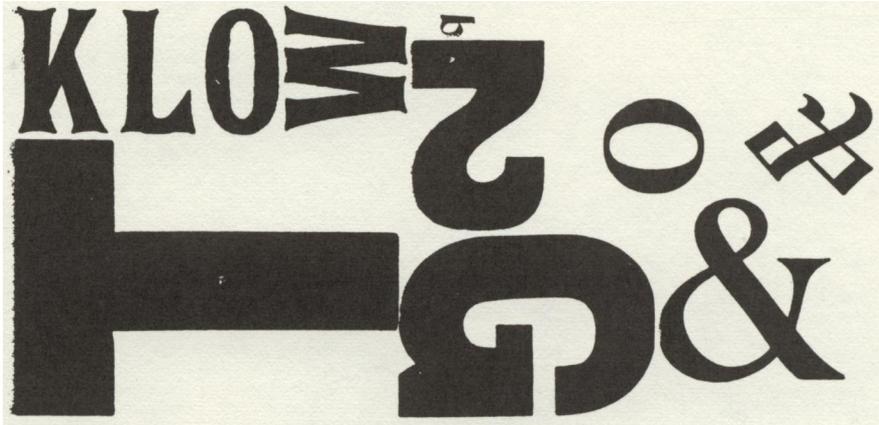
—to understand how men like John D. Lee could become embroiled in the horror at Mountain Meadows;

—to understand my father, aged five, taken from his mother in Salt Lake City to live with "Aunt Lizzie" and the rest of his father's family in Canada;

—and yes, even to understand what it was like to be the grandson of a polygamist, living on a farm in Canada during the depression.

My story is secret, in large measure even from myself. I must discover it and reveal it all together through the point of my pen, a line at a time. And though the enterprise isn't easy, we have no choice but to go forward, with whatever forces of intellect and talent we command, to make our lives, and by extension the lives of our people, real.

Yeats went on to say that ". . . an emotion does not exist, or does not become perceptible and active among us, till it has found its expression, in color or in sound or in form, or in all of these."⁶



In a way, then, we have power, if not to create, at least to more fully realize our world, by giving it expression. We can make our symbols and our language more explicit representations of our thought. It is time for us to get rid of our fear, to forget this inwardness, covering, hiding—to throw our coats open to the wind, unmindful of scars or psychic wounds. If we can do it honestly, the world will not laugh at us. It is not pain that makes people laugh, but sham.

Somewhere, a book is waiting to be written. It is important that it be written, for the promises of the scriptures notwithstanding, our survival as a people may well depend on it. What would we know about the Mulekites, were it not for the Nephite record? or the ancient Greeks, were it not for Homer? And it isn't enough to put characters on paper, or even engrave them on gold plates—the words we write must have power in themselves to endure.

We have all seen ferny imprints of leaves etched in solid rock which tell a story millions of years old. At his core the writer, or musician, or painter or sculptor longs to match the significance of that prehistoric mudbank—to become indeed what he is sometimes accused of being: an old fossil. As artists, we must try to be sensitive enough to take the imprint of our time, yet strong in the capacity of our work to endure, able to preserve the shape of that imprint long after the world it represents has washed away.

NOTES

¹ "The Writer's Sense of Place," *South Dakota Review* 13 (Autumn, 1975): 83-84.

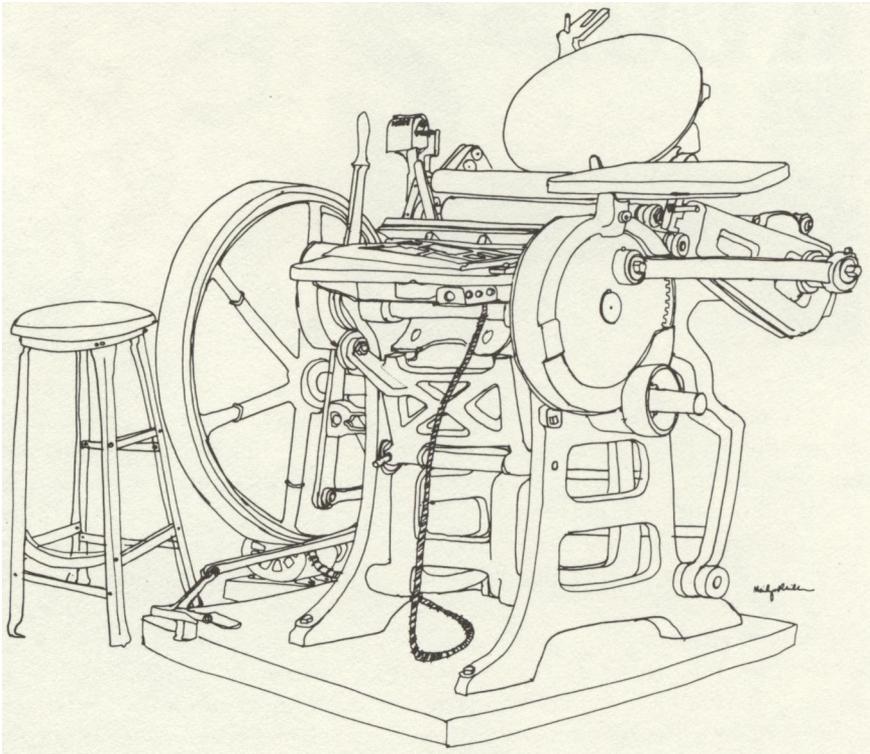
² *Literary Symbolism*, ed. Maurice Beebe (San Francisco: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc., 1960), pp. 26-29. From "The Symbolism of Poetry" (1900), in *Essays* (New York: Macmillan, 1924), pp. 188-202.

³ *Literary Symbolism*, p. 32. From "The Dragon of the Apocalypse," *Selected Literary Criticism*, ed. Anthony Beal (London: William Heineman, 1955).

⁴ *In the American Grain* (New Directions, 1956), pp. 225-26.

⁵ From a talk delivered at the Santa Barbara Writers Conference, June, 1976.

⁶ Yeats, in *Literary Symbolism*, p. 27.



The Representation of Reality in Nineteenth Century Mormon Autobiography

NEAL LAMBERT

SOME HAVE SUGGESTED that the most successful writing about the Mormon experience in the nineteenth-century comes from the frail and fading pages of the personal accounts recorded by first generation Mormons. From the first it has been difficult for most of us to imagine the size and the nature of this body of material. Now with the publication of Davis Bitton's *Guide to Mormon Diaries and Autobiographies* we can see it laid out before us for the first time.¹ It is indeed an impressive sight: listing only those items available for research and concentrating on holdings primarily of Utah institutions, the *Guide* lists just under three thousand (2,894 to be exact) separate diaries and autobiographies, written for the most part in the nineteenth century. As Bitton suggests, "It is hard to believe that any group of comparable size, with the possible exception of the Puritans and the Quakers, has been so relentless as the Mormons in writing diaries and autobiographies."²

Indeed, the parallels with these other religious groups are both interesting and important. They may, for instance, help to explain this remarkable impulse toward autobiographical writing, for not only did many of those first Mormons have their roots deep in New England soil, but the situation of the mid-nineteenth-century Mormon Church offered many parallels with the seventeenth-century puritan experience: both groups of people lived in a universe that was totally God centered; they were both working out a history that was shaped by divine providence; and with millinarian enthusiasm, they were both planting a new Christian society in an unsettled wilderness. It can be said that both groups were, in their personal writings,

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explaining themselves to themselves and to the world. Both were responding to a vital impulse to give order and meaning to the otherwise varied and disordered nature of individual experience. For both peoples, the autobiographical act in any of its many forms was, in its own subtle way, an attempt not only to preserve but to understand and to shape—an effort at once to fix and to know one's identity. And, on a deeper level, both peoples were responding to that basic human need to locate their identity in some kind of universe that was logically consistent with their own definitions, their own values, their own sense of self.

These claims may attribute more sophistication and intellectuality to these pioneering people than they would like to assume. And by no means do I wish to suggest that such complex concerns were always or even frequently a conscious part of these writings. These people were not primarily philosophers. The sweat of their collective brow was more likely to be spent on personal and social survival than on fine tuning of some harmonious philosophical system. Nevertheless they looked on their experience from a given point of view, and that view provided the reference points by which life and experience were ordered and by which meanings were assigned. And if that world view shapes the meaning of experience, then it must also have some effect on the expression of that experience—on the relationship which a writer establishes between his material and his narrative voice, on the selection and arrangement of details, even on the choice of the words themselves. It must also be true that autobiographies are created by people writing out of a deep level of their own psyche.

What I propose, then, is a tentative venture into that cosmos suggested in nineteenth century Mormon autobiographical writing, discovering at least the outlines of a world that seems to be radically different from its puritan antecedents.

It is not an easy task, for in looking at this body of material one is immediately aware of a striking variety, not just in the size of the pieces themselves but in the subject matter, in the style and in the treatment. Let me, for purposes of illustration offer some representative examples:

The first one is taken from the *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, perhaps outside of Joseph Smith's own story, the best known work of autobiographical writing to come out of the Mormon experience. In the following familiar episode Pratt has been arrested for preaching and brought before an apparently prejudiced court:

I was soon ordered to prison, or to pay a sum of money which I had not in the world. It was now a late hour, and I was still retained in court, tantalized, abused and urged to settle the matter, to all of which I made no reply for some time. This greatly exhausted their patience. It was near midnight. I now called on brother Petersen to sing a hymn in the court. We sung, "O how happy are they." This exasperated them still more, and they pressed us greatly to settle the business, by paying the money.

I then observed as follows: "May it please the court, I have one proposal to make for a final settlement of the things that seem to trouble you. It is this: if the witnesses who have given testimony in the case will repent of their false swearing, and the magistrate of his unjust and wicked judgment and of his persecution, blackguardism and abuse, and all kneel down together, we will pray for you, that God

might forgive you in these matters.”

“My big bull dog pray for me,” says the Judge.

“The devil help us,” exclaimed another.

They now urged me for some time to pay the money; but got no further answer.

The court adjourned, and I was conducted to a public house over the way, and locked in till morning; the prison being some miles distant.

In the morning the officer appeared and took me to breakfast; this over, we sat waiting in the inn for all things to be ready to conduct me to prison. In the meantime my fellow travellers came past on their journey, and called to see me. I told them in an undertone to pursue their journey and leave me to manage my own affairs, promising to overtake them soon. They did so.

After sitting awhile by the fire in charge of the officer, I requested to step out. I walked out into the public square accompanied by him. Said I, “Mr. Peabody, are you good at a race?” “No,” said he, “but my big bull dog is, and he has been trained to assist me in my office these several years; he will take any man down at my bidding.” “Well, Mr. Peabody, you compelled me to go a mile, I have gone with you two miles. You have given me an opportunity to preach, sing, and have also entertained me with lodging and breakfast. I must now go on my journey; if you are good at a race you can accompany me. I thank you for all your kindness—good day, sir.”

I then started on my journey, while he stood amazed and not able to step one foot before the other. Seeing this, I halted, turned to him and again invited him to a race. He still stood amazed. I then renewed my exertions, and soon increased my speed to something like that of a deer. He did not awake from his astonishment sufficiently to start in pursuit till I had gained, perhaps, two hundred yards. I had already leaped a fence, and was making my way through a field to the forest on the right of the road. He now came hallooing after me, and shouting to his dog to seize me. The dog, being one of the largest I ever saw, came close on my footsteps with all his fury; the officer behind still in pursuit, clapping his hands and hallooing, “stu-boy, stu-boy—take him—watch—lay hold of him, I say—down with him,” and pointing his finger in the direction I was running. The dog was fast overtaking me, and in the act of leaping upon me, when, quick as lightning, the thought struck me, to assist the officer, in sending the dog with all fury to the forest a little distance before me. I pointed my finger in that direction, clapped my hands, and shouted in imitation of the officer. The dog hastened past me with redoubled speed towards the forest; being urged by the officer and myself, and both of us running in the same direction.

Gaining the forest, I soon lost sight of the officer and dog, and have not seen them since.³

This is a fine little set piece. The organization is carefully shaped, focusing on a series of three scenes: the court room, the public house and the edge of the forest. The dialogue that Parley recreates sets the vernacular replies of the sheriff against the elaborate discourse of the hero himself, thus giving added impact to the incongruous juxtapositions that characterizes the jokester hero of this tale: namely the singing in the courtroom, the elaborate invitation to come along in the escape attempt and the pursued aiding pursuer. As we list these, we are aware that the singing of hymns by the

captives, the praying for one's captors, and the facing of the possibility of being torn apart by wild beasts are all the very stuff of Christian martyr stories; yet in reading this piece, we do not see the episode that way at all. We do not hold our breath; rather we smile and chuckle, not because of what happened but because of the particular way in which what happened has been treated by Parley Pratt. He has consciously (or perhaps unconsciously) recreated the scene not in terms of Christian history but in terms of literary comedy, constructing an elaborate framework around the actual experience, a framework that mediates that experience in a delightful way for the reader.

An example of a piece essentially comic in tone, but less highly structured in its presentation is found in the diaries of Thales Haskel in which Haskel recounts his experiences as a settler, a soldier and an Indian missionary. On one occasion, Haskel and his companions are having considerable difficulty getting to the place where they must preach to the Indians. One of their biggest problems is the cart and its load of supplies they are trying to maneuver across the roadless wilderness.

Monday 10th We rolled out again br Knell officiating as bull driver—got along fine till we came to the clay hills. . . . Set about hunting a road through the hills with uncommon vigor—at length we managed by considerable whipping hooping yeling etc. to get up some 3 or 4 hills. but in going down one, the Cart capsized plumb bottom up with Br. Riddle and myself hanging to the stern. We righted her up, gathered our things together, loaded up, and tried again—went about 30 steps and capsized again—our faith in regard to the cart going to the Colerado now began to weaken. However, after some labor we got the thing started again and finally got through the hills and into the deep sand—here the cart rolled heavily. . . .

Tuesday 11th . . . Br. Hamblin [arrived soon and] thought we looked rather low spirited we told him cart was a bad egg and that we did not think it would make the riffle

Wednesday 12th . . . We now packed up and took after the cart—found it at the foot of the mountain where the thing refused to climb so we took out our plunder and had a good time displaying our ingenuity in the art of packing. Went on our way rejoicing. It was dark by the time we got to the top of the mountain and some of our packs getting loose we had enough excitement in repacking, hunting the trail, etc. to make it interesting. Br. Crosby had one mule named devil which I considered, very aproprate as he semed to take great delight in all kinds of mulish deviltry—for instance Jumping stifleged, turning his pack, getting tangled in the riging, etc Crosby's riding mule also bucked a while but geting pretty well acquainted with a pair of American spurs concluded to give up and be gentle"

Again here, as in the Pratt piece, we are conscious of the writer's tone, a tone characterized by a comic detachment from the weary toil of the actual experience.

The elaborate understatement with its pseudo-religious overtones ("Our faith in regard to the cart going to the Colerado now began to weaken."), and the unexpected circumlocution (Brother Crosby's mule "getting pretty well acquainted with a pair of American spurs") are not new techniques; still, they are successful devices—pleasing to the reader—and, I would imagine, to Haskell too. If the experience itself was unpleasant, the act of

writing about it could be less so. Indeed, Haskell's attitude toward his Missionarying is exemplified in a bit of verse written in that same Missionary Journal.

I wish I had a clean shirt
I wish I had some shoes
I wish my old mule was fat
And I didn't have the blues
If ever I get home again
Contented I'll remain
And never go exploring
Till called upon again⁵

It is the paradox of those last lines that catches our interest. Here is exemplified that old tension between desire and duty which is so much a part of the religious experience and which informs the humor of Haskell's diaries. Instead of wrestling with angels the man is wrestling with himself, and the wit of his comic stance gives him a perspective that makes it possible to endure and to try again.

There is, of course, more than one mode for dealing with difficult experiences. If a comic tone served well, there were other times when only a serious tone would do. And serious autobiographical efforts have their own problems. This can perhaps be illustrated by considering attempts to deal with what we might call limit situations, confrontations with overwhelming catastrophe or great loss. When pushed into the anguish of such situations, the writer may well grasp for whatever means of expression are at hand. Sometimes this means simply picking up from genteel culture and popular parlance an easy set of expressions which may be familiar, but which are finally inadequate or even misleading. Again, let me illustrate, this time from the Journal of Hosea Stout. In this particular episode Stout's little son has just died.

Thus died my son and one too on whom I had placed my own name and was truly the dearest object of my heart. Gone too in midst of affliction sorrow & disappointment in the wild solitary wilderness. Surrounded by every discouraging circumstance that is calculated to make man unhappy and disconsolate. Without the necessaries of life, Without even our daily bread and no prospects for the future. There in this wild land to lay him where the silence of his peaceful grave would only be broken by the savage yells of the natives seemed to come in bold relief before us. . . .

We buried him on a hill in the prairie about one mile from the Nodaway where there was the grave of an infant of Brother John Smith and then pursued our journey leaving the two lovely innocents to slumber in peace in this solitary wild until we should awake them in the morn of the resurrection.⁶

There is no doubt that Hosea was grieving, nor is there any doubt that the sight of that fresh, hilltop grave made a deep impression. But the real significance and meaning of that experience are held at arms length. We cannot get close to the events themselves. We are, to a degree, separated from the experience by the language itself which is more appropriate for describing a sentimental nineteenth-century parlor picture than the scene at

hand. And if this is true for us, may it not also be true for Hosea himself? Thus, with Stout (as with Haskell and Pratt) a particular rhetorical mode mediates between the reader (and the writer too, perhaps) and the events themselves.

There is, however, another journal-autobiography in which almost nothing is interposed between the material and the audience. The experiences are presented directly and apprehended directly. While such a mode can be consciously constructed (one thinks for instance, of Hemingway's careful selection of detail) more often in the autobiographies we are looking at, such expression is the unconscious product of a sensitive but unsophisticated mind.

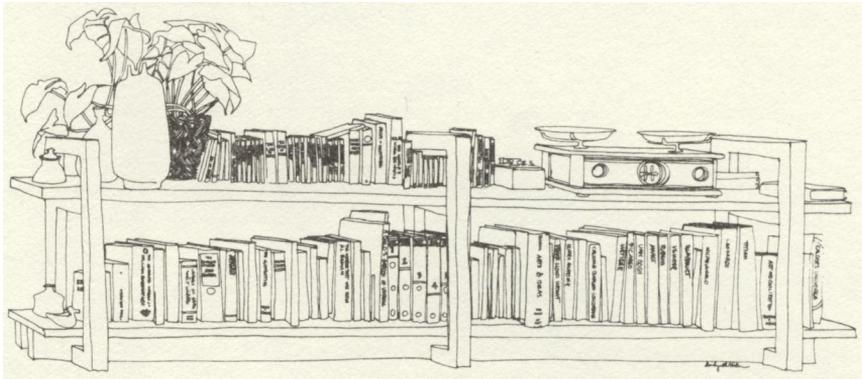
The following excerpt was written by someone whom I would guess is entirely unknown to this audience—Patience Loader. Her account of her own life is unpublished. There exists, so far as I know, only the original manuscript and the typescript copy from which I quote here. She was, in our parlance, uneducated: her writing is not only misspelled and unpunctuated, but it is innocent of any sense of the received notions of grammar or syntax. In this section Patience Loader recounts her experiences as a young girl coming through the snow-choked Rockies with the Martin handcart company. Her father, weakened by exposure and the unfamiliar labor of pulling their belongings on a two-wheeled cart across the plains, is dying. Unable to walk further, he has been laid on the cart itself which Patience, her sisters and her mother now pull.

That was a terrible day never to be forgotten by us and poor father dieing on the hand cart, he did not seem to suffer pain he never opened his eyes after he closed them in the morning . . . [p. 152] the brethren came to adminester to father in the afternoon they anointed him oil his lips was so dry and parched they put oil on his lips then he opened his Mouth and licked the oil from his lips and smiled but did not Speak the breathen Knew he was dieing they said we will seal father Loader up to the Lord for him alone is worthy of him he has done his work been a faithfull Servant in the church and we the Servants of God Seal him unto God our Father: and to our surprise my dear father said amen so plain that we could understand him and . . . that was the last word he said Amen to the blessing the breathren prounouced upon him and he seemed to Know and understand all they said and we oursevs thought he could neither hear or speak [p. 153] . . . but when the brethren came to adminester to him it seemed that he understood all thay said by saying Amen: we started again from that place at Six o clock in the evening to find a camping place So we could get wood and water it got dark long before we campt we traveled over brush and on awfull rough road we did not camp untell past ten oclock we could not moove poor father as he was not yet dead so we put the tent up and took the hand cart into the tent and our dear father died he breathed his last at fifteen minute past eleven o clock at night [p. 154] that had been avery hard trying day on us all and we spent asorowfull night . . . the next morning Br S. S. Jones and his brother dug two graves one for my poor father and the other for a welch brother . . . this was asevere trial here we had to rap my dear father in a quilt all we had to lay him in no nice casket to lay him away in comfotable but put into the grave and the earth thrown in upon his poor body oh that sounded so hard I will never forget the sound of that dirt beign shoveld into my fathers boday it seemed to me that it would break every bone in his body. it did indeed seem a great trial to

have to leave [p. 155] our dear father behind that morning . . . we comfort to our Minds our father had a good deep grave the two Kind brothers Samuel and Albert Jones dug him a deep grave so that the wolves could not get to him and we all fealt to thank and ask God to bless our breathren for there kindness to us in our great Sorrow and Berevement.⁷

This is a different artistry. This piece impresses us by its very simplicity and its lack of sophistication. It flows forth under the pressure of simple recall, uninterrupted. Like a stream of consciousness it follows the eddies of spontaneous design, organizing itself around such dominant perceptions and impressions as the father's dry lips, the startling sound of his loud "Amen," the thump of frozen clods dropping into an open grave and the necessary depth of the grave itself. The effect of these reiterated details is to bring us into an immediate relationship with the experience of Patience Loader herself. Indeed the quality of this piece lies in the simplicity and the unconscious directness of the narrative technique. Even if we are not expected to admire the writer as a separate performer, we can still be profoundly impressed by what she has done.

What we see here in these different pieces suggests the vast range of technical and tonal possibilities in the large area of Mormon autobiographical writing. One can find examples, of course, of a rich variety of presentational techniques: from conscious virtuosity to self-conscious artifice, from unconscious brilliance to dull-minded monotony. One can find many examples of writers painting over their own lives in broad sweeps of purple prose while others, like Patience Loader, catch in the web of their subconscious the appropriate details which not only make past experiences live, but which give them lasting significance.



I have been concerned thus far with pointing out certain technical differences, matters that are fairly obvious and explicit in the works themselves. I would now like to focus on the necessary but more difficult problem of similarities. The people in these pages did not spend much time anguishing over the conditions of their souls or in longing for deliverance from the catastrophically fallen world. Theirs was not the puritan sense of sin. Indeed they seem not to be very other-worldly. Their concerns are, for the most part, this-worldly. As different as they are in their tone and technique from each other, neither Patience Loader nor Parley Pratt reach above and beyond their material world to find meaning and significance for their day-to-day

existence. The events and experiences of their lives are neither types nor shadows, nor are the things around them symbols reflecting a higher or transcendent reality. Rather both writers—though they make reference to God and salvation and religious concerns—find their highest reality made manifest in the here and now, in the clear light of common day. The universe in which both Patience and Parley live and move and have their being is a world accessible to sense perception and open to observation. The locus of the reality that underlies both their accounts is not in any transcendental world, it is in the phenomenal world, the world they move in now. Mormon autobiographical writing has, in other words, much more in common with the *Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* than it has with the *Personal Narrative of Jonathan Edwards*. The latter, for all its concrete detail, finally locates its highest reality in a transcendent world, the former is solidly grounded in the stuff of this life.

If this rather metaphysical observation is correct (and I believe it is) we are presented with a particular difficulty: we seem to be saying that in locating their ultimate concerns in the immediate world of common man, nineteenth century Mormons were (like the eighteenth century Franklin) essentially secular, that even their theology was reduced to a set of intellectual constructs derived from everyday experience. We seem to be saying that if they did not carry a calvinistic sense of sin, neither did they carry a sense of the sacred, that their values were essentially practical and pragmatic. Looking at some passages in these journals and autobiographies may seem to suggest as much. Consider the particular emphasis given to the sacrament of marriage in these two passages from two separate journals:

April 29 we took the train for the city paying \$2.00 for our tickets and reached the city at about 9 a.m. I spent the day in making some purchases of goods for the store, and in settling up some accounts for different persons.

On May 1 I went to the endowment house where I got Adelaide M. Smith sealed to me, after which I transacted some business at some of the stores. I went to the Land Office and got the patent for Parowan City. I made arrangements during the evening for the shipping of the goods that I had purchased, and a wagon that I had purchased for Brother Neils Mortensen. While in the city I stopped with Mrs. Susan West Smith, an old neighbor of ours in Parowan, and the girls' aunt.⁸

June 26th. Being the Sabbath preached in Antwerp village in the forenoon and also in the afternoon upon the faith once delivered to the saints, the falling away of the church, the losing of the authority of the priesthood. . . .

June 27th. Elder Dutcher and myself laid hands upon Mrs. Hamlin who was sickly and then went to LeRayville. Preached in the afternoon upon the spiritual gifts. . . .

July 3rd. Preached to a crowded congregation at the yellow schoolhouse in Henderson. . . .

July 4th. In the forenoon went to the water and baptized 7, four of whom were from the town of Mexico. In the afternoon I was married to Sister Sally M. Bates, the ceremony being performed by Elder Luke Johnson. After the ceremonies of the wedding were over in the evening, attended to the confirmation of eight. . . .

July 7th. Myself and companion rode to Jerico. I preached in the afternoon at Jerico upon the falling away of the church and the restoration of the gospel by another Angel. . . .

July 8th. We rode to LaRayville. I preached in the afternoon at Evans Mills upon the first principles of the gospel. . . .

July 10th. I preached in Antwerp upon the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, its contents in short, the blessings of Joseph. . . .

July 12th. . . . I did not preach.⁹

In these passages, marriage seems to be reduced to whatever denominator is common to the day on which it occurs, whether that is buying supplies or preaching a sermon. Mormon journals and diaries are replete with examples of what we might ordinarily think of as the sacred treated in exactly the same manner as the profane. Sometimes both are presented in the now obvious incongruous juxtaposition and with little or no distinction between the two. This may appear on the one hand to be a profaning of experience. But is it not also possible that just the opposite is true, that such a juxtaposition comes about because the writer believes that all experience is infused with the sacred?

Consider for a moment the following typical experience recounted in the journal of Mosiah Hancock:

While we were going down East Canyon Creek, mother's foot got caught in between the box and wagon tongue and broke the toe at the upper joint; but the skin was not broken. So father anointed her foot there and administered to her and it was healed. We went on and at the mouth of Emigration Canyon I broke a hind wheel; but we had some of father's carpenter tools along and the wheel was mended.¹⁰

This is a rather startling juxtaposition—all the more so because of the interesting rhetorical balance of the sentences. This equation of miraculous healing and repairing a wagon wheel may seem incongruous to us, but—and this is my point—it was obviously not so to Mosiah Hancock. His world included both.

This is not a denial of transcendence but a demonstration of it. For these people, God was not something separate and apart. His will, his power, his spirit were in the world. God was not metaphorically but literally building his kingdom on earth. An actual prophet spoke God's word, a new Jerusalem was literally to be built. This was not a rehearsing of the old revelation, a working out of the old patterns, it was a new revelation, a literal preparation for the coming of the kingdom of God.

As the German theologian Professor Ernst Benz has reminded us:

For the Puritan immigrants, America was the wilderness, including the American Indians, a wilderness provided by God to European religious refugees for the plantation of a better church in the desert, better than the older European churches corrupted by popes, bishops, and kings. The American continent appeared to the European immigrants as a wild place of refuge, a wilderness without history, a *tabula rasa* offered by God for a new beginning. The historical consciousness of the Puritans was always that of immigrants.¹¹

This was not true for the Mormons. For them America was not a *tabula rasa*

but a land with a long religious history recounted for them in the pages of the Book of Mormon. But even more significant, this land was one of the geographical centers for their own version of traditional Christian eschatology. The history of the redemption of mankind was to include the Mormons' own sacred cities in Missouri and Utah.

So they proceeded to work out this religious history, suffering as earlier settlers had done, but not seeing that suffering as the consequence of sin, rather seeing it as one of the experiential necessities of this life, a life represented not in terms of human catastrophe and deserved degradation, but latent with promises and potentialities. Thus these writers were, in their journals and autobiographies in small, sometimes in grand patterns, working out a meaningful part of a cosmic enterprise that needed no reference points outside of itself. As they struggled across the "great American desert," they did not need the Bible to explain the spiritual significance of their exodus. For them the biblical analogues may have been useful, but they were almost never central. Their enterprise contained its own validation within itself.

Such a universe can be a very comfortable reality to inhabit. As one Mormon pioneer said:

I felt happy. I had a good, affectionate wife, a promising young son, a comfortable house, a little farm, a good stock of cattle. I was in the church of Latter-Day Saints, settled in the garden of the world, a secluded retreat in the mountains of Ephraim. I was one of the Seventies, chosen as a special witness to the nations, to preach the Gospel of Christ to the meek and lowly.¹²

Such a world view may in some cases give rise to a personal account that is not only positive but cock-sure. We must acknowledge that for us now some of those early writings seem to carry personal enthusiasm to the point of arrogance. There is certainly a clear note of superiority that rings throughout much of Parley Pratt's autobiography.

Given the apparent simplicity and surety of the world of these autobiographies, we may say to ourselves these are not for our troubled times. They may well be interesting historical artifacts, but they speak of another world. We may feel that as a body they have little to say to us or to our age with its existential paradoxes and tragic dilemmas. That is only partly true. It seems to me that, at their best, these writings may have literary significance for us here and now, not just to us as Mormons, or even as Americans, but as human beings. Again, let me illustrate with an impressive autobiography.

Like Patience Loader, Mary Goble Pay was uneducated, a simple pioneer girl making her way with the remnants of her family from Winter Quarters to Salt Lake City. Like Patience Loader, her pioneer company was caught in the early snows that trapped the emigrants in the Fall of 1856. The telegraphic quality of her presentation with its unconsciously controlled understatement is impressive. Here are selected passages dealing with her voyage to America, her trial on the plains and her arrival in Salt Lake City:

When I was in my twelfth year, my parents joined the Latter-day Saints. On November 5th I was baptized. The following May we started for Utah. We left our home May 19, 1856. We came to London the first day, the next day came to Liverpool and West on board the ship, Horizon. . . .

When we were a few days out, a large shark followed the big vessel. One of the saints died and he was buried at sea. We never saw the shark any more. . . .

My sister Fanny broke out with the measles on the ship and when we were in Iowa Campgrounds, there came up a thunder storm that blew down our shelter, made with hand carts and some quilts. The storm came and we sat there in the rain, thunder and lightening. My sister got wet and died the 19 July 1856. She would have been 2 years old on the 23. The day we started on our journey, we visited her grave. We felt very bad to leave our little sister there.

We traveled on till we got to the Platt River. That was the last walk I ever had with my mother. We caught up with Handcart companies that day. We watched them cross the river. There were great lumps of ice floating down the river. It was bitter cold. The next morning there were fourteen dead in camp through the cold. We went back to camp and went to prayers. We sang the song "Come, Come, Ye Saints, No Toil Nor Labor Fear." I wondered what made my mother cry. That night my mother took sick and the next morning my little sister was born. It was the 23rd of September. We named her Edith and she lived six weeks and died for want of nourishment.

We had been without water for several days, just drinking snow water. The captain said there was a spring of fresh water just a few miles away. . . .

I became confused and forgot the way I should go. I waded around in the snow up to my knees and I became lost. Later when I did not return to camp the men started out after me. My feet and legs were frozen. They carried me to camp and rubbed me with snow. They put my feet in a bucket of water. The pain was so terrible. The frost came out of my legs and feet but did not come out of my toes. . . .

We left our wagons and joined teams with a man named James Barman. He had a sister Mary who froze to death. We stayed there two or three days. . . . My brother James ate a hearty supper was as well as he ever was when he went to bed. In the morning he was dead.

My feet were frozen also my brother Edwin and my sister Caroline had their feet frozen. It was nothing but snow. We could not drive the pegs in the ground for our tents. . . .

We traveled faster now that we had horse teams. My mother had never got well, she lingered until the 11 of December, the day we arrived in Salt Lake City 1856. She died between the Little and Big Mountain. She was buried in the Salt Lake City Cemetery. She was 43 years old. She and her baby lost their lives gathering to Zion in such a late season of the year. My sister was buried at the last crossing of the Sweet Water.

We arrived in Salt Lake City nine o'clock at night the 11th of December 1856. Three of four that were living were frozen. My mother was dead in the wagon.

Bishop Hardy had us taken to a home in his ward and the brethren and the sisters brought us plenty of food. We had to be careful and not eat too much as it might kill us we were so hungry.

Early next morning Bro. Brigham Young and a doctor came. . . . When Bro. Young came in he shook hands with us all. When he saw our condition—our feet frozen and our mother dead—tears rolled down his cheeks.

The doctor amputated my toes using a saw and a butcher knife.

Brigham Young promised me I would not have to have any more of my feet cut off. The sisters were dressing mother for the last time. Oh how did we stand it? That afternoon she was buried.¹³

The terse, laconic, unsubordinated style of these passages has a power not unlike that of some of the best modern writers. But more significant is the impression of the experiences themselves. In unmitigated starkness Mary Goble presents a world that is at once immediate and transcendent, a world that is both harsh and meaningful as she herself explains on the occasion of writing these memories down. "I have been to a reunion, . . . had a good time talking over incidents of our trip across the plains. It made me feel bad it brought it all up again. It is wise for our children to see what their parents passed through for the Gospel, yes, I think it is."

Perhaps all of us in our human longings to locate ourselves in some kind of identifiable reality would like to be able to "see what [our] parents passed through," would like to know from where and from whom we came to this particular here and now. Perhaps we still would like to locate our own ancestral exodus that would help us find the meanings we seek for our present situation. Until such needs and longings are satisfied, autobiographies such as Mary Goble Pay's will continue to speak to us from their own God-centered world to remind us of the fragile dimensions of our own.

NOTES

¹ Davis Bitton, *Guide to Mormon Diaries and Autobiographies* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1977).

² *Ibid.*, p.v.

³ Parley P. Pratt, [Jr.], ed., *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1950), pp. 49-51.

⁴ Thales Haskel, "Journal, 1859-1860," typescript, Brigham Young University Library, pp. 2-4.

⁵ Haskel, p. 41.

⁶ Hosea Stout, "Diary, 1844-1869," As quoted in Richard Cracroft and Neal Lambert, *A Believing People* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1974), p. 131.

⁷ Patience Loader Rosa Archer, "Autobiography, 1827-1872," typescript, Brigham Young University Library, pp. 151-158.

⁸ Joseph Fish, *The Life and Times of Joseph Fish*, ed. John H. Krenkal (Danville: Interstate Printers and Publishers, Inc., 1970), p. 163.

⁹ Orson Pratt, "Journal, 1811-1868," holograph, Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

¹⁰ Mosiah Hancock, "Journal, 1834-1867," typescript, Brigham Young University Library, p. 26.

¹¹ Ernst Benz, "Mormonism and the Secularization of Religions in the Modern World," *Brigham Young University Studies* (Summer, 1976), 16, p. 632.

¹² Maybelle Harmon Anderson, ed., *Appleton Milo Harmon Goes West* (Berkeley: Gillick Press, 1946), p. 56.

¹³ Mary Goble Pay, "Autobiography," as quoted in Cracroft and Lambert, *A Believing People*, pp. 143-145.

Literary Dimensions of Mormon Autobiography

STEVEN P. SONDRUP

AMONG MORMONS, autobiography has been for decades one of the most widespread modes of literary expression and can be related to the larger tradition of the genre in terms of the nineteenth-century origin of the Church. Some of the finest and most moving examples of Mormon autobiography owe their very existence to the admonitions of early church leaders that institutional as well as personal histories should be kept.¹ One thinks immediately of *The Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt* and of the various autobiographical sketches of Joseph Smith, most especially that contained in the "Writings of Joseph Smith" in the Pearl of Great Price. Although *The Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt* was edited possibly rather heavily, it nonetheless stands as one of the greatest monuments to the spirit of self-depiction in the literary history of the Church. In their majestic simplicity, both works are towering examples of self-expository genius, and they paradigmatically represent important characteristics of the tradition that arose in their wake.

This tradition of Mormon autobiography and, indeed, these works themselves stand in marked contrast to the great classics of nineteenth-century autobiography. Whereas Wordsworth, Stendhal, and Newman, among many others, used autobiography as an exploratory means of coming to self-knowledge, Mormon writers have more typically presented themselves directly and unquestioningly. Where many nineteenth-century autobiographies ask the question "What am I?", the statement "What I *am!*" is at the heart of the Mormon presentation. Joseph Smith, in his autobiographical writing, is assured and confident of his understanding of the prophetic calling: writing is not an occasion to explore the ramifications of his spiritual experiences or to seek a spiritual identity, but rather the opportunity to expound these insights to others. Parley P. Pratt is equally clear-eyed and direct. His autobiography does not explore the meaning and significance of

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the apostleship, but rather it presents and illustrates it. There are certainly exceptions, but, in general, Mormon autobiographers are remarkably secure in their position. Is this security superficial and facile? Is it the confidence of men and women who simply do not understand some of life's most profound and vexing existential dilemmas? Can this surety be explained as rural naiveté in contrast to the cosmopolitan sophistication of a Wordsworth, a Stendhal, or a Newman? Perhaps in part yes; but more profoundly it is a self-assurance that derives, I think, from faith, convictions that resolve some of life's most fundamental questions and obviate the need for asking others.

Though explainable and indeed understandable, this security and self-assurance may be the greatest single weakness of Mormon autobiography. On the rhetorical level it too often leads to tiring bombast, creating a tone of condescending stuffiness. But more seriously, it artificially limits, in some cases, the depth and breadth of the personality being presented. It is difficult to believe that some characters could have been as shallow and vacuous as they appear in their autobiographies.

Another characteristic of Mormon autobiography is derived from this security and confidence. Since writers were not writing for themselves in the spirit of self-exploration to the same extent as their contemporaries, they were more consciously writing for the benefit of others. In explaining his reason for writing the description of his life that appeared in the *Pearl of Great Price*, Joseph Smith noted: "I have been induced to write this history, to disabuse the public mind, and put all inquirers after truth in possession of the facts, as they have transpired, in relation both to myself and the Church, so far as I have such facts in my possession."² What is particularly noteworthy here is the motivation to inform and instruct others to the extent of the author's competence; it is clearly not, at least not primarily, a quest for the authentic self. Similarly the justification for printing the third edition of *The Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt* is that it "... will do much to stimulate the missionaries, teachers, and members of the Church to greater faith and activity."³ The rationale for and explanation of autobiography in terms of its outward reaching effect on others rather than its inwardly strengthening potential carries over to the modern admonition that all members of the Church should compile personal histories, as one prominent Church official recently pointed out, for the benefit of succeeding generations, for the blessing and enrichment of children, grandchildren and great grandchildren.⁴

Mormon autobiography, though, is not entirely alone in focusing attention on the outward impact of autobiography. An acknowledged classic written in much the same mode is the *Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, a volume that seeks to pass on to others the practical wisdom and keen insight of a singularly enlightened mind. Others as well—among them Augustine, Petrarch, Freud, and Gibbon—in more or less subtle ways have acknowledged that the public's desire to know was part of their motivation for writing. Yet Roy Pascal is right, I think, when he points out that "good autobiography is always more than a mere exposition to the public of something already known to the author."⁵ It is precisely in this context that Arthur Koestler's two-volume autobiography is less than satisfying to many readers: though engaging and intellectually stimulating, Koestler is too sure, too intent on informing the public; he is, at times, too condescending.

Mormon autobiographers writing from a special kind of spiritual security run this aesthetic danger, and indeed some writers sacrifice literary value to their obsession to inform. The element, though, that redeems the most significant Mormon autobiographies, even those clearly written for the benefit of others, is the soul-searing belief—indeed the complete confidence—that the source of the writer's security is transcendent truth rather than individual and personal strength, a characteristic that in some respects links Mormon autobiographies to the great religious and mystic autobiographies of the past.

Just as has been the case with many of these accomplished autobiographies in the long history of the genre, the interary aspects of Mormon autobiography have been too often overlooked, or relegated to an insignificant place within a given critical framework. The practice currently popular among Mormons of referring to autobiography as "personal history" only serves to further obfuscate the literary dimensions of autobiography by strongly emphasizing the historical component. Even readers sensitive to the literary values of a novel or a sonnet manage to ignore the aesthetic qualities of autobiography. Somehow the notion obtains that when it comes to autobiography, one simply remembers and copies oneself down: no invention, no imagination, no creation. This is nonsense, of course. The best autobiographies are revered because they possess in rich abundance many of the literary merits one would expect in any accomplished narrative; and conversely, the weaker autobiographies are usually weak because these qualities are notably lacking.

In pointing to "the limits of language, the slipperiness of experience, the difficulties of both comprehending and re-creating experience," Stephen A. Shapiro has convincingly argued that the autobiographer, like the poet, is a creator and is, moreover, a creator faced with the challenge to do what is nearly impossible: "recapture time, shape the shapeless, make many one and one multiple, transform an inner image into a picture-mirror for others, make the flesh into words and words into flesh."⁶ And certainly the challenge of the Mormon autobiographer is no less demanding.

With attention directed primarily toward aspects of literary worth rather than historical accuracy, one of the most celebrated passages from the entire corpus of Mormon autobiography, Parley P. Pratt's description of Joseph Smith's rebuke to the foul-mouthed guards at the Richmond Jail in Missouri during the winter of 1838–39 emerges with arresting power.⁷

On a sudden he 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 look 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 solemn 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 any other considerations this is impressive literature. The subject itself is significant, and its mediation in language is impressive. The passage, brief though it is, resounds with moral and aesthetic sincerity, and the verbal power forcefully communicates not only the writer's sentiments but also his profoundest feelings. The question may be asked whether this is precisely the way the event, in very point of fact, took place; whether this is the way one of the guards would have described the scene; or even whether this is the way Parley P. Pratt himself would have portrayed the exchange immediately after it took place. Although these questions may be of some interest, they do not lead to significant literary insights. The strength of the passage is independent of its historical veracity: it derives rather from the staggeringly successful evocation of a seminal emotional and spiritual event in the life of the writer. This is the portrait of a soul by means of image and metaphor: although it refers to external reality in telling ways, it makes no attempt to present or to recreate externality.

Annie Clark Tanner recreates another such event in *A Mormon Mother*, that of her courtship and marriage as a plural wife.⁸

He came a few times to see me in the fall, yet when the day was set for our marriage I would have gladly put it off. Perhaps it was because I was so young, having recently passed my nineteenth birthday. I was as happy at home as a girl could be, but Mr. Tanner insisted that a long courtship in cases of polygamy was entirely improper.

On the appointed day I was to come to Salt Lake to meet him and Mrs. Tanner. . . . In the late afternoon Mr. Tanner came, and we were married on the 27th day of December 1883.

After the ceremony, Mr. Tanner and Aunt Jennie, as we familiarly called the first wife, and I took the northbound train. I got off in Farmington and they went on to Ogden. I do not recall any conversation while on the train. Perhaps the feelings of Aunt Jennie accounted for the silence.

It was dark when the train arrived home. . . . The family had finished the evening meal. As I sat down to a glass of bread and milk the thought came to me. "Well, this is my wedding supper." In those few minutes I recalled the elaborate marriage festivals which had taken place in our own family, of the banquets I had helped to prepare and the many lovely brides among my friends. I even began to compare their wedding gowns. I was conscious of the obscurity of my own first evening after marriage.

"What a contrast," I said to myself. "No one will ever congratulate me."

Yet I was sure I had taken the right step and recall feeling confident that something really worthwhile had been accomplished. Finally I broke the silence.

"The experience wasn't half bad."

"You haven't half begun yet," my father replied.

I realized the truthfulness of his remark two weeks later when Mr. Tanner failed to keep his appointment to come to see me. I was so disappointed that it seemed that the very angels wept with me.

This too is good writing. The faith, the anxiety, and even the confusion of a nineteen-year-old young woman at a turning point in her life are movingly elicited but notably without sentimentality or self-indulgence. A spirit's voice, heightened and amplified by the power of literate articulation, cries out for understanding, for an understanding that the sensitive reader willingly accords. To the extent that literature is clear thinking about mixed emotions as W. H. Auden has suggested, this is literature, and literature deserving critical consideration.

Finally, I should like to make some practical suggestions about the reading of autobiographies which, I hope, will facilitate their enjoyment and evaluation. The first is in some ways derived from what I have already said: although the expression "personal history" is popular, and in spite of the fact that it is traditional to read autobiographies—particularly within the Mormon community—from the point of view of history, a certain aesthetic dimension deserves attention. The reader must bring his or her best reading skills to autobiographies in order to appreciate their literary depth: he must be sensitive to image and allusion; he must watch for irony and hyperbole; in sum, he must find the central metaphor of self that unifies and is at the heart of the best autobiographical writing. For example, anyone reading President Spencer W. Kimball's autobiographical sketch, *One Silent Sleepless Night* in a purely historical context without an understanding and appreciation of its aesthetic qualities will miss much of the richness and depth that this slender volume has to offer. Its telescoping of narrated time within its narrative time and its use of many rhetorical devices are skillful and moving. The return of health and the normal perception of time after the painfully prolonged, silent, sleepless night that the book describes are powerfully evoked in its closing lines:

Pain, the ugly, sadistic companion of the past three weeks, has moved out to give place first to the mild-mannered gentleman Distress, which in turn has now given way to the friendly person Comfort. And with comfort comes peace, and with peace a return of memory of a certain Time, the Time with which I was formerly acquainted; the Time which has now rubbed its eyes, taken a deep breath, saluted, clicked its heels, and comes marching its way back into the normal sixty-second minutes and sixty-minute hours and twenty-four hour days. TIME has been resurrected, peace restored, and life is good again!⁹

There is little here of purely historical consequence, but soul speaks to soul by the power of metaphor and image, and the sensitive reader is made acutely aware of the personal and spiritual moment of the healing process.

My second point is that autobiographies are not necessarily better or more accomplished when they are based on documentary sources or are demonstrably accurate. In autobiography, memory is entirely sufficient because the essence of the genre is not the reconstruction of external reality but the forging of a metaphor of self that communicates insights and values often defying direct exposition.

Thirdly, the reader must respect the limitations of the genre. He must not allow himself to be disappointed by expecting more than can be provided. Although an autobiography typically provides insight that is otherwise inaccessible, there are limits to what the individual can know about himself. There is, in the words of Roy Pascal, "a cone of darkness" at the center of every autobiography.¹⁰ Even in the most psychologically penetrating autobiographies, certain aspects utterly escape description: they are too close to the center of being to be brought into clear focus. Aspects of motivation and mystic or religious insight often lie not only out of the view of the inspecting eye, turned back upon itself, but beyond the capacity of language to suggest. The reader must not expect more than the autobiographer can provide: the autobiographical narrative voice has an unreliability that simply must be accepted.

My fourth and final suggestion is that certain kinds of Mormon autobiography are most rewarding and fulfilling when the reader is willing to participate in the recreation of a personality. Since Mormon autobiographies are often written for the benefit of others, the reader must be willing to look beyond the surface moralizing, which on occasion becomes blatant preaching, to deeper and more revealing levels of personality. What, for example, is the motivation for the moralizing and preaching? Why the seemingly excessive concern with a given issue? Naturally, care must be exercised in order not to do violence to the verbal meaning of the text by prying beneath its surface, but if there is evidence of a fascinating personality lurking behind trite generalizations and prolix admonitions, effort is well rewarded.

Since autobiography may well be the most distinctive and characteristic mode of literary expression among the Mormons,¹¹ anything less than a creatively critical reading that elucidates its literary dimensions fails to come to terms adequately with an especially rich aspect of Mormon culture.

NOTES

¹ In this context, there is no need to distinguish between autobiography in the narrow sense and memoirs, reminiscences and reflections. The sole consideration is that an autobiography is a document presenting the life of an individual or a segment of that life as narrated by that individual. As for the term *Mormon*, suffice it to say that as used here, it denotes the work of an individual for whom Mormon theology made, or makes a difference.

² Pearl of Great Price, 2:1.

³ *The Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, 5th Edition (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1961), p. 5.

⁴ See, for example, Theodore M. Burton, "The Inspiration of a Family Record," *Ensign*, January, 1977, pp. 13-14.

⁵ Roy Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 181.

⁶ Stephen A. Shapiro "The Dark Continent of Literature: Autobiography," *Comparative Literature Studies*, 5 (1968): p. 422.

⁷ Pratt, p. 211.

⁸ *A Mormon Mother* (Salt Lake City: Tanner Trust Fund University of Utah Library, 1969), pp. 64-67.

⁹ *One Silent Sleepless Night* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1975).

¹⁰ Pascal, p. 184.

¹¹ See, for example, Dale L. Morgan, "Literature in the History of the Church: The Importance of Involvement," *Dialogue* 4, No. 3 (1969) p. 28.

I, Eye, Aye: A Personal Essay on Personal Essays

MARY L. BRADFORD

IN *A BELIEVING PEOPLE*, Richard Cracroft and Neal Lambert lament that the essay “has not been as vital a literary force in Mormondom as might be expected.” Early Mormons, they note, kept forceful diaries, wrote poetry (much of it didactic), recorded their sermons, eschewed fiction, but what passed for essays “read like editorials” and avoided the revelation of personal feelings and attitudes. “The personal essay with all of its reflection and scrutiny on life, seemed to have little role in Mormon literature, although the personal reminiscence of the pioneer and the General Authority were—and still are—important. As the Church struggled for its corporate life, its members saw more value in writing of those things which fostered group identity than they did in examining those individual characteristics which make each Saint different from his brother.”

I don’t know why we expected the early Mormons to write essays. I am not surprised that they didn’t. They were too busy pushing back frontiers and building monuments. They might have turned parts of their diaries into essays, but essays are usually written in tranquility, and in those early days there was little tranquility in Mormon life—nor is there much today. The busy structure of the modern Church does not lend itself to the rumination required for the birth of that fragile form—the personal essay.

Nor do I think essays can grow from the soil of Mormon life without considerable husbanding. They must be cultivated like the plants that transformed the desert. Both readers and writers must help create the right environment for the growth of this distinctive form which is capable of giving such peculiar and particular pleasure.

“Peculiar and particular”—these are the words to describe the personal essay. I think of Lowell Bennion rubbing his chin as he ponders the possibility of being both rationally and emotionally committed to his faith; I think of Eugene England blessing his Chevrolet; of Laurel Ulrich marching

bravely into priesthood meeting to tell the brethren how it feels to be a woman; I see Ed Geary saying goodbye to his hometown; I see Dean May irrigating his garden; Clifton Jolley watching for his baby's first smile. I see peculiar people setting down their particular observations according to their own slightly eccentric habits, and I celebrate their truthfulness, their willingness to risk themselves for small gain. I celebrate them for their willingness to be vulnerable. For the personal essay is vulnerable. It cannot stand upon its footnotes.

I first became aware of the personal essay in Mormon life through the writings of Parley A. Christensen. He was still teaching at Brigham Young University when I went there as an instructor, more than twenty years ago, and I am glad to have known him in his last years, and to have been introduced to his *All in a Teacher's Day*. His was a calm and witty dedication to the humanities and to the teaching of the humanities.

My real commitment to the form began, however, with the founding of *Dialogue* in 1966. Its editors, especially Gene England, were devoted to the essay as a logical extension of that vital form—the testimony. The first issue carried what I believe to be one of the finest essays ever written by a Mormon—"The Challenge of Honesty" by Frances Menlove.

Who, having read that first issue, can forget the "myth of the unruffled Mormon" and the "malaise among Mormons today" which keeps them from confronting their own "inner reality" and dealing openly with what they do and do not believe? Her warnings to both liberals and conservatives are cogent still:

The religious liberal is generally thought of as one who examines his religious life and his church frankly and openly and recognizes the weaknesses and incongruity where they exist and comments freely on his observations. He is often . . . candid . . . while remaining active in community church organizations and maintaining a respected place in the . . . community. The potential of inner deception here lies in the possibility that he will use his candidness, his frank and often entirely justified criticisms and demands for change as a smoke screen for his more basic religious problems The individual is thus relieved from coming to terms with himself. . . .

Similarly, the religious conservative has his particular pitfalls. In his desire to preserve and protect he may become indiscriminate and fail to make important distinctions between historical accidents and timeless truths. . . . Behind the mask of fanatical preservation may be the real fear that the truth of the Church is too fragile to tamper with, that an honest and open examination may destroy his faith or his way of life. Thus the religious conservative may also be hiding from himself a basic lack of faith.

The mid-sixties also saw published Karl Keller's "Every Soul Has Its South," a moving account of a Mormon's venture into the Civil Rights Movement:

"You leave God behind, you know, when you enter Kentucky," the driver of the car said as we crossed the Ohio River bridges into Louisville. "This is the South, the damned and damning South."

I was a Mormon going civil-rights-ing and that made a difference. . . . Local members advised me not to go. It's not approved. You're needed here; It's beneath you; You can't change things. . . . You're not the

type; But little they know the reasons of the blood.

I went because I was frankly worried: worried that my wife and children should find me slipping after talking intense brotherhood, worried that church members I had led and taught should know where the doctrine but not the action in life is, worried that the students I counseled and read and philosophized with where I taught should reach for meaning for their lives and find no guts, worried in fact that I should somehow, while propagating and preaching the Kingdom of God, miss it, miss it altogether. The rest was nonsense.

When time no longer ties me to certain necessities. . . I will turn again . . . to lose myself among the trapped and degenerate. How else am I to find what I in this world must find—myself? Every soul has its own South. Especially a Mormon's.

Keller suffers more beautifully on paper than almost anyone else, and has followed up that first piece with many other fine essays, incisive and literary.

In 1967 Carlos Whiting wrote his popular conversion essay, "An Honorable Surrender," (followed in 1974 by "Some Thoughts on a Rational Approach to Mormonism"). Conversion came to him "suddenly," he wrote,

There was no voice and no vision. I merely surrendered, as the honest and honorable thing to do. It was a Sunday morning and we were at breakfast. In a few minutes my family and I would leave for Sunday School at a nearby protestant church. There was a notable unwillingness to go (I was an officer and had many responsibilities in the church and it was my duty to attend). I looked around the table at my wife and young children.

"Should we go to Mormon Sunday School?" I surprised us all by asking.

"Yes, let's," they clamored.

I smiled wryly at my wife. "I'm converted at the breakfast table."

Others followed, most notably Carole Hansen's "Death of a Son," an eloquent and painful account of a child dying of cancer, the inability of the elders to heal him and an ensuing renewal of faith. By 1968 such personal essays, under the title "Personal Voices" had become a regular *Dialogue* feature. In this space Victor Cline, whose fine "The Faith of a Psychologist" appeared in *Dialogue's* first issue, regularly contributed his fascinating and, to some readers, maddening opinions; Lowell Bennion shared his thoughtful reflections on the meaning of daily life; Ed Geary perfected his brilliant predeliction for the nostalgic and yet unsentimental that has become a mainstay of the genre.

Happily the fresh pace of the late Sixties accelerated in the Seventies. The "pink" woman's issue of 1971 helped launch the now well-established *Exponent II*, published originally by Claudia Bushman *et al*, and carried on by Nancy Dredge and Grethe Peterson in Boston. In that issue Laurel Ulrich debuted as an essayist in a personal discussion on birth control; Christine Durham in an account of how she and her husband not only raised babies but also put each other through school. Lucybeth Rampton's Mother's Day speech qualifies as a fine personal document. Such essays as Almera Anderson Romney's prize winning account of life as a white teacher in a black school, "All Children are Alike Unto Me," joined Jaroldeen Edwards'

hymn to the earth mother, in "Full House":

I wake up in the morning to the sound of my husband's voice. But it is not really an awakening, rather it is a continuing. For night as we used to know it no longer comes to our home. There is a lull in activity, yes; but in the way of our youth, when night and sleep were a total experience that blocked the chain of days, a precious all-in-one piece of unconsciousness, an ending and a forgetting—in that sense night does not come. . . .

BYU Studies, *Exponent II*, *Sunstone*, the BYU Alumni paper *Today* and *Utah Holiday* have also made lasting contributions to the form. *BYU Studies* published Leonard Arrington's charming autobiographical essay. *Exponent II* has as its stated objective to publish small personal accounts of individual lives that might not otherwise see the light of day. As might be expected, they often discuss the problems of housewifery. Helen Candland Stark cries "When is Enough, Enough?":

Since I was the eldest of nine children, with no sisters until after four brothers, I naturally fell into the role of Mama's little helper. In addition, Mama had a legitimate escape hatch—she liked to work in the garden. So I manned, or rather, womanned the kitchen . . . Was there no end except bed? Something in me cried for some time of my own.

Ardith N. Walker asks "What's a Mother to Do?"

I've been jogging every morning for ten months, three weeks, and two days. I've had to fight off mad dogs, ignore jeering high school students, brave blinding snow storms, endure twelve degree weather. I've tripped through ankle deep chuck holes, inhaled stunning odors on garbage days, and worse of all, had to slog uphill the last half of the way . . . but I was convinced it was worth it. . . . Then yesterday an orthopedic surgeon told my husband there is nothing worse on feet and knees than jogging.

Emma Lou Thayne's personal tribute to tennis is more upbeat. She describes the thrill of playing in a tournament during which the adult she is merges with the girl she was. "It may stay as one of the real recognitions that only now and then is it allowed us—to see the gratuities of eternity—that growing older is the richest kind of blending, for it multiplies as it combines. On the court, in the heart, in the plan, the growing not old, but older is probably the only way of knowing how much right there is in the journey."

Today, in my opinion the best alumni newspaper, is fortunate in having some fine essayists on the BYU campus. Laura Wadley, assistant editor of *BYU Studies* contributes to the nostalgic, occasional form. She is good at making lists that stay in the mind. In the school's Centennial commemoration, she recounts its blessings: ". . . The short shaky climb up the stepladder to the telescope to see the moon suddenly sprung close. . . .

. . . The lazy lighthearted sunny afternoon class in Mark Twain in which the teacher can say Pap Finn was a real Adult Aaronic and be *perfectly* understood.

. . . Brigham Young standing silent at the upper edge of the campus. . . .

. . . The long rows of beguilingly bound books, of test tubes, or sewing

machines, typewriters, lathes, paintings and clay pots. The life of the mind, the skill of the hands, all that will take us from where we are to where we most earnestly desire to be. . . .

. . . and finally . . . one man coming to the Center of the darkness of the deep of the Marriott Center, the light gathering around him as he walks. He begins: "My beloved brothers and sisters. . . ."

Clifton Jolley's confessionals also appear in *Today*. He recounts his trips abroad, his former deceptions as an undergraduate, and most delightfully his opinions as a father. In "Food is important, but . . ." he claims to be profoundly concerned about pollution and the rapidly diminishing food supply, but he allows that he has a problem—actually, five problems: three girls and two boys.

You see, I am not particularly fond of children. As a matter of fact I am almost certain to loathe *your* children—wretched little creatures who are more likely to wipe their noses on my trousers' leg than thrill me with their sweetness. So if you were to suggest that *you* were planning to limit your family to one or two children, I would probably be enthusiastic. If, on the other hand you were to suggest that *I* limit the number of *my* children well . . . that's my problem.

He claims his own children as gifts, and his wife agrees:

You see the last baby was absolutely perfect . . . Oh, I know it's horrifying. The idea even horrifies me a little—all those orchards filling up. Los Angeles getting no nicer. But then again, there *is* Sarah. She'll eat rocks, and anyone who'll eat rocks can't be too much of a threat to the environment.

Utah Holiday is making a continuing contribution to the art of the comic essay, and its classic is "I remember Ernie," by Jaron Summers, former BYU newspaper editor. His portrait of the late Ernest Wilkinson is funny, and it will awaken memories in anyone who ever had his hand crunched by "Ernie." But it manages, too, to bring a lump to the throat, as the best comedy can do. Having described Ernie as a "Tasmanian Devil . . . a giant badger . . . a troll" he elaborates in his "compulsion to prove to BYU and the rest of the world that he was as stout as Jimmy Cagney and as rugged as John Wayne." He did this through his handshake. . . . "He was proud how he could out crunch thousands of the frosh and just to make sure no one forgot what he was doing, Ernie had someone standing by with a pocket counter." Years later, Summers writes, he returned to Utah where he saw Ernie coming toward him: He had been sick, and had lost weight; he looked weak. "Time had won." Jaron is touched as he takes "Wilkinson's hand softly in mine . . ." only to be surprised once more by the iron grip:

Instantly the fire blazed in his eyes. He clamped down on my five unsuspecting fingers; and I knew what it would be like to have my hand tangled in an electric flour mill. He gritted his teeth and chortled. . . .

And then he let up, and that awful pressure faded and he shuffled down the corridor to his meeting; and I think if I hadn't loved the old bugger so much I would have body-checked him through the nearest window, or tried to.

II

As an undergraduate at the University of Utah, I amused myself by writing feature articles for the *Utah Chronicle*. They covered such important topics as my phobias, advice on dating, pseudo surveys. One day, the father of one of my good friends, a writer on the *Salt Lake Tribune*, called me into his office. He had been reading my pieces and he wanted to offer a bit of useful advice from an old pro. It was "Never use the first person pronoun." My work was studded with "I's"! Why, there were three or four of them in one paragraph. Such egomania had no place in serious journalism.

I have never forgotten his advice and I have seldom obeyed it.

I am happy that the writers of the Mormon essay do not obey it either. I maintain that the *I's* are what distinguish the personal essay from other forms of literature and that all the best ones combine the best use of three *I's* (*I's*, *eyes*, *ayes*). Like any other pat structural analysis, this can be carried too far, but I like it, not only because I made it up myself, but because it allows me to discuss my personal favorites.

At first glance it seems that women writers use more first person pronouns than other writers do, but I have not documented this. I notice that my favorite among my own attempts, "Mr. Mustard Plaster," has seven *I's* in the first paragraph and that "Counseling the Brethren," by Laurel Ulrich, has three *I's* and several *me's*:

The scent of shaving lotion startled me. It was like finding a "No Trespassing" sign in some familiar patch of woods. I'd walked through that door a hundred times, would teach Sunday School in the same classroom an hour later, yet the spice in the air made me an adventuress.

"Hey, Sister Ulrich, this is a priesthood meeting," an elder teased from the end of the row as I sat down. His good humor made me feel more comfortable, but less exotic. He knew I'd been invited.

Using so many *I's* could mean an overpowering ego at work, or it could represent a refreshing willingness to share oneself. I submit that it is less egotistical in the traditional sense of the word to use the simple *I* than to assume a royal *we*. The *I* takes complete responsibility for its own failings and peccadillos—a nice change from the monumental style of many sermons and articles in our past and present. Nor are these *I's* afraid to make grandiose claims for themselves. Gene England, in what he tells me is his own favorite, begins this way:

The first time I participated in the "Hosanna Shout" I felt the presence of actual beings from another world joining us in that cry of praise and the following "Hosanna Anthem." That was in the Celestial Room of the Oakland Temple in 1964, following President David O. McKay's dedicatory prayer . . . And I do believe, strange as it perhaps seems for me—a skeptical, rationalistic, university-trained professor of English—to be saying this, that we were joined by spiritual beings—whether former prophets, angelic messengers or repentant sinners—who had similar reasons to our own to rejoice.

His description of the dedication of the Washington D.C. Temple is in a

personal style—some might claim too personal for publication, dropping names of good friends, almost as in a letter home.

Exponent II's editors have claimed that the non-threatening "throw-away" quality of their paper was meant to encourage women to emerge from their cocoons and, if not to fly away, at least to test their wings. Although I sometimes worry that the throw-away paper lacks the permanence researchers and future readers need, I continue to appreciate the diverse voices published there. Its coverage of the IWY conferences in various states illustrates the variety of *I's* attending. Rebecca Cornwall cries out: "I am not comforted by the reality that Mormon women were misinformed and manipulated by radical conservatives . . . I am disturbed that Mormon women were so easily manipulated. . . ." While Belva Ashton says, "As I read some of the negative news reports of the Utah IWY Conference, I could not believe they were reporting the same conference I was attending. I felt in general that it was great. . . ." "What woman isn't unique—one of a kind?" asks Diane McKinney, and the personal essays throughout *Exponent II* answer this question.

The *eye* is the ability of the writers to see more clearly than ordinary folk, to record what is seen in selective detail and to shape the record to support the other *I's*.

Edward Geary's *eye* is not bloodshot, though it occasionally holds a tear. Like a camera it records and preserves artifacts of our culture. The *eye* of his essays is truly conservative, conserving and generously preserving humor, characters and scenes from the past. "Goodbye to Poplarhaven," is the Geary *eye* at its clearest. "The town of my childhood, Huntington, Utah, is no older than my grandparents and contains nothing that is likely to outlast my grandchildren; yet from it has come whatever sense I have of human continuity." He compares the town to the Lombardy poplar tree which is "not a long-lived tree; its limbs are brittle and its soft wood subject to decay. This pattern of early growth and early decline held true for the town as well as its trees." His brief history of the town is wistful but realistic: "It was into this gradual and gentle decay that I was born, and I grew up in an old town. The people were old because the majority of each new generation left the valley and only a few, like my parents, remained out of nostalgia or hope, to have in their turn children who would grow up to move away."

In "Disorder and Early Joy," the reader shares Geary's finely tuned sense of humor as the *eye* sees that "to grow up in rural Utah is to inherit a tradition of unpainted outbuildings, tumbled-down fences and superannuated farm implements; a world held together by bailing-wire." He quotes a friend who maintains that a "true Utahan cannot be perfectly happy unless he has an old Buick rusting away in the pasture," or, from Geary's childhood, "an old Dodge with wooden spoked wheels, decaying gently under an apricot tree beside my grandfather's tool shed."

He describes his grandfather's entire stock of rusty tools and the other treasures that enriched his own fantasy life, and ends with his dream: "Some men cherish the secret dream of escaping to a South Sea Island teeming with brown-limbed maidens. . . . But I am looking for an old farmstead somewhere in a forgotten corner of Utah. The house isn't important, but I want a sway-backed barn that has never known a coat of paint . . . an apricot tree and a yellow transparent apple tree . . . a place whose inhabitants never

throw anything away that might come in handy some day."

Samuel Taylor and Wayne Carver are also able to transform their past with the magic wand of the fiction-writer, often using their gifts to turn essay into memoir. Carver's "A Child's Christmas in Utah," a Mormon version of the famous Dylan Thomas story, beautifully recreates the rural atmosphere of a Utah that is past. Taylor's "The Second Coming of Santa Claus: Christmas in a Polygamous Family" is only one of a whole collection of witty essays in which Taylor invokes a particular time and place in Mormon life. His voice is always true to the form, a voice easily recognizable, often endearing, a voice that truly speaks for his selective eye.

The eye of the Mormon essayist is nearly always looking upon the past, applying it to the present with sadness, yet with hope. Even in "Death of a Child," the unsentimental account of an unbearable experience, we are reminded that hopelessness is brief and does not endure.

Late that afternoon . . . he died. His spirit struggled to free itself from that wasted body, and he was free.

Oh, how empty was that room. I wrapped what was left of his little body tenderly in a blanket and held it close in my rocking chair as I had yearned so long to do. He could feel the pain no longer. And when at last I gave him up to the mortician, he received the body with tears on his cheeks.

That body had grown in four months from a child to a wasted old man. And his spirit had grown large enough to fill all our hearts and lives with faith and expectation until we meet again.

If tragedy can be described as ending, as permanent loss, then tragedy is foreign to most Mormon writers. As Maureen Ursenbach Beecher has put it, even in applying the term "martyrdom" to the murder of Joseph Smith is found the "doctrinal assurance that death was not a tragic end to this life but a glorious promise for the next."

Many eye-catching essays are written testimonies. Gene England bears his testimony when he describes the emotional significance of the Temple, as he applies consecrated oil to his car, or, when he launches a new magazine. In fact, most of the essayists I have mentioned bear their testimonies to life itself, its variety, its humor, its pain and to the many lessons it teaches.

Lowell Bennion's personal essays are not life transformed into art, or life transformed by art, as in the works of Jolley and Taylor; they are bits and pieces of himself, collected and presented for inspection. It can almost be said that his life and his work are one, all of a piece created out of whole cloth.

"Brother Bennion" has dedicated his professional and religious life to "carrying water on both shoulders," that is, to helping the student to reconcile the two worlds of university and church, the life of the mind and the life of the spirit. Bennion's students will recognize the voice in this paragraph:

. . . I look upon religion and secular thought as being complementary . . . as well as conflicting. . . I no longer seek to harmonize them . . . in the sense of expecting them to give me identical views of reality (as I once did). I reject, for example, those well meant efforts of people whom I respect, who try to make a biology or geology text out of

Genesis . . . or who read a theory of physics into D&C 93. For me, the scriptures declare the existence of God and his will and man's obligation to God and fellowman, and they leave me free to explore nature and human nature as I will.

Typically, Bennion declares the inalienable right to free agency in all of his works but accompanies it with a plea for humility: "Religionists have a tendency—based on their faith in revelation—to reduce God and His ways to man's ways of doing and perceiving things. . . . It is becoming to a man of faith to realize that his knowledge of God and His eternal truth is relative to the person's own capacity and experience," or "Our religion is bigger than any one man's conception of it."

Perhaps the best part of the aye-saying essay is its humor. Mormons, usually a jolly people, often seem afraid of humor in print. We may need to be reminded that in the personal essay the writers speak only for themselves, not for anyone else, certainly not for God. They are therefore free to laugh at themselves, and if they find no one else is laughing, that is the chance they must take.

I have already mentioned *Utah Holiday*. It makes a continuing contribution to humor in its regular features, most notably James Kimball's travel columns, and Richard Menzies' "Pure Mendacity," which takes wry jabs at Utah culture. For instance, in the "Swell Names Zones":

The need for new and different given names resulted from the practice of plural marriage. Since the progeny tended to share a common surname, it became necessary to invent ever more original first names. Otherwise, life in the provinces assumed a depressingly monotonous flavor—witness the case of Jens Jensen, born and buried in Jensen, Utah.

Most Mormon humor is gentle. It may be applied to institutions, but it usually pointed inward. I think of Clifton Jolley's descriptions of his children, Taylor's accounts of polygamous family life and Geary's regional portraits, like this brief one of Bert Westover who reputedly fought at San Juan Hill with Teddy Roosevelt:

Except for his own funeral, I don't ever remember seeing him inside the church house. However, he used to declare his intentions of moving away somewhere before the Millennium because his house would be the first place they hit coming over the hill from the cemetery and they'd eat him out of house and home.

Certain characteristic themes recur throughout all the personal essays: loss of old buildings and old towns; the difficulty of living one's religion creatively; the search for authenticity and wholeness; the need to mend fences, to preserve eccentricity. And through them all, there is the desire to reach out without striking out, a striving for the right word, the delicate balance.

Insights from the Outside: From a Commentator's Note Pad

CANDADAI SESHACHARI

AT THE SECOND ANNUAL MEETING of the Association for Mormon Letters, as at the first, two literary concerns seemed to have emerged. Not so surprisingly, at the bottom of both these issues was the question of the relationship between literature and dogma. Since dogma and Church fiat control much of what the faithful write, could Mormon letters, it was asked, break through the mold of teleological and eschatological givens to become a literature of significance outside its own confines?

The other concern questioned whether Mormon literature was, because of its "Mormonness," too exclusive in its subject matter and too facile in its world view to be meaningful to a non-Mormon audience. Would a Mormon literary work be intellectually, emotionally and aesthetically "accessible" to readers who do not relate to Mormonism? Even editors Richard Cracroft and Neal Lambert in their anthology, *A Believing People: Literature of the Latter-Day Saints*, seem to have these concerns in their mind when they say that "Mormons characteristically continue to see the world through a paradisiacal glass, brightly," and that essentially "Mormon writing is outside the mainstream of modern literary fashion."¹

In the first of these arguments, I fail to see how one could set aside—even sublimate—one's past, one's culture, in a sense, one's being, and compose a literary work that's the life blood of one's spirit, as Milton would have said. Indeed, why should one disregard one's teleolog-

ical or religious predilections? Would Milton be more Milton if he disregarded his strong, sometimes even perverse, theological convictions? Or is his theology the very bedrock of his literary genius? More fundamentally, could a writer neglect the very stuff of his being and yet somehow remain himself and whole? Perhaps this question of the relationship between dogma and literature was best answered by novelist V. S. Pritchett. In a letter to fellow novelist Graham Greene, he appropriately argued:

You point to the dangers of the religious groups who wish to impose a certain spiritual life; but there are the political groups too, the totalitarian, the socialist, the liberal, and also the huge jelly fish composed of deadly, transparent people who believe they belong to no group at all, which desire to impose upon the writer.²

Of course this imposition by a group is not just inevitable; it is the very condition of human existence. As inevitably, the Mormon writer brings his unique experience to probe and define the complexities of the human condition. It is through this singular experience that he asserts his individuality, indeed his humanity. This experience defines his being. If one takes away from him the memory of the martyrdom of Joseph Smith, the tragedy and the heroism of the exodus of his ancestors, as well as the everyday details that made Zion happen, it is like blotting out the story of Christ from a Christian's

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consciousness, or like rooting out the fact of slavery from the racial memory of the American black. Bereft of his "Mormonness" which saturates all levels of his conscious and unconscious mind, the Mormon writer is naught, unfit both as subject matter and creator of literary works. What Carl Becker said of the historian is even more apropos of the writer: "The historian and his concepts are part of the very process he would interpret . . . he is not outside history as the chemist is outside chemistry."³ The writer's subjectivity is what quickens his art.

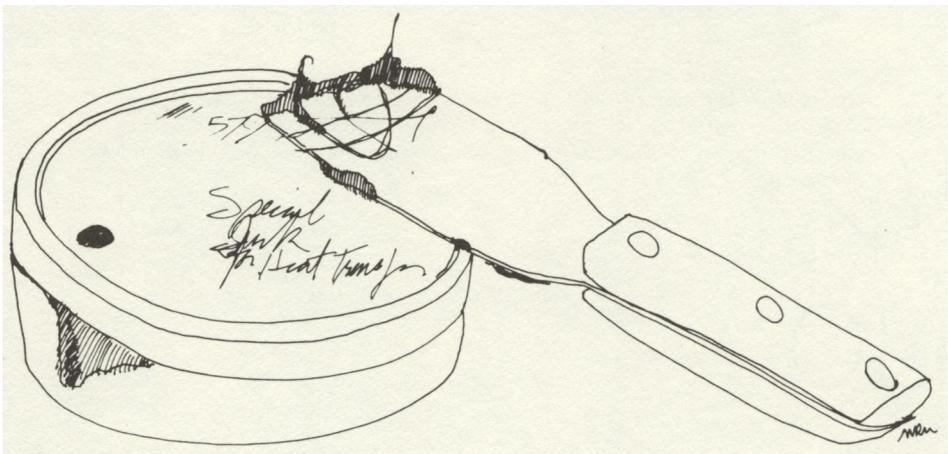
For the Mormon writer, the creative center of this subjectivity lies not so much in what he shares with the rest of mankind but in that unique Mormon experience which he shares with fellow Mormons. He does not however forsake the literary symbols and metaphors to which he is generally heir; to these he adds other symbols and metaphors from his own Mormon experience. To the problems of human existence he brings an affirmation of faith and vision which had lighted the path of his own ancestors.

If to every writer's credo there is a source of life-giving inspiration which sustains his art, then to the Mormon writer the wellsprings of his art lie in his dogma. All of this in no sense makes Mormon literature any more inaccessible to the readers than is John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* or Jonathan Edwards' "Sinners in the Hands of An Angry God" to the readers of our generation or, for that matter, Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* is to non-Indian readers or Yasunari Kawabata's *Snow Country* is to readers who have not enjoyed the fleshly companionship of a geisha. The subject matter of

all literature, in any age or clime, deals both with the universe in which we live and with the predicament and exaltation of human existence. Whether the characters have an unpronounceable Russian or an incomprehensible East Indian name, or whether the flora and fauna of the setting have anything in common with the native American genus or species is not of much consequence to a reader's imaginative involvement with a work of art. Ultimately all literature becomes vital at the imaginative level which, in turn, is essentially vicarious, but no less real.

Thus the Mormon writer, like any other artist, imparts to his works a sense of his own values or vision. The vision sometimes may be too simplistic or too complex, too dismal or too optimistic, but in no way can the writer separate the substance of his writing from the substance of his being, whether he be a Mormon or Hindu, a raving liberal or diehard radical. That is as it should be, for the reader can experience every kind of emotion and can recognize every kind of idea. But whether he will equally enjoy all works of art alike or subscribe to all ideas is a different argument altogether.

It is a truism that even though literary works give aesthetic pleasure and engender feelings of empathy, they do not necessarily create an identity of views in the readers. For instance, who would not be moved by the way Alma, the old man in Herbert Harker's recent novel *Turn Again Home*, meets his end, which he imploringly seeks, at the hands of Hickory Jack. Alma had wanted to see his own blood flow as an act of atonement for his part in the Mountain Meadows



massacre. The pain of living had been too much for him, but the irony of ironies was that Hickory Jack, in the act of helping Alma expiate his own sin, had shot Alma point-blank. "I forgot he wanted to see the blood," Hickory Jack intoned in recollecting the incident.⁴ An utter sense of waste pervades the ending of the novel. To revert to the question: how crucial is it to one's aesthetic enjoyment of the novel to be aware of the doctrine of blood atonement which some saints subscribed to in the agonizing days of the early persecution of Mormons?

In the foregoing discussion I have not dealt with the general quality of Mormon literature nor the achievements of its significant writers. The literary merit of a work is independent of whether it falls within the realm of Mormon literature or some other literary classification. A work must be able to stand scrutiny in terms of well recognized canons of criticism. A Mormon writer's inherent right to his subject matter is no passport for him to be judged differently—or indifferently. In this context of a critic's prerogatives the participants at this second annual symposium have discussed their several topics. Their right is the right of the critic, but they can in no way impinge upon the prerogatives of the writer.

At this point, I can do no better than narrate an incident which Booker T. Washington mentions in his famous Atlanta exposition address. A ship which had lost its bearings at sea, on sighting a

friendly vessel, signaled: "Water, water; we die of thirst!" And the other ship replied, "Cast down your bucket where you are." A second, third and fourth plea for water was similarly answered. The captain of the distressed vessel, finally heeding the injunction, let down his bucket to come up with fresh thirst-quenching water from the Amazon.⁵ Likewise, the Mormon writer should cast down his bucket into the life-giving waters of his own culture and into the stream of his own inner self. He can do no less; to do otherwise would be to betray himself and his craft.

NOTES

¹ Richard Cracroft and Neal Lambert, "Introduction," *A Believing People: Literature of the Latter-Day Saints* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1974), p. 5.

² V. S. Prichett, *Why Do I Write* (London: Percival Marshall, 1948), p. 34.

³ Carl Becker, *Detachment and the Writing of History: Essays and Letters of Carl Becker* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1958), p. 21.

⁴ Herbert Harker, *Turn Again Home* (New York: Random House, 1977), p. 244.

⁵ Booker T. Washington, "Atlanta Exposition Address," *The Rhetoric of Black Americans*, eds. James Golden and Richard Rieke (Columbus, Ohio: Charles Merrill Publishing Co., 1971), p. 113.

For whether the man of religion likes it or not he needs and uses the resources of art to arrive at, to define, and to communicate his deepest insights. And whether the artist likes it or not his deepest insights ring with religious overtones.

—MARDEN CLARK
Vol. I, No. 4, p. 83

GUEST ARTIST

Marilyn R Miller

Marilyn R Miller, a native of Idaho, served a mission in Hong Kong and the Philippines and now lives in Salt Lake City. She received her MFA from Brigham Young University and has mounted one-woman shows at BYU, at the Utah Artist's Guild in Salt Lake City and at the Salt Lake Art Center.

At the request of the Association for Mormon Letters, she made the print for the cover and the illustrations that appear throughout this issue. Her pen and ink work also includes landscape and figure drawing as shown here. Her illustrations have appeared in *Sunstone* and *The Friend* magazines.

Artists who would like their work considered for use in Dialogue may submit samples and ideas. Dialogue does not pay for art but will feature guest artists whenever work is provided especially for the magazine.



STEVEN GOLDSBERRY

A Study of Oranges

It might never happen, I say.

The wind might rise
on the lake and then every
image would be broken,
scattered into itself.

Two boys stand on the bridge,
tossing oranges into the water,
watching the long cones
of the splashes.

It is winter.
Into this snowy landscape
the oranges seem to carry
their own light—the definitive
shapes of incursion, sharp
solitude made real.

Sometimes I pretend I am the wind
and begin shouting.

The last orange drops
perfectly. Its reflection
sails up toward the swift eclipse
of the splash.

A Trapper Dreams of Silver Deer

The ridge is crusted with blue snow.
Evening descends, learning its way
to the river, the slow deep core of winter.

It is seven miles into the mountains,
past anything he might have recognized:
the turns in the wind

or the first shadow of the moon.
Under the snow the trapper stirs
in his blankets, his body vaguely aware

that the cold is turning darker.
In a longer journey, through a night
as tall as the wind, he finds

the last curve of transparent light.
The hawk pulls down the stars
and screams the night home.

AMONG THE MORMONS

A Survey of Current Literature

STEPHEN W. STATHIS

"OF MAKING OF BOOKS there is no end." These words from Ecclesiastes could as well be applied to the more than thirty thousand doctoral dissertations and an even larger number of master's theses completed in the United States in 1977. The tendency toward irrelevance and triviality sometimes evident in the "dissertation-mill" has been frequently commented upon in recent years. In the 16th Century, Erasmus made a similar observation:

I must acquire the absurd title of 'Doctor.' It will not make me a hair the better, but as times go no man can be counted learned unless he is styled 'Doctor.' If the world is to believe in me, I must put on the lion's skin. I have to fight with monsters and I must wear the dress of Hercules.

Although the scholarship in this survey of Mormon-related works seeks to avoid these pitfalls, it is inevitable that not all of it will endure, that most of these titles will fade into footnotes. But, taken together, they denote the growing concern of American scholars with every aspect of Mormon life and doctrine, past and present, and they underscore the continuing vitality of Mormon studies.

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NOTES AND COMMENTS

Zeal Without Knowledge

HUGH W. NIBLEY

The positive response generated by publication of Nibley's "Bird Island" (Dialogue X, No. 4) encouraged us to offer additional popular Nibley samizdat. Nibliophiles will be delighted to learn that events have overtaken us in this plan, and a volume of classic Nibley essays now has been published by BYU's Religious Studies Center. This collection, which begins with a new "intellectual autobiography" and ends with a comprehensive bibliography, includes such popular essays as "Educating the Saints," "Beyond Politics" and "Subduing the Earth,"— as well as "Zeal Without Knowledge," the Nibley classic reprinted here with the permission of the Religious Studies Center.*

IN ONE OF HIS FASCINATING scientific survey books, this time dealing with the latest discoveries about the brain, Nigel Calder notes, "Two of the most self-evident characteristics of the conscious mind are that 1) the mind attends to one thing at a time, and 2) that at least once a day the conscious mind is switched off."¹ Both of these operations are completely miraculous and completely mysterious. I would like to talk about the first of them. You can think of only *one* thing at a time!

If you put on a pair of glasses, one lens being green, the other being red, you will not see a grey fusion of the two when you look about you, but a flashing of red and green. One moment everything will be green, another moment everything will be red. Or you may think you are enjoying a combination of themes as you listen to a Bach fugue, with equal awareness of every voice at a time, but you are actually jumping between recognition first of one and then another. The ear, like the eye, is, in the words of N. S. Sutherland, "always flickering about . . . the brain adds together a great

* *Volume One in the Religious Monograph Series* is Nibley on the Timely and the Timeless (Salt Lake City: Publishers Press, 1978), 323 pp., \$7.50. A limited number of first editions are available to Dialogue readers at a 10% discount if they order directly from the Religious Studies Center, 165, JSB, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah 84602.

variety of impressions at high speed, and from these we select features from what we see and make a rapid succession of 'models' of the world in our minds."² Out of what begins as what William James calls the "great blooming, buzzing confusion" of the infant's world, we structure our own meaningful combination of impressions, and all our lives select out of the vast number of impressions certain ones which fit best into that structure. As Neisser says, "The *model* is what we see and nothing else."³ We hold thousands of instantaneous impressions in suspension just long enough to make our choices and drop those we don't want. As one expert puts it: "There seems to be a kind of filter inside the head which weakens unwanted signals without blocking them out. Out of the background of the mind constantly signals deliberate choices."⁴ *Why* the mind chooses to focus on one object to the exclusion of all others remains a mystery.⁵ But one thing is clear: the blocked-out signals are the unwanted ones, and the ones we favor are our "deliberate choices."

This puts us in the position of the fairy-tale hero who is introduced into a cave of incredible treasures and permitted to choose from the heap whatever gem he wants—but only one. What a delightful situation! I can think of anything I want to—absolutely anything! With this provision, that when I choose to focus my attention on one object, all other objects drop into the background. I am only permitted to think of one thing at a time, that is one rule of the game.

An equally important rule is that I must keep thinking! Except for the daily shut-off period I cannot evade the test. "L'ame pense toujours," says Malebranche: We are always thinking of *something*, selecting what will fit into the world we are making for ourselves. Schopenhauer was right: "Die Welt ist meine Vorstellung." And here is an aside I can't resist: What would it be like if I could view and focus on two or more things at once, if I could see at one and the same moment not only what is right before me, but equally well what is on my left side, my right side, what is above me and below me? I have the moral certainty that something is there and as my eyes flicker about, I think I can substantiate that impression. But as to taking a calm and deliberate look at more than one thing at a time, that is a gift denied us at present. I cannot imagine what such a view of the world would be like, but it would be *more* real and correct than the one we have now. I bring up this obvious point because it is by virtue of this one-dimensional view of things that we magisterially pass judgment on God. The smart atheist and pious schoolman alike can tell us all about God—what he can do and what he cannot, what he must be like and what he cannot be like—on the basis of their one-dimensional experience of reality. Today the astronomers are harping on the old favorite theme of the eighteenth-century encyclopedists who, upon discovering the universe to be considerably larger than they thought or had been taught, immediately announced that man was a very minor creature indeed, would have to renounce any special claim to divine favor, since there are much bigger worlds than ours for God to be concerned about, and in the end give up his intimate and private God altogether. This jaunty iconoclasm rested on the assumption that God is subject to the same mental limitations that we are; that if he is thinking of Peter, he can hardly be thinking of Paul at the same time, let alone marking the fall of the sparrow. But once we can see the possibilities that lie in being

able to see more than one thing at a time, (and in theory the experts tell us there is no reason why we should not) the universe takes on new dimensions and God takes over again. Let us remember that quite peculiar to the genius of Mormonism is the doctrine of a God who could preoccupy himself with countless numbers of things: "The heavens they are many, and they cannot be numbered unto man; but they are numbered unto me, for they are mine." (Moses 1:37.)

Plainly, we are dealing with two orders of minds. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are . . . my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55:8-9.)

But why this crippling limitation on our thoughts if we are God's children? It is precisely this limitation which is the essence of our mortal existence. If every choice I make expresses a preference; if the world I build up is the world I really love and want, then with every choice I am judging myself, proclaiming all the day long to God, angels and my fellowmen where my real values lie, where my treasure is, the things to which I give supreme importance. Hence, in this life every moment provides a perfect and fool-proof test of your real character, making this life a time of testing and probation. And hence the agonizing cry of the prophet Mormon speaking to our generation. ("I speak unto you as if ye were present, and yet ye are not. But behold, Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing" [Mormon 8:35].) He calls upon us, "Be wise in the days of your probation . . . ask not, that ye may consume it on your lusts" (Mormon 9:28); i.e., that you may use up or consume your probation time just having a good time or doing what you feel like doing—nothing could be more terrible than that: "But *woe* unto him . . . that *wasteth* the days of his probation, for *awful* is his state!" (2 Nephi 9:27. Italics added.) It is throwing our life away, to think of the wrong things, as we are told in the next verse that "the cunning plan of the evil one" is to get us to do just that; trying, in Brigham Young's phrase, to "decoy our thoughts," to get our minds on trivial thoughts, on the things of this world against which we have so often been warned.

Sin is waste. It is doing one thing when you should be doing other and better things for which you have the capacity. Hence, there are no innocent idle thoughts. That is why even the righteous must repent, constantly and progressively, since all fall short of their capacity and calling. "Probably 99 percent of human ability has been wholly wasted," writes Arthur Clarke, "even today we operate . . . most of our time as automatic machines, and glimpse the profounder resources of our minds only once or twice in a lifetime."⁶ "No nation can afford to divert its most able men into such essentially noncreative and occasionally parasitic occupations as law, advertising, and banking."⁷ Those officials whom Moroni chides because they "sit upon [their] thrones in a state of thoughtless stupor" (Alma 60:7) were not deliberately or maliciously harming anyone—but they were committing grave sin. Why do people feel guilty about TV? What is wrong with it? Just this—that it shuts out all the wonderful things of which the mind is capable, leaving it drugged in a state of thoughtless stupor. For the same reason a mediocre school or teacher is a *bad* school or teacher. Last week it was announced in the papers that a large convention concerned with violence and disorder in our schools came to the unanimous conclusion—students

and teachers alike—that the main cause of the mischief was *boredom*. Underperformance, the job that does not challenge you, can make you sick: work which puts repetition and routine in the place of real work begets a sense of guilt; merely doodling and noodling in committees can give you ulcers, skin rashes, and heart trouble. God is not pleased with us for merely sitting in meetings: “How vain and trifling have been our spirits, our conferences, our councils, our meetings, our private as well as public conversations,” wrote the Prophet Joseph from Liberty Jail, “—too low, too mean, too vulgar, too condescending for the dignified characters called and chosen of God.”⁸

This puts a serious face on things. If we try to evade the responsibility of directing our minds to the highest possible object, if we try to settle for a milder program at lower stakes and safer risks, we are immediately slapped and buffeted by a power that will not let us rest. Being here, we must play the probation game, and we pay an awful forfeit for every effort to evade it. We must think—but what about? The substance of thought is knowledge. “The human brain depends for its normal alertness, reliability and efficiency on a continuous flow of information about the world . . . the brain craves for information as the body craves for food.”⁹ “Both individuals and societies can become insane without sufficient stimulus.”¹⁰ If the mind is denied functioning to capacity, it will take terrible revenge. The penalty we pay for starving our minds is a phenomenon that is only too conspicuous at the BYU: Aristotle pointed out long ago that a shortage of knowledge is an intolerable state and so the mind will do anything to escape it; in particular, it will invent knowledge if it has to. Experimenters have found that “lack of information quickly breeds insecurity in a situation where any information is regarded as better than none.”¹¹ In that atmosphere, false information flourishes and subjects in tests are “eager to listen to and believe any sort of preposterous nonsense.”¹² Why so? We repeat, because the very nature of man requires him to use his mind to capacity. “The mind or intelligence which man possesses,” says Joseph Smith, “is coequal with God himself.” What greater crime than the minimizing of such capacity? The Prophet continues: “All the minds and spirits that God ever sent into the world are susceptible of enlargement. God himself, finding he was in the midst of the spirits and glory, because he was more intelligent, saw proper to institute laws whereby the rest could have a privilege to advance like himself. The relationship we have with God places us in a situation to *advance in knowledge*.”¹³ *Expansion* is the theme, and we cannot expand the boundaries unless we first reach those boundaries, which means exerting ourselves to the absolute limit.

Now we come to a subject with which the Prophet Joseph was greatly concerned. To keep the Saints always reaching for the highest and best, the utmost of their capacity, requires enormous motivation—and the gospel supplies it. Nothing can excite men to action like the contemplation of the eternities. The quality in which the Saints have always excelled is zeal. Zeal is the engine that drives the whole vehicle; without it we would get nowhere. But without clutch, throttle, brakes, and steering wheel, our mighty engine becomes an instrument of destruction, and the more powerful the motor, the more disastrous the inevitable crack-up if the proper knowledge is lacking. There is a natural tendency to let the mighty motor carry us along,

to give it its head, open up and see what it can do. We see this in our society today. Scientists tell us that the advancement of a civilization depends on two things: a) the amount of energy at its disposal, and b) the amount of information at its disposal.¹⁴ Today we have unlimited energy—nuclear power, but we still lack the necessary information to control and utilize it. We have the zeal but not the knowledge, so to speak. And this the Prophet Joseph considered a very dangerous situation in the Church. Speaking to the new Relief Society, he “commended them for their *zeal*, but said that sometimes their zeal was not according to *knowledge*.”¹⁵ He advised restraint in an effort to keep things under control. The Society, he observed, “was growing too fast. It should grow up by degrees,” he said, and “. . . thus have a select society of the virtuous, and those who would walk circumspectly.”¹⁶ What good is the power, he asks, without real intelligence and solid knowledge? He gives the example of those Saints who were carried away at the thought and prospect of “a glorious manifestation from God.” And bids them ask, “a manifestation of what? Is there any intelligence communicated? . . . All the intelligence that can be obtained from them when they arise, is a shout of ‘glory,’ or ‘hallelujah,’ or some incoherent expression; but they have had the ‘power.’”¹⁷ Another time he warned the sisters against being “subject to overmuch zeal, which must ever prove *dangerous*, and cause them to be rigid in a religious capacity.”¹⁸ Zeal makes us loyal and unflinching, but God wants more than that. In the same breath, the Prophet said that the people “were depending on the Prophet, hence were darkened in their minds, in consequence of neglecting the duties devolving upon *themselves*.”¹⁹ They must do their own thinking and discipline their minds. If not, that will happen again which happened in Kirtland: “Many, having a zeal not according to knowledge,” said the Prophet, “. . . have, no doubt, in the heat of enthusiasm, taught and said many things which are derogatory to the genuine character and principles of the Church.”²⁰ Specifically, “soon after the Gospel was established in Kirtland . . . many false spirits were introduced, many strange visions were seen, and wild, enthusiastic notions were entertained . . . many ridiculous things were entered into, calculated to bring disgrace upon the Church of God.”²¹ This was the time when some of the brethren in Kirtland were out to prove that they were smarter than the Prophet and produced the so-called “Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar,” to match *his* production of the Book of Abraham.

This illustrates another point—that knowledge can be heady stuff. It easily leads to an excess of zeal—to illusions of grandeur and a desire to impress others and achieve eminence. The university is nothing more or less than a place to show off: if it ceased to be that, it would cease to exist. Again, the Prophet Joseph is right on target when he tells us that true knowledge can never serve that end. Knowledge is individual, he observes, and if a person has it, “who would know it? . . . The greatest, the best, and the most useful gifts would be known nothing about by an observer. . . . There are only two gifts that could be made visible—the gift of tongues and the gift of prophecy.”²²

Our search for knowledge should be ceaseless, which means that it is open-ended, never resting on laurels, degrees, or past achievements. “If we get puffed up by thinking that we have much knowledge, we are apt to get a contentious spirit,” and what is the cure? “Correct knowledge is necessary

to cast out that spirit."²³ The cure for inadequate knowledge is "ever more light and knowledge." But who is going to listen patiently to correct knowledge if he thinks he has the answers already? "There are a great many wise men and women too in our midst who are too wise to be taught; therefore they must die in their ignorance."²⁴ "I have tried for a number of years to get the minds of the Saints prepared to receive the things of God; but we frequently see some of them . . . [that] will fly to piéces like glass as soon as anything comes that is contrary to their traditions: they cannot stand the fire at all. . . ."²⁵ [If I] go into an investigation into anything, that is not contained in the Bible . . . I think there are so many over-wise men here, that they would cry 'treason' and put me to death."²⁶ But, he asks, "why be so certain that you comprehend the things of God, when all things with you are so uncertain?"²⁷ True knowledge never shuts the door on more knowledge, but zeal often does. One thinks of the dictum: "We are not seeking for truth at the BYU; we have the truth!" So did Adam and Abraham have the truth, far greater and more truth than what we have, and yet the particular genius of each was that he was constantly "seeking for *greater* light and knowledge."

The young, with their limited knowledge are particularly susceptible to excessive zeal. Why do it the hard way, they ask, when God has given us the answer book? The answer to that is, because if you use the answer book for your Latin or your math, or anything else, you will always have a false sense of power and never learn the real thing. "The people expect to see some wonderful manifestation, some great display of power," says Joseph Smith, "or some extraordinary miracle performed; and it is often the case that *young* members of this Church, for want of better information, carry along with them their old notions of things, and sometimes fall into egregious errors."²⁸ "Be careful about sending boys to preach the Gospel to the world," said Joseph Smith. Why? Certainly not because they lacked zeal, that's the one thing they had. The Prophet explains: "Lest they become puffed up, and fall under condemnation . . . beware of pride . . . apply yourselves diligently to *study*, that your *minds* may be stored with all necessary *information*."²⁹ That is doing it the hard way. Can't the Spirit hurry things up? No—there is no place for the cram course or quickie, or above all the superficial survey course or quick trips to the Holy Land, where the gospel is concerned. "We consider that God has created man with a mind capable of instruction, and a faculty which may be enlarged in proportion to the heed and diligence given to the light communicated from heaven to the *intellect* . . . but . . . no man ever arrived in a moment: he must have been instructed . . . by *proper degrees*."³⁰ "The things of God are of deep import; and time, and experience, and careful and ponderous and solemn thoughts . . . stretch as high as the utmost heavens."³¹ No short-cuts or easy lessons here! Note well that the Prophet makes no distinction between things of the spirit and things of the intellect.

Some years ago, when it was pointed out that BYU graduates were the lowest in the nation in all categories of the graduate record examination, the institution characteristically met the challenge by abolishing the examination. It was done on the grounds that the test did not sufficiently measure our unique "spirituality." We talked extensively about "the education of the whole man," and deplored that educational imbalance that comes when

students' heads are merely stuffed with facts—as if there was any danger of that here! But actually, serious imbalance is impossible if one plays the game honestly: true zeal feeds on knowledge, true knowledge cannot exist without zeal. Both are “spiritual” qualities. All knowledge is the gospel, but there must be a priority, “proper degrees,” as he says, in the timing and emphasis of our learning, lest like the doctors of the Jews, we “strain at a gnat and swallow a camel.” Furthermore, since one person does not receive revelation for another, if we would exchange or convey knowledge, we must be willing to have our knowledge *tested*. The gifted and zealous Mr. Olney was “disfellowshipped, because he would not have his writings *tested* by the word of God,” according to Joseph Smith.³²

Not infrequently, Latter-day Saints tell me that they have translated a text or interpreted an artifact, or been led to an archaeological discovery as a direct answer to prayer, and that for me to question or test the results is to question the reality of revelation; and often I am asked to approve a theory or “discovery” which I find unconvincing, because it has been the means of bringing people to the Church. Such practitioners are asking me to take their zeal as an adequate substitute for knowledge, but like Brother Olney, they refuse to have their knowledge tested. True, “it needs revelation to assist us, and give us knowledge of the things of God,”³³ but only the hard worker can expect such assistance: “It is not wisdom that we should have all knowledge at once presented before us; but that we should have little at a time; then we can comprehend it.”³⁴ We must know what we are doing, understand the problem, live with it, lay a proper foundation—how many a Latter-day Saint has told me that he can understand the scriptures by pure revelation and does not need to toil at Greek or Hebrew as the Prophet and the Brethren did in the School of the Prophets at Kirtland and Nauvoo? Even Oliver Cowdery fell into that trap and was rebuked for it. (D&C 9.) “The principle of knowledge is the principle of salvation. This principle can be comprehended by the faithful and diligent,” says the Prophet Joseph.³⁵

New converts often get the idea that, having accepted the gospel, they have arrived at adequate knowledge. Others say that to have a testimony is to have everything—they have sought and found the kingdom of heaven; but their minds go right on working just the same, and if they don't keep on getting new and testable knowledge, they will assuredly embrace those “wild, enthusiastic notions” of the new converts in Kirtland. Note what a different procedure Joseph Smith prescribes: “[The] first Comforter or Holy Ghost has no other effect than pure intelligence [it is not a hot, emotional surge]. It is more powerful in expanding the mind, enlightening the understanding, and storing the intellect with present knowledge, of a man who is of the literal seed of Abraham, than one who is a Gentile.”³⁶ “For as the Holy Ghost falls upon one of the literal seed of Abraham, it is calm and serene; and his whole soul and body are only exercised by the pure spirit of intelligence.”³⁷ “The Spirit of Revelation is in connection with these blessings. A person may profit by noticing the first intimation of the spirit of revelation; for instance, when you feel pure intelligence flowing into you, it may give you sudden strokes of ideas . . . thus, by learning the Spirit of God and understanding it, you may grow into the principle of revelation.”³⁸ This is remarkably like the new therapeutic discipline called “biofeedback.”

The emphasis is all on the continuous, conscientious, honest acquisition of knowledge. This admonition to sobriety and diligence goes along with the Prophet's outspoken recommendation of the Jews and their peculiar esteem and diligence for things of the mind. "If there is anything calculated to interest the mind of the Saints, to awaken in them the finest sensibilities, and arouse them to enterprise and exertion, surely it is the great and precious promises to . . . Abraham and . . . Judah . . . and inasmuch as you feel interested for the covenant people of the Lord, the God of their fathers shall bless you. . . . He will endow you with power, wisdom, might and intelligence, and every qualification necessary: while your minds will expand wider and wider, until you can . . . contemplate the mighty acts of Jehovah in all their variety and glory."³⁹ In Israel today, they have great contests in which young people and old from all parts of the world display their knowledge of scripture and skill at music, science, or mathematics, etc., in gruelling competitions. This sort of thing tends to breed a race of insufferably arrogant, conceited little show-offs—and magnificent performers. They tend to be like the Jews of old, who "sought for things that they could not understand," ever "looking beyond the mark," and hence falling on their faces: "they needs must fall." (Jacob 4:14.) Yet Joseph Smith commends their intellectual efforts as a corrective to the Latter-day Saints, who lean too far in the other direction, giving their young people and old awards for zeal alone, zeal without knowledge—for sitting in endless meetings, for dedicated conformity, and unlimited capacity for suffering boredom. We think it more commendable to get up at 5:00 A.M. to write a bad book than to get up at nine o'clock to write a good one—that is pure zeal that tends to breed a race of insufferable, self-righteous prigs and barren minds. One has only to consider the present outpouring of "inspirational" books in the Church which bring little new in the way of knowledge: truisms, and platitudes, kitsch, and clichés have become our everyday diet. The Prophet would never settle for that. "I advise you to go on to perfection and search deeper and deeper into the mysteries of Godliness. . . . It has always been my province to dig up hidden mysteries, *new things*, for my hearers."⁴⁰ It actually happens at the BYU, and that not rarely, that students come to a teacher, usually at the beginning of a term, with the sincere request that he refrain from teaching them anything new. They have no desire, they explain, to hear what they do not know already! I cannot imagine that happening at any other school, but maybe it does. Unless we go on to other new things, we are stifling our powers.

In our limited time here, what are we going to think about? That is the all-important question. We've been assured that it is not too early to start thinking about things of the eternities. In fact, Latter-day Saints should be taking rapid strides toward setting up that eternal celestial order which the Church must embody to be acceptable to God. Also, we are repeatedly instructed regarding things we should *not* think about. I would pass this negative thing by lightly, but the scriptures are explicit, outspoken, and emphatic in this matter; and whenever anyone begins to talk about serious matters at the BYU, inevitably someone says, "I would like to spend my time thinking about such things and studying them, but I cannot afford the luxury. I have to think about the really important business of life, which is making a living." This is the withering effect of the intimidating challenge

thrown out to all of us from childhood: “Do you have any money?” With its absolute declaration of policy and principle: “You can have anything in this world for money!” and its paralyzing corollary: “Without it, you can have *nothing!*” I do not have to tell you where that philosophy came from. Somebody is out to “decoy our minds,” to use Brigham Young’s expression, from the things we should be thinking about to those which we should not care about at all.

The most oft-repeated command in the scriptures, repeated verbatim in the Synoptic Gospels, the Book of Mormon, and in the Doctrine and Covenants⁴¹ is “Take ye no thought for the morrow, for what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, or wherewithal ye shall be clothed. For consider the lilies of the field” We cannot go here into the long catalog of scripture of commandments telling us to seek for knowledge in one direction but not in another. “Seek *not* for riches, but for wisdom”; “lay *not* up treasures on earth,” but in heaven, for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. You *cannot* serve two masters, you must choose one and follow him alone: “Whatsoever is in the world is *not* of the Father but is of the world,” etc. We take comfort in certain parables; for example, “Which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost” (Luke 14:28ff. Italics added), as if they justified our present course. But the Lord is not instructing people to take economic foresight in such matters—they already do that: “Which of you does *not*?” says the Lord. He points out that people are only too alert and provident where the things of *this* world are concerned and says, to their shame: “If you’re so zealous in such matters, why can’t you take your eternal future seriously?” And so he ends the parable with this admonition: “Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.” That is the *same* advice, you will observe, that he gave to the rich young man. The Lord really means what he says when he commands us *not* to think about these things; and because we have chosen to find this advice hopelessly impractical “for our times” (note that the rich young man found it just as impractical for *his* times!), the treasures of knowledge have been withheld from us. “God [has] often sealed up the heavens,” said Joseph Smith, “because of covetousness in the *Church*.”⁴² You must choose between one route or the other. If we go on “lusting after the grovelling things of this life,” says Brigham Young, we remain “fixed with a very limited amount of knowledge, like a door upon its hinges, moving to and fro from year to year without any visible advancement or improvement. . . . Man is made in the image of God, but what do we know of Him or of ourselves when we suffer ourselves to love and worship the God of this world—riches?” “I desire to see everybody on the track of improvement . . . but when you so love your property as though all your affections were placed on the changing, fading things of earth, it is impossible to increase in knowledge of the truth.”⁴³

What things should we think about then, and how? Here the Prophet is very helpful. In the first place, that question itself is what we should think about. We won’t get very far on our way until we have faced up to it. But as soon as we start seriously thinking about that, we find ourselves covered with confusion, overwhelmed by our feelings of guilt and inadequacy—in other words, repenting for our past delinquency. In this condition, we call upon the Lord for aid and he hears us. We begin to know what the Prophet

Joseph meant about the constant searching, steadily storing our minds with knowledge and information—the more we get of it, the better we are able to judge the proper priorities as we feel our way forward, as we become increasingly alert to the promptings of the Spirit which become ever more clear and more frequent, following the guidance of the Holy Ghost: and as we go forward, we learn to cope with the hostile world with which our way is sure to bring us into collision in time. That calls for sacrifice, but what of that? Eternal life is not cheaply bought.

This may sound very impractical to some, but how often do we have to be reminded of the illusory and immoral nature of the treasures we are seeking on earth? Even without the vast powers of destruction that are hanging over our heads at this moment, even in the most peaceful and secure of worlds, we would see them vanishing before our eyes. Such phenomena as ephemeralization and replication, once dreams of the science-fiction writers, are rapidly becoming realities. Speaking of the ephemeralization, of technological obsolescence, A. R. Clark writes, "Within the foreseeable future all the most powerful and lucrative callings in our world will exist no more. Because of new processes of synthesizing, organizing, programming basic materials of unlimited supply into the necessities of life, we shall soon see the end of all factories and perhaps of all transportation of raw materials and all farming. The entire structure of industry and commerce . . . would cease to exist . . . all material possessions would be literally as cheap as dirt. . . . Then when material objects are intrinsically worthless, perhaps only then will a real sense of values arise."⁴⁴

Yes, you say, but meantime "we must live in the world of the present." Must we? Most people in the past have got along without the institutions which we think, for the moment, indispensable. And we are expressly commanded to get out of that business. "No one supposes for one moment," says Brigham Young, "that in heaven the angels are speculating, that they are building railroads and factories, taking advantage of one another, gathering up the substance in heaven to aggrandize themselves, and that they live on the same principle that we are in the habit of doing. . . . No sectarian Christian in the world believes this; they believe that the inhabitants of heaven live as a family, that their faith, interests, and pursuits have one end in view—the glory of God and their own salvation, that they may receive more and more. . . . We all believe this, and suppose we go to work and imitate them as far as we can."⁴⁵ It is not too soon to begin right now. What are the things of the eternities that we should consider even now? They are the things that no one ever tires of doing, things in themselves lovely and desirable. Surprisingly, the things of the eternities are the very things to which the university is supposed to be dedicated. In the Zion of God, in the celestial and eternal order, where there is no death there will be no morticians, where there is no sickness there will be no more doctors, where there is no decay there will be no dentists, where there is no litigation there will be no lawyers, where there is no buying and selling there will be no merchants, where there is no insecurity there will be no insurance, where there is no money there will be no banks, where there is no crime there will be no jails, no police, where there are no excess goods there will be no advertising, no wars, no armies, and so on and so on.

But this happy condition is not limited to celestial realms of the future;

it actually has been achieved by mortal men on this earth a number of times, and represents the only state of society of which God approves. All the things that are passing away today are the very essence of “the economy,” but they will be missing in Zion. They are already obsolescent, every one of them is made work of a temporary and artificial nature for which an artificial demand must be created. Moreover, few people are really dedicated to them, for as soon as a man has acquired a super-quota of power and gain, he cuts out and leaves the scene of his triumphs, getting as far away as he can from the ugly world he has helped create—preferably to Tahiti. The race has shown us often its capacity to do without these things we now find indispensable. “The Devil has the mastery of the earth: he has corrupted it, and has corrupted the children of men. He has led them in evil until they are almost entirely ruined, and are so far from God that they neither know Him nor his influence, and have almost lost sight of everything that pertains to eternity. This darkness is more prevalent, more dense, among the people of Christendom than it is among the heathen. They have lost sight of all that is great and glorious—of all principles that pertain to life eternal.”⁴⁶ “Suppose that our Father in heaven, our elder brother, the risen Redeemer, the Savior of the world, or any of the Gods of eternity should act upon this principle, to love truth, knowledge, and wisdom, because they are all-powerful,” says Brigham Young, “they would cease to be Gods; . . . the extension of their kingdom would cease, and their God-head come to an end.”⁴⁷

Are we here to seek knowledge or to seek the credits that will get us ahead in the world? One of the glorious benefits and promises of the gospel given the Saints in these latter days is that “inasmuch as they *sought* wisdom they might be instructed; And inasmuch as they were humble they might be made strong, and blessed from on high, and receive *knowledge* from time to time.” (D&C 1:26, 28. Italics added.) But they had to want it and seek for it. What is that state of things? The late President Joseph Fielding Smith wrote: “We are informed that many important things are withheld from us because of the hardness of our hearts and the unwillingness as members of the Church to abide in the covenants and seek divine knowledge.”⁴⁸ “Our faculties are enlarged,” said Joseph Smith, “in proportion to the heed and diligence given to the light communicated from heaven to the intellect.” “If [a man] does not get knowledge, he will be brought into captivity by some evil power in the other world, as evil spirits will have more knowledge, and consequently more power than many men who are on the earth. [We need] revelation to assist us, and give us knowledge of the things of God.”⁴⁹ There is indeed an order of priority. The things of God come first, and the seeker ever tries to become aware of that priority. “All science,” says Karl Popper, “is eschatology,” concerned fundamentally with the questions of religion. The most important question of all is that of our eternal salvation.

I once acted as counselor to students in the College of Commerce for a couple of years. Most of these students were unhappy about going into business and admitted that Satan rules this earth and rules it badly, with blood and horror, but they pointed out the intimidating circumstance that you cannot have money without playing his game because he owns the treasures of the earth. They could see he owns them as loot, and by virtue of a legal fiction with which he has, in Joseph Smith’s terms, “riveted the

creeds of the fathers," but still the students would ask me in despair, "If we leave his employ, what will become of us?" The answer is simple. Don't you trust the Lord? If you do, he will give you the guidance of the Holy Spirit and you will not end up doing the things that he has expressly commanded us not to do.

May God help us all in the days of our probation to seek the knowledge he wants us to seek.

NOTES

- ¹ Nigel Calder, *The Mind of Man* (London: BBC, 1970), p. 25.
- ² *Ibid.*, p. 169. ³ *Loc. cit.*
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 29. ⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 29, 184.
- ⁶ Arthur Clarke, *Profiles of the Future* (N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1962), p. 197.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 96. ⁸ *DHC*, 3:295f.
- ⁹ Calder, p. 33. ¹⁰ Clarke, p. 83.
- ¹¹ Lyall Watson, *Supernature* (N.Y.: Anchor Press, 1973), p. 239.
- ¹² Calder, p. 77.
- ¹³ Joseph Fielding Smith, comp., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1967), p. 354. Italics added. Hereafter cited as *TPJS*.
- ¹⁴ Carl Sagan, *The Cosmic Connection* (N.Y.: Dell, 1973), Ch. 34.
- ¹⁵ *TPJS*, p. 201. Italics added. ¹⁶ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁷ *TPJS*, p. 204. ¹⁸ *TPJS*, p. 238. Italics added.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.* Italics added. ²⁰ *TPJS*, p. 80.
- ²¹ *TPJS*, pp. 213, 214. ²² *TPJS*, p. 246.
- ²³ *TPJS*, p. 287. ²⁴ *TPJS*, p. 309.
- ²⁵ *TPJS*, p. 331. ²⁶ *TPJS*, p. 348.
- ²⁷ *TPJS*, p. 320. ²⁸ *TPJS*, p. 242. Italics added.
- ²⁹ *TPJS*, p. 43. Italics added. ³⁰ *TPJS*, p. 51. Italics added.
- ³¹ *TPJS*, p. 137. ³² *TPJS*, p. 215. Italics added.
- ³³ *TPJS*, p. 217. ³⁴ *TPJS*, p. 297.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.* ³⁶ *TPJS*, p. 149.
- ³⁷ *TPJS*, pp. 149, 150. ³⁸ *TPJS*, p. 151.
- ³⁹ *TPJS*, p. 163. ⁴⁰ *TPJS*, p. 364. Italics added.
- ⁴¹ Matthew 6:25ff, Mark 13:11ff, Luke 12:11ff, 3 Nephi 13:25ff, D&C 84:81ff.
- ⁴² *TPJS*, p. 9. Italics added.
- ⁴³ Brigham Young in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1855-86), 7:337. Hereafter cited as *JD*.
- ⁴⁴ Clarke, p. 16. ⁴⁵ *JD* 17:117f.
- ⁴⁶ *JD* 8:209. ⁴⁷ *JD* 1:117.
- ⁴⁸ Joseph Fielding Smith, *Answers to Gospel Questions*, Melchizedek Priesthood Manual, 1972-1973, p. 229.
- ⁴⁹ *TPJS*, p. 217.

The Tables Turned: An Exercise in Consciousness- Raising

The following manuscript was sent to Dialogue by Maude Hat of Hat Creek, California. Driving down to Oakland one morning, Miss Hat gave a lift to an elderly woman. After she had dropped off her passenger in Oakland, she noticed a manilla envelope lying on the car seat. It had no name or address to identify its owner. Miss Hat sent Dialogue the manuscript because "it seemed the logical thing to do."

(Our play is set in a conventional classroom. It is the first day of the semester. Three students are seated, awaiting their teacher. The two women, Young and Fielding, are dressed somewhat more casually than their lone male classmate, Bell, who is neatly turned out in a tie and jacket, though some might fault his trousers for being a bit tight. Enter Smith, with a stack of books and papers. She goes to the podium.)

Smith: Good morning, good morning, students! Now, this is Humanities 13, the course titled "A Comparative Approach to the Major Figures of the Literature, Language, and Composition of the Western World." 2 hours credit. If anyone is in the wrong classroom, she can leave now while the getting's good. Okay? Everyone in the right pew? Well, now, those good sisters that run the huge computer system over there have gotten our rolls to us very quickly this semester, so I'll just call the names I've got down here and see who we have. Ummm. . . . Phyllis McConkie Young the Third?

Young: Here. Oh, by the way, Professor Smith—my mother asked me to convey her regards to you. Mildred McConkie?

Smith: Oh, yes, yes! Mildred and I served our missions together! A great woman, Mildred. She's a real spiritual giant. The whole mission field looked up to her, but especially those little gentlemen missionaries, if you know what I mean! (Smith, Young, and Fielding laugh knowingly.) Ummm . . . Fielding? Karen Kimball Fielding the Fourth?

Fielding: Here.

Smith: Karen Kimball Fielding . . . hmmm . . . is your mother Karen Kimball Fielding the Third?

Fielding: Yes, that's right. She mentioned to me that you and she had gone to graduate school together. She asked me to say hello.

Smith: Well, I should say! She and I just about ran the Las Palmas Stake together for about ten years. When we moved, they divided the stake and made three stakes where one had been—it took that many women to do what we had been doing. Well, be sure to give her my warmest best wishes. Now let's see here: Bell? Lawrence, uh, I can't make out this second name—Kar—?

Bell: KarDonna. My father's name is Karl and my mother's name is Donna.

Smith: Well, isn't that cute! Lawrence KarDonna Bell. Now, do most people call you Larry? Or Lare?

Bell: (*Not too happy with any of the diminutives, but passive.*) Oh, well, whatever you want. Larry, I guess—that's okay. . . .

Smith: All right, good. Now I'm going to hand out these course outlines here. We're going to be concentrating on the major British and American figures in literature and language, for the most part, but we *will* look at some major contributions from the continent—Simone de Beauvoir, of course, and Georges Sand, and a few others. Now we have a rough chronological pattern, as you see—Anne Bradstreet, Phyllis Wheatley, Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, of course Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton; then quite a bit of time with Emily Dickenson, naturally. The great novelists—Jane Austen, George Eliot, Willa Cather, Virginia Woolf, Doris Lessing . . . (*Raises his hand tentatively.*) Yes, Larry?

Bell: Umm, well, maybe I'm being picky. . . . (*His voice fades.*)

Smith: Oh, no, no, that's all right. Speak up. What is it?

Bell: Well, I just wondered. How come . . . I mean . . . why are all the writers women?

Smith: *Women? Are they?* (*Looks at sheet.*) Why, I hadn't noticed. Now, I'm sure I had a poem here by . . . yes, here it is . . . a poem by John Whatshisname Whittier. And I think we have a short story by Poe somewhere along the line, too.

Bell: But they *are* all women except for those two. . . .

Smith: Well, I didn't even *notice* that! You know, Larry, when I select the readings for a course, I never ask if the writer is a man or a woman; I just pick the best material. For example, who could I give up here on this short story section? Eudora Welty? Flannery O'Connor? Katherine Mansfield? Carson McCullers? Katherine Anne Porter? I'm sorry, Larry, but these are the major figures in the short story genre, and I can't justify leaving any of them out just to include some writer merely because he's a man. But I'll tell

you what! If you want to do your book report on a man writer, or on *several* men writers, that would be just fine. You could report on a book by, oh, umm, well, Louis L'Amour or Jack London, or, anybody. How would that be?

Bell: Well, I guess that would be okay . . . thanks. . . .

Smith: Now, in order to help me get some idea of what focus we should use in the class, I'd like each of you to tell me a little about why you're taking the class. Phyllis?

Young: Well, my advisers told me that analytic skills and psychological insight are really important in the study of law and international diplomacy, which I plan to go into. Also, familiarity with the great classic writers, like Austen and Eliot, and so forth, is necessary if one is to be accepted as a civilized woman, at least in Europe and South America, where I plan to be working a good deal.

Smith: Very true, Phyllis, very true. I've certainly found that to be true in *my* travels. Both on my mission and during my trip to Europe for the Church last year, I found people very eager to share views on what is happening in the arts. Now, Karen, what about you?

Fielding: Well, my advisers stressed the career advantages too, of course, and also pointed out that experience in a good writing course is important for women who will be leaders in the Church someday—that writing is crucial for the manuals and filmstrips and speeches and articles that the Church needs from us—they said that the women at BYU today will have to be running the Church tomorrow.

Smith: I couldn't agree more. Any member who doesn't get all the background she can in writing will regret it. And now, Larry, what about you?

Bell: Well . . . I kind of had a hard time getting *in* this class, to be honest. I mean, the advisers tried to steer me away from it. They suggested I take a course in Advanced Skills in Taking Out Garbage. But I've already had Beginning Garbage Skills, and Intermediate, and even a seminar, kind of a practicum. I know how to carry garbage up from the basement, and how to take it out the back door *and* the front door; how to use the plastic bags, and how to decide between metal garbage cans and plastic cans; and how to make the cans secure against dogs . . . I really don't think I *need*. . . .

Smith: Well, Larry, you know it's always important for a man to know about these important male responsibilities, no matter what else he does. I don't know where I'd be if my husband wasn't just the handiest little fellow with a garbage can. I mean, that just takes a man's touch. But tell me, Larry, why did the advisers try to

discourage you from taking *this* class?

Bell: Well . . . they said I'd probably just get married before I could use any of the stuff I'd learn. . . . (*Young and Fielding snicker knowingly.*)

Smith: Well, of course that may be true. I'm sure a nice-looking boy like you doesn't plan to remain a bachelor! But I don't agree that what you learn would be wasted. Fathers need to know all they can, you realize, so they can teach their children. And of course, if you ever need to give a lesson in your priesthood class, or at a P.T.A. meeting, you'll be very grateful for this background. No, we're very glad to have you here, Larry. Now, in addition to these readings and our regular class lectures and discussion, we will be having some guest speakers from the college come in and talk to us in their areas of specialization. We'll be hearing from Dr. Linda Martin, Dr. Mildred Southerland, Brother Ron Snow, and Dick Craig. Of course, you know Dr. Martin is an expert in comparative literature, and particularly the novel—I'm sure you've heard some of her lectures in this genre already; and Dr. Southerland is one of the great experts in French phonology—this week she is consulting back at Harvard, giving them some help in their language seminars. And of course you all know Ron Snow—he is always a barrel of laughs and you won't want to miss him . . . Dick Craig is a wonderful person, husband of Ann Craig, the violinist, the father of eight daughters—I admire him so much, I just don't know how he does it all! Well, let's move on to a discussion of our term projects, which are to be substantial papers on some thematic or philosophic insight. (*Young raises her hand.*) Yes, Phyllis?

Young: Well, I heard that we had a term paper to do, so I've been thinking a little about it. I wonder if it would be all right to do an eschatological analysis of Simone de Beauvoir's success-avoidance theme, especially as it relates to the work of Diane de Poitiers and Eleanor of Aquitaine, oh, and of course, Maria de Medici?

Smith: That sounds good. You'll need to focus in tightly and build some solid bibliography in French, Latin and English, of course.

Young: Of course. In fact, I've actually started to get some sources together.

Smith: (*As Fielding raises her hand.*) Yes, Karen?

Fielding: I thought I'd like to look at some archetypal analogues for Hrosthwitha of Gandershine's fifth canonical psalm collection, tying it in with Elizabeth of Saxony's middle period. Has that been overdone, do you think?

Smith: No, no; I'm sure you'd bring something fresh to it. Now Larry, have you any ideas?

- Bell:** No, actually . . . I hadn't heard that there was a paper. . . .
- Smith:** Well, look, since you're interested in men writers, if you like, you can do a study of the contributions of men to the art of the novel in the 18th and 19th centuries. You could even include some of the men writing in the 20th century, if you sort out those who are merely political apologists, of course.
- Bell:** Let's see: Contributions of male writers to the art of the novel in the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries. Was that it?
- Smith:** Yes. I think that sounds splendid. And if you have any trouble getting materials in our Library here, we can use Inter-Library Loan facilities with Berkeley—they have large holdings in the works of male writers, I know.
Now another thing. I think you people in the program need to get to know each other, and learn about each other's accomplishments. When one of you has a success, I think we should all know about this student's achievement and congratulate her, maybe have her share her insights with us. For example, I have some clippings here—one tells about Phyllis's work this past summer as a congressional intern to U.S. Congresswoman Barbara Jordan. Our congratulations, Phyllis. And here's a notice that Karen has just received a prize for the best undergraduate paper submitted to *Signs: A Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. We're very proud of you, Karen. That's the kind of work we expect from you people. Oh, yes . . . ummm . . . I noticed here in Mildred Whats-her-name's column in the Provo Herald that Larry won first prize in the Boise-Cascade "Make It Yourself with Plywood" Contest. That's just *great*, Larry!
- Bell:** Well, along other lines, I also have had three poems accepted for publication in the *Sewanee Review*.
- Smith:** You DID? In the *Sewanee Review*? My goodness, what will you boys do next, I wonder? Well, you women had better be on your toes, I can see that. (*Nodding to Young and Fielding*.) But you know, Larry, I'm almost prouder of your "Make It With Plywood" prize. I believe in equality—no one more. But there is one thing about all this equal rights business that I do object to: I don't like to see boys acting like women. I don't know; it just cheapens them, somehow. I like to keep fellows on a little bit of a pedestal. And remember, you have a role no one else can fill, being supportive to others and doing the cheering for the winners *and* the losers. Wasn't it Kingsley who said, "Be sweet, young man, and let who will be clever." Well, now, one or two more details. This week, the political assembly cuts an hour from our time, so we'll need to meet another day. What about Friday at 2?
- Young:** Well, I have a tennis match in Salt Lake that day, and. . . .

Smith: Oh, well, that's important; we don't want to interfere with that. What about Thursday?

Fielding: I'm a referee at the Thursday matches. . . .

Smith: Oh, well, we can't interfere with the conference play-offs. I guess we'll have to settle on Wednesday.

Bell: Professor Smith, my brother's going into the hospital that day, and I need to take care of his children.

Smith: Well, Larry, we all have to establish our priorities. It's your decision. Now a final matter. There is a Katherine Anne Porter conference in San Francisco the week of the 18th. Phyllis is president of the campus chapter of the Student's Literary Association, and so her way is being paid to the conference, but there is room for one more. (*Larry raises his hand. Fielding does not.*) Oh, let's see, that presents a problem. Larry, I'm afraid we are not allowed to send a woman and a boy alone together in a university car. . . .

Bell: Well, my parents live in San Francisco. I could drive to the conference myself.

Smith: Ummm, no, you see, we can't allow boys to travel *by themselves*, either. It is a nuisance, isn't it? Well, Phyllis, I guess you'll just have to go by yourself this time. Larry, I'm sure some fellows from other classes will be going down to Snow College for the Edgar Guest Festival, and we'll try to work you in on that. Okay, I guess that does it for today. Everyone should have all her textbooks by next class meeting, and should have done some more thinking on her term paper. (*Young and Fielding rise and go off slowly, talking.*) Oh, Larry, could I see you a minute?. . . Larry, I want to commend you on your coat and tie, and your appearance generally. But there is just one thing. Your trousers. Now, I'm sure a sweet boy like you has no idea what goes through a woman's mind when she sees boys in pants that tight. But just take my word for it. If you'll just let your pants out a little, then we'll all be more comfortable, and no one will think you're the wrong kind of boy. All right? (*Bell exits, somewhat puzzled, Young comes up to him, putting an arm casually around his waist.*)

Young: Hey, Larry, if you run into any trouble in this course, I'd be glad to help you out, if you want. In fact, I could come over to your apartment this Sunday for dinner, and then maybe we could study a little afterwards. And, umm, maybe I could bring along a few of my blouses, so's you could give them a once-over with the iron while we're studying. How does that sound?

Bell: Oh, wow! I don't know why I'm so lucky!

Young: Oh, by the way: do you type?

EXIT

Senator Edward W. Brooke at BYU

“A few heads turned on campus,” noted the BYU Daily Universe recently, “as a familiar figure—President Oaks—strolled through Wilkinson Center with . . . the nation’s only black senator, Edward Brooke, who came to speak at a Forum assembly, to tell BYU students of living conditions in South Africa and to bridge a gap between his race and the Mormons.” Senator Brooke has provided Dialogue with the text of his remarks, delivered January 12, 1978, from which these concluding remarks have been extracted.

WE IN THIS GREAT FIELDHOUSE can and should be united in our hope that a sense of justice and of equity for all peoples can come to characterize the situation in South Africa. Yet, I fully recognize that there are special circumstances that perhaps would create an obstacle in the minds of many in this fieldhouse regarding a sense of mission for bringing about equal rights for all South Africans. You and I know that the relationship between black Americans and Mormons in general is not all that it could or should be. This is distressing to me personally, for I find that the two groups have much in common. Black Americans and Mormons have a common heritage of persecution at various points in their history in this country. Black Americans have been told, as was Joseph Smith by Martin Van Buren, that “Your cause is just, but I can do nothing for you.” We know what these words meant to Mormons, and I fervently hope that Mormons understand what words similar to these have meant to us.

There is also a great similarity in the depth of spiritual sensitivity shown by both groups. Black Americans and the Mormons have sought solace, comfort and strength from their spiritual and ancestral roots. Both groups have been sustained in times of adversity by their seeking to know the will of God and to carry it out. And both groups have found in their religious moorings the guides to social and political action.

Yet, even though these affinities exist, we know that Black Americans and Mormons have only begun the process of understanding that can result in greater empathy for each other. And realistically, we must admit that the road ahead for the two groups will be long and, at times, a rough one.

In the microcosm, one can say that we have some similar paths to tread, as do the whites and blacks of South Africa. Fortunately, we live in a society, and both groups have contributed to making it a society where political freedom and social equality are goals that are generally agreed upon, if not at all times honored. Thus the environment within which a continuing reconciliation between Black Americans and the Mormons can take place is much more conducive to that process than is the case in South Africa.

It would be presumptuous and inappropriate for me to insist that the

practices of the Mormon Church be altered to fit my preferences. That is a decision for you and your church leaders to make by the well-accepted principles through which change has been initiated in your church. Yet, it is important to understand that this obstacle to better understanding, to greater appreciation of the decent qualities of both groups, places a special burden upon you and me. For the temptation is great to let this obstacle be the justification for alienation or indifference between the two groups. It should not be. Only if we overcome that temptation and actively seek to join hands in causes in which both groups find merit, will we come to understand and appreciate each other more.

One such cause, I believe, is that of opposition to the practice of apartheid in South Africa. That system of discrimination is anathema to all we hold dear as Americans. It is contrary to the belief we hold in common today of the brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of God. It is wrong in both concept and design. It lacks an ethical or moral base. And all Americans, regardless of race or religious persuasion, should be united in opposition to that practice in that country, or similar practices in any country or even in our own country.

I have tried to be candid today in my discussion of Africa, especially the situation in South Africa, and the special relevance it has for us in attendance today. I have done so not to be controversial, but out of a belief that there are times for simple, straightforward talk and this is one of those times.

It has been my privilege over the years of my political life to be associated with many members of your faith in good causes. I have come to love and respect men and women such as George and Lenore Romney, Wallace Bennett, Jake Garn, Orrin Hatch and Frank Moss, with whom I have been so engaged. And, in developing that love and respect, I have come to wish fervently for a closer association between the Mormons and my people. I hope and pray that what I have said here today will be conducive to helping bring that about. We have so much to offer each other and by the will of God, we will overcome whatever obstacles are in our way to doing this. At this annual time of new resolve, the establishing and strengthening of the bonds of brotherhood between us is an undertaking worthy of our constant attention and effort. Thank you.

He that wrestles with us strengthens our nerves and sharpens our skill.
Our antagonist is our helper.

-EDMUND BURKE

BOOK REVIEWS

Exploring the Mormon Past

DONALD R. MOORMAN

Guide to Mormon Diaries and Autobiographies edited by Davis Bitton. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1977, xi, 406 pp., index. \$29.95

Mormons have always had a passion for recording the experiences that shaped their lives—their dreams, ideals, intentions and conceptions of themselves. The sheer volume of their diaries, journals and other records stagger the imagination. Nothing so certifies this phenomenon than Davis Bitton's monumental collection, the product of more than a decade of hard work and tenacity. Taking the citations in their entirety, scholars can view the broad panorama of Mormon society—how money and power, along with a variety of religious, economic and historical influences entered the lives of pioneers and shaped their character as well as their assumptions about their world. From the writings of ordinary people, as well as from the exalted, the volume records their candid reactions to the many problems that haunted their existence. The result leaves a picture of a humane, gentle, hard-working and very opinionated Mormon population—a portrayal that goes a long way toward destroying the provincial, narrow-minded and puritanical image that lived in the minds of nineteenth-century enemies of the Saints. When contemplated together, the diaries and journals have the same fascination as a well-ordered history held together by the thread of the pioneer's common experience. Good witnesses to the crippled dreams and frustrations of the hard-scrabble life and to the haunting solitude indigenous to the wide-open frontier of the Great Basin are to be found in profusion among the nearly three hundred

sources in this *Guide*.

For those who spend a greater part of their productive years in the gloom of dusty archives, this volume is a breath of air. As most scholars realize, history is the gradual accumulation of assorted glimpses, each unimportant in itself, but collectively contributing to a written portrait. It is easier to skim off the most important and the readily accessible materials, usually papers of outstanding national figures or religious figures of regional importance. In Utah, the ruling hierarchy, along with those who enjoyed their close association and confidence, have received more than their fair share of attention while the unheralded many have generally been ignored. It is in this light that one must carefully look at Dr. Bitton's compilation.

Conscious of the increasing interest in all aspects of history, Dr. Bitton, assistant to the Mormon Church Historian and Professor of History at the University of Utah, has published this new study to encourage further research in the life and times of the Latter-day Saints. The editor has spared no pains in covering available materials in the local archives and has relied heavily on published lists in libraries outside Utah. Generally, he employs a rigorous and substantial scholarly apparatus to ensure accuracy in content and execution. Proofreading is uniformly careful, and the *Guide* is well-organized and clearly written, though many entries might be criticized for their brevity.

It seems carping then to find fault with Professor Bitton's work, yet minor irritants do deserve attention. Biographical entries are sometimes incomplete. This useful book is marred by a less than comprehensive index; the author omits

important place names and specific references to neighboring states. Having personally watched the progress of this work, this reviewer must note that the brief credits in the forward do not give deserved recognition to those who labored in gathering, writing and arranging the *Guide*. Even a token *et al* would be preferred to the passing manner in which they are recognized. Although the print

is clear and pleasing in size, the binding is so weak that one wonders about its longevity under heavy use.

This book is a collector's item, however, in spite of its awkward format (8½ inches wide by 11¼ inches) and its thirty-dollar price tag. All students of Mormon history will find themselves constantly referring to this useful volume.

A Clash of Interests

RICHARD A. BARTLETT

A Clash of Interests: Interior Department and the Mountain West 1863-96 by Thomas G. Alexander. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1977, xii, 256 pp., appendix, bibliography, index. \$11.95

This excellent, provocative study breaks new ground in probing the history of the Intermountain West. It had its inception when Professor Alexander noticed the widespread dissatisfaction of the residents of the far western Territories with the Federal government. Why, he asked, did they grumble when that government clearly spent more money in the Territories than it took from them? Expanding his investigation, he had to answer still other questions: For what functions did Congress appropriate funds, and why? For what activities did Westerners want Federal funds appropriated? How well were policies planned and how well were they implemented?

For his study the author chose Utah, Idaho and Arizona Territories. They were geographically similar and their histories fitted into a relatively similar chronology. Arizona and Idaho Territories were created in 1863; Idaho achieved statehood in 1890 and Utah in 1896. Moreover, Idaho and Arizona would balance any tendency away from the norm due to Utah's Mormon population and

its conflicts with the Federal government.

In three parts, cut into nine chapters, Alexander analyzes these relations. Particular attention is paid to land policy as carried out under the General Land Office and Indian matters under the Bureau of Indian Affairs. He rightly identifies the Washington policy makers and probes their rationales. The Secretaries of Interior are given ample attention, but Alexander finds that for much of the period the real source of power was the Appropriations Committee of the House of Representatives. There the opponent of Western needs was ultraconservative, narrow-minded William S. Holman of Indiana.

Conclusions from this penetrating study are enlightening. Canards about the corruption of Indian agents, accusations about frauds in land acquisition, and widely believed premises about western attitudes toward land and Indians are exposed as totally inaccurate or, at the most, half-truths.

For almost the first time a competent western historian has written a book that defends Westerners from these widely disseminated accusations. The blame for so much wrong is placed squarely in the lap of Congress and the Eastern establishment. John Wesley Powell, that patron saint of western bureaucrats and certain well-known writers about the

American West, is also exposed for his arrogant Big Brotherism. Finally, the reasons for the troubles are described: thoughtless parsimony, pupilage, the ideological construct of men in power who possessed a Midwestern view of how things should be done in the arid West where water, not land, was the key to development; cultural imperialism that harassed the Mormons and tried to make sobbusters of Indians.

In our own age of excessive government expenditures, it is hard to believe the stinginess of the Congress of the 1870's and 1880's. Yet parsimony was rampant, and Alexander makes it clear that economy took precedence over effectiveness. He finds one Territorial governor who had to remove his telephone for lack of funds, contractors who raised their bids by 20% because payment was so slow in coming, and starving Indians breaking out of one reservation while Indians at another reservation had too much food.

Sometimes the problems involved

poor communications. Federal funds often were dispersed from New York or San Francisco, and beef contracts for Indians were opened in New York City. Given the communications of those years, a breakdown was inevitable.

Alexander is a thoughtful, provocative, competent historian. He is full of suggestions and new ideas. Who else ever has thought of comparing the 100th meridian demarcation line with the Proclamation Line of 1763? His essay on the Industrial Christian Home Association, funded by Congress for female refugees from polygamy, is fascinating reading. His linkage of the Dawes Severalty Act with the Edmunds-Tucker Act creates a new, wider view of American bigotry and anti-pluralism in the two decades before 1900.

Let us hope that Dr. Alexander will continue his research and in the process will prepare the long overdue defense of the much maligned citizens of the arid West in the late 19th century.

Mormonism and Labor

JOHN S. MCCORMICK

Deseret's Sons of Toil, A History of the Worker Movements of Territorial Utah, 1852-1896 by J. Kenneth Davies. Salt Lake City: Olympus Publishing Co., 1977, 264 pp. \$9.95

J. Kenneth Davies, a long-time student of Utah labor history, has been interested in the relationship between the labor movement in Utah and the Mormon Church. *Deseret's Sons of Toil* is intended to be a detailed study of that relationship during the half century before Utah became a state. The first book published on Utah labor history, it calls attention to an important and neglected subject, provides a useful sketch of the early Utah labor movement, raises some

important issues and brings together a number of valuable facts. As a whole, however, the book is disappointing. It is badly organized, repetitious and awkwardly written. The level of analysis and discussion throughout is superficial, and much of the content is trivial.

Davies opens the book with a discussion of current Mormon attitudes toward labor. From his previous studies, he has concluded that Mormons as a body have developed a philosophy of labor with strong anti-union overtones, and that the more active a church member is, the more likely he is to be opposed to unions. On the other hand, most Mormons feel that unions and Christianity are basically compatible, and many Mormons

belong to unions. The roots of these attitudes, Davies believes, are to be found in the last half of the nineteenth century.

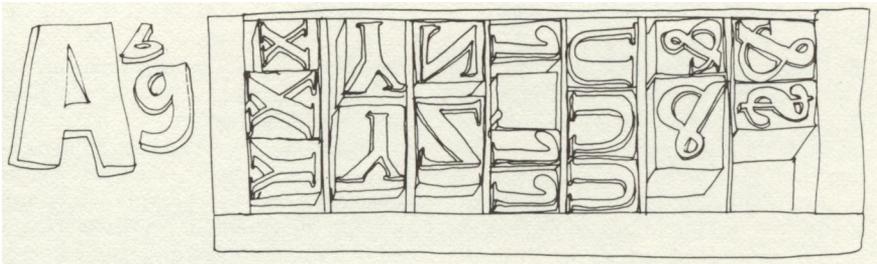
Having had predecessors in Nauvoo, worker organizations evolved early in Utah. By 1861, fifty crafts were organized and until the late 1860's had the encouragement and even the sponsorship of the authorities of the Mormon Church, including Brigham Young. They were controlled by active Mormons, and some of them were open only to Mormons. In the late 1860's and early 1870's, the situation began to change. Over the next two decades, the membership and leadership of unions became increasingly non-Mormon, the labor movement became more and more independent of the Mormon church, and the church became increasingly hostile to unions. By the time Utah became a state in 1896, the labor movement was as secularized as the state's economic and political life. A variety of factors were responsible, the most important of which was a heavy influx of non-Mormon workers into Utah after 1869, particularly in the railroad and mining industries; the cooperative movement of the Mormon church, which drew off many Mormons from union activity; the opposition of Mormons to the closed shop as a denial of the principle of free agency; the anti-union philosophy of church leaders, who tended to be employers; and the predisposition of many Mormons to accept the views of church leaders on all questions, social, economic and political, as well as religious.

Davies provides a useful outline of early Utah labor history and in doing so raises some interesting points. The prob-

lem, however, is that in the course of the book, the outline is barely filled in, and the issues raised are not pursued. He says, for example, that the Church itself, and church leaders, had the psychology of employers and were thus bound to come into conflict with their Mormon and non-Mormon employees; that there long existed among the Mormons a distrust of gentiles and apostates; that Mormon union-members found it increasingly difficult to reconcile the demands of their church and their union. These ideas, and others, are not discussed or analyzed, however. They are merely noted. Their full implications and the way in which they worked out in practice are consequently not shown.

Davies says too little about important points. At the same time, he says too much about things of little importance. The impression is that the author was determined to tell his readers everything he knew about the early Utah labor movement whether it was significant or not.

The result of saying both too much and too little is that, at the end, fundamental questions have gone unanswered. Why were unions in Utah organized in the first place? What did they stand for and what did they seek to achieve? How were their philosophies implemented? What kind of people joined unions? Were they native-born or foreign-born? Skilled or unskilled? What response, other than increasing hostility from Mormon authorities, did unions meet? What impact did they have? What, if anything, did they accomplish? These questions, central to an understanding of unionism in Utah, are largely unexamined.



A Tractable Tract

LAVINA FIELDING ANDERSON

Elders and Sisters by Gladys Clark Farmer. Provo, Utah: Seagull Books, 1977. \$2.95

Writing a book of short stories/sketches about a group of missionaries in France is picking a hard door to knock on—missionary work is surrounded with ideals, taboos, and nostalgia—but Gladys Clark Farmer makes it swing open. As a former French missionary myself, I wallowed shamelessly in the details—the affectionate appellation “Sis,” halfway between nickname and endearment, the French put-offs at the doors (“*ca ne m’interesse pas*”) that became part of our dreams, the warming of hands and stomachs with roasted chestnuts wrapped in newspaper cones, and purchased on street-corners, the panicky triumphs of trying to sight-read enough of the first line to tell which hymn we were looking at.

This book portrays in realistic and warm terms those universal “missionary experiences” that happened to our parents and will happen to our children: the “golden” family too deeply “Christian” to change, the woman who has actually read the Articles of Faith card and wants to ask intelligent questions, the hesitant contact who is transformed by an answer to prayer, the inactive woman who, in one of Farmer’s felicitous phrases, “couldn’t resist the ardent though lustless wooing of a pair of handsome elders who with holy water would make her clean again. But somehow rebirth didn’t bring back youth.”

The emphasis is not on the investigators and members, though, but on the “elders and sisters” of the title. The first story, “Beneath the Surface” contains a telling vignette in which the hardest-working (and runner-up for dowdiest)

sister in the mission meets her brand-new green companion:

She looked even more striking close up—high heeled shoes, a very light, easily wrinkled dress with colors guaranteed to turn the head of every man between here and the branch meetinghouse. Made up just right. *She’ll make a terrible missionary*, thought Sister Allen.

Hello, she could hear herself saying, *I’m Sue Allen, your dumpy, sensible senior companion for the next sixty years. You must be Sister Palmer, my beauty queen junior fresh from the States. You don’t speak a word of French, and you’ll be no help to me at all. Oh, forgive me, she prayed, suddenly feeling very wicked. I must try to be kind.*

Naturally there’s a happy ending—companionship emerges that is more than friendship. Mercifully for those of us who were dreading a glib reconciliation, it’s believable. It develops from shared blisters: Sister Palmer mothers Sister Allen through an illness, the green sister gives a discussion with only the moral support of two greener elders; they are led to Sister Durant, a sick member who needs them and needs the healing the elders bring. But the emotional and spiritual high that unites them is balanced by realism: there is a miracle, but it does not touch Sister Durant’s drunken husband. As the sisters ride away, they hear shouting and breaking glass behind them. More than joy, that shared grief is the bond.

The other situations ring equally true: there is the enthusiastic greenie, Elder Harper, who “had never been more ready in his life. He had waited nineteen

years for this moment. He had talked about going on a mission as long as he could remember, had gone with his dad to open a missionary savings account the day after he was ordained to the Aaronic Priesthood. His older brother Dave had just returned from Brazil with 130 baptisms to his credit, and now it was his turn! We see him coping with the inevitable discouragement and depression as he encounters the reality of only ten baptisms a month in the whole of France.

One memorable episode occurs in a district where he's simultaneously made district leader and branch president. While struggling against the enmity of a baptism-hungry elder who thinks two children are ready because "they really liked the flannel-board stories," he handles with limited success, a bitter feud in the branch. Finally, breathes to himself, "*What a wonderful leader I am . . . Maybe I can get a member to apostatize and my day will be complete.*" Sister Palmer, the missionary in his district who had reassured him that people are more important than statistics and that the authority of his stewardship outweighs his youth is now too terrified to open her mouth.

There is the fat and bitter sister who calls herself "naive to think I could change my life by going on a mission. But it seemed so romantic at the time . . . the first really independent, courageous thing I'd done in my life." There's the California elder with a tan, the inevitable case of diarrhea and the equally inevitable letter from his devoted Jeanie beginning "I don't know quite how to tell you this, but my first week here, I met this fellow . . ." There is the district that decides to initiate a greenie by pretending to live in a commune, call each other by first names, and pick fights with people they tract out; the greenie, instead of being appalled by their apostacy, cheers right up. There's the "trunked-out" senior, galvanized into effort by a dedicated—and angry—junior (Elder Harper again).

This is a book to read a slice at a time. Reading it at one sitting points out that its greatest strength, "missionary experiences," is also its greatest weakness. It covers too many situations too fast to capture the depth of the missionary experience, even though the vignette method is a fair representation of the complex clutter, the wearying and exhil-

arating busyness of a missionary's life.

And its upbeat strength sometimes edges into glibness. There are the investigators who turn away, but there are also the investigators who join—even Sister Durant's drunken husband. The lazy, frightened missionaries sooner or later discover what it's all about; the missionary whose member-tutor has fallen in love with him is saved by a wiser companion.

To some extent, the positiveness of the approach obscures the wounds that every missionary carries home with him, wounds that may cease aching but never disappear completely. There is occasional bad writing. The format and cover design make the book look regrettably like a manual. And perhaps most frustrating, there doesn't seem to be any way to avoid the trap: in Mormon culture things that are most deeply true are most inevitably trite. Farmer has not found a way to write about the daily miracles of spiritual experience without using the clichés of Mormon experience: Elder Harper realizes: "*No sir, old Dave with his 130 baptisms couldn't be any happier than I am with my one.*" Two elders part after a difficult few months together realizing "The Lord did know what was best for me. President Horne knew that Elder Brown and I needed each other." The elder who tells the Joseph Smith story and realizes "for the first time in my life—the very first time, Elder—that it's true."

And most gratuitously trite, a closing scene of Elder Harper and Sister Palmer sitting in a car in Pleasant Grove acknowledging, in a speech that cannot avoid coyness, "The rules are different now."

Yet in spite of the triteness, the "formula" construction of each chapter and the emphasis on situation at the occasional expense of character, there is the warmth of affection, the wryness of experience realistically remembered, the flashes of wit and charm illuminating dialogue and description. Neither solemn nor cynical, *Elders and Sisters* tells it almost "the way it was."

A Vibrant, Vertical Town

LOU ANN STOKER DICKSON

Upstairs to a Mine by Violet Boyce and Mabel Harmer. Logan: Utah State University Press, 1976, 189 pp. \$6.95.

For several decades Bingham, Utah was a turbulent mining town. Built on the edge of the "greatest hole on earth," its inhabitants slaved for gold and then for copper. One day Bingham disappeared, consumed by the mine for which the people had toiled so long.

Upstairs to a Mine is the loving narrative about that vibrant, vertical town where everyone lived upstairs to someone or something. Not the kind of book that demands intricate cerebral gymnastics, it lopes along like a visit with Grandma or a favorite aunt. It is the kind of book that Mom picks up between loads of laundry or that history buffs browse on a pleasant evening. A potpourri of nationalities, generations and activities, this is not a Mormon book in the truest sense, but the Mormon soul will instantly recognize the terrain.

These reminiscences of Violet Boyce and Mabel Harmer are retold with keen insight and kindly humor. The memories are vivid and descriptive, but they leapfrog, leaving large gaps that sometimes puzzle the reader. In spite of this, the book is fairly concise and does not ramble as many such narratives are prone to do.

Set in Bingham and the surrounding Salt Lake valley in the opening quarter of the century, the book begins chronologically, but soon dissolves into a collection of humorous tales and interesting anecdotes. Everyone in Bingham is related to everyone else either by blood or by longevity of approximation, and the interactions of this ragged clan in daily survival display a wealth of imagination and some remarkable personalities.

In the forefront of these is "Aunt Becky." She plays a prominent part in

many of the incidents and seems to have been particularly admired by the author. Aunt Becky is a closet feminist who "... had a home in Midvale and owned the Miner's Hotel in Bingham. She ran both with great efficiency and even had enough energy left over to run the town ... " leaving little doubt in anyone's mind that "... (neither) the mayor nor the sheriff had any great illusions as to who was the real boss."

Notable for his ingenuity was Mr. Wallin, a grandfatherly Welshman, full of good humor, songs, tricks and stories. A favorite of the children of Bingham, he had a watch-cat named Midnight whose reputation could chill the heart of any child. Mr. Wallin's imaginative use of Midnight regulated the enthusiastic visits of neighborhood children to tolerable doses.

Of particular interest to today's homogenous society might be the diverse nationalities which inhabited Bingham. The Swedes are extolled as the "... greatest celebrants of any people ... when it came to Christmas. They made it last almost a month." Scattered throughout the narrative are such disparate characters as an Assyrian with a double hernia, a patriotic Armenian, Chinese who bathe every night in tin tubs, Greek bakers and Finns who enjoyed saunas before they became a status symbol.

Reproduced in the book are several old photos which, while interesting, would be more valuable if dated. Readers unfamiliar with the locale might also wish for a map of Bingham and the surrounding valley.

Overall the book suffers from sloppy editing. It is filled with cliches and town jokes that, although part of the vernacular, need not be given such prominent display. Better organization would make the book less confusing.

Incidents tend to be repeated, some events prematurely introduced. Lopez, for example, is presented to the puzzled reader several times before we finally realize his importance. There is also a disconcerting tendency to materialize and then to vaporize characters without introduction or explanation. Quotes are not attributed; assertions are not documented and there is neither index, introduction nor footnotes.

For all its faults, the book is a valuable record of the working class in a mining town during the early part of the century. While activities of the upper classes are generally well documented, little is written about the lower classes. Survival leaves them neither time nor

energy to record their stories. Many of them are illiterate. *Upstairs to a Mine* relates the daily activities of these people beyond lifeless statistics. The colors and flavors of their daily lives are vivid, and there are some startling insights into the quality of life in this small mining town.

The authors have taken the thread of family life in Bingham and have strung it on their loom. Using the gaily colored threads of daily interaction, they have woven the bright, intricate tapestry that was Bingham before the "giants moved it away." The finished cloth may be roughly woven and flawed in places, but it has an unmistakable reality, an exciting pattern.

We Are What We Remember

STEPHEN L. TANNER

Frost in the Orchard by Donald Marshall. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1977. 173 pp. \$4.95

Wright Morris once said, "The 'subject' of Wolfe, Hemingway, and Faulkner, however various the backgrounds, however contrasting the styles, pushed to its extremity, is nostalgia." He should have included Fitzgerald, and even then the list would have been incomplete. Nostalgia permeates American fiction in our century. Donald Marshall may not equal the names above in literary skill, but he shares their subject and has explored it in a penetrating and often profound way.

Having a "subject"—in other words focusing on a significant aspect of human experience—is what distinguishes *Frost in the Orchard* from most Mormon fiction. Too many writers in the Church overrate the uniqueness of the Mormon experience as a source for literary art. More precisely, they overrate the external and superficial characteristics of that experience while at the same time ignor-

ing the deeper core of the uniqueness. Writing about wards, home teaching, polygamy, testimony meetings or folkways of the Wasatch Front is no guarantee, in itself, for creating special or significant literature.

Marshall does not make this mistake. His stories are distinctively Mormon without being self-consciously so. The regional and cultural flavor is there to be enjoyed (the book is a showcase of names delightfully typical of rural Mormonism), but the essential concerns in the stories transcend Utah and Mormon life and treat the universals in human experience, particularly the complex and fascinating experience of nostalgia.

Perhaps nostalgia is not an accurate word. I am referring to more than mere homesickness. Remembrance of things past constitutes a large part of one's character and personality in the present. To a large extent we are what we remember. Consciousness, after all, is mostly memory. Because memory is subjective and suffused with subtle and evanescent

emotion, each unique human personality is mysterious to itself as well as to others. The power and source of nostalgia lie beyond the scalpel, yet a recognition of the fundamental and pervasive influence of the nostalgic, under whatever name, can unlock for the artist a way of interpreting human behavior with new realism and greater insight. The understanding of interpersonal relationships requires an appreciation of the role played by nostalgic sentiments.

Nostalgia is the string on which the stories of *Frost in the Orchard* are strung. A wintry mood dominates. The frost of the title, the frequent winter settings, the winter scene on the cover, the mood photos with their pattern of autumn/winter/early spring images of old things, even the blue ink used in printing—all these convey an atmosphere of past life now in sterile suspended animation. And this overt mood corresponds with a dreary state of soul portrayed throughout the stories. The consistency of theme and atmosphere, both in content and presentation, is a remarkable achievement in unifying a collection of stories.

The title of the first story, "Fugues and Improvisations: Variations on a Theme," suggests the method used for the collection as a whole. For example, one set of variations explores the way people are haunted by bitter or tormenting memories. The speaker in "Light Switch," is troubled by memories of events some of which were only dreamed in the first place. These memories, associated with guilt and death, disturb him with visions of his own death. The narrator of "Christmas Snows, Christmas Winds" recollects the images and impressions of childhood Christmases with a vividness that may unlock the reader's cherished memories. But sweet recollection turns sour when he remembers an act of childish insensitivity that can never be undone: "Unwelcome guest in that memory world of gumdrops and candy canes, it sneaks along the edges of the mind, demanding it be seen, heard, remembered."

In "Souvenir" a young father with a wife dying of cancer learns that he must let go of his fondly remembered past just as he must let go of his beloved wife. His daughter's gentle lesson that the past cannot be shared or retained in any meaningful way helps him face the future—but it is a sad lesson. "The Reun-

ion" is a comic variation depicting the confrontation between the reality of the present and the warmly recollected past. In this story, whatever fondly remembered family ties motivated the reunion are shattered in the confusion and abrasion of present personalities and relationships. "Homecoming" is the most unsettling story in this set of variations. The point seems to be that you not only can't go home again but even to try is self-destructive.

Self-centered insensitivity and failure to communicate provide the material for another set of variations. "Fugues and Improvisations: Variations on a Theme" tells of J. Stewart Christenson, a teacher of music appreciation at BYU, who in making out final grades must reconcile impartial, objective judgment with sympathy and personal involvement. The case in point involves an elderly woman with good intentions but little ability. The teacher is hampered by never having found a proper balance between interest in his own inner life and sincere interest in the inner lives of others. "Why did they invade him with their lives?" he wonders about his students. "What did it all matter? What did any of it, finally, have to do with him and with Music 101? Haydn and Mozart and Back and J. Stewart Christenson were something quite apart from all that, weren't they?"

"The Wheelbarrow" and "The Thorns" portray the way family relationships deteriorate when people can neither empathize with each other nor find a way to share their own inner life. The young husband in "The Wheelbarrow," isolated in his own world of "blurred memories" and frustrated longings, has no capacity to sense meaning in the world of his wife and in-laws. A childhood marred by his parents' divorce and frequent moves has left him with no satisfying memories. He reflects on the places he has lived: "None of these scenes begged him for sentiment, berated him for a lack of nostalgia; they turned, instead, their cold, indifferent backs." Consequently, he cannot understand his wife's inner life, marked so strongly by nostalgic recollections of home and family. "I should feel something toward all this," he thinks as he scans the backyard of his parents-in-law. "Even if it isn't mine, was never mine, it seems as if I'm supposed to feel something—maybe because it's something I

should have had, or because it's something she once had and therefore should still have some meaning." Something is wrong with his marriage, "something he couldn't label or even begin to identify without wading back through the clutter of varied backgrounds and mixed interests, of common goals and private dreams . . ." The marriage deteriorates for nostalgic reasons.

Nostalgia also plays a principal role in the unfortunate family relationships described in "The Thorns." The young wife cannot tolerate her father-in-law because she cannot empathize with him. His recollected past means nothing to her, and she is simply annoyed when he talks about. The father-in-law is equally incapable of appreciating her inner life. The situation is skillfully epitomized in the contrasting reactions to slides. The father-in-law is bored and a little disgusted by the couple's pictures from their stay in Pakistan. When the father-in-law gets out his slides, the situation is reversed.

In a more satiric vein "Friends and Loved Ones Far and Near/Merry Xmas from Our House to Yours" and "Bus Ride" explore a similar indifference to the inner world of others. The former story consists of several years of Christmas letters exchanged between two families. The reader gradually realizes that one of the families could have helped the other if empathy and communication had been achieved. Mrs. Winterrose of "Bus Ride" is so anxious to share her memory of an insignificant involvement in movie-making that she is not really interested in others, though she has convinced herself otherwise.

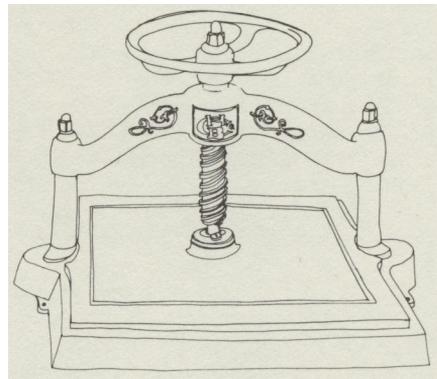
This collection is unified through variations on a single significant theme, but how successful are the individual stories? Some of the trees in the orchard need pruning and trimming. A short story writer must develop his material fully enough to create an intense impression, but if he goes beyond a certain point, additional development only obscures or diminishes the effect. Marshall relies less on dialogue and action than on descriptive thoughts, impressions and recollections. He does this very well; it seems to be his favorite narrative technique. But perhaps because it comes easily to him, he does too much of it.

Marshall's own susceptibility to nostalgia mars some of the stories. This is

apparent in the many passages of childhood recollections in which he displays a singular fear and distrust of nostalgia, as though to indulge in it were an abnegation of responsibility or a flight from reality. In "Homecoming," the death at the end seems gratuitous. We cannot recover the past, but is there such harm in trying? C. S. Lewis believed that the pleasures of nostalgia are a subtle hint of heaven, a fleeting sample of a joy to be known in its fullness only in a life to come. What a somber and unsettling contrast to this notion is provided by Marshall's stories! I wonder if an unresolved tension between his nostalgic temperament and his sense of obligation as a writer to face reality and social responsibility is reflected in the stories by an occasional wavering or a false note in the resolution of the action.

Marshall's principal strength is the way he gives significance to ordinary people and events. With the exception of the bizarre death in "Homecoming," he does not resort to sensational or melodramatic action. Marshall's focus is on the inner drama of familiar life, on the puzzling issues of interpersonal relationships known even to the most conventional and well-adjusted among us.

His first book, *The Rummage Sale*, was printed in brown. This one is printed in blue. What comes next? If future work (which I look forward to) reveals additional artistic development, Donald Marshall will be approaching the achievement claimed for him on the back cover of this book.



Everything that Glitters

DENNIS CLARK

Betrayed by F. Scott Fitzgerald by Ron Carlson. New York: Norton, 1977. \$7.95

Though set in Salt Lake City, *Betrayed by F. Scott Fitzgerald* is not a "Mormon novel", even in the way that Scowcroft's *The Ordeal of Dudley Dean* is—which does not mean it will not interest Mormons. Still, the first thing to interest them will not be Carlson's Salt Lake City, nor the drunken academic party that opens the book—at least not in the way it seems to have misled Francine Du Plessix Gray into calling it "a nerry, very witty romp through contemporary Academe" (as quoted on the jacket). Most Mormon readers will be first interested in the character of Larry Boosinger and his language, because they, and not plot nor place, hold this book together.

Character is perhaps too precise a word. It implies a clear (or critically clarified) psychological profile of a figure in a narrative. Boosinger is defined not through his psyche but through his gestures. It would take a critic, not a reviewer, to clarify any character he might have. On the other hand, Larry Boosinger is a "character" familiar in modern fiction—all gesture, with the flamboyance of the innocent romantic, the student prince, monarch of himself: he is living in late adolescence, an American prolonged adolescence. He shows no ties to his family but memory and love, no responsibilities but those of a teaching assistant (and those primarily selfish), no obligations but to pay the rent (and other bills).

That is not entirely true. Larry has a fiancée, Lenore, who is leaving, whom he wants to stay, and a friend with whom he shares an apartment, Eldon Robinson-Duff. Both he and Larry are writers, and it is one of Carlson's gestures in defining

his book to have these two supply him with epigraphs: "Everything that glitters should be gold" from Eldon, and

My undergraduate days, having
left my bed and board, I can no
longer be responsible for their
debts.

Larry Boosinger
Daily Utah Chronicle

Boosinger's epigram not only defines his "character" but illustrates, in the attribution, Carlson's manner of generalizing from the specific, here using the name of a student newspaper (at the U) as a claim for the book. But is it a daily Utah chronicle? Some Mormon readers will find themselves asking that question for the Utah in this novel does not match, say, that of Don Marshall or Doug Thayer. Comparison with other writers is not really fair, for this is largely a (Salt Lake) city novel, but Carlson's Salt Lake does not develop like one of the new instant dry photographs, over time, in one's hand. It may simply be unfamiliar territory to LDS readers like me. But it remains for me the topos of the action, an abstract place never localized. Carlson likely knows exactly where are the houses, apartments, trailers and stores of which he writes, but it is not one of his concerns to tell those who do not know.

This generalizing of place helps mark the book as more romance than novel, matching the emphasis on "character" and gesture that replaces plot. True, there is a narrative line: Larry wins at drunken croquet and offends his teachers and fellow students; Larry and Eldon show a movie in their apartment and offend their landlady and the police; Larry drops out of school to write, offends himself, has an auto wreck and offends the garage owner who fixes his

truck, who then uses it to commit a crime which lands Larry in prison at the Point of the Mountain; Larry escapes and offends no one—is in fact ignored by police; Larry and Eldon go fishing to rest from offense; Larry enters a demolition derby staged by the garage owner and offends him and his henchmen with a spectacular crash—which batters him out of adolescence and into adulthood, and whereby he “clears his name”; Larry settles into convalescence with Eldon’s widowed sister Evelyn, and family life begins to heal the wounds of self-conscious romanticism that adolescence has inflicted upon him.

Having mentioned that Carlson’s language glitters (in keeping with Eldon’s maxim), let me quote Larry quoting Eldon: “His motto was simply, ‘If you want to read a good book, you have to write it.’” That concept, along with the following observation from Larry, governs his structuring of the book and frees Carlson from the necessity of a conventional plot: “Writers’ block (which troubles Larry at the time) is not really so much massive cerebral shutdown, as it is a toxic belief in all the bad things people have ever said about you”. Larry writes his book as an aftermath to the crash which breaks him of adolescence, and likewise smashes his writers’ block. The detoxifying wit glitters on the page. But the gold of the book is its record of Larry’s escape from the self-derived romantic

lunacy (which he credits to his worship of F. Scott Fitzgerald—hence the title) he has lived, a madness originating in what he calls “easy access . . . a source for a major portion of all the grief and regret that blindingly swarm this planet”. In his break-out from habits of easy excess, Larry reveals the sentiment with which Carlson hooks the reader.

The fishing scene celebrates rural, earth-grown values—wisdom, patience, careful work. Much of the wisdom (in scene and in book) comes from Larry’s father, memories of whom surface like a mythic trout, one Larry is trying to hook. His father’s maxim, “Blame is not important. Whose fault it is will not get anything fixed”, introduces the book and provides the easy-going tone, devoid of much rancor, in which Larry narrates. And the close, which finds Larry enjoying a present domestic bliss and projecting it into coming days, living a settled life with Eldon’s sister Evelyn and her son Zeke, is the fitting development of such solid values.

The sentiments, the concepts controlling the action, tone and outlook of the narrative, will interest a Mormon reader of the book, not the place, nor any possible gossip about its people, nor observations on its things. This is where the value of the book resides, for although its considerable charm will delight the readers, only its truth to those sentiments will bring them through.

Brief Notices

GENE SESSIONS

History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints by Joseph Smith, Jr. Edited by B. H. Roberts. 2nd ed. rev. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1978, seven volumes, index. \$12.95

This edition of the *History of the Church* in paperback is perhaps the best economic news scholars of early Mormon history have received in years. Page for page an exact reproduction of the famil-

iar hardbound set, this inexpensive boon to Mormon studies will make the so-called “Documentary History” the standard reference tool it should always have been, not only among scholars and teachers, but also for other Latter-day Saints interested in the fundamental beginnings of their religion and culture. While reducing the size of the page to 7 × 4 inches (the print does become somewhat small) and printing on stock

pulp paper, Deseret Book has managed to produce durable volumes that will withstand the wear of long use and constant reference.

Encased in a box and packaged similar to the popular "Reference Set" published last year, this new edition of the *History* will enable its students to mark, cut, and digest its contents without the anguish of a fifty to ninety dollar price tag. It is nevertheless painful to notice in their "Preface to the Study Edition of the History of the Church" that "The Publishers" continue to hope that Mormons will consider the *History* to be the exact words and journal of the Prophet, despite B.H. Roberts' careful announcement in his "Preface" that it is instead the product of many. While we await the work of Dean Jessee and Richard Anderson on the actual writings of Joseph Smith, we can still relish the use of this essential gold mine of early Mormon sources, and with more physical freedom than ever before. Perhaps we might even look forward to hearing the *History of the Church* quoted from the pulpit instead of its misused stepchild, *The Discourses of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, also recently reissued by Deseret Book.

A Topical Guide to the Scriptures of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1977, 500 pp., index. \$5.95 (pb)

In order to provide Mormons with cross references and notes for Bible study that would apply to the other three canons of the Church, the LDS Correlation Department decided some years ago to begin a "Bible Aids Project". Hoping to produce an edition of the Bible containing these study aids, the committee determined to publish separately a topical guide to scriptural passages on major gospel themes. The result is a 500-page compendium of one-line references to keyword passages in the four standard works for 640 topics, ranging from *Aaron* to *Zion*. An alphabetical index precedes the topical guide as a finding aid. Using a computer system, BYU religionists fed thousands of key words into a program which then provided the topical guide. Although the publisher chose not to list all of the computer's output, he hopes "that sufficient coverage is provided to

satisfy many needs, and to lead the careful student to additional research through the use of complete concordances." Thus, while limited in scope, the *Guide* is an immense timesaver and a worthy purchase in either paper or hardback.

The Giant Joshua by Maureen Whipple. Salt Lake City: Western Epics, Inc., 1976, vii, 309 pp., illust., maps. \$9.95

Still touted nationally as "the best Mormon novel to date," *Giant Joshua* has made a reprint appearance after a quarter-century career—a unique piece of literature. Published first in 1942 by Houghton-Mifflin and then in paperback by Dolphin Books, Whipple's classic tale of nineteenth-century Mormonism from the woman's point of view has lost little of its appeal. This handsome reprint is a welcome and continuing tribute to its author's vitality. Her deep interest in the gnarled roots of rural Mormonism form the texture of this novel about polygamy, Dixie and the forces behind Utah's settlement.

Children of God: An American Epic by Vardis Fisher. Boise, Idaho: Opal Laurel Holmes, Publisher, 1976, xix, 769 pp. \$11.95

If *Giant Joshua* is "the best Mormon novel to date," *Children of God* must be considered "the best ex-Mormon novel to date." As Joseph M. Flora indicated in his 1969 *Dialogue* article on Fisher's landmark novel (an abridged version of Flora's essay serves as the "Introduction" to this reprint edition), Fisher was to Mormon literature much the same as James Joyce was to Catholic literature. Appearing first in 1939, *Children of God* was popular on the national scene for several years. It created considerable controversy, particularly between Mormons and ex-Mormons who agonized over whether it was a brilliant exposé of the whole charade or a strange affirmation to the sentient truthfulness of the Restoration movement. Whatever it was and is, *Children of God* deserves reprinting. Flora's suggestion that Mormons "ought to understand and to sympathize with" Fisher and his outlook remains undeniably cogent.

Essays on the American West, 1975-76 edited by Thomas G. Alexander. Charles Redd Monographs in Western History, No. 8. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1978, 176 pp. \$4.95

Featuring three essays directly concerned with Mormonism in the West, this issue of the Redd Series presents articles developed from five lectures delivered at the Charles Redd Center for Western Studies at BYU during the academic year 1975-76. Included are "Rites of Passage: Young Men and Their Families in the Overland Trails Experience 1843-69," by Howard R. Lamar; "Freedom and Individualism: The Historian's Conception of the Cowboy and the Cattleman," by Don D. Walker; "Ethnicity in Mormonism: A Comparison of Immigrant and Mormon Cultures," by Helen Z. Papanikolas; "Political Conflict and Accommodation in Utah since Statehood," by Keith Melville; and "Soul-Butter and Hog Wash: Mark Twain and Frontier Religion," by Jeffrey R. Holland.

Prophetic Warnings to Modern America by Duane S. Crowther. Bountiful, Utah: Horizon Publishers, 1977, xii, 415 pp., illus., port. \$9.95

As Mormonism's self-appointed fortuneteller, and now in possession of his own publishing house, Duane Crowther continues to add to his list of works examining prophecy as the key to the future. In this one he discusses "the evidences of the moral decay which will lead to a loss of [America's] freedoms" if there does not soon occur some great and unlikely "repentance on a national scale." Sounding much like a late-night fundamentalist Christian radio program, *Prophetic Warnings* neglects the international church flavor of modern Mormonism to propound a kind of "Moonie" philosophy about God's one and only country. His simplistic interpretations of complex prophecies are designed, he explains, to outline "specific actions which Latter-day Saints can undertake to reverse the tide" of evil in the United States. He promises that those who read his book will then be able either to turn back "the judgments or shield the righteous [themselves, of course,] from their full impact." It is

unlikely, however, that a shield the size of Crowther's book could do much to protect his readers from the bewilderment that will ensue when they realize that a flimsy comprehension of the complex progression of events leading into the future offers little real safety, even to the righteous.

That Day in June: Reflections of the Teton Dam Disaster edited by Janet Thomas. Rexburg, Idaho: Ricks College Press, 1977, vii, 309 pp., illus., map. \$5.00

The first of what will probably be a small deluge of books on the events surrounding the breaking of the Teton Dam in southeastern Idaho in June 1976, this one presents a hefty sampling of reminiscences concerning the experiences of the flood victims. Most of the stories included are either faith-promoting, exciting, or both, indicating considerable editing for content. There is little about the incredible graft and selfishness accompanying the courage and altruism. We await works on the disaster by Bruce D. Blumell, who conducted a painstaking oral history survey during the immediate days following the collapse of the dam, and F. Ross Peterson, who is working with a national press on a history of the event.

Zion Town by Phebe Thurber and Gay Taylor. Salt Lake City: By the Authors, 1976, Intro., 183 pp.

Samuel Taylor describes his wife Gay as "the one with talent" in the family during the course of his long introduction to this novel she adapted from early drafts by Phebe Thurber. Like *Giant Joshua*, it is a novel about nineteenth-century rural Mormonism and about polygamy, but it displays little of the consistent quality and emotion for which Whipple's work, despite its shortcomings, became famous. Critic Linda Sillitoe faults *Zion Town* particularly for its tendency to make the "talents" of its author "forever present in the story," so that it reads as if it is not only about the nineteenth century, but written in it as well. "Narration tells the reader whatever he needs to know," Sillitoe has observed, "rather than letting him witness or experience it with the characters." The explanatory

and descriptive passages are often stilted, awkward, moralistic, or tedious." Although the dialogue offers some spicy moments, the rest of the volume leaves a bland taste that is quickly forgotten.

Government Impact on Family Life edited by Bruce A. Chadwick. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1977, 55 pp. \$1.95

Drawn from the papers presented at BYU's Fifth Annual Family Research Conference, this small paperback publication illuminates the views of such scholars as Robert J. Levy and Theodore Caplow, who "share personal and intellectual perspectives on such subjects as federal policy and family life, divorce and the marital partnership, rights of children, and rights of parents."

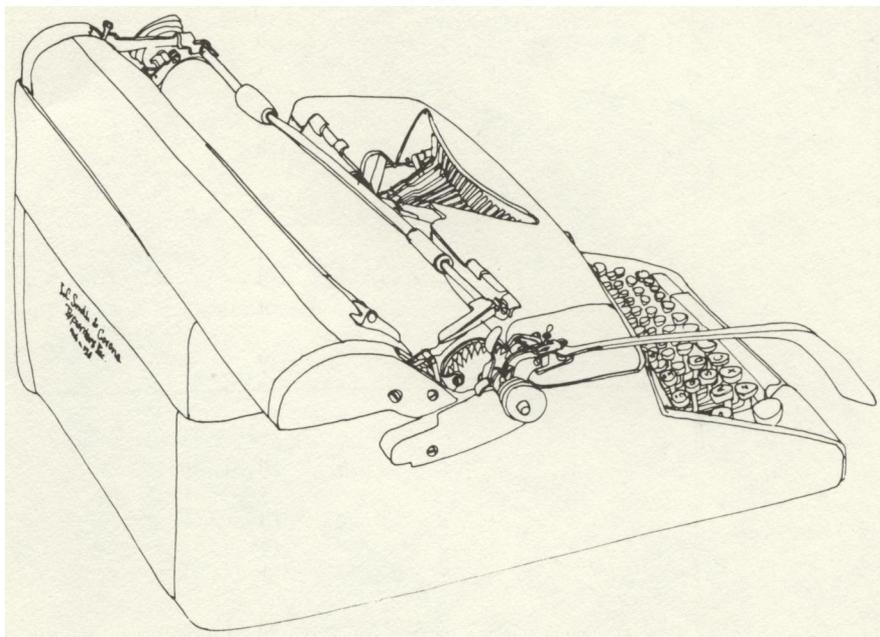
Rocky Mountain Rendezvous by Fred R. Gowans. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1977, 312 pp., illus., maps. \$8.95

For a fleeting period of about fifteen years before the advent of the immigrant movement of the 1840s, the greatest social and economic gatherings in the West were the meetings of the trappers, and

their helpers, wives and Indians. Each rendezvous gave the soon-to-vanish mountainman a chance to trade furs and news and to bluster with his fellow nomads of the West. Gowans has done a creditable job of portraying these events primarily through the journals and diaries. An attractive book available in both cloth and paper (\$4.95) it is worth purchasing for the fine collection of photographs and maps alone.

For God and Country: Memorable Stories from the Lives of Mormon Chaplains by Richard Maher. Bountiful, Utah: Horizon Publishers, 1976, 228 pp., illus., port. \$5.95

A convert from Boston, Massachusetts, Richard Maher is a manufacturing engineer turned seminary teacher with a flare for amateur oral history. Designed strictly as a faith-promoter, his book on LDS chaplains unfortunately does little to illuminate this crucial aspect of Mormon relations with the military, or to analyze the issues incumbent to Mormon pacifism, Mormon militarism, and the unresolved conflicts between. Such section headings as "A Sailor Healed Through Faith" and "Prayer Stopped Their Profanity" illustrate the anecdotes Maher chose to include in his book.



THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

OFFICE OF THE FIRST PRESIDENCY
SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH 84150

June 8, 1978

To All General and Local Priesthood Officers of The Church of Jesus Christ
of Latter-day Saints Throughout the World

Dear Brethren:

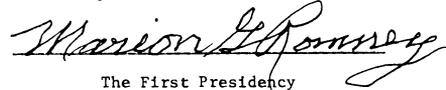
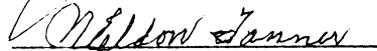
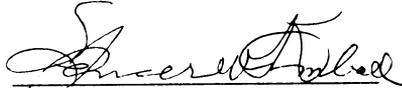
As we have witnessed the expansion of the work of the Lord over the earth, we have been grateful that people of many nations have responded to the message of the restored gospel, and have joined the Church in ever-increasing numbers. This, in turn, has inspired us with a desire to extend to every worthy member of the Church all of the privileges and blessings which the gospel affords.

Aware of the promises made by the prophets and presidents of the Church who have preceded us that at some time, in God's eternal plan, all of our brethren who are worthy may receive the priesthood, and witnessing the faithfulness of those from whom the priesthood has been withheld, we have pleaded long and earnestly in behalf of these, our faithful brethren, spending many hours in the Upper Room of the Temple supplicating the Lord for divine guidance.

He has heard our prayers, and by revelation has confirmed that the long-promised day has come when every faithful, worthy man in the Church may receive the holy priesthood, with power to exercise its divine authority, and enjoy with his loved ones every blessing that flows therefrom, including the blessings of the temple. Accordingly, all worthy male members of the Church may be ordained to the priesthood without regard for race or color. Priesthood leaders are instructed to follow the policy of carefully interviewing all candidates for ordination to either the Aaronic or the Melchizedek Priesthood to insure that they meet the established standards for worthiness.

We declare with soberness that the Lord has now made known His will for the blessing of all His children throughout the earth who will hearken to the voice of His authorized servants, and prepare themselves to receive every blessing of the gospel.

Sincerely yours,



The First Presidency

DIALOGUE Celebrates the Priesthood Revelation

Dialogue rejoices with all members of the Church at the extension of the blessings of the priesthood to all our brothers and sisters. In celebration, we invite readers to share with us their feelings about the meaning and implication of this momentous announcement, both to us as individuals and to the Church as a whole.

There once was a time, albeit brief, when a "Negro problem" did not exist for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Lester Bush, "Mormonism's Negro Doctrine"
Volume VIII, Spring 1973

Nothing could be easier than to join in the chants of unison that proclaim the perfect equality of all men in all things that are fashionable at the moment; that way we could proclaim our idealism to the world while continuing, like the rest of the world, to treat our fellow man much as we always have.

Hugh Nibley, "The Best Possible Test"
Volume VIII, Spring 1973

We Mormons have our own special cross—one which must weigh heavily on our hearts if we are truly trying to live our religion . . . I also believe that the Lord wishes a change *could* be made and that we *all* bear responsibility for the fact that it hasn't been made yet.

Eugene England, "The Mormon Cross"
Volume VIII, Spring 1973

That the Church must be open to change is a contention that probably no one will contest, and Mormonism is structurally and theologically better equipped for change than are most denominations, precisely *because* of the principle of continuous revelation.

Armand L. Mauss, "Mormonism and the Negro"
Volume II, Winter 1967

What the Lord can offer, we can only patiently wait for; what we can offer, we must learn to give. This calls for a tremendous sensitivity and an immersion in personal relationships. . . . Perhaps our situation could be viewed as a modern-day refiner's fire or as a test of our understanding of the spirit of brotherhood and of the Gospel. We must learn what elements of ourselves can be given in solution of the problem which we face.

Robyn Sandberg, Letter
Volume II, Autumn 1967

Lester Bush's "Mormonism's Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview" is now available in reprint from *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Reprints, P.O. Box 1387, Arlington, Virginia 22210, at \$2.50 each.

