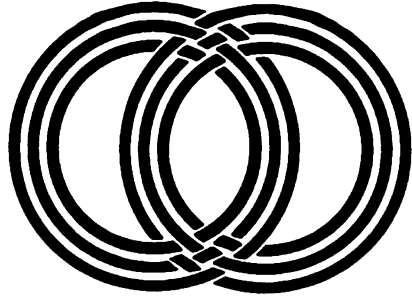


DIALOGUE

A JOURNAL OF MORMON THOUGHT





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*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 the
larger stream of world religious thought
and with human experience as a whole
and to foster artistic and scholarly
achievement based on their cultural
heritage. The journal encourages a
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not necessarily those of
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Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought is published quarterly by the Dialogue Foundation, P.O. Box 20210, Shaker Heights, Ohio 44120, 216-491-1830. *Dialogue* has no official connection with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Third-class postage-paid at Shaker Heights, Ohio. Contents copyright 1999 by the Dialogue Foundation. ISSN 002-2157. Regular domestic subscription rate is \$30 per year; students and senior citizens, \$25 per year; single copies, \$10. Regular foreign subscription rate is \$35 per year; students and senior citizens, \$30 per year; air mail, \$55 per year; single copies, \$15. *Dialogue* is also available on microforms through University Microfilms International, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106-1346, and 18 Bedford Row, London WC1R4EJ, England.

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The State of Mormon Literature and Criticism

Gideon Burton and Neal Kramer

Gideon Burton and Neal Kramer both serve on the board of the Association for Mormon Letters. In consultation with Dialogue's editors, they have chosen and edited the selections for this issue.

TWO DECADES HAVE PASSED SINCE *Dialogue* last published an issue entirely devoted to Mormon literature. In the meantime literary writing about Latter-day Saints has been burgeoning both in LDS and national markets—so much so that it is difficult for literary critics to keep up with this growing body of novels, plays, poetry, and literary nonfiction. It is very important, however, that they try. To have a sense of the future of Mormon literature, it is vital that we see how present writings articulate with traditions from the past.

Producing literary criticism to do just that is the central function of the Association for Mormon Letters, whose goal is to serve authors, scholars, and general readers of Mormon literature. In our yearly conference, through readings, book reviews, a very active e-mail list, and now an annual writers' workshop and a small quarterly literary magazine, *Irreantum*, we attempt to introduce people to Mormon literature past and present and to critically evaluate it. In this issue of *Dialogue*, we share with a broader public some of the best criticism that has been generated at our conferences and published in the annuals of the Association, as well as a sampling of new creative works from active writers.

As editors we have found our task different from the one faced by editors of *Dialogue's* prior literary issues because the object of our study has been evolving, as have our means of literary analysis. Discussions of Mormon literature from earlier decades seem to have been controlled by a basic assumption, derived from standards established by the "New Critics" of the 1940s and '50s, that the quality of literature could be de-

terminated based on formal aesthetic qualities as established in conventional literary genres. Thus, critics of LDS literature have asked, "Is there any literature published by Mormons or for Mormons that meets high aesthetic standards?"

This remains an important question, especially since everyone recognizes great differences in the aesthetic quality of literary works by or about Mormons. But it has become more difficult to answer this question, both because the traditional genres have been complemented with new ones, and because literary markets and standards continue to evolve.

In the 1940s and '50s, for example, writers of LDS fiction proved their aesthetic mettle by writing to a national audience, crafting their Mormon subject matter according to the high literary standards demanded by national publishers. For many such authors (sometimes known as Mormon Literature's "Lost Generation"¹), the result was the achievement of national critical acclaim but rejection from Latter-day Saints. The flip side of this tradition was the ongoing "Home Literature" tradition in which faithful Latter-day Saints published affirmative works supportive of LDS values and goals but generally lacking in literary quality.

Today, even though the national market/LDS market division remains, the lines are blurring considerably. More and more authors of LDS literature are finding national publishing venues, and regional presses such as Deseret Book are both raising their standards and reaching out to non-LDS markets.

Meanwhile, among literary critics and scholars, the standards for judging literary value have been evolving. The new questions raised today are less concerned with aesthetic standards per se, but with how the various contemporary critical approaches allow us to understand the literary dimensions to Mormon culture generally. This is a crucial difference in approach, for it widens the object of inquiry to include all that is literary about LDS culture, while at the same time it returns our attention to established or traditional texts in the LDS canon with new critical tools.

The explosion of the LDS market for fiction, especially genre and serialized fiction, has made the literary component of our culture inescapable, but it also makes that component more difficult to grapple with—not simply because of the number of works published, but also because the ways of reading texts have multiplied. Measured by the varities of criticism practiced in academic literary studies today, that is quite a lot. Rather than be dismayed at this, we see this as an opportunity to re-

1. See Edward A. Geary, "Mormondom's Lost Generation: The Novelists of the 1940s," *Brigham Young University Studies* 18 (Fall 1977): 89-98.

visit the past with the new literary tools of today, while using that traditional canon to help situate the newer works and genres that are populating Mormon bookshelves.

During the last 20 years, the focus of literary criticism has turned more and more towards the study not so much of texts, but of contexts. In other words, the line has been blurred between studying literature and studying the culture(s) that produce and consume it. In the Association for Mormon Letters, this has been manifest by broadening our attention to look at folklore, popular fiction, humor, rhetoric (including the sermon), devotional and inspirational writing, and women's issues. The AML board has reflected this change in its personnel, including, for the first time during this past decade, representatives from the popular Mormon presses, and hosting fund raisers and readings that feature less strictly "literary" authors but those who are read by, or who are clearly influencing, reading Mormons.

Much of what concerned Mormons who have reacted negatively to the "good" writers of the Lost Generation (those who met the high aesthetic standards from New Criticism) was the perception that Mormon religious life was being used as a prop for aestheticism, which seemed to undercut the power of Mormon spiritual experience. That is to say, the LDS elements in such writings appeared to be exploited rather than respected. That remains a perennial difficulty. However, another bogeyman also confronts LDS readers today: the presence of "cultural criticism" and "postmodern criticism." These are frightening spectres both to more traditional academics and to mainstream audiences. This is unfortunate, since the way that contemporary criticism broadens both the objects and methods of literary studies makes possible an engagement with the full gamut of our LDS history and religious experience.

This was already intuited by the editors of the first major anthology of Mormon literature, Richard Cracroft and Neal Lambert, whose *A Believing People*² boldly included genres like the personal essay, the sermon, diaries, hymns, devotional literature, etc.—genres only now being recognized and studied by literary scholars. Of course, there is much that seems inconsistent with LDS interests or standards in some versions of cultural criticism today (gay and lesbian studies, for example). But for now, we are confident that more will be gained than lost as we move from text to context in Mormon studies. For example, contemporary critical theory holds out the possibility that readers may find spiritual vital-

2. Richard H. Cracroft and Neal E. Lambert, eds., *A Believing People: Literature of the Latter-day Saints* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1974). Most of this anthology is included in an on-line anthology at the Mormon Literature Website (<http://humanities.byu.edu/mldb/mlithome.htm>).

ity in all kinds of writing—not necessarily in writing attempting to be aesthetically *or* inspirationally superior.

One reason for our optimism has been the presence of critics who have learned well the newest languages of literary analysis and are articulating these to LDS audiences in ways that make literary criticism seem an opportunity, rather than a threat, to our religion and our literature. This is the spirit of Michael Austin's award-winning essay, "The Function of Mormon Literary Criticism at the Present Time," which would have figured prominently in this volume had it not already been published recently in *Dialogue*.³ Robert Bird successfully employs a post-modern approach in his essay about Maragaret Young's *Salvador* and Orson Scott Card's *Lost Boys*, included below.

Besides Austin and Bird, other valued voices in this new generation of literary criticism include Susan Howe, John Bennion, Neal Kramer, Orson Scott Card, Tory Anderson, Harlow Clark, Gideon Burton, Benson Parkinson, Eric Eliason, John Needham, Lisa Tait, and Laurie Illions Rodriguez. Happily, these newer critics have not forgotten the pioneering work of earlier critics that have both defined and refined the field of Mormon letters: Dale Morgan, Karl Keller, William Mulder, Richard Cracroft, Neal Lambert, Eugene England, Edward Geary, Bruce Jorgensen, Samuel Taylor, William A. Wilson, Marden Clark, Mary Bradford, Lavina Fielding Anderson, Wayne Booth, Steven Tanner, and Richard D. Rust.⁴

Insightful writers like these have demonstrated how good literary criticism can and should be a crucial mediating force between books and people. We maintain our faith in criticism as a way of winnowing the wheat from the chaff. But the task has become more daunting in recent decades as developments in three important publishing arenas have reshaped the landscape of Mormon literature: national publication, the LDS book market, and electronic publication.

National Publication

The first major development in the landscape of Mormon literature in the closing decades of the twentieth century has been that more and more LDS authors and works featuring Mormons have been published nationally. A few examples include Judith Freeman's *Chinchilla Farm* (Vintage, 1989), Walter Kirn's *My Hard Bargain* (Knopf, 1990), and Brady

3. Michael Austin, "The Function of Mormon Literary Criticism at the Present Time," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 28, no. 4 (winter 1994): 131-144. Also on-line at the Mormon Literature Website (<http://humanities.byu.edu/mldb/austin01.htm>).

4. Brief biographies and bibliographies of all the critics mentioned here can be found in the "Who's Who" section of the Mormon Literature Website (<http://humanities.byu.edu/mldb/whoswho.htm>).

Udall's *Letting Loose the Hounds* (Simon and Schuster, 1997). National publication in specialty genres has been particularly fruitful recently for works by or about Latter-day Saints. In nonfiction, for example, Terry Tempest Williams's *Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place* (Vintage, 1991) has earned great notoriety. In young adult fiction, Dean Hughes has published multiple titles through Atheneum and Alladin. In science fiction, Orson Scott Card's many novels and series published through Tor have retained their national appeal while becoming more explicitly LDS. Dave Wolverton joins Card as another LDS science fiction author gaining prominence nationally, publishing his own novels through Tor, and *Star Wars* novels through Bantam. In the mystery genre, Ann Perry's novels continue their broad international exposure through Fawcett, Ivy, and Ballantine, with recent settings and characters becoming more explicitly Mormon.

The number of Mormon poets publishing in national forums has increased dramatically over the last 20 years, and includes Kathryn R. Ashworth, Danielle Beazer, Colin B. Douglas, Kathy Evans, Laura Hamblin, Lewis Horne, Susan Howe, Lance Larsen, Timothy Liu, Karen M. Moloney, Dixie Lee Patridge, Loretta Randall Sharp, May Swenson, Anita Tanner, Sally Taylor, and Richard Tice.

The trend towards more national publications is a very positive one, of course. It broadens the exposure of LDS writers and themes, forces LDS writers to meet higher literary standards, and lessens possibilities of parochialism.

LDS Publishing

While more LDS authors and more works featuring Mormon elements have been making their way to national markets, the world of strictly LDS publishing has been growing by leaps and bounds in the past 20 years. Mormon retailers and Mormon publishers together vie for a market that currently spends over 93 million dollars annually, according to the LDS Booksellers Association. LDSBA has been a very important force in organizing and professionalizing retailers, publishers, and authors. At least for English-speaking areas of the world, distribution channels are now well established and growing, enabling Latter-day Saints to produce and consume many bookstore products.

Ironically, however, books often seem secondary to the flood of other LDS-oriented products marketed through LDS bookstores: CTR rings, scripture cases, videos, music CDs, art candles, sheet music, t-shirts, tie tacks, puppets, genealogy aids, recipes, key-chain oil vials, refrigerator magnets, wheat grinders, dolls, cassette tapes, scrapbook supplies, etc. The annual meeting of the LDS Booksellers Association often seems less a clearing house for literature as it does a carnival of pop culture and kitsch.

The silver lining to finding an angel Moroni hood ornament or a gold-plated bust of Lavell Edwards in an LDS bookstore is that one will also find there books from many new publishers. Despite some legitimate concern that this year's acquisition of Bookcraft by Deseret Book would result in a huge, restrictive LDS publishing conglomerate, the new entity shows little intention of monopolizing a market it already dominates, and is instead pushing to reach non-LDS and national markets through its Shadow Mountain imprint and capitalizing on the new electronic market for LDS titles. Deseret Book may have the best publication record and distribution for LDS buyers, but there is strong and healthy competition from both publishers and distributors that have come into their own in the last two decades.

Prominent competitors to Deseret Book/Bookcraft include, for example, Covenant Communications, which has graduated from selling scripture cassettes and become a bonafide publisher of popular titles, putting out the well-received *Tennis Shoes Among the Nephites* juvenile fiction series by Chris Heimerdinger and the *First Love and Forever* romance series by Anita Stansfield. Aspen Books has also met a wide variety of LDS tastes. It has published more literary authors in its past—such as Samuel Taylor, Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, Margaret Young, and Marden Clark—but is now succeeding in marketing young adult fiction (the *Latter-day Daughters* series by Carol Lynch Williams and Launi K. Anderson and the *Values for Young Women* series by Shirley Arnold and Kathryn Palmer), Mormon humor (Robert Kirby's *Sunday of the Living Dead*, Robert Smith's *Baptists at Our Barbeque*), and some LDS historical fiction (Marilyn Brown's *Statehood*). Cedar Fort Inc. (CFI) launched the popular *Storm Testament* series in 1982 by Lee Nelson (now published by Council Press), and has become a major publisher/distributor of popular LDS titles. Horizon Books has branched out from its titles in camping, cooking, and near-death experiences (not necessarily related!) and is publishing some fiction aimed at teens and children.

Among the alternatives to Deseret Book and Bookcraft, special mention must be made of Signature Books. Since its inception in 1981, Signature has been a significant outlet for more "literary" LDS literature, publishing essays by Eugene England, Elousie Bell, and Ann Edwards Cannon; fiction by Bela Petsco, Michael Fillerup, Douglas Thayer, John Bennion, Levi Peterson, Linda Sillitoe, Marden Clark, M. Shayne Bell, Rodello Hunter, and Phyllis Barber; the poetry of Clarice Short, Emma Lou Thayne, Linda Sillitoe, Lisa Orme Bickmore, Kathy Evans, Marilyn Bushman-Carlton, Susan Howe, and Alex Caldiero; several biographical, theological, and historical studies of literary importance, a Mormon Classics Series that includes three long out-of-print works by Virginia Sorensen; and most notably, several influential compilations and anthologies: (all but the last two out of print, sadly): *Greening Wheat: Fifteen*

Mormon Short Stories (1983); *Harvest: Contemporary Mormon Poems* (1989); *Bright Angels and Familiars: Mormon Short Stories* (1992); *Tending the Garden: Essays on Mormon Literature* (1996); and *In Our Lovely Deseret* (1998).

In 1989 the Association for Mormon Letters presented Signature Books with a Special Recognition award for providing a much-needed venue for more literary sorts of LDS publishing. As an "alternative" press, Signature has dared to publish what the official and quasi-official presses could not. Its more liberal editorial policies have made possible publication of works of a high literary quality, but such policies by no means guarantee literary quality, and can, in fact, prove very narrowly liberal, as Eugene England argues in his review of Signature's *In Our Lovely Deseret* in this volume. The publisher's liberal reputation has estranged not only mainstream LDS audiences but many authors and academics uncomfortable with the ways LDS leaders and culture are not respected in some Signature titles.⁵ Signature has thus both filled a gap and created another.

Many smaller publishers have appeared in recent years attempting to fill that gap, at least in part. In 1989 Orson Scott Card inaugurated his publishing company, Hatrack River, with the publication of Kathryn H. Kidd's *Paradise Vue*. In his preface to that novel, he provided a manifesto for popular and literary LDS fiction that he has tried to realize in sponsoring nine novels to date from that press. In 1999 Tabernacle Books began the *Mormon Literary Library* series, reprinting the fiction and non-fiction of critically acclaimed works by Eugene England, Douglas Thayer, and Donald Marshall, and promising to feature new fiction as well. Eborn Books has published reprints of early LDS tracts, pamphlets, and histories (LDS "literature" in its broadest sense). Although there is much that is peripheral to literary interests on their list, Eborn has made available some essential, but otherwise inaccessible, early LDS fiction and literature, such as the first LDS short story, Parley P. Pratt's *The Angel of the Prairies*. With the ease of desktop publishing and with publishing-on-demand technologies making possible economical press runs of small quantities, we are sure to see an increasing trend towards self-publishing, publishers issuing reprints, and specialized new publishers that can afford to stay small. One such example is Zarahemla Motets/White Crow Press in Thousand Oaks, California, which has allowed poet Michael R. Collings to produce several high-quality poetry monographs, including *The Nephiad*, an epic in blank verse based on the Book of Mormon and done in the style of Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

5. Signature has earned the sobriquet of "Korihor Press" during an altercation with FARMS not long ago, and has become for many a litmus test for Mormon liberals. See, for example, John W. Redelf's much-circulated and debated internet essay, "Who are the Signatur?" (<http://www.ptialaska.net/~la7878/signatur.html>).

The big sellers in LDS publishing are fiction series. Gerald Lund's *The Work and the Glory* series (Bookcraft) has awakened a whole new generation of LDS readers to the vitality of the fictional medium for experiencing LDS history, and its runaway success has given momentum to other historical fiction series, such as the *Children of the Promise* series by Dean Hughes (Deseret Book). As mentioned above, genre series are also now very prominent in LDS publishing, including children's, young adult, science fiction, and romance series. If 25 years ago authors like Shirley Sealy and Jack Weyland were proving to Deseret Book that fiction would sell, Lund and Hughes have now proven that the fiction series will sell best to a Mormon market.

Electronic Publication

A third important development in the landscape of LDS literature is the advent of electronic publication. As Robert Hogge asserted in his recent presidential address to the Association for Mormon Letters, electronic publishing is changing LDS publishing dramatically.⁶ This can be seen on several fronts.

First, major LDS publishers have assembled CD-ROM products that make available many literary titles long out of print. The Infobase Library (Bookcraft) and GospeLink (Deseret Book)—now being merged along with their parent companies—are primarily gospel study aids, but include literary titles or other writings very relevant to literary research. Signature Book's *New Mormon Studies* CD-ROM is a more expensive but very useful CD-ROM for literary purposes, including many of Signature's own out-of-print literary titles and the full text of all back issues of *Dialogue*, *Sunstone*, and *Sunstone Review*. All of these CD products suffer from "shovelware" marketing, the attempt to digitize and dump onto a disc public domain or out-of-print titles that are not necessarily of superior quality in order to advertise the greatest number of available works. All of them have interfaces that are frustrating to use for computer novices and experts alike (despite all advertising to the contrary). And all are much more likely to be used for occasional reference than for any serious, continuous reading. These are problems more of the medium than the content, but the problems remain. The upside is that titles unlikely to be reprinted are receiving a new life, and this opens up real possibilities for literary research, if not for popular literary consumption. What does not exist is a CD of out-of-print or public domain LDS titles of a purely literary character, but that may be too much to hope for. However, Brigham Young University has recently committed enormous re-

6. Robert M. Hogge, "Mormon Literature in Cyberspace: The New Frontier," *Annual of the Association for Mormon Letters*, 1997, ed. by Lavina Fielding Anderson, Salt Lake City: Association for Mormon Letters, 1997. 1-5.

sources to transcribing and digitizing numerous pioneer diaries that will open up both literary and historical study of these cultural treasures as these diaries get published electronically.

Second, the electronic realm is now becoming a principal medium for marketing books. Deseret Book on-line, LDSWORLD, seagull-book.com, and most recently AllMormon.com⁷ are regional equivalents of Amazon.com (where LDS books are also regularly sold), and these reach many people who do not have an LDS bookstore around the corner where they can shop. Regardless of the products currently being sold, the avenues of advertising and distribution are being laid like so many train tracks across the desert, and this means more books and more kinds of books will be reaching more and more people (LDS or not). One negative note on the commercial electronic frontier is the attempt by Deseret Book to monopolize LDS on-line sales. While offering all vendors of LDS titles free promotion on their website, they threaten to pull those vendors' titles from their bookstore chain if they ever set up an on-line presence to compete with Desert Book's on-line storefront. This seems very much against the democratic and entrepreneur-friendly environment of the web, and will perhaps not last.

Many of the smaller publishers alluded to above are staking a claim on the electronic frontier with small on-line stores. For example, Encore Performance Publishing⁸ offers more LDS plays, musicals (and even puppet shows) for purchase on-line than you ever knew existed. It isn't hard to set up a website and begin selling one's wares directly to the public, and little LDS publishers and vendors come and go with some regularity.⁹ An example of a more established, single-publisher website (in contrast to the all-things-LDS megasites) is Orson Scott Card's Hatrack River. Besides having its own web address, this publishing company is part of Card's well-known and much visited on-line community, "Nauvoo."¹⁰ There, in a model of how the electronic environment can really service literary interests, one cannot only purchase books, but chat about them in live sessions with authors, and download first chapters or drafts of Card's works in progress. Card is to be applauded for innovating reader feedback and for taking seriously the integration of literature within the framework of LDS living generally. (His on-line community also includes "Vigor," a pragmatic newsletter on living the gospel.)

Third, the electronic realm is proving a wonderful new resource for literary research. Along with the CD-ROM products mentioned above,

7. <http://deseretbook.com/>; <http://www.ldsworld.com/>; <http://seagullbook.com/>; and <http://www.AllMormon.com> respectively.

8. <http://www.encoreplay.com/>

9. See, for example, Zedek Books (<http://www.mormonprophecy.com/>).

10. <http://www.hatrack.com/>; <http://www.nauvoo.com/>

websites devoted to LDS literature, authors, or to things Mormon in general are becoming very important. The Mormon Literature Website¹¹ is maintained at BYU by Gideon Burton, who teaches LDS Literature there. This contains an electronic bibliography of LDS literature developed by Eugene England, a large and growing on-line anthology of LDS literature, many full-length historical and critical articles on LDS literature, as well as on-line biographies of authors, critics, and others important to the LDS literary scene. Some websites are devoted to individual authors, such as the sites featuring poet Charis Southwell,¹² children's book author Rick Walton,¹³ mystery writer Anne Perry,¹⁴ or Rachel Nunes,¹⁵ author of the best-selling *Ariana* series (Covenant). Other general LDS websites sometimes include a literary dimension, such as familyforever.com. That site is devoted mainly to genealogical help, but includes a section profiling LDS artists, including authors.¹⁶ The church's official website now includes full-length General Conference addresses. As the sermon becomes more studied as literature, this will increase in importance (as will the full-text version of all past issues of the *Ensign* that the church has promised but indefinitely postponed publishing on CD-ROM). Anyone on-line knows that many a web-savvy Mormon has created his/her own website, and a number of these present general information or links to LDS materials that include much of literary and cultural interest. Perhaps most prominent among these are LDS-Index.org, "The Index for LDS Readers"; MormonLinks; LDSDirectory.com; About.com's LDS site; CyberSaints; the Bengali Project's LDS Internet Resource; and Gregory Woodhouse's LDS Resources.¹⁷ The most extensive effort yet to canvass, catalogue, and categorize the Mormon electronic frontier is Lauramaery Gold's book, *Mormons on the Internet*,¹⁸ whose 2000-2001 update is in the works. Not all of this impressive resource concerns the literary dimension of Mormonism, but it is the current "bible" of LDS on-line sources. Benson Parkinson maintains a much smaller list, but one focused exclusively on Mormon literature. His includes literary events, LDS publishers, journals publishing LDS writing, and links to relevant newspapers, bookstores, libraries, and other websites relevant to LDS writers.¹⁹

11. <http://humanities.byu.edu/mldb/mlithome.htm>

12. <http://www.rfgreenwood.com/charis/>

13. <http://users.itsnet.com/~rickwalton/>

14. <http://www.plcmc.lib.nc.us/find/bios/perry.htm>

15. <http://www.ranunes.com/>

16. <http://www.familyforever.com/artists.htm>

17. <http://www.lds-index.org/>; <http://www.mormonlinks.com/>; <http://www.LSDirectory.com/>; <http://www.LDS.about.com/culture/lds/>; <http://www.ptialaska.net/~la7878/>; <http://www.lds.npl.com/>; <http://www.wnetc.com/resource/lds/>

18. Lauramaery Gold, *Mormons on the Internet* (Rocklin, California: Prima Publishing, 1997).

19. <http://www.cc.weber.edu/~byparkinson/aml-list.html>

Fourth, the electronic realm has proven to be a healthy medium for budding writers to form communities, exchange information, and develop their craft. The AML-List email list,²⁰ moderated by the indefatigable Benson Parkinson, has become a staging grounds for many up-and-coming writers, as well as a forum for those posting queries or interested generally in issues relating to LDS literature. It has spawned a sister list, LDSF, that discusses and promotes LDS speculative fiction.²¹ Another focused on-line forum is ANWA (American Night Writers Association—formerly the Arizona Night Writers Association), which is for LDS women writers.²² The Association for Mormon Letters has noticed its membership swell ever since the inception of AML-List, testifying to the way that a new generation of writers is both interested in writing and discussing LDS literature, and that the tools and communities necessary for becoming bona fide writers are being brokered on-line.

Not to be overlooked is *Harvest: An On-line Magazine for the LDS Community* (www.harvestmagazine.com), which promises to enrich LDS literary culture generally and to provide a publishing outlet for LDS writers especially. This recent comer to the Mormon internet is an attractively designed on-line periodical which, in addition to posting current news of interest to Latter-day Saints, features columns such as "Discipleship," "History," "Classic Mormon Discourse," "Building Bridges" (devoted to appreciating non-LDS culture from a Mormon viewpoint), and "World at Large." This last column is to feature "LDS and non-LDS writers who focus on topics, stories, books, history, films, etc., that are from the world in which we live." Current offerings in the magazine include a rather eclectic mix of both LDS and non-LDS writings, reprints, and new material: Lowell Bennion, Eugene England, J. Reuben Clark, Jr., Fyodor Dostoevsky, Henry David Thoreau, and Seamus Heaney. Time will tell if the editor, Dallas Robbins, can sustain interest in such diverse offerings and if he can both solicit and require quality material from new writers.

We see the burgeoning electronic realm with both optimism and caution. On the one hand, it makes many more texts available to more people—both new titles being marketed on-line and older texts being resurrected or archived digitally. Through electronic discussion lists and e-mail generally, critical discussion about LDS literature occurs constantly and brings together people of different backgrounds, disciplines, and tastes who would otherwise be unaware of their common interests. On the other hand, much of the discussion of LDS literature can be superficial, uninformed, or redundant. On the AML-List, for example, certain issues are revisited regularly without adding particularly to the

20. <http://www.cc.weber.edu/~byparkinson/aml-list.html>

21. <http://www.zfiction.com/lds/>

22. <http://www.netzone.com/~pegshumw/>

most cogent statements that have been published on a given issue. However, e-mail discussions often include references to, or reminders of, such seminal works. And from time to time a discussion "thread" will indeed add something significant to larger critical discourse, and has become the basis for more developed print articles. Still, the nature of e-mail today remains informal and underinformed. It need not, since a lot of the primary works, bibliographical references, and criticism about LDS works are archived and growing on-line. Perhaps in the future online critical discussions will become as informed as they are lively. Promoting such critical forums lies at the heart of the Association for Mormon Letters.

In a seminal review of LDS literary history, Eugene England referred to the dawning of a brighter day as he assessed the breadth of new writers and subjects that had come to be since the 1960s.²³ At the turn of the century, we reiterate his theme and his optimism. The numbers of writers, publishers, publications, genres, journals, publishing venues, and media have all increased, multiplying the amount and the significance of LDS literary adventures. The Association for Mormon Letters wishes to provide and encourage the criticism so needed to match this output. Our hope is that each of the works in this issue continues to move us in that direction. We strongly believe, along with Wayne Booth, that Mormons "won't get a great artistic culture until we have a great critical culture."²⁴ This, we feel, would give Mormon literature its best chance to meet Orson Whitney's prophetic dream of creating Miltons and Shakespeares of our own.²⁵

23. Eugene England, "The Dawning of a Brighter Day: Mormon Literature After 150 Years," *BYU Studies* 22 (Spring 1982): 131-60.

24. Ross, Joy C., and Steven C. Walker, eds. *Letters to Smoother, etc.: Proceedings of the Fifth Annual BYU Symposium on the Humanities* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, n.d. [1980?]), p. 32.

25. Orson Whitney, "Home Literature," *Contributor* (July, 1888). Rpt. in *A Believing People: Literature of the Latter-day Saints* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1974), 206.

Danger on the Right! Danger on the Left! The Ethics of Recent Mormon Fiction

Eugene England

THE FIRST EXAMPLE of what could be called a Mormon short story was written by an apostle, Parley P. Pratt. It was published in the *New York Herald* on January 1, 1844, and collected in Richard Cracroft's and Neal Lambert's anthology, *A Believing People: Literature of the Latter-day Saints* (Provo, Utah: BYU Press, 1974). It is called "A Dialogue between Joe Smith and the Devil" and is quite witty, imaginative in setting and characterization, lively in its language, and, though clearly pro-Mormon, aimed at a non-Mormon audience. It consists wholly of a conversation between Joseph Smith and "his Satanic majesty," whom Joseph interrupts putting up handbills calling for all "busy bodies, pickpockets, vagabonds, filthy persons, and all other infidels and rebellious, disorderly persons, for a crusade against . . . the Mormons."

The story has an obvious didactic purpose, as Elder Pratt has the Devil bring up most of the central precepts of Mormon doctrine, such as "direct communication with God," and then indirectly praise them by pointing out how powerful they are and destructive to his own evil purposes. The story is important for my discussion here because of the author's ability to create two characters so completely different from each other in perspective and purpose and keep us interested in, and even sympathetic to, both throughout the story. At the end, the Devil proposes, "What is the use of parting enemies, the fact is, you go in for the wheat and I for the tares. Both must be harvested; are we not fellow laborers?" And Joseph Smith agrees: "I neither want yours, nor you mine—a man free from prejudice will give the Devil his due. Come, here is the right hand of fellowship." The Devil suggests they "go down to Mammy Brewer's cellar and take something to drink." Mammy Brewer is quite surprised but pleased: "If you can drink together, I think all the world

ought to be friends." The Devil then suggests, "As we are both temperance men and ministers, I think perhaps a glass of spruce beer apiece." Joseph Smith agrees and in turn suggests they toast each other. And they do, the Devil with grudging admiration and Joseph with a fine example of frontier hyperbole:

Devil: Here's to my good friend, Joe Smith, may all sorts of ill-luck befall him, and may he never be suffered to enter my kingdom, either in time or eternity, for he would almost make me forget that I am a devil, and make a gentleman of me, while he gently overthrows my government at the same time that he wins my friendship.

Smith: Here's to his Satanic Majesty; may he be driven from the earth and be forced to put to sea in a stone canoe with an iron paddle, and may the canoe sink, and a shark swallow the canoe and its royal freight and an alligator swallow the shark and may the alligator be bound in the northwest corner of hell, the door be locked, key lost, and a blind man hunting for it.¹

Ethical fiction, I believe, like Joseph Smith here, gives the Devil his due, brings opposites together metaphorically, and thus makes more possible what I believe to be the greatest single ethical ideal—that, as Mammy Brewer puts it, "all the world ought to be friends."² A few months after this story was published, Joseph Smith was killed, for some of the very reasons the Devil predicts in this story—that in the future he will not be so friendly: "If my former course has excited contempt and caused you to be despised, my future course will be to excite jealousy, fear and alarm, till all the world is ready to arise and crush you."³ Just a few weeks before his death, Joseph wrote a man who had sent him a book on various U. S. religions, praising him for letting each church "tell its own story" through the words of one of its own believers and then putting those presentations together for comparison because, "By proving contraries, truth is made manifest" (*History of the Church*, edited by B. H. Roberts, 6:428). By "prove" he did not mean to provide a final proof of one or the other contrary, but to test, to try out, to examine both alternatives, or all, in the light of each other; he meant that truth is not found in extremes, in choosing one polar opposite over another, but in seeing what emerges from careful, tolerant study of the dialectic between the two. Ethical fiction brings the great contraries into juxtaposition and moves us to new visions of truth greater than any of the poles.

Perhaps the single greatest contrary, the one responsible for most of the terrible wars and atrocities of history and the divisions and preju-

1. Cracroft, 339.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

dices and hate crimes that continue to plague and divide us, is the contrary of self and others, between private conscience and public responsibility, between the claims of one's deepest sense of selfhood and the claims of the "other." These are, of course, forms of what post-modern thought has focused on as "alterity" and explored as a central element of all our human experience and constructions, including language, one which often leads to anxiety, oppression, even violence, but consciousness of which can allow for change and healing. Our fear of difference, of otherness, too often results in our inability or unwillingness to respond in love, with a sense of ethical responsibility, to other humans who are unlike us in certain ways (gender, race, religion, tribe, sexual orientation, political party, economic class), our unwillingness even to tolerate such difference and, thus, our various efforts to destroy it. Ethical fiction helps us learn to give such "devils" their due. Ethical fiction is, as Kafka said, an ax for the frozen sea within us—the frozen sea, I believe, of intolerance, of prejudice, of fear of difference.

The central scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and of the Book of Mormon call us to accept the "other" unconditionally, to welcome the stranger, even to extend ourselves to serve those we feel are most different and, thus, undeserving of our love and help. To the House of Israel, who prided themselves on being chosen and thus favored by God, God said, "The stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God" (Lev. 19:34-35). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus made an even more demanding proclamation of what God asks of us in order to be his children and follow his example, "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy, But I say unto you, Love your enemies. . . . That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:44-45). And the ancient American prophet Nephi declared, "All are alike unto God, . . . black and white, bond and free, male and female, . . . Jew and Gentile" (2 Nephi 26:33).

Such fundamental ethical teachings are, I believe, reinforced powerfully by ethical fiction, both through honest and thorough examination of difference and the gaps in our thought structures and institutions that reveal our efforts to suppress it and also in visions of new and healing possibilities. Simply *knowing* how wrong and destructive prejudice is and what its masks are will not move us to change as effectively as *feelings* can, the way ethical fiction can; we need axes for the frozen seas within us.

In 1992 I published an anthology of "contemporary Mormon stories" called *Bright Angels and Familiars*. It was the fruit of the unprecedented, nearly explosive, growth of Mormon literature in the 1980s, when there were huge gains in quality as well as quantity and increasing publication

both nationally and locally. In the late seventies you could count the fine Mormon fiction writers on one hand, and all of them were then published only by regional presses and journals. By 1992 I was able to include twenty-two very impressive authors, nearly all of whom had published their own collections and many of whom were placing stories and collections with national publishers—and I apologized that I did not have room for others of similar quality. In an essay in 1980, I had claimed, mainly as an act of faith, that Mormonism was a new religious tradition with a unique theology and powerful ethnic identity and mythic vision of the kind that should produce a good and characteristic literature. Only ten years later, as I read over all the Mormon stories I could find, choosing the best for my anthology, and then reread and thought about the collection as a whole for my introduction, I was elated. Here was a plenitude of rich confirmations of my faith in Mormon literature and much reason for optimism about the prospects of more and better to come.

I was especially pleased that I could find so many stories that were not only esthetically good but *ethically* good. I had long been convinced, due to the influence of mentors like William Mulder and Brewster Ghiselin at the University of Utah and Wallace Stegner and Yvor Winters at Stanford, that any literature that is worth much of our attention is ethical—that it is intended to persuade us to understand better the values we do or might live by and thus to choose better, to be more humane, sympathetic, compassionate, at least more courageous, more able to endure. I was able to say in my introduction to *Bright Angels* that I had chosen stories that were valuable “not only because they are skillful. . . [but] because they are written by people with a recognizably Mormon background which leads them through their stories to express, reveal, develop, and challenge the shape of Mormon beliefs.” I asserted that “morality—and faith—in fiction are not a matter simply of content nor even a question of whether a matter is presented in a ‘balanced’ way. They have much more to do with the shape of the author’s own belief and moral vision, which inevitably show through to a careful reader.” I claimed that the stories I had been able to choose each give “a new vision of life, filtered and energized through a believing, moral intelligence as well as a gifted and disciplined artistic sensibility.”⁴

Six years later I am not as optimistic—about either the esthetic or the ethical quality of the Mormon fiction now being published. Two anthologies of Mormon short stories have been published since 1992, *Turning Hearts: Short Stories on Family Life* (Bookcraft, 1994) and *In Our Lovely De-*

4. Eugene England, “The New Mormon Fiction,” in *Bright Angels and Familiars*, ed. Eugene England (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), xviii–xix.

Deseret: Mormon Fictions (Signature Books, 1998).⁵ At first glance, these collections may seem polar opposites of each other: The first, published by what was then the major semi-official LDS press, Bookcraft, is conservative, cautious, earnest, with much amateur writing and much piety. The second, published by the sometimes radically revisionist Mormon independent press, Signature Books, is liberal, experimental, ironic, with much very skilled writing and in-your-face impiety. But my main point here is that the two anthologies are actually very much alike in crucial ways, that many of the stories in each fail—ethically and esthetically—for very similar reasons. If there is anything like a “great tradition” of Mormon literature, a center of integrated artistic and moral quality based firmly in an informed and critical Mormon world-view, one that *Bright Angels* demonstrated and encouraged, then these books show that tradition is in some danger—for quite similar reasons—from both the right and the left.

A great part of the danger is the very division itself into right and left. In the past ten years, the Mormon intellectual community has been riven into two mutually exclusive groups. On the one hand are those who call themselves “faithful” and “submissive”—and who are dismissed as “apologists” by the other group, while on the other hand are those who call themselves “honest” and “revisionist” and are dismissed by the first group as “dissidents,” with each group supporting mainly (sometimes exclusively) its own favored forums and journals and publishing houses. It seems now that the literary community is following suit in this immature divisiveness. Though there are some of the authors I chose for *Bright Angels* in each of these anthologies, not even one author appears in both of them; the right and the left are exclusive of each other, even somewhat militantly so. Ethical fiction, I believe, must not be exclusivist. It must at least *try* to draw circles that include rather than ones that exclude. It must certainly recognize, define, even emphasize contraries, but must be willing to bring them together with demonstrated respect for all the differences.

The very titles of the two new anthologies are indicative of separation, of self-conscious moving to the extremes of the right or the left. The phrase “Turning Hearts” used in the one title refers to a well-known and evocative passage from both the Bible and the Doctrine and Covenants, which announces that the ancient prophet Elijah would return to the earth to provide means to unite in love the whole human family, even across generations: to “turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the children to the fathers” (Mal. 3:24, D&C 128:17). In his introduction,

5. Orson Scott Card and David Dollahite, eds., *Turning Hearts: Short Stories on Family Life* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992); Robert Raleigh, ed., *In Our Lovely Deseret: Mormon Fictions* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998).

Card tells us explicitly that the editors' purpose was "to try to fulfill that prophecy" by choosing stories that "deal with family relationships as we hoped," and he praises one story for exemplifying "all that I hoped for in the fiction of commitment."⁶ On the other hand, "In Our Lovely Deseret" is the title of a favorite early Mormon hymn which, as the cover blurb reminds us, is used here ironically: "[The hymn] urges Latter-day Saints to be 'polite,' 'affable and kind,' and 'treat everybody right.' In [our anthology], good manners and proper etiquette are no longer even considered virtuous in many situations." In his preface, in addition to claiming his authors are all "on the periphery" of Mormonism, Raleigh sets them up as in opposition to the Mormon tendency "to see the world in terms of good and evil only" and to use fiction to "instruct and enlighten." His selections are, in contrast he claims, "not for or against, but about."⁷ To the extent that is true, his selections tend to be ethical, to allow for the proving of contraries, but it seems to be there is much "for and against" in *Lovely Deseret* as well as *Turning Hearts*.

Both of these editors, coming from very different places, seem to indulge in the same fallacy—that good ethical fiction can be produced by mere commitment to ethical positions, by an ideological design, one that is either already in favor of certain didactic premises or already against them, with either a right-wing or a left-wing cultural agenda. That leads directly to ethical manipulation, not ethical discovery and genuine change. Good ethical fiction, it seems to me, comes about when ethical people, with inborn and well-trained literary ability, engage the world artistically and openly. When this happens, characters are created who are allowed—even encouraged—by their authors to take on a kind of independent existence. Through the essentially mysterious process of imaginative creation, they can thus appear actually to have independent existence, a kind of moral agency, and thus make surprising, unprogrammed, ethical moves and discoveries. In turn, we as readers are open to consider and adopt new ethical perspectives for ourselves, because we too feel our agency is being respected, that we are not being manipulated. The characters thus take on such an appearance of reality that we love them and learn from them—like we do our friends, or even people we know well whom we think are wrong. The stories in both anthologies that fail for me, and I'm afraid that is most of them, do so mainly because I feel equally manipulated by them, whether from the right or the left. Too few of the stories have characters who seem independent from their authors, capable of making decisions the authors would disapprove of and still love them.

6. Orson Scott Card, "Families in Fiction," in Card and Dollahite, 3-4.

7. Raleigh, "Editor's Preface," viii.

In addition, neither anthology is able to supercede the ancient wisdom that good literature both ethically instructs and esthetically delights—and that you can't really do one without the other. The morality of too much of *Turning Hearts*, no matter how earnest, is flawed because the stories are amateurish, stereotyped, and sentimentally manipulative; the quality of too much of *Lovely Deseret* is flawed because the stories, however well written, are aggressively, didactically unmannerly, in-your-face, and yet also sentimentally manipulative.

Time for some examples: Though I am going to focus here on the stories that fail for me, both anthologies certainly contain good stories and are worth reading, for positive reasons as well as the negative lessons I will emphasize. Some of the best work in *Turning Hearts* is by the editors themselves. David Dollahite, who has never published fiction before, begins the collection with "Possum Funeral," a complex study of a father haunted so much by the failures of his own father that he continues to make the same mistakes with his son. Orson Scott Card, who has published lots of first-rate fiction and won national and international prizes, ends *Turning Hearts* with a fine story, "Worthy to Be One of Us," full of wit and complex characters, including a woman who both uses the name of God in vain and has prophetic dreams. However, Gideon Burton has persuasively argued that even these two stories—and most of the others in *Turning Hearts*—are flawed by leaving us with fathers who have acted like spoiled brats through most of the story and cannot be redeemed into models of maturity and change by a sudden resolution that ends with hugs and kisses.⁸ Two stories that do produce believable characters going through believable change toward maturity, with no sudden and simple solutions, are Margaret Young's "Hanauma Bay" and Zina Peterson's "Now Let's Dance."

Lee Mortenson's story, "Not Quite Peru," is one of the best in *Lovely Deseret*. It is an exceptionally skilled and engaging first-person study of a Mormon woman trying to find her own way, drawn both by actual parents on a mission in Peru and the body-building guru, a "surrogate parent," she lives with—all of whom both oppress and nurture her: "I think of Linda and her holiness. I think of my parents and their holiness. There are few moments when my brain is not full of the people I love."⁹ There is also a segment from Levi Peterson's fine novel, *Aspen Maroonery*, where the protagonist, attending his high school reunion, discovers from his lover of forty years ago that he has a son by her. This man is a miss-

8. Gideon Burton, "Aspirations to the Spirit of Elijah: Can Mormon Fiction Transcend Its Adolescence? Orson Scott Card and David Dollahite's *Turning Hearts: Short Stories of Family Life*." Annual Conference of the Association for Mormon Letters, February, 1998. Available on-line at <http://humanities.byu.edu/MLDB/burtcard.htm>.

9. Lee Mortensen, "Not Quite Peru," in Raleigh, 173.

shapen reprobate, whom he finds, when he goes to verify her claim by watching him perform at a rodeo, looks just like his own father. We get here a good sense of the huge compassion Levi feels for the grotesques and sinners of the world.

But too many of the stories in both anthologies are so driven by didactic purposes that the complexity and compassion of good ethical fiction are missing—and the esthetic quality suffers as well. Stories that are written to prove a pre-determined point, rather than as a journey of ethical discovery, tend both to get the details of everyday living unclear or wrong and yet to find some way to have someone state the “moral” (however immoral it is) clearly and baldly at some point. “Father, Forgive Us” in *Turning Hearts* is a simple lesson against judging: A man reading the Book of Mormon one evening is suddenly struck with the insight that King Benjamin asks his people to “repent of your *sins* and forsake them” and that for forty years he has been using the safer phrase in his prayers, “help us to overcome our shortcomings and imperfections.” He decides that he *is* a sinner (uses “cuss words” and misses home teaching visits occasionally, was uncomfortable with a Vietnamese family moving in close by), so that night, in prayer with his wife, asks God to “forgive us our sins.” His wife gets suspicious that this is guilt over something specific and builds an imaginary case in her mind for an affair with his new secretary, bangs a skillet on the counter, and goes to confront him at his office when he works late. There, she finds she’s mistaken, so she goes home to fix him his favorite foods—and that night surprises him when she too prays, “Please forgive us for our *sins*.”¹⁰

The story has a nice twist, from the husband’s somewhat overzealous focus on his minor sins to the wife’s deep recognition of the serious sin of suspicious judging. But this is merely a clever sermon, not really fiction, not ethical storytelling, no carefully recreated journey and hard-won new understanding and relationship. There is even a cop-out by the author and by the husband. When he comes home to find the favorite foods prepared late at night and a dent in the Formica counter-top, he keeps silent: “He wasn’t sure he wanted to know and he wasn’t sure he would understand anyway.”¹¹ No honest, confrontative journey to new communication here, no testing out, working through, of contraries. And for me this little moral tale further loses its moral force when the author has the bishop, who has also begun to make judgments, call and take the husband fly-fishing in order to fish for evidence of an affair with the secretary. For me a clear symptom of the problem is that the author gets the details of fly-fishing quite wrong.

10. Randall L. Hall, “Father, Forgive Us,” in Card and Dollahite, 61-62, 67.

11. *Ibid.*, 67.

Does this matter? I think so. If we can't trust authors about the details of the surface of life, how can they expect us to trust their moral guidance and judgments when they go under the surface to the deepest matters of life, like sexual infidelity and honest prayer? That is, if they are unwilling to focus on the details and do the careful observation and thinking (including doing research and asking those who know) and by these means go beyond stereotypes in some areas, ones we know the truth about, such as a trade or profession of (especially) a culture, we may rightly wonder if they are feeding us clichés rather than fresh ethical thinking in the even more difficult areas.

In another story from *Turning Hearts*, "Birthday Gift," a father rejects the puppy his children and wife buy him for his birthday because of unresolved guilt and grief about Suzy, a family dog his own father had had put down when he was a boy because the dog was not consistently disciplined and killed a neighbor's ducklings.¹² The author is, again, careless about surface details—he describes the wife standing "with hips akimbo" (only arms and legs, not hips, can do that). But he is very careful to make sure the *moral* is clearly stated by that patient wife. After the husband describes, looking with her at a photograph of him and Suzy, how his mother only cut his or the dog's hair when she couldn't ignore it, he continues: "We'd lope along with everybody doing their own things until something would go wrong" and then Mom or Dad "would get a bee in their bonnet and make life hell for us." On cue the author tells us, "Janet's eyes were thoughtful, 'That's what happened . . . with Suzy. . . . Instead of solving the problem when it would be easy to solve, everybody let it slide until there was a crisis.'"¹³ And now that he, and we, have learned the moral, the story quickly ends, happily of course, as they keep the puppy, everyone resolved to discipline it properly.

The authors in *Lovely Deseret* do not often make careless surface mistakes in such details as fly-fishing and usage; they are mainly better-trained writers and seem to value their craft. The mistakes here are more those of sloppy generalization and ideological stereotyping, leading to similarly didactic and ethically sterile conclusions. Every Mormon authority figure is crass, prejudiced, clueless. Almost every first-person narrator is sensitive and misunderstood, with no apparent ironic distance from the author. Nearly every member of a minority group—except the Mormons of course—is intuitively wise, beautiful in their own way, and persecuted.

For instance, in "Almond Milk," the narrator, a closet gay missionary trying to make it through with his testimony and a new, straight identity

12. Carroll Morris, "Birthday Gift," in Card and Dollahite, 68-84.

13. *Ibid.*, 81.

still intact, has a zone leader from hell, a one-dimensional Nazi Mormon who speaks nothing but insults—like, when the narrator starts to leave the bathroom, “Wash your hands, Elder. You’ll be out there representing the church. Don’t be disgusting.”¹⁴ The story is one of the better-written and most interesting, exploring the inner conflict of a young man in such a desperate dilemma, but the author seems unable to let that man have agency, the full complexity that he implies by making him both gay and committed to the gospel. The elder’s thoughts regularly slip from that complexity to the direct and bitter denunciations that we must assume are really the author’s own voice drawing an obvious moral: “It seemed there had to be something wrong with the kind of leadership I’d experienced my whole mission which made . . . selfishness almost inevitable. In fact, the whole idea of the mission was to use other people, to baptize others to prove ourselves to God that we were worthy of the Celestial Kingdom.” Or, another time, “I remembered my Sunday school teacher telling our class of fourteen-year-olds that if for no other reason, we should stay in the church and be good so we could have eternal sex. It was a way of keeping us in line sexually, to threaten to take sex away from us.”¹⁵ Such negative stereotyping might work as irony or to reveal an unreliable narrator, but there is no hint of such things going on here.

The worst offender in this kind of surface inaccuracy and bald didacticism that undermines the possibility of ethical insight is in the last story in *Lovely Deseret*, usually the place of honor for highest achievement. Indeed, that place is given to Walter Kirn, the writer here with the largest national reputation, whose story, “Mormon Eden,” was published in 1997 in *The New Yorker*. The narrator, a teenager recently converted to Mormonism in Minnesota, just as Kirn himself was, is much like the one in Kirn’s other Mormon stories—somewhat naive, genuinely converted to Mormonism’s practical, good influence on his dysfunctional family. Here, the young narrator is further impressed by being in a religion whose sacred places are close by in America—New York, Missouri—“where a person could actually see for himself.”¹⁶ Indeed the story is of a church youth trip by bus to Nauvoo, Illinois, and the places in Missouri where Joseph Smith said Eden had been and Christ would come again.

But Kirn gets many of the details of Mormon life wrong and gives us crass stereotypes: The ward youth leader is called “Elder Tinsdale” and says things like, “The seating arrangements are fixed. . . . They’re the result of careful prayer.” A more serious error is Kirn’s description of a Mormon priesthood blessing, given when the narrator is ill: “Two elders

14. Johnny Townsend, “Almond Milk,” in Raleigh, 67.

15. *Ibid.*, 72.

16. Walter Kirn, “Mormon Eden,” in Raleigh, 273.

sat me in a folding chair, settled their palms on my skull, and started muttering. After requesting Heavenly Father's aid, they went on to predict my future."¹⁷ Besides the gratuitously belittling tone, that passage is extremely unlikely in its details.

The most seriously mistaken and unethical claim of the story concerns the girl who sits by the narrator on the bus and that night seduces him with oral sex when she takes him out from the chapel where they are all staying. Kirn has the narrator claim she does all this because of "an assignment" from church leaders who think he is falling away from his conversion—and then, believe it or not, deserts him in order, by assignment, to do the same to his bitterly sophisticated, skeptical friend ("other people need me too"). This is not just bad writing. It is ethically corrupt, not interested in breaking down stereotypes and creating new ethical insight and compassion for the other, for those who are different (in this case main-stream Mormons), but contemptuously willing to provide readers a safe kind of voyeurism, even a vicarious violence that can only increase prejudice. The story makes vicious fun, through extreme caricature, of one of the few minorities it is still politically correct to bash—that weird, ultra-conservative sect, Mormonism. And Raleigh and Signature Books—and perhaps most of all *The New Yorker*—ought to be ashamed of themselves for promoting such violence.

But there is a greater shame, one all the editors and publishers of both anthologies must share. That is the shame of promoting an agenda, without self-criticism, whether from the cultural correctness of the right or the political correctness of the left, so single-mindedly that very serious ethical *blindness* results. The most damaging example of this in *Turning Hearts* is "The Door on Wickham Street," in which a first person narrator, visiting his dying grandmother each Thursday, gradually learns that she believes firmly she will "be in hell perpetually."¹⁸ She had had five children in seven years and was pregnant with another when the trusted community doctor told her it wouldn't be wise to bear another child so soon, that she would die and leave her other babies and husband alone—and she agreed to an abortion. But afterwards she feels that "when that little soul was ripped from mine I knew I had done wrong . . . like a little light inside me had gone out," and prays that God will give her a chance to "make things right with Him."¹⁹ Soon another baby comes—but as a young child is accidentally run over by the husband. She begs God, "If you want to send me more children I'll take as many as you send me. I won't complain. And I won't do that awful thing I did before. But, Father, please, please don't take any more babies from me . . . You can take away anything else from

17. Ibid.

18. Robert England Lee, "The Door on Wickham Street," in Card and Dollahite, 261.

19. Ibid., 253.

me and let the devil have my soul when I die. But please don't take any more babies."²⁰

The narrator reflects on what he knows of his grandmother's heroic life and about the times of her being honored, and he finds and copies for us her humble, one-page, life story of self-sacrifice. As the grandmother dies, he is granted a vision of her child that was killed coming to take her home, and then, at the funeral, given another vision of his grandmother's mother birthing her as they crossed the plains, after helping push a wagon up a hill, and then singing a hymn of peace and God's unending love—all of which he calls "little snippets of light granted to me by Divine Providence."²¹

Some may see this as all very edifying, an example perhaps of what Card in his introduction praises as "visionlike spirituality," but to me it borders on blasphemy. The narrator never attempts to disabuse his grandmother—or us—of the utter wrongness of such a concept of God or the injuries done to whole lives by the popular Mormon theology that gave her such a concept. This seems to me an insult both to God and to Mormonism. The God who reveals himself through Christ would never punish such an innocent mistake made under the pressure of authority, certainly not by taking away another child or condemning the mother to hell. The author's anti-abortion agenda has led him (and, indirectly, the editors and publisher) to condone an ethical mistake much worse, I believe, than the grandmother's frightened, obedient abortion.

Perhaps this author can be excused in part by his earnest naivete and lack of writing experience. But no excuses can be found for an equivalently bad story in *Lovely Deseret* called "Sleuths," whose author has published before and is the very opposite of naive. His calculated, in-your-face sophistication is revealed in his author's note, where he chooses to tell us only that he is "a returned Mormon missionary" who "lives in New York City with his boyfriend."²² The "sleuths" of the story are two missionaries, companions who are AWOL, driving out in their mission car to hike the Appalachian Trail (with the car's odometer disconnected to hide the evidence) because they suddenly feel they "deserve a weekend off."²³

This isn't entirely improbable, but the details of the weekend are: These two "sleuths" seem to be searching out some meaning for their boring, over-regulated missionary lives—and the author rewards their search with his own sophomoric nihilism. One elder tells of stuffing a ring in a couch, saying some hocus pocus over it, and then finding it in

20. Ibid., 255-56.

21. Ibid., 263.

22. Raleigh, 288.

23. Derek Gullino, "Sleuths," in Raleigh, 154.

an antique dresser. The two argue blandly whether this is a miracle or just magic and then shift to similar skepticism about the narrator's early experience with a priesthood blessing that he had been told brought him back to life. They get to the trail head and sleep together on the blankets they've brought, engaging off-handedly, uncertainly, in homosexual petting. The next day they "traipse around the Appalachian trail for the greater part of the day. In the afternoon we take pictures of each other acting like explorers, like Lewis and Clark looking for signs of civilization in a new, untamed world. We're bored."²⁴

Of course, by this time we readers are bored too, by this all-too-common form of the imitative fallacy: trying to capture the quality of repetitive, everyday, meaningless existence with boring writing. And so the author tries a familiar cop-out of inferior writers: Rather than stepping back from meaninglessness and attempting to define clearly the shape of its boundary and its ethical significance, he simply tries to shock us with its meaningless horror. The two decide to go back that night, "so as not to press our luck," are passed by two racing cars, and later pass those cars "in a ditch, soldered into each other." The narrator asks, "Do you think they're dead?" and his companion answers in the affirmative with an obscenity that I'll spare you.²⁵ The main point is that they then drive on without helping. The two sleuths have found reality all right—and deserted it.

All this might serve as some kind of cautionary tale, if we could locate an ethical perspective in the story. But the author's tone suggests he's precisely as irresponsible as his characters, as bemused by the quotidian, meaningless world as they are, with only an occasional sexual titillation or religious debunking to relieve it. And those are presented as if they warrant more of the author's (and our) attention than the large ethical questions raised by his attempts to shock us.

But perhaps I'm being unfair in suggesting that this story, and others in *Lovely Deseret*, are merely cynical, even nihilistic. The great Catholic writer Flannery O'Connor produced fiction full of grotesque human beings who mainly failed ethically and spiritually. She was accused of cynicism and even nihilism, despair. But she wrote something that describes herself and all those willing to make the huge effort to write fiction, including those in *Lovely Deseret* I've been critical of:

People without hope not only don't write novels, but what is more to the point, they don't read them. They don't take long looks at anything, because they lack the courage. The way to despair is to refuse to have any kind of experience, and the novel, of course, is a way to have experience.²⁶

24. *Ibid.*, 155.

25. *Ibid.*

26. Flannery O'Connor, *Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose*, ed. by Sally and Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1969), 78.

Let me end on a more positive note. The chief formal tool of an ethical storyteller, I believe, is the skillful use of point of view, especially first person or implied persona, to communicate powerfully to the reader both intense sympathy for the characters and also various means of evaluating their moral journeys. Especially since the brilliant achievements of Robert Browning with dramatic monologue and of Henry James with roving central consciousness, there have been marvelous developments in both technique and skill as writers have learned to use variations in point of view to both delight us esthetically and move and instruct us ethically. Robert Langbaum, in *The Poetry of Experience* (1957), and Wayne Booth, in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1960), gave us the first major critical examinations and evaluations of these tools, especially focusing on the power of first-person narration to gain our non-judgmental sympathy for the main character and yet the subtleties by which the ethical naivetes and immaturities of that unreliable narrator could be signaled by a skillful writer.²⁷ The best of Mormon storytellers, I believe, have used these tools well, for profoundly ethical purposes, and thus have not merely conveyed the author's own prejudices—as, for instance, the authors of "Almond Milk" and "Mormon Eden" do.

Virginia Sorensen grew up in Manti, published three excellent novels about Mormon experience with national publishers in the 1940s, including *The Evening and the Morning*, perhaps the finest Mormon novel.²⁸ She won national prizes for her children's books in the 1950s, and began to write fictionalized essays about her own life. About forty years ago, like Walter Kirn, she published a first-person narrative in *The New Yorker*, but that story, "Where Nothing Is Long Ago,"²⁹ is, I believe, much superior ethically and artistically to "Mormon Eden." It even more powerfully reveals some flaws in Mormon culture but does not belittle that culture or its people—and it uses a complex point of view to show the author subtly learning ethical maturity and drawing us into that same process, rather than into mere prejudice.

As in all her work, Sorensen's subject is sinners, but here these include herself. The implied author is a mature woman looking back on her childhood self but also re-imagining her childhood from the point of

27. Robert W. Langbaum, *The Poetry of Experience: The Dramatic Monologue in Modern Literary Tradition* (New York: Random House, 1957); Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1961). An enlarged second edition of Booth's work was published in 1983.

28. Virginia Sorensen, *The Evening and the Morning* (New York, Harcourt Brace, 1949; Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1999).

29. Virginia Sorensen, "Where Nothing Is Long Ago," in *Where Nothing Is Long Ago: Memories of a Mormon Childhood* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963; Salt Lake City, Signature, 1999).

view of her younger self. The story refers to a poem which begins, "Here in America nothing is long ago," and Sorensen reminds us that Utah Mormon culture is such a place, a place where all the history, including the initial struggle to survive and create a civilization, is recent. The narrative, in Sorensen's mature voice, begins with her telling of a recent letter from her mother about the death of "Brother Tolsen" and a reminder that many years ago that good Saint had killed a water thief with his shovel. The voice and point of view shift to that of Sorensen the summer she was nine, when the killing took place, reflecting in the child's way about her morbid interest in the affair and her apparently uncomprehending awareness that she was "absolutely certain for years afterward that two piles of bloody rabbits' ears I saw on the courthouse lawn at the time of Brother Tolsen's trial had something to do with the killing he was being tried for. They hadn't. They were merely tokens of the fact that the annual county rabbit hunt had gone off according to schedule."³⁰

But, of course, this is the mature author subtly giving us a crucial hint that there *is* a connection, one that Sorensen's mind had intuitively preserved, and her artistic skill puts it in the story in a way that it begins to work on our minds and its journey of ethical discovery, especially as it is reinforced by another seemingly off-hand reference to those rabbit ears. The child's narrative voice notices they are being counted on the courthouse lawn while the jury is being selected, and the mature narrator makes the jarring comment, "Those piles of ears I see to this day."³¹ But before we see the full connection, Sorensen establishes the range of ethical complexity by dwelling in loving detail on the water of her childhood and its fundamental importance to the community. For instance, she reveals its effect on Bishop Peterson, her best friend's father, who was able to leave his lovely Denmark only when he became certain he was going to the Kingdom of God on earth and who found the mountain water "so pure, so shining, so cold, so free, . . . an unmistakable sign of the Kingdom."³² Sorensen includes the naive viewpoint of the child, observing the lonely grief of the murdered man's widow, and the simple sense of justice in the town as Brother Tolsen is acquitted and there is no more water stealing in the valley. But she also includes her mature reflection on how close we still are in the West to the time "when important things were settled violently," how "we remember the wide dry wastes before the mountain water was captured and put to use. Even now, the dry spaces, where the jack rabbits hop through the brush as thick as mites on a hen, are always there, waiting to take over."³³ And that, of

30. *Ibid.*, 3-4.

31. *Ibid.*, 13.

32. *Ibid.*, 7.

33. *Ibid.*, 4.

course, gives us the clue to the irresistible connection of those rabbit ears to Brother Tolsen's killing of his neighbor.

We still retain in the West, beyond any possible need, a sympathy with, even tendency toward, casual violence—whether in the mass rabbit hunts that even in Virginia's childhood had become mere rituals, no longer necessary to protect the crops, or in deer hunting rituals today no longer necessary for survival, or our more serious general acquiescence in vigilante justice, both local and international. Sorensen reminds us of all this, subtly, with her skillful use of complex point of view, and then she ends her essay with a reversal of roles, the naive child confronting the horror and the mature woman showing her compassion for the "other" in her determination to write about her own people's strange but understandable ways. She both increases our ethical judgment of wrong and our empathy for those who are wrong:

... I recall an evening, months after the trial was over, when my parents and I were driving along the road where his fields lay and saw Brother Tolsen working with the little streams that were running among his young corn. Dad and Mother waved and called to him. He lifted an arm to answer, and I saw that he held a shovel in the other hand. "I wonder if he bought a new shovel," I said suddenly.

For a minute, the air seemed to have gone dead about us, in the peculiar way it sometimes can, which is so puzzling to a child. Then Mother turned to me angrily. "Don't you ever let me hear you say a thing like that again!" she said. "Brother Tolsen is a good, kind man!"

So until this very hour I never have.³⁴

That first-rate story was collected in *Where Nothing Is Long Ago: Memories of a Mormon Childhood* (Harcourt, Brace, & World, 1963), which, to their great credit, Signature Books republished in 1999 as part of a series of Sorensen's major work.

Levi Peterson began writing fiction in the 1970s and won the Illinois Short Fiction prize in 1981 for his first collection, *The Canyons of Grace*, which included publication by the University of Illinois Press. In 1986 he published his first novel, *The Backslider*, with Signature Books, another great debt we owe that publisher, which has almost singlehandedly kept serious Mormon fiction on the market the past twenty years. *The Backslider*, in my opinion, rivals Sorensen's *The Evening and the Morning* as the best Mormon novel. Peterson is comparable to Flannery O'Connor in his ability to deal seriously with the theological issues as well as the history and culture of his religion and in his use, for ethical insight, of "gro-

34. Ibid., 14.

tesques"—the physically or spiritually wounded and marginalized humans who, paradoxically, can be made to touch the very center of religious and moral experience and feeling. He is comparable to Faulkner and Morrison, as well as Virginia Sorensen, in his use of complex point of view, often a mature narrator telling a story from a younger, more naive point of view, that leads the reader to share in the ethical growth the narrator has experienced—or failed to experience—since the time of that earlier story.

For example, "The Confessions of Augustine" explores both the illusion of wilderness as an escape from God and the experience of wilderness as the place of an overwhelming encounter with divine grace that "saves" the protagonist but leaves him beaten down, destroyed in will—and still yearning for his lost freedom.³⁵ The narrator, Fremont Durham, is led by continuing guilt and uncertainty to read St. Augustine and then in turn to reflect on an experience from his teenage years when he had worked as a logger, had fallen in love and slept with a non-Mormon woman, then felt suddenly alienated from her, as if God had suddenly interfered. The no-longer-naive narrator insists on the terror just under the surface of his present desperate, heretical theologizing and his life of Mormon orthodoxy haunted by the memory of helping to devastate the forest that he loved. Great ethical complexity is achieved because Fremont, in his presented first-person telling twenty years later, is both a tamed rebel and a successful lumber merchant. Peterson lets a slight edge of irony in Fremont's narrative voice reveal the cost he has paid for such abject surrender to what he thinks is divine grace:

The love of God is obedience. Like Augustine, I know that God will not be scorned. If it suits Him, He will feed me tragedy on the instant. He will shatter me. . . . I will be put into the fiery furnace and whatever is base and impure in me will be burned away and I will be the pure metal that God desires me to be.³⁶

This seems to me, like Sorensen's story, both a more devastating and a more compassionate critique of Mormon culture—and thus more ethically true and helpful—than most of *Lovely Deseret*. Without mere stereotyping, Peterson gives the devil his due and moves toward making the world friends. On the other hand we have, in the work of people like Douglas Thayer, more complex and convincing—and thus more ethical—stories about "turning hearts" than in the anthology of that name. In a story from his first collection, *Under the Cottonwoods* (first published

35. Levi Peterson, "The Confessions of Augustine," in *The Canyons of Grace* (Midvale, Utah: Orion Books, 1982; Urbana, University of Chicago Press, 1982), 1-26. The story first appeared in *Denver Quarterly* 12, no. 4 (Winter, 1978).

36. *Ibid.*, 25.

in 1977), called "Opening Day." Thayer gives us an ethically revealing double voice by having a middle-aged Mormon recount the story of his first deer hunt after returning from his mission in Germany.³⁷ There, after seeing the horrors that resulted from WWII, he had vowed never to kill anything again. Thayer gains our full empathy by creating the hunt with the immediacy of the young man's naive voice, but the narration is constantly, though subtly, informed by details and symbols only possible from the older man's sorrowing, repentant, possibly redeemed, point of view. This includes the final lines, when the young boy, after arrogantly tempting himself by going on the hunt, succumbs to temptation and shoots: "Still trembling, I knelt down by the big buck's head. His pooled blood started to trickle down through the oak leaves. 'Oh, Jesus, Jesus,' I whispered."³⁸

There is little as truly orthodox religiously as this in *Turning Hearts* and little as truly sophisticated esthetically and both moving and challenging ethically in *Lovely Deseret*. And yet Thayer was not invited to contribute to either anthology. We are suffering, I fear, from a version of the old logical fallacy of the excluded middle, ripping Mormon literature apart to the remarkably similar extremes of right-wing and left-wing piety and cultural correctness and mutual exclusion. Of course, there are honorable exceptions, which all of us should encourage by careful reading and recommendations to others. Signature Books is soon to publish a fine novel by John Bennion about Mormons recovering from sin and making a marriage work and Deseret Book has been publishing a series of novels by Dean Hughes that is a well-crafted look at a complex Mormon family (good but over-bearing, patriarchal father, submissive but resentful mother, variously rebellious children) in a World War II presented not as "the good war" but as very complex (with Mormons fighting on both sides, terrible costs, and the acknowledged pacifism of President J. Reuben Clark). However, except for the reprints of classics like Thayer's *Under the Cottonwoods* and Donald Marshall's *The Rummage Sale* by Tabernacle Books (whose efforts to encourage fine Mormon literature we should encourage with our purchases), too many of those writers in what might be called the radical middle, who have no simplistic pro-Mormon or anti-Mormon agenda, but try to practice their craft with careful esthetic skill and ethical insight, can't seem to get themselves published to a Mormon audience. It's a shame. I might even say, if I were an extremist, a damn shame.

37. Douglas H. Thayer, *Under the Cottonwoods* (Salt Lake City, Tabernacle Books, 1999), 17-38.

38. *Ibid.*, 38.

Naked

Marilyn Bushman-Carlton

They'd come from practice at the gym,
their hair steaming,
and in the flirt and banter
would reach inside my girlfriend's car
to ruffle our teased hair.
We'd swat their hands and laugh
(keeping one hand free to tug our skirts in place)
and slump our shoulders
when sweaters stretched too tight across our breasts.
We'd scold occasional swear words
from boys we'd known since grade school,
sat beside through lessons on modesty
in church.

It was spring, dirty streets and nets of leaves
oozing from the thaw.
The talk was cars, and for an hour we traded—
Suzie's Karman Ghia for their polished white sedan.
In the passenger side of the front,
I noticed the glove compartment was locked,
tight as their zippered jeans,
but the key fit, and I read aloud
from the cleanly-typed pages.

At first it seemed funny, a little naughty,
an extension of our taunt and toy.
When I stopped, we all knew it wasn't—
the girls who were not girls at all, but
hyperbolized parts,
their faces detached and unimportant.
The language didn't feel like love.

It was our baptism,
our initiation to the fleshy underbelly of brotherly advice,
chivalry, scrubbed skin,
lettermen's jackets and August kisses,
to the secrets that trapped their tongues,
kept their conversation small.

Toward a Mormon Criticism: Should We Ask “Is this Mormon Literature?”

Gideon Burton

CONSIDER THE RESTORATION of the gospel as a paradigm for Mormon criticism. Sensing some apostasy from truth, the critic rectifies this falling away through an act of restoration. As Joseph Smith sensed something incomplete about the truths of religion and then became an instrument in restoring this truth, so the Mormon critic, equally sensitive, becomes an instrument in restoring the truth to which he or she is witness. One *feels* a void, then *fills* that void with words. Here Restoration invokes original creation: God’s spirit, brooding on the void, filled it through His word. In this sense Mormon criticism is both restorative and creative, both reactive and active. The Restoration paradigm provides powerful metaphors for criticism: critics can assume roles as prophets and creators, as mediators and seers. It is a heady vision for criticism, but one to which I have been witness, one for which—according to the paradigm—I am constrained to bear testimony.

Richard Cracroft exemplified such a Mormon criticism in his review of the first major anthology of LDS poetry, *Harvest: Contemporary Mormon Poems*.¹ The apostasy Cracroft identified was the non-Mormon nature of many of the poems included in a putatively Mormon volume. He sensed this regrettable falling away from Mormon spiritual roots in such poems as Lance Larsen’s “Passing the Sacrament at Eastgate Nursing Home.” Here he discerned “no hint of transcendence or greening spirituality,” calling it “a competent, earth-bound (non-Mormon) poem.”² Cracroft

1. Eugene England and Dennis Clark, eds., *Harvest: Contemporary Mormon Poems* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989); Richard H. Cracroft, review of *Harvest: Contemporary Mormon Poems* in *BYU Studies* 30, no. 2 (Spring 1990): 119-123.

2. *Ibid.*, 123.

delineated the criteria for Mormon literature which he felt would restore it to its true potential. Truly Mormon literature would resound with the “distinctively Latter-day Saint voice, the sensibility of the believing poet.”³ He spoke of the stewardship of the Latter-day Saint artist centering in a:

deep-felt awareness of mankind’s indebtedness to the redemption freely proffered by Christ and of the power God has granted his children to sanctify themselves by overcoming the world. In such a reality Latter-day Saints live, move, and have their being; it is their meat and drink; and it is this covenant theology that has moved Saints, from 1830 to the present, to flee Babylon, sacrifice the world, and cross the spiritual plains to Zion, forging en route an evolving latter-day mythos that becomes the soil—not merely a sprayed-on nutrient—for the Latter-day Saint poet.⁴

As Joseph felt a falling away from truth and then helped fill it with a stream of potent words, so Richard Cracroft has felt a falling away from truth in Mormon letters and would fill that void with his own highly eloquent vision of the LDS “mythos.”

Bruce Jorgensen, in his turn, also fulfilled the paradigm of Mormon criticism when he addressed a falling away from the truth, a certain apostasy he sensed in Cracroft’s review. Like Cracroft and Joseph Smith before him, Jorgensen, in his 1991 presidential address to the Association for Mormon Letters, filled the void he felt by trying to restore the truth to which he had been witness.⁵

Cracroft’s review, bold enough to label a poem by a Mormon author about a Mormon priesthood ordinance as fundamentally non-Mormon, raised a question that had been raised before: What is Mormon literature? But determining the essence of Mormon literature is precisely that falling away from truth to which Jorgensen objected. Labeling works as “Mormon” or “non-Mormon” is an act of uncharitable exclusion. Jorgensen proposed a kinder, gentler criticism, one employing the “ancient and widely understood habit of hospitality as metaphor and ground for Christian (and Mormon) imagination and criticism.”⁶ In Jorgensen’s vision for criticism, he would restore this ancient custom of hospitality; we would then see ourselves as “a wayside inn, not a court.” Rather than making essentialist judgments tending toward xenophobia and ethnocen-

3. Ibid., 122.

4. Ibid., 121.

5. Bruce W. Jorgensen, “To Tell and Hear Stories: Let the Stranger Say,” *Sunstone* 16, no. 5 (July 1993): 41-50. Reprinted and slightly revised in *Tending the Garden: Essays on Mormon Literature*, Lavina Fielding Anderson and Eugene England, eds. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996): 49-68. Also online at the Mormon Literature website: <http://humanities.byu.edu/MLDB/totell.htm>.

6. Ibid., 43.

trism, we should be entertaining guests, hearing new tales. Our criticism, if I am accurately representing Jorgensen, should convey a sense of tolerant community that acknowledges differences in experience and invites these to be starting points for sharing our stories, rather than demarcations of inclusion and exclusion. "Welcome to our common room," should be our invitation to the stranger. "Tell us your story."

Interestingly, in criticizing Cracroft's review, Jorgensen was holding fast to Cracroft's criteria. Jorgensen's criticism was deeply rooted in the Mormon experience and spiritual tradition: not only did he draw upon scriptural evidence from Abraham through the road to Emmaus episode on the issue of hosting strangers, but his tone was characteristic of those key Mormon communication ideals articulated in the Doctrine and Covenants: he spoke with persuasion, with kindness, with gentleness, and love unfeigned.

Cracroft questioned whether Jorgensen also spoke with "pure knowledge" since he saw their positions to be conflicting. In turn, Cracroft answered Jorgensen in his own AML presidential address in 1992, attempting once again to restore the truth to which he had been witness.⁷ This is consistent with the Restoration paradigm. Truth was not restored wholesale to the earth one spring day in 1820 like the ark of the covenant returned to Solomon's temple. Successive prophets and visions have built up truth line upon line, sometimes pronouncing things seemingly in conflict with one another but always in a consistent spirit. And so if Jorgensen and Cracroft disagree, even strongly, they both serve truth by speaking it in love, and in their cheerful banter toward one another, we sense a mutual love unfeigned. That crucial tone of good will, a contrast from the rancor that characterizes some non-Mormon criticism, is an act of charity toward their audiences, allowing us faith in the reconciliation of views that may at first appear opposing.

To me the conflict between Jorgensen and Cracroft is resolved at one remove, at the point at which we see them both practicing Mormon criticism. I believe criticism undergirds the issue of defining our literature (and will keep this as a primary focal point), but there are even greater things afoot. If we will view both literature and criticism within the larger context of the Restoration, then the two positions which Cracroft and Jorgensen represent—fidelity to the Mormon ethos and openness to otherness—become complementary and mutually interdependent necessities in a venture so significant it cuts across lines of Mormon membership: effecting a Zion culture.

7. Richard H. Cracroft, "Attuning the Authentic Mormon Voice: Stemming the Sophic Tide in LDS Literature," *Sunstone* 16, no. 5 (July 1993): 51-57. Also on-line at the Mormon Literature website: <http://humanities.byu.edu/MLDB/attune.htm>.

As Cracroft exemplifies in his passionate eloquence, the sense of a unique vision is empowering. Unless we safeguard our sense of being a peculiar people with noble and lofty purposes, Mormon letters can never achieve its potential significance for Mormon and non-Mormon audiences alike. Inscribed upon the palms of our hands and the fleshy tables of our hearts should be those seminal statements from Spencer W. Kimball and Orson Whitney, the veritable patriarchal blessings for Mormon letters:

For years I have been waiting for someone to do justice in recording in song and story and painting and sculpture [to] the story of the Restoration, the reestablishment of the kingdom of God on earth. . . .⁸

We will yet have Miltons and Shakespeares of our own. God's ammunition is not exhausted. His brightest spirits are held in reserve for the latter times. In God's name and by his help we will build up a literature whose top shall touch heaven, though its foundations may now be low in [the] earth.⁹

If we do not regularly revive and refresh the vision in these words, we may be left wandering in Sinai or on some muddy bank of the Platte, forever this side of the promised land where Mormon letters blossom as a rose. Moreover, unless we sustain this vision, a non-Mormon audience will suffer from what we do not contribute to it both by way of literature and criticism. So concerned about the development of our own culture, we sometimes forget that its greatness will in no way be proportional to its insularity. Having Miltons and Shakespeares of our own means providing new Miltons and Shakespeares for the entire world. After all, it wouldn't be Mormon to hoard up truth and beauty for self-consumption like a two-year cache of unground wheat. In keeping the vision of Mormon letters alive, we must keep alive its complete breadth.

That breadth must comprise the unique role possible for Mormon criticism, not just Mormon literature. Mormon criticism begins in the fact that Mormonism itself is a critique of the world it has entered, and its set of claims about God and man and time and eternity provide the basis for a rich critical tradition, as Eugene England has eloquently and powerfully argued.¹⁰

8. Spencer W. Kimball, "The Gospel Vision of the Arts," *Ensign* 7 (July 1977): 3.

9. Orson Whitney, "Home Literature," *Contributor* (July 1888). Reprinted in Cracroft and Lambert, eds., *A Believing People: Literature of the Latter-day Saints* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1974), 206. Also on-line at the Mormon Literature website: <http://humanities.byu.edu/MLDB/homelit.htm> [18].

10. See Eugene England, "The Dawning of a Brighter Day: Mormon Literature After 150 Years," *BYU Studies* 22, no. 2 (Spring 1982): 131-60, reprinted in Thomas G. Alexander and Jessie L. Embry, eds., *After 150 Years: The Latter-day Saints in Sesquicentennial Perspective* (Provo, Utah: Charles Redd Center for Western Studies, 1983), 97-146. England expanded

Early leaders of the church made specific statements regarding the nature of critical discourse and its relationship to learning and literature of which we should be reminded. Joseph Smith and Brigham Young both encouraged vigorous verbal explorations of truth. From Liberty Jail Joseph mourned,

How vain and trifling have been our spirits, our conferences, our councils, our meetings, our private as well as public conversations—too low, too mean, too vulgar, too condescending for the dignified characters of the called and chosen of God.¹¹

Hugh Nibley clarifies Joseph's meaning of *condescending*: "settling for inferior goods to avoid effort and tension." Such intellectual cowardice Brother Brigham could not abide. With typical verve he affirmed:

That diffidence or timidity we must dispense with. When it becomes our duty to talk, we ought to be willing to talk . . . interchanging our ideas and exhibiting that which we believe and understand affords an opportunity for detecting and correcting errors.¹²

In Nibley's gloss of Brigham, "the expanding mind must be openly and frankly critical, come hell or High Council."¹³

Rigorous critical discourse was seen as a necessary part of what Nibley explains is the grandiose intellectual project to which newly converted Saints have been put to work, "nothing less than the salvaging of world civilization!"¹⁴ We can hear this in the less quoted but equally important parts of Orson Whitney's 1888 Home Literature address. "God had designed, and his Prophet [Joseph Smith] had foreseen, a great and glorious future for that people," said Whitney.

He knew there must come a time . . . when Zion, no longer the foot, but as the head, the glorious front of the world's civilization, would arise and shine

and updated this as "Mormon Literature: Progress and Prospects," David J. Whittaker, ed., *Mormon Americana: A Guide to Sources and Collections in the United States* (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 1995), 455-505. This is available on-line at the Mormon Literature website, <http://humanities.byu.edu/MLDB/progress.htm>. An abbreviated version of this same essay may be found in Anderson and England, *Tending the Garden*.

The many iterations of England's essay reflect the way he and others have also followed the Restoration paradigm. Brian Evenson perceived a lapse in some of England's claims, especially about postmodern literary theory, in his "Chaotic Matter: Eugene England's 'The Dawning of a Brighter Day,'" *Dialogue* 27, no. 4 (Winter 1994): 159-62. England subsequently refined and somewhat altered his claims in later versions of his essay.

11. Quoted in Hugh Nibley, "Educating the Saints—A Brigham Young Mosaic," Cracroft and Lambert, *A Believing People*, 229.

12. *Ibid.*, 229-30.

13. *Ibid.*, 230.

14. *Ibid.*, 223.

“the joy of the whole earth”—the seat of learning, the source of wisdom, and the centre of political power, when, side by side with pure Religion, would flourish Art and Science, her fair daughters.¹⁵

Zion’s citizens, Whitney foresaw, would be “as famed for intelligence and culture as for purity, truth and beauty. . . . [Joseph Smith] knew that his people must progress, that their destiny demanded it; that culture is the duty of man, as intelligence is the glory of God.”¹⁶ Whitney’s rousing rhetoric impressed on young saints that they were “on the threshold of the mightiest mission ever given to men in the flesh,” a mission, I would emphasize, entailing more than acquiring converts (however important that is). The Restoration comprises the very renaissance of the world and its culture. And, to continue citing Whitney, “It is by means of literature that much of this great work will have to be accomplished; a literature of power and purity, worthy of such a work.”¹⁷

Did Orson Whitney see literature as proselyting fare? Yes. But not only! “Literature means learning” he asserted, giving it an important epistemological—not just a proselytizing—purpose.¹⁸ To read Whitney is to understand literature as more of an *activity* than a body of static works. It is what we *do* on the way to a still distant, spiritual-cultural destiny called Zion. The reading and writing of literature become enterprises that are part of the renovation of world culture enabled by the Restoration as it continues unfolding toward Zion.

Our early leaders did not divorce the concept of literature from that of achieving Zion, and this meant not short-changing literature’s potential to help saints both teach *and* learn. The urgency in Joseph Smith’s and Brigham Young’s opinions about rigorous critical discourse came from their understanding of how much the saints needed to grow intellectually, as well as from an understanding of the natural error many Latter-day Saints still make: believing we already *have* all truth because we would claim it. These church leaders saw the reading and producing of literature as a tool to help saints grow to the level of intellectual vitality a Zion society required and with which to approach the full breadth of truth that a Zion world would embrace. They held to this view of literature’s role as strongly as to the view that it should serve to record or disseminate Mormon wisdom to the literate and the literary.

“Let us not narrow ourselves up,” Brigham warned, for the world, with all its variety of useful information and its rich hoard of hidden treasure, is before

15. Whitney, 204.

16. *Ibid.*, 204.

17. *Ibid.*, 204.

18. *Ibid.*, 205.

us; and eternity, with all its sparkling intelligence, lofty aspirations, and unspeakable glories, is before us.¹⁹

Mormonism aspires to intelligence and culture as ideals towards which we may move only by engaging ourselves in heaven and earth at once in an act of critical faith. Literature is a way of broadcasting our knowledge and experience, but may more fruitfully be seen in light of Brigham Young's and Orson Whitney's comments as learning, as epistemology, as an agency through which this Zion culture to which we aspire is, in the same act, both discovered and achieved.

Given the views of these early church leaders on literature, critical discourse and education in light of the unfolding Restoration and its movement toward a Zion culture, I am better prepared to show how Cracroft's and Jorgensen's seemingly disparate views actually frame the twin requirements for a Mormon criticism and literature. Cracroft urges us to be grounded in the Mormon "mythos" in both our criticism and our literature—which I understand to mean both our culture's history and our Mormon "ethos." He is right, for if our roots are not deep in the soil of Mormon experience and in the spiritual reality of the Restoration, we are only voices in the relativistic maelstrom of modern Babel and Babylon. But to be grounded in the Mormon "mythos" is to be willing to journey into the unknown with faith that in entertaining the stranger, as Jorgensen urges us to do, we might be entertaining angels unawares, messengers of truth who require our patient listening before we know them for who they are.

The production and analysis of literature are too narrowly conceived if these activities are viewed only as a means of disseminating or shoring up what we already have or know. Our early church leaders urged us to deeper kinds of engagement, the kind of interaction with different thoughts and people that will enable us to grow and change, not simply accumulate and dispense (or teach). In entertaining the stranger, we might teach, but we should hope to learn and to develop through exchanges made in good faith. Our Mormon religion, our heritage, and theology and experience are all precious and worthy to be shared; they are equally worthy to be expanded, to be completed, to be broadened in that adventure that can only come through entertaining what is strange to us and by maintaining that humility inherent in the Restoration from its inception: truth comes in installments of light, and sometimes only in the friendly fray of intense critical discourse.

Worries over preserving Mormon identity in literature should center less on whether we are reminding readers of our current cultural configuration than on whether we are maintaining this vision of an emerging

19. Quoted in Nibley, "Educating the Saints," 223.

Mormon identity—one in which we come to understand ourselves more fully during that process of reflection and interaction which occurs in making ourselves known to others and making others known to us. We will see ourselves emerging not just in numbers, but in cultural significance—both to the members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and to those outside our fold.

But just as our Mormon roots enjoin openness to the stranger, that same religious heritage constrains the nature of that openness. “Entertaining the stranger” does not necessarily equate with “pluralism” or “diversity” as these terms are sometimes used in today’s idiom; acknowledging and seeking truth in all realms isn’t tantamount to relativism. To be open in a Mormon way is to be so only in terms of the Restoration: we are to seek wisdom from out of the best books, but faith is to accompany our studies (D&C 88:188); we are to be instructed in things both in heaven and earth, but are required to prove and test all things before holding fast to them as truth (D&C 88:78-80; 1 Thess. 5:21); we seek after what is of good report (within and outside of Mormon areas), but we are to use our powers of discernment to gauge whether the report is trustworthy (Art. of Faith 13; Moroni 7:13-19). A Mormon epistemology governs our openness: knowledge is sought, debated, and expressed by those believing truth can be circumscribed into one great whole; the Holy Ghost is held to be as valid a means of knowledge as empiricism or rational debate; whatever persuades to believe in Christ is held to be of God; individuals are empowered to discern absolutely what is of God in their own lives but are constrained by concepts of stewardship and non-lateral revelation not to generalize this freely to others; the means by which we obtain, discuss, and spread knowledge is understood to have an ethical dimension that we ignore only at the risk of violating our covenants of allegiance and our deepest convictions to be charitable and honor the worth of souls.

Should we ask whether something is Mormon literature? Not unless we are prepared to engage the issue fully, something that cannot be done without recourse to the larger issues this invokes, including both the openness enjoined by Jorgensen and the rootedness in Mormon experience and vision called for by Cracroft. Hopefully I have shown these two positions to be inter-implicating: one cannot be true to the Mormon “mythos” or “ethos” without venturing out, pioneer-like, to engage strange worlds and peoples; similarly, our encounters with strangers are prosperous only through the liberating restraints of our Mormon epistemology.

Of even greater importance than the reconciliation of these two views is that which envelopes them both—the Restoration. Mormon literature, as Mormon criticism, history, education, arts and discourse generally, must be regarded within the encompassing vision and teleology

of the Restoration. To what is all of this leading, after all? Mormon literature and criticism can only progress within a vision of the rise of Mormon culture to its culmination in a Zion culture. Another way of saying this is that the role of Mormon literature and criticism will not be to establish what our culture currently conceives of as Zion (something too apocalyptically distant, I fear, and too simplistically like a cross between the United Order and the Emerald City); rather, Mormon criticism and literature will help to discover and define Zion—to *achieve* this aspiration, not just reflect it. Mormon literature and criticism cannot work toward these ends as long as they are seen statically. Their available potential is linked to their heuristic and explorative capacities, not just their ability to mimetically represent or advertise Mormon experience or religion.

What is Mormon literature? The answer will always change so long as it is a literature living up to its potential for furthering the Restoration. Like those who would read and write it, Mormon literature must be seen as progressing toward our common goal. Perhaps it, like us, can fall away, repent, and move forward to Zion.

Perhaps we have fallen away from the unity of our founders' visions and must be restored to the ideal that our literary enterprise is itself an effort to salvage, perfect, and redeem world culture. This is a vision with heights so high one gasps at the pitch, but then, great doings are only fueled by great visions, and we are believers in the small and simple bringing of great things to pass.

Let us view Mormon letters and criticism as means of engaging the world and the restored gospel simultaneously. This puts us into a precious and precarious position of participating simultaneously in two worlds which are never wholly compatible. There is always the danger of closing oneself to the other side. More frequent, I believe, are two dangers: misrepresenting one side to another and underestimating the utility of one side to the other. Let me illustrate.

As Mormons we fall prey to a certain fallacy of gleaning. Told to search the world for knowledge, we come home with reiterations of things we already knew, like LaRena Homer, the protagonist in Donald Marshall's "All the Cats in Zanzibar," who visits Egypt and the Holy Lands but never really leaves Panguitch.²⁰ If we reduce the world's learning back into Mormon terms without allowing our engagement with the world to change or redefine our essential being, we might as well have stayed in Panguitch with LaRena. I respect John Tanner for his essay, "Making a Mormon of Milton," which criticizes this easy trap of

20. Donald R. Marshall, "All the Cats in Zanzibar," *The Rummage Sale* (Salt Lake City: Tabernacle Books, 1999), 27-35.

dissolving real otherness through assimilation.²¹ Engaging the other is an act of faith, not an exercise in sacking a text for Mormon-looking quotes or attitudes. Our indignation rises when people misrepresent Mormons by putting us into their unsavory terms without respect to our essential identity, yet I must wonder whether Wordsworth might feel equally misrepresented were he to hear our frequent and acontextual use of his "trailing clouds of glory" lines to corroborate LDS doctrine about the pre-mortal existence. We ought to have the faith (and respect) to try to see others' experience and beliefs as they, in fact, experience and believe them. This is both sound criticism and sound Christianity.

The second error I mentioned being possible for the Mormon critic—perched precariously there between two worlds—is underestimating the utility of one group for the other. A good example of this is the dismissive impulse some Mormons have regarding works of "gentile" literature, particularly those which depict evils which Mormons do not approve of. And while I do think another tenet of Mormon criticism is the fundamental respect of a reader's agency (even the agency to bypass art works I hold dear), I admire the way Karl Keller has shown how fiction, even putatively "bad" fiction, can be serving ends that Mormons could identify as their own. He explains how the reading of literature is "a kind of sacrament of the Lord's supper in which one constantly renews his search for anything that is true and good."²² He helps Mormons see that even the worst literature might be morally useful in engaging our critical search for the true and good. More of this kind of criticism could redeem whole literary worlds for some Mormons.

Keller's criticism is also useful because it analogously employs a religious ordinance. Once analogized, the religious concept is made available and useful to that secular reader who may dismiss or ignore religious faith altogether. An atheistic reader, for example, could alter her view of the fundamentally disengaged nature of aesthetics after considering Keller's analogy. Never practicing religion herself, she still could understand that Mormons or Christians generally employ the sacramental ordinance for introspection and may choose to accept Keller's claim that such an experience is genuinely analogous to the reading experience. A Mormon critic knows you don't have to make someone a Mormon to bring him or her good thoughts and things by way of our religion.

In time I hope to further probe the ways by which the religious and secular realms can prove to be resources to one another and how fruitful

21. John S. Tanner, "Making a Mormon of Milton," *BYU Studies* 24, no. 2 (Spring 1984): 191-206.

22. Karl Keller, "On Words and the Word of God: The Delusions of a Mormon Literature," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 4, no. 3 (Autumn 1969), 19.

our role as Mormon critics could be in exploiting this reciprocal relationship. To be brief, our middle position between two worlds enables us to consider religion in secular terms and to understand secular concerns in religious terms—each enabling a better understanding of the other. Kenneth Burke has mined a rich vein here in his formidable *Rhetoric of Religion*.²³ He is a model to Mormon critics in exploiting religious language for the secular realm. He does this not out of any missionary zeal, but because he finds religious language such a thorough system, and thus a powerful critical paradigm when applied analogously to other fields. Wouldn't it be uncharitable not to give others our own thorough theology in this same way? We would do well to further investigate and perhaps imitate Burke, making our religion itself available to the world as a thorough and engaging critical paradigm.

Within the paradigm that is the Mormon worldview, I find Restoration a compelling starting place—historically, religiously, and conceptually. Consider the Restoration not merely as a pattern for Mormon criticism, but a vision within whose contemplation Mormon criticism, literature, and culture will together flourish. Let us restore the vision of the Restoration itself, the critical methods which our church fathers enjoined as a means of advancing it, the cultural renaissance it holds out as an ideal, the engagement with worlds beyond familiar Mormon ones that the Restoration requires, and ultimately, the Restoration's consummation in that apex of social, political, religious, and artistic progress we call Zion.

23. Kenneth Burke, *The Rhetoric of Religion* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 1970).

Fertility

Carol Clark Ottesen

On your twelfth birthday,
the day you found a kinship with the moon and tides,
you sat on the front steps as a great burlap ball
rolled in its place secured and shimmering—
an olive tree.

And when it grew the tree became
a pestilence of black stain, olives smashed
We sprayed the blossoms, pruned the limbs
but every year the olives fell.

But you in careful blossoming and being
never knew why you dropped no fruit
or why apples lie rotting in the ditch,
the trout lays ten thousand eggs or more,
precious semen spills unused
while you, with olive oil upon your head
ask for just one.

THE MORMON FICTION MISSION

Tessa Meyer Santiago

As Latter-day Saints, we are under obligation to fulfill three specific missions: perfecting the saints, spreading the gospel, and redeeming the dead. As LDS writers, we add a particular covenant and mission to “the word made flesh.”¹ Eugene England would probably say that our role in the making of the word precedes that of any other literary redemptive mission: “If [we] cannot do justice to the visible world and make of it fictions which are believable, [we] cannot be trusted to bear witness to the invisible world.”²

As writers, how do we fulfill these four missions? First, the three-fold mission of the church: the work of the ministry requires that we consider audiences outside the LDS experience. Writing to these audiences tests severely any use of “the common metaphors of the Mormon journey”—unless we are so egotistical as to assume that the Mormon journey *is* the human journey. Writing to the Gentile also questions the notion that only Mormons will read a Mormon book.

Redeeming the dead by the word becomes slightly more problematic as redemption comes only through a full confession of actual events: “inspiring stories and uncomfortable truths about . . . the past.”³ This, too, is a difficult mission, just as it was difficult for Ender to confront the truth of the Bugger Queen in Orson Scott Card’s science fiction novel *Ender’s Game*.⁴ It requires us—writer, reader, and critic—to root out the disbelief and shame in ourselves regarding the discord in our past, to present ourselves and our church as true and honest to the world.

1. Eugene England, “The Dawning of a Brighter Day: Mormon Literature after 150 Years,” *BYU Studies* 22, no. 2 (Spring 1982): 135.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Michael D. Quinn, “150 Years of Truth and Consequences about Mormon History,” *Sunstone* (February 1992): 12.

4. Orson Scott Card, *Ender’s Game* (New York: Tor Books, 1992).

Perfecting the saints seems the easiest mission for the LDS writer: writing to a captive audience, about a subject shared in common, in a supposedly common language with common metaphors for the edification of both reader and writer. And for exactly the same reasons, this perfecting of the Saints is perhaps the hardest mission for the LDS writer to adequately, truthfully, faithfully fulfill.

Surprisingly, Richard H. Cracroft considers this perfecting of the saints the major, if not the only, mission of the LDS writer. Expressing disbelief that others outside the church would deign to read an LDS-authored book, he relegates the LDS writer to the position of literary home teacher, placing upon the Mormon writer the restriction of writing only in the metaphors of Mormonism to orthodox Mormon audiences who "cultivate a sense of God in their lives and seek about them the presence of the divine, eschewing faithlessness, doubt, and rebellion—not coddling it—and quietly enduring uncertainty."⁵ He reduces the Mormon audience's literary intelligence to a dismay that not all Mormon books "reflect a Mormon world view with which they can identify."⁶

To live as a Mormon and believe as a Mormon is to be constantly aware of the difference of our view: with the world around and in the soul within. Being Mormon means having to live with ambiguity, between how our life is and how we tell ourselves and others it should be. Being Mormon means living with the constant failure to be perfect and the constant possibility of joy. It means not splitting to some theoretical world away from the human condition with its accompanying experiences, mistakes, weaknesses, and ambiguities—which is, however, what some Mormon fiction, claimed by and written to this general LDS audience attempts to do.

To ask writers to tell the truth as some critics expect of them is to ask for writers as missionaries. The impulse of most missionaries is to speak the truth as best they know how, the truth as they know it. Not more, not less. The fear of most missionaries is to speak falsely, to speak more than they know. However, to complicate the missionary's task, we add, to the plain injunction to speak gospel truth gained through faith and experience, cultural notions about propriety and piety which confuse the message with the messenger: no inappropriate relations with the opposite sex; be in at 10:30; avoid dissension; only an hour for dinner at members' houses, etc. If you are the messenger, it is easier, at times, you feel, even more imperative, to satisfy these proper notions than to tell the truth as you know it.

5. Richard H. Cracroft, "Attuning the Authentic Mormon Voice: Stemming the Sophic Tide in LDS Literature," *Sunstone* (July 1993): 52.

6. *Ibid.*, 54.

My official mission voice was about as unauthentic a voice as I have ever used: a cross between my mission president's Star Valley, Wyoming, whine, an East Bench real estate developer's confidentiality, and the local Amway salesperson. A sort of desperately authoritarian steam train listing to the beat of seven-syllable discussion lines. But it was official. It was sanctioned. Sure, it taught false doctrine at times, skirted around the truth, but my shirt was always buttoned, my hair always in place, and I was always polite. If people interrupted me while I was picking my teeth to ask me a question about the church, I could feel the lights go on, the spiel about to begin. There were other moments, though, when I spoke plainly, simply, without complete assurance, the truth as I knew it. Not as I had been taught it, not as I knew I should know it, but as I knew it. Even then, it was not without risk. Could I tell my mission president that I cackled like a cowardly chicken when Phil refused to be baptized? Could I share with my companion the fear in my stomach as we reached the Joseph Smith story, the embarrassment rising to my cheeks at just how backwoods all this sounded? So I raced to the "I knew and I knew God knew, and I could not deny it" (JS-H 25) and let Joseph say it for me—Joseph, who knew it so much more than I did.

To be an LDS speaker or writer of truth, gospel, or the personal is to take risks. First, the very notion of writing is belittled by a "uniformly accusatory environment."⁷ Second, the messenger may not sound as, or be what, she is supposed to be, and, thus, the message is discredited. See, for example, Gladys Farmer and her collection of short stories, *Elders and Sisters*.⁸ It was "banned by Deseret Book" for not making her "characters less human" and consequently more "equal to the task."⁹ By the acceptance of the male-authored *Under the Cottonwoods* for sale in the same weeks by Deseret Book, it seems Farmer was not a messenger authorized to bear witness of the "uncomfortable truth" she "revealed about Mormonism."¹⁰

Third, the writer's truth might not be the officially sanctioned or culturally accepted truth of the general LDS audience. It might be an unwelcome truth, too close for comfort, an insistent reminder that we are also human in this endeavor. About ten years ago, I entered an essay into a writing competition on campus, detailing my experience as a young girl with sexual abuse and the eventual repentance and forgiveness both of myself and of the perpetrator. The essay caused some consternation

7. Lavina Fielding Anderson, "Making 'The Good' Good for Something: A Direction for Mormon Literature," *Dialogue* 18, no. 2 (Summer 1985): 106.

8. Gladys Farmer, *Elders and Sisters* (Provo, Utah: Seagull Books, 1977).

9. Gladys Farmer, "A Footnote in Mormon Literature," unpublished manuscript, 1-2.

10. Quinn, 12.

among the judges. I read one critique which called it "perhaps the most Christian essay in the competition." But ultimately, the subject matter was deemed unfit for a general LDS audience, and the essay was excluded from the competition. President Rex Lee, however, decided to award me \$750 for my efforts. At the time, more worried about paying for my wedding dress than making a stand for all sexually abused women who were part of that general LDS audience, I took the money and ran. But I am bothered now. Particularly in the light of subsequent experiences.

She came to me during office hours a couple of years later. A freshman honors student, she had been in my class for only six weeks. I didn't know her very well; she was a quiet but fervent student. The previous week's reading assignment had been another of my essays which hinted slightly at the sexual abuse. She asked me tremulously, "You know . . . this line here, does this mean that . . ." She could not say the words, but I understood. "Yes," I said. Through her tears, she said, "I thought I was the only one."

For the next hour, this young woman unloaded to a virtual stranger ten years of silence about her father, the stellar professor on campus, the stalwart temple attender, the award-winning researcher, the family man who had molested her when she was ten years old. She spoke of feelings of unworthiness as she sat in Relief Society lessons about temple marriage. She tried to understand why she felt such anger and such love at the same time. She tried to explain the hurt, the bewilderment as her father continued his apparently approved life in the church and she fell further and further behind. Most of all, she wondered how God could let this happen. I knew her questions, I knew her pain, I knew her struggles. I had written my answer, but it was judged unfit for a general LDS audience.

The reasoning might be that the LDS story does not include sexual abuse of a child by its parents. That's not one of the six discussions. The Mormon story does not include divorce, suicide, excommunication, apathy, indifference, fraud, domestic violence, a Cowboy Jesus. The Mormon story is faith, repentance, baptism by immersion, the gift of the Holy Ghost, the vision of the boy prophet, a God who intervenes to aid his children. Ironically, the writing of my essay on sexual abuse allowed me to come closer to "the undisclosed center"¹¹ of the Atonement than any other spiritual exercise. To find the words to describe the act, the reaction, and the healing was to make whole the events, to seal them up as best I could, and offer it as a sacrifice for the building of the kingdom, to lay it on his altar and wait for his acceptance.¹² Perhaps that was my

11. B. W. Jorgensen, "Up Against the Flannelboard," Review of *Corey Davidson*, by Randall L. Hall, *Sunstone* 10, no. 11 (August 1986): 46.

12. See Paris Anderson, *Waiting for the Flash* (Orem, Utah: Scotlin, 1988), 115.

Mormon answer to the human question. And in writing it, I had entered into a discussion, a missionary discussion if you will: intimate, private, not *the* Mormon story, but a Mormon story sharing weakness, trials of the flesh, doubt in the Atonement, the workings of the Savior, the need for forgiveness, the love of a father for a child. It was a story not needed by the general LDS audience, but welcomed by a specific LDS reader. Finally, there is no general audience, only readers one by one, as there are converts, one by one.

The fourth reason writing truth is risky for writer, reader, and critic is that truth is uncomfortable, even violent in its capacity to create change. This dynamic is met with great reluctance by a comfortable audience and a comfortable writer. Bruce Young describes the experiences of love and joy as "intense, soul-transforming and thus, not comfortable."¹³ I might add encountering truth is one of these experiences. Love, joy, and truth "require some letting go and giving up, and so most people are afraid of them."¹⁴ Receiving, understanding, and writing the gospel is not an easy venture. Christ came "not to send peace, but a sword. . . . To set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother. . . . A man's foes shall be they of his own household," his own church, perhaps even within his own self (Matt. 11:34-36). Writing the truth requires each writer to examine soul, conscience, and experience, then commit talent, time, and energy to the building of the image, the rendering of the word in flesh. Receiving this same "truth of the human heart"¹⁵ requires the audience to lay upon the altar "their unique idiosyncracies or even weaknesses,"¹⁶ including their notions of what is proper, what is moral, and what being a righteous people with a mission in this life really means.

This fear of audience, fear of truth and audience intermixing, is what causes most mistakes and, if not mistakes, apprehensions for LDS writers and critics. We write and critique under the impression that Mormon audiences "cannot bear too much reality," to borrow Eliot's phrase. Gladys Farmer, in writing of her experience with *Elders and Sisters*, wondered what would offend the critics the most: "the 'dammit' [she] had one elder mutter as he ripped his new suit? the mention of competitive pressure to baptize, regardless of the preparation of the candidates? the display of personality conflict between companions . . . or maybe the account of the attraction a member felt for an elder?"¹⁷ Paris Anderson

13. Bruce Young, "The Miracle of Faith; The Miracle of Love," *A Thoughtful Faith*, by ed. Philip Barlow (Centerville, Utah: Canon Press, 1986), 270.

14. *Ibid.*

15. Richard H. Cracroft and Neal E. Lambert, eds., *A Believing People: Literature of the Latter-day Saints* (Provo, Utah: BYU Press, 1974), 5.

16. Paris Anderson, 114.

17. Farmer, "Footnote," 5.

added an apologetic preface to his missionary novel *Waiting for the Flash*: "I am aware a few passages may offend some readers. For this I am very sorry. . . . I have spent much of my life in a sordid world, and many of my friends are dirty people. . . . [I hope] the readers understand these dirty people are not necessarily evil."¹⁸ Two years later, the judges of the same Christian essay competition awarded another essay of mine, "The Hand of God," which merely hinted at the sexual abuse through a convoluted metaphor involving sunset, a place in the winner's circle, describing it as "a moving paean to the healing power of God seen through nature."¹⁹ Why better because it's "through"? Why is it we rarely write "the world" as it happens? Because we're supposed to be "in" it, not "of" it? The tendency to interpret through metaphors, through literary machinations and familiar phrases, only divorces us more from the actual and makes our tasks as writers and readers so much more difficult. The less clearly we see this physical world, the more difficult it becomes to understand the spiritual. At times there is so much dark glass, I can barely see at all.

The fear of the audience that afflicts LDS writers reminds me of the most acute fear on my mission. I labored continually, frantically, under the assumption that, should I stop, there would be somebody around the corner who would not hear the gospel. They would suffer in their sins because of my transgression or exhaustion or hunger. Similarly, we believe that should we write about something too real, our words will have the same effect on the reader that I supposed my "laziness" would have in the mission field. To impose upon a writer, whose writing is her gift, the responsibility that her words will inexorably affect the eternal salvation of another Latter-day Saint, that it is better not to write at all than to write too much truth, is to lay guilt at the wrong doorstep. What about the injunction that we teach them—members/readers—divine principles and they govern themselves? Apparently we don't trust our readers to embrace our story or us with open arms. We excuse, we preface, we pull punches, we introduce metaphors, we embellish in the fear that our truth and maybe even our testimony will be judged lacking.

Randall Hall's novel *Corey Davidson*,²⁰ described as a "well-written chronicle of breaking and contrition of hearts following transgression,"²¹ does just that. It's a novel with a mission about a mission, spoken by a culturally approved spokesperson (Hall is a CES coordinator). Because of these very factors, it falls into the trap of caring too much about propriety, of making sure the actions are cleverly covered up, the reader

18. Paris Anderson, iii.

19. Presentation program.

20. Randall Hall, *Corey Davidson* (Thompson Productions, 1984).

21. Cracroft, "Attuning the Authentic Voice," 56

protected, and the writer absolved of any responsibility for the readers' actions. Consequently, it fails to "make the word flesh."

The novel opens with Corey Davidson, the mission financial secretary, traveling on the bus to his new city. His new assignment is to be zone leader, but in his heart he carries his secret. In his daily dealings with the finances, he had found himself at the bank "when suddenly her eye caught his."²² Flushing, he turns away, vowing to return to "the strict visual chastity expected of him."²³ But she writes him a note; helpless he responds, already "haunted by guilt and wondering and dark eyes and the bust of Nefertiti sitting provocatively on his desk."²⁴ After meeting with her alone two or three times, being "careful to keep his imagination from going too far, for he knew the enormity of sexual sin,"²⁵ he sins. And this is how the crucial event is described:

There, swept into the whirlpool of her beautiful eyes and the eagerness in her soft, desiring voice, he had done what he never had, even in his imagination, supposed he would do. He had done what he had vowed he would never do. And he split himself in two.²⁶

Sin is thus presented as a big surprise: He found himself doing things he never imagined, for no specific reason. As readers we like this plot: it keeps us comfortably removed from responsibility in the whole process, allowing us to still keep the vision of "pilgrims wandering by faith across a twilight stage buffeted by the forces of evil"²⁷ firmly in place.

In relation, sin is not the result of our own doing; neither is the journey to forgiveness. Some will seduce us into sin, and others will seduce us out: Terzhina's whirlpool eyes and soft, desiring voice sucked Davidson into sin. The notion of sin, especially sexual sin, as a female two-by-four which slams you upside the head, stunning you, so you hardly know what you're doing, rings loudly of the oldest, most preferred, male sexual fantasy: woman seduces unsuspecting male into sexual sin without his consent. She may, according to Hall, also seduce you out of sin. Christina, who "tried to love [Corey] purely, as a mother or a sister,"²⁸ sucks him back out. She is supposedly a "gracious and intelligent [woman] who befriends him,"²⁹ but the prose betrays Corey. He watches as she "walk[s] gracefully, easily, smiling at him, her long white gown

22. Hall, 5.

23. *Ibid.*, 6.

24. *Ibid.*, 7.

25. *Ibid.*, 8.

26. *Ibid.*, 13.

27. Cracroft, "Attuning the Authentic Voice," 53.

28. Hall, 146.

29. *Ibid.*, jacket cover.

clinging to her."³⁰ He finds it "subtly invigorating"³¹ to watch her paint. "From time to time she would draw her eyebrows up pensively, and bring her tongue slowly along her top lip; then, quickly pursing her lips together, she would paint for several minutes . . . her lips returning to their fullness."³² It is this woman, this *female* Christ in a figure who paints the world, allowing Corey to see himself with new eyes, who seduces him back to his old world self.

Perhaps the Mormon reluctance to speak of the sin, and thus to speak inaccurately, stems from two notions: one, the admonition of the brethren not to dwell on our past sins, but rather to press forward; and two, the reluctance of the LDS audience to view themselves as sinners. The metaphors with which we are most familiar are "chosen people," "city on a hill," "a peculiar people," "saved for the last day," "pilgrims in a lonely wilderness," "Saturday's warrior." It is not easy to combine the apostolic caution with these metaphors without producing a peculiar aversion to the discussion of sin, a refusal to see ourselves as sinners, which makes the redemptive process all the more difficult and the writing of that redemptive process almost impossible. Once we, surprised, see ourselves as sinners, the tendency is to beat ourselves with more than enough stripes, as if attempting to redeem ourselves.

And so Davidson, in his prideful remorse, finishes the rest of his mission as ZL, then disappears on the last day into the Brazilian countryside, with no more than a terse letter to his parents and mission president. ". . . Have decided to stay in Brazil for a few more months. . . . Do not try to locate me. I will be in contact with you from time to time."³³ For five isolated months, he lives by himself in a small apartment kept company by visions of Terzhina after which "ashamed, he would flay himself with blame, his desire to be with her waning, then disappearing into the weary darkness of his mind."³⁴ On the eve of his departure, after a confession to the new mission president and a terse conversation with Terzhina in which he asks for forgiveness and she doesn't understand, we find him before the sculptured Christ on Sugarloaf Mountain realizing Christ is real.

If making the word flesh—not proper—is the LDS writer's responsibility, does the "aw-shucks Cowboy Jesus (in Levi Peterson's novel *Backslider*³⁵), who straightens Frank out by dishing out, while smoking a Bull Durham cigarette, homely counsel about Frank's sexual hangups,"³⁶ fail

30. *Ibid.*, 112.

31. *Ibid.*, 120.

32. *Ibid.*

33. *Ibid.*, 75.

34. *Ibid.*, 81.

35. Levi S. Peterson, *The Backslider* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1986).

36. Cracroft, "Attuning the Authentic Voice," 55.

any less dismally than a marble Christ? Levi Peterson attempts to “find new forms, adequate to the meaning”³⁷ of meeting Christ if you’re a backslider, while Hall provides an ending grounded not in Mormon but in Catholic metaphors. Which *deus ex machina* is more believable: Peterson’s protagonist “flushing the urinal, retching, vomiting, then crying”³⁸ as he realizes the reality of an understanding God or an officially, fully confessed Corey Davidson, seeing Christ for the first time on the Sugarloaf as he looks at the statue, “offering the possibility of life, of change, of overcoming fear and darkness . . . and [he feels] the gentle wash of peace upon his soul”?³⁹ A cowboy Christ or a statue—which is more troublesome? That some resurrect the Savior in their most personally appealing image or that the most intimate moment of redemption in a novel comes second-hand, through a statue? Which is more authentic, more Mormon?

To strip Hall’s book to the bare bones, to uncover the metaphors used which Mormons relate to so easily, is to find yourself, as Bruce Jorgensen describes it, “up against the flannelboard.”⁴⁰ The story of sexual sin is one told over and over again in priests’ quorums and Laurel classrooms around the world and in all classrooms at the MTC, using every kind of literary and theatrical device: chewed bubblegum, ink in milk, crushed flower petals; still, it seems capable of literary conception only in whirlpools and soft, desiring female voices, and sunsets on beaches.

But what some Mormons desire to read more than anything else is a representation of life as they live it. To know that they are not alone. They do not want to read only “the firm, invulnerable voice of success: the voice in the middle, about setting goals, establishing yourself, and being simply good.” At times, they also yearn for “the dark night of the soul and its exaltation.”⁴¹ They want to be strengthened by writers, true and honest to what they know, not protected by benevolent voices speaking old, familiar phrases.

Ironically, and perhaps with real reason, I must turn to Orson Scott Card writing for the general human audience, for a more truthful rendition of my Mormon condition:

It gave her a chance to brood about her life and whether she was a good wife and a good Mormon and even a good person, which she secretly knew she was not and never could be, no matter how she seemed to others, because none of them . . . knew what she was really like inside. How weak she was,

37. Lavina Fielding Anderson, 111.

38. Cracroft, “Attuning the Authentic Voice,” 55.

39. Hall, 188.

40. Jorgensen, 45.

41. Eugene England, “We Need to Liberate Mormon Men,” *Dialogues with Myself* (Midvale, Utah: Orion, 1984), 168.

how frightened, how uncertain of everything in her life except the church—that was the one thing that did not change. . . . Everything else was changeable. . . . [Someday she might] turn to face her husband and find a stranger in his place, a stranger who didn't approve of her and didn't want her in his life anymore. DeAnne knew that to hold on to any good thing in her life—her husband, her children—she had to do the right thing, every time. . . . If only she could be sure, from day to day, from hour to hour, what the right thing was.⁴²

Why the difference, the sense of recognition? Because of the ambiguity, the lack of interpretation. Because of the attempt to "make sense out of human interaction that includes both the deepest doubts and anger. . . . And swelling rejoicing and gratitude."⁴³ Because this passage feels not like a teacher, but like a friend, soul to soul. Ironically, we do that better with non-members than with our own kind. Non-members need the truth to be redeemed. As missionaries, making real the word, testifying of the other world, there is no other option. There is no expectation, no common metaphor, no shared world view, no appropriate behavior or sense of propriety, no phrases which will substitute for actual experience. There is only the truth. But, I sense, should we be brave enough to write our personal, Mormon truth, our audience, our specific, one LDS reader (we don't get in at every door) who will pull us to her bosom, crying, like DeAnne on reading Anne Tyler: "I'm just going to hold [the book]. . . . It's an anchor. It's another woman telling me she knows about things going wrong, and I just need to hold the book."⁴⁴

So what are we left with? What kinds of literary missionaries on what kinds of literary missions? We have tender, soft-hearted ward missionaries like *Corey Davidson* speaking half truths but in a voice we easily recognize. We have missionaries nobody wants like Levi Peterson, who claims, "This is my place and these are my people."⁴⁵ But he never teaches from the discussions, exasperating his mission president and answering only to the Lord. We have missionaries, ashamed of their meager offering, of their "dirty" lives but willing to speak anyway. We have missionaries unwanted, banned from circulation because they offer a different story. We have "garden, hybrid [and] noxious weed."⁴⁶ We have, I suppose, some form of vineyard in which we must write until the night of darkness comes.

42. Orson Scott Card, *Lost Boys* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 54.

43. Lavina Fielding Anderson, 108.

44. Card, *Lost Boys*, 383.

45. Levi S. Peterson, "The Art of Dissent Among Mormons," *Sunstone* 16, no. 8 (February 1994): 35.

46. Cracroft, "Attuning the Authentic Voice," 52.

Mormon Postmodernism: Worlds without End in Young's *Salvador* and Card's *Lost Boys*

Robert Bird

JOSEPH SMITH'S REVISION of the Pauline closing, "world without end" (Eph. 3:21) to become "worlds without end" (D&C 76:112), is a significant ontological move. Specifically, Smith's closing provides an opening for contemporary Mormon literature to explore the possibility and implications of multiple worlds and realities.

Brian McHale, a senior lecturer in poetics at Tel Aviv University, argues, in *Postmodernist Fiction*, that the shift from modernism to postmodernism is a shift in philosophical emphasis. In modernism, the principal concern was epistemological: What do we know? How do we know it? and How much can we trust our knowledge?¹ Modernism, for the most part, conflated the metaphysical world into the physical world and produced what is called, in Mormon literary circles, "sophic" literature. In the natural and psychological realism of modernism, even Mormon modernist literature, there was little room for the supernatural.

For example, Maurine Whipple's *The Giant Joshua* explores only the weak theological idea of togetherness; and its final, typically modernist, death bed scene portrays the protagonist Clory—after realizing that she does indeed have a testimony of the gospel—merely concerned that her fingernails be manicured as she enters into the beyond. The *Giant Joshua* and most other modernist texts failed to portray anything beyond the natural world, beyond death or what Jean-Paul Sartre metaphorically called "The Wall."

On the other hand, postmodernism has moved away from epistemological concerns to those of ontology. Ontological questions concern the

1. Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London: Methuen, Inc., 1987), 6-11.

nature of reality and the possibility of multiple realities and plural worlds. The postmodernist shift in academics has resulted in the inclusion of multicultural literature and of genre fiction such as fantasy and science fiction. Ihab Hassan provides one possible definition of postmodernism as “a response, direct or oblique, to the Unimaginable which Modernism glimpsed only in its most prophetic moments.”² In other words, postmodern literature often creates worlds of wonder and of miracle and explores the supernatural.

The exploration of the supernatural and its often harsh juxtaposition with the natural world is a principal characteristic of much postmodern literature. Such writing makes a space for literature that is neither superficially faith-promoting, ignoring the difficulties of reality, nor convolutedly skeptical and disillusioned, unable to see beyond this telestial world.

By traveling among worlds, crossing over into other cultures and other realities, Mormon postmodernism affirms the intrusion and influence of one world upon another. A modernist wall, a sense of epistemological limitation has come down, and in its place only a postmodern veil separates the human from the divine and this life from the afterlife. This veil is easily parted, allowing for revelation, manifestations of goodness and of evil, and glimpses into multiple realities.

The Mormon novel *Salvador* by Margaret Blair Young contains much crossing over, overlapping, and blurring of worlds and realities in the Magical Realism zone of Latin America.³ *Salvador* is the first-person narrative of Julie (a recently divorced Mormon woman searching for her identity and her faith) who with her parents, Chuck (a disillusioned, excommunicated apostate) and Emmie (a selectively orthodox Mormon who spouts optimistic clichés), travels from the snow-tipped mountains of Orem to the oppressive heat of El Salvador.

Julie, Chuck, and Emmie leave behind capitalist America and mainstream Mormonism to enter into the quasi-religious zone of Zarahemla, a place forged out of history, myth, and the Central American topos. The reason for their journey is to visit Uncle Johnny, the salt-and-pepper-bearded, prophetic figure who lives in another reality of consecrated and polygynous jungle communities. Julie, Chuck, and Emmie fail to escape their reality completely, for capitalist America and the mainstream Mormon church are present in El Salvador, embodied in Piggott, the district president, who lives in a luxurious, servant-attended mansion.

Still, Julie and her parents experience in El Salvador the reality that “we Gringos see on the 6:00 news: that world of wars and quakes and

2. Ihab Hassan, *Paracriticisms: Seven Speculations of the Times* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975), 53.

3. Margaret Young, *Salvador* (Salt Lake City: Aspen Books, 1992).

starvation and little brown people with desperate eyes who were born to be part of Dan Rather's script."⁴ The world that used to end "when *Wheel of Fortune* begins"⁵ had now become Julie's world. Yet this country of poverty and suffering is also a place of romance, religious discovery, and danger, where ancient ruins have been overgrown by jungle and where jaguars prowl in the night.

Julie has escaped to El Salvador after filing for a divorce from an abusive husband, a divorce that Julie blames on her mother's idealized notions of marriage and the church. Like her father who served in Vietnam, Julie is disillusioned because of her exposure to excessive cruelty and evil, and she attempts to find hope and redemption by leaving her reality and traveling to a world of myth.

But besides natural danger, the mythical world in the jungle also abounds with human cruelty and evil. In his attempts to establish his dream of a religious Zion, her Uncle Johnny, though extremely charitable to the poor, domineers over his wife and tyrannically controls other women and his followers. Hints of murder and revenge pervade the narrative as Alberto, Johnny's illegitimate son and disciple, faces the Hamletesque dilemma of whether to heed the demands of his ghosts.

In the climactic scene of the novel, Alberto takes Julie to the temple ruins of Zarahemla where, Johnny claims, Christ preached to the Nephites. Alberto shows Julie pictographs on the wall that prove to him that this was the temple of Zarahemla; but Julie reads the signs, not as Lehi's vision of the tree of life, but rather as a human sacrificial ritual of the Mayans. A clash of interpretations and of realities follows, which results in Julie's return to the United States, in Alberto's disappearance into the landscape of myth, and in Johnny's denunciation as sinful.

Both Julie and Alberto profit from a clash of realities. Julie returns to the United States more mature and with an understanding of the miracles that her mother subtly works while seeming to be superficial and foolish. Alberto frees himself from Johnny's control and begins to develop his faith elsewhere. Johnny, on the other hand, though confronted and rebuked by the district president and others, still refuses to change his abusive nature.

Eugene England, in a blurb at the front of the novel, suggests that this work by Young is not yet the great Mormon novel, but that it shows the way. May I suggest that the great Mormon novel will be one in which the realities of Julie and Alberto do not just clash and break apart but instead come together—thesis and antithesis—in a new synthesis, in a new world of logos and of mythos, a world in which a ruin could be both sacred temple and sacrificial altar.

4. Ibid., 71.

5. Ibid.

A step beyond *Salvador's* clashing realities is Orson Scott Card's *Lost Boys* in which evil and grace intrude into this world from other ontological levels.⁶ Card creates a postmodern zone not in the jungles of Central America, but in the workings of a computer game. Mystically using a computer game as an extension of his consciousness, Stevie Fletcher—an eight-year-old, Christ-like boy—communicates with seven molested and murdered boys who are buried under the Fletchers' house.

In *Lost Boys*, a crossing over of realms or ontological levels occurs: from the natural realm with its greedy, perverse, but also good and charitable humans who are, at different times, kind, cruel, worn out, and even insane; from the realm of evil that is eternal and unexplainable; and from the realm of the divine from which come supernatural manifestations and communication.

Card's text reads like detective fiction as the reader is invited to identify and name various types and degrees of evil which beset the Fletcher family. The principal question in this text is: What are we to do when we are confronted with evil? The narrative itself proceeds to provide possible answers.

As a postmodern work, the concern of this narrative is more ontological than epistemological. The tension of the novel arises, not because of an unreliable or limited narrator, who delays the revelation of the cause of evil, but rather from the fact that the evil itself cannot be completely constrained because it exists on a supernatural level. The reader is introduced to the real evil of the novel in a disturbing prologue, but because the prologue is discontinuous from the rest of the text, the evil seems to exist prior to the world of the narrative, to be distant and incomprehensible, and to make itself manifest in this world from a different ontological level.

Two possible explanations are suggested for the existence of this evil: abuse of a child character and his having witnessed what Freud calls the primal scene. The evil takes upon itself the name of "Boy," the term used by the father in his abuse of the child. The child character takes that word "inside himself and it [becomes] the name for all his bad desires."⁷ The evil grows within the character as it makes him play pranks, cheat on tests, even when cheating is unnecessary, and finally becomes too strong to be contained, bringing the character to molest and murder those who will be known as the lost boys.

But, as stated previously, though the abuse fosters the evil, the evil, like the prologue itself, already existed. Just as the prologue is a given, structurally preceding, independent of, and disconnected from the narrative, so the evil in this work is a given, an independent entity. As the

6. Orson Scott Card, *Lost Boys* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992).

7. *Ibid.*, 1.

connection between prologue and narrative is tenuous, so is any attempt to establish a direct or simplistic causal relationship between the abuse in the prologue and the manifest evil in the narrative itself.

After the prologue, the narrative begins with the Fletcher family moving from Vigor, Indiana, to Steuben, North Carolina. Moving away from the comfort zone of family and friends, the Fletchers gain a heightened awareness of the dangers and threats that abound, especially in a strange land. In response to these newly perceived threats, the three children—Stevie, Robbie, and Betsy—naturally turn to their parents—Step and DeAnne—for protection. Understandably, DeAnne attempts to calm the children's fears by teaching that though they may be on their own, Heavenly Father watches over and protects them.

Step, reacting to what he considers a simplistic explanation of the workings of the divine, interrupts DeAnne: "God doesn't work that way. . . . He doesn't stop evil people from committing their crimes." After DeAnne rephrases Stevie's question as asking whether they are safe, Step elaborates on his previous response: "Yes, Stevie, you're safe, as safe as anybody ever is who's alive in this world. But you were asking about what if somebody really terrible wanted to do something vicious to our whole family, and the truth is that if somebody is truly, deeply evil, then sometimes good people can't stop him until he's done a lot of bad things. That's just the way it happens sometimes." What then, Stevie begins to wonder, is the role of God in protecting his children? Step concedes that "only in the long run" does God seem to get those who commit evil.⁸ This scene, which suggests the vulnerability of good to the attacks of evil, concludes with Step's partially comforting remark, "There aren't that many really evil people in the world."⁹

But the narrative forces the reader to question Step's concluding remark. The narrative abounds with evil people. At work, Step associates with the self-protecting, deceitful Dicky who tries to intimidate and manipulate Step, while making plans to steal Hacker Snack (Step's successful computer game) and with Gallowglass, a bright, young computer whiz who admits a sexual interest in children.

At church, the Fletchers are hounded by Dolores LeSueur, the prophetess in their ward, who claims to receive revelations for everyone. Most of the time, Dolores, as long as she gets her way, is harmless; but at times she intimidates others, as when she tells Stevie that his parents are unrighteous and are preventing him from accomplishing a great work. Even at school, Stevie is emotionally abused by a teacher who has allowed hatred to grow inside her like a disease.

8. *Ibid.*, 14.

9. *Ibid.*

Step confronts, addresses, and attempts to remedy all these manifestations of evil. By getting a contract with Agamemnon, another software company, Step is able to leave the evil environment at work and the family learns to ignore Dolores LeSueur's revelations. In the case of Stevie's teacher, Step confronts the teacher and principal, resulting in the teacher's dismissal. In reporting his confrontation with the teacher to Stevie, Step summarizes how good people are to respond to evil: "I mean, that's what you do with bad people, when you can. You just name their sin to them. That's what the prophets always did," said Step. "Just name their sins, and if they have any spark of goodness in them at all, they repent."¹⁰

These attempts by Step to confront evil are part of the development of the principal theme in *Lost Boys*, which is that the most effective way to combat evil is to identify and name sin. As Step tells Stevie, "[People] can only do their evil when they think that nobody knows."¹¹

Step believes that people with a spark of goodness in them will repent when their sins are named. Stevie, however, asks about people who are the exception, who seem to lack any element of goodness. The narrative contains a foreshadowing of the novel's conclusion as Step, using the example of the prophet Abinadi in the Book of Mormon, shows that sometimes evil people choose to kill the messenger, rather than repent. Speaking about the possible consequences of naming sin, Step says, "Son, I guess [Abinadi] knew and the Lord knew that death isn't the worst thing in the world. The worst thing in the world is knowing that something really bad is going on and then not doing anything about it because you're afraid."¹²

Although Step and DeAnne identify, confront, and eliminate many manifestations of evil, the real evil of the novel remains unknown to them. Stevie is the only character who recognizes the evil that was foreshadowed in the prologue, evil which is of a different kind than that which Step and DeAnne overcome. Eventually—like the prophet Abinadi and even the character's possible namesake, Stephen in the New Testament—Stevie will sacrifice his life in order to identify the greatest evil in the novel. His ultimate sacrifice leads to the containment of evil, but only after that evil has taken the lives of seven boys plus his own. Stevie is able to bring about a redemption and healing only after the evil has brought about much suffering. Though Step and DeAnne can confront and overcome one kind of evil in the novel, the uncreated evil is overcome only by Stevie's sacrifice.

With the computer used to extend his consciousness, Stevie's goodness

10. *Ibid.*, 240.

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*

and sensitivity lead him to an awareness of, and contact with, the seven boys who have been molested and murdered as a result of the evil described in the prologue. When Stevie's growing list of imaginary friends matches the names printed in the newspaper of the missing boys, Step and DeAnne call the detective in charge of the murder cases. After briefly meeting with Stevie, Douglas, the detective, comments to Step and DeAnne on the relationship between the good that he discerns in Stevie and the evil which has caused these boys to be lost:

What's going on here in Steuben is so evil and he is so good and pure that he can't help but feel it. . . . The rest of us, we've got good and evil mixed up in us, and our own badness makes so much noise we can't hear the evil of the monster out there. . . . The evil that pushed those names into his mind, that is real.¹³

The detective recognizes within Stevie a purity which reacts to the real evil present in Steuben, a real evil that will be contained only by a sacrifice of goodness.

Card's work portrays the Mormon theological belief that evil really is real; it has an ontological status of its own; that is, evil does not merely exist in order to promote a higher good. As B. H. Roberts stated, evil "is not a created thing. It is one of the eternal existences, just as duration is and space. It is as old as law—old as Truth, old as the eternal universe."¹⁴ This evil comes from another realm, another reality, at times making itself manifest in this world.

Sterling McMurrin in *The Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion* explains that "the primary meaning of human existence is found in the struggle to overcome [evil]." Humanity can choose to either resist God or join with him in the endless struggle "to extend his dominion over the blind processes of the material world and to cultivate the uses of freedom for the achievement of moral ends."¹⁵

The members of the Fletcher family are—to quote the Apostle Paul—"laborers together with God" (1 Cor. 3:9) in the creation of the good and in the struggle against evil. They live through the severest of adversity and attempt to transmute some of the evil—whatever portion is possible—into good. For the most part, they are able to withstand the evil, but they do not stand unaffected.

Card's narrative suggests the importance of identifying and naming evil and taking action against it, even though the consequence may be death. While reading the novel, the reader brings about the narrative's

13. *Ibid.*, 441.

14. Quoted in Sterling M. McMurrin, *The Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion* (Salt Lake City, University of Utah Press, 1965), 108.

15. *Ibid.*, 97.

disclosure of evil and, therefore, participates vicariously in the struggle against it. Contrary to the belief that narrative often advocates or gives license to evil, this particular narrative identifies, struggles against, and, after much suffering and pain, binds evil.

Card's *Lost Boys* and Young's *Salvador* are postmodern texts that explore multiple realities and the intrusion of the supernatural into this world. Postmodernism encourages the juxtaposition of realities and worlds in a way that seems propitious for Mormon literature. Postmodernism allows for the combining of diverse elements—the natural and the supernatural, the human and the divine, the reality of one culture and that of another—in the same text in a way that didn't seem possible in modernism. However, as in modernism, many elements of postmodernism are obviously antithetical to Mormonism. The most disturbing characteristic is what has been called the "entropy of meaning,"¹⁶ as narrators become impotent and as structure, the intelligible shape or form of what we call meaning, becomes "deconstructed."

But as these two works demonstrate, much meaning can be created out of the struggle between, and the synthesis of, realities and realms. Other works of Mormon literature could continue to explore the tension resulting from such a clash. The great Mormon novel might be the one that can bring these realities and realms together in visionary combinations, allowing us—like Joseph Smith—a glimpse at worlds without end.

16. Hassan, 55.

Thin Ice

Ken Raines

I watch two girls on wheels.
Four neon-green wheels
on each foot. Rollers

in the shape of a blade,
they schuss and stall,
and hesitate, and slalom;

Stutter down the easy dry slope
of driveway concrete
fresh poured last summer.

On the hour, the radio reports
sixteen degrees and falling
In a steep chill-factor wind.

But the hurly-burly ballet
continues undimmed in Lycra-
bright enthusiasm.

They skate with the grace
of those unhobbled by concern
over false starts and faux pas.

With no signs posted
to advise skaters
of their own fragility,

or caution them that their egos
may one day give way
with only an ominous crack

of belated warning,
They roll on
with bolder and bolder strokes.

Winter Dies

N. Andrew Spackman

The full third moon of passing
winter rears up
against an x-ray white orchard.
There are tree skeletons.
And puddles like black eye sockets.

My naked feet sink in snow.
They break through
the crust like a skull.
Underneath, mud swallows my toes.
Bruised eyes open where I step.

“Easy to be Entreated”: Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent and Christian Communication

Grant Boswell

I FIRST ENCOUNTERED WAYNE BOOTH’S *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent*¹ when I started my Ph.D. program 1979. One of my best friends from graduate school told me that he owned the book when the book was recommended to us in our first seminar together. He said he had bought it solely on the basis of its cover. He had no idea what the content was, but he liked the picture. The cover is a photograph of three students engrossed in serious conversation over coffee. Perhaps the first lesson that Professor Booth wants us to take from this book is that Mormons should take their coffee substitutes more seriously.

I read the book twice during graduate school and am happy for the opportunity to have returned to it a third time for this essay. I believe, upon this my third reading, that it is a remarkably prescient book, foreshadowing many of the debates in the literary profession that have occurred since the lectures were given at Notre Dame in 1971. The book starts with a narration of an event that informs the entire argument; I will begin my discussion narrating an event that I hope will inform mine.

On June 11, 1993, Brigham Young University announced that it would terminate five faculty members, two of whom had attracted much public attention and therefore were high profile cases. The university

1. Wayne C. Booth, *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

claimed that procedures were followed, facts considered, experts and peers consulted. Doubters claimed that the decision was based not on the facts but on political, religious, and personal motives. Students demonstrated and rallied, letters and editorials were written, discussions were held all over campus.

Interestingly enough *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent* begins with an analogous event. A popular professor's employment had been terminated. Students revolted and took over a building; and for the next sixteen days, they occupied the building from which they issued their demands. Not to be outdone, the administration and some faculty wrote their responses claiming reason, fact, evidence, procedure as their guides. In Booth's words:

Nobody now doubts that this event was disastrous, even though some would argue that it was an experience that we had to pass through. For many of the radical students it was disastrous—more than forty were finally expelled by a disciplinary committee. For the university it was disastrously embittering—only now [two years after the fact] has the normal level of tolerable mistrust between faculty and students been restored. If the main purpose of the university is learning and teaching, everyone concerned would say that the real university was diminished for many months. And even the most extreme students who at first claimed that their defeat was a victory, since at least "the university had been polarized," found at the end that the sit-in had produced apathy in most other students, not unity and spirit.²

Although the events at BYU and at the University of Chicago are strikingly analogous, there are obvious differences. The BYU students didn't take over buildings and write obscenities on the walls. You can be only so radical at BYU. But I believe the consequences at BYU were equally disastrous: mistrust, apathy, bitterness. Booth analyzes this event as a rhetorical failure not simply of the participants, although there is blame for them as well, but a failure of the modernist paradigm that informed the entire event and most of this century.

Modernism for Booth is the schism of fact from value beginning with Descartes' philosophy of doubt and resulting in two modernist dogmas. The first is that the only way to know anything is by verifiable fact and cold, hard logic. Opinions, beliefs, values, and the like cannot be verified, so they are ruled out of bounds. A fact must be verified by holding it up to rigorous scrutiny and to systematic doubt. That is, the only way to verify anything is for the best possible minds to try to falsify it. If it can't be falsified, then it can be accepted as being verified. This dogma Booth labels "Scientismic."³

2. Booth, 9-10.

3. Ibid., 17.

The second modern dogma counters the Scientismic with its own beliefs that logic, facts, and evidence are mere façades for other, more deeply seated motives such as power, desire, and prestige. This is the result of a fiercely romantic distrust of the rational and the willing adoption of the intuitive, the emotional, and the irrational. This dogma Booth calls the "Irrationalist."

For the adherent of the Scientismic, communication must adhere to the standards of logic and evidence; all else is propaganda. For the Irrationalist, all claims to rationality and evidence are opportunities for delving beneath the surface in what Paul Ricoeur calls "interpretation as exercise of suspicion."⁴ The Irrationalist can take nothing at face value; a cigar is never just a cigar.

In dogmatic encounters such as I described above, I hope we can see the futility of any attempt at communication, at reaching other persons and changing their minds. The Scientismicist wants only what can be verified, a kind of Sergeant Friday—"Just the facts, ma'am." The intended audience of this factual appeal sees the facts as dodges for what really motivates other persons and asks that they come clean, tell the truth, stop playing games. The situation is similar to what Wendell Berry in his wonderful essay, "Discipline and Hope," sees in political discussions; there is a radical left, a radical right, and a radical middle.⁵ All sides are so rooted in their positions that they cannot entertain another point of view. Any real communication is impossible and the exchange quickly devolves to a bomb-lobbing contest. One side hurls a fragmentation grenade; the other side takes cover, regroups, and launches an incendiary device. It escalates until the two sides run out of things to throw or until one side kills or dominates the other. Bystanders are either bored or are forced to cheer their side against the other; hence, the apathy and the distrust. No one wins, nothing is accomplished; hence, the bitterness.

For Booth this is a rhetorical failure because his definition of rhetoric precludes such an exchange. For Booth rhetoric is "a whole philosophy of how [humans] succeed or fail in discovering together, in discourse, new levels of truth (or at least agreement) that neither side suspected before."⁶ His is "a view of rhetoric as the whole art of discovering and sharing warrantable assertion."⁷ In essence, then, *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent* is occupied with the following two questions:

4. Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 32-36.

5. Wendell Berry, "Discipline and Hope," *Recollected Essays 1965-1980* (San Francisco: North Point, 1981), 152.

6. Booth, 10-11.

7. *Ibid.*, 11.

1. *How should [humans] work when they try to change each other's minds, especially about value questions?*
2. *When should you and I change our minds?—That is, how do we know a good reason when we see one?*⁸

The book is an examination of these questions in light of the consequences of modern dogmas and of the possibility of changing the modernist tendency to apply systematic doubt into a postmodernist opportunity to begin with assent. I will not attempt to summarize in a few pages what Booth has so thoroughly explored in his book. I will simply restate his conclusions to present to you the opportunity for assent that Booth foresees, and urge that as Christians we have already the wherewithal to do as he suggests.

After a careful analysis of the preference of fact over value and after careful consideration of the consequences of doubt and of how it is that people make ordinary decisions, Booth concludes that the modernist philosophy of doubt is bankrupt because it is disastrous, is internally inconsistent, and because it is unnecessary. People make ordinary decisions just fine without it. Knowledge does depend on values and beliefs, and it would be impossible to know anything or even do anything without them. Instead of "doubt pending proof," we are free to "assent pending disproof."⁹ This is not an invitation to gullibility, and Booth is careful to explicate why this is so, but suffice it for this discussion to know that the consequence of a willingness to assent rather than to doubt is significant to the questions of changing minds.¹⁰

From Booth's point of view, the self is no longer the transcendental ego of the Enlightenment striving for, and isolated and alienated within, universal reason. Nor is the self the brooding, intuitive genius of Romanticism, equally isolated and alienated. Instead, the self is "essentially rhetorical, symbol exchanging, a social product in process of changing through interaction, sharing values with other selves."¹¹ This view of the self changes everything for Booth: "[The individual] is essentially, we are now saying, a self-making-and-remaking, symbol-manipulating creature, an exchanger of information, a communicator, a persuader and manipulator, an inquirer."¹² And if humankind is essentially different once we reject the tenets of modernism and its philosophy of doubt, we can begin to ask different and interesting questions. Thus Booth suggests, "But if all [humans] make each other in symbolic interchange, then by

8. *Ibid.*, 12.

9. *Ibid.*, 101.

10. *Ibid.*, 111.

11. *Ibid.*, 126.

12. *Ibid.*, 136.

implication they *should* make each other well, and it is an inescapable value in their lives that it is good to do it well—whatever that will mean—and bad to do it badly."¹³ Hence a primary value of human existence is to be found in human rhetoricity—the medium or mode in which we change our minds as well as others' minds.

Booth believes that at this juncture in history, the postmodern, whatever that is, transcends "the shocks of negation that produced the modern temper."¹⁴ We now have the opportunity to affirm rather than doubt as we go about changing one another's minds. This rhetoric of assent, by which we change our minds and remake ourselves in communities of shared values, enables the kind of communities based on tolerance and dignity that have long been envisioned because assent makes discussion about beliefs and values possible, even necessary. As we discuss and argue opinions, beliefs, and values, we also learn to entertain the reasonableness of beliefs, opinions, and values other than our own, even when we do not accept them. Thus, the quality of our social relationships depends on the quality of our communication. Without the presumption of assent, we risk the rhetorical impasses of the modernist era and their disastrous consequences. With the presumption of assent, we hope for genuine community, though not total agreement. But why stop there? Booth poses this as another question: "Who or what made the universe such that it can be apprehended only in a shared language of values?"¹⁵ Such a provocative question propels us into a consideration of how we as Christians respond to the word and to *the Word*, how it is that our communications configure our relationships both human and divine.

At this point I would like to pursue the reasoning of *Modern Dogma* to its reasonable conclusion for Christians. If the time is now ripe for us to consider how it is we change minds as we engage in symbolic interchanges, I believe that Christianity has something to offer in this matter. In essence I believe that Christianity is not a dogma, although Christians can certainly be dogmatic, and thus is not susceptible to the critique of modernist dogmas that Booth presents. I also believe the obverse: to the extent that a person is dogmatic, he or she is not acting as a Christian. Christianity is not a dogma in Booth's sense because the changeability of minds is integral to Christian salvation through repentance.

The issue of changeability of minds became an issue for Christianity in the fifteenth century when Lorenzo Valla, a fifteenth-century Italian philologist and humanist, wrote his *Collatio* and *Adnotationes*, or notes and commentary, on the New Testament. Valla applied a philological method to the Greek and Vulgate texts to determine critically what the

13. *Ibid.*, 137.

14. *Ibid.*, 201.

15. *Ibid.*, 136.

text actually said. His method and temperament put him at odds with the Catholic Church. For example, in discussing 2 Corinthians 7:10-11, in which Paul speaks of repentance and the change that occurs to the repentant soul, Valla argues that no doctrine of penance is stated or implied in these verses. The King James version reads as follows:

10. For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.

11. For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter.

The Greek *metanoia*, "repentance," is translated in the Vulgate as the Latin *poenitentia*, "penance." The Latin suggests a weariness or annoyance that is not present in the Greek. The Greek verb *metanoew* means quite literally "to change one's mind." Other connotations include "reconsidering one's judgment" or "concern to become better after reflection."¹⁶ This meaning is quite clear, Valla argued, in verse 11, and does not suggest a doctrine of penance, but merely a willingness to change one's mind. Erasmus repeated Valla's judgment in his New Testament and thus came under the same criticism from the church. He consistently translated the Greek as *resipiscite*, "change your minds."¹⁷ Later this point would be taken up by Luther. But the Greek is quite clear in its sense of repentance as a change of mind and heart. A godly sorrow moves us to repentance in that it causes us to change our minds. Repentance is a rhetorical act of assenting to the Word of words. Insofar as Christians must constantly be in a state of repentance, they must always be willing to ply their minds in order to change them; they must always be willing to assent to the Word.

As Christians this state of being places us under certain obligations in our communications. We are obliged to persuade all to come to Christ and to heed the Word and its goodness (See 2 Ne. 25:23, Jacob 1:7, Ether 4:12, Moro. 7:16-17). But how does the Christian do this without dogmatism? The responsibility is similar for both speaker and hearer. Speaking of a heavenly wisdom James admonishes as follows:

13. Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. . . .

16. Liddell and Scott, *A Lexicon Abridged from Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1972), 439; Jerry H. Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ: New Testament Scholarship in the Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 64.

17. Bentley, 139; Roland H. Bainton, *Erasmus of Christendom* (New York: Crossroads, 1982), 139.

17. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy, and good fruits (James 3:13, 17).

Likewise Alma urges that the followers of Christ be "humble, and be submissive and gentle; easy to be entreated; full of patience and long-suffering" (Alma 7:23). And at the time of Christ, Nephi longs for a people that would be "easy to be entreated" (Hel. 7:7). I do not believe that this phrase, "easy to be entreated," means to make easy marks of ourselves or willing dupes. It does mean being patient, long-suffering, and submissive. It means being willing to hear the other out and consider the reasons and appeals carefully, deliberately, and considerately, setting aside for the moment ego, interest, prejudice, and ambition. It means being willing to change our minds, to assent pending disproof. The obligation of a Christian audience is to hear as faithfully as possible what is being said, to take it up deliberately, to be entreated by it easily if the reasons are good.

And as in most else, the Golden Rule also applies to the speaker: speak as you wish to be heard. Nowhere is the duty of the Christian rhetor more thoroughly spelled out than in Doctrine and Covenants 121:

41. No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned;

42. By kindness, and pure knowledge, which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy, and without guile.

The rhetoric of Christianity is not involved in any power play or any attempt at victory for its own sake. The Christian rhetor knows that if we are made in the image of God, we are made as the Word, in and by words, refashioned by the things we say and do to each other. And as we repent, changing our minds, vowing to do better upon reflection, we make each other better by our symbolic interchange, and so we edify one another (D&C 50:22). The state of mind for the Christian is assent, assent to the Word, and "inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me," he reminds us (Matt. 25:40). The Lord requires "the heart and a willing mind" (D&C 64:34). He requires this willingness of heart and mind to assent to him and to each other so that our communication can truly be the foundation for our relationships, both human and divine.

If Booth is right that postmodernity is a crucial juncture for improving human relationships, I believe that Christians need to leave their dogmatism behind and, as always, show the way by their example and their practice. Christian communication requires practice at assent and at being easily entreated. It requires a practice that becomes habitual. Because

Booth gave the lectures that he reworked as *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent* originally at Notre Dame, he ended the final lecture with an allusion to the Catholic church and some of the rhetorical turmoil it was experiencing. I will end with his words, hoping that you can make the requisite translation for our own church.

I have met some rebels in the last four days here who talk as if salvation will be found only if the church can be dragged, kicking and screaming, into the twentieth century. Many have been eager to show me that my audiences here will be just as secularized, fully as modernist, as I could find at my own university. Whatever the reasons, good and bad, for turning from traditional Catholic dogmas, I would hope that the turning would not be simply a rerun of the triumph of modernism. To catch up with Bertrand Russell is not enough for a modern Catholic or rebel-Catholic—not if one of the things we know is that beliefs are not disproved simply by asking whether we can prove them in the modernist sense.

In short, it would seem to me a pity, if in fighting the dogmas of pre-modernism, you were to fall at this late date from the arms of the church into the thorns of modernism. I suppose that what I am asking, without being entirely sure that it is possible, is for a leap over modernist battlefields to the postmodern rediscovery that the primal symbolic act is saying yes to processes like the wrenching one in which you are engaged.¹⁸

Our own church is sometimes embroiled in wrenching rhetorical turmoil that in many ways reflect the modern dogmas Booth outlines for us. For some the truth of the gospel will be proved beyond skepticism when the golden plates are returned or when the city of Zarahemla is finally located, when a founding document or artifact is discovered, when a historical enigma can finally be put to rest by incontrovertible fact, when the doctrine can be verified with tangible evidence. This is the Scientific dogma. For others any such claim is met with skepticism and distrust, as an opportunity for suspicion. This is the Irrationalist dogma. I, together with Booth, would hope that this modernist wrangle of dogmas could be transcended by an invigorating yet long-suffering, a demanding yet loving rhetoric of assent in which the ease of being entreated is commensurate with the ease of His yoke, a burden borne lightly by virtue of the Word.

18. Booth, 203-04.

The Lyric Body in Emma Lou Thayne's *Things Happen*

Lisa Orme Bickmore

Mine is no callous shell,
I have instant conductors all over me whether I pass or stop,
They seize every object and lead it harmlessly through me.
I merely stir, press, feel with my fingers, and am happy,
To touch my person to some one else's is about as much as I
can stand.

—Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself"¹

Beauty is momentary in the mind—
The fitful tracing of a portal;
But in the flesh it is immortal.

—Stevens, "Peter Quince at the Clavier"²

THE EPIGRAPH TO EMMA LOU THAYNE'S BOOK *Things Happen*³ from Alice Walker reads: "One wants to write poetry that is understood by one's people." In the same spirit, I want to write to my people about a poet, one of our own, whose poems I believe stand among the finest. Some of these poems I read when they were published ten or more years ago; one, "Love Song at the End of Summer," has stayed with me all those intervening years, shaping both my readerly and writerly consciousness with its heartbreaking grace. In order to address what I take to be a crucial ontological issue in lyric poetry, Emma Lou Thayne's in particular, I want to set up a rubric, and to do that I need to talk about my own studies of, and concerns about, the lyric.

1. Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself," in *Poetry and Prose* (New York: The Library of America, 1982), 27.

2. Wallace Stevens, "Peter Quince at the Clavier," in *Collected Poetry & Prose* (New York: Library of America, 1997), 74.

3. Emma Lou Thayne, *Things Happen: Poems of Survival* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1991).

I have been studying a very long poem, *The Changing Light at Sandover*, by James Merrill, a contemporary American poet. The poem details the encounter of a late twentieth-century consciousness with a world other than this one. Merrill's sensibility as a poet is pronouncedly lyrical: most of his poems prior to this one, and since it, are lovely and highly wrought, and decidedly short, lyric poems which limn the characteristic subjects of the lyrist—"love and loss," in the words of one of the inhabitants of the long poem's other world. Merrill's poem struggles not only with how to believe the unbelievable, the insistent intrusion of another world into this one, but also with how to express it—how to employ the lyric gift in the service of an unwieldy and mysterious narrative. In some ways, this struggle becomes a meta-discourse on how to fit the human into the domineering narrative of the divine; and what I find is that for a lyrical sensibility like Merrill's, one solution is to give the human its own insistence, to raise up again and again the figures of the human as a kind of caduceus, to ward off the blinding power of the divine. The otherworldly narrative that invades the lovely world, the this-world, of the lyrist, seems in this long poem to threaten to abolish it at every turn. Thus, one of the things that might be lost in Merrill's poem is the very world he loves, the world that those in the other world also want, paradoxically, to save.

The world that Emma Lou Thayne's poems inhabit is not troubled or threatened by the encroachment of the divine, but it is troubled, as are all lyric poets, by the encroachments of time, decay, and death. The very things the singer celebrates are shadowed by their own ghosts: loveliness by bleakness, abundance by scarcity, flourishing by decay, the sentient body by its failure. The nearness of the ghostly to our loved presences is often so close to consciousness that we cannot bear it; so we make tropes to save this world. Commonly, we abandon this world, this beauty, for another that seems more durable—a spiritual world that trounces the angels of death hovering so near. One consequence of this trope is that the voice of the singer, then, can take us only so far and then no farther: if the spiritual world becomes the ground of all lyrical metaphor, the voice of the singer may lose its earthly force. Think, for example, of the plaintive wishing of Yeats's singer in "Sailing to Byzantium" in hoping for an extra-natural state from which to sing:

Once out of nature I shall never take
My bodily form from any natural thing,
But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make
Of hammered gold and gold enameling
To keep a drowsy Emperor awake. . . .⁴

4. William Butler Yeats, "Sailing to Byzantium," in *Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats* (London: Macmillan Press, n.d.), 193.

Inherent in this dream of a body no longer in nature is the loss of the human. And a singer that is not human has no song to speak to this world. What Yeats here subtly reminds us, and what many great lyric poets do as well, is that for poetry we have no other world than this one; and the song the poet sings is drawn from actual breath taken into an actual body.

The seduction of a spiritual world in which nothing dies, nor decays, nor falls apart, is powerful for us who love this world, this body, this flesh; we long to redeem what we love from the forces of time and death, to ward off what will, finally, dismantle us. I have said this is an ontological issue in lyric poetry, because in many ways, the figural efforts of poetry are made in order to save the lyric world from extinction, from not-being; therefore, the types of tropes and our readings of them are most profoundly about lyric poetry's being. It is an epistemological effort as well: if the consciousness of the lyricist is purely consciousness, it more easily turns into spirit, a saving of the transient matter of this world by capturing its ideal, non-material, state. If we know in poetry by the mind alone, we turn more easily, of necessity, to an other world. But the lyric poets always remind us of their one truth: that the body in poetry can only be redeemed by raising it, as itself, as a fleshly body, again and again as the figure and ground of our love and loss. This seems to me the profound truth in any theorizing of lyric poetry. It seems to me true as well of the poems in *Things Happen*, where the poems save the body, which saving simultaneously saves the body of the poem as well—its participation and being in this world. This is part of what moves me about them, what makes me want to return to them, what makes them great poems.

You can see what I'm talking about in the first poem in the volume, "Planting Wildflowers in September at the Cabin." As read in its entirety, the poem enacts the perpetual lyric drama of redeeming the body into the body itself:

Easy, say directions on the can:
Scatter, rake, or stomp in gently,
spray/sprinkle till damp, not wet.

The moist seeds, webbed in the floss
of each other's company, buried alive,
come out with my fingers
winged, Gypsy-ready for somewhere new.
Shaggy, hung with their own marsh
and mountains, they cling to my fingers,
scatter like kisses on the brown hillside.

I rake them in, say,
Live here, tantalize spring.

In winter dreams
 I will return again and again,
 My palms wet with you,
 my nails sprouting your musky scent.

And flowers, surely flowers,
 wild as Gentian and Indian Paint Brush,
 will grow from my fingertips,
 silky bouquets to touch across my face.
 And I will rise with them
 no matter where I am.⁵

A reader of this poem will certainly hear, gently but insistently, the trope of the resurrection in the final lines: the speaker rising with the flowers, “wherever I am,” in the many destinies of a human singer, the wherevers that may, in truth, be the nowhere of death. One senses here, implicit in the tradition of such tropes, a turning away from this world, a rising above and beyond; rising into transcendence. But the world is ever the poet’s lover: it lives in and through and upon her body, growing from her fingertips as if she were the earth itself. It is the weird engendering made possible by the bodily being of the poem: the speaker plants the seeds in a piece of beloved ground, then blesses them with her utterance: “Live here, tantalize spring.” The poem itself tantalizes eternity, tempts it to come near, beckons it to turn our attention, in the dream-space allowed by lyric, to another world, where we may rise. But we do not rise: instead, we stay in the dream-space, where the body of the poet does not decay or waste. The poem raises up, in the traditional topos of transcendence, of resurrection, a body leafy and floral, a body magically, for the space of the lyric dream, both world and lover of the world. The body raised up in the poem is not a transcendent one, but a body rising with and through flowers.

I read this poem at length to give an example of the phenomenon I spoke of in my introduction: the body raised up as figure and ground of love. And there are plenty of poems in this book that enact the same gesture, patiently or not so patiently, turning our attention back to this world, to the bodily force of the lyric space we are in as we read. Take, for instance, the poem “Margaret at 94 Refuses a Retirement Center.” Margaret speaks to us as a consciousness; but she does not allow her wasting flesh to fade from our attention nor let us forget that her voice speaks with breath drawn into lungs within ribs:

Vintage now, under the birthdays and loose clothing
 I am more than whispering out my time.
 I refuse to be lost in what I have been.

5. Thayne, 13.

With my knees bone on bone, my legs parentheses,
 My back the curve of meeting itself,
 I would still be a body lighted by love.⁶

If "Planting Wildflowers in September at the Cabin" veers dangerously near the transcendent turn, the figure of a woman at the verge of death begs for a release from the insistent reminders of the body's transience. Even here, though, the world is lover; the body is still beloved in its abjectness. She says: "God still sings in my shape though more of me / goes every day to join me later." The pathos of this body is redeemed by the figure of the divine; yet it is a specific sort of God that sings in the shape of the old woman: it is a god who takes his form from a natural thing, who does not shun but rather embraces the specific bodily shape of this woman and the longings that spring from it. Even as she imagines death, it is not a death which leaves the body behind:

Then, when an old door shuts itself
 I will leave undemolished,
 me, a container of secrets, set for surprise.

Few enough times in our lives we get to wake up.
 I would wake swaying, I swear, like a sapling

enough to please the sky, my skin, and me

and him
 in a fitting place
 acquainted with the size
 of who I am.⁷

Though God circulates in this poem—as singer of the shape of the body, as one who fits a place for "the size / of who I am"—it is most strikingly here as lover he appears, even in the very refusal to name him as more than a pronoun. Though death demands an account here, the poem raises up the body; "swaying . . . like a sapling, enough to please the sky, my skin, and me / and him / in a fitting place / acquainted with the size / of who I am."⁸

This poem raises the most potent questions. If the body may magically raise itself up in the face of absolute loss, insisting on its own force, then what of the body in pain, the body itself as the radical site of loss? This book is founded upon such an eventuality: its title reads *Things Happen: Poems of Survival*. One might add that things happen to the vulnerable body, yet the body survives. The poem of that same title refers to an accident that the speaker survives, though not without trauma:

6. Ibid., 18.

7. Ibid., 20.

8. Ibid.

Things happen. A crash like a shot, your hand full of blood
 From temple and eye, the split second. Speed ramming steel
 Into your newly spent lifetime the blanks of bewildered abruption.
 Not in on what was before you, gone the luxury of seeing, of choice.
 From the highway, through the windshield the splatters of morning.
 Smashed to floating that side of your face, what it held.
 Instant the clouds, the passages saying You hear me?
 Another place, a distant light, a flower in wind, you echoing Why?
 Spilled questions wrenching your temple and eye to strenuous focus:
 A dark navigable by caress and whisper. A stillness.⁹

While one might expect, in a poem such as this, the abolition of the old body, and in its place pure consciousness (as is the case in the poem immediately following this one in the volume, "When I Died"), what happens instead here is the phenomenon of the body's wound making the opening, the lyric space. In some sense, this poem issues from the wound, and its "new manual of how" helps us to interpret the body as locus of both pain and song. In "Margaret at 94 Refuses a Retirement Center," you remember, we are told "few enough times in our lives we get to wake up." The occasion of the wound is also the aperture through which new sight is possible. Sight is a trope for consciousness; the consciousness this poem provokes is located in the body. This is true also of the healed body figured in the poem, "You Heal," where after the "morning you woke / and everything works / and almost nothing hurts," what happens is that

. . . the heart of not
 figuring a way back
 just happens again
 in the still world
 like rain running the
 skies and green becoming
 the hand of the sun
 with God standing by.¹⁰

The world and the body are redeemed. Again, God stands by, and what he does is approve, as of a new creation, of the reconstitution of the world, the body, by the process of the healing of flesh. Such consciousness, new sight, located in and through the body, is not restricted to the moment of violence. Rather, what these poems point us to, over and over, is the fact that, in the space of the lyric, all sight, all consciousness, is located specifically in the body. If we look at the longer poem, "Nirvana," we can see this most profoundly. Subtitled "Last Morning after

9. *Ibid.*, 57.

10. *Ibid.*, 60.

Time Away," the poem accounts for a state of mind that becomes talismanic for the speaker who has been away from home and family. What this speaker enacts for us is the way that everything of the mind—memory, wish, conception, idea—has a specific bodily force. It is as if the body were the only real register of acts of consciousness:

You are ready for bed without knowing
everything in for speculation. Formalities
take shape: kneeling sitting lowering to a pillow
nothing yet touching off edges and ends
trying to let go of themselves:

Perhaps you will read them to rest.
You will know when it is time:
You will reach for the light
barely sink from it to remember your scalp:
how it likes to draw back on its goods
free its face to feel: the pillow the cheek
the temple the jaw the ear flush with the down
the case. . .¹¹

The speaker registers drifting off to sleep as a series of specific bodily renderings: thoughts erupt in the head; as she drifts off, she "remembers" her "scalp." But waking up is represented in the poem as slow and precise, a kind of ritual of bodily remembrance. It is as if the poem re-constitutes the body, piece by piece, sense by sense:

Then it is morning probably not late:
No sound has found you only dreams
not wanting to be lost. An eye might flicker
toward the window for a time:
No matter. The lid is unwilling
to part for long with what is behind it:
the generous granter of wisps waiting for form
liberators, informants
characters of a language never inconceivable.

You cohabit the space that is nowhere:
Drafts and injections spill within you:
You are empty and full by now weightless.
Enjoy the luxury of levitation: Nothing
is separate: No wrist or hip has ligament muscle.

Examine the comfort of everything
come into place: tongue to mouth palate teeth
surfaces having found each other:

11. *Ibid.*, 74.

legs sheets bottom the outside of
your ribs arms shoulder what they lie on.¹²

What this poem gives us is the body as talisman; the flesh as magic protection against the undoings of the night.

I've saved the best of these splendid poems for last. "Love Song at the End of Summer" is a love song to the body. It enacts for us the famous mind/body split of western thought. Albert Grossman, in *Summa Lyrica*, says this of that split:

The poem is a solution to the mind-body problem in the same sense that a self is a solution to that problem. The unity of the poem, like the unity of self, being otherwise without a name, is disintegrated by discourse and restored by experience.¹³

As this poem is read aloud, one can see how its discourse allows for the disintegration of being, while the experience of hearing the poem restores us to the body:

It is clear now, body. Every day can be late August
after the birth of babies, never quite cold.

But one must learn early what you are for forever.
Good old leather tiger, half domesticated
by paws in pans and shoulders hung too often with beaded fur,
you may think I forget. But you do not let me.
By now I know better. I come back.

Still, you never take me not surprised, faithful one,
by how to arrive, and the pleasure of sweat,
and how to shiver away the bee.
You move to the song behind the dance.
Even after a standard, plain white, unstriped day,
you ripple in our sleep and wait, mostly unperplexed.

And when, no matter how faint, the music breathes
behind the catcalls of too much to do, you muster
almost without my inclining, potent as needing to dance,
to pace off the house, the garden of weeds, the clogged creek,
and the midnight clutch of vagrancies. You pad from
some spring, and wild, except for my importuning,
go. To do it all.

When we lie down, it will be like the squirrel there,
unflagging in the last swift moving in the leaves,
August stashed in crisp piles above the dust.

12. Ibid., 75.

13. Allen Grossman, "Summa Lyrica: A Primer of the Commonplaces in Speculative Poetics," *Western Humanities Review* (Spring 1990), 85.

I may find no way at all without your sleek taking.

Under the wrinkles that tell you no, I can hear you now
saying, "I still love you," and to time, "Leave her alone."¹⁴

The very form the poem takes is a dialogue of the self—the soul?—with the body. What the powerful discursive self is constantly in danger of is forgetfulness of the body—forgetting what we must learn early—"what you are for forever." The body surprises: its force is not to speak, but to be, to take the speaker where she needs to go, whether she knows it or not. The body here is its own argument: its presence, "old leather tiger," is its own reason for being, and its own way of knowing. The self is subjugated, domesticated; but the body is wild and potent, and releases, dances, moves, with the self, even as the self is in thrall to the "catcalls of too much to do." The body is the lover of the self, and does not flag, and never fails: "When we lie down, it will be like the squirrel there, / unflagging in the last swift moving in the leaves, / August stashed in the crisp piles above the dust. / / I may find no way at all without your sleek taking." When the speaker tells us, earlier, "By now I know better. I come back," the last clause has more than the force of a return to some important, remembered thing. It is also a reappearance—"I come back." In forgetting the body the lyric self is abolished; in remembering, in returning, the lyric self may be reconstituted, may come back. It is this that is the lyric's most powerful surprise, and one that takes us over and over: that the lyric body, lifted up each time, is the lover that may ward off time and death even as we draw inexorably nearer to them:

Under the wrinkles that tell you no, I can hear you now
saying, "I still love you," and to time, "Leave her alone."

This, finally, is what poetry is for. As Philip Levine tells us in "Making Light of It":

I can follow the day
to the black rags and corners it will
scatter to because someone always
goes ahead burning the little candle
of his breath, making light of it all.¹⁵

14. Thayne, 79-80.

15. Phillip Levine, "Making Light of It" in *New Selected Poems* (New York: Knopf, 1997), 261.

Grandma Comes for Me

Emma Lou Thayne

Out of Sunday morning dark
My grandma came for me.

Stripped bare to dreaming I saw
Her occupy the fat black leather rocker

Where my uncle lifted her from bed
And Mother helped her dress to be,

The last time up before the liver cancer took her.
Her velvet dress, long, blue on blue.

And amber beads I knew, but
Her hand that reached for mine, a 12-year-old's,

Lay identical to mine at 72, tawny,
Veined, with fingers straight, bones obvious

On the cushioned leather arms. I slid
My smaller hand to where she covered it

With hers and pressed anointing into me
Flooding as her smile between the hollow cheeks,

The deep brown claiming eyes still holding me
These sixty years beyond another touch.

To church I wore my blue on blue ten years hung away
And with her amber beads long curled untouched

In that dark drawer, the grandma that I am
Became a lighted shell housing like the wind in trees

The limber spirit of a girl
Touched holy by a holy knowing how.

The Path of the Wanderer: Autobiographical Theory and the Personal Essay

Valerie Holladay

IN HIS NOVELLA, *A River Runs Through It*, Norman Maclean describes a conversation with his father, who knows of Norman's desire to write.

"You like to tell true stories, don't you?" the father asks.

"Yes," Maclean answers.

"After you have finished your true stories sometime," his father suggests, "why don't you make up a story and the people to go with it? Only then will you understand what happened and why."¹

Maclean's novella is full of "stories" about his family. Easily autobiographical, they are short, self-contained explorations into his life and family that could also be seen as personal essays. Admitting that he didn't understand the people he loved in life, Maclean writes about not understanding and yet loving anyway. Ultimately he learns that his father was right when he said, "It is those we live with and love and should know who elude us." Through his writing, Maclean "reach[es] out to them."²

For many people, writing is trying to make sense of "those we live with and love and should know." It is reaching out for something intangible, elusive. It is this definition of writing as "reaching out" that draws me to the essay, with its roots in the French word *essayer*: to try, to experiment, to risk, even—as essayist Philip Lopate says—"to leap experimentally into the unknown."³

1. Norman Maclean, *A River Runs Through It and Other Stories* (New York: Pocket Books/Simon & Schuster, 1976), 113.

2. Ibid.

3. Philip Lopate, *Against Joie de Vivre* (New York: Poseiden Press, 1989), 76.

Like the personal essay, the autobiography is also a “search for one’s inner standing. . . . [It is] a process . . . not simply [a] narrative of the voyage, but also the voyage itself [with its] sense of discovery.”⁴ Traditionally, the autobiography has been defined as a straightforward account of the life one has lived, with a definite beginning and a description of events that have occurred during that lifetime. A survey of critical autobiographical theory, however, shows that autobiography is much more than that, and is in fact very similar to the personal essay, despite the obvious difference in length.

In *Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place*, a collection of autobiographical essays, Terry Tempest Williams says she writes “to confront what [she] do[es] not know,” “to create a path for [her]self.”⁵ This rationale transforms the traditional definition of autobiography into an unknown path that the writer takes in search of understanding. The autobiography of a life that is “understood from the outset,” that begins with a completed outline allowing the autobiographer to merely “flesh out” the details, is considered by some theorists to be “a failure, [or] a partial failure at any rate.”⁶ This is because the boundaries are already set and the writer does not move beyond them in search of what remains to be discovered. In this regard, the autobiography and the essay are similar, both serving as a “leap into the unknown,” an attempt to reach out toward an understanding of one’s life and those who are a part of it.

In the many, many papers I wrote as an English major, I learned to start with an idea, a thesis, and support it with various examples from literature. In other words, I started with the answer and then defended it. In my experience with the personal essays I have undertaken, I found a wonderful freedom, a freedom to ramble through unformed thoughts and incomplete memories, a freedom to begin with an unformed but intriguing concept or memory and to allow the ideas to arise through the writing. And in looking for meaning to the often bewildering events of my life, I have found both understanding and healing in the journey. I am deeply sorry I didn’t make the discovery until graduate school—a discovery that many students may not make at all—that writing isn’t just a means to communicate ideas and to set forth theories; it can lead the writer to concepts that weren’t even imagined at the outset of the assignment if he or she is willing to take risks. Writing can and does serve an important social function, but I believe its personal use is just as power-

4. Roy Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), 182.

5. Terry Tempest Williams, *Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 4.

6. Avrom Fleishman, *Figures of Autobiography: The Language of Self-Writing* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1983), 11-12.

ful. Unfortunately, political, social, and academic purposes often take precedence over writing about one's self.

Williams's collection of essays, *Refuge*, has been widely praised for its cultural and environmental insights, and yet Williams acknowledges that, for her, writing is "an attempt to heal [her]self."⁷ Another widely anthologized writer, Frank Conroy, published an autobiographical novel that I happened to find at a used bookstore one day. The novel, which reads very much like a collection of connected personal essays, is titled *Stop-Time*, Conroy says, because writing is the "one still point" in the midst of "the sloppiness of things." It is the act of stopping time long enough to figure things out, and through understanding to achieve some sense of acceptance and healing. Despite his trepidation in writing so personally about himself, he writes because of his "faith in the act of writing."⁸ And likewise, so do we all.

In a lighter vein, Eloise Bell compares writing to unpacking in "Unpacking Interruptus" from her collection of essays, *Only When I Laugh*. Packing for a weekend, a week, a ten-day hike in the wilderness is a breeze, she says. But unpacking leaves one staring in bewilderment at a closet that doesn't have room for everything that was there before the trip. This, she informs us, is because "the real unpacking from a journey doesn't have to do with clothes, toiletries, and accumulated souvenirs. It has to do with experiences, insights, inner changes—what we went away hoping to see and do, what actually happened, [and] what we lost along the way."⁹ Writing allows us a place to put things in order. The personal essay and the autobiography both offer us room to sort out our experiences, to examine the souvenirs of our journey, and to consider what is worth keeping and what is not.

Both essay and autobiography have deep roots in our literary heritage; the essay is generally attributed to Michel de Montaigne, the autobiography to St. Augustine. The personal essay, or more precisely the autobiographical personal essay, is, I believe, a fairly recent development, at least in the Mormon community. Richard Cracroft and Neal Lambert's *A Believing People*, published in 1974, contains seven personal essays, although only one, Ed Geary's "Goodbye to Poplar Haven" is noticeably autobiographical. In fact, another essayist in the collection, Truman Madsen, says at one point, "To be autobiographical for a moment . . .," showing that autobiography and personal essay are not synonymous for him.¹⁰

7. Williams, *Refuge*, 4.

8. Frank Conroy, *Stop-Time* (New York: Viking Press, 1967), ix-xi, 29.

9. Eloise Bell, *Only When I Laugh* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990), 28-29.

10. Truman Madsen, "Human Anguish and Divine Love," in *A Believing People: Literature of the Latter-day Saints*, Richard Cracroft and Neal Lambert, eds. (Provo, Utah: BYU Press, 1974), 161-168.

A Thoughtful Faith and *Personal Voices*, both LDS collections, contain a good many autobiographical essays, but also some that are more theological and philosophical explorations.

In these collections are two of my favorite essays: one leans toward the autobiographical personal essay, the other leans more toward the theological/philosophical personal essay. In Bruce Young's essay, "The Miracle of Faith, The Miracle of Love: Some Personal Reflections" (in *A Thoughtful Faith*), Dr. Young describes his experience meeting his wife-to-be, Margaret, and learning to love her and to see himself as lovable.¹¹ Richard Poll, the author of "What the Church Means to People Like Me" (in *Personal Voices*), uses his essay to describe two different kinds of church members, both intelligent, spiritual, and loyal, who have a contribution to make to the church though in, at times, almost contradictory ways.¹² As Dr. Poll tells me what the church means to "people like [him]," he does include some personal narrative, but his essay is noticeably more philosophical than autobiographical.

Eugene England, considered by many to be the "father of the Mormon personal essay," has probably had a broader impact with his essays than any other Mormon writer. Many of his essays are clearly theological discussions, which the titles themselves often make clear; although not autobiographical, they may contain brief but powerful passages of personal narrative. Other essays, like "Monte Cristo" and "Jacaranda," appear to be autobiographical narrative for the most part.¹³

Before enrolling in Professor England's LDS literature class, I had little exposure to the personal essay. The class was invited to write a personal essay as one of our assignments, and as I tested out this unfamiliar style of writing, I was amazed at its power to transform ugliness and chaos into grace and beauty. I was also surprised at the things, somehow appearing on the paper, that I hadn't planned to write. For my essay, I began with a short narrative I had written earlier in a personal history class. The episode dealt with my mother's shopping sprees to Deseret Industries for dolls when I was a girl. I didn't expect to conclude that my mother was talented and caring, but so divided in her loyalties that she expended all her love and energy on boxes of old, second-hand dolls. When the essay was later published, the editor assigned to me asked how my family felt about my writing, then quickly added, "Or don't

11. Bruce Young, "The Miracle of Faith, The Miracle of Love: Some Personal Reflections," *A Thoughtful Faith: Essays on Belief by Mormon Scholars*, Philip L. Barlowe, ed. (Cen-terville, Utah: Cannon Press, 1986), 259-276.

12. Richard Poll, "What the Church Means to People Like Me," *Personal Voices: A Celebration of Dialogue* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1986), 167-178.

13. *Wasatch Review International* (June 1993): 84-102; see also *Making Peace: Personal Essays* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), 107-130, 203-222.

they read your essays?" implying, I believe, that I would likely not show my essays to protect my family from embarrassment or hurt.

Yes, my family has read my essays. One very personal essay caused some pain, which seems to have softened over the years. But that first essay had a fairly immediate, miraculous effect on my mother, who saw herself, perhaps for the first time, as too talented and too loving, rather than what she had always believed: that she wasn't enough of anything. And I believe the rest of my family felt closer to my mother after reading that essay.

Shortly after I discovered the personal essay, I was introduced to autobiographical theory. Again and again I found striking similarities between the two forms of self-writing. I learned that the personal essay allowed me to make certain discoveries and to create meaning, and that in my attempts at autobiography, it was acceptable to learn about my life as I wrote, that in telling about a life, I would find it "at once a discovery [and] a creation."¹⁴

I learned, too, that I was creating a different self within my essays. Autobiography and essay have both a narrator and an author, ostensibly the same person, but although a relationship exists between the two, they are not the same person. "In the act of remembering the past in the present, the autobiographer imagines into existence another person, another world, and surely it is not the same, in any real sense, as that past world that does not, under any circumstances, nor however much we may wish it, now exist."¹⁵ When we write about our lives, we create a new order to the pattern of our experiences; we create a new person as well. This is because we are not only the person who lived them, we are now the person who is writing about them, "and surely it is not the same."¹⁶

Another autobiographer, Mary McCarthy, notes this strange relationship between describing one's self and creating this self in the process of writing: "I suppose everyone continues to be interested in the quest for the self, but what you feel when you're older, I think, is . . . that you really must make the self. It's absolutely useless to look for it; you won't find it."¹⁷

14. James Olney, "Autobiography and the Cultural Moment: A Thematic, Historical, and Bibliographical Introduction," in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, James Olney, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 19.

15. Olney, "Some Versions of Memory/Some Versions of Bios: The Ontology of Autobiography," in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, 241.

16. *Ibid.*

17. Mary McCarthy, quoted in Elisabeth Niebuhr, "Interview with Mary McCarthy," *Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews*, 2nd series, George Plimpton, ed. (New York: Penguin, 1968), 314.

It is strangely comforting to create a new persona, one who is wiser and stronger than we were or one who will ultimately be able to make sense of her experiences. When I wrote "Companionship," an essay about my mission, I could, for the first time, feel compassion for the missionary narrator I created. She was so young and naive going into her mission, pumped full of enormous expectations about herself and others. I didn't create her on purpose, nor did I write that essay to tell about my mission; I was simply responding to a writing assignment to tell about an exotic place I'd been. The only place I could think of was France, although the culture really hadn't seemed so very foreign to me. (It was the mission that brought on culture shock!) I learned to care for and to forgive this fragile young missionary in my essay in a way that I had not learned to forgive myself. In this way, I discovered that writing provided a way for me "to redeem" the past, which autobiographical theorists call "the prime motive—perhaps, indeed, the only real motive of the autobiographer."¹⁸ Through writing, we have the chance to "win back what has been lost."¹⁹

I believe writers often write to put things in place, a process the autobiographer explains in this way: "In recounting my history I take the longest path, but this path that goes round my life leads me the more surely from me to myself. . . . It is the law of gathering in and of understanding acts that have been [mine] and all the faces and all the places where [I] have recognized signs and witness of [my] destiny."²⁰

Like Norman Maclean, who writes about his family and his life in order to better understand them, essayist Mary Bradford experiences writing as the "search for authenticity and wholeness, . . . the desire to reach out without striking out."²¹ Alfred Kazin writes "to make a home for himself, on paper,"²² and Joan Didion writes "to find out what [she's] thinking."²³

When we write we gain "by the very act of seeking, that order that [we] would have,"²⁴ a pattern-making which is echoed by Richard Selzer. A surgeon-essayist, Selzer turns to writing after long days in the operating room. After all, he writes, "surgery and writing are more alike

18. Olney, "Some Versions of Memory," 241.

19. Georges Gusdorf, "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography," in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, 39.

20. *Ibid.*, 38.

21. Mary L. Bradford, "I, Eye, Aye: A Personal Essay on Personal Essays," *Personal Voices: A Celebration of Dialogue* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987), 11.

22. Alfred Kazin, "The Self as History: Reflections on Autobiography," *Telling Lives: The Biographer's Art*, Marc Pachter, ed. (Washington, D.C.: New Republic Books, 1979), 88.

23. Joan Didion, "While I Write," *The Dolphin Reader*, Douglas Hunt, ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1986), 1016.

24. James Olney, *Metaphors of Self* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 4.

than they are different. In surgery, it is the body that is being opened up and put back together for repairs. In writing, it is the whole world that is taken in for repairs, then put back in working order, piece by piece."²⁵

I believe it is significant that more than one prophet of God has told us to write our life stories, our personal histories, or in other words, our autobiographies. As I've read the autobiographical writings of Ellis Shipp, of Mary Goble Pay, and others, particularly from the early days of the church, I feel blessed and thankful for these women and others like them. Even though I respect a writer whose imagination and sensitivity can create a story about suffering, about loss, about self-discovery, there is a certain power in sharing certain personal experiences and discoveries, either as the reader or the writer.

Autobiographical writing does have certain limitations. Despite any claim to be a true and accurate record of a life, an autobiography simply cannot be true. No autobiography can tell the "whole truth and nothing but the truth," and any attempt to include every detail, every thought, every moment would result in an encyclopedic effort, even if it were possible to remember and record all events accurately. And yet, forgetting to include one or two important details could produce an entirely different account from one written with the inclusion of those details.

Another criticism, and a legitimate one, is that any attempt at a true record is subject to "memory and introspection and even *imagination*," and as such, autobiography "is often unreliable as a record of facts."²⁶ It is always interesting to compare my sister's memories of certain events with my own. They seldom match, but my sister, an enthusiastic and vibrant storyteller, defends herself by claiming she just "remembers bigger."

Since an accurate and truthful retelling of one's life is so fraught with likely missteps, the goal of autobiographical writing becomes "truth-seeking," rather than "truth-telling." The autobiographical personal essay invites writers to use fictional techniques to enhance their experiences when the bare facts, even if they could be remembered accurately, would not lead the reader to live the experience as the essayist did. For me, the essay calls for every skill the writer possesses—careful crafting of events and their settings, rich characterization, tight plotting, realistic dialogue—as well as courage and honesty. The result is that "the autobiographer half discovers, half creates a deeper design and truth than adherence to historical and factual truth could ever make claim to."²⁷

25. Richard Selzer, *Mortal Lessons: Notes on the Art of Surgery* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), 9.

26. Kathleen Morner and Ralph Rausch, *NTC's Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Lincolnwood, Ill: National Textbook Co., 1991), 17.

27. Olney, "Autobiography and the Cultural Moment: A Thematic, Historical, and Bibliographical Introduction," in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, 11.

Essayist Philip Lopate says of the essay that it “liberates the writer . . . and allows one to ramble in a way that more truly reflects the mind at work.”²⁸ But the essay must be more than simply impromptu stream of conscious journal writing. It demands the same careful attention to detail and audience as do other literary efforts.

I believe the unique strength of such writing—including biography, family, and even church history—is that these are all powerful “forms of spiritual autobiography” that can enrich our lives.²⁹ Watching his father-preacher, David Bradley observed, “In confessing his own weakness my father . . . found access to a hidden source of power inside, or perhaps outside, himself. In any case it was a source of power that was magical and mystical.”³⁰ Bradley says further that before he began writing, he had thought, “The writer’s goal was to reveal truths in words manipulated so effectively as to cause movement in the minds and hearts of those who read them.” In a powerful conclusion, he admits: “What I hadn’t understood was that it would cost anything. I thought I could do those things while remaining safe and secure in myself.”³¹

It is this “cost” that makes the personal essay one of our most demanding literary forms and, ultimately, one of the most rewarding for both writer and reader. To reveal our longings for wholeness, our lack of understanding, our pain in the face of injustice—this vulnerability gives birth to the power to redeem, which gives the autobiographical personal essay its power. This kind of power is nearly palpable in numerous personal essays that I could mention, among them Steve Walker’s “Like There’s No Tomorrow” and Carole Coombs Hanson’s “The Death of a Son.”³² It is the courage to be vulnerable that will make the personal essay, as Gene England has said, the “most important contribution [of LDS writers] to the wider world literary culture.”

The essay also has the power of directness, says another essayist, Clifton Jolley. He goes on to say that this power makes up for what it may lack of the “formal elegance of poetry” and “the rich textual elements of fiction.”³³ But I disagree with him here. Many personal essays I have read are as “rich” in “textual elements” as the best of fiction. Like a

28. Philip Lopate, 75.

29. Richard Cracroft and Neal Lambert, eds., *A Believing People: Literature of the Latter-day Saints* (Provo, Utah: BYU Press, 1974), 9.

30. David Bradley, “Bringing Down the Fire,” *Spiritual Quests: The Art of Religious Writing*, William Zinsser, ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1988), 78.

31. *Ibid.*, 78-79.

32. Steven Walker, “Like There’s No Tomorrow,” *Personal Voices: A Celebration of Dialogue* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Signature, 1987), 167-78, and Carole Coombs Hansen, “The Death of a Son,” *Personal Voices*, 41-48.

33. Clifton Jolley, “Mormons and the Beast: In Defense of the Personal Essay,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 11, no. 3 (Autumn 1978): 137-39.

poem or short story, the very brevity of the form requires careful craftsmanship.

For me, the essay has been an exercise in faith, in charity, and in understanding, as well as language. I can see greater meaning in the at-times bewildering events in my life—even if I am the one who creates the meaning and puts it there. As I have shared my life and my search with others, I have also received invitations to accompany others along their paths, to share their wanderings and to feel their wonder as we discover meaning in the world around us.

"The only important part of life," says one writer, "is the regathering. When everyone understands this . . . , everyone will write. . . . Each [of us] will read [ourselves]. And [our] own life will become more clear."³⁴

34. Italo Svevo, quoted in Fleishman, *Figures of Autobiography*, 4.

Reclamation

Ken Raines

The Oquirrh Mountains form a finger of land
which rests its tip in the Great Salt Lake. Slopes
behind alfalfa gently rise until they stop
where the motion of ancient waves left benches of sand.
Above these former beaches, abrupt juts
of stone angle into the eastern sky.
Below, we feel delivered, allowed a dry
miraculous passage when water fills the cuts
in the hills and tumbles through the gullies that lace
the bed of this landlocked and receded sea.
And even in extended absence, we
can sense a swell of gravity in this place.
We know the pull of refuge, the call of home;
in our tidal blood we feel compelled to come.

Heart, Mind, and Soul: The Ethical Foundation of Mormon Letters¹

Neal W. Kramer

WHEN I WAS IN MY EARLY TEENS—it seems like I was no older than fourteen—I received a special gift from my grandparents. They knew I liked to read. In fact, they knew that I read a lot. I was a regular patron of the local library, often rushing through two or three books on a long summer day. Of their twenty-seven grandchildren, therefore, I was singled out to receive a treasured possession, a copy of Orson F. Whitney's *Love and the Light*,² which my grandfather had given my grandmother shortly before they were married in 1926. The book was remarkable to me. It was the very first example of Mormon literature I had ever seen. In fact, I was amazed that Mormons actually wrote literature for other Mormons. I had thought that if we needed literature, we turned to the gentiles—or the *Reader's Digest Condensed Books* in the basement. I was not surprised to find, however, that Elder Whitney had written the poetic romance for the youth of the church. It was didactic literature designed to help young people struggling with intellectual challenges to their faith. In addition, it provided models for appropriate behavior. Whitney hoped to educate our conduct and believed literature was an appropriate vehicle to that

1. Versions of this essay were presented at a Ricks College Major Forum in February 1999 and as the Presidential Address at the 1999 Annual Conference of the Association for Mormon Letters. I would like to thank Scott Samuelson of the Ricks College English department, Richard Dilworth Rust of the University of North Carolina English department, James E. Faulconer of the BYU philosophy department and BYU Dean of general education and honors, and Paul Alan Cox, Director of the National Tropical Botanical Garden, who each read earlier drafts and made many helpful suggestions. I, of course, am solely responsible for the many flaws which remain.

2. Orson F. Whitney, *Love and the Light: An Idyl of the Westland* (Salt Lake City: n.p., 1918).

end. I am still pleased to have received that gift. It holds a prominent place today on my most important bookshelf. I also continue to ponder the idea that Mormon literature ought to use the power of its art to educate conduct.

The common place I have been describing, the power of literature to influence our conduct in deeply meaningful ways, has been under assault for over two hundred years. With the advent of modernism in poetry, painting, and fiction came a new commonplace. Art was valuable for its own sake—as something beautifully crafted—and not because it persuaded or moved us to become better ourselves. Both Gerald Graff³ and John Guillory,⁴ literary critics at the University of Chicago and John Hopkins University respectively, have recently noted that this new sensibility tended to minimize the social function of literature. That is, it tried to separate literature from its ethical and religious functions. Those functions had not necessarily been either overtly didactic or even sentimental. But new critical charges of didacticism and sentimentality, along with the effort to assign exclusively pejorative connotations to both terms, successfully changed the acceptable forms and purposes of serious literature in the twentieth century. Only recently has there been a slight resurgence of critical efforts to begin thinking anew about the relationship between literature, ethics, and social responsibility. Foremost among such critics have been the Marxists,⁵ on the one hand, and a small group of American critics, including J. Hillis Miller⁶ from Yale University and Wayne C. Booth⁷ from the University of Chicago. Both Miller and Booth published impressive books on the ethical influence of texts on readers during the 1980s. More recently, Roger Shattuck⁸ of Boston Uni-

3. Gerald Graff, *Professing Literature: An Institutional History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 145ff.

4. John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993). See especially chapter three, "Ideology and Canonical Form: The New Critical Canon," 134-175.

5. One thinks of critics like Theodor Adorno, Lucien Goldmann, Walter Benjamin, Raymond Williams, Frederic Jameson, and even Frank Lentricchia, who are always concerned with the relation between literature and social practice.

6. J. Hillis Miller, *The Ethics of Reading: Kant, de Man, Eliot, Trollope, and Benjamin* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987). Using a Kantian formulation of the moral, Miller looks at the works of various authors and raises questions about the moral significance of their writing.

7. Wayne C. Booth, *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988). Using Aristotle's *Nichmachean Ethics* as a foundation, Booth constructs an elaborate system for evaluating the kinds of friendship books and authors offer readers. For a more extensive discussion of the book, see my review in *BYU Studies*, vol. 30, no. 1 (Winter 1990), 112-116.

8. Roger Shattuck, *Forbidden Knowledge: From Prometheus to Pornography* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996); *Candor and Perversion* (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Co., 1999). In both books, Shattuck "defends art's undeniable moral component."

versity has also entered the discussion, expanding the conversation to include previously taboo subjects like whether it is possible to suggest that certain books are better left unread. While it is not my concern here to try to construct a list of books none of us should read, I do hope to build on these earlier efforts in order to think about the possibility of an ethical criticism that carries with it significantly scriptural overtones. That is, I want to think about the classical notion of virtue, but with the help of the New Testament. And I hope to suggest a very simple framework that will allow us to begin thinking about literature, including Mormon literature, in those terms. In other words, I want to suggest some ways in which Mormon readers might think about the consequences for conduct suggested by the literature they choose to read.

In classical literature, writers often speak of the seat of virtue in human beings as the “heart.”⁹ Classical philosophy encourages us to think of virtue as achievable through rational study and careful consideration of practical wisdom.¹⁰ In other words, it urges us to consider the role of the intellect in the process of developing character. The New Testament suggests that the categories “heart” and “mind” make sense but also adds awareness of the spirit in the following passage: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.”¹¹ I like the possibilities for reflection suggested by the three categories.¹² To love God with heart, soul, and mind implies a high level of unity or integrity among the three. To love God with heart and soul, heart and mind, or any other partial combination of the three would be inadequate. The three may be separate entities, but they are also necessary to each other to complete a unit greater than any single one or even any pair. I would like to suggest that a good framework for evaluating powerful literature and its consequences for readers starts with thinking about these three concepts as parts of us—heart, soul, and mind—that are engaged, affected, and influenced by ethical literature.

I will begin by defining each category. In relatively simple terms, we can think of each as an essential human capacity: the heart is our capacity for affection; the mind is our capacity for reason; the soul is our capacity for inspiration. Let me also suggest that each of these capacities is associated with a number of qualities that we can call moral virtues, in

9. This is especially true in the great epics. *The Odyssey*, *The Iliad*, and *The Aeneid* consistently refer to the heart as the seat of virtue for Odysseus, Achilles, Hector, and Aeneas.

10. Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* is the most systematic of the classical works and introduces the very helpful concept of practical wisdom in Book II.

11. Matt. 22:37

12. I'm not certain that each of these names really describes separate faculties. On the other hand, I believe it makes rhetorical sense to expand the words we use to describe the seat of moral decision-making so that we can talk more freely and more specifically about the variety of virtues required to construct a good character.

the sense that the Greek philosopher, Aristotle, uses that phrase in *Nichomachean Ethics*. We can associate virtues like love, charity, courage, loyalty, and mercy with the heart; reasonableness, truth, justice, craftsmanship, and beauty with the mind; joy, awe, worship, and hope with the soul. We can see that these capacities are not innate, but that they need to be developed. The fact that they can be developed, however, also implies the possibility that they can be disfigured and distorted. Dallin H. Oaks explained how potential strengths or virtues can become weaknesses in these terms: "It may be just as dangerous to exceed orthodoxy as it is to fall short of it. The safety and happiness we are promised lie in keeping the commandments, not in discounting or multiplying them."¹³ The fact that we can, and do, "exceed" and "multiply" or "fall short" and "discount" our capacities explains much about how heart, soul, and mind function. Aristotle similarly uses the terms "excess" and "deficiency" to explain how virtues can become vices.¹⁴

Allow me to explore how the virtues of the heart, soul, and mind can become distorted through excess or deficiency as a means of suggesting a method for evaluating the ethical capacity of literature (see fig. 1). The virtues of heart are associated with affection that is honest, genuine, and sincere. Excess of heart is something different—technically it is no longer even heart but something else. Excess of heart, I suggest, must be associated with unbridled passion. Passion distorts the heart and moves us quickly beyond the bounds the Lord has set to rashness, lasciviousness, and wrath. Its consequences are damaging not only to ourselves but also to others. It is dangerous and threatening. Deficiency of heart, on the other hand, resembles something like sentimentality. Sentimentality is lazy. It produces emotions that are unearned, and it has no lasting effect. It is like the excitement that comes while you listen to a popular song but dissipates as soon as the last note dies. It has no lasting effect beyond tricking you into believing you have experienced the real thing. If you experience only sentimentality, your life will be devoid of genuine affection, of lasting relationships.

The virtues of mind are associated with the honest and humble search for truth. Its standard is reason, but reason that is familiar and comfortable with the ways of the heart and the soul. I suggest that excess of mind results in dogmatism. Dogmatism is dishonest certainty, knowing without effort that your truth is deeper and more profound than anyone else's and being willing to enforce it. It results in book banning, petty inquisitions, and fear of any claims to continuing revelation. Deficiency of mind, I think, can best be characterized as what the Lord calls "light-

13. Dallin H. Oaks, "Our Strengths Can Become Our Downfall," *The Ensign* (October 1994), 13.

14. Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, Book II.

mindfulness."¹⁵ It consists mainly in trivializing things of great importance. It is also just plain silliness, the sort of thing that passes for entertainment on late-night television or daytime talk shows. It is the endless sharing of opinions on the radio without any effort to justify them. It is the attitude that nothing is sacred. I'm afraid it characterizes much of life in America today.

The virtues of soul are associated with inspiration from on high. They lead us to recognize, with Gerard Manley Hopkins,¹⁶ that the world is filled with the grandeur of God. They hasten the sudden feeling, on a crisp, winter morning with the sun shining brightly and the temperature hovering somewhere between freezing and zero, that Jesus is indeed the light and life of the world. They invite us to find meaning in our lives, to sense what the apostle Paul taught, that we are actually children of the living God. "That in him we live, and move, and have our being. . . . For we are also his offspring."¹⁷ Inspiration leads us upward, inviting us to understand not just who we are but who we may become. The excess of soul is asceticism, a belief that life is corrupting. It claims to lead us to God by having us despise our bodies, our social relations, our daily work. It claims that God demands our total and exclusive devotion and attention. It sees our service to God as adoration of him without service to our fellow beings. Deficiency of soul is materialism, trusting in the arm of flesh. For the materialist the world we see is all there is. The materialist focuses exclusively on the present. Materialism suggests that "every man fare[s] in this life according to the management of the creature; therefore every man prosper[s] according to his genius, and . . . every man conquer[s] according to his strength."¹⁸

Before we go on to discuss how these definitions help us to think more carefully about the consequences for conduct of reading literature, I need to say a little more about the relationship between heart, soul, and mind. It may seem that each one should serve as a corrective for the other if they fall out of balance. But that is not the case. A little dose of mind will not mend a distortion of the heart or soul. These capacities do not sit in uneasy balance with each other that can be easily upset or easily rectified. If that were so, a tepid moderation or mediocrity would be the ultimate virtue. We can compare the complete set of virtues

15. D&C 88:121.

16. "The world is charged with the grandeur of God.

It will flame out like shining from shook foil;

It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil

Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?"

W. H. Gardner and N. H. MacKenzie, eds., *The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 66.

17. Acts 17:28.

18. Alma 30:17.

associated with heart, mind, and soul, to a piano keyboard. When the piano is in tune and the notes are played in concert with one another, we experience integrity. The finest music comes from the integrated playing of the most keys. But a catchy tune using fewer keys can still be good. On the virtue keyboard, excess or extreme and defect or deficiency refer to states of quality (like a key that needs to be tuned) not quantity (hitting the wrong note). As we improve each separate capacity, we become better people. The best people will have developed all three capacities to a large degree and will have discovered how and where they overlap and thereby move toward a richer integrity.

How, then, ought we to think about heart, soul, and mind in relation to literature—poetry, drama, and fiction? I suggest that we think more carefully about how individual works of literature seek to influence each of these fundamental human capacities by asking a few questions. Does the work appeal to one capacity more than another? Which one? Does the appeal suggest a particular virtue or a collection of virtues associated with the capacity? Or does the work promote a deficient or extreme distortion of the capacity? What evidence from the text itself supports this interpretation?

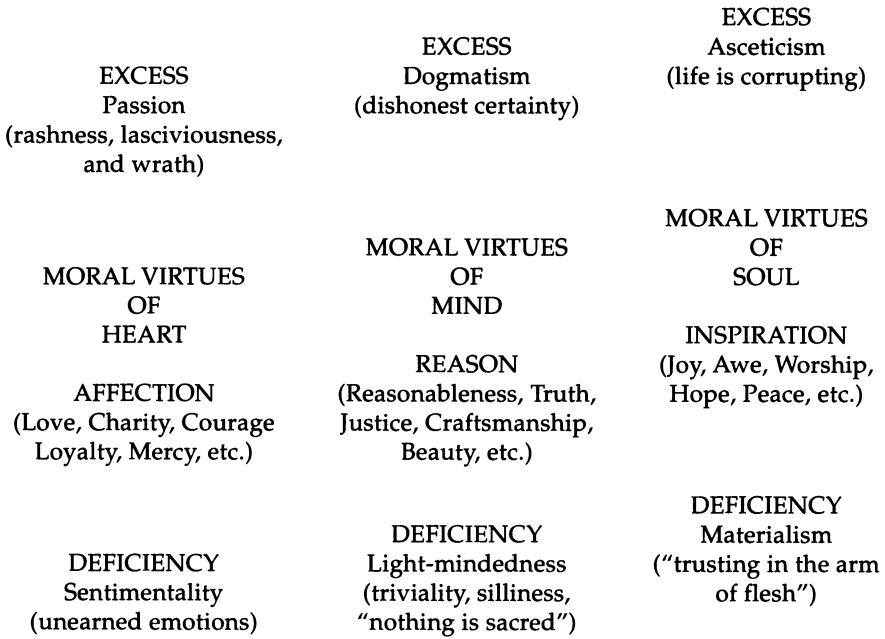


Figure 1

It is my contention that works of literature often reveal important ideas in crucial scenes that help to illuminate appeals to the capacities we've been considering. Careful scrutiny of such scenes or passages can help us understand the kinds of appeals that poems, plays, novels, television programs, and movies are making to heart, mind, and soul. The same kind of scrutiny can help us learn to adjust our taste—our desire to be entertained and instructed by certain kinds of literature. Our educated and spiritual tastes should lead us to literature that is aware of its persuasive power to influence conduct and that seeks to lead us upward, to expand our hearts, minds, and souls in the direction of righteousness, truth, and virtue. I fully realize that this makes our experience of literature more intellectual and more challenging. Anything less, I suspect, would diminish our awareness of ourselves as children of God. It would encourage us to allow ourselves to be entertained and unconsciously influenced by the heartless, the mindless, and the soul-less.

For the next few pages, then, I would like to present and examine some of these crucial scenes, scrutinizing their appeals and evaluating their influence. I suggest that we look first at the consequences of conduct of Jane Austen's *Emma*.

Emma is a story about love and romance set in England in the early nineteenth century. It is a quiet little book. But it is also very much about how we ought to conduct ourselves in our everyday relations with friends, neighbors, etc. I suggest that the village of Highbury in *Emma* is, in its own way, much like your home ward. It is peopled with individuals and families with little quirks, personality problems, family troubles, and other human failings. In the midst of this little community lives Emma Woodhouse. She is young and impetuous. She is also mildly arrogant, convinced of her superiority over the people around her. She loves to meddle. She especially loves to play matchmaker. But she is a very poor judge of human character, that of her friends certainly but more especially her own. These weaknesses are so apparent that Jane Austen reportedly said that Emma was a heroine "which no one but myself would like." I like the novel because it is a brilliant study of the subtleties of good character.

The most important scene in the novel takes place during a community outing, a picnic at Box Hill. Emma has been disappointed with how the day has gone. She senses that people are uneasy and hopes to bring some levity to the occasion by suggesting that they play a harmless game. Her frustration with her friends, however, intrudes in a sharply rude comment pointedly directed at an older lady who has seen much trouble in her life—the harmless Miss Bates. I'll let Jane Austen take over. Frank Churchill is speaking:

"Here are seven of you, besides myself (who, she is pleased to say, am very entertaining already), and she only demands from each of you either one thing very clever, be it prose or verse, original or repeated—or two things moderately clever—or three things very dull indeed, and she engages to laugh heartily at them all."

"Oh, very well," exclaimed Miss Bates, "then I need not be uneasy. 'Three things very dull indeed.' That will just do for me, you know, I shall be sure to say three dull things as soon as ever I open my mouth, shan't I?—(looking round with the most good-humoured dependence on every body's assent)—Do not you all think I shall?"

Emma could not resist.

"Ah! ma'am, but there may be a difficulty. Pardon me—but you will be limited as to number—only three at once."

Miss Bates, deceived by the mock ceremony of her manner, did not immediately catch her meaning; but, when it burst on her, it could not anger, though a slight blush showed that it could pain her.

"Ah!—well—to be sure. Yes, I see what she means (turning to Mr. Knightley), and I will try to hold my tongue. I must make myself very disagreeable, or she would not have said such a thing to an old friend."¹⁹

Austen leaves off right there, as another companion starts the game. Why dwell on the uneasiness introduced by Emma's cruel jibe or Miss Bates's painful recognition? If we were at a party and someone had carelessly insulted a guest, followed by the now infamous "just kidding," we all would try to move to something else as quickly as possible. Of course, that would also mean that another insult would be waiting to pop out, if not at our party then another. So Austen seems to let the moment pass. But she cares too much about Emma, and about her readers, to leave the matter there.

Not too long after the event, but when Emma is alone enough to be out of earshot of the others, her friend and confidant, Mr. Knightley, reminds her of what happened and explains how and why it was more painful to Miss Bates than Emma seems to know.

While waiting for the carriage, she found Mr. Knightley by her side. He looked around, as if to see that no one were near, and then said,

"Emma, I must once more speak to you as I have been used to do: a privilege rather endured than allowed, perhaps, but I must still use it. I cannot see you acting wrong, without a remonstrance. How could you be so un-

19. Jane Austen, *Emma* (London: Penguin, 1966, 1985), 364.

feeling to Miss Bates? How could you be so insolent in your wit to a woman of her character, age, and situation?—Emma, I had not thought it possible.”

Emma recollected, blushed, was sorry, but tried to laugh it off.

“Nay, how could I help saying what I did?—Nobody could have helped it. It was not so very bad. I dare say she did not understand me.”

“I assure you she did. She felt your full meaning. She has talked of it since. I wish you could have heard how she talked of it—with what candour and generosity. I wish you could have heard her honouring your forbearance, in being able to pay her such attentions, as she was for ever receiving from yourself and your father, when her society must be so irksome.”

“Oh!” cried Emma, “I know there is not a better creature in the world: but you must allow, that what is good and what is ridiculous are most unfortunately blended in her.”²⁰

At this point Emma certainly wishes to be absolved of any responsibility for what she said. While it may have inflicted a temporary hurt, she thinks it was just a simple statement of fact. But Knightley (and Austen) refuse to leave it there. They will not let Emma (or us) off the hook.

“They are blended,” said he, “I acknowledge; and, were she prosperous, I could allow much for the occasional prevalence of the ridiculous over the good. Were she a woman of fortune, I would leave every harmless absurdity to take its chance, I would not quarrel with you for any liberties of manner. Were she your equal in situation—but, Emma, consider how far this is from being the case. She is poor; she has sunk from the comforts she was born to; and, if she live to old age, must probably sink more. Her situation should secure your compassion. It was badly done, indeed!—You, whom she had known from an infant, whom she had seen grow up from a period when her notice was an honour, to have you now, in thoughtless spirits, and the pride of the moment, laugh at her, humble her—and before her niece, too—and before others, many of whom (certainly some,) would be entirely guided by your treatment of her.”²¹

Some may ask why I have chosen what many would call a very trivial example of bad conduct. This is really just a case of a single joke gone sour. We can’t afford to pay very much attention to it when there are so many worse things we have to combat. That attitude, of course, is the reason I included the example from *Emma*. Let’s apply the framework.

What sort of appeal does *Emma* make to the heart? For much of the novel, every single action seems to revolve around marriage and romance—an appeal to love and family life. They are, I think, the very core of

20. *Ibid.*, 367-8.

21. *Ibid.*, 368.

the virtues associated with heart. But the sections we just read make a crucial case for another kind of love. "Her situation should secure your compassion." Austen recognizes that compassion is not simply an abstract ideal, to be contemplated but never applied. Instead, she calls attention to our duty to be carefully aware of the circumstances of others and to act toward them with appropriate humanity: to do the right thing, in the right place, at the right time. I hope that daily compassion is not so trivial that we forget to strengthen the feeble knees. I freely admit that I find no passion in the example and am not persuaded that it is so trivial as to be sentimental.

What about mind? There may be a temptation here to become dogmatic about civility. But Knightley is careful not to push Emma herself beyond the limits of a certain degree of reasonableness. If Miss Bates were better able to defend herself, the insolence at Box Hill might have resulted in nothing more than a healthy laugh for all. But her weakness before Emma requires a different response. This passage could be accused of light-mindedness, with a slightly different twist. By assuming this to be an important example of moral conduct, we could be making it more compelling than it ought to be. Thus we wouldn't necessarily be belittling the sacred; rather, we would be sanctifying the frivolous. But I think Jane Austen is encouraging us to think carefully and well about the consequences of incivility toward the weak—physically, emotionally, spiritually, economically. A society that tolerates the brutality of incivility is in some danger of slipping toward accepting other forms of barbarity.

Does *Emma* appeal to soul? Does it inspire? If there is inspiration in the novel, it must be the kind of inspiration that characterizes everyday life, where God is in the details. While only indirectly, Knightley's awareness of the need to show respect for Miss Bates may also indicate some recognition that compassion is more than just an aristocratic responsibility. To show compassion may also be to acknowledge a slight spark of divinity in each person we meet. The world of Highbury is somewhat characterized by a version of materialism, but the sense of obligation toward the needy dilutes any ultimate reliance on the arm of flesh. And there is no asceticism to speak of in the novel.

How then ought we to characterize Jane Austen's *Emma*? Again, the previous analysis has been superficial, but we have been able to conclude that the novel speaks ably to heart and mind. Allow me also to suggest that it takes little away from the soul. It is subtly inspiring as it encourages us to enhance our understanding of others. And I am also willing to suggest that Jane Austen's current fashionableness comes from her ability to speak gently and subtly to heart, soul, and mind in a society where so much else that passes for literature refuses to. It is little wonder that so few people even remember the title of a *New York Times* best-seller of last year while many more continue to read Jane Austen's work nearly two hundred years after it was first published.

Austen's ethical subtlety and its important role in the success of her artistry suggest that we can use the framework to take a closer look at literature authored by Mormons. I believe that good Mormon writers try to find ways to engage these fundamental capacities, heart, mind, and soul, in profound and often challenging ways. I wish to take a closer look at three works which in 1998 won awards from the Association for Mormon Letters: Brady Udall's "Beautiful Places," a story from his collection, *Letting Loose the Hounds*;²² Susan Howe's poem "Mountain Psalm" from her collection, *Stone Spirits*;²³ and Eric Samuelsen's play *Gadianton*.²⁴ Each work addresses its audience with the idea of inviting further thought about identity, LDS and otherwise, but also about conduct. Each piece suggests dilemmas that good people may face and then probes how responses to the dilemmas become crucial to the further growth and definition of character. Allow me to examine each dilemma via the framework I've proposed. The results may surprise you.

Brady Udall's story, "Beautiful Places," exhibits many characteristics of the other stories in his collection, *Letting Loose the Hounds*: minimalist style, blue collar narrator, brisk sense of humor, fascination with western locations. This particular story is interesting to Mormon readers because of what the narrator discovers, by accident, after his used up Monte Carlo breaks down just outside of Logan, Utah, on an early spring Sunday afternoon. The narrator and his friend and traveling companion, Green, "a guy with long hair and a beard and missing his right hand,"²⁵ walk into town, only to find everything closed and the streets deserted. Green, who has been nervous since they've crossed the state line into Utah, breaks his usual silence to inform the narrator that nobody's there to help them because it's Sunday. They travel a little farther when they hear "singing so beautiful it could break your heart or make you sterile."²⁶ The narrator is drawn to the music and steps into the chapel, where he makes eye contact with Wade, "a kid with a crewcut who doesn't seem to be enjoying himself."²⁷ "He's got ears like frisbees and nice teeth. He wears a tie and cowboy boots. I've never seen anybody do that before."²⁸

Relieved at the chance to leave church, Wade offers to help the two stranded travelers. He allows them to wash his car for a little spending

22. Brady Udall, "Beautiful Places," *Letting Loose the Hounds* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1997), 178-189.

23. Susan Elizabeth Howe, "Mountain Psalm," *Stone Spirits* (Provo: The Charles Redd Center for Western Studies, 1997), 65-66.

24. Eric Samuelsen, *Gadianton* (unpublished typescript in possession of the author). This fine play was first produced at BYU in 1997.

25. Udall, 180.

26. *Ibid.*, 181.

27. *Ibid.*, 182.

28. *Ibid.*, 183.

money and then provides a picnic lunch along the shore of the Logan River. The conversation during lunch reveals that Green was once a Mormon. Like Wade, he was even involved with Boy Scouts. Once the secret is out, he and Wade seem to pour out their souls to one another. We learn that Green loves the music to hymns but can't remember the words. Wade is having trouble with social pressure designed to get him out on a mission. Soon their shared frustrations with aspects of Mormon culture have established a sort of bond. They notice that Wade's dog and the narrator are having a great time playing in the water and decide to join them. "Green's skin is so white it is almost blue. Wade comes up, water rolling off him, sputtering like a kid. He takes Green in a bear hug and dunks him under."²⁹ As they continue to frolic in the water, the narrator comments that "Green is free and easy, the happiest I've seen him for a long time and I can't help but be happy too."³⁰

Wade's last act of charity is to buy the dead Monte Carlo for forty dollars and drop the two travelers along the side of the highway, pointed in the direction of Salt Lake. A ride with an old couple gets them to Salt Lake, where they hook up with a trucker on his way to Phoenix, their final destination, the land of summer construction jobs. "The light is just coming up, turning the snow on the mountains purple and orange. The sky is opening sharp and clear. I can't be sure, but I think a place like this is just a little too beautiful for Green to stand."³¹

Let us ask a few questions of this interesting little story about two marginal insiders told from the perspective of an admiring, but perplexed, outsider. I like the story, in part, because it's sneaky. It speaks very differently to the insider and the outsider. The outsider sees the Sunday work and the romp in the river as pure charity, a day of rest stimulated by the good heart of a religious young man. The pharisaic insider, though, is tempted to see the same romp as guilty charity for Wade. He turns his back on his duty to listen to, and admire sermons and lessons on the Good Samaritan, as well as his obligation to channel his charitable impulses into culturally acceptable, conventional expressions of love. Instead, he plays religious hooky. He turns Sunday into a holiday. Or does he? For the insider, the knowing Mormon, that is the question.

Does this story, then, appeal to heart? I think so. Its humor and its point of view appeal to our generous nature. The point of view helps alleviate the cautious fear of strangers that keeps us from reaching out. Of course, I can't help but be nagged by my fear that strangers may just as likely be slasher drifters or X-file aliens as one-handed ex-Mormons. Does it appeal to the passionate extreme? I can't say that the story en-

29. *Ibid.*, 187.

30. *Ibid.*, 187.

31. *Ibid.*, 189.

courages letting go. The passionate extreme of generosity, a kind of spendthrift foolishness, doesn't come into play here at all. Does it appeal to sentimental deficiency? The danger to heart in this piece is its flirtation with sentimentality. "Beautiful Places" plays to the conventional critique of Utah Mormons as uptight, rigid zealots, with a limited capacity to serve beyond prescribed norms. Just as Mormon stories that celebrate this stereotype are often sentimental, so, too, the conventional critique. The story teeters on the edge of heavy-handed condemnation of active Mormons as parochial givers who look inward with ease and peace but seldom look outward to serve. It almost succumbs to the temptation to assert that only the marginally active have the freedom to be truly charitable. I would urge *caveat lector*—reader beware.

Does the story appeal to mind? Again, I think it does. It urges intellectual engagement not only with its well-crafted minimalist style, but also through the sneakiness I referred to before—its dual implied audience. It cares about language and is aware of its power. Does the story encourage dogmatism? Again I think the story is not intellectually extreme. Does the story, though, appeal to light-minded deficiency? As with heart, the story again teeters on the edge. I believe the story is ultimately more serious for the insider Mormon audience than it is for the broader national audience. We know what's going on. For us, some of the humor borders on light-mindedness—mockery of the sacred. This is a tried and true American way of telling stories, of course, from Mark Twain to Kurt Vonnegut, but Mormons do know that *something* is sacred. A romp in the river in just your underwear, even if accompanied by a dog named Robert, isn't really a baptism.

Does the story appeal to soul? Yes. The story urges us to see beyond the failure of its three characters. The narrator and Green are struggling drifters. They drink too much. They waste their money as fast as they earn it. But they are presented as likeable, even good, men. They present no danger to naive young Wade, who leaves the safety of church to help them out. There is no question that Wade is a better man for having spent the afternoon with them and then sent them on their way. And for all of his worries about pressure to serve a mission, Wade still reaches out. He is not self-centered, though he may have left the chapel for selfish reasons.

Does the story appeal to asceticism? No. The story is firmly about serving one's fellow beings. Does the story appeal to materialism? I think the story leans in the direction of trusting the arm of flesh. It glories in the feel of things: "the old car humming beneath your feet, the wind like a woman's fingers in your hair, bearing the smell of pine and fresh water and mint."³² "I spray Armor All on the tires and wipe the chrome so clean I can see the pores on my face in it. I try to keep my

32. *Ibid.*, 179.

mind on my work but girls in long dresses walk by and I am instantly distracted. When a breeze blows their skirts about their calves[,] I feel something flutter down the length of my spine."³³ But you can't escape the feeling that something more lies just beyond the limited perspective of the narrator. And that is why it feels so sad that Green has to move on so quickly, that "a place like this is just a little too beautiful for Green to stand."³⁴ Is our lovely Deseret just a little too lovely? That is a question worth asking, and Brady Udall asks it pretty well in "Beautiful Places."

Let us turn to Susan Howe's poem.

Mountain Psalm

We didn't come here to pray
But snow and a brittle skim of ice
Suggest otherwise. And to climb
Is a form of worship: we accept
Someone else's version of the way up;
We trust and follow.

Of course questions, doubts: Why so slight
An incline? all the doubling back
When we might rise? Is a trail
Best for some best for us?
How to reconcile crystal-laden air
With the consequence of sight?

We walk under pines, stiff as elders,
Imposing answers all along our way.
From beneath, they are a density
Allowing now and then
Dusts of brilliance, surprises of light.
But the more we climb, the smaller
They become, an aspect, a deeper green.

And then, the nature of treachery
Or the treachery of nature. Considering
Flaming peaks are tricks of light on ice,
The way up is also the way down,
And we don't transcend but climb,
For what, then, should we pray? Balance,
And the snowy grip of each footfall?

And sun, source of energy and vision,
Metaphor for whom we seek and how.
Father, Mother, give us distance

33. Ibid., 184.

34. Ibid., 189.

Through which to see our lives.
 Passage to this lookout and a blessing
 To perceive the extent and limits of our sight.

From this height, air streams down
 To the valley floor, refreshing
 The city as it struggles through its haze.
 But the city of our dwelling has become
 Its own reward, streets locked,
 All of the angles right. How rarely
 We prevail, vision cleared, above,
 Eating apples, bread, and cheese
 In the clean moment, on the legitimate rock.³⁵

If, as I suggest, Udall's story appeals primarily to the capacities of heart, it should be fairly apparent that Howe's poem appeals to capacities of mind. It is a meditation on spirituality, but it urges careful pondering as opposed to fervent response.

Writing a poem at the end of the twentieth century about communing with God in nature is a risky enterprise. Such poems have become so conventional, such sentiments so clichéd, that the poet is tempted to sound just like everybody else, just to chime in. By appealing to mind rather than heart, Howe avoids the cliché-ridden alternative. She even informs us in the first stanza that she knows and understands the risk. Thus, climbing the mountain becomes a metaphor for worship rather than an act of worship.

The poem becomes a meditation on perspective or point of view and its influence on faith, "To perceive the extent and limits of our sight." I will limit my interpretations to three images which explore the dynamic between point of view and faith. The first is "pines, stiff as elders, / Imposing answers all along our way." I take this to be an image of the rigidity of orthodoxy and those who uphold it. Their authority appears to be constraining, almost frightening, when seen up close. They hamper as much brilliance as they allow. And yet the image also shows that the most rigid tree, even when we stand directly in its shadow, does not so much "allow" "brilliance" or "surprises of light" as it is finally incapable of blocking them. A shift of perspective reveals the pines to be less menacing. They become only an "aspect" and not the essence of experience on the mountain.

The second image is the combination of "sun" and the allusion to "O, My Father" in stanza five. Here, Jesus is revealed as the object of our faithful search and the model for our seeking. While concerns with orthodoxy in the poem may be topical allusions to contemporary Mormonism, the invocation "Father, Mother" alludes to both past and present. Howe

35. Howe, 65-66.

here announces her desire for sisterhood with Eliza R. Snow as Mormon poet on the one hand and as Mormon feminist on the other. She suggests that we and Jesus have heavenly parents and invokes their help in expanding our perspective and increasing our faith.

The final image is the mountain top, "In the clean moment, on the legitimate rock." At this point, Howe has led us up the mountain, invited us to think more deeply about issues of faith and orthodoxy, and admonished us to look more urgently to Christ. This moment above trees and smog is "clean" because, however briefly, we are standing directly in the light. The rock is "legitimate" because of its permanence and solidity in relation to the light. To sit or stand on the rock is to be firmly enlightened, rightly inspired. And don't we all understand that Mormon mountain tops are temples of the Most High?

Does this poem appeal either to deficiency or excess of mind? Does it urge light-mindedness or dogmatism? Howe's poem does neither. Much Mormon feminism distorts itself into a dogmatic mirror image of the straw orthodoxy it opposes. Not so here. Rigid opposition to rigidity finds no place in it. And the poem does not descend into the light-minded sentiment that God is found only in nature, that Sunday worship is fulfilling only in the cathedral of the pines. I guess, finally, what I'm saying is that we need to claim Howe for the virtuous center. Her questions are too reasonable, her beliefs too humble, her gift too spiritual for us to reject her as a truly Mormon writer. Congratulations to Ed Geary, Bert Wilson, and the Redd Center at BYU for publishing this lovely book.

How does one do justice to Eric Samuelsen's *Gadienton* in just a few pages? The play is an extended study of the cancer of greed and the harm it does to individuals and communities. Space limitations will not allow me to sketch the plot. For me, the most important character in the play is McKay Todd, an LDS bishop who runs the mail room at Datafine, a large software firm located somewhere in the universe, but where large clusters of Mormons also dwell. Todd runs into a classic Book of Mormon dilemma. And that makes the audience very uncomfortable. Perhaps the hardest, and harshest, Christian critique of conduct is the attack on hypocrites who "strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel."³⁶ The Book of Mormon hearkens back to the Old Testament, as well, in its critique of people who, "because they are rich, they despise the poor"³⁷ and who "grind the faces of the poor."³⁸ The hypocrisy in the play consists of the rich characters acting as if they care for the poor, their employees, and neighbors until circumstances require them to choose between their neighbors and their money. The play condemns all who choose their profits over their neighbors.

36. Matt. 23:24.

37. 2 Ne. 9:30.

38. 2 Ne. 13:15; Isa. 3:15.

The crucial scene for Bishop Todd comes when he is forced to choose between support for members of his ward, who have relied on him for temporal and spiritual welfare, and his job. To keep his job when others are being laid off has the potential to push him toward selfish hypocrisy. To give up his job will place the welfare of his family, and maybe the strength of his marriage, in serious jeopardy. In this scene several contending voices speak to McKay Todd. The character most linked with Gaudianism in the play, Fred Whitmore, confronts Todd with an impossible choice: Keep your job while a pregnant, single mother from the ward, who desperately needs health insurance, loses hers, or give up your job to save her, even though they may lay her off anyway. No guarantees. It is a pure sacrifice with no promise of reward. Whitmore speaks first.

Fred: Like we shouldn't lay her off. Like we should lay you off instead. Is that the kinda mistake we made? Is it?

Karen (McKay Todd's Wife): And another 318 for the car payment. 1170 for the house.

Brenda (the pregnant single mother): I want this baby, Bishop.

Karen: We need the money, McKay. This is no time for scruples.

Fred: Is it?

Brenda: I can feel her inside me, kicking and pushing . . . and I . . . I wanna hold her. In my arms.

Karen: 700 a month for the twins—.

Fred: IS IT?

Bishop Todd: Yes.

Karen: McKay?

Fred: Excuse me?

Bishop Todd: Yes. I'm saying that that's the kind of human mistake you made.

Fred: You're kidding.

Karen: You did what?

Fred: I didn't even mean it serious. Maybe I said it wrong, got you confused.

Bishop Todd: I understood.

Fred: She gets your job. You get the boot.

Bishop Todd: I know.

Karen: WHY?

Bishop Todd: Because I'm bishop of this ward, Karen. How could I work for a company that just laid off thirty of my ward members? Who I hired? How could I look at them each Sunday?

Karen: (A pause. Terrified.) But what are we going to do?

Bishop Todd: I don't know.³⁹

As you can tell from just one scene, this is an intense play. It emphasizes the hardness of the doctrine, and it stretches to unbearable limits the willingness of the audience to imagine correct conduct. The night I watched the play, I could sense the desire of the audience that Todd give up his job. But given a moment to consider what he had actually done, uneasiness settled over the crowd. Samuelson sets up a dilemma that plays heart against mind. Bishop Todd's alternatives are unreasonable. He seems, therefore, required to make a choice based exclusively on emotion or simple sentiment. I suggest though, using the terms of our ethical framework, that Samuelson hopes the paradox will be resolved by inspiration, the capacities of soul.

Let's quickly interrogate the scene. Does it appeal to heart? Most definitely. It emphasizes compassion and the courage that accompanies it. But the compassion called for has consequences that reach beyond our normal expectations. I love my bishop, and my ward expects a lot from him. But I don't think we require him to put his livelihood on the line to serve us. His calling should not require him to change employment. Bishop Todd, though, faces what seem to be unusual circumstances. For good men, work is an extension of family life. Their ability to make a living, to provide, is the measure of their commitment to wife and children. Bishops become bishops, in part, because they are good family men. Bishop Todd, however, is asked to place his family identity in some jeopardy in order to help the helpless. His decision requires faith in his ability to assess what the gospel requires of him. No one else in the play has shown any sign of believing that one should sacrifice temporal security for spiritual benefits. Bishop Todd, though, decides the gospel requires him to take the risk implied by Jesus' teachings. "Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? Or, What shall we drink? Or, Where-withal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."⁴⁰ So Todd's faith in God's promises must translate into courageous conviction. He must act on his beliefs, hoping that acting morally will not harm his more immediate

39. Samuelson, 121-23.

40. Matt. 6:31-33.

family. He cannot know what the future will bring. He can only move with bold courage to help Brenda and her baby. Such moral courage, according to Samuelsen, is part of the antidote to Gadiantonism. And the play does not save us from the anguish brought on by what may simply be foolish. We don't get to see McKay Todd six months later, with a better job, a brand new car, and a very happy wife. That sort of *deus ex machina* isn't part of Samuelsen's dramatic universe.

Returning to our framework, does the scene also appeal to the mind? Yes. But within limits. Todd's choice certainly requires him to think hard. But the solution to his problems is not simply intellectual. If there were a calculus of charity and compassion, Todd's choice would be easy. Just find the most reasonably charitable alternative and take it. But Todd's choices are unreasonable. To choose one alternative over the other means limiting compassion toward someone. Compassion is also limited by Todd's three primary loyalties. He wears three hats: bishop, husband/father, and supervisor. The play never makes clear which priority takes ultimate precedence over the others. McKay Todd chooses, but with some uncertainty. Ask him to explain his choice, and he will have difficulty offering a rational justification for his decision.

But a rational temptation remains. By having Bishop Todd make a choice, and implying it is the right one, Samuelsen runs the risk of suggesting that bishops should always choose congregation over family, sacrifice over success. Rules of conduct are relatively easy to follow if one version of good conduct does not conflict with another. When categories conflict, the rational temptation is to reify categories and dogmatize the rules of right conduct. It is possible to interpret the play as urging all of us to reject the messy conflicts that arise between the very real worlds of business, neighborhood, and family by just leaving the business out. If we go that far, then we turn the play into an example of the virtues of mind taken to the extreme of dogmatism.

I believe the third aspect of the framework, soul, allows us to examine the play in its best light. The scene under discussion certainly appeals to soul. It invites us to think carefully about our relationship to God and how that relationship ought to define our conduct. Many of the conflicts in the play urge us not to forget that we are children of God. Brenda's desire to bear and raise a potentially handicapped child rather than have the abortion her doctor recommends brings out the best and the worst in her and her friends and neighbors. She seems to be acting selfishly. Her neighbors judge her. Her bishop helps her to seek God's help. If Brenda and her bishop are acting under inspiration, the choice to keep the child may also have wonderful consequences. For that to have any chance of occurring, though, Bishop Todd must be willing to accept the possibility that her keeping the child will require his losing his job. The play is constructed well enough that we in the audience take that possibility se-

riously. Todd's choice is not outlandish, but it is shocking. We are asked to consider whether such inspiration could come from a Heavenly Father who loves us. We are also challenged to test our own faith. Would we do what Bishop Todd does? Would our society be more like Zion if we did act as Bishop Todd does?

At the same time, some of the play's appeals to soul are less adequate. An understanding of our relationship with God must include some awareness of evil. The evil in this play runs the danger of being caricatured. It appears that Samuelsen would have us believe that all business practice is cursed to succumb to the logic of Korihor, that whatsoever a man did, as long as it made a profit, was no crime. Such a view makes evil seem much less complex than the good we've seen dissected in the scene under discussion. That may be so, but the play leaves us feeling that all endeavors whose primary motive is profit are finally evil. On this score, Samuelsen is at least partially supported by no less an authority than Hugh Nibley.⁴¹ But Bishop Todd's choice may imply that evil is just too powerful and must be succumbed to. What if Whitmore plays on Todd's good motives just to fire him? What if Brenda is fired tomorrow anyway? Has evil then triumphed? If the play is to work, genuine evil must be presented and countered. As it stands, the play leaves us hopeful that McKay Todd has made a choice that will be ratified by God, but we're still wondering about how this small act is turning back the tide of the evil corporation. Should we believe that such small acts of courage can combat Gadiantonism? I personally hope so. Samuelsen has produced a well-crafted work of art that challenges the Mormon audience to consider the conduct of our society in the light of the doctrine of the gospel. That is good Mormon literature.

I believe that the best Mormon literature will accept the challenge of taking ethics seriously. At the same time, I hope that Mormon letters will reject extremes—dogmatism, asceticism, passion—especially if those extremes are only reactions against the obvious deficiencies of our popular culture—sentimentality, light-mindedness, materialism. But I fear the popular deficiencies will dominate, if only because deficiency is always easier than the virtuous alternative. I hope that the Association for Mormon Letters in the future will strive to find a way to clarify standards and challenge the culture to move toward moral virtue, that our criticism will not abdicate the responsibility to encourage right conduct and will honor literature that does just that.

41. Hugh W. Nibley, *Approaching Zion* (Salt Lake: Deseret Book/F.A.R.M.S., 1989). See especially chapters 7 through 9, "How to Get Rich," "Work We Must, but the Lunch is Free," and "But What Kind of Work?"

There is Always Someplace Else

(from a novel by)

Reed McColm

IN 1957, A YEAR AND A HALF before she married the man who would leave her, Kören Dixon was almost the Carnival Queen of Conjuring Creek. There were only three nominations for the job, and seventeen-year-old Kören had two of them; she turned down the high school nomination, red-faced, because the town of Calmar had asked her first, at an informal council meeting held at the Dixon farm the night before the high school vote. Kören was delighted but abashed by too much attention. She hadn't campaigned for the position. The idea that she deserved it came from other people—her father's friends in the Lions Club, or her three brothers and their hockey buddies. Tickets to the County Ice Carnival were sold one to a customer in the name of each nominee, and the girl selling the most would then be crowned Queen. For weeks, friends swirled around Kören to buy and help sell. Her brothers called her "Highness." But at the carnival that winter, in an awkward ceremony held in the cold center of the county skating rink, Kören lost the crown to Dagmar Eriksson, two years older and a tartish flirt. Unsteady in her first heels, with the tin tiara of the runner-up freezing to her forehead, Kören waved from her wrist to family and friends watching in the stands. Late that night alone in her room, pulling out her pin curls with tugs and yanks, she said "damn" for the first time.

Kören didn't know Dagmar well and never would, but they crossed paths here and there through the years like distant fish from the same pond. They each married Texaco Oil boys, and then set up houses in a small-town succession around the province. Though Kören never asked, mutual friends now and then mentioned Dagmar's whereabouts, that she had left Calmar for Hinton, then Hinton for Grande Prairie, where she left her husband and moved back to Leduc. It seemed to Kören that Dagmar's moves were proof of a forlorn restlessness, and her divorce, when it happened, the sad but predictable reward for the tease she had

been. Kören had also moved (from Fort McMurray before Kirsten was born and again within three years from Thorsby while pregnant with Toller), but she didn't think herself at all restless. Instead, she considered herself loyal and dutiful and *married* in a solid way that didn't apply in comparison to Dagmar Eriksson. The fact that Kören was this surely connected, to husband and children and to her future with both, separated her in a vague but vast way from that unsettled, faraway woman.

Turned out, though, that Dagmar would be seen again, even a few times, in the same Edmonton hospital where Kören took Sam. Sam was born in Wetaskiwin, Kören's third baby, scrawny and sickly as neither of her other children had ever been. He nursed more often, sucking hungrily, but not much stayed inside. His diapers soiled an ugly green and stank terribly, much worse than Toller's, who was two and healthy. Sam's breathing was clogged with thick phlegm, and at six months he was no bigger than Toller had been at six weeks. Neighbors said to Kören, "He sounds colicky," and, "Give him solids," as though they could help.

At the town hospital in Wetaskiwin, Dr. Sowby first said Sam had the flu. But shots didn't help, and Sowby reconsidered. He suggested that Sam might be allergic to Kören's milk, then that one of his lungs hadn't formed. Finally, after consultation with doctors from Camrose, Sowby decided that Sam had celiac disease, a chronic case of it, the worst he'd ever seen. He put the baby on a gluten-free diet and instructed Kören to stop using wheat flour. But at nineteen months Sam remained gaunt like a plucked bird with horrible diarrhea Sowby couldn't cure. Shaking his head and lifting his moustache to his nose, the doctor gave up. He told Kören she must take Sam to gastroenterologists up in Edmonton, 40 miles away. "You'd better get him there quick," he said, looking at the floor.

That was on a Tuesday, and Peter was away checking pipelines until the weekend. So Kören asked a neighbor four trailers down to take Kirsten and Toller overnight, then bundled Sam in several layers and walked with him on hard crunchy snow to the Greyhound stop at Mel Markoe's Esso gas station on the north end of town. Sam fussed with rough coughs and sharp cries during the long ride to the city, and needed to be changed twice. Kören bounced him and cooed into his ears, but the child would not be soothed. Other passengers glared sharply at Kören with alarm and reproach; she felt blamed and unwelcome. She swallowed and looked away, pressing into her narrow seat, lightly scratching out letters of the alphabet on the fabric over Sam's back. She rocked him, whispering, "There, there, my baby, there, there."

For the rest of the family's time in Wetaskiwin, almost another year, Dr. Sowby was attentive and protective toward Sam. He called Kören at home with news of research in Baltimore or a magazine article that promised a raised life expectancy of some CF children, from three years

to five, or even seven. Claiming he needed to visit a chemist in the city, Sowby twice drove Kören and Sam to Edmonton for the boy's monthly stay at the University of Alberta Hospital. To Kören the doctor's courtesies seemed guilty and compensatory, but also sincere and, heavens, they were needed. She wanted every hopeful word he had to say.

Kören had never heard of cystic fibrosis until the day it was explained to her that Sam had it. She spent the first few weeks thereafter reading about it in library encyclopedias, fidgety between entries, scanning for contradictions. Within a day (and for ever after) the disease became "CF" to her, like a title, a code, a password. She knew its name like her own.

Because the sickness was genetically passed, both Kirsten and Toller were also given the CF sweat test in Edmonton. Sam's first CF test had inexplicably come out negative, delaying the diagnosis by three weeks, and so Kören insisted the doctors test Kirsten and Toller twice. "We're sure," the doctors had told her after her older children's initial tests, but she closed her eyes and shook her head: "I'm not," she said, "Please do it again." A week later she paced between Kirsten and Toller, in separate tinny-clean rooms on the third floor, and Sam's cramped room on the fourth. She imagined clearing space in Sam's room for two more children, began strategies for keeping Toller quiet in bed, considered words for telling her daughter she too had a breathless disease. But both tests for Kirsten and Toller claimed they were strong and unblemished. A rough-skinned nurse said, "They sweat like we do," gave Kören's arm two swift pats, and left her. Kören blinked, watching the nurse's back shrink down the hospital hall. For a while she just stood, wondering how her children had been divided. Until now she'd believed she'd given each child almost the same parts of herself—pretty much the same pieces of her body, more or less identical pieces of her devotion; though relieved, she was also baffled, plainly baffled, when informed that in at least this way, this one remarkable way, she had not.

On one of her trips between floors, while staring only at the numbers above the elevator doors, Kören heard someone call her name. It was a dry, throaty growl, and said, "Hello, Kory."

Kören turned and blinked at a bony woman in purple stretch pants, wearing sunglasses indoors, with narrow black hair swept up on her head, spun like cotton candy. The woman stood smiling at her, and Kören automatically, unsteadily, smiled in return. Then she realized this woman was Dagmar Eriksson.

They hugged like friends, and chatted in broad catch-up sentences that covered several towns and ten years. They exchanged news of the maladies that brought them into the city: Kören lightly explained cystic fibrosis, while Dagmar shook her head and grimaced; for her turn, Dagmar tapped her own chest and said, "TB. Just getting out."

Kören said, "Oh, Dagmar, I'm sorry," because seeing Dagmar's pained expression, it seemed the appropriate thing to say. But she thought Dagmar had said, "BB," and had no idea what it was. In the split second when she could have easily cleared it up, Kören chose instead not to ask, because at the root of her, she just didn't want to know.

Dagmar, though, was thrilled to see Kören, and said so, again and again. They had coffee in the cafeteria, then went together into the child care ward, where Sam and three other toddlers sat and lay, playing with blocks or sleeping in elevated cribs, all of them attached to individual intravenous bags, which hung like vines of clear ivy beside them. Sam smiled with a big open mouth seeing Kören, then smiled and laughed for Dagmar, delighting her. "Look at this boy," Dagmar said, and said it again, laughing and coughing, poking Sam's stomach, while he laughed and coughed along. They played on the floor, and Kören sat on a bed and watched. She felt relieved of the need to entertain, because Sam could do it well. He was freed of mystery now and, lately he'd become her Ever-Cheerful Boy.

Kören walked with Dagmar to the front doors of the hospital. In the waiting area across the hall, Kören noticed a tall spindly man in a plaid cloth jacket toss aside the magazine he'd been reading and arise when he saw Dagmar approach. Kören whispered to Dagmar, "Someone you know?"

Dagmar said, with a casual flip of her hand, "Oh, that's Philip."

Kören said, "Your husband?"

And Dagmar said, "No, he's just Philip," which made Kören laugh, and in turn surprised them both.

Dagmar looked up at her, as though to ask, "What?"

The laugh caught in Kören's throat, and hung on. The women gawked at one another, like schoolgirls with some bright shared secret, about to well up inside them both and gush out. Kören saw Dagmar's lips turning up, nearing glee, and together at once, they laughed, uncapped, clear and loud, in front of Just Philip and all the strangers in a somber hospital.

"Goodbye, Kören," Dagmar said and kissed Kören's cheek. "I always liked you."

Kören scanned Dagmar's face to see if she was joking; it was that peculiar.

*

After Sam's childhood had been survived and his teenage at last begun, Kören often heard other Mormons recount with dreamy recollection their own first experiences at the church, and how they came to stay there. Kören learned to nod along and appreciate their stories of amazed,

convoluted conversions. But when she told *her* story of how it had happened to her and her kids, she felt a little shamed because she hadn't anything angelic to share; it was a place to take the Astre.

Kören thought of Sam as an enduringly glad and lucky child, who charmed doctors and nurses and neighbors and fates. Through his first years in Wetaskiwin as an undersized tot, his digestive tablets had been large and legion, sometimes pink and sometimes chalk, the size of pennies. He'd needed between six and twelve of them, at every meal, before every snack or treat, every day, forever. As the Edmonton doctors rotated, some seen by chance only once or twice, others consistently greeting Kören for months or years, the medications changed with them, given new names, or sizes, or forms, often as powders and occasionally liquids. When at last they moved into the city, Kören devoted an entire kitchen shelf to Sam's pills.

Painfully, Sam built up immunities to every drug, slowly needing more pills to eat smaller portions of food. Doctors nervously tapped Sam's file with their pens or rubbed their foreheads wearily, while they admitted to Kören their fears that helplessness was inevitable and approaching with every coming week. Still, Sam repeatedly outlived his drugs, as breakthroughs were announced just as he needed them most, and new medications began his diet cycle anew. With sputters and hacks, he grew past three, five, and seven. By his eleventh birthday, Kören simply expected him to live.

That was 1976, the year Peter left her. Toller was thirteen, and Kirsten two and a half years older. One of Sam's doctors charitably referred Kören to a secretarial job in a public relations office downtown. She was under qualified but determined, and after several weeks managed to acquit herself at her desk with relative skill. Her brother Gôran co-signed with her for a car loan, which bought a used '73 Pontiac Astre at monthly payments of \$106. She and the kids stayed in the house, but Peter wanted to sell it. Kören began reading real estate ads. She depended with increasing heaviness on Kirsten to wash clothes, to make dinners, to keep Toller from pummeling Sam.

Traffic snarled and tugged at Kören's panting little car, pulling her in every morning and holding on too long every night. Behind the wheel Kören twinged with restless guilt over recent grimaces from her children. Kirsten sighed and gritted her teeth when Kören told her in the morning she might be late that night; Sam took sick and to bed for her first three weeks at work; Toller taunted her, saying "I hate you," slamming doors whenever he left a room she was in. She yearned for time with them.

Every weekend Kören took the family together for a trip in the Astre, whether grocery shopping or to the U of A for Sam's treatments or to Calmar to visit her parents or (on special occasions) to a movie. They would all go, often fighting or sullen or giddy, tightly packed in a small

green car. Kören spent her weekday commutes thinking up a new need, a new place for the family to go when the weekend came. She planned Saturdays until Toller joined the junior high wrestling team and Sam tagged along, keeping stats. Thereafter Kören looked to Sundays for something to do.

Two of the five Steadman children from two blocks over had CF—a daughter named Alissa, a year younger than Sam, and a boy of two named Spencer. Kören met Maureen Steadman at the hospital where their mutual wheezers once stayed overnight in adjoining rooms. When they discovered both families lived in the same neighborhood, they became friends, sometimes carpooling together.

After one such checkup, as soon as they were out of the Steadman's station wagon and Maureen had pulled away, Sam asked Kören, "What's a Mormon?"

Kören made him repeat the word because she didn't know it. To her it sounded like the name of an elk or something Peter used to hunt; she told Sam that she thought maybe a mormon was a type of deer. He made a face and said that didn't make sense at all.

A few nights later, Maureen dropped by the house to ask Kören if Sam could go to church with the Steadmans the following week. Kören blinked twice, then asked, "What church?"

Surprised, Maureen said, "Oh, we're Mormons!"

For a flash, Kören was shocked, aware what was meant but reminded of the elk, imagining a herd of Steadmans, grazing around the dinner table. She laughed at the thought and then covered her mouth with her free hand.

She told Maureen she'd have to talk to Sam about it, which seemed to make Maureen apologetic. "Whichever way you go is fine, Kory," she said. "I just wanted to ask."

The following Saturday in the Astre, shopping for cheap wrestling shoes for Toller after his first week on the team, Kören asked the kids if they'd like to go to church the next day.

"Yeah, Mom," Sam chirped from the back seat, "Let's go with the Steadmans."

Kirsten said, "I like this song," and turned up the radio.

Kören said to her, "Did you hear what I said?"

Kirsten nodded and sang, "*She get down on her knees and hug me, she loves me like a rock.*"

Toller reached between the front bucket seats from the back and pointed across his mother's face. "There, Mom, Sportsworld, they have wrestling shoes!"

Sam pulled on Kirsten's shoulder and said, "Who is this?"

Kören pushed away Toller's hand. "You'll cause an accident here, Toller; that place is too expensive; sit back when I'm driving!"

Kirsten said to Sam, "Paul Simon."

Sam asked, "What's the difference between an Astre and a Pinto?"

Toller slugged Sam's arm and said, "The name. Shut up."

Kirsten sang, "*Who do you think you're fooling?*" and Sam echoed her, both of them swaying one side to the other.

Kören checked Toller in the rearview. "Can't you borrow some old shoes from someone on the team?"

Sam said, "Yeah, he can," and continued singing.

Toller grimaced, shouting, "I want my own!"

"*She rock me like the rock of ages, oh she love me love me love me—*"

Kirsten nudged Kören, saying, "Mom, sing with us."

Kören raised her eyebrows to Toller's reflection. "We can't afford eighteen-dollar shoes just for wrestling, Toller."

Toller hit Kirsten's seat with his fist. "I hate you to hell," he said, pointing at Kören's eyes in the mirror.

Kirsten sang, "*Ooo, your mama loves you, she loves you—*"

Toller swiped at her but missed.

Sam said, pulling on Kören's arm, "Mom, sing."

Kören's face worried up, and for a moment she reconsidered her budget, glancing back in the rearview at Toller, who was angry to the edge of flushed tears. She raised her brow and sighed, clearing her own eyes, smoothing her face, deciding to calm. She joined Kirsten and Sam, singing, shifting their shoulders up and down, chanting off-key and bouncing their elbows, stubborn warblers insisting to Toller how his mama loved him loved him loved him, while he sulked, and hit Kirsten's seat, and yelled to Kören how he hated her to hell. She wouldn't believe him.

For years, riding a bus toward or away from the U of A hospital, Kören had seen the Mormon church on Whyte Avenue, but the red brick exterior struck her as so plain that until going inside she had thought it a school. Kören expected churches to declare themselves, with a cross on the lawn, or a vendor sign abutting the sidewalk, announcing the week's sermon title in imprecisely spaced plastic letters. Where the Southgate/University bus turned on 109th Street, there sat a small corner church with a sad, weathered sign that said *Jesus Saves*. Across the street was a grocery store with a sign four times that size, which said *Loblaws Saves You More*. Kören thought, now there's a church.

But the Mormon church was nondescript on the outside and fairly plain within. There weren't any paintings or candles as she expected, just the chapel with an organ and a piano and maybe flowers—and a rec hall built for basketball.

So Kören began going to church and meeting missionaries and sort of seeing Jack O'Carroll, a high school teacher and recently divorced father of four, whom married members repeatedly asked if she had yet met. It was an awkward first meeting (Maureen introduced them and

shyly excused herself), but Jack was kind and sweet, amused and unhurried by the social pressures of the ward. For Kören he became a shield, an insulation from too much information or expectation or even just too many names, with new “Brothers” and “Sisters” eager to make her acquaintance, to shake her hand, to meet her children, to ask her questions and wait for hers, to gladly insist they were “available” to her for anything at all. Kören let words and names slide over her, and offers and scriptures and doctrines, allowing everything to course around or past, knowing Jack would catch it for her when and if it was ever needed. She didn’t see him through the week unless he came to the house with the missionaries. He was her church guide and her weekend friend.

But believing—in God or Jesus or Joseph Smith or any of it—was clearly a crucial part of the going, and Kören began to doubt she could stay. The kids had followed right along: Kirsten blithely made several friends and resisted not a bit; Sam trusted the church completely; even Toller had started attending meetings with them. As the weeks grew more serious, Kören felt herself and her children mired in place and wondered where she had led them all and where they would go.

Back in Wetaskiwin, in the early winter days of Dr. Sowby’s guesses and Peter’s far-off pipelines, Toller had caught one leg between the branches of a tree while playing with Kirsten in the field behind the trailer park. He fell back and hung there, unable to climb up or down, twisting his calf. Kirsten had started climbing first and was a limb above Toller, but she jumped out of the tree when he screamed. From the ground she reached up to her dangling brother and held his shoulders so that he was almost parallel to the branch. The lift stopped his screaming, but he couldn’t unhook his foot. So Kirsten called across the field to a neighbor boy, commanding him to get Kören and bring her to the tree, which he urgently did.

Thinking someone dead, Kören ran to the field with Sam swaddled in her arms. She breathed when she arrived and then laughed: her five-year-old daughter with her arms over her head, holding her two-year-old stuck in a tree. Kören carefully lifted Toller with one arm and with the other handed Sam to Kirsten. While Kören untangled Toller’s leg, Kirsten sniffled, saying with enormous shame, “I’m sorry, Mommy. I was supposed to take care of him.” More with sorrow for Kirsten than pain of his leg, Toller began crying too, and Sam had been doing so since Kören left running from the trailer. The chorus made Kören giggle, but it touched her too, as she led them back home, promising all would be well, that they’d take care of each other forever.

Kören told the story of “Toller in the Tree” to Dagmar Eriksson in the U of A hospital one Tuesday night in March. After supper on Monday, while in with Sam for hardly an hour, Kören had caught a glimpse of Dagmar in a tv room, wearing a dark blue bathrobe and fuzzy pink slip-

pers, smoking and watching *Maude*. Kören knocked on the door and called Dagmar's name.

Dagmar turned sharply, as though caught like a deer in headlights, but relaxed after a second or two of refocusing. At last, she smiled right across her face and held out her arms. "C'mere, honey," she croaked, and Kören hugged her in her chair.

"Where's my boy?" she asked, meaning Sam, which was what she had asked the last time Kören had seen her here when Sam was six.

"He went ahead to the pharmacy. He's eleven now."

"Eleven," said Dagmar, sitting back. She leaned forward again. "And he's all right?"

For some reason she didn't grasp, this question moved Kören, and she felt her eyes sting. She looked up at the wall to help it pass, and answered simply, "He's fine, Dagmar."

"Well, you see," Dagmar said, brushing Kören's hand with her own in a mock sort of slap, "Not so bad after all, is it?"

Kören smiled. She asked, "Why are you back?"

Dagmar fluttered a hand around her, sweeping the couch and table and television. "The decor, dear. I love it. I'm thinking of moving in."

For a while they swapped gossip and brief news of their lives until Sam appeared in the door and Dagmar squealed to see him. She insisted on walking them out to the front, but walking was a struggle, and she stopped instead at the elevator, winded and hacking and waving Kören's arm from her back.

"Come see me while I'm here," she said, straightening. "I'll sneak an extra plate; we'll have dinner."

Kören said maybe she would, if she could find the time. Dagmar nodded, smiling, and winked at Sam before the elevator doors closed.

But the next night at home while the tv hummed, Kören found herself thinking of Dagmar up at the U of A, smoking through *Laverne and Shirley*, and on a whim she put on her coat, left Kirsten in charge, and drove the Astre back to the hospital.

Dagmar was sitting in bed in her room, awake with a book on her lap but not reading it. When Kören entered the room, Dagmar raised both her hands over her shoulders in burlesque surprise. She said, "Honey, I forgot all about dinner!"

"You owe me," Kören said and sat next to Dagmar on her bed.

Dagmar was animated, sputtering machine-gun opinions and making Kören laugh, gesturing pointedly, stabbing the air on one side and then slicing it with a grand sweep on the other. But as Dagmar talked, Kören studied the thin lines of her face and the clawed digits her fingers had become, and saw nothing at all of the woman in the ice rink of her own youth. Discreetly looking down now and again, Kören examined her own hands in comparison, amazed to think Dagmar was only two years older than she.

Dagmar must have read the difference, too, because after a while she fell silent and held her hands up to her face. "Liver spots! God!" she said, twisting up her face. "I look like Old Man Hlushko."

Kören dropped her jaw and held it with one hand. "Mr. Hlushko," she said.

"Remember Bud? All those liver spots he had?"

Well, she didn't particularly remember the liver spots. But Kören nodded yes, she certainly remembered the man. "He crowned us the night of the carnival," Kören said, smiling.

"And as drunk as a skunk that night, too." Dagmar scratched one hand lightly and watched for any result.

"No!" Kören said, puzzled, remembering differently now.

Dagmar looked up and said, "Oh Kory, c'mon. He slipped and slid all over the rink. I practically had to hold him up. That man was flammable."

Kören started to laugh. Of course he was drunk.

"And I'll tell you something else I'll bet you never figured," Dagmar said, sitting up, warming. "Why do you think you lost that crown to me?"

Kören blanched. She shook her head.

"Because I cheated, that's why!" Dagmar said and nodded once for emphasis and jabbed the air.

Kören said, "What?"

"I cheated. I did. Remember, the girl who sold the most tickets to the carnival got to be queen. And you were just little Miss Popular, everybody was buying your tickets."

Kören forced a chuckle, feeling flushed and embarrassed.

Dagmar rolled her eyes. "But see, you were just selling one at a time. That was how it was supposed to work, of course, but hell, those Lions Club dodgers, they just wanted to raise money; they didn't care. I sold tickets by the case to truckers in town. I batted my eyes and promised them I'd win and, hey, they'd buy me out. I was a real rotter."

Kören laughed once, a resigned sigh. Then she laughed again, longer, bringing her hand up to her head.

Dagmar smoothed her blanket and did not laugh along. After a minute, staring at her lap, Dagmar said softly, "Everywhere I've gone, I've wanted to be someplace else. I think I'll be happier there,"—she jabbed at the air—"or better yet, there." And she jabbed again, on the other side.

She cupped her hands together, rubbing her joints. "But there is never here, Kory," Dagmar said. "There is always someplace else."

Kören placed her hand on both of Dagmar's, and Dagmar started to cry. To her amazement, Kören thought she understood. In bed with Peter, their legs entwined, their arms searching up and down each other, when

their lives rolled up together, he had whispered to her, "Are you there?" And sometimes she answered "Yes," and sometimes she answered "Soon," but mostly either was a lie because, honestly, she could never quite tell. Where had they been, then—Thorsby? Wetaskiwin? Not Edmonton, anyway. Not here.

And Kören knew she had been naive. Seeing herself in Conjuring Creek through Dagmar's eyes, she was even shallow. But Kören also knew that she had since drifted away from that shoal where she had been, and for a moment the knowledge made her wonder. Her eyes drifted off to no specific spot, and she idly patted Dagmar's hands. She thought, a person starts in the shallows and, without intention, softly treads from no sorrows to many, to a pool full of them, poured steadily over time until heavily they sink, deep like a lake, and fill a life. It seemed to Kören that this was how a woman was defined: she was only the sum of the sadnesses that submerged her.

Her answer about the church came two weeks later, through Sam, on the night of the Academy Awards.

The Edmonton *Journal* had predicted a sweep for *All the President's Men*, and *Maclean's* magazine said *Network* or *Taxi Driver*, but Kören couldn't find anything that gave the edge to *Rocky*, and she knew Sam would be shattered. He'd wrapped up his whole faith in the expectation that the underappreciated underdog would beat the odds, as in the film, and win everything. Kören pointed out that in the movie, Rocky didn't actually win, that for him "going the distance" was reward enough, but Sam would not be dissuaded. Rocky may have lost the fight then, but this time he was going to win Best Picture. Sam was praying for it.

No one could argue with Sam without losing their point. He was buoyant and persuasive. Figuring that Bishop Fairbanks, the Mormon ward leader, represented for Sam the ultimate local authority, Kören asked the bishop to talk to Sam about *Rocky* and Oscars and how they weren't necessarily connected to the Lord. A good-natured dentist during the week, with plenty of experience dealing with kids, Bishop Fairbanks chuckled and agreed, taking Sam into his office after sacrament meeting the Sunday before the awards. They talked privately for about twenty minutes while Kören, Toller, Kirsten, and Jack waited in the hall. The bishop opened his door with his arm over Sam's shoulder and announced, "Tomorrow night, the Best Picture will be *Rocky*!"

Toller rolled his eyes and said, "Someone shoot that kid."

But by suppertime Monday night, Kören didn't think Sam's ardor was funny or trivial; it had become too significant, and insistent, and dangerous. A few minutes before the program began, while Sam was antsy and eager to watch, Kören pulled him into the kitchen for one last try.

"Sam, listen to me," she said, stern against his puppydog eyes. "What will you do if *Rocky* doesn't win?"

"It *will* win."

"I know, but if it doesn't, what will you do?"

Sam considered. At last. He said, "What do you want?"

"I want you to promise me you won't get upset, or kick the coffee table, or get sick, or be mad at God."

Sam stared up at her, morally offended. But he said, "Okay."

"Okay," Kören said in return, and let him go.

He didn't move. He said, "What'll you do if it wins?"

Kören smiled and thought, you little rock. "I don't know," she answered. "What do you want?"

"You get baptized."

Kören paled, thinking, you awful little kid.

"Mom?"

"What?"

"If *Rocky* wins Best Picture, you get baptized. Okay?"

She stared back at him and said, "Okay."

It was then that Kören realized that *Rocky* would win, that it had all come to this, that her son had the power to give Oscars. She laughed to herself all through the evening until the last award was given, and her fate was sealed, and Sam shouted, "Yes! Yes! Yes!"

Formally interviewing her the next week, a small sheet called a baptismal recommend filled out and ready to sign, Bishop Fairbanks asked Kören, "Do you have a testimony that the Church is true?"

It was the question of her conversion, the story she never knew how to tell. What did these people mean when they said "testimony"? A pact? A surety? Kören had given testimony in her divorce papers; the bishop could go down to the courthouse and read it for himself. In stark, short terms, her lawyer had set down the facts of her life: she was a displaced Swede, a farm girl grown up, without college, without work experience, without a husband, and with kids. She wondered what she would add to her testimony now.

Only that she knew where she was, where she might always be. The man she'd slept with for seventeen years would forever sleep some place else. She had three children. Her home was sold, her car a cost, and the weather was harsh. She needed a place, and hope, and a faster route to work. These were the convictions to which she could swear.

Finally she brushed her eyelashes with one finger, and answered the bishop. "Oh yes," she said. He seemed satisfied, and nodded, and signed the recommend paper.

But the answer she suppressed was, "For God's sake, Bishop, I'm *here*."

Elijah's Calling: 1840-41

Margaret Young and Darius Gray

The following chapter is excerpted from One More River to Cross, the title of the first novel of a trilogy to be called Standing on the Promises being published by Deseret Book beginning in August 2000. Young and Gray's historical fiction explores the experiences of Elijah Abel, Jane Manning James, and other early African-American Latter-day Saints.

BROTHER JOSEPH'S VOICE was never angry and never hopeless. Nothing could get Brother Joseph to lose faith in God or in the Mormon people. And in that certain, peaceful voice, in one easy sentence, he asked Elijah wouldn't he like to live with him and Emma? And would he mind serving as Nauvoo's undertaker?

Yes to the first, lemme think on the second.

Undertaker! But he was trained in woods!

"That's why. The saints should have the best coffins in North America." They were standing in a weed-spiked field which would one day house a whole block of stores, according to the prophet. It was late spring now. The weeds were mostly young thistle and jimson, but the land was so boggy there were some random cattails too, and clumps of swampgrass.

"Bury my gifts, you mean?" Elijah said. "Do my best work I can and then put it under the ground?"

"It's always been considered a great calamity, Elijah, not to obtain an honorable burial."

"I know that, Brother Joseph."

"One of the greatest curses the ancient prophets could put on any man was that he should go without a burial."

"That so?"

"Will you?"

"Undertaker!"

Death had spooked Elijah since he was six years old and stuck in Massa's parlor keeping watch over a life-gone girl, her skin pale as birch bark, her mouth hung open. And oh how he remembered his first

experience as an undertaker: building his first coffin and burying his Mama somewhere in the Lion's Paw. It wasn't an activity he had thought of taking on as a career. Besides, he knew the deaths he'd deal with in Nauvoo: from the summer Ague that brought chills and fever and nose-bleeds, then twisted air out of the lungs until there was no air left—the ague that was contagious as pollen off the goldenrod.

"Will you?" This was Brother Joseph, those brilliant green-blue eyes already certain of the answer.

But Elijah didn't want to give that answer just yet. So he looked at his boots, which were much in need of blacking. He kicked a pebble gently. "Aw, why you want that?" he asked.

"You think I'm the one who wants it, Brother?"

There was going to be no way around this. Elijah rolled his eyes, still watching his boots. "It's God?" he said, already resigned.

Joseph didn't reply, just smiled when Elijah finally looked up at him.

Elijah sighed. "Awright. If you bless me I don't get sick, Brother Joseph, I do what you and God wants." He looked at his boots again. "All right, even if you don't bless me, I do it."

Later on, Joseph laid his hands on Elijah's head—not in the field, because that was no place for kneeling, but in the simple frame house Joseph had put up as his temporary place. Elijah's soul got peaceful as the prophet blessed him. There was some reason he was being called as undertaker, and, given time, he'd know it.

So here he was: Elder Elijah Abel, black man, carpenter for a temple of the Lord, former minister of the Mormon gospel, now called by the prophet to carve out coffins from pitch pine because God said.

It was babies first—those that didn't make it out of the womb breathing, and those that caught the whoop before their cheeks got fat. Then it was the old women and old men. Come July, with the steady hum of the mosquitos down the swampland and the jeers of cicadas, it was everybody dying.

Elijah didn't have to do the laying out; the midwives did that most often—almost always when it was a woman dead. Sister Sessions was the best. She'd get the body cleaned up even under the fingernails, dress it in good clothes, get coins on the eyelids to keep them shut, tie a cloth around the face to keep the mouth closed, and everything would be set by the time Elijah arrived with his wagon, hauling a coffin so new there'd still be sawdust in the corners. He'd pick the body up, lay it in its box, then—alongside the family men—carry it first to the sitting room (if the family had one) where mourners could weep over the corpse and snip off mementos of hair before the lid was nailed shut, then to the grove, finally to the grave.

He didn't know most of the people he coffined, so their deaths didn't melt or wreck him. He simply stood back and watched grief settle into

the mourners' face lines. Death was the ultimate slavery, that was it. A living, breathing soul became a thing to get boxed up, not even human anymore. And he, Elijah, was supervising the process: measuring the remains, cutting the wood, putting the box together with strong nails to withstand the weight of centuries. He was the carpenter measuring out the division point—brothers divided from sisters, husbands from wives, children from parents. He took the money for his pains and theirs, and watched the white folk become one mass of weeping humanity, hardly any distinctions between them: all dressed in black, all teary.

Elijah had always loved open space and hated boxes, and now he was building them. It got so he was shocked by color, as when he left the shop before dusk and saw calico dresses, green polka dot slippers, magenta silk, peacock hues swirling around the Mormon women—especially around the English converts. There was a whole world of greens and blues and purples outside his door, and for days at a time, he hardly saw it.

Inevitably, he got too used to death. He became gentle but unemotional as he took still babies from their mothers' arms, lifeless husbands from sobbing wives, lifeless wives from sobbing husbands. And he never did get sick, even when Brother Joseph and Sister Emma got sick in the bad summer and lived in a tent on their homestead. Elijah's health showed more of God's mercy: keeping him whole so he could care for the ones Jesus was claiming. He saw heaven's mercy in Brother Joseph too, for Joseph looked ready to go under one moment and was healed the next, then blessed the ones still sick, sending his red handkerchief when he couldn't get to a bedside himself.

Elijah got fast accustomed to funeral sermons too—and learned a thing or two in the process, including more scripture stories and new revelations.

After Brother Seymour Brunson's death, Brother Joseph told the Saints they could do baptisms for their loved ones who had died without it, which they commenced to perform in the Mississippi. Elijah, unconnected to about everyone, couldn't think of any dead folk he'd want to stand in and go under for—excepting the two Delilahs who surely had kept watch over him: his mama and his baby. So he walked into the river holding their names in his heart and let another elder immerse his live body for their dead ones.

When Zina Huntington passed, he heard Brother Joseph tell Zina Diantha, the dead woman's daughter, "You'll see your mother again—and you'll see your eternal mother, the wife of your Father in Heaven." Elijah had never thought of God being married, though it made good sense, and made him think he ought to find him a wife too.

In time, he learned the undertaker's words and tones of comfort, though mostly he kept quiet. He certainly didn't use his powered talk when he was prying a woman's fingers off her gone baby (mothers

would often grab the body when it came time to box it), but spoke softly of God's love—if he spoke at all. In Nauvoo, God was as real as a neighbor you saw only occasionally, but whose presence you felt by the lantern light in his window, which was always burning. Elijah took to addressing God just as he would that neighbor—usually in an out-loud voice, because he didn't want to trouble the almighty into mind-reading. "Now, God," he would say, "what do you think of this? What need did you have of this child, God Sir, that you'd take it away from its earth-mama?" He didn't picture a face for God, just the brilliance of the sun that warmed a body through and burned away any impurities. That brilliance was God to him, though he understood and accepted the doctrine that somewhere at the nub of all that radiance was a flesh-and-bones body. He did not picture that body with any particular pigment, just beams of light for eyes and sun-struck clouds for hair. And Elijah knew God wanted him serving as the undertaker because that warm peace filled him whenever he questioned his job. "Now, God, Sir," he might say, "there must be occupations a lot more fun than this one here, Sir. But I ain't turnin' my back on anyone in need of my services, Dear Lord, which you know." And peace would come as answer.

Maybe Elijah was called to build coffins so he could see the saints in their tenderest, most vulnerable moments, so he could expand his store of human pictures to include white faces alongside the black ones. He pitied them, these poor white slaves of death. He knew their faces, and he did pity them.

But he surely never thought the teary faces would include the Smiths, or that he'd tend the corpse of Father Joseph.

The old man hadn't been well since he and Mother Lucy arrived in Nauvoo. By September, he was vomiting blood. Consumption, maybe, brought on by all the pain and pressure of the Missouri time. And it was bad. Elijah had experience now; he knew death was come stalking. He sat at the bedside, September 12, 1840, not so much waiting for last moments as just keeping the patriarch company.

The day was muggy hot, air so stale you could taste it. It hung on the skin, compelling water from every pore, inviting mosquitos, which hummed everywhere. You could flap them away or slap them dead, but there were always others troubling your ankles or tempting you to hit your ears. Elijah's clothes were wet, face dripping. Father Smith, lying there, seemed too dry and cold to perspire much, though a film of sweat gleamed on his forehead. Elijah would wipe it, but a moment later it'd be back, though never drippy.

Most of the Smiths hardly noticed him sitting in the room like a shadow, and never asked him to leave (which he didn't, except to answer nature's call in the outback shed), so he heard every last word between

them, heard Father tell Mother Lucy in a strangled breath: "The world does not love us. Hates us because we are not of the world." Which was all truth, and something Elijah understood. The old man tried to lift himself up in bed, and Elijah, calling him "Father," said, "You best not try." Joseph Sr. moved his eyes towards him. They were glazed blue, lit up with last lights; his eye whites had taken on bile. The old man moved his gaze to Lucy, who was weeping without a sound, and he said, "Such trouble and affliction on this earth. I dread to leave you surrounded by enemies." No one offered reassurance that he wouldn't be leaving anytime soon. They all knew what was ahead; no use pretending otherwise.

Brother Joseph came in towards dusk, hardly recognizable for being so sad, head down, shoulders stooped like he had been preparing to kneel the whole day, which he did now at the bedside, collapsing to his knees. Tears and sweat rolled down Brother Joseph's face, and Elijah whispered to him, yes, it looked bad, then watched Father Smith raise his hands high as he could—which wasn't high—and pronounce a last blessing on his son: "You are called to do the work of the Lord. Hold out faithful and you shall be blessed, and your children after you. You shall even live to finish your work." The blessing spoken, Father's hands dropped like the life had gone out of them, though Elijah saw he was still breathing.

That was the first time he saw Brother Joseph weep like a baby, bowing his head to the blankets, crying out, "Oh, Father, shall I?"

In a thin breath, Father Smith promised: "You shall live to lay out the plan of all the work God has given you."

Elijah stood, wiped the sweat film from Father's brow again, and told him to rest, no use straining himself. The patriarch looked straight at him and said, surprised, "I can see and hear as well as ever I could."

"Now that's a blessing," said Elijah. "You best lay you back down, though, Sir."

The old man didn't pass until two more days had come and gone. Elijah, with all the Smiths, was with him when the final summons arrived. Father said he'd live seven or eight more minutes. Then his breaths got deep, then further spaced, then they clean stopped. As the women wailed, Brother Hyrum told Elijah to do his best job for this particular dead man.

Which Elijah did, measuring the body like it was sacred—as it was. This was his own father by adoption, the man who had laid hands on his head and blessed him—beyond what any Black in this slave-loving nation had ever received, he supposed. This was the man who had joked with him, fed him, prayed with him, hauled temple rocks with him. This was the man who had looked at the woodwork Elijah had given the Kirtland temple and called it "consecrated." Remembering, Elijah's eyes got as wet as the rest of his face. Tears dripped down his cheeks with the sweat as he gave his own blessing to the old man, consecrating the body

as he noted its dimensions for the coffin. This was the first time he had ever wept so hard doing his duty.

"You gets this back in the resurrection," he said, though this version of the body didn't seem much worth reclaiming. Grey skin hung on the bones; all the blood had stopped, the veins gone flat. The angry fight Father had put up against the sickness seemed carved into his face—around the half open mouth especially, like a frown—though he had been an easy smiling man, just like Brother Joseph. Serious about the work of restoration, but easy-smiling. In his prime, Father had weighed near two hundred pounds like his sons—and he was a wrestler too, as was Brother Joseph. The last ague, Elijah guessed, had stolen fifty or more. "Only you gots to wait some before resurrection happen. It be worth it, though. This old body goin' get young again, ever' hair put back in its place." In the resurrection, the two Josephs—father and son—would most likely look like twins. "And health in the navel and marrow to the bones," Elijah said. There was no anger in his tones or in his heart—none of that now, just a quiet, hazy sadness. Elijah had gone soft.

Though he didn't need to, he sat with the body after the mourners had left, being scared only once during the night, when a blast of wind came at him through the window and lifted Father's white hair like the life had come back to it.

At the graveyard, part of his own self got buried with Father Smith—not just the coffin, which was the best one he could make, but a portion of his heart. By the time he ate the funeral meal, he realized he had hardly touched a morsel since Father started dying. He was hungrier than a hog, and Isaac Lewis James—another black Mormon living by the Smiths—brought him pork roast, fried corn, and gingerbread, and talked to him about everything that had gotten buried in that grave with Father's body.

It proved a short conversation, as the two of them didn't have all that much in common.

Notes

That Elijah Abel was given "'the calling of an undertaker' by Joseph Smith" is substantiated by Walker and Van Wagoner in *A Book of Mormons*, pg. 7, and by Newell Bringhurst in "Elijah Abel and the Changing Status of Blacks in Mormonism."

I referred to Donna Hill's biography, *Joseph Smith, The First Mormon*, in recreating Joseph Smith, Sr.'s death scene. Ms. Hill called partly upon Lucy Mack Smith's biography of Joseph for her text (Lucy Mack Smith, *History of Joseph Smith*, Preston Nibley, ed. [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1958]). Indeed, Elijah Abel recalled being present at Father Smith's deathbed "during his last sickness" in 1840 (Newell Bringhurst, "Elijah Abel and the Changing Status of Blacks in Mormonism," in *Neither White Nor Black*, Bush and Mauss, eds. [Midvale: Signature Books, 1984]).

In the early baptisms for the dead, performed in the Mississippi River before the Nauvoo Temple was completed, men often did the work for women, and vice versa. We have a record of Elijah Abel having been baptized in the instance of "Delilah Abel, rel: Mother," and for "Delilah Abel, Rel: Dau." (Bush and Mauss, p[p].).

Joseph Smith's description of a Mother in Heaven as given to Zina Diantha Huntington [Smith Young] is taken from Susa Young Gates, as quoted in Richard and Jeni, Holzapfel, *Women of Nauvoo* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, p. 200). Since Zina and Eliza R. Snow were great friends, one often speaking in tongues and the other translating, it is quite likely that Zina shared Joseph's words with Eliza. Or, since Eliza was a plural wife of Joseph Smith (as was Zina), she could have heard the doctrine directly from him. In any case, there is clearly some foundation for Eliza's poetic description of a Heavenly Mother in the hymn, "O My Father."

The introduction of baptism for the dead at Seymour Brunson's funeral is as quoted in Holzapfel, p. 90.

Accounts of the many deaths in Nauvoo from malaria (called "ague" by the Saints) can be found in any history of the church. I relied heavily on the Church Education System text, which describes the undrained swampland around Nauvoo, the ubiquitous anopheles mosquito, and the consequent contagion.

My descriptions of funeral customs and an undertaker's duties were drawn from Barbara Jones, *Design for Death* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1967), and Habenstein Lamers, *The History of American Funeral Directing* (Milwaukee: Bulfin, 1962). Indeed, it was quite common for carpenters, such as Elijah Abel, to take on undertaking duties as well as upholstery. Sometimes the undertakers did "lay out" the bodies (though embalming didn't begin until the Civil War years), but it was far more common to have family members or midwives attend to those duties. Patty Sessions, the Mother of Mormon midwives, mentions laying out the dead numerous times in her journal (Donna Toland Smart, ed., *Mormon Midwife* [Logan, UT: USU Press, 1997]).

Temple Square—Past and Present

Delbert W. Ellsworth

Past

Through iron gates shine
Bronze doors never opened—Holiness to the Lord.
Sun, moon, and stars live in granite,
Carved by dead ancestors
Whose handcart and family group in life-sized cast
Personify the mystery in human toil.
Seagulls over fountain expand to pantheism
The hand of God, a domed tabernacle.
Inside a pin drop innocently entertains passersby.
Outside small statues of Joseph and Hyrum stand silent.

Present

In the shadow of World Headquarters
Name-tagged tourist guides
Point to the Protestant Christ with outstretched hands
Bidding all to embrace the new.
Replicated oxen reflect the light of flash bulbs
Forming souvenirs for droves
At the home of the famous choir.
Posters and talking mannequins explain Bible prophesy.
Manicured flower beds make the grounds attractive.
A large statue of Adam and Eve recounts a familiar story.

Measures of Music

Bruce Jorgensen

IT CAME THEN THAT SARA DREAMED of the flood. It had been the news for weeks, cities all along the Front sandbagging streets, sidewalks, driveways, window wells, a mudslide that made a lake over a town. She had gone to sleep several nights thinking of those houses under water, full of water. But their cul de sac was well above the nearest flood zone; nothing to fear.

She woke shaking, to Ryan sitting up peering at her, his eyes dark hollows in the dark, saying, "What is it?" and that she was kicking and making odd little yips in her throat, like a pup.

Out of breath, off balance, "Did I?" She still shook. "It was the water," she told him, water coming at the house in a stream as from a hose to push through the wall.

He put his arm around her, joked, mock-analyzed, comforted till she leaned against his neck.

But still hearing the water thunder coming fainter, far yet steady, no flashback, "Wait," she said; she was hearing it. "Listen."

After a stillness he explained it was the catch basin, it was coming in there, they were controlling the outflow, part of it going down past the temple into storm drains on Ninth East. "Nothing to worry about," he murmured and hugged her. "Lie down, sleep," and lay back and pulled her. She yielded her head to the hollow of his shoulder.

She didn't sleep a long time wondering if he did, hearing the flood louder than breath or heart, her mind breached by the dream, a ram of water breaching a wall. This was Sunday morning.

* * *

After church, after dinner, the table cleared and children dispersed, she asked Ryan to come with her. He was at the piano laboring out a bass part: "And the glory, the glory of the Lord shall be re-veal-ed," finishing the phrase before answering that he still had to pack, and she ought to practice, too, get her cello out. "Fastest packer around, fastest out of town," she chided him, and urged, "Come on."

"Where?" he asked.

"Anywhere," she said. "Up to the catch basin."

"Ah—" and wagging a finger he analyzed her ulterior motive, her dreamwork.

"I want," she told him, "your company."

They bicycled as near as they could and left the bikes chained to a street sign to climb the weedy, truck-rutted lot sloping to the basin, the high bank with stones half unearthed by rain. People were there, some walking up, others down, others standing or walking along the bare crest of the dam. She couldn't see what they looked at but the dam only, the wide notch of the spillway with its gray square-scored concrete face, above that the canyon mouth and the rough escarpment, and then lint-colored sky.

She'd worn sandals, so Ryan had to take her wrist and pull to help her up the steep bank. They stood on the dam. She wasn't as impressed as she'd thought to be: the water still six or eight feet below the spillway, four or five below the screened mouth of a big corrugated pipe standing up several yards out. Just a glorified chuckhole, she told him. He pointed. "Over there."

She looked, then heard as she should have been hearing all along, the noise that tracked her dream. Several thousand gallons a minute, he was saying, and they were letting it out as fast as they dared, but it was gaining, had been twelve feet down yesterday.

Across the wide basin like a big gravel pit, she saw a deep-cut gully, a wash bending out of sight into the canyon, and coming through it a brown torrent tumbling on itself, flinging barrelsful into the air high as the banks with that noise, wind-like, rattling, and rock-like. She was safe she knew; she could see it tamed when it spread into the basin, the water at her feet appearing still as sleep. But everything could move. She watched the stream, incessant and ferocious.

Ryan was talking again, as if to a freshman earth science class, of how this was made thousands of years ago, all the area below a fan delta, rocks and silt carried out of the canyon. "Alluvial," he said. He turned his head toward her. "Our house is built on the same kind of stuff. The old lake terraces."

Bonneville. But she watched the stream. She saw it toss small boulders into the air, heard it mumble. She thought of the empty houses under Thistle Lake and the stripped rooms with water gliding through windows and doors, secret along halls, up stairwells on obscure errands; thought of the ancient lake filling the whole valley, centuries gone before anyone settled on its deep benches. The voice of water and silt and stones fluttering on her skin, strumming her tendons, jarring the beat of her blood.

Ryan packed after the children were in bed, and Sara more anxious than angry did not pick her usual farewell fight with him but sat in her nightgown crosslegged with covers to her waist and watched him meticulously lay into his carry-on bag his necessities—three changes of garments, three pair of dark socks, two extra shirts, an extra pair of cords, his shaving kit, his tank top, shorts, and running shoes, his leather-bound scriptures. His thin briefcase had been packed since Friday with the paper he would present, copies of the papers he would respond to and his notes on them, the text for his one spring term class, a folder of problems he'd grade on the plane and return when he got back Thursday. He was trying to fit half a dozen books into the bag—physics, novels, biography, she wasn't sure what; reading was his main extravagance, or a vice so regular as to seem governed by natural law. He liked, he said, to have choices. Amused, she watched his oblivious mummery. The books weren't all going to fit.

"Amazing," she said.

"Intellectuals travel light."

"Not light enough," she said and bet he wouldn't open half.

"The point is I could," he said and set three thinner books aside, then took out the thickest to put the thin ones back in, then zipped the bag.

"Tell the kids goodbye?" she asked.

"Oh no. I'm sorry." His usual.

They might not notice, she told him. "It was a couple days last summer before anybody said where's Dad."

"The incredible disposable man," he said.

When he set the bag onto the floor by the bed, she felt the absence of the weight keener than the thought of his going while she would be sleeping.

"Not yet," she said. "Astrophysical clown. Come here." She rocked a wave toward him.

He looked up and signed a T: time out to brush his teeth and gargle?

"Penalty," she warned.

He stepped into the unlit bathroom.

When she heard him tap his rinsed toothbrush against the sink, she switched off the bedroom lights.

"Hey," he said. "What?"

"Touch system," she said. "Find me."

*

Later they sat up to watch random lightning shift along the horizon south to north to west to northwest with low, almost continuous, thunder.

It was like that, he told her, where she touched him: "Little flashes out at the edges and then closer."

"Will it hit here?" she asked. She laid the backs of her fingers against the slope of his side.

"Probably," he said. "It will be a while."

It was with them a long time, the erratic flaring and the thunder never surely assignable to any one flash. It drew close enough to light the yard, the walls of the room, yet never all the way to them, moving always in stealth and sudden leaps on the clouded rim of the valley.

Later still, before Sara slept, she was thinking how each trip now left her more alone, more at risk of losing him to hazards of machinery or flesh or feeling. When she did sleep, she had been looking at the still erratically lit parallelogram of sky out the north window, thinking how rain would mist in through the screens and mix its cool after-lightning breath with the tang of dusty wire. Tonight they had slid the windows wide the first time this season.

When Ryan got up in the morning to meet the limousine, he kissed her awake long enough to hear him say, "Goodbye, Stormgirl. Kiss the kids for me."

But she overslept and, barely seeing them bathed and dressed and combed and breakfasted and launched toward school, she forgot.

*

And she felt listless half the morning, left dishes on the table, didn't run, could not think where or what to begin. She took her cello out of the back of the closet and unlocked it from its case, then leaned it against the piano and laid the bow along the keyboard. It was time to start spring cleaning in earnest. But it was the late wet weather, winter dragging on in cold heavy rains, prolonging the confinement she had waited for in the fall, but now felt oppressed by.

She missed Ryan. Absurd since, if he were home, he would be at work, and she should be used to his conference trips. But his absence this morning was the palpable vacancy of the house and she drifted in it till she caught herself staring at the family-room window, seeing only glass.

She started cleaning then and didn't stop till near noon when she walked out of the house and down to the end of the cul de sac for the mail. The day was clear and the air warming.

Mrs. Francis, leaning on the mailboxes, greeted her with the fine day, and Sara asked how she was getting around.

"This—thing!" She lifted her walker, shook it. "You get old, you get spare parts."

Sara opened her mailbox.

Where had her husband gone so early, Mrs. Francis was asking, and Sara said to New York to give a paper: "Something to do with event horizons."

"Beyond me."

"Sometimes he says it's a little beyond him." Sara shuffled her envelopes: bills and coupons.

Not a thing for her, Mrs. Francis said, but she expected a letter from her daughter any day. Sara hoped it would come, she said, and said she needed to get back to cleaning. Mrs. Francis set her walker a step in the direction of her house. "You have a good time now."

Passing the Morisons' on her way back, Sara saw across the low board fence Darrell Morison hunched in the garden, setting out tomato plants. Off this term, as she was, he stayed home while Jan, his wife, ran endless statistical correlations toward her thesis. Sara admired them both, and recited the phrases Darrell once had told her from his specialty, Boethius: *Naturae rationalis individua substantia*, the philosopher's definition of a person that seemed to omit something; and then as consolation, Darrell had said, for what that might lack, *Interminabilis vitae tota simul perfecta possessio*, eternity as the mind of God knows it, a perfect possession altogether of endless life. Boethius also, he told her, had said temporality imitated eternity by binding itself to the fleeting moment, which bore a faint semblance of timelessness.

She couldn't decide whether that was profound or sad. She returned to the house and made an omelet. Ryan would saute alfalfa sprouts and mushroom slices in bacon fat, toss in avocado when the eggs were half done, sprinkle on lemon pepper and grated cheese, make it all up as he went along. Like the quantum universe, he would say, might be one way, might be another; you play it by ear, you look and see. He had invented this while he was gone last summer, sleeping in an attic and cooking for himself in the kitchen of a house belonging to some church members in Ithaca while he worked on radiotelescope data. Sara had tried but could not make it quite right, and not today either. The one thing Ryan could do and did was cook.

She sat at the breakfast bar chewing rubbery eggs and remembering the awful summer. She had burned the bottom out of a cold-pack canner, burned up a stovetop unit, the hood on the Rabbit had flipped up while she was doing forty-five on the Parkway and the insurance would not pay because she admitted she had checked the oil that morning and that made it probable she had been negligent. Put that in your endless life. She had written Ryan long letters with all the grim details and told him, "If you were my boyfriend, I'd drop you like that." But she got used to his being gone—it was simpler. "It's quieter here," she wrote him, "more orderly with you gone. Not that we don't miss you." She had almost dreaded the disruption of routine when he came back, the weight of another personality in the fine-strung web of amenity she had woven with Sharon and Alicia and Brendan. She had even come to like sleeping alone, the restful depths.

Last night, this morning, when they made love, she had felt him go out of himself or farther in, seen his face blind and abstract over her, felt herself lift, delicate and seeking, felt and heard each breath hum in her throat. They had turned and turned, the bed, the room, she wanted never to stop, she had no words, they poured force and grace back and forth, emptying and filling, wider and wider. In live remembrance, warm light sang from her shoulders to her belly.

You married a man, lived with him eighteen years and made children with him, made the love you could, which was harder, and it became daily bread and clear cold water too plain to notice though it fed your life. Then something like this, some good time out of nowhere and lighting the whole sky one moment and gone to memory the next morning, so you feared to cherish or wish it to come again. Put that into your endless life. Sara felt like a glass bowl, brimful and floating roses. She stood and felt blown apart like a dandelion.

She went back to cleaning. Mid-afternoon, not long before the girls and Brendan would be coming from school, she went to her cello again. For years since graduate school, she had played only occasionally and had not played now since last Easter in a string quartet to accompany the ward choir singing Faure's *Requiem*. Ryan had sung bass in that. Now they had begun learning the first part of *Messiah* for Christmas.

The instrument had still gleamed dustless inside its case. She sat on the piano bench, wiped the strings and tuned them, tightened the bow and snapped off a few loose hairs, stroked rosin on it, positioned the cello in the grip of her knees, arched her fingers over the neck and set the bow to the C string.

The first note struck her like a shockwave and sounded her and she stopped. Not knowing if it was joy or desolation, she wept.

*

That night she turned the thermostat down to fifty-five and again left the bedroom windows open. A few days there might be, possibly a couple of weeks, the interval between furnace and air-conditioning, when the house could be open, airing.

She had told the girls and Brendan they could watch television if they kept the sound low and left no unnecessary lights on and went to bed immediately after and did not spill popcorn, and they had promised. She was so tired she probably would not wake at two or three and track down their glaring bulbs. She hugged them and asked them to remember Dad in their prayers and went up to brush her teeth and undress.

She knelt for her own prayers and began with habitual words, thanks for what she had, petitions for health, safety, guidance, peace. And broke off, unable to think what to say. It was all true and insuffi-

cient. Everything, she thought, everything I have, everything. And: I want, I want, I want I don't know what. She was a long time not saying or thinking anything, and she was not to remember getting into bed or waiting for sleep, but the dream.

*

Of a room high-ceilinged with a tall, transomed door and walls bare as an abandoned schoolroom, in which she sat in a wide, too-soft bed, hugging a heavy quilted comforter around her knees, wearing a sheer nightgown, deep burgundy. In the room in profile to her, a man stood, suitably tall and dark-haired but slightly stoop-shouldered, wearing a brocaded robe, dark velvet lapels. "Alluvial" one of their voices said. His long fingers let drop a glass and it broke, and he bent to begin picking up the pieces.

How like Ryan, she thought: stopping to pick up, clean up. And she woke then still thinking how he kept everything neat but the desk in his study, which was unredeemably messy; how when the children were younger and even more disorderly, he histrionically cursed them as junior anarchists and minions of entropy.

She remembered how he had wakened her the morning before and called her Stormgirl, sappy as something inside a card, a pop song title. But she took it as a name, herself newly named.

*

And slept again. And again in the morning when the children had left for school and she had cleaned the kitchen, made the bed, and vacuumed the bedroom and upstairs hall and stairs, she didn't run, and wondered where to begin. She bathed in the tub rather than showering, but without lingering, and put on snug jeans and a cotton shirt cool and almost weightless.

She walked in the still rooms and heard herself humming the phrase Ryan had picked out on the piano: the glory, the glory of the Lord.

She stopped to curl her fingers on the neck of the cello and lift the bow thinking of runs, arpeggios, double stops, measures of music, but she did not play.

Out the family-room window she could see into Morisons' yard, the bared broken earth of the garden, the tomato plants standing upright, their leaves lifted. Light warmed the ground and the day. Sashes on this side of the house had been raised. The air was moving and she thought of it moving through and between the houses, finding its own ways.

In her study and sewing room, she went to the window and slid the sashes from both ends toward the center. The curtains stood inward with the air.

She turned to her desk where the month's accumulating bills waited to be opened and totaled and paid as far as the money would go. She should begin. She stood with the fingertips of both hands touching the cool polished wood. She felt the air move and looked toward the window. The curtain bellied into the room; its corner stroked her forearm.

She stood watching the slow wave of gauze.

Brother Melrose

Douglas Thayer

THE OLD MAN WALKED OUT from under the line of high, heavy trees bordering the cemetery. He stopped. He looked up, blinking his eyes. He held his hands palms up to the fading April sunlight. It was early evening the Saturday after Easter.

"Well," he said. "Well."

He nodded his head and then started down the dirt road toward the town, which was not far away. It was not a large town. He did not walk fast. He stopped to look at a horse in a field. He whistled, and the horse raised its head and walked over to the fence.

He rubbed the horse behind the ears and petted his neck.

"Good old Red. Good old Red."

The horse raised and lowered its head.

At the next field he stopped to look at a cow and her calf. The cow walked toward the fence; the calf followed. He stopped to watch a flock of pigeons flying above the trees. When he crossed the bridge just outside the town, he stopped and looked down at the water.

"Well," he said.

Looking down at himself, he brushed off his suit jacket and pants with the flats of his hands.

He was dressed in a new black suit, white shirt, and dark tie. He wore shiny new shoes. He did not have far to go; his house was on the edge of town. He left the road and got on the sidewalk. He stopped to smell a rose.

Across the street an older woman out hoeing her peas waved to him. He waved back. She stood and watched him as he passed. She put up her right hand to shade her eyes, pushing her head forward like a chicken. She rested her hoe against a gooseberry bush and walked to the fence, but the old man had passed by already.

"I could have sworn . . ."

She stood there looking at his back. She shook her head and turned toward her garden. She stopped and turned once to look after the old man and then went on. She took up her hoe again; she stood there holding it.

A brown dog came out to bark at the old man, but then walked up to him sniffing and wagging her tail.

"Well, hello, Iris," the old man said. "How are you?" He reached down and petted the dog. Iris whined. "Good old dog, Iris. Where's Joey?" Barking and jumping, Iris circled the old man and then ran down the sidewalk ahead of him.

A pickup truck coming in the opposite direction passed the old man and then stopped suddenly in the middle of the road. The driver got out and stood looking at the old man. The driver walked to the back of his pickup and watched the old man approaching the gate of a comfortable-looking, white-framed house set deep in the yard.

Another pickup stopped behind the first pickup. A heavy-set man stuck his head out the open window.

"You out of gas, Heber?"

"No, no, George. I just thought I saw old man Melrose." He nodded toward the old man entering the gate.

George looked toward the white house. He shook his head.

"Better drive into Springerville to the clinic and get your eyes checked, Heber. Old man Melrose's been dead and buried for nearly a year. Don't expect him back either. Probably a bum looking for a handout. Stole himself a nice suit of clothes somewhere. See you, Heber. I'd make that appointment." He laughed.

"No, I . . ."

Iris leading the way, the old man walked up on the porch of the white house.

"Grandpa! Grandpa! Grandpa!"

The screen door flung back, and a blond-headed boy came running out of the house.

"I knew you'd come back! I knew you would! I just knew you would! I told Mom you would! You just had to. I prayed you would all the time. I prayed and prayed."

"Yes, Joey, I know."

The old man bent over to hug the boy. Barking, Iris jumped up and down.

Joey put his arms around his grandpa's neck and squeezed tight.

"Oh, Grandpa, it's so good to see you."

"You bet."

"Mom will be so happy. Mom! Mom! Grandpa's back! Grandpa's back!"

Joey let go of his grandpa's neck, jerked open the screen door and ran into the house.

"Mom! Mom!"

The old man walked into the house. He stopped to breathe in deep the smell of fresh-baked bread.

"Joey, I've told you your grandpa isn't coming back. He's dead. Now what is this nonsense." The woman came out of the kitchen and into the front room wiping her hands on her apron. "I'm making pies for Sunday and your father will be home for supper. I haven't got time . . ."

Looking up, the woman screamed, the scream sharp and piercing. She fell into a sofa chair near where she stood.

"Now, Elsie, there's no need to act like that."

The old man leaned down to take the woman's hand.

"What's wrong with my mom, Grandpa? Is she sick?"

"You go get your mother a glass of water. Now, Elsie."

"No, no, no, no." Lying back in the chair, the woman rolled her head from side to side like she was taking a fit. She seemed to hold her eyes closed intentionally.

"Here, Grandpa."

"Thank you, Joey."

The old man took the glass and held it to the woman's lips.

"You'll feel better."

The woman opened her eyes and closed them again.

"Nooooo," she said, like a woman shouting down a tunnel.

"Come on now, Elsie. It can't be helped."

Staring at the man, the woman sipped the water.

"Dad?"

"Yes, Elsie, it's me I'm afraid."

"But."

"I know. I know. It can't be helped, right now anyway."

"Are you okay, Mom? What's wrong with you, Mom?"

"It's just not possible. It's not. What are people going to say? You had such a lovely service. Everybody came. They all saw you. Everybody said how nice you looked. You had a new suit just like you wanted, and new shoes too, although why a person would want new shoes I don't know."

She took the glass from the old man. "Here, I need the rest of that."

She emptied the glass and then sat holding it with both hands.

"The whole family was there, even Kenneth and Ruth and their kids, and they don't usually come to anything in the way of family, not even weddings. You know that. The Relief Society sisters fixed such a nice lunch afterward. The flowers were so nice. People went out of their way to say such nice things about you even though you weren't buried in temple robes. You looked so peaceful. Mom must have been waiting at the veil when you got there. Your service was so nice. I can't believe it. I can't. I can't. It's too much."

Elsie kept her head pressed against the back of the chair for support, as if she was afraid her head might fall off.

"I know."

"You know? How could you know?"

Elsie shook her head.

"I can't believe it. I won't believe it. I was to get this house when you died. We've been painting and fixing up things till I've got a decent roof over my head finally for the first time since I married Fred. I used the money you left me for that. Of course it was Mom's money to begin with. The Melroses never had a dime and never will have. It was the Thatchers had money."

"I don't want it back, Elsie. You don't have to worry about anything."

"How in the world?" Shaking her head, she closed her eyes and then opened them again. "Where's the bishop? Where's the stake president? Both of them off somewhere of course. Never around when you need them and always standing at the door when you don't."

"But, Mom, Grandpa's come. Shouldn't we be happy?"

"I know he's back. If anybody would be coming back it would be him. He was the most stubborn man I ever . . ." She looked at the boy, as if noticing him for the first time. "Now you go out and play. Your grandfather and me have things to talk about. What your aunts are going to say about this, I don't know. Of course it wasn't them that took care of him for ten years either."

"Oh, Ma."

She raised her head and looked down at the boy.

"Go on now, and take that dog with you. That wretched animal is on my new carpet. Why the Wilsons can't keep their dogs chained up or build a fence I'll never know. They have a dog, but they expect *me* take care of it of course."

The dog was lying on the brown carpet, her head between her paws. She stood up.

"Oh, Ma."

"Just do as you've been asked. You've got to have a bath too. It's Sunday tomorrow, don't forget."

"Gee whiz. Come on, Iris. Goodbye, Grandpa. See you later."

"Goodbye, sonny boy."

Joey pushed open the screen door, and he and Iris went out onto the front porch.

"Fred. I'll call Fred to come home early. He's your son-in-law. It's his responsibility too. You'd think he might be of some use in a situation like this."

She stood up from the chair.

"Well, while you're doing that, I need to go to the bathroom."

"Bathroom. I didn't think people . . . Well go on then while I call Fred. He'll just have to come home early, that's all, whether Mike Jones likes it or not."

"That bread sure smells good, Elsie. You always made good bread."

"It does, does it?"

"It's nice to be back."

"Nice? I would think . . . Oh, well."

Elsie walked to the phone on the wall just inside the kitchen door and dialed the number. Listening to the ring, she looked down at her unfinished pies. She shook her head.

"To think that . . . Fred? Is that you, Fred? Well, I want you to come home right now." Elsie held the telephone cord with her free hand as if hanging on for support. "I know you're supposed to stay and lock up that store. Don't you do that every night. I know what you do, Fred Williams. This is an emergency." She looked at the wall. "No the house isn't on fire. I wish that's all it was. Now listen, Fred. Just listen for once in your life. Your father-in-law is back." She closed her eyes and opened them again. "No, I'm not crazy, but I may be if you don't get home here as fast as you can."

Still hanging on to the telephone cord, she sat down on the chair below the phone. "No he hasn't got wings, and he didn't land on top of the roof. This is no time for your humor, Fred. Just get home here. I need you. What are people going to say? This is terrible." She shook her head. "What's he doing? He's in the bathroom." She listened. "Well how would I know what he wants with a bathroom. What a person usually wants, I suppose. You can ask him when you get home, if you think it's important."

Elsie stood up.

"No, you don't need to come home and take me to see Doctor Rogers. What good would he do me now? You'd think eighty-seven years would be enough for anybody. He was just like a child the last three years. Wandering all over town talking to people, and horses and cows if he couldn't find anybody, and even chickens. How could a man talk to a chicken? Joey was the only one who could talk sense to him. I'm not going through that again. Now you just get home, Fred Williams, as fast as you can." Elsie hung up the phone. "You'd think a man could find a better job after thirty years than just being a clerk in a hardware store."

She shook her head. She listened to the toilet flush down the short hall and then the tap run. The old man came out of the bathroom and into the kitchen.

"You've fixed the bathroom up real nice, Elsie."

"That's one of the things we had done." She turned on the kitchen light. "We got a new furnace too, and a new roof. The house needed a lot of fixing up. Every dime you left me we spent on the house. I didn't let Fred get his hands on any of it, you can be sure of that. There's none left."

"I don't want the money back, Elsie."

"Well, that's good because there's none to give back." She looked at the old man. "Why don't you go in the living room and sit in your rocking chair there by the big bay window for a few minutes while I think. You used to like to do that. I've been going to paint that chair, but I haven't got around to it yet. There's so much to do around here, you never get done. I'll pull it over where you used to like it."

"You're making pies."

"Pies. Of course I'm making pies. Tomorrow's Sunday."

She led the old man out of the kitchen, through the dining room, and into the sitting room. She pulled the rocking chair into the alcove formed by the window.

"This is nice." The old man sat looking out the window and rocking just slightly. "Where's the rest of the children, Elsie?"

"Of course Fred junior and Billy are married and gone, and Ellen is married now and living in Springerville. Thank the good Lord for small favors."

"Yes, we knew about Ellen getting married. He seems like a nice boy."

"Well, how could you know about that? It was three months after you . . ."

"Well, your mother and me kind of keep track of things. Important things anyway."

"You do?"

"Yes."

"Why didn't she come with you if you had to come?"

"I didn't know I was coming."

"Why did you have to come at all?"

"Well, because of Joey, I guess."

Elsie shook her head.

"If it isn't one thing with that child, it's another. How is Mom?"

"Just fine."

"How's her arthritis?"

"It's all gone, Elsie."

"Well, at least there's some benefit to dying. I sure hope she's enjoying herself finally. Worked herself to death. Yes, and she tried all her life to get you to go to the temple, but she might as well talked to a wall. It's a wonder you and Mom are together. I would have thought you would be somewhere . . ."

The phone rang. Elsie walked back into the kitchen.

"Yes, Liza."

Holding her hand over the receiver, Elsie turned to look through the kitchen door at her father. There was no wall or doorway between the dining room and the living room.

"It's Liza Campbell." Elsie spoke loudly so the old man could hear. He nodded but didn't turn to look at her.

Elsie took her hand off the receiver.

"You were out in your garden and you thought you saw who?" Elsie sat down on the chair. "You thought it might be a tramp bothering me. Well I guess that's who you did see. What? No not a tramp, Liza, my father. Yes, he's sitting right here in his rocking chair." She listened. "Yes, Liza, I'm feeling just fine. And, no, I haven't been out in the sun. But thank you for asking. Yes, yes, I know Liza. Yes, yes, Liza, I'm just fine. Nothing wrong with me. No, of course not. Thank you for your call, Liza."

Elsie reached up and hung up the phone. She didn't stand back up. She turned toward the old man.

"Now she'll phone everybody in town to tell them I've finally gone crazy. It won't surprise very many people, I expect, and they'll be over here poking their noses in. There's not much peace in this life, I know that. You think things are going to settle down, but they never do. There's always something. I'll never get those pies finished now, or anything else I suppose, and tomorrow's Sunday again already, and I've got a Primary lesson to get. Teaching those eight-year-olds is no joke, I can tell you that. They think because I've got Joey, I can handle 'em, but I can't. Joey was a big surprise, I can tell you that. Fred and his grand ideas about what can't happen. Well it did happen."

The old man didn't turn to look at her. He sat smiling and looking out the window. He waved.

Elsie stood up from the chair by the phone and walked back into the dining room. Fred was just opening the screen door. Joey and Iris stood behind him, but they didn't come in. Joey pressed his nose against the screen, the end of his nose flat and white against the wire.

"Now, Elsie, what is all this nonsense? There's people outside on the lawn as I drove in. You've probably had one of your spells." Just as Fred spoke, he turned to see the old man in the rocking chair. Fred leaned forward like a tree about to fall over. He turned back to look at Elsie and then at the old man again. "Well, I'll be damned." He looked at Elsie again. "It ain't possible."

"Well, see'n is believ'n, ain't it, Fred. And please don't swear in my house. Now what are we going to do about this situation?"

The old man turned in his chair. He nodded and smiled at Fred and then turned back to look out the window.

"It's him all right."

"Now what are you going to do about it, Fred?"

"Do about it? What is there to do about it? What do you want me to do, haul him back out to the cemetery and bury him again? Maybe we should have another funeral. The first one didn't seem to work so well."

"Now, Fred, I want you to be serious."

"I am being . . ."

"Well, looks like the sheriff had to come too, of course."

Elsie stood looking out the screen door. Fred turned his head to see the sheriff turn off his headlights and red flashers. The sheriff held on to the top of the door to get out of the car.

"Thank the Lord he had enough sense not to use that siren of his. The whole town would have followed him. They'll be here quick enough though. Nothing else to do on a Saturday night, of course, except bother me."

The sheriff came up on the porch and opened the screen door. He didn't ring the bell. He was a big man. Joey and Iris stood at the screen looking in.

"Well, I heard you folks have been having some trouble. Some bum walking in your house or something, Elsie? Heber Jones called me. Is this the intruder?"

The sheriff turned and walked into the living room. "Now look here, mister."

The sheriff stopped, stepped back, then leaned forward, squinting his eyes like a man who thought he might be going blind.

"Oh, sweet Jesus." It wasn't blasphemy but more like the beginning of a prayer.

"Hello, Bob. I see you're still sheriff."

The sheriff turned to look at Elsie and Fred.

"It's all right, sheriff. You can talk to him. Dad's not going to evaporate."

"Well, Brother Melrose, this sure is a surprise."

"Yes, I expect it is. I'm a little surprised myself."

"Well, how are you feeling?"

"Fine. Fine. Looks like folks are coming by. That's nice, ain't it?"

The sheriff didn't walk over to shake the old man's hand. The sheriff looked out the window.

"Seems like you got some folks on the front lawn, Elsie."

Elsie and Fred both turned to look. Maybe a dozen people stood on the lawn in the light from the street lamp.

"That has to be Liza Campbell's work. She never did know when to keep something to herself." Elsie walked to the screen door. "Well, they're not coming in here on my new carpet unless they take off their shoes, and that goes for the cousins too. Or they can just look through the window if they don't want to do that. I expect church will be a circus tomorrow. What the bishop is going to do about this, I don't know. He's supposed to be back in town late tonight."

She turned on the porch light.

"Well, it says the dead will rise again, Elsie."

"I know that, Sheriff, but there's no rush as far as I know. What's so special about my father is beyond me, even if Joey . . ."

"Well I think I better stay around for a while and keep things orderly. I think I'll just radio Hank at the office and have him run out to the cemetery and have a look around. See if there's any more of these folks about there wandering around. They may need a ride. Your family plot's over by the gate, ain't it, Elsie? At least, that's what I remember."

"Yes, Sheriff, that's where it is. I hope there's nobody else from my family. One's enough right now."

"Well, I'll let you know what Hank finds out. I don't want half the town out there either. It's too dark. Somebody could fall in a hole and break a leg, or worse. Have to haul people all the way to Springerville to the hospital. It's expensive."

The sheriff got those neighbors lined up who wanted to come in the house and see Brother Melrose. They took off their shoes on the porch. There might have been thirty people on the lawn. Some didn't want to come in. Others came in the house but didn't go into the living room to shake old Brother Melrose's hand. They just stood in the dining room with Elsie and Fred, their arms folded tight across their chests, looking, and occasionally shaking their heads.

Her arms folded across her chest, Dora Jenkins stood next to Elsie.

"I don't want to shake hands with him," Dora Jenkins said. "At least not yet. Thank you, no. I'll just stand right here. Shakin' hands would be too much for me. Maybe tomorrow, but not tonight. Something like this takes time."

The overhead light shone off her eyeglasses when she moved her head.

"Your father never seemed like a man much concerned about heaven, Elsie. Not like your mother. She was looking forward to it."

"Yes, and with good reason."

It was mostly old people who went in to shake hands with Brother Melrose. The sheriff kept the line moving, so all they had time to do was shake hands and say hello, not ask questions. Some of the old sisters patted Brother Melrose on the shoulder.

Liza Campbell walked over and stood by Elsie and Dora Jenkins.

"Well, it's him all right, Elsie. No question about that. I knew it was when I was out in the peas, but you can't be sure about a thing like that, can you? Just now, when I shook Brother Melrose's hand, I wanted to ask him about my Gordon, but there wasn't time. But maybe he wasn't there where Brother Melrose was anyway. I always told Gordon he was going to hell, all that drinking and carrying on. I sure don't want him back. I enjoy my peace and quiet too much to wish that. I've often wondered what he does all day. Of course, it would be nice to have my Jennie back. You remember, Elsie, Jennie died of the whooping cough when she was five."

"I remember."

"But then I'm seventy-four. What would I know about raising a child that age? I guess she'd come back the same age, just like Brother Melrose. She wouldn't be grown, would she, Elsie?"

"Heavens, Liza, how would I know? I wouldn't think so though."

"A thing like this just throws everything out of kilter, it seems to me, just everything."

The sheriff came in to tell Elsie that Hank Green had radioed and told him that nobody else was out at the cemetery or walking along the road toward town either. He'd gone over to the Melrose family plot. He said only the one grave was open.

"What does he mean open?"

"Well, just like it was freshly dug I guess, Fred. He said the lid was off the vault and the coffin lid was up."

"Well, I guess the old man just didn't seep up like swamp gas or something then. That's important to know."

"Fred, stop talking blasphemy, because that's what it is. The graves shall be opened, remember that, and not like cans of tomatoes either."

"Joe had to run some teenagers off that came out nosing around."

"Thanks, Sheriff. We don't want anymore trouble than we've got already. How long is this all going to take. Pies don't make themselves. That's for sure."

"Well, I don't know, Elsie. I don't think people are going to be satisfied just coming by. You're going to have the tv and newspaper people here. All over the state, and probably the country too, people are going to want to know once this gets out. It's unusual. People are going to have a lot of questions about what it's like on the other side. I wouldn't be a bit surprised to see the governor come around, maybe even the president. Who knows? All the churches will be sending people, including ours. They'll be sending somebody down from Salt Lake to check on this, you can depend on that, probably an apostle. Of course, it's going to take a while for people to actually believe it's true, but when they do, there's going to be a lot of excitement for a small town."

"We could charge admission, Elsie. We'd get rich. Buy a new Ford pickup. People would pay to see him. They could talk to Dad and shake his hand and ask questions about what it's like and what he does all day. Maybe ask about loved ones and what they're doing. Why not? We could rent the Jensens' barn and clean it up. They're not using it now. Joe sold his milk cows. We could go on tv. We could write a book all about it."

"Fred Williams, you make more sense when you're asleep. How did a woman ever marry such a man?"

She turned back to the sheriff.

"Oh, it's going to be terrible, I know that. What did he have to come back for? Why didn't he wait until everybody else was ready, and we could all come together. We'd all be in the same boat so to speak. It isn't

even decent. How long's he going to stay? What on earth is there for him to do? I don't want to be rich. I just want my peace and quiet and a chance to do a few things I want to do." Elsie looked up at the clock on the wall. "Good heavens, look at the time. Joey should be in taking his bath right now. I still haven't got my Primary lesson done, or my pies. It's time to stop all this, Sheriff. Dad looks tired out anyway."

"I don't hardly think they'll be doing much in church tomorrow, Elsie. The line's pretty well ended for now anyway. I'll just chase off the rest. But I wouldn't be a bit surprised if you didn't wake up to a whole crowd of people standing on your front lawn bright and early in the morning. When the rest of the town hears about this, they're going to want to see Brother Melrose too. They'll have a lot of questions."

"Everybody's life's going to be upset, just because of one stubborn old man. If it was anything my father was it was stubborn, stubborn as a mule, and lazy too unless talking is work. Everybody said that. Even his own mother couldn't deny that. I'm not calling my sisters tonight, and that's certain. They'd just throw a fit, both of them, and have their husbands drive them down here in their big new cars. Plenty of time for fits tomorrow. Why a man would want to be buried in a pair of expensive new shoes I don't know. What would he need . . . well."

"You never know, do you, Elsie? You just never know. I've been sheriff long enough to . . ."

"Fred, you go get Joey in here. He's been running around out there all night."

"I'll just send folks on home, Elsie. It's time they were going. Tomorrow's going to be a big day for this town. I'll keep Hank outside for a while, so people don't bother you."

"Thanks, Sheriff. That'll be a help."

Elsie and Fred said goodbye to the last neighbors to come through the line.

"What a wonderful blessing to have your father back, Elsie," May Bell held Elsie's hands in both of hers.

Elsie said nothing. When May Bell was gone, Elsie put the catch on the screen door and stood looking out.

"Blessing. I've got another word for it and it ain't blessing."

"Now, Elsie, this whole thing just might turn out to be a blessing in disguise." Fred looked over at the old man.

"Yes, and I know what kind of blessing you're thinking of too, so don't think I don't."

"Now, Elsie."

"Joey, you get in here right this minute."

Elsie lifted the catch off the screen door.

"I thought you were in the house. That dog's not coming in. She can go back home to the Wilsons where she belongs."

Elsie held the screen open for Joey then put the catch on again. Iris cocked her head and whined.

"No, you're not coming in. Just go home where you belong." Elsie closed and locked the door and turned off the porch light.

"You should be in bed. You never can get up in time for church."

Joey walked over and put his arm around his grandpa's neck and leaned his head against him.

"Can Grandpa come up and help me put on my pajamas and say my prayers, Mom, please, just like he always did? He always turns off the light like you want."

"I suppose, I suppose. Get yourself a glass of milk and be sure and wash your face and hands. It's too late for you to take a bath. You take one in the morning."

Joey drank his milk and the old man followed him up the stairs.

"I prayed and prayed you'd come back, Grandpa. I knew you would. I just knew it."

"I appreciate it too."

When the old man came back down the stairs, Elsie asked him if he wanted some supper. "I guess you eat, don't you."

"Yes, Elsie, we eat. Some bread and milk would be fine. Pies ain't done yet, I see."

Fred sat at the table while the old man ate. The old man stopped once to take two more teaspoonfuls of sugar.

"Mom ask you to tell me anything, Dad?" Elsie turned from putting a crust on a pie.

"No, Elsie, she didn't. I didn't know I was coming."

"Well, they might have given you a few minutes to say goodbye, you'd think anyway. How's the rest of the family?"

"They're fine. About the same, I guess."

"How's Grandma and Grandpa Thatcher?"

"They were fine the last time I saw them."

"And Aunt Doris and Uncle Jim?"

"Just fine."

Fred picked up the salt shaker that was on the table and poured salt into the palm of his hand.

"What do you do all day, Dad?"

"Oh, about the same as you do here, I guess, Elsie, pretty much."

"You mean it's not different?" Elsie turned again from her crusts.

"Oh, it's different in some ways, Elsie. It's not so bad. It's all right."

"Well, I just hope there's a little time to do what you want, maybe rest a little." Elsie poured fresh-cut apples into another pie shell. "The Savior's there, of course?"

"Yes."

"That must be wonderful."

"Yes."

"Be nice to see him. Well, it's been a long day, Dad. I expect you must be tired. I'll put you in one of the back bedrooms. Of course, Fred and I have the big bedroom now."

"I'd like to sit out on the porch in the swing for a while, if that's all right. I want to listen to the crickets and watch the bats."

"Yes, I know. Well, if that's what you want to do. I'll leave the light on in the room. I'll set out a pair of Fred's pajamas. I guess we'll have to be buying you some new clothes. I gave all yours away."

"Well, there's no hurry, is there? Thanks for the bread and milk. You always made good bread, Elsie."

The old man got up from the table.

"I'll just be on the porch."

Later, after she had everything finished, Elsie came out with a blanket. Iris lay by the old man's chair. He stroked her head. The porch light was off.

"Now don't stay out here and take a chill, Dad. I brought you this blanket. Your bed's ready."

"Thank you, Elsie. It's been nice to visit with you and Fred and Joey. He's a fine boy. Good night."

"Well, don't stay out here all night then. Good night, Dad." She looked down at him. "I'm sure we'll manage somehow. We always have and I guess we always will." She bent down and kissed him on the forehead. "The pies will be cool enough to cut a little later, if you want a piece."

"Thank you, Elsie. Thank Fred for me too. He's a good man in his own way." The old man reached up and patted her hand.

"Yes, I suppose."

The old man sat and listened to the crickets and the other night sounds, watched the bats fly in and out of the light from the street lamp, and stroked Iris.

He sat there in the porch swing all night. He got up twice to get a piece of pie with vanilla ice cream on top and to go to the bathroom. Just as it began to grow light, he took the blanket off from his legs and stood up. He folded the blanket and laid it on the swing. He walked down off the porch. At the gate he turned and looked at his grandson's bedroom window. He smiled and lifted his hand.

The old man opened the gate and walked slowly down the sidewalk. Twice he stopped to smell roses. He talked to a grey cat sitting on a fence. He stroked the cat. Iris didn't bark; the cat didn't hiss.

Iris walked at the old man's side. When the sidewalk ended he walked out into the road. Crossing over the bridge, he stopped to look down at the water. The cow and calf looked up as he passed. Old Red stood at the fence.

“Good old Red.” He patted the horse’s neck.

Standing at the edge of the trees bordering the cemetery, he stopped to watch a flock of grey gulls fly slowly out toward the fields. He bent down and petted the dog on the head.

“You go on back now, Iris. Good dog, Iris. Go find Joey.”

The dog looked up at the old man. She whined and then turned and walked down the road. She turned once to look and then kept going.

The old man watched her, and then he walked in under the trees.

Surviving with Hope

John Bennion

Survival Rates by Mary Clyde (Athens: University of Georgia U.P., 1999) 161 pp., \$24.95.

MARY CLYDE'S SHORT STORY COLLECTION, *Survival Rates*, won the Flannery O'Connor award for short fiction last year. Two other Mormon story writers in the past six years have achieved the same honor: Paul Rawlins, whose *No Lie Like Love* won the award in 1994, and Darrell Spencer, whose *Caution: Men in Trees* won the award this year and will be published next year. While these collections are each unique, they have in common their careful devotion to voice, the unique language and vision of their characters. Each story entertains a different stranger, as Bruce Jorgensen has suggested good readers and writers do¹; they all produce a deep and abiding empathy for the plight of the people in the stories.

Clyde's stories are especially generous. Her grace toward her characters begins with her carefully wrought lines, which are as tight as a Pope couplet, as ironic as Jane Austen, and as playful and carefully parsed as stand up comedy: "A little yoga and a lot of money have made her serene."² "Surely divorce is the most public of failures—untidy, personal, inevita-

ble—a hair clog in a bathroom sink."³ "He thought he should tell her more about how his mother's death had changed everything, as the first gunshot turns a battle scene into a battle."⁴ "We trust you," his parents said over and over, until Todd wanted to scream, "Please don't. I think I might be a maniac."⁵ Line by line she forces her characters against the limitations of their own vision. Her stories contain household tragedy rather than epic tensions forged against a pervasive myth, the kind of structure that produces heroes. The result is humanist-Christian empathy for those who—as she said in a recent interview—are, like most of us, imperfect people:

I've never been able to create a villain because I don't understand villains. I feel that I understand people like me, who mean well, yet messed up on the way. The other reason I never create villains is that I don't have a real fondness for them. I have a fondness for my characters—a certain admiration for them in that they struggle through life, indeed finding some way to survive.⁶

Because they are survivors, her characters are pitiable but not pitied.

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1. "To Tell and Hear Stories: Let the Stranger Say," *Sunstone* 16 (July 1993): 40-50.
 2. Mary Clyde, *Survival Rates* (Athens: University of Georgia U.P., 1999), 1.
 3. *Ibid.*, 56.
 4. *Ibid.*, 73.
 5. *Ibid.*, 118.
 6. Mary Clyde, interview by author, tape recording, Provo, Utah, 10 Sept 1999.

They are in troublesome circumstances—a girl whose nose was bitten off by a dog, a man whose mother is dying, two young women who have had illeostomies, a woman who has chosen security over romance in marriage, an infant whose burial urn is abandoned roadside, a divorced wife who can't explain to her son why she can't forgive his father, a young man so petrified of people that he hides in his girlfriend's closet from her family, a man whose cancer might break up his marriage, a high school graduate who doesn't know what he's going to do with his life, a mother whose daughter has just lost her boyfriend, a girl who watched her young women's leader die in a fall from a ski lift.

Of course, my typifying the stories this way—as tragic situations—is a distortion, exactly the order of condescension Clyde avoids. The magic, or I might say Christianity, of her fiction is that the characters earn respect as we consider their *responses* to these difficult experiences. As the dust jacket says, "Mary Clyde's stories explore not so much what has happened already but what happens next." What do we make of the misfortunes of life? She describes the tragedies, large and small, surviving which we endure.

What happens is that her characters encounter moments when they must discover whether they measure up. For one character, this means facing his mother's death with charity for her.

Dear," [his mother had] said, "I'm very ill. It's t-e-r-m-i-n-a-l." And he'd thought, actually prayed, *Please let me be good. This time. Let me rise to this and do the right thing.* But he also thought—and he was ashamed to

admit it—*why did she have to spell it?* (2)

Clyde invites us to courteously consider his plight. Another character says, after dropping herself from the stalled ski lift which killed her youth leader, ". . . in jumping we saved ourselves. In the action, we exercised an option; we made an exclamation. We said, *We have survived.*" In our interview, Clyde said:

I'm interested not only in the pure yes-no of being alive; I'm interested in the dynamics of survival. And what it means. To that character [the one who jumped to save herself from her leader's fate] it meant that while she had suffered something incredible and difficult, she had some agency in it. She had been able to say, we did this and we said, "We're alive." A lot of my stories come down to people grappling with the issue of what kind of life survival means. . . . Part of the reason is that the action itself in many cases is just forced on us. You know, we don't have a lot of say in our thyroid cancer or illeostomy or sometimes in our divorce. But what we start to have a say in is indeed what happens to us.⁷

In "Howard Johnson's House" the protagonist replaced a child's dog-bitten nose with one that is more comely than the one she inherited at birth. The mother may sue him because she wants her child to have the same face she had before the accident. The surgeon faces a contemporary moral/ethical dilemma. His wife, Beth, advises him to refer the case to another doctor.

7. Ibid.

"But suddenly he can't stand to hear it, can't stand to think what this says about Beth—that a certain dispassionate objectivity would allow her to abandon the girl; that her decisions can be based on mere expediency."⁸ Not giving another human careful consideration is unbearable to all of Clyde's narrators. Her narrative voice makes a marriage between fashionable, edgy play with language and old-fashioned respect for others, a courtesy that runs so deep that it transforms the reader.

Clyde's Mormon characters—mothers and daughters, sons and fathers—are both familiar and universal; they fit neither national stereotypes (pinch-faced polygamists, conflicted gay men, radical conservatives, and other types grabbed off the rack ready-made) nor regional stereotypes (faithful pioneers, pious helpmates, and children with cute afflictions). In Clyde's stories the moral act is seeing beyond stereotype. She ignores (as if it were a tiny crack) the current chasm which divides much of Mormon writing into two camps—that which is ardently faithful and that which is ardently critical; both radicalize at the expense of story. Her characters and their situations are more important to her than narrow politics.

In "Victor's Funeral Urn," a woman is reproached by her son, who wishes she could forgive his father's adultery, the adultery for which she divorced him. "Max glimpsed behind the *Wizard of Oz* curtain—behind the booming voice demanding bedroom cleaning and teeth brushing—and saw the puny

reality of me. And how could he hide his disappointment? How could he pretend anything would ever be the same?"⁹ The counterpoint story is that the mother finds a baby's funeral urn at roadside and brings it home. How was something so important lost? Her son is terrified by what this means, that the ashes of an infant might *not* be missed. He says, "'But you'd stop and get it.' Then I see it occur to him it could fall out without someone noticing. 'You'd find it. Wouldn't you? . . . I mean, you'd get it back?'"¹⁰ In that moment of pausing in the face of tragedy, when we consider a moral dilemma carefully with the characters, a kind of grace enters in. Clyde says of her fictional creations,

So I think I have the impulse to embrace them, but I don't feel sorry for them. Even the little girl with the bitten off nose—there's the moment she makes that connection with the doctor and I think, "Oh, she's going to make it." I hope good things for them. . . . I remember when I wrote *Farming Butterflies*, there that kid stood before me, doing that weird thing with his levis [circling his thumb on the brass rivets], and I thought, "I hope he's going to be okay."¹¹

These stories give liberally to the extent that charity becomes an almost physical quality—a margin of chivalry or compassion for another, thus avoiding the small-minded bickering to which we often descend in conversation and fiction.

8. Clyde, *Survival Rates*, 11.

9. *Ibid.*, 55.

10. *Ibid.*, 63.

11. Clyde, interview with author.

So reading, we learn empathy. As one of the victims says at the end of a story, "There is tenderness there, and yes, warmth."¹² But no sentimentality. Her genuine respect for these survivors allows for no teary-eyed and heart-wrenching pity (the grease which makes much Mormon fiction work) for the cancer victims, the divorcees, or those on the brink of leaping into danger.

Always at the edge of vision is the "pale, hardscrabble desert,"¹³ another corrective to sentimentality. One character says, "He feels daring living here, where the landscape doesn't want to be inhabited and seems to wait patiently for him—for all of them—to go."¹⁴ Javelinas and other creatures of the desert slip along the edge of her stories, as if to remind us that there is a whole universe of "other," a setting against which our paltry (but ironically essential) human decisions are made. The physical setting reminds us that tragedy is as close as a rattlesnake in a bush at the edge of a groomed lawn. In the title story a man finally admits his cancer might kill him: "'That's right,' she said. 'You might

die.' He thinks she might stay, now that he has admitted defeat. But his loss is so absolute he blinks repeatedly, sensing he has given away something bigger than anything he knew he owned."¹⁵ Clyde says of this piece:

The story is that he does not look at the cancer as hopeless—kind of brushes it off. And it's his wife that insists. To me the poignant moment is when he confesses he could die and that he realizes that he's given up more than he knew he had—he's given up the hope. Many of the stories come down to that hope.¹⁶

Clyde, and these other writers, have helped me better understand the question, "How does our charity manifest itself in literature?" Not only through the surface detail, the diction of Mormonism—home teaching, baptism for the dead, eternal progression—but rather through deep compassion for people, even if they are only fictional creations. This is close to the compassion Christ demonstrates for each of us and which should be the cornerstone of any Mormon aesthetic.

12. Clyde, *Survival Rates*, 106.

13. *Ibid.*, 1.

14. *Ibid.*, 7.

15. *Ibid.*, 106.

16. Clyde, interview with author.

Anne Perry's *Tathea*: A Preliminary Consideration

Richard H. Cracroft

THE PUBLICATION OF ANNE PERRY'S *Tathea* in September 1999 under Deseret Book's Shadow Mountain imprint marks a significant literary milestone in Mormon letters. Although *Tathea*'s appearance was heralded by *The Salt Lake Tribune* and the *Deseret News*, LDS-centered journal editors, either standing all amazed at this imaginative theological thunderbolt or overwhelmed by the bulk of the 522-page tome (the same number of pages as in the English edition of *The Book of Mormon*), remain curiously silent about this important Mormon cultural event. The fact is Anne Perry, the internationally famous writer of nearly three-dozen, well-received mystery novels set in Victorian England, with seven million books in print, and the most famous and widely published Mormon author (including Gerald N. Lund, Orson Scott Card, and Dean Hughes, and excepting only Mormon himself) has stepped outside of her accustomed genre to write a fantasy-based spiritual autobiography which renders in *Tathea*'s epic journey-to-the-light the Essential Mormonism to which Perry converted in 1967 and to which she continues a fervent disciple.

Some of Perry's readers, accustomed to the familiar eccentricities of astute London detectives William Monk and Thomas and Charlotte Pitt, seem dismayed at their favorite au-

thor's generic switch, even though she continues to produce her two-per-year quota of Monk and Pitt mysteries. On Amazon.com, readers register responses ranging from "disappointment," "tedious," "rather dull," and "she's lost a lot of credit with me," to "one of the most beautiful books I have ever read," and "on par with the great fantasies, adventures, spiritual journeys done by Tolkien and Lewis," and "a remarkable, clever, and poignant book that defies the norms of modern fantasy and demands to be read."¹

Although *Tathea* contains a mystery or two, readers must grant Perry her *donnée* and follow her epic hero, *Tathea*, on her spiritual journey, in which Perry explains her own deeply felt Latter-day Saint convictions "concerning who we are, why we are here on this planet, and where we are hoping to go when this life is over and God finally says, 'Welcome home.'"² *Tathea* becomes Representative Woman, whom we vicariously follow on her Salvation Journey, a journey which also traces the spiritual history of God's dealings with His mortal children—on whatever world they may be found.

In *Tathea*, which Perry originally dedicated to a number of friends, including "Russell M. Nelson[,] for setting the star to follow,"³ one senses her profound purpose in writing the book: "Everything else I've done," she said in a recent interview with Dennis Lythgoe,

1. Amazon customer comments.

2. "Anne's Own Comments," *The Perry Chronicle: The Journal for the Discerning Detective* 2, no. 8 (Nov. 5, 1999), 5.

3. Jacket blurb of *Tathea*, 4.

has been moving toward this [book]. The inspiration came from who I am. I believe very strongly that one of the most powerful ways to reach people who do not wish to open the scriptures and who are not actively searching for something is to tell them stories. You can move people by stories, whether they wish to be moved or not.

Bearing her witness of the Restored Gospel, says Perry, makes *Tathea* "the most important book I've written to date[;] indeed it may well be the most important that I shall ever write."⁵

The genre carrying *Tathea's* spiritual quest—which could be called *Tathea's Travels* or *The Magnificent Journey*—might be called epic fantasy—although it bears little resemblance to classic fantasy; or it could be considered religious allegory—although its figures are only occasionally Bunyanesque (except for the minor character of *Sophia*, who is, she tells us, *wisdom*); or perhaps the novel is Christian apologetics—although Perry is more didactically overt than J. R. R. Tolkien, and is nearer, yet different from, C. S. Lewis; or the book might be called a *Bildungsroman* or a *rite de passage* through humankind's several estates, ala Nephi Anderson's *Added Upon*, The Book of Abraham (especially chapter 3), or O. S. Card's free adaptation (in his Homecoming series) of the Lehiite wanderings, or—inevitably we turn to what were likely the greatest influences on Perry's imagination, namely Lehi's visionary journeys in 1 Nephi and mankind's pilgrimage to holiness as represented in the House of the Lord. After all is said and *donnéed*, however, *Tathea* thumbs its literary

nose at generic categorization and takes a form distinct and unique in Mormon letters, if not in world literature.

The setting of *Tathea*, according to Perry, although not readily deduced from the book, is "on another world, not unlike our own, about two thousand years ago."⁶ The strange and exotic pre-technological cultures which *Tathea* visits in vision or in person vaguely suggest ancient Rome, Egypt, barbaric northern Europe, and renaissance Venice, but, again, are distinctive. The racially varied peoples and societies which Perry depicts share Earth's all-too-familiar capacities for good and evil, love and hate, avarice and generosity, sorrow and joy, hope and despair, folly and nobility. The characters in *Tathea* are not subtly nuanced or psychologically dynamic: they are epic characters, good or evil, who become better or worse, according to their embrace of truth. In an attempt to humanize *Tathea*, Perry dangles moral and ethical temptations before her, but the reader does not for a moment believe this otherworldly saint will fall, even to learn the value of repentance.

The Prologue: Preparing for the Journey

The book divides naturally into a Prologue: Preparing for the Journey; Part I, The Vision of the War in Heaven; Part II, The Book and the Mission; and Part III, The Coda: The Words of the Book. The prologue begins as *Tathea*, wife of the Isarch of Shinabar, "the oldest civilization in the world," awakens in the night to find her young son and royal husband

5. "Anne's Own Comments," p. 5.

6. Ibid.

murdered in a palace coup. Spirited into the desert by a loyal servant, the spiritually shattered Tathea takes ship and sails, Ulysses-like, through the dreadful Maelstrom to exile in the Lost Lands, where she seeks out the sage "who was said to know the meaning and purpose of all things" (13). To her queries, "Why do I exist? Who am I?" (26), the old man, directing her quest "to know the mind of God" (26), sends her to the seashore to prepare her soul to receive further light and knowledge.

**The Pre-Existence:
The Vision of the War in Heaven**

In the dawn, Tathea's guide, Ishrafeli, an angel and a Christ-figure but not the Christ, comes for her in a skiff, asking only, "Are you sure?" "I am sure," she answers (28), and the pair embarks upon five distinctive but thematically related journeys. In Parfyryon, she encounters Cassiodorus, a triumphant general who is conspiring to rob the city of its agency; learning that his course is "the age-old pattern of all tyranny" (48), she unmasks him as "a shadow of the Great Enemy." Cassiodorus pronounces a malediction on Tathea, which recurs in each of the subsequent journeys: "Woman, . . . I know who you are. I have your name on my hands and I shall remember you in all the days that are to come" (50). In Bal-Eeya, Tathea, acting like Charlotte Pitt in Perry's mysteries, detects and exposes the woman Dulcina as a selfish servant of the Great Enemy; whereupon she, too, swears in her hatred for Tathea, "I'll find you wherever you go." (77) Next, Ishrafeli and Tathea travel to Malgard, where the rulers have banned change, pain, sadness and death. Ishrafeli, in singing a plaintive song, introduces the city to the dark night of the soul which makes more

joyous the subsequent soaring to great light, and he understands that, "I have broken a dream with the hand of awakening" (97) and has brought about the fall of Malgard. Tathea, shocked at the pain which truth has caused the innocents, complains to Ishrafeli, who teaches her that, "our pain is incomplete if we suffer only for ourselves" (98). After exposing the leader of Malgard as yet another servant of the Great Enemy, who desires to keep his people in ignorance, they undertake their fourth journey, into the frozen Lands of the Great White Bear where they join Kolliko and his band in warfare against the evil Tascarebus and his barbaric army. When Kolliko is killed Ishrafeli says, "my friend has gone his way and kept his first estate" (109), and the alert reader (you and I), in an "ah-hah" experience, begins to sense that we are tracking Tathea through the pre-mortal existence, a fact which is confirmed by Sophia, who encourages them in their "journey of the soul," and explains that, "what you have learned here you will never entirely forget, and it will serve you . . . in your second estate, when you will have forgotten this" (121). Tathea and Ishrafeli arrive at their fifth destination, Sardonaris, a Venetian-like city of canals ruled by the secret acts of the Oligarchs. Separated from Ishrafeli, Tathea, attacked and wounded, is taken home by Ellida, who possesses the gift of healing (she will reappear in her Second Estate as the Lady Eleni, a healer). Betrayed to the Oligarch Tallagistro, yet another "Shadow of the Great Enemy" (144), Tathea is delivered to execution in scenes which suggest the betrayal and execution of "our [unnamed] brother" (151) who died for all mankind in all worlds.

Spared from death at the last moment, Tathea is directed to a long, pillared gallery, where she concludes her

journey through the pre-mortal existence by being allowed to enter into the holy presence of God, "Man of Holiness" (147), and to witness in vision the Grand Council in Heaven and the ensuing war. The first speaker before the Council is new to Mormon theology—he is the humanist Savixor, who posits an egotistical humanist agenda for mankind, "this most marvelous of all creatures." Such a self-sufficient creature "does not need gods!" he haughtily exclaims (149). Then another steps forward, "so like Ishrafeli and yet unlike him," thinks Tathea: "I am Asmodeus," he says, leading us back to the script; "I have a plan that is better than Savixor's. I will save every soul that is given me. Not one of all the millions shall be lost[;] not one shall perish or fall into sin!" (150). He concludes ringingly: "I will bring back every soul as perfect as I receive it; therefore follow my plan and let me have dominion over them—and the glory" (151).

In response, Ishrafeli comes forward, "sweet and sure, without shadow, yet as she had never seen him before" (151). Speaking not his own words, Perry carefully explains, but "those of our brother who has already redeemed the flesh of all worlds from the corruption of physical death," Ishrafeli outlines a plan whereby every man must have choice, agency. "Let this be the plan," he concludes: "a world where every good and every evil is possible. Let man choose for himself, and the glory be thine." The Man of Holiness declares, tetragrammatonly, as in the Book of Abraham, "Let him choose. . . . Prove him, that he may work his own salvation and inherit glory, dominion and everlasting joy, for this is indeed why he was born." Transfixed by what she has witnessed, an exultant Tathea realizes, "This was the truth. This was

what she had been searching for and paid such an agonizing price to know" (153).

The Book and The Mission

At this crucial and culminating moment—the end of her quest—Tathea is introduced to The Book, "covered in beaten gold and set with chrysolite and pearls, . . . its workmanship unlike any she had seen. Its great hasp was set with a single star ruby" (153). She reads the first words: "Child of God, if your hands have unloosed the hasp of this Book, then the intent of your heart is at last unmarred by cloud of vanity or deceit." It continues by revealing what Latter-day Saints call The Law of Eternal Progression: "When God was yet a man like yourself, with all your frailties, your needs, and your ignorance, walking a perilous land as you do, even then was the law irrevocable." She reads further: "By obedience you may overcome all things, . . . until no glory is impossible. By such a path did God ascend unto holiness" (154).

Filled with the power and spirit of The Book, Tathea understands her charge: "She would take [The Book] back to the world, share with everyone this treasure, this key to all happiness" (154). Ishrafeli leads her into the presence of God: "In the center [of the room] stood one Man alone, and in His face was the love that has created worlds, and before whose beauty the stars tremble" (156). The Man of Holiness places His hands upon her head, and His words, "written on her soul," stress mankind's divine lineage, divine potential, and divinely assured agency to choose in all things:

I bless you to go forth in the world and teach My Word to all the people of the earth, that they may know

they are My children and may become even as I am, and inherit everlasting dominion and glory and joy. But they are agents unto themselves, and in all things they must choose" (156).

Then, following the ancient pattern, as Man of Holiness exits, Asmodeus, the Great Enemy, comes, tempting, "his eyes glitter[ing] with a hatred older than time." Ishrafeli joins combat with Asmodeus. The two marshal their fantastic forces, which recall the Book of Revelation: the terrible Manticore against the fantastic Unicorn, Basilisk against huge White Bear, and Dragon of Sloth versus the White Swan of Compassion. Ishrafeli triumphs and sends Tathea, cradling The Book, back to her Second Estate, to begin her mission to the world.

The Mission

When Tathea awakens back on the shores of the Lost Lands, she has forgotten everything about her journey through the First Estate, but she has not returned empty-handed:

There was only one certainty, absolute and unchangeable, The Book clasped in her arms was the source of all that was beautiful and precious, the beginning and the end of everlasting joy. The power of the universe was in its pages. She must share it. Everyone must know (165).

She retains, as well, the knowledge that she must teach everyone that, "He was the Father of all mankind. They were begotten in His likeness"; that mankind carried "in its frail and foolish soul the seeds of Godhood"; and that life was a journey back to God (166).

Her own spiritual quest fulfilled,

Tathea, still an exile from Shinabar, travels to Camassia. She establishes herself, studies and translates The Book, which is written in an ancient tongue, and undertakes to teach the words of The Book, first to Camassia, which she accomplishes by beginning with the royal family, and then to her native Shinabar, which she conquers at the head of Camassian armies. Daunted by the challenge of presenting The Book to the emperor Isadorous, she reads the familiar promise of The Book: "I give no commandment except I make a way possible for you to fulfill it, if you will work in obedience and trust in me" (191). She converts the emperor with the simple intelligence that, stripped of all his power and possessions, "you are a child of God. And that means you must learn to behave like Him" (193). The emperor, like all converts to the words of The Book, enters into a covenant with Man of Holiness "to walk in the teachings of The Book and keep its word" (196).

At every juncture, however, Tathea is opposed by yet other manifestations of the Shadow of Asmodeus, who tempts and tries her and, on threat of destroying the capitol of Shinabar, persuades her to abdicate the throne, Alma-like. Leaving the original Book in possession of her first convert, Ranufis—there are now many copies of the text—she undertakes to teach The Book to other peoples.

Tathea and the high priest Tugomir, her once-implacable enemy who makes a Korihor-like turnabout in his conversion to The Book, undertake Paul-and-Timothy- or Alma-and-Amulek-like missionary journeys to convert the forest people of Sylum and the Flemens. Through her missionary journeys, we learn of the mission of "the Beloved One":

There was a beloved Son, of whom

God spoke . . . , who lived on another world from ours, in such a way that He might answer the law and redeem worlds without number. I do not know how He did it, only that He did. I cannot touch such a thing with the furthest reaches of my imagination, but I know that it is so. . . . But if you ask God yourself, He will cause you to know it. You will feel a fire of warmth inside your heart, a radiance, and a great peace, and it will be the voice of God" (370).

Tathea's last missionary journey takes her to the Lost Legion and into a long and thrilling adventure in the Waste Lands against Yaltabaoth and his terrible horde. She is successful in converting and bringing hope to the Lost Legionnaires, who "drank so deeply of the words of The Book," that like the City of Enoch, "they became of one heart and mind in purpose, and every man sought his neighbor's well-being" (397).

At the conclusion of the final battle, in which she and the diminished Legion thwart the evil Yaltabaoth, Tathea receives "The Vision of the Beginning of Time," which, "knowing it must never be forgotten," she engraves "painstakingly on thin, metal plates which the farrier made for her because they had no paper" (408). In the vision, a kind of Gospel According to Tathea, she sees a Woman in a beautiful garden being tempted by Asmodeus. The Woman, fully aware of her right of choice, and fully aware of the consequences of any decision she takes, chooses to partake of the forbidden fruit, knowing "I have eaten death, as well as life. But it is better so," for "without knowledge of good and evil I cannot become like my Father. I know

that I walk a knife blade between light and darkness" (405).

As the vision progresses, Tathea learns that, just as the blessing of the fall came about by one heroic woman in a garden making a crucial choice, so mankind's future "depends on one man in the meridian of time, who had offered to live without stain and at the appointed hour, to face Asmodeus in another garden." Tathea sees the Woman "put it to her lips and ate," thereby launching the "exile of the great journey, with all its trials and pain, its labor and grief." And, we read, Tathea "loved [the Man and Woman] with all her heart" (405), and all believing men and women who came thereafter "kept faith that in that white instant at the center of time, one man would come who would stand alone in a garden and look upon hell, and he would not turn his face away from it" (406).

In the same Alpha and Omega vision, Tathea sees the advent of the Beloved. Listen to Perry's moving rendering of her Gospel:

The moment came, the day and the hour. The man was born. He became a child, and then a youth. . . . And the man came to maturity with a pure heart and clean hands and began to preach the Word of God with power. Some listened to Him, many did not He shed light about him, those who feared the light conspired against Him, and the weak, the cruel, and the self-seeking . . . hated Him with a terror because He showed them the truth, and they could not abide it. . . . It was the moment. They sought to put Him to death, and He prayed alone in the garden. His soul trembled for what He knew must come,

and He longed to step aside, but He knew at last what weighed in the balance. Eternity before and after hung on this one battle.

And they took the man and killed him, and He died in the flesh. But His spirit was whole and perfect and living, and all creation rejoiced. The dead of all ages past who had kept faith with Him awoke and were restored, and those who had died in ignorance were taught in accordance with the promises of God. And the man returned to the earth to tell those who loved Him of His victory, and they believed and were filled with a hope which no darkness could crush or devour.

They taught in His name, and some believed, and some did not. And when they passed from mortality into immortality, their words became perverted, even as the man had foreseen in the face of hell. Evil things were done in His name, and twisted doctrines spread a new kind of darkness over the world. But even while there was ignorance, war, corruption, and tyranny, there was also love, courage, and sacrifice, and a hope which never quite faded away. Again men waited and watched and prayed.

Then came the Restoration (though never called such in the novel):

And after a great time, truth was given anew out of heaven, and the old powers were restored, and the old persecutions, because as ever the Word of God was a sword which divided the people, and a mirror which showed a man his face as it truly was (406-408).

Tathea returns to Shinabar, where

she learns that Ra-Nufis, her first convert, has betrayed The Book and led the nation into apostasy, violating the people's agency, perverting "the doctrines of God" (445), promising life without pain, teaching a false God, establishing a professional priesthood, introducing non-related ritual, and asserting that "Ra-Nufi's interpretation of The Book is the only correct one" (463). Threatened with death by the jealous priesthood, Tathea storms the underground vault where The Book is kept, kills Ra-Nufis in a thrilling encounter, and flees with The Book, which she takes back to the Lost Lands, battling onboard ship the Unrepentant Dead, who are dispersed only when her companion raises his right arm and commands, "In the name of Him who faced the powers of hell and overcame them, I command you to depart!" (495).

Coming full circle in her long and arduous journey in defense of truth, Tathea returns to the Islands at the Edge of the World. Overcoming one last temptation by the tenacious Asmodeus, whom she at last recognizes as "the corruption of what had once been sublime," and, resisting his last temptation, rebukes him. Carrying The Book, Tathea is met at the ancient seashore by a man "like Asmodeus, slender and dark with a face of marvelous beauty, and yet he was also utterly different. In him was the knowledge of pain and glory, and his eyes shone with the light in his soul." Instantly she remembers Ishrafeli from the First Estate and recalls the lessons of her early visions. Ishrafeli gives her a surprising final charge:

You took the fire of truth from heaven. You must guard it until there comes again one who is pure

enough in heart to open the seal and read what is written. It may be a hundred years, it may be a thousand, but God will preserve you until that time and the end of all things. In that day I shall come again, and we shall fight the last battle of the world, you and I together (504).

Ishrafeli kisses her and walks into the sun, leaving Tathea on the shore, "the golden book in her arms and the fire and the light of God in her soul" (504). She waits there yet—and will wait there until the sequel, expected next October, when she will find the boy who will "raise the warriors who will be righteous and strong enough to fight Armageddon."⁷

Coda: The Words of The Book

In the process of translating and teaching the words of The Book to the people, Tathea introduces the reader to the words and message of The Book, until she has gradually revealed and interpreted most of its contents of The Book, which Perry presents in its entirety in a seventeen-page coda. The prologue to The Book begins: "The conversation between Man of Holiness and Asmodeus, the Great Enemy." The body of The Book is a transcript of the Great Conversation, during which Man of Holiness describes His Plan of Salvation, and Asmodeus presents his dissenting and antithetical responses. For example, The Man of Holiness, echoing the doctrines of Joseph Smith's King Follett Discourse, says in stately words, "It is My purpose and My joy that in time beyond thought he may become even as I am, and to-

gether we shall walk the stars, and there shall be no end." But Asmodeus counters, "[man] is weak and will despair at the first discouragement. But if you were to set lanterns to his path of rewards and punishments, then he would see the good from the evil, and his choices would be just." And when the Man of Holiness promises that the obedient man will one day hold "My power in his hands to create worlds and dominions and peoples without end," Asmodeus retorts: "He will never do that! The dream is a travesty!—Give him knowledge, a sure path. He will never be a god, but he will be saved from the darkness within him" (507).

The Man of Holiness tells Asmodeus that it is not about power, as he mistakenly believes; "It is love . . . it has always been love" (508). At the heart of His plan is agency. "I will not rob man of his agency to choose for himself, as I have chosen in eternities past, what he will do and who he will become." "Wickedness can never be joy," He intones. "Even I cannot make it so" (508). The journey to godhood requires obedience and self-mastery: "If he would become as I am, and know My joy, which has no boundary in time or space, then the first and greatest step on that journey is to harness the passions within himself and use their force for good. Without that he has no life but only a semblance of it, a fire-shadow in the darkness." He insists, "There must be opposition in all things; without the darkness, there is no light" (517). Asmodeus argues that in exercising agency man will abuse the procreative powers "above all the other powers you give him. He will make of that desire a dark and

7. Lythgoe, "Anne Perry," E3.

twisted thing. . . . He will corrupt and pervert, distort its very nature until it grows hideous." But Man of Holiness persists: "I know it, and My soul weeps. But it must be. The more sublime the good, the deeper the evil that is possible from its debasement" (509). Still, He says,

I know him better than he knows himself. I give to every soul that which is necessary for it to reach the fullness of its nature, to know the bitter from the sweet, which is the purpose of this separation from Me of his mortal life. It is a brief span for an eternal need, for some too brief for happiness also. But to each is given the opportunity to learn what is needful for that soul, to strengthen what is weak, to hallow and make beautiful that which is ugly, to give time to winnow out the chaff of doubt and impatience, and fire to burn away the dross of selfishness. The chances come in many forms and oftentimes more than once (510).

But at the end, to Asmodeus's scornful question as to why Man of Holiness would undertake all of this "for a creature who is worthy of nothing?" God replies, "It is because I love him. . . . That is all. It is the light which cannot fade, the life which is endless. I am God, and Love is the name of My soul" (522).

The Question of Style: Conclusion

I present these lengthy citations from The Book in order to address the question of style in *Tathea*, which is at once off-putting for readers accustomed to Perry's mystery novels, and "virtuous, lovely, . . . of good report or praiseworthy," for those who read the

book not only as an epic, full of sound and fury and profoundly significant, but as alternative holy writ, paraphrasings of God's Word, and close to the mark. Perry's style in *Tathea* must steer a tight course between suggesting on one page the credible and powerful presence of the divine in human life, on whatever world; while evoking in the next pages exotic desert and frozen landscapes, wild seascapes, and even the holy halls of God; and on a further page eliciting the fantastic through evil, malformed dwarfs, a fairy-angel with bells on his toes, ships manned by the Unrepentant Dead, horrible Manticores and Dragons, stately Unicorns and White Swans, not to forget a princess who is a practitioner of white magic and an evil king-mother who is a practitioner of necromancy.

Not everyone will agree with me (oh happy day that would be!), but I believe she has brought it off with distinction in this landmark *tour de force*, which will hereafter occupy a distinguished place in Mormon letters. If we grant Anne Perry her *données*, or, as one of my errant-prone missionaries used to plead, "cut [her] a little slack," I am persuaded that she has brilliantly negotiated a literary Scylla and Charbydis and written a book which is even more than what she calls "a gripping story of love and conflict that also looks at the great challenges in life—the nature and meaning of who we are." *Tathea* is vitally important to Perry herself, and, by implication, to every covenanted Latter-day Saint, dealing, as she describes it, with the moment of consecration,

the dilemma each of us could potentially face when we are allowed to receive something that is so important we wish to share it with others, but realise [sic] that in doing

so we will put our own lives considerably at risk. At that point, we reach the crossroads and have to ask ourselves if we believe in what we are doing enough that we would be willing to give up all we have for it, if necessary even our lives.⁸

In writing *Tathea*, Anne Perry has courageously put her career on the line in

proclaiming her faith in and consecrating her talents to the Restoration, by revisiting and rendering, however obliquely, the Plan of Exaltation, and she has done it in a fantastic, magically realistic, exciting, refreshing, and spiritually moving way which heeds Emily Dickinson's counsel to "Tell all the Truth but tell it slant."⁹

bash

bash: *latterday plays* at the Douglas Fairbanks Theatre, New York City, NY, Summer 1999

The last time we saw Mormons prominently featured on the New York stage was in Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*, where an orgasm-inducing female Angel Moroni crashed (literally) through an apartment ceiling and radicalized an AIDS-infected gay man into a millennial prophet.

In Neil LaBute's recent Off-Broadway hit *bash: latterday plays*, Mormons (and Mormonism) were not half so over-the-top as Kushner's wild creations, which were inserted by the playwright for theatrical effect and as a comment on LDS homophobia. Instead, the Latter-day Saints in *bash* reveal Mormon character as it crystallizes like sugar along narrative lines of devastating proportions.

Happily, *bash* has bigger fish to fry than just making sure we get our quota this year of the ever-growing membership of America's most successful indigenous religion. LaBute, who re-

cently was the bad boy of BYU's theatre and film department where he was engaged in a Ph.D. program, is by no means a provincial Mormon playwright. He is most noted for crushingly dark films, *In the Company of Men* and *Your Friends and Neighbors*, where nary a Mormon is seen nor heard of.

Like Euripides and other Greek playwrights, LaBute is tackling big themes, specifically evil, albeit in the relatively quiet, plebeian lives of four modern Americans. Two of those characters were played in the first and third one-acts by Calista Flockhart of TV's *Ally McBeal*, undoubtedly one of the reasons why this riveting, scorching show (in a limited run through July 25 this past summer) enjoyed enormous popularity.

All of the characters in *bash* find that telling their story is tantamount to their survival, a motivating factor in Mr. LaBute's films as well. It's as if reality is only in the telling, and the telling burnishes their lives into understanding, into absolution, into justification, and perhaps into meaning.

8. Anne's Own Comments.

9. #1129.

The woman in the police station indicates to the unseen inquisitors that the tape in the recorder is about to run out. It's as if she must have a permanent record of her story, which makes up her life, not unlike the tragic heroes of Greek drama. It's not an unusual story, she says at one point, except that it happened to her.

More than just "holding the torch" for the father of her son, this woman is caught in a deadly cocktail of garden variety, adolescent fantasy and Greek cosmology on a poignantly elementary level. Again and again she struggles to remember the Greek word which denotes how humanity through its mortal nature has thrown the whole earth off its axis. And when she'd learned by chance in a high school office of her lover's hasty exit, she was, she explains, "frozen in time. All I could hear was the universe. The cosmos was laughin' down at me."

What's touching about this woman is that she is a simple person filled with street talk. Ms. Flockhart was able miraculously to appear as both a tower of complicated desire and a mall-traipsing ditz at the same time. The result was that her strung-out and beaten-in character had the dignity of a tragic figure, alternately addled and oddly calm, eventually exploding into blood-curdling screams right out of *Oedipus Rex*.

In *Iphegenia in Orem*, a Mormon executive finds that he must tell his story, involving the death of his infant daughter, even if it's to a stranger. Or perhaps *because* it's to a stranger. "I can't tell anyone at church," he explains to a woman sitting across from him in his hotel room, "or the police. So I chose you. I walked through the lobby and I just chose you."

Ron Eldard played with cheesy affability the middle-aged Orem resident

who finds the trappings of his office life (the fax machines whirring, the hustle and bustle) almost to be an aphrodisiac. And, in fact, Eldard got several laughs through his ethnic Mormon boyish tics and his creepy naivete that somehow seemed calculated. When the character is threatened with being downsized out of the firm, he becomes energized, spinning, as it were, into an ancient Mediterranean world of fate.

This middle executive, who goofily references old movies like *Alfie* and *Kramer vs. Kramer*, makes a huge Mormon point of the fact that he doesn't drink and doesn't swear. And yet ultimately, he reveals a twisted justification, perhaps more Faustian than Greek, for a deed so dastardly that the audience audibly gasps.

In *A Gaggle of Saints*, we get LaBute's signature, David Mamet-inspired cross talk even though the piece is actually two interlaced monologues of a college couple about to be engaged. Theirs is a tale of a "bash" or party, which they and a few other couples from neighboring wards upstate attend in Manhattan—a prom of sorts, glitized and tuxedoed-out. John, a returned missionary and the son of a bishop who likes to give his son unwanted haircuts, was played by Paul Rudd who was all brash and bravado, a young lion still entranced with his own roar. Watching him talk about how he met Sue (Ms. Flockhart stunningly dressed in a black taffeta gown) as well as about his friends and myriad exploits was like watching an athletic event of sorts—in a tux. Both he and Sue were instantly likable by sheer virtue of unabashed youthful charm. "He's cute, nice body, and I didn't know him" recounts Sue when she first spies John on the school outdoor track.

But at the plush Plaza Hotel,

which Sue describes dreamily as “a wedding cake someone left out there on the corner” opposite Central Park, the “gaggle” of Latter-day Saints cannot hold onto the picture-perfect night of their dreams (literally punctuated from time to time by the clash and flash of a photo shoot on the actors’ still selves). John, it seems, can’t seem to get over the sight of two gay men being affectionate with one another in the park, one of whom reminds him of his father. So it is later, after the dance, while the girls rest in the hotel room the group has rented as a crash pad for the night out, that the boys go for a walk in the park. When John recognizes one of the men from earlier, he follows him into a public bathroom while his friends wait just outside and the word “bash” eventually takes on a different meaning.

Evil in this one act is first made to make us laugh, to collectively luxuriate in the memory of our own youthful ardor, all dressed up in formal attire. It is an evil embodied in a passing “adventure,” in young men “giggling like school boys” as they clatter back to the hotel. It is an evil in which a ring is stolen from a broken body on a concrete lavatory floor, in which a vial of Mormon consecrated oil is mockingly poured on a now soft and bloody head, a so-called “elder” crooning a “blessing” in the *coup de grace* of this priesthood posse-turned animal.

“I know the scriptures,” states John, in a tone deadly serious. “And come on! It’s [homosexuality is] wrong!”

The evil portrayed in “bash” is so brackish, so jolting in its revelation that Mr. LaBute leaves us wondering how it could ever happen. And like Sue, back in the hotel room with the other primping and simpering girls, we are also left questioning how any of us could decide not to know in order to keep the evening, the relationship, the life, whatever, so perfect. “It was a perfect night,” she tells us, while fingering the gold ring Joe presented her in front of the others at breakfast.

Mormons are sometimes referred to as “Super Americans” because of their accommodation *en extremis* to “traditional” American ways and mores. LaBute has done what *Angels in America* did a few years ago—that is, posited Mormons into the conversation which the rest of the world is already privy to. But the bad boy playwright from Provo also seems to have created Latter-day Saints whose stories (even as they tell them) are far from the rosy, family-centered picture we get elsewhere—from 50 East North Temple to *Time* Magazine to Barbara Walters. What vaults evil into institutional, arguably cosmic dimensions is not that one is capable of it, but the wholesale denial of our capacity to do evil.

CONTRIBUTORS

ART CREDITS

This issue features the art of Robert Sumner, who currently resides in Virginia Beach, Virginia, and is studying arts administration at Old Dominion University. His work has appeared most recently in the New York metropolitan area at exhibits with jurors from the Guggenheim Museum and the New York Museum of Modern Art. His art will next be seen in May 2000 at the Lindenberg Gallery in the Chelsea district of New York City.

AUTHORS

JOHN BENNION writes short fiction and novels about the western Utah desert and the people who inhabit that forbidding country. Publications include *Breeding Leah and Other Stories* (Signature Books, 1991) and *Falling toward Heaven*, forthcoming this year from the same press. He is currently working on *Avenging Saint*, a nineteenth-century murder mystery, and *Second Wind*, a young adult novel. An associate professor at Brigham Young University, Bennion teaches creative writing, the British novel, Mormon literature, and Wilderness Writing, a course in which students hike and backpack and write personal narratives based on their experiences. He lives in Springville with his wife, Karla, and their three youngest children.

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GRANT BOSWELL graduated with a Ph.D. in rhetoric, linguistics, and literature from the University of Southern California in 1985. He is now an

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RICHARD CRACROFT, Nan Osmond Grass Professor in English at Brigham Young University, is one of the most important and active critics of Mormon literature. With Neal Lambert he has edited two anthologies of Mormon Literature, *A Believing People: Literature of the Latter-day Saints* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1974; online at <http://humanities.byu.edu/MLDB/abp-toc.htm>) and *22 Young Mormon Writers* (Provo, Utah: Communications Workshop, 1975). Cracroft continues to write numerous reviews of Mormon literature in a regular column in *BYU Magazine* and in other venues of Mormon criticism. A past president of the Association for Mormon Letters, he teaches Literature of the Latter-day Saints at Brigham Young University, where he currently serves as the director of the Center for the Study of Christian Values in Literature.

EUGENE ENGLAND is a critic, essayist, teacher, and leading scholar of Mormon letters. In 1966 he co-founded *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, an important venue ever since for Mormon literature and criticism. He co-founded the Association of Mormon Letters and has promoted Mormon writing and writers through reviews, anthologies, and critical writing. He taught Mormon literature at Brigham Young University for many years and currently teaches Mormon literature at Utah Valley State College.

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VALERIE HOLLADAY received her bachelor's and master's degrees in English from Brigham Young University. Her personal essays have previously appeared in *Dialogue* and other literary magazines. Currently the

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TESSA MEYER SANTIAGO has received numerous awards for her personal essays, many of which have appeared in various LDS periodicals. Most recently she has been serving as the editor of *This People* magazine. A native of South Africa, she lives in Provo with her husband, Kevin, and their four children. She is committed to writing and encouraging personal essays, believing that "we, especially Mormon women, need to be more expressive in capturing the content and significance of the stories and lives we live."

DOUGLAS THAYER lives in Provo, Utah, with his wife, Donlu, and family. He teaches creative writing at BYU. He has published a novel, *Summer Fire*, and two collections of short stories, *Under the Cottonwoods* and *Mr. Wahlquist in Yellowstone*. He is currently working on other fiction.

MARGARET YOUNG has published several novels and short story collections including *Salvador*, *House without Walls* and *Love Chains*. She currently teaches creative writing at BYU. She has authored the play *I Am Jane* (*The Story of Jane Manning James*), which was recently staged for the Genesis Group in Utah.



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