

# BOOKS

A Response to the review published in *Sunstone*, Volume Two, Number Two of *Turn Again Home*.

A book deserves to be as well read as it is well written, and the quality of both operations is what is reflected in a responsible review. For that reason I cannot take seriously the note on Herbert Harker's *Turn Again Home* in the latest issue of *Sunstone*. I fear that your reviewer reads less well than Harker writes. Let me illustrate.

She begins by suggesting that the book's slow start—she confesses to some difficulty in getting past the first hundred pages—is attributed to its lack of plot. That she got to the end without discovering where the plot lay, unaware that it took as its thrust the involutions in the mind of its protagonist rather than the events of his present life, suggests that she was reading on the level of a pulp novel, a book which was written for much more thoughtful consideration.

Damning with faint praise, she accuses the book of following a formula for Mormon novels by including what she calls the "Big Three" topics: polygamy, the Mountain Meadows massacre, and Joseph Smith, as though that were the Mormon equivalent of box office oriented sex-and-violence patterns. To suggest that the book is *about* any of those is to lose its kernel in a flurry of chaff, like saying *A Farewell to Arms* is about the Spanish civil war. The book is *about* things which far transcend the milieu in which it is set. A responsible review would perceive and delineate those themes and patterns which are the stuff of the novel.

The one point of criticism raised in *Sunstone's* review worthy of serious consideration concerns itself with the book's transitions from time present to time past. "A few well-placed *hads*," as recommended by your reviewer, is hardly adequate to the complexity of reality with which Harker is dealing, however. The memory merges with the present mind in ways much more subtle than mere grammatical shifts can represent. "Slowly," Harker writes, "with the same languid motion with which those years had passed, the memory of them returned to him." The techniques of transition, as James

Joyce and Virginia Woolf discovered long ago, must reflect artistically the motions of the mind—and be as varied, one would add, as the workings of the mind itself. So Harker carries his reader "slowly," with the "languid motion" of a swaying tree from time present to time past, or suddenly, with the swift intrusion of an opening door, back to time present. All is done with care, and usually with great skill.

As in, for example, the transition from a scene remembered in which Paula seduces Jared from his childhood into a temptation with the reassurance that "You don't have to worry. I'll stop you" (p. 145). The next paragraph continues: "Tonight he did not want to be stopped. Somewhere he'd discover a dark pool of wickedness, and bathe himself in it, wash away the crust of piety that covered him like a coat of mail. Perhaps at last he'd find peace, rest from this infernal labor of righteousness." The following paragraph begins, "As he came over a height of land..." and the transition is complete. One short intervening paragraph, in which time present overlaps time past, in which the thoughts which Jared recalls from one period are precisely those which apply to the later situation, brings the reader carefully from past to present without the jarring of a sudden transition.

But the device accomplishes so much more than mere transition. The whole question of the individual struggling under the weight of his cultural baggage, and the temptation to chuck the whole of it by some sudden act of rebellion, tells us not only where Jared was, mentally, in the past sequence, but what he is dealing with in the on-going story. If there is a problem in Harker's transition it is that there are too many *hads*, not too few; those more complex transitions which require some thought and sensitivity on the part of the reader are well worth the effort.

*Sunstone's* reviewer and many of the rest of us have perhaps jaded our taste on too many shallow stories in Mormon settings to be ready for a work of depth, one willing to plumb the depths of our souls for our Mormon response to the larger questions. While I'm not sure that Harker's *Turn Again Home* is the Great Mormon Novel, I am convinced that it will hold up to more responsible criticism than it received at the hand of *Sunstone's* reviewer.

Valerie March

*Turn Again Home*, perhaps the most significant fictional work about the Latter-day Saints to appear in recent years, merits continued examination and study. In that

spirit, and for readers unfamiliar with the original *Sunstone* review, the following is offered.

**Turn Again Home** by Herbert Harker  
Random House, 1977; 245 pages; \$7.95

I have made the drive from Provo to Los Angeles many times and have rarely failed to enjoy the expansiveness of the countryside along the road. But while making the drive several weeks ago, I experienced something new as I neared Cedar City. Having recently read Herbert Harker's novel *Turn Again Home*, I found myself picturing Jared Roseman searching for the site of the Mountain Meadows Massacre, traveling southward as I was traveling, but doing so on horseback. I even considered turning off the freeway to find the meadow, stand with Jared beside the mound of stones marking the victims' common grave, and wonder with him at his father's part in the murders there. *Turn Again Home* tells both Jared's and his father's stories.

The novel opens in Cardston, Alberta, in 1915. When Alma Roseman disappears on his seventy-seventh birthday, his son Jared begins a long search to find him. This search leads Jared south to Smithfield, Utah, where he is reunited with his mother (he has been raised in Alberta with the family of Alma's second wife). In his mother's home, Jared discovers his father's old journal, passages of which intimate an involvement in the Mountain Meadows Massacre. Jared followed this lead, traveling on to Cedar City. There he meets a woman who, as a child, survived the massacre. She is anxious enough to describe to him what did transpire in the meadow that day. The effects of this discovery on Jared's life and on the lives of those he loves interplay throughout the remaining story until brought to dramatic climax and resolution.

Characterization is pivotal in the novel, and Harker is no immature craftsman. His technique serves his purpose. For example, the plot serves to illuminate the people whose story it tells. Therefore, when Jared is confused in the early chapters of the book, groping forward and discovering through both action and flashback, the reader is given no "in" on the exploration. The deft use of flashback allows the reader to participate with Jared, to get inside his psyche and learn as he learns, for example, who Grace is. The reader does not simply watch Jared learn, but comes to know him.

*Turn Again Home* is about Mormons and the West; it is also a mystery and an historical romance. But the novel transcends the limitations of regional literature and literary genres. Non-Mormon readers, for

example, do not need to understand the doctrine of blood atonement to appreciate the effects of Mountain Meadows on both the murderer and the survivor. The tragedy apparent from merely following the story line would not be any more poignant for knowing the Mormon requirements for gaining the celestial kingdom. In fact a definition of "celestial kingdom" is not even necessary for non-Mormon readers to appreciate the use of the term in the book. Indeed, the novel moves beyond the narrow confines of a sectarian literature, beyond polygamy and Mountain meadows, even beyond the death of the prophet in Illinois, to broader concerns, universal themes of revenge, retribution, sin, guilt and responsibility.

And despite some triteness (Paula, for example, is a thin stereotype) and some jarring dialogue (I have trouble seeing Jared's taciturn father describing a bullet wound as a blooming red flower), *Turn Again Home* boasts some moments of incredible grace--none more beautiful nor richly symbolic than the scene in which Jared skillfully tames the horse Chim, an act that prefigures his marriage to Kelly.

I am impressed with Harker's control over his material. His treatment of so sensitive an issue as the Mountain Meadows Massacre is tasteful, as tasteful as his treatment of a boy's growing up. Harker also shows masterful restraint. For example, when the novel climaxes with Jared's deciding to stop the bitter process of bequeathing and inheriting sin, another author might moralize. Harker instead describes the moment with precision, hitting the mark with exactly enough impact. There are many more fine moments in the novel; they add up to rewarding reading and increased insight. Maybe on my next trip to L.A. I'll leave the freeway, after all, as I approach Cedar City.

Karen Moloney

**Frost in the Orchard** by Donald R. Marshall  
BYU Press, 1977; 175 pages; \$4.95

Don Marshall's first book, *The Rummage Sale*, was printed in brown ink, suggesting faded letters on documents of an earlier time. For his second book of stories, Marshall has chosen blue ink. The tone of these stories has changed to match the tint--from nostalgia to cyanosis. *Frost in the Orchard* is a more somber book; even Marshall's mood photos between the stories are mainly autumnal or wintry scenes, suggesting cold, dissolution and death.

The chilly side of *The Rummage Sale*, most grimly seen in "Something awful has happened and I think somebody ought to

know," dominates *Frost in the Orchard*. While the oxygen-starved characters of the new book have their counterparts in *The Rummage Sale*, they echo an even slower heartbeat and shallower breathing of people long exposed to the cold, outer fringes of life.

Take Delton Mecham of "Serenade." No one else will--not even himself. A balding bachelor living in a fishbelly-white, 28-year-old skin, Delton finds himself repelling. By accepting his looks as the measure of his worth, he betrays himself: He wishes to look like his roommate Rick, a tanned and muscled "California type," and tries to act like Scott, his "really cool" roommate who serenades girls with hymns. His efforts (using Scott's technique) at manipulating a girl who works in the BYU library end on a sour note, driving him to further contemplation in front of the bathroom mirror.

Hulda Mae Spencer of "Nazareno" journeys from Fillmore, Utah, to Seville, Spain, ostensibly for Holy Week, but chiefly to see her brother Wendell. He can't entertain her because of small living quarters and an ill wife; so he gets her a room in town and visits her once. On her own she encounters a Spanish "wolf," an American deviate, and a mock procession of children imitating the penitents of Holy Week. Ready to return to her job at the library in Fillmore, she ends her stay, devastated by her visit but comforted by one of the children from the procession. The boy reminds her of a younger brother at home: both are mongoloid.

Like most of the characters, Delton and Hulda feel that they have grown away from their contemporaries. One who tries to go back to start differently, Sariah Euphelda Mangum Pedersen, sorely amazes Dr. Christensen of "Fugues and Improvisations: Variations on a Theme." Her persistence in failure and her pleading for a good grade are as inconsistent with her age as her appearance in Music 101 among freshmen forty years her junior. She is the frost on her instructor's orchard that autumn and brings his disquieting role as judge hard up against his own age.

In "The Wheelbarrow" a former jazz musician settles uncomfortably into work as a Sears vacuum salesman in Price, Utah. His memories of the jazz days are more real than his job (a sore point) or his wife or her family whom they are visiting on Thanksgiving. He is not thankful for his family. He drifts away from them, following the current of his memories of playing, jamming, soaring. Lines from the song "Misty" (used in the book without permission) haunt him. He feels disinclined to adopt the patriarchal role his wife expects of him. He'd like to ask for a divorce--or leave. But his love for one of his daughters, as ambivalent as any emotion can

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be, traps him.

Marshall's improvement of *Frost in the Orchard* over *The Rummage Sale* is striking, as evidenced by a greater determination to work the unpleasant elements in his characters' lives. Unfortunately the book suffers from severe editorial lapses, such as the repetition of "multi-colored hardtack" twice in the same sentence in "Christmas Snows, Christmas Winds."

Nevertheless, readers who liked *The Rummage Sale* will find in *Frost in the Orchard* and old friend speaking a subtly different language with a certain change in attitude, yet recognizable and only on reflection disquieting.

Dennis Clark

**Beyond This Moment** by Shirley Sealy  
Seventy's Mission Bookstore, 1977; 206 pages; \$4.95

Jane Tulley, the heroine of *Beyond this Moment*, arrives in New York to get away from an unhappily ended engagement. She immediately discovers all kinds of good she can do. The wealthy uncle and aunt she is staying with are estranged because they don't share common goals--Aunt Julia is not a good Mormon; Uncle Lawrence is not a Mormon at all. Their oldest son Cam lives in the shadow of his father's success as a real estate developer, and the uneasy truce between them falls apart when Mr. Kelly Devereaux, an arrogant but talented architect, arrives on the scene.

Jane's earlier heartbreak, her budding romance with Kelly, and her ongoing love affair with the Church dominate the fast-moving story. In the tradition of the Victorian romances, characterizations are thin and limited to obvious types that are not popular in these liberated times. Interest centers on how this loveable Utah Mormon unravels the conflicts all around her. Relying heavily on devices like overheard conversations and personal letters, the plots and subplots develop quickly--in one place paralleling the parable of the prodigal son--and in the end Jane gets her man and the Church.

*Beyond this Moment* makes enjoyable reading, and even the most critical will find themselves caught up in it. The prose, if somewhat affected and sentimental, is readable. And while the book is without subtlety, Mormon adolescents will find it as good as, and perhaps better than, any modern romance.

Kevin G. Barnhurst

**Elders and Sisters** by Gladys Farmer  
Seagull Books, 1977; 162 pages; \$2.95

From the title I expected *Elders and Sisters* to be just another compilation of conversion stories, but it certainly isn't that. While each chapter is a complete story, the four main characters, two elders and two sisters, are present throughout the book. There is also an interesting assortment of companions, contacts and members who touch the missionaries' lives.

The book is written in a most readable style, and I found it hard to put down. From her own experience as a missionary in France, the author furnishes a believable background for the story and gives an apparently accurate picture of the life of a missionary. The disappointments, joys and self-realizations of the characters don't leave the impression that a mission is easy. Instead the story shows that hard work and self-discipline result in enough joy to make a mission worthwhile.

Even though the ending is a little unbelievable, I found it delightful because I love happy endings. Parents of missionaries might gain a better understanding of their child's experience by reading the book, and returned missionaries will find it enjoyable.

Marjorie Larsen

### Other Books Received

*A Clash of Interests*, by Thomas G. Alexander. BYU Press, 1977; \$11.95.

*Betrayed* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, by Ron Carlson. W.W. Norton & Co., 1977; \$7.50.

*Columbus, Explorer for Christ*, by Helen Hinckley. Herald House, 1977.

*Dry and Save*, by Dora D. Flack. Woodbridge Press, 1977; 118 pages; \$2.95.

*Guide to Mormon Diaries and Autobiographies*, by Davis Bitton. BYU Press, 1977; \$29.00.

*His Everlasting Love*, by Norma Clark Larsen. Horizon Publishers, 1977; 173 pages; \$5.95.

*Orson Hyde*, by Howard H. Barron. Horizon Publishers, 1977; 336 pages; \$6.95.

*Our First Estate*, by R. Clayton Brough. Horizon Publishers, 1977; 173 pages; \$5.95.

*That Day in June*, ed. Janet Thomas. Ricks College Press, 1977; \$5.00.

*Utah*, by Charles S. Peterson. W. W. Norton & Co., 1977; \$8.95