

The best writing in Mormon literature has been done by the Sophics, who have bones to pick and axes (and teeth) to grind. But the large majority of the Latter-day Saints are not responding to literature that seems to them unauthentic—a ladder leaning against the wrong wall.

ATTUNING THE AUTHENTIC MORMON VOICE: STEMMING THE SOPHIC TIDE IN LDS LITERATURE

By Richard H. Cracroft

I

“E SSENTIALISM IS THE PROBLEM,” PROCLAIMED my colleague, Bruce W. Jorgensen, in his 1991 presidential address to this distinguished body of Latter-day Saint writers, critics, publishers, and readers, thereby fixing his sights on an elusive problem that is central to the purposes of the Association for Mormon Letters and to future Mormon literary criticism. Elevating to Pearl Harbor status my review of Eugene England’s and Dennis Clark’s important but spiritually bifurcated anthology, *Harvest: Contemporary Mormon Poems*, Jorgensen dive-bombs my review, zeroing in with Sophic glee on my attempts to show the presence and absence of the *spiritual essence* of Mormonism in the works of contemporary Mormon poets (Cracroft 1990). Urging a Mormon literature that is hospitable to the stranger at the gate as well as to the next-door-neighbor, Jorgensen firmly shuts his door on my assertion that an anthology subtitled “Contemporary Mormon Poems” should reflect a Mormon *Weltanschauung* and ethos, insisting at last that “Maybe Mormonism itself has no ‘essence’ but only a story,” and asserting that “It’s a striving after wind to pursue the ‘essence’ of Mormon literature.” “Essentialism is the problem” of my review, insists the usually astute Jorgensen, and he is right. Just as I am right about the fact that *essentialism* is also the answer to the need to center and ground modern Mormon criticism. Allow me to remind the reader of the contexts of Jorgensen’s claim: In my review of *Harvest*, I assert that which is apparent to any right-thinking, red-blooded, and sanctified Latter-day Saint who reads the poems sequentially,

attentively, and—big gulp here—*spiritually and essentially*—that a surprisingly large number of the poems written by Mormon poets and included in the “New Direction” section of *Harvest* selected by Dennis Clark are skillfully executed poems grounded in the “earth-bound humanism” (Cracroft 1990, 122) of our contemporary secular society, but reflecting little or no essential Mormonism. It seems to me, as I state in my review, that such poems, mislabeled *Mormon*, lack, ignore, repress, or replace the Mormon “essence” so *essential* to distinguishing a work of Mormon letters from a work that is merely Western or American or Protestant or Jewish. If a work of literature is written by a Latter-day Saint and sails under the title of “Mormon,” it is, I believe, the duty of a Mormon literary critic to point out for the potential readership, which inevitably will be mostly Mormon, the presence or lack of such Mormonness.

In describing western novels, the late Virginia Sorensen says that western writers and readers have, in addition to telling with integrity the human stories of life in the American West, “the responsibility of preserving some web of significance men can live by” (Sorensen, 283). Present-day readers, writers, and critics of Mormon literature and members of the Association for Mormon Letters are part of what amounts to the first generation of critics of a nascent Mormon literature. We are likewise weaving and identifying—privileging—and scrutizing this aborning Mormon literature to trace a “[larger] web of [deeper] significance” (Sorensen, 283), which—if truly Mormon—is being woven out of the stuff of Mormonism and spun across a Mormon world view interlaced with Mormon *essences*, those often ethereal but real, ineffable but inevitable spiritual analogues and correspondences that convey Mormon realities, and without a sense of which no literature could be essentially Mormon. Such is at least part of the responsibility of the Mormon critic.

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But there is an obstacle that must be confronted by members of the Association for Mormon Letters and by the contemporary and future Mormon critic. Most of us who devoutly study Mormon literature are Latter-day Saints of some variety—garden, hybrid, or noxious weed. More or less, we share a love for the Mormon Idea, for Mormon doctrine; we see the world Mormonly; or we love the Mormon ethos—its tradition and culture and history; or, at very least, we are curious about what happens when Things Mormon hit a fan called Things Non-Mormon, Things Worldly. Still, the obstacle persists: It is (for some—surely not the present reader) our inner *Schweinhund*, our doubting, skeptical, Sophic, eye-single-to-the-glory of secular humanism willingness to be hospitable to virtually any attack upon our own church or its leaders, to substitute almost any cause or complaint for fixing our souls to the cross, to overlay the prevailing, faithless world view on our once bright faith in the Restoration.

Whether we trail our Mormonness behind us, conceal it, or wear it on our sleeves, most of us who constitute the LDS literati leave our Mormon Home Places to become steeped at our various worldly universities in the alluring secular *Weltanschauung* of a relentless, overweening, skeptical, and triumphant empiricism. Then, having absorbed the world and all of its attractive graces and having replaced the spiritual authority figures of our youth with new-found Sophic authorities, we sally to our separate Zions in the tops of the mountains, flourishing newly won and brightly burnished "objectivity," a quiver-full of tyrannical and dogmatic literary ideologies, bristling with a wonderful array of arcane critical tools, and a helmet brimming with ardent appreciation for those who profess the gospels of immorality, atheism, nihilism, negativism, perversity, rebelliousness, doubt, disbelief, and disorder. With a world view fraught with what Thomas Mann has called a "sympathy for the abyss," we survey the field, full of troops ill-equipped with Urims and Thummims, Liahonas, and the Peepstones of Faith, we strap on the breastplate of humanism and lower our lances of Marxism, Deconstructionism, Post-Structuralism, Feminism, or Reformed New Criticism and boot-up our computers in the cause of Mormon letters—*sans* its so-called (*shudder*) essences.

II

BUT what to our wondering eyes should appear but the Mormon audience—the orthodox Latter-day Saints who, to our embarrassment, resemble our own believing and innocent former selves—the selves we shelved in the cause of the worldly philosophies. Though we generally succeed in ignoring that Mormon audience—talking by them, or dismissing them as ignorant and incompetent—at some point we who battle for Mormon letters must confront the fact that they are our constituency, the only audience likely to listen to us, the only group to whom Mormon critics and the Association of Mormon Letters have any real obligation. To Sidney Smith's 1819 query, rephrased, "Who in the world reads a [Mormon] book?" we must answer, *Mormons*—until such time as some-

one organizes "Gentiles for Mormon Literature" or promotes an "Ex-Mormons for Mormon Literature" night at the local high school gym.

And if teaching the Latter-day Saints about Mormon literature is at least part of our work and our glory, what is it, then, that we should keep in mind about our audience? What is it that makes them orthodox? "Orthodoxy," says Eugene England, the founder of our feast, means to be "focused on the great central ideals and values of a group. In Mormonism . . . that means being committed to the optimistic view of life, to faith in Christ and his Atonement as sufficient and powerful to save us from ignorance and sin, to a liberal concept of the nature of humans and of God and to a conservative moral life, based in reason and committed service" (England 1991, 60).

Such a definition, however, makes no differentiation between *Christian* and *Mormon*, and does not define the Latter-day Saint at the center of the faith. My experience of over twenty years in many thousands of personal interviews with salt-of-earth, temple-recommend holding, and thus orthodox Latter-day Saints, is that the "central ideals and values" of a majority of ecclesiastically active Saints are more or less rooted in essences of spirituality shared by those whom Jeffrey C. Jacob has called "Charismatics," men and women who do not fit comfortably in Richard Poll's (1967) classifications of "Iron Rodders" or "Liahonas," but whose lives are informed by and whose values are centered in a personal, *dynamic* theology of momentary supernal expectation; men and women who, in the face of an overwhelmingly secular society consciously 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 while seeking to elevate "the place of the Holy Spirit in their lives, . . . as an independent source of guidance and inspiration." Such charismatic Latter-day Saints seek, says Jacob, a "personal relationship with Christ" (Jacob, 48, 49 *passim*), and such, I believe, stand at the center of Mormon orthodoxy.

It is vital to the future of LDS literature that Mormon critics, scholars, and publishers—people who *are not*, generally, this charismatic kind of Latter-day Saint—would do well to remember that when they solicit the attention of a Latter-day Saint reader, they are treading on holy ground occupied by the potential protagonists of Mormon letters, by inconsistent, foible-ridden, groping men and women, who nevertheless differ from other believers, as Joseph Smith said to President Martin Van Buren, through "the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Hill, 271); in such men and women the Godhead is lively; they expect the presence of the Godhead in their lives; they believe in the literal reality of God as a sensate, corporeal being who lives on the planet nearest Kolob; and they believe in Jehovah, who is Jesus Christ, the Creator of earth and the Savior of humankind; and they believe in the possibility of gaining what Christ called "life eternal," of coming to know Elohim and Jehovah (John 17:3) through what Stephen L. Tanner calls "empiricism of the spirit" (Tanner, 50). Herein is the great difference—that Latter-day Saints believe that the Father and his Son *can* and *may*

and *do* intervene in mortal lives—and may do so momentarily—to assist mortals in their individual and collective courses. They believe that Joseph Smith Jr. is one of those chosen prophets in whose life the Godhead intervened to effect the opening of the Last Dispensation of the Fullness of Times; and they believe that each Latter-day Saint is part of the dynamics of God's uttering again to the whole earth—to the living and the dead—the good news of the redemptive acts of Jesus Christ, and, in his stead, of the Church of Jesus Christ. The Latter-day Saint sees as his or her mission the preparation of a Zion people (beginning with their own families) for the second advent of Jesus Christ. Enroute, the Saints must walk by faith, not skepticism and doubt, learning, as Brigham Young called it, to be "righteous in the dark," but directed according to the will of the Father and personal righteousness, by the prophets, holy scripture, including the Book of Mormon, translated from ancient records through the gift and power of God, the Holy Priesthood, and by individual access to the Holy Spirit through the dynamics of personal inspiration and revelation from the Godhead to every faithful and worthy member of the Church of Christ.

I believe that such orthodoxy prevails, more or less, among the Latter-day Saints and thus among Mormon readers—though certainly not in certain circles—present company *accepted*. Those central and orthodox beliefs spark literary imaginations; and Latter-day Saint writers and critics can spark the imaginations of that orthodox audience—if their own lives are informed by such orthodoxy. These beliefs, indelibly etched on the souls of each faithful Latter-day Saint, are the home base to which each believing Mormon returns after venturing into the bewildering world where temptations and sins of omission and commission and insistent and persuasive voices and presences cry, "Lo, here" and "Lo, there." Roughly half of the Latter-day Saints lean against these pillars of Mormon orthodoxy, while planting their footing in the shifting sands of mortality and taking a spiritual fix on Kolob. They strain and sweat and err and falter under their weary, mortal loads, but remembering that at least one definition of a *Saint* is that of a "sinner who kept on going," they plod on, cock-eyed—one eye fixed on Kolob and the other fixed on the next, deceptive step in front of them. I admire the plodding Latter-day Saint, them of the last wagon—or the middle or the front, for that matter; and I believe that, collectively, they are about as faithful and good-hearted and Christian a people as exist on the face of the earth. And I believe that their struggles toward Sainthood are the stuff of a great moral literature; and that poetry and fiction and drama can be a blessing to such in their mortal wanderings, clarifying their vision and giving uplift and instruction, creating delight and beauty.

We who write and critique and publish for the Saints must not forget, then, that these are people who have followed Joseph to their individual sacred groves and struggled up the mountain, returning to their dailinesses forever altered in vision and countenance, their lives centered in Jesus Christ and irrevocably altered by the historic events of the Restoration and the occurrences of the Holy Ghost in their lives, much as

Pip's view of matter was altered by what he saw in the fathomless depths beneath the *Pequod*. Among that *believing people* whose literary expression we undertake, encourage, and promote, are many who would echo C. S. Lewis's (paraphrased) statement about Christianity: "I believe in [Mormonism] as I believe that the sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else."

Such indelible belief posits a controlling metaphor by which Mormons experience the world, and through which we can communicate with the Saints. Metaphors assist us, asserts Neil Postman, in constructing reality: "We make the world according to our own imagery," he explains, and those images and metaphors express "some of our most fundamental conceptions of the way things are" (Postman, 123-24). Imbued with the sense that "all things . . . are spiritual" (D&C 29:34) and "are created . . . to bear record of [God]" (Moses 6:63), the Latter-day Saints attempt "to live," as President Marion G. Romney would say of President Harold B. Lee, "in the shadow of the Almighty" (Kimball and Kimball, 208), to see the world as emblematic and anagogical, like the nomadic Abraham, who wrote, "eternity was our covering and our rock and our salvation, as we journeyed from Haran . . . to the land of Canaan" (Abraham 2:16). This Latter-day Saint metaphor of the Plan of Salvation, with each Saint slogging, via Babylon, on a Pilgrim's Progress toward Zion's Celestial City, informs Mormon reality and becomes a tenacious presence in the Mormon soul—ask any who have left the Church how difficult it is to slough off and switch the metaphor.

In fact, it makes a remarkable difference to a writer and a reader if both writer and reader make God and humankind constantly present on his or her world stage—see the world anagogically, emblematically, and typologically, or by the light of the metaphor of men and women as children of heavenly parentage, and mortality as a way-station in eternity. Or if they see the world modern—as a dead-end street, and see men and women and their self-serving institutions as deluded and misguided, worshiping a fabricated projection of their own minds and needs.

If we who are Mormon writers, critics, and publishers wish to speak to the Saints, we must speak to them through LDS metaphors. We cannot dismiss or belittle or patronize them merely because we have supplanted their metaphors or because they refuse to set their familiar metaphors aside. This people deserves a literature grounded in Mormon metaphors, exuding their essences, mirroring their dualistic world, establishing their vision of themselves as pilgrims wandering by faith across a twilight stage, buffeted by the forces of evil, seeking the forces of good, and wondering at the shadows and ambiguities to be found between these bewildering parentheses in eternity. Again, the very stuff of literature.

Should LDS writers and critics and publishers continue to feed these men and women stones when they ask for the Bread of Life shaped from the stuff of the mortal experiences, good and bad, of fellow believers? When it is the Mormon *essence* that enlivens these metaphors and speaks to the souls of the LDS reader, can writers and critics continue to countenance

Jorgensen's statement that "It is a striving after wind to pursue the 'essence' of Mormon literature" (Jorgensen 1991)? On the contrary, as Elder Orson F. Whitney urged in his "Home Literature" sermon of 1888, "The Holy Ghost is the genius of 'Mormon' literature" (Whitney, 206).

Faithful Latter-day Saints need, as I need, a Mormon literature that enables us to explore common metaphors, to probe how one copes as a faithful Latter-day Saint with the junctures between the vertical and the horizontal, between the love of God and the love of our fellow beings, between the wearisome today and the promise of tomorrow—confrontations that exude essences of spiritual realities while dealing with the stuff that makes for a representative literature "which," as President Spencer W. Kimball expressed at BYU's 1976 centennial celebration, "edifies man, which takes into account his immortal nature, and which prepares us for heaven" (Kimball, 454). Some years ago, Jorgensen expressed well his similar need: "I need Mormon literature," he wrote; "I need to understand and share Mormon experience, need to imagine it as a way to understand, in pain and joy, myself, my brothers and sisters, my Brother, my Father" (Jorgensen 1974, 61). We all need such a literature.

III

IN the midst of these Saints, each adventuring along the gap between celestial ideals and telestial realities, stand the Mormon writer and critic and publisher, literary midwives to our Mormon experiences. While too many popular modern LDS writers mistake sentimentality for spirituality and sell their art and their audiences short, distrusting as they do the spiritual sensitivity and intelligence of the Mormon audience (the subject for another day), too many of the artistically gifted literati are ignoring essential Mormonism in their writing and criticism and publication and continue to insist, with Jorgensen, that it is futile to seek for "an elusive metaphysical or 'essential' notion of 'spirituality'" in shaping a Mormon literature for this people (Jorgensen 1991, 14).

Lacking a firmly founded center stake, then, modern Mormon criticism, like Mormon literature, is unsettled and uncentered, too prone to follow Corianthon in a-whoring across distant and exotic horizons after the shallow attractions of blind secularism, visionless and perverse fault-seeking, skeptical and compromising humanism, and hearkening to glib but hollow and faithless voices of Babylon. Ignoring the spiritual essence of Mormonism, the very essence that differentiates Mormonism from other believers and from the world, too many of our modern writers and critics—the *creme de la creme* of Mormon letters—have bound themselves to the literary masts of the world rather than orthodoxy, and have become "like the wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed." The consequences are clear: as Latter-day Saints read the literature of doubt and dissonance so often applauded by Mormon critics and the Association for Mormon Letters, they register dismay on reading short stories, novels, poetry, and drama that fail to reflect a Mormon world view with which they can

identify. Such a literature of shock, supported by a justifying criticism, continues to create a gap of distrust between critic and reader. Repeatedly, Latter-day Saints positioned at the center of the Mormon experience must put down the latest Mormon novel or collection of poetry and sigh with J. Alfred Prufrock, "That is not it at all,/That is not what I meant, at all."

The reason for the confusion lies with Latter-day Saint writers and critics who, unable to write out of faith or to leave off skepticism, attempt in their writing to have their faith and doubt it, too. It is the ancient paradox of Goethe's *Faust*, "Two souls alas! are dwelling in my breast" (Goethe, I, ii). It is the old, old dualism of Plato, Paul, Kant, Coleridge, and Emerson. Hugh Nibley labels it as the *Mantic* versus the *Sophic*, "two fundamentally antithetical ways of perceiving the world" (Nibley, 314). Positing the reality of other worlds, the *Mantic* world view, based in the Greek word for *inspired*, *prophetic*, or *oracular*, is simply "vertical supernaturalism" (Wright, 55). Manticism is not mysticism, but "the belief in the real and present operation of divine gifts by which one receives constant guidance from the other world" (Nibley, 316). The "sophic world view of horizontal naturalism," on the other hand, confines all realities to the natural order (Wright, 51), is "necessarily antireligious," critical, objective, naturalistic, scientific, and horizontal in attitude. And though the Sophic has as its purpose "the elimination of the supernatural or superhuman" (Nibley, 383), it can only be understood in relationship to the Mantic, believing tradition against which it is reacting.

Antithetical to the Mantic Mormon world view, the Sophic nevertheless reigns triumphant in Western culture and has had a vigorous impact upon contemporary Latter-day Saints. It has become a *given* in our society to think of the supernal as mere superstition, and of notions of God, eschatology, redemption, and theophany as quaint and outmoded. "Modern men take it for granted," asserts Rudolf Bultmann, "that the course of nature and of history . . . is *nowhere* interrupted by the intervention of supernatural powers" (Bultmann, 15-17; emphasis added).

Certainly "all have not faith" among the Latter-day Saints, and Mormon literature must continue to be hospitable to the writings of those among the Latter-day Saints who are struggling with doubt and are torn by the old tension. But such works must be understood and criticized from the Latter-day Saint standpoint and not in such a manner as to advance the Sophic world view as representative of Mormonism.

These Mantic-Sophic tensions so evident in contemporary Mormon literature find parallels in the often acrimonious struggle currently being waged between New Mormon historians and the Traditional Mormon historians, between those Sophics who understand events as proceeding from natural causes and who balk at the historicity of theophanies, visitations, and golden plates; and those Mantics who see such as occurrences arising from divine intervention and purpose (Thrower, 229).

In modern literature, the Sophic position ascended with Literary Realism, a technique become a philosophy that is, in

Thomas Carlyle's word, "descendental," or non-transcendental. "The realists," claims Harold H. Kolb Jr. in his fine treatise, *The Illusion of Life*, "cannot accept supernaturalism, Platonic idealism, and the worlds of spirit. They do not necessarily deny the validity of such worlds; they simply ignore them as unknowable in ordinary human terms and thus irrelevant to ordinary human experience" (Kolb, 38). This Sophic-Realistic denial of such essences as irrelevant characterizes the literature of what is increasingly called the post-religious or post-Christian age, and translates variously into twentieth-century American literature as Literary Naturalism, Modernism, Existentialism, or Nihilism. By whatever philosophy, writers have been anxiously engaged since around the American Civil War in "Horizontalizing the vertical tradition" (Wright, 57).

Mormon writers and critics have been schooled in this Sophic literary tradition and unnaturally apply it to the Mantic tradition of Mormon letters. It is no wonder, then, that Jorgensen would shudder at examining *essences*; no wonder that a great deal of confusion has resulted; no wonder that there is no solid center to Mormon criticism or Mormon literature. Often torn in our own faith between Mantic and Sophic traditions, we are even more confounded as Sophic critics by the task of dealing with the Mantic world in Sophic terms—the only way we know how. It is in this context that we must understand President Kimball's call for a literature and, by inference, a criticism of our own, centered in Mantic Mormonism and dealing honestly and literarily with human life as experienced by Latter-day Saints. Orson F. Whitney was referring to the essential difference between an LDS and a worldly literature when he said, "Our literature must live and breathe for itself. Our mission is diverse from all others; our literature must also be" (Whitney, 206).

But in Mormon criticism the confusion between the Mantic and Sophic stances continues. A typical illustration of such doublemindedness is seen in Eugene England's enthusiastic but Sophic review for a primarily Mantic BYU Studies audience, of Levi S. Peterson's well-crafted, imaginative, serio-comic, obstinately perverse, and theologically non-Mormon novel, *The Backslider* (1986). England describes with reverence—and to the stunned disbelief of many BYU Studies readers who are not part of the frequent gatherings of Sophic Saints (the Inward Church below?)—Frank's culminating, *deus ex machina* vision that comes as he zips up his pants before a flushing urinal in which he suddenly sees an aw-shucks Cowboy Jesus who straightens Frank out by dishing out, while rolling and smoking a Bull Durham cigarette, homely counsel about Frank's sexual hangups, his guilty sensual indulgences with his wife, and his longstanding quarrel with a vindictive, Tetragrammaton kind of God. Jesus' advice to Frank, as he rides off on his horse, is, "And work on that crap about hating God. See if you can get over it." Frank culminates this descendentially transcendental travesty by flushing the urinal, retching, vomiting, then crying (Peterson 1986, 356). And England culminates his review of *Backslider*: "That vision is one of the most lovely and believable epiphanies I have encountered in modern fiction. It is the capstone to an extraordinary

achievement, not only in thematic content that is seriously theological but in form that is meticulously crafted to give permanent being to that content" (England 1990, 101). My own Sophic literary sensibilities cheer England's testimonial: *The Backslider* is true and faithful to a Sophic and secular vision of literature. But my Mantic sensibilities recoil, as have so many Latter-day Saint readers who, approaching this work of Mormon literature touted by England and others, are shocked by this profanation of Christ, as they are by the grotesque God of Frank's strange, quasi-Calvinistic—but decidedly not LDS—theology.

Of course *The Backslider* doubtlessly speaks profoundly and in relief-rendering tones to readers who are grappling with the guilt imposed on them by LDS-Christian theology, enabling them to look closely at the pin that skewers their souls. For many Mantic LDS souls, however, *The Backslider* speaks a shocking, disconcerting, and dissonant language that seems unauthentic and off-putting. In fact, such Sophic works constitute much of the better-written contemporary Mormon fiction. Likewise, much of our contemporary LDS criticism about such works is centered in Sophic secularity. And where Sophic and Mantic criticism come into confrontation, the Sophists—who edit the journals and privilege the books to be reviewed and the reviewers who do the reviewing—hasten to correct any Mantic deviations, just as my criticism of a number of the *Harvest* gleanings as excellent Sophic but certainly not LDS-Mantic poems is countered by Jorgensen's attempts to shoe-horn, stretch, and (I believe) skew these poems into expressions of the LDS ethos, much like the painful attempts of Cinderella's ugly sisters to wedge large feet into a dainty glass slipper. Such Sophic strivings do not resonate with those who share the Mormon vision and seek in their literature the spiritual essence of Mormonism. There can be congeniality between the two positions, and hospitality without accommodation, but there can never be comfortable compromise of Mantic and Sophic viewpoints.

IV

WHAT I have said can be misconstrued, I realize, as being exclusionary, even elitist. I do not mean it to be such. Nothing that I say here will change the fact that, to date, most of the best writing in Mormon literature has been done by the Sophics, who have bones to pick and axes (and teeth) to grind and divine itches that need to be scratched, while the inarticulate Mantics are too busy doing their Home Teaching—and making faithful statements that pain the Sophics. Nothing that I say here will change the nature of a single struggling doubter or, for that matter, of a struggling charismatic—for we all struggle.

I simply suggest that the large majority of the Latter-day Saints are not responding to literature that seems to them unauthentic—a ladder leaning against the wrong wall. Of course the Sophic will continue to write a literature that reflects his or her reactive world view, but we must understand that such a world view will continue to be unauthentic to the

charismatic Latter-day Saint.

I affirm Candadai Seshachari's admonition: "For the Mormon writer, the creative center of his subjectivity lies not so much in what he shares with the rest of mankind but in that unique Mormon experience which he shares with fellow Mormons." And he adds, "This experience defines his being," for "It is through this singular experience that he [the Mormon writer] asserts his individuality, indeed, his humanity" (Sesachari, 109). In a similar vein, Don D. Walker has noted, "To write with integrity for readers who understand that integrity, writers need a tradition, a system of moral values in which they can make meaningful judgments—they need a frame of belief" (Mulder, 210).

The challenge to LDS writers who desire to touch the lives of their people is to write honestly and well, from within this frame of shared belief in the Restoration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to probe the lives of faithful men and women confronting a Sophic society, a difficult world, and a self that seems ever to fall short of achieving the ideal. How much better does anyone accept direction and challenge from one who understands and empathizes and shares—and believes.

In increasing numbers, in every literary genre, the Mantic voices are there that speak to the Saints from within the fold, with power and authenticity and integrity. The Association of Mormon Letters has honored a number of them. In fiction alone, we find, for example, the powerful and freeing fantasy of Orson Scott Card's *Seventh Son*, *The Red Prophet*, and *Prentice Alvin* centered in the essences that moved the Maker, Alvin Miller Jr., whose life parallels in so many ways the life of the Prophet Joseph; or in Card's novel, *Saints*, where he portrays Dinah, the Gentile soul adrift in Babylon, brings her to conversion at the hands of the sincere and profane Heber C. Kimball (surely the most brilliant portrayal to date of a Mormon missionary at work), and lifts her out of Babylon—at dramatic personal cost. Or the power of Marilyn M. Brown in *The Earthkeepers*, in which she narrows the canvas, as William Mulder urges, but not the expansive spirit of Mormondom. Or Gerald N. Lund's notable and prize-winning contributions to LDS historical fiction, moving readers first by the twice-told truths of the Restoration and again by the reader's vicarious participation, through the Steed family, in their individual spiritual confrontations with Mormonism; Lund is true to the essence of Mormonism in, among other scenes, Mary Ann Steed's moving conversion to Mormonism as she listens to the Prophet Joseph reading aloud from 3 Nephi (Lund, 331). Or in Margaret B. Young's Jewish-to-Mormon conversion novel, *House Without Walls*; or in Randall L. Hall's *Cory Davidson*; or Carroll Hofeling Morris's *The Broken Covenant*, well-written chronicles of the breaking and contrition of hearts following transgression; or Kathryn Kidd's comically authentic *Paradise Vue*; or, recently, the movingly refreshing evocation of the essence of universal spirituality in Judith Freeman's *Set For Life*—not a Mormon novel but surely a Mantic one. Or what seems still to be the best fictional expression of Mormonism's essences to date, Eileen Gibbons Kump's sequential stories, *Bread and Milk*, a cycle which follows Amy Gordon through a

Latter-day Saint life that is quietly but strongly centered in the Mormon ethos. For example, Kump concludes the book with an *essential* moment, as the now elderly and widowed Amy Gordon, suffering from mortal symptoms while writing her recollection of her wedding day, dissolves the veil in a wonderfully Mormon *coup de force*:

Amy took the pencil and began to write. There was a numbness in her arm, slight but not imaginary. She wrote regardless, driven to preserve the picture. . . . When she was finished, she fell backward. Then she let go of the pencil. "Please," she said aloud. "I want the memory of my wedding day!" She was in her white dress, waiting, and Israel hadn't come yet. She started to cry and there he was, arms outstretched, hurrying toward her. Only this time the hair and mustache were white. (Kump, 91.)

The day-dawn is breaking, as it should—and with our support—for the subject matter is there, if Mormon writers will accept the challenge to deal with the subjects Mormonly. "It does seem odd," the late Karl Keller wrote in 1974, "that of all the things Mormon writers of fiction have had to offer the world, they have not yet offered it their beliefs, their theology, the gospel" (Keller, 62).

However post-structurally or Marxianly or feministically modern Mormon critics wish to deal with horizontal, Sophic literature, it is their challenge, when acting as LDS critics, to promote a truly Mormon literature, to read and critique LDS writing with eyes of faith, with feet firm-set in Mormon metaphors. Then, allowing the LDS writers their *donnée*, that their work is faithfully grounded in the Mantic realities of the spiritual world, in important *essences*, to sound that work for honesty and integrity and authenticity, to subject that portrayal of Mormon reality to the most rigorous literary standards. It is the critics' responsibility to understand the essential Mormonness of the work, to place the work within the Mormon tradition and ethos; to place it in the literary tradition of Gentile writers; to show where and how it succeeds, and why; and if it falls short, why—but, for a pleasant change, from the window of the Latter-day Saint's house of fiction, or verse.

We need, for a change, an alternative criticism, a *Latter-day Saint* criticism centered in the gospel, in Mormon faith, and not in the Sophic creeds of secularism. By "Faithful Criticism" I do not mean a criticism that shuts its eyes to falseness, to the lies of sentimentalism, or promotes tidy didacticism and *deus ex machina* conclusions. I do not call for a Literary Divining Rod to be bestowed on qualified LDS critics for the purpose of detecting the presence of the Holy Ghost—although given Elder Whitney's pronouncement that the Holy Ghost is the genius of Mormon literature, such wouldn't hurt. We need Faithful Critics who cultivate the presence of the Holy Ghost, who are themselves faithful Latter-day Saints who have been to the mountain, who understand the Mantic-Mormon paradigm of the world, who are willing to grant the *donnée* of faith and belief and the exciting spirit of expectation, the possibility of holiness, the eventuality of the Finger of the Lord enlivening the Latter-day Saint life, critics who will formulate a criticism

that can deal honestly, authentically, and artistically with that kind of world view.

Given this green and vibrant world and other-world view, the possibilities are limitless. The way to perfection, which Joseph Smith compared to a ladder, is arduous and long and fraught with missteps and backward steps—the stuff of fiction and poetry and drama. Eternal Lives arise from hard-won experience in the crucible of mortality, where we learn that the old verities are eternal in fact and mortal in application. Mormon artists have the opportunity, within their own framework and metaphors of faith, “To make a world,” wrote Karl Keller, “where the factors of one’s faith actually become realities” (Keller, 71). Doing justice, as he noted elsewhere, “to the visible world because it suggests to [the writer] an invisible one,” Mormon critics will avoid mixing the metaphor and thus falsifying the sound. They will seek to identify and shape a literature that can probe the essences, and the authentic Mormon voice, long recognized by Latter-day Saint readers who know the voice of the Shepherd, will rise above its present murmur as William Mulder prophesied in 1954: “Mormon literature will move toward the promise of its highly articulate beginnings,” he wrote, “for Mormon readers will demand of Mormon writers authentic voices, whether in fiction, in history, in biography, or in missionary tract—the authority of good writing, of truths made memorable” (Mulder, 211). ☒

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