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## REVIEWS

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# A CALL FOR MORAL TRADITION

HEALTH AND MEDICINE AMONG THE LATTER-DAY SAINTS:  
SCIENCE, SENSE, AND SCRIPTURE

by Lester E. Bush Jr.

Crossroad Publishing, 1993

xv + 234 pages, \$19.95



Reviewed by Courtney S. Campbell, Ph.D.

LESTER BUSH HAS written a splendid contribution to the highly acclaimed "Health and Medicine in Faith Traditions Series" of the Park Ridge Center (see *Religious Studies Review* 19:2, April 1993, 103-09) that will be informative for Mormons and non-Mormons alike on the nature of health and medical practices within Mormonism. The series as a whole uniquely conveys both the breadth and depth of how fourteen different religious communities enact their faith through health behaviors and ethical medicine. The series also facilitates comparative study of the faith communities since each author organizes his material through ten common themes: well-being, sexuality, passages, morality, dignity, madness, healing, caring, suffering, and death.

The distinctive "peculiarity" of the LDS approach to such themes is conveyed in the title of Bush's volume. Bush focuses on health and medicine "among" the Latter-day Saints, and is the only author to do so; the other authors interpret these themes in the Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Jewish, Islamic, Hindu, etc., "traditions." At least two implications follow from this titular change. The first is that Bush's concern is with health practices as they are embodied in the *lives of people*, and it is these practices that precede and give shape to the enunciation of theological principle. Bush's interpretation of the

origins and development of the Word of Wisdom, which I shall comment on below, is a case in point. The second implication is a rather damning indictment that the Latter-day Saints have not developed *any tradition* of theologically informed intellectual reflection on these themes. I have frustratingly found confirmation of this in the rare occasions that I have been invited to speak on ethics, health, and medicine before an LDS audience. When confronted with a difficult ethical choice, the first answer of my audiences is inevitably "prayer." More tragic to me are the stories of persons who wished to conceive children through reproductive technology, but did not because they were (wrongly) informed that the LDS church was opposed to artificial insemination or in vitro fertilization; or were invited to participate in organ donation, but refused because they had been (wrongly) informed of ecclesiastical opposition to organ transplantation. Bush quite correctly implies there is no meaningful religious and moral "tradition" of discourse within Latter-day Saint communities on the relevant health and medicine themes of the series.

Bush's substantive narrative begins at the ending, that is, with a descriptive account of LDS attitudes about death and dying. His narrative method relies on fascinating historical material, and serves well to illuminate his central thesis that Latter-day Saints have dealt with the "problem of death" through ritual. Proxy baptisms, endowments, sealings, etc., all serve to bring the community a measure of control over the silence that is death. This confrontation with death also is constituted by what the Danish philosopher

Søren Kierkegaard referred to as death's "retroactive power" over life. The full life requires an awareness of the fragility of mortality, and LDS practices and rituals surrounding death heightens the intensity of this awareness.

Still, the reader can sympathize with series editor Martin Marty's prefatory comment that "from page one" Bush's account sets up a "distance" between Mormon and non-Mormon. Bush has chosen to emphasize distinctive LDS practices and beliefs, and so informs the reader very early on that the Mormon setting for death and dying consists in convictions embodied in rituals about the plurality of gods, sacred temple ordinances, the eternal nature of family, and the kingdoms of glory in the afterlife. Marty, and other readers, I am sure, want this world of Mormonism to be understandable and accessible, but it is not clear that Bush has offered initially any bridges between these worlds.

It is possible, however, to focus on distinctive theological claims without imposing the insider/outsider distance to which Marty alludes. Mormonism proposes a paradigm-shattering understanding of God as an embodied being, and this somatic theology cannot but help inform the community's response to matters of health and medicine. Given this integrity of bodily and spiritual unity, the LDS plan of salvation, as exemplified in Bush's account of the endowment, might then be portrayed as an example of a universal feature of religiosity, namely, as one grand, eternal *rite of passage*—marked by themes of separation, transition, and reincorporation or new life. What identifies these various phases are precisely transformations in the nature of our embodied existence—unembodied spirit, embodied mortal, disembodied spirit, resurrected being, etc. Thus, a focus on embodiment as a different but distinctive theological claim would have allowed Bush to also incorporate concepts and language more inclusive and accessible rather than distancing.

The section on death and dying concludes with an unduly brief attention to provocative issues in medical ethics, such as suicide and euthanasia. To suggest one example that I have found to be of increasing concern for LDS families, Bush observes that current ecclesiastical teaching holds there is no obligation to use "unreasonable" means to prolong life when death seems inevitable. End of discussion. But, what does "unreasonable" mean: Permission to refuse or withdraw ventilators, feeding tubes, antibiotics, etc.? To put a point on this, were the antibiotics used to treat President Benson's pneumonia

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in 1992 an example of using "unreasonable means" to prolong life? On such matters, I don't think it's good enough for family members and others to just muddle through on faith, hope, and love; some tradition of ethical reflection is a necessary balance to ad hoc ("inspiration") practices.

THE fusion of physical and spiritual in Mormonism opens Bush's discussion of the themes of "being well and suffering." This has implications for one of Bush's sub-themes—science—that unfortunately are left unexplicated. It is much harder to affirm an interconnection of *soma* (body) and *pneuma* (spirit) once the materialistic reductionism embedded in modern science and medicine is embraced as the dominant explanatory paradigm for health and disease. We need not accept a simplistic causal account of righteousness and health, or sin and disease, to still observe that our very concepts of "wellness" and "illness," "health" and "disease" are laden with cultural and religious values. Masturbation continues to be a

source of religious stigmatization in LDS culture, unlike some other faith communities, but during the last century, it was listed as a cause of death on many death certificates in the southern United States. We need, in short, to look more carefully and critically at our foundational concepts in health and medicine (and within the faith as a whole).

Bush's treatment of the Word of Wisdom, to which he devotes an extensive doctrinal genealogy, insightfully exemplifies this larger point. Bush contends that the historical context for the Word of Wisdom was consistent with the "conventional wisdom" then prevalent in medical culture about risky stimulants. Yet, this suggests the primary reason for compliance ("living the Word of Wisdom"), past or present, is self-interested (and discretionary) prudence. Having suggested this, however, it would then seem important to use the Word of Wisdom to explore the implications of Mormonism's somatic theology: We want to know why, if this is merely conventional wisdom, it should over time become a culturally distinguishing charac-

teristic of the Latter-day Saints. What other values are embedded in LDS teaching that require the current ecclesiastical emphasis on the Word of Wisdom that Bush acknowledges (57)? The Mormon concept of "being well" simply cannot be wholly explained by a reductionistic model of modern organic science.

Bush's extraordinarily rich historical treatments of the themes of "healing" and "sexuality" also offer insight into the transformation of the Mormon faith as a whole. How is it, a reader should ask, that a nineteenth-century religious community with a scriptural mandate to use faith healing and herbalism in response to health crises can accommodate a supportive context for late twentieth-century experimental technology such as the artificial heart without compromise of its identity and integrity? The medicalization of Mormonism from natural to technological responses to illness parallels its homogenization into American cultural beliefs and patterns of living. More striking and disturbing, the historical evolution of

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healing within LDS culture displays what the German sociologist Max Weber referred to as the *routinization of charisma*. The charismatic gift of healing as a mark of the Restoration is gradually formalized in pattern and institutionalized through priesthood organization. This routinization results in a loss of function for such practices as healing baptisms, or consecration of any afflicted body part with oil (or consumption of consecrated oil), as well as the ecclesiastical displacement of the healing gifts of women. What guides the religion in its century-long transformation of healing, Bush seems to suggest, is a scientifically informed common sense pragmatism, itself the quintessential American philosophical ethos. Yet, pragmatism also implies there is little *principled* identity and integrity to permit a cohesive and pro-active, rather than re-active, transformation. And if the faith community is always and only positioned for re-action to science and new medical technology, then it will have lost the capability for *prophetic critique*. That critique should have been present, in my view, in the context of the artificial heart experiment of the 1980s, and an occasion for its expression looms in the 1990s as we enter into an era of invasive genetic manipulations.

The medicalization of Mormonism has been so encompassing, according to Bush,

that "all . . . medical issues of concern to the church, save one, have been resolved" (106). That exception concerns sexual and reproductive medicine, which is "without parallel in the window it offers on the evolution of authoritative guidance within the LDS Church" (139). Thus, in this area, the focus moves away from "among" the Latter-day Saints and more toward ecclesiastical authority.

THERE is at best an ambivalent attitude about sexuality in LDS culture. On one hand, Bush observes, an open and affirming philosophy of sex is embedded in doctrines of a (non-sexual) Fall and reproductive sexuality through the eternities, as well as practices of plural marriage. At the same time, ecclesiastical stress on the sin of sex outside marital boundaries could not be more pronounced, nor, more importantly, enforced through excommunication or disfellowshipping sanctions. Moreover, it is difficult to separate sex from procreation within LDS culture in the absence of an articulated theological purposiveness to sex. Given these tensions, there are few things more futile than to speak to the MTV generation through the pithy wisdom of a Brigham Young.

These embedded tensions of sexuality are of course expressed in prescribed gender

roles and responsibilities. One very unfortunate consequence of the theological suspicion of non-marital sexuality is that it inhibits sustaining any genuine friendships with adult members of the opposite sex. It is as if Mormon teaching assumed the validity of C. S. Lewis's mistaken observation: "When the two people who thus discover that they are on the same secret road [of friendship] are of different sexes, the friendship which arises between them will very easily pass—may pass in the first half-hour—into erotic love" (*The Four Loves*, 98). More generally, it is rather remarkable how freely Latter-day Saints use the language of "companionship" (my "eternal companion") or "fellowship" (the quorum's "fellowshipping activity"), while the virtue of friendship, the highest form of human relationships in the classical world and a symbol of relation with God in Christianity, has all but disappeared from LDS discourse. The eclipse of friendship, I am arguing, is attributable in large measure to the ambivalent LDS perspective on sexuality.

The concluding sections of Bush's chapter on sexual and reproductive medicine address the "hot button" issues of contemporary medical ethics—abortion, contraception, genetics, reproductive technology. Bush's probing analysis reveals how the convictions and practices of a religious community undergo adjustment and adaptation in the face of scientific knowledge and medical innovation. The challenge for the faith community is whether this adjustment can be carried off without compromising or abandoning fundamental values. The missing piece of Bush's otherwise compelling analysis is that it does not enumerate what these fundamental values might be. The abortion question is a case in point, where scriptural evidence might be cited to support either a conservative or liberal position, and the point then at issue is what additional values are involved in the conservative position the ecclesiastical leadership has promulgated. It is one thing to identify the ecclesiastical stance of the LDS church, past and present, on abortion and another to determine and evaluate the normative values that support this position. I would identify four central values embedded in LDS medical ethics relating to the beginnings of mortal life: a procreative imperative; the sacralty of family; the necessity of embodiment; and the principle of moral (free) agency. Those values, it seems to me, ground neither an ethic of life's absolute value nor an ethic of unrestricted choice, but rather a strong presumption in favor of birth as a soteriological rite of passage.

Bush is quite correct to observe in conclu-



ELDER, MAYBE IT'S YOUR DOOR APPROACH...

sion that individual Latter-day Saints have not contributed an "influential body of reflective medical-ethical literature" (201). This simply confirms my initial claim that a meaningful "tradition" of ethical discourse on medicine is not present in the LDS faith community. There may be some understandable reasons for this, such as reliance on personal free agency and inspiration or conformity to the enunciations of ecclesiastical leaders. It may also be attributable to intellectual laziness. The eminent Yale professor of Christian history Jaroslav Pelikan was once asked to write a short book for his own religious community, entitled *What Lutherans Are Thinking*, to which he replied that a more appropriate title would be "What? Lutherans Are Thinking?!" The problem similarly for Latter-day Saints is not that we have the answers—Bush's narrative witnesses to the contrary—but that we may have stopped asking the questions. We have not taken seriously the eloquent words of Holocaust survivor and Nobel Peace laureate Elie Weisel that "true dialogue" occurs when "man questions God and God answers" and that our prayer should be to ask God to give us "the strength to ask Him the right questions" (*Night*, 2–3). We have instead become comfortable with a model of ecclesiastical direction that says, in effect, "Here's your answer; now what's the question?"

In calling for the creation of moral tradition within the LDS church, I do not mean vain repetition of the wisdom of the past, a practice that Jesus condemned. Rather, I have in mind a sense of tradition (see Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 206–07) as an ongoing argument about the goods and values constitutive of the identity and integrity of the faith community. That argument need not reflect the American tradition of adversarial challenge, but instead embody Mahatma Gandhi's idea of an argument as a *collaborative quest for the truth*.

*Health and Medicine among the Latter-day Saints* has in fact made an immense and unprecedented contribution to that quest. The two-fold challenge with which Bush confronts Latter-day Saints is the identification of the normative ethical values embedded in LDS teaching and practice and the development of a rabbinic-like casuistry that tests and refines these values in concrete situations. The call for a moral tradition is a hope that the evangelical dynamism experienced by the contemporary LDS church will be mirrored by an intellectual dynamism and vitality that enables our personal and collective quests for truth. ☒

## ANTI-MORMONISM FOR VOYEURS

SECRET CEREMONIES:  
A MORMON WOMAN'S INTIMATE DIARY  
OF MARRIAGE AND BEYOND

by Deborah Laake  
William Morrow & Co., 1993  
240 pages, \$20.00



Reviewed by Massimo Introvigne

DEBORAH LAAKE HAS produced a best-selling book about her experiences in Mormonism, psychiatric disturbances, broken marriages, and miscellaneous sex affairs. All of the ingredients for a successful book are present. Apparently, the reading public is still eager to learn about "secret ceremonies" in the Mormon temples, the peculiarities of Mormon women's sex lives, and the psychiatric disturbances suffered by young Mormon women, all of which have been popularized in fiction and documentary format.

Laake's book covers her life as a BYU student who fell in love with her handsome Sunday School teacher, but is eventually rejected because of her lack of spirituality (an understatement, in view of subsequent developments). At BYU she searched desperately for a husband and found one diminutive and uninspiring Mormon called Monty, whom she did not love, but became convinced that God wanted her to marry him anyway. Laake claims that BYU assumed that Mormon girls were completely unfamiliar with sexuality and offered basic information through rather ridiculous courses and seminars held by bishops and local psychiatrists which included slides depicting male private

parts. When she finally married Monty, Laake was "horrified" that he "was *nothing* like those slides" (97, emphasis in original). In the meantime, Laake was married and "endowed" in a Mormon temple through the endowment and temple wedding ceremonies, which she describes in some detail, including temple garments. She was disturbed but altogether unexcited about the ritual. She also mentions theories about Masonic borrowings in the endowment ceremony. Laake claims that she had some difficulty—after so many years—in reconstructing the temple ritual and had to request the help of some friends, and seems very proud to offer—for the first time, she implies—astonishing revelations. She apparently ignores that the endowment and wedding ceremonies have been the subject of countless exposés and that the full ceremony is still available from anti-Mormon ministries.

After the wedding, matrimonial life with Monty was a disaster, and Laake only found relief in masturbation, graphically described and theologically discussed (a bishop advised her that it was an excommunicable felony, while Laake's father—regarded by her as an authority in matters of Mormon doctrine—guaranteed her that it was not really serious). She even claims that masturbation was first suggested to her by a Mormon psychologist she regarded as a "man of God" (120). Finally, tired of mere masturbation, Laake left Monty, obtained a quick divorce, and retired to Florida where she had grown up and where she claims she had problems with her bishop who regarded her as a fallen woman because of her divorce. In Florida she

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worked at a health spa, but felt uncomfortable because of her temple garments (an obsession for Laake throughout the whole book) and finally lost her job. Thereafter, she attended college again and married a Phoenix gentile. Always obsessed with what she describes as her Mormon education—the impossible search for the perfect husband—she was not true to her new husband and started seeing an old Mormon boyfriend.

Disaster strikes again, and she ends up both in a psychiatric clinic and in an unpleasant confrontation with her local Mormon authorities. The unavoidable result was another divorce, a lapse from the faith, and a move to Salt Lake City where she lived for a short time with a liberal Mormon architect she calls Adam in the book and worked for “a small city magazine known for its willingness to treat Utah’s sacred cows, including

the church, with near objectivity” (190) (which one easily recognizes as the now defunct *Utah Holiday*). In Utah, she entered the world of the Mormon liberals, Jack Mormons, and lapsed Mormons, but crisis strikes again when she asks Adam “to marry her.” “My God, my God, I’m just not sure,” Adam replied (206), and Laake—after a new attempt at college at Northwestern University—landed again, this time for real, in a private psychiatric hospital, where she realized that her situation may be more serious than she had thought. When she finally left the hospital, she tried marriage once again and tied the knot with a “charming lawyer” (227) in her first really “secular” marriage, which is not about Mormonism or anti-Mormonism. Notwithstanding its secularity, their marriage also failed, and Laake decided never to marry again. She settled down in Phoenix writing for a Phoenix weekly, *New Times*, where she still works today. Religiously she is not only anti-Mormon, but has been “trained to detect the hollow moan of dogma wherever it arises, which is nearly everywhere. When I’m up against a wall and someone or something is telling me there’s only one solution, I know the message is wrong . . . I can feel the lie” (240).

If the book has a theme (other than confession), it is the impossible expectation that the Mormon doctrine of marriage creates in young girls, dooming them to failure because no perfect husband can match the heavenly image of a would-be god taught in Mormon Sunday Schools. This is a common theme in some anti-Mormon literature, but Laake’s presentation is excessive and the number of failures in her marriages and sex life leaves one wondering whether she may have personal problems that have nothing to do with Mormonism. Besides, her understanding of Mormonism can only be classified as poor. She seems to fall victim to anti-cult stereotypes when she calls Mormonism a “metaphysical sect” (13), emphasizing the most bizarre elements and ignoring the core points of Mormon doctrine and everyday life. Her emphasis on the world of spirits in Mormonism seems peculiar to Laake and would not be recognized as an acceptable reconstruction of Mormon spirituality by serious Mormons. Laake insists that an “extraordinary number of [Joseph] Smith’s revelations concern spiritualism. When he died . . . he left behind the doctrine that every member of his church was surrounded by fabulous ghosts—the glorious dead, the wistful unborn, the searching and the monstrous—as well as an understanding that every man and woman was entitled to hear from ghosts, and

## RECENTLY RELEASED

This section will include new titles from Mormon publishers; descriptions are usually taken from promotional materials. Submissions are welcome for future listings.

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*Nicole*. By Jack Weyland, Deseret Book, \$11.95.

A novel “which explores a lively and unlikely relationship and engages . . . hearts by what [it says] about special needs kids [and] their place in the Church.”

*The Work and the Glory: Thy Gold to Refine*, Vol. 4. By Gerald N. Lund, Bookcraft, \$16.95.

Volume 4 picks up the story of the fictional Steed family in the summer of 1838, as the family reunites in Far West.

*Simeon’s Touch*. By Brenton Yorgason & Richard Myers, Bookcraft, \$12.95.

A novel which mixes adventure and romance with conjecture about the second coming.

*Patriarchs of Kingdom Come*. By Lynn R. Eliason, University Editions, \$9.00.

A contemporary international novel which follows its main character, Mikhail Blazhenstvo, from Bonn to East Berlin, Salt Lake City, and Moscow.

### CHILDREN’S LITERATURE

*Where Have All the Nephites Gone?* By Pat Bagley, Deseret Book, \$12.95.

A children’s activity book and decoder, illustrating various aspects of Mormon life and culture.

### CHRISTIAN LIVING

*Chainbreakers*. By Michele R. Sorensen, Deseret Book, \$14.95.

The story of “how one woman is ultimately able to escape the torment [of an abusive stepfather], heal from its effects, and forgive her abuser.”

*Raising Up a Family to the Lord*. By Gene R. Cook, Deseret Book, \$13.95.

“Nearly one hundred examples and stories that illustrate how to involve the Lord in raising up a family to him.”

*Peculiar People* (paperback). Ed. by Ron Schow, Wayne Schow and Marybeth Raynes, Signature Books, \$18.95.

Explores the issue of same-sex orientation, including personal essays by gay and lesbian Mormons, their families and friends, theological and scientific developments, and national survey information.

### CHRISTMAS

*Christmas Presence* (booklet). By Chieko Okazaki, Deseret Book, \$1.50.

Reprint of a Christmas address delivered at an Orem (Utah) Ward Women’s Meeting in 1992.

*The Real Spirit of Christmas* (booklet). By Howard W. Hunter, Bookcraft, \$1.50.

A sermon on the origins and real meaning of Christmas.

*A Christmas Parable*. By Boyd K. Packer, Bookcraft, \$9.95.

Second edition, enlarged and illustrated. A parable illustrating the true meaning of Christmas.

### HISTORY & BIOGRAPHY

*A Ministry of Meetings: The Apostolic Diaries of Ruderger Clawson*. Ed. by Stan Larson, Signature Books, \$85.00.

These diaries focus on Church financial policies, disagreements on polygamy, sacredness of confidentiality, and Clawson himself being “debarred from writing in my journal the doings of the council, which . . . I regret exceedingly.”

*In Search of Sir Richard Burton* (paperback). Ed. by Alan H. Jutzi, Huntington Library, \$16.00.

Papers from a Huntington Library Symposium, including “The Captain Has Seen Utah without Goggles: The Mormons and Sir Richard Burton,” by M. Guy Bishop.

*Competing Visions of Paradise: The California Experience of 19th Century American Secularism* (paperback). By John K. Simmons & Brian Wilson, Fithian Press, \$9.95.

This third volume in *The Religious Contours of California* series explores the “made-in-America” sectarian religious groups of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including Mormonism, Adventism, Christian Science, New Thought groups, and Pentecostalism.

### HUMOR

*The Sunstone Joke Book: The Book of Sunstone—Another Testament of Folly*. By Rush Utah (pseudonym), \$8.95.

Distributor’s Note: “A new writer on the scene from Arizona, Rush holds back no punches in this humorous work directed at so-called ‘Sunstoners.’ If you consider yourself a ‘Sunstoner,’ we apologize in advance if you are offended. Rush wanted us to be clear that he is, in fact, not sorry!”

from God, as routinely as in later years modern Mormons would pick up the phone. . . . Since babyhood, when my parents had first begun passing Smith's wisdom on to me, I'd been instructed in how to discern difference between a messenger from God and one from the devil, whenever spirits appeared to me" (34). Although stories of spirits are certainly common in Mormon folklore, few present-day Mormons would recognize daily appearances of spirits and the feeling of being surrounded by "fabulous ghosts" as the core of their religious experience. Laake is not proficient in Mormon history, either. She places the first vision in 1823, confuses it with the visitation of Moroni, and (as usual) assumes God always appears surrounded by a "cavalcade of spirits" (33). She could perhaps be forgiven, since she admits she spent most of her time in Sunday School fantasizing about romantic relations with her teachers.

Although Laake could have written an interesting book about the female condition in present-day Mormonism—a topic emphasized in recent feminist Mormon literature—she chose instead to underline the most sensational aspects of her story and produced what can only be termed an anti-Mormon book. In fact, students of the anti-Mormon literature easily recognize all the ingredients of a garden variety exposé. Although psychiatry replaces polygamy, the "secret ceremonies" and sexually graphic descriptions of Mormon life have been the common ingredients of anti-Mormon literature since the nineteenth century. Craig Foster has recently noted that a mild pornographic element was often included in this type of literature.<sup>1</sup> The comments on the relationship between temple garments and lovemaking—couched in pop Freudian terms—are also not entirely new, having already appeared in Peter Bart's anti-Mormon novel *Thy Kingdom Come* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1981). Some passages about how young girls at BYU were taught about sexuality are admittedly humorous, but it is a cheap shot to single out Mormonism for this kind of morality since many Christian churches were advancing similar conservative mores in the United States and elsewhere in the 1960s and early 1970s. Laake seems prone to fall victim to a common Mormon mistake that Mormonism is unique also in details—such as strict sexual morality—which are in fact common among the majority of mainline churches, except the very liberal ones.

Summing up, the book, as it is, will not significantly advance an understanding of

Mormonism by non-Mormon readers and could even distort their perception. This apparently happened to one Bob Shacoich, quoted as a famous author in the dust jacket (although I admit that I have never heard his name before), who assures the reader that "Ultimately, *Secret Ceremonies* will be read as a fascinating metaphor for the cultural divide in America, and Deborah Laake will be hailed as a clear-eyed survivor from the wildest, God-craziest, most far right side of the tracks." Of course, read this way, *Secret Ceremonies* will just serve the typical function of anti-Mormon books. This is why I would not recommend this book to serious students of Mormonism or even to lay readers with an interest in what Mormon life is really about. Readers who like to read about sexual lives of

psychotic women and female masturbation would probably prefer stronger literature. Even those interested in books connecting secret ceremonies, magic, spirits, and sex will find more satisfaction in books on sex magic like those of Aleister Crowley, which are still in print and readily available at any occult bookstore. Crowley surely knew how to mix sex and "secret ceremonies" better than Laake. He was also, without doubt, a more reliable expert on "metaphysical sex." ☞

#### NOTE

1. See Craig Foster, "Victorian Pornographic Imagery in Anti-Mormon Literature," *Journal of Mormon History* 19 (Spring 1993): 115–32.



### IF YOU WANT TO CRY, TOUCH ME

Sad in the night he talked to stars  
 while she kept silence with the clouded moon,  
 allowed his conversation to roll downhill  
 like gravel underfoot,  
 allowed herself to hear the pure clarity  
 of insect voices that make summer  
 eternal—  
 the billionth you've lived  
 whether you're five  
 or ninety.

He said, "I can't live without my father,  
 a big hole opens and spreads out,  
 sucking everything in  
 and I can't see any end to it."

She said, "Take the new shoes off,  
 the silk socks, the red-striped  
 tie and suspenders. Roll your trousers,  
 stand barefoot in the wet grass the way  
 he did the night you were born—calling  
 up through the window,  
 through the morphine drowsiness,  
 asking boyorgirl boyorgirl over and over.  
 Hear the chigchigchig  
 of the sprinkler sluicing through the picket  
 fence he built and whitewashed year  
 after year. Think of him like that."

He said, "I told him everything I ever wanted  
 him to hear—how good he was, how I  
 loved him—I told him everything and still  
 I feel so bad. He is me. I am him. Where  
 do I go from here, who am I to look like,  
 sound like, think like?"

She said, "If you want to cry, then cry."

—SEAN BRENDAN BROWN