

The Association for Mormon Letters

1346 South 18th East
Salt Lake City, Utah
84108

Vol. 3, No. 1

Newsletter

December 1978

THIRD ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM - ANOTHER RESOUNDING SUCCESS!

The 1978 symposium of the association for Mormon Letters was held on October 7th in the Marriott Library on the University of Utah campus. The sections were well attended and there was general agreement that the papers presented in both sessions were interesting and of uniformly high quality.

The theme of the morning session, "The Search for Self in Mormon Letters," was treated in widely differing ways including a study of the autobiographical writing of Eliza R. Snow, a discussion of the identity crisis in L.D.S. missionary fiction, and an assessment of Claude T. Barnes as Utah's Thoreau. Eugene England's probing commentary provided some provocative insights into the Mormon concept of selfhood.

Neal E. Lambert regaled those who attended the luncheon with a stirring address entitled "Some Thoughts on Mormon Sense of Place" which afforded some unique insights into the geographical, symbolic, and theological implications of Mormon roots and rallying points. At the conclusion of the luncheon, the first Annual Association for Mormon Letters Awards were announced by Maureen Ursenbach Beecher who chaired the 1978 Awards Committee. Douglas Thayer and Donald Marshall received awards for fiction; Linda Sillitoe and Arthur Henry King for poetry; and Clifton Holt Jolley for critical writing.

Under the rubric "The Mormon Novel and Moral Criticism," the afternoon session included papers on folklore in *The Giant Joshua*, Samuel Taylor's *Heaven Knows Why*, and a moral approach to literary criticism. The session culminated in Levi S. Peterson's stimulating and well-rounded commentary.

A fitting and thoroughly satisfying climax to the events of the day was provided by the evening session on poetry and prose in progress held at the home of Davis Bitton. Chaired with much wit and a firm hand by Elouise Bell, the session included seven accomplished writers who read entertaining and often deeply moving selections from their own works.

As a follow-up to the symposium, the AML sponsored its second conjoint meeting with the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association which was held in Phoenix, Arizona on October 28, 1978. Chaired by Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, the session was well attended and included two very fine papers--"Element and Glory: Reflections and Speculations on the Mormon Verbal Imagination" by Bruce Jorgensen and "The Psalm of Nephi: A Poetic Reading" by Steven P. Sondrup.

Finally, I am happy to be able to announce that the Executive Council of the Association recently decided to publish the symposium proceedings as well as the papers presented at the conjoint meeting of the RMMLA and distribute them to the membership of the AML, hopefully with the next Newsletter early next year.

Richard J. Cummings
AML President

AML AWARDS

Two poets, two fiction writers, and a literary critic were honored with prizes at the annual luncheon of the AML October 7. The critic, Clifton Holt Jolley, was awarded a prize carrying a cash award of \$100.00 for his essay "The Martyrdom of Joseph Smith: An Archetypal Study," (*Utah Historical Quarterly*, 44 (1976), 329-50). The prizes for fiction and poetry both were divided this year into two, each recipient receiving \$50.00. Douglas Thayer, for stories in *Under the Cottonwoods* (Provo, Utah: Frankson Press, 1977), and Donald Marshall, for stories in *Frost in the Orchard* (Provo, Utah: BYU Press, 1977), shared the fiction awards, and Arthur Henry King, for "The Field Behind Holly House" and Linda Sillitoe, for "The Old Philosopher" and "Letter to a Four-Year-Old Daughter" received the poetry awards. Those three poem are printed below with permission.

The awards committee, consisting of Bruce Jorgensen, Elouise Bell, Laurel Ulrich, Bob Rees, and Maureen Beecher had considered for these first award material bearing publication dates in 1975, 1976, and 1977.

In making the awards, the committee honored each writer for specific qualities of his/her work. Clifton Jolley's essay was praised "for brings to bear on historical materials the insights of literature, thereby enhancing the contributions of both disciplines." Donald Marshall, whose stories "The Wheelbarrow" and "The Reunion" were singled out as his finest, was praised for his serious portrayal of contemporary life in its breadth and depth, and encouraged in his explorations of the comic mode. The award to Douglas Thayer noted his unflinching yet sympathetic portrayals of the Mormon soul in conflict with itself. His "Indian Hills" and "Zarahemla" were selected as his most worthy stories, and his meticulous attention to matters of theme, structure, and background--the small towns of Utah, historical, geographic, and communal--was approved.

The two poets honored were representative of two very different styles. Linda Sillitoe's two poems were described in the award as "clear-eyed, hard-edged perceptions of ordinary and extraordinary experience which first address us in deceptively plain style and then surprise and delight us with unobtrusive formal patterns." Arthur Henry King's poem was cited as bringing to bear on Mormon experience the great sources of Western Culture, and through the tradition of English meditative poetry expressing "a deeply personal and seriously theological mediation on time and eternity."

Next year's prizes will be awarded for works bearing a publication date in the calendar year 1978. Authors are encouraged to contact awards chair Lavina Fielding Anderson to be assured that their works are available to the judging committee.

The Old Philosopher¹

Linda Sillitoe

It is worth the coin in pain to wrench my head,
confronting the repeated noise of bird
that interrupts internal tedium.

There. Upon that slanting post of red
smudge between dark wings, a robin's word
to anyone, "here I am, I am,"

is the second thing I like. The first is this:
my cell is three doors past the delivery room
and every child drenched in sudden air
who finds his toes unraveled from his hair,
hands flapping no boundaries, the womb
well lost, wails his knowledge, I exist!

¹By permission of Brigham Young University Studies.

My numbed and stricken wife, for my pleading
blinked one eye to affirm identity
true as one Indian intricately beading
a bricklayer slapping strophe after strophe
like a typewriter bleed blow breath
build brick whack blood death

These thoughts unlatch the joinings of the walls
which float away. The sounds of bird and squalling
infant keen the idiom of skies--
not of stars, but of unseen thinkers differing
as star from star. One like a comet
falls in wingless flight, a newborn human cries.

My voice is mine, my hands grope loosening air,
within my brain a heart, within an ear
which hears another voice. Know that I
am Alpha and Omega, Lord of sky
and Earth, beginning and end, exalt and damn.

The robin spoke the word: Ego, I am.

Letter to a Four-Year-Old Daughter¹

Linda Sillitoe

The days you instill in me only exhaustion,
reverberating from living room walls,
leaping, hanging, hurling as you instruct,
"Listen but don't look--tell me what this hits!"
I force my eyes to look calmly at a coloring book,
stained-glass with fifty colors patched on a waxy duck,
and send you off to sing, riding breakneck
on your toy horse to rhythms of "I am a child
of God", leaving me penitent in my fatigue.
As you compose, "Joseph Smith was a good prophet..."
I recall with renewal the day at your insistence
you learned how he was murdered. Refusing evasion,
you required whole truth, scorning attempt
at explanation tolerance, and a happy ending
in heaven; you choked down scrambled eggs, weeping,
"But they didn't have to kill him," and again
at bedtime, "they didn't have to kill him."
Like Porter Rockwell, one of few, you inquired,
"Who were they, what were their names?"
Now, horse providing percussion, you end your song,
"It was so long ago, we don't know their names,
don't know their names." In a sudden double-exposure
I glimpse a hounded man--a prophet--and a blond head
bowed for blood that shines from a newly found grave.

¹By permission of Brigham Young University Studies.

The Field Behind Holly House¹

Arthur Henry King

Right at the end, I mean to see that field:²
fifty-five hundred miles as crows make wing
steady, deliberate, straight to their own end.
At any time of year now I am old,
that field I aim to scan: wheat-blades in spring
sprouting to blackbird whistles; grain-stalks' bend
under the claw, as small birds thin the yield
in swarms and swoops of avid pilfering;
the stubble trampled into mud; the brand
of hoar frost on the furrow--a cultured wild,
not the Grand Canyon, or too tame to sing.
The kind of scene to give one peace of mind?

At the south end, one oak takes pride to be
isolate in the hedge, tawny in Fall
and April, ilex-green in August, bar
by my years' time, a sturdy, skeleton tree
that shows its stripped form best at the annual lull,
yet sleeps indifferent to my aging stare.
At the north end, the house end, in its lee,
grows from the ditch a crippled bush for all
titmice--blue, great, cole, marsh--and more that dare
a forage-base for suet or nut. I see
those many miles away the flick of a tail,
flirt of a wing, head's quirk, there--here--here--there.

The black cat through a tunnel of gold or green,
or slinking round the selion hugs his way,
following smaller bodies rarely seen
that save their lives or give them up as prey.
The stoat and weasel similarly pass
from east to west through oats, lucern, or grass,
from west to east. The cycle day by day
by month by season, the will be and has been--
present: right now I mean that field to stay
in all its times, as I in mine, one scene
in every scene, the field that is and was
my eyes and ears, my equal gain and loss.

This field's the one that Judas' crime lays waste;³
where Faust despairs,⁴ and the Old Guard goes west;⁵
where Hector runs to kill or shed his blood;
where "country folk would lie,"⁶ but the adder stings;
the field of fold where Lehi,⁷ Langland,⁸ brood;
the field by Mamre,⁹ where all Israel clings.
The dark frown conjures, but the white brow sings:--
The soul has found a cross-tree in the wood.
The Lord of Easter, roused by morning's wings,
has risen, and here I stand as Magdalen¹⁰ stood.
My days now one to me from first to last
I watch for sleep and wake my future's present past.

¹By permission of *Brigham Young University Studies*. ²*Macbeth*, 3.2.50-51. ³Matthew 27:3-10.
⁴*Faust*, Part I, last scene but two. ⁵Waterloo. ⁶*As You Like It*, 5.3.23. ⁷I Nephi 8:9.
⁸*Piers Plowman*, Prologue, 17-109. ⁹Genesis 23:19; 49:29-31; 50:25. ¹⁰Pronounced "Maudlin."

SYMPOSIUM SCHEDULED

The fourth annual Symposium of the Association has tentatively been scheduled for September 29, 1979 on the campus of Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. Two sessions will be held during the day, one of which will be devoted to literary approaches to the Book of Mormon, while the other will be more general in nature. An evening session will once again be held in which writers will be invited to read from their recent works. A call for papers is, therefore, issued for both of the critical sessions; any proposals, however, dealing with literary dimensions of the Book of Mormon will be especially welcome. Detailed abstracts should be sent to the Program Chairman, Prof. Levi S. Peterson, 1561 25th Street, Ogden, Utah 84401, no later than March 1, 1979. A call is also hereby issued for TEXTS of fiction or poetry which authors propose to read at the evening session. Work sent for consideration must conform to a 10-15 minute time limit and be submitted, similarly, by March 1, 1979 to 1346 South 18th East, Salt Lake City, Utah. The authors of those works which are selected for presentation will be notified by April 1, 1979. Papers in finished and complete form MUST be submitted to the Association by September 1, 1979 in order to allow adequate time for the preparation of commentary.

The Association is also planning another conjoint meeting with the Rocky Mountain Modern Languages Association in late October 1979 in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Proposals for that meeting are also invited and should be sent to the Association no later than March 1, 1979.

READING GROUPS SCHEDULED

In response to numerous suggestions made at the business meeting after the recent Symposium, a number of reading groups have been scheduled over the next several months. The first will be held on January 12, 1979 at the home of Neal E. Lambert, 3105 Navajo, Provo, Utah. Levi S. Peterson will read from his recent work and discussion will be invited. The evening will begin at 8:00 p.m. All members of the Association are invited to participate. On February 9, 1979, Linda Sillitoe will read some of her recent poetry in Ogden. Precise details will be announced later. In March, a group is scheduled for Salt Lake City; in April, for Logan; and in May, again for Salt Lake City. Dates, times, places, and speakers will all be announced later.

Members of the Association are reminded that anyone wishing to sponsor similar reading groups--particularly outside of Utah--may request manuscripts from the Association. A variety of works are available from Linda Sillitoe, 1718 Lake Street, Salt Lake City, Utah 84105. It is suggested that the manuscripts be read aloud (copying violates copyright) and then discussed. The Association and the authors would like to know your response, so an evaluation form will be included with the manuscript. Authors currently available are Dennis Clark (poetry), Clifton Holt Jolley (poetry), Linda Sillitoe (poetry), Emma Lou Thayne (poetry), and Béla Petsco (fiction). Writers who would be willing to have their work added to this catalogue are invited to contact Linda Sillitoe at the above address.

President: Richard J. Cummings
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Newsletter

June 1979

PROCEEDINGS AVAILABLE

The proceedings of the various symposia sponsored by the Association during 1978-79--specifically those in Salt Lake City, Utah, in Phoenix, Arizona, and in Charlottesville, Virginia--are now available. Unfortunately, the cost of production, handling, and mailing has made it impossible to offer the volume to the membership gratis as was originally anticipated. Members of the Association, though, may order copies from the Association (1346 South 18th East, Salt Lake City, Utah 84108) at a cost of \$3.00. Copies will be available to those not members of the Association at a cost of \$5.00 as long as the supply lasts. (Charges represent partial and full reimbursement respectively.)

Included in the volume are papers by Lavina Fielding Anderson, Stephen Tanner, William Wilson, Richard Cracroft, Davis Bitton, Neal E. Lambert, Bruce Jorgensen, Steven P. Sondrup, Chris Arrington, and Richard Rust.

SYMPOSIUM IN CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA

On Saturday, April 28, 1979, the Association sponsored a symposium in Charlottesville Virginia. The conference which met on the campus of the University of Virginia was under the general direction of Chad Wright and attracted participants from Boston, Massachusetts through Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

The opening session was devoted to critical responses to Mormon literature and included presentations by Neal E. Lambert ("A Sense of Place in Mormon Literature"), Richard Rust ("All Things Which Have Been Given of God...Are the Typifying of Him': Typology in the Book of Mormon"), and Chris Arrington ("The Literature of the Women's Movement and Mormon Sisterhood." After a brief break, Steven P. Sondrup presented a paper entitled "The Psalm of Nephi: A Lyric Reading," and Tony Kimball discussed "The Process of Living: C.S. Lewis as a 'Guide of the Perplexed.'"

After an informal supper at the home of Prof. and Mrs. Bill Beazer, an evening of original poetry/drama/fiction was held. Among the participants were Kristie Gynn, Mary Bradford, Meg Munk, Dixie Barlow, Béla Petsco, Susan Howe, and a Relief Society workshop on poetry from the Washington, D.C. area. Participants in the latter presentation included Kristine Barrett, Linda Andros, Kaye Smith, Sonia Johnson, Joyce Carson, and Marie Chamberlain.

READING SCHEDULED

Dr. Gordon Allred, professor of English at Weber State College and widely-published author, will read from his recent work on Saturday, June 23rd at the home of Linda Sillitoe, 1718 Lake Street, Salt Lake City. Dr. Allred has published young-adult novels; short stories; *The Valley of Tomorrow*, a novel on a contemporary Mormon theme; *God the Father*, a compilation published in March 1979 by Deseret Book; and *FAMILY!*, narratives about the Allred family, to be published by Bookcraft. All members of the Association as well as friends are cordially invited to attend. For further information, contact Linda Sillitoe, 484-4908.

Members of the Association are reminded that anyone wishing to sponsor similar reading groups--particularly outside of Utah--may request manuscripts from the Association. A variety of works are available from Linda Sillitoe at the above address. It is suggested that the manuscripts be read aloud (copying violates copyright) and then discussed. Authors currently available are Dennis Clark (poetry), Clifton Holt Jolley (poetry), Linda Sillitoe (poetry), Emma Lou Thayne (poetry), and Béla Petsco (fiction). Writers who would be willing to have their work added to this catalogue are invited to contact Linda Sillitoe.

SUNSTONE FICTION CONTEST

Sunstone has recently announced a fiction contest that should be of interest to many members of the Association. Prizes--first prize: \$500, second prize: \$250, and 3rd: \$100--will be awarded to the authors of works selected by a distinguished panel of judges. Entries must be less than 5,000 words and should be submitted to *Sunstone*, P.O. Box 2272, Salt Lake City, Utah 84110 by October 1, 1979. Any work submitted must, of course, be original. Winners will be announced in the January 1980 issue of *Sunstone*, and *Sunstone* requires of the first rights of rejection with regard to publication.

PRODUCER SEEKS SCRIPTS

Robert N. Hatch, an independent film producer, is in the market for material that could be used for educational films. He points out that the motion picture industry can be visualized as a large inverted pyramid. The upper area, which employs the most people, is marketing and distribution, and it rests on a smaller area of actor and production crew, which in turn rests on the yet smaller producer/director area. At the apex, the part supporting the entire inverted pyramid, is the writer. The ideas that come from the writer begin the whole motion picture process.

More scripts are needed to form these apexes. Didactic drama producible as educational films are being actively sought. Educators, churches, and businesses need and use films that tell a story and leave a message. Any story of uplifting quality--concerning motivation, values, love, success etc.--may be adaptable to the film format.

Ideas, stories, outlines, treatments, scenarios, one-act plays, or completed scripts should be sent for consideration to Robert N. Hatch, 1804 South 440 West, Bountiful, Utah 84010. Apexes pay dividends!

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TO UTAH

On May 18, 1979, the hospitality of Dale F. and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher provided the opportunity for Prof. Edward L. Hart to read from his recently published collection of poems entitled *To Utah* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1979).

This slender volume represents a sampling of Prof. Hart's poetic activities over the last several years. It is particularly notable for the clarity and lucidity of its poetic vision and the honesty and sincerity of its lyric expression. Sentimentality, bombast, and posturing are utterly foreign to its conception and execution.

Highly recommended!

President: Richard J. Cummings
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Vice President: Levi S. Peterson
Executive Secretary: Steven P. Sondrup

Council:
George S. Tate
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Elizabeth Shaw
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Neal E. Lambert

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Vol. 3, No. 4

Newsletter

September 1979

FOURTH SYMPOSIUM ON MORMON LETTERS SCHEDULED

The 1979 Symposium of the Association for Mormon Letters will be held in the Alice B. Reynolds Room of the Harold B. Lee Library at Brigham Young University on Saturday, October 13, 1979.

- 9:00-10:00 Registration
- 10:00-12:00 The Book of Mormon as Literature
Levi Peterson, Chair
Mark Thomas: "The American Apocalypse: Lehi's Dream as Rhetoric"
Steven C. Walker: "More Than Meets the Eye: Book of Mormon Concentration"
Clifton Holt Jolley: "Rhetorical Evidences for Claiming Moroni as a Tragic Protagonist"
Thomas F. Rogers, Commentator
- 12:15-1:45 Lunch: Skyroom, Ernest L. Wilkinson Center
Chairman: Eugene England
Speaker: Richard J. Cummings
- 2:00-4:00 Theme and Character in Mormon Fiction
Kenneth B. Hunsaker, Chair
Elouise M. Bell: "'(ALMOST) ALL IS WELL': Thematic Sophistication as an Index of Quality in Short Stories by L.D.S. Student Writers"
Bruce W. Jorgensen: "'Herself Moving Beside Herself, Out There Alone': The Shape of Mormon Belief in Virginia Sorensen's The Evening and the Morning Star"
Linda Sillito: "'The Upstream Swimmers': Female Rebels as Protagonists in Mormon Novels"
Richard Cracroft, Commentator
- 4:00-5:00 Business Meeting
Reports
New Officers
Other Business
- 7:00-9:00 Poetry and Prose in Progress: Mormon Writers Read from Their Work (At the home of Charlotte and Eugene England.)
Linda Sillito, Chair
Penny Allen Arthur Henry King
Kathryn Ashworth Béla Petsco
Marden Clark Douglas Thayer

Members of the Association planning to attend the Symposium are encouraged to pre-register and, if desired, to make reservations for the luncheon. A pre-registration/reservation form is included with the Newsletter for the benefit of those wishing to take advantage of this option. The registration fee is \$1.00 and the price of the luncheon is \$4.50. Although the registration fee may be paid at the door, luncheon tickets will, unfortunately, not be available after Wednesday, October 10, 1979. The form together with the appropriate remittance should be sent to The Association for Mormon Letters, 1346 South 18th East, Salt Lake City, Utah 84108. Members who have pre-registered will be able to claim their packet of registration material at the door on the morning of the Symposium.

The Alice Louise Reynolds Room in the Harold B. Lee Library is on the sixth floor, at the top of the north stairs and elevators. Brigham Young University parking restrictions do not apply on Saturday (unless so posted), and there will be ample parking available just west of the Library and north of the Wilkinson Center. Parking is also available north of the Harris Fine Arts Building, where there will be art and photography exhibits which may be seen before or after the Symposium. The Wilkinson Center, where the luncheon will be held, (in the Skyroom at the top of the central tower) is just east of the Library. The Englands' home is readily accessible from the campus: 1775 North Andrus Lane.

A Mormon Epic: Paul Cracroft's *A Certain Testimony*

R. Paul Cracroft, *A Certain Testimony* (Salt Lake City: Epic West, 1979), pp. 479; \$10.50.

John Milton did not have a little brother such as I; thus he wrote *Paradise Lost*. R. Paul Cracroft has me; thus he has written four hundred joyous pages of remarkable blank verse.

A Certain Testimony, a Mormon epic in (of course) twelve books, deserves the immediate attention of L.D.S. readers. Its more than four hundred carefully crafted pages of crisp and crackling blank verse read like a novel. Gripping, graphic, inspiring, powerful, Bishop Cracroft's poem covers in a moving and majestic way the history of the gospel of Jesus Christ on the American continent. From the creation (with hints of the pre-existence), the poem moves, Paul writes, "through the cataclysmic days of the Temptation and the Flood, picks up the Jaredite and Nephite migrations to their respective Promised Lands, . . . and reaches a high point in the pivotal Visit of The Savior. The poem then shifts focus and even poetic style to depict the Restoration, finally taking the reader right up through today's disturbing headlines."

The epic is no mere redaction of the scriptures. Replete with humor, witty and sharp commentary on the modern world, and good sound doctrine, the poem reflects the unusual personality, the profound faith and vibrant style which are my brother Paul; it is a work of art--a readable epic!

Six years in the writing, *A Certain Testimony* must be reckoned with as one of the most important events in the history of Mormon literature. The book can be purchased for \$10.50 at Zion's Book, Deseret Book, and other bookstores, or may be ordered by sending a check for the required amount to Epic West, 2302 South 20th East, Salt Lake City, Utah 84106.

There I did it. I could have done the same, I suppose, for Milton, but I am content to have done it for Brother Paul Cracroft.

Richard Cracroft, Brigham Young University

NOMINATION COMMITTEE ANNOUNCES SLATE OF NEW OFFICERS

With the annual symposium in October, four officers on the present Executive Council of the Association for Mormon Letters will retire or change position: Richard C. Cummings, president, becomes a member of the Council for a one-year term; Neal Lambert and George Tate, each having served his full term, retire from the council; Levi Peterson, who served a one-year term as second vice-president, is released with thanks.

The nominating committee met recently and agreed to present to the membership as their nominations the following slate to replace those officers who retire from official service:

As first vice-president and president-elect, Levi Peterson, Weber State College,

As second vice-president and program chairman, Edward A. Geary, Brigham Young University,

As members of the council: Karen Lynn, Brigham Young University, and William A. (Bert) Wilson, Utah State University.

In addition to filling vacated positions, the committee, acknowledging the growing membership of the Association outside of Utah, nominates herewith two distant members for the council to serve in their representative regions in consultation with the council and executives in whatever activities might further the purposes of the Association. So nominated are:

Chad C. Wright, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia and

Robert A. Ress, U.C.L.A., Los Angeles, California.

It is anticipated that in future years other regions will be likewise represented with council members.

At the annual meeting, nominations by members of the Association will be received from the floor. Persons nominated must either be present or have indicated willingness to serve by submitting a signed statement.

ASSOCIATION TO MEET IN ALBUQUERQUE

The Association for Mormon Letters is planning a special symposium session in conjunction with the annual conference of the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association in Albuquerque, New Mexico, in the Zuni Room of the Albuquerque Convention Center from 9:00 until 10:30 a.m. on Saturday, October 20, 1979. The session will be chaired by Steven P. Sondrup. The three presentations that have been scheduled are:

Maureen U. Beecher: "The Scribbling Sisters: Newspaper Verse on the Mormon Frontier,"

Clifton Holt Jolley: "Toward the Rhetoric of Mormon Sermons," and

George S. Tate: "On Book of Mormon Typology."

All members of the Association are cordially invited to attend. Guests will be, as always, most welcome.

Members attending the RMMLA meetings should take special note of the presentation, by Association members Richard Cracroft and Neal Lambert, of a paper entitled, "America's Second Errand into the Wilderness: The Mormon Journal as Literature," Session III-D, Friday, October 19th from 9:00 to 10:30 a.m., also in the Zuni Room.

STORIES ABOUT PEOPLE WHO HAPPEN TO BE MORMONS

Béla Petsco, *Nothing Very Important and other stories* (Provo, Utah: Meservydale Publishing, 1979).

Despite its title, Béla Petsco's new book, *Nothing Very Important and other stories*, is important and worth serious consideration. Petsco, who published the book himself, is publicizing it with the tag, "Stories about people who happen to be Mormons," but that's not quite right. The people don't happen to be Mormons; they are Mormons because Mormons and Mormon problems are a central part of Petsco's knowledge and experience, and it's the ambivalence of the Mormon lifestyle that he has chosen to deal with. Were his characters Catholic or Jewish or agnostic, they would be entirely different people with entirely different conflicts. But perhaps what Petsco wishes to emphasize in using the tagline is that his characters are human beings, flesh and blood creatures who are men and women first and Latter-day Saints next. Indeed, it is when the realism of the human animal encounters the idealism of the Mormon soul that the author's best stories result--as in "The Shell," the story of a sensitive, idiosyncratic loner who tries with painful awareness to become a satisfactory missionary but simply cannot find enough support in his world to sustain life. The story, though dealing with individual sensitivity and the problems inherent in its excess at either end of the spectrum, is not over-wrought or precious, but bittersweet, told through a narrative voice that is both ironic and compassionate.

Indeed, it is that particular voice that makes *Nothing Very Important* significant. Here is a collection of fiction pieces--not quite stories, many of them; some critics are calling the book a "fragmented novel." Whatever--that does what so many L.D.S. readers have looked for literature to do: it deals maturely and unflinchingly with the ambiguities involved in being a Latter-day Saint in the twentieth century; it offers no easy answers, indeed few answers at all; yet, it is completely free of bitterness and the hard, grating rasp so often found in books that purport to "tell it like it really is."

The book's central character is Milahly Agyar, a convert of Hungarian ancestry (like Petsco himself), working as a missionary in California and Arizona. Agyar's age (he is perhaps five or more years older than the average missionary), his convert status, his exotic genealogy, and his artist's temperament (before his mission he was a painter) make him a rich, perceptive intelligence through which to tell the various tales.

Though Petsco's writing is not without flaws, it is smooth, professional, and highly readable. He has yet to master the integration of theme and narrative in such a way as to produce a self-contained short story that really *feels* like a short story, yet these pieces taken together do give us the satisfaction that a short novel gives.

A.M.L. members interested in obtaining a copy of the book can order one by sending \$7.95 to Meservydale Publishing Company, P.O. Box 558, Provo, Utah 84601. Petsco is a major new talent on the Mormon letters scene, and his first book can be read and recommended without any serious reservations, but with whole-hearted pleasure.

Elouise M. Bell
Brigham Young University

President: Richard J. Cummings
President Elect: Eugene England
Vice President: Levi S. Peterson
Executive Secretary: Steven P. Sondrup

Council:
George S. Tate
Linda Sillito
Elizabeth Shaw
Candadai Seshachari
Neal E. Lambert

The Association for Mormon Letters

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84108

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL AND PRE-REGISTRATION

Members of the Executive Council have determined that the membership dues for 1979-80 should be \$5.00 for individuals and \$6.00 for couples desiring joint membership. Members of the Association are invited to renew their membership for another year by filling out the form below.

For the sake of efficiency and convenience, members of the Association planning to attend the Fourth Annual Symposium to be held Saturday, October 13, 1979, at the Alice Louise Reynolds Room of the Harold B. Lee Library at Brigham Young University are invited to pre-register. The registration fee is \$1.00. Those planning to attend the luncheon to be held in the Skyroom in the Wilkinson Center at a cost of \$4.50 must make reservations in advance. Although registration fees may be paid at the door, no luncheon reservations will be available at that time.

To pre-register and/or renew membership, detach the form below, and mail with check or money order. The deadline for receipt of luncheon reservations is October 10, 1979.

~~as a magic program~~
Thomas F. Rogers, Commentator

- 12:15-1:45 Lunch: Skyroom, Ernest L. Wilkinson Center
Chairman: Eugene England
Speaker: Richard J. Cummings
- 2:00-4:00 Theme and Character in Mormon Fiction
Kenneth B. Hunsaker, Chair
Elouise M. Bell: "'(ALMOST) ALL IS WELL': Thematic Sophistication as an Index of Quality in Short Stories by L.D.S. Student Writers"
Bruce W. Jorgensen: "'Herself Moving Beside Herself, Out There Alone': The Shape of Mormon Belief in Virginia Sorensen's The Evening and the Morning Star"
Linda Sillito: "'The Upstream Swimmers': Female Rebels as Protagonists in Mormon Novels"
Richard Cracroft, Commentator
- 4:00-5:00 Business Meeting
Reports
New Officers
Other Business
- 7:00-9:00 Poetry and Prose in Progress: Mormon Writers Read from Their Work (At the home of Charlotte and Eugene England.)
Linda Sillito, Chair
Penny Allen Arthur Henry King
Kathryn Ashworth Béla Petsco
Marden Clark Douglas Thayer