

# The Association for Mormon Letters

1346 South 18th East  
Salt Lake City, Utah  
84108

Vol. 7, No. 3

Newsletter

November 1983

## WEST COAST SYMPOSIUM

The first west coast symposium of the Association for Mormon Letters was held on September 17, 1983, at the Huntington Library in San Marino, California. Karen Lynn, a member of the Association's executive committee, planned and organized the meeting.

The first session, entitled "Language, Perception, and Personality," was chaired by Robert Rees. Chris Conkling, the first speaker, discussed the tension between the belief in a "one-and-only truth" and philosophical pluralism in both Mormon life and letters. Irene Bates's paper focused attention on "Mormon Letters--The Other Kind." Using a number of striking examples, she illustrated how letters--the kind people mail to each other--provide a means of coming to terms with problems and express joy as well as frustration. Nicolas Shumway analyzed the relationship between truth and language in the Judeo-Christian tradition and contrasted the view of textuality in that tradition with the concept of sacred text implied by Mormon belief.

In the second session, Russell Chandler, religion editor of the Los Angeles Times, was the featured speaker. In his presentation, "What Makes Religion News," he commented on recent developments in American religious belief and responded to questions concerning his article on Mormonism.

After lunch and a tour of an exhibit featuring some of the Huntington Library's most notable Mormon holdings, the third session, entitled "Historical Perspectives," convened. Valeria Franco, a librarian at the Huntington, described the Mormon collection and how it was built. Maureen Ursenbach Beecher's paper, "'On Subjects Not Disclosed': An Interlinear to the Diaries of Eliza R. Snow," was particularly appropriate because the diaries discussed are housed at the Huntington. Grant Underwood's presentation, "'Saved or Damned': Tracing a Persistent Protestantism in Early Mormon Thought," traced the history of the doctrine of three degrees of glory with particular attention to its relationship to the saved-or-damned dichotomy.

The third session provided a reading from Levi Peterson's short story "Road to Damascus" by Steven P. Sondrup, after which Gloria Cronin discussed Peterson's development as a writer on the basis of the two published versions of that story.

The final session of the symposium was held at Karen Lynn's home and was under the direction of Ruth Rees. The session, entitled "Mormon Hymns and Children's Songs: High Church to High Comedy," was a retrospective of Mormon hymnody involving the presentation of hymns that for various reasons no longer appear in the hymn book and group singing of other hymns that have played an important role in the development of Church music.

Plans for a west coast symposium in 1984 are already being discussed. Specifics will be announced later.

## READING HELD IN OGDEN

The AML sponsored a reading by Joseph Peterson in Ogden on the evening of May 28, 1983. Mr. Peterson, presently living in Roosevelt, Utah, and teaching English in the extension service of Utah State University, read a short story and excerpts from a novel in progress. A recent graduate with an M.A. in English from Brigham Young University, he has written a number of stories receiving recognition through prizes or publication.

## UTAH SYMPOSIUM

Plans are progressing under the direction of Linda King Newell, program chairman, for the annual Utah symposium of the Association, to be held January 21, 1984, in the Marriott Library on the campus of the University of Utah. One session will focus on "The Literature of Immigration," while other sessions will cover a range of topics.

## PROCEEDINGS MAILED

Copies of the Proceedings of the Association for Mormon Letters, 1979-82, have been sent to all paid-up members of the Association. The Proceedings includes twelve papers presented at AML symposia. Any member who has not yet received a copy should write to the Association at 1346 South 18th East, Salt Lake City, Utah 84108. Beginning with the 1983 volume, which will be published early in 1984, the title will be changed to the Mormon Letters Annual, and the publication will include papers from all of the Association's symposia as well as other papers which may not be suitable for oral presentation because of format or technical considerations.

## RMMLA CONJOINT SESSION

A conjoint session sponsored by the AML was held at the annual Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association meetings in Glendale, Arizona, on October 22, 1983. The session was chaired by Richard H. Cracroft and included papers by Eugene England, "Thayer's Ode to a Red Tail Hawk"; Bruce W. Jorgensen, "'A Smaller Canvas' of the Mormon Short Story Since 1950"; Mary L. Bradford, "The Quintessential Mormon Genre: Practitioners of the Personal Essay"; and John S. Tanner, "Shared Heresies: Milton Among the Mormons." John Tanner will serve as chairman of the 1984 RMMLA conjoint session, to be held in El Paso, Texas.

## LETTERS INVITED

We invite response on items and information included in the Newsletter as well as comments on other topics related to Mormon letters. Such correspondence should be sent to Randall L. Hall, 356 South 1160 West, Orem, Utah 84057.

Candadai Seshachari, President  
Edward A. Geary, President Elect  
Stephen P. Sondrup, Executive Sec.  
Linda King Newell, Program Chairman

Executive Committee:  
Lavina Fielding Anderson  
Clifton Holt Jolley  
Thomas R. Burton

L. Jay Fox  
Linda King Newell  
Randall L. Hall

# The Association for Mormon Letters

1346 South 18th East  
Salt Lake City, Utah  
84108

## ATTENTION PUBLISHERS

The Association for Mormon Letters will hold its annual meeting on 21 January 1983, in the auditorium of the Marriott Library, University of Utah. This is an all-day affair with registration beginning at 9 a.m. when the library opens.

We invite you to display your publications throughout the day. Each display table will be \$10 with \$5 for a half table. Since the tables will be in the same room as the conference sessions, we invite you to come promptly at 9 a.m. for setting up. A table will be reserved for you and so labeled on a first-come-first-served basis as we receive your check and your reservation. We are inviting a number of publishers and the table space is limited, so we encourage your early response.

Please make your check payable to the Association for Mormon Letters and send to me.

Lavina Fielding Anderson  
1519 Roberta Street  
Salt Lake City, Utah 84115

# The Association for Mormon Letters

1346 South 18th East  
Salt Lake City, Utah  
84108

Vol. 7, No. 2

Newsletter

June 1983

## EAST COAST SYMPOSIUM

The fifth annual symposium of the Association for Mormon Letters was held May 13-14 in Philadelphia under the direction of Erin and Charlotte Silva.

The first session was held in Philosophical Hall. This building on Independence Square was begun in 1785 to house the American Philosophical Society, an organization "to cultivate the finer arts and improve the common stock of knowlege" that Benjamin Franklin had helped establish some forty years earlier. In his opening remarks, Erin Silva welcomed the more than eighty participants in the conference and called attention to the long tradition of learning and discussion associated with the hall.

Eugene England then delivered a plenary address entitled: "Are Mormon Women Freer than Men under the Patriarchy: The Evidence of Mormon Literature." Taking issue with several recent studies that suggest that Mormon women are suppressed by the patriarchy, he argued that women are actually more liberated than men in basic and fundamental ways. The fact that in every period and in all genres well over half the best literature is written by women is indicative of women's fundamental freedom and the ability to come to terms with the ordinary demands of daily life. The works of many prominent women ranging from Eliza R. Snow to Lavina Fielding Anderson, from Juanita Brooks and Fawn Brodie to Linda Sillitoe and Eileen Kump were discussed in this context. A panel consisting of Claudia Bushman, Eloise Bell, Mary Bradford, JoAnn Young, and Susan Howe responded. The reactions of the panelists were extremely varied but in general found noteworthy insights in the analysis of the literary contributions of women but questioned whether literary skill and achievement necessarily indicate any kind of significant freedom or liberation.

The second session convened in the Bodek Lounge of Houston Hall on the campus of the University of Pennsylvania. Susan B. Taber's paper discussed the Book of Mormon as a work carefully structured by one mind--Mormon's--for specific purposes and suggested that the pattern of of editorial comments reveals Mormon's changing attitudes toward the text.

Gloria Cronin spoke on Eileen Kump's recent book Bread and Milk and Other Stories. She argued that the collection of stories can well be understood as a Bildungsroman that stresses the various ways in which change, development, and most especially initiation are life-long processes. The concluding speaker in this session was Richard Bushman. After commenting on some recent fundamental changes in Church practice in recent years, he pointed to some likely areas of expansion and development in the foreseeable future.

After a buffet lunch, everyone joined in "Marching through Utah: A Utah Suffrage Sing-along with Claudia Bushman: A Participatory Exploration of One of the Immaterial Cultural Artifacts of the Mormon Feminist Past." The rest of the afternoon was filled with the presentation of original music, poetry, personal essays, and short stories. Elouise Bell, Jane Geller, Joyce Stevenson, Jennifer Dix, Kevin Barnhurst, Debra Blose, Lonnie Gibson, Ruth Knight, and Ann Woodward all took part.

**ABSTRACTS OF SOME PAPERS  
PRESENTED AT THE AML SYMPOSIUM  
JANUARY 1983, SALT LAKE CITY**

**Patient Griseldas and Reluctant Heroes:  
Character Types in Contemporary Mormon Fiction**

In Mormon literature two archetypal characters appear. One patterns after patient Griselda of folk tales--a long-suffering wife who submits to male indignities with inner dignity for the good of family, society, and her own soul. The fate of this good wife inspires the creation of her foil--"impatient Griseldas," who war against such injustices.

A second archetypal character is the reluctant male hero. First a happy bumbler in the Yankee Jonathan tradition, the reluctant hero often appears as an authority like a bishop who must live by faith to handle challenges beyond his own capacities. His homeletic speeches edify, while his humorous adventures enliven.

Putting the two character types together enhances a Mormon comic literature whose heroes make mistakes and know it and whose heroines aspire and are usually ignored. Both types act within the classic pattern of mythic adventure:separation-initiation-return.

Cherry B. Silver  
Moses Lake, Washington

**RLDS Hymnal, 1982  
(Scheduled for publication in Dialogue)**

Any denomination will periodically outgrow its hymnal. About ten years ago the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints began work on a new volume--Hymns of the Saints (1982) to replace its 1965 hymnal.

Out of 501 hymns, more than a third are new to this collection. Included are hymns from many nationalities and denominations, and the new hymns often reflect a growing sense of mission as a world church. In addition, many existing hymn texts were revised to eliminate sexist language or doctrinal problems. Almost all the hymns are within the general Christian mainstream, with few references to uniquely Mormon doctrine, scriptures, or historical events. Though some inferior hymns were retained because of their popularity, the collection overall shows considerable variety and quality. An unusual feature is a scriptural index which correlates scripture passages with hymn texts.

Karen Lynn  
Glendale, California

**Feud and Fun:  
Humor in the Poetry of  
John Lyon**

The Scottish-American John Lyon (1803-89) was the first Mormon to publish a full volume of poetry; the year was 1853. During the next thirty-five years he continued writing prose and verse which recorded his feelings and experiences in pioneer Utah. Some of his poetry tickles the funny bone as it reflects the comic in nineteenth-century Mormonism. Lyon lightheartedly pokes fun at (1) marriage and polygamy, (2) garrulous women, (3) the school and legal system, and even a jestful jab at his own work, (4) the writing of poetry. This paper examines the comic aspects of Lyons's verse.

Thomas E. Lyon  
Provo, Utah

**"Moonbeams From a Larger Lunacy:"  
Poetry in the Reorganization  
(Scheduled for publication in Dialogue)**

Members of the RLDS church have published a good deal of poetry. However, the evidence in official sources is that the poetry has been seen more as a filler than as an expression of religious concern. Not only is there little poetry directed to Restoration topics, most of the work is immature and lacking in both technical competencies and human sympathies. Published poetry seems to follow the popular schemes of rhyme and stress; but in the main lacks the imagination necessary for real religious expression. This paper suggests that there is something in the RLDS structure that limits the ability of its members to write what is usually considered to be religious poetry, having been denied both an ontological hunger and a tradition of artistic communication.

Paul M. Edwards  
Independence, Missouri

## Dutch Literary Competition

Horizon, an independent Dutch-language journal addressed to the LDS community, is now in its second year of publication and reaches well over 90% of the Church membership in Holland and Belgium. The editors recently sponsored a literary competition and awarded prizes for poetry and fiction. The prize winners in the poetry category were 1. Marik Messiaen, 2. Maria van der Laan-Korte, and 3. Mieke van den Heuvel. Marik Messiaen also won first place in the short story division, and Renée Graven-Pasture and George Tuffin took second and third places respectively. The stark simplicity and undeviating faith of Marik Messiaen's first-place poem, "Moroni," are, perhaps, its most striking characteristics and ring true even in translation.

Moroni<sup>1</sup>

Moroni

Wij weten niet  
of hij de steen kantelde of schoof,  
toen hij het boek  
voor duizenden seizoenen  
aan nacht en aarde overdroeg.

We do not know  
whether he tilted or shoved the stone,  
when he entrusted the book  
for thousands of seasons  
to night and earth.

Het maakt niets uit -  
de kleine kamer, zwart en droog,  
verborg van miljoenen  
de eerste wijsheid en het leven,  
de laatste zonde en de dood.

It does not matter--  
the little room, dark and dry,  
concealed from millions  
the first wisdom and life,  
the last sin and death.

En hij ging heen.

And he departed.

Misschien was het herfst  
en geurde de heuvel  
naar mist en zurig mos.

Perhaps it was autumn  
and the hill smelled  
of mist and sour moss.

Translated by Marik Messiaen  
and Steven P. Sondrup

<sup>1</sup>Published by permission of Horizon: Tijdschrift over de mormoonse gemeenschap.

## PROCEEDINGS

The Proceedings from the 1979-82 Symposium will soon be printed and mailed. Beginning this year the AML will begin publishing an Annual which will include papers from the various symposia (Utah, East Coast, West Coast, RMMLA) as well as other papers which may not, because of technical requirements, be suitable for oral presentation.

Those wishing to submit papers for consideration in the 1983 Annual (available in January 1984) should do so by October 15 to Steven P. Sondrup, 1346 South 1800 East, Salt Lake City, Utah 84108.

## PRIZES

Any nominations for Mormon literature published in 1982 to be considered for AML prizes should be submitted to Richard Cracroft, Prize Committee Chairman, by 1 October at College of Humanities, 2054 Jesse Knight Humanities Building, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah 84602.

## FIRST WEST COAST SYMPOSIUM

The first West Coast Symposium will be held this year on September 17 at the Huntington Library in San Marino, California. Proposals for papers should be sent by July 20, to Karen Lynn at 3161 Glencrest Drive, Glendale, California 91208 Telephone: (213) 248-4506.

Contact her for registration information.

Sunstone's annual Theological Symposium is scheduled for August 25-27 at Hotel Utah in Salt Lake City and offers a range of papers and panels on Mormon thought.

## CALL FOR PAPERS

Next year's Utah symposium will be held 21 January 1984 in Salt Lake City, Utah. Proposals for papers should be sent to Linda King Newell, at 1218 Harvard Avenue, Salt Lake City, Utah 84105, by 15 September 1983. One session of the symposium, focusing on the literature of immigration, will include a paper by William Mulder and has space for other proposals.

## TEXTS AND TUNES

An April reading included sight-reading for a group of about twenty participants in Salt Lake City in April. Lynn R. Carson, a composer, performed some of his own hymns and arrangements of traditional text for the first time before a group, including the hymn text by Paul L. Anderson that had received the first place award in the 1983 All-Church Music Contest sponsored by the Ensign and the Church Music Committee. Several other unpublished hymns, including some by Michael Moody and other Mormon composers, were also featured; and participants also sang some selections from the newly published 1982 RLDS hymnal. Kathryn Ashworth of Provo, a poet, revealed that she had also been writing hymns and their impromptu performance was an unexpected highlight.

## LETTERS INVITED

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## Scaling the Canyons of Grace Richard H. Cracroft

Levi S. Peterson, The Canyons of Grace (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 135 pp; \$4.95 (Illinois Short Fiction Series)

Members of the Association for Mormon Letters who fail to purchase copies of Levi S. Peterson's important collection of short stories, The Canyons of Grace, should have their Master M-Man or Golden Gleaner pins unceremoniously ripped from their heaving bosoms and be skewered with pins thereof to the nearest meetinghouse tackboard (if one is too young to possess a Master M-Man or Golden Gleaner pin, a Duty to God pin or Laurel necklace must suffice).

Being skewered, J. Alfred Prufrock-like, is not only proper punishment for recalcitrant LDS readers who fail to purchase this book, but it is the standard state for most of the protagonists in Peterson's intensely Mormon but not necessarily orthodox collection of six fine stories, all of which have been previously published (in Ascent, Denver Quarterly, Dialogue, and Sunstone--and two of them, "The Confessions of Augustine" and "Road to Damascus," won the AML Mormon Fiction Award). In The Canyons of Grace, Peterson carefully skewers a handful of brilliantly realized, intrinsically Mormon characters and sets them to writhe on their pins of Mormonism, or, more particularly, faith. Peterson's characters do not doubt the existence of God nor the divinity of his Church; they struggle, instead, along their various roads to Damascus, or Ninevah, or Zarahemla, like the mini-Pauls, Jonahs, and Almas they are, each revealing a private obduracy, a willfully persistent perversity to resist God's proffered, fearful grace--resisting priesthood for selfhood. As Arabella, the protagonist in the title story, "The Canyons of Grace," states it: "There has to be a God. No one else can save me, though the price He asks is my integrity." Always willful, she does not, after permitting herself to be seduced, "doubt her damnation," but nonetheless exults in her venturesome and daring acts of willful transgression--her assertion of integrity.

Peterson's characters share a terror for the Mormon God and the strictures of his Church. Paul, the non-Mormon protagonist of "Road to Damascus," compares the commandments of his wife's LDS faith to a crippled tree: "The commandments overweighted a man, bent him low, squeezed him into odd shapes like a gnarled, missprouted tree," he laments, and observes that around his Mormon home, "The air stinks of the commandments." He longs for freedom from such binding responsibility, even from his wife and her God. But after resisting temptations of the flesh and spirit while on a journey, he hesitantly returns to her--and her God--repelled and attracted, but weeping at his loss of self, which Peterson emblemizes in the straight and crippled trees on a hill above Paul's farm.

The terror in the various characters is caused, in part, by the need each feels to assure his or her unyielding integrity

against God's demands for submission. Fremont Dunham, the protagonist in "The Confessions of Augustine," leaves his Mormon home in Snowflake, Arizona, during the summer after high school and drifts into alternating moments of "penance and fornication." It is a summer in which Fremont fears God while persisting in fleshly delights, relishing his impulse "to be and grow regardless of God . . . in a profane world." With the rest of Peterson's creations, he realizes the inevitability of divine retribution; and recounting the story twenty-three years later, Fremont, now mellowed by a life of repentance and orthodoxy, admits to enjoying a bright recollection of the details of his sins and awaits, in faith, the "exact payment" and "purging" which God will demand in penance. In contemplating such resolution of his willfulness he finds a certain grace and peace.

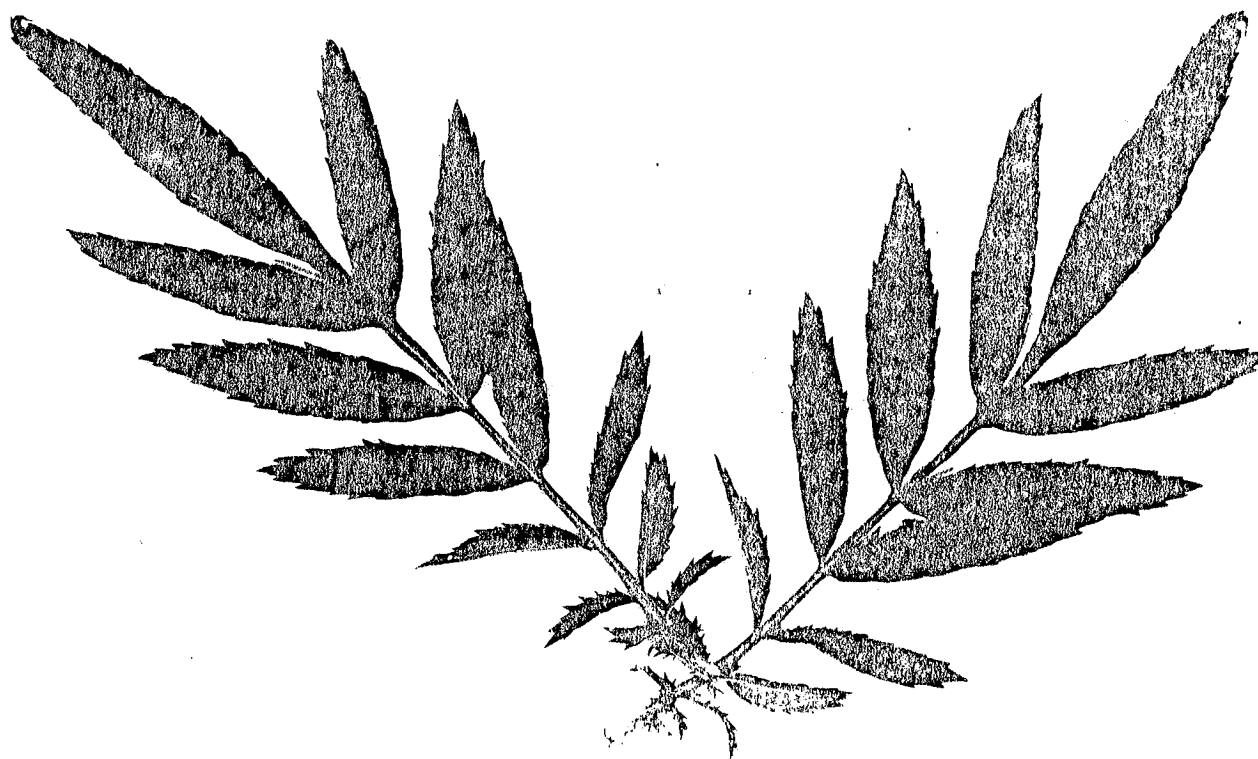
In "Trinity," perhaps the least satisfying of the stories--though some will disagree--Jamie, a young Mormon missionary in France, agonizes over his unstable lady missionary who has just undergone a secret abortion. In their shared suffering and personal terror, Jamie finds catharsis and grace in an epiphany in which he perceives the suffering of God the Father. In "The Shriveprice," Darrow Sevy, the aging protagonist, returns to the faith after various disputed reconstructions of his grandfather's alleged role in assisting his friend to die in a ritual act of blood atonement. Darrow realizes that resolution of his life-long willfulness can likewise come through his own blood atonement. The way to appease an obdurate God, the way to heaven, he concludes, is through "horror and blood" and suffering.

But the most obdurate of Peterson's heroes and heroines is Rendella Kranpitz, the demented, hilarious shrew who antagonizes stake president Sherman Colligan in "The Christianizing of Coburn Heights." Ignoring the pleas of the frustrated bishop to excommunicate Rendella for total disruption of her ward and neighborhood, President Colligan confronts Rendella's perverse irascibility and, with long-suffering Christian endeavor, mobilizes the resources of the entire stake in her behalf. But Rendella is no run-of-the-mill test. She was an epic probe, "and the stymied president begins to contemplate the day of his release. This fine comic story, a Mormon rendering of the dilemma depicted in Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener," pits willfulness against conventional Mormonism in a delightful but provocative way.

Peterson's penchant for depicting men and women who will "be other than God wills" culminates in Arabella Gurney, the protagonist of the title story. Arabella, from a solid Mormon background, seeks to pit her obduracy against God's grace through consciously turning "seditious thoughts into an irreversable act." Like Hawthorne's Ethan Brand, she succeeds. Troubled by persistent belief, she hopes to be "enveloped in flames of the Spirit testifying that God doesn't exist." She fears God and sees his hand in the actions of Reuben Millring, a fanatical fundamentalist who kidnaps her and takes her as his ninth wife. Seeing the "face of God" in Reuben's face, she surrenders herself to him, hoping thereby to be "purged of her perversity." But she awakens in the morning to the realization that her integrity has

been violated; that no grace has come. She attempts to flee and in the process kills Reuben, escaping into the wilderness where she concludes that she has found the ultimate "reality." In the wilderness she is "filled with grace," but not a Mormon or Christian grace. This is a troubling conclusion to the story and to the collection, evading as it does any real answer to the questions repeatedly posed throughout the book. The reader, unsatisfied, suspects that Arabella likewise cannot be satisfied for long: evasive action didn't work for Jonah; it will not work for Arabella; she should likewise be permitted to squirm on the pin awhile longer.

Crafting his stories in a powerful and compelling style, Peterson has wonderfully shaped his original characters around an essentially Mormon core. His Mormons are head-to-toe Mormons, not veneer Mormons. Like Jonahs they fear God, flee his grace, consistently manifest a "private obduracy," a hesitancy to yield to God in humility. For Peterson's characters, the skewer pin seems to hurt too much to allow gracious acceptance; they struggle on. Not all readers will cheer Peterson's vision of man's lot, but all who love Mormonism and literature will cheer his stories and the questions they raise. Publication of this book cheers us as well, suggesting as it does that Mormon letters may have found in Levi S. Peterson a sunnier Hawthorne to assist us in interpreting the human condition--the Mormon human condition--as far as it is translated correctly.



Candadai Seshachari, Pres.  
Edward Gear, Pres. Elect  
Annette S. Rogers, Prog. Chairman  
Steven P. Sondrup, Exec. Sec.

Executive Committee:

Lavina Fiedling Anderson Jay Fox  
Clifton Holt Jolley Linda King Newell  
Thomas R. Burton Randall L. Hall

AML DUES

Members of the Executive Council have determined that membership dues for 1983 should be \$8.00 for individuals, \$9.00 for couples, and \$6.00 for students. Members of the Association are invited to renew their membership for another year by filling out and returning the form below with the proper remittance. Those who have joined the Association since 1 July 1982 do not need to renew their membership.

Those persons who have not renewed their membership since January 1 are presently in arrears, and unless they remit dues promptly, will be reluctantly removed from the mailing list.

To: The Association for Mormon Letters  
1346 South 18th East  
Salt Lake City, Utah 84108

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_

Enclosed please find \_\_\_\_\_ dollars for \_\_\_\_\_ membership(s) in the

Association for Mormon Letters. The membership(s) is/are (please check)

\_\_\_\_\_ individual, \_\_\_\_\_ joint, \_\_\_\_\_ student.

Total Amount for Membership Enclosed:

\_\_\_\_\_

# The Association for Mormon Letters

1346 South 18th East  
Salt Lake City, Utah  
84108

Vol. 7, No. 4

Newsletter

December 1982

## EIGHTH SYMPOSIUM SCHEDULED

The 1984 Symposium of the Association for Mormon Letters will be held in the Marriott Library Auditorium at the University of Utah on Saturday, January 21, 1984.

- 9:00-9:30 Registration  
Welcome Candadai Seshachari, President
- 9:30-11:30 The Literature of Immigration  
William Mulder: Scandinavian Immigrant Humor  
Frederick S. Buchanan: The Immigrant and the Muse  
Margaret Munk: Writing the Literature of Immigration:  
Fiction from Personal History  
Steven P. Sondrup: Commentary  
Questions and Answers
- 11:30-12:00 Break
- 12:00-1:30 Lunch: Panorama Room of the Student Union Building  
Presentation of the 1983 Prizes  
Business Meeting and Election of Officers  
Presidential Address: Candadai Seshachari
- 1:30-4:00 Afternoon Session  
Chairman: Richard Cracroft  
Cherry and Barnard Silver: Madelyn Cannon Stewart: Poet of  
Personal Discovery  
Neila Seshachari: Confrontation vs. Tradition: The Lives of  
Trapped Women in Maureen Whipple's The Giant Joshua
- 2:30-2:40 Break
- 2:40-4:00 Linda Wilcox: Crying "Change" in a Permanent World: A Look at  
Contemporary Writing of Mormon Women on Motherhood  
Gloria Cronin: One Female Folk Performer in the Mormon  
Folk Oral Tradition  
Annette Rogers Sorensen: Commentary  
Questions and Answers
- 7:00-9:00 An Evening Gathering at the Home of Marcia and Clifton Jolley  
Remembering with Maggie Smith  
A Scene from Nothing Very Important by Béla Petsco  
Scottish Folk Music by Fred Buchanan

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 \$4.00 and the price of the luncheon is \$6.00. Although the registration fee may be paid at the door, luncheon tickets will, unfortunately, not be available after Wednesday, January 18, 1984. 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 Auditorium of the Marriott Library is on the second floor. Those entering the Library from the west will see the Auditorium immediately in front of them. Those entering from the east, though, will need to go down one floor and through the door immediately to the left following the corridor to the main entrance of the Auditorium. University parking restrictions, we are informed, do not apply on Saturdays, so all of the parking area surrounding the Marriott Library will be available to Symposium participants. The Union Building, where the luncheon will be held, is within easy walking distance of the Library.

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#### SLATE OF NOMINEES

The following have been nominated by the nominating committee for the offices indicated. Members of the Association will have a chance to ratify or reject these nominations at the business meeting.

President Elect	Edward L. Hart Provo, Utah
Board Member, three-year term	George S. Tate Provo, Utah
Board Member, three-year term	Bethany Chaffin Salt Lake City

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#### CALL FOR PAPERS

There now exists a sizeable body of Mormon literature, one being added to at a quickening rate. The past few months alone have seen the publication of a collection of plays, a novel, and a gathering of short stories. We now need, however, to measure our literature in close analysis against not simply the Mormon tradition but wider literary movements.

For the upcoming AML conjoint session at RMMLA (October 1984, El Paso, Texas), we would particularly welcome essays that look closely at specific works of Mormon literature, especially that written in recent years. Send inquiries, abstracts, and manuscripts to: Prof. John S. Tanner, Dept. of English, BYU, Provo, Utah 84602.

President: Candadai Seshachari	Executive Committee:	
President Elect: Edward A. Geary	Lavina Fielding Anderson	L. Jay Fox
Executive Sect.: Steven P. Sondrup	Clifton Holt Jolley	Linda King Newell
Program Chairman: Linda King Newell	Thomas R. Burton	Randall L. Hall

REVIEW

Jørgen W. Schmidt, Mormonpigen Eva: En dansk minoritetspige i Danmark. Lyngø: Forlaget Moroni, 1982. ISBN 87-997145-15. Dkr. 49.75.

If it is true that the correct identification of genre is antecedent to valid interpretation, then a work that resists generic classification, an odd hybrid (not to say mongrel mixture or genre faux), presents the critic with unusual difficulties. Jørgen Schmidt is best known for his fine study of the emigration of Danish Mormons, published by one of the leading scholarly presses in Denmark (Oh, Du Zion i Vest: Den danske Mormon-emigration 1850-1900 [Copenhagen: Rosenkilde og Bagger, 1965]). But his second book, Eva the Mormon Girl, published privately, is a tenuous commingling of genres. Its packaging and initial chapters lead one to expect that this will be a Danish contribution to the expanding list of Mormon romances, but this generic expectation is frustrated and the novel/romance undermined upon further reading. On the back cover, Schmidt refers to the book as a "debatbog . . . i underholdende roman-form" (a discussion book, or book of problematics, in entertaining novel form). The closest Mormon analog to Schmidt's idea of debatbog I can think of is Ben E. Rich's Mr. Durant of Salt Lake City: "That Mormon" (1893, 1899, 1951)--distant progeny of Plato's Symposium and Castiglione's Courtier. Rich's strategy was to provide a narrative frame for somewhat urbane conversations and forthright preachments about Mormonism. Rich has his missionary, Charles Durant, quote in conversations with his interlocutors the Articles of Faith, the testimony of the Three Witnesses, Eliza Snow poems, a lengthy passage from Bancroft, etc., and he uses other devices than conversation--a sermon, a letter--to expand the possible contexts of instruction. But the narrative makes no pretense of being more than a frame. No one would be tempted, as one is with Eva, to read Mr. Durant as a novel.

The weaknesses of Eva lie principally in its claim to "roman-form." The heroine, a self-confident fifteen-year-old, who has the ambition of becoming a gynecologist, is static. She undergoes no real development and experiences no significant enlargement of insight through her varied experiences, as a member of a minority group, with many kinds of people in different situations. In the second paragraph of the book, Schmidt writes that "Eva havde allerede taget sit standpunkt" (Eva had already taken her position). She never waivers, always has the right answer, always seems to be smiling "her quiet smile," and is never seriously challenged in her beliefs or her standpunkt, nor ever tempted. In the third chapter, as Eva lies in the hospital musing after a serious operation, she reaches "vigtige beslutninger" (important resolutions, p. 26), the most important of which are to be sure never to be at a loss for a proper answer to any inquiry about her observance of standards and to resist every temptation because she has already taken her position. The trouble with these resolves, in terms of characterization, is that Eva had taken her standpunkt at the beginning of the book and has never been lacking the ready answer to this point. In other words, the narrative occasion for a deepening of insight simply confirms the heroine as static from the outset. In the last chapter, after the class's year-end party which Eva hosts gets out of hand (with goings-on that remind her of the posters advertising Caligula), she goes to her bishop to confess and seek counsel, because she feels that the party may have hurt the Church's reputation. The bishop's go-and-sin-no-more consists of goodly advice about better party planning. Eva is duly humbled; this is her darkest hour. Her party had been the occasion for others to sin.

On the back cover, Schmidt writes that "Eva is presented as something of an ideal as seen from the Church's perspective." Her steady virtue and confidence bring rewards: she comes to be viewed as "klassens dronning" (queen of the class); her popularity increases (because she is an impossibly difficult conquest); she is appointed to the student council and is eventually elected president. All of this is ideal indeed, as are her well-formulated answers and ready ripostes. One wonders though at the slight smugness and occasional vehemence of this ideal. The narrator tells us that as a result

of her hospital meditations Eva "became more humble; . . . was not so quick to judge others; became more human; and learned to forgive others" (p. 26). But this transformation is subsequently called into question. When her classmate Birgitte urges feminist views on her, she is "mercilessly [ubarmhjertigt] interrupted by Eva, who was now becoming bellicose [ved at komme i kriegshumør]" (p. 34). Later when Birgitte makes a lesbian pass at her, Eva, "filled with loathing beyond all bounds," attacks her so vehemently that she breaks her leg (pp. 54-55). When her boss, whose keen ethical sense had led him to fire her because he mistakenly thought she had done something illegal, apologizes and asks her forgiveness, Eva indignantly goes to work for his competition (ch. 5). Her sense of justice is characterized by a certain fierceness.

Schmidt seems to have begun by drawing up a long list of topics to be treated, including many explanatory bits of information about the Church (aimed largely at a non-Mormon audience) as well as essentially all imaginable questions, scoffings, and temptations that might confront a Mormon teenager. He then loops the narrative around each of these items by creating contexts for the answers, explanations, and models of action. Some of these situations seem natural and congruent with character; others seem contrived (e.g., Eva's parties with set topics for discussion or her school essay on the value of work which alludes gratuitously to tithing). The main problem with the method is that the narrative situations and natural interlocutors are exhausted before all the items on the list have been ticked off. Schmidt uses some of the devices Rich had used, especially the placing of quotations from other sources in the mouths of his characters--sometimes with footnotes, sometimes a little incongruously as when Eva's father spontaneously quotes from Napoleon ("Every action has its proper moment") while bearing testimony to the sacredness and joy of sex to Eva's discussion group. Increasingly artificial devices are created. In the absence of another character as interlocutor, for example, the narrator introduces a four-page imaginary dialog thus: "If someone had asked Eva whether there were talk of love" between Erik and her, "she would have laughed and said. . . ." And if she had been asked how she wards off a boy's advances, she would have responded, "It never goes that far, because when we sit down I take up my handiwork and set to work on it" (p. 58). The narrator often functions as a kind of deus ex machina, supplying Eva with just the correct answer. In chapter four, the narrator says, "That day Eva found out that there is something called the womens' issue, equality, and 'red-stockings'" (p. 32). This statement introduces a conversation between Birgitte and Eva during which Eva, who seems just to have been told about feminism, suddenly seems supplied with technical information and spouts off knowledgeably about how much earlier Mormon women enjoyed the right to vote than other women in the United States and so forth (p. 33). The effect of these devices is twofold: their artificiality often undermines the high quality of the answers and arguments they frame, and they confuse the narrative voice by shifting levels of discourse. Hence, although the debatbog, which is admirable in its own right, triumphs over the roman, it is also somewhat undercut by the novelistic elements.

Non-Mormon readers will learn a great deal about the beliefs, standards, and society of this peculiar people. (Schmidt has Eva say, oddly but with some insight, "If someone, for example, were to write a book about me, it would deal mostly with the Church and how it has affected me" [p. 80].) Mormon readers will learn many useful, well-formulated responses to inquiries and criticisms, and they may welcome the refreshing directness with which Schmidt discusses stark but sensitive issues (abortion, pre-marital sex, teenage prostitution, drugs). Neither group, though, will learn very much about the art of narrative.

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