

## REVIEWS

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### Brief Notices

#### *Gene Sessions*

SOME TIME AGO, a slithery fellow came through my neighborhood selling "Church history tapes." Always interested in what people are willing to do to escape reading, I invited the man in and agreed to listen to his demo cassette. While he booted it up in his player, he prattled about how the "Brother" had endorsed the tapes and that Orson Scott Card had scripted them. Inasmuch as I had heard of Card's potential to take Mormon culture a major step in the direction of intellectual maturity (to paraphrase Doug Alder's overstated review of Card's *A Woman of Destiny*, UEH, April 1984), I expected a pleasant surprise. Ten minutes later, I threw the guy out. The dramatization taught me that Joseph Smith and his associates were nothing more or less than "Gunsmoke" versions of Paul Dunn and the Osmonds. I have worried ever since about the power of electronic technology to destroy the quality and depth of Mormonism as the Saints (in hand with the gentiles) increasingly insist upon entertainment as the path to understanding. My experience with the Church history huckster occurred at about the same time as blacks were learning everything there was to know about slavery from TV's "Roots." More recently, Americans saw how George Washington was really an egalitarian chap with the hair-sprayed coiffure of Barry Bostwick who loved Jaelyn Smith rather than Martha the whole time, just like in the soap operas.

So, you say, another historian gets mad because he cannot make history interesting enough to compete with fictionalized drama. Tough. But what about the scriptures? If they're not interesting enough to compete with drama and fiction, what then? I happen to agree wholeheartedly

with "a discouraged lover of the scriptures" who early in 1984 became so fed up with the hogwash he heard in the Living Scriptures version of the Book of Mormon that he wrote to the company's president Jared F. Brown an anguished letter charging that "poetic license" had actually distorted even the simple facts of the story to say nothing of the sentient impact of the canon. Brown's demo tape, for example, has Father Lehi telling Ishmael that he has four sons but no daughters when 2 Nephi 5:6 states that Nephi had sisters. Of course, such enterprises as Living Scriptures worry little about the truth in their eager pursuit of mannon, which is why this quarter's Milk the Mormons Award (the coveted "Elsie") goes to Brown and other such entrepreneurs of ignorance who so lucratively exploit the willingness of Mormons to forsake the seeking of knowledge from the best books in favor of dramatized claptrap.

An older and more praiseworthy method of making the scriptures less dreadful to read and more accessible to the ordinary student is through the production of commentaries and guides. These run the gamut between the superb and the stupid, not only among the Mormons but with all scripture-based religionists from Jesuits to Jehovah's Witnesses. A potentially good LDS commentary to appear recently is Monte S. Nyman, *The Words of Jeremiah* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980, 120 pp., index, \$6.50). Readable although decidedly superficial, it summarizes and outlines the essentials of Jeremiah's message particularly as it took the common form of prophecy. Nyman's thrust consists of tying Jeremiah into the Book of Mormon as well as bringing his words into har-

mony with the pronouncements of latter-day prophets. Each chapter contains a brief summary of a section of Jeremiah and then a verse-by-verse or verse-group analysis of the scripture. Unfortunately, the BYU professor of ancient scriptures became so anxious to get his work into the Mormon book market that he apparently allowed the good milkmen at Bookcraft to contort the manuscript until it would "prove" the doctrine of a preexistence among the ancient Hebrews and to mention ad nauseam often tenuous connections between the meaning of Jeremiah and the course of the Restoration. As usual, what could have been a solid Mormon contribution to Bible scholarship became in the hands of Mormon book-hawkers a rather narrow and doctrinaire polemic. Perhaps Nyman intended it to be just that, but we can hope otherwise.

One of Nyman's colleagues at BYU has taken the scripture-improvement effort more seriously. Representative of an colossal amount of work, Avraham Gileadi's *The Apocalyptic Book of Isaiah: A New Translation with Interpretive Key* (Provo: Hebraeus Press, 1982, 207 pp., \$9.95) is a masterpiece of scholarship which raises the words of Isaiah, in Hugh Nibley's words, "above the level of superficial manuals, piecemeal commentaries, sketchy summaries, classroom routine, and microscopic learned routines." Gileadi reworks most of Isaiah, casting the poetry into verse and recasting much of its bulky language. Nowhere in the book does the translator/commentator succumb to the temptation to make his work into a supportive timber for the superstructures of Mormon theology and scriptural interpretation as did Nyman's treatment of Jeremiah. Consequently, non-Mormon Bible scholars have hailed his book as "new-dimensional" (R. K. Harrison of the University of Toronto) and "exhaustive" (David Noel Freedman of the University of Michigan). But Gileadi's book appeared from a minor local press and has sold few copies while Nyman's hit the local bigtime at Bookcraft

to house his wife and eight kids. "Choose ye this day. . . ."

Although the new translation of Isaiah is a type of book unfortunately destined to have little impact on Mormondom, few Latter-day Saints escape the weight of modern anti-Mormon propaganda. Literally dozens of books and a boxload of pamphlets are now in print either for the purpose of converting misguided Mormons to a purer brand of Christianity or to dissuade investigators. This, of course, is and has probably built a new family room nothing new, but in recent years, primarily due to the efforts of Jerald and Sandra Tanner and such groups as the Utah Tract Society, anti-Mormon publishing has acquired a fresh and correlated vigor. Occasional counter-efforts have fallen short of the mark and have done little to diminish the strength of these dedicated crusaders. Although Tanner diatribes and similar material often elicit boisterous laughter from Mormons well-schooled in the historical method, the work goes forward in such lengthening strides that we need not mention here the many current efforts of these valiant and usually quixotic warriors for the "truth."

Recently, an Arizona couple, Robert L. and Rosemary Brown, determined to fight fire with fire and have published a Tanner-style volume called *They Lie in Wait to Deceive* (Mesa: Barnsworth Publishing Company, 1981, v+287 pp., \$9.95) that also appears to be a call for donations to a "Religious Research Association" that will continue the struggle against the anti-Mormons. The Browns' first volume consists mostly of a very devastating dismemberment of the famous and verbose Dee Jay Nelson, who has made a fine living lecturing as an "Egyptologist" on the fraudulent qualities of the Book of Abraham. While the Brown book represents an unbelievable amount of work and miniscule attention to detail, it reads and looks just like a Tanner publication, with excited prose and bold-face emphases. Whether this is a better approach to the problem

than ignoring it (which seems to be the essential position of the Church itself) remains to be seen, but narrow-focus scholasticism has consistently backfired in the past. One thing, however, is for certain: The Browns have buried the Nelson imposture, and that alone makes their book worth its paper.

Unworthy of its paper or anything else is this quarter's winner of the Pull the Latter-day Leg Award. If there is anything worse in print than Mormon books full of "true stories of humor and inspiration for teenagers and youth," it could only be *The Wit and Wisdom of the Ayatollah Khomeini*. Allen K. Burgess, *From Twisted Ear to Reverent Tear* (Provo: Perry Enterprises, 1983, 89 pp., \$7.98) contains twenty-three insipid anecdotes just right for youth speakers to read in sacrament meeting. By the time the Church reaches saturation with this issue's Ahab-winner, there will undoubtedly be a sequel called *From Twisted Mind to Reverent Whine*, a book of true stories of humor and inspiration for residents of insane asylums filled to the brim with Mormons who lost their marbles sitting through such drivel week after week. The thing that makes this particular volume even worse than *Especially for Mormons* is that all twenty-three stories not only bore with exactitude but also make a science out of overblowing the commonplace. And get this advice to the lovelorn: "Remember, all you handsome, spiritual, neat, talented guys, when your heart is stolen by some beautiful, spiritual, talented young lady who just happens to make the best apple pie in the world, stop and ask your Father in Heaven if she is right for you." (p. 63) If He says no, give her heart and the pie right back. In case you have a hard time retching them up, just remember this book.

For those who prefer their true stories of humor and inspiration celebrity-style, we notice Luise King Rey's *Those Swinging Years: An Autobiography* (Salt Lake City: Olympus Publishing Company, 1983, 154 pp., illus. \$10.95). Although her hip

nephew Lex de Azevedo (who won last quarter's Ahab) should have warned her that the BYU Bookstore might not carry a book about "swinging," Rey has produced a fascinating memoir, not only illuminating the rise to stardom of the King Sisters (and later Family) but also shedding poignant light upon the lives and trials of the many Mormons who, like the Kings, joined the twentieth-century American pilgrimage to the Golden State. Well worth the price of the book are the collection of nostalgic photographs and scrap-book items in the back of the volume. While avoiding controversy, Luise reveals (mostly between the lines) the travail of her family as it sought to play the genteel entertainment game without losing the meaning of its heritage. Although the bulk of the book will appeal only to King family and friends, that strange breed called California Mormons will also recognize both the scenery and the sentiments.

Another book about a different strain of Mormons is Rendell N. Mabey and Gordon T. Allred, *Brother to Brother* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1984, viii+161 pp., illus. \$7.95), the story of the two missionary couples who went into West Africa in 1978 to organize official branches of the Church where in Ghana and Nigeria several hundred "Mormons" already worshipped a semblance of the God of Joseph, Brigham, and Spencer. In one year, Ren and Rachel Mabey along with Ted and Janath Cannon baptized more than 1,700 Africans and created five districts and thirty-five branches. Their story reads like a great adventure and is probably as faith-promoting a volume as has come along in years. In the capable hands of accomplished and colorful writer Gordon Allred, *Brother to Brother* inspires admiration for the two couples as well as pangs of sentiment for the humble souls in Africa who seem to have found peace of mind in a strange religion from the heartland of America.

An important part of that heartland, Jackson County, Missouri, holds both cur-

rent and historic significance to all Saints of various varieties, including those whose attitudes about priesthood allowed them to pursue African converts long before the Cannons and the Mabeys. Presently underway all across the country, Windsor Press's community history projects have already covered most major American towns, including Salt Lake City (by John McCormick) and now Sherry Lamb Schirmer and Richard D. McKinzie, *At the River's Bend: An Illustrated History of Kansas City, Independence, and Jackson County* (Woodland Hills, California: Windsor Publications, Inc., 1982, 362 pp., biblio., index, \$24.95). Beautifully packaged, well-written,

and lavishly illustrated, the Kansas City history is a centerpiece of publishing and writing quality. Its brief though complete treatment of the Mormon part of the community's story is typical of the overall quality of the production. Pleasantly understanding though perhaps overly sympathetic, the authors trace concisely the arrival, the trials, and the expulsion of the Saints in the 1830s and then the return of the RLDS. This is a book that exemplifies the best in local history, a delightful contrast to what this column usually addresses itself. So, you see, you critics of "Brief Notices," I am not such a hardened curmudgeon after all.

## Ancient Chiasmus Studied

*Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structures, Analyses, Exegesis* by John W. Welch, ed. (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1981), 353 pp.

Reviewed by John S. Kselman, Associate Professor of Semitic Languages at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., and book review editor for the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*.

FOR THE LAST TWO CENTURIES, the scientific study of the Bible has been dominated by historical concerns, as scholars have attempted, in different ways, first to write a history of the literature of ancient Israel and of the primitive church, and then, on the basis of these sources, to reconstruct the histories of both communities. The methods developed for such study over the last two centuries are varied. To mention two examples, there are source criticism (the attempt to discover and describe the several sources that make up a book like Genesis) and form criticism (the study of the recurring patterns of the small, presumably originally oral units of the literature, and the purposes for these units—preaching, catechesis, miracle stories or the like, as in the synoptic gospels).

The impact of such historical questions and concerns has been enormously produc-

ive; these methods have cast new light on many obscurities of the biblical text. However, the dominance of the historical-critical method in biblical studies and in the professional training of biblical scholars has had the unintended effect of deflecting interest from the literary-esthetic level of the text. There were, to be sure, scholars who studied the biblical text as literature, like the English scholar R. G. Moulton at the end of the nineteenth century and the American Nils Lund at the beginning of the twentieth; but they were a minority.

Happily, the situation has changed dramatically in recent years. While not ignoring or rejecting the continued importance of the historical-critical method, more and more scholars are turning their attention to the literary qualities of the Old and New Testaments. The volume under review is one of the most recent and most interesting of such studies. Its approach is both narrow and wide: narrow, in that it studies only one literary device, chiasmus; wide, in that it is concerned with this device not only in biblical literature, but in such related literature as that of ancient Mesopotamia, of the second millennium B.C. Syrian city of Ugarit, and of the fifth century B.C. Aramaic literature of Elephan-