

males of African descent could not hold the priesthood, non-Mormon readers might conclude that the priesthood had been reserved for Caucasians only.

And as a final example: Cowan notes that in 1979 the office of Patriarch to the Church was permanently vacated and its present occupant assigned emeritus status because of “the availability of patriarchal service throughout the world” (p. 409). But, he continues, the Church has nonetheless called several patriarchs on short-term assignment to give blessings in areas of the world not covered by stakes and stake patriarchs. Thus, readers are left wondering why the office of Patriarch to the Church was vacated at all if there is still a need for it.

Topics Cowan does not even broach, evidently because of his emphasis on the Church’s successes, include, to name a few, the 1930 debate among General Authorities over organic evolution (an excellent case study of the Church’s confrontation with science), the committee of General Authorities assigned to help modernize and streamline the temple ceremonies during the 1920s, the challenges and problems confronting the Church’s mutual improvement programs during the 1930s, the Third Convention in Mexico, the tragic Helmut Huebner incident in World War II Germany, the proselyting excesses in Europe in the 1960s when the push for converts resulted in hundreds, if not thousands, of so-called baseball baptisms, and the Church’s financial burdens incurred during the late 1950s and early 1960s as a result of the deficit-spending policies of Henry G. Moyle. My guess is that Cowan chose not to discuss any of these subjects because of

their controversial nature. But for me, their absence became far more distracting than any discussion of them could have been.

Given the apparent unwillingness to address these and other presumably sensitive aspects of twentieth-century Mormonism — subjects which, because of their very controversialness, illuminate how the Church has dealt with the modern world — Cowan’s narrative sometimes failed to capture the drama that is so much a part of Mormon history and to engage me in what should be a memorable and satisfying experience with my religious and spiritual heritage.

Where Cowan excels is in his use and graphic presentation of numerical data. His book boasts some thirty-five charts and tables, ranging from “The Church’s Public Image, 1887–1917,” “Sacrament Meeting Attendance (1920–70),” and “Rate of Growth Per Decade (1860–1980),” to “Melchizedek Priesthood Bearers (as percentage of membership by areas, 1920–70),” “Converts Per Missionary (periodically by area, 1925–80),” and “The Lord’s Law of Revenue (percentage of Church funds spent for various purposes, 1925–55).” For the sheer breadth of research and knowledge the compilation of these figures must have required, Cowan’s accomplishment is impressive.

In summary, *The Church in the Twentieth Century* is an adequate, although incomplete, introduction to modern Mormonism and a useful compendium of statistical and other numerical data relating to the Church’s growth and development. A more complete history of the Church’s encounter with and response to the twentieth century remains to be attempted.

## A Life Well-Shared

*So Far: Poems by Margaret Rampton Munk* (Bethesda, Maryland: Greentree Publishing, 1986), 93 pp., \$5.95.

Reviewed by Mary L. Bradford, former editor of *DIALOGUE* and author of *Leaving*

*Home*, who is currently working on a biography of Lowell L. Bennion.

IN THE FALL OF 1985 *DIALOGUE* published Meg Munk’s suite of poems entitled, “One Year.” In a mature voice and through par-

ticular images, she dramatized her battle with cancer. In the spring of 1986, this suite joined with others, some reprinted from *DIALOGUE* and *Exponent II*, to make her first book of poems. Its title—*So Far*—announced a poet and a life still in process for which poetry had been both therapy and record. “Contrary to the best advice and the best of intentions,” Meg explained in the forward, “I have never been a keeper of diaries or journals. I have found, however, that poetry has been a satisfactory way for me to give expression to feelings and the impact of events on my life.”

Two short months later, in the summer of 1986, Meg died. She spent some of her last moments preparing her funeral service and writing a letter to her friends to be read by her daughter. In the letter she asked that her friends refrain from attempting to comfort her children with the doctrine that she had been called to a better place. Her place, the place she had fought so hard to retain, was on this “sweet terrestrial” earth with her family and friends.

As one of several she had designated to read a poem or scripture at the service, I chose “Let There be Trees” (p. 54). As I sat in the chapel near the windows, I took courage from the trees outside the windows whose curtains were opened at Meg’s direction. The poem pleads for her view of the hereafter: “Tell me there are trees/ And all the sweet terrestrial things I love —/ And that I need not leave these joys/ To be with Thee” (p. 55).

Her love for the earth and all living things is organized in five parts that cover the emotional terrain of her life. The first deals with her family members, in poems sometimes named for them. When her adopted daughter cries for her “real mother,” she answers with a poem about the obscurity of Heavenly Mother: “I cannot tell her yet/ How I have cried/ Sometimes at night/ To one whose memory/ My birth erased/ . . . Then hid her face from me” (p. 7).

In “Kinship” (p. 13), a thoughtless “matriarch” asks her about her Filipino

son: “Why graft this brown-skinned child/  
Into your family tree,/ A tropic pineapple/  
Upon a bough of temperate pears?/ . . .  
This is not your son.” To which the poet responds: “She has forgotten/ To be prouder still/  
Forgotten that her family/  
And mine,/ Is large,/ and ancient,/ And of royal lineage.” And then she concludes: “She is right/ That he is not my son/  
He is my brother.” Thus she joins good Mormon doctrine with brotherhood in a special way.

In these poems, as well as in her fiction, essays, and family history, Meg took upon herself the sufferings of others. If that meant dressing a dead sister’s body for burial in her role as Relief Society president, she did that. If it meant writing openly about an attempted rape so that others might be warned and better informed, she did that. In the other sections of the book entitled “Sisterhood,” “Earth and Sky,” “Faith and Doubt,” and “One Year,” Meg eventually explores her own suffering. When I first read “One Year,” I marveled at her power to describe the ravages of cancer while she was still in the throes of it. Isn’t poetry supposed to be “emotion recollected in tranquility?” She describes all the stations of her cross with strong, sure strokes. Without sentimentality she applies her extraordinary perceptions to the rhythms of speech and the concrete details of ordinary life.

In “The News” she mentally rehearses a scene in which the tumor is pronounced “benign,” and then with a “hard tube filling up/ The passageway of sound,” she rewrites the scene to read “malignant” and turns the instruments of her torture into the language of poetry. When she tells her doctor that she cannot bear to undergo treatment, he assures her that she will change her mind — for the children. And then she recounts the chapters of chemotherapy with their cruel attack on the “copper strands” of her hair. The hair has become a symbol of her childhood, her young womanhood, and her marriage when she “grew it long again/ For him.” Finally,

she combs it "clipped and brittle and drug-dead/ Into a basket/ In the bathroom/ Of my mother's home," and she joins her mother "in mourning."

The worst is yet to come. Her life waits on a tube that she compares to "Shiva, Preserver and Destroyer/ In one essence" where she must "trust the drop-lets/ That carry death/ Into my waiting vein/ To carry life instead" (p. 87). Perhaps writing these poems helped Meg find the final courage to orchestrate her death.

Meg didn't want to die. "God, God!

Not yet!" she cried. "Keep me longer/ From the darkness of those beds. . . . Let me be here to see/ With open eyes/ And well-loved people/ Just a call away" (p. 90). I mourn the loss of one who still had many poems to write, but I can rejoice in a life well-shared. I hear her calling to the autumn leaves, "Hold on! Hold on!" (p. 91) She sets her feet "Fearful but willing/ As the blind curves loom,/ Singing a prayer/ For a completed year. . ." (p. 97).

Margaret Rampton Munk. She showed me how to die. She showed me how to live.

## Women Coping

*Sideways to the Sun* by Linda Sillitoe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987), 255 pp., \$7.95.

Reviewed by Gary Topping, curator of manuscripts at the Utah State Historical Society.

WHAT HAPPENS when a Mormon housewife, faithful to husband and church, encounters the dark side of human experience including adultery, child molestation, spouse abandonment, and divorce? In this fine first novel, Linda Sillitoe answers that question with a courage and honesty that is most welcome in Mormon literature.

She gives us the story of Megan Stevens, whose husband vanishes without warning or explanation, leaving her and their children to fend for themselves. Trying to cope with her bereavement and locate her husband, she draws strength from Kristen, a divorced woman in her ward, and from her own newly discovered inner resources. The novel contains no epiphanies, no sudden and magical solutions. Life simply deals rotten cards sometimes, Sillitoe is saying, and we have to play them as best we can, with all the patience, creativity, and good humor we can muster.

In working through her tribulation, Megan finds most of the expected sources

of support to be neutral at best. Her church is especially ambiguous; as a faithful married woman with children but no husband, she fits none of the Church's convenient categories, a fact that neither she nor the Church can immediately assimilate. The predictable Relief Society casseroles are as effective as aspirin in a cancer case, and other programs prove little better. Megan finds it helpful to establish a certain distance from the Church: she serves as a visiting teacher but attends only the church meetings that she expects will be personally useful. She discards her temple garments in a particularly memorable and significant passage, finding in the absence of their symbolic armor an opportunity to engage the world directly in a way she has not done before. Megan never leaves her church, but she finds that in coping with experiences for which it neither prepared her nor offers satisfying answers, she has to back away from it and find her own solutions.

Megan does not automatically flee to another man, or to men in general, for support. She engages in a mildly romantic relationship with another man, but he offers few practical solutions to either the day-to-day necessities of living or her recent emotional trauma. When her daughter is recruited as a possible plural wife by her seminary teacher, Megan realizes it is a