

ORSON SCOTT CARD: WITHOUT JOSEPH SMITH AND MORMONISM
THERE WOULD BE NO SEVENTH SON, NO RED PROPHET, NO ALVIN MAKER

by

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Abbreviations

BM	The Book of Mormon
DC	The Doctrine and Covenants
<u>HC</u>	<u>History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints</u>
LDS	The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
<u>PA</u>	<u>Prentice Alvin</u>
PGP	The Pearl of Great Price
<u>RP</u>	<u>Red Prophet</u>
<u>SS</u>	<u>Seventh Son</u>
<u>Storyteller</u>	<u>A Storyteller in Zion</u>

Table of Contents

Chapter	Page
Forward	1
Introduction	11
Without Joseph Smith There Would Be No <u>Seventh Son</u>	17
We Didn't Read the Same Book	56
Conclusion	70
Works Cited	72

Foreward

My family and I spent Christmas of 1990 in Salt Lake City. Our oldest son was a student at Brigham Young University, thirty miles south of Salt Lake City, and we decided that instead of bringing Jonathan home to New York for the holidays we would go to him. Eager as we were to be with Jonathan, we had an ulterior motive: Skiing. Those glistening ski trails were almost shouting to us, "Come for Christmas!" We couldn't resist.

I began making arrangements for our trip and soon discovered that the whole family could travel by bus for less money than it would cost for one of us to fly. We had luck on our side as the calendar that year gave us two full weeks plus two days for the school recess. The trip out was scheduled to take forty-five hours and the return fifty-three. Grueling as that sounded, we could endure anything to have ten-plus days of skiing on some of the best snow in the world.

Realizing that forty-five hours on a bus would probably seem like ninety, I packed several novels and lots of junk food in my carry-on bag; I planned to read and eat the entire twenty-two-hundred miles to Salt Lake City. We left Rochester, New York, at exactly midnight on December twenty-first. Being rather excited, I simply couldn't get to sleep and as we left the lights of Buffalo behind I gave up trying. My husband and kids were curled up comfortably, all sawing logs, so I decided it was time for a snack and a book. I pulled out a can of Mountain Dew, a bag of Cheetos (with everyone asleep, I wouldn't have to share) and my brand new paperback copy of Orson Scott Card's Nebula and Hugo Award winning novel, Ender's Game. This was the seventh Card novel I had read in the last year and a half. From all the reports I'd heard, Ender's Game was Card's best,

and I was eager to immerse myself in the story. Everything I'd read by him had been eminently satisfying and I anticipated a real feast. I plumped my pillow, drew my coat over me like a blanket, adjusted my overhead light, popped a Cheeto in my mouth and began to read. I was on page thirty-seven when a fellow passenger walked past on his way to the rest room at the back of the bus. He paused as he reached my seat, looked as if he wanted to say something, and then went on. I watched him go. He was about twenty-two or twenty-three years old, wore a tattered tee-shirt, off-white jeans, and sandals with no socks--and it was December in New York (the mother in me couldn't help but wonder about his mother and why she hadn't trained him to dress for the weather). I went back to my book. Ender, the title character, was contemplating his isolation from the group of boys he had been assigned to join at Battle School. Because he was so small and so very young (six-years-old) he couldn't compete physically. But intellectually Ender was superior, and through his desk communicator/computer he found a way to win the boys' respect and eventually their loyalty. It was the mother in me that cheered Ender on. As I read, Ender became my little boy, suffering the ugliness heaped upon him by the other boys and the adult leaders at the Battle School.

I was rather annoyed when the young man who had passed me earlier stopped on his return trip back to his seat and interrupted my reading.

"You're a Card fan, huh." It wasn't a question.

I replied rather reluctantly, "I guess so." I was new to bus travel and was rather suspicious of the "kind of people" who frequently traveled by bus. He moved so I could see his face.

"I've read everything he's ever written--at least everything I know about." Pointing to my book, he said, "Ender's Game is my favorite."

A voice from somewhere up ahead called out, "Did somebody say Ender's Game?"

"Hey, I've read that. Card's great--isn't he!" whispered another voice.

Somebody way in the back of the bus leaned into the aisle and quietly but distinctly said, "I liked Seventh Son better."

"Have you read Treason?" asked someone else.

And still another said, "Yeah, it's good--but Ender's Game is better--always better."

"I'm reading The Folk of the Fringe right now," said a youngish girl sitting across the aisle and up one seat. She waved her copy of the book for all to see.

"Did you know Card's a Mormon?" said somebody else.

An old grouch sitting directly behind the bus driver growled. "Will you people shut-up and go to sleep!" It was about 2:00 a.m.

"Ah, stick a sock in it," said the young man standing in the aisle beside my seat.

By this time all those disembodied voices were turning in their seats or standing trying to locate each other. My daughter Martha moaned and began adjusting her position in the seat next to me. I urged her to move across the aisle and sleep next to her dad, who was oblivious to all that was going on. Others on the bus were doing the same and within minutes fourteen passengers (out of forty-five) had grouped themselves in the middle of the bus. We talked about Orson Scott Card and his novels until six a.m. when the bus stopped somewhere close to the Pennsylvania/Ohio

border to gas-up, clean-up, and allow us time to freshen-up and get breakfast. We took on several new passengers and as we pulled out of the terminal one of the Card fans called out, "Any of you guys read Orson Scott Card?"

One of the new arrivals answered, "Yeah, in fact my brother's wife's sister's kid goes to elementary school with Card's kid in Greensboro, North Carolina." He and one other new arrival joined our group and we spent several more hours discussing, arguing about, agonizing over, and enjoying Orson Card's work. At every bus stop all the way to Salt Lake City the Card readers said goodbye to someone and welcomed someone new. When I left the group in Salt Lake City, forty-three hours after first discovering this strange and fantastic bond, there were still a dozen Card readers on the bus--some of them longtime readers and some of them recent converts (of less than twenty-four hours!), and I was still on page thirty-seven of Ender's Game. It was a phenomenon unlike any I had ever before experienced, though similar things (also Card-related) have happened since. Among English teachers, literature students, and writers, similar discussions (usually of shorter duration) occur. But the connections between those people are evident. On my cross-country bus trip there was only one connection between those passengers--a love of the fantasy and science fiction writing of Orson Scott Card.

I listened as the ever-changing group argued over Card's characterization. Was Ender believable as a child-hero? Did Alvin become too powerful at too young an age? Was Lanik's reaction to his regenerating body parts anything near to a normal teenage response? Did Anset's homosexual episode in Songmaster destroy or strengthen his innocence?

Card's themes were always in debate. His heroes always have to endure great pain and sacrifice, and just as often they inflict pain and suffering, though usually unwillingly. Salvation plays a part in almost every plot, and this topic was constantly debated by more than one sub-group on the bus. Card's Christic symbolism was constantly discussed.

Card's settings received the least attention of any elements of his writing. All of these readers were hard-core science fiction and fantasy readers so times and places far removed from twentieth-century America were commonplace to them.

Nobody ever formally addressed the issues of plot, theme, setting, or characterization, which probably would have happened in a more "literary" setting. But each issue was thoroughly discussed and, interestingly, approved, even acclaimed by the group.

One aspect of Card's writing missing from that forty-three hours of intense discussion was his use of Mormon doctrine, history, and tradition in every one of his novels and the vast majority of his short stories. I was intrigued by the fact that every reader that came and went between Buffalo and Salt Lake City, made only incidental references to Card's Mormon background. I was the only Mormon reader in the group, and as I listened to the rousing discussions of first one book or character and then another, there were numerous times when I wanted to point out what I perceived as missed themes, or reasons for specific actions and certain twists in the stories. Often actions taken by the characters in Card's stories are blatantly "Mormon" in their origins. I tried to convince my new friends that the seventh son in Seventh Son is actually Joseph Smith,

founding prophet of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the LDS or Mormon Church). Though most were aware of Card's Mormon leanings (he often uses backslid Mormons in his stories and labels them as such), no one wanted to label Card as a Mormon writer. My attempts to acquaint the bus group with portions of Card's stories that I thought they had missed because they were unacquainted with Mormonism were largely ignored. I retreated and just listened and learned; after all, I was a relative newcomer to science fiction.

In those few hours, spent mostly listening to other readers' perceptions of Card's work, I discovered that there is a richness to much of Card's writing that is not totally recognized and appreciated by those unacquainted with Mormon doctrine, history and tradition; there are occasions when "knowing" would enhance or enrich the reading. Michael Collings, an authority on Card's fiction, speaks of a student working on a term paper dealing with Card's Speaker for the Dead:

One non-LDS student writing a term paper on Speaker for the Dead noted the three divisions of piggy life and knew instinctively that they provided a key to understanding the novel. He became increasingly frustrated in completing the paper, however, because while he could tell that the novel was working toward a specific symbolic reading, he could not understand why the three stages differed so completely from one another, why they were so obviously important literally and symbolically, or what Card intended to say through them. Yet a brief explanation of the Mormon doctrine of the three estates sufficed to

make the novel and its symbolism much more accessible. Such symbolic references are so integrated into the plot and resolution of the novel that to extract them as specific references to Mormonism would destroy the narrative; yet, in some senses, they only resonate fully in conjunction with an awareness of LDS teachings (Collings 58).

I first became acquainted with Orson Scott Card's work in the fall of 1988 while taking a Fantasy/Science Fiction course from Dr. Calvin Rich at SUNY Brockport. The course was an elective I chose because of the professor, not the course itself. I had always avoided fantasy and science fiction, regarding the genres as inferior. That's akin to disliking strawberries without ever having eaten them. My respect for Dr. Rich and my desire to be able to serve my students as an English teacher at least marginally acquainted with all aspects of literature made me rethink my attitude, and I decided to give science fiction and fantasy a chance. I must confess that I was immediately hooked by Stephen Donaldson, Gordon Dickson, J.R.R. Tolkien, and C. S. Lewis. It was during a class discussion on Lewis's Perelandra that Dr. Rich learned I was a Mormon. Dr. Rich asked me if I had read any of Card's work and encouraged me to do so. He especially recommended Seventh Son. I had never heard of Card and was pleased to learn of a Mormon writer achieving such a wide readership. I must honestly confess, however, that I avoided reading Card. Most Mormon fiction writers I had read had been major disappointments because of their didactic tendencies. I didn't want to add another to my list. It wasn't until two years later that, at Dr. Rich's insistence, I finally read Seventh Son.

followed by Red Prophet. I read them both in a day. I put down Red Prophet and drove to four different bookstores where I bought four more Card books--only four were available. According to the clerks who assisted me, Card's books, no matter what title, sold so rapidly that they were difficult to keep in stock.

I have always carried a book with me to fill the "waiting" moments. Carrying Orson Scott Card's books has not increased my reading time. Instead, I have become involved in conversation after conversation with other Card readers who have seen me reading.

"I loved that book!"

"Have you read _____?" (Please fill in the blank. I've been asked that question about every novel Card has written to date.)

"When you finish that you ought to read _____." (The parenthetical sentence above applies here as well.)

"My mom gave me the whole Ender trilogy for my birthday." (This from a forty-five-year-old male bank officer.)

"I've read everything Card has written."

"How did you like The Lost Boys? I hear the Mormons aren't too crazy about it."

"Do you read Card's column in Asimov's Magazine?" (I bought a subscription.)

And on and on and again and again.

No one has ever interrupted me or made a single comment when they have seen me reading Willa Cather, William Faulkner, or even John Grisham. This Card thing is a puzzlement--one that has spurred me to thoroughly read all of his fiction, as much of his non-fiction as I have been able

to locate, and all of his work pertaining to Mormonism that is available. Orson Scott Card has published sixteen science fiction/fantasy novels, one novel of historical fiction, well over one-hundred short stories in several volumes, and several dramatic plays with Mormon themes. To his credit are dozens of articles dealing with computer games and various programming techniques, "how to" articles and books on writing, a monthly magazine column recommending science fiction/fantasy novels by other authors, a modest amount of poetry, and numerous articles devoted to Mormon issues. He is the scriptwriter of the new Hill Cumorah Pageant which is produced annually by the Mormon Church and presented in Palmyra, New York. He has written the scripts for several animated video productions presenting scripture stories for children. To say he is a prolific and diverse writer is understatement.

Card is a devout member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, commonly known as the LDS or Mormon Church. His devotion to Mormonism informs the great majority of his fiction. While the greater portion of Card's readers are not Mormons, the majority of them are aware of his Mormon affiliation. His Mormon readers, on the other hand, cannot escape the allusions to, and often blatant use of, Mormon doctrines, historical events, figures, and traditions in his writing.

Card once responded to critical comments about his use of Mormonism in his work by saying that readers are ". . . actually noticing things that I did not deliberately do" (Storyteller 158). This statement was made in 1985 before Card published the Tales of Alvin Maker, and The Homecoming Saga, novels based on The Book of Mormon. Card wrote, "I resolved long ago, when I was a playwright trying not to lose more than a few thousand

dollars a year writing plays for the Mormon audience, that I would never attempt to use my writing to overtly preach the gospel in my 'literary works' (158). While "preaching the gospel" may not have been Card's intent, exposing it, articulating it, and retelling its story have certainly become a foundation upon which much of his fiction is based.

Introduction

Stories set in fantastic worlds offer marvelous advantages to the reader. One advantage is the utter delight and wonder at events not possible in the real world. Another is the usually neutral ground provided by a secondary world. In a fantastic setting the reader can temporarily relinquish real-world presumptions and enter a landscape where vision means more than understanding, where magicians, wizards, sorcerers, and even gods work their various magics unfettered by nagging disbelief, where ways and means of "doing" require a willing stretch of the imagination while universal truths about human nature remain unchanged.

When people read a story that takes place in an enchanted world, they go beyond a suspension of their disbelief to enter a secondary place where they can accept the other-world and its parameters on their own terms, excluding whatever laws, systems, or boundaries that might interfere with their immersion in the story. Of course all fiction requires a certain amount of this kind of secondary belief, but it is absolutely essential where fantasy and science fiction are concerned (Tolkien 57).

C.S. Lewis populated The Narnia Chronicles with talking animals, other mythological creatures of his own creation, and creatures borrowed from earlier mythologies. He bore his readers to Narnia through an opening in the back of an old wardrobe where disappointed children were disposed to hide. Ransom reached Perelandra, in the novel Perelandra, by-way-of a coffin-like wooden box. Perelandra's geography was marked by land that shifted and undulated like waves of the sea. Lewis used both of these alien worlds to explore basic Christian themes. (Examples are Christ himself, who appears in The Narnia Chronicles as the Lion, and Adam and Eve,

who are both present as the creation couple in the world Ransom visits. In "Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's to Be Said," Lewis ponders; "Supposing that by casting all these things into an imaginary world, stripping them of their stained-glass and Sunday school associations, one could make them appear in their real potency (37). According to Lewis, examination of real world truths, truths according to Lewis' view of life at least, through fantasy and science fiction, is one of the genre's principal values. He further stated:

By putting bread, gold, horse, apple, or the very roads into a myth, we do not retreat from reality: we rediscover it . . . This book applies the treatment not only to bread or apple but to good and evil, to our endless perils, our anguish, and our joys. By dipping them in myth we see them more clearly" (37).

Lewis's contention was that when applied to truth, magic, fantasy and fairy all have a strangely defining quality, that truth can be seen more clearly, that vision is sharper, that we can cultivate the ability to see "things as we are [or were] meant to see them" (16). Lewis is quoting Tolkien.

In the three-volume series The Tales of Alvin Maker, Orson Scott Card does the same thing with Mormonism that Lewis did with Christianity; that is, he articulates Mormon history, tradition and doctrine in an other-world setting--an alternate America in the early 1800s--a world in which magic works. While Card's Tales draws heavily on Mormon history and tradition for its characterization and plot, its focus is primarily on Mormonism's mystical and archetypal aspects. Mormons share many doctrines with

traditional Christianity and these common beliefs play a part in the Tales. However, emphasis in these stories is on Mormon beliefs that have a profound effect on the Mormon view of life--here and hereafter. While the Bible overtly plays a major role in Card's tale, woven subtly into the story are borrowings from Mormon Church history, The Book of Mormon, The Doctrine and Covenants, priesthood and temple teachings, and the life of the Mormon Prophet, Joseph Smith. So well intertwined into the story, these absolutely Mormon themes are often missed by casual Mormon readers because they resonate to the very core of their beings; they cannot separate themselves from these beliefs without conscious effort. Non-Mormon readers are largely unaware that LDS dogma is even there.

Michael Collins addressed Card's "substrata of religious intensity" in his book, In the Image of God: Theme, Characterization, and Landscape in the Fiction of Orson Scott Card:

Rather than litter his landscapes with easily identifiable Mormon tags, he assumes a distinctively LDS worldview. The results are science-fiction and fantasy novels that speak to a wide non-Mormon audience (witness his multiple awards and nominations, and the many positive reviews that do not even mention religious elements in his works) and at the same time offer careful readers insights that are compelling and moving in their religious intensity (45).

Collings adds that Card's works "are so fundamentally colored by and informed with Mormonism, that in some cases evidence for his Mormonism is barely discernible to LDS readers and virtually invisible to

others" (44).

Indeed, virtually all of Card's work is fundamentally Mormon in its approach to life, whether that life is set in the Hio valley of The Tales of Alvin Maker, or in a society in a far-away galaxy removed from the present by more than 40,000 years, i.e., the new Homecoming Saga. While none of his science fiction/fantasy pieces can be termed spiritual tracts or didactic preachments, each one resonates most fully when viewed in conjunction with its essentially religious base. Paul Horgan noted:

We must go beyond the pencil boxes, as it were, and look beyond the page to consider the writer's vision of life, which all simple and habitual mechanics of writing exist to serve. Where many literary workers fall short of making significant works is just where spiritual values come into focus in a point of view (57).

Orson Scott Card makes no attempt to persuade or convert his readers. He does require them to accept his distinctive world-view when they enter the world he has created in his stories, a world drenched in his LDS faith. They do so most often, unaware.

Prior to the publication of Seventh Son, Card said of his own writing, "I believe that I present Mormon theology most eloquently when I do not speak about it at all" ("SF and Religion" 11). However, it is almost impossible to find a single Card fiction piece that does not reflect the significant spiritual values spoken of by Paul Horgan. Though Card claims to include Mormonism unconsciously in his work, The Tales of Alvin Maker and The Homecoming Saga, with their overt use of LDS history, tradition

and doctrine, did not coincidentally happen. They were strategically planned and plotted.

Seventh Son, the first of three books in the Tales of Alvin Maker, opens with the birth of Alvin Miller, Jr., Card's fantasy analogue to Mormonism's founding prophet Joseph Smith, Jr. Due to unfortunate circumstances, the Miller family must move from the north country to the Ohio valley--in the case of the Smith family the move was from Sharon, Windsor County, Vermont, to a Manchester farm in upstate New York. Nature conspires to end young Alvin's life, and Joseph's also, in the very first hours after their births, but miraculous intervention by a higher power saves both children. Both babies are named for their fathers--Alvin Miller, Sr. and Joseph Smith, Sr. Both Alvin and Joseph are physically strong boys and both are wrestlers of some reputation. Both are aware of their destinies, at least to some degree, at very early ages (Joseph at fourteen and Alvin at six). Both are visited by divine messengers in vision; each one receives three visits by the same personage in white, who teaches them things pertaining to their own salvation and the salvation of others. Both young men are fascinated with the American Indian and their relationships to the Indians. Alvin and Joseph both suffer from an infected leg bone which can only be corrected by surgical means. Both Joseph and Alvin have bouts of youthful irresponsibility and both are told they can be removed from their callings, Joseph as prophet and Alvin as Maker, unless they cease from selfishness and retrench. The similarities continue throughout Card's trilogy.

Don't be deceived; The Tales of Alvin Maker is not a biography of the Mormon Prophet. It is a magical tale, a fantasy that extrapolates the

archetypal goodness of a real man, adds a healthy dose of magic and a good deal of original fiction, to create a "Maker" every reader wants to believe in.

Without Joseph Smith There Could Be No Seventh Son

Along with doctrine, history, scripture and tradition, Orson Scott Card makes liberal use of people prominent in Mormon history. While each of these aforementioned categories will obviously overlap, I will begin by introducing the fictional people of Card's Tales as they relate to flesh and blood people from Mormon history.

The opening pages of Seventh Son, the first volume of The Tales of Alvin Maker, introduce the reader to the Alvin Miller family whose fortunes had recently changed, and who were forced by reduced circumstances to leave their home in west New Hampshire to seek a new and better life in the frontier valleys west of the Hio river (SS 7). Alvin Miller, Sr., is the fictional counterpart of Joseph Smith, Sr., who brought his family out of Vermont because of three consecutive years of crop failure, mounting debt, and projected famine. Joseph Smith, Sr., having heard of the more temperate climate and fertile lands of upstate New York, determined to move his family there in hopes that a reversal of their fortunes could be made (Nibley 63).

Joseph Smith, Sr., traveled to Palmyra, New York ahead of his family to survey the prospects there, and later sent for them. His wife and children gathered their few possessions, hired a teamster to guide them to their prospective home, and with one wagon, a team of horses, and tremendous determination they set out to join their husband and father. Like the Smiths the Miller family traveled with one wagon, a team of horses, and a passel of children from the disappointments in New

Hampshire to what they hoped would be a more promising, if not prosperous, new life in Ohio:

The two mothers involved in these journeys were cut from the same cloth. Faith Miller's courageous act in the early pages of Seventh Son was the delivery of her seventh son and thirteenth child. It was this child, young Alvin Miller, who would become the main character in Card's trilogy. Faith Miller writhed in the last stages of hard labor in a wagon bed hopelessly mired in the raging Hatrack river, as her oldest son drowned while battling the river that tried to prevent the birth of the expected baby. Vigor lost his battle for life with the raging river, but not until after his mother had given birth to the seventh son of a seventh son (SS 15-29). Lucy Mack Smith's ordeal was traveling with eight young children, one of whom was still recuperating from typhus fever, three-hundred miles with a teamster whose intent was to deprive her of her horses and wagon. Her oldest son, Alvin Smith, reported one morning, "Mr. Howard has thrown our goods out of the wagon, and is about starting off with the team" (Nibley 62). Mr. Howard had used up all of the money Mrs. Smith had entrusted to him and was bent on deserting her and her children. Lucy confronted him in a barroom where he was bragging about what he planned to do. "I now forbid you touching the team, or driving it one step further," she said. "You can go about your business; I have no further use for you. I shall take charge of the team myself, and hereafter attend to my own affairs" (63). Lucy Mack Smith did exactly that, and ". . . in a short time arrived in Palmyra, with a small portion of . . . [their] affects, and barely two cents in cash" (63). The six-year-old son who was still suffering from typhus fever was Joseph Smith, Jr., the flesh and blood

inspiration for Card's Alvin Miller, Jr.

While the Smiths had arrived at their intended destination, the Millers had not. After allowing two weeks for Faith Miller to recuperate after giving birth to Alvin, Jr., burying Vigor, and building a number of covered bridges over the Hatrack river, the Millers moved on westward to what would later become Vigor township (SS 34).

Faith Miller and Lucy Mack Smith were both strong and faithful Christian women; their husbands were hard-working, sensible men who had little use for organized religion. Alvin Miller, Sr., was conspicuously absent among the faithful Christians of Vigor township who built Philadelphia Thrower's church. He refused to worship in Thrower's congregation. A sermon concerning the evils of "hexes and doodles and charms and beseechings and suchlike" (36) had offended the senior Miller early on, and his belief that such things worked and worked well along side Christian theology made it impossible for him to support Thrower with his presence at the church, either in the capacity of work or worship. Miller's attitude toward religion prevailed throughout the entire trilogy and it was always his wife, Faith, who told about her husband's religious reluctance.

Likewise, Joseph Smith, Sr., was one lukewarm about Christianity as he observed its practice around him. Lucy Mack Smith recorded in her journal, "I retired to a grove not far distant, where I prayed to the Lord in behalf of my husband--that he might become more religiously inclined" (Nibley 43). Over the years that followed, Joseph Smith, Sr., continued to resist church activity because of the discord and confusion he observed within organized religion. He was "confirmed . . . in the opinion that there was no order of religionists that knew any more concerning the Kingdom of

God than those of the world, or such as made no profession of religion " (48). Smith remained unattached to any church until his son Joseph organized The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, on April 6, 1830.

While Alvin Miller, Jr., and Joseph Smith, Jr., learned their respective roles (as Maker and Prophet) the two fathers, fictional and real, stayed quietly in the background, struggling with their individual challenges, all the while helping to pave the paths their sons were destined to follow.

In Card's trilogy the three most thoroughly developed Miller boys were called Vigor, Measure and of course Alvin. Their counterparts in the real life Smith family were respectively Alvin, Hyrum and Joseph. Vigor, the Miller's oldest son, died in the Hatrack river while trying to save his pregnant mother's life. He clung desperately to life long enough that the baby his mother was carrying might be born the seventh son of a seventh son. As the oldest of the Miller children his death had a profound effect on the entire family. He was spoken of with deep affection throughout the entire three-volume work, and his influence was constantly felt, probably as much as any living character in the Tales, with the notable exception of Young Alvin Miller

The real-life Vigor was named Alvin Smith and he had the same sort of influence in the Joseph Smith, Sr., family that Vigor had in the Miller family. Like Vigor, Alvin Smith died a young man; he was twenty-five. He never married and remained a young man in his family's memories. In her history Lucy Mack Smith, Alvin's mother, recorded how devoted Alvin was to his brothers and sisters. She reported that of all the family, Alvin was more zealous about Joseph's call as a prophet and seer than anyone (89).

In 1836 Joseph received a vision of what could be compared to Card's Crystal City, wherein he saw Alvin, in the "transcendent beauty" of the Celestial Kingdom (DC 137: 1-5). Orson Scott Card's choice of Alvin as the name for his Maker can be attributed to the deep affection and respect Joseph Smith had for his oldest brother Alvin.

Measure, Alvin Miller's oldest living brother, was a remarkable character in Card's story. He unflinchingly supported, lifted, and even obeyed his younger brother. His devotion to Alvin, his absolute trust and belief in him were manifested in Seventh Son as he willingly performed surgery on Alvin's diseased leg, in Red Prophet as he accompanied Alvin on his quest with Ta-Kumsaw, and in Prentice Alvin when he began an apprenticeship of his own. Alvin finally discovered that the basic responsibility of a Maker was to prepare a people worthy to inhabit the Crystal City. Measure was the first to let Alvin teach him the rudiments of Makership (PA 339-40).

Easily recognizable as Measure's counterpart was Hyrum Smith. Hyrum, like Measure, was loyal, totally devoted, and fully committed to Joseph's work. He cared for Joseph through more than one illness, sacrificed material comforts, left his wife and children for months at a time on a variety of missions, proselyted among the Missouri Indians, spent months in jail because of his refusal to deny the efficacy of Joseph's ministry, was poisoned, beaten, and approached death on more than one occasion. His end was with his brother. He was shot to death in a Carthage, Illinois, jail cell, defending to his last breath the teachings of his brother, Joseph Smith. Joseph recorded the following in his journal:

Thought I to myself, Brother Hyrum, what a faithful

heart you have got! . . . Oh . . . the care you have had for my soul! Oh how many are the sorrows we have shared together; and again we find ourselves shackled with the unrelenting hand of oppression (HQ, Vol. 5 107-8). .

Surely the kinship between Measure Miller and Hyrum Smith is unmistakable.

Peggy, the torch girl--the most magical of all of Card's characters save Alvin only--who was she? At the age of five she presided at Alvin's birth. She sent the rescuers who brought Faith Miller to her family's roadhouse where Alvin was born and saved when Peggy pulled the wet and sopping birth caul from his face. It was Peggy whose "sight" assured Alvin, Sr., that his newborn son truly was a seventh son of a seventh son. She "watched" Alvin grow up in Vigor township from her home in Hatrack river country, and sent her torch's powers to help prevent his destruction by the Unmaker on more than occasion. As she grew to young womanhood she viewed Alvin romantically and realized that he would eventually come to her feeling obligated to make her a part of his future. Alvin's focus was on his role as a Maker, and he would come to understand that his power, mingled with Peggy's, would enable him to truly become a Maker. Peggy's vision of her possible future with Alvin brought her grief because she understood that a union with Alvin under those circumstances would be a union of duty, not love. Peggy didn't mind about the duty part, but she was so hungry to experience the sweetness of love between a man and a woman that she turned her back on her knack as a torch and left Hatrack. She continued to watch Alvin from afar, and her love for him and his destiny grew as he grew. She educated herself so that when and if the union with

Alvin ever became a reality she would be prepared to help him, to teach him, to stand beside him as he unfolded his destiny as a Maker.

The very kind of marriage relationship Peggy desired was a reality for Emma Hale. Though Emma didn't enter Joseph Smith's life until they were both young adults, she did have a profound impact on his life. Emma, like Peggy, was better educated and more refined than Joseph. Both Peggy and Emma were older than Alvin and Joseph; the two women were twenty-three when significant relationships began between the two couples. Both Peggy and Emma were beautiful young women. Alvin was apprenticed to Makepeace Smith and living away from his home when he and Peggy met as adults. Likewise, Joseph Smith was apprenticed and living away from his home when he met the lovely Emma. Emma, like her fictional counterpart, made tremendous personal sacrifices for Joseph and his calling. The minor similarities between Peggy and Emma definitely link them. However, it is the intense love that Emma had for Joseph that make Emma and Peggy similar. While Prentice Alvin closes before any mutual feelings of romantic love are expressed between Peggy and Alvin, Joseph and Emma did marry and share the kind of love Peggy envisioned for herself and Alvin (HC Vol. 1, 17).

Because there is as yet no volume four in The Tales of Alvin Maker, a non-Mormon reader is denied the vision of Alvin and Peggy's future relationship. Mormon readers anticipating volume four instantly anticipate a glorious union between Alvin and Peggy because they recognize the parallels between the fictional couple and the flesh and blood couple.

Other significant characters, Taleswapper, Philadelphia Thrower, Lolla-Wossiky and The Shining Man, are treated in detail in either an

historical/traditional or doctrinal context.

The Hatrack river and other sources of water play a role of major significance in Card's narrative. In the beginning pages of Seventh Son the reader is introduced to the dangers of the water. Card's entire story is dependent upon Alvin Miller, Jr.'s vulnerability to water. In the context of Mormon history, tradition and doctrinal beliefs, Card's emphasis on the destructive power of the water becomes thoroughly clear.

When the Millers began to ford the Hatrack river, the river was calm; the spot they chose to cross was shallow. Still Alvin Miller, who "had learned never to trust water," (SS 8) hesitated. Only his wife's advancing labor pains could have induced him to cross then rather than spend the night on that side of the river. The roadhouse three miles beyond seemed a better place for birthing a child, so Alvin and his boys plunged into the task of fording the Hatrack. Miller still had misgivings about the river and water in general. "No matter how peaceful it looks, it'll reach out and try to take you" (8). Alvin's presentiment proved prophetic:

The clouds came up and the rains came down and the Hatrack became . . . insane. It doubled in speed and strength all in a moment. [It was] as if the river knew they were coming and saved up its worst fury till they were already in it and couldn't get away" (16).

In its cataclysmic surge the river claimed the life of Vigor, Alvin Miller's oldest son, and nearly took Faith and the unborn child. Calm, Measure, Wastenot, Wantnot, and David, the Miller's other five sons, somehow got the wagon to the river's edge and transferred Faith to a wagon which would

transport her to the roadhouse where Alvin, Jr., would be safely born. Young Peggy, a five-year-old torch, had "seen" the catastrophe being played out on the river and had sent men and a wagon from her parent's roadhouse to the Miller's rescue. Vigor held to life long enough for the seventh son to be born and then his heartfire was extinguished. Alvin Miller's grief-stricken response was, "The water had its way" (SS 21).

Little Peggy's grandfather, Oldpappy, taught her about the water:

Fire makes things hot and bright and uses them up.

Air makes things cool and sneaks in everywhere.

Earth makes things solid and sturdy, so they'll last.

But water, it tears things down, it falls from the sky and carries off everything it can, carries it off and down to the sea. If the water had its way, the whole world would be smooth, just a big ocean with nothing out of the water's reach. All dead and smooth. . . .

The water wants to tear down these strangers, whoever they are, tear them down and kill them (25).

When using her powers as a torch and looking into baby Alvin's future, Little Peggy saw "death down every path. Drowning, drowning, every path of his future led this child to watery death" (29). At one point in Seventh Son Alvin, Sr., said that fourteen times the water had tried to take six-year-old Alvin's life (68). Miller and his sons built covered bridges over the Hatrack and other streams near Vigor township in order to protect this magical boy from the destroying power of the water.

These expressions of the destructive power of the water fill all three volumes of The Tales of Alvin Maker. In The Red Prophet, the title

character saw in vision the destructive power of the water. "He saw the black noise again, a great sheet of it, hard and frozen. It was the river. It was the water. It was made of death" (96). Alvin, Jr., also spoke of the power of the water in The Red Prophet. At the age of ten he was beginning to test his miraculous powers. He didn't understand the power he possessed, but was discovering a little at a time how to use it. "He knew there was some things he didn't know how to handle. Water was the main one" (136).

At one point in Prentice Alvin, Alvin Jr., became acquainted with a dowser who came to locate a well for Makepeace Smith, the blacksmith to whom Alvin was apprenticed. The dowser took an instant dislike to Alvin without being able to reason why. Alvin recognized the enmity immediately:

Alvin knew from childhood the Unmaker hankered after water. Water was its servant, did most of its work, tearing things down. So it was no wonder that when a water man like Hank Dowser come along, the Unmaker freshened up and got lively (100).

To say the Unmaker "freshened up" is a gross understatement. It was while digging the aforementioned well that Alvin came closest to being destroyed by water (117-18).

Card's use of the destructive power of water as a theme throughout The Tales of Alvin Maker is a direct correlary to the teachings of the Mormon Prophet, Joseph Smith, relative to water and its evil power. Reference to water's destructive power is made twice by Joseph Smith in his journals, which were compiled, edited and published under the

direction of the general authorities of the Mormon Church. On August 9, 1831, Smith recorded the following concerning the dangerous power of the water:

On the ninth, in company with ten Elders, I left Independence landing for Kirtland. We started down the river in canoes, and went the first day as far as Fort Osage, where we had an excellent wild turkey for supper. Nothing very important occurred till the third day, when many of the dangers so common upon the western waters, manifested themselves; and after we had encamped upon the banks of the river at McIlwaine's Bend, Brother Phelps, in open vision by daylight, saw the destroyer in his most horrible power, ride upon the face of the waters; others heard the noise, but saw not the vision (HC Vol. 2, 202-03).

The following day Smith received a revelation now known as Section Sixty-one of The Doctrine and Covenants (a volume of sacred Mormon scripture). In that revelation Joseph Smith acted as spokesman for the Lord, who said:

Behold I, the Lord, in the beginning blessed the waters; but in the last days, by the mouth of my servant John, I cursed the waters. Wherefore, the days will come that no flesh shall be safe upon the waters. And now I give unto you a commandment that what I say unto one I say unto all, that you shall forewarn your brethren concerning these waters, that they come not in

journeying upon them, lest their faith fail and they are caught in the snares. The destroyer rideth upon the face thereof (61: 14-19).

Later in the same section the voice of the Lord is directed to several specific men, Joseph Smith being one of them:

And now, concerning my servants, Sidney Rigdon, Joseph Smith, Jun., and Oliver Cowdry, let them come not again upon the waters, save it be the canal, while journeying to their homes; or in other words they shall not come upon the waters to journey, save upon the canal (61:23).

The reference made to "my servant John" in Doctrine and Covenants 61: 14 is found in the New Testament, the Book of Revelation 8: 8-11, and reads:

And the second angel sounded, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea: and the third part of the sea became blood; And the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, and had life, died; and the third part of the ships were destroyed. And the third angel sounded, and there fell a great star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of waters. And the name of the star is called Wormwood: and the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many men died of the water, because they were made bitter.

Common Christian belief is that the Book of Revelation is John the

Beloved's vision of those events that will occur in the last days prior to the second coming of Christ. According to the prophetic predictions of both John and Joseph Smith, water will play a significant role in ushering in those last days. Card has relied heavily upon John and Joseph Smith's revelations in his alternative history of nineteenth century America.

Later in Joseph Smith's personal history he again comments on the destructive power of the western waters. "The steamer Edna collapsed her flues at the mouth of the Missouri river; more than sixty persons were badly scalded. A proof among many similar that the waters of the West are cursed" (HC Vol. 5, 56). In an article titled, "The Fulfillment of Prophecy, the Testimony of the Floods" first printed in The Improvement Era (for eight decades the Mormon Church's monthly magazine), in the September, 1903 issue, Joseph Smith's predictions of the destruction upon the inland waters of North American and Western Missouri were again detailed (275-78).

Not only were the documented evidences named above available to Orson Scott Card as he invented The Tales of Alvin Maker, he also had access to a vast body of oral tradition passed from one generation to the next concerning the dangers of the water. From September of 1968 through November of 1970 I served as a missionary for the Mormon Church. Many of my friends served during that time in both this country and several European and South American countries. Each one of my friends (I contacted seven) attested to the verbal warnings from church authorities concerning the dangers said to be rampant upon the water. Swimming was forbidden to missionaries, as was unnecessary travel by boat. My son,

currently serving in Argentina, was required to fly from the southern-most tip of Argentina, to the tip of Ashuah, in Tierra del Fuego, rather than travel by sea (Porschet, Interview). While nothing beyond Section Sixty-one in The Doctrine and Covenants is formally written concerning the dangers common upon the waters, and no mention is made of it in general meetings, under some circumstances the doctrine/tradition is still formally observed in this modern era. Orson Scott Card used this doctrine taught by Joseph Smith as a cornerstone in his fantasy tale.

Another aspect of Card's narrative that has its roots in oral tradition is the danger Joseph Smith faced as a newborn baby at the family farm in Sharon, Windsor County, Vermont. The Smiths worked a rented farm high in the granite-and-marble-laden mountains of central Vermont. The climate provided a minimal growing season and the Smiths were more or less subsistence farmers in Sharon. During a visit to the Joseph Smith birthplace in October of 1989, I heard again the story of the baby Joseph's birth on December 23, 1805. My father shares Joseph Smith's December birthday, and so it was not the first time I had heard of the frigid temperatures and killing blizzard during which the baby Joseph was born. According to the missionary sister who took us to the hearth stone (all that remains of the house where Joseph was born are the hearth stone and back stoop), Lucy Mack Smith rocked her newborn son at the hearth during a blizzard in which families lost children and parents to the torrents of the storm that lasted several days. As a youngster I was frequently reminded that even nature recognized the potential greatness of Joseph Smith from the moment of his birth and that Satan utilized his

power over earthly elements to try to snuff out the life that would, from that time forward, thwart his evil influence over mankind.

Alvin Jr.'s childhood ran parallel to Joseph Jr.'s. Through Alvin's father, Card reported numerous occasions when the baby, and later the growing boy was threatened. Alvin, Sr., remarked to the boy's mother, "It's the elements of the universe, don't you see that he's an offense against nature? There's power in him like you nor I can't even guess. So much power that one part of nature itself can't bear it" (SS 70).

In telling Alvin's story using incidents from Joseph Smith's life, Card did not limit himself to Joseph's boyhood. While the three volumes of the Tales saw Alvin through only his eighteenth year, Card borrowed experiences and events from Joseph Smith's adult years as well as his childhood. One such incident involved Reverend Philadelphia Thrower. From his introduction into the story Reverend Thrower brought an edge to the narrative. "Rather than having a binding influence on frontier families, as a minister should, Thrower seemed to create tension. The people of Vigor seemed loyal to the Reverend out of duty rather than out of trust and genuine fondness. In particular he antagonized Alvin Miller, Sr. Thrower preached against the hexes, doodles, charms and beseechings that were an integral part of life in Card's landscape. He referred to himself not as a man of God but as a scientist, his science being the study of phrenology. To Faith Miller, Thrower impatiently explained, "Everything in the world is either science or miracles. Miracles came from God in ancient times, but those times are over. Today if we wish to change the world, it is not magic but science that will give us our tools" (37). Faith, a woman who

wove strong hexes and charms, one who was firmly entrenched in both the strength of Christian belief and the power of folk magic, was not impressed with Thrower's science. She responded, scornfully, "Science, like feeling head bumps?" She laughed, remembering how her son Measure called the science of phrenology "dowsing for brains" (46). While Faith's belief system could simultaneously include Christianity and folk magic, she rejected phrenology out of hand as nonsense.

During the erection of Vigor Church the ridgebeam fell and snapped in half a split second before it should have crashed down upon six-year-old Alvin's head. Thrower was a witness to this miraculous event and though he had a wariness about young Alvin (seventh son, unexplained powers, etc.) he was intrigued and wanted to examine the boy's head scientifically:

I must understand what has happened here, thought Thrower. He strode to the boy, placed his hands on the child's head, searching for an injury. Not a hair was out of place, but the boy's head felt warm, very warm, as if he had been standing near a fire. Then Thrower knelt and looked at the wood of the ridgebeam. It was cut as smooth as if the wood had grown that way, just exactly wide enough to miss the boy entirely (44).

Thrower couldn't explain it. The season for miracles had passed and there was no power in the magical arts practiced by so many of his parishioners. He spurned the murmurs in the framed church of "seventh son, doodlebug, healer," and spat out the epithet "devil's spawn" (45).

The Reverend couldn't restrain himself. He told Alvin's mother that he wanted to formally examine Alvin's head:

She rolled her eyes upward and muttered, "Dowsing for brains," but she also moved her hands away so he could feel the child's head. Slowly now, and carefully, trying to understand the map of the boy's skull, to read the ridges and bumps, the troughs and depressions. . . . He had learned a few things about people with particular skills, and head bumps they had in common. He had developed a knack of understanding, a map of the shapes of the human skull; he knew as his hands passed over Al's head what it was he found there. Normal. Absolutely normal. Not a single thing unusual about his head (47).

The deviations he expected to find weren't there. Philadelphia Thrower was aggravated by the seeming miracle. Card wrote, "An ordinary child would have died this day. Natural law demanded it. But someone or something was protecting this child and natural law had been overruled" (47).

At the age of thirty-seven Joseph Smith submitted to a phrenological examination by a Professor of Phrenology, one A. Crane, who was also a medical doctor. Professor Crane submitted the following letter to the editors of The Wasp, a Nauvoo, Illinois Newspaper:

Mr. Editor:

SIR: -- I take the liberty to inform you that a large number of persons in different places have manifested a desire to know the phrenological development of Joseph Smith's head. I have examined the Prophet's head, and he is perfectly willing to have the chart published.

You will please publish in your paper such portions of it as I have marked, showing the development of his much-talked-of brain, and let the public judge for themselves whether phrenology proves the reports against him true or false. Time will prove all things, and a 'word to the wise is sufficient.'

Yours respectfully, A. Crane (HC Vol. 5, 52-3).

A comprehensive chart detailing Joseph's temperament followed, along with an explanation of the chart. Five categories dealing with propensities, feelings, sentiments, and perceptions were detailed. Under each of these categories various qualities and abilities were listed. Each one was rated with a number from one to twelve. A rating of one revealed an almost total lack in that area, while a twelve indicated great strength. Thirty-eight areas were analyzed. Joseph received 323 points out of a possible 456, revealing him to be not a scoundrel, as was held by some, but quite a normal individual who was perhaps a bit above average in some areas. Following the letter Joseph Smith said of the experience, "I give the foregoing a place in my history for the gratification of the curious, and not for [any] respect [I entertain] for phrenology" (55).

The phrenology incident in Joseph Smith's life is one that is treated with humorous respect within the Mormon Church. It is often used in sermons and lessons to illustrate the unimportance of the opinions of those who attempt to malign the prophet and the church as a whole. Faith Miller's reaction mirrors the reactions of today's church members. Nonetheless it is a story that is told not for any doctrinal importance, but rather as an historical tradition.

Another such traditional incident that Card uses in Seventh Son is the story of Alvin's infected leg. Some of Alvin's near-death experiences came from many sources seemingly unrelated to water. One that is lifted directly from the life of Joseph Smith is the infected leg incident. Alvin, using his knack, cut from the stone deposits above the Miller farm a huge millstone to be used in the family gristmill. The work was grueling but almost complete; the brothers were maneuvering the stone into position at the mill when the horses became skittish, the ropes securing the huge stone became slack and the millstone fell. Using his extraordinary powers Alvin prevented the stone from breaking, but in so doing put himself in great jeopardy. Peggy, the torch, was "watching" in far away Philadelphia, and between her powers and Alvin's own his life was spared. However, his right leg was caught at the shin and the skin and muscle were torn away to the bones, which snapped in half. Chapter Thirteen of Seventh Son relates how the healing process involved Alvin's calling as a Maker in a most magical and miraculous way. However, the relevant part of this experience was the surgery that was performed. After dealing for several weeks with infections and deathly fevers, it was determined that a portion of the diseased bone in Alvin's leg be removed. No surgeon being available, it was decided that Thrower, the minister, would perform the surgery. For various reasons Thrower couldn't do the surgery, and finally Measure, Alvin's most trusted older brother, became the surgeon. Alvin, using his knack, guided Measure through the operation. Measure's unconditional faith in Alvin's knack, and his great love for his brother, persuaded him that he could do it. Alvin refused any alcohol, which was the only available anesthetic, and demanded that his father hold

him. "I won't jump if Pa's holding me," he said (215). Measure did the cutting, Pa did the holding, and Ma did the sewing. Alvin did the healing.

Joseph Smith's leg operation came as the result of an infection that settled in his leg after a serious bout with typhus fever. Like young Alvin, he suffered for weeks with the sickness brought on by the infection.

Where Measure was the one to stay by Alvin's side, it was Hyrum, Joseph's older brother, who sat by his bedside hour after hour and at the worst times even held "the affected part of the leg in his hands and pressing it between them, so that his afflicted brother might be able to endure the pain which was so excruciating that he was scarcely able to bear it" (Nibley 55).

The Smiths called for a surgeon, who made an eight-inch incision in the leg. The procedure gave the boy relief for a time. As the incision healed, the pain returned, even more violent than before. The surgeon was called again and repeated the same procedure with the same result. Finally a group of doctors were called together to examine Joseph, and amputation was recommended. Lucy, Joseph's mother, prevailed upon the doctors to try once more to correct the problem before giving over to amputating the leg (56). Lucy recorded the following in her journal:

The principal surgeon . . . ordered cords to be brought to bind Joseph fast to a bedstead; but to this Joseph objected. The doctor, however, insisted that he must be convinced, upon which Joseph said very decidedly,

"No doctor, I will not be bound."

"Then," said Dr. Stone, "Will you drink some brandy?"

"No," said Joseph, "Not one drop."

"Will you take some wine?" rejoined the doctor.

"You must take something, or you can never endure the severe operation to which you must be subjected."

"No," exclaimed Joseph, "I will not touch one particle of liquor, neither will I be tied down; but I will tell you what I will do--I will have my father hold me in his arms, and then I will do whatever is necessary in order to have the bone taken out" (Nibley 56-7).

The surgery commenced. Joseph was healed.

The Shining Man in Card's narrative is an easily-recognizable part of Mormon history. Because it is recorded in The Book of Mormon the Shining Man doesn't fit the tradition category; however, it is a piece of Mormon history so mythic in its proportions that it should be included with the leg incident.

Joseph Smith and Alvin Miller shared a vision that shaped both of their lives, real and fictional, in quite remarkable ways. Alvin knew from early childhood on that he had a knack--powers that enabled him to do remarkable things. As occurs in every family with children, competition arose between Alvin and his siblings. On one occasion his sisters filled Alvin's night shirt with straight pins, so when he dressed for bed, he was stabbed in every direction by the sharp steel pins. Having recently endured many such pranks at his sister's hands, Alvin was determined to get even. His knack included a remarkable ability that enabled him to communicate with small animals, particularly the roaches that inhabited the Miller home. He had somehow made a pact with the roaches:

They could get into anything they wanted if it was on the floor, but they didn't climb into Calvin's bed nor Alvin's neither, and they didn't climb onto his stool. In return, Alvin never stomped them. As a result Alvin's room was pretty much the roach sanctuary of the house, but since they kept the treaty, he and Calvin were the only ones who never woke up screaming about roaches in the bed (SS 56).

As Alvin sat on the edge of his bed removing the glinting pins from his nightshirt and rubbing his wounds, some of them bleeding, he hungered for revenge. He noticed the roaches skittering about on his bedroom floor and a marvelous plan blossomed in his mind. "He knelt down on the floor . . . and began whispering to the roaches, just the way he did when he made his peace treaty with them. . . . He started telling them about food, the most perfectly delicious food" (58) they would find on his sisters' pink skin. He assured the roaches, who had gathered all around his feet without touching him, that there was nothing to fear and that they would be perfectly safe at the banquet he had invited them to. "The whole troop went off in a single great cavalry charge" (58) into the girl's room. In moments the first scream was heard and in less than a minute Alvin's father, his older brothers and of course his sisters were furiously stomping and squashing the roaches.

Alvin's first reaction to all that followed was sheer delight. As the household settled, however, the atmosphere in his room changed. He could sense a presence but couldn't see anything. He tried to ignore it until the presence became a light and within the light was a man--a man Alvin

described as "shining as if he was made of sunlight. The light in the room was coming from his skin, from his chest where his shirt was tore open, from his face, and from his hands" (60). Terror engulfed Alvin and he feared for his life. "Then it was like as if the light from the man pushed right through Alvin's skin and came inside him, and the fear just went right out of him" (61). The Shining Man appeared three times in the night with various messages. Through The Shining Man Alvin saw the roaches' terror as they were brutally destroyed. In vision Alvin became a roach and witnessed their destruction as one of them, experienced their agony, felt their sense of betrayal. Alvin returned from the vision realizing that worse than the death faced by the roaches was the trust he had broken. He felt he had "done Murder" (62). Alvin learned through The Shining Man that the real atrocity of his act was not the death of the roaches, for death is a part of life, but that he had used his knack, his special power, for his own selfish pleasure. He was chastised, and in great remorse came to the realization that his knack was never to be used for his own pleasure. He vowed then never again to use his knack for himself alone (64).

On the twenty-first day of September, 1823, Joseph Smith had an encounter with his Shining Man:

I discovered a light appearing in my room, which continued to increase until the room was lighter than at noonday, when immediately a personage appeared at my bedside, standing in the air, for his feet did not touch the floor. He had on a loose robe of most exquisite whiteness beyond anything earthly I had ever seen. . . . His hands were naked, and his arms also, a little above

the wrist; so, also were his feet naked, as were his legs, a little above the ankles. His head and neck were also bare. I could discover that he had no other clothing on but this robe, as it was open. His whole person was glorious beyond description. . . . When I first looked upon him, I was afraid; but the fear soon left me (PGP/JSH 1:30-32).

The messenger who appeared to Joseph Smith called himself Moroni. He appeared three times that night. Though the messages delivered by Moroni and The Shining Man were vastly different, their intents were very much the same: to help prepare the recipients of their individual messages for the great works that awaited each of them. Both Moroni and The Shining Man visited Joseph and Alvin respectively on other occasions with additional messages and visions. The Shining Man's ultimate message was, "Make all things whole" (SS 65). Alvin spent the rest of his life discovering the meaning of that injunction. (The three appearances of The Shining Man are easily recognizable to Mormon readers as Card's adaptation of the Angel Moroni's three visitations to Joseph Smith.)

Alvin grieved over the misuse of his power in the roach incident. He regarded The Shining Man's visit, in part, as a warning, and his resolve never to use his knack to benefit only himself was one he never broke.

Though unrelated to Moroni's visitations, Joseph Smith was reminded early in his ministry that he was to humble himself, to focus his energies on the work he was engaged in and not to succumb to his own selfish desires or the wishes of other men. In Section three of the Doctrine and Covenants Joseph received this rebuke:

For although a man may have many revelations, and have power to do many mighty works, yet if he boasts in his own strength, . . . and follows after the dictates of his own will and carnal desires, he must fall . . . therefore, repent of that which thou hast done . . . and thou art still chosen . . . Except thou do this, thou shalt be delivered up and become as other men, and have no more gift (DC 3:4-11).

Like Alvin, Joseph resolved never to use his gift for personal gratification.

In a work intended for Mormon audiences Card indicated that much of his fiction is written in the style of The Book of Mormon. He pointed out that his sentence structure and particularly his use of conjunctions as beginning words for sentences comes from The Book of Mormon (Storyteller 14). True to form, in The Tales of Alvin Maker Card's turn of a phrase or use of a particular word triggers a distinct response in Mormon readers. The very same phrase would go unnoticed by a non-Mormon reader. An example of such a phrase is "study it out in your mind" (SS 92,132), which is used twice in Seventh Son. It is like the gong of a bell or the flash of a neon light to Mormon readers. In 1829 Joseph Smith and his closest companion, Oliver Cowdry, were seeking help with the translation of The Book of Mormon. They knelt in prayer and Joseph received a revelation admonishing Oliver particularly to "study it out in your mind" (DC 9: 8). The verses in Section 9 of the Doctrine and Covenants continue:

But, behold, I say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if

it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore you shall feel that it is right. But if it be not right you shall have no such feelings, but you shall have a stupor of thought that shall cause you to forget the thing which is wrong (9: 7-8).

These verses are probably the most often quoted treatise on prayer, and receiving and recognizing answers to prayer, in all of Mormonism. If they can't quote chapter and verse, every child over the age of eight can quote the passage verbatim, and anyone over the age of twelve, who is a regular attender, can turn to the passage in the scriptures in seconds. Of course Card's use of the words "study it out in your mind" would strike a resonant chord in Mormon readers and seem totally insignificant to non-Mormons.

The second volume of Card's Trilogy, Red Prophet, deals with the American Indian's plight in the America of the early 1800s. While highly fictionalized, the story presented by Card gives a fairly realistic picture of the decay and destruction of a once noble race. The massacre of Lolla-Wossiky's ten thousand Indians who refused to bear arms in their own defense is a recreation of a Book of Mormon battle between an Indian race known as the Anti-Nephi-Lehies and their unconverted brothers, the Lamanites. The Anti-Nephi-Lehi Nation in The Book of Mormon had made a covenant never to bear arms again. Because they had been a bloodthirsty people and had delighted in the shedding of blood, they were fearful of being overcome with that same bloodlust if they ever again took up arms, even in self-defense. In the ensuing battle they were slaughtered by the thousands:

And this they did, it being in their view a testimony to God, and also to men, that they would never use weapons again for the shedding of man's blood; and this they did, vouching and covenanting with God, that rather than shed the blood of their brethren they would give up their own lives (Alma 24:18).

While The Book of Mormon slaughter occurred between two warring Indian nations and Card's massacre was perpetrated by whites on Indians, it is probable that The Book of Mormon record shaped not only the battle, but Card's whole concept of a tribe of Indians laying down their weapons of war and seeking peace after their conversion to a belief in a benevolent and just God. The battles in Red Prophet and The Book of Mormon had identical outcomes. People without weapons refused to fight and stood while their enemies attacked them:

But they weren't making a move to defend themselves. It wasn't an ambush. They had no weapons. These Red folks were all lined up to die (RP 237).

They weren't fighting back. They were just standing there, men and women and children, just looking out at the White men who were killing them. Not a one even turned his back to the hail of shrapnel. Not a parent tried to shield a child from the blast. They just stood, waited, died (RP 241).

The Book of Mormon is used by Mormons as a companion to the Holy Bible. Mormons believe the Bible is the divine record of God's dealings with men and women in the old world while The Book of Mormon is believed

to be the written record of God's dealings with the people of the new world--the American continent. In Red Prophet Card uses the destruction of the American Indian as he learned it not only from American history, but as he learned it from his study of The Book of Mormon.

One of Card's most delightful characters in The Tales of Alvin Maker is Taleswapper. While Taleswapper is an incarnation of the English poet William Blake, who has nothing to do with Mormonism, his book is significant to Mormon readers because of its one similarity to The Book of Mormon. Taleswapper carried with him a book in which he wrote about the truths he learned as he meandered across the hills and valleys that made up Card's alternate America. In the front portion of Taleswapper's book he allowed other people to write the story that was most meaningful in their lives. When she was but five years old Little Peggy scrawled, "A Maker is born" in Taleswapper's book (SS 142). The larger portion of his book was sealed from the occasional reader and writer. It was in the sealed part that Taleswapper wrote his own history (133).

The gold plates, which Mormons believe were translated by Joseph Smith and which became The Book of Mormon, were partially sealed. Only a portion of the plates were translated by Smith and, like Taleswapper's sealed book, the portion of the gold plates not translated contained histories not shared with others (II Nephi 27, Isaiah 29). While Taleswapper's sealed pages and the sealed part of The Book of Mormon were not sealed for the same reasons, it is clear that Card used the sealed religious record translated by Joseph Smith as his inspiration for Taleswapper's sealed book.

It was in Taleswapper's book that the term Maker first became significant in Card's narrative. Card included the word Maker in the title of his trilogy, The Tales of Alvin Maker. Taleswapper and Alvin discussed the possibility of Ben Franklin having been a Maker on the occasion of their first visit (§§ 115). Taleswapper told Faith, Alvin's mother, of Peggy's declaration that Alvin was a Maker; her response was a mixture of wonder and reverence, "There hasn't been a Maker since the one who changed water into wine" (142). As the story progressed it became clear that Alvin's destiny was to become a Maker. Alvin's path involved learning to use power he didn't understand to bless the lives of others. His ultimate responsibility was to build the Crystal City and he eventually learned that the Crystal City was not a city made of glass towers:

See, the city ain't the crystal towers that I saw,
the city's the people inside it, and if I'm going to
build the place I got to find the kind of folks who
ought to be there (PA 308).

In his review of Michael Colling's book about Card and his writing, Jonathan D. Langford defined a Maker this way:

The work of the Maker--whether he or she is simply
a shaper of stories and tales or, like Alvin Maker,
a creator of genuinely new things in the real
world--is to create a community by teaching other
people how to be Makers (214).

Joseph Smith was never given the title of Maker. He was referred to as a prophet and, like the Old Testament prophets before him, claimed to speak with God. Joseph Smith maintained that his work was God's work

and God's work was to bring people to such a degree of righteousness, all the while allowing them their free choice, that they would be prepared to inhabit the Celestial Kingdom (Card's Crystal City) where they would create new worlds where more of God's children would chose to learn to do the same things as those who had gone before them (PGP/Moses 3: 5).

John Taylor, a man who stood beside Joseph Smith through the establishment of the Mormon Church, through all the persecutions heaped upon the Mormons, and on through the Prophet's martyrdom, said of him: "Joseph Smith, the Prophet and Seer of the Lord, has done more, save Jesus only, for the salvation of men in this world, than any other man that ever lived in it" (DC 135: 3). While Mormons do not worship Joseph Smith, they do believe his work to have been directed by Jesus Christ. Therefore, Mormon readers are comfortable with the comparisons made between Alvin Miller and Jesus as analogous to the relationship they perceive between Joseph Smith and Jesus. Card's entire Alvin Maker series hinges on the Maker's role in the alternate America of the 1800s. Mormonism, an institution with far greater implications than a fantasy story, depends entirely on Joseph Smith's role as a prophet in these latter-days.

Prominent among the dogmas that rule the behavior of every devout Mormon are the related doctrines of self-sacrifice and human divinity. Mormons believe that the supreme purpose of man's creation is to become as God is--that is, to deny one's self in service to others until one learns to love and serve unconditionally as Christ did as a mortal. It is a process that requires much more than the time allotted to mortal men and women to complete. Card's replication of this is the refining process young Alvin Miller goes through on his quest to become a Maker in Seventh Son and the

volumes that follow it. Like the piggies in Speaker for the Dead, Mormons teach that this refining process continues after the death of the mortal body, and that through time this development of Godlike characteristics can be achieved. Mormons have a particularly unique view of human divinity: they believe that the path Christ took is one that all humans are expected to follow. Card's Christic figures have a distinctly LDS twist; each one of them, from Alvin of The Tales of Alvin Maker to Lanik of Treason, from Ender of Ender's Game to Anset of Songmaster, from Orem of Hart's Hope to Nafai of The Homecoming Saga, is on his own path to Godhood, and their ultimate responsibilities are to prepare those they serve for the same path. Thus, in Alvin Maker, Alvin teaches Measure the rudiments of Makership, with the eventual purpose of teaching all who are willing to make the necessary sacrifices. And when the necessary sacrifices have been made these Makers will dwell in Card's Crystal City (Mormonism's Celestial Kingdom).

Whether in a real-world or fantasy setting, good always has its evil counterpart. True to this pattern Card presents the reader with both a Maker and an Unmaker. Card's image of the "water" wielding the power of unmaking, undoing, uncreating, is just as important to his narrative as is the creative power of the Maker. Whatever terms Card uses, Unmaker, destructive power of the water, power of evil or darkness, the theme of opposites is implicit in Card's story. More than one character in The Tales of Alvin Maker expressed this belief in opposites. Faith, Alvin's mother, expressed this when she said, "Perhaps our present happiness is sweeter from the memory of our grief" (SS 113). Furthermore, Alvin, as he came to

understand just a mite of what it meant to be a Maker commented on opposites:

[He] . . . knew all kinds of opposites in the world: good and evil, light and dark, free and slave, love and hate. But deeper than all those opposites was making and unmaking. So deep that hardly anybody knew that it was the most important opposite of all (SS 129).

In The Book of Mormon, which was translated by Joseph Smith, the prophet Nephi spoke on the issue of opposition:

For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things. If not so, my first born in the wilderness, righteousness could not be brought to pass, neither wickedness, neither holiness nor misery, neither good nor bad. . . . And if ye shall say there is no law, ye shall also say there is no sin. If ye shall say there is no sin, ye shall also say there is no righteousness. And if there be no righteousness there be no happiness. And if there be no righteousness nor happiness there be no punishment nor misery. And if these things are not there is no God. And if there is no God we are not . . . wherefore all things must have vanished away (II Nephi 2: 11,13).

It is terribly significant that the character in Card's trilogy who most thoroughly understood the doctrine of opposition was Taleswapper. As has been noted, the character Taleswapper was inspired by the English poet William Blake, who wrote most eloquently about opposition and the contraries every man must encounter. In his brilliant satire, "The Marriage

of Heaven and Hell," Blake insists that it is in response to the contradictions of life that the human spirit achieves its greatest liberty and growth:

Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence.

From these contraries spring what the religionsists call Good & Evil. Good is the passive that obeys Reason. Evil is the active springing from Energy.

Good is Heaven. Evil is Hell (69).

The irony in Card's use of Blake/Taleswapper to fortify the theme of opposition in the Prentice Alvin series is the simple fact that William Blake viewed the Judeo-Christian God as an angry creator who suppressed man's imagination and creativity through guilt. Blake resisted the authority of the "church" as an institution that could define right and wrong, morality and immorality, good and evil (Kunitz 6,7). And yet Card found in Blake's articulation of the Contraries, parallels to The Book of Mormon's rendition of the opposites that govern man's possibilities. In large part it is Taleswapper who teaches Alvin much about life's contraries and opposites, and enables him to move closer to Makerhood. Card ironically depends on Blake/Taleswapper to teach Alvin the doctrine of "opposition in all things." It is this opposition that provides the dramatic conflict between the power of a Maker and the Unmaker. And without the destructive power and the dark despair perpetrated by the Unmaker there would be no need for a Maker in Card's narrative.

Alvin experienced repeated encounters with the power of the Unmaker which was described on several occasions as an oppressive sort of blackness. Lolla-Wossiky, the drunken Indian who later became the title character of the Red Prophet, described the power of the Unmaker as a black noise which "wasn't a thing. It was nothing. Emptiness" (BP 96).

In Prentice Alvin Card has Alvin describe the Unmaker as:

". . . a vast nothingness that rolled invisibly toward him, trying to crush him, to get inside him, to grind him into pieces. It was old Taleswapper who first helped Alvin give his empty enemy a name. The Unmaker, which longs to undo the universe, break it all down until everything is flat and cold and smooth and dead (100).

Alvin's description of the Unmaker is reminiscent of Oldpappy's earlier description of the destructive power of the water in Seventh Son. It was this power that Alvin was destined to combat as a Maker.

At the age of fourteen Joseph Smith experienced what became known as the first vision. Recorded in several places, Joseph's experience details a heavenly vision of God and Jesus Christ. Of significance to Card's work is the description Joseph gave of the happenings just prior to his vision:

After I had retired to the place where I had previously designed to go, having looked around me, and finding myself alone, I kneeled down and began to offer up the desires of my heart to God. I had scarcely done so, when immediately I was seized upon by some power which entirely overcame me, and had such an astonishing influence over me as to bind my tongue

so that I could not speak. Thick darkness gathered around me, and it seemed to me for a time as if I were doomed to sudden destruction (PGP-JSH 1:15).

Joseph added that the power of the enemy which had overwhelmed him, made him "ready to sink into despair and abandon myself to destruction--not to an imaginary ruin, but the power of some actual being from the unseen world, who had such marvelous power as I had never before felt" (1:16).

When Alvin dug the well for Makepeace Smith, he came closer to losing himself to the Unmaker than at any other time in Card's tale. Alvin's description of that experience reflects Joseph Smith's experience prior to the first vision related above:

Alvin opened his eyes again, and still he couldn't see: without closing them, he opened them still again, and each time the sky seemed darker. No, not darker, simply farther away, rushing up and away from him, like as if he was falling into a pit so deep that the sky itself got lost. Alvin cried out in fear, and opened his already-open eyes and saw the quivering air of the Unmaker pressing down on him, poking itself into his nostrils, between his fingers, into ears The Unmaker whipped inside his mouth, down into his lungs, and he couldn't close his teeth hard enough, his lips tight enough to keep that slimy uncreator from slithering on inside him (PA 118).

Alvin was delivered from this destructive power when Gertie Smith came

to draw water from the finished well. Joseph was delivered by two heavenly beings in a pillar of light, which descended from heaven. The parallels between the two events confirm again Card's heavy reliance on Joseph Smith as a prototype for Alvin Miller.

As the reader approaches the end of Seventh Son, the Reverend Philadelphia Thrower begins to show his true colors as a servant of the Unmaker. Mormon readers recognize Thrower's dark side earlier in the novel because of his Visitor. Beginning very early in Seventh Son Thrower had regular visits from a messenger whom he believed to be the Lord. In one critical scene, Thrower, in a state of frenzied worship, attempted to touch his Visitor. "Thrower reached for the proffered hand, to cover it with kisses; but when he should have touched flesh, there was nothing there . . ." (89).

In February of 1843, Joseph Smith received a revelation concerning divine manifestations. He recorded that there are keys to be used to determine whether or not a messenger in a vision is from God. He wrote:

When a messenger comes saying he has a message from God, offer him your hand and request him to shake hands with you. If he be an angel he will do so, and you will feel his hand. If it be the devil as an angel of light, when you ask him to shake hands he will offer you his hand, and you will not feel anything; you may therefore detect him (DC 129: 4,5,8).

Philadelphia Thrower's allegiance to the power of the Unmaker was unmasked for the Mormon reader at the very moment when Thrower reached

for the Visitor's hand and felt nothing.

While Thrower had visions from the Unmaker, Alvin had visions of a divine nature. At one point in his travels with Ta-Kumsaw in Red Prophet, Alvin dreamed. In the dream he found himself at Eight-Face Mound climbing among a forest of silver-leaved trees. Every tree was the same; the breeze whistled through their leaves and in the branches of each tree was cradled a nest of redbirds:

Except one tree. It was different from the others.

It was older, gnarledLike a fruit tree. And the leaves were gold, not silver. . . . In the tree, he saw round white fruit and he knew that it was ripe. But when he reached out his hand to take the fruit, and eat it, he could hear laughter, jeering. He looked around him and saw everybody he ever knowed in his whole life, laughing at him. Except one--Taleswapper.

Taleswapper was standing there, and he said, "Eat." (220).

Alvin did reach up and partake of the fruit, which he described as "a taste he wanted to hold inside him forever" (220). Taleswapper encouraged Alvin to remember how the fruit tasted and Alvin assured him he would never forget. He looked about and realized that everyone about him was still mocking him and laughing. He paid no attention. His main concern was his desire to share the fruit:

. . . all he wanted now was to bring his family to the same tree, and let them eat; to bring everybody he ever knowed, and even strangers, too, and let them

taste it. If they'd just taste it, Alvin figured they'd know (RP 220).

When Taleswapper asked Alvin what others would know if they ate the fruit Alvin's response was, "Just know. . . .Know everything. Everything that's good" (220). Knowledge came with the first bite; but what about the second bite? Taleswapper told him, "With the second bite, you live forever" (220).

Lehi, a Book of Mormon prophet, dreamed. In his dream he too saw a tree:

And it came to pass that I beheld a tree, whose fruit was desirable to make one happy. And it came to pass that I did go forth and partake of the fruit thereof; and I beheld that it was most sweet, above all that I ever before tasted. Yea, and I beheld that the fruit thereof was white, to exceed all the whiteness that I had ever seen. And as I partook of the fruit thereof it filled my soul with exceeding great joyI cast my eyes round about, that perhaps I might discover my family also . . . that they should come unto me and partake of the fruit also (1 Nephi 8: 10-15).

Like Alvin, Lehi looked about him and saw many people in a large and spacious building who "were in the attitude of mocking and pointing their fingers" (8: 27) at those who had partaken of the fruit. The tree in Lehi's dream was referred to as "The Tree of Life" (8: 22), and those who tasted of the fruit in Lehi's dream would have eternal life--a parallel to Taleswapper's statement that the second taste of the fruit in Alvin's

dream would cause the one who tasted it to live forever. It would be folly not to recognize Card's use of the Genesis record of the tree of knowledge of good and evil of whose fruit Adam and Eve partook. Taleswapper guided Alvin through his dream and indicated that the fruit Alvin ate brought both knowledge and eternal life. Mormons claim the Bible as a companion volume to The Book of Mormon and place great faith in the creation stories of the Old Testament. Card's use of the tree of knowledge from the Garden of Eden and the tree of life from Lehi's dream in The Book of Mormon further illustrates his dependence on Mormon theology. ("The Tree of Life" dream is repeated in the first volume of The Homecoming Saga.)

I have not exhausted the multitude of allusions to Mormon history, tradition, doctrine and people found in The Tales of Alvin Maker, and I have only treated three of his sixteen novels. In every one of the sixteen novels Card has published to date he has borrowed liberally from Mormon doctrines, the lives of prominent historical Mormon figures, the scriptures peculiar to Mormonism--particularly The Book of Mormon--and the traditions revered by Mormons over their 164-year history. In an essay titled "Science Fiction and the Mormon Religion," Orson Scott Card said:

I am . . . dealing with the LDS cosmology--or my version of it--in everything I do; but on an unconscious level that I discover only after the work is finished.

I have come to trust that it will always be present in every work that I write with honesty and passion--which is, I believe, all of them (Storyteller 160).

We Didn't Read The Same Book

"We didn't read the same book." Those were the words of Al Autovino, the math teacher on my eighth-grade teaching team at Sodus Junior-Senior High School, when we compared readings of Seventh Son. It was during my second year at Sodus that Al and I discovered our mutual interest in Orson Scott Card. I was assigned to lunchroom duty that fall and I hopefully carried a Card novel with me that first day as a monitor at junior high lunch. I never got the opportunity to read, but Al saw my book and we made an appointment to "talk Card" after school that day. Al was reading Saints, and when he learned I was a Mormon he had some questions he wanted to ask about the novel. We quickly disposed of Saints and moved on to other Card novels. In my enthusiasm at finding a Card reader in the classroom next to mine, I said rather more than I should have about Card's heavy use of Mormonism in his science fiction/fantasy writing--especially Seventh Son--and that was when Al said, "We didn't read the same book."

As a devout Catholic Al had seen none of the allusions that colored my reading of Seventh Son. When I pointed out that Alvin Miller was loosely based on the life of Mormonism's founding prophet, Joseph Smith, and when I pointed specifically to Card's use of the name Alvin, Joseph Smith's oldest brother's name, also to Alvin's leg surgery--a real event in Joseph Smith's life, and to Card's Shining Man as a recreation of Mormonism's Angel Moroni, Al was dumbfounded. As we concluded our discussion I was worried that I had, at best, ruined Seventh Son for Al, and at worst, offended him and jeopardized our fledgling friendship. To my great relief the next morning Al wanted to talk about Ender's Game. "What in here

correlates with the Mormons?" he asked. I hadn't yet read Ender's Game, so we discussed Songmaster instead. We eventually talked about Card in the presence of other teachers, none of whom were Mormons, and discovered that the seventh grade Social Studies teacher and her daughter were great Card fans, as was the Junior High Reading teacher (Autovino, Interview). Other colleagues on our wing began reading Card and the librarian ordered The Tales of Alvin Maker and the Ender's Game Trilogy.

I began loaning paperback copies of Card's books to my best students and before long students from the high school were coming to my room to borrow Ender's Game, Seventh Son and Treason. Of course I refrained from discussing the Mormonism in Card's work with students. In so doing I had to look at the stories more objectively, which wasn't easy; separating myself from the blatant Mormonism in the stories was close to impossible. I tried very hard to read as my student's were reading--without recognizing any of the Mormon allusions. Without knowing anything about Card's reliance on Mormon history, doctrine and tradition, my students fell in love with Alvin, Ender, Lanik, Anset and Orem. The kids saw themselves in Card's young heroes. I was really perplexed by this non-Mormon response to Card's work. Though I knew his novels were highly regarded because of the numerous awards he had received, and because of the difficulty I had in purchasing his books due to the rapidity with which they sold; I still somehow believed you couldn't really understand Card without an understanding of the Mormonism that so thoroughly shapes his work. I was always just a little disgruntled when one of my students would say, "Hey, Mrs. Porschet, did you know Orson Scott Card is a Mormon like you?" I struggled with my assumption that a non-Mormon couldn't

really know Card and love his work as a Mormon could. I had nearly two-dozen students who gathered regularly in my classroom to praise Card and talk about his characters; never a word was said about Card's deft use of this or that doctrine, Joseph Smith or The Book of Mormon. Al Autovino's statement, "We didn't read the same book," echoed in my mind.

Because I didn't know any, I began to search for Mormon readers of Card's work. They weren't hard to find. By carrying Seventh Son and Ender's Game under my arm to church for two or three Sundays in a row I found six or seven of them in my own congregation in Canandaigua, New York. Through them I found two-dozen more Card readers in the greater Rochester area. Many of these Mormon readers were friends I had known for years. They had never recommended Card to me because I was an English teacher and "English teachers don't read science-fiction--do they?" I had known one Mormon Card reader for over twenty years. He was a physicist associated with the University of Rochester. All of his older children had read and loved Card. He and they were disturbed by the homosexual overtones in Songmaster, but otherwise were quite proud to say that the writer of The Hill Cumorah Pageant Script, an internationally known and respected writer, was a Mormon.

I sent copies of Card novels to my brothers, college roommates, and other friends in faraway places with the request that they read the books and write me with their evaluations of them. I began carrying a list of questions on Orson Scott Card and his books with me to every Mormon meeting I attended. I always carried a copy of Seventh Son and Ender's Game, and when anyone commented on my reading material I informally

interviewed them, asking how much of Card's work they had read, what was their favorite novel so far, and why. (These so-called interviews were really just conversations from which I extracted every possible piece of information concerning Orson Scott Card. I approached non-Mormons the same way.) After they identified their favorite novel, I always asked the question, "Was there any point in the novel when you thought Orson Scott Card used Mormon history, doctrine or tradition to the detriment of the story?" Forty Mormons responded that Seventh Son was their favorite novel and all forty felt that the leg operation intruded. I agreed.

Card supplied varying details to the leg story in his fantasy version. Nevertheless, Alvin's surgery is so decidedly the same as Joseph's that it is the one place in the narrative where, for Mormon readers, the Joseph Smith story intrudes. The saga of Joseph's surgery has taken on meaning of such mythic proportions in Mormon oral tradition that three-year-olds can retell the story without prompting. Therefore, when Card departed from the real story, Mormon readers were unceremoniously bumped from their believing stance. In the real story Joseph's mother was forbidden by him to stay in the room while the surgery was performed. He insisted that she leave the house so as to be unable to hear his cries. Not a single Mormon reader I surveyed failed to comment on their mental attempts to revise Card's narrative when Alvin's mother stayed, held the skin flap back during the surgical procedure, and then sewed the boy up with a needle and thread from "the pincushion she wore around her neck" (SS 219-20).

In all, I talked with over seventy Mormon Card readers. Ender's Game and Seventh Son always emerged as the favorites. Seventh Son was named favorite novel by forty respondents, Ender's Game by twenty-three, and

Treason by two. These were the top three. Once each person named their favorite they invariably went on to relate how much they liked the novels that followed, as well as other Card novels from other series. Five respondents replied that they didn't have a favorite Card novel. They were, in fact, disturbed by Card's writing. They felt he made light of sacred things, didn't teach moral lessons, and was more or less an embarrassment to Mormonism. (Those were some of the same reasons I used to avoid reading Card when he was first recommended to me. I was afraid he would be didactic and use his work to preach, as so many Mormon novelists I had read, did. Of course the fact that he wrote science fiction/fantasy didn't help his stature with me either.) Of these Card readers I asked, "Why do you keep reading him?" They always answered, "Because his science fiction is so good." I was perplexed by this because so much of Card's fiction is so literally dependent on Mormonism. All five readers were unable to articulate the reasons why they continued reading Card beyond the fact that his science fiction was so good.

Card has commented on feedback he often receives from Mormon readers who are disgruntled because he refuses to make his writing a forum for preaching Mormonism. In commenting about another Mormon author's work Card said:

Most Mormon critics who have commented on my work and Larsen's make the same self-contradictory mistake: They find Larson's approach--dropping trivial LDS references--superficial, and then complain that because I don't do the same, I am denying/concealing/

ignoring my Mormonism" (Storyteller 159).

One Card reader who deserves a closer look is a man in his middle thirties by the name of Jim Goff. Jim is a librarian at Finger Lakes Community College in Canandaigua, New York. He has been an Orson Scott Card fan for many years. Jim has attended several science fiction/fantasy conferences at various locations in the United States, and at two of these conferences he met Card and had dinner with him. Just over two years ago Jim was referred to the Mormon Missionaries, who, in a series of appointments, taught him the gospel and introduced him to The Book of Mormon. As Jim read and studied The Book of Mormon and the additional materials presented to him by the missionaries, he recognized many of the doctrines as things he had encountered before. It didn't take him long to recognize where it was he had heard these things. Jim made the decision to become a Mormon. His membership in the Canandaigua congregation brought us together while I was doing research on Card. Jim proved to be the perfect example of the non-Mormon Card reader, who, like my students, loved the characters and stories without any knowledge of the Mormonism so profoundly prevalent in Card's work. Jim reread all of Card's novels and the second time around proclaimed, "The second time through each book was like reading a different book. I read as eagerly the second time as I did the first, discovering something new on each page" (Goff, Interview).

Card has been accused of using violence and sex too freely in his work. One of the five naysayers mentioned earlier said, "Mormon writers of real conviction would avoid both [sex and violence]." Card's response to those who take issue with the presentation of evil in his work is this:

Both the illusion of truth and the unavoidable substance

of truth require evil to be present in fiction. . . . I know of no way to live untouched by evil, and so the characters that I write about will also confront evil. It is impossible to write any other way (Storyteller 71-72).

Card goes on to explain that evil in fiction becomes dangerous only when it is encouraged or advocated, not just depicted (78-79). He points to The Book of Mormon, wherein murder, rape and all manner of evil things occur. The Book of Mormon is a holy book which depicts evil, but never advocates it. Card contends that the presentation of truth requires the presence of evil just as The Book of Mormon teaches the necessity for opposition to evil in all things (II Nephi 2: 11).

Mormons reading Orson Scott Card do read different books than non-Mormons read. Mormons feel like "insiders" as they read Card's work. It's much like hearing an anecdote only those "in the know" can enjoy. Reading Card and recognizing the deeply spiritual truths that only a committed, involved Mormon could be aware of, creates a unique kinship with the author. Mormon readers feel something about Card that goes beyond appreciation of good writing or the telling of a good story. It is almost an undefinable thing. It is akin to the feeling that devout Mormons have toward Joseph Smith, and asking Mormons to express that feeling in mere words is asking the impossible. It isn't worship--nor is it reverence. But it approaches those attitudes.

Card's reliance on Joseph Smith and The Book of Mormon is largely responsible for his success as a writer. He once said, "The Book of Mormon is the most important book in my life" (Storyteller 13). His great love for the patterns for living found in The Book of Mormon surface again and

again in his writing. He has a deep and abiding love for the Mormon prophet Joseph Smith and, like The Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith's teachings, episodes from his life, and his personal sacrifices form the foundation of much of Card's work. And yet non-Mormon readers are unaware that Joseph Smith, The Book of Mormon and Mormon doctrine are there. While Mormonism never intrudes, overwhelms or takes possession of Card's stories, it obviously has possession of Orson Scott Card.

Non-Mormon readers I have encountered find Card's work thoroughly satisfying without having any extraordinary knowledge of Mormonism. While they are often aware Card is a Mormon, his religious affiliation is a non-issue with them. Among the many I talked with, only one reader, Monica Gilligan, who knew before reading Seventh Son that it was based on Joseph Smith's life, had difficulty with The Tales of Alvin Maker. She said she felt excluded. "There was much there that I could not get a handle on. Do I have to educate myself in order to enter his world? Fiction should not require that of me" (Gilligan, Interview). Monica Gilligan read Card because I recommended him and she abandoned him after reading only The Tales of Alvin Maker. It was after she asked the question, "Do I have to educate myself in order to enter his world?" that I began to ask specific questions of non-Mormon Card readers. I discovered that Ms. Gilligan was soured on Card by me. As a Mormon reader I had told her too much about Joseph Smith's part in the novels. As a result she felt that there was more there than she could understand without a thorough knowledge of Mormonism and so she felt excluded. Her response

was not the usual response of non-Mormon readers to Card's work. I learned that by asking the following questions of each non-Mormon reader I encountered. (These questions were always part of a very informal conversation. I never presented them in written form. We just talked about Card and his work. I always answered as many questions as I asked.)

1. How many Card novels have you read? Please name them.
2. What is/are your favorite(s) and why?
3. What recurrent themes do you find in Card's work?
4. Do you find these themes intrusive?
5. Please name any literary devices Card uses that you particularly like or dislike.
6. Are you aware that Card is a Mormon?
7. Have you ever felt that Card's Mormon background intrudes in his stories?
8. How did you first become acquainted with Card's work?
9. How many people (approximately) are now Card readers because of your recommendations?

Never at any time did I present a written agenda to any of the people with whom I discussed Card and his work. Because of their enthusiasm for Card and his stories no one ever refused to talk with me about him. Nine of the non-Mormon readers I questioned were people with whom I work. Twelve were my students. Others were people I met in doctor's offices, airports, shopping malls, libraries, bookstores, sporting events, concerts and business meetings. I simply carried a Card novel everywhere I went and each time someone remarked on my novel I asked them the questions listed above. On several occasions I asked the same

questions of readers I observed carrying a Card novel. Over a period of four years I recorded fifty-three such conversations (excluding the bus trip related in the forward of this work). All of the readers I informally interviewed had read seven or more Card novels (except Monica Gilligan). All fifty-three strangers, twelve students and nine colleagues had read Seventh Son and Ender's Game. Fifty-three of the seventy-four had read all three of The Tales of Alvin Maker. All but Ms. Gilligan were Card enthusiasts and had high praise for his novels.

Initially my students all chose Ender's Game as their favorite Card novel. When they read Treason several of them shifted loyalty to Lanik's story. And when they began reading The Homecoming Saga they abandoned Ender in a wholesale move and focused in on Nafai as their favorite. My teaching friends named Ender's Game and its companions as their favorites until they talked together in a group. Then as one individual spoke of his or her favorite part of a particular story, others would say, "Yes, I liked that too--maybe it is my favorite," or "You're right, that is his best work," or "I can't name just one." One woman said, "My favorite Card novel is the one I'm reading when you ask me."

I had only one opportunity with the strangers I interviewed in chance encounters, so I never got to hear their changing opinions. Most of them named either Seventh Son or Ender's Game as their favorites though every book received high praise. The only novel not mentioned by any reader was Hart's Hope. Interestingly, Card once said he thought of Hart's Hope as his best work ("Notes on Ender's Game" 34).

During the last two years every discussion about Card's writing included expressions of great anticipation for Card's remaining two

volumes in The Homecoming Saga. Because Card followed the story of The Book of Mormon so closely in his first three novels in this series I was tempted to tell my new acquaintances what the next book was sure to be about; I used great restraint and simply agreed with their eagerness to read the promised volumes.

The theme most commonly recognized by these non-Mormon readers was that in almost every novel Card's central character struggles to become a savior. "Each of Card's protagonists seems to view himself as one whose personal needs must be subordinate to the needs of those he serves," said one respondent. Another said, "There is always a group in need of rescue and a hero to do the rescuing." Yet another said, "Even though all the novels I've read have a certain amount of violence, death, and evil, the heroes are always moral, ethical and self-sacrificing. Card demonstrates evil in his fantastic worlds, and without being sappy somehow good always triumphs--I like the balance he creates." No one left this question unanswered; all those who responded mentioned the idea of the hero giving up his own life, figuratively at least, for the people in the community in which he lived.

My students were the only ones who responded to the question on literary devices. They all were impressed by Card's use of very young protagonists. (Alvin's story begins at his birth and ends in his eighteenth year. Ender is six when his story begins. Nafai is fourteen and Lanik is seventeen. Orem is but a child, as is Anset.) My students, who range in age from thirteen to eighteen, found this extremely appealing. They felt that most so-called young-adult novels condescend to them. Card, however, imbues his young protagonists with dignity, respect from adults,

and maturity. They see Card as an author who respects his young readers as much as he does his young characters and so they read him with respect and maturity. Their whole approach to Card's work is different because of this. When they read Card they feel they are reading about themselves; when they read mainstream young-adult authors they often read with a distance between themselves and the characters. In the introduction to his Ender's Game: Author's Definitive Edition Card addresses this very issue. He quotes a letter from a teenage girl attending a residential summer workshop for gifted and talented high school students at Purdue University. In a class titled "Philosophy and Science Fiction" twelve very talented young people studied, discussed, and wrote about Card's Ender's Game and Speaker for the Dead. One young girl concluded a letter to Card by saying:

You couldn't imagine the impact your books had on us; we are the Enders of today. Almost everything written in Ender's Game and Speaker applied to each one of us on a very, very personal level. No, the situation isn't as drastic today, but all the feelings are there (xviii).

The same deeply-felt association between these young readers and Card's self-sacrificing main characters was expressed by my students . In my room after school one day a very bright eighth-grade Card reader had an intense discussion with the President of Sodus High Student Council, an eleventh grader. Both had read and loved Ender's Game. "Don't you think of yourself as an Ender?" the eighth grader asked the older boy? "I do," he went on. I don't have many friends and, like Ender, I think it's because I'm a

dedicated student--I take things seriously." The older boy very somberly agreed. "I do. I really do," he said.

The answer to the question, "Were you aware that Card is a Mormon?" was always yes, and the answer to the question about Mormonism intruding in Card's work was no. This was true in seventy-three of seventy-four cases.

For most readers the most common introduction to Card's novels was the recommendation of a friend. Six people said they read him because they never read anything but science fiction/fantasy and Card's name was too much in the forefront of the genre to have missed him. All the adults said they had recommended Card to hundreds of people over the last few years. "At least ten or twelve friends are Card fans because of me," was one woman's response. A chemistry teacher from Palmyra, New York, said, "I should get a commission on all the Card books sold because of me--I could retire."

"The feelings are there," said the young woman who wrote to Card (*Ender's Game: Author's Definitive Edition* xviii). That is the response shared by every one of the Card readers I became acquainted with, Mormon and non-Mormon alike. In every one of Card's novels it is the good of the community that is the central issue. Card creates a character who is willing to sacrifice himself to the cause of that community to which he belongs. It is in identifying with the sacrificial aspects of Card's central characters that draws an emotional response, "feelings," from every reader, whether or not they recognize and understand the Mormon doctrines, history and traditions upon which the stories they are reading are based. Card's readers want to do more than like Card's heroes--they

want to BE like Card's heroes. I must include myself in this phenomenon. We willingly step into Card's fantastic worlds and the threatening landscapes of participatory reading. We glory in the greensong heard in the Red Prophet, and run naked with Alvin through the forests as he races to learn to be a Maker. We enter the searing flames with him as he produces the living plow, and suffer his pain as the fire burns his flesh. We yearn to be worthy to inhabit Alvin's Crystal City. And whether Mormon or non-Mormon, when the beseeching Card has worked on us wears thin we come back to the real world of 1994 America and curse Card for making us wait so long for volume four of The Tales of Alvin Maker.

Conclusion

I cannot read Eugene England's work as a critic. I am too much a part of the natural audience for his words. I can't step outside and dispassionately watch his transactions with his readers. I am caught up, captured, possessed, and for a time I see the world through his eyes. Later, after reflection, I can report on the experience. That is as close to "criticism" as I can come (Sunstone 30).

Orson Scott Card wrote the preceding lines about Eugene England, another LDS author (Sunstone 30). It so perfectly fits my attitude toward Card's work that I want to claim the sentiments as my own. I cannot read Card dispassionately. His writing goes beyond creative and clever and technically correct. It is a testimonial to all he is and believes. As Card said of Eugene England, "I can only report on the experience" (30) of being absorbed by Card's work. Reading him is almost a spiritual experience, an affirmation of religious belief for me. The best part of Card's work is that Card's Mormon imagery, his use of LDS doctrine, history and tradition, does not diminish the non-Mormon reader's experience. Card's fiction is obviously as motivating, captivating and fulfilling to the non-Mormon reader as it is to the Mormon reader. Orson Scott Card is undoubtedly the most successful, and clearly one of the most talented writers of fiction the Mormon community has yet produced. He is unquestionably an important figure within the science fiction/fantasy genre. His work must be praised not only for its popularity and wide acceptance, but also for its high literary standards. Card attempts to blend science fiction and fantasy

with his own Mormon beliefs and in so doing creates for the Mormon and non-Mormon reader alike a distinctly Mormon world-view--one in which his themes, settings, points of view, and ultimately his characters emphatically illustrate man's responsibility to be his brothers' keeper.

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