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The Image of Mormonism in French Literature: Part II

Wilfried Decoo

The first article in this study of the image of Mormonism in French literature concentrated essentially on the period 1850-1866, a time of intellectual fervor in France during which the historians and the philosophers dissected Mormonism in "scientific fashion." We also touched upon Mormonism as it appeared in the popular tradition of the time and in travel accounts, which form a literature that continued more or less irregularly until the end of the nineteenth century.¹ Although the Mormon theme is rare in French publication from 1900 to 1919, it is worthwhile to mention briefly certain interesting works of this period. In 1904 the journalist Jean d'Entraigues, after a visit to Salt Lake City, published a very laudatory article about the Mormons, using an amusing style to denounce the historical prejudices against the Latter-day Saints.² In 1907, in a voluminous account of a journey across the United States, Jules Huret devoted no less than five chapters to Mormonism. These chapters contained interesting interviews with President Joseph F. Smith and with a number of distinguished Mormon women, all belonging to polygamous families.³ Also worth noting are two scholarly articles, one on Utah by L. Gallois, and another on the siege of Nauvoo by the historian George Tricoche.⁴ But it is the decade from 1920-1930 that gives us several works of considerably greater significance.

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¹Wilfried Decoo, "The Image of Mormonism in French Literature: Part I," *BYU Studies* 14 (Spring 1974):157-75.

²Jean d'Entraigues, "La Ville des Mormons," *Le Monde Moderne* 20 (1904): 44-45.

³Jules Huret, *En Amérique: De San Francisco au Canada* (Paris: E. Fasquelle, 1907), pp. 106-63.

⁴L. Gallois, "L'Utah," *Les Annales de Géographie* 22 (1913):185-96; George Nestler Tricoche, "Le Siège de Nauvoo ou la Bataille des Maladroits (épisode de l'histoire des Mormons)," *Revue historique* 119 (1915):5-16.

SECOND PERIOD—THE TIME OF A FEW GREAT NAMES (1920-1930)

Whereas the first period of serious French literary interest in the Mormons (1850 to 1866) is characterized by the number of works and the variety of attitudes, the ten years from 1920 to 1930 are noteworthy more for the importance of several authors who wrote about the Mormons—including Guillaume Apollinaire, Pierre Benoit, and André Maurois.

GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE: *La Femme Assise*
(*The Seated Woman*) (1920)

Guillaume Apollinaire, primarily known as an avant-garde poet and the inventor of the word "surrealism," stands a good chance of becoming one of the great names of French literature, thanks to the support of his faithful friends and the continuing interest of the academic critics. However, the few prose works of this poet are still little-known, and, among these *La Femme Assise* is fortunate if scholarly studies devote two or three lines to it. Moreover, many critics, including even Apollinaire's most fervent defenders, claim that he was not truly a storyteller. Too much attached to the pure image, to the light of intuition, and to the disparity and ambiguity of ideas, Apollinaire could not sustain a strong plot line throughout an entire book, subordinating secondary actions to it. The novels which he projected in interviews, and even in pamphlets, never saw the light of day, but miscarried in the early stages while still no more than notes scattered about in desk drawers. We have the titles of several of these projected works, among which is *La Mormone et le Danite* (*The Mormon Girl and the Danite*). Then in 1917, we suddenly find the poet feverishly putting together a collection of segments from these incomplete novels and of odds and ends previously published in the *Mercure de France*. The result was *La Femme Assise*, which did not appear until 1920, after the death of its author. A second version, only slightly less disjointed, came out in 1948.

The beginning of the novel unfolds the activities of a young lesbian, Elvire Goulot, through her Parisian and Russian environs, which are debauched and decadent in the extreme. Thereafter follows a rather long depiction of the world of the artists and scoundrels in the Montparnasse of 1914. At this point, a totally artificial thread permits Apollinaire to include in his novel a hundred pages about the Mormons. Elvire Goulot has a copy of an 1851 letter

from John Taylor to Brigham Young, written from Paris. It concerns the conversion of her grandmother, Pamela Monsenergues, to Mormonism. Elvire reads this letter to Otto Mahner, the great-uncle of a friend, who grew up in Salt Lake City. Since Otto had known Pamela there, he recounts to her granddaughter Elvire the events of Pamela's life as a Mormon, focusing on fantasized descriptions of public events: The arrival of emigrants to Salt Lake City, the assembly of the Saints, and a sermon by Brigham Young on that occasion, the ritual procession following the proclamation of the revelation of polygamy, and a party in the Social Hall. In all of this, Pamela's story occupies only a secondary position: after a period of hesitation in the home of Brigham Young, the French girl agrees to become the fifteenth wife of Elder Lubel Perciman, only to run off with a Danite the day after the wedding, and head back to France. After the chapters on Mormonism—which comprise the core of the book—Apollinaire returns to events of the First World War, pausing from time to time to recount the military deeds of a number of great ancient and medieval warriors. At this point also he resumes the shuffle through Elvire's amorous adventures.

Apollinaire's interest in the Mormons dates back before World War I, according to the accounts of several friends.⁵ He had plans for *La Mormone et le Danite* as early as 1912.⁶ Busy with the re-editing of old books of erotica in the series "Les Maîtres de l'Amour," ("Masters of Love"), Apollinaire rummaged day after day in the "hell" of the National Library of Paris, and brought forth from obscurity the work of John Cleland and of the Marquis de Sade.⁷ Doubtless it was during the course of these bibliographic researches that he began to be interested in the Mormons. What must have enticed Apollinaire was the strangeness of the sect, the allegedly bizarre mores, and especially the accusation of sensuality, centering in polygamy. In the image of the Latter-day Saints which was current in France, the writer found interwoven two themes which predominate in his work—on one hand, the picturesque life

⁵Thus André Billy in the preface to Guillaume Apollinaire, *Oeuvres poétiques*, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), p. xl; Paul Dermée, "Apollinaire," *Apollinaire* (Paris: Eds. de l'Esprit nouveau, n. d.), unpagged; Hubert Fabureau, *Guillaume Apollinaire: Son oeuvre, portrait et autographe* (Paris. Eds. de la Nouvelle Revue Critique, 1932), p. 75.

⁶Cf. Pierre-Marcel Adéma, *Guillaume Apollinaire, Collection Les Vies perpendiculaires* (Paris: Eds. de la Table Ronde, 1968), p. 303.

⁷Cf. René-Guy Cadou, *Guillaume Apollinaire ou l'Artilleur de Metz* (Nantes: Chiffolleau, 1948), pp. 41-51.

of the outlaw, the exile, and on the other hand, eroticism. Apollinaire's fascination with the persecuted, estranged, hero radiates from the pages of *L'Hérésiarque et Cie* (*The Heresiarch and Co.*) and *Le Passant de Prague* (*The Passerby from Prague*). His obsession with sexual themes is evident except to the reader who knows Apollinaire only from *Le Pont Mirabeau* (*The Mirabeau Bridge*). When we remember, moreover, that the apollinarian eroticism often surfaces in a biblical context, used to shock and scandalize the reader, we are not surprised that the libertine found useful materials in the history of the Latter-day Saints. Clearly Apollinaire used his talents to the utmost to render the Mormon milieu as strange and exotic as possible. If he bases his writings chiefly on names and historic facts which he found in the works of Jules Rémy,⁸ he distorts them by exaggerating hazardous elements or by adding others foreign to Mormonism. For example, he does not hesitate to introduce among the Mormons the rolling, jerking, and shouting associated with certain fundamentalist sects.⁹ Whole pages are devoted to a description of a congregation of Mormons in a hallucinatory delirium. The following paragraph gives only an incomplete idea of the tenor and content of this passage:

Their arms flailing, the pregnant women laughed so wildly that, no longer able to support the weight of their shaking bellies, they fell to the floor. Unearthly chants arose and the Indians uttered guttural noises that sounded like funeral knells. Then came tortured cries from women on the gentile side of the room, and not a few men, fraught with terror, trembled and sobbed. The raucous cries of the Mormons became howls, and people began to faint, first letting out a piercing cry which resounded like the sinister call of a bird of ill-omen. Next a frenzy jolted the entire assembly. The fit seized the people as one body. Those who had not fainted threw themselves on all fours and, raising their heads, looked Brigham Young in the face and began to bay like wild dogs. The sermon continued, and the voice of the Prophet, rolling forth words of revelation, surmounted the yelpings of the men and screechings of the women. He cried out with all his might; eyes

⁸Jules Rémy, *Voyage au Pays des Mormons: Relation, Géographie, Histoire naturelle, Histoire, Théologie, Mœurs et Coutumes*, 2 vols. (Paris: E. Dentu, 1860). Professor Guiette appears to be wrong in choosing the *Mémoires d'un Mormon* by Louis Bertrand (1862) as the primary source of *La Femme Assise*. Cf. Robert Guiette, "Notes sur La Femme Assise," *Revue des Sciences humaines* 84 (1956):457-60.

⁹Rémy mentions these details in connection with other religious groups in America (*Voyage*, 1:1xix-1xv). In his article on the Mormons, Prosper Mérimée had also conjured up a burlesque revival scene, insinuating that it referred to the Mormons. Cf. Prosper Mérimée, "Les Mormons," in *Mélanges historiques et littéraires* (1855; rpt. Paris: M. Lévy, 1867), pp. 18-19. It is therefore not surprising that Apollinaire combined the particulars in his account.

upturned to heaven, his tall hat on the back of his head, his swollen neck popping the button of his wide collar, his tie skewed to one side of his neck, his shirt opened and the prophet's goiter sprawled out on his chest like a cow's dug. He spoke with a voice of thunder, and he bent forward now to look his barkers in the eye, as they approached him on all fours, growling and showing their teeth.¹⁰

If the composition of the book as a whole seems very confused—and several critics have rather mercilessly underlined this weakness¹¹—one cannot deny that throughout the book runs a certain thematic unity. As in many of his poems and stories, Apollinaire concerns himself with the problem of the meaning of love, particularly from the point of view of the woman's function. He thus contrasts very forcefully two extremes of sexual attitude—on one hand, the debauched and sterile affairs of Elvire (and to a lesser degree those of Pamela), and on the other hand the marriage and the fecundity of the Mormon women.

For Apollinaire, tormented by the ravages of the war, the theme of fecundity became obsessive.¹² His famous surrealist play, *Les Mamelles de Tirésias* (*The Breasts of Tiresias*), presented in 1917, sent forth a call, both grotesque and tragic, for Frenchmen to multiply more abundantly. It was in Mormonism, synonymous with polygamy, that Apollinaire found "a way to give back to France the population which she needs to remain a great nation."¹³ Doubtless it is not necessary to take seriously the justification of a matrimonial system which France rejected as barbarian or absurd: The author of *La Femme Assise* most likely wished to shock his public by presenting Mormonism as a possible solution to the problem of depopulation. The arguments that he advances are nevertheless valid, taken directly from the testimony of a Mormon woman whom Rémy had interviewed.¹⁴ Apollinaire even hurls this trenchant variation

¹⁰Guillaume Apollinaire, *La Femme assise: Chronique de France et d'Amérique* (1920; rev. ed. Paris: Gallimard, 1948), pp. 83-84.

¹¹Thus Emmanuel Aegerter and Pierre Labracherie, *Guillaume Apollinaire* (Paris: Julliard, n.d.), p. 217; Claude Bonnefoy, *Apollinaire*, Classiques du XXe siècle (Paris: Eds. Universitaires, 1969), p. 101; Fabureau, *Guillaume Apollinaire*, pp. 74-77.

¹²Cf. Billy, Préface, pp. xxxvi and xl-xliv; Robert Couffignal, *L'inspiration biblique dans l'oeuvre de Guillaume Apollinaire*, Bibliothèque des Lettres Modernes, No. 8 (Paris: Minard, 1966), pp. 64-71; Mihaïlo Pavlović, "La Repopulation et *Les Mamelles de Tirésias*," *Revue des Lettres Modernes* 166-169 (1967):133-50.

¹³Apollinaire, *La Femme assise*, p. 39. Thus there is no reason to consider *La Femme assise* as "one of Apollinaire's most pessimistic works," as Scott Bates claims in *Guillaume Apollinaire* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1967), p. 137.

¹⁴Cf. Rémy, *Voyage*, 2:82-92. Apollinaire, *Le Femme assise*, pp. 60-61, 78-79, 91-93.

of the scripture: "Let he who is not polygamous in Europe cast the first stone at the Mormons!"¹⁵ Mormon women are presented as happy, living calm and natural lives, without jealousies or vicissitudes.¹⁶ By contrast, Elvire Goulot, whose adventures envelope the Mormon episode, practices a kind of "reverse Mormonism": tied to several lovers, she wishes nonetheless to "remain sterile in a time when defense and social honor calls for a particular fecundity from women."¹⁷ Elvire, thus, is a false woman, and it is in this sense that the title of the book receives a first explanation: Elvire resembles the seated woman on the Swiss five-franc coin, counterfeits of which were circulating at this time.¹⁸ But there is also a Mormon counterpart to this symbol of falseness, notably an enormous mannequin representing a seated woman, which the Mormons parade on a chariot of sorts during a ritual procession. This woman symbolizes the *true woman*, that is to say, natural and thus fertile.¹⁹ A third explanation of the title is found at the very end of the novel, citing the relationship between the sexes in a more purely social context: "Woman seated in the time when men are on the move."²⁰

In summary, Apollinaire's novel, of which we have indicated only the major outlines, has a thematic richness which merits a more in-depth analysis and which can illuminate other of the poet's works. Historical sidelights are abundant in the materials devoted to the period 1910-17. The Mormons are in the tapestry as a pretext for gaudy descriptions and as a justification for preposterous fertility by the subterfuge of polygamy. Finally, if one must recognize the pen of an author as fertile as the Mormons, one must also smile at his wild imagination. But the smile of true Mormons will dissipate rather quickly when they learn that the author of an "objective" study of the Church cites in his bibliography *La Femme Assise*.²¹

¹⁵Apollinaire, *La Femme assise*, p. 96.

¹⁶In this respect it is worth noting that the revival scene is discordant with the tone of the work as a whole. This is probably due to the fact that Apollinaire developed the theme of "glorious fecundity" during the war, considerably after the early pages, which were more unusual and perhaps more satiric. M.-T. Goosse thus is wrong to compare polygamy with the convulsion scene and to assume a frenetic and bestial love among Apollinaire's Mormons. Cf. Marie-Thérèse Goosse, "Une lecture du 'Larron' d'Apollinaire," *Archives des Lettres Modernes* 112 (1970):39-41.

¹⁷Apollinaire, *La Femme assise*, p. 147.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 156.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 103.

²⁰Ibid., p. 156.

²¹Thus the clergyman Charles Brüttsch in *Les Mormons ou Saints des derniers jours*, Coll. Connaissance des Sectes (Neuchâtel: Eds. Delachaux et Niestlé, 1960), p. 83.

PIERRE BENOIT: *Le Lac Salé (Salt Lake)* (1921)

Pierre Benoit, a member of the French Academy, clearly merits the titles given him by Marcel Girard: "manufacturer of adventure novels" and "facile magician."²² Each year for forty years, Benoit gave his many readers a new book. These works were sound, even though they were brought forth with little effort and always modeled upon a clearly defined pattern: everything proceeded logically from premises established in the first few pages. The characters follow their passions relentlessly, these passions most often being pride, greed, or love. Such is the case with the novel *Le Lac Salé*, published in 1921, which Benoit himself cites as a model of the narrative pattern found in all his other books.²³ The variety of each book was assured by the choice of settings, which Benoit made highly exotic: Utah and its inhabitants gave him such a setting, remote and original. Like Apollinaire, Benoit owes the geographical and historical background of his novel to Jules Rémy. Rémy had devoted part of one chapter to the Mormon War of 1857, which he documented with precision.²⁴ Benoit has his novel begin the very day the federal troops enter Salt Lake City. Rather than an analysis of the book, we shall give you here a quick summary.

Annabel Lee is the very young widow and heiress of an Irish Colonel who grew fabulously rich in the new mining companies of the West. Having come to Salt Lake City in 1857 to settle the affairs of her late husband, Annabel has not yet managed to leave the territory when the story begins: first because the hostilities prevented safe travel, then because of an affair with a federal officer who was billeted with her. In addition to the officer, a Jesuit priest lives with Annabel, one Philippe d'Exiles, missionary to the Indians, who had promised Colonel Lee to watch over the interests of his wife and above all, to see that she returned East as soon as possible. But a new obstacle to her return to civilization has emerged in the person of a young Methodist minister, Jemini Gwinett, dashing and shamelessly hypocritical. Gwinett, in league with the ambitious Mormon woman Sarah Pratt, is secretly "converted" to Mormonism. Then, in order to get his hands on Annabel and her wealth, he arranges, with the help of a toxic potion, to fall gravely ill in her

²²Marcel Girard, *Guide illustré de la littérature française moderne de 1918 à nos jours* (1949; rpt. Paris: Seghers, 1954), p. 163.

²³Pierre Benoit and Paul Guimard, *De Koenigsmark à Montsalvat: Quarante années, quarante romans* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1958), p. 62.

²⁴Rémy, *Voyage*, 1:400-419.

home. The young widow, now feeling useful and happy in her role as nursemaid, gives up all plans for returning East. After Father d'Exiles leaves, heeding the call of missionary duty to Idaho, Annabel falls completely into the clutches of the diabolical Gwinett. The minister, concealing his conversion to Mormonism and his marriage to Sarah Pratt, finally convinces Annabel to marry him. On the day of the marriage, Annabel, totally entangled in the minister's cunning web, believes she is going to be married in a Protestant ceremony. The ceremony, which Benoit took in full from the facts supplied by Rémy, comes off without incident.²⁵ But the next day, Annabel discovers to her horror that she has become Mrs. Gwinett Number Two!

Her attempts at divorce and escape are foiled by Gwinett and even by Governor Cumming, who wants no trouble with the Mormons. Wretched and ashamed, Annabel is overcome by an illness which does not quite succeed in putting her out of her misery. Father d'Exiles, learning of the plot, returns to Salt Lake City to try to free Annabel. His meeting with Brigham Young is one of the most vivid episodes of the novel: it is the encounter of two superior minds, jousting with great skill for intellectual superiority. By blackmail—he knows about the existence of secret funds Brigham Young has stashed away in New York—the Jesuit obtains the prophet's permission to whisk Annabel to safety. However, Annabel's shame and incomprehensible love for Gwinett are stronger than her desire to flee, and she refuses to follow the Jesuit. He will go to die, a willing martyr, among the Ute Indians. The epilogue, a final scene set in 1882, shows us Gwinett as Brigham Young's successor and Annabel "a miserable human vegetable," locked up in an asylum.

Since a rather large part of the French population has read and still reads the novels of Benoit, it is not surprising that Frenchmen often think of *Le Sac Salé* when they hear of the Mormons. However, the history of Annabel Lee contains very little information about the Latter-day Saints. The author is so caught up with his heroine and her fatal passions that the background remains hazy, and neither Mormon society nor theology is depicted. Only one theme of the traditional literature about Mormons is clearly in evidence, which is the concept that Mormonism is directed by men of superior intellect but without faith or scruples. But the ecclesiastical criticism in this book is not directed specifically against individual

²⁵Ibid., 2:111-12.

Mormons: Gwinett, who behaves so vilely out of ambition and greed, is a Protestant minister; Father d'Exiles, who is in love with Annabel and who commits suicide, is a Jesuit. As far as the Mormon environment in the book is concerned, Benoit has only rendered the classic picture of the literature of Mormonism, probably convinced that he was describing reality. In a recent study on his own heroines, the novelist indicated that he had received postcards showing him the present-day Salt Lake City. Naively he regrets that the "sinister Mormon city" is no longer what it was in the time of Brigham Young. According to him, the city at that time was

. . . more picturesque with its extraordinary and grotesque profession of secret societies, its Danites, its Angels of Destruction, its Thrones, its Virtues, its Dominations, the extravagant panoply with which these people loved to adorn themselves on the great celebration days, the Urim, the Thummim, the Seal of Solomon, the pigskin apron embroidered with fig leaves, the cloaks of white linen, the sashes and fantastic decorations. . . .²⁶

Such is the image of historic Mormonism held by a member of the French Academy scarcely ten years ago. Obviously, as concerns the French literary milieu, it was Apollinaire who did more than his share to forge this vision of a phantasmagoric world in the Rocky Mountains.

ANDRÉ MAUROIS: *La Vie de Joseph Smith*
(*The Life of Joseph Smith*) (1927)

Another member of the French Academy, rather more illustrious than Benoit, will also, in the eyes of Mormons, rank as more sacrilegious. In 1927 André Maurois, under his real name, Emil Herzog, published a life of Joseph Smith that Voltaire himself would not disown. It is a strange little book, this casual biography—satiric, cheap, most often ignored by the critics, and altogether out of place among the other works which Maurois produced during this same period: the famous novels *Bernard Quesnay* and *Climats*, *La Vie de Disraeli*, and *Les Etudes Anglaises*.

It is true that *La Vie de Joseph Smith* was not written for the general public: only a hundred copies were printed, each numbered and signed, the book intended only for Edouard Champion and his friends—"les Ronins." One is rather surprised that Maurois, a disciple of the great moralist and aesthetician Alain, chose to write

²⁶Pierre Benoit, *Mes héroïnes, d'Aurore à Aïssé* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1965), p. 37.

the biography of so obscure and ridiculous a figure as Joseph Smith was in his eyes. Evidently the nature of the "farce," the "gross mystification"—for such did Maurois consider the founding of Mormonism—beguiled this versatile author, for we must not forget that Maurois had a weakness for Anglo-Saxon humor and American history.²⁷

La Vie de Joseph Smith is only sixty-some pages long. The story follows chronology faithfully, from the First Vision in 1820 to the death of the Prophet in 1844. Four pages of a so-called epilogue are supposed to recount for us the rest of the Mormon story, but Maurois amuses himself instead by describing at length some technical details of the Salt Lake Temple. The style of the book is extremely simple, almost childish, thereby emphasizing rather forcefully the supercilious irony and at the same time, the archness of the author.²⁸

Very much in the manner of Voltaire, Maurois satirizes in particular the divine aspect of Joseph Smith's calling. For example, the revelation concerning plural marriage is explained with this facile sentence:

He [Joseph Smith] had always felt, each time he saw a pretty woman, feelings so violent it seemed unthinkable to him that they did not come from the Lord.²⁹

And polygamy itself merits this treatment:

But the prophet was too respectful of divine messages not to obey them. From this day forth, he married all the women for whom the Lord inspired righteous desires in him. Ultimately, he mortified himself to the point of possessing twenty-eight women.³⁰

By the very nature of its publication, *La Vie de Joseph Smith* did not attract much notice. Moreover, the book is now extremely rare. But a study such as this one cannot neglect to point out that Joseph Smith merited the attention, albeit malicious, of a writer such as André Maurois.

²⁷Cf. *Les Silences du Colonel Scramble* and *Histoire des Etats-Unis*. Note that in this latter work, Maurois writes more objectively and positively about the Mormons.

²⁸G. Lemaître, one of the few critics of Maurois who mentions *La Vie de Joseph Smith*, has not quite understood the vehemence of Maurois' irony. Cf. Georges Lemaître, *Maurois: The Writer and His Work* (New York: F. Ungar, 1968), p. 58.

²⁹André Maurois, *La Vie de Joseph Smith*, Les 49 Ronins du Quai Malaquais, No. 6 (Paris: Edouard Champion et ses amis, 1927), p. 26.

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 35.

OTHER WORKS OF THE PERIOD, 1920-1930

Apart from the "Mormon writings" of these three notable figures, Apollinaire, Benoit, and Maurois, the decade 1920-1930 produced nothing very original. The various novelty pieces of the sort we examined for the period 1850-1866 were still around, pretty much hollow echoes of a bygone day.

Occasionally, amateur historians and moralists would publish once more the old saws about the history and theology of Mormonism and especially about polygamy. For example, in his little book, *La Polygamie aux Etats-Unis: Les Mormons*, Raymond Duguet claims that the Latter-day Saints do not uphold the *Manifesto* but continue instead to sanction polygamous unions. Even though the author is convinced that the Mormon missionaries "will scarcely succeed in Latin countries, especially here," he nonetheless considers it necessary to put his fellow Frenchmen on guard against Mormonism, which "tries to carry off, by conversion, some loved one whom you will never see again."³¹

An article in much the same vein turns up by René Guénon: "Les Origines du Mormonisme." Here the author resurrects the whole Spaulding theory concerning the Book of Mormon. His conclusion places the Mormons in the larger perspective of a credulous and extravagant America: Mormonism was "the rather alarming symptom of a mental unbalance that threatens to become widespread if not carefully watched."³² But the positive judgments are not lacking either in this literature that seeks to be "objective"—confirming thereby the ambiguous character of the French attitude towards the Mormons.³³ One author whose attitudes are predominantly favorable is Charles Cestre, professor of American literature and civilization at the Sorbonne. Professor Cestre maintains an excellent relationship with the leadership of the French Mission, recently relocated in Paris.³⁴ His great work on the United States of America contains pages highly laudatory of the Mormons, in which polygamy is defined as "a moral idea not without grandeur."³⁵

³¹Raymond Duguet, *La Polygamie aux Etats-Unis: Les Mormons* (Paris: Eds. du Nouveau Mercure, 1921), pp. 8 and 98.

³²René Guénon, "Les Origines du Mormonisme," *Revue politique et littéraire* 64 (1926):541.

³³Cf. Decoo, "Image of Mormonism," pp. 157-59.

³⁴Cf. Gary Ray Chard, "A History of the French Mission of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1850-1960" (Master's thesis, Utah State University, 1965), p. 80.

³⁵Charles Cestre, *Les Etats-Unis* (Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1927), p. 270.

Popular literature, in which category we can place Benoit's novel, is not dead either. In 1857, Paul Duplessis published a mediocre adventure novel about the Danites.³⁶ He had his counterpart in 1930: in a book called *L'Oeil de l'Utah* (*The Eye of Utah*), George Sim sends a young French girl and her fiancé to Utah to claim the inheritance from a gold-mining uncle. The Mormons, who have created for themselves strange ghettos in a West we would not recognize, do all in their power to thwart the hero and heroine and to seize the treasure. Needless to say, the villains are foiled by the intrepid pair. This novel, published as part of a popular series of adventure tales, has no literary merit.³⁷

Finally, we find occasional travelers, rather less common in this difficult post-war period of economic crisis, bringing back to France their extremely favorable impressions of the Mormons. A famous example is that of the journalist René Puaux, who made a tour of the United States by means of a Carnegie endowment, and returned with "an admiring respect" for the works of the Mormons. To the Latter-day Saints he renders the classic travelers' homage: "What was formerly nothing but a terrifying desert has been transformed into a land of milk and honey by a messianic vision, to which a ferocious energy and a magnificent industrial effort have happily given a material base."³⁸

But, as we have seen, it is not in this commonplace truism of such a positive nature that the great names found their Mormon inspiration. Apollinaire, Benoit, and Maurois—for it is to them that any conclusion of the period 1920-1930 must return—saw Mormonism solely as a source of original and strange raw materials. According to their personal tastes and the current needs of their literature, they deformed the Mormon society, so malleable because so little known. From this point of view, the surrealistic vision of the Latter-day Saints that Apollinaire gives us, the intrigues of *Le Lac Salé*, and Maurois' satiric pamphlet do not constitute malevolence towards the Mormons. We cannot remind ourselves too often that the French writers remained detached from all religious controversy: They were simply amusing themselves at the expense of a multifaceted tradition.

³⁶Cf. Decoo, "Image of Mormonism," p. 170.

³⁷Georges Sim, *L'Oeil de l'Utah*, Collection du Livre National, Bibliothèque des Grandes Aventures (Paris: J. Tallandier, 1930).

³⁸René Puaux, *Découverte des Américains* (Paris: Fasquelle, 1930), p. 61.