



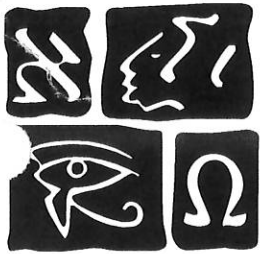
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FARMS Preliminary Reports

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Hugh W. Nibley

Larson Memo

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Summary

In this short series of communications, Hugh Nibley expresses his philosophy that "the function of the poet is to hold one's head while he pukes."

Paper
Mormon Studies

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INTERDEPARTMENTAL MEMOS

March 4

Dear Hugh,

Did you say and do you believe that the function of the poet is to hold one's head while he pukes? You have been quoted and I want to be sure I have the right of it.

Clint

March 8

Re: The Cosmic Retch

Dear Clint,

I did say it -- and never a truer word was spoken! Shakespeare's insomnia, Milton's blindness and Larson's ulcers testify to it.

Hugh

March 9

Dear Hugh,

In retching you may find the wind against you. What about the many notable poets of the Old and New Testaments?

Clint

March 10

Dear Clint,

I suppose you can see poetry in everything. But that does not mean that every writing that impresses you is the work of a poet. The only consciously creative writing in the Bible is deeply pessimistic.

I am amazed that you should go so far afield for an example. Every Prof. of Lit. & Lang. knows that the art of a poet is expressed in his language, and can never be examined in another idiom. (Just ask that redoubtable Hellenist, P.A.?) Let us stick to the poets we can read!

Hugh

March 11

Dear Hugh,

Certainly every piece of poetry is not a consciously planned aesthetic object! Many of the Biblical writers may not have realized they were poets -- but poets they were. For a poet may be simply one who writes poetry. And I cannot agree even that the "consciously creative writing" of the Bible is all "deeply pessimistic," for the Song of Solomon must have been created, as it were, as pure song, and with such euphoria!

My friend, it was you who first dealt a generalization -- and you know how untenable generalizations become under scrutiny. So I must attack the notion that poetry can "never" be examined in another idiom. The quality of a translation depends precisely on the insights of the translator or translators, and I am of the mind that such folk as the King James scholars and Joseph Smith were pretty good.

I therefore cannot be stood off by the fact that I do not know Greek and Hebrew, for I am impressed that life is too short for one to acquire idiomatic control of even the major languages. Moreover, I suspect that some who have publicized that they possess such control actually fall far short of it and would be considerably chagrined if confronted by literary artists of these languages. The mastery of any language must be a life-time pursuit, anyone's gifts notwithstanding.

Clint

