

Book Reviews

THREE BOOKS OF POETRY BY UTAH POETS

(Reviewed by Elouise Bell, instructor of English at Brigham Young University. Miss Bell, a poet in her own right, teaches creative writing at BYU. She was Utah's Outstanding Young Woman in 1970.)

GALE TAMPICO BOYD. *The Lost, The Found*. Privately published, 1971. 77 pp. \$2.95.

The distinctive characteristic that bursts through the poems of Gale Tampico Boyd is a rich, aggressive vitality. This vitality is expressed both in the content and in the form of the poems. The result is a potpourri into which the reader may dip at will and be sure of coming up with something new each time.

Of course, any potpourri is a risk. Vitality by its very nature results in an occasional miss, an excess, or an experiment that fails. Not all of the poems in Ms. Boyd's collection are equally effective. Let us examine a few of the problems before going on to the many successes.

Nature poetry is always a challenge to write. Nature, like love, is in itself a very powerful subject. Before the poem is even written, the content is loaded with emotional freight. Then, too, many of us not only respond deeply to nature but identify with it—see our own emotions symbolized and paralleled in it. Because of this, many poets fail to create nature poetry which does its own work. Instead, they paint fragmental wisps which may bear a significant personal meaning but which do not function as full-fledged poems of their own because the personal meaning does not become in any sense universal. The magnificence of nature itself and the magnificence of the emotions aroused in a poet do not auto-

matically guarantee a magnificent poem. Ms. Boyd needs to examine exactly what it is she is attempting in her nature poetry and then make sure that the poems themselves achieve these ends.

Now a word about words. They are the poet's tools, and naturally he is constantly experimenting to see what he can do with them. Such experimentation is a vital part of the poet's discipline. But many attempts will fail; many words simply will not work in certain ways. However delightful a certain word may seem, if it does not work as a window, if it does not allow the reader to see through it to the meaning and total content of the poem, then the word must go. Occasionally, Ms. Boyd uses words so self-consciously that the poem is damaged. Witness the phrase

Your transparent gauze of hair
that idles on the pillow where
my vision progresses. . . .

"Transparent gauze," though chancy, can work. But "idles" cannot. The verb implies a contrast of animated movement. Possibly an adjective form might work—"idle hair." But to animate hair so that it has the possibility of idling is to commit the pathetic fallacy to no purpose. One can see what Ms. Boyd was reaching for, but the choice was wrong. "Progresses" is likewise amiss in this context.

Ms. Boyd occasionally tries too hard, reaches too far. Only rarely does she err in the other direction—towards the cliche. In "The Convent in Spring," she does falter, making a stale nun-penguin comparison.

There are other problems—the whole tone of "Awaiting Birth" seems wrong, for instance (one can applaud humor in such a situation—but not cuteness)— but the delights of this collection far outnumber and outweigh the failings.

One of the delights is "Snow Desert," a strong, original poem:

Thin layers of ice
Seal mud-puddles into shiny scabs on lacerated
Pavement, and people walk carefully on the healed
Surfaces. . . .

Another untitled desert poem works beautifully: "Blistered with stars/the desert sky/salves itself with dark heat. . . . I am

at a loss, however, to explain the poet's purpose in shifting the whole tone of this fine poem in the closing line, which is a superficial parody: "Oh, to be in Finland/now that summer's here." That's good light verse, but inappropriate here.

"The Fun House Manikin's Lover" is typical of the imagination and resourcefulness Gale Boyd shows in her best poems:

The fun house manikin's lover
Slumps at east between tours,
Pounds of suspended plastic
With padded paunch
And face of welded jello. . . .

One of the strongest poems in the collection is "The Invalid":

I accept their sad sighs
as careless howling hymns,
Hollow as air that passes from frigid
Places. Their faces, those faces: rigid
With practiced pity, pretending to cry.
All warmth that comes from cold lips is a lie.

In addition to the clear, unobstructed movement of the poem and its perfect control of tone, one admires the skillful use of meter and rime, subtle yet supportive from first to last.

Certainly with *The Lost, the Found*, we have only the debut of a rich, multifaceted talent that will continue to develop and produce in the years ahead.

CHARIS SOUTHWELL. *Collected Poems of Charis Southwell*. New York: Exposition Press, 1972. 62 pp. \$3.00.

Charis Southwell, a graduate cum laude of Brigham Young University, died at the age of twenty-nine, while still developing her poetic talents. Her *Collected Poems*, therefore, contains pieces of varying quality; but among them are several of lasting value which we are fortunate to have permanently preserved.

The poems take various directions, some relatively stylized and elaborate in the manner of the (now old) New Critics, most much more direct and open in the contemporary mode. To this reviewer, the latter seem more successful. For in-