Book Reviews

Marshall, Donald R. *The Rummage Sale.* Provo, Utah: Heirloom Publications, 1972. 141 pages. $3.75 hardback. $2.50 paperback. Reprinted, Salt Lake City and Santa Barbara: Peregrine Smith, 1975. $4.95 hardback.

(Reviewed by Elouise Bell, who is assistant professor of English at Brigham Young University, where she teaches creative writing.)

The opening line of "The Pines," the final selection in Don Marshall's anthology of short stories called *The Rummage Sale,* begins with this question: "Are you really going to let him take you back to Utah?" The question is asked of Lida Burrows, whose second husband, Verdell, wants her to return with him to Utah, where they both grew up. But in a larger sense, the question applies to every reader of *The Rummage Sale,* and the answer for most readers—certainly the answer for this reader—will be, Yes, I'm going to let him take me back to Utah.

For this is, in fact, what *The Rummage Sale* is all about. When Verdell Porter, in "The Pines," proposes to Lida, he tells her he has turned his back on his heritage long enough. Now he wants to go back to the family homestead and "pick up the neglected pieces of the past." In this book, Marshall has embraced the Utah subculture as one returning to the family homestead. He has picked up the neglected pieces of the past in order to show us their impact on the present. He has taken us—including those reared far from the Rocky Mountains but now, by choice or marriage, by faith or fate, part of the culture—back to Utah in a way no other Mormon writer has yet done. It is a serious and worthwhile undertaking, and we must not let the delightful humor that shines throughout the pages mislead us as to the basic importance of the book. Rummage sales occasionally produce rare treasures, especially for those willing to look patiently and carefully at the items displayed.

Let us think about that treasure for a moment. Joseph Campbell, in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces,* describes the fundamental archetype of the journey, a pattern underlying much of the central literature of the world. The hero, he says, leaves his homeland, makes a voyage, and in its course descends into a dark world, an underworld, where he wages a great battle but triumphs and returns victorious with a prize. Surely Marshall's heroes make the same journey. It is more than coincidence, more even than the author's own background of world travel, that accounts for the many travels taken in the anthology. Virtually all the key characters travel—Thalia to California, LaRena Homer to the Middle East, Cecil of "The Parasites" to Mexico, Ila Rae Dodds from coast to coast in search of her destiny, Owen Goulding to Italy, and Lida Burrows to California and finally back again. Each hero ventures out and battles various demons. But this is realistic, rather than epic, fiction, so not all return with a prize, even the prize of self-knowledge. Some of them *do* earn that treasure, however, and when they do, it is at a genuine price. There are no easy victories in Marshall's stories, which is one reason they rate so high in the (as yet) rather small library of Mormon fiction.

Some readers of *The Rummage Sale* have "rummaged" too quickly, too casually, and have said, "The stories are depressing." It is a comment worth considering. To answer the charge, I refer readers again to "The Pines." Marshall has clearly placed his stories where they are in the book with good reason, and none better than "The Pines." The book begins with the story of a woman who fulfills a life-long dream by going for a brief, daring vacation to Carmel. And it ends with the story of a woman who had lived most of her life happily in California, with no dream of returning to Paradise, Utah. In this piece, her first husband, Orville, represents California and Lida's feelings about it. Symbolizing Utah is Verdell, a man she had known long ago, when he was a "marvelous honey-haired boy." In fact, we are told, "she loved him . . . long before Orville, before she had even heard of names like San Marino, Sierra Madre, and Hacienda Heights." This little story is an epitome for the entire book, for every hero who ventures forth, perhaps to stay half a lifetime, but who, in one way or another, returns to acknowledge and love "the neglected pieces of the past." Every fragment in *The Rummage*

Sale is a piece of the past and its ongoing continuation, the present; and each is shown for what it is, without romanticizing, but with real understanding and compassion.

One interesting manifestation of that compassion is Marshall's treatment of his women characters. All of them, even the most misled, like Minna, or the most imperceptive, like LaRena Homer, are portrayed with a certain tenderness and sympathy. One might ask how the author gets away with using women as his central characters so much, when writers are usually advised to stay with protagonists of their own sex, for greatest credibility. I think the answer is in the lack of introspection in most of the characters. They are real women, and very credible, but none is really self-aware, none probes her own motivations very far. That disturbing business is left to the men. There are only two adult men as protagonists in the book, and both are introspective. Perhaps as a result, or perhaps for other reasons, neither is very sympathetic. Both Cecil of "The Parasites" and Owen of "The Sound of Drums" are rather selfish, egocentric misfits, and if they gain a prize as the result of their voyages, it is the bittersweet one of greater self-knowledge.

Another manifestation of compassion is a device many readers will think of as a mere gimmick—Marshall's careful linking of characters. Central figures in one story will be casually mentioned in another. As Lida returns to Utah, she stops by to visit Thora, who had a key role in "All the Cats in Zanzibar." Viola Pratt, whose calendar notes make up one piece of the anthology, is a relative of Calbert Dunkley, whose letters form another story. And so it goes throughout the whole book. This device does more than illustrate the known truth that Utahns, and especially Utah Mormons, are widely interrelated. It underscores a kinship that is deeper than genealogy. It says, not to put too fine a point to it, what the Jungle Boy said: "We be of one blood, me and thee."

An especially strong point of the book, and its affirmation, is the balance Marshall achieves. There is no "message," no propaganda. People can err in all directions, can tangle their lives in brambles on either side of the road. There is Minna, who never goes out but endlessly smothers her children; there is also Reula Fay, who in the story is literally always gone and neglects husband and child. There is LaRena Homer, who travels widely, yet in a sense never leaves home; there is also

Owen, who, even when he is home, is not at home. Yes, some of the foibles of small-town folk are mocked, but many of the affectations of the would-be sophisticates are even more strongly ridiculed. And these small towns also produce Thoras, who travel and benefit from it, or Thalia Beales, who maintain dignity and duty, and dreams as well, or Neils, who can set the Owens of the world straight about the values of home and family and caring. Marshall succeeds with virtually every form he attempts—even with such experiments as "Contents of an El Roi Tan Box Found Under a Bed," or "Notes on a Calendar Found in an Empty House After the Death of Viola Pratt," or the marvelous monologue, "Somehow They Always Seem to Change It On You," which I predict will become a favorite "reading" in this area in years to come. The one genre which is not a total success, at least as he attempts it here, is the story-in-letter-form. This is not a fault of the form itself; there have been great short stories written in the form of letters, including "Address Unknown," and "Some Like Them Cold." But in "May the Good Lord Bless and Keep You" and "You'll Never Believe It," Marshall tries to paint his humor with too wide a brush, and the resulting farce is a bit heavy, the characters rather undeveloped. These stories are, however, very popular with many readers, who can perhaps identify with the missionary situations involved, but it seems to me that in both Marshall sacrifices subtlety and texture for the easy laugh.

May I end, again, with a suggestion that the reader "rummage" carefully at this particular *Sale?* By doing so, he will find many treasures and bargains he might otherwise have missed. To return whence we began, many readers have felt that "The Pines" is a downbeat story because it ends with Lida weeping. But words give off charges, positive or negative (upbeat or downbeat connotations, if you prefer). Listen to the words—and hence the tone—of the closing paragraph of "The Pines": "Plums cooling in the sycamore shade," "through the willowed evening . . . bob-o-links and crickets called them on," "they ate peaches and cream at the kitchen table," "through the clean green fields . . . where the wind hurried the white clouds through the endless blue skies and carried with it the sweet scent of hay, freshly mown and moist," "the tall cool pines." Yes, of course Lida weeps at the end. She

has come home, with, and *to,* her first love. One suspects Don Marshall has done the same.

Miller, David E., and Della S. Miller. *Nauvoo: The City of Joseph.* Salt Lake City and Santa Barbara: Peregrine Smith, 1974. 262 pp. $10.00.

(Reviewed by Glen M. Leonard, a senior historical associate with the Church Historical Department in Salt Lake City. Dr. Leonard is a former Publications Coordinator for the Utah State Historical Society and serves on the editorial staff of the *Journal of Mormon History.*)

Mormon Nauvoo is an easily defined subject. It begins in 1839, ends seven years later, and incorporates such essentials as the move to Illinois, city and temple building, the Nauvoo Legion, political stresses, and the death of Joseph Smith. The Millers' attractively printed narrative history recites all the generally known facts. In addition, it supplies newer information on land purchases and the operations of city government, plus descriptions of important landmarks now the object of historic restoration.

Nauvoo: The City of Joseph originated a dozen years ago as a dual-purpose report. Compiled for the National Park Service, which was considering the Mormon westward movement for its Mission 66 program, it also served as an initial historical summary for Nauvoo Restoration, Inc.

As published, the study proceeds in six segments. In the first, the Mormons move quickly from their beginnings in New York to the expulsion from Missouri and the purchase of an inheritance in Nauvoo. Section two briefly describes church government, then chronicles the daily routine of municipal affairs under the Nauvoo Charter. A lengthy third section touches on church activities and general growth, lists major economic developments, describes social and cultural life in Nauvoo, and identifies major public buildings. In the fourth division, the narrative moves forward through political conflict to the assassination of the Smith brothers and the succession crisis. Section five describes the death of Nauvoo and traces plans for the westward trek. A final part sketches the post-Mormon era and attempts an interpretation of the period's influence on subsequent events in Utah. A helpful survey of pre-Mormon Nauvoo is relegated to an appendix but deserves