

Incidents tend to be repeated, some events prematurely introduced. Lopez, for example, is presented to the puzzled reader several times before we finally realize his importance. There is also a disconcerting tendency to materialize and then to vaporize characters without introduction or explanation. Quotes are not attributed; assertions are not documented and there is neither index, introduction nor footnotes.

For all its faults, the book is a valuable record of the working class in a mining town during the early part of the century. While activities of the upper classes are generally well documented, little is written about the lower classes. Survival leaves them neither time nor

energy to record their stories. Many of them are illiterate. *Upstairs to a Mine* relates the daily activities of these people beyond lifeless statistics. The colors and flavors of their daily lives are vivid, and there are some startling insights into the quality of life in this small mining town.

The authors have taken the thread of family life in Bingham and have strung it on their loom. Using the gaily colored threads of daily interaction, they have woven the bright, intricate tapestry that was Bingham before the "giants moved it away." The finished cloth may be roughly woven and flawed in places, but it has an unmistakable reality, an exciting pattern.

We Are What We Remember

STEPHEN L. TANNER

Frost in the Orchard by Donald Marshall. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1977. 173 pp. \$4.95

Wright Morris once said, "The 'subject' of Wolfe, Hemingway, and Faulkner, however various the backgrounds, however contrasting the styles, pushed to its extremity, is nostalgia." He should have included Fitzgerald, and even then the list would have been incomplete. Nostalgia permeates American fiction in our century. Donald Marshall may not equal the names above in literary skill, but he shares their subject and has explored it in a penetrating and often profound way.

Having a "subject"—in other words focusing on a significant aspect of human experience—is what distinguishes *Frost in the Orchard* from most Mormon fiction. Too many writers in the Church overrate the uniqueness of the Mormon experience as a source for literary art. More precisely, they overrate the external and superficial characteristics of that experience while at the same time ignor-

ing the deeper core of the uniqueness. Writing about wards, home teaching, polygamy, testimony meetings or folkways of the Wasatch Front is no guarantee, in itself, for creating special or significant literature.

Marshall does not make this mistake. His stories are distinctively Mormon without being self-consciously so. The regional and cultural flavor is there to be enjoyed (the book is a showcase of names delightfully typical of rural Mormonism), but the essential concerns in the stories transcend Utah and Mormon life and treat the universals in human experience, particularly the complex and fascinating experience of nostalgia.

Perhaps nostalgia is not an accurate word. I am referring to more than mere homesickness. Remembrance of things past constitutes a large part of one's character and personality in the present. To a large extent we are what we remember. Consciousness, after all, is mostly memory. Because memory is subjective and suffused with subtle and evanescent

emotion, each unique human personality is mysterious to itself as well as to others. The power and source of nostalgia lie beyond the scalpel, yet a recognition of the fundamental and pervasive influence of the nostalgic, under whatever name, can unlock for the artist a way of interpreting human behavior with new realism and greater insight. The understanding of interpersonal relationships requires an appreciation of the role played by nostalgic sentiments.

Nostalgia is the string on which the stories of *Frost in the Orchard* are strung. A wintery mood dominates. The frost of the title, the frequent winter settings, the winter scene on the cover, the mood photos with their pattern of autumn/winter/early spring images of old things, even the blue ink used in printing—all these convey an atmosphere of past life now in sterile suspended animation. And this overt mood corresponds with a dreary state of soul portrayed throughout the stories. The consistency of theme and atmosphere, both in content and presentation, is a remarkable achievement in unifying a collection of stories.

The title of the first story, "Fugues and Improvisations: Variations on a Theme," suggests the method used for the collection as a whole. For example, one set of variations explores the way people are haunted by bitter or tormenting memories. The speaker in "Light Switch," is troubled by memories of events some of which were only dreamed in the first place. These memories, associated with guilt and death, disturb him with visions of his own death. The narrator of "Christmas Snows, Christmas Winds" recollects the images and impressions of childhood Christmases with a vividness that may unlock the reader's cherished memories. But sweet recollection turns sour when he remembers an act of childish insensitivity that can never be undone: "Unwelcome guest in that memory world of gumdrops and candy canes, it sneaks along the edges of the mind, demanding it be seen, heard, remembered."

In "Souvenir" a young father with a wife dying of cancer learns that he must let go of his fondly remembered past just as he must let go of his beloved wife. His daughter's gentle lesson that the past cannot be shared or retained in any meaningful way helps him face the future—but it is a sad lesson. "The Reun-

ion" is a comic variation depicting the confrontation between the reality of the present and the warmly recollected past. In this story, whatever fondly remembered family ties motivated the reunion are shattered in the confusion and abrasion of present personalities and relationships. "Homecoming" is the most unsettling story in this set of variations. The point seems to be that you not only can't go home again but even to try is self-destructive.

Self-centered insensitivity and failure to communicate provide the material for another set of variations. "Fugues and Improvisations: Variations on a Theme" tells of J. Stewart Christenson, a teacher of music appreciation at BYU, who in making out final grades must reconcile impartial, objective judgment with sympathy and personal involvement. The case in point involves an elderly woman with good intentions but little ability. The teacher is hampered by never having found a proper balance between interest in his own inner life and sincere interest in the inner lives of others. "Why did they invade him with their lives?" he wonders about his students. "What did it all matter? What did any of it, finally, have to do with him and with Music 101? Haydn and Mozart and Back and J. Stewart Christenson were something quite apart from all that, weren't they?"

"The Wheelbarrow" and "The Thorns" portray the way family relationships deteriorate when people can neither empathize with each other nor find a way to share their own inner life. The young husband in "The Wheelbarrow," isolated in his own world of "blurred memories" and frustrated longings, has no capacity to sense meaning in the world of his wife and in-laws. A childhood marred by his parents' divorce and frequent moves has left him with no satisfying memories. He reflects on the places he has lived: "None of these scenes begged him for sentiment, berated him for a lack of nostalgia; they turned, instead, their cold, indifferent backs." Consequently, he cannot understand his wife's inner life, marked so strongly by nostalgic recollections of home and family. "I should feel something toward all this," he thinks as he scans the backyard of his parents-in-law. "Even if it isn't mine, was never mine, it seems as if I'm supposed to feel something—maybe because it's something I

should have had, or because it's something she once had and therefore should still have some meaning." Something is wrong with his marriage, "something he couldn't label or even begin to identify without wading back through the clutter of varied backgrounds and mixed interests, of common goals and private dreams . . ." The marriage deteriorates for nostalgic reasons.

Nostalgia also plays a principal role in the unfortunate family relationships described in "The Thorns." The young wife cannot tolerate her father-in-law because she cannot empathize with him. His recollected past means nothing to her, and she is simply annoyed when he talks about. The father-in-law is equally incapable of appreciating her inner life. The situation is skillfully epitomized in the contrasting reactions to slides. The father-in-law is bored and a little disgusted by the couple's pictures from their stay in Pakistan. When the father-in-law gets out his slides, the situation is reversed.

In a more satiric vein "Friends and Loved Ones Far and Near/Merry Xmas from Our House to Yours" and "Bus Ride" explore a similar indifference to the inner world of others. The former story consists of several years of Christmas letters exchanged between two families. The reader gradually realizes that one of the families could have helped the other if empathy and communication had been achieved. Mrs. Winterrose of "Bus Ride" is so anxious to share her memory of an insignificant involvement in movie-making that she is not really interested in others, though she has convinced herself otherwise.

This collection is unified through variations on a single significant theme, but how successful are the individual stories? Some of the trees in the orchard need pruning and trimming. A short story writer must develop his material fully enough to create an intense impression, but if he goes beyond a certain point, additional development only obscures or diminishes the effect. Marshall relies less on dialogue and action than on descriptive thoughts, impressions and recollections. He does this very well; it seems to be his favorite narrative technique. But perhaps because it comes easily to him, he does too much of it.

Marshall's own susceptibility to nostalgia mars some of the stories. This is

apparent in the many passages of childhood recollections in which he displays a singular fear and distrust of nostalgia, as though to indulge in it were an abnegation of responsibility or a flight from reality. In "Homecoming," the death at the end seems gratuitous. We cannot recover the past, but is there such harm in trying? C. S. Lewis believed that the pleasures of nostalgia are a subtle hint of heaven, a fleeting sample of a joy to be known in its fullness only in a life to come. What a somber and unsettling contrast to this notion is provided by Marshall's stories! I wonder if an unresolved tension between his nostalgic temperament and his sense of obligation as a writer to face reality and social responsibility is reflected in the stories by an occasional wavering or a false note in the resolution of the action.

Marshall's principal strength is the way he gives significance to ordinary people and events. With the exception of the bizarre death in "Homecoming," he does not resort to sensational or melodramatic action. Marshall's focus is on the inner drama of familiar life, on the puzzling issues of interpersonal relationships known even to the most conventional and well-adjusted among us.

His first book, *The Rummage Sale*, was printed in brown. This one is printed in blue. What comes next? If future work (which I look forward to) reveals additional artistic development, Donald Marshall will be approaching the achievement claimed for him on the back cover of this book.

