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Collected Poems of Charis Southwell Charis Southwell

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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-

stance, in "Snowed In," a family awaits Christmas in the country. The snow is high. There is a chance the advancing snow plow may reach them in time for them to have a conventional Christmas, complete with store-bought presents; there is a chance it may not. The atmosphere is perfectly rendered, balanced between the two possible futures. The fulcrum of the poem is the sound of the nearing snow plow, a mixed blessing which causes the narrator to ponder, "What might have come of one more solitary morning/Silent, dark, and waiting?" Understated yet fully accessible, the emotions of the poem are created by the poem itself.

The power of the unembroidered style is evident in another poem, untitled, which begins:

I have this small, spare gratitude to give,
Hardly there for all Your Care.

Though this poem (like several others) echoes strongly of Hopkins, Cummings, and even Emily Dickinson, it retains a freshness of its own.

Lest these mentions of simplicity suggest a poverty of style, be assured that Ms. Southwick's poems *are* poetry, not merely rearranged prose. The poet knew well and was becoming skillful in the special uses of the poetic line. Listen to the first stanza of "Our Family":

The sweet dreams of the warm evening
Brush aside the whisps of years,
And bring us close again
In arms of thought
And a touch of tears,
Remembering the bright, noisy love that filled our house,
The never quiet, unrelenting clang and call and song.

No culture ever has too many serious poets; and the Mormon sub-culture has never had enough. Charis Southwell's early death is a loss to that culture and to the wider audience of poetry readers in general. But because she was a serious poet engaged in learning her trade well, Charis Southwell produced, even in her short lifetime, a significant though small body of work. For this, we can be grateful to her. We also owe gratitude to her husband, William H. Southwell, who undertook the publication of her poems after her death. That she anticipated that death and faced it like a woman is

evident from many of the poems in this collection, none, perhaps, more direct and poignant than "Butterfly":

Remember me, I cry I cry
Remember me I can't say why
Except I longed, except I loved
And now before I lived, I die.