

Struthers Burt by Raymond C. Phillips, Jr., and:

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James Welch by Peter Wild, and: Preston

Jones by Mark Busby, and: Richard Hugo by

Donna Gerstenberger, and.

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 ***Struthers Burt* by Raymond C. Phillips, Jr., and: *James Welch* by Peter Wild, and: *Preston Jones* by Mark Busby, and: *Richard Hugo* by Donna Gerstenberger, and: *Sophus K. Winther* by Barbara Howard Meldrum (review)**

Delbert E. Wylder

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REVIEW

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Reviews 187 Struthers Burt. Boise State Western Writers Series No. 56. By Raymond C. Phillips, Jr. (Boise,

Idaho: Boise State University, 1983. 48 pages, \$2.00.) James Welch. Boise State Western Writers Series No. 57. By Peter Wild. (Boise, Idaho: Boise State University, 1983. 49 pages, \$2.00.) Preston Jones. Boise State Western Writers Series No. 58. By Mark Busby. (Boise, Idaho: Boise State University, 1983. 52 pages, \$2.00.) Richard Hugo. Boise State Western Writers Series No. 59. By Donna Gerstenberger. (Boise, Idaho: Boise State University, 1983. 50 pages, \$2.00.) Sophus K. Winther. Boise State Western Writers Series No. 60. By Barbara Howard Meldrum. (Boise, Idaho: Boise State University, 1983. 52 pages, \$2.00.)

It is unusual, in any series, to produce five very successful, well-written, and interesting pamphlets in sequence, but this is the case with Boise State's Western Writers series pamphlets Numbers 56 through 60. The first of these concerns Struthers Burt, a "poet, essayist, novelist, short story writer, librettist, reviewer, author of a literary manifesto, contributor to letter-to-the-editor columns, and personal letter writer" who was most popular in the twenties and thirties. Burt, like Emerson Hough, though not so successful financially, was interested in conserving the western environment, philosophized too frequently in his novels, and was extremely patriotic. After analyzing Burt's weaknesses in almost all of the genres mentioned above, Raymond C. Phillips concludes that at least Burt helped "to focus his countrymen's minds on the West." Phillips presents Burt as a human being who would have been good to know. Peter Wild's sensitivity to language is apparent from the first page of his work on James Welch. Unfortunately, Wild introduces the pamphlet with a commentary on the mood of American society in the sixties and seventies, the rise of ethnic literature, and the particular plight of the American Indian writer in America because, for one reason among others, the Native American writer "has few reference points to chart his course." For general readers, such an introduction might well be necessary, however, and once Peter Wild gets to his analyses of the poetry and novels of James Welch, this is a fine pamphlet. Wild's evaluation of *Winter in the Blood*, for example, carefully examines the critical positions taken toward the novel, pointing up strengths and weaknesses, and comes to the conclusion that the protagonist becomes "a kind of Indian Woody Allen . . . looking for a reasonable way to live but befuddled by the lack of sense of the world around him." I have seen only one of the plays of Preston Jones, *The Last Meeting of the Knights of the White Magnolia*, but that was a memorable experience indeed. Mark Busby's *Preston Jones* makes me want to see all of his plays, even the failures. This is a well-researched pamphlet that tenderly mixes biographical details with running commentaries (I don't call them plot summaries because they are more than that), and analyses of the plays. He 188 *Western American Literature* debunks the myth that Jones was a Texas playwright by pointing out his New Mexican background, and the myth that he was destroyed by the negative reaction from the New York critics by presenting proof of Jones's development after he returned to Texas. Most important, he destroys the myth that Preston Jones was a limited playwright. What one learns first from Richard Hugo is that Donna Gerstenberger knows Hugo's poetry, almost "forward and backward" as the old saying goes. Readers are thus treated to some fine explications of individual poems and a more or less chronological development of Hugo as a poet. After studying under Roethke at the University of Washington soon after World War II, Hugo worked as a technical writer at Boeing. His first book of poetry, *A Run of Jacks*, was not published until 1961, when he was 38 years old. Gerstenberger comments not only on the regional character of the poem but also on Hugo's attempt to come to terms with his childhood and with the world around him. She sees his deepening humanity as his poetry progresses, his awareness of human problems, the maturation of his understanding...

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Baltimore, Maryland, USA 21218
[+1 \(410\) 516-6989](tel:+14105166989)
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