

Reviews

Edge of the Wind. By James E. Cherry. (Nacogdoches, TX: Stephen F. Austin University, 2016. Pp. 200. \$16.20, paper)

James Cherry's *Edge of the Wind* carries readers and its characters on a wild ride toward a not distant collision. Riders see the end approaching and, whenever we do not, Cherry's mastery of language displays what we must see, even images not desired. Alexander van der Pool joins us for a day. During our brief visit to Alex's complicated and self-created world, we learn, up close and personal, the complexity of his deepest thoughts, fears and aspirations, even his soul. Our brief interlude traverses the rural West Tennessee countryside where he resides with his sister and onto the campus of a nearby urban institution of higher learning.

Alex leaves much in his wake, including his family—a mother, step father, sister and a biological father, whose abandonment contributes to this young adult's troubles two decades later. We meet his voices, including the imaginary Tobi, who Cherry paints with vivid strokes like the characters of flesh and blood. Alex stopped taking his meds; he is handsome, creative, charming, naïve, stealthy, schizophrenic, and dangerous. He introduces himself to a young successful female banker, whose journey crosses his voyage. Her looks, success and intellect have attracted Alex. Her loneliness and personal needs, along with a knowledge of Alex's sister, allow his brief access. She likes what she sees, wants more. Alex's feelings mirror hers, and he desires female contact almost as much as his primary misguided mission: becoming a poet and showing the world that he matters, that he should be heard, and that his biological father should not have abandoned him.

James Cherry intermixes motion and dark-

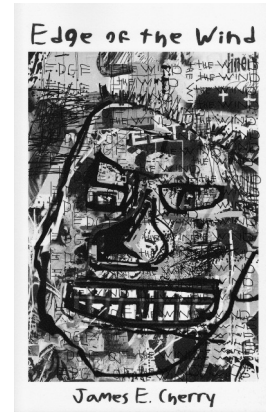
ness with beauty from the area flora and fauna: "Outside, three bluebirds lighted upon a tree and flew away. Their wings beat music upon the air, shadows across Alex's face." Then, in his typical abrasions into Alex's consciousness, Tobi interrupts, "You ever kill anything, van der Pool?" (pp. 7-8).

These juxtapositions of peace and danger propel the story along its path. Each use of this technique attaches a reader to Alex like an umbilical cord does a child to mother. Each time the sunshine and darkness intermix, we feel the collision at the end drawing nearer. We care like a parent waiting by the phone for a word from an endangered offspring.

Cherry places people of interest into our world. Alex's mother, like an increasing percentage of mothers, raised children alone. His sister's life and success derail from her concern and intertwined existence with her brother. The personal traits of Alex's step father shatter the stereotype of non-biological parents. He cares and knows how to show it for a family he did not originate but volunteers to serve and protect.

Alex encounters a poetry class full of students and Cherry takes side treks into their worlds on our day trip. The participants, willingly and unwillingly, share their backstories, and these tales combine with the world created in Alex's explosive mind and physical presence.

James Cherry shares a complex tale in a short space. The book's darkness includes sexy interludes. Alex met an earlier love interest at a delivery stop via his transportation job. "From the right side of the room, she moved towards



him and brought the whole world with her in slow motion. All Alex saw was long black hair, hazel eyes on a petite brown frame across his peripheral vision and the closer she got, the anticipation of her presence grew. Like when he was a kid at the county fair and he gasped when the rollercoaster fell from its peak” (p.133). These interludes display Cherry’s storytelling strength: a fluid visual beauty amidst the increasing tragedy of mental illness, something often seen in global and local headlines.

Each twist puts readers on the edges and even out of their seats, yet when the darkness looms too large, Cherry pulls them in again and again, like Mario Puzo’s Michael Corleone in *The Godfather* Trilogy. The author’s ability to mix light and dark, beauty and horror, tragedy and triumph, tastes like eating a sweet peppermint stick buried inside a sour dill pickle. Cherry drags us forward, slowing to examine Southern and Memphis culture. We visit actual sites, including the Half Shell on Poplar Avenue in East Memphis (where I proposed to my wife decades ago) and the Downtowner, a long-time eatery on Main Street near the Mississippi River.

At the Downtowner, Cherry routes a detour, sharing the Southern stereotypes on the intersection of race, class, and oppression of those of little note. Comments flow at the weekly breakfast of an archetypical Southern sheriff and several area good ole boys. Their stories fuel the pending wreck and crisis. The lawman, caught out of uniform in jeans and a red flannel shirt, shows his primary goal for the day when asked by his comrades if his choice of attire included work on an undercover case:

“Is this a murder case, Sheriff?”

“Dam betcha,” The expression on Sheriff Johnsey’s face began as a smile and ended as laughter that rose above all their heads. “And I’m the one doing the killing. I’m going to try and murder as many catfish as I can. Catfish, crappie, blue gills. Anything that’s moving is in trouble.” (p. 18)
Like all who encounter van der Pool, Sher-

iff Johnsey’s day deviates from his fishing plans to a complex crime scene, under the maniacal rule of Alex and Tobi. Through his madness, Alex shares dreams of poetry and a heard voice. Cherry toys with readers’ emotions and historical awareness using humor derived from an ignorance of diversity. Our conductor signals a slowing of the train by sharing the impact of the Harlem Renaissance on Alex with a joke about the sheriff’s lack of knowledge of Langston Hughes, the famous and deceased African American poet and writer, during a phone call:

She paused to catch her breath and was about to say that it was a remarkable poem when the phone rang from the floor between her knees. Megan looked at Alex. “It’s the Sheriff.”

“See what he wants.”

“He wants to know what you want.” She slid the phone across the floor to Alex.

“Alex? Sheriff Johnsey. This Langston fellow . . . he in on this thing with you?” (p. 82)

In Al Pacino movie speak, James Cherry takes readers hostage on a mission during a *Dog Day Afternoon* amidst a military siege, a family vigil, and media circuses increasingly performed across combative global rural, urban and suburban landscapes. Like the people in the novel—Alex’s mother, his protective older sister, his unfulfilled love interest, Sheriff Johnsey, the officials of the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, his literal captive audience in a sophomore English class at Stoval State Community College, and an entranced public—we wait and grieve the ending around the bend.

--Dwight Fryer



Sonia Sanchez’s Poetic Spirit through Haiku. Edited by John Zheng. (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017. Pp. xxv + 183, intro-

duction, general index, index of
Sonia Sanchez, about the contribu-
tors. \$95, hardcover)

Sonia Sanchez, a prominent voice in the Black Arts movement and a former professor at Temple University, is celebrated in this collection not only for her contributions to the form of Haiku, but also to the civil rights and feminist movements. Professor John Zheng (Mississippi Valley State University) has assembled a powerful and convincing store of essays which should cement Sanchez's place among contemporary American letters. While a book about haiku might seem a bit generic at first glance, it is the "poetic spirit" of Sanchez that renders the form new and pliable over decades of her devotion to the art.

Among the first aspects to consider is how Sanchez bends the form to her own artistic vision, often producing haiku that might confound the purist, but might also please the experimental impulses of any reader. In fact, the various scholars struggle to describe exactly what it is that Sanchez attempts. Meta Schettler suggests "haiku-like qualities" (p. 8), while Michio Arimitsu acknowledges that Sanchez's "rebellious, buoyant, and at times ferocious spirit has given birth to a haiku-inspired poetic form that she calls 'sonku' (Sonia + ku ['verse' in Japanese])" (p. 17).

Haiku was initially introduced to the black community during the Harlem Renaissance by Lewis G. Alexander, and was quickly appropriated by "quite a number of African American poets, including Langston Hughe" (p. vii). But it was Sanchez who, in avoiding the familiarity of the nature poem, gave the form a political and street context, and allowed it to flex and evolve beyond even the strict syllabic count. Much like Gerard Manley Hopkins revolutionized the sonnet, Sanchez altered the face of haiku.

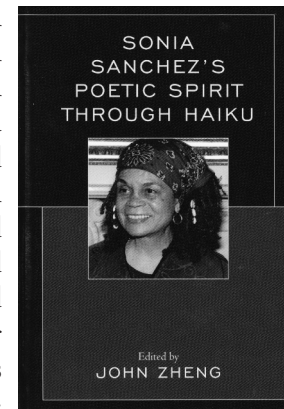
It was a form she discovered early and dramatically: "From the moment I found a flow-

ered book high up on a shelf at the 8th Street Book Shop in New York City, a book that announced Japanese haiku; from the moment I opened that book, and read the first haiku, I slid down onto the floor and cried and was changed" (p.18). Interestingly, she did not begin her career publishing haiku, but once she did, she discovered within its structure a concise and radical framework from which to contemplate the African American experience. Her tributes and references are wide-ranging and numerous: Toni Morrison, Emmitt Till, the MOVE bombing, Malcolm X, Odetta, etc. And her stark imagery can, at times, rival a painting by Francis Bacon:

they came eating their
own mouths orgiastic teeth
smiling crucifixions (p.8)

Sally Michael Hanna argues that Sanchez's most recent collection, *Morning Haiku* (2010), is "an attempt at racial representation leading to the reclamation of black/female history or 'herstory'" (p.71). Further on, she states that "In the hands of a poetic guru, haiku is re-created in newness that helps reconstruct a vision of African American consciousness that acknowledges blues and jazz as it celebrates the discipline of a tightly controlled stanzaic form" (p. 73). Perhaps another way to consider this is to suggest that Sanchez's immersion into Japanese forms is comparable to the New Formalists and their experiments with the classic Western forms. Even when she renders the form pliable, Sanchez's respect for and knowledge of haiku is palpable.

In his essay concerned with Sanchez's creative mind, John Zheng explores, among other things, the imagistic quality of Sanchez's poetry, which he traces to the influence of William



Carlos Williams. Certainly, there is a preciseness to her poetry that would align her with any number of the Imagists. And he discusses her fascinating creation of the aforementioned sonku, a form that evolves to fit the poem: “Sonku is a nonrestrictive syllabic pattern of 4-3-4-3 or 3-3-3-3 with variations of lines as short as four or as long as fifteen. It is Sanchez’s inventive play of the form showing her handle on her artistic mind” (p.114).

In the final analysis, this book serves a number of worthwhile purposes: to introduce Sanchez to a wider audience (although she has won some pretty big prizes, including an American Book Award), to widen the discussion regarding haiku and its possibilities, and to remind us of the importance and beauty of the Black Arts Movement. Sanchez’s body of poetry embraces much more than just haiku, but she has pioneered the form and brought it into the 21st Century.

--Marck L. Beggs



The Undiscovered Room. By Jo McDougall. (Portland, OR: Tavern Books, 2015. Pp. 68 + acknowledgments. \$17.00, paperback); *In the Homes of the Famous Dead.* By Jo McDougall. (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2015. Pp. 330, Index. \$24.95, paper)

The Arrogance of Dirt, a Review of Jo McDougall’s *The Undiscovered Room* and *In the Home of the Famous Dead*:

One commonality between poets who’ve studied at the University of Arkansas under Miller Williams is their minimalistic approach. In Jo McDougall’s newest collection, *The Undiscovered Room*, her poems bear this mark

in their stripped-down minimalism. McDougall grabs hold of the shaking hands of her subjects and asks them to dance. I mention McDougall’s connection to Williams because she dedicates the book to him, followed by an epigraph by e cummings that states, “love is more thicker than forget.” The awkwardness of the quote belies the awkwardness of grief and love, and it’s clear throughout the pages of the collection that grief and love both loom large. In “Talking with My Dead Daughter (2)” McDougall writes about trying to capture her memories of her daughter. She says,

I was the one Fate chose
to keep you alive, to make the air
remember.

Now and then—minutes, seconds go by—
I don’t think of you.

I’ve failed at grief. (p. 35)

These poems are her attempt to capture not just her daughter, but others she’s loved who’ve left and might be forgotten without McDougall’s pen.

The book, proper, begins with the poem, “A Way with Mules.” McDougall’s narrator states:

I don’t like writing about the dead,
conjuring them in language
that some of them
never would have used—
pushing them onstage,
saying, “Go. It doesn’t have to be the
truth.” (p. 15)

Yet what stands out most about McDougall is her clarity when describing sometimes chilling events. She cuts to the icy heart of truth with a wisdom that’s come from experience. Sylvia Plath once wrote that if she saw a dead baby in a jar she would stare and stare until she’d seen everything there was to see. McDougall has stared because she had no choice but to, and these poems are her dispatches. “In a Muddy Town” describes a classmate feeling hopeless in a small town. The girl was

skinny in a bad dress.
No one noticed

a dream or two lost.
 No one knew
 when she first came to understand,
 in those moored rooms
 surrounded by fields of vetch,
 that a page had turned,
 that her life had dimmed
 to the colors of snow
 or rabbits or celery. (p. 17)

It's absolutely heartbreaking because it's so common. McDougall never rises to heightened language or even approaches purple prose. "Poverty" prevents a strong portrait of rural, Southern life. "Every visit to that farm, / I smelled it," the poem begins, referring to the signs of poverty. The poem lists seemingly simple descriptions filtered through the lens of hindsight, such as "Rusty water in the well" rising to a description of McDougall's grandfather's funeral:

the too-small suit they buried him in,
 the Church of the Newborn, its one
 draft window.
 The young preacher late,
 borrowed from another county. (p. 18)

"Flat, Outside Memphis" describes a young man, stranded with his wife and four kids, as "It grows dark, / the headlights of passing cars / disinterested as bankers" (p. 36). There is so much packed into that image. The fear and uncertainty of the man and his family. The man's alienation from the strangers who pass. The use of "bankers" implies cultural baggage. This is a man who has seen families lose their farms, their homes, and a world that doesn't care about that loss and seemingly doesn't care about the concepts of home and family, of history. All of that is packed into the last three short lines of the poem. It is this mix of unblinking honesty with a lack of pretense that gives McDougall's poetry its power.

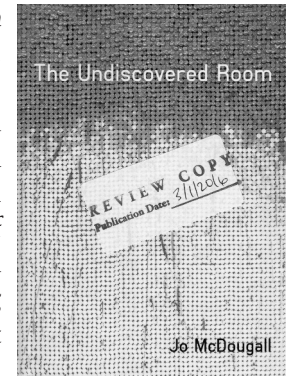
The Undiscovered Room is a great follow-up to McDougall's collected poems, *In the Home of the Famous Dead*, a hefty tome collecting two chapbooks and five full-length collections. The poems in McDougall's first

chapbook, *Women Who Marry Houses*, have almost surreal elements, such as "A woman half as tall as a thumbnail" (p. 3) and a poem in the voice of Alice B. Toklas which describes Toklas riding on the moon. But even in this first collection, McDougall's minimalist approach and deft handling of intensely emotional situations is apparent.

The title poem from the chapbook, "Women who Marry Houses," describes widowed or divorced women who live alone. "Women who marry houses / are fond of the dark / when the house cracks its knuckles" (p. 14), she explains. The implication is that they've found peace in solitude. McDougall's poems in these books are mostly short, mostly observations from her life or persona poems. McDougall inhabits the lives of mostly poor farmers, scraping together some semblance of life in the Arkansas Delta. "Farm Wife," from *Towns Facing Railroads*, describes a drought. The crops are dying and her car breaks down. "Her husband withers like the wheat. / He's been in town since yesterday, / drinking down the smell of dead cows" (p. 72).

The title poem for the collected works, "In the Home of the Famous Dead," describes a visit to a museum house. McDougall describes it as similar to visiting a hospital, "except that we don't have to talk to anyone / and the men if they wear hats keep them on" (p. 103). She goes on to discuss the illusion of authenticity, "We know this is not the house they knew, / not the way they knew it, anyway" (p. 103). It's a pale imitation, since the best furniture has been taken. McDougall seems to be drawing a correlation between memories and the past.

But I don't mean to give the impression that McDougall is humorless. In *From Darkening Porches*, her poem, "I Describe to My Fur-



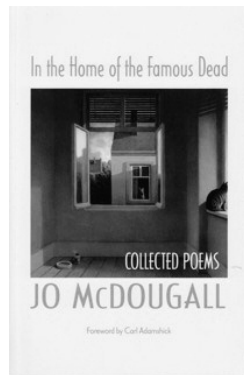
niture a House I May Buy,” begins:

My sofa wants it,
wants to dig into the carpet
its pig legs.
The dining room table can't wait to tap
its toenails into the vinyl.
Every night they set up a clamor.
Buy it! Buy it!

I remind them
they've been wrong before. (p. 162)

Dirt and *Satisfied with Havoc* are devastating collections that chronicle the deaths of McDougall's daughter and son. These are deeply personal poems, and yet McDougall manages to maintain her artistry and never devolves into sentimentality. Either collection on their own would be worth the cost of the collected works.

McDougall is one of our greatest poets. I think of her as the poet laureate of the Arkansas Delta, and though I do appreciate her subject matter, it's her wisdom and control on the page that show her profound talent. There's great sorrow in some of these poems but also—outshining that at every turn—great love and great joy.



--CL Bledsoe



The Bohemian South: Creating Countercultures from Poe to Punk.
Edited by Shawn Chandler Bingham and Lindsey A. Freeman.
(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017. Pp. xi +341, acknowledgments, afterword, contributors, index. \$29.95, paper)

Ever since H. L. Mencken slammed the US South in the 1917 essay, “The Sahara of the Bozart,” defenders of the region have been striking back. Few today would call the South “almost as sterile, artistically, intellectually, culturally, as the Sahara Desert” (p. 1). Equally few, I suspect, would call the region a bastion of bohemianism. If the eighteen contributors to the edited volume, *The Bohemian South: Creating Countercultures from Poe to Punk*, offer a corrective to the stereotype of the South as a wasteland for the creative, a seared zone of cultural conservatism, they also stop short of anointing it as the new Greenwich Village. Rather, this volume’s editors, Shawn Chandler Bingham and Lindsey A. Freeman, argue that the southern states can lay claim to particular individuals, foodways, films, literary and musical expressions, intentional communities, neighborhoods, and even whole cities that skew to the left, the countercultural, the creative, and the “weird” (p. 293).

Southern bohemianism can be found in the mindset and influence of such nineteenth-century figures as Edgar Allen Poe and Ada Clare, who were among its early exemplars in antebellum New York’s Greenwich Village. It peeked through the writings of James Agee and William Faulkner, and now bursts forth in the lines of such Global South poets as Brenda Marie Osbey, Yusef Komunyakaa, Derek Walcott, and Kwame Dawes, as in the food-saturated imagery of southern lesbian writers Dorothy Allison and Minnie Bruce Pratt. The famously bohemian strongholds of New Orleans, Austin, and Asheville now face competition as centers of countercultural creativity from places like Athens, Georgia, the Research Triangle of North Carolina, and parts of Memphis, where a “black bohemian scene” (p. 226) pulses with vitality. And these are not all.

What, then, constitutes bohemianism? The authors here offer appropriately latitudinous definitions. Bohemia seems often to involve the arts, food, and sexual experimentation. It has,

historically, drawn to it the “creative, quixotic, visionary and eclectic,” (p. 4) providing in return “spaces of acceptance and creativity . . . environments where artists and scholars could hatch ideas, learn from one another, and organize their activities,” (p.



11) “free from restrictive bourgeois politics, aesthetics, and economics” (p. 148). While “one of the most bohemian of impulses has always been to wander in search of diverse and unfamiliar people and places,” (p. 160) with most of those searches ending in urban environments, rural and small-town sites can take a turn toward the bohemian, too, if enough people congregate to form a “scene”—with scene defined here as “more than a few odd folks . . . a fusion of a physical place, a network of people, and self-consciously oppositional creative practice” (p. 181).

The generous definition of bohemia employed in this volume prompts some questions. Principally, and as the editors and several of the contributors themselves aptly ask, what precisely is the relationship between the bourgeois and the bohemian? Self-declared bohemians often cast themselves in opposition to the confines of bourgeois respectability, in employment, living arrangements, aesthetics, appearance, and more. Yet as these writers and many before them have pointed out, “dropping out” presupposes a certain level of privilege. Plush material, educational, and familial cushions pad the floors of bohemia, now as always; those who struggle for subsistence seldom have the full luxury of “lifestyle” experimentation.

Moreover, bohemia nudges up against the bourgeois every time a “scene” takes shape. Absent an endless free-flowing faucet of private or public funding, bohemian “creatives” need

“customers.” Several of the writers here distinguish between “hipsters” and true bohemians, claiming a deeper distinction than the generational or sartorial. Hipsters allegedly pose as creatives, when in fact they do nothing but rub shoulders with the artists, the thinkers, the authentic bohemians, purchasing their creations, attending their concerts, films, and poetry readings, and imitating their style. Contaminating the “authenticity” of bohemia, these poseurs turn creativity into consumerism, and opposition into watered-down appropriation. How many farm-to-table restaurants, yoga studios, and “local” art galleries does it take to turn a neighborhood into a “bohemian enclave”?

The Bohemian South does not claim to settle these longstanding, needling contradictions of countercultural life in the U.S. or beyond. Its *modus operandi*, rather, is that of “piling up” (p. 4) enough southern examples of this slippery, shape-shifting cultural phenomenon that some call bohemia to convince any Mencknite holdouts that the South has as much of the “weird” as any other place in the United States. You might have to look a little bit harder to find the southern pockets of bohemia, and you might not at first understand what you are seeing (I, for instance, had no idea that a subculture of train-hopping anarchist punks enamored of old time country music existed), but rest assured, it is there and it’s not square!

--Lauri Umansky



***Hillbilly Hellraisers: Federal Power and Populist Defiance in the Ozarks.* By J. Blake Perkins. (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2017. Pp. xi + 277, acknowledgments, notes, bibliography, index. \$24.95, paper)**

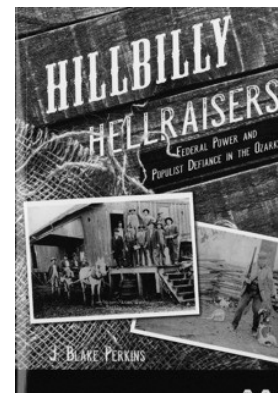
In the popular imagination, the Ozarks have been viewed as a remote, unruly place, with hardscrabble farmers toiling in the rocky soil, determined to carve out independence on their own terms. A strident antigovernment perspective runs through much the region's history, from the Populist rhetoric of the notorious "Wild Ass of Arkansas," former senator and governor, Jeff Davis, to the present-day Tea Party movement that emerged in the wake of the Great Recession. As scholars search for antecedents to Southern suspicions of federal power, the Ozarks, like Appalachia and other pockets of rural America, have been cited as deep-seated sources of reactionary sentiment dating back to the earliest days of the Republic. *J. Blake Perkins's Hillbilly Hellraisers: Federal Power and Populist Defiance in the Ozarks*, upends this notion, arguing that the Ozarks are rife with complex, nuanced attitudes toward federal authority and social programs. Instead of opposing any hint of federal encroachment, poor Ozark farmers often saw government as a useful bulwark against elites within their own communities.

Perkins offers a welcome corrective against histories of the Ozarks that view the region as a hotbed of inflexible antigovernment resistance. Instead, since the Populist era of the 1890s, Ozark federal defiance has been dynamic and fluid, situational and conditional. Ozark conflict with authority is also not closely linked to the grand American tradition of agrarian revolt dating back to the Early Republic. Rather, the region's distrust of federal power represents a unique, localized response to modernity, as farmers struggled to adapt to an ever-changing economic environment that underwent a transformation from a marketplace dominated by subsistence farming to one marked by agribusiness, retail, and tourism.

Few stereotypes of Ozark Hill Country are as pervasive as that of the moonshiner plying his trade in the face of federal authorities intent on tracking and destroying homemade stills. As

Perkins uncovers through an evocative micro-historical approach, moonshine "wars" that erupted in the 1890s (and occasionally during the Prohibition era of the 1930s) were not clashes between rough-hewn Arkansas outlaws and federal outsiders, but rather intra-regional disagreements between poor farmers and local elites. Desperate for income in a tough economic landscape, farmers resorted to whiskey production, often exporting to nearby Oklahoma Indian Territory. Meanwhile, wealthier businessmen effectively utilized federal authority to root out moonshiners as tax evaders. The temperance movement was embraced by the local business elite for a variety of reasons, but most significantly because alcohol consumption curbed the productivity of the mining, timber, and railroad camps that dotted the Ozark hillsides. Moonshiners stood in the way of progress, but as Perkins persuasively shows, struggling farmers who turned to whiskey production were not antigovernment, even as the law pursued them. In fact, they longed for more government oversight to protect their farms, and they despised how "the well-to-do seemed able to employ the power of the American state and, in their minds, use that power at the expense of hard-working common folks like themselves" (p. 37).

This is the central theme of the book, that Ozark farmers never inherently opposed the government, but often hoped for a stronger national footprint in the region to foster reforms that would protect them from predatory elites, who in turn proved far more capable of securing federal support for their aims. When the New Deal emerged in response to the Great Depression, Ozark farmers grew cynical of public works projects like the 1938 Flood Control Act that built hydroelectric dams along the White River.



While the short-term jobs that came with the project were undoubtedly appreciated, the New Deal, as Perkins sees it, consolidated the power of local elites, and hastened the emergence of agribusiness and new tourist locales. In the process, traditional Ozark farm family life declined despite the stated goals of the New Deal to protect such interests. Moving forward to the Great Society programs of the 1960s, poor Ozark residents once again found that efforts to assist them only contributed to further struggle and, ultimately, outmigration. Corporations proved far more skillful at securing grants and federal funding, and small farmers were forced to adapt, evolve, or leave altogether. Many converted to running factory farms, producing poultry, and as a result became “temporary caretakers of the company’s valuable property” (p. 169).

Hillbilly Hellraisers represents an important contribution to rural history and a valuable narrative of those who struggled to confront the changes that reshaped the region. Its strongest moments derive from the individual stories of those who sought to hold on to their farms and their traditional modes of living. The book also charts under-explored corners of Ozark life, such as an early chapter on the anti-World War One military conscription movement in Northwest Arkansas. Mid-twentieth-century segregationist Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus’s father, Sam, was a leading voice in this fight, viewing the conflict as a rich man’s war that unnecessarily imposed hardships on families who lost sons—and thus farmhands—to the draft. Perkins concludes by perceptively tackling the rise of the contemporary Tea Party movement in the Ozarks, finding that defiance against federal authority is still a local concern too. While Tea Party advocates decried the welfare state (often in racist-tinged rhetoric) they also rallied to resist rural post office closures. Here again, Ozark defiance was nuanced, and did not reject federal intrusion entirely, but sought to harness it for the betterment of those in need. As one Arkansas activist put it, “There are those who

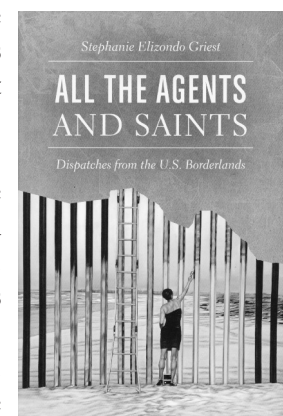
have been downtrodden so long they can’t get back up. [But] there are others who’ve been downtrodden so long they decide to fight back” (p. 221). With *Hillbilly Hellraisers*, Blake Perkins has produced an exceptional study of a misunderstood world.

--Brenton E. Riffel



All the Agents and Saints: Dispatches from the U.S. Borderlands.
 By Stephanie Elizondo Griest.
 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017. Pp. xv + 289, introduction, prologue, epilogue, acknowledgments, notes, about the author. \$30, hardcover)

Stephanie Elizondo Griest parlayed God-given talents and a strong work ethic into a distinguished career as a well-traveled foreign correspondent and award-winning author. Eschewing an old writer’s proverb that you can’t go home again, Elizondo Griest did just that in 2007—and was not at all pleased with what she found in her old haunts along the United States’ southern border. In researching *All the Agents and Saints*, she discovered that her childhood playground in south Texas and northern Mexico had become a place known for the kinds of people other communities don’t want: violent drug gangs; environmental racists; undocumented people crossing the border in search of a better life; and some of America’s unhealthiest people. As a finished product, her book became the



voice of the people who live this nightmare, and the author tells stories that expose a critical flaw in borderlands life: communities constructed along fault lines of race and class cannot stand forever without serious consequences. Her book is all about fostering in the reader a sense of empathy and understanding of the depth of the problems facing residents living in southern as well as northern borderlands. As a writer-activist, she wants to motivate citizens to act now to prevent the social quake that could permanently besmirch the reputation of her borderlands home.

Borders, the author tells us, are elite-driven. They are created by and for the rich to seal off an area for profit-seeking. The political rule of the new jurisdiction is easy when institutions are stacked with people who will kowtow without question to elite interests. While serving bourgeois interests, borders also inconveniently slice ancestral spaces into pieces, dividing families and cultures into parts which are only with difficulty fused back into a single identity. Elizondo Griest, for example, has Mexican family roots but grew up in Texas as a U.S. citizen—she's *Tejana*. *Tejanas/os* have a lingering sense of otherness, sometimes feeling not Mexican enough to please the Mexicans and not American enough to satisfy the Americans. This disconnect is not self-inflicted. Tejanos did not cross the border, the border crossed them. The Aztec word for such cultural malaise is *nepantla*, a recurring sense of in-betweenness.

Cultural borders within towns further isolated Tejanos. The sad tale of Corpus Christi environmental activist Suzie Canales is an example of how local political-economic power isolated African American and Tejano families and placed them in harm's way. Attending the funeral of her sister Diana who died of cancer at age forty-two, Suzie struggled with her grief but could not help but notice the stories of ill health from neighbors in her old Greenwood community in west Corpus. Two brothers in one family dead from cancer at a young age. A sister who died of cancer at thirty-two. Three

sisters who had hysterectomies. Later she learned of babies born with holes in their hearts. Little girls dying of leukemia. Digging deeper, Canales discovered that racist zoning ordinances in the 1940s placed African Americans as fence-line neighbors with petrochemical industries along Refinery Row, while Tejanos were invited to live on top of a former toxic waste dump. These ordinances kept both minorities and pollution away from the white people who built lavish homes on Ocean Drive in south Corpus Christi.

Places like Corpus Christi, built on the fault lines of race and class, cannot stand still. The social structure shifts underneath the surface as pressure builds for injustices to end. Much like the physical plates beneath the earth that shift periodically, sending Californians into waves of fear, cultural plates are subject to "snapping," sending a social quake which may reverberate all the way to New York-Washington media markets. When this happens, the event (regardless of underlying cause) takes on a name that will live in perpetuity for all the wrong reasons—Ferguson, Baltimore, Katrina, Love Canal, Three Mile Island, Deepwater Horizon, Picher, Libby, and more. *All the Agents and Saints* is about preempting such a catastrophe in the borderlands.

Minorities in Elizondo Griest's beloved *Corpitos* do what they can to cope with the environmental sludge pit they inhabit. Activists such as Suzie Canales fight to raise awareness but are no match for the deep pockets and political clout of the industries. Others pray incessantly for divine intervention to cure the sick. Meanwhile, Tejanos build strong interpersonal networks where they revel in warm association with friends, family, and neighbors, people they've known for decades. Even when industries decide to decommission and destroy toxic plants—offering buyouts to families that live nearby—some fence-line neighbors choose not to leave. The social bonds forged in the neighborhoods are so strong that staying put is a more attractive option than leaving for an apartment

on the south side.

Elizondo Griest's captivating, riveting book is a call to action for anyone that claims to really care about solving the complex social problems festering in the borderlands. The time for talk and political wrangling is over. Something must be done to solve these problems before a larger than life crisis erupts. With the government's response to border issues becoming more repressive, intensive grassroots activism may be the only way to avoid cataclysm. The people who live and work in the borderlands are the ones who will pay the greatest price if nothing is done.

--Stan Weeber

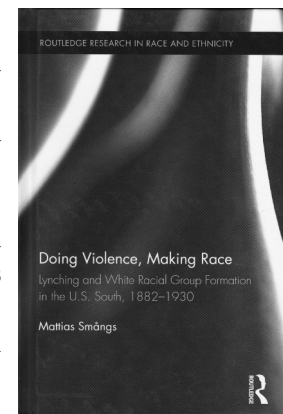


***Doing Violence, Making Race: Lynching and White Racial Group Formation in the U.S. South, 1882–1930.* By Mattias Smångs. (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017. Pp. viii–x + 169, list of figures, list of tables, acknowledgments, methodological appendix, index. \$116, hardcover)**

Sociologists have long been key figures in the study of lynching, from James Elbert Cutler, whose 1905 *Lynch-Law: An Investigation into the History of Lynching in the United States* constituted the first real study of the phenomenon, down to present-day scholars such as Stewart E. Tolnay, E. M. Beck, and Amy Kate Bailey, who have worked to connect the frequency of lynching to cotton prices, local politics, religion, and more. Though some historians lament that social science tools tend to produce pat, overarching explanations for human violence, often losing sight of local historical circumstance or even individual psy-

chology, the quest to see the forest—even when each individual tree has its own unique story—remains worthwhile, for only by tackling the big picture can we see lynching as a truly regional and national phenomenon in relation to other social, political, and cultural factors. Moreover, the sociological perspective can reveal certain fundamental mechanisms at work in the creation of collective violence, thereby highlighting continuity between lynching and other atrocities, at home and across the globe, centered upon racial or ethnic identity.

Thus is Mattias Smångs's *Doing Violence, Making Race* a compelling contribution to the literature on lynching in the United States. Unlike other scholars who unquestioningly lump together the actions of quiet, small mobs and the mass spectacle atrocities that attracted thousands under the rubric of “lynching,” with little explanation as to what unites the two phenomena, Smångs diligently seeks to advance a conception of lynching that accounts for its diversity, one founded upon robust theoretical, conceptual, and methodological foundations. His thesis, in short, is that lynching, like the formal Jim Crow system, constituted a means of generating white racial identity across class boundaries after a Reconstruction period that “destroyed the institutionalized antebellum system of symbolic and social race boundaries, categories, and identities” (p. 9). Opening with his theoretical conceptual framework, Smångs outlines how collective intergroup violence dramatizes group narratives and “can thus be seen as a performative ritual in a dual sense,” serving to communicate “a particular message to a particular audience” while also acting as “a constructive group-formative practice bringing forth that which it represents” (p.



25). The author then elaborates upon the historical context of lynching, tracing the Southern regime of race relations from the time of slavery to the early twentieth century. After the Reconstruction years, in which citizenship was de-coupled from its exclusive connection to whiteness, there emerged a radical white supremacist view that, in contrast to antebellum perspectives, invested all whites with the “respectability” of their race, regardless of class circumstances, while attributing inherent racial deficiencies to all African Americans.

Employing comparative data from Georgia and Louisiana, Smångs reveals public lynchings (of the sort Amy Louise Wood chronicled in her 2011 book, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890–1940*) to be “an important form of collective mobilization available to southern whites to join forces against blacks in what they perceived as defense of their communities,” especially regarding such crimes as rape (p. 61). These were met with mass approval and were attended by various strata of white society. By contrast, the private mobs of a handful of vigilantes who murdered in inconspicuous spots would “typically be constituted by whites who felt that they, or their family or friends, had somehow been personally faulted or offended by African Americans in ways warranting violent reprisals,” and while such lynchings were often met with indifference, they occasionally incurred “heavy public disapproval and sanctions” (p. 64). Smångs devotes a chapter examining the Democratic Party’s role in the emergence of the “Solid White South,” especially its strategic association of racial and political identity as a means of staving off challenges from Republicans and Populists willing to cross racial boundaries for votes, but his data illustrates that lynching constituted much more than competitive electoral politics, for the success of disfranchisement campaigns, and the removal of African Americans from the public sphere, did not reduce the frequency of public lynchings; in fact, these practices “comple-

mented each other in promoting and enacting white group unity and power” (p. 103). Meanwhile, there also is a direct correlation between farm size and private lynching, suggesting that such violence often served as a means of disciplining a black labor force.

While many scholars have taken the black-white binary as a natural and historical division, and therefore treated violence as arising from that boundary, Smångs, instead, illustrates how violence served to create the boundary. His study, therefore, aligns more with treatments of identity-based conflict outside the United States, such as T. K. Wilson’s 2010 monograph *Frontiers of Violence: Conflict and Identity in Ulster and Upper Silesia, 1918–1922*, which partly examines how violence was used to reify communal identities in a region spanning the German and Polish borders, a region where such identities were not immediately apparent. *Doing Violence, Doing Race*, therefore, will prove valuable not only as a scholarly examination of Southern lynching, revealing how such violence relates to other developments with the South, but also as an important contribution to the study of collective violence in general, even outside the immediate American context of this book.

--Guy Lancaster

