

Reviews

***Cinderblock Houses: Short Stories.* By Krista Creel. (New York: Adelaide Books, 2018. Pp. 131. \$19.20, paper)**

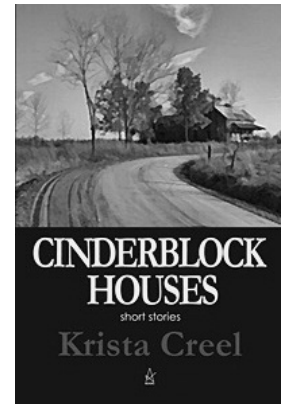
After spending time with Krista Creel's collection, I am urged to think about the function of short stories and what roles we ask them to play for the writer and the reader. Not that these are new questions. Mastering the short story trains one to write more accomplished short stories, which Krista Creel already does. However, many say that for the writer, short stories are also good training for the novel. That movement is not always a successful one, but some writers, and Creel is one, demonstrate hints of that ability. The second question—what does a short story do for the reader—depends upon the writer. If, as Robert Frost has said, “every poem is a momentary stay against the confusion of the world,” Creel's short stories are an invitation to the confusion, a brief spin around the block in an open car, which leaves one a bit breathless. Through Creel's adept handling, we are invited to the confusion with the guarantee that even if “tomorrow is nothing yet,” there will be one if we can imagine it (p. 98).

A good storyteller doesn't shout, and Krista Creel is a good storyteller. Her quiet voice is assured yet yearning, her eye keen yet unselfconscious. While the pantheon of Southern women writers—O'Connor, Welty, McCullers, Lee Smith, Jayne Ann Phillips, and Mary Hood—is at Creel's emotional fingertips, and I'd wager in her bones, these stories are her own. Creel's fictive worlds are peopled by characters without much but a good dog and hope coiled at their feet, and who lean on what truths they know, despite some awareness that the more they know the less they are able to be-

lieve. And since Creel is equally at home in third person and first person narration, she creates a unified collection through voice and tone, in addition to setting.

The book's structure is of interest, as the first three stories are told in the first person—followed by two stories in third—ending with three in first. When I read the collection in its entirety, the effect was one of a breathing lens—pulling in, releasing, and pulling in again. I was drawn by this nuanced undulation and attracted to most of the characters. The narrator in the first story “Bent Broke” is one I would like to invite to dinner just to hear her thoughts about the world. She says, “I try to accomplish something productive every day, no matter if it is just getting out of the driveway or shaking a moth loose” (p. 11). Later, when pondering her Mennonite neighbors and the fact that the girls wear dresses, “even on four-wheelers,” she claims, “I had a dress once, but I outgrew it” (p. 12). It is obvious that the narrator's metaphor is intended. Her savviness is apparent through her scrutiny, hence ownership, of the mundane, and nothing escapes her. She describes the sound of an old tractor starting: “It kicked on like some tired, hot bull” (p. 10). When her gaze fixes on snakes, she is just as astute: “I think people make too big a stink about snakes. . . . I've never had a snake run after me” (p. 15). Common sense, perhaps, but not a common voice.

Other characters are equally compelling. Take Milli, for instance, from the story “Night Blooming Cereus,” which is set in the small town of Newt, Mississippi, where what is for-



eign occupies the same space as the familiar, and the protagonist, Milli, does not quite fit into the puzzle of her life. With Polish ancestry and Yankee parents who came from New York, Milli is a self-identified outcast by virtue of background even if she has grown up in Newt. This tension—the insider who is also the outsider—is at the center of the story. Milli’s realizations come through the small, often metaphoric, moments of her life, and in this regard many instances in Creel’s story remind me of the end of Virginia Woolf’s *Jacob’s Room* in which Jacob’s death is finalized by his old, empty pair of shoes. Like Woolf, much of Creel’s work is invested in the interior of her characters, but an interior still connected to the physical world. Milli is a thorough thinker, weighing her options carefully, but she is also game, albeit practical, in her spontaneity. In one scene, “she was tempted into the line of the prayer drive-thru at Christ Community Church. She figured if she could get some quick Jesus like she could get her fast food, then she could save herself the trouble of faith and works” (p. 66).

Understandably, Milli is more comfortable with strangers, as she says, “there are no expectations of how the other is supposed to be. . . . But strangers were hard to come by in Newt” (p. 68). Even her job at the only Mediterranean restaurant in town does not supply her with enough exterior strangeness, as she is matter-of-fact about the people who own the restaurant and the patrons. However, when she hits an owl with her car and tries to save it, Milli imagines herself “where she could do anything like swim the breaststroke through the treetops or fling her hair over a balcony or pick up small owls or talk to sheep . . .” (p. 74). The stunned owl recovers and becomes a wild thing in her backseat, neither appreciative nor in need of rescue (only to die days later in the same spot on the roadside after Milli releases it), but she learns something about herself through the encounter—that knowledge is not necessarily an obstacle and imagination is a form of belief.

Milli learns what fiction teaches us: it is ultimately our imaginations that will save us, and we can go anywhere or be anything if we can imagine it.

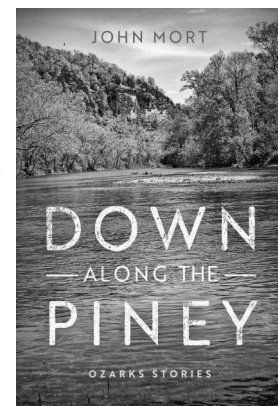
There is much more to appreciate in *Cinderblock Houses*, and as far as collections of short stories go, this one is a winner. I would like to see Creel continue with the form, but she is a writer whom I predict could move into longer work. Her literary skills—her cinematic pacing and intricate characterization, along with a deep sense of place that reminds me of director John Sayles—indicate she has the potential to make a fine novelist, as well. I’d like to see that happen because I’d like to spend more time with her words. But before she writes her novel, can we please have another collection of stories?

--Lynn DiPier



***Down Along the Piney: Ozarks Stories.* By John Mort. (South Bend: U of Notre Dame P, 2018. Pp. 186. \$20.00, paper)**

John Mort’s excellent new book, *Down Along the Piney*, is his fourth story collection and winner of the Richard Sullivan Prize in Short Fiction. The thirteen stories collected here take the Ozarks as their geographical center, though the settings occasionally range far beyond the rivers and forests of Missouri and Arkansas. These are more than just regional tales of flyover country, but deeply imaginative and often surprising accounts of the vast inte-



rior life of all sorts of folks who rarely appear in contemporary fiction. John Mort sidesteps the absurd clichés that sometimes characterize stories of the Ozarks, and finds his way instead into deep mysteries of the human heart: love and loss, faith and, often, violence. These are dark stories, but not without humor and sudden, even surprising joy.

Many of the early stories in *Down Along the Piney* find John Mort working in a mode best described as richly detailed realism. The material is traditional at its core, but fully realized and deeply affecting. In “Pitchblende,” a teenager welters under the tedium of high school as the specter of Vietnam looms in the far-off distance. The unnamed narrator tells us five of his friends will be dead by the war’s end. “We were the names you see on those brass plaques at the courthouse,” he tells us (p. 3). A familiar plot set-up, except for his father obsessively mining the hills of his Missouri farm for the uranium he believes will make him rich. Dreamers—some harmless, some not—make up a central character type found in many of the stories. “The Hog Whisperer” follows Carrie Kreidler, a talented agricultural engineer who may or may not be autistic. She grinds away at her career, finding safer, cleaner ways to dispose of waste from industrial hog farms. Deep emotional connections elude her throughout the story, until she falls for one of her Mexican coworkers, Raul. Love strikes her with terrifying suddenness, a bolt of blinding light from out of nowhere, and the reader is left wondering if she’ll ever recover.

The later stories in *Down Along the Piney* move from realism to a deep, almost dreamlike surrealism. The back half of the collection is also where some of the more dangerous inhabitants of the Ozarks seem to congregate: the alcoholics, meth addicts, gun nuts and zealots. John Mort excels in depicting the darker facets of rural life; he never allows the reader to dismiss these elements out of hand. In “Behind Enemy Lines,” a Vietnam veteran lives off the grid, scavenging for a living with his dog, Wolf.

Far from the violent romance of the Rambo films, the protagonist drifts in an alcoholic haze from past to present, and lucks his way into 100% disability through the VA hospital—health and dental care, or as his companion puts it, “good as it gets” (p. 84). A significant portion of the collection’s second half is taken up by a novella titled “Take the Man Out and Shoot Him.” The piece follows a Christian community isolated in the hills of Arkansas, as it grows from one man’s vision into a sprawling Christian theme park. One of the inhabitants of the park takes it into his head that a Missouri politician is the Antichrist, and winds up killing a police officer as he makes his way north. Even here, John Mort doesn’t allow readers to rest easily in preconceived notions of good and evil. The shifting point of view of the novella allows readers to see the deeply American strangeness of the characters’ motivations.

The best stories in the collection combine traditional realism with more adventuresome formal elements. The most affecting story in *Down Along the Piney* is “Mariposa,” a story about fourteen-year-old Portia, a girl of Mexican descent who is born and raised in rural Arkansas. When politics and economics force her family to relocate to their ancestral home in Angangueo, Mexico, her world is completely uprooted. She never learned Spanish, but Portia tries her best to adjust to life in this deeply alien landscape, to shift her horizon of expectations to a future without college. She falls into drugs and alcohol, and drinks too much of the *pulque* her father keeps in the fridge. Her father takes her one morning to see the monarch butterflies which have migrated down from “el Norte.” Covered in butterflies and sunlight, Portia’s heart thrills when she learns he is bringing her home again—to the deep woods of Arkansas. These are powerful, moving and often unexpected stories. *Down Along the Piney* is a story collection worth the attention of any reader interested in fiction about the Ozarks, or looking for excellent fiction in general.

--Mark D. Baumgartner



Pretend I am Someone You Like.
By Shome Dasgupta. (Livingston:
The University of West Alabama's
Livingston Press, 2018. Pp. 1-154.
\$14.95, paper)

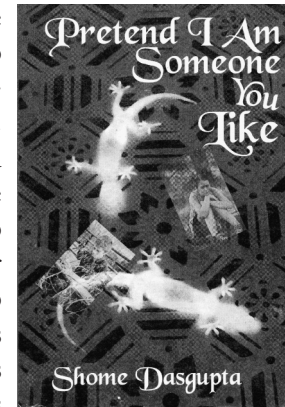
When authors write about poverty and the Deep South, they usually do so from an outsider's view, often by repeatedly turning characters into political foils in their schema or by understanding poverty from the condescension of privilege. In *Pretend I am Someone You Like*, though, Shome Dasgupta creates the heart-breaking, violent, beautiful world of a pieced-together family in rural Louisiana from within, without condescension, through experimental narrative techniques to show how loyalty is the strongest survival mechanism that binds human beings.

The narrator of *Pretend I am Someone You Like*, Mutty, is a 22-year-old man who doesn't seem to have a job, steals relish packets from the bowling alley when he's hungry, and doesn't have any plans because there doesn't seem to be a reason to make any. His father long ago left to womanize and commit crime, so Mutty lives with his "Ma"—a caring, strong, beer-drinking, single woman on a small, unproductive farm—and his seven-year-old cousin Barn, who stopped speaking when his father, referred to as "Uncle Gerald," was arrested for any manner of his criminal offenses. Barn functions as a metaphor and mystic throughout the novel. He is silent and all knowing. He is unable to speak but able to act. He is convinced he can fly if the right moment arrives, and Mutty both protects Barn's conviction in the magical while protecting him from its dangers. The trajectory of the novel revolves around Mutty's relationship with Pepper, a young woman with a rough family

past, with whom he has a lot of sex, and to whom he quickly becomes fiercely loyal. Pepper is hunted by a character called The Dirty Man, who bought her from her father and is ready to sell her for sex. Mutty's role, along with Ma, is to protect Pepper as they are all three beaten and tortured for protecting each other and for existing.

Dasgupta intersperses a highly unique narrative technique throughout the novel that reads almost like the *Dick and Jane* beginning-level reading series: "See Barn digging up the garden lifting his hands to the sky, running in circles and diving into the dirt. See Barn say nothing. Say something Barn. See Barn take off his shirt and try to fly. See Barn see the bird. See Barn see his own memories" (p. 18). As the novel progresses, these *Dick and Jane* moments are used to express visual flashes and the intensity of emotions, from adult themes to the childlike: "Whip, whip, whip went the lash. Face, face, face went the mask. Leather, leather, leather went the thong" (p. 78). While at first the reader might worry this narrative technique will be a twee device, they become intrinsic to the world of novel, and a means of expressing the visual within the emotional in a deeply guttural way, as if mimicking the way a film can use repeated shots to slow down time to intensify effect.

Though the title is a direct quotation of something Mutty says to Pepper—"Pretend I am someone you like"—the title can also be a metaphor for how the dominant culture views those in poverty (p. 4). In this view, the title is a request for understanding and empathy (an ultimate purpose of reading literary fiction), to ask the reader to "pretend to like" people and places often denigrated in mainstream culture and politics. After Mutty says his title line, Pep-



per asks him “Why are you here[?]” to which he replies, “To make you feel good,” which also should lead us to ask, as readers, why we too are there, and what we are hoping to gain by reading about others (p. 4). It is tempting to dismiss Dasgupta’s portrayal of a woman who is characterized by her sexuality as simplistic and disappointing, but his female characters are strong, complex, and independent. The novel’s world is a microcosm of poverty that functions under the tensions of morals and loyalty, rather than those of gender and class. Referring to The Dirty Man and his ilk, Mutty says, “There were bad things. Bad people. They knew no other way. They grew up to be bad. . . . If they saw good, would they be bad or good? Bad made them feel good. Good made them feel scared” (p. 121). By framing the dynamics this way, Dasgupta asks the reader to hold off the typical questions asked by mainstream culture of those in poverty—why don’t they leave that town? why don’t they make a better life for themselves?—and shows the reader why those questions are ridiculous to begin with by immersing us in the things that hold the rural poor together: loyalty to those you promised to care for. The characters’ choices and planning are by necessity moment-to-moment, not long term, so outside judgments of them from a place of privilege feel as they probably should: cruel and fruitless.

Pretend I am Someone You Like is a groundbreaking, distressing, brilliant novel. It is not an easy read, but well worth the work all the way to the end to understand why Dasgupta would describe such a world in such a way.

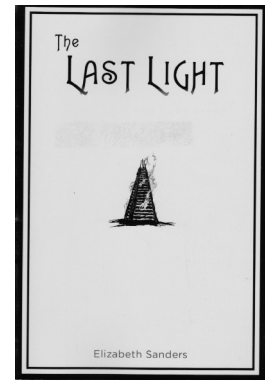
--Erin C. Clair



***The Last Light.* By Elizabeth Sanders. (Seattle: Broken Levee Books, an imprint of Chin Music Press, 2015. Pp. 133, acknowledg-**

ments. \$12.50, paper)

At first glance, Elizabeth Sanders’s debut novel, *The Last Light*, seems to be a slim book about a slight subject, but a deeper acquaintance reveals the appeal of its “slow burn”—an increasingly engrossing narrative that draws the reader in, holds her fast, and lingers in her mind days after putting the book down. The main character, Walter Doucet, is a nephrologist in New Orleans whose personal life—while seemingly placid on the surface—is roiling with alienation and mourning. He grieves for his recently deceased father, even as he struggles to connect with his older brother, Collins, a successful oilman and their father’s favorite son. His wife, Phoebe, has her own struggles,



an empty nest recently vacated by two daughters and a mother with advanced Alzheimer’s. Their marriage coasts along, not unhappy but not happy, and their intermittent attempts to rekindle a more fulfilling intimacy fail more often than not. The novel spans the month of December, dramatizing the build-up to the Louisiana ritual, “Feux de Joie,” a Christmas Eve tradition that finds families from New Orleans to Baton Rouge building bonfires all along the Mississippi River to “light the way for Papa Noel and his gators in this swampy pit of Earth” (p. 5). There are strict rules to this tradition, and in particular, the span of time and methods by which one can gather wood. It’s only allowed from Thanksgiving until Christmas Eve, and it must be “found” wood—nothing cut down or stolen.

Over the years, this tradition has morphed into a competition for the Doucet men, with Collins and his father on one team, and Walter and his father’s brother, Uncle Wilvin, on the other. The novel, told from Walter’s point of

view, follows his quest to locate just the right amount and type of wood to build a pyre that will finally burn longer, brighter, and higher than Collins's, and which, Walter insists, will be his last. The urgency of this brief, month-long search is juxtaposed with frequent flashbacks that account for Walter's current pain and ambition. He's never been able to please his father; when Walter announced his intention to attend medical school, all his father said was, "Why the hell would you want to be a piss doctor?" (p. 10). This slight presages what may be the core tragedy of the novel: Walter's utter helplessness while his father lies dying from an inexplicable illness in the hospital where Walter works. Walter is so haunted by the doctors' inability to save him that he keeps his father's medical file in his desk, returning it to it over and over again, trying to find the answer that eluded him when it might have done some good. Walter's sense of failure and regret is heightened when he learns that his father has left Collins the family home in Vacherie, Louisiana, a dilapidated shack that is, nevertheless, both men's childhood home, as well as the site of the "bonfire battleground" (p. 20).

It becomes clear that Walter is ill-equipped to deal with the regret and sense of inadequacy that permeates his life and which led to the alienation from his brother and wife. Time after time, Collins tries to breach the distance between them, but his efforts are awkward and indirect; he fishes for his brother's attention but Walter never takes the bait. Phoebe's own grief and pain creates a wall that is seemingly impenetrable, and Walter watches helplessly from outside. Unable to recoup the intimacy he so clearly craves, Walter fixates on the two things on which he is an expert: kidneys and burning wood. His ruminations on both swing widely from scientific detachment to metaphysical meditations. Take for example, this diagnosis: "Oak is a hardwood. . . . Its heating value increases the longer it's been seasoned. It's easy to split, few sparks, slight fragrance, moderately easy to start . . ." (p. 42). Later, as he and a

friend strategize about their pyre-building plans, Walter thinks of the original "Bonfire of the Vanities": "During the Mardi Gras Festival of 1497, in an effort to purge their souls, the people of Florence, Italy, collected things such as books, art, mirrors, cosmetics, . . . and fancy clothes, and publicly burned them. Fire was their mediator for redemption. It was their agent of purity, incapable of polluting itself" (p. 77). As these insights and memories accumulate, the reader becomes aware of the centrality of the Feux de Joie for the Doucet men; Walter has learned about oak's properties because he has burned it every Christmas Eve for 57 years, alongside his father, brother and uncle who have passed on this knowledge and mentored him in the art of building something just to watch it burn.

The stakes heighten as Christmas Eve nears and the fissures widen between Walter and those closest to him, even as his confidence grows that he will finally build the better bonfire. The reader finds herself rooting for Walter to make everything right and to emerge victorious, but alas, the ending is ambiguous and ambivalent. Is Walter saved or lost? Can you rebuild something after you have burned it down?

--Leslie Petty

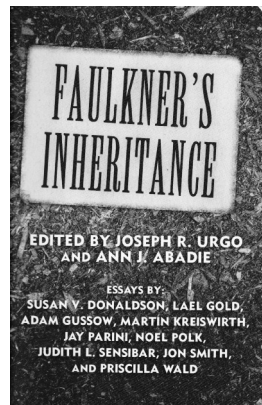
***Faulkner's Inheritance.* Edited by Joseph R. Urgo and Ann J. Abadie. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007. Reprint, 2017. Pp. xviii + 178, introduction, a note on the conference, contributors, index. \$30.00, paper)**

Faulkner's Inheritance is a collection that offers many opportunities to advance scholarship on Faulkner. Some of these geneses have been fulfilled, such as the contributions from Judith L. Sensibar and Jon Smith, which have

subsequently been reprinted in their works *Faulkner and Love: The Women Who Shaped his Art*, *A Bibliography* and *Finding Purple America: The South and the Future of American Cultural Studies*, respectively. However, this 2007 collection still has much to offer to current and future scholarship, particularly because of its focus on feeling and environmental affect. The chapters are particularly useful for scholars looking for attention to affect and update psychoanalytic readings on race and anxiety.

Indeed, Joseph R. Urgo's "Introduction" meditates on the notion of inheritance in a style that resonates with current discussions of affect and subjectivity. He begins the collection by focusing on Faulkner's story "Was" to claim that Faulkner illuminates how "inheritance entangles with free will and chance" (p. ix). His close readings show that inheritances from the past are both stable and unstable; they can neither be eradicated nor secured. Urgo explains, "inheritance is no passive act of receivership, but an active challenge by forces outside our influence to command the future"; therefore, inheritance is "central to a Faulknerian conception of the complex interplay between received conditions and the human capacity to act, to redress the past, to affect the present, and in one's turn, to bequeath to the future the products of one's own effort" (pp. xi-xii). Urgo's claims anticipate our current turn in literary studies by calling for precise attention to affecting forces and characters' struggles with such forces.

The late Noel Polk's contribution advances Urgo's introduction by putting forward a comparative reading of Willa Cather's *My Ántonia* and Faulkner novels in order to comment on Cather's new, Midwestern frontier, and



Faulkner's seemingly overdetermined South. While Cather presents her characters with "a land completely free of a history," he claims, Faulkner's writing shows the impossibility of a completely blank slate (p. 5). Yet, Polk argues, Faulkner uses aesthetic and narrative choices to elude the South's overdetermination; Faulkner wants readers to be suspicious of the false simplicity of history. By focusing on a variety of characters' interactions with and challenges to history—Joe Christmas, Thomas Sutpen, Temple Drake, and others—Polk claims Faulkner "constantly attacks the cohesion that chronology and genealogy supply by showing us . . . how fragile they are, how susceptible to manipulation and misinterpretation, and so how tenuously they supply us with historical certainty" (p. 10). Polk argues that Faulkner gave himself the present moment; not a blank page like Cather's, but "a page teeming with possibility . . . perpetually in motion, never fixed and stable" (pp. 16-17). This orientation to the presentness of Faulkner's writing calls for attention to the fluidity of affect rather than the pre-determination of one specific effect of one specific past.

Both Priscilla Wald's "Atomic Faulkner" and Martin Kreiswirth's "The Uncanny Inheritance of Race" provide excellent commentaries on race and social structure. Ward's chapter on Faulkner's interest in and writings about fear and race comment candidly on the cultural implications of emotions. She examines the way Faulkner thought about white fear of displacement and dispossession in his essays and fiction. She argues that Sutpen completely understands the fabricated mechanisms of racism, but that his fear erases any considerations of humanity in others: "everyone is instrumental to him" (p. 48). Ultimately, Ward's analysis of the racialized politics of fear in *Absalom, Absalom!* shows how identity politics and social structures have a direct relationship to how we narrate the past. Kreiswirth reads the uncanny familiarity of Charles Bon and Joe Christmas to the text's white characters. Building on philosophers such

as Sigmund Freud, Friedrich Schelling, and Julia Kristeva, Kreiswirth analyzes the gap between *heimlich* and *unheimlich*. He argues that Faulkner uses Bon's and Christmas's characters to create "an elaborate discursive machinery designed to generate epistemic gaps, and gaps within gaps, that put representative undecidability on exhibit" (p. 128). According to Kreiswirth, Bon is uncanny because of his intimacy and knowability: Rosa feels as if she knows so much about him without having ever seen him. However, this intimacy is broken when his ancestry is uncovered: "things change drastically when the repressed heredity link has come home—has become *heimisch*" (p. 131).

Adam Gussow's "Plaintive Reiterations and Meaningless Strains: Faulkner's Blues Understandings" is valuable because of his measured approach to literary criticism. Gussow deconstructs fanciful imaginations of the blues' influence on Faulkner by explaining proximity fallacies and asking, "What *did* Faulkner actually know about the blues, and when did he know it?" (p. 58). He tediously works through documentable connections Faulkner had to the blues and shows how his representation of the blues is often in a marginal, particular register of white response in a dialectical racial dialogue. Gussow's chapter is refreshing and should be used in graduate seminars as a model for good scholarship. He takes a pairing academia might call "sexy" (the blues and literature) and makes it unsexy, which is exactly what current scholarship needs.

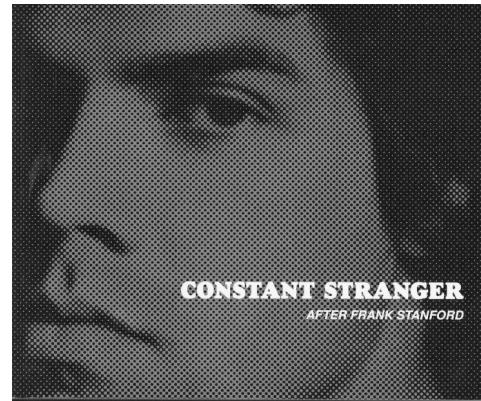
While *Faulkner's Inheritance* was published in 2007, it is still timely. The book's continued relevance is a testament to the how vital questions of inheritance are to Faulkner's works, and how those questions anticipate those of affect and queer theory today. Indeed, this collection challenges even the idea that there is a past and present for Faulknerian scholarship, but rather something uncannily in-between.

-Jill Fennell



***Constant Stranger: After Frank Stanford.* Edited by Max Crinnin and Aidan Ryan. (Buffalo, New York: Foundlings Press, 2019. Pp. 285, acknowledgments, contributors. \$22.00, paper)**

Readers interested in a cultural, biographical, and aesthetic appraisal of poet Frank Stanford's meteoric career—one that ended abruptly when he went into the back bedroom of a small



white clapboard house in Fayetteville, Arkansas, about 7:00 in the evening of June 3, 1978 and banged off three rounds from a .22 caliber pistol into his own heart—need look no further than this splendid gathering of elegies, interviews, remembrances, and life studies edited by Max Crinnin and Aidan Ryan. During his brief span (twenty-nine years) spent mostly in the tri-state region—Tennessee, Arkansas, and Mississippi—that forms the heart of the Delta, Stanford amassed an astonishing corpus that includes everything from the lyric brilliance of his first published collection *The Singing Knives* (1971) to the astounding *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You* (1977), a stream-of-consciousness epic of 15,283 lines purportedly begun when the poet was still in his teens.

Crinnin and Aidan provide several biographical and critical sketches of the poet, and A. P. Walton's essay "Lives and Works: From Myth to Mythology," adapted from his 2015 master's thesis at Lund University entitled "Toward Innumerable Futures: Frank Stanford & Origins," is undoubtedly the most thorough. An indefatigable researcher, Walton's footnotes contain such minutiae as the "imitation pearl grips" of the revolver that the poet used to end his own life and the fact that the divorce petition of his widow, Ginny Crouch Stanford, was received and filed on June 1, 1978, just 48 hours before the prolific author's apparent suicide (p. 121). Walton also relates that Stanford's wife and his partner in Lost Roads Publishers, fellow poet C. D. Wright, confronted him with his infidelities shortly before his death, but cites a police report stating conclusively that his fatal wounds were self-inflicted (p. 122). Yet Walton doesn't let the lurid details of Stanford's star-crossed relationships interfere with a perspicacious assessment of the poet's prodigious gifts. Moreover, he offers an abridged compendium of characters appearing throughout Stanford's oeuvre that includes Abednego the Gypsy, Mama Julinda, Charlie B. Lemon, Ray Baby, and Jimbo Reynolds, an old shoeshiner in the University of Arkansas student union who remained close friends with Stanford until the poet's death (pp. 124-140). Crinnin and Ryan include other excellent essays in a similar vein, such as Leo Dunsker's "'The Great Poem of Death in These States': The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You and Its Canons" (pp. 166-173).

Foremost of the remembrances about Stanford is Steve Stern's "Frank Stanford (1948-1978): An Appreciation." A graduate of the University of Arkansas MFA program in Creative Writing, Stern is an award-winning author of short story collections that include *Isaac and the Undertaker's Daughter* (1983) and *The Book of Mischief* (2015). He recalls that "Frank Stanford, the poet, is the only man of whom I can say I saw the movie and read the book before I met him" (p. 66). Of course, Stern alludes

to Stanford's avant garde film profile, *It Wasn't A Dream, It Was A Flood* (1974), and the book was *The Singing Knives*, a volume that he describes as "one of the most savagely beautiful books I know" (p. 66). Stern remembers the poet as a genuine charismatic with his conclave of devoted followers: "Late of an evening I've heard Frank, grown restless, say to a room full of friends 'Let's put on a pot of coffee and write all night'" (p. 70). He notes that the strange and estranging phenomenon of death held an irresistible allure for Stanford: "It is the same audacious impulse that incites a boy to prowl about a derelict mansion or steal upon a girlfriend's clothesline" (p. 70), and proceeds to quote these lines by the poet: "When no one is looking / We touch the thin underthings / Of death to our lips." No less compelling is Ginny Crouch Stanford's "Requiem: A Fragment," laid out in the poet's highly associative, somnambulist mode: "Frank's poems were quiet as a needle gliding through silk; they made the bride's trousseau and her burial gown" (p. 78). Here her evocation of Eros and Thanatos replicates beautifully her late husband's manner, but she refuses to romanticize his last moments: "I remember the strange staccato rhythm of three shots mixed with his voice, that deadly duet; Pop Oh! Pop Oh! Pop Oh!" (p. 75). Such a grim threnody stops short of lament for a peace-parted soul. A sublimely gifted painter, Ginny Stanford's portrait of Hillary Clinton now hangs in the National Portrait Gallery in the Washington, DC.

Crinnin and Ryan bring together a series of other tributes, such as Ata Moharrieri's absorbing conversation with 89-year-old Benedictine monk Leenus Orth, who taught English to Stanford at Subiaco Academy in the Ouachita Mountains in Arkansas. Moharrieri's skill as an interviewer is impressive; he knows which questions will lead the aged preceptor to call up the poet's years as a student and his growing passion for Chaucer, Shakespeare, Donne, Keats, and Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood* (1952). Moharrieri introduces asides—"A few bubbles gur-

gled to the pond's surface"—that intimate the poet's imagination was in a state of perpetual ferment (p. 59). The editors also offer a spate of elegies for Stanford that include Aidan Ryan's own engaging entry: "when he died every woman / He had loved lined up to toss delicate palmfuls / Of dirt on his box" (p. 36). Best of these is probably Leon Stokesbury's "A Few Words for Frank Stanford: 1948-1978," which evokes so memorably the night of Stanford's death: "It fell to us to clean the sick mess up,— / so we drove over, and slid up into his yard / and parked the car. The honeysuckle stank" (p. 28). But Stokesbury's mourning is ultimately what scholar Jahan Ramanzani would term compensatory: "When he sat down at a desk / the juice crackled and came" (p. 30). R. S. Gwynn and Forrest Gander contribute affecting verse testimonials as well. One could not hope for a better introduction to poet's turbulent life and legacy than *Constant Stanger: After Frank Stanford*.

--Floyd Collins

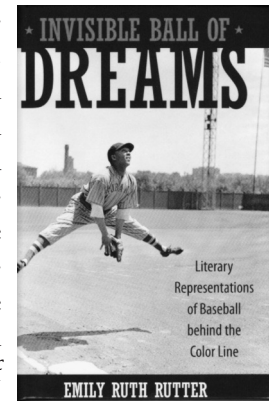


***Invisible Ball of Dreams: Literary Representations of Baseball behind the Color Line.* By Emily Ruth Rutter. (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2018. Pp. ix + 190, acknowledgments, index. \$70.00, hardcover)**

Baseball meticulously curates its past. Historians, both amateur and professional, work to uncover the most obscure minutiae relating to the national pastime. Broadcasts are peppered with archaic references to statistics long forgotten. The length of past games, the umpires, and attendance are all recorded for future reference. However, even with this predilection to procure and preserve facts about the game's history,

baseball is guilty of ignoring a large portion of its past. Its references, statistics, and representations are, for the most part, exclusively white.

Until Jackie Robinson broke Major League Baseball's color barrier, the Negro Leagues were the primary outlet for black players to showcase their talents. Teams barnstormed across the nation and thrilled crowds with their flair and high caliber of play. Sadly, the exploits of African-American players were haphazardly recorded and the informality of Negro League operations means preserved scorebooks and statistics are largely incomplete and disproportionately underrepresented in the baseball archives. Thus, the true prowess of greats like Satchel Paige and Josh Gibson, and their experiences while playing, may never be known.



Emily Ruth Rutter attempts to uncover some of this incomplete past in, *Invisible Ball of Dreams: Literary Representations of Baseball behind the Color Line*. Rutter seeks to mine what she calls the "shadow archive," to unmask the largely ignored lived experience of black players during baseball's Jim Crow era (p. 7). Rutter's approach is unique. She examines the literary representation of the black baseball experience in order to develop a better understanding of players' lives. Rutter contends, "imaginative literature plays a crucial archival role, both revivifying baseball behind the color line and raising epistemological questions about its past," while filling in the gaps left in this "shadow archive" neglected by baseball historians (p. 5).

One of Rutter's stronger arguments is that portrayals of the African-American experience within baseball are largely presented from a white perspective with black players often employed as stock characters working only to ad-

vance a narrative (p. 41). These characters, whom Rutter refers to as “magical negroes,” often only serve to highlight the misgivings of white protagonists and develop little over the course of the work, while whites possess redemptive qualities and often act as “saviors” for players of color (p. 42). This is a common theme; however, it is too simple a solution to what was a complex reality, robbing black characters of agency while failing to provide a true representation of their lives.

Rutter’s goal of finding the solution to this underrepresentation of the black experience is important. Literary portrayals of Negro League players can fill in some gaps, but relying on them too much in correcting the historical record is a flawed approach. The majority of Rutter’s argument relies heavily on extrapolation. Her solution to employ imaginative literature and film to describe or record the exploits of black players is problematic. Literary representations carry with them the burden of fantasy. The historical “truth” of a subject is not as significant a factor as the advancement of the plot. While history has its heroes and villains, their personal exploits reveal them as such through the documents we can muster, whereas literary characters are employed to achieve a certain purpose. A creative license may fill in certain gaps, but to uncover the true plight of black players during this period, one must provide substantial primary source evidence which historians can examine to verify the validity of such claims. Otherwise, the work will simply be fiction masquerading as fact.

For literary purposes, Rutter’s work is a call to employ social realism in describing the history of the Negro Leagues. There are enough oral histories about black players and the vivacity of their play to create stirring tales of courage and accomplishment while highlighting the pain and prejudice players must have felt. Literary representations can adequately describe such circumstances, but fail in their factuality. For historical records, like the statistics so cherished by baseball historians and aficionados,

anything imaginative is inadequate. To fill the “shadow archive” with the conjecture and fiction of social realism dilutes the need for the empirical evidence Rutter seeks.

In order to delineate the full experience of African-American players, one must rely on historicity. One must be careful to not overlay modern ideas onto the experiences of the past. While social realism produces gripping literature, to suggest it can lend credence to historical analyses is folly. While *The Grapes of Wrath* and *The Jungle* accurately portray historical events and the lives of those who experienced them, their usefulness as historical artifacts is limited. They are important works for understanding their respective historical periods, but one must concede they are works of fiction created by an author to serve a certain purpose.

Serious baseball scholars must continue to explore the available resources in search of evidence to construct historical studies that add to the already rich history of the game. If in doing so, there is discovered to be a dearth of information, then we must accept that due to segregation and prejudice, some information may, unfortunately, be lost forever. Some things in baseball remain shrouded in mystery. Did Babe Ruth call his shot in 1932? Was Shoeless Joe Jackson complicit in throwing the 1919 World Series? Was Josh Gibson the game’s greatest home run hitter? Those who witnessed these events hold conflicting views. The mystique of the game intrigues us as much as its verifiable history. Just because we lack the resources to fully document something does not mean we should represent it in a way that may not be truly accurate. The experience of African-American athletes during a time of such cruel injustice deserves much more.

--Danny Aaron Russell



Remembering Ella: A 1912 Murder and Mystery in the Arkansas

Ozarks. By Nita Gould. (Little Rock, Arkansas: Butler Center Books, 2018. Pp. 9-451, acknowledgments, preface, epilogue, appendix A, appendix B, appendix C, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95, paper)

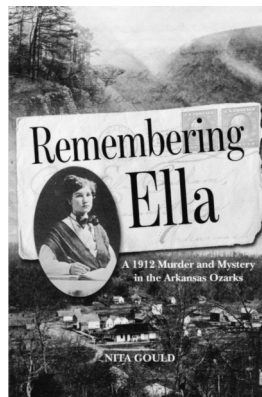
Nita Gould's work *Remembering Ella: A 1912 Murder and Mystery in the Arkansas Ozarks* offers the reader a thorough description of the events leading up to a truly grisly crime followed by its investigative, trial, appeal, and punishment phases. While delving into all the known facts and attempting to analyze the reasons for various lapses, both investigative and legal, the author maintains a focused study of the events. For the most part, the book is a compelling read as the reader revisits a rural world, its traditions, and intimate personal interactions as well as the effects of this culture on the crime and the crime's effect on the culture.

The work attempts to tell the story of the 1912 murder of Ella Barham near Zinc, Arkansas, in Boone County and the subsequent arrest, trial, and hanging of Ella's rejected suitor, Odus Davidson. The depiction of Ella is well-rounded and offers the reader an insight into the young women's life, personality, and demeanor. Less well-developed is the treatment the work accords Odus Davidson. His depiction offers a vague, less well-defined view, which limits the reader's understanding of the reclusive Odus Davidson. One reason for this may be the lack of definitive sources.

The author faced the problem that many local histories have: the availability of rich re-

search source material. Generally, the author did an admirable job in finding and using sources. Numerous newspapers accounts coupled with some interviews and secondary sources provided the foundation for the research. Court records, census reports, and land records were also consulted. Newspaper accounts from the early 1900s are usually prone to emphasize the dramatic nature of events and thus they may not always offer the most objective and complete factual narrative. The author appears to have done a good job of dealing with the inherent source limitation of the events, although, as noted above, the accused and later convicted individual, Odus Davidson, remains impersonal to the reader as source materials described him simply as a quiet, unemotional, and reclusive figure. While attempting a detailed study into a more than one-hundred-year old event, the author used primary sources and attempted to reconcile differences discovered in the research. This work rests on an admirable research effort.

The first two chapters in which the reader is introduced to the victim and the facts surrounding her murder and its immediate investigation are extremely well-presented and compel the reader to continue with the work. Chapter Three, which informs the reader about the trial, is somewhat tedious as the author attempts to discuss every major aspect of the trial. Chapter Five, some seventy pages long, is a labored review of the legal appeals in the case. Chapter Six is a well written study of the punishment phase as is Chapter Seven, which offers a follow-up study of the lives of all the participants involved. There are several sections of the book which appear unnecessary and detract from the work, including Chapter Four, which offer letters written to the victim's mother and the three appendices. The book would be stronger if much this appended information was included in other chapters of the book. The appendices, as they currently are presented, seem somewhat disjointed and detract from the power of the narrative. The two maps, one of



the crime scene area and one of the crime scene area's relationship to the larger geographic setting of northwest Arkansas, are particularly useful. The photographs, which are scattered throughout the work, are also helpful and interesting for the reader.

The author should be praised for attempting to present a definitive study of an event some one-hundred-plus-years-old that has been long the focus of local folklore and conjecture. Given her exhaustive study of newspaper accounts, legal documents, and the small number of available interviews, she presents a thorough account of the crime and the events surrounding it, the trial, legal appeals, and ultimate punishment rendered. Given the lack of conclusive evidence, she was, however, unable to offer the reader a definitive answer to the perennial question: did the accused commit the murder? Of course, this lack of a conclusive answer to Odus Davidson's guilt is the precise reason this crime has remained of interest for more than one hundred years. Nonetheless, even without ascertaining a conclusive appraisal of the accused's guilt, this book is worth the read as it adds a more objective review of the life and death of Ella Barham while it transports the reader into the well-established yet frontier-like culture of the Ozarks as it existed in the early 1900s.

--Mildred Diane Gleason



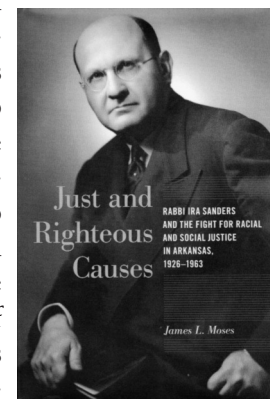
Just and Righteous Causes: Rabbi Ira Sanders and the Fight for Racial and Social Justice in Arkansas, 1926-1963. By James L. Moses. (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 2018. Pp. ix-xi+219, acknowledgments, abbreviations, introduction, appendices, notes, bibliography, index,

\$34.95, hardcover)

From 1926 until his retirement in 1963, Rabbi Ira E. Sanders, a socially and racially conscious reformer, led Little Rock's Reform Congregation B'Nai Israel (CBI). Based upon Sanders's papers, interviews with his daughter Flora Louise Sanders and CBI members and other key sources, *Just and Righteous Causes* is James L. Moses's much-needed biography of Sanders. Moses, who is a professor of history at Arkansas Tech University, argues that his contributions on behalf of social and racial progress qualify him as "one of the most significant figures among [twentieth-century] southern rabbis" (p. 6).

Moses devotes the first chapter to describing Sanders's childhood, education, and earlier career in Allentown, Pennsylvania and New York City. Born in Rich Hill, Missouri, on May 6, 1894, he aspired to enter the rabbinate from boyhood, receiving encouragement from his mother. His mentor was Rabbi Harry Mayer of Kansas City, Missouri, who had previously served CBI from 1897 to 1899. CBI learned of Sanders through Mayer. While studying for the rabbinate at Cincinnati's Hebrew Union College, he solidified his commitment to serving God and his fellow man. Ordained a rabbi in 1919, he later earned a master's degree in sociology at Columbia University.

Shortly following his assumption of CBI's pulpit in 1926, Sanders encountered the racially-segregated city streetcars and witnessed the lynching of John Carter. His early exposure to Little Rock's brutal racial status quo strengthened his resolve to oppose racial injustice. Sanders strove to uphold that resolve. In 1927, he established the Little Rock School of Social Work, which was affiliated with the Uni-



versity of Arkansas. Despite the initial objections of a few white students to the presence of the school's two African American female students, one of whom was Sadye Thompson, Sanders held firm and the women remained. Although the university administrators eventually forced him to dismiss Thompson (the other black student had already left), that was not the end of their relationship.

Moses's discussion of Sanders's involvement with the Arkansas birth control movement breaks little new ground. Lesser known to some may be his role as the founder and first president of the Arkansas Human Betterment League (AHBL). Established in 1951 and funded by Procter and Gamble heir and eugenicist Dr. Clarence J. Gamble, the AHBL promoted non-racially-targeted, voluntary surgical sterilization for low-income Arkansans and, more problematically, for people with mental disabilities. In actual practice, the AHBL, before it closed in 1958, only disseminated information and had no involvement in any sterilization procedures.

During the 1930s, while Sanders assisted some European Jews who sought asylum in the United States, he regretted not being able to help more. Following World War II and the Holocaust, he supported the newly-created state of Israel. In 1941, while serving with the Urban League of Greater Little Rock (an organization he co-founded in 1937), he worked to help black Arkansans secure equal employment opportunities at the Jacksonville Ordnance Plant. Moses offers us a glimpse of the human impact of Sanders's service. Encouraged by Sanders, Sadye Thompson secured employment on the production line at the Jacksonville plant. Thompson later attended Philander Smith College and cited Sanders as her inspiration for choosing a career in social work.

Remaining true to his longtime convictions, Sanders defended the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision before the state legislature and supported the desegregation of Central High School. Unlike some of his con-

temporary southern rabbis, he benefitted from his status as an established community leader and an urban racial climate that had become more moderate—a major exception was the 1957 Central High School desegregation crisis. In 1957, arguing against four proposed segregationist laws (the measures passed anyway) before the Arkansas General Assembly, he defended the authority of the Supreme Court and the importance of “liberty and justice for all” (p. 170). He responded to the Central High Crisis by joining other religious leaders in the Ministry of Reconciliation, which sought to draw the community together. In 1978, Sanders admired Little Rock's greater modernity and diversity that was, as Moses has clearly shown, “in many ways the culmination of the fruits of his own labors” (p. 161). Historians of Arkansas, civil rights and American Judaism will find *Just and Righteous Causes* an indispensable addition to the literature.

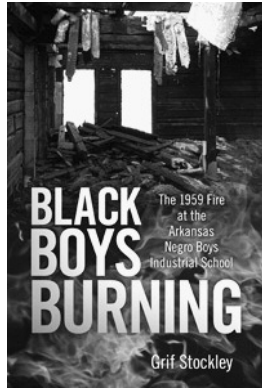
--Melanie K. Welch



***Black Boys Burning: 1959 Fire at the Arkansas Negro Boys Industrial School.* By Grif Stockley. (Jackson, University of Mississippi Press, 2017. Pp. 194, acknowledgments, introduction, notes, bibliography, index. \$35.00, hardcover)**

In United States history there are people who die trapped behind locked doors and then there are people who do the locking. When historians examine both sides of the doors, they find power relationships that structured the past. In 1911 it was 146 workers, primarily young Italian and Jewish immigrant women, who died at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory in New York City. On March 5, 1959 it was twenty-one African-American boys who burnt

to death at the Arkansas Negro Boys Industrial School (NBIS) in Wrightsville just outside of Little Rock. While one person may have keyed the lock that fateful night, Griff Stockley argues that the blood was on many hands, for the fire was ultimately caused by Jim Crow-style structural racism. Whereas the Triangle fire catalyzed reform and became a durable symbol of the depredations of sweatshop labor in history textbooks, the fire at the NBIS had few repercussions on white power in the state and, Stockley contends, has been overshadowed in Arkansas history by the Central High crisis.



Stockley begins the book with details of the 1959 fire and its aftermath before retreating in time to explore aspects of the political and social history of the NBIS. He investigates the superintendents who managed the day-to-day operations and pieces together evidence about conditions there from the 1930s to the 1950s. Stockley finds that the NBIS was closer to a prison farm than a school. During the day the boys saw more cotton fields than classrooms. At night they occupied a building that concerned visitors. Even though the boys' farm labor generated considerable revenue, there never seemed to be money to implement a vocational training program or improve the living quarters. Stockley suggests these structural inequities created the combustible material that only needed a spark for tragedy to ensue.

After investigating the history of the NBIS, Stockley turns to documenting the aftermath of the fire in chapters that read as part history and part legal drama. By the end of 1961 a political and judicial process guided by white supremacy chose winners and losers based on skin color. Stockley shows that almost all of the losers were African Americans: the twenty-one boys who

died; the surviving boys who continued to be worked and whipped at the NBIS; superintendent Lester Gaines, his wife, and two other NBIS employees who lost their jobs as a result of the fire; and the families of the dead. On the other side of the ledger stood those who faced no repercussions or who clearly benefited. Stockley closely scrutinizes Orville Faubus's response to the fire and finds the governor beyond reproach. White Arkansans must have, too. Faubus won election after election until he retired from office in 1967. However, white landowners who benefited from prison labor before the fire, such as Faubus's friend T. J. Raney, continued to do so afterwards. White lawyers, who represented the families at the Arkansas Claims Commission, collected fees representing as much as fifty percent of the monetary compensation awarded. This was justice Jim-Crow style.

Stockley's skill as a researcher is a key strength of the book. He supplemented an array of newspaper and archival sources by interviewing survivors of the fire, relatives of the deceased, and others with memories of the NBIS. Although the interviews rarely yielded credible evidence to answer questions animating the book, they served other purposes admirably. Interviews with African Americans provided some balance to a source base otherwise dominated by whites, and they offered valuable testimony to the deep wounds left by white supremacy.

Black Boys Burning complements Stockley's previously published books on race relations in Arkansas and is useful to any reader interested in the Negro Boys Industrial School, in general, and the fire, in particular. However, some aspects of this history could have been better developed to support Stockley's assertion that the NBIS fire provides a model case study to examine structural racism. He successfully shows a pattern of neglect at the NBIS but offers little about when and why the segregated facility was founded, how its operation compared with the white juvenile detention center

in Pine Bluff, or the NBIS's relationship to the broader history of convict labor in the Jim Crow South. Nor do readers learn much about the boys sentenced to the NBIS, the types of crimes they committed, or the length of their tenure as compared to white counterparts. Ultimately, *Black Boys Burning* gives attention to a significant event in Arkansas history and offers insight into the way racism determined who held the keys to the locks.

--Michael K. Rosenow

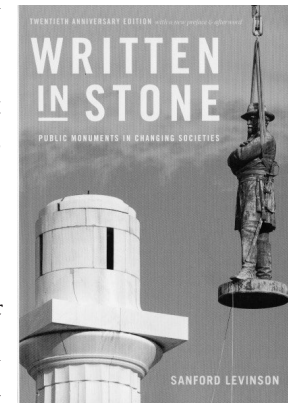


***Written in Stone: Public Monuments in Changing Societies.* By Sanford Levinson. (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2018. Pp. Xi-xv +206, preface to the 2018 edition, afterword, introduction, notes, afterword, notes, acknowledgments. \$22.95, paper)**

In 1998, Duke University Press published Sanford Levinson's *Written in Stone*, which was originally meant for inclusion in a larger work on diversity before the fast ballooning chapter on the controversy concerning the memorialization of the past in public places warranted its excision from the original treatise and publication under a separate cover. Twenty years after its initial printing, the book's largely theoretical discussion of the contested meaning of historical markers is more topical than ever as monuments, especially those related to the Confederacy, are being removed from major cities such as New Orleans and college campuses such as the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Capitalizing on the newfound relevance of Levinson's work, Duke University Press released a 2018 anniversary edition of

Written in Stone featuring a new preface and afterword by the author.

A lot has changed in the twenty years separating the publications of *Written in Stone*. The dispassionate discourse that Levinson hoped, from his vantage point in the late twentieth century, would lead to peaceful dialogue and amicable solutions regarding the placement of Confederate monuments has given way to bitter acrimony and an absence of meaningful debate in the twenty-first century. It is rare indeed to find a civil exchange on the issue in the present. Reflecting the current climate, Levinson's new edition adopts a pessimistic tone from the start. Where once the author hoped for the creation of a "grand theory of monumentalization" (p. 173), he now concedes that no such prospect is likely or even possible. Instead, he sees continued discord on the subject as the inevitable byproduct of multiculturalism and identity politics. With



so many diverse perspectives now present at the table, the prospect of alienating one group or another, according to Levinson, is almost inevitable when new public displays are planned or old ones revisited.

Although short on explanations for the cultural changes that have made a common historical narrative nearly impossible to forge, Levinson, in the updated edition, points to the 2015 massacre of African American congregants by avowed white supremacist Dylann Roof and the 2017 imbroglio in Charlottesville, Virginia, surrounding the "Unite the Right" rally following a decision to remove a statue honoring Confederate General Robert E. Lee as critical events that polarized opinion regarding displays featuring the Confederate flag and prominent public placement of markers and monuments related to the American Civil War.

The shocking violence surrounding these events, according to Levinson, has heightened awareness of other unsavory markers, monuments, and symbols that adorn public places, especially those connected either directly or indirectly to the nation's slaveholding past. Despite focusing his attention on the contested meaning of Civil War markers, Levinson's work has broad applicability to all public commemorations and civic displays. In short, this is not a book simply about how the Civil War is commemorated; it is an analysis of the struggle faced by diverse and free populations regarding how best to memorialize the past in their public spaces.

The twenty-year anniversary edition is not without issue. Some readers might argue that stakeholders in the production of this book were more concerned with capitalizing on the topical nature of the commentary found in the 1998 version than they were in producing something relevant to facilitate contemporary discussion. The additional material does not flow well and does little to advance the narrative of the original. The trenchant analysis which typified the 1998 edition is simply not present in the anniversary edition. Levinson's additions merely chronicle what has transpired since 1998 rather than provide a new theoretical framework that might focus public debate in a more meaningful direction. To be sure, detailing the evolution of the controversy since 1998 is important. At the time of the first printing, the big issue was removal of Confederate battle flags. Markers and monuments were only a peripheral part of the discussion. Today, both Confederate flags and monuments are coming down. A more nuanced assessment of what this all means from a legal and cultural perspective would have greatly enhanced the work. Scholars should also note that Levinson is a constitutional lawyer not a historian. Historical inaccuracies are evident in the text, such as reference to Louisiana Governor William Pitt Kellogg as "William Penn Kellogg" (p. 39). These shortfalls, however, do not detract from the im-

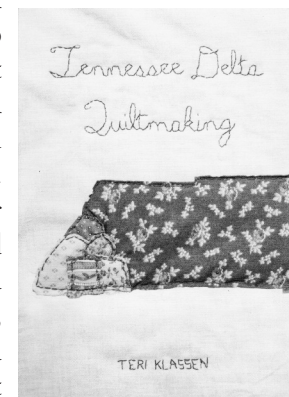
portant information found in *Written in Stone* regarding state and federal use of public places to celebrate past achievements. The question of who should control these spaces and whose narrative should be privileged in them is as pertinent today as it was in the last century. Although the new material found in the 2018 edition has its limitations, the content that comprises the original version is certainly worth revisiting for the perspective it might provide in these troubled times.

--Keith M. Finley



***Tennessee Delta Quiltmaking.* By Teri Klassen. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2017. Pp. 155, black and white photographs, color plates, maps, appendices, index).**

Teri Klassen became interested in quilt-making in southwestern Tennessee after she viewed an exhibit of quilts from Gee's Bend that was curated in 2006 at the Indianapolis Museum of Art. She followed up on contacts that she made from touring the exhibit to discover a vibrant quilting community in Haywood County and its surrounding region. In researching her book, she completed extensive work with a range of organizations, including Indiana University's Project on African Expressive Traditions and the Mathers Museum of World Cultures, the American Quilt Study Group, and Memphis Brooks Museum of Art. Klassen



had previously worked as a journalist, and she used her reporting skills, along with the best practices of quilt documentarians, to create an extensive study gleaned from fieldwork with thirty-eight consultants in the Tennessee Delta. Derived from her doctoral research in folklore, *Tennessee Delta Quiltmaking* establishes Klassen as a major contributor to quilt scholarship. As both a regional ethnographic study and a social history, her book offers excellent insights into both the cultural history of quiltmaking as well as its place within an active community of quilters.

Her research is meticulous and engaging. The first chapters provide a treatment of quilts within the region's history. Klassen provides clear discussions of settlement in the Delta, agriculture, trade, and transportation; she then looks at the plantation economy's shift from slavery to tenant farming and sharecropping to provide a context for understanding this art. These early sections help readers understand the region's current demographics and economic base. The historical background allows her to place quiltmaking within its historic and geographic contexts, and she offers readers a thorough discussion of quilts' diffusion into the region. The approach shows the continued value of the historic-geographic method of studying material culture, especially within regional studies that are grounded in ethnographic inquiry. Klassen uses a variety of sources for understanding quiltmaking by examining the presence of major patterns of history and culture within the art. Specific areas of inquiry include the interrelationships between black and white communities, the vitality of social gatherings that featured quilting, and the influence of migration into the region on arts such as quiltmaking. Her history demonstrates how quiltmaking has been an integral aspect of both black and white lives and she provides insightful analysis into reasons why the folk art is emblematic of local history. Her approach, here, is truly integrative.

Klassen uses a wide range of sources to in-

terpret the social history of quiltmaking within the Tennessee Delta. There are ample historical photographs and references to a wide range of printed materials throughout the first section of the book. The overall theme that emerges is that quiltmaking was originally seen as a utilitarian craft, and even a salvage art, that helped residents make do within challenging circumstances. Even though relatively affluent women made quilts in the nineteenth century, the majority of quilters that she documented in the region were women and men of modest means. Nevertheless, Klassen demonstrates that quilting was not necessarily learned solely as a traditional craft. The folk art is grounded in traditional cultural processes, but many of the nineteenth-century patterns are also rooted in printed publications. Nineteenth-century magazines, newspapers, and books had a strong influence on quilt making. This early history is important for understanding the contemporary art, and Klassen explores how the legacy of the nineteenth century continues to influence twenty-first-century quiltmaking.

Klassen devotes a large part of her analysis to a major shift in the art that occurred over a half-century ago. Through extensive interviews with active quiltmakers, Klassen discovered that quilting had gone into a period of decline by the late 1950s. She elucidates numerous reasons for the drop of interest in the art, and much of the waning interest resulted from factors such as shifts in population, out-migration, and the ascendancy of post-World War II consumer culture. She turns up familiar ground, here, as she looks at the art in terms of other major shifts that have led to the decline of other homemade arts and crafts. What Klassen explores especially well, however, is the roots of the 1970s revival of quilting in this region. Klassen explores how the resurgence of quiltmaking is linked to deliberate and self-conscious initiatives to reconnect with the past. In the process, the commonly accepted appraisal of quilting shifted. No longer was it primarily regarded as a domestic and utilitarian craft.

Rather, the reappraisal of quilting began to transform it into what we now see as a heritage art. In this new valuation, the everyday artistry of the domestic sphere is considered in a new light. The family quilts may achieve heirloom status and they become both security blankets for storing memories but also colorful and intricately patterned works of creative expression. Throughout her analysis, Klassen skillfully blends her own treatment of the quiltmakers' artistry with the perspectives and insights of the quilters and consultants whom she interviewed. The result is a widely ranged interpretation of the meanings that can be read from these textiles. Her documentation and her conclusions provide interesting ways to understand relations between art and community life in the Delta as well as in wider regions across the United States.

Klassen's *Tennessee Delta Quiltmaking* is the result of over a decade of research. The research adds to our understanding of the specific art of quiltmaking as well as offering more generalized contributions to scholarship on folk art, craft, and broader patterns that emerge in material culture. Her writing provides accessible models for learning how to read the texts that constitute material culture. In this respect, Klassen affirms how the study of history and culture is enriched by research techniques that provide broader ways of conceptualizing historical texts. Her research demonstrates the need to look beyond what expressed through the written or spoken word so that we are reading everyday objects and extraordinary textiles as historical texts. Klassen creates these research texts from a wide array of quilts. Her careful research shows ways to read historical photographs, and her own vivid photographs augment her analysis and contribute to the historical record. *Tennessee Delta Quiltmaking* is a model study that incorporates research methodologies that are invaluable for researchers interested in studying other aspects of material culture within other regions.

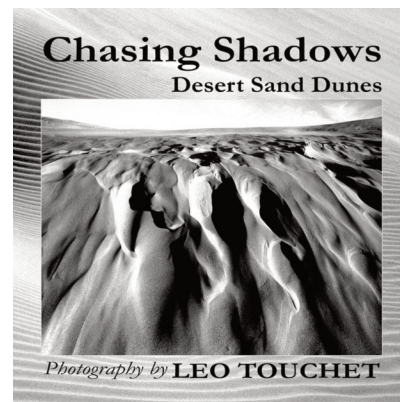
-- Gregory Hansen



***Chasing Shadows: Desert Sand Dunes.* By Leo Touchet (Breaux Bridge, Louisiana: Photo Circle Press, 2018. Pp. 36. \$20.00. Paperback)**

Chasing Shadows: Desert Sand Dunes is a collection of black and white photographs taken by Leo Touchet in seven sand dunes: The Dunes of Coro in Venezuela's Médanos de Coro National Park, Mesquite Flat Dunes, Eureka Valley Sand Dunes, and Ibex Sand Dunes in Death Valley National Park in California, Tularosa Gypsum Dunes in White Sands National Monument in New Mexico, Monahans Sand Hills in Texas, and Big Dune in Nevada.

An American photojournalist from Louisiana who has traveled to over fifty countries to photograph for numerous publications



and corporations, Touchet has published books of photography including *Rejoice When You Die: The New Orleans Jazz Funerals*, *Duet: Poet & Photographer*, *At the Races* and *People Among Us*. His photographs have been held in permanent collections by the Bibliotheque National (France), New Orleans Museum of Art, Houston Museum of Fine Arts, Everson Mu-

seum of Art, New York Schomburg Center, United States National Park Service, Chase Manhattan Collection, and Sir Elton John Photography Collection; published in numerous publications including *Boston Globe*, *Der Stern* (Germany), *Fortune*, *Life*, *National Geographic*, *Newsweek*, *Panorama* (Italy), *Popular Photography*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *Time*; and exhibited in many metropolitan museums and university galleries.

The photographs in *Chasing Shadows* present facets of the beauty of dunes that are hard to resist when a keen-eyed photographer comes upon them. Touchet reminisces in the introduction, "I came upon the dunes, I pulled over, grabbed my camera bag and headed into the dunes. The sun was about to set as I walked up into the dunes to a higher level. Suddenly, I found myself surrounded by sand and shadows which kept changing with every step. It then became a race with the setting sun to photograph as much as possible before the dunes and shadows became darkness. It felt like I was chasing shadows." In other words, the shadows Touchet was chasing are shapes of beauty that strikes the eye.

The composition of these beautiful shapes depends on the time of day and effects of light and shadow, but to capture these beautiful moments depends on the photographer's aesthetic experience and skills. Enriched by the contrast of light and shadow, these stunning images show a tension of fluidity and stillness in the beautiful shapes of sand dunes, evocative of other forms of artistic expression. The one on page 18 looks like a cubic painting and the ones on pages 31 and 32 look like abstract paintings. In fact, quite a few of Touchet's photographic images in *Chasing Shadows* possess the quality of correlativity. The image of Monahans Sand Hill on page 7 challenges a viewer to imagine an amalgamation of skeletons or skulls bound to connect with Georgia O'Keeffe's spooky paintings of skulls. This association is helpful to interpreting Touchet's photograph as a symbol of death or desolation that reaches far and wide

ad infinitum.

Touchet has a natural knack for discovering abstract beauty in the shadowed shapes of sand dunes. His images sometimes are a combination of different shapes in a photograph that possess something complex and tasty. The composition of the photograph on page 21 contains the curved, round, and slanting shapes that show his aesthetic taste in using the contrast of light and shadow to bring out the mystery and serenity of sand dunes and to highlight beauty for visual sensibility. On the other hand, images in the photograph of Eureka Valley Sand Dunes on page 11 challenge the viewer to associate the background shadow with the lying mummy of an Egyptian pharaoh or a collapsed ancient totem and the foreground wavy shapes of sand look like an Egyptian labyrinth that seems to disappear into the shadow and then reappear on the far left of the composition.

Many of his photographs reveal his aesthetic vision in characterizing beauty. The most visible characteristic is the feminine beauty of sand dunes he captures with his lenses. The images on pages 21, 28, 29, 30, 32, and 33 are not only charming and calming to the eyes; they also arouse imagination and convey additional meanings. For example, the one on page 28 shows that the high contrast of black and white produces a visual effect of nature's tranquility. The shadowed foreground and background function like protection of the middle whitish part, an oasis where low trees stand as persistence of life. A second look at the composition, however, may help associate the shapes to feminine beauty—the curved outlines of two reclining bodies.

However, the most stunning picture is the one taken at Mesquite Flat Dunes on page 30. The image evokes an instant association with Gustave Courbet's oil painting, *The Origin of the World*. While Courbet's image possesses an erotic and primitive quality through his realistic expression that characterizes physical beauty and the mysterious creation of life, Touchet's image presents aesthetic beauty focused on its

surreal quality that aims to awaken a viewer's imagination and aesthetic appreciation through a process of seeing, associating, and gaining. As a consequence, the visual effect produced by this image is not erotic but aesthetic and not artificial but natural as well, showing the photographer's power of perception and expression of beauty.

Doubtless, *Chasing Shadows* has characterized the beauty of shadows for visual delight and

aesthetic appreciation; each photograph reveals also a binding, or an inseparable oneness, of nature and human nature. The moments in time become permanent as visual art, reflecting Touchet's aesthetic ideal that beauty discovered in nature is important to photography.

-John Zheng



Wister Gardens in Belzoni, Mississippi.
Photograph by Jianqing Zheng.