

Reviews

The Fruit of All My Grief: Lives in the Shadow of the American Dream. By J. Malcolm Garcia. (Seven Stories Press: New York, NY, 2019. Pp. 11 + 256, contents, preface, \$21.95, paper)

“Above all else: in God’s name don’t think of it as Art!” roared James Agee in the preface to *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, his tortured, beautiful witness to the lives of Alabama tenant farmers. Since Agee railed against pretty much any interpretive take on the book, it’s hard to say why the thought of calling it Art particularly rankled. Maybe this was a warning to himself, lest aesthetic considerations distract him from the truth. Or maybe he thought the label of Art would let readers keep his work at arm’s length, distancing themselves from liability and the pressure to do something about the injustices portrayed.

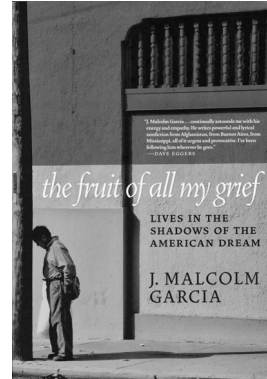
In recent decades nonfiction has expanded to include many more idiosyncratic works that, like Agee’s, can’t be neatly categorized. We’ve seen the rise of the prose poem, the lyrical essay, “narrative nonfiction,” and the “nonfiction novel.” Invented passages, elided incidents, and reconstructed dialogue in books labeled nonfiction generate controversy and sometimes lawsuits. It’s no wonder that today’s students will often declare that they’re writing a “fictional story” or a “nonfiction essay”; their instructors can no longer reflexively call that out as redundant.

This dissolution of boundaries within prose

has been accompanied by journalists’ movement into literary territory. Embedding themselves in other cultures and experiences, they produce long-form pieces that are more subjective and more freely crafted than traditional reporting. J.

Malcolm Garcia is an independent journalist who has staked ground for himself in this evolving landscape. A former social worker, he became a freelancer published in journals such as *Granta*, *McSweeney’s*, and *Guernica*. His writing has won a Pulitzer Prize and the Studs Terkel Prize, among other awards. Garcia, who disparages “our breathless, twenty-four-hour news cycle” (p. 9), may feel that important subjects deserve a different kind of amplification than traditional news features can provide. His specialty is the marginalized, people left in the wake of social upheaval who otherwise would not have a voice.

In his newest book, *The Fruit of All My Grief: Lives in the Shadow of the American Dream*, Garcia introduces an eclectic group of people adversely affected by everything from the BP *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill to the Iraq War to the United States’ byzantine immigration policies. The chapters are discrete, each profiling a different person. Two are set in Arkansas: one about the collateral damage of fracking near Greenbrier and another about a trucker, now incarcerated, who turned to drug trafficking to pay his son’s medical bills. These stories are told mostly in the individuals’ own words, sometimes in indirect dialogue and sometimes as direct quotes, usually without quo-



tation marks. The result is a curiously terse, affectless style, reminiscent of Denis Johnson or Raymond Carver. In fact, Garcia says his talent lies “mostly in nonfiction that is influenced by the techniques of fiction” (*Massachusetts Review* interview, August 23, 2019 <http://massreview.org/node/7521>).

Although the title tries to impose a sort of unity, it remains opaque why these profiles belong in a single book. Garcia supplies something of a rationale in the preface: “The lives lurking beneath the surface of the everyday continue to intrigue me” (p. 10). He wants to counter our snap judgments, our surface assumptions and prejudices, rather like fiction writers who, in the words of novelist Mohsin Hamid, aim to “recomplicate what’s been oversimplified.” (Booktopia interview with Mohsin Hamid, July 3, 2015 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Teg4bt1owis>).

However noble its aims, the project is only partly successful. Chapters that use conventional journalistic techniques are the strongest. They clearly situate the reader and provide at least some societal context around their subjects. For example, “Nothing Went to Waste: Considering the Life of Ben Kennedy,” about an eccentric philanthropist in Helena, Montana, is straightforwardly told, using tried-and-true methods such as carefully selected descriptive detail and well-chosen quotations. Explaining his interest in Kennedy, the writer sheds light on his motivations in general: “A short notice about his death in the *New York Times* didn’t tell me much, just enough to make me want to put this guy into a box, tidy him up with neat explanations about his philanthropy, and forget about him. But I couldn’t” (p. 125).

When Garcia drops the standard journalistic approach for something more self-consciously literary, the result is less satisfying. He waxes metaphorical and enters freely into the mind of his

subjects, interspersing found material in the form of signs and Facebook posts. The dialogue has no quotation marks. The sentences are short, the tone flat, and the unending use of present tense gets tiresome. After long stretches of emotionally colorless external narration, there are disconcerting swerves into the subject’s interior life. Here is the central figure of “Sanctuary,” as that piece ends: “Letting out a long breath, Sixto stares at the sky. He sees falcons circling, no clouds. Tranquility. He closes his eyes. He glides on invisible currents. He feels air. He feels freedom” (p. 30). And here, in “Fishing with the King,” the narration swells as it enters the consciousness of a Louisiana shrimper: “He is chasing something he can’t see beneath the dark, brooding waters bonded together with that something by generations of fishermen who did the same thing . . .” (59). Slipping into someone’s mind in this way may be fair game for a fiction writer, who after all invented the character whose consciousness they are voicing; but using free indirect style in journalistic writing to convey a real person rings hollow at best, and at worst is a creepy kind of appropriation.

The Fruit of All My Grief lifts up sad stories that would otherwise go unsung. It does not try to advocate for solutions or pinpoint the failures of the American dream; maybe Garcia would regard those efforts as putting people’s lives “into a box” or packaging them too neatly. Instead there’s a whiff of general grievance against The System—cards that were stacked against these individuals, hurtful circumstances not of their making. In introducing us to these lives, Garcia blurs the lines of journalism and claims his niche in the tradition of hard-to-pigeonhole prose writers. Sometimes with such nonfiction the goal is understanding and policy change. Sometimes it’s Art. Sometimes it’s hard to tell.

~Hope Coulter

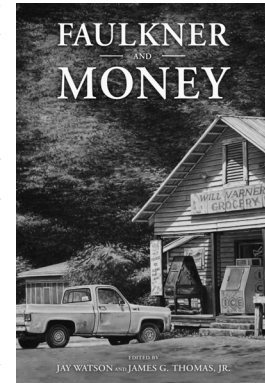


***Faulkner and Money.* Edited by Jay Watson and James G. Thomas, Jr. (University Press of Mississippi: Jackson, MS, 2019. Pp. 3 + 230, contents, introduction, note of the Conference, contributors, index. \$70, hardcover)**

Faulkner and Money is an edited collection born from the 44th Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha Conference, which convened in late July of 2017. The collection consists of fourteen chapters and an introduction. The first six chapters form what Jay Watson, editor and writer of the introduction, calls an “economic biography” that comments upon the local and global economics during the time Faulkner writes, as well as Faulkner’s personal finances (p. xiv). The latter chapters provide readings that are less bibliographical and more focused on reading Faulkner’s texts and characters through an economic lens.

Watson’s “Introduction” contributes to the collection by framing the conversation of Faulkner and money within an entirely human context. He emphasizes the social nature of market economies to make the claim, “Macroeconomists could do worse than to study Faulkner’s fiction for memorable dramatizations of the economic currents, institutions, and systems that have shaped the modern world” (p. xii). While the collection’s discussion necessarily delves into specific mechanisms of microeconomics, macroeconomics, and the intricacies of economic theory, Watson grounds these discussions in the human pressures and anxieties that perpetuate

and knot these systems. He explains Faulkner’s economic hardships and his invention of the Yoknapatawpha world as responses to a capitalist market comprised of actors who “carry with them at every moment all manner of secondary motives, psychic baggage, unfinished business, complicating if not obliterating entirely the rationality of their decisions and choices” (p. x). This introduction prepares readers to think about Faulkner and



money in terms of systems, yes, but ones that also include mindsets, systems of thoughts, and structural anxieties that are informed by both the South’s former New World colonialism and early twentieth-century consumer mentality.

The standout essay from the economic bibliography section of the collection is John T. Matthews’s “Financialization and Neoliberalism: A Snopes Genealogy.” Matthews shows how financialization becomes a motivating factor and lens through which to read the behavior of Faulkner’s characters in *The Hamlet* and *The Town*. For example, he explains how “Financial schemes in *The Town* routinely appear to involve making money off nothing” (p. 62). However, in a move back towards that groundwork which Watson provides, Matthews emphasizes, “And yet, the increasingly abstract and fictive machinations of financialized capitalism never, in Faulkner’s telling, float entirely free of the laboring bodies whose capitalization yields profit” (p. 62). He goes on to argue that Faulkner’s writing suggests a “perversity of immaterial value forms,” because Faulkner emphasizes how the exploration necessary requires a monetized valuation on interpersonal relationships—a kind of localized

knowledge Matthews repeatedly shows to be financialized across these texts (p. 63).

Ted Atkinson's "Too Small to Fail: Jason Compson's Precarious Self-Worth" is an outstanding essay from the latter half of the collection that examines how the mythos of exceptionalism merges with race and class-based expectations to instill a sense of inherent desert or right to financial success and stability. Atkinson explains how Jason is caught between the mythos of his mother's family's success—"What it means to 'be a Bascomb,' in this instance, is to have the potential to thrive in modern business"—and the "Compson curse," which Atkinson argues, "in materialist terms, . . . is a means of cloaking in the performative trappings of tragedy the family's inability to adapt to a rapidly changing modern economy driven by the shift to finance capitalism" (p. 111). Atkinson shows how Jason's fragile ego and inability to let go of his romanticized view of his social standing leads to his poor financial and familial decisions such as buying a car as a status symbol with money given to him to invest in business. He also shows how Jason uses anti-Semitic stereotypes to blame others for his failure and ignore his own white privilege manifesting in a network of help and favors, including his ability to secure his job. Atkinson concludes by emphasizing how Jason projects the cause of his faults to others "to avoid admitting what he really wants is to succeed in business without really trying" (p. 120).

Faulkner and Money adds to Faulkner scholarship in a significant way because of its detailed contributions to our understanding of Faulkner's life as well as how the economics during his lifetime influenced characterization in his writing. Moreover, the early chapters provide interesting details about Faulkner's life that will excite Faulkner scholars and enthusiasts. However, a reader base beyond well-read, dedicated Faulknerians

may find it difficult to keep up with how some essays move quickly through examples and expect audience proficiency. Indeed, there are some ways in which the collection very much reads like a record of the conference that cultivated it. But this detailed nature also helps the collection add to our understanding of the Global South as a network bound by an economic market and financialization as well as an exceptional mythos, which together create and dictate a lived experience in Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha and beyond.

~Jill Fennell



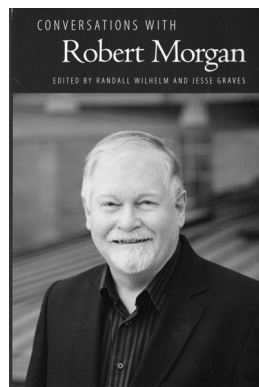
***Conversations with Robert Morgan.* Edited by Randall Wilhelm and Jesse Graves. (University Press of Mississippi: Jackson, MS, 2019. Pp. 3 + 208, contents, introduction, chronology, additional resources and selected bibliography, index, about the editors)**

One of the latest entries in the University Press of Mississippi's Literary Conversations Series is a volume of interviews, essays, and discussions with the Appalachian author Robert Morgan. Like most other editions in this series, the editors provide a generous list of secondary sources, bibliographies, and additional avenues of study for readers wanting to more aggressively dig into scholarship surrounding Morgan's work. But the real star of this show, of course, is the interviews themselves. Given the long timeline of Morgan's career, the capaciousness of his subject matter, and his adroit ability to shapeshift and

cross genre boundaries, this new edition, edited by Randall Wilhelm and Jesse Graves, is especially welcome.

Known primarily as a poet and prose-writer of Appalachia, Morgan's work often showcases "preoccupations with memory, family, history, [and] the natural world" (192). Such themes also populate his ruminations on his work. Morgan's abiding interests in these subjects, especially the natural world, also come with not just an artistic mindset, but also one of scientific accuracy. Throughout many conversations, Morgan explores how his peripatetic youth saw him attending a number of different universities, studying a number of fields, and how taking "classes in advanced calculus, differential equations, physics, and mechanics" simultaneously influenced his understanding of the art and the world around him (x). With such an impressionable and passionate mind for learning, it's little wonder that Morgan continues to evolve, finding critical and, more recently, commercial success with his work.

A major highlight in Morgan's career occurred in early 2000, when Oprah Winfrey selected his novel *Gap Creek* (about which he says his "whole life was research" for its writing [104]) as an entry in her astronomically successful book club. One imagines such an experience would be discombobulating. And although his remarks read as reluctant, almost embarrassed, about his success, he also provides a lucid and thoroughly entertaining account of the myriad successes and challenges brought about by Winfrey's selection. While "the publicity has forced [him] to be a much more public person," it also exposed his



thoughts to an entirely new audience (97). A particularly moving account emerges in his interview with Patrick and Resa Crane Bizzaro when he recollects his mother fielding cold calls from strangers eager to discuss his work. He remembers, "She said, 'You know that book really *means* something to people.' And I realized *that's* what I wanted to do all along" (97). Several such recollections, the personal melded with the commercial and academic, pepper the collection and make it all the more entertaining and compelling.

While Morgan's literary reputation is well known, he also proves himself a forceful critic and scholar. Throughout this collection of interviews, readers receive glimpses of Morgan's erudition, his strengths, not just as a writer, but as a reader. An interview with Peter Josyph midway through the collection finds Morgan and his interlocutor discussing Cormac McCarthy's oeuvre, specifically a long out-of-print Public Television film *The Gardener's Son*, for which McCarthy wrote the screenplay. Given how relatively few people have seen or have access to the film, the decision to include this conversation might at first strike readers as an odd one. It becomes quickly apparent, however, that the interview is as much about Josyph and Morgan's "sense of encouragement and possibility" when reading McCarthy's work, as it is about a specific entry in McCarthy's catalog. Even those uninterested in McCarthy's writing will find something to appreciate here, as the conversation nimbly jumps tracks to parallel discussions of Appalachian accents, sustenance farming, the exploitation of workers in mill towns, and, naturally, advice for aspiring writers. Likewise, readers especially well-trained in the history and incarnations of poetic forms will greatly enjoy David L. Eliot's 1993 discussion about the formal aspects Morgan's and others' poetry. That some of the most inspired

commentary in this text revolves around the work of others suggests just how thoughtful a reader Morgan is.

Because of his long tenure both in the literary community and as a faculty member at Cornell, where he has been teaching since 1971, it comes as little surprise that advice for the aspiring and nascent writer abounds in this volume. “Try to finish whatever you start, at least in a draft” he tells William Harmon (25). To maintain his writing habit, “I keep farmer’s hours. I go to bed early and I get up early,” he explains to Donald Anderson (40). “If you have the compression and naturalness of free verse, plus this other game of form, you obviously have a richer medium” he advises David L. Elliott regarding the values of traditional poetic forms and free-verse (61). And this, perhaps, is the collection’s greatest strength. Those looking for encouragement, motivation, and insights into the writing process will find no shortage in *Conversations with Robert Morgan*. Regardless of your feelings toward the author or his work, you will no doubt find much to appreciate in this volume.

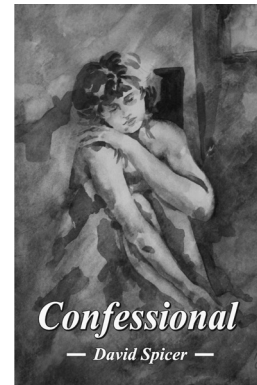
In a discussion with Robert West midway through the volume, Morgan notes that he’s not particularly fond of discussing poetry or providing interviews, but nonetheless “learned to impersonate the kind of person that talks about poetry” (81). Fortunate for us that he did, because his eloquent and learned responses, performative or not, provide an invaluable resource to anyone interested in Morgan’s work, the field of Appalachian literature, poetry, or even the craft and artistry of composition.

~Jim Coby



***Confessional*. David Spicer. (Allahabad, India: Thomson Press (India) Ltd., 2020. Pp. 115. \$15.00, paper)**

Although he was born and raised in South Dakota, David Spicer earned his baccalaureate degree from Elon University, and eventually received his MAT from the University of Memphis. Beginning in the mid-seventies, Spicer rejuvenated the Mid-South’s largely inert literary scene when he began to edit *Raccoon*, a beautifully formatted 9 x 6 poetry journal printed on textured cambric paper with blue wraps. From the first, he showcased the work of established poets in the Memphis area such as Fredric Koeppel, Gordon Osing, and William Page, and also provided a splendid forum for comparative new-comers, including Corey Mesler, Lindsay Hill, and Marie Connors. Moreover, Spicer introduced readers on the Delta to significant voices from other regions, among them Michael Waters, Alane Rollings, Pamela Stewart, and Norman Dubie. But his enthusiasm for the language arts did not stop with *Raccoon*; he soon instituted a chapbook series that included Floyd Collins’s *Scarecrow* (1980) and eventually burgeoned under his new imprint Ion Books to embrace full-length volumes such as Pattiann Rogers’s *Legendary Performance* (1987). He was also active in seeing other authors—C. D. Wright, Terry Stokes, and Joseph Bruchac—brought to the Bluff City for public readings where their books were available for purchase. In short, Spicer was at the epicenter of belletristic happenings in the tri-state region of Tennessee,



Arkansas, and Mississippi for well over a decade.

Of course, one employs the locution “bellevist” advisedly. Spicer’s enthusiasm for iconoclastic poets—in particular, Charles Bukowski—continued unabated throughout his own career; however, his taste in literature was essentially eclectic as evidenced in the journals he contributed to—titles ranging from the *American Poetry Review* and *Ploughshares* to *Anti-Hero Chic* and the *Rat’s Ass Review*. His influences encompassed the ill-starred Delta and Ozark poet Frank Stanford in addition to Diane Wakowski who remains associated with San Francisco’s Beat Movement to this day. Spicer could sometimes be a poet of gentle epiphanies and at others launch into an enraptured opprobrium akin to Allen Ginsberg’s “Howl.” The former impulse informs “Goodbye Mr Merwin,” a deeply introspective elegy for W. S. Merwin, whose poems and translations achieved canonical status in his own lifetime. Here are the fourth and fifth tercets, wherein Spicer subtly achieves a fusion of the master’s technique with his own in six mellifluous and carefully modulated lines:

I met you at a reading a seer I loved said you
owned an ancient spirit’s eyes the color of
sad joy
the centuries’ mysteries and pleasures married
in them

you inscribed my battered copy of *The Lice*
your swift script beautiful as a school-
teacher’s
you gazed at me with eternal eyes of blue clarity
(p. 57)

Spicer adopts the pared-down quiescence and fluid run-on lines sans punctuation that evolved into Merwin’s signature style beginning with the latter third of *The Moving Target* (1963). In all probability, the “reading” Spicer refers to was part of the River City Contemporary Writers

Series sponsored by the Creative Writing Program at the University of Memphis. Accompanied by a “seer I loved,” the poet captures beautifully the visionary gleam in Merwin’s limpid blue gaze that seems to evoke the crumbling limestone monasteries built several millennia ago in the Far East. In the ensuing stanza, he alludes to Merwin’s watershed volume titled *The Lice* (1967), a tome composed mainly in the Dordogne region of France, terrain in which the reader can almost hear the tinkling bells of sheep being herded to pasture during the draconian reign of the Black Prince.

However, the volume also contains the frequently anthologized poem, “The Asians Dying,” a haunting landscape peopled by the million Vietnamese souls who perished when America napalmed countless bamboo villages with thatched huts. But Spicer remembers a Merwin grown gentler with the passing of nine decades, a presence he limns in the almost calligraphic loveliness of the adjective-noun combination “swift script.” Even the title of the Memphis poet’s subtle homage eschews the stylistic strictures imposed by punctuation that Merwin forsook in the early-to-middle sixties. Notice the absence of the period after the honorific “Mr” when one reads the poem a second time. But Spicer recalls most of all Merwin’s “eternal eyes of blue clarity,” the oceanic depth and unfathomable plenitude of eyes that have beheld both a beauty and atrocity that spans two centuries. In his closure, Spicer refers not only to the macular degeneration that afflicted Merwin in his final years, but he also laments the figurative darkness enveloping a globe when one of its more pellucid lights winks out: “now that you have journeyed to a new world / and grief for the loss of your light lingers / this dying globe is darker” (p. 57).

Other poems in *Confessional* betray the often salutary influence of that classic bohemian bard,

Charles Bukowski. Spicer typically assimilates the semantic edginess and deceptively gratuitous profanity of his German-born exemplar in anecdotal poems that chronicle the vexed relationship with his own father. In “Selective Memory,” he offers us a privileged glimpse into the elder Spicer’s formative years by asserting the dubious precocity of his male progenitor: “My father spelled *hippopotamus* / and *inconsequential* as a three-year-old / in a country shack near Paris, Tennessee” (p. 24). If this assertion strains our credulity, we must recall that Spicer routinely resorts to a brand of hyperbole that deliberately lays bare the inherent pathos in any situation. The poet is only too aware that his father’s abusive nature derives from his own disillusioned and battered youth: “He quit school, / joined the navy at sixteen, begging my grandmother / to swear he was seventeen so he’d escape his father’s / leather” (p. 24). Through Spicer’s adroit application of the metonym “leather,” we awaken to the livid welts his own father hoped to offset through navy stripes of red, gold, and black. The poet descants on his dad’s negligible stature, “[s]tanding 5’ 7” in scuffed brown shoes,” and how the hardscrabble existence that the man led also embraces his family members: “he pumped gas, // fixed flats, changed oil, replaced windshield wipers, / and complained. He worked twelve hours a day, / and we ate macaroni, pinto beans, breakfast chops” (p. 24). Here Spicer compresses the daily round of a bleak lifestyle into a scant three lines; note how the subject-verb-object construction “he pumped gas” segues into the repetition of fricative *f* sounds in the alliterative unit “fixed flats,” thus connoting flatulence, even as the poet catalogues the poor fare—“macaroni, pinto beans, breakfast chops”—that graced his father’s table.

Those few detractors who insist that Spicer’s style is too expansive would do well to observe the facility with which he compacts the almost

derelict second-hand jalopies his male parent purchased into a single verse paragraph: “My father never owned a new car, buying junkers: / a rusty ’40 Ford sedan, a ’49 Nash Rambler / and a brush-painted fern-green ’53 Merc” (p. 24). While this poet is decidedly not devoted to prosodic verve at the expense of narrative particulars, one cannot forego relishing the half-chime and scintillant cadences embedded in the phrasal turn “fern-green ’53 Merc.” Paradoxically, this car owns none of the sprayed-on luster desirable in a late-model vehicle but is marred by the broad strokes of a house-painter’s brush. The speaker sums up his misgivings about parental concern in his penultimate stanza: “I chose not to raise children, fearing I’d / make mistakes molding a son who’d break / my heart like I shattered my father’s” (p. 26). Yet in his closure Spicer relinquishes all cynicism regarding the proverbial “old man”: “My father? He once said, *Son, I love you.* / I think I love my father” (p. 26).

Spicer is decidedly not a practitioner of the language arts who scrupulously observes the family pieties, as his poem “Prodigal Brother” laments the death of a younger sister who perished in infancy: “I saw my sister lying in a casket / no longer than a toy wagon / and bawled like the baby I was, / two years old in overalls” (p. 9). The poet’s mother recounts fifteen years later his one peek into the satin-upholstered coffin: “*You couldn’t see your baby / sister, so I held you in my arms*” (p. 9). Perhaps simultaneously drawn to and repelled by the strange and estranging phenomenon of death, the speaker can experience a return to the lonely cemetery plot only by proxy of his female parent and a sister named Darla. Among the granite obelisks and angels hewn from marble with delicately percussive strokes, the speaker describes what the two bereaved women beheld there:

Mary Ann’s grave littered with bluebells

and a rotting cross that leaned to the left,
a rosary wrapped around its intersection,
black beads stained during those decades. (p.
9)

Perhaps the most poignant and heartbreakingly lovely image in this volume, the poet's depiction of the delicate bell-shaped blossoms hanging their heads and grieving like flowers in a fairy-tale proves singularly arresting. On the other hand, the locution "littered" connotes a fecundity born of decay and intimates that the child's grave is little more than a patch of neglected weeds. Spicer underscores this perception when he designates the slightly askew cross marking her pathetic mound as "rotting." The cross is shackled with "rosary beads" and its "intersection" like the crossroads one approaches in a nightmare. The plosive adjective-noun combination "black beads" verges on the pyrotechnic; indeed, the entire four-line tableau bursts upon our consciousness, and leaves us staggering in its volatile aftermath. The poet proceeds to relate his distaste for death's various rites of passage: "I avoid wakes and funerals now, / dislike the color black and veils / over women's faces, refusing / to attend death's formal farewells" (p. 10). Perhaps a bit of an apostate or else blessed with a sovereignty that needs no priest to negotiate the hierarchies of grace for him, in his closure Spicer visits his sibling's final resting place and bestows a benediction of his own: "Before I left, I thumbtacked the photos / under the rosary with its blemishes and said, / *Sister, I wish I'd known you better*" (p. 10).

Spicer explores his affinity for artists working in other realms of endeavor in "Chet, When I Listen to You," a paean for the phenomenally gifted jazz trumpeter Chet Baker who was known as the "Prince of Cool," notwithstanding the heroin addiction that marred his otherwise illustrious career. In its basic structure, this poem is

a sonnet laid out in two quatrains and a brace of couplets, but the poet fractures the mold of form in his refusal to adhere to a decasyllabic line or any rhyme-scheme whatever. He recollects his devotion to Baker's almost effortless virtuosity, citing his identification in the poem's first line: "I escape behind your face's sun-scorched wrinkles" (p. 49). Indeed, Spicer's knack for hard-hitting epithets memorably replicates his protagonist's unique style that blended melodic strains with notes cracked like a trumpet's battered brass bell: "Sinatra never crooned like you, my smack-addled trumpeter" (p. 49). Moreover, he waxes downright lyrical in the poem's first sestet: "Oh, Chet, I shudder when *Every Time We Say Goodbye* soothes / my ears. When I listen to you, I slouch on the beat-up velvet / in your neon-lit hotel room in downtown Chicago" (p. 49). Here Spicer has recourse to the cinematic technique called "forward reference" in lines foreshadowing how Baker fell to his death from the open window of a room in the Hotel Prins Hendrik, Amsterdam, his lifeless corpse riddled by needle tracks that led the coroner to his abuse of heroin. Nevertheless, the poet's closure is one of compensatory mourning that leaves him addled with a bliss not subject to a syringe's plunger: "you lullaby me to a sleep never matched by that needle piercing / the lost vein in your arm, blowing your scuffed trumpet, / a young Gabriel sending me to a heaven that has no heroin" (p. 49). Throughout "Chet, When I Listen to You," Spicer beguiles us with his love of wit and wordplay in a style not easily to be matched.

Confessional is ultimately a volume of accomplished verse by a poet, editor, and publisher whose dedication will not likely ever be encountered again in the city where Tennessee, Arkansas, and Mississippi intersect to form the tri-state region. Its cover is graced with artwork provided by the late poet's wife, Nancy Clift Spicer. The

recent passing of David Spicer marks the end of an era in Memphis letters.

~Floyd Collins



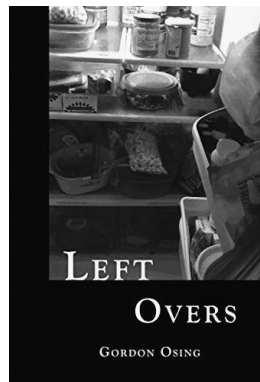
***Left Overs.* By Gordon Osing.
(Spuyten Duyvil: New York City, NY,
2020. Pp. 9+43, contents, Paper)**

In his newest collection of poetry, Mississippi scribe Gordon Osing opens with a nine-page case study of a miracle.

In the super-slow commotion of the years
whatever can happen likely will.
Here in the Cold Water River Valley
many enjoy stories that amount to
a trumping of godless, suspect science.
Their Bible is full of stories scientists
smile at that could not ever possibly
have happened, but the impossible can
happen. (p. 9)

Ostensibly, this poem addresses a near head-on car wreck in which the two protagonists, Luke Collins and Les Ferguson, miraculously survive. While the reader is confronted with a philosophical dilemma (divine intervention? fate? luck? molecules in motion?), Osing takes a deep dive into Mississippi culture.

Arkabutla Lake, in Northern Mississippi, is favored by locals for fishing, camping, and picnics. It is a large croissant-shaped reservoir created by a flood-control dam in the 1940s, and it is referenced in the Cohen brothers' movie, *O*



Brother, Where Art Thou? More importantly, to the topic at hand, Highway 304 cuts through its muddy bottoms.

Although it does not evoke the bright-lights/big-city allure of Las Vegas or Atlantic City, Mississippi is a gambler's paradise, and Luke Collins has been sucked into the addictive side of the gaming industry. He whispers sweet nothings to slot machines as they swallow his rent money, leaving him with a "belly full of reproach" (p. 10).

Conversely, Les Ferguson is the poster child of good ol' boys everywhere:

He worked out back at the lumberyard,
drove a loud '73 Mustang, and always
drank Bud Light, like the old regulars. (p.11)

Hurling towards each other on Highway 304—a little tired, a little drunk—they swerve into each other's lane to avoid a sure-death wreck. Luke ends up in the waters, while Les flies into the trees. The poem's narrator, as the first car upon the scene, assumes the role of Ishmael to relay the miracle that both converted on the spot to spiritual paths.

While much of this collection revolves around narrative contemplations of ordinary occurrences (bar patrons, cartoons, television shows), Osing positively shines when he addresses his topics from lyrical angles. "Re: the Blue-Eyed Blues" is a masterful meditation on the musical genre that lays bare (better than any other) the exposed nerve of human experience.

The Blues is another Gospel incognito,
only its salvation is yourself in the moment.

The Blues is arrival where you are
living in the moment, time a blue bottle tree
playing the wind. Tchaikovsky, the Buddha,
and the Lakota hymns to the Vedas. Listen.
(p.29)

Entertainment, in general, strives to block the present moment, to allow the audience a tempo-

rary escape from reality. Not so with the blues. As in meditation, the blues singer summons up present, occurring pain in order to face, and to detach from, it. Osing's twenty-one stanzas remind us of how fundamental this concept is to a full life: "Trust and compose, this life is all lives" (p.32).

"Masks" is a contemplation of inauthenticity amid the universal struggle to be seen.

Between the self and the world of others
the mask is the best guesses of the spirit,
changeable, all but unrecognizable, not
exactly of this world even in dreams.

...They feed and clothe us.

Masks inhabit the other kind of time. (p.41)
The complete human can never be seen at once; nevertheless, Osing recognizes the historical and cultural reality of donning masks, literally and figuratively. In fact, throughout this collection, and his earlier work as well, Osing's musings on the human condition are terse and attentive.

~Marck L. Beggs



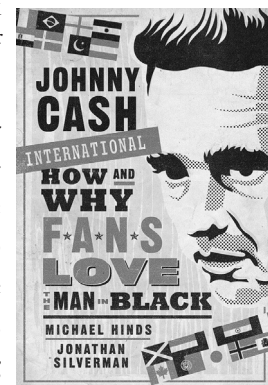
Johnny Cash International: How and Why Fans Love the Man in Black. By Michael Hinds and Jonathan Silverman. (University of Iowa Press: Iowa City, IA, 2020. Pp. 13 + 211, contents, acknowledgments, preface, introduction, afterword, appendix, notes, references, index, fandom and culture. \$27.50, paper)

While reading this book, I couldn't help

but think: grad school lied to us. We were never supposed to write books like this. Where is the deep archival research? The long hours in a special collections library, where the author had a big breakfast so he could skip lunch? When did he submit application for fellowships so that he could scrape \$500 or \$1,000 to spend 40 hours a week—and hopefully Saturday—looking through manuscripts collections and trying to decipher pre-internet scrawl?

I went to a graduate school that touched lightly on anything approaching postmodernism and its obsession with "texts." Nowadays, historians are much more comfortable calling various things "texts." I have a friend who teaches a course on *Mad Men* in Texas, and he calls the show a "rich text." Hinds and Silverman clearly see Johnny Cash as a "rich text" and explore how his fans honor him in various ways, from internet postings to tattoos and tribute bands.

Michael Hinds is a professor of English at Dublin City University in Ireland. Jonathan Silverman is a professor of English at the University of Massachusetts Lowell and the author of the superlative *Nine Choices: Johnny Cash and American Culture*. The authors take a decidedly twenty-first century approach to their subject matter. A more traditional book would examine stacks of paper related to Cash. Hinds and Silverman obviously want to take a different tack, but anyone hoping they could do Cash research these days—Covid limitations or not—without diving deeply into the internet would face major challenges. Many Cash books have been written by family members or those who knew Cash well. *Johnny Cash International*,



however, takes a more democratic approach. It is a book about all kinds of Cash fans that uses a variety of readily available research material.

Johnny Cash died in 2003, but his legacy is strong. Scholars continue publishing books about him, and he continues to release new music completed by him, friends, and family members. Hinds and Silverman certainly have a large and deep pool of fans to draw upon. I don't think I've ever met anyone who dislikes Johnny Cash, though lovers of the man and his music can be obsessive. Even so, Cash was never a kitsch character in the way Elvis was. His music had a darkness and intellectual depth that endeared him to a certain kind of fan. Despite being born and raised in Arkansas and an artist who wrote often about his native South, Cash was perceived as the most American of Americans. His appeal, nevertheless, is global.

Johnny Cash International begins with an exploration of Cash's following in Ireland, where Cash is well known for a song popular among the Irish, "Forty Shades of Green," which, to the unknowing ear, sounds as if it were written by an Irish balladeer. Rather, it was written by Cash in 1959. Cash's Irish fans obviously benefit from being English speakers, though Ireland's history has many connections to Cash's Arkansas. Both are historically impoverished places with a great musical tradition. Cash himself had Celtic roots in Scotland. And it is no surprise that Cash's 1990s comeback began with him singing on the song "The Wanderer" for U2's *Zooropa* album.

I found one of the best sections of the book was the chapter (twelve) examining a Dutch group's tour of the Mississippi Delta, including a trip to Memphis, where Cash got his musical start. They also toured Graceland, an experience that left them underwhelmed. More illuminating was the restored Cash house in Dyess—a true time machine for fans and those interested in the

history of the area. The Dutch visitors saw not only Cash and rockabilly history, they were exposed to the shocking poverty of the Delta, a region that is rare in America in showing the disparities of wealth in this country—a disparity that has worsened since Cash's death. Their tour of the Delta, unfortunately, highlights how race is little discussed in traditional country music in any positive way.

Cash fans should know that while this is a non-traditional academic book, it is an academic book all the same. It does not always make for quick or light reading. References are made to Silverman in parts, and obviously the authors are sharing experiences with their human subjects, but the book doesn't have a journalistic feel. At times, the fan service is laborious. The authors' examination of Youtube comments, for example, can become as tedious as scrolling through the comments board of any website. And while I am impressed that the authors traveled the globe in search of Cash fans, I might have liked to know more about those south of our border. The Mexican band Los Tigres Del Norte, for example, played at Folsom prison in 2018 for the fiftieth anniversary of Cash's concert. Cash clearly has a following in the enormous Spanish speaking world to our south.

Johnny Cash International would be a fun book to discuss in a graduate school seminar. One could ask: is the methodology more democratic than it pretends to be? In many ways, the book depends on "regular" people, examining as it does sources available to anyone on the internet. All too often, some historians pretend that the internet doesn't exist. Here, though, is a clear product of the ever expanding archival digital age. As the book shows, the virtual world provides historians with new opportunities for search and understanding. The authors, nevertheless, did a lot of traveling internationally—

travel beyond the means of many scholars of any age or academic status. Not many people would be able to travel the world to meet Cash fans to write a book about them. But then, again, not many people can afford to even go a few hundred miles to do research at a traditional archive. Perhaps even in the digital age, the more history changes, the more it stays the same.

Whatever one's views on historical methodology, Hinds and Silverman's book reveals how relevant Johnny Cash is in a hideously divided America. In 2017, an alt-right protestor at the deadly Charlottesville riot was seen wearing a Cash t-shirt, eliciting a strong response from Rosanne Cash, who made it clear that her father rejected everything the alt-right stood for. She was correct. But her appeal to sanity only revealed how rare a figure like Cash is these days: a true patriot who appealed to everyone on the political spectrum. We need more people like him. Lacking that, though, we have still have his music, which continues to inspire legions of devotees.

Johnny Cash International is an illuminating and memorable book, one that says much about the Man in Black and his fans. It brings up larger issues about country music, authenticity, patriotism, and the democratic nature of pop culture. Anyone interested in Johnny Cash should read it.

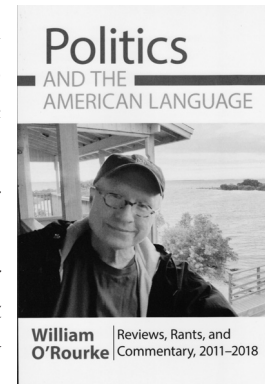
-Colin Woodward



Politics and the American Language. By William O'Rourke (Welcome Rain Publishers: New York, NY, 2020. Pp. 13 + 244, contents, preface, acknowledgments, index.

\$18. paper)

William O'Rourke's longtime fans will delight in reading the third collection of his non-fiction, this volume covering work from 2011–2018. The genres will be familiar. There are reviews (of course), "rants," shorter pieces focused on current events; and finally, an assortment of long and short projects, anchored by "Whither the New Cath-



olic Left," the coda to the 2012 reissue of his classic book about the Harrisburg 7. O'Rourke speaks as the patient teacher, the slow professor who takes his time to explain that which he knows thoroughly, doing so with panoptic vision and crystalline clarity.

The reviews are pure O'Rourke, cutting criticism his readers expect, along with a measure of praise to the author for having worked hard to produce a book. The reviewed author finds out in a hurry that which (s)he does not know, but the dose of mercy wears well in such acrid times. I wish that more reviewers would emulate O'Rourke's example.

Current events are in play for the rants, but O'Rourke often finds a historical sidebar that ends up owning the whole story. For example, when Barack Obama briefly spoke at the Tucson memorial for those killed and injured by Jared Lee Loughner, he won wide praise for being a comforter-in-chief during a difficult moment in America's history. His performance was compared to President Reagan's after the *Challenger* disaster. But O'Rourke points out that Reagan's 1986 performance was flawed, composed by a

speechwriter and read on the teleprompter. Reagan's role in the disaster is rarely discussed; he insisted on the early launch in freezing temperatures, so that, if all went according to plan, he could brag about the nation's first teacher in space, Christa McAuliffe, during that evening's State of the Union address. The address was canceled, and the President offered a eulogy instead. According to O'Rourke, Donald Trump further lowered the bar of rhetoric with his batty tweets, his inability to grasp basic facts, and his ignorance of history. All this proved Orwell right (again) when he wrote that as politics descends into a stew of toxic sludge, language will suffer.

Realizing that Trump 45 may not be the nadir of this awful trajectory, O'Rourke pivots in Part III to a more reflective, hopeful, and forward-looking tone. The next generation of readers could be better, more discriminating and more demanding of quality from the writers they choose to read. He reflects on a long career teaching young people, relating the joy that he had in assisting his star student Michael Collins and the peaks and valleys of being a close friend of his favorite teacher, Edward Dahlberg. Though closing the loop for veteran readers, the Harrisburg essay is written as much for a generation coming of age in the Smartphone era. The patient teacher carefully and clearly explains what the 1960s were all about, the social movements that roiled America's spirit, and that trial in Harrisburg that he covered back in the day, the one only he understood.

O'Rourke believes that the problem with today's literary scene is not the lack of good writers. There are plenty of good ones, all with one good book in them (according to an old saw), and plenty of publishers thanks to the coterie presses. Readership is lacking. The number of people reading books has declined to about the number of people playing a musical instrument

in the 1960s—a small proportion of the population. Simultaneously, there is more to consume in this reader's market than one can consume, novels in particular. So, O'Rourke has reason to question whether he will have any fans at all reading this book as they might have fled elsewhere to other genres. He may be hoping for, and he may eventually get, a new generation of readers that is more discerning, demanding quality use of language and upscale writing from the books they read. These selective readers will find their way to O'Rourke, for in this professor's work, the language bar is set very high.

—Stan Weeber



Gender and the Jubilee: Black Freedom and the Reconstruction of Citizenship in Civil War Missouri. By Sharon Romeo. (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2016. Pp. xii-xvi + 118, acknowledgments, notes, bibliography, index of works, index of subjects. \$59.95, hardback)

Over the past thirty years a growing number of books have focused on Black Freedom and the role of men of African descent fighting for the Union during the American Civil War. Dr. Sharon E. Romeo's *Gender and the Jubilee* opens a new chapter in the study of civil participation and engagement of black women in the Border State of Missouri. What sets this book apart from other Civil War books is its lending credence to the theory that enslaved women and children were not just cast-offs and camp followers, but

movers and shakers, sifting the laws of justice for true freedom.

Romeo is a talented, gifted researcher and writer, and the book is the culmination in part of her research for “Freedwomen in Pursuit of Liberty: St. Louis and Missouri in the Age of Emancipation,” which was her doctoral thesis and dissertation at the University of Iowa. Romeo is currently an Assistant Professor of History and Classics at the University of Alberta, Edmonton AB Canada.

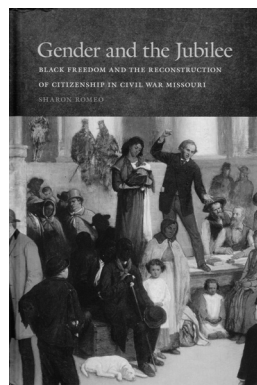
Gender and the Jubilee fills the void that was created by a book like *Heroines of the Rebellion or Woman’s Work in the Civil War: A Record of Heroism, Patriotism and Patience* by L. P. Brockett and Mary C. Vaughn and published by Zeigler, McCurdy & Co. (1867). By its title, that book extols the virtues of northern women in their philanthropy, humanitarian work, and benevolence to aid the sick and wounded soldiers as well as the poor freed men. Romeo’s book enters into this parallel women’s history of the Civil War from a perspective that has been silent or unknown for over a hundred and fifty years.

Romeo states that *Gender and the Jubilee* reexamines the legal legacy of the Civil War, especially as it relates to the newly freed women of African descent. Through her introduction, Romeo does an admirable job of explaining what each chapter entails: how various free and enslaved women in Missouri utilized Federal officers and military justice to supersede or mediate civilian complaints against an oppressive antebellum legal system. “Proslavery politics and the southern political culture defined citizenship

as a category exclusive to the white, male, head of household” (p. 17). This definition of citizenship impacted the Northern educated aristocratic ladies and the noble, indomitable white women of the South as well as newly freed and lesser-considered black women.

For women of the Civil War era on either side of the color line, “I Told My Mistress That the Union Soldiers Were Coming,” the title of the opening chapter, expressed not a mere casual recognition of a passing parade, but an acknowledgment of the end of bondage as well as a paradigm shift in their relationship as slave and mistress. Romeo focuses on the elevation and enfranchisement of the formerly enslaved in chapter three, “‘A Soldier’s Wife Is Free’: African American Soldiers, Their Enslaved Kin, and Military Citizenship.” She discusses how the significant others and legally married spouses of black men who were serving as Federal troops, as well as their families—though not freed under Missouri state law until 1865—were treated by the United States military during the war as citizens with rights and deserving of protection.

One of the strengths of this book is the inclusion of the personal cases and testimonies of over seventy free born, enslaved, and emancipated black women. These women forged a path to challenge and exercise their freedom while trying to raise their children—although many of their husbands were in service of the Union army. Among these women was Harriet Scott, the wife of Dred Scott. Harriet initiated the original suit, April 1846, in St. Louis civil courts for the freedom of their daughters. This case would later be heard before the US Supreme Court in 1857, where Chief Justice Roger B. Taney, would rule in essence that “Negroes could not be United States citizens.” Another notable ex-slave mentioned in the book is Elizabeth Hobbs Keckley, who had purchased her own and her son’s



freedom in 1855. Keckley's son, George Kirkland, was killed in the Battle of Wilson Creek on August 10, 1861. She would become one, if not the first, woman of color to apply for and receive a Widow's [Mother's] pension. Keckley is best known as the talented seamstress and confidant to Mary Todd Lincoln.

Romeo devotes the last several chapters to basic citizenship rights that Northern and Southern women had long taken for granted: legal protection of their persons, the right to due process under the law, legalized marriages and united families, as well as the benefit of compensation for the loss of their husbands and sons during the war.

Gender and the Jubilee is more than a book on women's studies or the Civil War. It is a deeper exploration into the understanding of what has divided Americans by race, region, economics, and gender in our long and tangled history.

—Ronnie A. Nichols



***Hold On With A Bulldog Grip: A Short Study of Ulysses S. Grant.* By John F. Marszalek, David S. Nolan, Louie P. Gallo, and Frank J. Williams. Afterward by Mark Keenum. (University Press of Mississippi: Jackson, MS, 2019. Pp.11 + 89, contents, plaque outside of the Ulysses S. Grant Presidential Library, introduction, afterword, notes, further reading, index. \$20, hardcover)**

As strange as it may seem to American

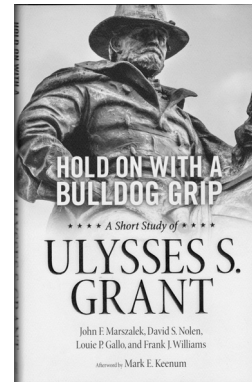
readers in the twenty-first century, given his utterly indispensable role in the Union army's decisive victory in the Civil War, the historical legacy of Ulysses S. Grant has only fairly recently begun to attract a more consistently sympathetic appreciation

among academic scholars and the general public. Although highly regarded in his lifetime, and revered by the soldiers and officers who served under his command during the war, Grant's legacy declined steadily after his death in 1885 as the mythology of the Confederacy's Lost Cause reshaped our understanding of the Civil War in terms that were far more sympathetic to the South and Robert E. Lee than to U.S. Grant.

According to that school of thought Grant was an alcoholic who barely managed to receive a commission at the start of the conflict and only won the war through sheer weight of numbers rather than by any discernible tactical skill or strategic brilliance. Likewise, the good intentions of his presidency suffered failure due to political naivete and rampant financial corruption.

Fragments of those older assessments linger, but a significant and much-needed reappraisal of Grant has emerged in recent years as scholars have begun to make a more nuanced examination of his complex and compelling life. And, much like the man himself, this movement toward a more positive evaluation advances at a steady and determined pace.

Hold On With A Bulldog Grip is a celebration of Grant's indomitable grit and his determination to see all endeavors through to their completion, in spite of the numerous obstacles and adversities encountered throughout his life. The difficulties with which Grant wrestled to varying



degrees of success or failure included financial limitations, the academic rigor of West Point, persistent rumors of alcoholism, the pivotal campaign against Vicksburg, the intrepid nature of Robert E. Lee and the Confederate army, the political and financial travails of Reconstruction and the Gilded Age, and the inevitability of mortality.

This small, but well-written, volume consists of ten chapters that briefly summarize the pertinent details of Grant's life from his youth in Ohio through his tragic but inspiring death from throat cancer at the age of sixty-three. Individual authors are not identified for any of the chapters, so the narrative of each chapter is presumably a collaborative endeavor by authors Marszalek, Nolan, Gallo, and Williams.

Although brief in length each chapter provides a thoughtful and balanced summary of Grant's experiences at particular times in his life and the role played by his quiet but tenacious personality as he encountered and mostly overcame so many varied obstacles. The authors, however, do not gloss over Grant's many struggles and mistakes or present him as a flawless icon. Nor do they condemn him for his short-comings. As a result, readers are introduced to a much more complex and engaging figure. Like all people, Grant struggled more than once with some of the specific difficulties that occurred throughout his life. Grant, however, showed a consistent ability to reflect on and learn from a multitude of struggles and failures in all phases of life and earnestly tried to incorporate valuable lessons from those early and difficult experiences. Sometimes Grant fell short in the attempt to improve himself or achieve a goal, but he continued to work toward improvement throughout his inspiring life. That bulldog-like tenacity, which laid the foundation for so many of his achievements, showed itself most poignantly dur-

ing his final months, as he raced valiantly against mortality to write the memoirs that would provide financial security for his wife and family upon his death.

Hold On With A Bulldog Grip is a welcome addition to the relatively new but growing body of scholarly work that highlights Grant's many substantial achievements and helps place his struggles as well as his successes in a more thorough and favorable context. It will appeal to anyone interested in the military and political careers of Lieutenant General and 18th President of the United States Ulysses S. Grant.

The late John Y. Simon, who spent his long and distinguished career editing the voluminous Grant papers in his capacity as Executive Director of the Ulysses S. Grant Association, is as responsible as any individual for the shift toward a more positive reevaluation of Grant's life and careers. It is, therefore, appropriate to see included in this publication a verbatim quotation of the plaque outside the Ulysses S. Grant Presidential Library on the campus of Mississippi State University, which pays homage to Simon's immeasurable contribution to our understanding of this seemingly simple yet subtly complex man.

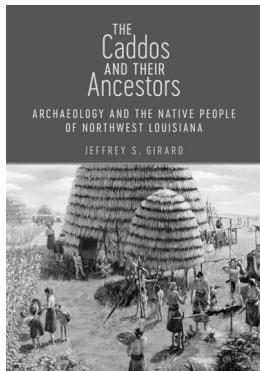
-Robert Patrick Bender



The Caddos and Their Ancestors: Archaeology and the Native People of Northwest Louisiana. By Jeffrey S. Girard (Louisiana State University Press: Baton Rouge, LA, 2018. Pp. 1 + 111, contents preface, acknowledgments, notes, glossary, references,

index. hardcover \$29.95)

The Caddos and Their Ancestors: Archaeology and the Native People of Northwest Louisiana is an excellent and easily readable history and archaeology of Native peoples who occupied much of northwest Louisiana. Jeffrey S. Girard is the regional expert on the archaeology in northwest Louisiana and has spent most of his career as archaeologist for the Northwest Louisiana Regional Archaeology Program (Louisiana Division of Archaeology) based at Northwestern State University in Natchitoches.



The book is organized chronologically, beginning with evidence for the earliest occupants to the region around 11,500 B.C. until A.D. 1835, when a treaty forced Caddo Indians to leave their northwest Louisiana ancestral homeland. Numerous maps of the region, photographs of important artifacts, and drawings from discussed archaeological site excavations nicely illustrate this long history of occupations and adaptations in the region. Chapters introduce the reader to important archaeological sites that serve as “case studies” highlighting important cultural developments in the region throughout time.

Chapter one begins by introducing the goals of the book, and archaeology in general, and how archaeological methods and data contribute to an evaluation and documentation of an unwritten past. Important in this chapter is an emphasis on archaeology as a scientific endeavor and the power of educating the public about archaeological and historic preservation.

The chronology of northwest Louisiana be-

gins in Chapter two at 11,500 B.C. Girard touches on important methodological challenges with respect to taphonomy and deeply buried archaeological sites, which limits what is known about the earliest Paleo-Indian cultures. Archaic cultures (8,000–5,000 B.C.) represent a move toward regional mobility and seasonal camps, which allows for greater archaeological visibility and evidence. The reader is introduced to the Conly site—a Middle Archaic (6,000–2,000 B.C.) residential camp and the earliest known cemetery in Louisiana. In his description of the unique combination of highly preserved data (burials, food remains, and stone, bone, and antler tools) and insights they provide related to mortuary, subsistence, and regional exchange, Girard also uses this discussion to highlight the collaborative nature of data collection with contributions from soil scientists, archaeologists, and local avocational society members, among others.

Chapter three discusses the Woodland Period (5,000 B.C.–A.D. 900), which represents a period of cultural change related to early moundbuilding, sedentism, elaborate burial practices, and exchange systems and social relationships that extend beyond the northwest Louisiana region. Excavations at Bellevue and Coral Snake shed light on construction sequences for early mounds and associated mortuary practices. The earliest examples of plant domestication, evidence for the introduction of pottery, and presence of exotic non-local goods during this period suggest the development of exchange connected to the broader Hopewell Interaction Sphere. By the Late Woodland (A.D. 500–A.D. 900) evidence for early ceremonial centers, such as the Fredericks site, documents links to contemporaneous ceremonial sites along the Mississippi River and the development of feasting rituals tied to human burial and mortuary symbolism.

The emphasis in Chapter four is on the origin and early development of Caddo culture (A.D. 900–1300) and ongoing questions related to social, economic, and symbolic relationships with the Cahokia site located to the north. This is a period with significant “changes in settlement patterning, economic factors, social connections, and artistic styles” (p. 42) and highlights that Caddo developments in northwest Louisiana did not develop in a cultural vacuum. The Mounds Plantation and Gahagan sites represent examples of these changes and interactions, in which similar expressions are present at contemporaneous Caddo ceremonial sites in Texas and Arkansas.

Chapter five reviews Caddo culture during precolonial times (A.D. 1300–1700) and the continued evolution toward the use of large ceremonial mound centers, such as the Belcher site with its complex mound construction, burial program, and elaborate mortuary goods. In fact, the Belcher site excavations “provide the most complete picture of the sequence of events relating to construction and use of a prehistoric mound from the Caddo area” (p. 73). This is also a period in which a pattern of dispersed community villages, such as those along Willow Chute Bayou, is increasingly evident. Communities consisted of clusters of homesteads made up of cone or “beehive” shaped dwellings, outbuildings, and garden plots that were spread out over several kilometers along productive waterways.

Chapters six and seven focus on early colonial encounters of Caddo by French and Spanish explorers (A.D. 1700–1760), their organization into confederacies, Euro-American expansions into the region and subsequent cultural interactions (A.D. 1760–1835), and the ultimate forced removal from the region to Indian Territory by the mid-nineteenth century. Girard importantly demonstrates that this was a time period of sig-

nificant economic fluidity and cultural change among Caddo living in northwest Louisiana.

The Caddos and Their Ancestors: Archaeology and the Native People of Northwest Louisiana is broad in scope, yet Girard provides readers with footnotes to numerous references for those interested in further reading and exploration. The overall presentation is well suited for the general audience and is written in a manner in which little or no archaeological background is necessary for those interested in learning about the diverse archaeology and early history of northwest Louisiana.

—Duncan P. McKinnon

