

# Reviews

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*Racial Terrorism: A Rhetorical Investigation of Lynching.* By Marouf A. Hasian Jr. and Nicholas S. Paliewicz. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2021. Pp. 291, notes, bibliography, index. \$30.00, paperback)

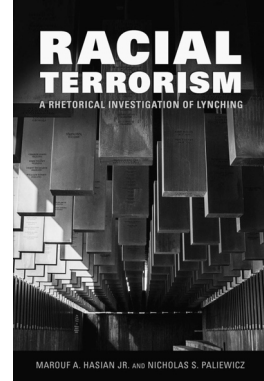
An inside job. Or maybe a love letter. There are multiple ways to describe the book *Racial Terrorism*, but its subtitle, *A Rhetorical Investigation of Lynching*, would not be accurate, for it constitutes less an analysis of the phenomenon of lynching and more a hagiographical account of the work of Bryan Stevenson and the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI). Specifically, the authors argue that Stevenson and the EJI “contributed to the formation of a ‘rhetorical culture’ that helped to set the stage for the serious consideration of the 2018 federal anti-lynching legislation” and that the opening of the National Memorial for Peace and Justice and the Legacy Museum that same year offered spaces “used by the EJI to rhetorically craft more confrontational ‘race-conscious’ messages” (pp. 4, 9, emphasis in the original). In other words, the authors focus upon the rhetoric of Stevenson and the EJI, rather than the rhetoric of lynching. Granted, anyone who has ever published a book has likely dealt with a publisher tinkering with titles so as to maximize sales, and so perhaps we cannot fault the authors for their misleading title. But nonetheless—*caveat emptor*.

Setting aside the title, is this a worthwhile book? Certainly, the work that Stevenson and the EJI have accomplished in bringing to greater public awareness the centuries-long violent assault

upon the personhood of African Americans warrants both significant praise and greater academic scrutiny. After all, they have created the framework that has motivated countless people across the country to engage with local history

and efforts at commemoration. But the way that authors Marouf A. Hasian Jr. and Nicholas S. Paliewicz frame their own study raises some important questions, especially given how they regularly position themselves as “critical genealogical scholars” working to reconstruct the intertwined history of violence and resistance that has shaped how EJI approaches matters in the twenty-first century.

These questions are most prominent in the first four chapters, which survey in brief the history of lynching and anti-lynching activism in the United States. For example, in the first chapter, covering the horrors of the Reconstruction and post-Reconstruction period, the authors regularly sideline historical sources (and sometimes historians themselves) in order to quote Bryan Stevenson. In one example, they cite, for historical context, a 2017 interview he did with *Teen Vogue*, and later they quote from a piece he wrote for the *New York Review of Books* that same year; the latter selection of Stevenson’s words entails only his summary of an 1887 *Chicago Tribune* article (pp. 21, 31). The next chapter goes so far as to say that the “type of analysis” Ida B. Wells-Barnett produced of lynching “prefigured” Byran Stevenson’s later discussions of the loss of presumption



of innocence for those who deserved tender mercy” (p 53, emphasis mine). The word *prefigured* here is really too much, rendering previous generations of anti-lynching activists as mere precursors to the work of Stevenson, and so treating the work of Wells-Barnett and others rather like how the first few generations of Christian apologists treated the Jewish scriptures, sifting for nuggets to indicate the fulfillment of prophecy. Of course, such apologists must often ignore evidence to the contrary of their chosen views, and Hasian and Paliewicz do that here, too, most notably in chapter 4, which covers post-World War II civil rights activism. Here, they completely ignore the work of the short-lived Civil Rights Congress, the most notable achievement of which was probably the 1951 report *We Charge Genocide*, which accused the United States government of perpetrating genocide, as defined by the 1948 United Nations Genocide Convention, against African Americans. Why is this omission so galling in such a book? Because the last chapter of *Racial Terrorism* specifically examines the “postgenocidal” narratives propounded by Stevenson and EJI, painting these as relatively innovative, when, in fact, the framework of “black genocide” has a history nearly as old as the word itself (the term *genocide* having been coined in 1944). These two authors, who regularly describe themselves as “critical genealogical scholars,” have essentially ignored several limbs in the EJI family tree they are purportedly reconstructing.

The latter half of the book, in which the authors finally focus fully upon Stevenson, is markedly better, if only because the authors no longer have to twist historical narratives to fit a Stevenson-centered framework. They even note how “the presentist needs of Stevenson and the EJI” have been served by “some of the repetitive ideographs, narratives, and other discursive units of analysis that have been cobbled together out

of the lynching archives” (p. 115). The authors first survey how Stevenson developed a worldview that linked the prison-industrial complex with the legacies of more explicit racial violence and the monumentalization of Confederate images and ideas. This culminates in a participatory critical rhetoric (PCR) analysis of the National Memorial for Peace and Justice and the Legacy Museum, two EJI sites that opened in 2018 and offer a counter-narrative that centers slavery and lynching in the story of the United States. “While other, more traditional memorials to the civil rights era—many of them in Alabama—have been erected by those who wish to recall triumphant outcomes to historical struggles, few have attempted to create a site of rupture, of open wounds, of haunting traumatic lynching memories,” write Hasian and Peliwicz (p. 183). And the authors offer a genuinely intriguing analysis of how the work of EJI in commemorating lynching and slavery does not merely aim to implant this history in the broader American consciousness but also to implicate the still-present regimes of segregation, incarceration, and economic deprivation that make up the nation’s ongoing system of structural violence waged against people of color. The second half of the book has much to say about why the so-called “monument wars” are so fraught with importance for all sides—precisely because what is at stake is not a statue but a worldview and the values and sense of place that come with it.

Unfortunately, the superior second half of *Racial Terrorism* is tethered to the first half and the rather uncritical genealogy offered therein, making this book truly a missed opportunity. Given EJI’s role in fashioning our cultural narratives, Stevenson and his organization warrant a genuine analysis, one that places them in the proper context of their forebears—not as the fulfillment of that history. Such a book still waits to

be written.

—Guy Lancaster



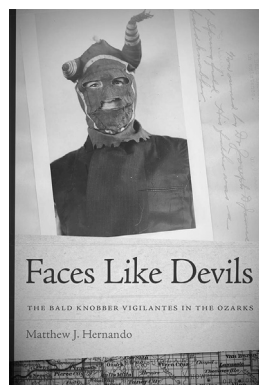
***Faces Like Devils: The Bald Knobber Vigilantes in the Ozarks.***  
By Matthew J. Hernando. (University of Missouri: Columbia, MO, 2019. Pp. 19+221, contents, acknowledgments, list of tables, list of figures, appendix A, appendix B, notes, bibliography, index. \$25.95, paper)

Matthew J. Hernando's first book provides a detailed history of the vigilante group named the Bald Knobbers that attempted to control the moral, political, and justice systems of southwest Missouri during the late 1880s. The nine chapters of the book detail the formation of the Bald Knobbers, their rise in Taney County, their expansion into Christian and Douglass Counties, and the demise of the group through high-profile court cases. Hernando's exhaustive research on the people and contexts that formed the Bald Knobbers would be of interest to anyone studying local Missouri history or vigilantism in the United States.

Hernando excels at detailing local history. He seeks to expand upon earlier accounts of the Bald Knobbers to explain "the underlying causes and motivations behind the Bald Knobber organ-

ization and what drove them to take such extreme measures," in particular "how economic conditions, local politics, or religion contributed to the events" that led to the rise and fall of the group (p. 13). Hernando succeeds in this task through careful accounts of primarily sources from southwest Missouri history. In the first two chapters he details the environment that led to formation of the Bald Knobbers in Taney County as a control mechanism to circumvent overwhelmed local law enforcement in the guerilla-fighter atmosphere after the Civil War. The next three chapters are devoted to local and state reactions to Bald Knobber violence first in Taney County, and then in Christian and Douglas Counties. The final three chapters detail the high profile cases that led to the end of the Bald Knobbers in the three counties.

As Hernando points out in the introduction to the text, vigilante behavior—or "the belief that ordinary citizens—not judges, politicians, or policemen, but *ordinary* citizens—retain an inherent right to take direct action to enforce the law as they see fit"—is a uniquely American perspective, and "remains one of the distinctive characteristics separating the United States from other nations" (p. 4). The formation of vigilante groups to enact forms of "justice" seems to make sense within the context of post-Civil War Missouri and the subsequent distrust of local and national government, as well as the economic instability that the war caused. Hernando does an excellent job explaining this context and how the local community reacted to this vigilantism. In particular, Hernando's skilled discussion about the local and national backlash against the Bald Knobbers after the 1887 murder of the Edens and Greene families in Christian County illustrates the moment as pivotal in the downfall of the group. The trial after the killings caught national attention and contributed to the national "hillbilly" narra-



tive that has defined the Ozarks ever since.

What's more interesting to me than the rise and fall of the Bald Knobbers themselves is their place within the long legacy of American vigilantism that continues to this day. Hernando astutely argues that vigilantism was "a response to the living conditions on the American frontier, where the regular institutions of law enforcement—the courts, judges, and police—could not always keep up with the furious pace of westward migration and settlement" (p. 6), and sees the vigilante justice of the Bald Knobbers as motivated by "politics and economic considerations" as well as "moral and religious concerns" (p. 8). While Hernando portrays the Bald Knobbers as a discrete group with a beginning and end, I wonder the extent to which they also are part of an American narrative of white control through intimidation and violence. The morality policing through intimidation and political control that the Bald Knobbers employed in Christian and Douglass counties resembles the same control still found in the relationship between local politics and white evangelical churches throughout the South, which attempts to control community laws and policies ranging from alcohol sale permits to reproductive rights. I'm interested in if the vigilantes who stormed the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021, were of the same American political strain as the Bald Knobber vigilantes who felt they were enforcing political peace and morality by killing, whipping, or driving out community members in nineteenth-century rural Missouri. While Hernando paints a painstaking thorough account of the history of the Missouri Bald Knobbers, I would have liked more of how the Bald Knobbers fit within the big picture of the United States. Had Hernando been able to frame his account of the Bald Knobbers around a more consistent argument about American vigilantism, the ideology of white supremacy, and

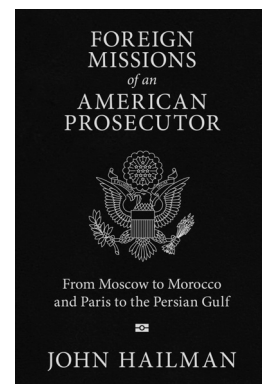
violent masculinity in the United States, *Faces Like Devils* would be of even wider interest to historians and cultural analysts.

~Erin C. Clair



***Foreign Missions of an American Prosecutor: From Moscow to Morocco and Paris to the Persian Gulf.* By John Hailman. (University Press of Mississippi: Jackson, MS, 2019. Pp. 336, contents, preface, useful abbreviations and foreign terms, prologue, epilogue, acknowledgments, further readings, index, about the author. \$29.95, paper)**

For readers accustomed to the familiar environs of home, travelogues have long provided insights into distant lands and peoples. Authors function as emissaries, bringing tales of their homelands, sharing them with hosts, and returning with experiences and observations that regale audiences, sparking imaginations with details about different customs



and lifestyles. Author and retired federal prosecutor John Hailman fills this role. An Indiana native and longtime Oxford, Mississippi, resident, he displays some essential traits of the best emissaries: intense curiosity, humility about one's nation, and adept language skills.

A lengthy prologue outlines the origins of Hailman's wanderlust. His parents withdrew him from school in first and fifth grades for trips to Florida and California, the latter by train, while a fourth grade teacher introduced Hailman to numerous European explorers, starting with Marco Polo. In the early 1960s, undergraduate studies in French at Millsaps College in Jackson, Mississippi, included a summer in France and another in Quebec, followed by two years at the Sorbonne and employment with Air France as a translator and tour guide. In his early twenties, Hailman enjoyed multiple adventures in Europe and, unwisely perhaps, even entered Algeria less than two years after the exodus of the Pied-Noirs. The prologue also divulges more details of his sexual liaisons than readers might like to see. They are harbingers of the author's unfortunate habit of remarking on the physical beauty of many women whom he met in subsequent travels.

Much of the book details Hailman's role as a legal expert whose work supported US diplomatic endeavors after the Soviet Union's demise. The Department of Justice created the Office of Overseas Prosecutorial Development and Training, or OPDAT, in 1991 to coordinate American assistance in training prosecutors in other countries. By 2012, Hailman explained, OPDAT had offered hundreds of training programs in 92 countries, with funding support from the Department of State, Department of Defense, and USAID. Hundreds of foreign legal professionals also visited the United States to observe local, state, and federal legal proceedings.

In October 1994, Hailman was one of three American prosecutors, joined by two judges, who spent two weeks in Paris immersed in a formal study of the French legal system. This junket concluded in Lyon with a short-term study of international law at Interpol headquarters. By this

time, Hailman had extensive experience moonlighting as a food and wine columnist, syndicated by Gannett no less, so assessments of local wines are interspersed amid legal commentary. Readers with some legal knowledge will be particularly interested in Hailman's list of differences between American and French trials, in addition to the numerous bits of advice that he gave prosecutors in other countries.

With this additional training, Hailman became a prime candidate to serve as an international legal advisor and observer, roles he filled in trips to Moldova, Russia, and Georgia, as their legal systems slowly evolved in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War. Numerous details from these excursions were captivating: the clumsy procedures at a criminal trial in Chişinău, some of the first jury trials in Moscow, and the ongoing challenges of accurately translating legal texts in Tbilisi. In retrospect, Hailman acknowledges the naiveté that marked such efforts. At the same time, he believes that there are people in those countries who remember "that there were once good Americans who came to help them try to improve their country and their personal lives, making both more free and fair, and that there must still be many Americans of the same kind, still ready to befriend and help their country" (pp. 148).

Further removed from the shadows of the former Soviet Union, Hailman also visited Tunisia, Oman, Morocco, and Indonesia. These trips typically consisted of the author holding seminars for prosecutors and law students and meeting with public officials who wanted to institute legal reforms that were ostensibly aimed at curbing corruption but as likely motivated by hopes of attracting American and European investment. US officials also deployed Hailman to harvest intelligence. In 1992, he was instructed to "inquire discreetly into human rights in Tunisian



courts, which were alleged to be suffering from instances of torture, coerced confessions, and summary executions” (pp. 70). Hailman broached the topic with his hosts by acknowledging the shortcomings of the justice system in the US, with its police brutality and racial discrimination. In 1999, the newly appointed US ambassador to Oman asked Hailman to find out if that country had anything comparable to a bar association. That request suggests the tenuous nature of some international relationships and the degree to which information technology has reshaped them. (Foreign service officers now check *Wikipedia*, right?)

In addition to the fascinating personal tales that Hailman shares, readers are left with a much greater sense of how soft power works, far away from television cameras and high-ranking government officials. Competing motives subtly connect these narratives—the US wants to build a world in its image, government leaders in many nations want to replicate aspects of American life while preserving most customs and traditions, and Hailman remains eager to travel. While his formal assignments may have brought only limited success, informal moments at mealtimes or amid sightseeing illustrate common threads in human experience. There was no explicit statement to this end, but the text invites readers to imagine a world in which citizen exchanges were more common. Hailman is a compelling emissary with an adventurous and gracious spirit whose life should encourage readers to learn a second or third language and visit another country—to explore, discover, and befriend.

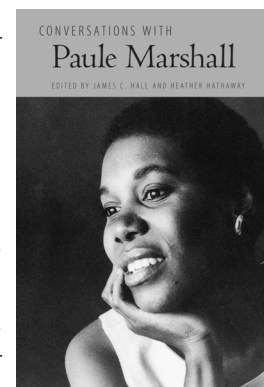
~Barclay Key



***Conversations With Paule Marshall.*** Edited by James C. Hall and Heather Hathaway. (University Press of Mississippi: Jackson, MS, 2019. Pp. vii+ 188, Q&A with Paule Marshall by Dawn Raffel, introduction, chronology, index. \$25, paper)

Noting unfavorable responses to the conclusion of *The Fisher King*, Paule Marshall opined, “the book is not about happiness, for god’s sake, it’s about the way we are as humans! With all of our mixed motives” (p. 163). This sentiment pervades her work from her first novel *Brown Girl, Brown Stones* to her memoir *Triangular Road*. Her deep investment in revealing the complexity of Black lives has cemented her legacy as a literary luminary. This collection of interviews with Marshall reveals her as a meticulous artist, immersed in the power of culture and selfhood, who is willing to share insight into her craft and her life philosophy.

The interviews reveal that before Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term or Patricia Hill Collins further advanced it as a critical theory, Marshall’s work was intersectional. A recurring theme throughout most of the interviews is her assertion of identity as both African American and Afro Caribbean. More profound are her dismissals of cultural hierarchies, on either side, and her frustration at being categorized by readers or the publishing industry. Her characters represent the African diaspora, highlighting both diasporic complexity and a through line of connectedness



that speaks to a degree of unity. In her interview for the literary magazine *Wasafiri*, she explains, “we are, as black people, in a kind of existential situation where we, in a sense, can create ourselves” (p. 81). This creation should embody a multiplicity of experiences from hybridized existences. As noted in her interview with Graulich and Sisco, Marshall’s hybridized identity, as both a child of the United States and of Barbados, and her inclusion of this in her work, counter the deleterious effects inherent in double-consciousness. With the ability to self-create, even in the face of the negatives of neo-colonialism, oppression, and systemic racism, the creator has the ability to remove the destructive white gaze from conceptions of self, even if those conditions remain.

Marshall’s well-trod discussion of the poetic beauty and creative potential of language speaks to that self-creation. She notes in majority of the interviews how the women she knew as a child “fought against . . . invisibility” using “Language as a creative expression, and a way of making sense of the world” (p. 134). The interviews reveal how many of her characters rally against the imposition of invisibility and assert their culturally infused definitions of self. Marshall’s womanist philosophy pervades the entire collection. In the Hall and Hathaway interview, she discusses the misogynoir faced by women during the Black Arts Movement and the dilemmas created by dismissal of the intersection of gender, race, sexual orientation, and class. Nonetheless, Marshall’s philosophy at once subsumes many of the principles of the Black Arts agenda while ex-cising hierarchical elements.

In addition, this collection also provides readers a glimpse of an established contemporary author engaging in conversations regarding the political nature of art—revisiting the debate between Zora Neale Hurston and Richard Wright. She addresses this age-old debate when she dis-

cusses her novels *The Chosen Place*, *The Timeless People*, and *Daughters*. Marshall asserts that “History to me is an antidote to the lies, and I’m interested in discovering and in unearthing what was positive and inspiring about our experience in the hemisphere—our will to survive and to overcome” (pp. 100-101). Her work unearths and reimagines history in ways that encourage the reader to shape themselves beyond the limits of Western narratives. Art, then, is always political to Marshall, though she makes clear that its political nature does not require sacrificing artistry.

This collection includes interviews from 1970 to 2009. There are moments—though rare—when an interviewer’s questionable attempt at omniscience intrudes. However, with the exception of a couple of interviews that add very little to conversations about the author or her work, most of the interviews are revealing about Marshall the woman and the artist. Whether as result of Marshall’s eschewing the spotlight or some other reason, there is an eight-year gap between the Hall and Hathaway interview in 2001 and the Raffel interview in 2009. Nonetheless, the collection includes significant discussions of all of her major works. Despite some redundancy, topics covered in the collection are far ranging. Marshall discusses social issues such as the costs of materialism and the challenges of immigrant communities. She also provides details about her writing process, sharing her challenges with creating dialogue and her willingness to challenge herself by experimenting with brevity and centering masculine characters. Though her death in 2019 means that the world is bereft of future works from this great talent, there is much more to be said about the works that she left behind; thus, this collection is a worthy contribution to Paule Marshall scholarship.

~LaRonda Sanders-Senu



***The Last Mastodon.* By Christina Olson. (Rattle Foundation: Studio City, CA, 2019. Pp. 9 + 33, contents, author's note, acknowledgments, about the Rattle chapbook series. \$6.00, paper)**

*The Last Mastodon* was inspired by a residency at a paleontology conference and exhibition, "The Valley of the Mastodons," at the Western Science Center in California. This gives the collection a somewhat educational feel. The first poem, "Catalogue of Damages," begins:

All these years not knowing  
the difference between mammoth

and mastodon: just another  
human so proud in her indifference (p. 9)

Here, Olson also establishes a tone of humility in the face of history and the grandeur of the mastodon:

It's in the teeth: mammoth teeth  
resemble the rubber sole of a snow boot—

mastodon teeth, jagged mountains  
turned to granite after all these years. (p. 9)  
She shifts into reverence, later, when she says, "All morning I've tried to reconcile / our ambition with the misery it brings" (p. 9).

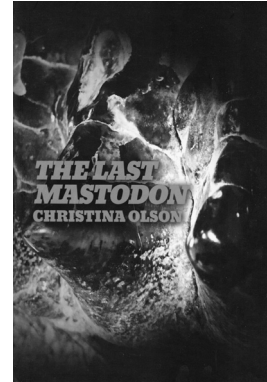
Olson balances science and mysticism throughout. In "Origin Story: Max Mastodon," she says, "... in California, magic is possible / the paleontologists know this already ..." (p. 10). She also examines how we interpret history. In "Who Gets To Be a Fossil," Olson compares the

postmortem journeys of Max the mastodon and Thomas Jefferson, both of whom she references throughout the book: "Max the mastodon gets to be a fossil. // Thomas Jefferson gets to be a fossil." (p. 11)." Here,

Olson is being metaphorical. Partly, she implies that Jefferson will be remembered for a very long time, but partly, she is also implying that he is a member of a bygone era. She discusses Max's life: "Sometimes, Max used his tusks to fight other mastodons . . ." (p. 11). She contrasts that with Jefferson, who "fathered six children with his slave Sally Hemings." (p. 11). Her unflinching examination of Jefferson's life, as well as seemingly mundane information about the website that lists his burial location, belie a call for honesty in historical preservation. Jefferson's sins were part of his life and therefore should not be overlooked when examining that life.

Olson focuses on realism throughout. The same way she humanizes Jefferson and Hemings, and the woman who runs the website listing burial locations, she is sure not to romanticize the mastodons that are the focal point of the book. She describes them fighting, killing each other, California as it is and as it once was, "... there is no lake and the mastodons / are not hardening in their muddy graves they are instead pissing / and fighting and breathing like you did this morning . . ." (p. 13). Similarly, she frequently relates the actions of mastodons to human actions and even desires.

Olson weaves threads of ideas all through the poems, which she touches on again and again. When discussing Jefferson and Hemings, she mentions that she can't talk to her father, appar-





ently because they differ in their perspective on history. Later, in “Animals Doing Things to Other Animals,” amidst descriptions of animals found in La Brea, she mentions, “I wish I could call my father, tell him where I stand.” Here, we’re beginning to realize that her father is dead. Throughout this poem, she introduces multiple ideas and returns to them later, shifting their meaning. When discussing Jefferson’s slave children, she explains that Jefferson freed ten slaves in his life, two of them his own children. “Madison and Eston were freed upon Jefferson’s death. Beverly and Harriet disappeared. Or rather, they passed.” (p. 16). The implication at first blush might be that they died, but later, she explains, “I meant they passed as white.” (p. 17).

Despite her focus on science, as well as mysticism, Olson, underpins her collection with commentary on the frailty of life. “When it comes to death, we are all magical thinkers,” (p. 30) she says in “The Last Mastodon.” Later, she explains, “This is not a story about mastodons. This is a story about humans, our animal ways.” (p. 30).

This is a collection about the dead but also about life. Though she critiques human foibles, she praises our triumphs. Olson has reverence for fossils, but at the same time she praises the stuff of their lives, pissing and fighting, eating and dying, ultimately to be preserved as fossils. But even that is not the end, as she explains:

“At the Western Science Center, the displayed fossils are set in cork. In case of earthquake, they are designed to drop back into the ground for safekeeping.

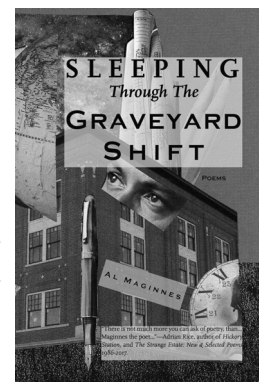
When California crumbles, Max will go back to his earth.”

—CL Bledsoe



***Sleeping Through the Graveyard Shift.* By Al Maginnes. (North Carolina: Redhawk Publications, 2020. Pp. 86. \$12.00, paper)**

Although born in Massachusetts and raised in North Carolina, Al Maginnes is a graduate of the University of Arkansas program in Creative Writing and a recipient of the John Ciardi Award for Poetry as well as several Peter Foundation Fellowships. His second volume, titled *The Light in Our Houses* (2000), garnered the Lena-Miles Wever Todd Prize from Pleiades Press, and grants from the North Carolina Arts Council have supported his projects in the past. Maginnes is an aficionado of popular music and celebrates the virtuosity



of Delta bluesman Robert Johnson, in addition to the Rolling Stones’ signature “electric slide drawl” and the “fatback enunciations” (p. 24) of lead vocalist Mick Jagger. His chawbacon narratives and cracker barrel wit are tempered by a gift for arresting images and apt metaphors that doubtless arouse the admiration of those whose impulse tends toward the lyric mode. Moreover, he assimilates his influences well. Among living masters of the previous generation, Charles Wright and Fred Chappell come most immediately to mind. In short, Maginnes is what the late James Whitehead would call “the real thing.”

“Love in Vain” is the most poignant entry in *Sleeping Through the Graveyard Shift*. The poem consists of forty lines that celebrate a heartbreak-

ing lament recorded in 1937 by legendary guitarist Robert Johnson, who reputedly sold his soul to the devil at the crossroads of Highways 49 and 61 in Clarkdale, Mississippi, in exchange for the gift to make his battered old six-string fret like a bluebottle fly. The Rolling Stones later covered the song and obviously aspired to a similar mystique; indeed, their sixth album was titled *Their Satanic Majesties Request* (1967). Structurally, the couplets of “Love in Vain” serve as an ideogram for those twin ribbons of steel that meet in infinity, and Maginnes also conjoins tenor and vehicle when the protagonist watches his inamorata depart on a night train for the dim precincts of oblivion.

Johnson sounds weary as a bad year as he watches

his baby leave on the train for Lethe or some  
shade-tangled  
branch of the underworld. Two lights, one  
red, one blue

burn from the back of that vanishing train,  
a glow

to turn all desire to ash. (p. 24)

The poet’s idol suffers from a twelfth-month’s weariness of soul before Willie Mae even vanishes from sight; his woman’s love is like a forgetful dram of “Lethe” as she crosses Stygian waters for the nether regions, which in this instance amounts to whereabouts unknown. According to Johnson’s lyrics, the “blue” light of the receding caboose represents his “baby” and the “red” his desolation of both mind and spirit. The Stones lent their version of “Love in Vain” a country twang in an effort to sound less derivative, but like the Delta autodidact, they strove for an almost ineffable goal: “to tune and chord the black dirt / the hangman’s moon, all the sweet voodoo of the blues” (p. 25). The succession of crooning u sounds in “moon,” “voodoo,” and “blues” cap-

tures beautifully the molten gold and charged sweetness of black vernacular. But according to Maginnes, Johnson and the British musicians do not share a common destiny:

The Stones’ baby, though, is not bound for  
hell, but London  
Manchester, Brawley, somewhere time-  
locked and sensible

unlike Johnson’s lover, whose fate lingers be-  
tween the drawn-out

notes the guitar can reach, the crackle of  
dust like time unfolding. (p. 25)

The Stone’s muse heads for the more agreeable environs of London and Manchester, whereas the genuine innovator looks on as the phantasm of his innermost being rides the rippling grooves of an old 78 rpm toward some literal or figurative time warp scored by “the crackle of dust like time unfolding.” Maginnes’s speaker then remembers the correspondence broken off by a dying friend for some unintended transgression: “I don’t believe any love is wrong, even / the one that hurts us empty, that makes us moan // like a piece of metal slurring down the neck / of a guitar” (p.25). The poet’s closure reaffirms the longing for what may be unattainable:

We are  
creatures made restless with desire, forever  
riding away

or waving farewell, always believing  
a stranger will descend from the dark plat-  
form

take our tired arms, ask our names, convince  
us

that once, at least, love will not be in vain.

“Sacrificing Home” recounts the watershed events and life circumstances of Tyrus Raymond Cobb, a baseball player almost universally ac-

knowledge to be the greatest athlete the game ever produced. His reputation is often compromised by Al Stump's needlessly iconoclastic and largely spurious biography that provided the screenplay for the 1994 cinematic production titled *Cobb*, which starred Tommy Lee Jones. The "Georgia Peach" owned ninety batting records in the "dead ball" era, and his overall average of .367 has never been seriously approached. Maginnes opens with his subject contemplating the lumber with which he intends to build his legend from the ground up:

A baseball bat is forty-two inches long  
but can carry the right person further  
than any outfield can stretch, all the way

from Royston, Georgia, known for nearly  
nothing, to Chicago, New York, Detroit.  
(p. 17)

Notice the alliterative plosives in "baseball bat," and the sonorous liquid nasals repeated in "Royston" and "Detroit." Thus, the poet endows these lines with a dense musicality one might miss in a cursory reading. But the seamy side of Maginnes's yarn runs deeper than the red stitching on horsehide ball: "Then a train brings / a boy back from his games to view his father / visit his mother accused but not arrested for / shooting the man she married when she was twelve" (p. 17). Contemporary rumor held that the elder Cobb was skulking outside his wife's window in an attempt to catch her in the act of infidelity when she reached for his .32 and squeezed off a fatal round. The 17-year-old Cobb testified on his mother's behalf and she was acquitted. Whether she was actually culpable is a matter of speculation, but other stories regarding his sense of fair play can be verified. For example, Cobb heartily approved of Jackie Robinson's having broken the color barrier in the major leagues. He declared that Roy Campanella was the best back-

stop in the modern game and said Willie Mays was the only outfielder that he would pay money to see. Cobb was a shrewd man of finance, holding millions in General Motors and Coca Cola stock, but the diamond he cared most about was not a faceted gem sparkling in a jeweler's case. Maginnes demonstrates that the Hall of Famer's abiding aim was sports immortality. The poet vividly depicts Cobb's keenness to excel: "the spikes / his new teammates will watch him sharpen / before his first major league game, three weeks // from tonight" (p. 17). In the concluding passage, Maginnes chooses Amanda Cobb as his vessel of consciousness:

Her son will be in Detroit,  
already known for giving no quarter when

he runs the bases. The whiskey someone  
gave him  
remains untouched. He needs only a little  
flask  
of rage he uncorks each time he crosses a  
baseline. (p. 18)

Cobb's prime whiskey was the rage that fueled his passion for the game, "anywhere men and women pay good money // to sit in sun-parched bleachers" (17). According to Maginnes, the "Georgia Peach" was a man gone down into legend during his own lifetime.

In "Hard Luck: A Requiem for Jerry Quarry," Maginnes pays his respects to another athlete, one who never quite achieved legendary status. A handsome six foot and 195-pound boxer with a granite chin and a shrewd left hook, perhaps the best counter-puncher of his era, "Irish" Jerry Quarry hated to be dubbed "the Great White Hope." He finished his professional career with a respectable 53-9-4 record that included wins over Ron Lyle and Earnie Shavers; the great Joe Frazier once said of Quarry: "He could have been a champion, but he cut too

easy.” Maginnes opens this seven-part narration with a portrait of the blond pugilist’s father: “First, the fist. The flat-knuckled hand, work-scarred, lettered with / India ink and a sewing needle, a letter on each finger // so his fists spelled *Hard Luck*, mantra for the low punches / and cheap shots life deals out” (p. 77). Notice the successive fricative f sounds that sizzle like a lit fuse, the glottal stops in the hyphenated adjective-noun combination “flat-knuckled hand” and the crude tattoo pricked out in “India ink,” as well as the family motto “*Hard Luck*” that denotes his son’s need to supplement his income by cracking the lugs on tires in a Greyhound terminal, even as his career was on the rise. Here Maginnes’s knack for compression comes together like a clenched fist. Indeed, nothing prosaic inheres in this poet’s unadorned style. More haunting is the 16 mm vignette that unfolds in section two of this splendid poem. Like a ghost answerable to a fearful summons, Quarry appears before our eyes in the throes of dementia pugilistica: “My last vision of him, in the unyielding glare of a camera, / as he shuffled, spoke in the broken syllables / of a man who has survived something horrible he can’t recall” (p. 78). In film long since consigned to a vault, the poet conjures his contender’s valiant efforts against the best fighters of the day: “Jerry Quarry stalking the ring, never backing up, waiting / for his opponent to make a mistake, patient // even when Ali or Frazier beats him to the punch / draws blood and slips the counter-punch” (p. 78). In a flickering, grainy light Maginnes projects his hopelessly over-matched protagonist onto a darkroom screen, the oxymoron “Quarry stalking” so adroit one reads over it on the first take. The speaker broaches part four with a simple statement of fact: “Jerry Quarry was the single fighter to say yes when / Muhammad Ali returned from suspension and needed / someone to fight” (p. 80).

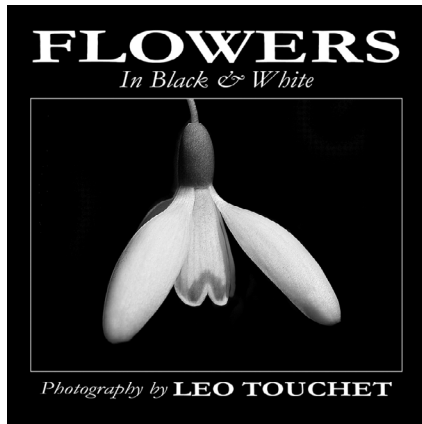
He then fast-forwards to part five, cataloguing the Irishman’s various hurts: “the hairline split / of scar tissue over one eye, then the other,” sutures that the passing years cannot efface” (p.81). In a sixth section dedicated to Arkansas poet and novelist Jack Butler, Maginnes contemplates a *Sports Illustrated* photograph of Quarry’s brawl with Jimmy Ellis: “Quarry was taking a punch, / his face twisted by the impact / his gloved fist lifted // to strike. He would lose this fight, his first shot / at the heavyweight title” (p. 82). Long and short i sounds lend this tortured freeze-frame an incongruous lilt. One recalls with dismay Quarry’s boxing style, pick and shovel with too many head-shots. But here the poet gets at heart of this requiem: “Maybe the photograph taught me / to love the ones who keep coming, whose art / is perseverance: the graveyard waitress / the hot tar roofer” (p. 82). Filled with tales of guts and stamina, *Sleeping Through the Graveyard Shift* could well be Al Maginnes’s finest volume to date.

~Floyd Collins



***Flowers in Black & White.* By Leo Touchet. (Photo Circle Press, 2018. Pp. 36. \$15.00, paper)**

Leo Touchet is an American photographer living in Breaux Bridge, Louisiana, who has published seven books of photographs including *Rejoice When You Die: The New Orleans Jazz Funerals*, *Chasing Shadows*, and *People Among Us*. As a professional photographer, Touchet has traveled to more than fifty countries to shoot pictures. His photographs have appeared in national and international magazines, such as *Life*, *Time*, *Na-*



tional Geographic, New York Times, Der Stern, Panorama, and Popular Photography and in corporate publications as well.

Most of Touchet's books have people as subjects, catching moments of their happiness, sadness, surprise, or poverty, but *Flowers in Black & White* shifts its attention to nature with a selection of flowers themed for this small collection of 28 black-and-white photographs taken in Louisiana, New York, Illinois, Florida, and Canada.

Touchet tends to think and shoot in black and white. Even after he began to use a digital camera, he still prefers to convert the color shots into black-and-white images, as he did for *Flowers in Black & White*. In real life, we are delighted by the colors and varieties of flowers in a botanical garden, but in the garden of Touchet's flower photographs, we are delighted by the close-up shots in black and white. The difference in our delights is that we see the flowers with our naked eye in a botanical garden, but we see the flowers in our mind's eye in the black-and-white images. This is an aesthetic experience of beauty which involves creativity and imagination.

One of the challenges in photography is the decision to be made to portray a flower in color or in black and white. In the introduction Touchet mentions his aesthetic experience of beauty through black-and-white photographs, "With film cameras, I needed to use two cameras to shoot both color and black & white at the

same time. This required me to think differently for each. It was like having a second brain. The digital camera offered both with the same camera. However, shooting both simultaneously still required a second brain. After a while, I realized I really did not like photographing in color. I'm much happier thinking in black & white."

His words tell how he wants us to view his flower garden and to experience his way of thinking and looking. Touchet's creative thinking in black and white shows his aesthetic attitude toward an art expression as well as his awareness and observation of nature around him. The close-up images accentuate shades and shadows with a possibility to create a spatial relationship between the subjects and the black background and to engage the viewers' eyes more focally on the highlighted images.

Many of Touchet's photographs in *Flowers in Black & White* are characteristic of abstract art and appeal to imagination. Some of them highlight a solitary state of nature. The crocus (p. 6) ready to bloom holds a moment of aloneness in the calm morning and its luminous veins on the folded petals give an effect of warm shine of sunlight in contrast to the stillness of the deep black background. Another photograph of crocus is on page 18. It's blooming. The six petals are wide open to welcome the sunrise and the three stamens represent the production of life. Its veins, effected by the light, exaggerate a self-expression or even a human expression of joy. These two photographs seem to show an interactive communication between the photographer and the images as if both enjoy a moment of aloneness together or a satisfaction of being alone with each other.

Two other photos I like most are the cucumber flower on page 8 and the snowdrop on page 22. The first reminds me of my farm experience more than four decades ago when I was sent to the countryside for reeducation. However,



what catches my attention especially is not the flower but a single tendril that stretches above the flower like a question mark, which immediately establishes a visual communication with the photographer or the viewer. The second gives an effective contrast of black and white. The deep black background sets off the bell-shaped white flower which droops as if from nowhere to engage you to see into the tranquil beauty of nature.

In short, Touchet's black-and-white photographs are delightful to the eye and the mind. I think they essentially reveal the joy of solitude in nature and in human nature as well.

-John Zheng

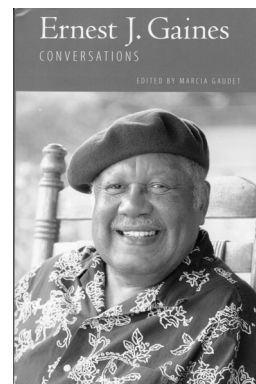


***Ernest J. Gaines: Conversations.* Edited by Marcia Gaudet. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2019. Pp. xiii + 218, introduction, chronology, additional resources, index. \$25.00, paper)**

Marcia Gaudet is Professor Emerita of English at University of Louisiana at Lafayette and the founding director of the Ernest J. Gaines Center. In *Ernest J. Gaines: Conversations*, Gaudet has collected interviews that took place from 1994 through 2017. The fifteen interviews include discussions of *A Lesson Before Dying* (1993), *Mozart and Leadbelly: Stories and Essays* (2005), and Gaines's last novel, *The Tragedy of Brady Sims* (2017) as well as earlier works. Five of the interviews are with international scholars while four are with Gaudet who conducted interviews with Gaines for decades beginning with their "porch talk" conversations in 1986 and 1987 with Gaudet, Carl Wooton, and Ernest Gaines when they

were colleagues in the English department at the University of Southwestern Louisiana (now University of Louisiana at Lafayette).

When Ernest Gaines died in November 2019, he left a legacy that included novels, short stories, essays, film adaptations, and a wealth of interviews. *Ernest J. Gaines: Conversations* (2019) is the third collection of interviews with the beloved and acclaimed Louisiana author. *Porch Talk With Ernest Gaines: Conversations on the Writer's Craft* (1990, edited by Gaudet and Carl Wooton) was the first full-length book on Gaines while *Conversations with Ernest Gaines* (1995, edited by John Lowe) was published just as Gaines studies was accelerating after Gaines's seventh novel, *A Lesson Before Dying*, won the National Book Critics Circle Award in 1993. This latest collection of interviews picks up where *Conversations* left off. In the intervening years there was an explosion of interest in Gaines as evidenced by monographs, articles, fellowships, honorary degrees, writer-in-residence positions, innumerable awards, and the creation of the Ernest J. Gaines Center at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette.



Nine of the interviews were conducted in the decade following the extraordinary success of *A Lesson before Dying*. Gaines spent 1996 in France teaching creative writing at University of Rennes, and two of the interviews took place in Europe during which Gaines reflects on his experiences living in France, the reception of his novels in Europe, and European influences on his writing. Gaines returned to his writer-in-residence position at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette in 1997, the same year that Oprah Winfrey selected *A Lesson Before Dying* for her book club. Oprah's

pick got the novel into the hands of hundreds of thousands of readers and attention increased with the film adaptation of the novel. Five additional interviews took place from 2005 to 2009. The concluding interview in the collection is a 2017 conversation between Gaudet and Gaines after the publication of his final novel.

The focus and tone vary in the interviews but what remains consistent is Gaines's generosity, sincerity, and reflection. When a French doctoral student asks about silence in Gaines's novels and offers examples of what he means, Gaines says, "I think you have read those books very well; I mean bringing up such points as silence is important to me" (p. 17). No matter the starting point for each interview—a particular novel, themes, influences, style, literary labels, or Gaines's own remarkable life—the conversation consistently returns to Gaines's desire to tell the stories others had not, the story of the people and land of Louisiana: "I did not know I wanted to be a writer as a child in Louisiana. It wasn't until I went to California and ended up in the library and began reading a lot that I knew I wanted to be a writer. I read many great novels and stories and did not see myself or my people in any of them. It was then that I tried to write" (p. 57).

There is a poignancy to reading a collection of interviews published in the same year as Gaines's death. The final interview is with Marcia Gaudet in 2017 after the publication of *The Tragedy of Brady Sims*. Gaudet interviewed Gaines a few weeks after his reading from the novel at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. Given a gap of eight years between interviews, uncharacteristically short answers by Gaines, and Gaines's death two years later, the interview strikes an elegiac tone. Gaines is no less open or engaged than in previous interviews, but he does express frustration with his lack of progress on the companion novella to *Brady Sims*: "I'm not working on

it, but I think about it every day. But thinking about it is not getting it done. I'm not doing a damn thing now as far as writing or anything else. I'm doing a lot of reading, but no writing" (pp. 198-199). When Gaudet reminds him that it is pretty remarkable to be publishing at eighty-four, Gaines laughs, talks about the novella's title and characters, and tells Gaudet he will get back to it: "I might get back to it next week" (p. 199).

A slight flaw in an otherwise valuable and illuminating collection is the inconsistency in the introductory notes for the interviews. While Gaudet provides helpful overviews of each interview in her introduction, she does not provide prefatory notes. Some interviewers identify themselves and the context for the interview while others do not. There is no information about some interviewers while others identify themselves as colleagues, scholars, or students. Gaudet does provide the original publication information for each entry in the collection; an additional brief editor's note for each interview would orient the reader who wants to read the interviews as a collection rather than piecemeal.

With the passing of Ernest Gaines, we lost a generous, compassionate, and compelling storyteller. Gaines has joined his ancestors, whom he valued and memorialized in his literary works. These interviews reveal Gaines's dignity, humor, and humility as well as his journey from reader to writer to keeper of ancestral lands and people. Do yourself a favor and read a novel or two and then sit in on some conversations with Ernest J. Gaines.

~Janelle Collins

