

MIDWESTERN
MISCELLANY XLV

Spring 2017

*being a variety of essays on
contemporary Midwestern short fiction*

by members of

The Society for the Study of
Midwestern Literature

guest editor

ANDY OLER

The Midwestern Press
The Center for the Study of
Midwestern Literature and Culture
Michigan State University
East Lansing, Michigan 48824-1033
2017

Copyright 2017 by
the Society for the Study of
Midwestern Literature
All rights reserved.

Printed in the United States of America.
No part of this work may be reproduced in
any form without permission of the publisher.

Midwestern Miscellany (ISSN 0885-4742) is a peer-reviewed journal published
twice a year (Spring and Fall) by the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature.

This journal is a member of the Council of Editors of Learned Journals



In honor of
Michael Martone

JAMES SEATON (1944-2017)
AN APPRECIATION

MARCIA NOE

Long-time SSML member James Seaton died of cancer on March 29, 2017. An obituary was published in the *Lansing State Journal* on April 2, 2017, and is available online. Many of you have known Jim since the '80s; those of you who are newer SSML members may remember him from the Law and Literature panels he organized and presided over in recent years at our annual conference, or as a fellow Editorial Committee member and peer reviewer for the Society's journals. Others may know him from his publications as a thoughtful, insightful, provocative, and productive scholar. James exemplified the gentleman scholar in the best sense of that term; he was invariably pleasant and cordial, respectful of those whose opinions differed from his own, helpful to the younger scholars and a very active member of SSML for over four decades who richly deserved the MidAmerica Award for distinguished contributions to Midwestern Literature, which he won in 2008. I deeply mourn his passing, am grateful to have known him, and am honored to have been able to call him a colleague.

CONTENTS

James Seaton: An Appreciation`	Marcia Noe	4
Preface	Andy Oler	6
The Midwestern Grotesque: How <i>Winesburg, Ohio</i> Has Influenced the Contemporary Midwestern Short Story	Sara Kosiba	10
Conversational Dissonance: Assault and Dialogue in Bonnie Jo Campbell's "Playhouse"	Douglas Sheldon	22
The Page and What's Not on It: Michael Martone Winking	Jim Gorman	30
Sports and Civic Identity in Michael Czyzniejewski's <i>Chicago Stories</i>	Michael Cocchiarale	42
Publishing from Flyover Country: The Rejection of Heartland Iconography by Contemporary Midwestern Literary Magazines	Patricia Oman	52
Contemporary Midwestern Short Fiction: Selected Primary and Secondary Sources	Micah Hallman	70
Recent Midwestern Fiction and Poetry		75
SSML Conference Information		76

PREFACE

In the 2014 short story, “How to Be Chinese,” Celeste Ng represents the interior monologue of Mackenzie Altman, a young woman who was adopted as an infant from a Chinese orphanage by a single mom in Michigan. At the beginning of her first year at a small liberal arts college in Ohio, Altman notes some of the challenges of discussing her heritage with her mother: “Don’t bring up the difficulties of learning to be Chinese in the middle of Michigan. Don’t remind her that except for the waiters at the Pearl of the Orient, you have never met another Chinese person. Don’t tell her you have no idea where to begin.” Throughout the story, Altman attempts to learn about Chinese culture by playing mahjong with other students in her college’s Chinese Student Association and dating a recent immigrant from Hong Kong, a date that includes meeting his mother and going to a “*real* Chinese restaurant.”

This issue of *Midwestern Miscellany* focuses on contemporary short fiction from the Midwest. Like Ng, the authors examined here portray both the benefits and the limitations of Midwestern life, and they write characters who attempt to develop a sense of self that accounts for their past but is not beholden to it. Midwestern literature has long been preoccupied with the region’s history, variously perpetuating and dismantling nostalgic images of the heroic farmer or the sleepy small town. In short stories and novels (to say nothing of poetry), contemporary Midwestern writers continue to develop their relationship to the region’s cultural and literary traditions. In *The New Midwest: A Guide to Contemporary Fiction of the Great Lakes, Great Plains, and Rust Belt*, Mark Athitakis observes this pattern among many of the most well-respected works of contemporary Midwestern fiction. It is perhaps most obvious in recent novels with historical settings, and Athitakis cites examples of settings ranging from the 1893 World’s Fair in Chicago to 1970s small-town Ohio.

Of course, not all contemporary fiction is set in the past. “How to Be Chinese” is one example, and Athitakis mentions Midwestern authors such as Bonnie Jo Campbell, Gillian Flynn, and Angela Flournoy as examples of those who write about the challenges of present-day life. Despite their contemporary settings, Athitakis claims that “even those books . . . are often concerned with the past—that is, with what’s been lost since the factories closed, after the verities of

‘Midwestern values’ have eroded, once the promises of the region as one that welcomed immigrants and provided stability for blacks and Hispanics has crumbled. If they’re not nostalgic for the past, they often lament what’s been lost in the present” (9).

Midwestern authors who write against heartland nostalgia often do so by thinking through the ways that local and regional histories have influenced the present tense of the story. For some, it’s because all the good jobs are gone or because corporate farms have bought out all the little guys. Ng, though, represents the Midwest as essentially additive—while Altman struggles to learn about her Chinese heritage, she meets several recent immigrants and visits a less-Americanized restaurant with servers who speak to her in Chinese. Altman’s inability to speak the language embarrasses her, indicating the difficulty of developing transnational identities in the rural Midwest. Despite that difficulty, the region here is a slowly expanding space, one that will allow her to hang onto the “private stories” she shares with her American mother while possibly developing new ones with her boyfriend, his mother, and the other members of the Chinese Student Association.

“How to Be Chinese” ends ambiguously, though, and Altman’s “biggest ironic smile” suggests that her future remains indefinite. Ng’s story shares that uncertainty with Alexander Weinstein’s “Ice Age,” one of the Midwestern stories in his 2016 collection, *Children of the New World*. In this story, set in the near future, glaciers have overtaken much of North America. A small community of people find themselves living in igloos and hunting elk on the ice above small-town Michigan, including Gordon and his hunting partner, Tom, with whom Gordon claims to have very little in common. Their suffering binds them together: “Tom lost a lot. The ice storms froze his wife and two children below. Still, we’ve all lost people” (206). Those losses extend even to language; Gordon mentions that he and his wife used to talk more, but the struggle to survive has overwhelmed their desire to process it. Despite the apocalyptic setting, this story represents a nostalgic family table: “for a moment it all feels good, for the four of us in our igloo with our moose fat candles burning, the morning sun catching the thinner parts of the walls and making a pattern of translucent gray patches on the ice. Lisa brings me a stone bowl of fish and puts another one on the floor for the kids. We sit down on our stones and eat” (201-202). By the end of the story, one of their neighbors has tunneled down to the ground and begun to

scavenge the houses below. Encased in ice, these houses have been preserved for future use. While their rudimentary barter economy threatens to devolve into violence, this story also underscores the opportunity to develop a new life based on elements of the old one.

The five essays collected here consider how contemporary short fiction repurposes elements of the Midwestern past—literary, personal, biographical, cultural, and iconographic— to reimagine its present and future. They examine fiction from across the region and distributed through various modes of publishing: short story collections, literary magazines, website, and short story cycles. Sara Kosiba tracks the influence of Sherwood Anderson’s 1919 short story cycle, *Winesburg, Ohio*, on contemporary authors Bonnie Jo Campbell, Charles Baxter, and Nickolas Butler, as well as Michael Martone and his collaborators on the 2015 collection *Winesburg, Indiana*. Douglas Sheldon finds that cognitive dissonance clouds dialogue about sexual violence in Campbell’s 2015 short story, “Playhouse,” from *Mothers, Tell Your Daughters*. Martone also makes another appearance, as Jim Gorman surveys short stories from across Martone’s career to investigate how his fictional biographies of actual Midwesterners provide a uniquely Midwestern spin on the ironic antihero. Michael Czyzniejewski’s 2012 collection, *Chicago Stories: 40 Dramatic Fictions*, also fictionalizes well-known Midwesterners, and Michael Cocchiarale shows how these stories elucidate the relationship between sports, humor, and civic pride. As a result, he argues, Czyzniejewski emphasizes the strengths of underdog Midwestern writers in comparison to those outside of “flyover country.” This issue closes with Patricia Oman’s study of the cover images from several Midwestern literary magazines, finding that the way they tweak representations of the Midwest has its roots in both recent economic trends as well as changes in the publishing industry.

Campbell, Baxter, Butler, Martone, Czyzniejewski, Ng, and Weinstein demonstrate the vibrancy and diversity of contemporary short fiction in the Midwest. Along with Athitakis and the region’s many literary magazines, these essays take part in a vital and continuing conversation about the literature and culture of the heartland. I am delighted to dedicate this issue of *Midwestern Miscellany* to Michael Martone, the winner of the 2016 Mark Twain Award for distinguished contributions to Midwestern literature. Please enjoy.

WORKS CITED

- Athitakis, Mark. *The New Midwest: A Guide to Contemporary Fiction of the Great Lakes, Great Plains, and Rust Belt*. Belt, 2016.
- Ng, Celeste. "How to Be Chinese." *Gulf Coast: A Journal of Literature and Fine Arts* 26.1 (2014) <http://gulfcoastmag.org/journal/26.1/how-to-be-chinese/>.
- Weinstein, Alexander. *Children of the New World: Stories*. Picador, 2016.

THE MIDWESTERN GROTESQUE: HOW *WINESBURG, OHIO* HAS INFLUENCED THE CONTEMPORARY MIDWESTERN SHORT STORY

SARA KOSIBA

Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919) is famous for its introductory chapter "The Book of the Grotesque," which establishes a framework for the strange and sad stories of the individuals covered in subsequent chapters.¹ While many may read Anderson's characters as extremes or isolated examples, the concerns they internalize are readily evoked by large swaths of the American (and even global) population, such as the search for something to believe in, the search for love or for the comfort that comes with being loved, or the fears that can govern or cripple our lives. These concerns could easily be classified as universal, but they are particularly interesting in a Midwestern context as they continually confront and complicate an idealized image of the region that too often negates the variety of individual experience present in the Midwest.

Short story writers today evoke similar aspects of the grotesque in their writing, presenting continued challenges to an idealized, homogenized sense of region that is desired as a wholesome American touchstone but that defies the realities around us. Americans may often cling to an idyllic desire to "make America great again," a catchphrase continually invoked by Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign, but this nostalgia is misguided because it presupposes a time of perfection in American history that never existed. Midwestern writers of the past like Anderson and those of the present like Bonnie Jo Campbell, the assorted authors of *Winesburg, Indiana* (2015), and others serve as commentators and historians of the true human experience, one that shows we are all grotesques; what distinguishes us is how we deal with our grotesque

concerns and challenges.

In “The Book of the Grotesque,” Anderson provides examples of truths that, once internalized, became falsehoods and thereby make people grotesques: “The old man had listed hundreds of the truths in his book. I will not try to tell you all of them. There was the truth of virginity and the truth of passion, the truth of wealth and of poverty, of thrift and of profligacy, of carelessness and abandon” (9). Within *Winesburg, Ohio* we can see that list expand to include the truths of religious belief, tradition, or the desire that any belief or system might save a person or provide them with answers. Again and again in his stories, Anderson shows that none of these beliefs is a panacea for our fears and concerns. Recognizing this lack of prescriptive solutions to the situations faced by characters in Anderson’s collection, Robert Dunne states, “Anderson successfully avoids preaching pat, absolute answers to the dilemma of the modern grotesque. Had he done so, he would have ironically fallen victim to his own rough definition of the grotesque” (12). Despite a desire for clear answers or expectations, we live our lives far more in the gray area between knowing and not knowing, and exploring that territory provides a far more nuanced and accurate picture of the American and Midwestern experience.

Reviewers of the time noted Anderson’s intent to peel back any veil of idealized small-town imagery. A review of *Winesburg, Ohio* published in the *New Republic* in June 1919 noted, “There is outward repose over Winesburg, a garment of respectable repose covering alike the infinite pain, the grief, the agony of futile groping, the momentary flare of beauty or passion of which the citizens are ashamed” (M.A. 257). Anderson’s novel challenges the homogenized small-town identity promoted and desired by many, and the “shame” felt by the inhabitants of Winesburg who felt different or desired different things actually showed much more of the flawed reality and significant diversity that actually *is* human existence. Clarence Lindsay confirms, “The truths, or narratives, the characters of *Winesburg, Ohio* claim as their own — and to which Anderson himself confesses — document America’s diverse ideologies of selfhood, providing a bustling library of the many stories of our desires” (xvii). Rather than some picturesque portrayal, *Winesburg, Ohio* captured the deep-seated desires of Midwestern and, ultimately, American life.

Unfortunately, present-day Midwestern writers are still facing the widespread generalization of the region as an idealized space. In

a 2015 *CNN* article, Carol Costello noted the desire by some Minnesotans to brand their state as something more distinctive than the stereotypically bland Midwest in an attempt to counter incorrect assumptions about the region (particularly regarding food, in this case) promoted by large national publications like the *New York Times*. Costello cites Midwestern historian Andrew Cayton regarding the symbolic value the Midwest has politically. “‘The Midwest,’ he told me, ‘has always been a dynamic and diverse place, but that image doesn’t fit with what people want to believe.’” And, by people, Cayton means politicians who routinely use the Midwest as code for a place in time that never actually existed: crime-free and populated with hard-working people who all look and worship the same. “‘Arguing about the Midwest,’ Cayton says, ‘has become arguing about America as a whole.’” (qtd. in Costello).

Contemporary Midwestern writers continue to respond to the idealized stereotype imposed on the region and are often taking the same critical flack for doing so. For example, Ellen Akins demonstrates some of those stereotyped expectations while reviewing Bonnie Jo Campbell’s newest short story collection, *Mothers, Tell Your Daughters* (2015), in the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, stating, “We may be in the Midwest most of the time, but the territory’s much more like Annie Proulx’s rough West than Jane Smiley’s farmland.” Akins’s comment encourages the oversimplified regional expectations for the Midwest by implying a picturesque farmland is more often what readers expect from the region than gritty realism.

Two 2015 Midwestern short story collections—Charles Baxter’s *There’s Something I Want You to Do* and *Winesburg, Indiana*, edited by Michael Martone and Brian Furuness—contribute to a sustained discussion of the analytical value of the grotesque, showing the structural legacy of *Winesburg, Ohio* almost one hundred years later. The publication of *Winesburg, Indiana* provides an interesting impetus to consider Anderson’s novel in a contemporary context, as the collection builds on some of the basic elements of Anderson’s initial work while also updating those concerns and concepts in a contemporary way. Despite the fact that *Winesburg, Indiana* is a compilation of stories written by individual authors, I have chosen not to attribute each story to its author and instead treat the collection as one unified work edited by Martone and Furuness. The collection itself seems to call for that style of assessment, as there is no byline near each story’s title, and a reader can only clarify authorship of each story by view-

ing the contributor information at the end. My intent in viewing the text in this way is not to discredit the work of the individual authors but instead to better parallel the larger structure and themes with Anderson's text.

The most notable tribute to the intertext within the newer *Winesburg* is the first chapter, consisting of a "Cease and Desist Demand" sent by the fictive town of Winesburg, Ohio, to the fictive town of Winesburg, Indiana, wherein the Ohio locale lays claim to "the distribution of Sadness, Fear, Longing, and Confusion itself. We have patented Madness. We own Trembling. We extensively market Grief. We facilitate the Recovery of Emotionally Paralyzing Memories and the Reliving of Childhood Trauma. We distribute Dirges and provide for all manner of Despairing Confession and Ecstatic Revelation in this aesthetically framed and fictive community" (2). While the cease and desist letter has aspects of tongue-in-cheek humor, the qualities claimed by the fictive town of Winesburg, Ohio support a legitimate view of Anderson's book as an "ur-text" for the similar ideas that have subsequently threaded throughout Midwestern short stories for almost a century. After that first chapter, Martone and Furuness's book parallels Anderson's formatting of *Winesburg, Ohio* by compiling chapters dedicated to the lives of different inhabitants in Winesburg, Indiana, creating a similar novel-in-stories feel. It distinctly has the appearance of a collection based on Anderson's same structural principles, but its focus has moved across the Ohio/Indiana border and is updated by several decades.

Charles Baxter's collection *There's Something I Want You to Do* (2015) contains fewer direct parallels to the formatting of Anderson's collection but still has some reminiscent structural qualities. Baxter's collection is split into two parts with the indistinctive labels of "Part One" and "Part Two," but each of those sections contains stories with names like "Bravery," "Charity," and "Avarice," qualities that many critics have noted fall easily into the categories of "virtues" (Part One) and "vices" (Part Two). Each of those qualities has the potential to rank as one of the "truths" the old man refers to in Anderson's "The Book of the Grotesque," and Baxter encourages that potential by never clearly moralizing the nature of the vice or virtue in the story. You finish "Charity," for example, without a clear sense of a lesson or moral, but, as with *Winesburg, Ohio*, in that lack of an easy lesson or explanation resides the value of the fiction: the reader is forced to reflect on the nature of the idea and on the reality

of it within our everyday world instead of on some idealized, pre-scriptive perception of the concept.

Reviews of *There's Something I Want You to Do* noted the influence of other writers and narrative styles on Baxter's collection, and the one in the *Boston Globe* confirmed the influence of Anderson: "Baxter edited 'Sherwood Anderson: Collected Stories' (2012) for the Library of America, and Anderson's influence is obvious here; 'There's Something I Want You to Do' is in many ways Baxter's 'Winesburg, Ohio,' an intimate look at the emotional lives of everyday folks sharing the same geography" (Jackson). The thematic influence of Anderson is clear in Baxter's collection, albeit revised and updated for a modern age. As Baxter himself has said about the impact of modernization on short stories like Anderson's, "Mass media constitute an acid that dissolves what was once distinctive about isolated places into a kind of quasi-global village. You can't imagine Sherwood Anderson's stories happening in the same way that they once did because of the isolation in a place like Winesburg" (qtd. in Lauck). Characters in Baxter's collection are not limited to Minneapolis, St. Paul, or surrounding environs, although those locations clearly form the most central nexus among the diverse stories. Instead, they reflect a modern world where folks in Minnesota are also familiar with folks from Seattle or have visited countries like Ethiopia or Italy. In "Forbearance," for example, Amelia is living in a small Italian town when she gets word that her niece Catherine is seriously ill. She rushes back to Minnesota to support her brother's family: "So bleary with jet lag that she could not sleep or make any sense in conversation, and feeling that her brain was a haunted house in which bats randomly flew from one attic beam to another, Amelia found herself at two a.m. walking outside her hotel and then along the Mississippi River" (123). While Anderson's characters knew the potential of a world beyond Winesburg, Baxter's characters can experience the far more rapid modern incongruity of moving from one country to another in mere hours.

Beyond structural parallels, Anderson's grotesques clearly demonstrate themes picked up by later Midwestern short story writers. For example, in Anderson's stories and those of contemporary Midwestern writers, we see characters searching for something to believe in, and that search is often internalized so deeply it becomes almost perverse. In Anderson's "Hands," Wing Biddlebaum's disillusionment with his own experiences has so intensely warped his

worldview that he wants to impart his lessons to George Willard. He desperately wants to believe that the world can be better for George, and that desperation is so deep it scares him. In this passage, readers gain a sense of Wing's yearning and focus:

Wing Biddlebaum became wholly inspired. For once he forgot the hands. Slowly they stole forth and lay upon George Willard's shoulders. Something new and bold came into the voice that talked. "You must try to forget all you have learned," said the old man. "You must begin to dream. From this time on you must shut your ears to the roaring of the voices."

Pausing in his speech, Wing Biddlebaum looked long and earnestly at George Willard. His eyes glowed. (14)

Wing wants, or even needs, to believe that there is something possible beyond his own awkward existence. When he fails to convey his message to George, he comes away from the encounter fearful that the hands are once again to blame. Anderson contrasts the fervent behavior of Wing in the story with the image of him eating crumbs at the end of the story "like a priest engaged in some service of his church" with nervous fingers that "might well have been mistaken for the fingers of the devotee going swiftly through decade after decade of his rosary" (17). For many, religion provides stability and a structured system of belief; however, for Wing those comforting structures are not present, particularly after the upheaval he experienced being banished from his teaching job and life in that earlier town. While Wing's religious faith may be lacking, he tries to put his faith in youth, as represented by George, who provides him with a focus for his desire to believe in something more.

Characters in contemporary Midwestern short stories also struggle with their beliefs or the desire to believe in something greater or outside themselves. For example, in *Winesburg, Indiana*, the title character in "Dale Rumsey" describes some of his work as he is employed by his "wife's family business," which takes care of "the concession, pumping the latrines, outhouses, comfort stations, porta-potties, and septic tanks over at the big Henry David Thoreau County Park" (26). He highlights that the site is a known location for alien abduction in the area, and, as a result, Dale has "started a collection of alien scat left behind on these occasions . . . when the spaceships jump into hyperdrive or wormholes or whatever" (26). In this chapter, Dale's conviction in the existence of aliens and his obsession with

collecting samples of their excrement—which he plans to put into a museum—at first sound absurd, something one could easily write off as the rambling of a crazed man. But the story comes back around at the end in a way that forces the reader to reflect on Dale’s beliefs as commentary on larger ills within our world: “In my expert opinion no one’s shit don’t stink, even the alien kind. But I have gotten used to it. Still, I have never gotten used to this other odor. The stench of our own stories is so attractive to us—bug-eyed and antenna-twitching carrion-eating creatures that we are” (28). The closing lines to this story, therefore, raise intriguing questions. Which is more absurd: a man who collects alien scat or a humanity that is often self-obsessed and intent on preying on the stories and experiences of those around us? Which is more grotesque? While Dale Rumsey’s beliefs are more unusual and perhaps less poetic than Wing Biddlebaum’s, both characters are held prisoner by those ideas and their deep conviction that truths lie within those beliefs.

Bonnie Jo Campbell’s “Fuel for the Millennium” from her collection *American Salvage* (2009) also evidences a similar grotesquery. Hal Little worries about the coming Y2K crisis, and much of the story is about his physical preparation—accumulating supplies—and his mental preparation—considering various potential situations that could result. His evangelism in spreading the cautionary word of preparedness to others is driven more by good intention than by a desire for recognition or to be seen as a prophet: “Hal Little liked the tall, smiling man whose washing machine belt he’d just replaced, and that was why he decided to make a suggestion” (144-145). While most of Hal’s fears are driven by religious concerns, his thoughts are also characterized by a wish to see humanity and the world continue to survive. In a structure similar to that of “Dale Rumsey,” Campbell’s last lines show Hal Little’s desire for something beyond mere religious salvation: “Up in Heaven, when Hal opened his reinforced steel-and-aluminum, solid-core door into the New Holy Universe, he knew he’d hear the sweet voices of birds and angels. He hoped he would smell flowers. He hoped there would be babies” (150). What is interesting in those final lines is the contrast Campbell sets up between what Hal knows and what he hopes. Birds and angels appear to be part of his standard definition of heaven, but he “hope[s]” to have flowers and babies there as well. The reference to flowers and babies appeals to something broader than simply a reli-

gious haven: even in such a place or in contrast to such a place Hal hopes for beauty and continued human life.

While Hal's Y2K concerns may seem over the top, his preparations are a way for him to channel his beliefs (and fears) into something tangible. Since Hal cannot control the future, he can attempt, through his stockpiling of gasoline and other efforts, to contribute in his way to a "doomsday ark" of sorts that can usher people not only to a possible salvation but also help preserve the human race. Is Hal crazy for his obsessive preparations, or are they his contribution to preserving and supporting the human race? While we may not take the same actions as Hal in either effort, we may have our own obsessive beliefs and our own ways of using them to contribute to a common good, making us more like Hal Little than we might assume on a first reading of this story. While a reader may not have the exact same beliefs as Wing Biddlbaum, Dale Rumsey, or Hal Little, there is something essentially human in the way those three characters internalize their concerns and cautiously project them on the world.

Fear of being without love or fearing the future can also cripple and twist individual lives. Anderson demonstrates this through a character like Alice Hindman in "Adventure." Alice believes she has found love and happiness with Ned Currie. When Ned fails to return to Winesburg or send word to have her follow him to live in the city, Alice's fear in seeing her youth pass by and a life of impending loneliness ensue becomes overwhelming, and she unsuccessfully resorts to rash action in an attempt to dispel it. In light of her mother's second marriage, Alice looks for practical solutions to her isolation: "Alice joined the church because she had become frightened by the loneliness of her position in life. Her mother's second marriage had emphasized her isolation. 'I am becoming old and queer.'" (89). Two years later, still yearning to find some love and companionship, Alice's desires become even more extreme as she cannot tolerate the attentions of the local drug clerk, who has taken to walking with her, because she knows she does not love him. She desires connection but cannot articulate a specific desire, and, in her frustration, one night she runs naked through the streets of Winesburg. Scared by her own behavior and uncertain of her future, Alice reflects at the end of the story on "the fact that many people must live and die alone, even in Winesburg" (92). Alice's fear of loneliness becomes so deeply internalized that she can no longer quite determine a solution, so as those

fears fester, they lead to her illogical actions and the despair that there may never be a cure.

Time characterizes the particular loneliness and isolation of Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio; however, the contemporary world is growing smaller and there are fewer places where people are geographically isolated or lack culturally flattening resources like the Internet. While there are now more alternatives for communication and potential companionship than ever before, characters in contemporary short stories, much like Alice, still have fears regarding the future or fear a future without love. In Nickolas Butler's "Beneath the Bonfire," a story from a collection with the same name, Kat and her boyfriend Pieter are preparing for a party with friends, one that will involve a giant bonfire on a frozen lake. In flashbacks, readers see the couple meet by chance in an amusement park and learn about them as they begin their relationship. While Pieter has his emotional baggage as a veteran of the war in Afghanistan and in coping with his parents' divorce, it is clear that Kat has insecurities that affected her previous relationships and threaten this one. While reflecting on their relationship during one of Pieter's routine absences, "She worried that she would get tired. She worried about so many things. She did not know how not to worry" (107). She also notes about these fears that "[i]n the past, it had begun to interrupt and then dissolve her relationships with men. She worried about calling them or their not calling her" (107).

Despite the fact that Pieter makes her feel more secure, Kat's fears are clearly overwhelming her. During the bonfire party, Kat and Pieter scuba dive beneath the ice and become momentarily separated. That temporary moment of loss is enough to rattle Kat's fear so that when she emerges from the hole in the ice, she is furious at Pieter and accuses him of leaving her on purpose. There is nothing in the story to indicate that Pieter had any such motive, leaving Kat's fears the only driving force behind such an accusation. The end of the story finds her walking away from the party with Pieter "calling her name out over the frozen lake" (111). The implication is that she's leaving him behind or breaking up with him and that her fears are a likely culprit, although Butler does not explicitly provide an explanation. Her worry about all aspects of life—love, her family, school, exercising more, her student loans—have overwhelmed her choices, making her unable to cope with the uncertainty and challenges of relationships. She fears possible separation from Pieter—the separa-

tion in the water an introduction to that possibility—and rather than confront the idea that separation and loss are inevitable parts of life, she chooses to walk away in pursuit of a concrete stability that never will exist.

Other fears common to both *Winesburg, Ohio* and contemporary Midwestern short stories are those that concern parenting and motherhood. As *Winesburg, Ohio*'s Elizabeth Willard dwells on her hopes and fears regarding her son George, so, too, do contemporary mothers fear for the dangers and perilous circumstances that their children may encounter. In Bonnie Jo Campbell's story "Tell Yourself" from *Mothers, Tell Your Daughters* (2015), the second-person narration puts the reader in the position of a mother fearing for her thirteen-year-old daughter Mary's safety as she begins to mature into a woman. The mother worries about her daughter's revealing clothing choices (low rise jeans and midriff-revealing tops), her behavior around her friends (flashing boys in the stairwell at school), and the possibility that older men (Mary's friend's dad or the mother's own boyfriend, Stan) could be trying to entice her into sex: "You think about what it might take for you to be reassured that your daughter is safe. A definitive *No* every day, from Stan and from every man within driving distance. A definitive *Yes, I understand* from Mary every day to let you know she sees there is a danger, that you're not crazy. That would be a start" (*Mothers* 46). While the mother has a valid fear that danger exists in the world, the level at which she desires reassurance is unrealistic. There is no way to completely protect her daughter from all harm. In the meantime, as she dwells on her fears and internalizes them, she is damaging her own life and chances at happiness; her paranoid suspicion that Stan could be sexually involved with her daughter ultimately ruins her own relationship. A certain amount of fear is healthy, but extreme fear can twist a person's life into something grotesque.

In "Bravery," Charles Baxter shows another mother's extreme fear, although in this case it is the fear that her rights and experiences as a mother are being infringed upon as she jealously observes the baby's father as an equal or even superior source of childcare. Susan never feels she is the equal of her husband Eli regarding compassion. She reflects early in their relationship, "How strange it was, his ability to give comfort. He doled it out in every direction. He wasn't just trained as a doctor; he was a doctor all the way down to the root" (8). Later in the relationship, the couple have a child and work to divide

childcare responsibilities, but Susan is unsettled by Eli's interaction with the baby. She sees Eli's participation as a threat to her role as a mother:

Inwardly, she was resisting the impulse to snatch the baby out of his arms. With one part of her mind, she saw this impulse as an animal truth, if not actually unique to her; but with another part, she thought: *Every mother feels this way, every mother has felt this, it's time to stand up.* She was not going to chalk this one up to postpartum depression or hormonal imbalances or feminine moodiness. She had come upon this truth, and she was not going to let it go. (19, italics in original)

The fact that Susan fears Eli as a threat to her own status is highlighted by her additional comment to Eli, ““You can't be his mother”” (19). Her fear is misplaced, as nothing in Eli's behavior implies he is trying to replace her or to assume her role in parenting. In this example, Baxter, more than any other author cited here, simultaneously shows the fear alongside a discussion of it as a “truth,” suggesting a parallel with the “truths that become grotesques” motif expressed in Anderson's “Book of the Grotesque.” After Eli storms out of the house in anger at her outburst, the story ends with the couple reunited, as he returns bruised and beaten from having defended a young woman on the street from being attacked. It is as if Eli's fight outside the home has broken the tension within it. Susan may have experienced more of a momentary grotesqueness than other characters have, but the depth of her unwarranted fear and the fact that she projects that fear onto others is still in line with the portrayal of grotesque characters by Anderson and others.

There is a clear line from Anderson's text to recent depictions of Midwestern life in the region's short fiction. Through their portrayals of characters facing a variety of deep-seated emotional concerns, contemporary writers show the depth of nuance in Midwestern life and in contemporary life more generally. As Robert Dunne argues, “In suggesting how grotesqueness is endemic to the wider American culture, Anderson also draws our attention to the power that popular cultural myths—as well as any instructive bromides instructing one on how to live one's life—have in influencing one's identity” (59). While Dunne is referring to the larger cultural myths of how one should live or love and how those constrain an individual's sense of identity, his words can also apply to the regional cultural myths of

the Midwest that imply or demand an idealized space of idyllic farmlands or heartland towns. Anderson's stories complicate those expectations by exploring the varied manifestations of the grotesque, and stories by contemporary Midwestern writers continue that work by showing a region that is far more nuanced in personality and culture than the stereotypes projected upon it. Anderson's town may not exist in the same form today due to the passage of time and the changes within Midwestern and American culture. Still, books like *Winesburg, Indiana* and stories by Bonnie Jo Campbell, Charles Baxter, and Nickolas Butler show that the Midwestern grotesque is alive today, even if the characters may be internalizing slightly different versions of those same original obsessions and concerns. This long exploration of what it means to be a grotesque—essentially, an exploration of what it means to be human—is invaluable in helping us to understand those seemingly inexplicable oddities of the Midwest and our own humanity.

Troy University

NOTE

¹This paper originated as a presentation at the 2016 Society for the Study of Midwestern Symposium in East Lansing, Michigan. That paper presentation was supported by a Paper Presentation Grant from the Troy University Faculty Development Committee.

WORKS CITED

- Akins, Ellen. Rev. of *Mothers, Tell Your Daughters* by Bonnie Jo Campbell. *Minneapolis Star Tribune* 3 Oct. 2015. Web. 30 May 2016.
- Anderson, Sherwood. *Winesburg, Ohio*. 1919. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999.
- Baxter, Charles. *There's Something I Want You to Do*. NY: Vintage, 2016.
- Butler, Nickolas. *Beneath the Bonfire: Stories*. NY: St. Martin's, 2015.
- Campbell, Bonnie Jo. *American Salvage*. NY: Norton, 2009.
- . *Mothers, Tell Your Daughters*. NY: Norton, 2015.
- Costello, Carol. "Hey Midwest, Minnesota Wants a Divorce." *CNN*. Turner Broadcasting, 4 Mar. 2015. Web. 30 May 2016.
- Dunne, Robert. *A New Book of the Grotesques: Contemporary Approaches to Sherwood Anderson's Early Fiction*. Kent, OH: Kent State UP, 2005.
- "Grotesque." *Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford UP, 2016. Web. 30 May 2016.
- Jackson, Buzzy. Rev. of *There's Something I Want You to Do* by Charles Baxter. *Boston Globe* 7 Feb. 2015. Web. 13 July 2016.
- Lauck, Jon. "Charles Baxter: An Interview." *Belt Magazine*. Belt Publishing, 26 Jan. 2015. Web. 7 July 2016.
- Lindsay, Clarence. *Such a Rare Thing: The Art of Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio*. Kent: Kent State UP, 2009.
- M.A. "A Country Town." Rev. of *Winesburg, Ohio* by Sherwood Anderson. *New Republic* 25 June 1919. 257, 260.
- Martone, Michael, and Bryan Furuness, eds. *Winesburg, Indiana*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2015.

CONVERSATIONAL DISSONANCE: ASSAULT AND
DIALOGUE IN BONNIE JO CAMPBELL'S
"PLAYHOUSE"

DOUGLAS SHELDON

The work of Bonnie Jo Campbell is often pregnant with tensions between male and female characters. Her stories reject male dominance, with strong females performing traditional male roles of hunter, farmer, or even circus strongperson. Of her characters Christopher Barzak claims that they "try to salvage what they can of the American Dream, the myth that keeps them going while simultaneously eluding them" (98). Women are rarely champions of feminist success within Campbell's writing, but rather reflections of the institutional and societal constraints that have limited their intellectual and often physical contributions to empowered Midwestern males. Despite these limitations, they often eke out minor wins that add incrementally to the larger battle for equal presence. The largest connectors between males and females, for better or worse, in Campbell's work are often acts of violence. In her newest collection, *Mothers, Tell Your Daughters*, "Playhouse" presents the aftermath of violence against a female character (a rape) as a struggle for honest dialogue and for the acceptance of the belief that no one is deserving of assault despite perceived immoral behavior or propensity for alcohol consumption.

In "Playhouse," the character of Steve displays a cognitive dissonance which disables him from rationalizing between the reality of an assault and his experiential memory of his sister, Janie. He uses this against Janie when she is raped by an acquaintance during a gathering at his home. Steve perceives her sexual experiences and self-destructive behavior as markers that women are obligated to perform specified social and sexual roles under his nostalgic views. When his

gendered expectations are violated, he is unable to negotiate beyond his own standpoint and proceeds to blame Janie for her own rape. (Steve even refers to the mother of his child as “the Bitch” (18) which reveals his respect for women to be tainted by nostalgia and personal experience.) Discourse dissonance and nostalgic notions of female social and sexual responsibility coincide as Steve uses victim blaming to justify the encounter between Roger (his workmate) and his sister. He seeks to discredit his sister’s claim that she was not a willing participant, and due to her frequent intoxication, he perpetuates his own male dominance over her social and sexual self. Janie is therefore a scapegoated representation, damned by her social history as the cause of her victimization—even though she was immobile, had low verbal response, and could not willingly consent to sexual activity.

In her examination of sexual violence and the aftermath of cognitive dissonance, Campbell displays a male conversational participant unable to recognize sexualized victimhood, especially when said victim has a history of self-destructive behavior. Susan Sessions Rugh and Robert Wuthnow agree that rural and semi-rural Midwestern locales possess a nostalgia about gender and performance in forms of social hierarchy. In the case of a sexual assault, this nostalgia can have a retrograde effect on the interlocutors, victim and complicit bystanders in conceptualizing the moment. Van Dijk argues that this type of contextualized dissonance is brought on by an interlocutor’s (conversational partner’s) inability to disconnect previous social behavior from current context and spurs a lack of rationality to recognize victimization. If context is disrupted by one’s conceptions of past events, then in the situation of Janie’s acquaintance rape, Steve cannot process her victimhood because he views the act through the lens of his conception of her pre-defined immoral/self-destructive past.

Janie’s experience in the story represents dissonance, which allows Steve to use only his prior encounter with his sister during times of inebriation to formulate her moral standing. Through the story’s dialogue, a discourse on notions of female promiscuity and victim blaming emerges which displays a male privilege of dismissing sexual violence when the perpetrator is perceived as more upstanding than the victim. Use of prior bad acts, nostalgic dissonance between perceived socially appropriate behavior of women, and Steve’s denying self-involvement lead to a discourse that reveals

victim blaming and admonishment of male complicity in sexual assault.

As Janie arrives to aid in the building of Steve's daughter's eponymous playhouse, she is told that there was a sexual incident between her and several guests at a party a few days earlier, which she roundly refutes: "I didn't screw anyone at your party. You know I am not like that." Steve replies, "You didn't used to be" (26). Steve is employing a personal nostalgia which enables him to use his historical knowledge of Janie to make situational judgments through their discourse and attempt to deny her a voice in the conversation about sexual assault. At this moment, Janie, as a discourse partner, is refuted not by an explanation of fact, but by an attempt to discredit her based on her behavior at the party, resulting in Steve's refusing empathy for her encounter, which is consistent with findings from Niemi and Young and Rusinko. Steve continues:

"You seriously don't remember what happed with Roger? And that friend of his, Mickey?"

"What are you talking about?"

"You were humping your bottle of tequila down by the peonies, and they were out of booze, so I told them to go down and harass you."

"Sons of bitches better not have taken my tequila," I say, and force a laugh. (26)

According to van Dijk, in a discourse context this gives power to the male interlocutor, leaving the embarrassed Janie attempting tension-splitting humor, even though her brother holds a responsibility for the attack by sending the two men to "harass" Janie while she was visibly unable to consent. As a female interlocutor with experiences that do not fit her male counterpart's nostalgic viewpoints, Janie is marginalized by Steve, reigniting the preconceived feminine notions held by her brother and allowing him to sympathize with the male perpetrator rather than the female victim. Victim blaming of this nature occurs when the responsible parties deny any participation in an assault (Niemi and Young). Janie, therefore, questions the existence of an assault due to a trusted party denying his own culpability and that of other male perpetrators. This denial absolves the perpetrator of any sort of cognitive blame in the mind of Steve, thus allowing him to legitimize blaming Janie for her own attack.

Yet as the discourse continues, and Janie's realization of her true victimhood reaches the surface, Steve portrays himself as the hero figure and claims to have resolved the issue:

"That guy Mickey took pictures on his phone," Steve says. "Don't worry, when I saw him showing Roger, I took his phone and deleted them all."

"Pictures? What pictures?"

"Not the kind of thing a brother wants to see" (27).

Steve is inserting his own discomfort (an attempt at making Janie sympathetic to his plight of having to see naked photos of a sibling) and further trying to distance himself from any culpability in her victimization. According to van Dijk and Bieneck and Krahe, this dissonance coincides with both sociocognitive and sociocultural conceptions that if a woman is intoxicated at the time of her rape or sexual assault, then those in the victim's immediate environment are more likely to lift blame from the perpetrator and become more skeptical about the victim's claim. Steve paints himself as an honorable, moral person, high above his sister and her perceived promiscuity. He peacocks as a hero who, even though he did not stop the assault itself, believes he prevented Janie's further embarrassment by removing the photos from existence. As she is not a victim in his eyes, but a willing participant, Steve convinces himself that he can draw and guard the boundaries of morality. However, Steve has removed evidence of the attack, so rather than saving the victim, he has vindicated the attackers and himself, preventing further inquiry into the assault.

Responding to this moment, Janie states, "I've been feeling shitty. I was wondering if maybe we ate some bad meat or something." Steve responds, "You got some meat, all right. Mickey was pissed when I erased the pictures . . ." (27). There is no mention of the attack or the fact that they had stripped off her clothes or forced themselves on her, only the photographic evidence. This dissonance aids in the denial of the authenticity of Janie's experience through the single-minded lens of Steve, who does not want to view current events without the perceived prior bad acts of a victim. Removing Janie's ability to confide in a trusted interlocutor and process the events without cognitively dissonant interruption, Steve is using the defense of his coworker, through the judgment of his sister's inebriation, as a way of absolving himself of blame for initiating the harass-

ment that led to Janie's assault. His denial of Janie's victimhood, due to her inebriation, leads Steve to then frame Janie as a willing participant in her own assault. This denial is perpetuated when he takes a pseudo-parental stance by deleting the photographs on the assailant's phone. With the crime eliminated from digital memory, Steve is attempting to repaint the scene with his own skewed perspective. Janie is now without proof, and her victimhood is erased, in the eyes of Steve, just as easily. Steve continues his defense of her attacker even after Janie questions the details:

“But you said I was passed out down there . . . You're saying I had my shirt off with a stranger?”

“Roger's not a stranger, you've see him plenty of times over here. He's a good guy.” (28)

By arguing that Roger is a “good guy,” Steve attempts to convince her that since Roger is known to Steve, there is no way that he could be guilty of wrongdoing. According to Rusinko, in stating that this was an incident where things simply got out of hand, Steve is portraying Janie as nonresponsive or lacking assertive refusal of sexual behavior, a portrayal that diminishes both Steve's empathy for the victim and her assailant's accountability. Janie is thus, in Steve's view, removed from the status of victim because she did not actively refuse the encounter with Roger. Her inebriation, in combination with her seemingly passive state at the time of the assault, has branded her a willing participant who, in Steve's perception, cannot be a victim according to his gendered and biased viewpoints on female sexual behavior. This dangerously nostalgic viewpoint of women being complicit in their own sexual assaults has pinned a tag on Janie of irresponsibility and serves to demean Roger, an upstanding member of Steve's community.

When Janie challenges this viewpoint by saying, “Damn Steve. You should have stopped them . . . You shouldn't have told them to harass me.” Steve responds, “Don't put it on me, sister . . . you should've told them no if you didn't want it. You should have pinched their balls” (31). By dismissing his own blame and pushing the responsibility back on Janie, Steve is attempting to justify *not* providing aid to his sister while she was in a vulnerable state. He assumes he is free from blame due to her inebriation and, using his contentious attitude toward what he sees as her previously immoral behavior, insists that if she did not want to engage in sexual activity,

she should have resisted, even if she was inebriated beyond that ability. This attitude reflects a culturally held value, in interlocutors like Steve, that when it concerns sexual promiscuity, females are held to a standard of sexual abstinence to inhibit any social or sexual corruption of their moral character (Niemi and Young 232). Since Steve blames Janie for her own assault, due to her inebriation, he can contextually separate himself from having to prevent the act (even though he sent the men to harass her) and argue that Janie should be shamed for letting herself be involved in that situation. He views her as an impure woman who should have saved herself from further social/moral embarrassment of herself and her family. He, therefore, has imbued himself with a principled standing that portrays him as the family hero and moral crusader.

This nonsensical heroism on the part of Steve falsely absolves himself and those whom he believes are “good guys” from being responsible for a sexual assault and thus removes any sense that Janie could be a victim. Janie is no fool, however, and finally confronts her brother with the facts: “I think maybe they raped me, Steve.” Steve goes back on the defensive: “Roger? Get real. I work with the guy every day. He’s a decent guy, maybe not the brightest bulb, but he’s not a rapist, Janie.’ He says *rapist* as though he might be saying *Martian*” (31). The intonation in Steve’s voice suggests that he is comparing a rapist to an alien and denying the existence of the sexual assault or that Roger could exist in the capacity as a rapist. Steve is, in a discourse capacity, denying not only the rape, but also Janie’s victimhood.

When Janie is labeled as participating in risky behavior, the implication is that she has somehow willed away her ability to claim victimhood. Since the behavior prior to the assault was viewed as dangerous and irresponsible, then Janie shares blame for the attack. Steve labels Janie as a willing participant and therefore does not wish for her to claim victimhood, as this would be admitting some responsibility for the assault or even for encouraging it (Droogendyk and Wright). This discourse acts as sociocognitive dissonance when Steve cuts away the ability for the victim, Janie, to address her experience as what it was, a rape. Due to his nostalgic intent to marginalize Janie because of her perceived immoral behavior, he wants to delegitimize her assault and his own complicity in allowing it to occur. This is an attempt to use his trusted confidant status as her sibling to erase his own culpability in making her a victim; Steve wants

her to believe that her violation of his dangerously nostalgic expectations for women has caused her to experience an unwanted sexual concurrence.

Campbell's fiction often questions the social roles of men and women. In a story like "Playhouse," the use of dialogue-based discourse has never been more revealing in how sexual violence can make culpable males react with self-preserving nostalgia in attempts to remove blame from assailants and rest it on victims. In addressing his sister as complicit in her own attack, Steve has attempted to use such dissonance within their dialogue to remove blame from himself and the perpetrators and shift the blame to Janie due to what he perceives as a dearth of moral behavior on her part. He cannot separate an incident of victimization from her prior bad acts and therefore creates a dissonance in conversation that delegitimizes Janie's experience. According to Neimi and Young and Rusinko, the use of victim blaming then makes a culpable participant out of the interlocutor who denies the facts, as it enables the agents of violence to marginalize the victim of their aggression. The eradication of evidence, the denial of wrong doing, and his already deep contempt for women in his past have led Steve to stigmatize Janie through his own negatively interpreted nostalgia rather than accept that Roger and Mickey are guilty (and himself partially complicit) in the rape of his sister.

His own blame stands by encouraging the two men to "harass" her while unconscious at the party. Yet since his sister violates his own perceptions of a moral or responsible adult, the dissonance he produces has left the victimization of his sister, like most memories he has of her, shrouded in his superior feelings of his moral rectitude. Janie thus represents a common form of victim blaming in which even the closest confidants are looking for a way to remove perpetrator responsibility from sexual assault by painting the victim in the seemingly irremovable lacquer of nostalgia.

DePaul University

WORKS CITED

- Barzak, Christopher. "The Closing Window." *New Labor Forum* 20.2 (Spring 2011): 96-99.
- Bieneck, Steffen and Barbara Krahe. "Blaming the Victim and Exonerating the Perpetrator in Cases of Rape and Robbery: Is There a Double Standard?" *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 26.9 (June 2011): 1785-1797.
- Campbell, Bonnie J. "Playhouse." *Mothers, Tell Your Daughters: Stories*. NY: Norton, 2015.

- Droogendyk, Lisa and Stephen C. Wright. "Perceptions of Interpersonal Versus Intergroup Violence: The Case of Sexual Assault." *Plos ONE* 9.11 (Nov. 2014): 1-12.
- Niemi, Laura and Liane Young. "Blaming the Victim in the Case of Rape." *Psychological Inquiry* 25. 2 (Apr-June 2014): 230-233.
- Rusinko, Holly M., et al. "Assertiveness and Attributions of Blame toward Victims of Sexual Assault." *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma* 19.4 (June 2010): 357.
- Sessions Rugh, Susan. "Rural Life: Family and Kinship." *The American Midwest: An Interpretive Encyclopedia*. Ed. Richard Sisson, Christian Zacher, and Andrew R.L. Cayton. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2007. 1027-29.
- van Dijk, Teun A. *Discourse and Context: A Socio-Cognitive Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008.

THE PAGE AND WHAT'S NOT ON IT:
MICHAEL MARTONE WINKING

JIM GORMAN

I met Michael Martone at the James Thurber House in Columbus, Ohio, in 1984. *Alive and Dead in Indiana* had just been published by a New York press, Alfred A. Knopf. The book was a collection of fictional monologues spoken by famous Indianans, most of them dead. One of the living ones, Olympic swimmer Mark Spitz, could have sued for libel or invasion of privacy, so the publisher's lawyers had convinced Martone to pull that story. At the Thurber House reading, Martone held up the book, pointing to a blank page at the end. He said the story was on that page, printed in invisible ink, a ghost story. He made a joke about the ghosts in the house that James Thurber had brought to literary prominence, hoped they were listening. Then he proceeded to read this story about Mark Spitz. In the audience, I craned my neck to see if he were reading from that blank page. It appeared that he was.

Looking back, I see Martone's performance at that reading as quintessentially ironic: his spoken story of literary suppression preceding his reading of the written one, that story present but not visible. Martone had winked at us, had broken the continuous dream of traditional realism and established an ironic relationship with us, his audience. Martone's preamble called attention to a gap between the story on the page (or, in this case, not on it, a suppressed story) and a larger story. It was up to us, his audience, to take in both, to measure the gap between them, to make meaning from the larger whole. This was just the kind of literary occasion that the directors of the newly restored and opened Thurber House were trying to engender: to acquaint Ohio audiences with contemporary Midwestern humorists who were, like James Thurber in earlier decades, already

challenging audiences in the wider world with the often undervalued wit of the region.

Martone's preamble should have made me realize, too, that the story to come would have little to do with the actual or biographical Mark Spitz. But no, I was still expecting to hear about the champion I knew: a heroic story of his struggle to win at the Munich Olympics in 1972 or possibly a narrative focusing on his Judaism, given that Israeli athletes had been kidnapped and massacred at these games.¹ But Martone's story, titled "Highlights," was anything but heroic. It portrayed Spitz as a dentist, and a childish one at that. After the reading, Martone was asked if Spitz had become a dentist. Not that he knew, he said. The story was fiction. Some aspects were true: Spitz does have large hands, had grown a distinctive mustache, was married to Suzy. But much of the rest was fiction. This duality, of super athlete replaced by childish dentist, was the story plus larger story—the biographical distorted by the fictional—that generated humor but also made the story dangerous and suppressible.

Rereading this story some thirty years later,² I rediscover its unusual qualities, not least its disjointed structure. Rather than a building narrative, a story, Spitz, presented as a mild-voiced dentist in practice in California, gives us his thoughts on one phenomenon at a time: here's one about hands, another about the skateboarders outside, one about tooth dust. His reflections feature metaphors, some clever, some less so: Spitz's hands are as large as fins, the skateboarders look like dancers doing the "Swim," the tooth dust is fine enough to seem liquid. These thought blocks focus us on the quotidian, as we've come to cherish in Martone's writing generally. Because there's so little else, though—no conflict in the present or progressive development of plot—we float in the head of this idle dentist. Forget the 1972 Olympics, both the contests and the deaths that marred them; instead, experience Spitz's empty and quite static present.

The dentist's ruminations do sometimes reach back to his past, but mostly to his past of training, a daily regimen that started at the age of five. As he swam his million laps, he was motivated by sexual fantasies, though tepid ones. He also analyzes his swimming stroke, describing the video and other training innovations at Indiana University that helped him perfect it, but he dwells on other odd skills too, like his ability to shave both his wife's armpits at once. Though his past was much more physically active than his present as a den-

tist, Spitz, as imagined by Martone, was scatterbrained even in his youth.

Martone uses Spitz's wife to bring another telling idea into the narrative, one that further emphasizes that the story is about the distinction between physical youth and mental adulthood. This is the writing of George Plimpton. Participatory journalists like Plimpton write a kind of pseudo-*autobiography*: they put on a uniform and pretend, using their un-athletic bodies, to briefly impersonate professional athletes. Spitz's wife changes this arrangement: she doesn't suggest that Plimpton impersonate and write about Spitz the swimmer, but, rather, she tells Plimpton, "You could pretend to be a dentist, George." Her suggestion sheds light on Martone's choice as well: he does not choose to impersonate or dramatize the younger Spitz, the active, competing, physical champion, but rather the older one, the dentist, this largely mental adult.

That mental adult, though, is a dullard. He is an adult who regularly reverts to childish thinking, as the story's title metaphor emphasizes: instead of reading intelligently in his spare time, Spitz is easily absorbed by the word-finder pages of *Highlights* magazine, eagerly circling the words with crayons. Some of his other thoughts suggest larger questions, but these also go nowhere: Are great swimmers born or made? And what of the next generation, and the next, what of evolution? Spitz's reveries, presented as fragments by Martone, show the dentist to be treading water intellectually:

If I were a fish I would want to be the kind that has a migrating eye. The eye itself turns the body flat as it comes loose and wanders over the head to the other side of the face. I would think about that while swimming laps. Growing gills, webs, flukes. Evolving backwards. Or maybe the mouth would migrate to the side so I wouldn't have to turn to breathe. Better yet, a hole in the middle of my shoulders.
(*Double-wide* 10-11)

So we see in this story that Martone is not directly satirizing the Olympic athlete, but the adult shell. That shell is the result of the athlete's exclusive pursuit of swimming expertise. This adult shell houses a childish, wandering mind, one that went untrained while the muscles of the body were refined. This wandering mind is largely incapable of mature thought.

From time to time, however, as in a psychoanalytic patient, mature concerns, especially about death, do surface in Spitz's thinking, as in this final passage:

I watch all the cartoons on Saturday so I can discuss them with my patients. To drown would be the only death that would make sense. The thing that makes you, kills you. The thing that serves you right. The hunting accident for the hunter. But I wonder if I could let myself or if the water wouldn't toss me back. No, it won't be the water that I'll drown in, it will be the swimming. (14)

Spitz has made a subtle leap here. The water will not drown him; the swimming will, just as the water did not prevent him from maturing mentally, but rather his too-exclusive pursuit of swimming. While swimming, his mind could dream and fantasize, as the story shows, but the swimmer could not hold a book or a calculator, could not really focus on training his mind.

Martone is not merely changing the facts of Spitz's known biography. In fact, except for portraying Spitz as a dentist, he changes very little of Spitz's life as known. Martone's portrayal of Spitz in "Highlights" may be closer to the actual Spitz than the heroic persona that grew in my mind following the terrorist incident at the Munich Olympics. That heroic persona is suggested by only one detail in Martone's story: "the smell of burning hair" (9). This phrase appears to be an allusion to the Holocaust and reminds me that Spitz is a descendant of Hungarian Jews who came to the US after World War II. At the 1972 Olympics, Spitz had already won his seven medals and was finished competing before the kidnapping and massacre of Israeli athletes, which started on September 5. Spitz was whisked away from Munich quickly, as his kidnapping was also feared (Karon). These dramatic events aren't mentioned in Martone's story. A character like this "heroic" Spitz could inhabit a whole heroic novel. Again, that would be historical or biographical fiction. Such a traditional story might be told in 1984 or today, but not by Martone. Martone doesn't acknowledge or build connections between this descendent of Holocaust survivors and the Munich events. His Spitz seems not to have experienced them and is totally occupied in his quotidian present. The person who inhabits "Highlights" is ahistorical and apolitical.

In contrast to "Highlights," Martone has written heroic stories about survivors of World War II and other wars. In *Safety Patrol*

(1988) and *Seeing Eye* (1995), the story collections that follow *Alive and Dead in Indiana*, stories such as “Watch Out” and “The Teakwood Deck of the USS Indiana” show us sympathetic characters dealing with the trauma of war in different ways and with different degrees of success. But these characters have experienced war directly, whereas the biographical Spitz has not. What Spitz has experienced is a lifetime of regimen, not military regimen but contemporary athletics. It is that lifestyle that accounts for Spitz’s dullness. His intellectual inadequacies are created by a singular focus on physical training, Martone suggests. What’s more, dullness is acceptable to Spitz; it is, as he says of his dental practice and of his traditional marriage, “nice” (14). He has become a dullard and seems to be tolerating it rather well. Martone’s story about Spitz the dentist is an indirect, though quite clear, cautionary tale aimed at kids, aimed at parents: vary your own or your child’s activities, or, more specifically, swim fewer laps and read more books—and books more challenging than *Highlights* magazine.

The story “Highlights” reveals a young writer discovering a method, one that he will use throughout his career in writing fiction about well-known persons. He even uses it once more to portray a celebrated athlete, this second time a baseball player. In contrast to “Highlights,” this piece, titled “The Death of Derek Jeter,” does not satirize the Yankee shortstop but rather paints a fond portrait of the athlete, showing him to be an urbane and artistic citizen of contemporary New York City. The piece was published in *Esquire* in November of 2006. Martone has said that he did not choose Jeter as a subject but was approached by the magazine’s editors. Along with the assignment came the obviously fictional title.³

Jeter is a larger subject than Spitz, his sports career equally momentous but, in 2006, still ongoing. Martone, then, has much biography to work with. On the other hand, in the Internet age, Jeter’s “real” biography is so well known that some writers, even the younger Martone, might be stymied. Not, though, the mature humorist. What is Jeter’s “real” biography? First of all, he’s biracial. Secondly, when the story was published in 2006, Jeter, though well into his Hall-of-Fame career, still looked like a fresh-faced boy and was still a bachelor. Thirdly, he’s from the Heartland, raised by working-class parents in Kalamazoo, Michigan. He is both a gifted athlete, with graceful signature moves as a shortstop (his jump throw), and a team leader, the captain of the Yankees. Martone doesn’t deny

these facts—which Jeter provides in a 2004 *Sports Illustrated* essay—but mentions only a couple of them.

Alternatively, as with Spitz, Martone begins by giving Jeter a distinctive way of thinking. In sharp contrast to Spitz, Jeter is no dullard. Apparently, he did more than play ball as a kid because he has emerged into adulthood as a creative and catalyzing thinker. As in “Highlights,” this story proceeds as a series of discrete units. These units—there are nine of them, so innings—also prevent an overall story from developing; each one is self-contained, each is more prose poem than story chapter. In following the title, each section presents a different kind of symbolic “death”: in the first, Jeter replaces a dead light bulb in the Yankee Stadium scoreboard; in a later inning, he plays cricket with a group of Pakistanis, a bemused novice at their sport who “dies” when the light over Central Park gives way abruptly. None of the sections takes place during a Yankees game, as Martone seems more interested in depicting the off-season Jeter; in other innings, Jeter is busy with his image, restyling his signature into a more fluid autograph, updating his baseball card biography, and concocting a cologne. Jeter’s mind works a lot like Martone’s but like a mature Martone; he is conscious of time, repetitions, puns and lists: the quotidian. He’s also occupied with how systems and machines work, even simple, old-fashioned machines like a block and tackle. How many Yankees does it take to change a light bulb? Only one, if you are Derek Jeter and have a ground crew at your disposal:

I’m a big pin-striped pendulum swinging back and forth, the crew winching me up with block and tackles. I have the bulb in my pocket. The lights all blaze so we can see which one died. Up close, I’m blind, but somewhere deep inside is the spot of blackness. I aim for it. “I see it,” I shout to the ground. I see it. I lean into the harness and wait for the weight of the whole contraption to come around. It is like following a fly ball into a mitt, but this time I am the fly ball and I am flying (*Esquire* 102)

The piece has postmodern strands, too, such as when a terrorist sparrow flies in a window to endanger the million dominoes that stand as symbols of New York buildings. Martone would call this allusive vignette a “grand narrative, one of the elements of postmodern literature that he discusses in the anthology *Extreme Fiction: Formalists and Fabulists* (edited with Robin Hemley). Modern Americans believed in their invincibility prior to 9/11—that belief is

the grand narrative. Unable to catch the sparrow, Jeter here symbolizes postmodern man, watching helplessly as the dominoes topple. But the dominoes are actually play things, not buildings, so the drama dissolves easily, a passing spoof. Politics sneaks into this piece here and there, but largely it is about aesthetics: the beauty of light, the grace of movement against gravity.

Again, as with the Spitz story, Jeter's story is so much more than an interpretation of a contemporary celebrity such as that which a historical novelist would give us. The historical novelist has a story to tell. Martone, in this piece, is more a lyric poet (not a narrative one) who uses language to transfigure cultural, environmental, and human stuff into surprising art. So, rebuilding the dominoes, Jeter creates a "pointillist portrait" of his predecessor, shortstop Bucky Dent. This domino chain becomes a performance art installation. It is created with the dominoes at Martone's disposal: words ("the column topples up an incline, tumbles off a sudden cliff, sparking, as it lands, the spontaneous collapse of . . .").

Jeter-as-Martone *is* an artist (a calligrapher as well a domino col-lagist), is *surrounded* by art (he's enwrapped in sail cloth by Cristo and Jeanne-Claude) and also an *appreciator* of it (at least of some of the paintings of Salvador Dali). Rather than telling a story, Martone is assembling an elaborate literary mash-up that makes us appreciate anew someone we thought we knew: the jump-throwing athlete becomes the artiste Derek and his dominoes. Again Martone has winked at us, has changed our perspective on this player and on sport, too. He's done so through what's presented, but also through what's left out: what's not on the pages of this story is the major sports drama of the 2000s, the dispiriting turmoil of performance-enhancing drugs. Athletes of this era, even baseball players (i.e., Barry Bonds and Mark McGuire), were both admired and despised for their super strength, but Martone ignores this sideshow. Rather, he portrays Jeter as a thinking athlete, one comfortable with his physical attributes. He will retire with a clear conscience and then will have even more opportunity to use his clever, artistic mind.

In the twenty plus years between the writing of the Spitz and Jeter pieces (early 1980s-mid-2000s), Martone continued to develop as a writer of biographical fiction. Some of his restylings were positive, as with Jeter, but others were as satiric as his send-up of Spitz. A subject in this latter group was Dan Quayle, the congressman from his own hometown of Fort Wayne, Indiana. Martone wrote about Quayle

in twelve brief “fictional essays” that were grouped under the title *Pensees: The Thoughts of Dan Quayle* and published as part of *Seeing Eye*, his third collection of fictions (1995).

Like Mark Spitz, Quayle had become a celebrity because of something physical, something golden. Unlike Spitz, though, who had *earned* his gold medals, Quayle’s golden boy good looks were unearned. As both a lawyer and congressman, he was undistinguished, hence the surprise when he was chosen as a candidate for vice president in 1988. Quickly, the late-night TV hosts, especially David Letterman, newly promoted out of Indiana himself, made hay with Quayle’s inadequate resume and his gaffs. Martone built upon this popular caricature, carving up a wooden-headed dummy, a Ken doll. The deft ventriloquist Martone makes this dummy perform at several expected public occasions: the State of the Union speech (where Quayle fantasizes a roomful of nude politicians), a campaign appearance at a toy factory (with a model posing as Barbie), and a tour of South America, where he rashly buys an obscene toy which is quickly renamed for him, the Quayleito (Pull the head and guess what pops up!). We also see Quayle in bed, his wife wearing a blindfold and snoring politely as he chafes at the late-night jokes about himself.

As with Spitz and Jeter, Martone gives Quayle a distinctive way of thinking. In fact, the satire of Quayle is all about his thinking. Martone emphasizes this critique through his faux fancy titles, first in the overall title, *Pensees*, an allusion to seventeenth-century philosopher Blaise Pascal, and second in the titles to the individual essays (i.e., “On Barbie,” “On Quayleito,” “On Snipe Hunting,” etc.), which connect to another French philosopher, Michel de Montaigne. How deft, a reference to Montaigne, that progenitor of our tradition of flexible thinking, to lampoon this guy whose thinking is so inflexible. Quayle brings up the French himself when he’s expressing irritation with comic Jerry Lewis, whom the French praise for acting like a child. Everything that Lewis and the French “say says the opposite of . . . what they really mean,” (*Seeing Eye* 107), says Quayle in presenting without irony an almost textbook definition of the very quality that frustrates him. Frustrating, too, is his experience of reading to his kids the French fable *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupery. Note that it’s the ironic gap that so infuriates Quayle, the gap between “are” and “supposed”:

Let me try to explain it to myself. Those books never are about what they are supposed to be. Reading transmits a disease that you get through your eyes. A thing like *The Little Prince* gives it to you. You feel worse. You feel like you have lost something you'll never get back. But you never had it and that makes you feel bad too. Therefore: Don't read. Stop now. Don't even crack the book open. In every story there is a dangerous formula hidden in the forest of the letters. It is there already, always. (*Seeing Eye* 107-108)

Quayle is no politician, but worse, as this passage shows, he is a failure as a parent. He can put bread on the table and even impart discipline, perhaps, but he can't help his kids enjoy or unravel the meaning of a fable. He can see "the forest of the letters" on the page, but can't grasp the meanings lurking beyond it.

One of the pleasures of reading Martone over several years is to see a subject from a previous book pop up again in a new one. These might be intentional formalist tricks (part of his collage process) or random mistakes. Thus, after reading "On Anesthesia," in the Quayle book, I am intrigued by a similar anesthesia-induced reverie in Martone's next book, the fictional "memoir" titled *Michael Martone*. Anesthesia makes Quayle tell all. It affects Martone similarly. Following his first colonoscopy, Martone describes how he bores his son after the surgery by telling him the same pre-surgery details over and over.

Whether trick or lapse, this parallel leads me to see other similarities in the two collections (*Pensees* and *Michael Martone*): both offer pieces that are short and full of irony and both riff on some of the same pop culture subjects of the 1990s. One small difference, though, is that the pieces in *Michael Martone* have no titles. It's part of Martone's parody of "genre" to omit them. They are contributor's notes after all, not stories. But in reading a whole book of them and trying to keep them straight, what do I find myself doing but *titling* them a la Montaigne (On Digging, On Colonoscopy, On First Sex). Thus, I have turned a difference into another similarity, and perhaps I have stepped across a gap, making Martone's notes mine. I sense him winking at me here.

And I think Martone has winked at us again in choosing to construct this fictional memoir out of contributor's notes. Until taken up in this way by Martone, contributor's notes were not thought of as a literary form. They were formulaic and often functioned to obscure individuality. A traditional contributor's note revealed little more than a writer's name, job, and a few publication titles and/or awards.

Martone's notes begin with such *pro forma* details ("Michael Martone was born in Fort Wayne, Indiana, and grew up there." *Michael Martone* 19), but then expand like bubble-gum bubbles. Where traditional contributor's notes are short, Martone's are, by comparison, long: they become yarns, shaggy dog stories — yes, *stories*: these notes are the most narrative of Martone's fictions to date. Some ramble and bluster, while others bluster with mock-formal language ("By human sexual intercourse, Martone means that he placed his erect penis inside a woman's vagina, where it remained until . . ." *Michael Martone* 151). Still others are dreamy, as the aforementioned piece about Martone's experience of coming out of anesthesia:

And then there he was, trying to start up that machine again. It was like yanking on the ignition cord of a recalcitrant lawn-mower. At last it took, sending the spool spinning centripetally in his mind, the gathering in of the things that would stick again. Martone told himself not to forget how it felt to forget. Remember, Martone remembers saying to himself. Remember how the past started up again, how it reattached to the ceaseless parade of present moments, moments you can't remember because you forgot how to remember them. (*Michael Martone* 58)

Michael Martone, this fictional "memoir," also poses another question: in switching from biography to autobiography, has Martone cooked his own goose, eliminating, for example, the Quayle, the dupe? Hardly. Martone is so self-deprecating that he is happy to play the dummy himself and to bring others into the narrative as the ventriloquist. In some of these notes, that ventriloquist is his mother, such as when he reveals, in a piece that might be titled *On Plagiarism*, that she's the talent behind his literary career, someone who not only "shaped his spontaneous utterances" but improved them with an "active editorial intervention" (*Michael Martone* 12). This piece opens the collection as well as establishes its manner of lying in broad daylight:

The collaboration continued through college, where assignments were mailed home and returned or, in some extreme cases, the prose response was communicated via the telephone and copied out in a rather cramped and illegible longhand in the dormitory phone booth. Most of Martone's first book of stories and his occasional essays on the subject of writing, published under his own name, were written

by his mother, who learned, finally, to type in 1979, the year she wrote his graduate thesis. (*Michael Martone* 12)

In the contributor's note that might be titled *On Writing a Contributor's Note*, Martone tells us, winking, that journal editors are remiss for failing to prescribe more precisely what these "bio notes" should contain. Absent such instruction, the ever-opportunistic Martone works from a shared understanding of actual biography (his own and that of his readers) to author ever-amusing variants about the authorial life. Vice President Quayle, that literalist, would not get these variants, but Martone's readers treasure them as if they had authored them themselves.

As stated above, each contributor's note begins with the same statement of biographical genesis and early education ("Michael Martone was born in Fort Wayne, Indiana, and educated in the public schools there." *Michael Martone* 11). Such is the common opening sentence that any of us might construct for ourselves. Our collective biography is that each of us, given our early education in the principles of democracy and the capitalistic ethic, will grow up to be the traditional hero. Alternatively and ironically, Martone suggests that this ideal of heroic biography, if it ever existed, does no more. In a world still glutted with images of it, it is important to find antidotes such as Martone's substitutes, substitutes such as Spitz ("nice" dentist), Jeter (clever artiste), Quayle (who won't read), and Martone (tireless producer of ironic substitutes). To paraphrase the anti-reading Quayle: reading is a disease that you get through the eyes. Reading Michael Martone gives you that disease. You could do worse than to die of it.

Otterbein University

WORKS CITED

- Hemley, Robin, and Michael Martone, eds. *Extreme Fiction: Fabulists and Formalists*. NY: Pearson/Longman, 2004.
- Jeter, Derek. "Kalamazoo Kid." *Sports Illustrated* 9 Feb. 2004: 39. 9
- Karon, Tony. "Revisiting the Olympics' Darkest Day." *Time* 12 Sept. 2000. <<http://content.time.com/time/arts/article/0,8599,54669,00.html>
- Kirshenbaum, Jerry. "Mexico to Munich: Mark Spitz and the Quest for Gold." *Sports Illustrated* 4 Sept. 1972: 20-23.
- . "The Golden Days of Mark the Shark." *Sports Illustrated* 18 Sept. 1972: 27-31.
- . "A Sanctuary Violated." *Sports Illustrated*. 37.12 (1972): 24-26.
- Martone, Michael. *Alive and Dead in Indiana*. NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984.
- . "The Death of Derek Jeter." *Esquire* 146.5 (2006): 102.

- . *Double-wide: Collected Fiction of Michael Martone*. Bloomington: Quarry Books of Indiana UP, 2007.
- . *Fort Wayne is Seventh on Hitler's List*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990.
- . *Michael Martone: Fictions*. Normal/Tallahassee: FC2, 2005.
- . *Safety Patrol*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1988.
- . *Seeing Eye*. Cambridge: Zoland Books, 1995.

NOTES

¹See Tony Karon's "Revisiting the Olympics' Darkest Day."

²Not published in *Alive and Dead in Indiana* (1984), "Highlights" was first collected in *Fort Wayne is Seventh on Hitler's List* (1990). It was also collected in *Double-wide: Collected Fiction of Michael Martone*, from which I cite.

³These remarks were made at the 2016 Symposium for the Study of Midwestern Literature at East Lansing, Michigan, which Martone was attending because he was awarded the Mark Twain Award for distinguished contributions to Midwestern literature.

SPORTS AND CIVIC IDENTITY IN MICHAEL CZYNIEJEWSKI'S *CHICAGO STORIES*

MICHAEL COCCHIARALE

Chicago Stories, Michael Czyniejewski's second book, is comprised of forty "dramatic fictions" that express the frustrations, desires, and fevered dreams of a startling array of many larger-than-life Chicagoans, past and present. Ann Landers, Ray Kroc, Hillary Clinton, Roger Ebert, Oprah Winfrey, Dennis DeYoung, Jane Addams, Sister Carrie, David Hasselhoff—these and more of the city's denizens are given their oftentimes absurd moment on the page. Taken together, they create a portrait of the Windy City that, if not always "a lot different than the stereotypes" ("Interview"; emphasis added), is certainly unforgettable. In addition to voices of famous politicians, musicians, media personalities, and even a murderer or two, the collection features several monologues that focus on well-known sports figures of Chicago.

The inclusion of such pieces makes sense because sports—especially but not only professional sports—are often inextricably bound up with how people view themselves and where they live. According to Charles Euchner, author of *Playing the Field: Why Sports Teams Move and Cities Fight to Keep Them*, "[m]ajor league sports brings a special status to a city. Whatever may be wrong with the city, having a big league club insures regular national attention" (10). Euchner goes on to explain that "[t]he emotional hold a team has on its home city stems partly from its ability to embody and enhance the city's identity," which "can overwhelm all the other ways that a city's residents think about themselves" (12). Although big-market cities on either coast might shrug off a professional team's poor performance, Czyniejewski shows how people living even in the highly populated

areas of “flyover country” often view the success of their sports teams as a matter of deep civic pride.

Czyzniejewski begins *Chicago Stories* with “Mrs. O’Leary’s Ghost Comforts Steve Bartman at the Ruins of Meigs Field,” a monologue that connects the devastating tragedy of the Chicago fire of 1871 with a relatively recent sports tragedy featuring the Chicago Cubs, the perennially hapless baseball team that—until 2016—had not won a title in over a hundred years. By connecting the two, Czyzniejewski underscores the importance of sports to the identity of this Midwestern city. The ghost of Mrs. O’Leary, the person whose cow supposedly kicked over the lantern that started the fire (Abbott), speaks to Steve Bartman, the fan whose interference with a possibly catchable foul ball during a 2003 playoff game was seen as a turning point in the Cubs’ best-of-seven match up with the Florida Marlins (Bahr).

As the title of the piece suggests, the ghost of Mrs. O’Leary appears to be providing comfort for Steve Bartman. She begins by invoking the figure of Sisyphus, which both lends mythic weight to the Cubs’ endeavor and emphasizes the compulsory need to try yet again. Later, Mrs. O’Leary makes a more recent reference to President Harry Truman, who “killed two cities with a nod, but when he ran for reelection, his legacy became an alleged defeat” (3). According to the logic of this comparison, if Truman, who ordered the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, can have his image rehabilitated by his surprising victory over Thomas E. Dewey in the presidential election of 1948, then Bartman, guilty of far less, should, over time, come to be seen in a more positive light.

In the second half of the monologue, Mrs. O’Leary’s attempts at comfort run up against reality and resentment. The ghost explains how she can take “solace in . . . how the city had a chance to start over” (3) after the fire. Bartman cannot take similar solace in the Cubs, however, since they have started over every spring since 1908, and each time their season has ended with failure, some more excruciating than others. Mrs. O’Leary closes by saying she takes comfort in “[h]ow that cow never gave much milk, anyway, and the shoes I made from her skin were the most comfortable I’d ever worn.” She mentions “[h]ow tender her meat was, bloody and thick, the taste of guilt bleeding from every bite” (3). With these comments, she seems to be offering not consolation but the disturbing suggestion that the party responsible for a colossal disaster should pay for the act with his or her life. Despite the promise of its title, this monologue is darkly ambivalent,

delivered by a voice that emphasizes both the city's resilience and its long-burning frustration in the face of terrible loss.

The hapless Cubs are the subject of another of these dramatic fictions, one with the humorously unwieldy title, "In a Prerecorded Message Played at His Hall of Fame Induction, Ron Santo Outlines the Inevitable Cubs World Series Championship Parade." In this piece, Santo, a well-loved Cubs third baseman inducted into the baseball Hall of Fame a year after his death in 2010 (Levine), lays out his ambitious plans for the ultimate World Series victory party. Santo was the captain of the infamous Cubs team of 1969, which had a nine and a half game lead in mid-August (Claerbaut 331) before folding down the stretch, surrendering the division title to the upstart New York Mets (Claerbaut 338). Santo does not focus, however, on the heartache of that notorious season. Instead, he looks forward to eventual glory, imagining a World Series parade that would welcome not only the players from that 1969 team, such as Ernie "Mr. Cub" Banks and pitching ace Ferguson Jenkins, but Cubs from all other eras as well. Even Sammy Sosa—the prodigious slugger from the 1990s who was later disgraced for using performance-enhancing drugs—would be invited.

However, Santo does not stop there. With feverish magnanimity, he goes on to include not only coaches and employees of the franchise, but also "anyone who's suffered, anyone who's endured, anyone who made it through to the end . . . everyone, everywhere" (102)—everyone, in other words, who has faced a Cubs-like struggle in life. The piece concludes with Santo laying out a dream of "what Cub fans deserve, what's been long overdue, a Cub dynasty to last the ages, nothing but total and complete domination" (103). The parade for the 2016 title, following a seven-mile route from Wrigley Field to Grant Park and attended by an estimated five million people (Johnson and Rosseau), may have fallen short of Santo's ambitious fantasy; nevertheless, it serves as ample proof of the meaning of this event for the city and its long-suffering fans. Like the ghost of Mrs. O'Leary, Santo understands that the fortunes of the city's beloved baseball team reflect how Chicagoans feel about themselves. Unlike O'Leary, Santo also suggests that the perennial plight of Cubs players and fans is universal—an inescapable aspect of the human condition.

Czyzniewski furthers the connection between sports and civic identity in "Unearthed at an Archeological Dig, the Shawon-O-Meter Speaks to the Media, Harry Caray's Tavern, 2169," another Cubs-focused monologue that takes a giant leap into the future. This time,

instead of presenting the words of a beloved local sportsman, Czyzniejewski gives voice to the Shawon-O-Meter, a laughingly low-tech contraption created by a Cubs fan to keep track of the batting average of Shawon Dunston, a middling shortstop during the '80s and early '90s (Richardson). Dug up after nearly two centuries, the Shawon-O-Meter is blissfully unaware of what has transpired in baseball history; however, it is most eager to catch up. "I don't want the highlights," the device explains to the media. "I want it all, the ups and downs, the tragedies, the triumphs" (131). Chicagoans, this monologue suggests, are not fair-weather fans. The whole story—the good and the bad—is what makes these people who they are.

In addition to the ability to face adversity, Czyzniejewski's Shawon-O-Meter is—again, like most Cubs fans—unabashedly optimistic:

I'm hoping for the best, of course, for happy endings to more than one story. Best-case scenario: we've caught the Yanks, fly as many banners, if not more, than those goons from the Bronx. Maybe we've lapped them. Maybe more. Worst-case scenario: I find just one flag, one shining moment, one title that ended the grief, the misery, the streak. (131-132)

It is important to realize that until 2016, the Cubs had won only two World Series titles—one in 1907 and another in 1908. For them to have caught the Yankees—even if the Yankees failed to add even one more title in those hundred and fifty-plus years—the Cubs would have had to win twenty-five more titles ("World Series Overview"). What is more, even the worst-case scenario is too optimistic. The Shawon-O-Meter fails to account for the real worst-case scenario, namely that the streak of futility has continued—that the Cubs, in other words, have won exactly zero titles in all the time since the Shawon-O-Meter was scrapped.

As with other pieces discussed so far, there's great humor and absurdity in this monologue. At the same time, the Shawon-O-Meter's fantasy about the Cubs surpassing the Yankees in terms of titles is yet another manifestation of the serious and long-standing Midwestern desire to matter—to alter the dynamic with the East. In his study, *An American Colony: Regionalism and the Roots of Midwestern Culture*, Edward Watts argues that, since the Ordinance of 1787, which led to the settling of the land beyond the Alleghenies, the Midwest has been seen by the East as a kind of American colony (xii). Watts contends that an antagonism still prevails: "[e]ven today,

Easterners consider other regions provincial in contrast to their own metropolitanism” (xvii). Unlike Ron Santo’s general dream of “total and complete domination” (103) for his team, the Shawon-O-Meter has a specific target—New York City. The best-case scenario regarding the Cubs is a comic manifestation of a Midwestern city’s desire to put a once-colonized colonizer in its place. A victory over a team like the Yankees is much more than another win. At the same time, there is perhaps implicit in this and the other Cubs-centered monologues the perverse yet equally strong desire to *not* matter—to, like Sisyphus, fail yet again, because that failure has become—over many, many years—an indelible aspect of who fans of the team see themselves to be.

For Czyzniejewski, if the Cubs represent hope despite perennial futility, then the Chicago Bulls—especially those Bulls teams of the 1990s—represent unqualified and unprecedented sports success. Although it has been twenty years since the last championship, the city’s professional basketball team is still a tremendous source of civic pride. In the monologue “Dennis Rodman Envisions His Final Tattoo,” the speaker is Dennis Rodman, easily the most infamous Bull from those championship years, a power forward whose prodigious skill at rebounding was outstripped only by the outrageousness of his character. Beloved in Chicago, reviled by opponents and players across the league, Rodman is not only keenly aware of the significance of his role in American culture but takes every opportunity to embellish it. He begins by saying, “People forget I started a revolution” (25). Before his arrival, the body of the National Basketball Association player was a *tabula rasa*—“Arms, necks, backs, chests: all blank slates, the kind of players you watched on Christmas, on Mother’s Day, the image the association was selling” (25).

By the end of his tenure with the Bulls, however, Rodman had—by his own estimation—single-handedly changed not only basketball but American culture in general. “I’d made my mark,” he declares, “infected everything and everyone. And not just the league. Your sons . . . Your daughters” (25). All bear the mark of tattoos this basketball player made popular. However, in typical Rodman fashion, he feels he does not get the credit he deserves. To express his displeasure, he imagines one more mark—a tattoo of “bright red lips . . . Square on my ass, right cheek, centered up” because “[i]t will remind me of what you should all do” (26). He ends his monologue by asking us all to kiss the tattoo or at least blow it a kiss. Fittingly,

he employs a basketball metaphor, saying that if this blown kiss happens to miss its intended mark, he will “snatch it clean out of the air and get you another shot” (26). Even after his retirement, Rodman casts himself as the rebounder, readily evoking the cliché of the scrappy, blue-collar player that fans of Midwestern teams love to embrace. Brash and outrageous, tireless and hard-working, the Rodman of Czyzniejewski's imagination reminds us of the indelible marks he has made on both Chicago and the world.

The Bulls' influence on Midwestern culture is also the subject of “Jean Baptiste Point du Sable Settles at the Mouth of the Cuyahoga River,” a monologue in which the speaker uses Michael Jordan, the star of all those championship Bulls teams, to revise Midwestern history radically. Point du Sable, Chicago's first permanent resident (Meehan 444), tells the reader to imagine him settling not in Chicago but in Cleveland, located 350 miles further east, on a dirtier river and a less impressive lake. From the beginning of the monologue, he conjures up a kind of Chicagofied Cleveland, one far from its still-popular image as the butt of jokes:

Imagine a skyline with buildings so tall, you could see them from Buffalo Think halls of fame—of blues and jazz and gospel—forming a mall with rock 'n roll. Picture the parks, lush and expansive, safe and inviting, a bushy green beard for Erie's chin. Envision the Flats, only larger, sporting better restaurants, more famous celebrities Perceive the river green on St. Patty's Day, on fire not at all. Forget “Mistake on the Lake,” unless you're talking about someplace else. (21)

In this passage, Point du Sable imagines a Cleveland with a more impressive skyline, a richer musical heritage, a more attractive lakefront, a glitzier nightlife, and a river that (unlike the Cuyahoga) did not catch fire three times. In other words, he imagines a place that bears little resemblance to the “Mistake on the Lake,” a moniker Cleveland has been saddled with for nearly fifty years.

Near the end of the monologue, Point du Sable's revisioning of Cleveland brings him inevitably to the topic of sports—specifically, Michael Jordan's 1989 game- and series-winning basket against the Cavaliers, known by Cleveland fans quite simply as “The Shot”. “Most of all,” Point du Sable tells his audience, “imagine Jordan getting that inbound pass, changing direction, pulling the ball off the dribble and erecting his body into perfect verticality. Chicago

Stadium hold its breath as the ball rolls off Michael's fingers . . . swishing home" (21). In this alternative version of things, however, Jordan is not wearing a Bulls uniform. Instead, "his chest [is] emblazoned with an orange CAVS, glowing like a miracle" (22). The image of Jordan in a Cavaliers uniform cannot help but give Cleveland fans the chills. What is more, the word "miracle" is certain to resonate with Cleveland fans, as it appears to be a subtle reference to the so-called "Miracle of Richfield," when the 1975-1976 Cavaliers unexpectedly beat the Washington Bullets to advance to the Eastern Conference Finals (Sims). In the end, though, Point du Sable's audacious vision only serves to further underscore how Cleveland's fifty-plus years of sports futility is inextricably bound up with the city's failures and frustrations over that same period of time. Fortunately for the psyche of the city of Chicago, Michael Jordan was drafted by the Bulls. Fortunately for Cleveland, the Cavaliers put an end to a half century of professional sports ineptitude when they won the National Basketball Association Championship in June of 2016.

As the Cubs-and Bulls-centered monologues show, professional sports and sports figures are vital to the identity of Chicagoans; however, amateur sports also serve a vital function in this respect. In "The Sixteen-Inch Softball Buys a Shot of Malort for the Italian Beef Sandwich at the End of the Bar," Czynniejewski draws attention to an amateur sport that is uniquely Chicago. With origins going back to the 1880s (Gems 4), sixteen-inch softball, according to historian Christopher Lamberti, is "[v]irtually unknown outside the city's greater metropolitan area" (94). However, for many reasons, the game has been—and continues to be—vital to the city, as it "strengthened players' and fans' bonds to communities they imagined themselves part of," helping them to "retain a macho, urban, blue-collar identity in the midst of a dynamically changing city" (93). A significant component of this identity building has always involved the meeting up of players in bars after games, a pastime just as important as the competitions themselves. As Lamberti explains, "[g]athering after the game at a local bar was an important part of the life for many players, and softball managers widely recognized that teams that got along together off the field played better on it. Known for softball, Chicago was even better known for its saloons, and the relationship between softball and the tavern industry was strong" (96). While it is true that, as Gerald Gems notes, "[s]ports were the high

road to Americanism" (4), participation in the sport of sixteen-inch softball was, more specifically, a way to be a Chicagoan.

Instead of focusing on individual softball players or fans, none of whom have the status of a Ron Santo or Michael Jordan or even Steve Bartman, Czyzniejewski presents two inanimate icons in this monologue: the speaker, a sixteen-inch softball, and the auditor, an Italian beef sandwich, a distinctive staple of the Chicago diet. Instead of focusing on the field of play, the setting here is a bar. As one might expect, once the absurdity is accepted, the sixteen-inch softball is a regular guy with "a wife and kids at home" (69). He sees that the Italian beef sandwich is depressed, so he orders him a shot of Malort, a bitter-tasting liquor produced and sold in Chicago. In addition to the drink, the ball offers a pep talk that conveys the kind of unshakable optimism that a Cubs fan would understand. First, he identifies himself with the sandwich, which makes sense, as they are both nothing fancy. "I get you," the ball declares. "You see, I used to be you" (69). Second, he acknowledges the harsh reality of Chicago but emphasizes how a good dose of Midwestern optimism might save the day: "Yeah, the mayor'll fuck us up with another tax hike before he's done, and if the kids keep shooting each other like this, they're going to call in the National Guard. The Cubs? Don't get me started But none of it's the end of the world. Somebody's out there, they like you Heck, I like you and I don't even know you" (70). After reminding the sandwich that "you're not alone," the softball closes his monologue by saying, "Na zdrowie" (70), which is Polish for "to your health." From the iconic characters to the type of beverage to the setting to the topics of conversation to the genial optimism to the specific ethnic blessing at the end, this piece (perhaps more than any other discussed) tries hard to convey the soul of Chicago.

In the monologue, "Barack Obama Describes His Perfect Bowling Game to the Graduating Class, Arizona State University Commencement, 2029," another quintessentially Midwestern sport is used to comment humorously on the discrepancy between the fevered expectations for Obama's presidency and the tumultuous reality of this famous Chicagoan's years in office. The monologue alludes to an incident that occurred on the campaign trail in 2008, when Obama, seeking to appeal to ordinary Pennsylvania voters, decided to take a shot at the blue collar sport of bowling. The candidate, who had been taking the nation by storm with his impressive eloquence and his energetic campaign of hope and change, rolled an

embarrassing 37, which led Don Van Natta from the *New York Times* to quip, “Is it even possible for a grown man to bowl a 37?”

Through the calling up of this humorous episode, Czyzniejewski reminds us that Obama (with, of course, the aid of his supporters) created expectations that were impossible for anyone to meet. Yet this fictive Obama, unlike his real-life counterpart, seems to have lived up to his billing. When he left the White House more than ten years before this commencement speech, his “resume, even by the harshest of standards, appeared, at long last, flawless” (5). In fact, one of the only things that remained for him to do was to expunge that ugly bowling score from his record. “[H]aunted” by that earlier failure, Obama becomes so “obsessed” with the sport that he was “bowling four hours a day, every day” (5). Eventually, the hard work pays off and he rolls a perfect game. As a result, he “put the ghosts to rest” and “answered my critics” (6). Perfection has been achieved. Unlike in matters of the economy and international relations, this achievement is irrefutably quantified. This is one number that cannot lie. Czyzniejewski’s Obama becomes a tremendous source of pride for Chicagoans—a man who, seemingly, can do no wrong.

In a 1997 essay, Garrison Keillor explains that “Midwesterners have a sixth sense, and it’s the sense of inferiority, a feeling that if we were really any good, we wouldn’t be living here.” But the truth is, as even many of Keillor’s fellow St. Paulites seem to recognize, that many people live fulfilling lives in the Midwest and, more importantly, display an indomitable artistic vision that is as powerful as it is diverse. In a recent *Chicago Tribune* article entitled “What is the Midwestern Literary Tradition,” Anna Clark presents the view of nine writers of the “region.” Highly lauded novelist and short story writer Bonnie Jo Campbell emphasizes the great variety of voices that write from the region—Sherwood Anderson, Marilynne Robinson, Saul Bellow, Richard Wright, Lorrie Moore, Charles Baxter, Toni Morrison, among others. She concludes her response by saying, “There is nothing we can’t do here in the middle of the country” (qtd. in Clark). To borrow a catch phrase from the Yankees—the Evil Empire, the sporting symbol of the dominating East—Michael Czyzniejewski’s *Chicago Stories* is another work of the region to add to the Murderers Row of writers that proves Bonnie Jo Campbell’s point. The competition in the literary world is keen, and, invariably, the works of the Midwest are significant underdogs; however, true

fans know that Chicago, as well as other distinctive places in the vast expanse between the mountains, will always emerge a winner.

Widener University

WORKS CITED

- Abbott, Karen. "What (or Who) Caused the Great Chicago Fire?" *Smithsonian.com*, 4 Oct. 12, www.smithsonianmag.com/history/what-or-who-caused-the-great-chicago-fire-61481977/?no-ist. Accessed 26 Sept. 2016.
- Bahr, Chris. "Flashback: Bartman Becomes Cubs' Latest Goat." *FOXsports.com*, 14 Oct. 2015, www.foxsports.com/mlb/story/steve-bartman-chicago-cubs-marlins-moises-alou-nlcs-goat-world-series-curse-drought-101415. Accessed 3 Aug. 2016.
- Campbell, Bonnie Jo. "What is the Midwestern Literary Tradition?" Interview by Anna Clark. *Chicagotribune.com*, 19 Sept. 2014, <http://www.chicagotribune.com/lifestyles/books/ct-prj-rust-belt-midwestern-literature-20140919-story.html>. Accessed 14 Apr. 2016.
- Claerbaut, David. "1969 and the Chicago Cubs." *The Chicago Sports Reader*. Ed. Steven A. Riess and Gerald R. Gems. U of Chicago P, 2009. 318-339.
- Czyzniewski, Michael. *Chicago Stories: 40 Dramatic Fictions*. Curbside Splendor, 2012. —. Interview by Jake Austen. *Time Out*. Time Out, 17 Apr. 2012. Web. www.timeout.com/chicago/books/michael-czyzniewski-interview. Accessed 8 Aug. 2016.
- Euchner, Charles C. *Playing the Field: Why Sports Teams Move and Cities Fight to Keep Them*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1993.
- Gems, Gerald. "Sports and Identity in Chicago." *Sports in Chicago*. Ed. Elliott J. Gorn. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2008. 1-18.
- Johnson, Carla K. and Caryn Rousseau. "Millions Celebrate Winning Chicago Cubs With Parade, Rally." *Absnews.go.com*, 4 Nov. 2016. <http://abcnews.go.com/Sports/wireStory/throngs-chicago-cubs-fans-expected-parade-43294686>. Accessed 13 Nov. 2016.
- Keillor, Garrison. "Sweet Home, Minnesota." *Time* 24 Mar. 1997: 108.
- Lamberti, Christopher. "Chicago's Game." *Rooting for the Home Team: Sport, Community, and Identity*. Ed. Daniel A. Nathan. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2013. 93-107.
- Levine, Bruce. "Ron Santo Elected to Hall of Fame." *ESPN.com*, 6 Dec. 2011, www.espn.com/chicago/mlb/story/_id/7318808/chicago-cubs-great-ron-santo-elected-baseball-hall-fame. Accessed 10 Aug. 2016.
- Meehan, Thomas A. "Jean Baptiste Point du Sable, the First Chicagoan." *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society (1908-1984)* 56.3 (Autumn 1963): 439-453.
- Richardson, Randy. "The Shawon-O-Meter's Remarkable 25-Year Journey." *Wrigleyville Nation*, 4 June 2014, www.wrigleyvillenation.com/2014/06/04/shawon-o-meters-remarkable-25-year-journey/. Accessed 8 Aug. 2016.
- Sims, Damon. "The 1975-76 Cleveland Cavaliers: Beloved Underdogs, Champs at Heart." *Cleveland.com*, 18 Aug. 2009, www.cleveland.com/cavs/index.ssf/2009/04/the_197576_cleveland_cavaliers.html. Accessed 8 Aug. 2016.
- Van Natta, Don. "They Got Game. It Just May Be the Wrong Game." *Nytimes.com*, 6 Apr. 2008, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/06/weekinreview/06vannatta.html?_r=0. Accessed 23 May 2016.
- Watts, Edward. *An American Colony: Regionalism and the Roots of Midwestern Culture*. Athens: Ohio UP, 2002.
- "World Series Overview." *MLB.com*, n.d., http://mlb.mlb.com/mlb/history/postseason/mlb_ws.jsp?feature=club_champs. Accessed 8 Aug. 2016.

PUBLISHING FROM FLYOVER COUNTRY:
THE REJECTION OF HEARTLAND ICONOGRAPHY
BY CONTEMPORARY MIDWESTERN
LITERARY MAGAZINES

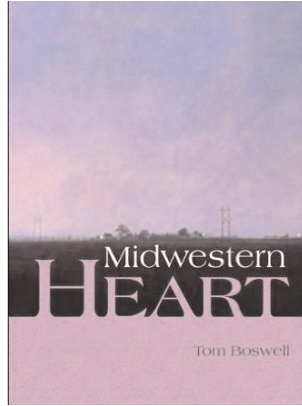
PATRICIA OMAN

Many book publishers have taken advantage of the “heartland farm” to market Midwestern-themed books in recent years, but a small crop of young Midwestern literary magazines—such as *Midwestern Gothic*, *Great Lakes Review*, *Old Northwest Review*, *NEAT*, and the anthology series *New Stories from the Midwest*—reject heartland iconography as representative of the Midwest. In fact, the marketing of these magazines, including cover images and distribution modes, suggests a fairly consistent attempt to subvert images of the Midwest as agrarian or traditional. In this essay, I argue that the rejection of heartland iconography (and its precursor, prairie iconography) in the current Midwestern literary renaissance is a response to both industry-wide changes in publishing and the recent US economic recession.

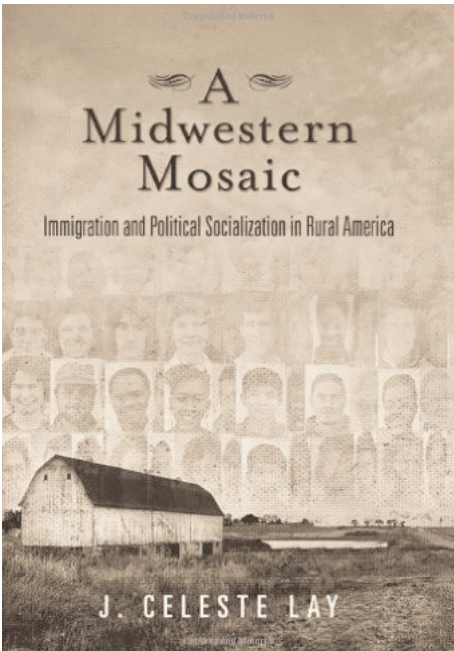
As the images in Figure 1 suggest, the semiotics of heartland iconography are fairly consistent and positive, invoking a nostalgic feeling of tradition and abundance while ignoring the modern means of achieving that abundance. The old barn at the center of each image, for instance, is large enough to indicate success but small enough to identify the farm as family-run rather than industrial. The barn is also typically made of wood, which signals the age of this successful family farm and both metaphoric and literal warmth. Through visual contrast the red color brings viewers’ attention to the abundance of the green or yellow fields that surround the barn and run to the horizon. But notice that despite the realist aesthetics of most of the images in Figure 1, none depict “real” farms. That is, there are no visible pow-



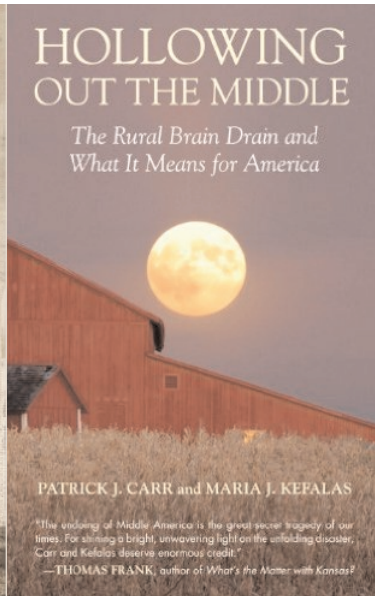
A: Diane Siebert (author) and Wendell Minor (illustrator), *Heartland* (2015, David R. Godine, Publisher). Jacket art © Wendell Minor. Reprinted with permission.



B: Tom Boswell, *Midwestern Heart* (2012, Codhill Press). Cover painting © Stephen Fox, book and cover design by Alicia Fox. Reprinted with permission.



C: J. Celeste Lay, *A Midwestern Mosaic* (2012, Temple University Press). Reprinted with permission.



D: Patrick J. Carr and Maria J. Kefalas, *Hollowing Out the Middle* (2010, Beacon Press). © 2009 Patrick J. Carr and Maria J. Kefalas. Reprinted with permission from Beacon Press, Boston, Massachusetts.

Figure 1: Compilation of heartland book covers.

erlines. Or tractors. Or any of the complex modern technology one would expect to find on a contemporary farm. Heartland farm iconography, as demonstrated by these book covers, thus deliberately ignores the present-day reality of Midwestern farms and the Midwest more generally.

Contemporary Midwestern literary magazines reject this nostalgic and traditional iconography in a number of ways—denying the myth of abundance, defining the Midwest as urban rather than rural, and incorporating modernist rather than realist aesthetics—but they all insist that the Midwest is worth looking at. In other words, they all argue for a unique Midwestern identity. Heartland iconography, for all its positive connotations, discourages viewers from acknowledging the contemporary existence of the Midwest and therefore reinforces the popular assumption that it is “flyover country,” that there is nothing interesting to see there. The rejection of heartland iconography is thus also the rejection of the label “flyover country.”

One magazine that rejects the positive tone of heartland iconography is *Midwestern Gothic*, which was founded in 2011 in Ann Arbor, Michigan, by Jeff Pfaller and Robert James Russell. By aiming to “catalog the oeuvre of an often-overlooked region of the United States ripe with its own mythologies and tall tales,” the editors of this magazine explicitly reject the common myth of the Midwest as invisible or something to fly over (“About” *Midwestern*). Its emphasis on the gothic, in particular, rejects the stereotypical agrarian pastoral that dominates much of Midwest discourse and heartland iconography. The cover images, for instance, critique the heartland myth of abundance by highlighting economic blight of rural areas. Like the heartland farms shown in Figure 1, the cover images in Figure 2 are framed to exclude modern technology (such as powerlines), but the dilapidated red barn on the cover of the Spring 2012 issue is a dystopian echo of heartland iconography. What was once a symbol of agricultural prosperity and family tradition has fallen to ruin and become overrun with weeds from disuse.



Figure 2, top: *Midwestern Gothic*, Issue 2 (Summer 2011) cover image copyright ©Jane Carlson, book design by Jeffrey Pfaller. Reprinted with permission



Figure 2, bottom: *Midwestern Gothic*, Issue 5 (Summer 2012) cover image © David J. Thompson, book design by Jeffrey Pfaller. Reprinted with permission.

The cover of the Winter 2013 issue juxtaposes an old, rusted car and a colorful mural of heartland imagery. The mural's slogan, "God Blessed Us," is ironic given the mural's own chipping paint and the rusted car parked in front of it—the optimism of the agricultural mural in direct contrast with the economic decline of its urban surroundings. While not all of the covers of this magazine address heartland iconography explicitly, most issues share an aesthetic of economic decline (such as desaturated colors and cloudy skies) that consistently rejects its positive tone.

The cover designs for the two most recent editions of Jason Lee Brown and Shanie Latham's anthology series, *New Stories from the Midwest* (Figure 3), approach heartland iconography from a similar gothic perspective. This anthology series does not promote a specific Midwestern identity, and it compiles short fiction published in a variety of magazines and journals, not just Midwestern publications, but the current publisher of the series—New American Press, a small independent press based in Wisconsin—embraces the series title by both acknowledging and critiquing heartland iconography. The wind turbine on the cover of the 2013 volume, for instance, recognizes not only the region's agricultural past but also the technology of its present. The low angle from which the turbine is depicted and the dark, iris-like gradient around the image, however, create a slightly creepy atmosphere. This is not a utopian depiction of technological progress—that is, an extension of heartland iconography—but a critical examination of Midwestern progress. Similarly, the cover image for the 2016 volume is a slightly sinister depiction of an old farm mailbox. The metal cage encasing it and the concrete-reinforced post seem designed to discourage the age-old but destructive rural game of mailbox baseball. Although slightly humorous, the farmers' need to defend their mailbox against destructive youths is not just an annoyance. It represents rural self-destructive behavior and a contradiction of traditional heartland values.

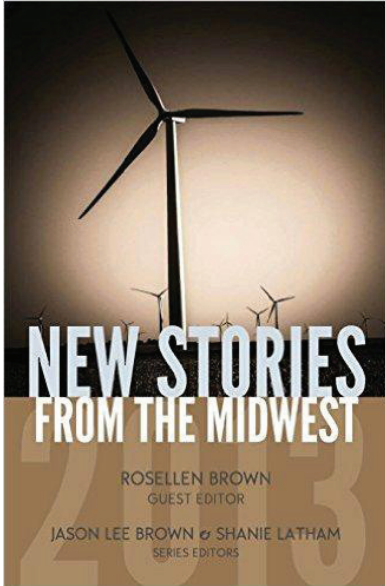


Figure 3, top: *New Stories from the Midwest* (New American Press), 2013 cover image © R.R. Beals, cover design by David Bowen. Reprinted with permission.



Figure 3, bottom: *New Stories from the Midwest* (New American Press), 2016 cover image © Shae Cohan, cover design by David Bowen. Reprinted with permission.

Started around the same time as *Midwestern Gothic*, *Great Lakes Review* redefines the heartland myth by focusing on areas within the US and Canada near the Great Lakes or, as managing editor Meredith Counts calls it, “the middle of North America.” The reconceptualization of Midwestern regions across national borders is not new—regional labels based on prairie ecology, for instance, also disregard the geopolitical boundaries between the US and Canada—but the recognition that a distinct regional culture exists around the Great Lakes both acknowledges and challenges the centrality of heartland iconography to Midwestern regional identity. Founding Editor Rob Jackson notes that the original focus of the magazine was urban centers, arguing that when the magazine was founded, “[t]here were no other publications that connected many of the great cities of the Great Lakes together. When we first started we were primarily focused on Toronto, Chicago, Milwaukee and Buffalo. However, soon after that we added Hamilton [Ontario] and Detroit and then organically we started to focus on the whole Great Lakes region.” In fact, the cover of the first issue (Fall 2012) includes an abstract painting of the Great Lakes and the cities along them (Figure 4). Buffalo, Cleveland, Chicago, Detroit, Milwaukee, and Toronto are identified by their iconic urban imagery, such as the Willis Tower in Chicago, and each of the southern cities seems to drip with orange rust, perhaps to signify the Rust Belt. Although later issues do not focus specifically on urban settings, the early identification of an urban, cross-national regional identity demonstrates the editors’ rejection of rural heartland iconography.

The cover for the Fall 2013 issue of *Great Lakes Review* similarly rejects heartland iconography in its clever parody of early pioneer metaphors of the prairie as inland ocean. As Walter Prescott Webb writes, Anglo-European explorers and pioneers “with one accord . . . compared the Plains to the sea. This comparison runs throughout the literature from Coronado on” (487). In fact, James Hurt argues that the First View of the Prairie “was so common that it constitutes a topos of western travel writing” (8). In heartland farm iconography, cultivated grain fields replace wild prairie grasses, but the landscape is still visually likened to the rolling prairie-ocean. The seemingly boundless body of water in this cover image cheekily acknowledges the prairie-ocean metaphor by depicting an actual inland sea. The viewer’s attention is brought to the red chair in the image’s foreground by the shallow focus and high-key lighting reminiscent of sunny heartland imagery, the

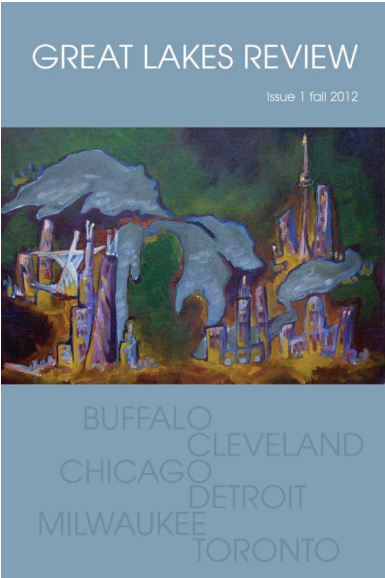


Figure 4, top: *Great Lakes Review* Fall 2012 cover painting © Alicia Disantis. Reprinted with permission.



Figure 4, bottom: *Great Lakes Review* Fall 2013 cover image © Jordan Affayroux, cover design by David Bowen. Reprinted with permission.

bright red color of the chair contrasting with the dark blue water, like a red barn against a sea of yellow wheat or green corn. The slightly worn edges of the chair suggest it has seen work, but it has no functional purpose in this landscape, as the barn does in heartland iconography. This is parody.

The cover images for the recently founded *Old Northwest Review* also invoke prairie iconography to interrogate the flyover myth (Figure 5). Founded in 2014 by Brandon James Anderson, *Old Northwest Review* focuses on “fiction, poetry, and creative non-fiction that is of, from, and aligned with the culture and aesthetic of the Great Lakes region and the greater Midwest” (“Old Northwest Review”). The prairie image on the Fall 2014 cover incorporates the characteristics common to the trope of the First View of the Prairie—waving prairie grasses and an island grove of trees—and the wooden walkway, which enables the tourism of even the most casual prairie visitor, harkens back to the prairie travel literature of earlier centuries.

The image’s perspective undermines these common prairie tropes, however. The walkway extends away from the viewer, as if he or she were walking along it, but there is no sense of visual mastery of the landscape, as in earlier accounts. The speaker in William Cullen Bryant’s “The Prairies” (1832), for instance, is able to view “the encircling vastness” (line 6) from atop his horse. As seen in the images of Figure 1, heartland imagery often assumes a similar perspective, depicting the rolling landscape from a distant or high vantage. In this image, the assumed viewer has no such vantage point or sense of “vastness.” Both the prairie grasses and the trees in the background encroach on the viewer, and the wooden walkway turns beyond the viewer’s vision. Thus, although the image acknowledges the tropes of prairie imagery, it suggests a more claustrophobic perspective on those tropes. The cover for the Fall 2015 issue similarly redefines prairie iconography but also incorporates overt themes of economic decline. The clean mid-twentieth-century architecture of the abandoned gas station reflects post-World War II American optimism and economic boom, but the surrounding vegetation is beginning to encroach on the buildings. The prairie seems to be taking back the landscape, ringing the now-empty gas pump “island” and signaling the failure of the entire project of western expansion and progress.

While publications such as *Midwestern Gothic*, *New Stories from the Midwest*, and *Great Lakes Review* retain the realist aesthetics of

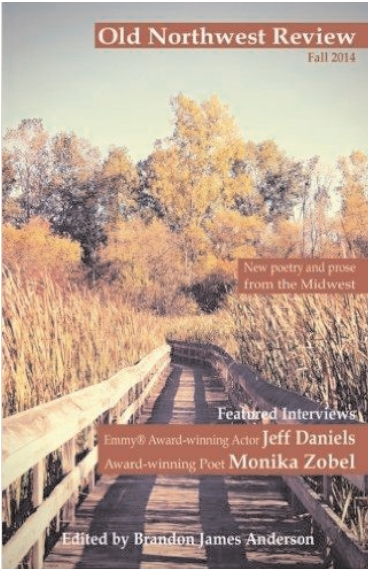


Figure 5, top: *Old Northwest Review* Fall 2014 cover image © Trista Geier. Reprinted with permission.

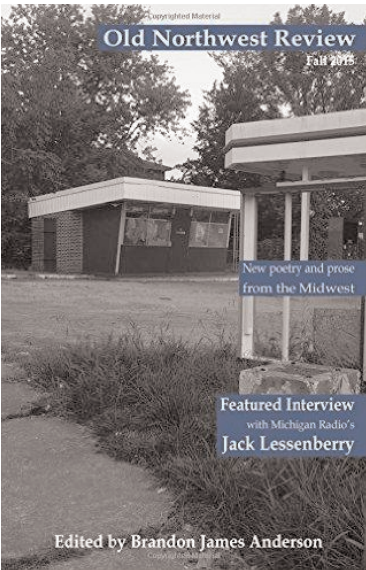


Figure 5, bottom: *Old Northwest Review* Fall 2015 cover image © Michael Brickey, cover design by K.M. Zhart. Reprinted with permission.

heartland iconography, however, the online magazine *NEAT*, whose tagline is “Midwestern Lit: Served neat and down-to-earth,” promotes a modernist (i.e., abstract) rendering of Midwestern identity. Started in 2013 by Elizabeth Jenike and TM Keesling, *NEAT* is “devoted to writers with ties to the Midwest” (“About” *NEAT*). At first glance, the magazine’s title and cover aesthetic may not seem to refer to the Midwest, but the cover image for each issue—whiskey served neat in a plain glass and shot in close-up (Figure 6)—is a distillation (pun intended) of the trope of the First View of the Prairie. In twentieth-century heartland iconography, the prairie-sea of early travel literature is transformed into a sea of grain; in the whiskey-neat metaphor, the heartland sea of grain is further transformed into a glass of grain alcohol—a sea of grain transformed into a small, manageable inland sea of whiskey.

In the image for the Winter 2013-2014 issue, “Snow Globe,” for instance, the warm caramel color of the whiskey contrasts with the cool-colored, abstract sunburst pattern in the background. The modernist juxtaposition of the blue and green, two-dimensional “sun” (i.e., the winter sun) and the whiskey glass (grain alcohol) suggests Midwestern winter wheat. The Fall 2014 issue’s cover image, in which the whiskey glass is placed on a mirrored surface, depicts the dreamy nature of the issue’s theme, “Nocturne,” through modernist fractured perspective. The shallow focus emphasizes the reflective surface of the table rather than the whiskey glass itself. Tree branches in the far background are reflected in multiple surfaces, including the whiskey, and the “encircling vastness” of the prairie ocean is represented by the blue sky and tree branches reflected around and in the whiskey glass.

Despite the editors’ claim to serve Midwestern literature “neat and down-to-earth,” they reject the realism associated with heartland iconography in their cover images. Realist visual aesthetics assume an embodied viewer—an image is considered realist if it mimics the stereoscopic vision of human eyes. Rather than surveying the Midwestern landscape from the elevated position of an explorer or tourist, therefore, these cover images deny the authoritative assumed perspective of heartland and prairie iconography. In the Winter 2013-2014 image, for instance, the sun is placed underneath the whiskey glass, thus denying a realist organization of landscape. In the Fall 2014 image, the multiple reflective surfaces achieve the disorienting effect sometimes experienced by early prairie explorers, but the

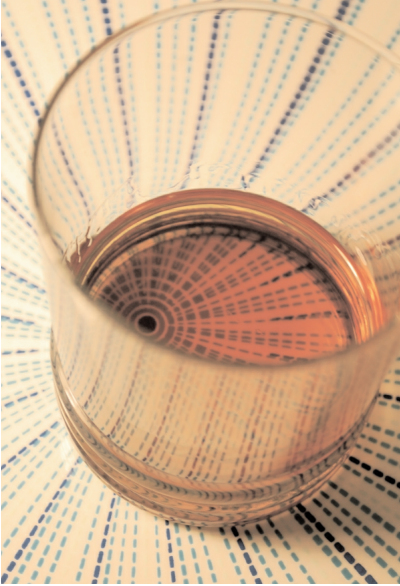


Figure 6, top: *NEAT Mag.* Winter 2013-2014 cover image © Tara Keesling via *NEAT Mag.* Reprinted with permission.



Figure 6, bottom: *NEAT Mag.* Fall 2014 cover image © Elizabeth Jenike via *NEAT Mag.* Reprinted with permission.

straight powerlines reflected in the foreground remind viewers of their contemporary moment.

It should not be surprising that the current renaissance in Midwestern literature rejects heartland iconography at the same time that many other publishers promote it. In fact, the same juxtaposition of nostalgic and critical regionalism occurred in the 1930s against the backdrop of the Great Depression. In *Revolt of the Provinces: The Regionalist Movement in America, 1920-1945*, Robert L. Dorman writes, "During the two decades between the world wars, artists and intellectuals across the United States awakened to cultural and political possibilities that they believed to be inherent in the regional diversity of America" (xi). Some of these regional expressions were positive and nationalist: the American Scene painters, especially Midwesterner Grant Wood, depicted nostalgic and heroic farm scenes; composers such as Aaron Copland borrowed vernacular melodies and themes for patriotic classical pieces; the Southern Agrarians posited the rural countryside as the antidote to what they called the dehumanizing effects of industrialization and capitalism. Alongside these positive regional images, however, were searing representations of the almost apocalyptic economic and environmental realities of the 1930s Dust Bowl. Realist photographers such as Dorothea Lange, for instance, documented the extreme poverty of Dust Bowl migrants and filmmaker Pare Lorentz narrated the agricultural practices that turned the Great Plains into the Dust Bowl in his 1936 film, *The Plow That Broke the Plains*.

One need only compare Grant Wood's 1931 painting, *Fall Plowing*, and Alexander Hogue's 1936 painting, *Erosion No. 2—Mother Earth Laid Bare*, to see this contradictory regional response to an economic depression. The paintings are remarkably similar in terms of subject and composition—in both paintings an unhitched plow rests in the foreground, and undulating, feminine fields stretch away to the horizon. While Wood's painting suggests plenty and nostalgia, however, Hogue's suggests economic and environmental ruin. In Wood's painting, the plow, which has stopped mid-furrow, reminds viewers of the hard work that has created the abundance in the background; in Hogue's painting, the plow is implicated in the desertification of the landscape, and the outline of the woman's body in the field suggests that irresponsible farm practices of the Dust Bowl are akin to rape. It is important to note that Iowa was not as negatively affected by the Dust Bowl as were the Great Plains, and

Wood's modernist aesthetics (i.e., flat colors and rounded, unrealistic shapes) could be an ironic critique of his presumably urban viewers, but the similar compositions of these paintings suggest two different regional responses to a national economic crisis.

Following the Great Recession of the 2000s, a similar turn to regionalism encouraged both a proliferation of heartland imagery on covers of Midwestern-themed books and the rejection of it by contemporary literary magazines. Many scholars have interpreted the regional movement of the 1930s as an intentional response to economic and environmental disaster. In fact, Wanda M. Corn argues, Wood's strategy of painting "visions of past peace and plenty, not records of hardships or tragedies . . . was a common artistic response running throughout the decade's films, mural paintings, and literature" (90). So, too, was the rejection of that nostalgic vision, as Corn documents in the criticisms of Wood's work (90). The recent proliferation of nostalgic heartland iconography echoes Wood's tendency to portray the "farm of his childhood, not the 1930s farms of tractors, trucks, and cultivators" (Corn 90), whereas the publications that compose the recent Midwestern literary renaissance perform the same cultural function as Hogue and other critical regionalists.

Like the regional flowering of the 1930s, the current Midwestern renaissance is not an organized movement, but the editors of these contemporary publications do have similar concerns. Dorman writes of the older regional period that "with its credo of decentralization, the movement itself had no center, no directing or dominating group. It was a movement less from its formal or organizational cohesiveness than from its simultaneity across the country, a simultaneity . . . that issues most crucially from a confrontation with common cultural, intellectual, and political problems (the future of rural America, to name one)" (34). The consistent rejection of heartland iconography today suggests a shared concern that depictions of the Midwest as rural and traditional misrepresent the region and make economic decline invisible. It is no coincidence that the majority of the magazines that compose the recent Midwestern renaissance—*Midwestern Gothic*, *Great Lakes Review*, and *Old Northwest Review*—were founded in the Great Lakes and Rust Belt areas. Even the *New Stories from the Midwest* series has been picked up by a Great Lakes press. These were the areas of the Midwest hit hardest by the recession. For the editors of these magazines, the term "flyover country" is not just insulting but potentially destructive. If heartland iconography were

to dominate Midwestern discourse, the region's devastating economic plight would be made invisible. Their strategy has thus been to insist on a unique regional identity divorced from heartland iconography.

The economy is not the only factor driving this reevaluation of Midwestern identity by literary magazines, though. Rapid changes in publishing technology and distribution not only affect how editors choose to distribute but also correlate with how they conceptualize the Midwest. Those magazines that focus on the Midwest generally tend to follow the traditional model of the literary magazine as a print publication, but those that focus on the Great Lakes have expanded digital content.

The Midwestern-focused magazines *Midwestern Gothic* and *NEAT* and the anthology series *New Stories from the Midwest*, for instance, all rely on the standard submission process: writers submit pieces, editors read and select the pieces that will appear in the issue, the issue is edited and laid out, and copies are printed and distributed. Print copies of *Midwestern Gothic* can be purchased through the magazine's web site and Amazon. eBook copies can be purchased through Amazon Kindle and Lulu (a self-publishing web site). Print copies of *New Stories from the Midwest* can be purchased online from Amazon. *NEAT* is downloaded from the web but is not strictly speaking an online magazine. Its issues are published as digital files (EPUB and PDF), which readers download directly from the magazine's web site for free. Despite relying on contemporary and digital distribution models, all three of these publications conceptualize each issue as a closed, printed product. The brand-new magazine *The New Territory*, which "dismantles the notion" that the "Midwest is 'flyover country'" and is published exclusively in print, continues this trend ("Our Vision").

Great Lakes Review and *Old Northwest Review*, which focus more on the Great Lakes area than on the traditional boundaries of the Midwest, have companion web content. In addition to selling hard copies on their web site and on Amazon, *Great Lakes Review* editors encourage nonfiction submissions to its online "Narrative Map." Writers can contribute "literary, nonfiction sketches of 1000 words or less," which online visitors read by clicking on the appropriate flags on the interactive Google map ("Narrative Map"). Similarly, *Old Northwest Review* is a companion project to a web-based blog called *Michiganders Post*, which is "a community blog

for Michiganders reporting on life in Michigan . . . intended to be an online, collaborative space for Michiganders to share thoughts and ideas” (“About” *Michiganders*). *Old Northwest Review* is available as hard copy through Amazon’s CreateSpace (which is a print-on-demand service), but the blog site offers digital access to content specifically about Michigan. Thus, while *Great Lakes Review* and *Old Northwest Review* are fairly traditional literary magazines, the accompanying online content moves beyond traditional modes of publishing.

Although not a literary magazine, *Belt Magazine*, which “focuses on longform journalism, op-eds and first person essays of interest to the Rust Belt and beyond,” is another publication that questions both traditional Midwestern tropes and traditional modes of distribution (“About Us”). The online magazine launched from Cleveland in 2013 after the success of Belt Press’s 2012 print essay collection, *Rust Belt Chic: The Cleveland Anthology*, and has a decidedly urban feel. In fact, the web site can be searched by categories such as “Cities” (which include Buffalo, Cincinnati, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Milwaukee, Pittsburgh, and Youngstown) and “Politics & Urbanism.” Like *Great Lakes Review*, therefore, *Belt* challenges the more dominant regional label of the Midwest, especially in its identification with cities such as Buffalo and Pittsburgh, but columns such as Mark Athitakis’s “Reading the Midwest” suggest that the magazine does not reject that label entirely. In fact, the publisher’s web site specifies that the digital magazine focuses on the “Rust Belt” whereas the print arm focuses on the “Industrial Midwest.”

All of these magazines cling to print publishing in one way or another, but this does not seem to be just a matter of economics. *Great Lakes Review* editor Counts admits that cost is a factor when choosing distribution methods when she writes, “Honestly, because we are volunteers, and independent of any university or institution, we’re finding publishing on the web to be much easier than producing hard copies.” However, she continues by arguing that there is an additional benefit to publishing online: “We love the book as an object, but we distribute out of our homes so we also love instantly reaching readers whether they be in Hamilton, Milwaukee, or in between.” *Great Lakes Review* is not unusual in being run by volunteers. Most contemporary Midwest literary magazines are volunteer-run, which means that the up-front costs (labor, shipping, and storage space) are

a gamble. But online publishing provides an immediacy that print publishing does not.

In the eight or so years since the beginning of the Great Recession, cultural conditions have been ripe for the existence of independent Midwestern literary magazines. The economic decline of many local communities has encouraged a renewed sense of regional identity, while new publishing technologies and distribution modes have made it possible for small, independent magazines to reach wider audiences. Wendy Griswold argues that even though modern digital distribution methods might seem antithetical to regional identity, regional literature actually thrives under these new technologies: “Paradoxical as it seems, the complex systems and technological capacities of the contemporary period make it easier for the reading class to enact its local-culture aspirations” (169). The American “reading class” in the twenty-first century, as Griswold defines it, includes both “the older, less technologically advanced, long-committed readers” and “an elite segment of the general population, one that is highly educated, affluent, metropolitan, and young” (65-66). The members of this latter group are “early adopters of the Internet” who form a “communications elite” (65). The magazines of the current Midwestern literary renaissance fall squarely into this phenomenon, promoting regional identity through digital means—rejecting the label “flyover country” as a theme but embracing it as a distribution model.

Hastings College

WORKS CITED

- “About.” *Michiganders Post*. Michiganders Post, n.d. web. michiganderspost.com/about.
- “About.” *Midwestern Gothic*. Midwestern Gothic, n.d. web. midwestgothic.com/about.
- “About.” *NEAT*. NEAT, n.d. web. neatmag.net/about.
- “About Us.” *Belt Magazine*. Belt Publishing, n.d. web. beltmag.com/about-us.
- “About.” *The New Territory*. newterritorymag.com/about.
- Brown, Jason Lee, Shanie Latham, and Rosellen Brown, eds. *New Stories from the Midwest*, 2013. Athens: New American P, 2013.
- Bryant, William Cullen. “The Prairies.” 1832. *The Norton Anthology of American Literature, 1820-1865*. Vol. B. 8th ed., Ed. Nina Baym and Robert S. Levine. W.W. Norton & Company, 2012. 126-129.
- Corn, Wanda M. *Grant Wood: The Regionalist Vision*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1983.
- Counts, Meredith. “Re: Survey about Midwestern Publications.” Received by Patricia Oman. 11 July 2016.
- Dorman, Robert L. *Revolt of the Provinces: The Regionalist Movement in America, 1920-1945*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1993.
- Griswold, Wendy. *Regionalism and the Reading Class*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2008.

Hogue, Alexander. *Erosion No. 2—Mother Earth Laid Bare*. 1936. Oil on canvas. Philbrook Museum. Tulsa, OK.

Hurt, James. *Writing Illinois: The Prairie, Lincoln, and Chicago*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1992.

Jackson, Rob. "Re: Survey about Midwestern Publications." Received by Patricia Oman 14 July 2016.

"Narrative Map." *Great Lakes Review*. Great Lakes Review, n.d. web. greatlakesreview.org/narrative-map.

"Old Northwest Review." *Michiganders Post*. Michiganders Post, n.d. web. michiganderspost.com/old-northwest-review.

Webb, Walter Prescott. *The Great Plains*. Boston: Ginn and Company, 1931.

Wood, Grant. *Fall Plowing*. 1931. Oil on canvas. The Figge Art Museum, Davenport, IA.

CONTEMPORARY MIDWESTERN SHORT FICTION: SELECTED PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SOURCES

MICAH HALLMAN

- BAXTER, CHARLES.** *Chameleon*. NY: New River P, 1970.
— *The South Dakota Guidebook*. NY: New River P, 1974.
— *Harmony of the World*. Minneapolis, MN: U of Missouri P, 1984.
— *Through the Safety Net: Stories*. NY: Vintage, 1985.
— *First Light: A Novel*. NY: Vintage, 1987.
— *Imaginary Paintings*. NY: British American Publishing, 1989.
— *A Relative Stranger: Stories*. NY: Norton, 1990.
— *Shadow Play*. NY: Norton, 1993.
— *Believers*. NY: Pantheon, 1997.
— *Burning Down the House: Essays on Fiction*. St. Paul, MN: Graywolf P, 1997.
— *Feast of Love*. NY: Vintage, 2000.
— *Saul and Patsy*. NY: Vintage, 2003.
— *The Art of Subtext: Beyond Plot*. St. Paul, MN: Greywolf P, 2007.
— *The Soul Thief*. NY: Vintage, 2008.
— *Gryphon: New and Selected Stories*. NY: Pantheon, 2011.
— *There's Something I Want You to Do: Stories*. NY: Pantheon, 2015.

SECONDARY SOURCES

- Bouldrey, Brian. "Cat's Cradle." Rev. of *Believers*, by Charles Baxter; *The Actual*, by Saul Bellow; *The Novellas of Hortense Calisher*, by Hortense Calisher; *Guided Tours of Hell*, by Francine Prose. *The Sewanee Review* 107.1 (1999): 134-42.
— Rev. of *Burning Down the House: Essays on Fiction*, by Charles Baxter. *Harvard Review* 13 (1997): 210-11.
Bowers, James, and Scott Rhoden. "An Interview with Charles Baxter." *Indiana Review* 19.2 (Fall 1996): 64-79.
Brown, Rosellen. "The Year in Fiction: 1990." *The Massachusetts Review* 32.1 (Spring 1991): 123-46.
Burt, Stephen. "Charlex Baxter, August, Kleinzahler, Adrenne Rich: Contemporary Stevensians and the Problem of 'Other Lives.'" *Wallace Stevens Journal: A Publication of the Wallace Stevens Society* 24.2 (Fall 2000): 115-34.
Caesar, Terry. "Knowledge, Home, and Gender in Charles Baxter's Short Fiction." *Revista Unimar* 16.1 (April 1994): 217-28.
— "Motherhood and Postmodernism." *American Literary History* 7.1 (Spring 1995): 120-40.
Davenport, Gary. "Making Virtue of Necessity." Rev. of *First Light*, by Charles Baxter; *The New Confessions*, by William Boyd; *The Two Deaths of Señora Puccini*, by Stephen

- Dobyns; *The Seven Ages*, by Eva Figes; *Vanished*, by Mary McGarry Morris; *Transferences*, by James Twiggs. *The Sewanee Review* 97.3 (1989): 468-74.
- Donald, Paul. "Chiaroscuro." *San Francisco Review of Books* 18.2 (1993): 8-9.
- Dunne, Éamonn. "Untology." *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 49.4 (2016): 571-88.
- Fitzgerald, Carol Ann. "Poppy Love: Fathers Find Salvation in Two New Novels." *Gettysburg Review* 17.1 (Spring 2004): 151-57.
- Glasser, Perry. "Literary Intimacy." Rev. of *Stories*, by Meir Blinkin and Max Rosenfeld; *Harmony of the World*, by Charles Baxter; *Hecatombs of Lake*, by Tom Ahern. *The North American Review* 269.3 (1984): 63-65.
- . "Making Introductions." Rev. of *Limbo River*, by Rick Hillis; *Twice Told Tales*, by Daniel Stern; *A Relative Stranger*, by Charles Baxter. *The North American Review* 275.4 (Dec. 1990): 60-64.
- Genoways, Ted. Rev. of *Shadow Play*, by Charles Baxter. *Prairie Schooner* 67.2 (1993): 164.
- Johnson, Greg. "It's All in the Details." Rev. of *Gryphon: New and Selected Stories*, by Charles Baxter; *Swim Back to Me* by Ann Packer; *Sequoia Gardens: California Stories* by Ernest J. Finney; *In Which Brief Stories Are Told*, by Phillip Sterling; *At-Risk*, by Amina Gautier. *The Georgia Review* 66.1 (2012): 180-88.
- Kaneko, W. Todd, Søren Palmer, and Lena Bertone Rosenfield. "Nine Answers from Charles Baxter." *Hayden's Ferry Review* 37 (Fall 2005/Winter 2006): 58-61.
- Kellman, Stephen G. "Cardiograms of the Heart." *Michigan Quarterly Review* 43.3 (Summer 2004): 467-76.
- Kirch, Clair. "Questions of Identity." *Publishers Weekly* 254.48 (Dec. 2007): 22.
- Lee, Don. "About Charles Baxter." *Ploughshares* 25.2/3 (Fall 1999): 210-17.
- Linnehan, MaryEllen. Rev. of *A Relative Stranger*, by Charles Baxter. *Harvard Book Review* 17/18 (Summer/Fall 1990): 15.
- Livingood, Jeb. "Charles Baxter: Fiction Resisting the Corilineal." *Hollins Critic* 37.5 (Dec 2000): 1-18.
- McGraw, Erin. "Larger Concerns." Rev. of *Burning Down the House*, by Charles Baxter; *Believers: A Novella and Stories*, by Charles Baxter; *Hints of His Morality*, by David Borofka; *Because They Wanted To*, by Mary Gaitskill; *Bear and His Daughter: Stories*, by Robert Stone. *The Georgia Review* 51.4 (1997): 782-92.
- McSpadden, Marsha and Trevor Gore. "A Conversation with Charles Baxter." *Missouri Review* 31.1 (Spring 2008): 100-10.
- Oliver, Bill. "Rick DeMarinis, Charles Baxter, and the Art of Surprise." Rev. of *The Coming Triumph of the Free World*, by Rick DeMarinis; *The Voice of America: Stories*, by Rick DeMarinis; *A Relative Stranger: Stories*, by Charles Baxter. *New England Review* 14.3 (1992): 234-41.
- Papandreou, Nick. "Imaginary Countries." *Open Book: Essays from the Vermont College Postgraduate Writers Conference*. Eds. Kate Fetherston and Roger Weingarten. Cambridge, VT: Cambridge Scholars, 2006. 208-19.
- Reinsmith, William A. "'Gryhon': Taming the Fabulous Beast." *Eureka Stories in Teaching Short Fiction* 5.1 (Fall 2004): 140-46.
- Sarri, Jon. Rev. of *Through the Safety Net*, by Charles Baxter. *The Antioch Review* 43.4 (1985): 498.
- . Rev. of *Shadow Play*, by Charles Baxter. *The Antioch Review* 51.3 (Summer 1993): 465.
- Schwartz, J. Brian. "Fear of the Narrative: Revisiting the Bartholomae-Elbow Debate through the Figure of the Writing Teacher in Contemporary American Fiction." *Rhetoric Review* 26.4 (2007): 425-39.
- Stanton, Maura. Rev. of *A Relative Stranger*, by Charles Baxter. *Ploughshares* 16.4 (Winter 1990/1991): 280-81.
- Spark, Debra. Rev. of *Shadow Play*, by Charles Baxter. *Harvard Review* 5 (1993): 218-19.

Wilhelmus, Tom. "Communities Perhaps." Rev. of *Eating Naked*, by Stephen Dobyns; *White Teeth*, by Zadie Smith; *Ploughing the Dark*, by Richard Powers; *The Human Stain*, by Philip Roth; *Wild Decembers*, by Edna O'Brien; *The Feast of Love*, by Charles Baxter. *The Hudson Review* 53.4 (Winter 2001): 693-99.

Winans, Molly. "Bigger Than We Think: The World Revealed in Charles Baxter's Fiction." *Commonweal* 124.19 (Nov 1997): 12-16.

BUTLER, NICKOLAS. *The Hearts of Men*. NY: HarperCollins, 2016.

—. *Beneath the Bonfire*. NY: St. Martins P, 2015.

—. *Shotgun Lovesongs*. NY: Thomas Dunne Books, 2014.

—. *In Western Counties*. NY: Thomas Dunne Books, 2014.

SECONDARY SOURCES

McPherson, James A. "On Nickolas Butler." *Ploughshares* 37.2/3 (Fall 2011): 14.

Maslin, Janet. "Friends Return, but Can't Go Back." *The New York Times* 10 Mar. 2014 late ed., p. C4.

Stansel, Ian. Rev. of *Shotgun Lovesongs*, by Nickolas Butler. *Middle West Review* 1.1 (Fall 2014): 128-30.

Strauss, Dorian. "Lord of the Flaws." *The New York Times* 12 Mar. 2017 late ed., p. BR9.

CAMPBELL, BONNIE JO. *Women and Other Animals*. NY: Scribner, 1999.

—. *Q Road*. NY: Scribner, 2002

—. *American Salvage*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State UP, 2009.

—. *Love Letters to Sons of Bitches*. NY: Center for Book Arts, 2010.

—. *Once Upon A River: A Novel*. NY: Norton, 2011.

—. *Mothers Tell Your Daughters*. NY: Norton, 2015.

SECONDARY SOURCES

Barzak, Christopher. "The Closing Window." Rev. of *The Lost Tiki Palaces of Detroit*, by Michael Zadoorian; *American Salvage*, by Bonnie Jo Campbell. *New Labor Forum* 20.2 (2011): 96-107.

Crapo, Trish. "Good Reads: The Half-Life of Violence." Rev. of *Trespass*, by Rose Tremain; *True Things About Me*, by Deborah Kay Davies; *Once Upon A River*, by Bonnie Jo Campbell; *Displaced Persons*, by Ghita Schwarz. *The Women's Review of Books* 28.4 (July/August 2011): 15-17.

Harrigan, Sharon. "Honest Violence and Women." *Pleiades* 36.1 (Spring 2016): 170-71.

Noe, Marcia A. "Up in Michigan: A Review Essay." *Midamerica: The Yearbook of the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature* 38 (2011): 24-27.

—, Mollee Shannon, and Laura Duncan. "The Dark Fairy Tale in the Fiction of Bonnie Jo Campbell." *Midwestern Miscellany* 42 (Spring 2014): 33-44.

CZYZNIEJEWSKI, MICHAEL. *Elephants in Our Bedroom*. Berkley, CA: Dzanc Books, 2009.

SECONDARY SOURCES

Guzlowski, John. Rev. of *Elephants in Our Bedroom*, by Michael Czyzniewski. *Polish American Studies* 67.1 (2010): 94-5.

MARTONE, MICHAEL. *At a Loss*. Fort Wayne, IN: Windless Orchard P, 1977.

—. *Alive and Dead in Indiana*. NY: Knopf, 1984.

—. *Return to Powers*. Fort Wayne, IN: Windless Orchard P, 1985.

—. *Safety Patrol*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1988

—, ed. *A Place of Sense: Pieces of the Midwest*. Iowa City, IA: U of Iowa P, 1988.

—, ed. *Townships: Pieces of the Midwest*. Iowa City, IA: U of Iowa P, 1992.

—. *Fort Wayne is Seventh on Hitler's List*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1993.

—. *Pensées: Thoughts of Dan Quayle*. Indianapolis, IN: Broad Ripple P, 1994.

- . *Seeing Eye*. Hanover, NH: Zoland Books, 1995.
- . *The Flatness and Other Landscapes*. Athens, GA: U of Georgia P, 1999.
- . *The Blue Guide to Indiana*. Salt Lake City, UT: Fiction Collective, 2001.
- , ed. *Trying Fiction*. Fort Collins, CO: The Center for Literary Publishing, 2001.
- and Robin Hemley, eds. *Extreme Fiction: Fabulists and Formalists*. NY: Pearson, 2003.
- , ed. *Contemporary Fiction*. NY: Touchstone, 2004.
- . *Michael Martone*. Salt Lake City, UT: Fiction Collective, 2005.
- . *Unconventions: Attempting the Art of Craft and the Craft of Art*. edited by Susan Neville. Athens, GA: U of Georgia P, 2005.
- , ed. *Rule of Thumb*. Cincinnati, OH: Writer's Digest Books, 2006.
- . *Double Wide: Collected Fiction of Michael Martone*. Bloomington, ID: Indiana UP, 2007.
- and Lex Williford, eds. *The Scribner Anthology of Contemporary Short Fiction: Fifty North American American Short Stories Since 1970*. NY: Simon and Schuster, 2011.
- and Lex Williford, eds. *Touchstone Anthology of Contemporary Creative Nonfiction*. NY: Touchstone, 2007.
- . *Racing in Place*. Athens, GA: U of Georgia P, 2008.
- , ed. *Not Normal, Illinois: Peculiar Fictions from the Flyover*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 2009.
- . *Four for a Quarter*. Salt Lake City, UT: Fiction Collective, 2011.

SECONDARY SOURCES

- Baker, Matthew. "An Interview with Michael Martone." *Hayden's Ferry Review* 49 (Fall/Winter 2011): 101-12.
- Basiletti, Emily. "An Interview with Michael Martone." *Assay: A Journal of Nonfiction Studies* 1.2 (Spring 2015). n.p.
- Berry, R.M. "Modernism and the Aesthetic of Cultural Studies." *The Limits of Literary Historicism*. Eds. Allen Dunn and Thomas F. Haddock. Knoxville, TN: U of Tennessee P, 2011. 127-43.
- . "'Is "Us" Me?': Cultural Studies and the Universality of Aesthetic Judgements." *Stanley Cavell and Literary Studies: Consequences of Skepticism*. Ed. Richard Eldridge and Bernard Rhie. NY: Continuum, 2011. 30-46.
- . "The Present of Fiction." ebr: *The Electronic Book Review* (2002).
- Church, Steven. "The Blue Guide Project: Fresno." *Assay: A Journal of Nonfiction Studies* 1.2 (Spring 2015): n.p.
- Davis, Todd F. "Anthrax, Plexiglas, and the Writing Life: An Interview with Michael Martone." *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies: A Journal of Criticism and Theory* 7.1 (Fall 2005): 116-26.
- Grove, James. "The Fiction of Michael Martone." *High Plains Literary Review* 11.2/3 (Fall/Winter 2006): 152-71.
- Maliszewski, Paul. "Michael Martone." *American Short Story Writers Since World War II: Second Series*. Eds. Patrick Meanor and Gwen Crane. Detroit, MI: Thomas Gale. 196-204.
- Martell, Scott. "Michael Martone." *Northwest Review* 20.2/3 (1982): 235-37.
- McQuade, Molly. Rev. of *The Imaginary Poets*, by Alan Michael Parker; *Michael Martone*, by Michael Martone. *Harvard Review* 31 (2006): 203-06.
- Milburn, Michael. Rev. of *Safety Patrol*, by Michael Martone. *Erato* 7/8 (Winter/Spring 1988):1-2.
- Miller, Kevin. Rev. of *Seeing Eye*, by Michael Martone. *Harvard Review* 9 (1995): 184.
- Russell, Josh. "An Interview with Michael Martone." *Five Points: A Journal of Literature and Art* 17.3 (2016): 55.
- Sheehan, Marc J. Rev. of *The Flatness and Other Landscapes*, by Michael Martone. *Fourth Genre: Explorations in Nonfiction* 2. 2 (2000): 244-46.

- Shortridge, James R. Rev. of *A Place of Sense: Essays in Search of the Midwest*, by Michael Martone. *American Studies* 30.1 (Spring 1989): 91.
- Stoner, Sara Jane. "A Prose Aesthetic of Progress: An Interview with Michael Martone." *Indian Review* 26.2 (Winter 2004): 83-98.
- Tichi, Cecelia. "Television and Recent American Fiction." *American Literary History* 1.1 (Spring 1989): 110-30.
- Wallace, David Foster. Rev. of *Fort Wayne is Seventh on Hitler's List: Indiana Stories*, by Michael Martone. *Harvard Book Review* 15/16 (Winter/Spring 1990): 12-13.
- NG, CELESTE.** *Everything I Never Told You*. NY: NY: Penguin, 2014.

SECONDARY SOURCES

- Chee, Alexander. "The Leftovers." *New York Times* 17 Aug. 2014 late ed., p.BR16.
- Collison, Robert. "Ambition, Assimilation." *The Toronto Star* 6 July 2014, p. IN6.
- Wilson, Fiona. "*Brittle Lives Shattered: Everything I Never Told You*." *The Times* 22 Nov. 2014 national ed., p.17.
- WEINSTEIN, ALEXANDER.** *Children of the New World: Series*. NY: Picador, 2016.

SECONDARY SOURCES

- Senior, Jennifer. "Bespoke Memories?: A Portal into the Future Imagines That and More." *New York Times* 3 Oct. 2016 late ed., p.C4.
- Wilwol, John. "They Deleted Their Kids." *the New York Times* 9 Oct. 2016 late ed., p. BR16.

RECENT MIDWESTERN FICTION AND POETRY

FICTION

- Agee, Jonis. *The Paradise of Bones*. Morrow, 2016. [Nebraska]
- Ash, Stephanie Wilbur. *The Annie Year*. Unnamed Press, 2016. [Iowa]
- Baxter, Charles. *There's Someting I Want You To Do*. Pantheon, 2015. [Minneapolis]
- Chaon, Dan. *Ill Will*. Ballantine Books, 2017.
- Darnielle, John. *Universal Harvester*. Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2017. [Iowa]
- Flagg, Fannie. *The Whole Town's Talking*. Random House, 2016. [Missouri]
- Fluke, Joanne. *Banana Cream Pie Murder*. Kensington, 2017. [Minnesota]
- Fordon, Kelly. *Garden for the Blind*. Wayne State UP, 2015. [suburban Detroit]
- Gillette, Meg, ed. *The Stories We Tell: Modernism in the Tri-Cities*. Augustana College East Hall Press, Rock Island, IL, 2014. [Iowa-Illinois Tri-Cities]
- Hamilton, Jane. *The Excellent Lombards*. Grand Central Publishing, 2016. [Wisconsin]
- Herbert, Christopher. *Angels of Detroit*. Bloomsbury USA, 2016. [Detroit]
- Lodgson, Loren. *The Moon was Big and Yellow and I was a Little Chicken Myself*. Eureka, 2016. [western Illinois]
- Means, David. *Hystopia*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016. [Michigan]
- Morris, Mary. *The Jazz Palace*. Doubleday, 2015. [Chicago]
- Rebeck, Theresa. *I'm Glad about You*. G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2016. [Cincinnati]
- Sittenfeld, Curtis. *Eligible*. Random House, 2016. [Cincinnati]
- Sorrentino, Christopher. *The Fugitives*. Simon and Schuster, 2016. [Michigan]
- Stradal, J. Ryan. *Kitchens of the Great Midwest*. Viking, 2015. [Minnesota]

POETRY

- Gerber, Dan. *Sailing Through Cassiopeia*. Copper Canyon, 2012.
- Heller, Janet Ruth. *Exodus*. Cincinnati: Wordtech Editions, 2014.
- Knoepfle, John. *The Aloe of Evening*. Indian Paintbrush Poets, 2016.
- Kooser, Ted. *Splitting an Order*. Copper Canyon, 2014.

The Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature
congratulates

Steven Trout

Winner of the 2017 MidAmerica Award
for distinguished contributions to the
study of Midwestern literature

and

Gloria Whelan

Winner of the 2017 Mark Twain Award for
distinguished contributions to Midwestern literature

These awards will be presented at noon on June 2, 2017,
at the Society's 47th annual meeting, Kellogg Center, Michigan
State University, East Lansing, Michigan, June 1-3, 2016.

For registration information, go to the
“annual symposium” link at ssml.org