

Review Essay

A Language for Vast Space

Mark Gonnerman, ed., *A Sense of the Whole: Reading Gary Snyder's Mountains and Rivers Without End*. Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2015. Cloth, \$28.

ShaunAnne Tangney, ed., *The Wild That Attracts Us: New Critical Essays on Robinson Jeffers*. Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 2015. Cloth, \$55.

The American long poem, once it departs from straightforward narrative, tends to fall into two categories. One is structured around and contained by myth, whether received myth or the mythologizing of a particular place or totemic object (*The Waste Land*, *The Bridge*, *Paterson*). The other begins with a voice, a particular way of looking at the world, and then can go almost anywhere (*Song of Myself*, *The Cantos*, *The Dream Songs*).

I've been inclined to put Gary Snyder's *Mountains and Rivers Without End* in the latter category. But *A Sense of the Whole* impels me to reconsider. It's an extraordinary book, edited by Mark Gonnerman out of a yearlong interdisciplinary seminar at Stanford University on the poem. There are interviews with Snyder; tributes by distinguished old friends, including Wendell Berry, Michael McClure, and Nanao Sakaki; and essays by professors of environmental and religious studies as well as literature. I'd now agree, at the very least, that the particular way of looking at the world in the poem amounts to an instruction manual, as Robert Hass suggests, in how to reenter a mythic imagination in postmodern times.

Of the many fine pieces in the book, I'm going to focus on the four that particularly address the question of the poem's unity. Katsunori Yamazato helps us understand Snyder's hints that *Moun-*

tains and Rivers follows the structure of a Noh play, not only in “The Mountain Spirit,” a Western rewriting of the Japanese play *Yamamba*, but in the structure of the sequence as a whole and of each of its four sections. David Abram starts by connecting Snyder’s specificity about the places where his poems are set with the ineluctable connection between places and stories in oral cultures, the subject of Abram’s famous book *The Spell of the Sensuous* (1996). But he goes on to suggest that much of *Mountains and Rivers* takes place in what the Aborigines call the “dreamtime,” where human, animal, and even mineral identities interpenetrate.

Robert Hass seems to concur on this dreamtime theme. But the great achievement of his essay, the longest in the book, is the way it charts the creation of unity through repeated imagistic motifs. Hass concentrates on two, both set forth in the initial description of the Chinese landscape painting from which the poem takes its title. One is the contrast between the upward motion of mountains, associated with (masculine) spiritual striving, and the downward flow of water, associated with Kuan Yin, the feminine, compassion. The other is the image of travel, the road, the boat, as a way of experiencing Buddhist impermanence; and the temple or hermitage beside the road as an emblem of how one can step aside, by meditation in the Buddhist tradition, by opting out of the mainstream economy, part of Snyder’s Beat heritage. Hass goes on to show how these motifs perform a subtle but pervasive binding function in the many sections that follow.

One particularly charming aspect of Hass’s essay is his willingness to admit to mixed feelings in his responses to Snyder. He says, for instance, “When I first read ‘Jackrabbit,’ I thought, ‘Well, this is not a very good poem. It’s one of his mediocre middle-period animal poems’”—and then goes on not entirely to retract this judgment but to qualify it in terms of the poem’s placement in *Mountains and Rivers* as a whole (197–98). Hass can also praise unequivocally: “Snyder’s music is so wonderful to me and he often begins with a kind of iambic music: ‘a trail of climbing’ and then he just piles up the strong stresses: ‘stairsteps forks upstream’” (165).

Finally, Stephanie Kaza, in a truly eye-opening piece, reads the whole poem as an account of a Zen student’s progress toward enlightenment. The dream of dying in “Journeys” (part 2) represents

the loss of the sense of a separate ego, and follows on a series of sections deepening the realization of *dukkha*, the suffering inherent in existence. All of part 4 is then a celebration of nonduality—a view Kaza argues brilliantly through a close analysis of the descriptive syntax. The poem ends with the obligation to pass on this vision to others, the sons and daughters “tasting grasshoppers roasted in a pan” in the vast emptiness of the Black Rock desert. I’m not 100 percent convinced; the more information-heavy sections of *Mountains and Rivers* still seem to occlude so clear a trajectory. But this volume has given me a great deal to think about.

Robinson Jeffers seems to me, increasingly clearly, to dominate the poetry of the Western landscape for the first half of the twentieth century, as Snyder does for the second half. True, there are many fine Western poets, but these are the two who managed to catch the feeling of “vast spaces,” in Snyder’s phrase, in their net of words.

But it is easier to write well about Snyder than about Jeffers. The worldview in Snyder’s poetry is congenial to his mostly liberal audience, but some of its sources (Zen, Far Eastern literature, even some of the sciences) still require elucidation for the average reader, whereas aspects of Jeffers’s worldview can still arouse revulsion, as they did in Jeffers’s time. His long narratives are extremely violent; he posits a worse-than-Calvinist God at times, who torments himself as well as his creatures; and he holds a low opinion of humanity, city dwellers in particular.

So it’s interesting to see a volume of essays on Jeffers, *The Wild That Attracts Us*, edited by ShaunAnne Tangney, appear at roughly the same time as the Snyder pieces in the Gonnerman collection. Perhaps predictably, there is a heavy emphasis on content. Tangney in her own essay argues that “Roan Stallion” is compatible with ecofeminism, though she gets into trouble, as she herself admits, when arguing that the heroine kills the stallion “to eradicate the masculine from her life” (156). Robert Zaller, the dean of Jeffers critics, compares Jeffers with various philosophers of “pessimism” and distinguishes between the “heroes of transgression” (73) and the “heroes of endurance” (90) in Jeffers’s narrative poems. But even Zaller, after observing that “For Jeffers . . . pain can have no other source than his panentheistic God, who simultaneously inflicts and suffers it,” can only say, “This seems a dismaying conclusion” (82).

As a partial corrective to this view, let me offer a remark Gary Snyder once made in his class on Zen and poetry at the University of California, Davis. Jeffers, he said, was an “*arhat*”—the kind of early Buddhist sage who, once he had had his enlightenment experience, retired to a cave to avoid contamination from the rest of humanity. To me, the interesting subtext here is the assumption that Jeffers was “enlightened” in the Buddhist sense. This may seem, on the face of it, hard to reconcile with Jeffers’s preoccupation with a cruel anthropomorphic god. But that, as I’ve argued elsewhere, had a great deal to do with Jeffers’s struggles with his background. (His father was a Calvinist theologian, and he was, as I’ve learned from this volume, a lineal descendant of Jonathan Edwards!) But I think the evidence that Jeffers had a different kind of religious experience can be found in the best of his short lyrics. “Oh, Lovely Rock” and especially “Night,” with its “matrix of all shining and quieter of shining,” show him reaching a “deeper fountain” of cosmic unity and interdependence, without the need for a personal god. Anthony Lioi says something very similar in his fine essay in this collection on Jeffers and the classical Stoics.

On the ecological side—which will arouse more universal admiration—Bryon Wilson has a graceful and well-written essay comparing Jeffers and Thoreau as exemplars of the reinhabitation of place. The rest of the anthology is something of a mixed bag. Two otherwise pedantic essays are worth reading for their cameos of the poet: the agoraphobic Jeffers, suffering from what would then have been called “neurasthenia” (28–29), “gr[inding his] teeth all the following night” after a day-trip to San Francisco (qtd. 26); and the young Jeffers swimming for half an hour in an icy mountain lake after his hiking companions had quickly fled. Petr Kopecky writes about Jeffers’s extraordinary popularity in Czechoslovakia, which he attributes largely to the fact that nature and the solitary individual were forbidden themes in the days of socialist realism. David J. Rothman makes an interesting case for Jeffers’s influence on poetic translation but a weaker case for the importance of the “new narrative” poets of the 1990s. These poets were skillful self-publicizers, but they are little read twenty years later.

Finally, one wishes in Jeffers criticism for less emphasis on the *what* and more on the *how*. Tim Hunt’s essay on self-doubt and self-

correction in “Point Joe” is really the only one here to provide this kind of close reading, though it’s marred by a very dubious equation of Eliot’s modernism with postmodern theorizing. (Eliot thought Jeffers underrated, a little-known fact.) But I would like to see a critic like Hass, who is willing to go line by line and say, “This isn’t so good, but *this*—this is wonderful.”

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Book Reviews

Anne L. Kaufman and Richard H. Millington, eds.,
Cather Studies 10: Willa Cather and the Nineteenth Century.
Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 2015. 438 pp. Paper, \$40.

While Willa Cather's position within the modernist canon remains highly debated, essays in the most recent collection of *Cather Studies* demonstrate that Cather's true authorial depth is best illuminated by exploring her Victorian roots. Like previous installments of this series, the essays developed out of papers given at the Thirteenth International Willa Cather Seminar held in 2011 and sponsored by the Willa Cather Foundation. Although the nineteenth century frames the collection, the Cather who emerges exceeds the frame. As editors Anne L. Kaufman and Richard H. Millington maintain, Cather is a transitional figure who cannot be relegated to one era. Many essays highlight how Cather transforms nineteenth-century literary conventions, making her arguably "modernist," but—perhaps more importantly—transformative and unique.

In part 1, "Contexts," seven essays examine Cather and her work within relatively large historical frameworks. For example, John Jacobs's and Janis Stout's respective essays tackle Cather's views on slavery and the Civil War by researching her origins in Virginia. Stout argues that *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* (1940) demonstrates a transitional concept of war through upholding the "reconciliation impulse" popular in late nineteenth-century literature about the Civil War and the "abolitionist view" made popular in the modern era (140). While this transitional picture of Cather dominates the collection, Charles Johanningsmeier argues that despite modern critics' adoration for hailing Cather a modernist, her contemporary audience actually appreciated the ways her work valued nineteenth-century reading methods and values. Through an analysis of fan letters, he explains how Cather's most devout readers saw her work as

antimodernist. Nonetheless, modernity looms large in the collection. Leila C. Nadir examines Cather's "modern environmentality" (71), and Susan Meyer argues that "dirty water comes to represent the threat posed by modernity to art and culture" through a comparison of Cather and Edith Wharton (98).

Part 2 contains ten essays that also historicize Cather's work but focus on very specific "Precursors and Influences." Deborah Carlin tackles the long-studied relationship between Cather and Sarah Orne Jewett, arguing that Cather's descriptions of Jewett evolve: over time "Cather's Jewett" changes from being an author Cather deeply esteems, to one representative of the nineteenth century, a literary past Cather no longer identifies with by 1930. This part of the collection not only covers expected Cather influences, like Jewett and Henry James, but also less common ones like poet A. E. Housman, composer Franz Schubert, and realist William Dean Howells. Despite Cather's occasional critique of Howells's work, Joseph C. Murphy's comparison of *The Rise of Silas Lapham* and *The Professor's House* demonstrates how she drew from and moved past her predecessor's realist form.

As is often the case with a collection so large, some of the seventeen essays address the topic more explicitly than others. Many do not situate their claims within the biographical or critical history of their respective topics, an omission that somewhat limits the accessibility of the collection to Cather scholars. Readers of *Western American Literature* will enjoy Leila C. Nadir's and Sarah Stoeckl's respective reexaminations of landscape in *O Pioneers!* (1913). Cather lovers in general, and especially those intrigued by Cather biography, will enjoy the ambitious plunge into the archive by many of these authors. The selections explore a vast array of Cather's nineteenth-century influences, ranging from the discovery of Pompeii to William Thackeray to the circus. Taken as a whole, the collection reveals the tremendous intellectual depth of Willa Cather, the complexity with which she employed this knowledge in her work, and her connections to and transformation of the nineteenth century.

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Evelyn P. Mayer, *Narrating North American Borderlands: Thomas King, Howard F. Mosher, and Jim Lynch*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2014. 227 pp. Cloth, \$64.95; e-book, \$64.95.

National borders are complex markers of identity. In addition to demarcating the territorial limits of countries, they highlight how societies see themselves and the world, not the least by revealing who is welcome—and who is not—at any particular time. Given the political and economic disparity between the United States and Canada, perhaps it is not surprising that the discourse on the frontier between the two countries tends to privilege the United States. This is certainly the case of Evelyn P. Mayer's *Narrating North American Borderlands*, which both captures the power imbalance between the two polities and reflects it.

Mayer's main thesis is that "borders are increasingly important" in what was supposed to be a "borderless world," and that, since the events of September 11, 2001, the Canada-US boundary has gone from a "friendly, open, and permeable" border to a "closed" one (13). She further asserts that while historically it has been "in the shadow of the US-Mexico border, the Canada-US border is now holding its own due to increased interest related to security issues" (37). Mayer, however, is not persuaded that borders can ever be truly hermetic. That is, that they can really contain what lies beyond them. For her, the porousness of borders is most evident in the lands contiguous to them, whose denizens do not always respect the national sovereignty that boundaries are designed to evoke. She illustrates her argument with close readings of three recent novels: Thomas King's *Truth and Bright Water* (1999), which explores Indigenous life along the Alberta-Montana border; Howard Frank Mosher's *On Kingdom Mountain* (2007), set in an isolated area of northern Vermont abutting Québec; and Jim Lynch's *Border Songs* (2009), which depicts post-9/11 international coexistence at the western end of the British Columbia-Washington border.

Narrating North American Borderlands is a welcome addition to border studies in general and to the scholarship on the Canada-US boundary in particular. Although critically informed, it has little jargon. That said, the text is somewhat repetitious. Mayer favors the non-national, or unnational, over the national, so she repeated-

ly informs us that King's novel is "subversive" and Mosher's "utopian" for challenging the jurisdiction of the two official nation-states in the regions they portray. Also, considering that Mayer focuses on only three novels, it is surprising that she does not situate them in relation to the oeuvre of each author. This strategy becomes especially questionable in the case of Mosher, the author of *North Country: A Personal Journey through the Borderland* (1997). While she cites the text, she does so only in reference to the author's biography, conveying little sense of the richness of detail and insight in Mosher's account of his travels along the boundary from the Atlantic to the Pacific. In addition, Mayer should have acknowledged that Lynch's novel, even though published as recently as 2009, has in some ways already become a historical document. In *Border Songs*, the two chief instances of Canadian difference are an unrelenting antagonism toward US foreign policy and a casual attitude toward soft drugs. But since Washington State legalized marijuana for recreational use in 2012, Lynch's novel underscores the fluidity of both national borders and cultures, for that which was perceived as intrinsically alien could so easily be legislated into the law of the land—or at least of a growing number of states.

According to Mayer, one of the merits of her book is its "bilateral Canada-US focus" (29), but Canada is presented very much as the junior partner. For instance, she often states that Canadians, particularly the English-speaking populace, need the international boundary "to distinguish" themselves from Americans (35), reflecting the fact that the Canadian relationship to the international boundary is "marked by identity insecurity" and the American one by "homeland security" (19). However, she never explains why it is the ostensibly more self-confident country, the United States, that is reinforcing the border. Also, it seems odd to suggest that a country's idea of national security is not inescapably linked to its culture. Perhaps even more problematic, one cannot help but notice that two of her primary authors (Mosher and Lynch) are from the United States and the third (King) was born and raised in California and only moved to Canada as an adult. This hardly seems like equal representation.

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James W. Parins, *Literacy and Intellectual Life in the Cherokee Nation, 1820–1906*. Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 2013. 296 pp. Cloth, \$34.95.

James Parins has written a tribute to the efforts of the Cherokee people to sustain their culture through language and literacy, arguing that their embrace of education and language provided the means to resist white encroachment. The book traces the many uses of literacy reinforcing Cherokee culture over a century, starting with the Cherokees' creation of a unique and revolutionary breakthrough in the early nineteenth century—a written Indigenous language. The story of Sequoyah's invention of a syllabary is well told here by the author who codirected the Sequoyah National Research Center at the University of Arkansas. It was a remarkable achievement by any standard, and Parins helps us understand the importance of the syllabary by placing it in the context of Indigenous languages in the Americas.

While the creation of their own written language and the resulting high literacy rates of the Cherokee people in the decades following the 1820s invention comprise the heart of the book, Parins aims for much more, examining, as he does, many aspects of literacy among western Cherokees over the nearly hundred years from their first move west up to the dissolution of Indian Territory, which makes for a complex and riveting story. He overreaches, however, by repeatedly claiming that an ethos of literacy helped to unite the Cherokees as they encountered the increasing stresses placed upon their culture during the nineteenth century. The use of English in literature, politics, and social and economic life also had a divisive effect within the Cherokee Nation, widening the gap between traditional and nontraditional citizens. While Parins explains this schism, he never reconciles its existence with his thesis of the unifying ethos of literacy. He also allows the reader to believe that the literary life he describes encompassed the Cherokee people as a whole; it actually involved mostly the nontraditional minority of nineteenth-century Cherokees. His focus in the last part of the book on mixed-blood writers William P. Boudinot and John Adair reinforces that tendency.

The book's nine chapters examine eighty-plus years of Cherokee

literacy, although not strictly chronologically: later chapters, for example, take us back to the 1820s to pursue a particular theme or argument. Because Parins maintains that literature and literacy were intertwined with social and political events, major periods of Cherokee history—such as Removal, the Civil War, and Reconstruction—appear here as context. Early chapters place the invention of the syllabary in the complex world of white–Native interaction. Since writing was connected to Euro-American concepts of civilization, missionaries—the primary white representatives of education and literacy—eventually accepted the Cherokee syllabary as a positive development, rightly awed by the lightning-fast spread of literacy in the Cherokee Nation. White southeasterners who coveted Cherokee land, however, saw no good in a development that undermined their characterization of Cherokees as savages who needed to be removed from civilized society, and ignored or moved to weaken Cherokee education efforts. The famous case of *Worcester v. Georgia* grew out of state efforts to prevent influential educators like Samuel Worcester from assisting Cherokees in printing a newspaper, among other literary activities. The Cherokee elite embraced the first Native newspaper, *Cherokee Phoenix*, as an important tool for preserving tribal identity and persevered in its publication. Like later attempts at newspaper publication (*Cherokee Advocate* and *Indian Chieftain*) and public school education, the *Phoenix* was short-lived but stands as evidence of some Cherokees' commitment to a literate life. None of these literary achievements stemmed the tide of white domination, however.

Despite numerous challenges, Cherokees became and remained a literate people. The leadership of the Cherokee Nation emphasized the importance of education, wresting control of schools from the missionary societies and committing valuable resources to the construction of teacher academies. The book chronicles the varied uses of a written language, from letters to legal documents. While written Cherokee was a remarkable achievement, English literacy came to dominate the culture, especially into the twentieth century. Although one might wish that Parins had placed these literate Cherokees within the context of their Native neighbors in Indian Territory, who also incorporated some level of English literacy into

their strategies of cultural survival, he has written a valuable survey of the world of words in the nineteenth-century Cherokee Nation.

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Molly K. Varley, *Americans Recaptured: Progressive Era Memory of Frontier Captivity*. Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 2014. 249 pp. Cloth, \$34.95.

A mainstay of American culture, captivity narratives' tales of abduction, adaptation, acculturation, and (possibly) release persist in their cultural and historical relevance, attending to the anxieties of each historical moment. During the Progressive Era, as Molly Varley argues in *Americans Recaptured*, harrowing tales of captivity were republished and memorialized in good part because they glorified certain "American" traits and justified a particular set of government policies toward "vanishing" Americans. Americans in the Progressive Era were actively expunging corrupt politicians from office, establishing antitrust laws to abolish monopolies, and ushering in suffrage for women. Captivity narratives' appeal to Americans at such a moment occupies Varley's study, which examines not only the creation of parks and historic landmarks dedicated to creating a necessary past for an American future, but also looks at the republications of captivity narratives such as those of Mary Jemison and Martha Bennet Phelps and how these tales shed light on controversies over race, gender, and national identity.

One creative approach to the topic of captivity narratives that Varley undertakes is the study of memorial ceremonies, such as the 1910 ceremony for Mary Jemison (Dehgewanus) at Letchworth State Park. In his remarks at the dedication, historian Hagaman Hall discounts the seventy years Jemison spent among the Seneca and instead maintains her identity as a "white woman." The statue itself identifies Jemison as "The White Woman of the Genesee" and claims her whiteness despite Jemison's decision to become Dehgewanus and remain with the Seneca. Another historian, Arthur C. Parker, himself a member of the Seneca tribe, took an entirely different approach to memorializing Dehgewanus,

casting her lot as an Iroquois woman as liberating, a model for American gender relations.

Varley acknowledges the contradictory treatments of figures like Jemison who refused to return to “white” society and remained with their Seneca families. For eugenicists like Madison Grant, Jemison retained her “whiteness” and proved that “white blood” prevailed despite deprivation; for anthropologist Franz Boas, who advocated cultural relativism, Jemison’s assimilation spoke to how comparable the two cultures were, and how intermarriage might help resolve the white-red conflict. Varley steers clear of collapsing the contradictions posed by figures like Jemison; instead, she revels in them as they elucidate larger contrary but nevertheless strongly held beliefs that informed public opinion and national policy.

One shortcoming of an otherwise smart study is Varley’s self-admitted reliance on a choice few captivity narratives and figures; the study’s historical parameters are, of course, key in limiting her study, but readers unfamiliar with the genre might believe there to be just a slim number of such tales.

Notwithstanding, what Varley contributes to the study of captivity narratives is the inclusion of memorials, the particular concerns animating the Progressive Era, and a willingness to embrace the contradictory views of American Indians and their position in the national imaginary.

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Paul Seydor, *The Authentic Death and Contentious Afterlife of Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid: The Untold Story of Peckinpah’s Last Western Film*. Evanston: Northwestern UP, 2015. 384 pp.
Cloth, \$89.95; paper, \$29.95; e-book, \$29.95.

Do we need another book on Sam Peckinpah and, in this case, a whole book devoted to one film? An unqualified yes if it is written by Paul Seydor and as original and provocative as this one. Considered a leading scholar of Peckinpah, Seydor has written extensive-

ly, persuasively, and passionately about Peckinpah's Westerns, but none of his previous books has focused exclusively or so intensely on one film. He justifies his current passion by the continuous controversy swirling around *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* since its release in 1973 and the various versions that have appeared since then. Seydor argues, convincingly, that the film warrants such a full-length study for three reasons: (1) it offers the opportunity "to observe . . . how a filmmaker navigates his vision through the creative and treacherous waters of collaboration, commerce, and his own self-destructive impulses and behavior," (2) it "is by far the best and most important of the fifty-plus films about Billy the Kid," and (3) the "most important" reason, Seydor proposes, "is the film itself and its place in Peckinpah's work" (xix-xx). There has rarely been, Seydor claims, a film whose reputation received such "universally poor reviews upon its initial release" to then have risen "so quickly and steeply as this one's did" (xx). Within a short period of time, major critics and leading film people were extolling its virtues with ringing accolades.

Seydor divides his extensively researched study into three parts. "Authentic Lives, Authentic Deaths" reviews the influences on Peckinpah and the various sources he drew on, including Charles Neider's novel *The Authentic Death of Hendry Jones* (1956) and Marlon Brando's film *One-Eyed Jacks* (1961). Part 2, "The Versions of Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid," renders a detailed examination of the various versions of the film. And part 3, "Ten Ways of Looking at an Unfinished Masterpiece and Its Director" (with a nod to Wallace Stevens's "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird"), explores the depth and passion Peckinpah brings to his characters and their tragic demise.

As Peckinpah's admirers know, most of his films have engendered controversy, some of it volatile (recall Pauline Kael's famous statement in a *New Yorker* review of *Straw Dogs* [1971]: "the film is a fascist work of art" [47.50 (January 29, 1972)]: 84), but *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* has been an even greater storm center of heated debate. In his penetrating analysis and meticulous research, Seydor provides a valuable guide to Peckinpah's sources, principally Pat Garrett's own book—*The Authentic Life of Billy, the Kid: The Noted Desperado of the Southwest* (1882), written with Ash Upson, and Nei-

der's book (mentioned above). Seydor argues that Neider's novel draws from Garrett's book, and Peckinpah's film draws from both. But Seydor also elaborates on Peckinpah's collaboration with the various scriptwriters (especially Rudy Wurlitzer), his relationship with veteran actors and those new to acting (Rita Coolidge and Bob Dylan), the actual filming in Durango, Mexico, with its many delays, and the confusing postproduction issues. Anyone wishing to learn about the various versions of the film, the cuts made, the material restored, followed by more cuts and then more restorations (and of course the interminable battles Peckinpah had with the Hollywood money men, especially James Aubrey), need go no farther. It's all here: in the discussion and in the many footnotes—a masterly piece of research, rendered in a highly readable way.

I have long admired *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* since its initial release in the 1970s but have been frustrated by the different versions and the claims made about them. This book has cast a stunning light on the making of the film and carved a coherent path through the jungle of controversy. It has helped us see and understand how Peckinpah, in this last of his Westerns, has left an indelible mark on the genre. In essence, this study has accomplished what the best film criticism always aspires to: producing fresh eyes and awakened senses in viewers, preparing us for a profoundly visceral experience. Seydor comments on one of Peckinpah's frequent sayings: “‘feeling it’ is what his films are all about” (243). Seydor's book helps us to feel it, powerfully and unforgettably in *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*.

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Mark J. Dworkin, *American Mythmaker: Walter Noble Burns and the Legends of Billy the Kid, Wyatt Earp, and Joaquín Murrieta*. Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 2015. 288 pp. Cloth, \$29.95.

American Mythmaker and the career of Walter Noble Burns (1872–1932) give readers the chance to explore the boundaries between legend and history. Burns is best remembered for mythologizing gunfighters. The late Mark J. Dworkin published in magazines such

as *Wild West* and served as book review editor of the *Wild West History Association Journal*. His biography wrestles with whether Burns was “a historian or a novelist.” Burns “clearly was not constrained by the recognized conventions of academic history,” Dworkin argues, but he “did adopt several of its methods” (x). Burns never resolved the tensions in these impulses and, perhaps appropriately, neither does *American Mythmaker*.

Burns led a colorful life. He was born in 1866 in Kentucky. His father was a Union colonel with Lost Cause sympathies. Young Walter won a high school writing contest; unable to afford to go to college, he worked as a reporter in Louisville in the late 1880s before heading west. His first book, *A Year with a Whaler* (1913), chronicled the season he spent on a whaling ship out of San Francisco. Burns moved around as a reporter in St. Louis, Kansas City, and Denver in the 1890s and served in the First Kentucky Infantry in the Spanish-American War. Landing in Chicago after the war, he built a career as a reporter and literary critic. In the 1920s he turned to writing about the West and about crime. His most influential books were *The Saga of Billy the Kid* (1925), *Tombstone: An Iliad of the Southwest* (1927), and *The Robin Hood of El Dorado: The Saga of Joaquín Murrieta* (1932).

Scholars have wrongly dismissed Burns as a fiction writer, Dworkin contends, holding him to standards not common in historiography about the West at the time. Dworkin shows that Burns did “meticulous research” (129), traveling to the Southwest to read local newspapers and court records, talking to locals who remembered the lawmen and outlaws he wrote about, and walking the land where legendary events took place. Where possible Burns interviewed these mythic figures themselves, notably an aging Wyatt Earp, living in Los Angeles in the 1920s. Burns also sought out folk tales and songs about his characters. His goal was to preserve “the spirit of the frontier,” like popular novelists and even academic historians from the time, notably Frederick Jackson Turner (128). According to Dworkin, Turner’s thesis influenced Burns.

Burns sought to “advance historical knowledge in a systematic, serious, and substantial way” (180), Dworkin states, but it is not clear what this means. Burns did try to “move beyond” folklore about his gunfighter characters, conducting systematic research,

but his writing is more akin to folklore than historiography. Dworkin himself notes that Burns was “[certain] that a good story should take precedence over the unvarnished truth” (x). This is what some locals thought about his books, protesting he wrote romanticized nonsense. Burns’s use of Homer’s *Iliad* in his account of Tombstone is indicative of his goals in writing. The truth he sought was mythic more than literal and factual. He did extensive research, but he wanted to create legends that would provide for America what Homeric myth did for ancient Greece.

It is hard to accurately measure Burns’s success. To draw tourists in the 1920s and 1930s, towns and cities in the Southwest began to exploit legends about outlaws and law-and-order gunfighters. Many more popular histories, along with novels, movies, TV shows, comic books, and theme parks about these figures and the frontier followed in the decades after Burns’s death. The failure of scholars to demythologize the West is hard to deny, as is the popularity of frontier mythology nationally and globally. Nor can the political influence of such stories be denied. America arguably remains a “gun-fighter nation.” But to what degree are the writings of Burns a chief factor in explaining this mythology and its influence? Or are they merely a small part of this history, building on a century of Wild West shows, dime novels about frontiersmen, and Hollywood films about lawmen and outlaws? Dworkin asserts the influence of Burns but provides little evidence to measure it.

These questions aside, Dworkin’s popular intellectual life of Burns should be read. He tells a good story, and he has uncovered new details about Burns’s life and work. Scholars of the popular culture of the West will better understand many details and something of the spirit of that culture by reading *American Mythmaker*.

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Dan O’Brien, *Wild Idea: Buffalo and Family in a Difficult Land*.
Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 2014. 272 pp. Cloth, \$24.95.

For those unfamiliar with the work of writer, teacher, and life-long outdoorsman Dan O’Brien, his latest book, *Wild Idea: Buffa-*

lo and Family in a Difficult Land, is an impressive introduction to his talent both as storyteller and visionary environmentalist. In telling the story of how and why he developed his Cheyenne River Ranch in South Dakota into a state-of-the-art operation producing grass-fed, humanely killed, and field-dressed bison meat, O'Brien also gives us the moving story of his own family and work relationships, bird dogs and falconry, as well as a history of the Great Plains and the sacred relationship between the land, the buffalo, and the Lakota people. In a sweeping narrative drama that reads like a Tolstoy novel, O'Brien connects these relationships into how he achieved the "wild idea" of founding a company that would provide humans with healthy red meat while also restoring large herds of bison to the Great Plains as a step toward restoring a healthy balance among humans, native wildlife, and the larger grasslands ecosystem.

Bison bison, the scientific name for the animal popularly known as the American buffalo, is the largest mammal native to North America and a keystone species for a functioning prairie ecosystem. Their selective grazing of grasses and forbs and their continuous movement allow the plants to regenerate and spread over a wider area through the fertilizing effects of bison dung. Over millennia, bison have uniquely evolved to have few natural predators and to survive climate extremes of summer heat or winter cold. O'Brien argues persuasively that the natural beauty and abundance of the Plains have been severely damaged by over a century of land degradation through the mismanagement of cattle ranching and agribusiness. Replacing cattle with wild buffalo, as well as the sustainable harvesting of buffalo without using feedlots and slaughterhouses, is his solution.

Those familiar with his work will enjoy another diverse yet gripping family narrative that provides a compelling sequel to his earlier memoir, *Buffalo for the Broken Heart* (2002), and effectively unifies previous texts. In the first book, O'Brien relates why he converted his Broken Heart Ranch from a resource-depleted cattle ranch to an environmentally friendly bison ranch and the tribulations involved. *Broken Heart* ends with O'Brien deciding to move to a much larger ranch in the Cheyenne River valley, between the Black Hills and the

Badlands, to continue his experiment with bison on a larger scale, and that is where *Wild Idea* begins:

For over forty years the prairies have been my home . . . a huge complex web of life clawing to keep its balance. I love the wind . . . even when it is too cold to endure. It is the wheezing breath of a huge, living thing, and I am a part of it. . . . I knew that my future would involve at least an attempt to put things right on the Great Plains and buffalo would be a part of that attempt. (3–5)

O'Brien finds, however, that a bigger ranch comes with bigger problems: his work of fixing and healing is endless, ranging from the broken ranch to broken bones to broken relationships, both personal and business. Ultimately, a visit from a customer-venture capitalist from Boston gives O'Brien the opportunity to attain the capital needed to expand his company and achieve his vision of large landscape restoration, albeit with the usual compromises demanded by partners who invest for profit. O'Brien learns that even buffalo cannot escape the pervasive market pressure for metrics, sales goals, and return on investment. As they sit on an ATV observing the herd, though, the timeless, fearless, communal energy emanating from the buffalo powerfully transcends the business viewpoint: "Only a few buffalo bothered to raise their heads to appraise us. I turned off the engine and let the silence settle. We didn't say a word and the buffalo moved around us. Slowly the tender grunting between the mothers and the calves became the central presence in the ocean of near silence" (204).

Concluding from his life work, O'Brien knowingly asserts that "We live in the borderlands between fertility and dust, where everything struggles to survive, where progress is slow and civilization staggers a few steps behind. There are the usual effects of drought, blizzards, low wages, racism, and ignorance" (259). O'Brien knows that "The best definition of success on the Great Plains is the ability to move from one disappointment to the next without losing your enthusiasm" (242). O'Brien's enthusiasm is contagious, and his love for the buffalo, the land, and his family and friends who work the land with him is emotionally conveyed to readers through the beauty of his words. He also readily admits that words are not enough.

Land this beautiful must be appreciated, and to be appreciated it must be seen and felt in person—with dogs running, falcons flying, and bison grazing on bluestem grass.

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College of DuPage

Sharon Oard Warner, *Sophie's House of Cards: A Novel*.
Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 2014. 360 pp. Paper, \$24.95.

In her intimate family novel *Sophie's House of Cards*, Sharon Oard Warner employs an omniscient narrator who demands that we work hard to get to the final essence of her narrative. She enriches the novel with several overarching and elaborate metaphors by which we must try to keep track: various Tarot cards that teenager Sophie Granger finds among her mother's keepsakes introduce each chapter. Sophie's father, Jack, provides another way to keep track of the several characters who fly in and out of the Granger hive, Jack being a keeper of bees in their yard in Albuquerque: early in the novel Sophie helps him when his queen bee dies and he must replace her, an act that portends later significant events. Sophie's own situation reflects one final correspondence Warner makes as we wind our way through the novel's most difficult part: about two-thirds of the way through, Sophie—now seven months pregnant—goes with her best friend Tam to see *Juno*, a film whose title character is a pregnant teenager.

Describing Sophie's reaction to *Juno*, the narrator tells us that "She is transfixed, so engaged by Juno and her nearly-identical dilemma to Sophie's own that she loses herself in the story" (212). We learn that Juno's story inspires Sophie to begin planning for her own baby's future. Then the omniscient narrator reveals something important about Sophie's future that Sophie herself cannot yet know: "A few years from now, [Sophie] will explain to Candace [her baby's eventual adoptive mother] how she made her decision" (212). Until the narrator confides in us at this point, we have been unsure of where our sympathies or allegiances ought to lie in the novel. That we learn something beyond what the characters know becomes a significant act of trust between readers and Warner's

narrator, providing us with a clarity we need to appreciate the lives about which we have been reading. The constantly moving swarm of characters and the complicated, sometimes contradictory behaviors we experience feel real, and our struggle to understand the confusion becomes our salvation. Like all the screwed-up, confused characters we've met, after the *Juno* sequence the narrator gradually prods us to focus clearly on Sophie, the most compelling of all the characters.

Through earlier chapters, we *almost* understand how and why most of the characters behave the way they do—but that isn't always easy. They have indeed flown in and out of our view like bees around a hive, perhaps causing difficulty keeping track. Sophie's retro-hippie mother, Peggy, hides secrets, lives deep within herself, and enjoys a distinctly unstable relationship with her husband, Jack. Jack has his own worries: an aging mother in a nursing home back East and ongoing money woes. Sophie's boyfriend, Will, a confused seventeen-year-old boy, cannot help but freak out over Sophie's pregnancy, while his own mother, Laurel, moves into the narrative to help Sophie. Sophie's younger brother, Ian, comes and goes through all of this drama and trauma. And then Candace, Peggy's old friend from commune days, flies in from Boston.

Like a tarot card reader, the narrator projects a future for us after *Juno*, and we begin to understand that Warner's many metaphorical structures really serve to prepare us for one very particular story here, one that we deserve to know before the other characters do. We recognize Sophie's transformation from careless and care-free teenager in the flurry of the novel's beginning to an especially thoughtful young woman by the end. Her profile of teenage courage in the face of unplanned pregnancy stands out in relief—Sophie indeed becomes the queen bee—by the final chapters. Indeed, Warner has structured this complicated story not just as a busy hive full of characters who fly into and away from each other, nor as a flimsy house of cards. As others move around her and walls fall down, Sophie reveals her fortitude. Her endearing story of teen pregnancy, growth, and resilience stands as the central support of *Sophie's House of Cards*.

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Gaynell Gavin, *Attorney-at-Large*. Charlotte, NC: Mint Hill Books, 2012. 98 pp. Paper, \$11.

Anarchy Barbie, the novella's protagonist—a specialist in family and juvenile law—describes her profession as “triage law.” This assessment is accurate. Gavin's book centers on a woman whose practice of law is often complicated by legal dealings that run counter to the common sense one would anticipate as critical to the safety of children and families, thus depleting both her energy and her ability to fight the system.

Through a progression of vignettes, the reader experiences the complexity of removing children from the home of their biological parents, the frustrations of foster care and the social services system, the intricacies of the court system, and the contingencies of such specific programs as the Federal Indian Child Welfare Act.

If one approaches a legal decision as simply a matter of one side winning and another losing, then the reader will see that often in this text the loser is the child. As Gavin creates continuous scenarios about children and families at risk, the reader views the complexity of the judicial system and how almost hopeless some of these family situations are. When Gavin allows Anarchy Barbie the device of “What I Did Not Say” and “What I Did Say” as preface to dialogue, the reader sees Barbie's credibility as a caring, competent human being as well as a foreshadowing of her movement away from the law as her chosen profession. The stereotypes of wealth, privilege, and status that may be commonly associated with practitioners of the legal profession are dispelled. Barbie's character is a single parent of an ethnically diverse child, and her finances are not secure. Gavin also provides important insight into the painful realities of social work professionals and the foster care system.

While the novella takes place in the Denver area, it could just as easily take place anywhere in this country. If it takes a village to raise a child, Gavin's book shows how woefully short we are falling in that attempt.

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