
REVIEWS

Reviews are published in alphabetical order according to the name of the author reviewed.

Carme Jiménez Huertas. *No venimos del latín*. Las Sandalias de Mercurio Press, 2016. 160p.

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No venimos del latín's scholarly analysis argues against the traditional position that Latin was the progenitor of the modern Romance languages. Following Christina Bescan's Foreword, Jiménez Huertas explains the "influence" of Latin and asserts that it was primarily a written, rather than spoken, language, with both the Iberian and Latin writing systems coexisting throughout the Peninsula well into the second century CE. Chapter 1 concludes that the first Roman settlers of Hispania were decidedly not Latin speakers, many of whom were mercenaries foreign to Rome, speakers of other Italic languages, or even Iberian locals. The subsequent chapter underscores that internal linguistic changes are necessarily slow. It reasons that morphosyntactic changes, thought to have occurred between Latin and the Romance languages in the very narrow window of 400-500 years, could not have taken place, based simply on the notion that people speak the way they think, and could not possibly change the way they think in such a short span of time.

In Chapter 3, Jiménez Huertas denies the simultaneous existence of a written "Classical" Latin alongside a spoken "Vulgar" Latin. Drawing on the historic proclamation of the Council of Tours of 813 CE and select early texts, such as the San Millán Glosses, the Strasberg Oaths, and the Valpuesta Charters, the author proposes instead a scenario in which written Latin existed alongside not the purported Vulgar Latin, but rather a variety of several "other" languages, be they Italic or not. The chapter ends with the assertion that due to distance, isolation, and separate evolution, the various Romance languages should have manifested many more differences than they currently exhibit, and instead, that many of the characteristics that they share were not in fact features of Latin.

The remaining four chapters address certain shared character-

istics at the levels of phonetics, lexicology, and morphosyntax, respectively. Chapter 4 showcases common sound patterns and processes such as palatalization and diphthongization, as well as suppression and addition of sounds. It also makes more general comparisons between syllable structure, vowels, and consonants in Latin and modern Romance languages and pays particular attention to stops, fricatives, affricates and sonorants. Chapter 5 on lexicon points out that several words shared among the different Romance languages did not arise from Latin words used for the same concepts, concluding with a discussion of toponyms and etymologies. Chapter 6, the longest chapter, discusses the nature of Romance morphosyntax and its differences from Latin. This includes generalities among the inflected grammatical categories on the one hand, consisting of nouns, adjectives, pronouns, determiners and verbs, and uninflected forms, such as adverbs, prepositions, and conjunctions, on the other. It closes with a discussion of the generalized loss of grammatical case markers, change in word order, and the formation of interrogatives.

The book's conclusion, in the form of an unnumbered final chapter, poses the overarching question as to origin of the Romance languages and proceeds to explain that they come from no one place in particular. Rather, it suggests that they were already in existence at the time of Roman conquest and that they definitively did not arise from Latin, but probably from some combination of Oscan, Umbrian, and Sabellic languages. The author adds that the case of Rumanian as an outlier language serves as strong additional evidence against the idea of a Latin origin, asserting that modern Rumanian is spoken throughout the entirety of Rumania despite the fact that the Romans only occupied a fourth of this region. According to Jiménez Huertas, this lends credence to the notion that Latin was not a mother tongue at all for the Romance languages but rather a sibling. The author calls for additional research into the language spoken by the Iberian substrate in order to have a better idea of the true origins of Ibero Romance. She suggests that current evidence from its writing system of two sibilants, consonant lenition, dual rhotic sounds, and vowel distribution similar to Ibero Romance varieties make it a promising path for continued investigation.

Jiménez Huertas's thesis of an other-than-Latin origin for the Romance languages is an interesting read for those interested in ex-

ploring alternatives beyond the traditional explanations for language change. However, several of the premises for some of the sweeping arguments are problematic when one considers contradictory circumstantial evidence that the monograph does not address. For example, one of her primary arguments against a Latin origin for Romance is the notion that language could not possibly transform in just 400 years and that it must necessarily change much more slowly over millennia and not centuries. She cites that in some cases, even after millennia, ancient forms of Greek or Arabic are still entirely intelligible by modern speakers of those languages. This generalized rationale, however, is problematic when one looks to other cases outside the Romance language family, specifically the trajectory between Anglo Saxon (or Old English) and modern English. It was immediately after the Norman Invasion in 1066 when, in the same short span of just 400 years, quite radical changes to Old English rendered a language that would be entirely different in precisely the same ways that Jiménez Huertas views as impossible to have occurred in the trajectory between Latin and Ibero Romance.

Another basic premise of the proposal that does not withstand critique is the position that certain common traits or trends found across the Romance languages today are nowhere to be found in Latin, and that this notion therefore precludes the possibility for Latin to be the mother tongue of these languages. The author claims that because of limited direct evidence, Vulgar Latin was something that did not purportedly exist. Therefore, she relies solely on Classical Latin as the baseline of comparison. What Jiménez Huertas does not take into account here is the vast amount of circumstantial evidence provided by comparative analysis that has allowed scholars to reconstruct various Vulgar Latin forms.

A final observation is that *No venimos del latín* fails to reference a previous 2007 study by Yves Cortez that proposed the idea that not Latin but Old Italian is the mother of French. Even more problematic is the fact that Cortez's work had already been refuted prior to the publication of Jiménez Huerta's book. The shortfalls enumerated here, along with the absence of citations or bibliography for any of the claims, calls into question the academic rigor of the study.

Peter Pabisch. *Geschichte der deutschsprachigen Dialektliteratur seit der Mitte des 18. Jahrhunderts: Ein literaturhistorischer Überblick mit Textbeispielen in 6 Büchern*. Germanistische Lehrbuchsammlung, 20.I-VI. Berlin: Weidler Buchverlag, 2019. Vol. 1, 483 p.

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There are many more dialects in this world than so-called standard languages (ca. 26,000 vs. ca. 7100). Dialects represent a linguistic dimension, which is hard to evaluate, especially regarding their social status, their rank within literary discourse, their communicative function and effectiveness, and their emotive value. They represent a linguistic minority, despite their much larger number all over the world, probably because all human societies have tried hard throughout time to establish a universal language—spoken, written, and understood by most people within one “nation”—while every region, province, or territory (even every village or city) maintained, willy-nilly, its own version. Dialect, however, has much to do with local culture and identity, and it still assumes a significant role in Europe and other parts of the world, whereas the situation in the United States (or Russia?) seems to be rather different, especially in light of the mass media since the early twentieth century, which contributed significantly to the elimination of dialects. However, even in the New World, a native speaker of New York might not be easily understood by someone from New Orleans, for instance, and vice versa.

Peter Pabisch, Professor Emeritus of the University of New Mexico, explores the history of dialects in German literature since the time of Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) until the recent past. His magisterial, six-volume treatment of this topic deserves our respect for its erudition, the author’s enormous energy in collecting a vast range of relevant texts, and the sensibility regarding the many efforts across the German-speaking world to preserve and practice dialects, especially in literary texts. The reviewer received only volume one, which is the most important one for the entire project because it outlines the historical framework of dialect literature, analyzes its evolution and function in the wider context and in specific works, and weighs and

balances the significance of dialects in the history of German culture since around 1800. Volume 2 contains the critical apparatus, the bibliography, appendices, and illustrations; volumes 3-6 present copies or excerpts of the relevant texts.

Since the early Middle Ages, there was a constant effort throughout German-speaking lands to negotiate the relationship between regional and standard language. This first led to the emergence of Old High German, then Middle High German, and finally Early New High German, with Martin Luther having been one of the most influential catalysts (not the creator!) in the development of the new standard language. Nevertheless, dialects are rather conservative, and they have survived until today, both in spoken and written German (and this actually in many parts of the world, including the USA); hence, the existence of dialect literature, although its function and relevance have always been questioned, debated, and fought about. Pabisch traces these ongoing negotiations in theoretical and practical terms, mostly beginning with central contributions by Herder, to whose insights he returns repeatedly. Much previous scholarship is reviewed at length, which might exhaust some readers since it amounts to a kind of bibliography within the text (not in the notes). However, the author is right to overview the vast field of research focused on dialects and especially on literature composed in dialect.

The discussion then turns to the many writers of dialect literature, tracing the tradition from mid-eighteenth century to the recent past by offering brief biographical sketches and critical comments. Might it not have been better to place that information directly in front of the respective text editions in the subsequent volumes? We observe with great interest that there was obviously never any hiatus in the use of non-standard language, but very often a rather deliberate decision by literary historians simply to ignore those texts written in dialect as unwelcome competition. However, the use of dialect made it possible for many writers to preserve their own local language and culture, which means that Pabisch here creates a historical overview, which is nearly parallel to standard literary histories. There were many minor, but also a good number of major writers who normally composed their works in High German, but who also included dialect or wrote some pieces entirely in dialect, which can be identified as “verisimilitude” (17). Some of the most significant impulses regarding the use

of dialect also in modern literature came from such famous Austrian poets/writers as Ernst Jandl and H. C. Artmann.

In global terms, this enterprise to bring to light the considerable significance of dialect in literature deserves our close attention and can easily relate to other world literatures (such as Francophone). Pabisch challenges colleagues to consider the extent to which the tension between standard language and dialect can be observed in other fields. What remains unclear, however, proves to be the much larger question of what particular qualities those dialect texts might have and whether to accept the notion of a higher degree of authenticity as solid criteria for research. With such a large number of authors and texts (nearly two hundred), there is hardly any room to investigate this critical issue in depth, apart from some personal comments sprinkled throughout. Popularity might be one criteria (as in film and audio recording nowadays), but this does not necessarily mean quality. The use of dialect by itself does not add quality – certainly a difficult quandary.

From the point of view of teaching foreign language, it is hard to conceive that we could make dialect texts more accessible and understandable to our students, who have a hard enough time learning the language and coping with various historical levels when reading individual texts. Friedrich Schiller, for example, proves to be very difficult even for our most advanced majors in German Studies. However, dialects exist in reality, and most speakers even today have at least some kind of accent (think of English in Texas, in the Deep South, or Boston as a parallel situation to German-speaking lands: Bavaria, Swabia, Rhineland, Low Germany, etc.). This literary history thus exposes readers to a significant aspect of German literature since the 1800s that cannot be denied and ought to be integrated into our language classrooms (see, for instance, “The Fisherman and His Wife” in the fairy tales collected by the Brothers Grimm) and in our research.

At one point, Pabisch also includes Nobel Prize winner Thomas Mann, whose dialect passages in the novel *Der Zauberberg* (*The Magic Mountain*, 1924) reflect linguistic reality in German-speaking lands and illustrate how language levels easily interact with each other. Additionally, French usage is significant when the protagonist Hans Castorp communicates with the highly alluring Russian Lady Chauchat. However, for me, this is only an example of multilingualism, and not a good case of verisimilitude. I would similarly question the inclusion of

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's comedy *Minna von Barnhelm* (1767) as an illustration of verisimilitude with a French speaker who utilizes very poor German.

Footnotes often contain anecdotes about Pabisch's personal contacts with dialect writers, with relatively few references to relevant research literature. Many remarks are unverifiable, even if they might be true, such as comments about Gerhard Rühm, purportedly regarded by Friederike Mayröckcommer as the most important representative of the Viennese Group (377; no reference). This affords the possible advantage of introducing and engaging with a truly large number of writers and their texts from the last two hundred years and more. However, the lack of critical commentary is a bit troublesome, and the heavy reliance on *Wikipedia* might be a red flag. The clear emphasis on Austrian dialect writers mirrors the author's own background. We hear a lot about Low German and Rhenish authors, whereas many other German dialect areas are not well or not at all represented (for instance, major dialect authors such as Ernst Elias Niebergall, Otto Flake, René Schickele, André Weckmann, Wolf Haas, and Jura Soyfer). It would have been very useful to include a systematic list of the various dialects and their literary representatives, such as: Vogtland, Sauerland, Hesse, Thuringia, Franconia, etc. This first volume concludes with an index for personal names and another one for subjects. Undoubtedly, much labor of love went into this project. Anyone interested in the role of dialect in modern (German) literature can easily profit from Pabisch's erudition.

Daryl W. Palmer. *Becoming Willa Cather: Creation and Career*. U of Nevada P, 2019. 247p.

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With *Becoming Willa Cather: Creation and Career*, a new biography focusing largely on Cather's early writings, Daryl Palmer compellingly examines her personality, relationships, childhood, and writing. It is in equal parts enjoyable and informative for established fans and new readers alike.

The initial image of Cather as the “woman on the wheel,” a young woman on a bicycle, “moving forward under her own power, aware of her youth and of a certain masculine prowess” (2) depicts her as the “New Woman,” persistently moving forward and embracing her masculine personality traits. It continues throughout the book and propels readers through her career at a steady pace. Palmer focuses heavily on her early work—a move that admittedly would have frustrated Cather, who viewed much of it with disdain. However, the examination proves fruitful as it investigates her complicated relationship with Nebraska and the West in more detail than previous scholars, who identified her youthful writings as scornful of her homeland. By studying “the ways in which Cather’s negative responses to the Great Plains in her early fiction, as far back as 1896, are interwoven with (and even enable) moments of recognition, resistance, and innovation” (17), this reimagining of her relationship with Nebraska allows a complex investigation of many other aspects of her literary production.

Palmer positions her as a distinguished writer who straddles the border between East and West. Despite spending much of her adult life “back East,” her childhood connection to the West and the territorial mindset is evident. Her obsession with “townmaking” started at just thirteen years old when she founded the town of Sandy Point in her backyard, enlisting the help of her father and friends. This imaginative endeavor was crucial to her development. The influence of Cather’s “mayoral” experience showed her the importance of observation to the creative process (19). This childhood drive to both mimic and amend her hometown of Red Cloud resurfaces in many of her novels and short stories, where the town and its inhabitants are re-imagined. Palmer argues, “ultimately, it was the call of townmaking that really captivated Cather. And, once again, she

was following the example set by the territorial folk who preceded her” (40). Defining her as a follower of “territorial folk” creates a deep and abiding connection to the territory itself, key to understanding her identity as a writer.

Cather’s townmaking was not limited to construction. By establishing herself as editor of the Sandy Point newspaper, she showed an understanding of the significance of journalism in frontier towns. The territorial tradition of townmaking depended upon newspapers to promote new settlements (40). Palmer traces these dealings with the press through each phase of her career, again demonstrating the influence of her territorial childhood on her works. Because newspapers were so vital to the West, she inherited an appreciation of them as well as townmaking. Although the relationship was often complicated, Cather recognized the power and influence of journalism and editors. From her youthful experience with Red Cloud’s competing newspapers, to her time on McClure’s editorial board, her townmaking, writing, and editorial careers intertwined.

This emphasis on the bonds with Nebraska, where territorial pioneer life could break down the boundaries between masculine and feminine (38), sheds new light on her complicated relationship with gender. The tendency to cast herself as the masculine lead in her stories is much more obvious in the early works, especially when viewed alongside her childhood activities. Weaving biographical details with literary analysis, Palmer demonstrates the complex ways in which Cather was experiencing and portraying gender; her relationship with gender, like everything else, was influenced by her relationship with Nebraska. This allowed her to sign her letters “William,” dress in masculine clothes, and represent herself as male in her early stories. “Tommy, the Unsentimental” tells the story of a young woman named Tommy and her experiences in a small Nebraska town. While many critics have observed this aspect of her identity, the connection to “territorial folk” allows Palmer to elucidate the portrayal of gender in terms of her own identity and the broader society.

The largely chronological approach traces her writing in detail, progressing from early short stories through *O Pioneers!* and *My Ántonia* and eventually to the final “era,” including *A Lost Lady*. By deeply investigating these depictions of Nebraska and the West, *Becoming Willa Cather* gives fascinating insight to this regionalist author’s relationship with her own home country.

Philip Pullman. *The Book of Dust. Volume two: The Secret Commonwealth*. Alfred A. Knopf, 2019. 633p.

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In volume one of Philip Pullman's *Book of Dust* series, the voyage of 11-year-old Malcolm Polstead seems to have just begun as he grips the rudder of his hardy canoe, *La Belle Sauvage*, at the head of the irresistible currents of a Great Flood that inundated his hometown, Oxford, and the colleges collectively known as Oxford University. The new inland sea, before it subsides, is dotted by mysterious islands that belong to a "secret commonwealth." The first island features self-preoccupied guests at a rich man's estate. Their vanity is a form of damnation, preventing them from noticing the working class--Malcolm and his compatriot, 15-year-old Alice Parslow, once his worst enemy in the kitchen of his parents' tavern, but now his fellow guardian of the infant Lyra Belaqua from the clutches of the CCD, the investigative agency of the sinister Magisterium. In *The Amber Spyglass*, the last volume of the *His Dark Materials* trilogy, Lyra is destined to separate painfully from her daemon, Pan, so she can find the ghost of her friend Roger. She ends by rescuing all the dead willing to leave. But years before that can happen, Malcolm does his part by tricking a swamp giant to open the water gate so *La Belle Sauvage* may escape the island of what seems to be upper class perdition. At the next island, Malcolm must also trick a fairy woman whose intent is to raise Lyra as her own. Malcolm and Alice escape with Lyra, but not before the woman breastfed Lyra, forever connecting her to the secret commonwealth.

In the second volume of *Dust*, we hear no more of flood or island. Pullman leaps years ahead to when the waters are all subsided, and Malcom is an Oxford professor and Lyra an Oxford undergraduate. To the dismay of her daemon Pan (now settled in the form of a Pine Martin), Lyra is no longer the passionate young savior of our universe. She has become an insufferable skeptic, a classic sophomore, who has all but ruled out the possibility of truth. If the first volume, *La Belle Sauvage*, owes something to C. S. Lewis's *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, then *The Secret Commonwealth* owes a debt to Puddleglum in

The Silver Chair. Pan's discontent frequently echoes that character as he takes up the cause of childlike make-believe over and against Lyra's austere grown-up reasonings, which make her miserable: "Sometimes," she confesses, "I think if I could kill myself without killing you, I might do it. I'm so unhappy" (174). Pan especially loathes the philosophical heroes of Lyra's generation, hip authors Simon Talbot and Gottfried Brande, who argue, among other things, that daemons are mere projections: "It's not just what you did then," Pan explains (referring to her abandonment of him on the shore of the Dead): "It's what you're doing now. [...] You're in a world full of color and you want to see it in black and white. [...] You're under a spell—you must be" (175). At times, Pan and Lyra's differences sound like two lovers—or more aptly—a married couple breaking up. And then Pan goes missing.

Meanwhile, Marcel Delamare, director of a religious agency called *La Maison Juste*, cleverly consolidates the power of the otherwise factionalized Magisterium under his own authority. He then turns his attention to the problem represented by rose oil, which—accidentally daubed on the lens of a lab technician's microscope—proved the existence of Dust, that quixotic substance which makes conscious the material world. Just as Lyra sets out to Anatolia to look for Pan (assuming he is looking for a mythical city of separated daemons called the Blue Hotel), her quest coincides with the machinations of Delamare in the east to take control of both roses and rose oil. Pullman's narrative sweep is visually suggestive of Alfred Hitchcock's cinematic tableau of vast, elegant train station lobbies and that sense of scale we associate with *North by Northwest*. Grown-up Malcolm is an Oakley Street secret agent gifted with quick thinking and instant reflexes, suggesting a kind of 1960s Sean Connery. Lyra too leaps into action, wielding her *lignum vitae* or wooden stick she calls her "Pequeno," like a lost Tarantino scene starring Uma Thurman.

The controversy for the Church in Lyra's world is that Dust implies that the spiritual is immanent, not transcendent. But the effect remains metaphysically dynamic. When Lyra echoes Brande and Talbot that nothing is more than it is, Alchemist Cornelis Van Dongen calls that creed a lie and corrects her: "Nothing," he says, "is only itself" (388). Van Dongen's son, Furnace Man, who is in search of his

daemon, Dinessa, who is made of water (when united they become alchemical steam), tells Lyra she is famous in the world of spirits; he also confirms Pullman's immanence: "Spirit," says the alchemist's son, "is what matter does" (380). Pullman, arguably the anti-Lewis, nevertheless takes up Puddleglum's cause: those who counsel against the imagination as truth are obliged to conspire against the possibility of truth itself. Pullman's epigraph from William Blake is telling: "Every thing possible to be believ'd is an image of truth."

Richard Robbins. *Body Turn to Rain. New and Selected Poems*. Spokane: Lynx House Press, 2017. 203p.

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Writing does not get easier with age or success, although the second is almost always more rewarding than the first. The more we write and publish, the better writers and mentors we become, and the more comfortable we are with entertaining and expressing ourselves with words and works that make others think. Seasoned writers deepen their skills in probing and sharing the kinds of engaging fiction and poetry underpinned by serious intent that remind readers that literature is worthwhile for civil society, and especially wholesome for aged souls. This is the sense that one gains from the dual thrusts of Richard Robbins and his poems.

Body Turn to Rain offers several new poems – 40 altogether – along with work from five prior collections. A transplant from Southern California and Montana, where he grew up, to southcentral Minnesota in the mid-1980s, Robbins has successfully managed to serve and succeed as both a dedicated teacher of creative writing (at Minnesota State, Mankato) and a prolific and persistent published poet. It is no wonder that his poetry reveals both an adherence to poetic meter and form as well as the departure from poetic technique and form into multiple variations of verse.

For example, the creative lyricism and foundational rhythms that must be observed and practiced by all budding poets in undergraduate and graduate creative writing programs can be found girded

in “Moon in Smoke, Teton Park” (2000): “We waited until you carved / the yellow darkness out, moved / land away like one still loved / but a burden – pulling up” (110). However, more advanced, critical and consequential poetic meaning and form pours out in the new poems such as “Pacific Coast,” where: “The woman became water again when the car and the house and the dog roaming in the yard all turned to her at the same time in order to grow larger than themselves” (37). Again, in the poem, “Violence,” when “she said love, she meant the reservoir emptying, the rush of water down the canyon, the eucalypti, cars, and broken households of the rich jostling toward the basin. In the one-story homes, lower-down, human beings could only dream of the love coming their way, driving them and animals to rooftops” (36).

Further examples of mastery at infusing critical thinking with dramatic storytelling abound. The opening poem, “Turpentine,” startles with: “the leg as it broke, quiet knuckle, / or the melon-thump that day a speeding / biker died into the curb” (1). Similarly, in the intimate conversation between the poet and a character named Pablo in “The End of a Long Winter North in the Northern Hemisphere”: “Still, I need you to explain the bagpipes / coming this way through the woods, and the kilts / flying up regularly, and the perfume / of sex now steadily on the wind” (29).

“A Map of the World” (51) is the last in the series of new poems, followed by a selection of 90 poems from five prior collections printed in 1984, 2000, 2008, 2009, and 2010. Fittingly, the anthology ends with a long poem titled, “Rain” (193-200), and thus is literally a “body turn to rain.” On the cover, William Trowbridge rightfully acknowledges that these poems are “grounded in the geography of the American West – its seasons, its people, its destruction – and lifted by the music Robbins coaxes out of language. They reveal a sympathy with nature and a passion for humane awareness in a culture which often seems to tell us merely to consume and, ‘Be happy you know nothing.’”

Yet the poet achieves more than commenting on the material, social, and ethical. His poems make individual statements about the worth and legacy of a writer and their relationship to others and their observations of the natural world that poetry makes possible and sustains in print. *Body Turn to Rain* is a compilation about the “human” and in real time. What flows from Robbins’ thoughtful mind and well-

hewed wrists are the works of an experienced teacher-poet. Here is a modern writer who has learned how to take stock in the ordinary and extraordinary, who appreciates knowledge, and who willfully shares this wisdom about humanity and literature through poetry, such as “slow as whole days. On his knees in the garden” (97); “He knew those hawks could pick him up / and have him / if they wanted” (120); “In your bandana was a pair of socks, a change of underwear, the misal you received for your First Communion, a Werewolf comic book” (41); and “God Particles” -- “They show up after a death, arranging the face on The Shroud. / They make the waterfall fall” (13).

Alfonso Rodríguez. *En las alas del alba: historias de esperanza y redención*. Miami: Alexandria Publishing House, 2019. 336p.

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En alguna u otra forma, el lector o la lectora de esta novela se ve identificado con los hombres y las mujeres que pueblan ese escenario de Glassville, una pequeña ciudad en el suroeste de Texas, próxima a la frontera mexicana. Es un ambiente que, gracias a la magia de la escritura, invención, creación y recreación del autor, se convierte en la parábola de las relaciones humanas, en la inmensa parábola del *yo* y de *los otros*--un yo sumergido en la vivencia de todos los demás. En ese pueblo, cada uno y cada una, viven la vida con alegría, con temor, con la esperanza de una redención que salve a todos del egoísmo, el miedo, la desconfianza, el odio cotidiano hacia *el otro*, hacia *la otra*, que no participa por la diferencia de idioma, de cultura, de religión, de política. Es un presente que busca y espera un futuro, que debe ser compartido cada día en ese espacio que se llama Glassville. La política, la religión, los migrantes, el arraigo y el desarraigo son constantes que marcan la vida en el teatro de ese pueblo.

Alfonso Rodríguez nos va guiando de la mano, su palabra, la realidad de la imaginación, para sorprendernos a cada instante con sus historias de esperanza y redención. Se levanta el telón, y el escenario es un restaurante, un supermercado, una iglesia, una calle, un bar, un barrio, un cine, una escuela, una hacienda; en resumen, un mundo ancho y ajeno y propio que el autor conoce muy bien. Hay una gran diversidad de personajes, los que nos invitan a participar de la comedia y la tragedia, de la sonrisa y el llanto: el abuelo, el político, el cura católico,

el pastor bautista, el maestro, el anciano, la solterona o el solterón. Es un desfile de personas, muchas veces con nombres simbólicos o emblemáticos, como esos que nos hablan en el capítulo “Otras puntadas. ¿Quién entiende a la gente?”: Roberto Cantú, Abundio Sánchez, Próspero Barajas, esa chica Angustias, que decide cambiarse el nombre y llamarse Victoria, o esa otra mujer, Dulce, cuya vida está llena de amargura hasta que encuentra su esperanza y su redención, o la señora septuagenaria de cabellera plateada, y Ambrosio, Nicanor y Gloria, y todos los demás, con los cuales nos identificamos, que son parte de nosotros, ocultos o transparentes, pero que nos hacen participar y compartir su vida.

Están los protagonistas, Diego Escalante y Peggy Lee, que mueven toda la historia, o que son movidos por esa historia que no se detiene, que avanza en el tiempo llevándose con ellos a todo el pueblo de Glassville, que participa como testigo u otro protagonista de la historia de amor entre Diego y Peggy Lee. Comienza desde la niñez, y más tarde la adversidad interrumpe el noviazgo por doce años hasta que al cabo de mucho caminar y recordar, el círculo del amor se completa. Diego y Peggy Lee son representantes de dos mundos: el mexicano y el anglosajón. Representan lo mejor de cada comunidad. Así, luchan contra la injusticia, la incomprensión, contra la separación cultural que incluye idioma y clase social. Es la parábola de las razas que parece no terminar jamás. La lección de que se puede vivir juntos, la lección del **yo** y del **tu**, que, para transformarse en el milagro de **nosotros**, necesita de esa historia del odio para volverse una historia de esperanza y redención. Es la parábola de todas las razas y culturas y religiones, que trata de enseñarnos que para sobrevivir se necesita amor. Debemos amarnos los unos a los otros según la enseñanza del Maestro, que el poeta inglés W.H. Auden repite y se hace eco en su poesía.

Para correr la cortina de Glassville, el autor se vale de muchas técnicas y recursos que nos van despejando, o mejor, desnudando, el alma del pueblo, que en el fondo espera su redención. El monólogo, las biografías, el sermón, la plática religiosa, el discurso, los refranes o proverbios, y la carta son variantes que nos van descubriendo el tejido y entretejido de esas vidas que se cruzan, se distancian y se vuelven a encontrar. Son recursos y técnicas que nos entregan la transformación y la salvación de todo aquello que parecía perdido. Habría que destacar, entre otras cosas, el papel que juega la música romántica tipo bolero. Las referencias musicales son abundantes. Muchísimos capítulos se abren con un recuerdo musical. Bastaría citar el primer capítulo donde

nos encontramos con uno de los boleros más famosos de la época: “Se vive solamente una vez/y hay que aprender a querer y a vivir,” que interpretaba el Trío Los Panchos; o ese otro del capítulo tres: “El amor cuando es sincero, se encuentra lo mismo/en las torres de un castillo/que en humilde vecindad,” del autor Luis Arcaraz, y que fue uno de los grandes éxitos de Javier Solís. Las citas de estos boleros son una manera de recordar la vida pasada, un momento de la historia de cada uno. El capítulo cinco abunda en este tema de la música, que se abre con: “No hay bella melodía/en que no surjas tú” del famosísimo bolero *Contigo en la distancia* del autor César Portillo, interpretado por Los Tres Ases. Rodríguez recurre a la música para revelarnos un estado de ánimo, una pasión que todavía existe y que se manifiesta a través de la palabra musical. Así, la música constituye un elemento de la novela, como otros autores han recurrido al poema, a la pintura o al teatro para desenvolver o envolvernos en la trama.

Vale, además, mencionar el aspecto lingüístico de la obra, el uso del español y del inglés, que se mezclan en los diálogos. Es un modo de entrar en la cultura del *otro* o de la *otra*, de compartir esa cultura. Dejemos que el propio autor nos explique el uso del bilingüismo en una nota al principio: “Esta es una novela en español con diálogos en inglés intercalados, a fin de procurar dar más autenticidad al ambiente y a los personajes.” El idioma es otra llave para entrar en el mundo de los demás, para ayudarnos a descubrir y comprender, el fuera de *nosotros*, el mundo de **los otros**.

Frederic J. Svoboda, ed. *Hemingway's Short Stories: Reflections on Teaching, Reading, and Understanding*. Kent State UP, 2019. 136p.

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“All you have to do is write one true sentence; write the truest sentence that you know,” counselled Ernest Hemingway in *A Moveable Feast*, his memories of 1920s Paris. Heeding his advice for truth telling, the truest sentence I can write about Kent State’s “Teaching Hemingway” series is that it will make you want to teach and read Hemingway in new ways and in old ways, again and again.

Boasting over nine volumes, the collection, edited by Mark P.

Ott and Susan F. Beegel, has been featured in our recent *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature* book review sections of issues 73.2 and 74.1. This fitting testimony to the impact of the series and the significance of Hemingway for many RMMLA scholars also has an ulterior motive to pique your interest in preparation for our upcoming 2020 convention in October in Boulder, Colorado. The featured Keynote speaker will be Hemingway's great-granddaughter, Cristen Hemingway Jaynes, author of *Ernest's Way: An International Journey through Hemingway's Life*. The biography and travel guide explores the influence of the places where he lived and worked upon his life and writing.

To encourage you and your students on your own journey through Hemingway's short stories, I enthusiastically recommend Editor Frederic J. Svoboda's newest volume in the series, *Hemingway's Short Stories: Reflections on Teaching, Reading, and Understanding*. Whether you are a veteran teacher who includes Hemingway in every syllabus or a reader who hasn't studied him since high school, these thirteen approachable essays by master teachers from secondary, post-secondary, and post-graduate levels will inspire you to return to the master storyteller once again.

Several essays walk teachers through a typical—or not so typical—lesson and illustrate how to guide students through dialogue and details to elicit and incite their participation and critical thinking. For example, Peter Hays's lead essay "First Things, Teaching 'Indian Camp'" travels through the classic initiation tale of how a young Nick Adams watches his father Dr. Adams perform a cesarean operation late at night. Here, the importance of questioning techniques—not just what to ask, but when and how to pose them, and how to raise more questions, demonstrates how discussion unfolds and prompts continued debate.

Careful, deep reading and attention to thematic and technical components address both touchy and touching subjects. Commentary and reflections about "The Battler" spark contemporary approaches to race relations in two timely articles by Marc Dudley and John Beall. Beall's suggestions for group free writing and Donald A. Daikor's use of pre-writing model teaching strategies that entice students to discover for themselves the importance of "story showing," not just story telling.

Kinetic learners will literally jump out of their seats to heft

Frederic J. Svoboda's 60-plus-pound backpack filled with the list of supplies that Nick mentions in "Big Two-Hearted River." This clever *realia* and reality approach resonates with his students who are familiar with fishing and camping in upper Michigan. Another form of reality—Reality TV and the Discovery Channel—serves Patrick Bonds well for teaching "The Last Good Country" virtually and for stimulating students to write their own conclusions to the unfinished novella. Verna Kale solves real-time conundrums by having students perform texts. They experience palpable tension by reading the scene about a couple contemplating an abortion in "Hills Like White Elephants" out loud, acting out the motions, and duplicating the awkward pauses and prolonged silences of a 5-minute dialogue spread across a 35-minute wait for the train to arrive. Likewise, acting out the waiters' dialogue in "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place," illustrates the much-contested question about which one is speaking.

An emphasis on writing—not just Hemingway's style, but on developing the student's own prowess—resurfaces throughout most of the essays, including up-to-date usage of digital resources and electronic databases to enhance research and hands-on group work. Practical aids—syllabi, lesson plans, lists, assignments, digital resources and bibliography—offer supportive tools to jump-start the teaching process.

My concluding sentence is also the truest sentence that I know, one that I learned from my daughter Justina: "When you fall in love with the process, the results will follow." That is always true for reading and for teaching. Svoboda and his contributors stir us to fall in love with the process of reading and teaching Hemingway all over again, and the results will follow. Students respond to teachers who love the process of learning and teaching. Books like this help us energize our students and ourselves to fall in love with the process. The results will follow in our own heightened satisfaction with teaching and in the enlightenment and accomplishment of our students, so they can think and write their own true sentences.

Bickford Sylvester, Larry Grimes and Peter L. Hays, eds. *Reading Hemingway's The Old Man and the Sea: Glossary and Commentary*. Kent State UP, 2018. 136 p.

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Over 5 million copies of the September 1, 1952 issue of *Life* magazine, which carried the complete text of *The Old Man and the Sea*, sold within 48 hours, notes Carlos Baker in his critical *EH a Life Story* (Scribner's 1969, 504). However, it was not only this unheard of runaway success which virtually guaranteed that Ernest Hemingway would soon be first in line for the 1954 Nobel Prize in literature, since in the minds of both readers and critics, he had at last produced a “nice book,” one that everyone could admire and enjoy simultaneously as great literature. Never mind that it was among his shortest full length narratives, barely one hundred pages, labelled a novella, a genre which no lesser a canonized figure than Henry James had notably made respectable decades earlier. Until *The Old Man and the Sea*, Hemingway's novels and short stories had garnered praise for their direct and stark language, a style well suited to the male protagonists that populated them, rough-hewn individuals who lived and fought by a code all their own, although never quite capable of measuring up to the standards set for and by themselves. Some of these characters died trying (Francis Macomber), others ended up deserting their cause (Fredric Henry), while yet others had to be content with pyrrhic victories signaling one last loss—as is the case of septuagenarian Santiago, hero of *The Old Man and the Sea*. The title of Hemingway's 1933 collection of fourteen short stories, *Winner Take Nothing*, identifies precisely the plight of the novella's ill-fated protagonist, a man alone at sea who endures a three-day struggle against a formidable prey, yet whose victory is negated by loss—the very definition of Pyrrhic.

Given the work's brevity, any attempt to place it alongside other sea tales in which the hero single-mindedly confronts overwhelming odds against a monstrous marine creature, such as Melville's voluminous *Moby Dick*, serves no purpose, regardless of the shared com-

mon themes. We must forget too, for any purpose of enlightenment, the film version that casts an overfed Spencer Tracy as Hemingway's malnourished hero—a Hollywood treatment the author hated. Wholly apart, *The Old Man and the Sea* is written in almost allegorical fashion with frequent stream of consciousness monologues, recurrent flashbacks of symbolic tropes, oneiric lapses attributable to sunstroke and dehydration, as well as subliminal references to subjects as diverse as marine life, baseball and the passion of Christ. Thus, what first appears to be a short, easily read fish story—and surely it can be read as such—the novella is so layered and polysemious that any veteran Hemingway reader will be glad to have this companion volume within easy reach at all times. Its four-hundred and fifty-nine explicatory entries—ranging from a single word to several pages—not only make it more interesting but also more meaningful. Sylvester, Grimes and Hays put on full display many of the work's narrative strategies, its subtexts and intertexts, its genesis from incipient beginning as mere fish log entries dating back to the early 1930's, when Hemingway first discovered deep sea fishing, to the baseball pennant games of the 1950 season. Because *The Old Man and the Sea* had likely been incubating in the back of the author's mind for the better part of two decades, its complexity, compounded by its succinctness, demands a tutorship that Hemingway chose not to supply. Not only are there no footnotes in the original Scribner's edition, but in fact, there are no chapter or other textual or typographical divisions of any sort.

The three co-editors not only fill in this lacunae and much needed complementary information, but also clarify myriad veiled references to arcane specialties such as navigational charts, Gulf Stream currents, marine measure indices, seagoing creature details (e.g., species, habitats, migratory patterns, feeding habits), seasonal changes in Cuban waters, and many other recondite data. They facilitate a Christian allegorical reading by decoding such symbols as: the skiff's mast (the cross), the fisherman's hand and facial wounds (stigmata), the marlin's fatal wounding at noon (time of the crucifixion), the burning of Santiago's back (scourges by centurions), and the onomastic symbolism of names (Santiago/ San Iago/ Saint James, one of Jesus' fishermen disciples, Manolín/Immanuel in Hebrew "God with us", Martín, the generous tavern owner true to his saint's namesake, and Ichthys, Greek acronym for Christ and its literal meaning of fish).

Yet another extremely helpful set of citations pertains to the realm of sport and its worship of champions. Many of his village friends have called Santiago *Campeón* over the years for his fishing prowess. In an exquisite linking to the religious fisherman interpretation, Santiago mentions repeatedly Joe DiMaggio's father's profession as a fisherman from San Francisco, thus implying the reason for the son's stature as baseball's greatest champion of his generation. The authors point out that the novella begins at noon on Tuesday, September 12 and ends on Saturday, September 16, precisely the game schedule that the New York Yankees and the Cleveland Indians played in 1951. It follows then that a large part of the glossary contains scores of baseball minutiae, significant but doubtless alien to a good many readers. An equally substantial and relevant number of entries elucidate, contextualize and translate Spanish words, idiomatic expressions and historical references that are indispensable for a fuller understanding of Hemingway's text. Here, a few errors creep in, some minor (punctuation, spelling), some historical ("¡Santiago y cierra España!" not "¡Santiago! ¡Santiago!"), some political (Catalonia is not a province but a *regional* nation) and some cultural (Manolete not Manolín was the greatest bullfighter of his age). Nevertheless, these errata can be easily overlooked, given *Reading Hemingway's The Old Man and the Sea's* enormous contribution for both general and academic readerships.

Thea Tomaini. *The Corpse as Text: Disinterment and Antiquarian Enquiry, 1700-1900*. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2017. 241p.

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Death is a business, but so is a lot of the busyness that precedes and lingers after someone dies. Certainly, death and dying were not spared from the business and busyness of the Renaissance and Reformation of Western Europe, when religious authorities expended great efforts toward reforming doctrines and practices. However, these activities penetrated socio-political ideas in ways that went beyond reforms of the Roman Catholic Church and Europe's ongoing encounters with other religions.

Not only was Protestantism born during the Renaissance on the Continent and in England, but also the beliefs and practices by both upper classes and ordinary individuals were set in the crosshairs of reward and relief. Psychological and material consequences were extracted for alleged and real sins that were committed throughout the masses; social reputations and political consequences were no longer reserved or meted out as just rewards or mercy only among royals and the aristocracy. In fact, the development and the preservation of “the self,” in life and in death, were launched during the early modern period. Thus, death took on greater meaning in terms of memory and materiality. Hence, Stephen Greenblatt’s well-coined term of “self-fashioning” meant that the process of constructing one’s identity, especially as a public persona, became a significant matter while one was alive and even after dying, according to a set of socially acceptable standards.

If the ideal societal behaviors set down by Baldassare Castiglione in *The Book of the Courtier* for how noblemen and women—and their lesser counterparts, the masses-- were to count, it is hardly surprising that a sustained cultural fascination and curiosity emerged about how they deserved to be remembered, validated or idealized into perpetuity. During the early modern era, the legacy of virtually every individual increasingly began to be perceived as a necessary, even curious, persona whose construction of self indeed warranted the comparison and worthwhile (or not) remembrance by others, just like when they had been alive or as the appropriate memory was demanded among the living.

Early modern scholars interested in the interconnections and cultural networks surrounding the materiality of death need to investigate the varying attitudes of the living towards corpses. The significant role that material objects play in the transition between a person’s legacy, deathbed, and their burial place requires study into funerary and exhumation practices. Too, the significance of the physical body and its retention of religious and social importance after death should become a part of a wide survey of literary and historical references. Further, if the deceased had been a writer, let us say a poet or playwright, their significance and relevance to socio-political events and the merits of their surviving material literature, i.e. in manuscript or print, become additional objects of worthy scrutiny. Objects – often recycled or ephemeral – sustained a connection between the deceased

individual and the wider community. When we today place a lens upon this curiosity about an artist's material body and their material works in print, the meaning and memories attached to the artist are figuratively held up to inquiry.

Thea Tomaini extends the study of the inquiry and discernment of lives, deaths and corpses beyond the early modern period. *The Corpse as Text* explores and contextualizes the discrepant interpretations of the radical business of disinterment between 1700 and 1900 by those who attempted to relate to the dead. Tomaini carefully examines how the cultural exhumation of bodies, when carried out for legal, ritualistic, or scientific purposes, produced various reactions, such as disgust, horror, fascination, and emotional gratification. These exercises are worthy academic examinations, citing and analyzing examples of British engagements in successful and rejected attempts with the disinterment of figures from English history and literature, including Henry VIII, Katherine Parr, William Shakespeare, Charles I, Oliver Cromwell, and others.

At the heart of Tomaini's book is a careful analogy of the competing aspects of death that interconnect and divulge ideology, aesthetics, allure, revulsion, attraction to death, and authorial or political legacy. For each case, Tomaini isolates a pervading, bi-partite tension operating in the business and busyness of disinterment practices. The first is a desire to have the dead speak to the living once again, the second, for each historical personage to symbolize larger aspects of contemporary culture.

What Tomaini's scholarship most unearths is that the practice of disinterring the dead was necessary for re-engagement with an exceptional self – Greenblatt's idea of the Renaissance noble. Disinterment activities offered a new discourse of validation, especially about people in politics and art whom culture had determined were individuals who had composed their lives in a carefully intended manner and degree of nobleness or brilliance, or at least, how they were best remembered by their contemporaries and the rest of us ever since. If you have any inclination to study the dead, Thea Tomaini's text reminds us that the relationship between self-fashioning and aesthetic mediums was, as it remains, a reciprocal one. The study of this curious relationship is academic; Tomaini has expanded scholarship about death and textual studies.

Rena Torres Cacuollos and Catherine E. Travis. *Bilingualism in the Community. Code-Switching and Grammars in Contact*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2018. 239p.

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Bilingualism in the Community. Code-switching and Grammars in Contact is an in-depth study, likely the deepest to date, on transfer in a linguistic contact situation. Although centered on the topic of pronominal subject expression in patrimonial New Mexican Spanish in contact with English, this is, above all, an extremely rigorous methodological proposal for language contact and transfer.

Unlike English, Spanish allows for the ellipsis of the subject in most contexts, so its expression via a pronoun is not mandatory as it usually is in English. Because of this difference in optionality, pronominal subjects have been a frequent locus of research into a possible influence of one language, English, into another, Spanish, particularly in areas where English is the dominant language and has higher overt prestige. Previous studies have hypothesized that this asymmetrical contact situation should produce a transfer of English structures over Spanish. This would mean an increased frequency of pronominal subject expression vs. subject ellipsis in Spanish clauses. Several studies have counted frequencies of expressed subjects vs. non-expressed subjects in the contact variety and non-contact monolingual varieties in order to verify this hypothesis.

Torres Cacuollos and Travis challenge the assumption that this traditional approach is sufficient. Instead, they offer a much more sophisticated and considerate model to answer two basic questions: (i) is there really a change on pronominal subject use? and (ii) if there is, is it due to contact, or rather due to some internal change? The key to their approach is to not only compare the bilingual varieties to both languages as benchmarks but to do so only in those contexts where there is a real variation. The authors pay special attention to the differential amount and direction of influence of different factors in the benchmarks and target bilingual varieties. They are looking for a

“transfer of factors’ impact” (coreferentiality, previous mention, type of verb, etc.) so to speak, rather than structures frequencies. In addition, current New Mexican Spanish is compared to a previous stage of New Mexican Spanish and even to situations of direct contact during code-switching.

The book is subsequently organized according to this methodological proposal. After presenting the scope of the book and the basic tenets of the methodology in Chapter 1, Chapter 2 presents detailed characteristics of the speech community studied, bilingual English and Spanish speakers in New Mexico. Chapter 3 continues this presentation by explaining the data collection method, the corpus organization, and its tagging and segmentation in intonational units. Chapter 4 shows how a detailed collection of data led to question some dichotomies (L1 vs. L2) and highlights the need to collect some other information instead (language preference vs. language actual use, for example). Chapters 5 and 6 expose the constraints on subject expression variability in Spanish and English respectively, revealing the true nature of the languages’ differences with respect to these variants. Chapter 7 then compares current New Mexican Spanish to a previous stage of the variety as well as to the two monolingual benchmarks. The main focus is in comparing trends, that is, if the same factors influence the use of pronominal subjects vs. ellipsis in the two stages of the varieties. The next two chapters, 9 and 10, focus on the actual title of the book, code-switching, which roughly consists of changing from Spanish to English and vice versa in one’s speech. Chapter 9 deals with the theoretical and cognitive basis of code-switching types and how to read the potential results. Chapter 10 looks at the actual effects of the contact in code-switching, which are due to the alteration of factors’ proportion presences, rather than on pronouns’ frequencies or how the factors influence those. Frequencies of pronominal subject expression are then not due to a transfer, but to the difference in contexts’ and factors’ proportions as a result of a larger presence of the other language where such contexts are more frequent. The final chapter, 11, reviews all findings and gives answers to the two initial questions.

This work is a very technical one as a result of its scientific rigor. Almost every decision taken is thoroughly justified, perhaps aside from the problem with sociolinguistic interviews vs. naturalistic conversation, which is later commented upon while explaining some

results. The authors also introduce very late the main theory their book is based upon: variationist typology. It will be useful to read first their most recent paper on this (Torres Cacoullos and Travis. "Variationist Typology: Share Probabilistic Constraints Across (Non-) Null Subject Languages. *Linguistics*, vol. 57, no.1, 2019, pp. 653-92.) Assuming some theoretical and basic statistical knowledge, the book is a very interesting read for a person curious about how to study transfers in language contact, including code-switching. It is also a must-read for graduate students and seasoned researchers alike in the field of variation studies. A model to be followed, it is shaped to be a classic read in the topic, comparable, although with a different approach and results, to *Spanish in New York. Language Contact, Dialectal Leveling, and Structural Continuity* by Ricardo Otheguy and Ana Celia Zentella (Oxford UP, 2012).

Michael Wutz and Hal Crimmel, eds. *Conversations with W.S. Merwin*. U of Mississippi P, 2016. 212pp.

JASON OLSEN

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When W.S. Merwin died in March 2019, one of the essential American poetic voices of the 20th and 21st century was silenced, but *Conversations with W.S. Merwin*, edited by Michael Wutz and Hal Crimmel, allows that voice to continue to educate with wisdom, clarity, and beauty. The compilation of interviews spans the years 1956-2012 with topics ranging from his general body of work to spirituality in poetry to his opinions on poets both influential and contemporary, with so many other discussions in between. As Wutz and Crimmel write in their wide-ranging and informative introduction, these interviews show that Merwin is as "intellectually agile face to face as he is on the page." While true, *Conversations* is far different from his poems and translations; the spontaneity of the interview format allows readers to gain an understanding into the mind behind the work in a way that is otherwise not available. It also provides a comprehensive chronology of the poet's personal and creative life and a definitive bibliography, making it an essential aspect of any serious study of Merwin.

The interviews themselves are what truly make the volume special because of both the remarkable diversity of topics and their insight into Merwin's writing and overall thought process. For example,

in “Fact Has Two Faces” conducted by Ed Folsom and Cary Nelson for *Iowa Review* in 1981, Merwin is asked about his larger body of work. Merwin describes it as “one large book” containing poems that “are not merely disparate pieces with no place in the whole” (47). In a 1984 interview with David L. Elliott, he discusses a progression between his earlier and more current work: “The earlier poems seem to be more distant than what I write now. I wouldn’t like to write from such a distance” (101). Much, later, in 2009, he tells Bill Moyers, “I wanted each book to be distinct from the others...And each book was necessary to write the next one. I think they are different. I’ve always wanted, through all of them, to write more directly, and in a sense, more simply” (174). One of the collection’s great assets is how these interviews, much like Merwin’s body of work, fit together as a long form view of a life, even if all the pieces, at first glance, do not seemingly fit. It is not contradictory for him to see his body of work as “one large book” and at the same time to see the individual books as disparate from one another. The interviews illustrate an evolution of his process, as defined by his career-long movement away from distance.

These conversations further illustrate Merwin’s career-long quest for vibrancy and immediacy. When describing his process with John Amen in 2003, Merwin says, “I suppose the constant effort for me is trying to bring what I care about into the words and the writing and the electric charge of language itself, and also to convey a certain immediacy of experience” (151). His articulation of this goal of creating work that is a celebration of “immediacy of experience” with “the electric charge of language” elucidates his poems in a way that seems obvious upon revisiting his creative work, especially when reviewing several books and observing the progressions Merwin acknowledges. Although not required to appreciate Merwin’s poems, the interviews unquestionably will expand an appreciation of his process, both in terms of how he views his work and how he views the work of others.

Throughout, Merwin is asked about and speaks frankly and passionately about other poets, including teachers and mentors like John Berryman, Ezra Pound, W.H. Auden and Robert Graves, influences like Walt Whitman, Henry David Thoreau and William Carlos Williams and contemporaries such as Galway Kinnell. This helps shape a larger narrative about Merwin and how he fits into a larger discussion and context, since both his longevity and his creative evolution help serve as a link between modernism and the 21st century. These interviews solidify his own awareness of this fact and fully present him as a

conduit between poetic eras and philosophies.

While these insights into his process and philosophy are valuable, what stays most with readers is an understanding of Merwin as a person. Any serious reader of his poetry knows the humanity that defines them, but there is still something profound in reading his more candid thoughts. For instance, in light of his death, his words about humanity's place in the universe are indeed affecting:

If you think of our species as alien—what a weird idea to think that we're alien to the rest of life and the whole of the unknown universe—if you go out and look at the night sky, are you depressed, or are you exhilarated? I think it's natural to be exhilarated and to be consoled. (195)

Merwin's poetic work is absolutely representative of this idea of simultaneously being "exhilarated" and "consoled" and *Conversations with W.S. Merwin* brings that to further illumination by giving us a complete look at a seminal poetic figure through interviews that are exhilarating in their profundity and perceptiveness, and consoling for keeping this giant of letters alive through his conversation. With this book, Merwin's conversational voice stays strong and resonant.