

after five hours of the third day at the Salvation Army Thrift Store, where she leaves her mark. The old lady hits the store as if she were a hurricane, and we recognize her, and share the poet's love for her. The clothes she tries on are outlines to be filled by our imagination. When the old woman wastes away with cancer, the poet becomes her grandmother's mother, and we feel and recognize the hardship and the love of the situation. It is art that will not leave us, or leave us alone.

Nikky Finney is "more Atlantic than anything," as she writes in the poem "the Undersea World of Jacques Cousteau," possibly the best in this collection. The old Frenchman "in a tiny red bathing suit no bigger than a smile" has "something watery about him" that makes us not turn away. And the poet has "never seen a white man like him before." Cousteau pulls her "into the old water" takes her "to see his violent peaceful planet."

If you are the callous rejector of all poetry, you should right away let Nikky Finney pull you into her fresh pool of poems where you can explore her violently peaceful, old-new undersea vision of the world. It is a catch to keep.

Jan Nordby Gretlund

Odense, Denmark

William Walsh, *The Conscience of My Other Being*. Atlanta: Cherokee Publishing Company. 2005. 99 pages; \$14.95 (paper). ISBN 0-87797-313-X

Having published poetry for years in the wonderful local periodicals, fortunately still underfoot and called 'review,' but full of poems not seen before, William Walsh has earned the right to publish a collection of his poems: *The Conscience of My Other Being*. It can be read *Conscience My Other Being*, as the italics of the article and the preposition in the title indicate. The other being Walsh refers to is his imaginary life, which he employs in an attempt to find his supposedly real self. If you get the notion that the title is more trouble than it is worth and half suspect that the poet meant being 'conscious' of his other self, as the poems do *not* focus on conscience, let me assure you that the title is the least successful part of the collection.

There are four sections, the first is called "Unsophisticated Time" and has poems on being in jail, suffering from Tourettes, lying, drinking, spying, burying (a dog), wanting, dying, and "Mowing the Yard of a Woman Whose Name I Have Forgotten." The section opens by quoting Czeslaw Milosz's "Return to Krakow in 1880" to bring out an existential hopelessness, but Walsh also quotes James Dickey's "Cherrylog Road" and this is where the true ancestry of the narrative poems is revealed. His masters are Southern poets such as Robert Penn Warren, A. R. Ammons, Fred Chappell, and Ron Rash, the great storytellers. In the poem "In Anticipation of Spending Several Nights in Jail" Walsh recaptures and holds the adolescent dream of the golden girl with cheerleader moves, for whose body "time and space were invented"

But you never
spoke to her because you were some brand of farm animal.
Maybe she was so golden that one single word spoken to her

would have imploded the known universe. How many years
has it been since you saw her? Wherever she is today,
she's still golden, still wrapped in blue jeans, sparkling
white sneakers, some guy's football jacket draped over her shoulders.
She isn't gone

The celebration of women and beauty continues throughout the collection, some in a woman's voice and some with surprise endings. The opening of "Espionage" reads "Kirk, my private detective-friend,/ has helped me on occasion run license plates/ of women who've given me that look/ we all look for" And the ending of the poem about planting a personal "Want Ad" reads "Sometimes/ just driving down the road with the radio blaring out/ "Long Cool Woman in a Black Dress" is all you need./ Makes me feel like crying." This preoccupation leads, of course, into thoughts about marriage "mapped into ritual" and other bills to pay. Except for the single Civil War excursion in "The Death that Never Occurred," the first section is a humorous and delightfully sensitive tribute to that other we call woman. The final poem ends significantly with a man remembering when he was fifteen and mowed a woman's yard: "It bothers me that I have forgotten her/ name, an insensitivity equal to lying/ and moving away/ without saying good-bye"

The second section "A Darkness Touching My Skin" is longer, more family oriented, still unable to resist the slapstick, as the ending of "The Fraud Investigator Has a Vision Late One Afternoon," still humorous and more mature in looking for some kind of "truth." It is a section by the successful son, grandson, golfer, tennis player, private eye, and unsuccessful husband, who is also William Walsh. He displays his perfected art of the run-on line, much in the James Dickey tradition. "The Letter Back Home" has lines that demonstrate how the run-on line gratuitously forces the reader to entertain rival impressions at the same time:

Since being kicked out,
some dark clouds of my mystery
are lifting, but I cannot bear
to cook. Most evenings
I eat dinner at Marie's,
drink hazel nut coffee,
and pick up women since my sex
appeal to my estranged wife
is like putting on a wet bathing suit. Mostly,
I sit in the kitchen with Marcel
Dufour's daughter, Marianne,
writing a paper on the fusion
of painting and poetry.

Walsh is good at giving you the plot of a narrative poem in a few lines that are an integrated dramatic part of the poem, as in the alligator poem "The Blood Running Through Us":

Fifteen years ago, my friend
 killed himself after his little girl fell
 from his shoulders. As quick
 as it took to scream, she was gone
 as they swarmed upon her

The surprise of the collection and the poem with real political bite is called "Bless You," which is an intelligent and amusing discussion of what is politically correct and what is not, p.c. vs. n.p.c. The poem has lines of mature consideration of many aspects of modern life, including marriage: "Life/ isn't a contest/ to see who wins the Irritation Competition/in the Olympic Marital Games." A section of the poem is a satire on the political candidate, "Vote for Me, I Love Children":

Will that get me elected? If not, what will?
 I'll have my picture taken (P.C.)
 with a whole slew of kids, boys and girls: a Black, an Oriental,
 a WASP, a Chicano, a Russian (to calm the peace-niks), a paraplegic in a wheel chair,
 a Jew, a child with Downe's syndrome,
 a child feminist, kids whose mothers are members of NOW,
 and children whose father were straight
 but are now gay, some who were straight, switched to gay,
 but switched back to straight
 and now can't decide. I'll have a Southern Baptist

 ... (all of this very, very P.C.) just one
 big happy family, no hate or prejudice, just love
 of mankind. I'll change my politics (p.c.)
 to suit your agenda, you the voting masses,
 the ticket punchers, the beautiful moms
 with two kids in an SUV waltzing
 down the highway in the slow lane at fifty-five.

Other interesting discussions in the nine page satire question whether it is p.c. to take a check to the bank quickly because it was written by a Mexican; is it p.c. to say "bless you" to a pretty blonde woman; would it be p.c. to voice a "bless you" if nobody sneezed; is it p.c. to have leather seats if they were not ordered; is it all right to mention a cat, when dogs get equal time in the collection as a whole? Or would you be accused of favoritism if you thought too long on a particular animal. Does *Trivial Pursuit* discriminate against the uneducated? etc. Walsh is looking for beauty and truth, but in the last poem of the second section his conclusion about truth is decidedly un-Keatsian "... what I was searching for/ was truth, but truth is a homeless beauty/ asking for a night of comfort/ who sometimes marries into the family./ Maybe truth is just the absence/ of nothing to lie about"

The third section is my favorite, possibly because the poems cater to a reader with a short attention span. It is called "Double-Live Cowboy" and is inspired by Johnny Cash's country songs. The first poem, which is for David Bottoms, acknowledges the Cash influence in its very title "As Sunday Morning Was Coming Down," and Walsh

fortunately chooses to ignore opportunities to refer to classical poems from Virgil to Tate in order to give us a straightforward account of an encounter with a poisonous snake. "Things I Should Be in Jail for" is also in the Nashville vein: "In my home town, no one locks their doors/ when going to church. I've walked through their houses./ not touching anything, just looking, deeply smelling the fried bacon/ and coffee still lingering in the air. Then I leave"

The celebration of life is combined with the repeated regret at the loss of love and youth and the continued play with illusions, such as driving too fast, robbing a bank, being a cowboy (riding a lawnmower) "taming the West," "shooting a man and watch him bleed," watching in a barroom mirror a "silky" woman taking off her shoes, and showing a general disregard for "pretty much everything." Walsh chooses to "howl everlasting" and to be the "double-live cowboy" so the world will not "dry up in disillusionment." The double consciousness of a real life and a powerful competing imaginary life is fruitful in the western poems, such as "The Tyburn Tree," possibly the best poem in the collection (except for one line). Rarely has the US West come so convincingly alive in just a few lines:

Yellow prairie dirt
dried like sun-baked marrow
from the bones of stranded cattle
swirls across the plains
as sagebrush tumbles
past the edge of town. Horses scuffle,
branches from the tyburn tree slap
in rhythm to the wind, whispers
pass among the townsfolk.

All of which is an introduction to a man being lynched from the tyburn tree eleven lines later.

The final section of the collection is called "Thirty Minutes Before Sundown," which I take to be a mid-life sounding, in the tradition of Keats's poem "When I Have Fears That I May Cease to Be" and Barry Hannah's short story "Midnight and I Am Not Famous Yet." Walsh wallows a bit in his "sea of thrashing mnemonics," it gives rise to some rambling sentimentality, such as "the world isn't quite the same/ since Johnny Carson went off the air." This reviewer tends to agree, but Walsh is much too young and talented for this line of thinking. His sense of loneliness, rejection, and loss comes across admirably as a Skeeter Davis song, but so does his obstinate faith in love, which I predict will also be central in his forthcoming novel.

William Walsh is not a celebrated poet and whether he will be remains to be seen, but in this collection he opens his bid for fame with a whole array of worthwhile poems. "Turning Towards White" contains the lines that give title to the collection and reveals the shock of rejection that brought the poet an awareness of his other being. But perhaps more important are the lines on what poetry is to him: "... poems are all I have/ to give, not nearly/ enough to bring back/ the breathlessness of our world." The poem is a good try to do just that. "Marriage" reveals that everything is still a metaphor for love, even marriage which is a "matchbox." Walsh has a Weltian

recognition of the poet's infinite possibilities in "Room 428 at the Days Inn Hotel: Montpellier, Vermont," he deservedly celebrates his own negative capability "... Today, I can be anyone/ from anywhere .../ ... in my naked mind/ like little post-cards spread out, each an individual bed/ of beautiful scenery I could dive into/ like a heated swimming pool." And this is where Walsh is at his best, incarnating his Southern everyday by "driving down Peachtree Road toward *Brusters*."

Jan Nordby Gretlund

Odense, Denmark

Jan Nordby Gretlund, ed., *Madison Jones' Garden of Innocence*, Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2005. 207 pages; ISBN 87-7674-001-3; \$34.95 hard-cover.

With the present collection of essays under his editing hand, Jan Nordby Gretlund yet again confirms his commitment to the literature and tradition of the American South. Following his work on Flannery O'Connor, Walker Percy, and a monograph on Eudora Welty, Scandinavia's most dedicated Southerner has turned this time to Madison Percy Jones, who is, in Gretlund's view, "a central figure in American literature, but paradoxically not very well known" (7). Gretlund's aim is to remedy the lack of a book-length publication on the last Nashville Agrarian, and the collection reads, by and large, as a panegyric to Jones and his opus. Considering the date of its publication, it appears to be a Festschrift to Jones on his 80th birthday, albeit there is no explicit mention to that effect, and the book is dedicated to Shailah, Jones' wife.

Since *Madison Jones' Garden of Innocence* offers itself as the only "book of criticism" on this neglected author (8), in the following I would like to consider to what extent it accomplishes what it sets out to do. While it is commendable to bring to light unjustifiably neglected writers, such an endeavor demands a commitment that goes beyond being partial to an author. The present book is an introduction to Jones as much as it is a collection of close readings of seven of his novels. However, not all contributions are equally successful, and some unfortunately end up as detailed plot summaries, lacking not only references and bibliographies, but oftentimes also adequate critical distance to the presented material. Despite some fine analyses of individual texts, to which I will return, my primary objection is that the book does not sufficiently justify its claim to Jones' greatness as an author. Writing in superlatives demands substantiation and clarification as to what makes a writer great, and in order to sound convincing, it should be grounded in analysis. The introduction would have profited from a discussion of what makes Madison Jones "a central figure in American literature" (7), of his role as the last Agrarian, and, above all, of his function as a bridge between the Agrarians and the new generation of southern writers, which are claims the introduction makes but never fully develops, nor do subsequent essays pursue these matters.

Jones is far from the object of this study, and Gretlund more than its editor. The writer's voice is present in the form of his acceptance speech upon receiving the T.S. Eliot award for *Nashville 1864: The Dying of the Light* (1997) in 1998; in his