

recognition of the poet's infinite possibilities in "Room 428 at the Days Inn Hotel: Montpelier, 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

response to David Madden's critical essay on his prize-winning novel, which is the only reading in the whole volume that goes against the grain; and last but not least, in the interview that Gretlund conducted over a period of twenty-five years. The editor on the other hand frames the collection with the mentioned introduction and a comprehensive bibliography, which he has compiled together with Thomas Ærvold Bjerre, and in which, upon closer examination, he himself figures as the most prolific of Jones' reviewers and critics. Moreover, his essayistic contribution, a reading of Jones' *To the Winds* (1996), and the mentioned interview underscore both his central position in the Madison Jones scholarship and his close relationship to the author.

Essays in this collection are ordered according to the year of the publication of the novels they discuss, from *The Innocent* (1956) to *Herod's Wife* (2003). The four novels that have not earned essay space are nevertheless presented in the introduction and/or are taken up in the interview, making certain that Jones' entire opus receives attention. The most successful among the essays are those with a clear thesis, those that examine a specific trait or topic and provide in-depth analysis. Among these Lewis A. Lawson's "The Uncanny World of *The Innocent*," Jewel Spears Brooker's "Cleansing the House: Race and Culture in *A Cry of Absence*," and the already mentioned David Madden, "The Innocent Stare at the Civil War: *Nashville 1864: The Dying of the Light*" are the best examples.

Lawson offers a psychoanalytic reading of Jones' first novel grounded in Freud's essay "The Uncanny" from 1919. He reads the protagonist Duncan Welsh's unconscious impulses which spring out from the castration complex, that first drive him away from home to bring him back after his mother's death. Home is the site of the canny/uncanny nexus, and – following Freud's discussion of the etymology of the German word *Das Heimliche* whose primary meaning relates to home – it is also a point of attraction and repulsion with regard to family relations and sexuality. These lead the protagonist to failed love and sexual relationships, and consequently to murder and his own downfall. While this is a Freudian reading at its best, the uncanny unfortunately figures only at the level of characterization and imagery; its potential textual-stylistic trait remains outside the scope of the essay. No serious objections there, but the proposed approach could have served as a means to explain Jones' acclaimed style. Moreover, Lawson's focus on the castration complex in *The Innocent* inadvertently invites Freudian as well as feminist readings of a number of Jones' novels in which women are depicted in little favorable light. Although this may again point beyond the collection of essays in hand, aesthetics is politically and gender inflected. While Jones emphasizes the former in declaring his Agrarian/conservative credo (31, 142), his gender politics remains dubious and is unexamined.

Jewel Spears Brooker is the only woman contributor to the present volume, and her essay on *A Cry of Absence* (1971) complements Lawson's piece in its focus on home. While home is the site of familial relations, the house is its physical embodiment, and Brooker's thesis is that the house (there are, in fact, three physical structures, thus three different traditions and histories) symbolizes the inside/outside dichotomy that governs familial, cultural and racial constellations. Following René Girard, Brooker links violence – familial, thus also fraternal – with cultural developments, and exam-



ines the fall of the house of Cameron Glenn, which is grounded in an unresolved narrative and narrated dialectic on family relations, class, history, and race. The essay demonstrates Brooker's ability to come to grips with different levels of Jones' novelistic project, be they thematic, political, structural or concerning the point of view. Because its tenets extend beyond the novel in question, Brooker's essay presents an excellent methodological exercise, which could provide valuable insight into the rest of Jones' oeuvre.

I cannot do justice to all contributions, but David Madden's essay and Jones' brief response to it deserve a special mention. On the one hand it is because of a thoroughgoing critique of *Nashville 1864*, on the other because this polemic between the two fiction writers concerns the issue of politics and political correctness. Madden's opening statement – "All Madison Jones' fiction is about the Civil War" (125) – springs from his conviction that *all* Southern fiction tries to come to terms with the War and/or Reconstruction, whose aftermath is always already embedded in the social and cultural environment of the South. His overarching critique is that the view on the Civil War that the grown-up memoirist, who experienced the war as a child, records, exceeds the possible memory of a child and becomes the narrator's fascination with facts and details that belong to the world of books and grown-ups. The innocent child's gaze at the war becomes a symbol of "an innocent stare" (126), with which, Madden argues, the South as well as the North have gazed at it, assuming that the gaze, with its apparent distance to the observed, implies lack of involvement, hence innocence. Yet the most serious objection relates to the presentation of the unresolved master-slave dialectic that colors the relationship between two boys. That apparent innocence is for Madden unpardonable.

If a book of criticism is to claim its status, it should allow for critical views, favorable as well as adverse. It may well be that some of Madden's objections are too harsh, but an experienced writer must be able to accept unfavorable reviews. Although both parties have scored their points, the editor, in my opinion, should have refrained from inviting Jones' response. Why? Because a versed reader can read Madden's essay for herself and judge its flaws and overstatements, and does not need the writer's corrective. Also, by letting Jones have a go at Madden, it is obvious where the editor's allegiance lies. The fact that much of the Madden-Jones debate concerns political correctness and ways of reading indicates that both authors-cum-critics reveal their blind spots when mixing their roles. Thus the "even" of Jones' closing statement – "I have never been on a guilt-trip, politically speaking, and I try to treat all men and even women with sweet charity" (142) – confirms, at least to me, that Jones does not belong to "the party of the Politically Correct" (142), of which he seems to be proud.

I have selected the contributions that I find thought provoking and whose insights go beyond the texts they discuss. The collection as such can inspire a reader not familiar with Jones' fiction to turn to his novels later to return to the contributions' hypotheses and claims. They certainly provide food for thought.