Robertson, John E.L. ***Paducah: Frontier to the Atomic Age.*** **Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2002. 160 pp.**

This volume is a part of "The Making of America" series, an ambitious undertaking begun in 1993. The project attempts to present serially America's history, each volume devoted to a particular town or city. Professor Robertson contracted with Arcadia Publishing to write a book on the history of Paducah from the time of its founding to the present. His book contains a rather detailed narrative as well as an impressive assortment of photographs, drawings, reproductions of posters and a few early maps.

It will surprise some readers to learn that Paducah was not named for a legendary Chickasaw chief, but for a tribe that once populated the area now known as North Texas. During the first years of European settlement in that region, most of these Indians died of disease or war. William Clark, father of Meriwether Lewis Clark, named the new town on the Ohio River for the hapless tribe known as the *Padouca.*

Two of the most informative chapters deal with events in Paducah's history during the Civil War and Reconstruction. Commerce in the neutral state of Kentucky was adversely affected by temporary blockades on the Ohio River and by the threat of hostilities between Union and Confederate gunboats. One of these two chapters gives a full account of General Nathan Bedford Forrest's two forays into Western Kentucky.

After the Civil War, Paducah became a major market for dark-fired tobacco. Duke's American Tobacco Trust contracted with many growers to buy their crops at a lower price than other growers wanted to accept. A large number of protesting farmers formed a secret organization known as the Night Riders. Robertson tells of a sensational trial held in Paducah

after Robert Hollowell filed a civil suit against his brother and twenty-seven other Night Riders accused of raiding the plaintiff's home. Hollowell alleged that one of the Riders shot Hollowell's wife in the face.

One of the most detailed chapters gives an account of the devastating flood of 1937. As did most other Ohio River towns, Paducah suffered tremendous damage. Robertson relied a great deal on primary research for the material of this chapter. Information from local newspapers and personal interviews complement the detailed information from secondary sources. Before the flood waters receded, the leaders of Paducah realized that a river wall was absolutely essential, and the long process of its construction began.

Robertson outlines the rapid growth of Paducah after the Atomic Energy Commission decided to build a gaseous diffusion plant there. The Tennessee Valley Authority later built a steam-generating plant that would help supply the energy needed to produce enriched uranium. Not emphasized but mentioned are the health problems of some former employees of the gaseous diffusion plant and long-term problems of soil and water contamination associated with its operation. Some will remember Bobbie Ann Mason's *New Yorker* article of a few years back on this issue.

The chapter on politics pays due attention to "adopted Paducahan" Alben Barkley and that politician's contribution to the nation as United States Senator and as Vice President under Franklin D. Roosevelt. According to Robertson, Barkley was the first to use the phrase "a New Deal" when he spoke to the Democratic convention in Chicago in 1932. The same chapter summarizes the accomplishments of the most recent mayors of Paducah.

The book is written in a readable style that includes necessary statistical information. The content displays Robertson's firm grasp on the history of a community he knows well. Photographs presenting images from the Civil War period to the present add authenticity to the account. The index, however, could be expanded, since it includes references only to individual people and not to other important topics. This volume makes a rich contribution to "The Making of America" series.

Robert Cowser
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Forrester, R.C. with Betty Burdick Wood.
Night Riders of Reelfoot Lake: The Untold Story.
Union City, TN: Forrester and Wood, Publishers, 2001, hardback, 186 pages.

This is the story of ambitious men and their conflicting plans for the use of Reelfoot Lake. Once known as Wood Lake, this 22,000-acre scenic wonder and sportsman's paradise was created by the violent series of earthquakes from December 16, 1811, through February 7, 1812. Ownership of the lake was in doubt because of controversy between federal and state governments over land grants, but local hunters and fishermen long considered the lake to be public domain and were not about to change that opinion.

When John Carlos Burdick, a nineteen-year-old native of Illinois, heard of this natural fish hatchery, he moved near it in 1869, establishing a successful commercial fishing business at Samburg. Burdick, who was an innovator, soon developed new equipment and methods for harvesting the

bounty of Reelfoot Lake. In 1890 he established his family, home and business in Union City and became one of its leading citizens.

As early as 1853, a claim had been made by a would-be owner of Reelfoot Lake, and in 1872 a man from Obion and another from Troy purchased that claim and began to lease fishing rights. Mr. Burdick had to pay them 100 dollars a year, but many of the fishermen, extremely averse to making such a payment, organized a union to fight both Burdick and the "owners." Some of their strong-arm methods were called "White Capping" as in that practiced by hooded KKK members.

Circa 1899, J.C. Harris of Tiptonville came up with the idea of draining the shallow part of the lake by cutting a ditch and drawing down the water level by three feet. Harris used lawsuits and unfair competition to try to drive Burdick and the fishermen out of business. Harris died in 1903, but his son named Judge Harris and his associates continued these lawsuits and further plans for draining the lake. With these associates Harris formed the West Tennessee Land Company in 1907.

J.C. Burdick was compelled to lease fishing and hunting rights from the WTLC in order to stay in business. Many of the fishermen misunderstood his action to mean he had joined their enemy. The more vocal and lawless among them began to recruit secret groups of vigilantes. It is thought that as few as twenty of these "Night Riders" coerced and frightened several hundred other men into joining their band.

The first acts of violence were whippings administered to citizens living from just north of Dyersburg to Lake and Obion Counties and seemed to have nothing to do with the lake. Nor did the atrocity of October 4, 1908, have anything to do with fishing rights when a mob of thirty to forty men burned the home of a black family near Hickman, murdering four and wounding three family members.

Most of the Night Riders' fury, however, was directed toward those who opposed them on the lake. In April, 1908, a mob of about thirty-five men wearing masks and KKK white sheets burned Mr. Burdick's fish dock at Samburg and announced to 100 or so fishermen that commercial fishing was over on Reelfoot Lake.

On October 14, 1908, Judge John S. Cooper of the Ninth Chancery Court in Trenton ruled in favor of the WTLC, thus confirming its ownership of the lake. Col. R.Z. Taylor and Quentin Rankin, attorneys for the Land Company, came to Ward's Hotel at Walnut Log to meet with others who were finalizing the Reelfoot deal. Sometime around midnight on the nineteenth of October, some twenty-five night riders kidnapped the two lawyers, advising them to get fully dressed. Col. Taylor put on his hip boots. The men were taken to a tree at the edge of a slough some quarter-mile away where Rankin, aged forty-five was murdered. Col. R.Z. Taylor, aged sixty, escaped and hid in the water behind a log, which took many of the shots intended for him. When the shooting stopped, Taylor made his way across the swamp to Slough Landing, about twelve miles below Hickman. In 1975 this reviewer visited with Mr. Aubrey Watson, Sr., a robust, alert gentleman of ninety-eight years whose looks belied his age. He informed me that Mrs. Watson had been Col. Taylor's secretary during "those terrible days." It took R.Z. Taylor thirty hours to make the journey to Lake County. In fact before he arrived, he had been given up for dead.

This book tells the story which I have just outlined and continues through the trials and appeals, but it does much more than that. Mr. Forrester and Mrs. Wood have fleshed out their account with details of much local and family history and with some 100 photos and illustrations, most from the Burdick family archives. I believe that after reading this

previously "untold story," readers will have a greater appreciation for Reelfoot Lake and for the state park and game preserve which bear its name--and they just may want to view these for themselves from Fish Gap Hill.

Joe Bone
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Coleman, James W. *Black Male Fiction and the Legacy of Caliban.* Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2001. 193 pp. $45.00 cloth. ISBN 0-8131-2204-X.

James W. Coleman, a professor of English at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, says in *Black Male Fiction and the Legacy of Caliban* that American novels written since about 1970 by black men have "become increasingly more bizarre, negative, and difficult," their texts "laden by oppression instead of successfully confronting it like those written by black women." Coleman's study tries to pinpoint the features of such works that have limited their appeal and helped produce a "failure of voice" in them (1-2).

One main cause, Coleman argues, is the presence of "Calibanic discourse" as the restrictive "central feature uniting a broad range of contemporary black male texts that in other ways are very different" (1). Contending "that the contemporary black male postmodernist novel shows best an unconscious restriction of liberating voice unique for black male writers" (154), Coleman studies some "modern and postmodern novels" by John Edgar Wideman (the subject of an earlier book of Coleman's),

Clarence Major, Charles Johnson, William Melvin Kelley, Trey Ellis, David Bradley, and Wesley Brown. A late chapter looks at Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), "a novel with both modernist and postmodernist characteristics, as the chief literary influence" on these younger writers (1). The closing chapter predicts that "black male writing will continue to thrive, as it has done so far, whether or not the change occurs that would deconstruct Calibanic discourse at the fundamental level of language and semiotics" (155).

Coleman's decision not to compare recent novels by black men with those by black women is understandable, since looking at that range of foils would have doubled the scope of his study. His choice not to treat such canonical writers as Ishmael Reed and Ernest Gaines is one he addresses but leaves vaguely rationalized (1-2). Exactly why he avoids chronology in tracing Ellison's influence on younger novelists is not clear.

The terms of Coleman's study, of course, derive from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, "a symbolic and iconic text" (2) in which Prospero's daughter Miranda teaches the slave Caliban to speak her father's language. Following Wideman and others, Coleman views this imposed tongue as "patriarchal," "incriminating," and beyond the reach of Caliban because "the patriarchy controls the symbols of signification." Caliban's imperfect efforts to use English "(re)inscribe his inferiority by sounding vulgar and brutish." Further, Caliban's attempt to have sex with Miranda "(re)inscribes his savagery and bestiality." "Scholars," Coleman says, see Caliban and his predicament as emblematic of "the oppression and generally negative perception of black men and other nonwhite males" (1-2).

One must note that this figurative equation stresses Caliban's social station, not his color: Shakespeare created several black characters, but

Caliban—an ignoble savage—is not one of them.

In any case, Coleman says that both "language and nonlinguistic signs" are characteristics of "Calibanic discourse," which "denotes slavery, proscribed freedom, proscribed sexuality, inferior character, and inferior voice" (3). The inability of black, English-wielding males to "speak in an empowering voice" or "tell a liberating story," Coleman argues, operates both consciously and unconsciously but is more important in contemporary fiction as an "unconscious" limitation. One response of black male writers, as Coleman illustrates, is to have a protagonist play the "bad man," talk dirty, and brag about his sexual prowess in explicit, phallocentric terms.

Coleman's book treats a fascinating topic but has serious weaknesses.

One of these is a confusing tone. Although Coleman's thesis is that these texts show a "failure of voice," he says initially that his "assessment of black male texts is positive." In my opinion his book equivocates in defining causes for this "failure of voice." Who or what is to blame? The black authors themselves? A social or linguistic environment that leaves some real and fictive black men powerless to discover affirmative lives? Exactly *how* are the authors or their characters trapped in language and culture? Why are black men of today, generations removed from slavery, more helpless than black women? Just how does speaking English force an African-American character to boast about his penis? What, if anything, *should* black male writers be doing differently? If the paradigm of Caliban "unconsciously" governs a writer, doesn't that mean that he's not fully in control of his materials? How can that lack of control—or indeed any "failure of voice"—be "positive"?

As Coleman introduces it, Caliban's "legacy" is a two-pronged model dramatizing both linguistic and sexual behaviors. Since the *post hoc* link in *The Tempest* between the creature's poor language skills and his randy

behavior is loose at best, any writer who applies this model needs to show how the causal linkage operates.

Despite early efforts to define governing terms, another main problem in the book is its imprecise critical vocabulary. For example, no clear paradigms or chronological landmarks help a reader draw the line between "modernist" and "postmodernist" fiction, and sometimes the two appear to merge in Coleman's thinking. Confusion also results from other unclear dichotomies, including the distinction between "sexual" and "phallic" (8). Obfuscatory, too, are certain redefinitions of existing jargon—such as Coleman's use of "counter-signifying" to mean "signifying" (6) and his "flexible" appropriation of Karla F.C.Holloway's term "shift" (157-58).

At a more basic level, it becomes evident much of the writing in the book is not clear: Of all the stylistic impediments, clotted critical jargon is the worst offender. From the outset, Coleman's reader trudges through the muck of "signification" and "counter-signification" (both "conscious" and "unconscious"), "structuralist and post-structuralist principles," "black male subjectivity," "hegemonic proscription of black men," "(white) postmodernism's liberating potential," "thematized writers," "textuality," "de-centering," "anti-realist de-formation," "symbolic negation/restriction," "philosophical/religious sources of liberation," "phenomenological paradigms," "liminal spaces of freedom," "voice/style/persona," "sympathetic human(e) imagination," "intersubjectivity," "(re)inscription," "semiotics"—You name it. Such jargon more often blurs meaning than sharpens it. Stock terms are repeated like mantras, mumbo-jumbo incanted through a thick rhetorical fog.

Listen, for example, to this comment on a black character boasting to his peers about his sexual prowess: "The 'bad man' above signifies on a

black man among black men. He speaks in hyperbolic terms that coalesce with the white patriarchal phallic symbolization of power, prestige, and privilege...." (7). Such orotund academese clashes disconcertingly with the crude vernaculars of the fictional characters whom Coleman quotes.

Another feature that impedes a reader's progress in *Black Male Fiction* is a twenty-three page unit of discursive endnotes, interacting with 155 pages of text. Note 6 to the Introduction, a very short one, will illustrate how the writer hops back and forth between these two components of the book. Early on, the text proper observes that, although many black male authors intend "to redefine black men, their stories challenge (that is, contest) and compromise (that is, restrict) their own ends by reaffirming Calibanic definitions" (4). Keyed to this observation comes a note that explains, "I will use the terms challenge/contest and restrict/compromise interchangeably throughout my analysis" (157). Readers here can judge what the note probably *means*, as opposed to what it actually says.

Later, in the text proper, we still find the writer tangled in his own web of semantic "equivalents" when he spells out "...contested and restricted/negated..." (144). Similar kinds of ambiguities crop up routinely in the book, burdening a reader with lexical or syntactic puzzles.

Other habits of style that obscure meanings include slashed terms such as "restricted/negated" and "realist/modernist/postmodernist"; noun clusters such as "modernist and postmodernist African American male novels"; opaque parentheticals such as "human(e)" and "(re)inscription"; loose connectors such as "coalesce with," "essentialize," "impact" (as a verb), and "in the terms of"; and awkward possessive forms such as the ones in this sentence: "In essence, none of the thematized writers fully escapes *All-Night Visitors'* main character's vulgarity and portrayal as the

'*nigger raping a white girl!*'..." (150, quoting Clarence Major's *All-Night Visitors* 28).

Basic writing problems add further confusion to the book. These include tense shifts within plot summaries and syntactic problems with incorporated quotations (e.g., 2), as well as other loosely connected syntactic elements; pileups of doublets; passive voice; and unclear pronoun references. Incidental errors in case (e.g., "who" for "whom" [8]) and confusions in agreement (e.g., "Neither different forms and different forums nor the physical absence of black men alter the fact..." [11]) are especially bothersome in an academic book.

Sometimes Coleman's prose is fairly clear, as in this overview: "The third chapter shows that Clarence Major's first five novels are a continuous quest by black male writers to define their secularity, human self, and liberating voice through progressively self-referential narratives." A more typical generalization, however, is the much fuzzier one that opens the section on Trey Ellis: "To begin, Ellis's *Platitudes*' overall project as a novel thematizes and formally symbolizes liberation in postmodern terms; it creates an opposition between the liberating potential of its postmodernist form and the unconscious (re)inscription of Calibanic discourse" (100).

A jacket encomium by Professor Warren Carson describes *Black Male Fiction* in electrified terms: "*Phenomenal?* Yes. *Engaging?* Quite. *Seminal?* For certain. *Distinguished?* Very possibly one of the most distinguished works on this subject to have come forth this century." Academic readers who undertake their own safari through the disturbing terrain of Coleman's investigation can judge for themselves whether Carson's ecstacy or my own agony is the more supportable response.

Given Coleman's academic credentials and the initial promise of the subject, it seems doubly disappointing to me that *Black Male Fiction* is such

a page-by-page struggle to traverse, so apt it is at hiding its gleams under mires of prose. Almost from the outset I wished that Leila Salisbury—marketing manager for the University Press of Kentucky and author of a cogent broadside blurb promoting *Black Male Fiction*—had gotten the *larger* assignment of recasting Coleman's book in clear, readable English before it went to press.

Clarity is a writer's first obligation.

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Haden, Walt and Betty, Editor and Technical Editor
***New Ground*, Vol. 5, No. 1**
The University of Tennessee at Martin:
2003, 82 pages, paperback
($5.50 at UTM Bookstore or Lanzer's in Union City)

This volume of the literary journal *New Ground* contains writing by thirteen authors of various ages, backgrounds and points of view. There are short biographical comments about each writer which are good reading in themselves.

The thirty-one poems (by nine authors) are worth reading, and most of them can be understood and enjoyed even by those of us who are "poetically challenged." I have a special liking for the family-themed poems "Replay" and "Act of Grace" by Joan Gilbert and also for her short, soothing poem which follows:

Affirmative

The rain says yes and yes and yes and yes.
The rain says it will keep on falling light.

The rain says hush and hush and hush and hush.
The rain says everything will be all right.

The rain says sleep and sleep and sleep and sleep.
The rain says we'll be safe enough, tonight.

Other poems that appeal to me are "Clearing the Meadow" and "Artesian Waters" by Robert Cowser and "Old Andrew" by Lewis Hamilton.

Leading the prose selections in this volume is "The House on the Corner." This skillfully told short story by Thel Taylor begins with a pleasant nostalgia, a wish to return to a happy boyhood in 1942, but it soon progresses into a gripping tale of horror. Mr. Taylor's drawing of the house and its eerie occupant are shown on the front cover of the journal.

"The Summer of '28," an essay by Kenneth McCorkle, recalls his experiences as a six-year-old from Newbern, Tennessee, who spends a summer in Forrest City, Arkansas, and discovers a new world "across the tracks."

"Hemingway in Arkansas" is a photo-journalism piece on the Hemingway-Pfeiffer Museum in Piggott, Arkansas, by Amanda Watlington. Rosemary Janes, who retired from teaching in 1998, now serves as Education Coordinator of this museum, located in the house where she once lived several years after Ernest Hemingway wrote some of his best known books at this home of his first wife's parents.

"Growing Up in Water Valley, Kentucky" is an essay of twenty-three pages of "random recollections" by Zee W. Pique. He gives a most

entertaining account of happenings in the lives of the author, his family, friends and neighbors in and around Water Valley between 1918 and 1933. A member of the Pigue family, Zee changed his name after his service in World War II. A military clerk misspelled it on his orders, and he found it easier to legally change it to Pique than to get the U.S. Army to correct their error.

Pique's already lively stories of the people and events of his hometown have been augmented by pertinent comments by his cousin, Frances Williams Pennington, who edited and typed his manuscript.

I heartily recommend *New Ground,* Vol. 5, No. 1 as a neatly done, compact collection of entertaining and thought - provoking writings to be kept and reread.

Joe Bone
Rutherford, Tennessee

Giles, Janice Holt. *Wellspring.* Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2002

It seems fitting that this new edition of *Wellspring*, first published in 1975, was the last book published in the lifetime of Janice Holt Giles. With this anthology and legacy of her fiction, nonfiction, and personal essays, her fans inherit a full knowledge of the source of Giles' inspiration: Kentucky. She especially loved the region of Adair County, where she and her husband made their home along the banks of the Green River, only "thirty-five land miles, sixty river miles" from its source in mountain springs.

In the section called "Spout Springs," among its stories is "We Built a Log House." Here Giles recounts her and her husband's humorous, impractical, but triumphant building of their rambling log house. The core of their home was a former fishing camphouse on the Green River--a relic no one else would buy because "the fish avoided" the waters there. Eventually, following one mishap after another, the couple moved into their hard-to-heat but much-loved home, now maintained by the Giles Foundation. Not long after completing the home, Giles campaigned for the election of John F. Kennedy; the chapter "We Point With Pride" describes, among other matters, the joys and hazards of putting together a Rose Kennedy tea in a state known for its factional politics.

Giles' love for the Green River continues in her final Spout Spring chapters based upon the interviews she conducted with local riverboat captains. From these and her account of twelve hours of "piloting" a tugboat, readers understand the source and inspiration for her historical novels set along and on the Green River.

This peek into a writer's preliminary research takes the reader full circle as "Rhythm in Writing," her first essay, shares Giles' "musical ear" for rhythm, music, and euphony through the diction of her titles, sentences and name choices for characters. For the rest of us who write, she advises reading aloud what we write and using an aid she uses—a thesaurus.

The sections "Kinta" and "Kentucky" further reveal the broad range of Giles' tone. She can share the poignant coming of age of a girl in the short story "The Gift" or of a boy in "When the 'lectric Come to the Ridge." In "The Gift," however, Giles comes close to the maudlin and to logic that is questionable: It is hard to believe that a nine-year-old child would have the maturity of insight Giles shows in this girl. Little Sally should have been a trifle older or the story slightly shorter—by a good half

page. However, this story's writing style is poetic, as "Kentucky" is in her measured, carefully cadenced essay about a state whose citizens, she says, have lost their former rhythm but "have not yet found another to which we can step confidently."

Humor and playfulness go into the telling of "Tetch 'n Take," the fictionalized account of a Giles ancestor. Placing his false teeth under the mule's saddle, he sends his rival for the hand of the "Widder Shanks." In "Dear Sir" Giles weaves both satire and humor into the letters of a mountain woman who ponders heartache and guineas in her correspondence to an IRS agent. "Wilderness Road" is a sobering retelling of the Daniel and Rebecca Boone story, particularly of the personal sacrifice they made to open up Kentucky. Only occasionally does Rebecca seem too good and too self-sacrificing to be true.

Overall, Giles is an entertaining storyteller in these eighteen chapters and 262 pages. To truly understand the sources of Giles' love and passion for the state of Kentucky--and for writing itself--you will want to read *Wellspring*.

Nelda Rachels
Palmersville, Tennessee

Macheski, Cecilia, ed. ***Quilt Stories: A Collection of Short Stories, Poems, and Plays.*** **Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 2001. 304 pages. $19.95. Paperback.** **ISBN 0-8131-0821-7.**

In a special exhibit during Fall 2002 at the Museum of the American Quilter's Society in Paducah, artist and quilter Phyllis Stephens exhibited a work entitled "A Piece of My Soul." This quilt shows a woman quilting, complete with real needle and patchwork. The quilt with its soul-searching title captures the attention of appreciative viewers even as Cecilia Macheski's art captures readers in *Quilt Stories: A Collection of Short Stores, Poems, and Plays.*

Each piece in this collection uses quilts or quilting as both subject and theme. Macheski's anthology of short stories, poems, and plays by such writers as Bobbie Ann Mason, Alice Walker, Joyce Carol Oates, Sharyn McCrumb, Marge Piercy, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and many others is a patchwork of twenty-eight pieces in five complementary sections. This collection of literary treasures forms a "quilt of words," as Macheski herself suggests in the insightful introduction.

The five sections are arranged thematically: "Memory Blocks" (stories of remembrance and meaning), "Double Wedding Ring" (stories of community and courtship), "Radical Rose" (stories of struggle and change), "Wheel of Mystery" (stories of murder and mystery), and "Old Maid's Ramble" (stories of age and wisdom). These diverse stories celebrate quilts, the quilting process itself, and women's lives. Ranging in time from approximately 1845 to the present, *Quilt Stories'* emotional depth and diversity form an intricate pattern of word symbols.

"The Patchwork Quilt" opens "Memory Blocks." Its anonymous writer, a young woman, leaves her rural home in 1845 to work in a Massachusetts cloth mill. Writing to relieve some of her loneliness, she focuses upon the treasured quilt that holds the history of her life: the tangible pieces of her childhood dresses and dreams, the stories in cloth of her mother's long-suffering patience and the pieces of fabric that reflect the writer's own transition into adulthood. As she holds her quilt, she is filled "with all its memories of childhood, youth, and mature years; its associations of joy, and sorrow, of smiles and tears; of life and death" (15).

Four poems follow this moving story and help readers deepen their appreciation of the scope of this anthology's literary quilt pieces. Marge Piercy's "Looking at Quilts" proves *"The love of the ordinary blazes out: the backyard / miracle: Ohio Sunflower,/ Snail's Track, / Sweet Gum Leaf, / Moon over the Mountain"* (20). Each quilt pattern captures an image and story of a woman who created quilts, who seized "her time and made new" (21).

Through these poems and stories, readers begin to think of how, as Joyce Carol Oates writes, "By squares, by inches, hour and hour, the great quilt grew' (22). As these quilts grew in size, the stories grew with them and around them; in Pauline Jiles' moving short story entitled "My Grandmother's Quilt," readers sense deeply the power of quilters to record human history. In their Missouri setting the two indomitable sisters Dale and Lula Belle are shuffled from one sad situation to another. Though their mother dies when they are both very young, Lula Belle will hold onto a fragile existence by beginning a quilt:

> Lula Belle takes up the scissors and cuts carefully into an old dress that had been given them by the church. "You know what," she says. "I'm going

> to make a quilt myself, and make it out of old patches from everybody's clothes so that you can see all the stories in it" (34).

Through Lula Belle's determination to make a quilt, she finds a way for the girls to survive disappointment, despair, and poverty:

> "Of the rags and tatters of the poor, the humble, the dispossessed and the hanged one, thou shalt make quilts, and these will tell their stories time without end, and protect thee with stories, even though the earth shall burn and the heavens be rolled up like a scroll" (53).

In a triumph of life and love, Dale, at her own wedding, tears off a flounce of her wedding dress for Lula Belle's quilt.

Among the many treasures of this fine volume is Alice MacGowan's most delightful short story "Gospel Quilt." Here readers meet Keziah, creator of a somewhat bizarre gospel quilt: Though the vision for the quilt comes to Keziah in a dream, her six-year-old "spoiled" daughter Mary Ann Martha is not so much a spiritual gift as she is a handful for everyone. Part of the pleasure of reading this story comes from the storyteller's voice: "The quilt was always at hand to bring out if there was trouble, or if someone needed to be overawed" (149). The intricate plot, which involves a theme of thwarted love, unfolds at molasses-making time, and the crisis comes when Mary Ann Martha decides to give Adam, Eve, and even the Snake--whose likenesses appear on the precious quilt—a generous sampling of sticky molasses! Mary Ann Martha explains what happened: "Give Eads some...and the--ol snake licked out his tongue, and I must put a teenchy-weenchy bit on it. Nen Adam, he's mad 'cause he don't get none; an--Mammy...has I ruinated the gospel quilt?" (157). In this story, all ends

well with the successful restoration of the quilt and with an untwisted love now carefully retied.

From stories about gospel quilts to classic short stories such as Alice Walker's "Everyday Use," Susan Glaspell's one-act play "Trifles," and Sharyn McCrumb's excerpt from her novel *The Hangman's Beautiful Daughter,* Cecilia Macheski's book is not limited only to readers interested in quilts. The audience for *Quilt Stories* will be those, indeed, who love language, stories, history--people who create art from the work of their hands and hearts.

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