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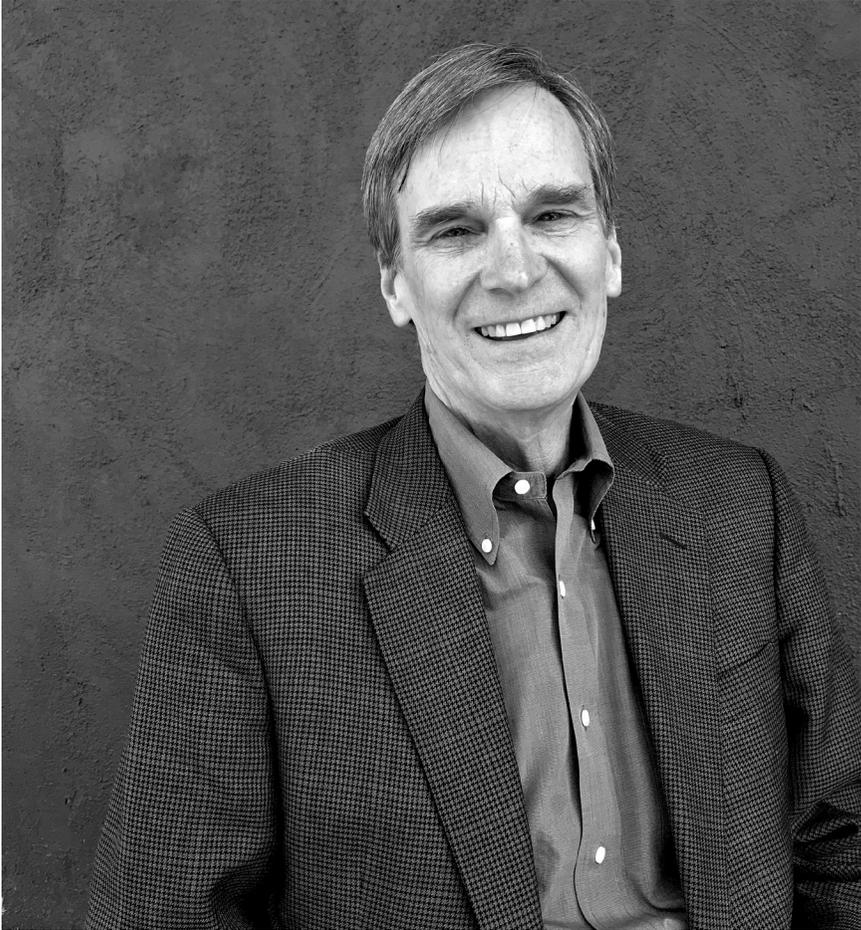
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Author Berkley Hudson (Courtesy of University of North Carolina Press)

The Jim Crow South in Pictures, but Not Many Words

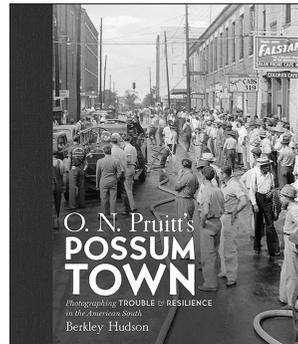
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O. N. Pruitt's Possum Town: Photographing Trouble and Resilience in the American South by Berkley Hudson. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2022. Photographs. Selected Bibliography. List of Photographs and Illustrations. Index. Hardcover, 272 pages. USD\$49.95.

In *On Photography*, Susan Sontag said, “Photographs furnish evidence.”¹ The evidence in Berkley Hudson’s *O. N. Pruitt’s Possum Town: Photographing Trouble and Resilience in the American South* is forty years’ worth of a small town’s early twentieth-century life, captured by its “picture man,”² Otis Noel Pruitt. The town in question is Columbus, Mississippi, and the images range from the mundane to the extraordinary, from the tame to the shocking, all taken in the segregated South and documenting the lives and deaths of Columbus residents, both black and white. Hudson, a native of Columbus, began curating this collection as a decades-long labor of love. He hoped it would accurately represent life as it *really was* in this small Mississippi town just west of the Alabama border. That Hudson achieved that goal is attested by the editors of the Documentary Arts and Culture Series of Duke University’s Center for Documentary Studies, to which *O. N. Pruitt’s Possum Town* is a 2022 addition. They describe the photographs and Hudson’s accompanying narratives as “stand[ing] as a visual record and expression of wider truths about the cultural history of the American South.”³

Columbus, a town best known as the birthplace of playwright Tennessee Williams,⁴ was nicknamed Possum Town after the man who ran a trading post on the site and who, according to legend, looked like a possum.⁵ As for Pruitt, he was not only a commercial photographer, taking wedding photos and family portraits, but also a photojournalist when the occasion called for it. Hudson, the son of local business owners, said his task was “to bring to public light these visual stories of trouble and resilience”⁶ that Pruitt captured on film. Hudson had more than 88,000 surviving negatives to select from,⁷ leaving him with an even greater task of uncovering/recovering stories behind the images. In this, his efforts find only partial success because



Pruitt, who took some remarkably good pictures, kept remarkably bad records. Thus, the bulk of the book's photographs possess little contextual information, their history lost. From portraiture to fox hunts to town disasters like fires and floods to at least one horrific lynching, Pruitt shot it all, capturing what James Agee called the "normal predicaments of human divinity."⁸ But, as in the case of the lynching photograph discussed later, they also left a visual record that Sontag would say "incriminates"⁹ Columbus for its part in Jim Crow violence and social injustice.

In considering a book like this, it is worth returning to Agee, who called *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* "the effort . . . to recognize the stature of a portion of unimagined existence, and to contrive techniques proper to its recording, communication, analysis, and defense."¹⁰ Agee and Walker Evans worked separately in that effort. And, for most literary journalism scholars, Agee's prose became the object of their analysis, with Evans's photographs seemingly an interesting, visual addendum. Regardless, the book challenged readers and critics to accept this amalgamation of the written and visual. A 1941 *Time* magazine review called it "the most distinguished failure of the season," recognizing that it was "an experiment in communication: 'an attempt to reproduce and analyze the actual.' Its medium: 32 photographs by Walker Evans and a 471-page commentary by James Agee. Subject: the life of three Alabama cotton tenant families, with whom the authors spent several weeks (as "spies") in the summer of '36."¹¹ Likewise, Hudson's book can be considered his and Pruitt's "experiment in communication" and, given that literary journalism scholars are becoming more expansive about what they see as worthy of study, it merits review. (Graphic nonfiction works, like Art Spiegelman's *Maus* or Joe Sacco's *Palestine*, for example, are recognized as legitimate examples of literary journalism, as are song lyrics and poetry. Certainly, visual media must be considered, too.)

"Photographs are portals to the imagination, and vessels of elusive truths," Hanno Hardt observed.¹² Thus, a photograph can be, on its face, one thing while belying deeper, hidden meanings. In photographs, we often see what we want to see and bring our own truths to interpretations of images. That is how I approached Hudson's book, relying less on his narratives about the photographs and more on the photographs themselves to imagine stories about their subjects. Pruitt's photographs of the everyday, the mundane, had me thinking most about the stories behind the faces, wondering what happened to these people. On pages 119 and 120, for instance, two basketball teams pose. In one, six young women from Columbus's Hunt High School's basketball team stand smiling for the camera. They are black. On the following page, ten others from Macon High School, about 30 miles south of Columbus, do the same. They are white. I assume that the young women from Hunt High School lived different, harder lives than the young women from Macon High School. This was Jim Crow South, after all. Whether I am right I will never know because the only information about that photograph is that it was taken "circa 1950s."¹³ No other captions or notes are provided. What is clear is that my own knowledge of that time fed directly into my interpretation of what I thought of the lives those Hunt High School athletes had. What were they thinking? What happened to them?

Another photo presents the casually posed image of a young, black man sitting

on a barrel and holding a broom.¹⁴ He is professionally lit, and the camera captures a face that exudes sweet gentleness. Hudson provides backstory here, revealing that the young man's name was Oscar West, known as "Humpy," and he worked as the "cleanup boy" for a local car dealership. Hudson learns West's story from a ninety-plus-year-old member of the family that owned the dealership. She describes West as an "honest, good soul," which is what the photograph conveys. Hudson's source connected him to one of West's children, a son who had never seen the photograph and had no knowledge of why Pruitt took it. As the man "looked at his father," Hudson wrote, "he cried."¹⁵

For his photojournalism, Pruitt was in demand. In July 1935, he received a call from the sheriff, notifying him of the lynching of two black men. At the scene outside of town, Pruitt saw the bodies of Bert Moore and Dooley Morton hanging from a tree. The two had been "accused of harassing a white woman."¹⁶ This photograph,¹⁷ this record of incrimination, assumed another gruesome life on a postcard. The preeminent African-American newspaper the *Chicago Defender* also published it, noting, "as long as our white citizens insist upon . . . taking such pictures as these to sell as souvenirs of their barbarity, it is our duty to present them to you."¹⁸ Hudson explains how, years later, a black woman approached him, wanting a copy of it, telling the author that she heard about the lynching and how her husband, then a five-year-old child, remembered seeing the hanging bodies. After speaking with Hudson, the woman refused his offer to give her a print of the photograph. Research failed to find any surviving relatives of either Moore or Morton.

As appalling as the lynching photograph is, another, a photograph of a black man's final moments before his hanging outside of the county courthouse, elicited greater pathos in me. This condemned man, James Keaton, looks directly into the camera with a slight grimace or smile and a pleading look of disbelief.¹⁹ "Under the best of circumstances, photographs constitute a conspiracy of purposes," Hardt observed, "without knowledge or understanding the social or cultural context in which they are always created, photographs may seem deceptively simple visual expressions, or else they become intricate and complicated observations of individuals with particular insights into biography and history."²⁰ We do not know why Keaton was to be hanged, but the photograph shows him, in the last minutes of his life, surrounded by grim-looking white men. It is a haunting image, but an incomplete one. About this, Stuart Culver observed that a photograph "comes into being as a fragment violently cut out from a larger whole and never complete in itself."²¹

So, if the book suffers, it is because the majority of photographs, like this one or the women's basketball players, appear as story fragments with no context, no narrative of the story behind the image. While the book provides a list of photographs, for the most part, they are without the "off-frame world that hovers around the edges of the picture."²² Some readers might find this off-putting. For me, however, once I accepted this limitation, I was free to supply the "off-frame world," construct my own narratives about the photographs of the faces and places in this town.

This is a beautifully bound, coffee-table-ready book for which the University of North Carolina Press took great care in the publishing. The 194 pages of photographs

fill the majority of the book's 272 pages. There is an organizational problem, however, as the photographs appear randomly placed, in no particular order or chronology, leaving the viewer to make order out of them. Perhaps Hudson intends to let this sweeping visual record speak for itself or, perhaps, he had no choice thanks to Pruitt's exiguous records. The narrative components, when they appear, are written in clear and deliberate fashion. While it is tempting to compare these to Agee's in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, it cannot be done. Agee was writing about his own lived experiences in that book, of course, whereas Hudson can only surmise what a dead photographer was thinking or feeling as his camera's shutter snapped. In a somewhat satisfying way, the lack of accompanying narratives and seemingly random photographic placement work in the book's favor because the images are the focus. Importantly, what this visual record reveals, and *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* did not, is the everyday lives of Possum Town's black community, who are always a part of a Southern town's life and should have been visible in the Agee-Walker book but were mostly in the background. Here, they share the foreground, which, according to Hudson, would have been unusual for a Southern white man like Pruitt to do this because it might have been seen as going against Jim Crow's racial order in creating such normal representations of black lives.²³ His portraits gave his subjects dignity, grace, and "resilience." While no evidence from Pruitt explains his intentions, his photographs suggest that he saw grace and beauty in all his subjects, black and white.

Finally, can this book be of interest to literary journalism scholars? Perhaps not in any conventional sense, but, if the scholar can accept what Hudson, a former magazine and newspaper editor and now emeritus associate professor of journalism, intended in this "photobiography"²⁴ of a small-town Southern photographer, it should. Columbus, Mississippi, was not Mayberry, North Carolina, and this visual review of its life shows that it was not. Still, these pictures let the reader/viewer know that black people and white people did live together, and most people—black and white—were just trying to get by as best they could, going to the grocery store, going to the dance, going downtown. Sontag remarked that:

photographs alter and enlarge our notions of what is worth looking at and what we have a right to observe. They are a grammar and, even more importantly, an ethics of seeing. Finally, the most grandiose result of the photographic enterprise is to give us the sense that we can hold the whole world in our heads—as an anthology of images.²⁵

While this particular "photographic enterprise" shows but a small piece of the world, it is an important piece for U.S. citizens, letting them know that, even at a difficult and dangerous time for many of their fellow citizens, grace and happiness was also within their reach.

Notes

- ¹ Sontag, "Plato's Cave," 5.
² Hudson, *O. N. Pruitt's Possum Town*, 1.
³ Dilworth, Hogan, and Rankin, "Editors' Note," xviii.
⁴ Hudson, *Possum Town*, 3.
⁵ Hudson, "Suqua Tomaha or Possum Town," in *Possum Town*, xvi.
⁶ Hudson, *Possum Town*, 2.
⁷ Hudson, 3, 5.
⁸ Agee and Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, xiv.
⁹ Sontag, "Plato's Cave," 5.
¹⁰ Agee, preface to *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, xiv.
¹¹ "Experiment in Communication," unsigned review of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, 104.
¹² Hardt, "Constructing Photography: Fiction as Cultural Evidence," 476.
¹³ Hudson, *Possum Town*, 119.
¹⁴ Hudson, 53.
¹⁵ Hudson, 51–52.
¹⁶ Hudson, 154.
¹⁷ Hudson, 161.
¹⁸ Hudson, 155.
¹⁹ Hudson, 160.
²⁰ Hardt, "Constructing Photography," 477.
²¹ Culver, "How Photographs Mean: Literature and the Camera in American Studies," 191.
²² Culver, 191.
²³ Hudson, *Possum Town*, 1.
²⁴ Hudson, 1.
²⁵ Sontag, "Plato's Cave," 3.

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A Triple Catastrophe Leavened by Beauty and Pleasures

Ganbare! Workshops on Dying

by Katarzyna Boni. Translated from the Polish by Mark Ordon. Rochester, New York: Open Letter, 2021. Sources. Paperback, 296 pp. USD\$16.95.

Reviewed by Beth Holmgren, Duke University, United States

Katarzyna Boni (1982–) represents a new cohort of female Polish reportage writers who now travel as widely in pursuit of their subjects as their male counterparts have for decades. Boni’s first book marks this change in progress: *Kontener* (Container, 2014), which examines the lives of Syrian refugees in Jordan, was coauthored by Boni and Wojciech Tochman (1969–), a well-established reportage writer whose work has led him to the Philippines, Rwanda, and Cambodia. Thereafter, Boni’s solo debut, *Ganbare! Workshops on Dying* (2016), emerged from the several years she spent traveling and doing research in Japan, where, according to her website, she tracked the aftermath of the March 11, 2011, earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi plant. As Boni explains in lieu of a preface, *Ganbare!*—a Japanese exhortation rendered as “Give it your all! Hang in there! Fight! You can do it!”—is “the most commonly repeated word in Tōhoku, the northwestern region of Japan destroyed by the tsunami” (5), featured on billboards, in the press, and public speeches. Boni’s *Ganbare!*, tempered by its sobering subtitle, is at last available to English-language readers in Mark Ordon’s superb translation. The Polish edition netted its author the 2017 Gryfia Prize, a Polish national literary award for women writers.

Boni’s coverage of Japan’s “triple catastrophe” (269) is a remarkable achievement—carefully contextualized, masterfully plotted, and stylistically deft. In contrast to reportage writers who organize thematic mosaics of unattributed quotations from their interviews with witnesses and survivors, Boni strives for a clearly embodied, sensorily rich, regionally attuned presentation of how the Japanese in Tōhoku experienced these catastrophes and coped with their psychological and material losses. In her acknowledgments, the Polish writer thanks a wide variety of Japanese experts and volunteers who helped her in this process, from directing her to specific witnesses to translating copious interviews (269–75). It is as if Boni, an “avid scuba diver,” (<https://katarzynaboni.com/en/about-me/>) has opted to make selective deep dives into topics and stories accompanied by an experienced cohort who know the murky terrain very well.



First and foremost, Boni immerses her readers in the religious culture of northwestern Japan, with its distinctive views on the relationship between the living and the dead. She sets the stage in her brief first chapter, evoking summer nights in Japan's isolationist Edo period (1603–1867) when locals gathered around low tables lit by a hundred candles to play “A Hundred Tales of Horror.” Cooled by the night air and accompanied by “croaking frogs and buzzing cicadas,” each teller of a terrifying ghost story would blow out one candle after their turn: “People believed that the ghosts would appear in their midst when the last candle went out” (11). Lest we dismiss this scene as a parlor trick, Boni's later chapters elaborate on Japanese belief in the importance of the dead's proper burial in order to shut the gate between living and dead (70–74) and Japanese fears about ghosts who may be caught between the two worlds because their bodies have not been found, or they left unfinished business in life, or their loved ones cannot let them go (134–35). Boni relates these beliefs and fears, as well as the existence of *kami* or local deities worshipped in Shintoism, *kami*—local deities worshipped in Shintoism—as matters of fact, without skepticism or sarcasm. She lists the Japanese names for the *kami* and entire categories of ghosts; she meticulously itemizes their physical attributes and superpowers.

Boni also familiarizes readers with the history and landscape of Tōhoku, considered the “back coast” by those in Tokyo, “an agricultural region which has been said to supply the capital with rice, soldiers, and prostitutes” (39). Resisting Tokyo's condescension towards its provincial supplier, she harks back once more to the Edo period, when the famous haiku poet Matsuo Basho finally dared to visit the wild, ungovernable, incomprehensible North in 1689. Boni imagines his reaction through her own observations: “. . . words cannot convey all the views, all the vast spaces, branches twisted in the wind, deep valleys, gentle slopes, forest trails, ragged shoreline, bamboo groves, rice fields in shades of neon green, the stone *torii* gates hidden between the trees, which lead to the Shinto shrines where the *kami* live” (63).

Ganbare! Workshops on Dying is divided into two sections relatively equal in length, followed by a short epilogue that at long last introduces us to the experience of its subtitle. The first section focuses on the tsunami's destruction of people, animals, towns, and forests, and the frantic, and eventually dogged responses of the survivors (11–135). Its chapters portray the desperate hunt for human remains in the sodden wreckage of buildings and deep down on the seafloor; the cherished recovery of objects that attested to the dead's past before the tsunami swept away all its traces (cellphones, business cards, damaged photographs); the survivors' relocation to temporary housing built with plastic windows and shared metal walls that kept out neither sound nor cold; and the efforts of monks from all sects and schools to help the despondent displaced get back on their feet by setting up mobile coffee shops and inviting survivors to complain, talk, and, eventually, grieve.

Boni cleverly shifts from tsunami-related tales to the second section's stories about nuclear power and disaster by revisiting the 1954 screen debut of Godzilla, the monster who breathes fire, shakes the ground, and feeds on radiation. She provides a brief history of Japan's eventual embrace of atomic power energy plants roughly a decade after the U.S. bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. A chapter titled sim-

ply “Boom!” plays out the intense five-day drama—enhanced by inserted dates and times—of the tsunami’s unexpectedly deadly impact on the Fukushima Daiichi power plant, the consequent meltdown of three nuclear reactor cores, and the release of a radiation cloud that affected villages in a forty-mile radius. Given that the Japanese government and the Tokyo Electric Power Company were long reluctant to disclose this information, Boni’s subsequent account relies extensively on the testimony of activist Kenta Satō. (In her acknowledgments, Boni notes that she talked for more than twenty hours with her obliging source.) Satō loved his village of Iitate in the Tōhoku region and planned to raise a family there so that his kids could relive his own golden childhood. After March 11, 2011, however, he quickly educated himself about becquerels and sieverts, decided to sign up for a Twitter account, and began posting that Iitate and its famous produce, dairy, fish, and wildlife were poisoned by nuclear fallout (203). When Boni met him, Satō had been serving nonstop as a witness about what was happening—at conferences, seminars, workshops, and on radio and television. He longed to found a museum about the nuclear disaster so he would “no longer have to talk about it” (206). (The Great East Japan Earthquake and Nuclear Disaster Memorial Museum was opened in September 2020 in the town of Futaba.)

It bears noting here that the grim, painful aftermath of the triple catastrophe Boni represents in *Ganbare!* is also leavened by her attraction to Japanese beauty and pleasures, and her appreciation for her colleagues’ vivacity and generosity. To a large extent, these feelings shape her choice of narrative construction and style. For example, in both sections, Boni mourns loss with a similar rhetorical format in which her sensorily indulgent evocation of what *was* overwhelms the austere sentence(s) declaring its erasure or contamination. In the first section, the city of Rikuzentakata is richly remembered and summarily canceled (13–15). In the second section, her description of the village of Iitate elicits a natural paradise that we are more likely to remember than the evil, time-limited spell of its radioactivity.

Hillsides, mountain streams, green rice fields, and river rapids in valleys. Wild boars, monkeys, and deer. The air filled with the scent of grass from pastures. Wooden houses with tatami mats and sliding paper walls. Even the cell-phone network was poor here. If you wanted to talk to a neighbor, you would take a walk through the woods rather than pick up the phone. Iitate. One of Japan’s most beautiful villages. But you’re not allowed to visit it. (192)

Perhaps most moving are Boni’s chapter-long recordings of Japanese interviewees to whom she cedes the microphone. Boni’s most charismatic subject in the first section is Grandma Abe, the woman who runs the temporary fish market in Onagawa after the tsunami. Boni, the reporter, functions solely as Grandma Abe’s guest—plied with the best seafood delicacies along with Abe’s emphatic suggestions on how to prepare them. Here, local food and food culture show Boni (and us) how a resourceful woman is reviving her devastated world and urging customers to savor one consumable pleasure of life. In the second section, an elderly group of *hibakusha* (those who survived the Hiroshima and Nagasaki blasts) treats Boni to the best food and drink in a restaurant, pairing different sakes with delicious hors d’oeuvres (142). Their eager recommendations and consumption at once enable and form an essential

counterbalance to the horrific memories that they almost casually interject between placing more orders.

In the de facto epilogue that introduces section 3 of *Ganbare!*, Boni includes us in a workshop on dying, an exercise in which we symbolically cast off the things, places, activities, and people we most cherish as we absorb a monk's chillingly realistic account of our dying up to the point of death. Yet the many stories that Boni has related, recorded, and arranged for us in her marvelous book perhaps have prepared us to offer well-considered answers to the monk's final questions: "You did not die. That was not your last breath. So what will you do with your life? And what will you do with the twenty treasures that are most important to you?" (264).

A Literary Journalism Master Collects His Work

The Detective: And Other True Stories

by Walt Harrington. The Stacks Reader Series. Sager Group, 2021. Paperback, 116 pp. US\$14.99.

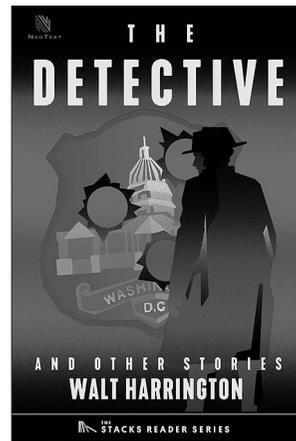
Reviewed by Nancy L. Roberts, University at Albany, State University of New York, United States

Anyone who has taught literary journalism and magazine and feature writing over the past twenty-five years knows Walt Harrington's germinal textbook, *Intimate Journalism*, as a bible for students of longform writing. Harrington is a master craftsman who worked both as a staff writer for the *Washington Post Magazine* and as a University of Illinois professor (and head of the journalism department). To the ten books he has written or edited, Harrington now has added this gem, a collection of eight of his *Washington Post Magazine* pieces from 1986 to 2011 that stand the test of time.

Dedicated "to the memory of Matt Harrington, my son and my friend," the book will inspire both students of literary journalism and practitioners alike. It's hard to identify a single favorite in this anthology because the subjects are equally compelling and the research and writing impeccable. "The Detective" gives a fascinating, inside view of a black homicide cop's daily challenges, evoking not only the hard physical work of investigating murder cases, but its concomitant mental and emotional drain: "His numbed heart is but an early warning" (23).

In "The Reverend Comes Home," a final illness brings an aged, once-powerful community icon into the care of his daughters. Harrington gives us a finely limned picture of the way of all flesh. Unavoidably we must face the "bittersweet blessing" (77) represented by the older generation's demise, a kind of rehearsal for our own.

"The Mystery of Goodness" explores the Christian agape that propels a young Harvard Law School graduate, Bryan Stevenson, to forsake money and prestige to rescue those sentenced to the death penalty. "The people who end up on death row are always poor, often Black," Stevenson tells Harrington. "And almost always they had bad lawyers—real estate lawyers who never handled a capital case and who had to be dragged screaming into the courtroom. In one case, the judge actually sent the defense lawyer out to sleep off a drunk" (59). But it's not just simple outrage at racial and economic inequalities that motivates this young lawyer. Harrington's multifac-



eted investigation concludes that the lawyer's compassion and decency flow from a cavernous well of spirituality. Stevenson's "deepest mission . . . is not to save the lives of convicted men, but to live in such a way that his own life is a question posed to others" (73).

"Born to Run" and "Dubya and Me" explore the lives of the forty-first and forty-third presidents of the United States, respectively. The first begins:

George Bush is a political phenom in reverse. He has made a life of mythic proportions seem somehow trivial, and he cannot understand why. He was the most lovable boy, always. President of his class at prep, president of everything else, too. Never a bad word about him. A war hero—not like John Kennedy, but an undisputed war hero. Skull and Bones, Phi Beta Kappa at Yale. Cushy job offers up the ying-yang. George said no. He packed his wife and infant son into an old, red Studebaker and hit the road for god-awful, rough-necking West Texas—and drilled a fortune in black gold. Then Congress, the U.N., China, the CIA, Saint Reagan's weep. Most Americans view him darn favorably too, according to the pollsters. So why the mean quips? "There's no there there." Why the David Letterman gag lines? Why the *Doonesbury* attack on his manhood?" (123–24)

Profiling the Bushes and other figures such as Jesse Jackson, Rosa Parks, and Jerry Falwell over the years has undoubtedly led Harrington to this perspective on history, that it "is composed of significant and less significant moments, the trouble being that we often don't know at the time which is text and which is footnote. Yet when it comes to presidents, even footnotes are worth recording" (148). His nuanced profile of "Dubya" benefits from this scrupulous fact-gathering.

"A Narrow World Made Wide" communicates the complex mystery of artistic creation as practiced by Rita Dove, a former U.S. poet laureate. Step by step, Harrington reveals Dove's creative process: "Rita is loose now, playing—with words, images, punctuation, enjambment and stanza size. She writes a line, walks out onto it, looks ahead, continues or steps back, tries another. For the first time, she can hear the rhythm of her poem before its words are written, as in a song that doesn't yet have lyrics" (44). Here Harrington gives us a most insightful account of literary creation, illuminated by his personal understanding of the craft of writing.

Aptly, Alex Belth's introduction to the book starts with this quotation from Harrington's book, *Artful Journalism*:

The artfulness required to do intimate journalism is not mostly a God-given skill, but craft. It's crucial to think that way. Otherwise, we make the mistake of assuming that some people just have the knack. Some people do have the knack, but much of artful journalism, whether or not it is about ordinary people, is simply hard work. (xxi)

Sage advice indeed, especially for our students who struggle to realize their own agency as writers.

Both learners and masters of literary journalism will find much of interest in Belth's introduction, a Q&A interview with Harrington that begins with his description of his high-school self as "kind of a knucklehead," until the school newspaper adviser asked him to succeed as editor his successful older sister (xxvii). That first

interested him in writing, though he first studied sociology in college, eventually earning a master's degree in that subject, followed by another in journalism. Harrington recounts early influences from reading *Esquire* and *Rolling Stone* and writers such as Jimmy Breslin, Hunter Thompson, Gay Talese, Tom Wolfe, and Joan Didion. Also key to his development was David Halberstam's work, especially *The Best and the Brightest*, as well as Robert Caro's *The Power Broker* and Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein's *Final Days*. "Reading these books I realized that journalism could be more than bureaucratic political coverage; it could actually be unraveling the human dimensions of power politics and policy" (xxviii).

The final piece, dating from 1987, showcases Harrington's multifaceted talent in a moving essay on fathers and sons. Here, he shares what he calls "a startling insight: If I am still resolving my feelings about my father, then when I was a boy my father was still resolving his feelings about his father" (173). As Harrington demonstrates, this generational tie is durable and influential.