



RED
CEDAR
REVIEW 2012

ANNUAL NEWSLETTER OF THE
TENNESSEE LITERARY PROJECT
MIDDLE TN STATE UNIVERSITY



RED CEDAR REVIEW 2012

The Eastern Redcedar became the official evergreen tree of Tennessee on March 13, 2012, when Governor Bill Haslam signed into law a bill approved the same year by the state legislature.

The tree flourishes across the entire state, gets along well with others, and usually is not found alone, preferring the company of pine, sassafras, hickory, oak, maple, beech, and walnut.

The Redcedar's fruit—a berry-like cone that appears first as light green before maturing into blue—is consumed by many animals, including robins, waxwings, turkey, starlings, crows, rabbits, foxes, squirrels, skunks, opossums, and raccoons.

Sparrows, juncos, mockingbirds, deer, and owls use the dense foliage for cover and nesting; even earthworms do well in cedar groves because the tree changes the chemical composition of the soil, making it healthier.

Red Cedar Review, the newsletter of the Tennessee Literary Project at Middle Tennessee State University, is published annually in the summer. Editor: Randy Mackin, Randy.Mackin@mtsu.edu.

TENNESSEE
Literary
PROJECT » MTSU
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The Tennessee Literary Project

By KARA WILSON

TLP Student & Intern

Writing is a talent, a lifetime struggle that may yield very few, if any, rewards. An author fights with every word in a story: Does this describe the action best? Will the reader identify with this character trait? Is the symbolism too obvious or does it need more emphasis?

The gift of writing requires more refining than most; unlike an artist, an author must create a piece that captures a person for hours on end. An author must successfully tap into a reader's emotions, but before even that, he or she must find an outlet through which their works will be recognized.

The Tennessee Literary Project was created in hopes of being that outlet and making the process easier.

Proposed in 2007 by Dr. Randy Mackin, the Tennessee Literary Project is an ongoing effort to research and compose biographies of authors with connections to Tennessee, and to conduct interviews with those writers whenever possible.

Submissions to the project are written by students enrolled in English 4670: Special Topics in Writing, at Middle Tennessee State University, a course offered to English department-approved major and minor degree programs.

The idea sparked during a conversation between Dr. Mackin and William Gay, the celebrated author of *The Long Home* and *Twilight*, who died in 2012. Gay mentioned that he wished Tennessee treated its writers in the same way Mississippi did. He contrasted how writers in Mississippi were revered; names such as William Faulkner and Eudora Welty are recognizable, whereas Tennessee authors are not as widely known.

The Tennessee Literary Project was the first idea to try and rectify the situation.

"I'm proud that we are actually doing something that hasn't exactly been done before, and that is why so much emphasis has been placed on students making the project and the biographies 'their own.' Other schools—UTK and UT Chattanooga—have launched Tennessee author projects, but the efforts have not really been maintained, and neither was personalized by the student-participants. Their work was almost exclusively research-based—just the facts—and lacked the personality that TLP students have successfully contributed to our project," said Mackin.

Dr. Mackin also serves on the editorial board of Chapter 16, the online publication of Humanities Tennessee, a valuable partner to the TLP:

Continued on page three



The Tennessee Literary Project

Continued from page two

“When I told Serenity Gerbman (Director of Literature & Languages for the state) about the project, we recognized that we had many of the same goals, primarily, to promote the state’s authors, their work, and legacy. Chapter 16 links to our site, and all of the biographies and interviews TLP students have generated are shared with TN Humanities.”

According to Dr. Mackin, the relationship between Tennessee Humanities and the Tennessee Literary Project will “become even more important” as both continue to expand and further serve Tennessee’s readers and authors.

Expansion is not a foreign concept to the project; already the online database boasts an impressive 148 completed biographies, 17 interviews, 13 photo essays, and 10 book reviews. Many of these interviews were conducted by the project’s 2011 intern, Derrick Hill, who discusses his work for the project on one of the website’s five videos:

“What the project did for me was really open my eyes to the wealth of literature that has been birthed out of this state. Interviewing authors such as Kevin Wilson, William Gay, Amy Greene, and Wyatt Prunty has changed my perception of what Tennessee has to offer as far as literary wealth.”

And the TLP has done the same for many of the project’s biographers, as well as the project’s director:

“As far as personal gain, the rewards are countless. Students in TLP are given the opportunity to do something no one else has done—write original biographies that emphasize their own voices and styles, build a database of research and interviews for public access, and, I think, bring to the state’s literary landscape a unique offering of their own. Students get full byline credit on the websites, and if the project’s work leads to actual book publication, the students will become published writers.”

Recent additions to the project include submissions of photo essays: series of photographs taken at Tennessee’s most famous landmarks. A new requirement has also been added to the curriculum: students must write one review of a book with Tennessee connections, or one written by a Tennessee author. Social media has proved a useful tool in promoting the project’s accomplishments. In addition to the TLP’s MTSU website (www.mtsu.edu/tnlitproj), the project has a Facebook page (www.facebook.com/pages/Tennessee-Literary-Project/312292922125108), and a blog hosted by Wordpress (www.tnliteraryproject.wordpress.com).

At the MTSU website, one can find a link to the CROW anthology: an online repository for any original material biography subjects were willing to share. Currently, CROW includes previously unpublished works by George Scarbrough, William Gay, Bill Brown, Claudia Barnett, and Adam Ross.

As for the project’s trajectory, perhaps the successes of the past four years will lead to Mackin’s original goal:

“From the beginning, the project was one part of a larger idea called the Center for Tennessee Literary Studies. In this economic climate, the funding for a Center was not possible, but an upper division course—the project itself—was.

“The English Department put the project at the top of its wish list in 2011 so that fundraising through university channels would promote it as a priority.

“If we find a donor, the project will expand to bring Tennessee writers on campus to do readings and workshops, and at some point in the future, host a two-day, biennial conference on Tennessee literature. My hope was to have a Spring conference in the years that the Conference on Southern Literature is not being held in Chattanooga.

“Funding would give us the opportunity and means to bring the best of the state’s writers to

Continued on page four



The Tennessee Literary Project

Continued from page three

MTSU, to perhaps sponsor a scholarship, hold writing workshops for students with instruction from the state's authors, and even sponsor student writing contests.

No doubt, whatever the course of action, the project will continue to bring attention to the state's tireless and deserving authors, as well as spark imagination in its students and promote the gains that come along with discovering a new favorite author, one that may have been overlooked if not for the efforts put forth by the TLP's diligent, dedicated biographers.

Writing is an art that may be overlooked, but with the help of the Tennessee Literary Project, it is an endeavor that can yield bountiful rewards to authors and readers alike.

Please visit our websites and see for yourself.



Kara Wilson was a TLP student in the Spring of 2012, and will intern with the Project this Fall

TLP biographies & features completed in Spring 2012

Deborah Adams

Chris Albertson

Tracy Barrett

Jefferson Bass

Alex Bledsoe

Jane Bradley

Blake Bouza

Neal Bowers

Will D. Campbell

The Carter Family

James Alley Conaway

Rodney Crowell

Angela Davis

Early Tennessee Writers

Fellowship of Southern Writers

Graham Foust

Arthur Golden

Tom T. Hall

Amanda Havard

Rick Hilles

Lee Houck

James Weldon Johnson

Grandpa Jones

Jackie Kay

Alan Lightman

Lorraine Lopez

Charlie Louvin

Uncle Dave Macon

Inman Majors

Richard Marius

Robert K. Massie

Patricia McKissack

RB Morris

Cathie Pelletier

John Pritchard

Michael Sims

Southern Festival of Books

Sue Stauffacher

Steve Stern

John Jeremiah Sullivan

Tennessee Literary Magazines
& University Presses

Abraham Verghese

Phil Vischer & Mike Nawrocki

Kevin Wilson

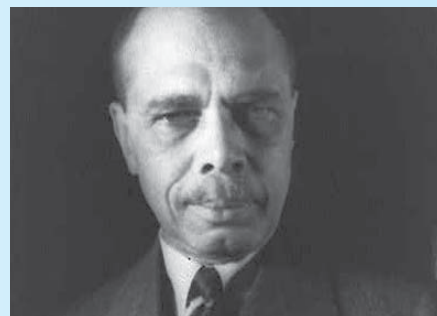
Ernest C. Withers

Charles Wolfe

J. Wes Yoder



ALAN LIGHTMAN



JAMES WELDON JOHNSON



MICHAEL SIMS



Excerpts: 2012 Tennessee Literary Project Interviews

John Pritchard

author of
Junior Ray and
The Yazoo Blues
interviewed by
Jeremy Legatzke
“It’s luck; basically
my stuff is episodic and
almost plot-less. One
could say that it is strong
on character, strong on
place, but very, very
weak on plot; it’s just epi-
sodic you know. Really;
it’s sort of shantyism, a
long shaggy redneck tale,
as someone may have
put it one time. And you
know when you ap-
proach agents with that



sort of thing they say,
‘No, no, no,’ because
they like good, well-
engineered plots, and so I
was lucky that NewSouth
gave me these contracts.”

J. Wes Yoder

author of
Carry My Bones
interviewed by
Erin Schotte
“In recent years I
moved to Barcelona for
a girl. That didn’t work
like I’d hoped, so I went
back to New York for
a year to be alone and
lick my wounds. I’ve
been pretty well settled
in Nashville for almost
two years. This is the
first period in my adult
life in which I’m not
pining for some new
experience in some
new place. There’s
challenges to living in
your home town, and
to staying put, but I’m
where I want to be.



“Right now I can’t
seem to write well. But
if you looked through
my many hundreds of
scrapped pages you’d
pick up on what I’ve
been these past few
years, a night fisher,
catching almost noth-
ing, but not too down
about it.”

Lorraine Lopez

author of
*Soy la Avon & Other
Stories*, *The Gifted Gab-
aldon Sisters*, *Homicide
Survivors Picnic & Other
Stories*, and *The Realm of
Hungry Spirits*
interviewed by
Kayla Giles



“My past has had a
tremendous impact on
my writing, especially
as regards setting and
the places I have lived.
For example, relocat-
ing from one place to
another tends to make a
person hyper-aware of
surroundings and this
enhanced awareness in-
forms the way in which
I compose setting.
Apart from this, I think

most writers weave
together three strands
when creating fiction:
memory, imagination,
and influences from the
literature they’ve read
and admire. Memory is
an integral part of my
fiction, so the past and
how I think about it not
only shapes who I am
as a person, it contrib-
utes significantly to the
stories I write.”

Ruta Sepetys

author of
Between Shades of Gray
interviewed by
Broniesha Sims
“I tell people that hu-
miliation and heartbreak
provide great inspiration.
I’ve experienced both
many times and now
weave elements of those
emotional strands into
my books—for better or
for worse.”

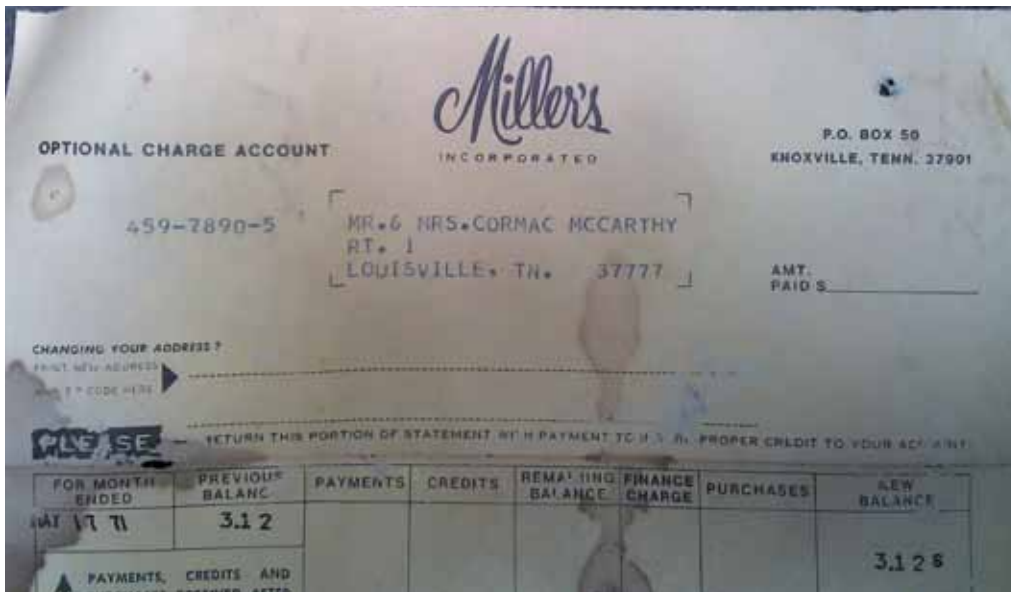


Visit www.mtsu.edu/tnlitproj for interviews with
**Claudia Barnett, Richard Bausch, William Gay,
Ishmael Reed, David Tucker, Allen Wier, Steve
Womack, Amy Greene, Wyatt Prunty, Kevin Wilson,
Charles Wright, & Jeff Daniel Marion.**



Cormac McCarthy home: Louisville, Tennessee

In the Spring of 2012, former Tennessee Literary Project student and intern decided to track down a house in Louisville, Tennessee, near Knoxville, that was once owned by Cormac McCarthy. After some searching, directions, and GPS assistance, Derrick located the structure, a former barn that McCarthy renovated for himself and wife Anne Delisle. Rumor has it that McCarthy did the stone work shown in the photos. The present owner allowed Derrick to take photos around the property, and produced the receipt he found in the attic: a bill from Miller's addressed to Mr. and Mrs. Cormac McCarthy.





BOOK REVIEW: THE ORCHARD KEEPER

BY ADDISON MCNATT
SPRING 2012

TENNESSEE
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Embarking on Cormac McCarthy's *The Orchard Keeper* is a bit like having your head repeatedly submerged underwater. As opposed to slowly enticing the reader into the dark forestation of his eastern Tennessee story, McCarthy thrusts it upon them. The effect is one discomfiting, beguiling, and riveting all at once.

McCarthy's 1965 debut novel traverses slowly and ponderously through a seemingly endless series of vignettes, much as its characters do through its dense and vivid locales. An old man comes upon a dead body, a careless driver tests his skills on a slick mountain road, a young rural boy ventures into a strange town to buy hunting traps. But these isolated scenes only seem disparate. McCarthy withholds the significance of many of these events until much later, allowing the reader to become truly engrossed in them and, by extension, the wondrous prose with which they're told.

Though brimming with tangibly fleshed-out characters, *The Orchard Keeper* centers on three reoccurring players. Marion Sylder is a jovial, yet potentially dangerous, bootlegger and outlaw. He runs whiskey out of a small town in Tennessee called Red Branch and into the relative metropolis of Knoxville. John Wesley Rattner is a young boy, around age fourteen, who lives a mostly isolated existence with his mother. His father, Kenneth Rattner, was murdered and he has promised his mother to find his father's killer.

The third central character is an enigma. For most of the novel, the reader knows nothing about him, other than that he is an old hermit of sorts who lives alone with his dog. We follow him and his actions throughout the book as he drifts about on the periphery of the story like a shadow. Eventually, McCarthy reveals that his name is Arthur Ownby and that he is John Wesley Rattner's uncle, unbeknownst to both parties.

Almost every sentence in *The Orchard Keeper* is riddled with an air of quintessential Southernness. The sights and sounds pool up around the reader, slowly like molasses, and the slight ambiguity of everything conveys the drawled nature of the old South, that feeling that everything you read about began a long, long time ago.

This novel finds McCarthy at his most Faulkner-ian. It is natural for a new artist to largely imitate the works and techniques of their influencers, and Faulkner's impact on *The Orchard Keeper* is undeniable. Though absent of Faulkner's dragged-out, meandering sentences, McCarthy makes deliberate use of Faulkner's more subtle literary devices: the ever-present feeling of information concealed that keeps you reading, as well as the coined terms that define a scene like no existing words ("ghost-gray").

Faulkner's hand aside, McCarthy's natural and instinctive talent for both story and setting emerge beautifully in *The Orchard Keeper*. It is a novel of tremendous visual and emotional power and an exhausting and utterly satisfying read, making it the perfect fit for those readers willing to work for their reward.

MORE BOOK REVIEWS

Visit www.mtsu.edu/tnlitproj for reviews by TLP students of the following books:

Carry My Bones

J. Wes Yoder
review: Erin Schotte

Child of God

Cormac McCarthy
review: Grace Platt

Junior Ray

John Pritchard
review: Jeremy Legatzke

Outer Dark

Cormac McCarthy
review: Kara Wilson

Bloodroot

Amy Greene
review: Leslie Dean

Pulphead

John Jeremiah Sullivan
review: Taylor Payne

*Reasons For and
Advantages of Breathing*

Lydia Peelle
review: Shenay Nolan

Twilight

William Gay
review: Kayla Giles

Father

Jeff Daniel Marion
review: Broniesha Sims

*Thank you for visiting
the website.*



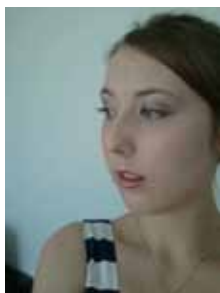
The Tennessee Literary Project Class, Spring 2012



Spencer Clayton Blake was born in Murfreesboro, in 1989. He has been a musician and writer for over a decade, performing and recording with dozens of acts. His current project, TETSUO, plans to release their third studio album in the spring. He also serves as film critic for *The Murfreesboro Pulse*.



Leslie Dean: I was born and raised in Union, Mississippi, to loving parents who taught me the importance of being true to myself. Family, friends, and the hunt for great books are vital. In my free time, I enjoy running, painting, writing, gardening, and spending time with my dogs, Artie and Doc.



Kayla Giles was born to a Tennessean and a Norwegian pilot. Growing up between the two countries and attending school in both, she has travelled the world, but Tennessee has always been home. She is an English major and plans to continue travelling the world with her husband when she graduates.



Jeremy Legatzke: I am a student at MTSU and a writer of no count or renown, but it is not by education or artistic merit that I define myself. I am first and foremost a husband and father--my greatest claim to fame and the sum of my joy throughout this life to date.



Addison McNatt: I spent the first 17 years of my life in the same house in a sleepy suburb of Nashville. After nearly two decades of living a mile away from Andrew Jackson's ominous and crypt-like home, I was ready to broaden my horizons. I attend MTSU for History and Writing.



My name is **Shenay Nolan**. I am a Junior and my major is Journalism with a concentration in Newspaper/Magazine. My minors are Spanish and Writing. I am from Memphis. I love writing, traveling, and listening to music. I'm also involved in two organizations on campus and enjoy helping others.



Taylor Payne was born in Bluff City, Kentucky, but has lived in Murfreesboro on and off throughout his life. Taylor is an English major with a concentration in writing and a writing minor. Taylor is still ironing out the wrinkles of his future aspirations.



Grace Platt is a native of Kingsport, and a sophomore English major at Middle Tennessee State University. She plans to pursue English in graduate school and hopes to teach at the college level. Grace has a passion for literature and for the state of Tennessee.



Jasmine Pratt is a native of Atlanta, and a senior at MTSU. Jasmine is studying English with a concentration in Writing, foreign language in Latin, and a minor in Women and Gender studies. As a singer she has toured worldwide, leading to an even greater appreciation for education and art.



Erin Schotte says, "Most of my life has been lived in the South, and the region aptly defines the word home. I'm currently a sophomore at MTSU majoring in English. After graduation, I plan to work in publishing and own an independent used book store."



My name is **Broniesha Sims**. I am originally from Chattanooga. I moved to Murfreesboro at age 18 when I graduated from Howard School of Academics and Technology. I am currently a Junior with a major in Political Science and minor in English. I plan to attend Vanderbilt School of Law.



My name is **Kara Wilson** and I study psychology, neuroscience, and writing. Fiction writing has been my passion since I was old enough to form words. I also enjoy painting, yoga, and horror movies. In Fall 2012, I'll start my writing internship with the TLP and look forward to the places it will take me.