

A CONVERSATION WITH DAVID LAROCHELLE AND MIKE WOHNOUTKA

How did you come to collaborate with Wohnoutka on *Moo!*?

LaRochelle: I first got the idea for this book over ten years ago. I was hoping to also be the illustrator, but then I received a postcard in the mail from my friend Mike Wohnoutka with a painting of a cow on it. When I saw his cow, I knew he would make the better illustrator for the book. Usually editors do not want authors and illustrators to team up on their own, but fortunately we found an editor who wanted to publish my story with Mike's pictures.

What do you hope your readers take away from your book?

LaRochelle: I hope that readers will laugh! I also hope that they'll notice how the entire meaning of a word can change depending on the punctuation and size of the word.

Wohnoutka: I hope younger readers will be empowered by being able to read *Moo!* "all by themselves."

What do you like most about *Moo!*?

LaRochelle: It has been tremendously rewarding to hear so many stories about

very young kids being able to read this book on their own. I'm proud to have helped create a story that will be the first book many kids can read by themselves. I also love Mike Wohnoutka's wonderful, expressive illustrations. They bring so much life to the story and I can't imagine the book looking any other way.

Wohnoutka: David came up with a brilliant idea — tell a story with just one word. I feel SO fortunate to be a part of this book. I love reading *Moo!* aloud to a large group of students. It's a beautiful thing to hear 200 second graders all mooing in unison! It has also been so much fun to do many events and presentations with David.

How and when did you first decide you wanted to be a writer/illustrator?

LaRochelle: I've always loved making up stories and creating books, even back when I was in elementary school. One of my most treasured pos-

"I love reading *Moo!* aloud to a large group of students. It's a beautiful thing to hear 200 second graders all mooing in unison!"

sessions is a story I wrote in second grade that my teacher saved and mailed to me when I was an adult. I was very fortunate to have parents who took the time to read every story that I ever wrote, all the way through college. Their interest in what I did made me feel like my writing was important.

Wohnoutka: Ever since I can remember I loved to draw, but I had no idea you could be a children's book illustrator. It wasn't until I was in college at the Savannah College of Art and Design and saw a presentation by David Shannon that I knew I wanted to be an illustrator. After graduating from SCAD I moved back to Minnesota, and after six years of sending illustration samples to publishers, Random House called with a book offer.

What is your biggest dream for your career?

LaRochelle: This past year I achieved one of my biggest dreams; the first book where I was both author and illustrator was published: *Arlo's ARTrageous Adventure!* I hope to continue to create books for young people for many, many years to come.

Wohnoutka: After illustrating 20 books, this fall my first book as both illustrator and author will be coming out. This is a huge dream come true for me. The title of the book is *Little Puppy and the Big Green Monster*.

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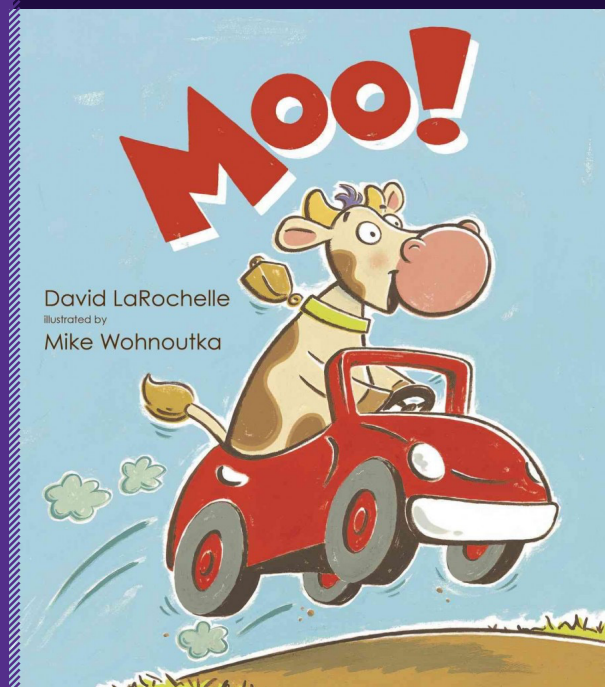
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CHILDREN'S LITERATURE WINNER

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David LaRochelle
Illustrated by
Mike Wohnoutka

Moo!

by David LaRochelle
illustrated by Mike Wohnoutka

WALKER BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS/BLOOMSBURY CHILDREN'S BOOKS

SUMMARY

When Cow gets her hooves on the farmer's car, she takes it for a wild ride through the country. But a bump in the road brings this joyride to a troublesome end. Using just one word (well, maybe two), this imaginative picture book will have readers laughing one moment and on the edge of their seats the next.

Bottom left: LaRochelle and Wohnoutka at the Minnesota Book Awards Gala



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The author wanted to write a story using only one word. Did he succeed? How many different words did he actually use?
2. After Cow lands on the police car, what do you think she is trying to tell the police officer?
3. Why do you think Cow says "Baaaaa!" at the end?
4. What do you think will happen after the last page?
5. What are three words you would use to describe this cow?
6. If Cow offered to give you a ride in her car, would you go?
7. Read the story out loud to a friend or family member. Use lots of expression! Then have that person read the story to you. Did you both read it the same way?
8. Because there are so few words, the illustrations tell much of the story. What is your favorite illustration in the book? Why?
9. After you've read the story go back and try retelling what happened in your own words.
10. The end flaps of a book often have short biographies of the author and illustrator. Even though the bios in this book are written in "cow," can you still figure out what they are saying?
11. Try writing your own story using only one word! Think of all the different ways that you can write the word (big, small, stretched-out) and all the different punctuation marks you can use. Draw pictures that help illustrate what is happening in each scene.



ABOUT DAVID LAROCHELLE & MIKE WOHNOUTKA

A former elementary school teacher, **David LaRochelle** has written or illustrated over twenty-five books, including picture books, puzzle books, craft books, and a book for young adults. He is the author of the previous Minnesota Book Award winning titles *It's a Tiger!* and *The Best Pet of All*. David is no longer a regular classroom teacher but visits many schools around Minnesota and the Upper Midwest each year to talk about his books. He lives in White Bear Lake.

Learn more about the author at www.davidlarochelle.com

Mike Wohnoutka is the acclaimed illustrator of more than 20 children's books including the forthcoming *Little Puppy* and *The Big Green Monster*, which is his first book as both author and illustrator. His other titles have won numerous awards, including the National Jewish Book Award, Society of Illustrators Original Art Show, and the Beverly Cleary Children's Choice Award. Mike lives with his wife and two children in Minneapolis.

Visit Mike on his website at mikewohnoutka.com.



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A CONVERSATION WITH JACK EL-HAI

What inspired you to write *The Nazi and the Psychiatrist*?

I learned about Douglas M. Kelley and his work with the top Nazi war criminals as a result of my research on my previous book, *The Lobotomist*. That book tells the story of the psychiatrist who developed and championed lobotomy to treat psychiatric disorders, but he also had a strong interest in investigating his colleagues who had committed suicide. In one of his books he briefly told the story of Dr. Kelley's suicide, and I was intrigued. When I found out that no one had ever written a book about Dr. Kelley's experiences, I began researching.

Describe the research you undertook in writing the book.

The most important part of my research occurred when I managed to track down Dr. Kelley's oldest son and asked him if he had any of his father's papers or records. The son said he did, and he invited me to visit him in California to look at the materials. I expected to find a few file folders and perhaps a family photo album, but instead the son presented me with more than a dozen boxes of

artifacts, letters, papers, medical records and other valuable materials that Dr. Kelley had brought home from Nuremberg. Those materials formed the foundation of my research. I also interviewed many people and visited the U.S. National Archives in Maryland and the archives of the University of California at Santa Cruz, among other places.

"There is no illness or personality disorder behind most mass murder—instead we find environmental factors and political climates that inspire certain people to act ruthlessly in their own self-interest."

What do you hope your readers take away from *The Nazi and the Psychiatrist*?

I hope that readers will take to heart Dr. Kelley's findings that the people who commit crimes against humanity are not necessarily insane and that many such criminals share personality traits that some of the law-abiding and socially adjusted among us possess. There is no illness or personality disorder behind most mass murder—instead we

find environmental factors and political climates that inspire certain people to act ruthlessly in their own self-interest.

How and when did you first decide you wanted to be a writer?

I became interested in writing as a high school student and focused on writing fiction for many years. Although I published short stories in several literary journals during the 1980s, I turned to nonfiction during that decade because I found it more interesting and more lucrative. After years of writing magazine articles, I published my first book in 1992. Since then I've written hundreds of articles and about a dozen nonfiction books.

How does being a Minnesotan and the particular community in which you live inform your writing?

I have benefited from the wealth of writing knowledge in the Twin Cities by taking courses at the Loft Literary Center during my early years and by swapping information with a variety of nonfiction and fiction writers who live here. I also gain much from my students in the MFA program in creative writing at Augsburg College, where I teach part time.

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GENERAL NONFICTION WINNER

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THE NAZI AND THE PSYCHIATRIST

HERMANN GÖRING,
DR. DOUGLAS M. KELLEY,
and
A FATAL MEETING
OF MINDS at
THE END OF WWII



JACK EL-HAI

The Nazi and the Psychiatrist: Hermann Göring, Dr. Douglas M. Kelley, and a Fatal Meeting of Minds at the End of WWII

by Jack El-Hai

PUBLICAFFAIRS BOOKS/PERSEUS BOOKS GROUP

Hermann Göring



SUMMARY

Author Jack El-Hai uncovers the remarkable relationship between army psychiatrist Captain Douglas M. Kelley and the elite of the captured Nazi regime, particularly Hermann Göring, during their detention in Luxembourg in 1945. Assigned to ensure that the captives were fit for trial at Nuremberg, Kelley embarked on a hazardous quest to discover a distinguishing trait among these arch-criminals, marking them as different from the rest of humanity—dangerous because he began to appreciate and understand Göring, with dire results.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why did stage magic attract Dr. Douglas Kelley?
2. Do you agree with Kelley's assessment that the Nazi leaders were mentally normal?
3. Why did Kelley and Gustave Gilbert reach different conclusions about the mental health of the Nazi prisoners?
4. Is the Rorschach test a reliable indicator of mental illness?
5. What was the connection between the suicides of Hermann Göring and Kelley?

6. How would you describe the relationship between Göring and Kelley?
7. How did Kelley's months in Nuremberg affect the remainder of his life?
8. What do you think it was like to be one of Kelley's children?
9. Why did Kelley shift his professional focus from psychiatry to criminology?
10. Was Kelley's suicide preventable?



ABOUT JACK EL-HAI

Jack El-Hai is the author of several books, including *The Lobotomist: A Maverick Medical Genius and His Tragic Quest to Rid the World of Mental Illness*, which won a Minnesota Book Award in 2006. His articles and essays have appeared in *The Atlantic*, *Wired*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, and elsewhere. He has received a Loft McKnight Fellowship, a June Roth Memorial Award for Medical Journalism, and research grants from the Jerome Foundation and the Center for Arts Criticism. He lives in Minneapolis and is a professor of creative writing in Augsburg College's MFA program. **Visit the author's website at el-hai.com.**



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A CONVERSATION WITH WILLIAM KENT KRUEGER

What inspired you to write *Tamarack County*?

I wanted to continue the saga of the O'Connor family in the fictional Tamarack County, Minnesota. I love spending time with these people in the North Country, and because I'm a storyteller at heart, it's a great deal of fun spinning webs of deceit and danger around them all.

What research did you undertake in writing this book?

There were a couple of areas in which my own knowledge ran pretty thin. In the scenes that deal with search and rescue operations, I had the very generous help of Deputy Julie Collman, of the Cook County Sheriff's Office. Also, in those issues that related to body trauma, I was fortunate to be able to tap the expertise of a friend of mine, Dr. Greg Brown, a renowned orthopedic surgeon. I also visited the state prison at Stillwater.

How long did it take you to write it?

About eight months. That's pretty typical for one of my manuscripts.

What interesting challenges have you encountered in writing the Cork O'Connor series?

As always, it's a challenge to keep the characters and the dangerous situations in which they find themselves believable. It's also a great challenge to create the puzzle at the heart of any good mystery, and to make the solution to that puzzle both logical and emotionally satisfying.

"I write out of a profound love for Minnesota. The geography, the people, the weather, and the issues particular to this place always play an important role in whatever I choose to write."

What do you hope your readers take away from *Tamarack County*?

That in the end, our lives are all about love—love in all its beauty and messiness and infinite complexity.

How and when did you first decide you wanted to be a writer? Please share a little bit about your journey in becoming a published author.

I always wanted to be a writer, as far back as I can

remember, and I have always written. For a very long time, I tried to write the Great American Novel, with no success. At forty, I went through a pretty dramatic midlife crisis, gave up my very literary ambitions, and decided I was going to write something that regular people might actually want to read. So I turned to mysteries. It took me four years to write my first published novel, *Iron Lake*, which was the first book in the Cork O'Connor series and was also a winner of the Minnesota Book Award. The decision to move toward popular fiction was the best decision I ever made.

How does being a Minnesotan and the particular community in which you live inform your writing?

I write out of a profound love for Minnesota. The geography, the people, the weather, and the issues particular to this place always play an important role in whatever I choose to write. For many of us who call Minnesota home, this state is Inspiration Central.

What are you currently writing and/or what's an inspiration you have for a future book?

I've just completed the next book in the Cork O'Connor series, number fourteen, a novel titled *Windigo Island*, which will be released in August 2014. I'm currently working on a stand-alone project called *This Tender Land*, a companion novel to *Ordinary Grace*, which was also not a part of my series and was released in 2013.

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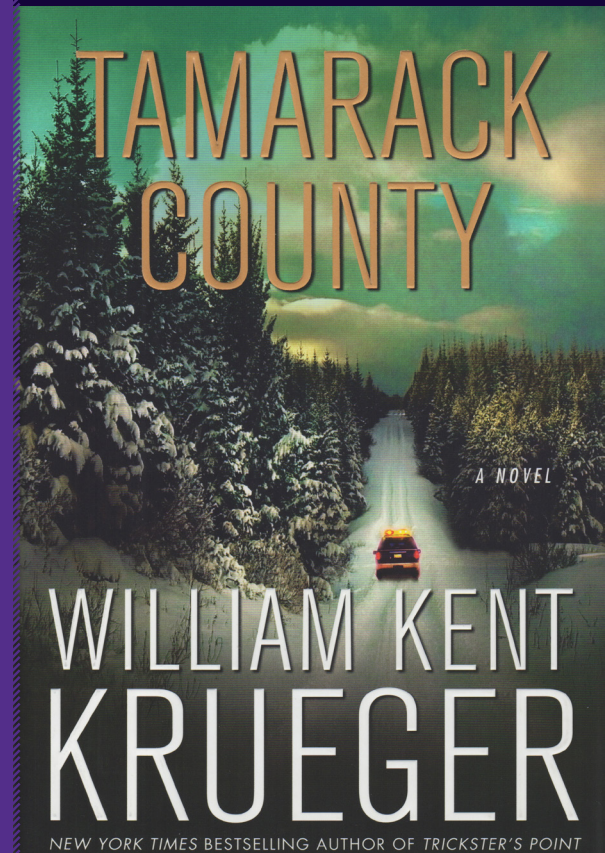
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NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF TRICKSTER'S POINT

Tamarack County
by William Kent Krueger

ATRIA BOOKS/SIMON & SCHUSTER

SUMMARY

New York Times bestselling author William Kent Krueger returns with the thirteenth novel in his award-winning Cork O'Connor mystery series. Someone is spinning a deadly web in the gorgeous yet unforgiving landscape of Tamarack County—the place sheriff-turned-private investigator Cork O'Connor calls home. While investigating a woman's disappearance, Cork and his family are pulled into a deadly series of events which may have a connection to a murder more than twenty years old—a case where Cork was the deputy in charge.

William Kent Krueger



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What do you think of Cork's relationship with Stella Daychild?
2. How did you respond to Anne O'Connor's struggle with her worldly relationship and her spiritual calling?
3. Talk about the various presentations of love as motivation in the story.
4. Many readers object to animals being killed in a story. Why do you think the author took the risk of doing this in *Tamarack County*?
5. What does the setting add to the story?
6. What are some recurring themes you noticed in the novel and how are they in dialogue with each other?
7. If you read *Tamarack County* without having read the other Cork O'Connor novels, were you able to follow the narrative and understand the characters' backgrounds?
8. If you have read other novels in the Cork O'Connor series, how do you think Cork has grown or developed over time? Do you see a definite narrative arc?
9. Could this novel have been set somewhere other than Minnesota? Explain.
10. Where do you hope Cork's story goes in future books?



ABOUT WILLIAM KENT KRUEGER

William Kent Krueger is a five-time Minnesota Book Award winner and recipient of the 2013 Edgar Award for his novel *Ordinary Grace*. He has also received many other awards and distinctions including the Northeastern Minnesota Book Award, the Loft-McKnight Fiction Award, and three Anthony Awards. *Tamarack County* is the thirteenth installment of Krueger's engrossing Cork O'Connor series set in Minnesota's North Woods and Iron Range. **Visit the author's website at williamkentkrueger.com.**

“KRUEGER'S EVIDENT EMPATHY FOR THE OJIBWE AND THEIR TRADITIONS AND VALUES BLENDS SEAMLESSLY WITH HORRIFIC VIOLENCE PLAYED OUT AGAINST O'CONNOR'S STRUGGLES TO HEAL HIS FAMILY'S WOUNDS—AND HIS OWN.”

- PUBLISHERS WEEKLY



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26TH ANNUAL MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

A CONVERSATION WITH MELANIE HOFFERT

What inspired you to write *Prairie Silence*?

I didn't actually sit down to write a book. Over the years I simply wrote for the pure love of the craft. Writing happens to be my natural creative outlet. Like a quilter sews together material to produce patterns and designs, I write to make meaning of my life experiences—to see patterns. It wasn't until the last few years that I even believed I could actually pull together a book.

What research did you undertake in writing this book?

My memoir is largely based on memories, images, questions, and challenges from my life story, as opposed to research. However, while working on the book I returned to my family farm in North Dakota to experience a season of harvest, which I hadn't done since childhood. Much of my time on the farm, and with the people of North Dakota, ended up being a large part of the book's final narrative.

"I hope that through my book readers can connect with the landscapes they love, reconcile the silences they hold, and reflect upon the experiences they've had that have helped them make meaning of the world around them."

What interesting challenges did you encounter in writing the book?

A main thread in the book is about how deeply particular silences can root in our lives and be almost impossible to undo. The personal silence that I was writing about—my experience of growing up gay in rural North Dakota—was not a resolved silence for me. Meaning, I was examining themes in my life not from a place of resolution, but from a place of struggle. Therefore one of my biggest challenges was to let the book go into the world, first as drafts and then as a published book, and fall into the hands of people with whom I had yet to rec-

oncile my silence. At times it was unbearable for me to release my words. However, having people read my work often changed the trajectory of our relationship, which taught me that writing is not just a process that captures stories, it is also one that can impact real life outcomes.

What do you hope your readers take away from reading *Prairie Silence*?

I hope that through my book readers can connect with the landscapes they love, reconcile the silences they hold, and reflect upon the experiences they've had that have helped them make meaning of the world around them. In the end, I hope that readers feel what I feel as a reader of others' work: elevated, alive, changed, and eager to create.

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prairie
silence

a memoir

a rural expatriate's journey to reconcile home, love, and faith

Prairie Silence
by Melanie Hoffert

BEACON PRESS

SUMMARY

Like most rural kids, Melanie Hoffert followed the out-migration pattern to a better life, yet she longs for her North Dakota childhood home, with its grain trucks and empty main streets. The prairie is a hard place to stay—particularly if you are gay, and your home state is the last to know. Stories about returning home and exploring abandoned towns are woven into a coming-of-age tale about falling in love, making peace with faith, and belonging to a place where neighbors are as close as blood but are often unable to share their deepest truths.

Melanie Hoffert at the Minnesota Book Awards Gala



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Prairie Silence* touches upon the theme of silence in our lives, about how it is often hard for people to speak their deepest truths. In what ways does silence transcend the topic of being gay? Do you think this silence is unique to rural America?
2. In what ways does the narrator reconcile her sexuality and her faith in the book? In what way are these issues left unresolved?
3. The land is almost a character in the book, as well as a metaphor for silenced people. The author seems to indicate that our first landscapes imprint upon us in some way. Do you think this is true?
4. The book rotates between a coming-of-age tale and a present-tense journey home. In what ways did the past and present inform each other in the narrative?

5. In the end, the barn serves as a symbol of both change and loss. What points does the author make about the changing fabric of our society where more people will grow up in an urban setting?
6. Do you think Hoffert's story would be significantly different if she had grown up in an urban rather than rural setting? How so?
7. As Hoffert alludes to in the book, Christian churches are not always accepting of homosexuality. Because of this, she has trouble fitting in within a community that is important to her. Would you deal with these issues in the same way as Hoffert, or would you do anything differently?
8. How does the author's ability to find self-acceptance come about? In what ways does her homecoming affect this ability?
9. What part of the book affected you the most and why?
10. How do you think *Prairie Silence* will inspire readers dealing with similar issues of self-doubt?



ABOUT MELANIE HOFFERT

Melanie Hoffert grew up on a farm in North Dakota before relocating to Minneapolis. She completed her MFA in writing at Hamline University, where she won the award for Outstanding Creative Nonfiction Thesis. Her essay "Going Home" won the Creative Nonfiction Award from the *Baltimore Review*. Her work has been published in several literary journals. This is her first book. **Visit the author's website: melaniehoffert.com**



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26TH ANNUAL MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

A CONVERSATION WITH KRISTIN MAKHOLM

What inspired you to write *Modern Spirit*?

It was the impressive collection of the work of artist George Morrison in the Minnesota Museum of American Art (MMAA) in St. Paul that inspired the writing of this book. The museum organized a nationally traveling exhibition to which this book was an accompaniment. It was originally conceived as an exhibition catalogue that expanded to become an extended narrative on the art, life, and inspiration of a great Minnesota artist.

What research did you undertake in writing this book?

Since the artist George Morrison died in 2000, we spent a lot of time looking at George's artwork, both in the MMAA's collection and in other collections throughout the state and country. This is the primary research for art historians. In addition, we looked through archives of George's papers at the Minnesota Historical Society and

"We wanted readers to understand that artists are more than the labels that people assign to them, and that the creation of an artistic identity is multifaceted and often very complex."

elsewhere, and materials that still exist with his family and friends. Interviewing friends and former colleagues and hearing stories about the artist were also very important to our research.

How long did it take you to write it?

My co-author and I conceived of the project (art exhibition and book) in January 2010. Research began in earnest in summer 2010, and *Modern Spirit* was published three years later.

What do you hope your readers take away from *Modern Spirit*?

This book tells an unexpected story of a Native American artist. George Morrison didn't depict typical Indian themes

or images in his work, as one might expect from a Native American artist. He worked at being an exceptional American modern artist, interested in abstraction, color, and form, and approaching his subjects (the landscape, people, and iconic forms) in a very unique way. We wanted readers to understand that artists are more than the labels that people assign to them, and that the creation of an artistic identity is multifaceted and often very complex.

What do you like most about the book?

The thing I like most about this book is that it isn't just a book of words, but a book where pictures of incredible works of art become part of the narrative. Paintings, sculptures and drawings tell the story of this artist and his life just as much as the words do. The words flesh out and explain the story seen in pictures.

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Modern Spirit The Art of George Morrison

W. Jackson Rushing III
Kristin Makholm
Foreword by Kay WalkingStick

Modern Spirit: The Art of George Morrison

by W. Jackson Rushing III
and Kristin Makholm

UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA PRESS

SUMMARY

The work of Chippewa artist George Morrison has enjoyed widespread critical acclaim and he is one of Minnesota’s most cherished artists. Yet because Morrison’s artwork typically does not include overt references to his Indian heritage, it has stirred debate about what it means to be a Native American artist. This stunning book, featuring 130 color and black-and-white images, showcases Morrison’s work across a spectrum of genres and media, while also exploring the artist’s identity as a modernist within the broader context of twentieth-century American and Native American art.

Cumulated Landscapes, George Morrison



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How did George Morrison’s Chippewa heritage take root in his paintings and sculptures? Are there motifs there that are particularly Indian in character?
2. In what ways did the Minnesota landscape play a particular role in the development of Morrison’s art?
3. If you were to make a work of art that was particularly Minnesota in character and expression, what material would you choose and why?
4. What effect is created by the contrast between Morrison’s abstract compositions of paintings and their concrete subject matter (landscapes, cities, etc.)?
5. How does Morrison’s modernist approach to art set him apart from other Native American artists? Similarly, how does his cultural heritage set him apart from other modernists?

6. In what ways does Morrison’s appropriation of natural objects like wood in his work speak to his culture’s connection to the land and nature?
7. Does Morrison’s modernist approach subvert certain stereotypes you have about Native American art? How?
8. Morrison’s totems take something that is usually curved, abstract and spiritually-based and make it geometric and rigid. How does this difference play into his subversion of Native American cultural stereotypes?
9. How do Morrison’s later paintings evoke the concept of “natural magic”?
10. In what ways do you think Morrison’s work evolves over time?



ABOUT KRISTIN MAKHOLM & W. JACKSON RUSHING III.

Kristin Makholm is executive director of the Minnesota Museum of American Art (MMAA). A Milwaukee native, she came to MMAA in 2009 as a respected curator, art historian, and teacher, having received her M.A. and Ph.D. in art history from the University of Minnesota. She has held curatorial and research positions at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis Institute of Arts, and The Saint Louis Art Museum. **Visit the author online at mmaa.org.**

W. Jackson Rushing III is Eugene B. Adkins Presidential Professor of Art History and Mary Lou Milner Carver Chair in Native American Art at the University of Oklahoma School of Art and Art History.



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A CONVERSATION WITH ETHAN RUTHERFORD

What inspired you to write *The Peripatetic Coffin and Other Stories*?

I spent a lot of time alone as a kid, and one of the great pleasures of being a lonely kid is the refuge you take in books. I experienced reading as a complete and total flattening of myself, an atomization: I am not here, in this library, I am in this book, with its characters and its far-flung settings, its adventure, its emotional heart. I had company, in other words—good company. And at some point it occurred to me that it might be worth trying to write these stories as well. So the stories collected here are sort of a “meet-cute” between two impulses I have as a writer. The first is to try to write the stories I liked reading as a kid—adventure stories, lost-at-sea stories, sci-fi stories. The second is to take whatever obsessions I have grown into as an adult—questions of responsibility, sustainability, how people act when their backs are against the wall—and weave that emotional urgency into them.

What research did you undertake in writing the stories?

For each story I read about three or four non-fiction books: on the Civil War, on the American whaling industry, on mental illness, on polar expeditions. The list goes on. All reading is, to some extent, research. But with these particular stories, some of which are deeply rooted in history, I had to read in order to get my

head in the right place, and to make sure that the details of the story (the size of a particular ship, how a whale-hunt occurred) were as right and correct as I could make them.

“I experienced reading as a complete and total flattening of myself, an atomization: I am not here, in this library, I am in this book...”

What interesting challenges did you encounter in compiling the collection?

Oh, the same as any writer. Which is, basically: this is a lot harder than I thought it was going to be. But one of the pleasures of putting this book together, for me, was that I fell in love with the revision process. Which is good, I suppose, since all the best writing happens in revision anyway.

What do you hope your readers take away from your book?

I do hope that readers will enjoy the stories. But my real hope is a little more direct and ambitious and open-ended than that: I'd like a reader to feel something when he/she reaches the final paragraph of each story. It would make me happy to hear that something in these stories stirred someone up a little bit, made them sad, or happy, or in some other way enlarged.

How does being a Minnesotan and the particular community in which you live inform your writing?

I could not have written this book anywhere else, and I truly mean it when I say that coming to Minnesota all these years ago to attend the MFA program at the University of Minnesota—which was a lark, as far as decisions go—was the luckiest thing that ever happened to me as a writer. There is such an amazing literary community here in the Twin Cities—from independent bookstores, to readings happening every night, to arts organizations dedicated to supporting writers at every stage of his/her career, to a fantastic group of local writers of all genres working hard to make the city a welcoming one. While writing this book, I received generous and invaluable support from the Minnesota State Arts Board, the McKnight Foundation, Intermedia Arts, and the Loft Literary Center. I think it is fair to say that I could not have written this book anywhere else, and I'll forever be grateful to the people I've met in Minnesota, and the readers I've found there.

How do you most enjoy spending time when you're not writing?

I write and listen to music. Listening to music is second only to reading, as far as the best way to spend one's time. I would say that's just my opinion, but I think that's actually a fact. I read that somewhere.

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NOVEL & SHORT STORY WINNER

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"Ethan Rutherford can slay you with humor and buoy you within the midst of tragedy. His range is amazing. Every story is 100% Grade A storytelling."
—Alice Sebold, author of *The Lovely Bones* and *Lucky*

THE PERIPATETIC COFFIN AND OTHER STORIES



ETHAN RUTHERFORD

The Peripatetic Coffin and Other Stories

by Ethan Rutherford

Ecco/HARPERCOLLINS PUBLISHERS

SUMMARY

The strange, imaginative, and refreshingly original stories in Ethan Rutherford's debut collection explore the ways in which we experience the world: as it is, could be, and all that lies between. From the dubious escapades of a head counselor at the world's worst summer camp, to the doomed mission of the beleaguered crew of the first Confederate submarine during the closing days of the Civil War, these stories are alternately funny, menacing, and deeply empathetic.

Ethan Rutherford at the Minnesota Book Awards Gala



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does the title of this book—*The Peripatetic Coffin*—work in terms of the other stories collected here? Do you feel that these stories are linked in any way? If so, how?
2. Many of these stories take place in dire settings and involve danger and survival. Yet, the tone of many of the characters is sardonic and detached. How does the humor that bubbles up in some of the darker situations work for you as a reader?
3. How do you relate to the emotional and physical isolation represented in the collection?
4. The author has said that “Camp Winnesaka” was written in response to the Iraq War, and used as its inspiration the true story of Pat Tillman, the NFL player who was killed in a friendly-fire episode early in the war. How does knowing that change, impact, or complicate your own reading of that story?
5. At the beginning of “A Mugging,” the omniscient narrator speaks directly to the reader and proceeds to tell the story in the future tense, never to address the reader again. How does this trick affect your response to the story?
6. How does a futuristic story like “Dirwhals!” compare for you to stories rooted in history, like “The *Saint Anna*” or “The Peripatetic Coffin”?
7. Many of these stories leave the reader in the middle of an unresolved action. What was your response to these endings? Were there any stories you wished were longer?
8. In what ways does Rutherford's narrative style remain consistent throughout the collection? In what ways does it change?
9. Which was your favorite story, and why?



ABOUT ETHAN RUTHERFORD

Rutherford's fiction has appeared in *Ploughshares*, *American Short Fiction*, and *The Best American Short Stories*. His work has received awards from the McKnight Foundation and the Minnesota State Arts Board. *The Peripatetic Coffin*, his debut collection, received honorable mention for the Pen/Hemingway Award and was named a Barnes and Noble Discover Great New Writers pick as well as a “Best Book of the Summer” by *Publishers Weekly*. His next book is a novel set in the Alaskan wilderness. **Visit the author's website at ethanrutherford.net.**



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26TH ANNUAL MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

A CONVERSATION WITH MATT RASMUSSEN

What inspired you to write this collection of poems?

My brother committed suicide when I was 16. He was 19. The book is centered around this event.

How long did it take you to write it?

I wrote the first poem about my brother's suicide at Emerson College in Bill Knott's workshop, approximately ten years

"I also had difficulty with 'saying the last thing' about my brother's suicide. I never felt like the book was finished, or that I could finish it."

after my brother died. It took another ten years to complete the book. I wasn't working on the book non-stop, but over time, as I wrote more and more poems that were concerned with or related to my brother's suicide, the book formed.

Describe the challenges you encountered in writing these poems.

It's difficult to write about grieving or tragedy because they are subjects that are already charged with certain emotions. The book took a long time because I think I needed distance between myself and the tragedy

to be able to examine it effectively, or artfully. I also had difficulty with "saying the last thing" about my brother's suicide. I never felt like the book was finished, or that I could finish it. Finally, inspired by a few friends to write a "closure poem," I wrote the poem "Aperture," which is, as the poem says, "the opposite of closure."

What are you currently writing?

I'm working on a children's book inspired by my daughter.

"AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL, SPECULATIVE, IMAGINAL, AT TIMES BITTERLY COMIC, OFTEN LYRICALLY SURREAL, MATT RASMUSSEN'S TRANSFORMATIVE POEMS LOOK OUTWARD... BUT THIS BOOK'S CENTRAL TASK IS THE ALCHEMIZING OF EXPERIENCE BY LANGUAGE: THE SUBJECT HERE IS THE SUICIDE OF A BROTHER."

- JANE HIRSHFIELD

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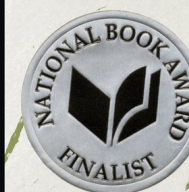
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MATT RASMUSSEN

BLACK APERTURE

POEMS

Black Aperture
by Matt Rasmussen

LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY PRESS

SUMMARY

In his moving debut collection, Rasmussen faces the tragedy of his brother's suicide, refusing to focus on the expected pathos, blurring the edge between grief and humor. The poems in this collection are both destructive and redemptive, with the complicated entanglements of mourning: sorrow and laughter, and torment balanced with moments of relief. *Black Aperture* is a winner of the Walt Whitman Award and a finalist for the National Book Award.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The author writes about his brother's suicide in this collection. Is there a particular grief in your life that you would address through poetry? What would the thematic angle be in your collection?
2. Why do you think the title of the collection is "Black Aperture"? How does the title tie in with the poem "Aperture" and do you think it's an effective way to encapsulate the poems in the book?
3. There is a hunting metaphor/theme that runs throughout the collection. How do you think these poems address the suicide?
4. Several of the poems have references to his brother's hands. Why do you think the author focuses on this repetition?
5. There are elements of wry humor throughout the collection. Do you think this helps you read/process poems about a difficult event? Do you use humor to address topics of grief?
6. The second section of the collection is structured as one long poem. How does this structure affect your reading of that poem as compared to the first and third sections of the book?
7. Why do you think the author has three separate poems entitled "After Suicide"? How are the poems different?
8. The majority of the poems are composed of two-line stanzas, some with only a few words per line. How does this writing style affect the tone of the poems?
9. Does the poem "A Horse Grazes in My Shadow" represent a fitting end to the collection?



Matt Rasmussen at the Minnesota Book Awards Gala



ABOUT MATT RASMUSSEN

Born in International Falls, Minnesota, Matt Rasmussen holds degrees from Gustavus Adolphus College and Emerson College. He is also the author of a chapbook, *Fingergun* (Kitchen Press, 2006), and is the co-founder of the independent poetry press Birds, LLC. He is a 2014 Pushcart Prize winner, a former Peace Corps volunteer, and teaches literature and creative writing at Gustavus Adolphus College. Rasmussen lives in Robbinsdale, Minnesota. **Visit the author's website at mattrasmussen.net.**



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A CONVERSATION WITH CARRIE MESROBIAN

What inspired you to write *Sex & Violence*?

I wanted to write about the kind of girl I knew from my own adolescence. The kind of girl I was, too. Somehow this turned into a book narrated by a boy. Fiction is weird.

What research did you undertake in writing the book?

I read a lot about lake ecology because I was curious about the features of lake islands. It turns out there isn't a lot of literature about lake islands, though. So I learned a lot about limnology in general. A book by Bruce Carlson called *Beneath the Surface: A Natural History of a Fisherman's Lake*, published by the Minnesota Historical Society Press, was one of my favorites.

What do you hope your readers take away from *Sex & Violence*?

My main hope is that readers just enjoy the experience of being in another world while reading. But I suppose if I have a wish for better public understanding of a topic, it's that recovery from trauma is long, variable and not linear, and processing what happens to us as children and adolescents is a messy and often life-long experience.

How and when did you first decide you wanted to be a writer?

Sex & Violence was my graduate school thesis. I have always written in some form or fashion; getting an MFA clarified for me what kind of fiction writing

I wanted to do. I wrote it my first year of graduate school in 2011 and started querying agents that spring. None of them offered representation, but I'd also sent Andrew Karre the manuscript in response to a call for submissions he'd done on his blog. I revised the book a bit under his direction, resubmitted it and it was acquired by Lerner Publishing Group in January 2012. I didn't have an agent when I sold the book, though I found one by the time I sold my second book.

"I feel that the landscape of Minnesota is constant, reassuring, and undistracting. Farmland gives you the sense that productivity in general is all around you, but it doesn't really lure you out to recreate, like mountains and seashore might."

How does being a Minnesotan and the particular community in which you live inform your writing?

I feel that the landscape of Minnesota is constant, reassuring, and undistracting. Farmland gives you the sense that productivity in general is all around you, but it doesn't really lure you out to recreate, like mountains and seashore might. And our long winters support a life spent indoors, with books and writing and

isolation. I can't see any reason I'd ever leave, really.

The YA literature community in Minnesota is spectacular. This is really the best thing about becoming a published author: getting to know all these great people who are funny and supportive and absolutely lovely to sit around gabbing with over a beer.

What is your biggest dream, for your writing career and/or another aspect of your life?

Mostly I just want to keep being able to make up stories. I also want to keep teaching teenagers writing; I've taught at the Loft since 2007 and cannot imagine my life without teaching there.

How do you most enjoy spending time when you're not writing?

I am so boring. I read a lot. I also spend a lot of time watching TV shows and processing the content of those shows via Twitter or my blog. I like to run, but I'm not competitive about that or particularly fast, either. I like to crochet and walk my dog. My daughter tells me all the time how boring I am and I'm afraid she's right about this. I need to work on acquiring some other glamorous hobbies.

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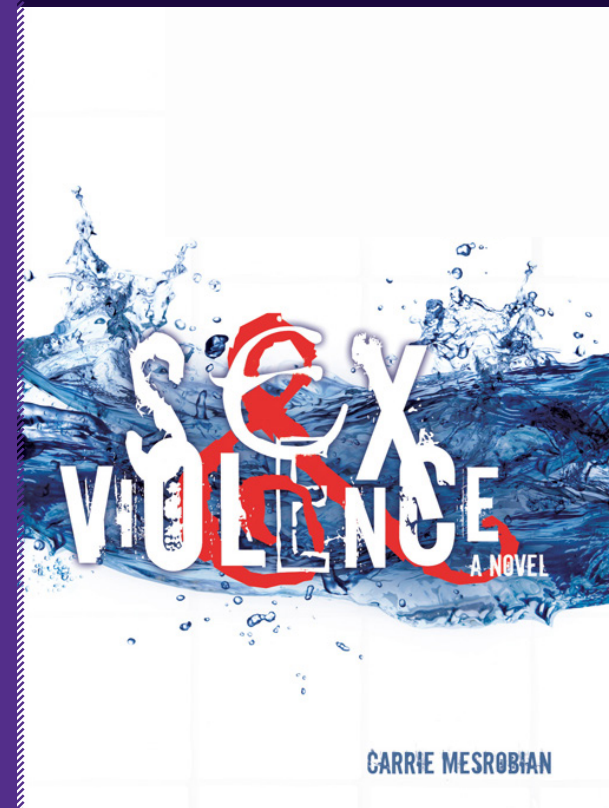
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WINNER

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Sex & Violence
by Carrie Mesrobian

CAROLRHODA LAB/LERNER PUBLISHING GROUP

SUMMARY

Sex has always come without consequences for seventeen-year-old Evan. Until he hooks up with the wrong girl and finds himself in the wrong place at very much the wrong time. After an assault that leaves Evan scarred inside and out, he and his father retreat to the family cabin in rural Minnesota—which, ironically, turns out to be the one place where Evan can't escape other people, including himself. It may also offer him his best shot at making sense of his life again.

Carrie Mesrobian at the Minnesota Book Awards' Meet the Finalists event



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What about Collette surprises and intrigues Evan right away? How is she different from the kinds of girls he usually hooks up with?
2. In his first letter to Collette, Evan says that the incident at Remington Chase cost him a “spleen and a left ear and a broken nose and ribs. More stuff too...” What else has he lost?
3. Do you think Baker is “abnormal”? Why or why not? What does Evan think?
4. Evan is disturbed by the possibility that his mother was involved with his uncle before his parents were married. What parallels does he draw between his own behavior and the way his father might've acted in that situation?
5. Baker tells Evan that he's “such a dork about people sometimes. Like you can just tell what people are like by how they look.” What's one example of Evan's first impressions being completely off-base? What about a time when his judgments turned out to be right?
6. Compare Harry's birthday party to the parties on the east side of the lake. Where is Evan more comfortable, and why?
7. Although Evan's run-in with Randy Garrington ends badly for Evan, how is the aftermath different from the attack in the Connison shower?
8. Why do you think Evan is willing to stick with Jordan, despite her problems, after years of avoiding real intimacy with anyone?
9. Soren is a firm believer in cycles. How does Evan's time at Pearl Lake fit into the pattern of his past life? How has he broken the pattern?
10. Do you think Collette will answer Evan's letters? What might she say?

Questions prepared by Carolrhoda Lab, a division of Lerner Publishing Group



ABOUT CARRIE MESROBIAN

Carrie Mesrobian teaches at the Loft Literary Center. Her work has appeared in the *Star Tribune*, *Brain*, *Child Magazine*, *Calyx*, and other publications. *Sex & Violence*, Mesrobian's debut novel, was a finalist for the William C. Morris Award. Her next book, *Perfectly Good White Boy*, will be out in the fall of 2014. **Visit the author's website at carriemesrobian.com.**



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