

Back in Time: Echoes of a Vanished America in the Heart of France. By Kent Cowgill. Paris, France: Ibis Press, 2007. 186 pp. Illustrations. \$16.00 paper.

Who would have thought Nebraska and France share so many similarities? Kent Cowgill's title gives out an important clue. In the winter of 2005, Cowgill travels to France for a dual purpose: to discover the French people's "real" views towards America, after Bush's reelection, and also to find out if rural France still brings back memories from past days in America's heartland.

Cowgill's original plan was to revisit six areas: first Normandy at Arromanches, then the southwest region, the Languedoc province, and finally Burgundy. He actually ends up exploring tinier communities than originally planned. His various encounters and discussions with the inhabitants reveal their struggles to keep their rural life alive against the "Walmarting" of their territory.

The author's peregrinations conflate very quickly into a deep and personal journey back to his Nebraska childhood at Silver Creek (population 450) where he was born on his parents' kitchen table. The French countryside conjures up memories of the now forgotten small town's life in the vast Plains of Nebraska. Nowadays, the small to medium-size farms have disappeared to be replaced by methamphetamine labs, "the only growth industry," and factory farming. The abandonment of rural areas is confirmed by Nebraska's last census, which shows that currently 52% of its population resides in three urban counties.

The author bemoans the loss of America's heart and soul, with the vanishing of its rural roots and way of life. He takes heart witnessing the struggles and the fragile survival of French vintners against globalization. He lauds also their valiant fight for the preservation of their country roots and culture. Cowgill writes convincingly and lovingly of a similar life, which once thrived in Nebraskan small rural towns, kept alive by railroad stops and small highways,

but which became almost extinct with the construction of the I-80 interstate. He advocates a revitalization of rural life with the help of organic farming and the creation of nature centers and bike trails.

Cowgill's various dealings with French country people remind him of the close-knit rural communities of his youth. He recalls exciting trips to the town grocery and drugstores. He writes of a prairie culture with its "gritty and hard working people" who were strong, silent, and independent. He recalls the simple pleasures of trout fishing in the Republican River, or road hunting pheasants with his family from their car.

This travel narrative successfully weaves two threads: the author's rediscovery of France's rural life and culture and, most importantly, a journey back to rural Nebraska in the 50s. This book could not have come out at a better time. It reflects the current mood, advocating a return to the basic and fundamental values, so well espoused in rural communities.

JULIETTE PARNELL

Department of Foreign
Languages and Literature
University of Nebraska at Omaha

Waiting for Coyote's Call: An Eco-Memoir from the Missouri River Bluff. By Jerry Wilson. Pierre: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2008. 284 pp. Map, photographs, index. \$24.95.

This book documents its author's move to the bluffs of the Missouri River valley in southeastern South Dakota and his experiences and personal reflections during twenty-five years of life there. In the spirit of Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac*, Jerry Wilson weaves together observations about the natural and human history of the bluffs and reflections—derived from his experiences on the South Dakota bluffs and his childhood on an Oklahoma farm—about how to live ethically on the land and toward its creatures. In so doing, he fashions an intimate tapestry of the Missouri River bluffs and

woodlands that are often underappreciated in the Plains.

Each of the book's five sections is divided into four chapters—each an extended essay. The first section, "Rehomesteading the Prairie," recounts how Wilson and his family purchased forty acres of bluff land and built a geo-solar home. Section two, "Into the Woods," describes personal experiences related to woodlands, water, and darkness. The third and longest section (seventy-one pages), "All my Relatives," devotes chapters to human predecessors on the bluff, both Native and Euro-American, and the animals and plants that live there. "Prairie Home" includes reflections about snow and winter, stones, gardening, and efforts at restoring the bluff land prairie. The final section, "The Bluff and Beyond," examines practices of land degradation (especially the loss of the family farm) that Wilson attributes to the arrogance of human attitudes toward the land. In the penultimate chapter, "Battles beyond the Bluff" Wilson extends his own ethic of land stewardship to struggles over a broader array of social and environmental issues across the state and region. The book ends with a diary of observations of nature on the bluff through the course of a year.

Although Wilson portrays the bluff's natural history in vivid detail, the book's central purpose is to promote an ethic of responsible stewardship of land and respect for wild creatures. In Wilson's view, we are all invaders who leave a mark on the land. The depth and permanence of that mark will depend on whether one chooses to view the land simply as "property" to which one holds rights, or as a "possession" that carries with it the obligation to "implement sustainable practices" and leave the land "at least as healthy as when he or she acquired it" As Wilson cautions, "We have but one moment to exploit the land—or to try in our feeble ways to begin to repay it for all it has given to so many who needed and took so much."

Waiting for Coyote's Call will appeal to Great Plains readers, particularly those familiar with the region around southeastern South Dakota. As a resident of Vermillion, just ten miles from

Wilson's bluff, I came away from the book with a deeper appreciation for the woodlands of the bluff and for the settlers who transformed the landscape (for good and ill) and attempted to eke out a living under the harsh conditions of the Northern Plains. But it will also appeal to a broader base, as the significance of the questions raised about the proper relationship of humans to the land have no geographic boundaries. In the words of Aldo Leopold, my land ethic, whether I view myself as a "conqueror" or as a "plain member and citizen" of the land will determine how I live, whether I will be an invader who leaves a lasting mark or a caretaker who will work to reduce or undo the damage done by me or my predecessors.

MARK D. DIXON

Department of Biology
University of South Dakota

Breathing in the Fullness of Time. By William Kloefkorn. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009. 231 pp. \$22.95.

The central metaphor in this final installment of Nebraska State Poet Bill Kloefkorn's four-part celebration of life in the Great Plains is air. Whereas his three previous memoirs—water, fire, and earth—explored childhood and adolescent memories, Kloefkorn here focuses mainly on adult experiences in college and the Marine Corps, teaching English at Nebraska Wesleyan, classroom adventures as a poet-in-residence, and his celebrated victory in the North Platte, Nebraska, hog-calling contest. Time and tradition are central concerns in this book, as is desire—in football and marriage, in writing poetry and being a good Marine or hog caller, in overcoming adversities like alcoholism—not his own, but his brother's.

Like all prairie pastoralists, Kloefkorn knows the darker side of nature and human nature, which, to his credit, he willingly admits in everything from subject matter to language. Without being sensational or noir, Bill Kloefkorn does name the names, drink the whiskey, use the words which are the strength of