

Power and the Afro in the 1970s. In addition, her analysis of beauticians' health activism in the late twentieth century does not make a distinction between the efforts of contemporary beauticians who have been co-opted by mainstream health organizations and the earlier work of beauty culturists whose activism was borne out of the black community itself. Despite this declension at the end of the text, *Beauty Shop Politics* remains a convincing chronicle of black women's social and political mobilization via the beauty industry.

*Memory of Trees: A Daughter's Story of a Family Farm*, by Gayla Marty. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010. xv, 237 pp. Illustrations, bibliographical note. \$24.95 cloth.

Reviewer Zachary Michael Jack is associate professor of English at North Central College. A native Iowan and resident of rural Jones County, he has edited many books of midwestern history, agriculture, and essay, including *Homer Croy: Corn Country Travel Writing, Literary Journalism, and Memoir* (2010) and *Iowa: The Definitive Collection* (2009).

I'm glad to have read Gayla Marty's smart, soulful memoir, *Memory of Trees: A Daughter's Story of a Family Farm* and happier still to recommend it. Although the Martys, like so many midwestern farm families, long ago sold out, Gayla Marty stands out as a farmer's daughter whose deeply felt epiphanies concerning the blessing and balm of her agrarian upbringing have been fully realized in an adult life lived in the Twin Cities. As the old saying goes, you can't take the farm out of the farmer's daughter, and for this fact we, her readers, are fortunate. Unlike other recent memoirs of its ilk, *Memory of Trees* is admirably understated and wholly but not blindly appreciative — not a purveyor of the wild child's woe-is-me, couldn't-wait-to-leave-the-farm tell-all that pervades today's farm memoirs written by erstwhile rural sons and daughters.

Although the trees that lend the book its name — maple, oak, birch, spruce, etc. — are episodically described in what amount to interstitial prose odes — the title itself misdirects: the book's front cover features good black dirt, tilled deep, for example, but only the foggiest outline of a tree may be made out. Marty's is not, then, principally a memoir of botany, ecology, or even sustainable agriculture, but a narrative of a daughter's role as a witness to, and sometimes player in, the machinations of a midwestern dairy farm near Rush City, Minnesota, in the 1960s and 1970s. Every farm family should be so lucky as to have a recorder as faithful as Marty, and she herself seems cognizant of her gift and its attendant burdens. "What was written on my

own forehead," she writes, "had not been visible to me, but now I knew part of it — that I should see this and write it down" (221).

The author is at her best describing the sweetly intentioned, utterly fallible members of her clan, lovingly parsing layers of family leaders and legends. As a trained journalist, Marty writes actively, with muscular verbs deployed in staccato rhythms that make for non-nonsense, monosyllabic music, like this: "Every other day, the bulk truck comes to pick up our milk from the cold tank in the new milk house. The driver pushes a giant hose through a trap door and attaches it to the bulk tank, and all the milk is sucked cleanly out" (52). Elsewhere the writing turns more rhapsodic, increasingly so as the memoir advances chronologically toward the present day, and as the voice of author, forced to bear witness to the illness and death of her elders and the ultimate auction of the farm, leans toward the worshipful. Of her uncle Gaylon, for example, Marty waxes, "I still see him in the sunlight, surrounded by a green field, fire lilies in the ditches, his face in the shade of the brim of his hat, light shirt, denim blue jeans . . . exulting under the sky" (230).

The author's ability to move between the utilitarian prose of a communications professional and the loftier rhapsodies of her family's Swedish Baptist faith distinguishes her writing, but such strengths sometimes turn to weakness when religious themes, so prominent in early chapters, functionally disappear in the book's broad middle. The author's intervening departure from the farm and from the book's initial eco-theological motifs makes the narrative and its author seem increasingly urban and secular with each successive chapter. Moreover, her laconic voice, coupled with the inherent timelessness of the farm, often make the whys and wherefores and whens of the story hard to track. A case in point is Marty's husband, Patrick, whom the memoir mentions only belatedly and obliquely, and the author's home in the Twin Cities, likewise mentioned sparingly. These omissions and others hint at unexplained gaps in a memoir that is, in the final analysis, far more revealing of the family than of the author-daughter as an adult.

In the end, midwestern readers, especially those with farm backgrounds, will discover in *Memory of the Trees* a well-wrought and historically relevant recollection. Like a sturdy hutch or table hewn by a farm elder, the art here shows signs of being fussed over and thoroughly worked. Others may want from it more roughness or more refinement; I like it just the way it is.