

Rooted: Seven Midwest Writers of Place, by David R. Pichaske. American Land and Life series. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2006. xxii, 355 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. \$54.95 cloth, \$29.95 paper.

Reviewer Diane Quantic is an associate professor emeritus of English at Wichita State University. She is the author of *The Nature of the Place: A Study of Great Plains Fiction* (1995) and coeditor of *A Great Plains Reader* (2003).

In *Rooted: Seven Midwest Writers of Place*, David Pichaske introduces readers to Dave Etter from Illinois; William Kloefkorn of Kansas and Nebraska; Norbert Blei, writing about Door County, Wisconsin; Linda Hasselstrom in South Dakota; Bill Holm, Minnesota writer; Jim Heynan of Iowa; and Jim Harrison, most closely identified with rural Michigan. After a first chapter on "Midwestern Literature," Pichaske devotes a chapter to each writer. His focus varies, depending on the nature of each writer's work: biography, formal literary analysis, various literary theories, language usage, and the writers' widely varying themes.

Most chapters include at least some discussion of each writer's connection to place, however tangential the connection might be. For example, the writer as outsider permeates Pichaske's discussion of Chicago native Norbert Blei, who writes about Door County, Wisconsin. Although he regretted changes in the popular tourist area, Blei gained a reputation as a spokesperson for the people of the region. Pichaske examines the life of rancher Linda Hasselstrom, whose work is deeply rooted in her experience around Hermosa, South Dakota, with cows, grass, and the "human community," especially her father and husband. A pun, "Holm and Away," is the title of Pichaske's take on writer Bill Holm, another wanderer who repeatedly retreated from and returned to Minnesota, Minnesota, and his ancestral home in Iceland, finally establishing homes in both places. The Iowa writer Pichaske includes is Jim Heynan, who wrote of Iowa farm boys in the 1970s and 1980s, although he never names the boys or the place. Like Blei, Heynan seems only distantly a part of the place he writes about. Finally, Pichaske discusses Jim Harrison, another wanderer who strayed as far as Hollywood, but who is, nevertheless, identified with upper Michigan and the Sandhills of Nebraska.

Pichaske titles his study *Rooted*, even though, except for Kloefkorn and Hasselstrom, his subjects are restless men who stray far from their roots. It is hard to get a sense of each writer's work because Pichaske rarely discusses a particular work at length. Nor does he provide dates of publication, preferring to organize his discussion around each writer's themes and literary devices. It appears that his study was conducted by reading the writers' works and critical studies and exchange-

ing e-mails rather than conducting face-to-face interviews with his subjects. As a result, it is difficult to get a clear sense of each writer's career and connections to the other writers. Instead of an integrated discussion of the importance of *place* in midwestern and Great Plains literature as depicted by these seven writers, Pichaske provides lists of words, names, idioms, metaphors, literary forms, and other devices used by each writer. *Rooted* seems an odd title for a work that relates the restless careers of writers, most of them academics, who, in several cases, *resist* place.

For readers of the *Annals of Iowa*, this work is apt to be a disappointment. There is little attempt to integrate the careers of these writers with the deep impact the prairie landscape of Iowa and surrounding states has had on so many writers. Better to read the writers themselves and discover the ways they explore their decidedly ambiguous roots.