

hybridized corn, Soviet collective farms could produce enough food for their people (something that had virtually never been accomplished throughout the history of Soviet Russia), and begin to challenge the agricultural superiority the United States has enjoyed since the end of World War II. The unlikely diplomacy between the two men who were described as rough around the edges was seemingly easier to accomplish than all of the state dinners, cabinet level meetings, and Washington insider networking events Khrushchev was treated to on his trip. The lack of emphasis on this part of the trip is a little disconcerting, knowing how much it meant to both men.

That said, for a readership that is not well acquainted with this part of the Cold War, Nelson and Schoenbachler have woven together an impressive narrative. They have introduced the people involved with the historic visit, their influences, and their desired outcomes. Readers will experience the clash between a true believer in the superiority of Marxist ideology and the bedrock figures of American capitalism. The authors have done well to shed light on a complex period in history in such a way that anyone could pick up the book, enjoy the story, and learn about a time during the Cold War when warheads were laid down in favor of toasting glasses and ears of corn.

A Delicate Aggression: Savagery and Survival in the Iowa Writers' Workshop, by David O. Dowling. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2019. xi, 420 pp. Timeline, illustrations, notes, index. \$35 hardcover.

Reviewer Jeff Charis-Carlson is a freelance writer based in Iowa. He is an adjunct instructor for the University of Iowa School of Journalism and Mass Communication, a former reporter for the *Des Moines Register*, and a former editorial writer for the *Iowa City Press-Citizen*.

"Everywhere I go I'm asked if I think universities stifle writers," Flannery O'Connor said during an interview in 1960. "My opinion is that they don't stifle enough of them." O'Connor offered that quip (which is cast in bronze on Iowa City's Literary Walk) more than a dozen years after she graduated from the Writers' Workshop at the University of Iowa. But the sentiment she expressed also deftly summarizes the Darwinian purpose behind the intensive critique sessions that her mentor, Paul Engle, envisioned for the MFA program he directed from 1941 to 1965.

How different writers react to those stifling Workshop sessions—those "volatile cocktail(s) of ego and competition" (2)—provides the through line for David Dowling's comprehensive history of the program, *A Delicate Aggression: Savagery and Survival in the Iowa Writers' Workshop*. In this 420-page, heavily endnoted book, Dowling traces the

long but hard-to-see shadow that Engle continues to cast on the most highly ranked graduate creative writing program in the United States. Dowling demonstrates how it was largely because of Engle's entrepreneurial energy (and his willingness to take money from nearly any source) that Iowa is now as well known for world-renowned writing as it is for regular visits from presidential hopefuls.

Past histories of the 83-year-old Workshop largely have been inside affairs, resulting in either quasi-hagiographical memoirs or critical denunciations of the Workshop method. The program's reputation stands to benefit either way. Writers and poets who thrive under the stress, like novelist T. C. Boyle and war memoirist Anthony Swofford, are hailed as success stories; those who rebel and denounce the blood-letting, like poet W. D. Snodgrass and poet/novelist Sandra Cisneros, are still hailed for finding their voice in opposition to the Workshop.

But there has been a growing area of scholarship (from Mark McGurl, Eric Bennett, and others) that situates the Workshop within the evolution of cultural production in the postwar era. Dowling, an associate professor of journalism at the University of Iowa, has extensive experience writing about the ways nineteenth-century authors learned to navigate shifting literary marketplaces. In Engle's long legacy, he saw an opportunity to link the intense professionalization of authorship in the mid-twentieth century with the mass cultural market forces of the present day.

Dowling argues that the Cedar Rapids-born Engle worked to bring talented young writers to the heart of the Midwest and disabuse them of the romantic notion that they just need to wait patiently to be discovered. Instead, he used the public university setting to expose them to the "savagery" they eventually would experience from literary agents, publishers, and critics. The resulting Workshop (always capitalized) began attracting award-winning writers to serve as faculty and saw graduates begin to claim their own Pulitzer Prizes, National Book Awards, and poet laureateships.

Rather than compose a straightforward chronological history of the Workshop's expansion as an institution, Dowling provides 15 "critical biographies" of students and faculty members identified with the Workshop's history. The list stretches from O'Connor in the 1940s to Ayana Mathis, whose *The Twelve Tribes of Hattie* (2012) gained a national following after it was selected for Oprah Winfrey's Book Club 2.0. The book also explores how Engle's successors—George Starbuck (1966–1969), Jack Leggett (1970–1987), and Frank Conroy (1987–2005)—continued to build on the pedagogical (and patriarchal) foundation that he laid. It is only with the 2006 hiring of novelist Lan Samantha Chang

as director that alumni begin to see “a sea change in the gender and ethnic politics of the program” (343).

Along the way, Dowling discusses a roughly equal number of poets and fiction writers—summarizing some well-known anecdotes from Workshop lore (such as the 1954 fistfight between future Pulitzer Prize-winning poets Philip Levine and John Berryman), providing thorough research on some lesser-known alumni (including poet Robert Shelley and novelist Marguerite Young), and giving a disturbing yet nuanced account of the misogyny, sexual predation, and hyper-masculinity that permeated Workshop culture for generations. The central chapters on the 1970s experiences of Cisneros, Joy Harjo, and Rita Dove are among the most compelling in the book.

Not all the anecdotes shared in *A Delicate Aggression* illustrate Dowling’s main thesis, and reviewers have been critical of when the book’s large-scale focus narrows to the minutiae of individual episodes. But Dowling demonstrates how the contradictions raised by Engle’s creative and market-driven visions remain as applicable for the Workshop in the twenty-first century as they were when Engle interrupted class to proudly announce that he had secured funding for an “Iowa Natural Gas Fellowship in Creative Writing” (63).

Visions of the Tallgrass: Prairie Photographs by Harvey Payne, photographs by Harvey Payne, essays by James P. Ronda. Charles M. Russell Center Series on Art and Photography of the American West 33. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2018. xv, 162 pp. Color photographs, map, notes, bibliography, index. \$34.95 hardcover.

Reviewer Rebecca Conard is professor of history emeritus at Middle Tennessee State University. She is the author of *Places of Quiet Beauty: Parks, Preserves, and Environmentalism* (1997).

Visions of the Tallgrass is a paean to the great prairie that once covered central North America, more particularly the 45,000 acres protected by The Nature Conservancy as the Joseph H. Williams Tallgrass Prairie Preserve near Pawhuska, Oklahoma, formerly the Barnard tract of the Chapman-Barnard Ranch established by Texas oilmen James A. Chapman and Horace G. Barnard. More than a hundred captivating photographs by nature photographer Harvey Payne, a native Oklahoman, are situated in a set of discursive essays by noted western historian James P. Ronda, a self-described “child of the Chicago suburbs” and transplanted academic (14). The skillfully interwoven text and images reflect an enduring friendship that began in 1990, when Payne was serving as the preserve’s first director and Ronda arrived at the University of Tulsa as the first holder of the Barnard Chair in Western American History.