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Ghost Dances: Proving Up on the Great Plains by Josh
Garrett-Davis (review)

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(Review)

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the center of American literary life in his time and served as a strong advocate of the Midwest finding its own voice, one less dependent on the East and Europe. In the end, Garland produced forty-seven books and hundreds of magazine articles. In both *Hamlin Garland* and *Garland in His Own Time*, Newlin has brilliantly captured Garland's significance.

When Garland began to make his way in the world of American letters in Boston, he left his mark by emphasizing the strains of farm life in once well known books such as *Main-Travelled Roads* (1891). Some mid-westerners thought Garland was catering too much to eastern prejudices in such works. Cather, for example, was critical of "all that sort of rot which Mr. Hamlin Garland and his school have seen fit to write about our peaceable and rather inoffensive country." Newlin also includes in *Garland in His Own Time* an account of the writer's early life in Dakota Territory, revealing that the Garland family was actually quite well off. It is the choice of such accounts that makes Newlin's new compendium a crucial source for those seeking to contextualize Garland's works.

After the turn of the century, Garland turned to other forms of writing, including novels about the farther American West, which helped him make money but cost him critical support. Later, he wrote a great deal about his own life, including *A Son of the Middle Border* (1917), which was more positive about prairie life and, arguably, more of a contribution to American literary realism. Garland also adhered to an older sense of decorum and resisted the "pornography" and publicity-driven themes he found in the works of modernist and "revolt from the village" writers. Newlin's thoughtfully selected commentaries will help a new generation of read-

ers understand these turns in Garland's career and how he was ultimately pushed to the margins of American literary life and deemed, as one of Newlin's commentators notes, a "no longer significant has-been."

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Ghost Dances: Proving Up on the Great Plains.

By Josh Garrett-Davis. New York: Little, Brown and Co., 2012. vii + 327 pp. Maps, photographs, notes, index. \$25.99.

This is not a book about the Lakota Ghost Dance that precipitated the death of Sitting Bull and the Massacre at Wounded Knee. Josh Garrett-Davis notes both of these events, which occurred in 1890, but his interest is in exploring the "ghost dances" of the 1990s, his formative years. Now studying history at Princeton University, the author lived in several South Dakota towns, such as Aberdeen, where he was born and his parents owned a record store; Hot Springs, where his father began his own career as an attorney; and Pierre, where he attended high school and played in a sequence of punk-rock bands. The object of seemingly unending custody battles between a leftist father who found a home in South Dakota and a lesbian mother who found a new home farther west, Garrett-Davis also lived for a time in Portland, Oregon.

Where he lived and why he, too, left are important points. Viewed through the especially relevant taxonomy proposed by Patrick Carr and Maria Kefalas in *Hollowing Out the Middle* (2009), Garrett-Davis is an Achiever, someone who leaves small-town middle America for college, in his case Amherst. But

he is also a Returner: he comes back, at least temporarily, to research his family for an MFA at Columbia, a project that takes him to Nebraska and ultimately to California. There he reconnects with an older cousin, herself a model Achiever.

One way to appreciate *Ghost Dances* is to see it as an amalgam of two other books about middle America—Ian Frazier's *Great Plains* (1987) and Debra Marquart's *The Horizontal World* (2007)—combining travelogue with autobiography, even spiritual geography, in the manner but without the tone of Kathleen Norris. Rather than choosing Lawrence Welk as an example of someone who made it out, Garrett-Davis gives us his cousin Ruth Harris, a music teacher turned activist from Nebraska who traveled the world in pursuit of peace and justice.

The third and final section of the book is called "Buffalo Commonplace," a pun on Frank and Deborah Popper's response to the depopulation of the rural Great Plains by proposing the creation of a vast bison commons. In many ways, the entire book is a commonplace, where the author has assembled retellings of his encounters with such ghost dancers as Scotty Philip, Willa Cather, William Jennings Bryan, William Janklow, and park ranger Bob Menasek. Here also are Fred Phelps, the Westboro Baptist pastor who fomented hatred of gays, and the gay cowboys of Cap Iversen's novels. In their own paradoxical way, each is seeking a vision, hoping for utopia, moving toward a time when the oppressors will vanish and the buffalo will return, as prophesied.

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Embracing Fry Bread:

Confessions of a Wannabe.

By Roger Welsch. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012. x + 256 pp. \$19.95 paper.

It was with some trepidation that I first opened Roger Welsch's book, having come from a history of teaching Native American literature for over eight years as a "non-Indian," and having encountered Sioux writer Vine Deloria Jr.'s essay "Indians Today, the Real and Unreal." In this essay Deloria states, "Those whites who dare not claim Indian blood have an asset of their own. They *understand* Indians." He goes on to emphasize, "We need fewer and fewer 'experts' on Indians. What we need is a cultural leave us alone agreement in spirit and in fact." My trepidation left as I encountered Welsch's work on "Wannabes." Perhaps this term is best understood in the beginning of the book when he writes that he avoids radical activism and polemics regarding Indian interests because he is not Indian and therefore cannot speak for Indians. "American Indians speak quite well enough for themselves, thank you very much, so I sit back and listen." Throughout, Welsch manifests himself as a listener who has spent fifty-five years involved in Native culture where he has made uncountable friends. His ability to write honest prose, both informative and erudite, captivates from the beginning.

The choice to start with a coyote story is both applicable and ironic. Coyote, a trickster figure in Native American cosmology, is one who both contradicts and illuminates. According to Welsch, those who are Wannabes become that way for a variety of reasons, which are equally contradictory (to non-Indians and Indians alike) and illuminating. Welsch clarifies all this and more in subsequent chapters full of personal anecdotal information and his-