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*Creating Dairyland: How Caring for Cows Saved Our Soil,
Created Our Landscape, Brought Prosperity to Our State, and
Still Shapes Our Way of Life in Wisconsin* by Edward Janus
(review)

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ler could easily be accused of romanticizing his beloved dairyland, and in turn, the larger idea of small town America. But he seems ready to counter any objections by doubling down, as he seems to here, again in the voice of Lee:

America, I think, is about poor people playing music and poor people sharing food and poor people dancing, even when everything else in their lives is so desperate, and so dismal that it doesn't seem that there should be any room for any music, any extra food, or any extra energy for dancing. And people say that I'm wrong, that we're a puritanical people, an evangelical people, a selfish people, but I don't believe that. I don't want to believe that.

Shotgun Lovesongs is a welcome respite from the parade of cynicism that makes up far too much of our American media. Even in the world of literary fiction, we too often detect a sort of glee emanating from the author behind the pages, as she or he luxuriates in the misfortunes of the characters. If there is a major fault in Butler's novel, it is the opposite. Perhaps he cares for these characters a bit too much, and this affection may disarm him and effectively prohibit him from exploring the depths of their natures. But one suspects that Butler might argue that, counter to accepted wisdom, one's nature may not be brought into clearest relief when suffering great distress; rather, it could be we find out who we really are on some day like any other day, having a beer with old friends.

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Edward Janus, *Creating Dairyland: How Caring for Cows Saved Our Soil, Created Our Landscape, Brought Prosperity to Our State, and Still Shapes Our Way of Life in Wisconsin*. Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2011. 232 pp. \$26.95, paper.

This extraordinarily readable book examines a quintessential midwestern cultural marker—the Wisconsin dairy industry—and argues that “dairy cows . . . created the Wisconsin that we know and love today” and instilled in local residents a “faith that care of the cow and the soil would bring them prosperity, even happiness” (xiii). In particular, the author notes his awe at the intellectual and scientific manner with which many farmers con-

ducted their business. Although many coastal residents view midwestern agriculturalists as uneducated rubes, Janus notes that these “progressive men and women taught me that dairy farming is as much about thinking as it is about mud, milk, and manure” (xv). However, he does not imply that all farmers are forward thinkers. His multi-perspective portrayal of Wisconsin dairying shows a deep appreciation for those who eschewed progressive methods because of their ability to find “satisfaction by playing only their own small part in the world” (xv). For Janus, these farmers are credited with preserving traditions passed down through generations. Most importantly, his focus is not only on methods of agricultural output. Janus elucidates the commitment farmers made to pass on a fertile, improved farm to their children and describes the lengths they undertake to achieve that goal.

To tell his tale, Janus provides a short history of Wisconsin dairying in the first third of his work and finishes with the stories of nine different homesteads in Southwest Wisconsin. The historical section, while brief, is broken into ten chronological chapters. While academic specialists will find little new material, these pages will bring historical perspective to many who wish to learn about one of the most iconic emblems of life in the Midwest. He uses a relatively large number of primary sources from around the state’s dairy region to express the desires and experiences of average farmers. Moreover, the author provides enough background on external forces to give readers a clear sense of why Wisconsinites chose to act as they did as noted by his description of wheat cultivation, early cheese production, the effect of immigration and industrialization. However, this book does not delve into dairying issues of the mid to late twentieth century. There is little discussion of the production revolution of the mid-twentieth century or the farm crisis of the 1980s. Janus provides some statistics on increasing herd size and milk output but provides less context regarding why these changes occur.

Instead, he lets dairy farmers speak for the decades after Great Depression themselves. The second part of the book—individual chapters highlighting the myriad experiences of Wisconsin dairying—are personal and enlightening. Beginning with the Saxon family homestead in Manitowoc County and their search for profitable, yet sustainable, agriculture, Janus provides readers with excellent examples of how Wisconsin dairy farmers across the state adapt to ever-changing economic climates and cultural needs. These stories highlight the personal nature of cow culture and con-

vincingly illuminate how and why dairy farmers choose to remain on the land when—as is often noted in this volume—milk prices refuse to cooperate with family budgets.

The author acknowledges that he fell in love with the “miracles” of dairying during his two year tenure as a dairy farmer in Crawford County in Southwest Wisconsin during the 1970s—and it is evident in this informative book. He notes that “being among cows . . . makes being a dairy farmer unlike any other vocation . . . as ancient a way of being as any that modern people can aspire to” (xv). The language of the book reinforces his dairy bias. Janus states that cash cropping during early statehood “made men a bit crazy” and “left severe deficits . . . in farmers’ moral core” (7–8). For Janus, cows are a key to morality because they force farmers to be steady, patient and understanding stewards of the land. However, this bias may not be his alone. Significantly, his interviews with contemporary farmers support this view. One farmer noted, “When I take a walk throughout little ten-acre woods . . . that to me is a sacred little spot on earth . . . so we have kind of a moral obligation to not let [our ancestors] down” (64). While skeptical readers could criticize his obvious connection with dairy farmers, his historical tale is sound, and the stories he tells convey the multitude of experiences that are present in Wisconsin.

Ultimately, readers interested in the Midwest will find this volume a forceful supporter of the “traditional” characteristics that make the region unique to the American experience. For Janus, cows are a salve for the human soul and no better lifestyle exists. The authors’ passion for sustainable dairying and clear prose combine to draw attention to the economic and social issues that are of foremost importance for contemporary milk producers. It will certainly entice general readers to further study an industry that is profoundly “midwestern.” On a broader scale, this book will draw interest in other aspects of midwestern life. Few readers will be able to finish this volume and resist the urge to comprehend how Iowans experience corn culture. Janus’s book is an excellent opportunity to begin to further the study of agri-“culture” in the Midwest. Midwestern life is often typified by a connection to the land and this volume is an admirable introduction to the historical, social and cultural issues of agriculture that force people to adapt to outside pressures to maintain that desired connection. Beginning with Janus’s work and penetrating more broadly and deeply into the historical record, historians will be able to more fully understand the experience

of agriculturalists in this and other industries and begin to reexamine our broader judgments about the nature of farming in the Midwest.

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Charlie LeDuff, *Detroit: An American Autopsy*. New York: Penguin Books, 2013. 304 pp. \$27.95.

In recent years the death of Detroit has joined such perennials as the sinking of the *Titanic* and the explosion of the *Hindenburg* as a favorite topic among disaster aficionados. A long list of books, articles, film documentaries, and television reports have fed the curiosity of those millions seeking to know what went wrong. Photographers, both amateur and professional, have descended on the city, providing an ample visual record for those wishing to gawk at the disaster that is Detroit. The Motor City has become the wreck on the highway that everyone slows down to stare at. Charlie LeDuff's *Detroit: An American Autopsy* adds to this mound of postmortems. Better written and more gut wrenching than previous works, LeDuff's account has achieved bestseller status. As LeDuff observes: "There is little else Detroit has to export except its misery" (283). Judging from the favorable response to LeDuff's account, that export industry appears alive and well.

Actually *Detroit: An American Autopsy* is as much a memoir as a commentary on a city in distress. Raised in the Detroit region, LeDuff returned to his hometown in 2008 after a stint with the *New York Times* and took a job with the foundering *Detroit News*. His book is a personal account of his two years covering the corruption and chaos of the once-great city. Not only is LeDuff himself the protagonist and first person narrator of his work, but his dysfunctional family serves as a symbol for the dysfunctional city. Plagued by drug use, a lack of education, and underemployment, the LeDuff clan, like the city, is clinging to existence, toughing it out in a hostile world. LeDuff chronicles the chicanery and buffoonery of Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick and city council president Monica Conyers, befriends the city's beleaguered firefighters, and reports on the feckless police department. Interlaced with these tales of civic larceny and frustrated but conscientious public servants, he poignantly tells of his deceased sister—a prostitute and drug addict who died young—and her daughter, who fatally overdosed on heroin. He