

The **NCB** News

Volume 15

Spring 2005

No. 1

A Publication of the Nebraska Center for the Book

Poet Laureate Ted Kooser Awarded Pulitzer Prize

The Pulitzer Board awarded Ted Kooser's *Delights and Shadows* the 2005 Pulitzer Prize for poetry (Review on page 7). The award recognizes a distinguished volume of original verse by an American author and is accompanied by a prize of \$10,000. Ted Kooser, of rural Garland, is one of Nebraska's most highly regarded poets and the country's current Poet Laureate. Kooser has been writing and publishing poetry for more than forty years. "Ted Kooser is a major poetic voice for rural and small-town America and the first poet laureate chosen from the Great Plains," Librarian of Congress James H.

Billington said. "His verse reaches beyond his native region to touch on universal themes in accessible ways."

Ted is a long-time leader in Nebraska literary efforts and one of the Nebraska Center for the Book's earliest supporters. In 1982, he served as founding president of the Nebraska Literary Heritage Association and he received the Mari Sandoz Award for significant, enduring contribution to the Nebraska book world from the Nebraska Library Association in 2000.

For more information on the Pulitzer Prize see <www.Pulitzer.org>. ▲

Nebraska Wesleyan Hosts 2005 Book Festival

by Shelly Clark,
Nebraska Center for
the Book President

2005 Nebraska Book Festival—a year for firsts! Nebraska Wesleyan University (NWU) is the site for the annual Book Festival to be held October 8, 2005. Not only is this the first time for the festival to be held on the NWU campus, but it is the first time the U.S. Poet Laureate will headline the festival as featured speaker. It's no secret that we are bursting with pride that "our" poet, Ted Kooser, has agreed to participate in the festival and will bring an added dimension to our program, along with many other talented artists and exciting activities.

Further program developments will be featured in the Summer *NCB News* and on the Nebraska Center for the Book Web site, <www.unl.edu/NCB/>.

But you can count on this: we are in good hands. Jim Schaffer, NWU English Department chair, is serving as the festival director and has recruited staff from NWU to join the planning committee. They are currently developing the festival activities and program in collaboration with committee members from Nebraska Center for the Book, Nebraska Library Commission, Nebraska Humanities Council, University of Nebraska Press, and members at large. It is a dynamic group and good things are going to happen at the 2005 Nebraska Book Festival, so mark your calendars for October 8. For more information contact Jim Schaffer, 402-423-6224, e-mail: <jrs@nebrwesleyan.edu> ▲



Nebraska Center for the Book Membership Doubles?

by Mary Jo Ryan,
Nebraska Library
Commission

Wouldn't it be great if we could use this headline for a story about the groundswell of support for the Nebraska Center for the Book? Since 1990, this coalition of organizations and individuals has worked to support Nebraska books and writing. We need your help to continue this fine tradition. Please use the

membership form on page 3 of this newsletter to join the Nebraska Center for the Book or to renew your membership. If you send your check today, your membership fees will help support the upcoming 2005 Nebraska Book Festival. Thank you, in advance. ▲

Exciting Times Ahead for the Center for the Book

Guest Editorial
by Shelly Clark,
Nebraska Center for
the Book President

What an exciting time to be the "captain of the ship." It is such an honor to serve as Nebraska Center for the Book (NCB) President in what I think will prove to be an exciting and pivotal year for this organization. I am so pleased that Nebraska Wesleyan University will be the site for the Nebraska Book Festival on October 8 and that Ted Kooser, U.S. Poet Laureate, will be the featured speaker.

In addition to the work of the festival, NCB board members and members of partner organizations such as Nebraska Library Commission and Nebraska Humanities Council are working on other vital programs. In January, the newly-formed permanent book festival committee began meeting to work on long-range planning for future festivals. Bringing together this committee has been a goal for the past few years. It is our belief that this is an integral step in strengthening the Book Festival and taking it "into the future."

If the chance arises, I shamelessly "brag" that I have attended all the Nebraska Book Festivals. I have driven across the state to Chadron, Wayne, Peru, Lincoln, Kearney, Grand Island, and Omaha. On several occasions, students accompanied me (at times having raised field trip money selling cake raffle tickets at high school basketball games and through other money-making schemes.) I treasure a photograph I have of five of my students gathered around Tillie Olson, all grinning widely (including Tillie), their arms intertwined, having spent the afternoon at the University of Nebraska at Omaha talking books and other things. She called them "her girls" by the end of the day.

I have also had the privilege of working with some of the finest individuals you can imagine as I served on various festival committees through the years. My life, my students' lives, and my daughters' lives have been truly enriched by the people brought together and the events sponsored by the Nebraska Book Festival. That,

in part, is why I feel so profoundly the need to do what I can to foster and promote this program. You cannot measure the kind of impact this can have on your life and the lives of others. You can only give testimony.

Meanwhile, other important programs fostered by NCB continue to serve the literary community. The Nebraska Book Awards program, now in its sixth year, continues to recognize and honor books written by Nebraska authors, published by Nebraska publishers, set in Nebraska, or relating to Nebraska. Award categories include fiction, non-fiction, poetry, anthology, children/young adults, and design/illustration. NCB is currently soliciting entries, so please encourage authors and publishers to enter (see page 4 for details). The honorees will be recognized at the Book Festival in October. Also, this year's recipient of the Mildred Bennett award will be given honors at the festival. Letters about Literature is another successful program that had an exceptional year in 2004 with a national award winner, Jackson Fisher, representing Nebraska. This national program continues as a NCB project. Congratulations, Jackson, and all the 2005 winners! (See page 3 for details on 2005 winners.)

In May 2004, I traveled to Washington D.C. to the Library of Congress where I met with Center for the Book representatives from across the nation and with John Cole, Director of the National Center for the Book and his staff. Before this trip, I always thought of the Nebraska Center for the Book as a "local" organization promoting literature and books in our state through programs and events. Suddenly, I realized that we are a part of something much larger. And with all the turmoil and uneasiness that seemed to be swirling around us that day in Washington D.C., I remember thinking, thank goodness for this repository, for this tradition of promoting and preserving "the word." How refreshing...and how very, very important. ▲

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Nebraska Center for the Book Board and Committees

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Denise Brady

Nebraska Library Commission Director Rod Wagner is an ex-officio member of all committees.

2005 Nebraska Center for the Book Board Meetings

May 7 Lincoln, Nebraska Wesleyan University
August 6 Central City
November 6 Lincoln, Annual Meeting

Advertising

The *NCB News* can accept up to four 1/8 page ads for each issue. The advertising rate

is \$125 for 1/8 page. *NCB News* is issued May 1, August 15, and November 1. The advertising and copy deadline is six weeks prior to issue date. For details, contact Mary Jo Ryan, Nebraska Center for the Book, The Atrium, 1200 N Street, Suite 120, Lincoln, NE 68508-2023; phone 402-471-3434, 800-307-2665, e-mail: <mjryan@nlc.state.ne.us>, <www.unl.edu/NCB>.

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All book cover art and photos reprinted by permission of the publisher.

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Nebraska Letters about Literature Winners Honored

On March 15, Governor Dave Heineman signed a proclamation declaring April 10-16, 2005 as National Library Week in Nebraska, celebrated with recognition of the **Letters about Literature** state award winners. Six young writers were honored for their letters to authors, living or dead, describing how the authors' books or stories changed their way of viewing the world.

The winners are:

- ▲ **Fiona Loggie** from Omaha for a letter to Dianne Gray
- ▲ **Elizabeth Milan** from Herman for a letter to Misty Bernall
- ▲ **Alexander J. Lin** from Lincoln for a letter to Mark Twain

Alternates are:

- ▲ **Alex Totusek** from Omaha for a letter to Montrew Dunham

- ▲ **Amanda Wall** from Henderson for a letter to Barbara Park
- ▲ **John Welch** from Hastings for a letter to Victor Hugo

The Nebraska Center for the Book, as an affiliate of the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress, hosted the young writers at a luncheon. Copies of the winning letters were signed and presented for inclusion in the archival collection in the Jane Pope Geske Heritage Room of Nebraska Authors, Lincoln City Libraries.

The Center for the Book in the Library of Congress, in partnership with Target Stores, sponsors Letters about Literature, a national reading and writing promotion program for children and young adults. The contest is sponsored locally by Nebraska Center for the Book, Nebraska Library Commission, and Houchen Bindery, LTD. ▲

What is the Nebraska Center for the Book?

The Nebraska Center for the Book brings together the state's readers, writers, booksellers, librarians, publishers, printers, educators, and scholars to build the community of the book. We are the people who know and love books, and who value the richness they bring to our lives. Our Nebraska Center supports programs to celebrate and stimulate public interest in books, reading, and the written word. We have been an affiliate of the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress since 1990. ▲

Nominate Now for Jane Geske Award

Nominations are sought for the Nebraska Center for the Book's Jane Pope Geske Award. Established in recognition of Jane Geske's contributions to the well-being of the libraries of Nebraska, the award recognizes a Nebraska association, organization, business, library, school, academic institution, or other group that has made an exceptional long-term contribution to the Nebraska Community of the Book in regard to literacy, books, reading, libraries, bookselling, and/or writing in Nebraska. Geske, former Nebraska Library Commission Director, was a founding member of the Nebraska Center for the Book and a long-time, active participant in many Nebraska library and literary

activities. The Nebraska Writing Project received the 2005 award.

Nominations and supporting letters must be received by July 15 at Nebraska Center for the Book Jane Geske Award, c/o Rod Wagner, Nebraska Library Commission Director, 1200 N. Street, Suite 120, Lincoln NE 68508-2023, 402-471-4001, 800-307-2665, fax: 402-471-2083, e-mail: <rwagner@nlc.state.ne.us>.

The 2005 Jane Geske Award will be presented at the November 6 Annual Meeting of the Nebraska Center for the Book in Lincoln. ▲

Join the Nebraska Center for the Book

Name _____ Address _____

Phone _____ E-Mail: _____

Name/address of a friend who might be interested in NCB membership:

___ \$15 Individual Membership ___ \$25 Organizational Membership ___ \$50 Octavo Membership
 ___ \$100 Quarto Membership ___ \$250 Folio Membership

**Please send this form and a check to: Nebraska Center for the Book
 The Atrium, 1200 N Street, Suite 120 • Lincoln, NE 68508-2023**



Nebraska Book Awards Nominations Sought

The Nebraska Book Awards, sponsored by the Nebraska Center for the Book and supported by the Nebraska Library Commission, recognizes and honors books written by Nebraska authors, published by Nebraska publishers, set in Nebraska, or relating to Nebraska. Submit nominations for the 2005 Competition (books with a 2004 copyright) by June 30.

Books must be professionally published, have an International Standard Book Number (ISBN), and be bound. Books may be entered in one or more of the following categories: Anthology, Children/Young Adult, Cover Design/Illustration, Fiction, Nonfiction, and Poetry. Certificates will be awarded to the winners in each category.

Award winners will be announced at the Nebraska Book Festival on October 8, 2005 at Nebraska Wesleyan University in Lincoln. The winning books will be displayed at the Book Festival. Winners are entitled to display award stickers on their book covers.

For more information and entry forms see the Library Commission home page, <www.nlc.state.ne.us>, search on NCB Book Awards or contact Maria Medrano-Nehls, 402-471-2045, 800-307-2665, e-mail: <mnehls@nlc.state.ne.us> for print information. Send the entry form, three copies of the book, and the \$40 entry fee to NCB Book Awards, Nebraska Library Commission, The Atrium, 1200 N Street, Suite 120, Lincoln, NE 68508-2023. ▲



Writers' Conference Set for June 18-24



Plans are underway for the third annual Nebraska Summer Writers' Conference, to be held on the campus of the University of Nebraska—Lincoln, June 18-24, 2005. The conference brings together writers from all across

the country at every stage of development, from seasoned professionals to talented beginners.

The program includes nine weekend workshops and eleven week-long workshops in poetry, novel, short story, creative nonfiction, mystery, memoir, publishing, and screenwriting. Master classes with best-selling novelist Ron Hansen and prize-winning

poet Hilda Raz will be featured, along with consultations with New York literary agents and editors.

Faculty for 2005 include Jane Barnes, Grace Bauer, Rita Mae Brown, Robert Olen Butler, Jonathan Coleman, Elizabeth Dewberry, Stephen Dunn, Ron Hansen, Jesse Lee Kercheval, Jonathon Lazear, Deirdre McNamer, Leslie Adrienne Miller, Lon Otto, Ladette Randolph, Hilda Raz, Emma Sweeney, Sharon Oard Warner, and Webster Younce.

New this year, Nebraska State Poet William Kloeffkorn will teach a workshop for Nebraska high school students, June 18-19. For more information, see <www.unl.edu/nsw>, e-mail: <jagee@unl.edu>, 402-472-1834, 402-797-2416. ▲

Review: *Murder in Volume*

by D. R. Meredith

Berkeley Prime
Crime, 2000

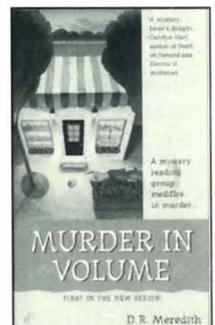
Reviewed by
Barbara

Rixstine,
University of
Nebraska-Lincoln

What happens when a mystery reading group meddles in murder? That's the basic plot of *Murder in Volume*, by D. R. Meredith. The first in a series, the book is set in Amarillo, TX and follows assistant reference librarian Megan Clark as she solves the problem of first one, and then two, murders related to her mystery group.

Dr. Clark has her doctorate in forensic anthropology. After not finding much work in her field, (she feels strongly that being only 26, petite, with curly red hair, and sounding sweet is part of the problem), she turned to library work. Helping her find and solve crimes is 45-year-old Ryan Stevens, curator of history at the Panhandle-Plains Museum at West Texas A & M. Stevens doesn't know much about mysteries, but he likes Clark.

Although Clark works as a librarian, not much of the book takes place in the library, except for an opening chapter where she's working in the children's literature section. Most of the action occurs in and around the Time and Again Bookstore, where the mystery group meets. I didn't find much of the solving-by-author that the book jacket suggests, and most mystery aficionados will spot the murderer before the denouement, but for book club members and their sponsors, it's an interesting take on whodunits. ▲



High Plains Reading

by **Michael Cartwright**,
Chadron State
College

For summer readers interested in literature originating on the Great Plains, there are a number of novels by which one can journey from Canada to Mexico and from the Missouri River to the Rocky Mountains. Ella Deloria's *Waterlily* is a good starting point. Deloria studied with the well-known anthropologist Franz Boas, who encouraged her and Zora Neale Hurston to write about the people they knew best. Deloria turned to her Native American roots in South Dakota for material for her novel written in 1944, but not published until 1988. *Waterlily* follows the life of a woman steeped in the tribal knowledge and customs of the Lakota.

From South Dakota one can move west into the Montana of Mildred Walker's *Winter Wheat*. Like Deloria's novel, Walker is concerned with a woman's life on the high plains. In Walker's book, the main character is the daughter of a New Englander who met his wife in Russia during WWI. After the war, the family moved to Eastern Montana, where they struggle to make a life as wheat farmers. *Winter Wheat* explores the maturation of a young woman as she sorts out her relationship with her mother, grieves a boyfriend lost at war, and copes with university life far from home.

Philip Kimball's 1984 work, *Harvesting Ballads*, on the other hand, is a picaresque novel about a teenager who takes to the road with a combine crew to follow the wheat harvest from his home in Oklahoma to South Dakota, with stops all along the way. The novel also includes a complex set of family relationships, a fascinating study of Native American history in the Oklahoma territory, and a concern for the ecological well being of the land itself.

Like any journey on the western plains, there is a lot of ground to cover when exploring the literary territory of plains novels. In Nebraska one can visit Tom McNeal's *Goodnight, Nebraska* set in and around Hay Springs or Mari Sandoz's *Old Jules*, a biographical novel about the author's pioneer father. Northeastern Colorado is the locale of Kent Haruf's *Plainsong*. In Wyoming, Gretel Ehrlich's *Heart Mountain* depicts the world of a WWII Japanese internment camp near Sheridan. Robert Day's *The Last Cattle Drive* is a humorous satire of the myth of the American West, in which a contrary Kansas rancher sets out to drive his contrary cattle herd east (not west) to market in Kansas City. And it is always rewarding to revisit Thalia, the decaying Texas town in Larry McMurtry's classic tale of the 1950s, *The Last Picture Show*. Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima*, set among the Hispanic population of New Mexico, follows a boy who is finding his own way between his father's family of restless vaqueros and his mother's family of farmers; between his mother's devout Catholicism and his father's agnosticism; and between the myths and legends of the regions and his own creativity.

Finally, one may close the circle by returning to Native American life in contemporary North Dakota where Louise Erdrich follows the generations of the Pillager family in her epic trilogy, *The Beet Queen*, *The Bingo Palace*, and *Love Medicine*.

Ed. Note: The Plains Humanities Alliance at the University of Nebraska—Lincoln recently previewed the Great Books of the Great Plains Web site at <<http://libr.unl.edu:2000/plains/bibs/index.html>>, a bibliography of books about life on the Great Plains. ▲

T-Shirts, Literacy, and History

by **Oliver B. Pollak**, University
of Nebraska at
Omaha

Look for the obvious that is overlooked. Whenever we go on a trip, we have to pack clothing for two to fourteen days. Trips to New York, San Francisco, or London provide an opportunity to see what still fits, what is tired looking, what is completely out of style and won't likely come back, and what can go to Goodwill. The closet is full of family history, recorded in t-shirts. Some t-shirts were purchased; some were gifts; and our children left many behind as we became empty nesters.

In the late 1970s Ocean Pacific produced t-shirts emblazoned with their logo, OP, my initials. I got three gift shirts and I still wear them. Personally, I wore (non-t-shirt) "tank top" undershirts for several years, then round-neck t-shirts, and somewhere in the last twenty years, I shifted to V-neck t-shirts.

Our sons went to Camp Ramah in Conover and Beber Camp in Mukwanago, WI; belonged to United Synagogue Youth (USY); and went on missions to Israel. When they moved to San Francisco they left behind t-shirts commemorating their travels and high jinks, including a t-shirt in Hebrew praising Magic

Johnson with a Hebrew N.B.A. glossary, and shirts proclaiming "From the Negev with Love" and "Co-ed Naked Davening."

Cultural and literary shirts praise Edgar Allen Poe, 1989 (grey) and 1991 (purple) Omaha Shakespeare on the Green Festival in Elmwood Park, 2001 J. Doe Project, and Chicago artist John Himmelfarb (who shows at Omaha's Gallery 72). National Public Radio contribution incentives communicate our listening choices, including the evening news, *All Things Considered*, and *Raw Bits* from Garrison Keillor's *Prairie Home Companion*.

The most historic is the t-shirt from a trip to Washington D.C., sponsored by the Jewish Federation, massing 300,000 Jews on the Mall. The shirt proclaims, "Omaha, Nebraska, We Care: FREEDOM FOR SOVIET JEWS." The most personal refers to a struggle with incorrect spellings of our name. My mother sent me a not quite custom made shirt, "I'm proud to be a Polac Pollak Polac Pollack!" More recently she sent me a t-shirt with which many readers can identify, "So many books to read, so little time." ▲

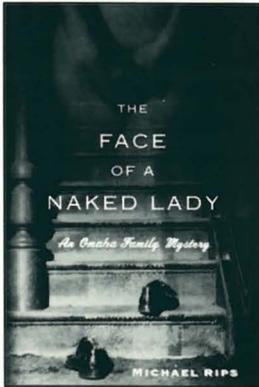


Review: *The Face of a Naked Lady: An Omaha Family Mystery*

by Michael Rips,

Houghton Mifflin,
2005
ISBN 0-618-27352-2

Reviewed by
**Joseph J.
Wydeven**, Bellevue
University



Many a man has written about his search for his father, but this book by fifth-generation Nebraska native Michael Rips is special for its bemusement, good humor, and quiet philosophical depth. Rips's father was a strangely distant but kindly man who operated an optical factory, painted unexplained portraits of a naked black woman, and perpetually exhibited an "impenetrable calm," even when dealing with his family.

The book is intriguing simply for its collection of anecdotes about life in Omaha. The protagonists are Rips's parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, and their friends—and some Omaha fixtures like political boss Tom Dennison, Mayor Jim Dahlman, Yvonne Kuntzel (the anxious proprietor of the Café de Paris), Richard Flamer (who hoped to find Weldon Kees alive in Omaha), and many others. Rips's great grandparents owned the Miller Hotel, a place Rips discovers to be "the family brothel"—as one might expect, the subject of many a story.

Rips piles up his anecdotes and sketches extravagantly: a water-soaked body comes "squirting through the ceiling" of a restaurant; a plumber murders an insufferable customer, then "distributes" her body throughout her house; a tornado sucks Rips's grandmother up a pantry chute; a friend falls out a second story window and lands safely upright in the snow below. Some stories stretch credibility, less because they violate reality than because they are more than twice-told, then subject to the author's sometimes hilarious enhancements.

On one level this book is simply entertaining. On another it offers a meditation on the mysteries of identity. The bridge between the two levels is frequently found in philosophical commentary—for example, Rips's interpretations of Emmanuel Levinas and classical stories cryptically told to him by his father. Levinas, Rips finds, is a philosopher of responsibility to human society—relevant to those who "led their tribes and were essential to their protection." With Levinas in mind, readers recall those incidents in the book about people protecting others: Omaha mayor Edward Smith's attempt in 1919 to save Will Brown from being lynched by offering himself to be hanged instead; more intimately, Rips's father's insistence on hiring women and blacks in his factory, or his intentions, during the race riots, in deliberately taking Michael to a restaurant in North Omaha, one of the few buildings not boarded up. His father, Rips movingly concludes, sought to see the social "other" and so found meaning by offering his protection.

Other reviewers have found similarities in *The Face of a Naked Lady* to Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* and Frank Conroy's *Stop-Time*, but I think, too, of Nebraskan Wright Morris, whose father was distant in an entirely different way (see *Will's Boy*) and with whom Rips shares an arresting interest in vision as a metaphor for consciousness. I was reminded also, if oddly, of W. G. Sebald (*Austerlitz*), whose sophisticated prose similarly cherishes buried mysteries. ▲

Review: *Looking for Alaska*

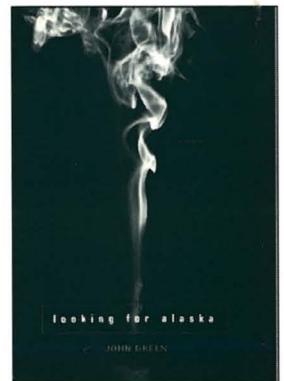
by John Green

Dutton Children's
Books, 2005
ISBN: 0525475060

Reviewed by
Ellen Scott,
The Bookworm,
Omaha

Young adults searching for their own Holden Caulfield (J.D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*) will welcome Miles Halter and his search for the "Great Perhaps." Thrust into a private prep school and armed with his collection of famous last words, Miles seeks the meaning of life. What he finds is friendship, love, and loss so great it seems unbearable unless he can make sense of it. Alaska is the girl who makes

Miles long for more of everything. Green's voice is fresh, oh-so-sarcastic, and clearly shows us who Miles is and who he will become. ▲



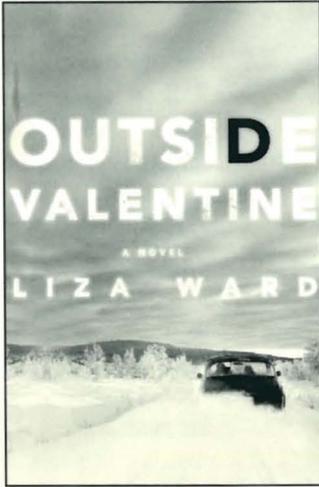
Review: *Outside Valentine : A Novel*

by **Liza Ward**

Henry Holt and Co.,
2004

ISBN: 0805075984

Reviewed by
Jeannetta Druke,
University of
Nebraska-Lincoln



If you go to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries or Lincoln City Libraries to look for books on the 1957-1958 killing spree by Charles Starkweather and Caril Ann Fugate, chances are that every single one will be checked out or missing. The librarians will tell you that the books have been stolen and replaced many times. Their loss is evidence of a continuing fascination with the events. The question of who killed eleven people that winter was never much of a mystery. *Outside Valentine* is a fictionalized retelling of the old story of Starkweather and Fugate.

It also tells new stories about people affected by the events. At the center of each story is a mystery. The novel offers three first person narratives in which fact and fiction are blended. The first fictional narrative, dated 1991, is by Lowell Bowman, the son of the wealthy Lincoln couple who were the ninth and tenth victims. Thirty-three years after his parents' murder, Lowell is a 45-year-old dealer in antiques, a reticent and distant figure to his wife and family. He has just received notice of nonpayment on a safety deposit box. His wife insists that he retrieve the

box and open it. He refuses but cannot say why. The contents of the box and the reasons for his refusal to open it are the mysteries at the center of his story.

The second narrative, which is dated 1959-1963, is by a young girl nicknamed Puggy. When Puggy moves to Lincoln, she becomes obsessed with the killings and with Lowell, who has moved back to his murdered parents' home. She plays detective to investigate two mysteries: how Lowell survived the loss of his parents and why Starkweather and Fugate killed so many people.

The third narrative, dated 1957-1976, is by Caril Ann Fugate. The extent of her own complicity in the crimes is Fugate's mystery. Two of the three narrators recall the end of the killing spree as it happened in real life—on the highway near Douglas, WY. In Fugate's narrative, they never make it to the Wyoming border. They are captured hiding in a barn outside Valentine, NE. This is a story about the ways in which terrible events affect people and the ways in which people come to terms with terrible events.

The author, Liza Ward, is the granddaughter of Clara and C. Lauer Ward, the Lincoln couple killed by Starkweather and Fugate. ▲

Review: *Delights & Shadows, Poems by Ted Kooser*

by **Ted Kooser,**

Copper Canyon Press,
2004

ISBN: 1-55659-201-9

Reviewed by
David Bristow,
Nebraska Life
Magazine

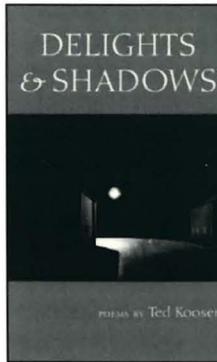
Ted Kooser is one of Nebraska's best poets, living proof that poetry does not have to be obscure and difficult to avoid being ordinary and clichéd. As a poet should, he says more in a few clipped lines than most writers do in pages of dense prose. Kooser mostly writes about small subjects, little corners of life such as a motorcyclist at a stoplight, a screech owl "no bigger than a heart," a woman walking slowly toward the examining room at a cancer clinic, or grasshoppers that are "exactly the size / of the pencil stub my grandfather kept / to mark off the days since rain."

He describes people and events in a startlingly fresh manner, but never gives the impression of literary posturing or showing off—or even of working very hard (good writing seems effortless). He describes, for example, a group of china painters

and their "clouds of loose, lush roses, / narcissus, pansies, columbine," painted on pots, teacups and saucers "spread like a garden / on the white lace Sunday cloth, / as if their souls were bees / and the world had been nothing but flowers."

In Kooser's hands, the commonplace ceases to be ordinary. The sense one gets from these fifty-nine poems is that of a person who appreciates deeply the brevity and value of life—not in some large, abstract sense, but within daily activities—and who is therefore determined to let none of it escape his attention.

Ed. Note: See page 1 for related story on Ted Kooser's Pulitzer Prize for this book. For more information, see <www.Pulitzer.org>. ▲





THE NEBRASKA CENTER FOR THE BOOK

an affiliate of the Library of Congress

c/o Nebraska Library Commission
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Lincoln, Nebraska 68508-2023
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**Writer's Conference
Set for June 18-24**



Calendar of Events:

- Get Caught Reading Month** May Nationwide
- Nebraska State Genealogical Society Annual Conference** May 6-7 North Platte
Contact: Jeannett Cline, 308-534-5040, <www.rootsweb.com/-nesgs/2005conf.html>
- Elia Peattie: Pioneer Journalist**, by Susanne George Bloomfield May 12 Auburn
Contact: Stacy Matteen, 402-274-3637
- Cattle Towns and Soiled Doves**, by Marla Matkin May 12 North Platte
Contact Kaycee Dye, 308-535-8036, <library@ci.north-platte.ne.us>
- Turning the Pages of Romance**, Contact: Rebecca, 402-441-4465, <romance@mail.lcl.lib.ne.us>, <www.lincolnlibraries.org/info/romance2005.htm> May 14 Lincoln
- Seeds of Art—An Evening for the Garden**, Elvin McDonald, *Better Homes & Gardens* Deputy Editor .. May 17 Omaha
Contact: Joslyn Art Museum, 402-344-3300, <www.joslyn.org/event/events.html>
- Mayhem in the Midlands Mystery Conference**, May 26-29 Omaha
Contact: Maggie Tarelli-Falcon, <mtarelli-falcon@omaha.lib.ne.us>, 402-444-4851, or Sally Fellows <sallyfellows1@cox.net>, <www.omahapubliclibrary.org/mayhem>
- Weekend with the Arts 2005** June 4-6 St. Paul
Contact: Three Rivers Arts Council, 308-754-5331 (Collette), <TRAC@nctc.net>, <www.threeriversartscouncil.com>
- Nebraska Storytelling Festival 2005**, June 9-12 Omaha
Contact: Nebraska StoryArts, 402-551-4532, <gteten@tconl.com>, <www.nebraskastoryarts.org/fest_info.html>
- It All Started When They Taught Us to Read: Women in America** by Kandra Hahn June 9 Kearney
Contact: Rebecca Hasty, 402-471-4823, <rhasty@nde.state.ne.us>
- Buffalo Commons Storytelling Festival** June 10-11 McCook
Contact: Carol Schneider, 308-345-8122, 800-568-4348, <Schneiderc@mpcc.edu>, <www.buffalocommons.org>
- Nebraska Summer Writers' Conference** June 18-24 Lincoln
Contact: Jonis Agee, 402-472-1834, <jagee@unl.edu>, <www.unl.edu/nsw>
- Violence, the Arts, & Cather: The International Cather Seminar 2005** June 18-25 Red Cloud
Contact: Beth Burke, 402-472-191, <eburke3@unl.edu>, <cather.unl.edu> or <www.willacather.org> & Lincoln
- 2005 Great Plains Chautauqua, "From Sea to Shining Sea"** July 1-5 Sidney
Contact Nebraska Humanities Council, 402-474-2131 July 8-12 Lexington
<www.nebraskahumanities.org/chautauqua.html>, <nhc@nebraskahumanities.org>
- National Literacy Day** July 2 Nationwide
- Nebraska's Musical Smorgasbord**, by Chris Sayre July 8 Blair
Contact: Caroline True, 402-426-3617, <ChildrensLibrarian@Blair.com>