

ing, as the seriousness of Lopez's task and the consequences of reaching his goal are revealed. Melancholy becomes the dominant mood as does the emergence of a sinister temper that has been lurking from the very beginning of the story.

Throughout, Anaya holds to his primary theme that there is a wisdom and philosophical superiority found in people who have been dispossessed by the American cultural machine. They look back to their Spanish foundations with both nostalgia and tenacity, refusing to give into assimilation, although they are not above cherry-picking what they like from the gringo offerings and making them their own.

An author with a lesser reputation and lower status than Anaya's might not have managed to get this novel into print. It often seems confused, unstructured, and, to some extent, confessional, derivative, and self-indulgent. None of this is to say that the book is bad or a waste of time. For long-established admirers of Anaya's work, *Randy Lopez Goes Home* offers insight into the author's nature and, to some extent, his artistic and philosophical process. For new initiates, though, this novel might be a bewildering and off-putting introduction to the fiction of one of the Southwest's great literary masters.

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Tiger, Tiger and Other Stories by Jerry Craven.
Norman, Oklahoma: Mongrel Empire Press, 2012.
158 pp. \$15 paperback.

Jerry Craven's new collection of short stories is much easier to read than it is to describe. If one looks only at the first and last stories, both centering on Kent Day, an east Texas artist, the book could be seen as a kind of reverse Bildungsroman, since the last story shows him embarking somewhat guiltily on the verge of his career, and the first one shows him in artistic fulfillment, painting the image of a hungry tiger while swinging from a vine over a Malaysian cliff.

The problem is that no other stories mention this character. The stories range in setting from Southeast Asia, Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, South America, 19th-century Madagascar, to Texas, which is featured in just over half of the stories. Four stories are excerpted from unpublished novels; four others, including the title story, appear in print for the first time.

As might be expected, given their range, some stories are less successful than others. For example, the novel excerpts sometimes present information through the main character's memories and seem fragmentary rather

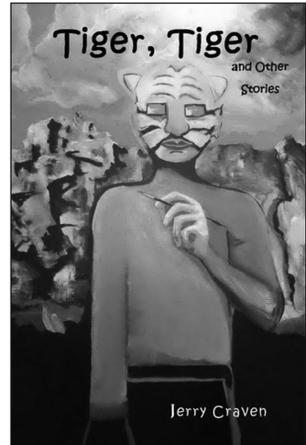
than fully realized. The exception is “Brenda without Skin,” in which two nuns’ influence on a budding artist is conclusively developed even though the artist’s career is not.

“Changing Zela,” set in Madagascar, is an exercise in historical fiction that seems anomalous in this context, and “Abu Hassan the Wise,” in which a young Pakistani jihadist is shown the folly of his commitment by a disillusioned hajji, reads like a moral drawn by an outsider telling another culture how to run its business, a failure of literary tact.

Craven is most successful when he sticks closer to home. Several of the stories deal with collapsing or collapsed marriages. The best of these, “The Greatest Name in Baseball,” turns on a marital duel observed by the couple’s son between the husband’s country music and the wife’s karaoke singing to Vivaldi.

This use of contrast is a recurrent feature: there’s contrast between the relaxed American artist and the O.C.D. Chinese-Malayan guide in “Tiger, Tiger,” between the two nuns in “Brenda without Skin,” between the past and possible future lovers in “Freshwater Pearl,” between the real and toy vehicles in “Red Pickup,” and between the blubbing and defiant boys in “Hard Scrabble Jury.” Perhaps some of the contrasts would benefit from a sense that stark opposites are not the only possibilities, but they can be effective on a story-by-story basis.

Three of the stories—“Two Men—Three Shoes,” “Freshwater Pearl,” and “Canoeing the Hill Country”—are set on Texas rivers and rely for their success as much on their carefully rendered descriptions as they do on the underlying theme of needing to come into harmony with other people. As with Hemingway’s *In Our Time*, a comparison that Craven’s framed stories makes inevitable, it helps to have a river running through them.



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