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Kathleen Diffley, ed. *To Live and Die: Collected Stories of the Civil War, 1861-1876.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2002. 448 pp. $39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8223-2887-2; $23.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8223-3439-2.

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The Inadvertent Novel

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During the middle and last decades of the nineteenth century, the American marketplace for literature was transformed by technological developments in the creation and delivery of printed texts. Periodicals reflected these developments and the relationships of writers, editors, publishers, printers and readers became more complex. Ralph Waldo Emerson asked, "Who are the readers and thinkers in 1854?" He answered that "readers and thinkers" takes in all classes and that the "humble priest of politics, finance, philosophy and religion" is the newsboy.[1] These "readers and thinkers" became the authors of the collected stories in *To Live and Die*, edited by Kathleen Diffley.

Students of mid-nineteenth-century literature have most likely encountered Edmund Wilson's *Patriotic Gore*, Daniel Aaron's *The Unwritten War*, Leslie Fielder's *The Inadvertent Epic*, and Kenneth Price and Susan Belasco Smith's *Periodical Literature in Nineteenth Century America*. Katherine Diffley has taken up the task proposed by each: issues of race, class, gender, and homogeneity in a pluralistic culture during a civil war. In particular, Diffley has not merely gathered stories but has created "an inadvertent novel of the times" (p. 2). Arranged chronologically, *To Live and Die* reminds this reader of the daring spirit of John Dos Passos and his creation of *The USA Trilogy*. "What magazines made sense of was the anxiety of their readers, who were often far from reported events. More than newspaper bulletins and broadside appeals, new weeklies and monthlies offered ways of seeing the war, in pictures and in prose, for growing numbers of subscribers who passed their pages along" (p. 1).

Diffley, in *To Live and Die: Collected Stories of the Civil War, 1861-1876*, gathers thirty-one tales, the settings of which span from Kansas in the late 1850s to the mustering out of the armies in mid-1865, with the exception of Mark Twains's story on the aftermath. Of the selections, the earliest is published in December 1861 and the latest in January 1875. Eleven of these stories were written during the war years. All are culled from the hundreds that circulated in popular magazines between the fall of Fort Sumter in 1861 and the celebration of the American Revolution's centennial year in 1876. The contriubutors of *To Live and Die* are generally little known and minor figures; Melville and Whitman are not represented; only Alcott, Hale, Harding, and Twain may be recognizable contributors to the common reader. The other writers are regional civilians, Union and Confederate soldiers, males and females. There are twice as many northern writers as southern ones and half as many female as male authors.

Realistic tales such as "Sentenced and Shot," "A Night on the Mississippi," "In Libey," and "A Night in the Wilderness" show the grim suffering, brutal discipline, and relentless aggression of war. Continued sacrifice and a refusal to grieve by the female protagonist in "A True and Simple Tale of '61" is the closest to sentimentalism that the collection gets. The human comedy is represented in "T. J.'s Cavalry Charge" and "Mr. Williamson Slippey and His Salt." A comedic, gothic tragedy in the Southern vein, similar to Flannery O'Connor's work, is present in "The Case of George Dedlow," the protagonist of which is a quadruple amputee who attends a seance and communes with his lost limbs. Samuel Weir Mitchell's story of multiple wounds and amputations is a significant selection in *To Live and Die*. The author served as a contract army surgeon in Philadelphia during the war. His extensive experience with battlefield survivors, patients at the Hospital for Nervous Diseases, allowed him to reflect on shock and pain management treatments. Before the war ended, he co-authored *Gunshot Wounds and Other Injuries of Nerves* and *Reflex Paralysis*. Hundreds of soldiers, thousands of patient notes, and tens of thousands of morphine injections convinced Mitchell that the mind and body could be at odds with each other.

In the story, George Dedlow is both the doctor and

the patient. In one foray, he is wounded in both arms; he is then captured and has his right arm amputated by the enemy. Returning from furlough, Dedlow rejoins his unit and is wounded again. Both legs are amputated. While in recovery, gangrene infects the wound previously received in his arm and it is removed. Phantom pain begins. "This pain keeps the brain ever mindful of the missing part, and preserves to the man a consciousness of possessing that which he has not" (p. 217). The physical sensations of feeling in his limbs remain though they have been removed. Dedlow ponders whether he possesses a sense of individuality and whether his sense of individual existence is diminished. It is a "New Church" seance that reveals and restores to Dedlow the U.S. Army Medical Museum items numbered 3486 and 3487, his legs.

For a moment, he walks on his legs, "feels a strange return to self-consciousness," and is "re-individualized" (p. 223). He later collects his army pension, but is "not a happy fraction of a man and is eager of the day when [he rejoins] the lost members ... in another happier world." Among Diffley's themes is the malingering malice of shocked psyches and torn bodies. American urban and rural landscapes are haunted ("Believe in Ghosts"), minds are fragmented ("Ellen"), and identities are violently conflated ("The Brothers"). The "readers and thinkers" of 1854, for which Emerson looked, are in pieces and not whole individuals by 1864. In this "inadvertent novel," so much like Dos Passos's *42nd Parallel, 1918, and The Big Money,* the characters are regularly abused by a war, a family or a lover.

Each story in *To Live and Die* is introduced with a paragraph that states the historical context of the story's events and time. Appendices include Diffley's biographical sketches of the authors, the sources of the illustrations selected by the editor for each story, a glossary of 140 Civil War era terms, and an extensive twenty-page bibliographic essay. *To Live and To Die* is neither inadvertent nor a novel. Diffley has intentionally anthologized short fiction that offers not a seamless narrative, but a collection of seams that hold patches together. Taken individually, the tales are oddly cut segments. There is a type of quilt that was made on the home front and sent to soldiers. Each patch was cut and sewn by an individual; the community then came together to sew the quilt. Before the patches were inserted into the quilt, the individuals signed their names to the patch. The soldier received a blanket that carried the names of relatives and strangers. Diffley's work is much like the signature quilts of the Civil War era; the message from these stories, taken collectively, is one of home and identity. Americans, both slave and free, from the north, south and west, and their stories, add to the impact and meaning of the generation that comes after it, much like each story collected by Diffley.

Note

[1]. Kenneth Price and Susan Belasco Smith, *Periodical Literature in Nineteenth Century America* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), p. 3.

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