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Jim Grimsley: Current state of research

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Abstract

Jim Grimsley (b. 1955) is a southern author of literary fiction, literature of the fantastic as well as numerous plays whose road to publishing success in the United States has been a thorny one. Grimsley had published two novels in Germany with translations to French and Dutch under way before his first novel, *Winter Birds*, was put out in 1994 by Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill following 10 years of futile attempts to get the book to press in his home country. Since the publication of *Winter Birds* in the United States, he has published six literary novels, three science fiction or fantasy novels, a collection of short stories, a book of plays, and a memoir in English. Although Grimsley explores topical themes in his fiction such as child abuse, class issues in the United States, same-sex relationships in the American South, as well as the relationship between technology and society, he surprisingly remains one of the most underresearched contemporary American writers. Nevertheless, the amount of research on the author has been growing in the last 20 years, so there can be no doubt about his inclusion in the canon of contemporary southern literature. The present article provides an overview of scholarship on Grimsley both in the United States and Europe, identifying several main research areas: (southern/queer) Gothic elements, abuse in all its forms, southern culture and its elements (region, space, class), gay identity, literature of the fantastic, and theatrical plays. As this overview and bibliography of research into Grimsley up to the present is meant to further current research and stimulate interest in the author and his works, the article also identifies new areas that deserve scholarly attention.

KEYWORDS: American literature, child abuse in literature, gay literature, Jim Grimsley, literature of the fantastic, southern Gothic, southern literature

1 INTRODUCTION

Jim Grimsley (b. 1955) is a southern American author of literary fiction, literature of the fantastic as well as numerous plays. Although Grimsley explores topical themes in his fiction such as child abuse, class issues in the United States, same-sex relationships in the American South, as well as the relationship between technology and society, he surprisingly remains one of the most under-researched contemporary American writers. However, the publication of the first book-length study on the author, David Deutsch's *Understanding Jim Grimsley* (University of South Carolina Press, 2019), has reaffirmed the author's canonical status within southern literature and thanks to this monograph more critical attention to Grimsley is likely to be forthcoming. Nevertheless, Deutsch's own list of

“selected” works about Jim Grimsley is far from complete, listing only eight scholarly articles among numerous introductions and encyclopedia entries. The purpose of the present article is to provide a more comprehensive overview of the current state of research on Grimsley both in the United States and Europe and in this way to provide a better vantage point for future research into Jim Grimsley and his work.

2 INTRODUCING JIM GRIMSLEY

Jim Grimsley is a native of Eastern North Carolina and a graduate of the Creative Writing program of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1978. While today he is a writer whose works are well received by academics and the reading public, his road to success was a thorny one. He started work on his masterpiece *Winter Birds* as early as 1975, finishing the manuscript in 1984. *Winter Birds* was discovered by the German publisher and translator Frank Heibert, who admired the novel so much that he published it in Germany as *Wintervogel* in 1992, 2 years before it was released in the United States. *Winter Birds* was finally published in the United States when Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill put out the novel in 1994 following 10 years of futile attempts to get it to press in Grimsley's home country (1994b). Indeed, during that decade, the book market had been made ready for novels full of violence exploring the situation of lower classes in the South. It is paradoxical, though, that while Dorothy Allison's *Bastard out of Carolina* (1992) helped to prepare the reading public for such novels, Grimsley's *Winter Birds* had been finished for eight years before Allison's novel appeared in print. To date, Grimsley has published six literary novels, three science fiction or fantasy novels, a collection of short stories, a book of plays, and a memoir in English, as well as dozens of short pieces published in literary as well as science fiction magazines.

Much of Grimsley's early literary fiction can be linked to events from his own life, yet the author states: “What I have written is autobiographical but is not an autobiography” (Grimsley, 1994a, p. 8). For example, he made it clear that he had never been sexually abused by his father in the way depicted in his first novel (Schumock, 1999, p. 155). The protagonist of *Winter Birds* is Danny Crell, an 8-year-old hemophiliac boy whose family ranks among the poorest white families in the area. The second-person narrative portrays the boy's life in poverty along with strategies he uses to cope with the situation. The long-term abuse from his father culminates in bringing the naked boy to his mother's bedroom for him to have sex with her. *My Drowning* (1997) portrays the childhood of Danny's mother, Ellen Crell, in the 1940s. The poverty suffered by the family in the novel is much more extreme than in *Winter Birds*. *Comfort & Joy* (German version 1993, English version 1999) portrays Dan Crell in his 30s as he works as a hospital administrator and tries to establish a relationship with a medical doctor. This relationship is influenced by the men's different class identities, Dan's need to cope with his history of child abuse, as well as his status as an HIV-positive gay hemophiliac, a status he shares with Grimsley.

Aside from his Dan Crell trilogy, in his early phase, Grimsley also published *Dream Boy* (1995), a story of two teenagers set in rural North Carolina. Nathan, arriving with his family to the town of Potter's Lake, has also been sexually abused by his alcoholic father. He bonds with Roy in a relationship that the boys refuse to name. On a camping trip with Roy's friends Burke and Randy, the boys enter a dilapidated slaveholders' mansion. When Burke catches Roy and Nathan engaging in sex, he rapes Nathan and murders him. In his dreamy vision while dying, Nathan gets up, finds Roy, and the boys leave the South together.

In 2002, Grimsley published *Boulevard*, the story of Newell, a young man from Pastel, Alabama, who fulfills his dream of going to live in New Orleans. Newell becomes a successful clerk in an adult bookstore, yet as he begins to understand the dark side of the French Quarter, he decides to leave the

city. His story is interwoven with that of Miss Sophia, an elderly transgender person who is much more deeply rooted in the gay subculture of New Orleans.

Grimsley's most recent literary novel was published in **2007**. The protagonist of *Forgiveness* is an Andersen accountant, laid off due to the economic crisis and too paralyzed to be able to cope with the situation. He decides to kill his wife as well as his adult son in order to win his fifteen minutes of fame.

After 2000, Grimsley published also three novels of the fantastic: *Kirith Kirin* (**2000**), *The Ordinary* (**2004**), and *The Last Green Tree* (**2006**). Literature of the fantastic includes numerous subgenres ranging from fantasy, through the hybrid subgenre of science fantasy, to science fiction. Grimsley's novels are difficult to categorize, as the author consciously challenges genre distinctions; the genre classification of the novels thus depends on a particular reading and a reader's choice to include or not include paratextual information into the interpretation (Trušník, **2018**). *Kirith Kirin* portrays the fate of Jesse, a young boy who turns into a magician and a lover of Kirith Kirin, the King of the land. Jesse later becomes the Great Irion, one of the most powerful men of the universe. *The Ordinary* explores the contacts between the world of Irion and an outside civilization, as well as Irion's growing interest in science and his attempt to explain magic through science. *The Last Green Tree* develops these themes, with the events culminating in a galactic war that results in vast damage to the universe. In spite of the works' dissimilar contexts, similar themes typical of southern literature can be identified in Grimsley's literary as well as fantastic novels, such as the idea of place, family, community, religion, and violence (in this case, violence ranging from abuse in the Crell novels to large-scale wars in the Jesse novels). Moreover, both series explore nonheterosexual sexualities (Trušník, **2018**).

Grimsley's achievements are not limited to prose writing; since the early 1980s, he has also been a successful playwright. While most of his plays have not been published, Algonquin did release a collection of four of them, *Mr. Universe and Other Plays* (1998), and two more plays were released in different collections. In 2008, Grimsley published *Jesus Is Sending You This Message*, a collection of short stories mapping his career from its beginning. In 2015, Algonquin published his memoir, *How I Shed My Skin: Unlearning the Racist Lessons of a Southern Childhood*, a work focusing on Grimsley's high-school years and the integration of African American students into the education system of North Carolina. Numerous works by Grimsley have been translated into German, French, Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Hebrew, and Japanese.

3 RESEARCH ON JIM GRIMSLEY

For the author himself and his commercial success, immediate reviews, interviews, and author profiles in popular magazines have been much more important than scholarly responses. Yet, a number of the magazine articles such as one by Howorth (**1999**) have helped to place Grimsley on the literary map. Howorth described Grimsley as an author "on the cutting edge of contemporary Southern fiction, where he [had] carved out a place for himself as literary chronicler of the Southern gay experience" (p. 39). It is noteworthy that the section "Critical Response" on the author's own website cites only reviews and endorsements from other writers, but no scholarly articles (Grimsley, **2020**). A bibliographic list of such reviews can be found in the entry on Jim Grimsley in *Contemporary Authors*, a publication that has included Grimsley in numerous volumes regularly since 1996 (*Contemporary Authors* **1996, 2000, 2007, 2008, 2016**). The 2008 version of the *Contemporary Authors* entry includes also Grimsley's "Autobiographic Essay" (Grimsley, **2008**). Scholars thus no longer need to rely on the biographical information scattered in the interviews and the author's short bio notes, though his memoir *How I Shed My Skin* provides a more detailed insight in certain periods of Grimsley's life.

Grimsley has been listed in numerous dictionaries and encyclopedias of American literature, for example, with entries authored by McQuinn (1998), Knight (1999), Ricketts (2002), Richards (2006), Brooks (2008), and Freeman (2009). This type of publication offers only a very limited space for the introduction of the author, yet the very presence of the author in these titles is evidence of his established position within American literature. Still, it is primarily responses from academic circles that are much more important for establishing an author's canonical status and maintaining a continuing interest in the writer's works.

The first scholarly articles on Grimsley began to appear in 2000. With the exception of the book-length study by Deutsch (2019), in a vast majority of the articles and chapters one theme of Grimsley's work was made dominant, though these sources could not avoid addressing related themes as well. In an attempt to identify the main research areas connected with Grimsley's work and in order to provide some structure to this overview of scholarship on Grimsley, I propose to divide the research into the following categories. The earliest line of research focuses on the Gothic nature of Grimsley's work, frequently on the queer and southern aspects of it. The second line is concerned with the theme of abuse portrayed by Grimsley, though these two categories overlap to a large degree, as many authors demonstrate how Grimsley often uses Gothic elements in order to portray abuse in all its forms, with the question of how memory works emerging as a significant aspect of dealing with abuse and trauma. This line also focuses on violence and the way characters cope with it, both at the time it happens as well as the subsequent trauma it has caused. A third line sees Grimsley's work in the context of southern culture. This is obviously associated with an exploration of regionalism, along with the space which defines southern culture and some of its features, most notably class. A fourth line of exploration focuses on gay themes within Grimsley's works in terms of same-sex desire and the question of coming out rather than queerness in the broadest sense of the word. Only a limited number of publications deal with Grimsley's achievements in the literature of the fantastic and his theatrical works.

A special position in Grimsleyan scholarship undoubtedly belongs to Deutsch (2019), who offers an extensive reading of Grimsley's oeuvre and identifies pragmatic optimism as its characteristic feature. This monograph touches upon all the areas identified above, yet its coverage of the more relevant literature on Grimsley is far from complete. Regardless of whether readers agree or disagree with Deutsch's interpretation of Grimsley, his book, which was published in the "Understanding Contemporary American Literature" series, is a major contribution to the field.

Indeed, much of Grimsleyan scholarship seems to be fragmented so far. Many articles offer a reading of a particular work by Grimsley, or use such a work for an analysis of another phenomenon, but rarely do they reflect adequately on previous scholarship on the author. The purpose of this article thus lies in identifying rather than evaluating as many articles on Grimsley as possible, including those which are not listed in academic databases, in the hope to inspire a wider academic debate.

3.1 THE GOTHIC

Articles on Grimsley in scholarly journals began to appear in 2000 as academics first began analyzing the author's work in the context of (southern) Gothic literature. Two of Grimsley's novels provided most of the material for these analyses, *Winter Birds* and *Dream Boy*. Jarraway (2000) endeavors to analyze the queering of American Gothic literature. Although the title of Grimsley's novel does not appear in the title of the article, Jarraway bases his argument on *Dream Boy*, which he calls "perhaps one of the most accomplished recent refurbishings of the 'Southern' tradition of Gothic novel-writing since William Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor" (p. 90). He takes *Dream Boy* "as an important sign that a certain strain of narrative discourse in America willfully refuses to come of age" (p. 91).

Another analysis of *Dream Boy* in the context of Gothic literature was offered by Madden (2000). Unlike Jarroway's theoretical work, Madden focuses on the religious dimension of Grimsley's novel, on "a strangely resonant connection between gospel promise and homoeroticism, a connection Grimsley explores throughout the novel" (p. 112). He argues that by "transforming the Southern gothic into a homoerotic gospel, Grimsley suggests, in the words of the hymn, that there is a place for gay men 'near to the heart of God'" (p. 112).

Michlin (2012) analyzes how the fundamental Gothic concept of the haunted house is exploited in recent fiction and films related to trauma. While her article is not devoted exclusively to Grimsley, a considerable portion of it explores not only *Winter Birds* and *Dream Boy*, but also the short story "House on the Edge." Michlin takes into account that Grimsley writes science fiction as well, and in this context, she suggests that "one might read this short story as a post-apocalyptic fantasy, featuring collective ruin and trauma," though she argues that the story "instead portrays an already-ghosted collective trauma, in a dream within a dream" (p. 26).

Another author who has researched the Gothic elements in Grimsley's texts is Paulina Palmer. Palmer (2012) analyzes *Dream Boy* once again focusing on the role of the haunted house, identifying "not just one ghost-infested house but two, exploring different forms of haunting they exemplify" (p. 110). One of the haunted places is metaphorical, while in the other one "an actual spectral event occurs" (p. 111). Moreover, she places Nathan's abusive father in the tradition of Gothic literature, an idea that also resonates with Michlin (2012). It is noteworthy that while a vast majority of critics assume Nathan died after being raped, Palmer offers another reading in which Nathan recovers consciousness (p. 115).

In another of her books on the Gothic, Palmer (2016) adds an analysis of *Winter Birds* to her research. According to Palmer, in *Winter Birds*, Grimsley "develops the tradition of the ghostless ghost story" (p. 51). She sees as a "distinctive feature of the novel ... the tension that Grimsley creates between the material world and the spectral" (p. 52), with Bobjay, Danny's father, representing the spectral dimension of the novel. According to Palmer, in this novel Grimsley "reject[s] the conventional connection of the haunted house narrative with a rambling Gothic-style mansion" and replaces it with a "series of derelict homes that the American Crell family are reduced to renting" (p. 59).

3.2 ABUSE

The second area of Grimsleyan studies focuses on diverse aspects of abuse. The articles listed in the previous section explore this theme as well, yet other texts focus on abuse primarily. Michlin (2008) analyzes the role of the abused child as a subversive theme in lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender fiction. Once again, the text is not devoted exclusively to Grimsley, but it places his *Dream Boy* in the context of other works dealing with the theme, including Dorothy Allison's *Bastard out of Carolina* (1992), Scott Heim's *Mysterious Skin* (1995), and the controversial J. T. Leroy's *The Heart Is Deceitful above All Things* (2001), among others.

Depending on the definition, violence can be understood as one of the components of abuse, and it is addressed by research as such. Rigaud (2008) explores the representation of violence in *Winter Birds* and *My Drowning*, focusing specifically on the aspects of violence suffered by Danny in the former novel as well as by Ellen in the latter. Rigaud emphasizes the effect of violence on the characters' bodies as both young people create a "dreamscape" for their protection, yet this does not provide the solution to the problem. As the author notes, "Even though the dreamscape of the narrator allows for the distancing/displacement [sic] of violence, it never actually denies it. In the two novels, violence is constantly performed on the body." She points out that the body of the father, "the main agent of

violence,” and the bodies of the victims “are described as being dismembered and their movements represented in a sort of macabre dance: violence is de-realized and metaphorized by the fragmentation it is subjected to at the hands of the narrative” (p. 41).

Trušník (2010b) analyzes the theme of child abuse in the three Dan Crell novels, *Winter Birds*, *My Drowning*, and *Comfort & Joy*. He points out that sexual abuse is just one of many forms of abuse and calls the three novels “an encyclopedia of child abuse in its complexity at all levels” (p. 62). The article explores in detail not only the strategies of dealing with abuse the child characters use but also how their future is influenced by the memories and trauma of abuse decades ago. Special attention is devoted to the narrative techniques Grimsley uses to deal with the theme.

Narrative technique and the questions of memory in the aftermath of abusive childhood have also been explored by George Garrett (2003), who offers a review of *My Drowning* in the form of a longer essay originally published in 1997, rather than an academic paper. Yet this essay is worth mentioning as it was reprinted in book form in a collection of Garrett's writing. Garrett comments in a sensitive way on several key features of the early novels. He shows awareness of the different narrative techniques of the three works and he understands that the theme of *My Drowning* is related to how memory works. While Garrett refers to writing about rural America and also about memory “literary trends,” he admits he knows of nobody “who writes like Grimsley, none among us who can speak so well for those who have been voiceless, if not ignored, amid the clamor of [American] culture” (p. 65).

3.3 SOUTH: SPACE & CLASS

As the features of southern culture are a vital part of Grimsley's work, references to the South cannot be avoided in any research on the author. Nevertheless, academic commentary in which the focus on southern literature and culture dominates over other themes appeared relatively late.

In her book-length study of the dandy in Irish and American southern fiction, Crowell (2007) offers a reading of *Dream Boy* vis-a-vis Emma Donoghue's “Words for Things.” According to Crowell, Grimsley's novel is similar to Donoghue's short fiction in fusing “two distinct literary genres: the Big House narrative and the coming-out story.” Yet unlike Donoghue's protagonist, “Grimsley's novel reorients the direction of the coming-out narrative: his protagonists seek refuge from persecution by venturing further into, rather than away from, the aristocratic landscape of the plantation South” (p. 184). Crowell describes how “because this narrative implies that contemporary queer protagonists might find refuge within the gothic landscape of the plantation, Grimsley borrows from the principles of dandyism: *Dream Boy*'s contemporary Southern lovers yearn for the dandy's protective aristocratic mask” (p. 184).

Trušník (2015) analyzes the treatment of social class in *Comfort & Joy*. The two protagonists of the novel come from different classes and are constantly confronted with the ramifications of their difference in background, creating situations which influence the relationships of the partners' families to the men as well. Moreover, Grimsley shows that the question of class is not only a matter of money but also of the whole culture breeding in the family. In the context of gay literature, Grimsley demonstrates that poverty is “not the entrance ticket to an underground existence” (p. 63). The article argues that *Comfort & Joy* is the best exploration of class in the contemporary South of all of Grimsley's novels.

Hayes (2016) can be included in this group, as he explores the question of (queer) identity in the South, when in his study he “takes as its primary object to study... desire for rooted identity—a desire to find

and become one with one's roots" (p. 1). Hayes analyzes ghosts in *Dream Boy* as well as in Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel*. According to Hayes, these novels "conjure up ghosts that challenge the family tree's racial purity and haunt both southern and American identity" (p. 40). In *Dream Boy*, he finds "two sorts of ghosts, the haunting associated with sexual secrets and that which represents the return of histories of racist violence" (p. 266).

Trušník (2017a) focuses on Grimsley's use of southern places, both real and fictional, in his literary fiction. The chapter points out that places in Grimsley's fiction have a strong *genius loci*, but what is even more important is Grimsley's movement between places, which the author uses to contrast various elements of southern culture, most typically class. Moreover, the journeys between various places have a "therapeutic and liberating effect on the characters" (p. 279).

Deutsch (2017) uses the concept of the "Euro-American cruising flaneur" to analyze how Grimsley presented queer experiences in New Orleans at the end of the 1970s in his novel *Boulevard*. Deutsch focuses on Newell and Miss Sophia, two observers of the life in the gay community who come from vastly different backgrounds.

Crank (2018) returns to the question of the queer nature of southern childhood. He notes that "being a child means occupying a queer space of time when everything feels confusing, mysterious, and strange, including, as a matter of course, your own body and those authorities who police your body behavior" (p. 74). This idea is made even more complex with the concept of "'Queer southern childhood' as a (visible/viable) identity [which] seems foreclosed by ... the word southern, which, in multiple national vernaculars (including the world of queer theory), stands as surrogate for adjectives like conventional or conservative" (p. 75). *Winter Birds* and the novel's theme of abuse provide fertile material for Crank's discussion.

3.4 GAY IDENTITY

While same-sex desire is an inseparable part of Grimsley's writing, some analyses examine the work through the lens of gay literature, focusing mostly on the problem of coming out, successful or unsuccessful. These articles generally compare Grimsley's novels with the acknowledged masterpieces of gay literature. In this vein, Trušník (2010a) analyzes *Comfort & Joy*, identifying similarities between Grimsley's novel and the gay classic *Quatrefoil: A Modern Novel* (1950) by James Barr. The analysis argues that the return to the nuclear family portrayed in both novels is a necessary part of coming out during which the families come to terms with their sons' sexual orientation. Moreover, one's partner can be fully understood only in the context of his family, which holds true for all the protagonists of Grimsley's and Barr's novels.

Murphy (2013) analyzes the development of gay identities of sons in southern families. Murphy focuses on three novels he identifies as *Bildungsromane*: *Winter Birds*, *Dream Boy*, and *Boulevard*. He argues that in Grimsley's fiction, "survival via the eventual escape from the familiar unit ... becomes an important and life sustaining trope" (pp. 114-115). According to Murphy, in the first two books, "the fathers are so destructive, not just to their gay sons but also to the entire familiar unit, that life becomes a matter of sheer survival, and escape becomes one of the most promising avenues of achieving it" (p. 115), while in the third, the father figure is absent and Grimsley focuses more on the protagonists' construction of a gay culture in the context of the history of New Orleans. Though Murphy's conclusions seem to be in direct contradiction to Trušník (2010a), it must be noted that these two scholars analyze different novels in Grimsley's oeuvre.

Trušník (2014) explores Grimsley's *Dream Boy* along with Randall Kenan's *A Visitation of Spirits* (1989). He understands both of these southern novels as deviations from other coming-out novels of the period, that is, as works in which their protagonists both develop typically proud gay identities as well as die violent deaths because of their same-sex desire. Another level of the novels' departure from realist coming-out novels is their extensive use of Gothic elements. Yet, as Trušník argues, "they still contain a plausible story portraying the interplay of the social and psychological facets of growing up" (p. 90).

Trušník (2016) analyzes Grimsley's *Boulevard vis-a-vis* another gay classic, Andrew Holleran's *Dancer from the Dance* (1978). Despite being published more than 20 years apart, both novels explore the arrival of their protagonists to a gay community of the 1970s: Holleran's Malone arrives in New York, while Grimsley's Newell arrives in New Orleans. Both Newell and the fictional author of Malone's story, however, are overwhelmed by the respective ghettos of the cities in the late 1970s and both have to leave for a quiet place in rural South. These two novels are thus "perpetuating the rather paradoxical image of the American South as a gay men's haven" (p. 106).

Trušník (2017b) also offers two opposing readings of *Dream Boy*. One interpretation understands the novel as a gay novel, with Roy a closeted gay man, the other one sees the novel in the southern context in which same-sex sexuality often works outside the Western categories of gay identity because many southerners who "may publicly denounce homosexuality [...] practice a day-to-day, quiet accommodation of difference" within the "nominally conservative institutions of small-town and rural life-home, church, school, and workplace" (Howard, 2009, p. 123). While the article leans towards the gay reading of the novel, it acknowledges that the "southern" interpretation offers a valuable insight into particular issues of same-sex desire in the South.

3.5 LITERATURE OF THE FANTASTIC

Grimsley's ventures into the literature of the fantastic have so far remained a marginal subject for scholars. Trušník (2018) analyzes Grimsley's transition from literary fiction to works of the literature of the fantastic. Trušník introduces the autobiographic Dan Crell trilogy, as well as the fantastic Jessex trilogy of Kirith Kirin, *The Ordinary*, and *The Last Green Tree*. Trušník here devotes particular attention to the publication history of the Jessex trilogy; he discusses the difficulty of assigning a genre classification to the individual works depending on whether these works are considered in isolation or vis-a-vis the entire trilogy. Moreover, the chapter points out how Grimsley is able to explore themes typical of southern literature in both literary and fantastic fiction.

Deutsch (2019) duly offers an analysis of the Jessex trilogy in his monograph as well. According to Deutsch, "Grimsley uses these distinct and yet related genres [of fantasy and science fiction] to explore, often in pragmatic ways, nonheteronormative sexualities and practices and reimagine more broadly how they connect to sequences of time, social customs, families, and spiritual beliefs, which, in turn, work to create a greater variety of what can actually count as normative standards in the first place" (p. 97).

Trušník (2020) analyzes the publication history of Grimsley's science fiction short story "Wendy," a story of a sadistic pedophile who assembles an 8-year-old girl out of body parts grown for transplantation. This short story was first accepted by the editor of *Asimov's Science Fiction*, only to be rejected weeks later by the magazine's publisher. The article explores the possible reasons behind the publisher's decision, as the publisher had been under attack from those who misunderstood the target audience of the magazine.

3.6 PLAYS

Just as in the case of literature of the fantastic, academic commentary on Grimsley's plays remains scarce. The four plays published by Algonquin in 1998 are introduced by four different literary authors: Romulus Linney, Reynolds Price, Kaye Gibbons, and Craig Lucas (Linney, **1998**; Price, **1998**; Gibbons, **1998**; Lucas, **1998**). While providing some insight into the plays, these short introductions hardly constitute detailed analyses.

Tipton (**2008**) analyzes the schizophrenic nature of the character of St. Paul in Erasmus's *Praise of Folly* along with an exploration of Grimsley's *The Lizard of Tarsus*. Richards (**2009**) compares two plays rooted in the culture of New Orleans: Grimsley's *Mr. Universe* and Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*. While Richards does point out flaws in Grimsley's play, he concludes that "what remains clear, at least for persons preoccupied with Southern drama, is Jim Grimsley's careful, thoughtful dialog with Tennessee Williams in these two New Orleans plays, plays that ultimately document queer intertextuality and, perhaps even more importantly, queer selfcritique" (p. 83). In spite of his criticism, Richards (**2013**) ranks Grimsley among the "major figures of contemporary United States and Southern drama" in his survey article of southern drama. *Mr. Universe* is also analyzed by Deutsch (**2019**).

4 CONCLUSION

The present survey offers an overview of scholarly literature on Jim Grimsley written in the last 20 years. The list of authors demonstrates that, just as Grimsley found the first audiences for his fiction in Europe, numerous European scholars like Michlin, Palmer, Rigaud, and Trušník have found Grimsley's work worthy of analytical exploration. Moreover, some authors, such as Deutsch, Michlin, Palmer, Richards, and Trušník, have published more than one scholarly work on Grimsley, which confirms that the author's work provides ample material for an exploration of the southern culture of the past decades. It is also noteworthy that a majority of research articles portrays Grimsley's work in positive light, unlike some reviews, which are not so reticent in pointing out possible shortcomings.

Areas of current research include the Gothic features of Grimsley's works, the theme of abuse and associated violence, the question of southern culture and how it can be defined, for example in terms of space or class, as well as the question of gay identity and coming out. It has to be noted, though, that such a division is motivated primarily by practical and didactic purposes, as many articles cover more than one of these areas. Two further categories defined by genre stand apart: Grimsley's literature of the fantastic and his theatrical works. All of these areas can be expected to be the basis of future work on Grimsley, perhaps offering new perspectives and exploring the author's works in yet other contexts. The present article will hopefully contribute to incorporating the current body of scholarly work into future academic discussions.

New opportunities for research, however, have also come to the fore. Most of Grimsley's recent fiction belongs to the literature of fantastic, which could draw to the author's work scholars interested in popular genres. Grimsley's theatrical work would deserve more attention as well, but in this case the situation is more complicated since only six published plays are readily available. Researchers would thus need to consult the collection of Jim Grimsley's papers archived at the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library at Duke University, or other archival collections focused on American theaters.

The collection of Jim Grimsley's papers, fully open to research since 2016, offers not only the play manuscripts but also other writings as well as plentiful biographical materials. So far, scholars have consulted material from the collection only for a few publications (Hayes, 2016; Trušník, 2020). Perusing and availing this material is likely to reveal a lot not only about the development of Grimsley as an author, but also about his experiences in the context of American publishing.

Still more opportunities for research remain outside of archival work: considering how attentive Grimsley has always been to his narrative techniques and how innovative he has been, it is rather surprising how little attention has been paid to this “technical” aspect of his fiction writing. This pertains especially to the question of memory work in his narratives, which might be subject to more theoretical exploration.

Another area neglected by scholars seems to be Grimsley's short fiction, both in its literary and fantastic varieties. The 2008 collection *Jesus Is Sending You This Message* has been largely ignored so far in spite of the fact that it provides a convenient start for such research. More recent fantastic works have been published especially in *Asimov's Science Fiction* and are readily available.

Last but not least, considering that Grimsley's first novel was published in the United States more than 25 years ago, a sufficient time span may have passed for more scholars to evaluate and reevaluate Grimsley's oeuvre vis-a-vis not only his forerunners and contemporaries but also in comparisons to more recent additions to the literature of the American South, to American gay literature, as well as to the literature of the fantastic.

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