

The Crawford County Sketchbook
A Novel by Tom Janikowski
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Pub Date: August 15, 2015



Tom Janikowski



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A NOVEL

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A waking dream of rural southern life centering on the struggle between good and evil, virtue, and desperation.

The Switchback family has inhabited Crawford County since before the War Between the States, and it has eked out an existence, and even prospered, by virtue of hard work and honesty. Peter Switchback, Jr., is the current inhabitant of the family estate and caretaker of the farm, and in many ways stands as a symbolic paragon of virtue. The Morgan family has been in Crawford County at least as long as the Switchback family, and has made its way in the world by means of greed, pride and dishonesty. Sheriff Cecil Morgan is the third in his line to hold his office, and like his ancestors he is an avowed enemy of the Switchback family and all that they stand for.

The life of Crawford County plays out through the course of short tales told by several of its inhabitants, some tragic, some whimsical. The stories wind their way through the lives of Switchback and Morgan, framed by several ponderings of moral philosophy and existence. We are faced with Peter Switchback's obituary on the opening page of the story, and the balance of the pages works its way to that eventual outcome.

Praise for *The Crawford County Sketchbook*

“Grotesque tales of the struggle between good and evil from a dark corner of the American heartland. Poet and surrealist Janikowski (*A Martini and a Pen*, 2014, etc.) does his best Faulkner impression here, using a blend of baroque Southern classicism and redneck patois to fuel a portrait of his fictional Crawford County, a character-rich settlement somewhere in the rural South. . . . The novel's exaggerated portrayals, distorted narrative threads, and flamboyant brand of Southern Gothic will ring the bells of a certain literary-minded audience.”

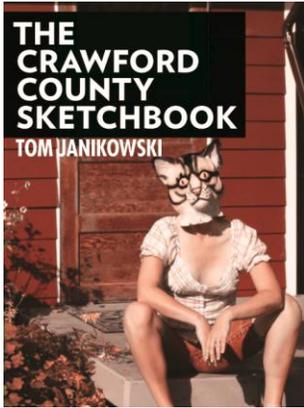
—*Kirkus Reviews*

“Readers of Tom Janikowski's remarkable *The Crawford County Sketchbook* will be reminded of other fictional towns and territories—Winesburg, Ohio, and Yoknapatawpha County, to name just two—but his characters are funnier than Sherwood Anderson's and less anguished than Faulkner's. Janikowski has created an original world and brought it to life in a rich, perfectly tuned vernacular.”

—Larry Watson, author of *Montana 1948*, *White Crosses*, *Laura*, and *Let Him Go*

Biographical Note

Tom Janikowski is a Midwestern author specializing in surrealism and symbolism. His flashes and short stories have appeared online and in print on both sides of the Atlantic. He currently writes, mixes cocktails, and makes his living as a priest in Davenport, Iowa, where he lives with his wife, Shelly.



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From *The Crawford County Sketchbook*

Critique

(according to Ashley—you know,
from down at the filling station)

Work that smile of yours, Augustus Grayling. Work it as you work the crowd. Smile like a movie star and make your momma proud. She's never seen what you really do, so you can get away with it. Smile, you wastrel.

Crawford County was never big enough for you, and her people were never good enough for you. The sons and daughters of Crawford County always had stringy bits of fried chicken in their teeth and patchy grease stains on the fronts of their shirts—grease stains where the little bits of biscuit landed and rested undetected until well after lunch and then were brushed away absentmindedly while sipping our sweet tea and looking out over the corn and pea fields. This place was never big enough for you and they never did sell that “arugula” stuff down at Brompton’s Market in Haverland. What the Hell is “arugula,” anyway? Sounds like a foreign-ass country somewhere.

We all know who you really are, Augustus Grayling, and we all know where you came from. And a lot of us know about the barn you nearly burnt down and tried to blame on the kids from Pole Creek. And I know all about the girl and the baby in Cotton City and one or two of us know about the boy and those filthy things in Cotton City and it just makes us all sick. So don’t think we don’t know, Augustus Grayling. And don’t you think that just because you use a fancy city name now that we don’t know that your name is Augustus Grayling and it is always gonna be so. You are always gonna be that mean little kid from rural Crawford County who liked to say mean things to people just to watch ’em flinch. You ain’t changed and neither has your life, really. You're famous now, but you were famous then.

People just couldn’t stomach you, you mean little bastard. And we know that’s true, as well.



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