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Homer Croy: Corn Country Travel Writing, Literary Journalism, and Memoir

Zachary Michael Jack, editor
Tall Corn Books (October 2010)
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This first-ever anthology of nonfiction by midwestern humorist Homer Croy (1883–1965) leaves readers wondering how this engaging voice of American regional writing faded into the folds of history. Born and raised on a farm in northwestern Missouri, Croy made a career of writing about the land, culture, and customs of his beloved "Corn Country," the midwestern Corn Belt. Prolific in his output—which ranged from countless nonfiction articles and radio scripts to fourteen novels, fifteen books of nonfiction, two memoirs, and eight movie scripts—Croy received a Pulitzer Prize in 1923 for his bestselling novel *West of the Water Tower*, and was the screenplay writer for Will Rogers's first talking picture, *They Had to See Paris* (based on Croy's novel by the same name).

This collection is organized in four sections to represent Croy's regional and humor writing. The largest section of Croy's travel writing and literary journalism includes seventeen essays which span subjects such as fencing practices, Abraham Lincoln's Iowa farm, the importance of corn to American agriculture, Antonin Dvorak's time spent composing in Iowa, and Midwestern pride in Jesse James. Croy renders each subject with a straightforward curiosity, drawing readers in with his surprise and amusement.

The three smaller sections provide a range of material, from humor and commentary to memoir. No matter if Croy writes about corn shucking bees or the "aristocracy of the land," he often uses himself as a character in his work—representative of all midwestern (and human) fears and delights. Indeed, this involvement provides readers a greater understanding of the Midwest, for Croy never stands removed from a scene to analyze or judge. While he left Missouri to find fortune on the East Coast, the farm in Corn Country remained in him, becoming the dominant force for both his perspective and voice.

Editor Zachary Michael Jack, author or editor of several regional/environmental books, provides fascinating introductory material on Homer Croy's life, work, and achievements. Included is a must-read 1948 profile of Croy which reveals a man who believed that, despite the bad things that can befall a human being (and there were many things in Croy's life—the death of two of his children, being unable to pay the mortgage on his Long Island home, and having to sell the Missouri family farm), joy and humor can still reign supreme.

This inviting collection brings back into the spotlight one of the best humorists of the American Midwest—with an appeal, like that of regional humorist Garrison Keillor, that stretches far beyond the Corn Belt.
JENNIFER FANDEL (November / December 2010)

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