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Literary

My Only Sunshine
Lou Dischler
Hub City Press
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In *My Only Sunshine*, author Lou Dischler creates an anti-hero's antihero, Charlie Boone, sets him in a family of criminals, and then sends him on a dark and humorous romp.

Dischler stages this coming-of-age story in the Louisiana low country of the 1960s. There, he explores themes of family, morality, poverty, and the impact of one's childhood on who one becomes. But mostly, he seeks to capture readers' hearts through a witty misadventure filled with questionable antics.

Charlie Boone, a Huck Finn-like boy, is raised by his grandparents because his mother has died and his father remains in jail. When his nefarious uncle and his scheming girlfriend arrive, events lead everyone, in his or her own way, deeper into trouble with the law. Robberies, murders, financial schemes, and general mayhem are all wrapped in a dry, dark humor. As Charlie's teacher says, "You Boone children are destined for prison. There's no accounting why, and there's nothing to be done to save you." Nevertheless, the reader, enthralled by these bumbling rogues, roots for Charlie and his family, hoping the teacher proves wrong.

Dischler became a novelist after abandoning a productive career as an inventor and scientist. Cajun by birth, his writing reflects his love for the Louisiana low country. While his affection for the region and its people shines through, his attitude toward his characters sometimes contradicts it. While his book seems to require a certain amount of caricature, Dischler's characters surpass caricature and zoom straight into stereotypes of poor Southerners. Unfortunately, this leaves the reader wondering whether certain sections should elicit laughter or not, which slightly hinders the experience.

Further complicating matters, the book's dark humor occasionally overshadows the lighter moments. With no redeeming characters, one feels a lack of light in the dark. In addition, some of the events read almost like a tall tale; they seem unsettling and out of place.

These issues prove particularly disheartening since they dim a book that otherwise

sparkles. Discher writes with a clever wit and provokes sympathy for Charlie. He draws readers fully into the vibrant world he created. He also makes one think about what it means to be trapped in a family that offers few positive role models but whose members love each other deeply. In the end, he leaves the reader a bit confused, but wanting to love this book and its many outstanding qualities.

Diane Gardner