Harvesting Ballads Short Guide

Harvesting Ballads by Philip Kimball

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Contents

Characters

Marcus Baldwin is a giant of a man—tall, all muscle, and totally focused on the farm, the place. He is the son of an alcoholic ne'erdo-well of a father and a strong, religious woman willing to sacrifice her own happiness to have a son and daughter who will help her carve a farm out of the prairie.

Baldwin inherits his mother's fierce hatred of alcohol and her dedication to church and work. Baldwin is a good man, but he is also uncompromising in his principles. He works relentlessly. A loyal man, he inspires loyalty in those who work for him. He believes—and acts on his belief—that "A man shouldn't look down on another man. But rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth." And on that note he hires Mackey, a dwarf who is the butt of practical jokes by the "townies." Mackey moves in with Baldwin and becomes his loyal retainer—and labors hard in all the things that he can do and becomes the nearest thing that Baldwin has to a confidant. Baldwin acquires other "loyal retainers" such as Malachi and Viola who cook, keep house, tend the gardens and the chickens, help with the farm work, and do the chores as necessary. They are all a loyal team.

The other main characters are Sorry, Baldwin's nephew; Blanchefleur, Baldwin's sister; Roger Lyons, rodeo bull rider, poet, troubadour, and ladies' man; Robert Keeper, bronco rider, farmer, and the man who raises Sorry as his own son; Isadora Faire, a 31-year-old nurse from Buffalo Gap, South Dakota, who tends to Sorry when he is admitted to her ward suffering from a serious head wound suffered in a snookerbased barroom brawl; Isadora Whitehands, a Cherokee woman with whom Sorry takes up after restoring Isadora Faire to Baldwin.

In addition, Kimball peoples his novel with a cast of dozens, the people of the Great Plains and the small towns and villages of the Plains.

Kimball characterizes his creations with a touch of physical description, picking two or three remarkable features to represent the nature of his characters. But it is their conversation that Kimball uses to distinguish each one, letting the readers hear each character's unique voice and diction.

He narrates and describes characters in action, revealing their qualities and beliefs through their actions and movements in moments of conflict and decision. Finally, he provides a window into their minds, thoughts, and reactions, letting the reader see the inner reflections, the cogitations, the fears and hopes of all of the principal characters. Kimball encourages readers therefore to form their pictures of the characters just as one would in real life by observing, listening, and inferring character from action.

Sorry is, as pointed out earlier, the embodiment of the proverb, "Man who is born of woman is born into Sorrow." He is also in the totality of his life as revealed in the novel, a man of sorrows who is acquainted with grief. Do these qualities make him a Christ figure? In some senses, yes, because Sorry does seem to be a man who must be about

his father's work, a man of compassion, a man who has "medicine in the blood" and seeks to save his fellow man. The comparisons, however, are not obtrusive and are in fact quite ironic (in Sorry's attraction to women and his committing adultery with his uncle's wife, for instance) and must be considered in much the same way that one considers other "Christ figures" in contemporary literature. In a number of respects, he is also a wandering trickster figure who seeks to "snooker" the forces of evil and ignorance by using the laws of physics and calculus to play the game. He is also a man of superb courage.

Social Concerns

In this focused yet wide-ranging novel of the contemporary Great Plains, Philip Kimball addresses a number of important social concerns. Themes include the nature of work, of community and the individual's place in it, the nature of family and family relationships, ecology and the stewardship necessary to preserve and enhance soil and other natural resources used in agriculture.

He also explores marriage in its many forms, as well as the condition of the American Indian, especially that of the modern Cherokee Tribe and the efforts of its members to adjust to the Great Removal while trying to retain their identity. Harvesting Ballads is a novel of ideas as well as of people and their passions.

For Marcus Baldwin, the son of an indomitable woman and an alcoholic father, the hard work necessary to make the farm (homesteaded in the Run into Oklahoma Territory in 1889 by his family) a fit place in which to live and thrive is all consuming.

"Make it look," he says, "as if someone lives here," whatever it takes. Baldwin expresses in his life the truth of a cultural belief wide-spread among Oklahoma farmers: one of the blessings of farm life is that there is always something to be done on a farm; the good farmer therefore is one who sees what must be done and takes hold immediately to do it. The issue of work, its necessity, and its being the most important measure of men and women emerges in a number of forms, including the law and rituals of the harvest, in this instance the annual wheat harvest. Oklahoma is part of the "bread basket" of America, and the wheat harvest, beginning in early May in Southern Oklahoma, extends through the summer northward through the Great Plains into Canada. "Following the harvest" has been a tradition at least since the early 1950s, and crews of workers, combines, and trucks move northward as the great fields of winter wheat ripen to "custom cut" them for farmers who are unwilling or unable to make the huge investment otherwise necessary in combines and other machinery. The crews are away from their homes for several months if the harvest is good. Not only is "following the harvest" an important service and very hard work, it also provides an opportunity for young men to see a bit of the country, earn money, and test themselves in various ways in the rites and rituals of manhood. These contemporary nomads of the Plains are following almost literally in the footsteps of the earlier nomads who roamed the Plains in pursuit of the buffalo.

Thus, the individual and his or her place in the community, another major social issue, is figured in this novel in several contexts. One is essentially nomadic, and includes the work of the harvest crews, in which the central character, Sorry, takes part; the other is the stable life of the farmer, dedicated to and rooted in the land, on the "place." The nomadic community has several shapes: one is the harvest crew's annual formation and migration from a starting point in Oklahoma to as far north as employment will warrant. Another is the circuit followed by the rodeo cowboy, whose life in this novel is less the work of the ranch than it is the work of the rodeo, a complex creation that mimics aspects of ranch life but is in reality an artificial set of contests between man and beast

that is similar to medieval jousts or tournaments held eight hundred years earlier. In either case, each nomadic community has its structure and its dynamic, clearly represented by the harvest crews of which Sorry is a part. Many events in the novel take place within these communities. Other events are represented in the life lived by Roger Lyons, Sorry's biological father, and Robert Keeper, Sorry's "social" or "real" father, that is, the one who reared Sorry.

In contrast to, and sometimes in conflict with, the nomadic community is the stable community of farms and small and larger towns represented by Marcus Baldwin's farm just north of Oklahoma City. The novel suggests that this land will eventually be overcome by the City's suburbs. But before that happens the novel shows Baldwin's essential dedication to the myriad of tasks necessary not just to survive, but to make the place bloom and thrive as a fit monument to the sacrifices made by his mother. It also serves as a base from which Baldwin exerts a powerful influence on the larger community of farmers and the small towns that serve as trading centers and the locale of schools and churches. In some respects, Baldwin becomes a tyrant, the absolute ruler of his kingdom both by the force of his intellect and his physical strength and size, as well as his unrelenting personal example of hard and focused work and his unswerving focus on doing what must be done.

But the novel is not a simple celebration of such dedication and focus, nor is it an expose of the human costs, psychological and physical, of such an imperial reign.

Instead, it raises through its plot and characters important questions about the need for balance and harmony in human life, about the nature of community and of family, about the nature of human relationships on the Oklahoma prairies, and the nature of the "good life," which Kimball focuses with the conflicts inherent between these two types of community.

The farm, as Marcus Baldwin sees it, is a site for the practice of practical ecology; of conserving the soil; of planting trees as windbreaks, orchards, and wildlife habitat; and of managing and conserving water, as scarce a commodity as soil. Baldwin builds terraces, plows and farms on the contour, builds and maintains ponds and sodded spillways, and looks for every other way to shape and preserve the land so that it can be a productive entity. But to what larger human end? This is the question that KimbalTs novel addresses in the form of Baldwin's essential aloneness. He is without a wife, without a companion. Thwarted in his youthful love for the daughter of a leading merchant in the community by his mother's unrelenting hatred and suspicion of the father, Baldwin has found no woman the equal of his older sister, Blanchefleur, whose fate he learns some twenty years after her unexpected disappearance when her son, Sorry, shows up attached to Marcus Baldwin's harvest crew.

It is not good for man to be alone.

Although Baldwin is "king of all he surveys" and has a crew of loyal retainers, he is alone. Sorry, essentially rebuffed in his efforts to be acknowledged by Baldwin as his nephew in an emotional as well as biological sense, decides that Baldwin needs a wife

and sets about to get him one, with consequences no one can foresee. How do men and women get together and form a functional family, that very necessary part of the larger culture? The question is not new, of course, but Kimball's presentation of it is compelling and often amusing.

Techniques

Kimball's techniques for structuring this novel, developing his plot lines, and creating memorable characters merit close attention. First of all, it is helpful to consider that a legend is a traditional story told (at least for some of its life) "for true." That is, legends represent actual and memorable persons in actual events at some actual place at a time that is not usually assignable with any precision and is, for the most part, believed by its tellers. Kimball uses a powerful legendary armature for his story—an early medieval Celtic legend about Tristan (variously Tristram, Tristrem), nephew of a King Mark of Cornwall. The King sends Tristan to Ireland in order to bring him back the Princess Isolde, who is to become his bride. However, Tristan falls in love with Isolde and sexually "betrays" his uncle.

This story of divided loyalties has had a powerful hold upon its audiences ever since Gottfried von Strasbourg wrote the Middle High German epic, Tristan und Isolt (1210).

Kimball is indebted to this legend for the basic internal form of his novel, for its armature, borrowing significantly from the plot and character elements of the legend in its various literary forms. Furthermore, he structures his novel in thirty chapters, each with a title that encapsulates the chapter's theme or a principal plot movement. His overall arrangement is dramatic in the Aristotelian sense, not the Medieval sense, in that he opens the novel in medias res, in the middle of things, relatively close to its climax. Not only does the novel open in Buffalo Gap, South Dakota, with the just-turnedeighteen Sorry setting out to hustle an old man at the snooker table, it closes with Sorry and the old man, the legendary Sapulpa Slim, about to shoot a little snooker in Sapulpa Slim's little bar-and-snooker parlor. One assumes that the bar is in Sapulpa, Oklahoma, a real town in Eastern Oklahoma near Tulsa. This device rounds the novel off nicely, bringing it to a satisfying closure in a number of ways.

Each of his thirty chapters is filled with a rich imagery, powerful and poetic, drawn from keen, close, personal observation of Oklahoma and Plains farm life. To cite just one example drawn from an early chapter: "Cool morning breeze over the field. Silent rustle of grain. Smell the gasoline, the sun in stubble red dust driving the moisture.

The pop of the bearing filling with grease curling rich green from the seam." The technique is concrete and imagistic. But only someone who has "worked the harvest," who is close to the realities of farm life in the 1950s and 1960s, and who has the soul and talents of a poet could produce such a rich and perfect series of images.

Kimball does it throughout the novel, at his best in describing farm life, the small villages and towns of the Great Plains, the bars and snooker parlors, the "punkin roller" rodeos, the endless roads paved and unpaved that cross the undulating swells of the great wheat-growing section of the central plains. His vivid pictures of backroom crap games, barroom pitch games, behind the scenes at rodeos, is. all so intense and spare that the reader is fully immersed in the smells, actions, speech, and people of the Plains.

Kimball weaves the stories of his characters together in complicated patterns, several dominant threads comprising the main narrative with plenty of time for flashbacks, fill-in narratives, descriptive sections with additional narratives embedded in a welded tuff, a breccia of stories within stories within stories. For example, the second chapter, "Lyons Stops to Farm," contributes to the principal overarching tale of Sorry by telling how his mother, Blanchefleur Baldwin, gets involved with Roger Lyons—cowboy, rodeo rider, poet, rake. The point of view is unlimited omniscient but focused on Lyons and Blanchefleur so that in the nearly thirty pages Kimball makes clear the powerful appeal of the vagabond poet and "twister," Lyons, to this attractive "thirty-something" farm woman whose life has never had something so exciting ride into it before. The result of the liaison, brief and passionate, is that she "runs off" with Lyons, becomes pregnant, and gives birth to a boy, whose name throughout the novel is "Sorry."

Blanche dies in childbirth at the same time that Roger Lyons is killed by "Duke Morgan," an exceedingly fierce and cunning bull in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. Sorry is subsequently raised by a buddy of Lyons named Robert Keeper as his own son.

But it is the solid undergirding of the Celtic legend of Tristan and Isolde and Kimball's unerring hold on a heightened, yet natural dialect that give the novel much of its compelling power. The parallels between the various versions of the Tristan and Isolde legends and Harvesting Ballads argue that Kimball has a solid understanding of most if not all of them and gives the novel a resonance that rewards reading and rereading. The figure of Tristan in the legend (reworked by Gottfried von Strasbourg and other medieval poets and—much later— by Richard Wagner in the nineteenth century) is the nephew of King Mark of Cornwall; sent to Ireland to ask the hand of the princess Isolde he wins her assent—and admiration—by slaying a dragon. However, Isolde and Tristan fall in love through a magic potion, complicating matters. In Kimball's adaptation, Sorry as the young Tristan ventures forth to Mud Butte, South Dakota (a substitute for Ireland), to fetch Isadora "the faire" for his uncle, Marcus Baldwin, a figure parallel to King Mark of Cornwall. Sorry has actually engineered the romance by submitting their names to a computerized Datamate Service, writing Baldwin's letters without his knowledge and receiving in turn the letters that Isadora writes. Later, confessing to Baldwin what he has done, Sorry tells Baldwin that she would make a good wife for him; he is surprised when Baldwin after "sleeping on it" accepts Isadora's impending visit and is even more surprised when Baldwin proposes to Isadora.

Thus it is that at the conclusion of the harvest run, Sorry stops in Mud Butte to pick up Isadora and return her to Oklahoma and the farm to become his Uncle Marcus' bride. They go out to eat at a roadhouse before setting out, and Sorry "slays a dragon" by jumping feet first into the glass front of a jukebox. And here the structure/events, and motifs of the legend begin to emerge most clearly. The jukebox features "a long scaled dragon curling around the selection window breathing fire belching triple forte into the room she wore an itsie bitsie teenie weenie yellow polka dot bikini;" "the machine dragon breathing fire" is devastating people's taste in music as well as the opportunity to sing together.

One version of the legend, the Luite Tristan, characterizes the Tristan figure as a minstrel, a role which Sorry has assumed early in his life by playing his father's steelbodied guitar and now continues by singing Roger Lyons' songs in order to court Isadora.

Wounded in the encounter with the "dragon," he is taken back to Isadora's place where she patches him up (she is a nurse in the local hospital). While he is soaking his body in a hot tub prepared by Isadora's mother, Isadora gives him a tetanus shot to make sure he will not contract tetanus from the wounds he endured in his attack on the jukebox. Then she finally recognizes him as the man who had nearly killed her uncle, McMorold, in a fight over a snooker game in Mud Butte South Dakota a few years earlier. In Richard Wagner's reworking of the story in his opera Tristan und Isolde, Isolde had been engaged to be married to one Morold whom Tristan had killed in combat some time before. Isolde recalls that after Tristan came to Ireland to collect taxes for King Marke and killed Morold, she had herself nursed Tristan back to health, using her mother's knowledge of herbs and magic. Similarly, Isadora now recalls that she had treated Sorry as a patient in her ward for head wounds suffered when her Uncle McMorold had broken a cue stick over his head.

On the homeward journey Tristan and Isolde fall in love because they drink a love potion prepared by Isolde's mother for the wedding night—"a case of champagne. For the wedding night." When Sony's car, Roger Lyons' 1931 Chevy, breaks down with a busted distributor cap in McCook, Nebraska, they are forced to spend the night in a motel waiting a replacement part. Drinking the champagne, as good a traditional "love potion" as one may find in these modern times, leads to love making, binding the two to each other by an imperishable love.

However, because Sorry has actually been instrumental in bringing Baldwin and Isadora together, based on his assumption that Baldwin needs a wife to "humanize" him, Sorry and Isadora remain loyal to Baldwin, just as Tristan and Isolde remain loyal to King Mark. And, as in the medieval legend, Tristan (Sorry) restores Isolde (Isadora) to King Mark (Marcus Baldwin). However, Sorry and Isadora continue their hopeless affair.

Mackey and Malachi, two of Baldwin's "retainers," (long-term workers in Baldwin's household) both try to tell Baldwin about the affair and then set traps for the lovers so that Baldwin can see with his own eyes.

Finally, in a hilarious and comic rendering of a section of the legend in which King Mark abandons Isolde to a band of lepers, Baldwin gives Isadora to an Oklahoma City motorcycle club, the Leaping Lepers; Sorry rescues her (as Tristan did in the legend) and urges her to go away with him. But Isadora decides that while she loves Sorry, she will remain true to Baldwin and returns to him. Much later, Sorry, disguised as a hippie selling jewelry, sees Isadora one last time and learns that she and Baldwin are having a baby. Thus, the rupture between Baldwin and Sorry is complete.

In all, Harvesting Ballads is one of the most successful and original adaptations of an earlier literary legend in American literature. Kimball successfully adapts and rearranges

the earlier material to suit his needs in this novel, lending the novel significant resonance and power. Furthermore, Kimball has transformed the ritual combat of medieval chivalry into the contests of the rodeo and the snooker table. Finally, the seasonal work of the wheat harvest seems to tie closely with the Christian themes of the law of the harvest—by their fruits shall ye know them—and with Marcus Baldwin's stern and uncomplicated belief in his mother's Protestant (Methodist) faith.

But there are other sources for Kimball's art. He asserted (private e-mail, 11/6/00) that the central influence on his writing is not literary at all. It is rather "the shortgrass storytelling style of the prairie community I was born into and [I] attempt to translate that into a literary style. . . . My dad was one of the best storytellers of that tradition, but only one of many—hence my interest [in] and love of multiple narrators." From that folk tradition, Kimball developed the seemingly random, communal stream of consciousness structure of Harvesting Ballads which carried over in ever-evolving form to his second novel, Liar's Moon.

Kimball also claimed another, nonliterary, influence on his plot development. He wrote: "in my youth you never worried about when a movie started, you just went and walked into the theater, sat down and started trying to figure out who was who and what was going on until you got to that point when someone would say 'this is where we came in.'" Kimball has a very interesting quality of mind, one which, in the same email, he characterized as being: for most things . . . disadvantageous, but for a fiction writer works out well: it is form, not content [that sticks]. I can pick up something I read last week and it will be like beginning a new work. The material fuses in the shallow but slippery puddle of my imagination. My mind does not respect intellectual property rights. . . . I make no distinction between something I think and something someone else thinks, a story in the New York Review or one overheard in the Bloomington hardware store. I suppose, like it or not, I am at heart (or at brain) postmodern (which may not be much different from premodern).

Themes

One of the novel's central themes is Sorry's search for who he is, his identity, both as part of a family and as part of a community. How does a man identify himself—as a worker, say, a farmer, a singer, a bull rider, a rodeo clown? Is he essentially a part of a family, a tribe, with a function within that unit? Or is he alone and a loner, one who is cut off from the usual structures that provide community? The action of this novel takes place, counting flashbacks, from about 1885 to the 1980s and ranges from a farm in Oklahoma to Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. And, if one considers its "Prologue Two," Kimball takes us back one hundred million years to the origins of the Great Plains and to the emergence of all of the forms of life that have occupied that huge sweep of space from dinosaurs to bull and bronco riders, wheat farmers, and WCTU members. Its "Prologue Three" surveys the humans who settled the prairies.

This sweep of history is relevant to Sorry's search for his identity. "Man who is born of woman is born into sorrow"—the proverb suggests not only Sorry's name but his condition. Sorry's grandfather, he learns, was an alcoholic horse trader and resident of the Great Plains (reminiscent of "The Ol' Man" whom we meet in Kimball's later novel, Liar's Moon), suggesting that Sorry's search is part of the larger saga of Everyman on the Plains. Harvesting Ballads traces Sorry's journey as he acquires knowledge of his heritage by spinning together "stories, threaded through, here and later, patchwork[ing] what we know into a fit of who I am." And that fit suggests that Sorry (as well as all the rest of us) constructs himself out of the shards of personal history and community myth and legend, fragments of a story that one assembles and says, "Here I am." But it is interesting to reflect on just how much Sorry's character and adventures reveal him as "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief."

Part of his identity involves Sorry's proving himself to be a man. He does this in a number of ways: by mastering work; by mastering scholarly knowledge, especially mathematics; by mastering snooker, a billiards-like game clearly identified in the novel as a form of ritual combat with serious wagering on the outcome. He does it by "slaying dragons" to win the hand of the fair maiden. He does it by being a wandering knight in search of—well, who can say exactly—the Holy Grail, perhaps? Sorry's father, Roger Lyons, was a "twister," rodeo slang for bull rider. Hence, he engaged in another form of testing. And as a bull rider, Lyons was enacting a primeval form of conflict, of man against nature—in this instance, the bull, Duke Morgan, wins. Sorry's areas of conflict involve man against himself, of man against the laws of physics, and of man against nature. Each of these themes is played out in Sorry's adventures with the harvest crew, at shooting snooker, and as an agent of his uncle Marcus. These are important themes in this bildungsroman, or apprenticeship novel, a novel that deals with the development of a young person.

They also relate closely to the social concerns discussed above about the nature of work in various communities. The function of artistic expression is also a major theme of the novel. In Harvesting Ballads men and women express themselves artistically

especially by writing and singing songs, by telling stories, by gardening, by cooking, and by shooting snooker.

Key Questions

Three areas of inquiry may be especially fruitful of excellent discussions. Studying the forms and functions of American folklore in scholarly collections and as analyzed in books such as Barre Toelken's The Dynamics of Folklore; Richard Dorson's Folklore and Folklife, and Jan Brunvand's The Study of American Folklore will provide information helpful to understanding the na-5. What do you think the meaning of the ture and function of folklore, especially book's title is?

legend, folk speech, games, and other traditional expressive behaviors in Harvesting 6. Read Ian Frazier's Great Plains (1989) Ballads. One might also examine the work and Richard Rhodes' Farm (1990) to of folklorist Beverly Stoeltje (published learn more about life on the Great Plains mostly in the journal Western Folklore) on in general and life on an American farm the nature of the American rodeo and study more specifically. as well the history and rules of snooker, especially as it is played in the United States. 7. Evaluate the function and purpose of Kimball's narrative methods. How ef1. Analyze the function of the snooker fective do you think the multiple and games that Sorry engages in with Sapulpa shifting narrative point of view is? What Slim in the first and last chapters. What is gained and what is lost by his choice are the societal and cultural values en-of this method as opposed to a straightacted in the contest? How do its con- forward, single-voiced narrative that duct and its outcome function to ad-begins at a particular and defined point vance Kimball's narrative purposes? of time and ends at a particular point?

What thematic functions does it serve? Where do you think the actual chronoHow does the encounter with Sapulpa logical beginning of Kimball's novel is?

Slim advance Kimball's narrative Its ending?

purpose?

8. Read Kimball's Liar's Moon (2000) and 2. Research the custom of "custom cut-reflect on his analysis of the way the ting" and "following the harvest" in Great Plains were settled and the peothe recent history of the Great Plains. ples who were involved as portrayed in What can you discover about how such harvest crews are organized, find work, this novel. What conclusions might one conduct their work, purchase and main- draw about Kimball's attitude toward tain their equipment. Discuss how this huge section of our country, its Kimball uses these sorts of historical geography, history, economics, and the facts in his fiction. people who live or have lived within it?

Compare that perspective with those of 3. Research the legend of Tristan and other writers about the Great Plains.

Isolde and the various literary versions of it. What do you think about Kimball's 9. Examine the various attitudes toward adaptation of this old story to a modern work expressed, for example, by Marcontext? What does it add to Kimball's cus Baldwin and Roger Lyons.

story? Does it detract in any way?

Literary Precedents

Kimball has confessed to several additional literary models, including James Joyce.

Joyce used the stream of consciousness technique most successfully in his works Ulysses and Finnegan's Wake. He has also acknowledged Thomas Pynchon's V (1963) as an important example of nonlinear narration, of disparate stories which the reader believes must all fit together somehow. Ken Kesey's Sometimes A Great Notion (1964) and Joseph Heller's Catch 22 (1964) "should be mentioned with their tangled and various plotlines," Kimball wrote (private e-mail, 11/6/00). He continued, "Then there's German poetry in general and Rilke in particular—a great influence on my intensity of observation (to the extent that such is apparent in my work—the texts are chockfull of snatches of Rilke, Hoffmannsthal, Eichendorf, Gottfried Benn, etc)." When Harvesting Ballads was first published in 1984, Kimball refused to acknowledge the Tristan and Isolde legend as an important source, waiting to see if his readers would pick it up. However, when asked in 2001 about it, he "confessed" that the legend was an important source of much of the plot.

Related Titles

Kimball now calls his second book, Liar's Moon (1999), the first of his Prairie Trilogy.

But, as Kimball wrote in an e-mail in 2000: Unfortunately, I didn't come upon the idea [that] the three works were a trilogy until after I had finished writing all three.

Had I thought of it earlier I would have done much more to weave them together.

For instance, one of the characters in Dirt of Other Dogs (the second one written—finished in draft form about 1986, as yet unplaced, and obviously in need of revision guided by some understanding editor's hand—and the third of the trilogy, set in the indefinite future—the way I now put it: [Liar's Moon] the 19th century, [Harvest Ballads] the 20th, and [Dirt of Other Dogs] the 21st) would have been [about] Isadora and Baldwin's progeny. As it is, the only things they have in common are thematic and geographic, and calling them a trilogy is more a marketing trick (so far unsuccessful) to get [Dirt of Other Dogs] placed.

Copyright Information

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Editor - Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Library of Congress
Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults
Includes bibliographical references.
Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for fiction, nonfiction, and biographies written for young adults.
Includes a short biography for the author of each analyzed work.
1. Young adults□Books and reading. 2.Young adult literature□History and criticism. 3. Young adult literature□Bio-bibliography. 4. Biography□Bio-bibliography.
[1. Literature□History and criticism. 2. Literature□Bio-bibliography]
I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952
Z1037.A1G85 1994 028.1'62 94-18048ISBN 0-933833-32-6

Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1994