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Review of *Road Trip: Conversations with Writers* By Shelly Clark and Marjorie Saiser

Jonathan Ritz

University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown

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Road Trip: Conversations with Writers. By Shelly Clark and Marjorie Saiser. Omaha: Backwaters Press, 2003. 242 pp. \$20.00 paper.

In the opening of this collection of interviews, authors Shelly Clark and Marjorie Saiser lay out a clear agenda for their project: to traverse their home state of Nebraska and meet with a number of noteworthy writers to talk about writing. This plan is revealed in an informal interview between the authors which

nicely defines the occasion of the book and casts Clark and Saiser as not only interviewers but also subtle yet discernible characters, a pair of literary devotees on the road. The result is an inviting collection of conversations with a dozen Nebraska writers, including Jonis Agee, Hilda Raz, and Ted Kooser, accompanied by brief selections of poetry or prose from each writer. Clark and Saiser, both poets themselves, don't delve much into technique or craft, inviting their subjects instead into a more general discussion of the writing life. Several themes come up repeatedly: the emergence of writerly attributes and aptitudes in childhood; the helpful influence of teachers, especially in the formative years of grade school; the assorted delights and burdens of teaching as a "day job"; the quiet pleasure of a daily writing regimen. Clark and Saiser's eloquently conversational questions ("Why should anyone write?" "How do you know when a story's good?") often elicit attentive, thoughtful responses.

Several writers speak movingly about the influence of the Nebraska landscape on their work. Poet Eammon Wall likens the Sandhills to the sea terrain of his native Ireland, and notes that the relative seclusion of the Plains provides visitors an opportunity for discovery unavailable in more well-traversed areas ("We'd been in New York; but everyone's been in New York").

It's tempting to quibble with the omission of certain Nebraska writers whose work is probably more noteworthy than several of the writers included in *Road Trip*, or the exclusion of any writers working in genres outside of poetry or fiction, though that feels beside the point. It's apparent that Clark and Saiser's intention here is not to compile a "Who's Who" of contemporary Nebraska writers but to allow readers the opportunity to overhear a series of congenial conversations on the writing life.

JONATHAN RITZ
Department of English
University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown