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And, Oh, My Heart Goes Out

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BOOK REVIEW

AND, OH, MY HEART GOES OUT

by Nathalie Anderson



EARLY in Christine Poreba '97's moving and compelling book, *Rough Knowledge* (Anhinga Press), her poem "Silent Elegy" recounts how a photographer, bereaved, purposely creates "small accidents" through his art: "a pitcher crashing to the floor in slow motion, / its contents pouring out over and over."

This image eloquently recalls the process Freud called "fort/da"—basically "gone, then there"—through which, he posited, children manage the fear of a mother's absence by throwing their toys out of sight. Poreba's book works in just this way. It continually anticipates loss, and—in recognizing its possibility—continually defers it, manages it, sets it gingerly to one side: A model airplane flies "into the light of things that were / about to end"; a woman soon to be married dreams

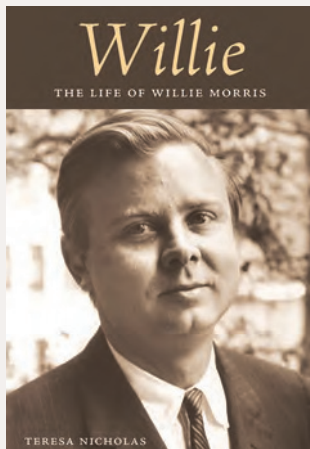
"a world / which one of us / will be first to leave"; a visitor to an exhibition of miniature rooms wonders, "Is this what the world will look like when we're gone?"

This pattern of deferred or managed trauma is particularly clear in poems that circle a fear of flight. First, a butterfly strikes a windshield "with the force / of a harsh current of sky." Then a woman dreams of flying, "a simple breaststroke / in the air," and flies her model plane: "If only other things were this easy to let go." But a poem about the rituals we deploy to manage risks, "tiny as the chances of being a passenger / in flames," ends with a crash, and subsequent poems imagine further dangers, culminating in an actual air disaster, the passengers "not alive when I awoke," "and, oh, my heart goes out."

That's Poreba's last line, and the whole book stands behind it, giving it the full heft of true concern. **S**

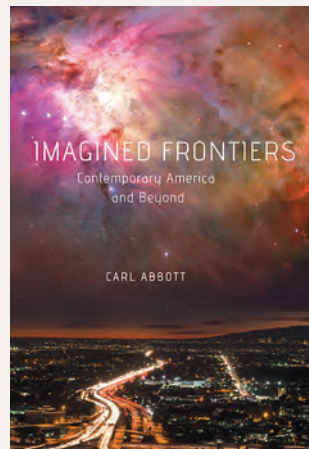
NATHALIE ANDERSON is director of creative writing as well as the Alexander Griswold Cummins Professor of English Literature.

HOT TYPE: NEW BOOKS BY SWARTHMORE GRADUATES



► **Teresa Nicholas '76**
Willie
University Press of Mississippi

In this sensitively drawn, impeccably researched bio, fellow Mississippian Nicholas reclaims the legacy of writer's writer and Southern icon Willie Morris. Rising to national fame as the youngest-ever helmer of *Harper's Magazine* in 1967, the brilliant, demon-battling Morris wrote 23 books (including *My Dog Skip*) and hundreds of newspaper and magazine articles. "For me, personally, he was a key figure," Nicholas says. "He encouraged me to 'get a good liberal arts education' before embarking on any writing career. It's because of Willie that I applied to Swarthmore."



► **Carl Abbott '66**
Imagined Frontiers
University of Oklahoma Press

Exploring the intersection of Western history, urban planning, and science fiction, Abbott digs into American artists' long fascination with life on the edge, whether that's the suburban New Jersey of Tony Soprano or the sagebrush-and-outer-space aesthetic of *Serenity*. Cutting across genres to blend history, social science, and art, Abbott analyzes how "frontiers, finally, are places of possibility for the invention of new institutions or the reinventions of self"—in other words: the ways Americans think about and define themselves, their world, and their future.