



A Walk on the Wild Side

Nelson Algren , Russell Banks (Foreword)

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With its depiction of the downtrodden prostitutes, bootleggers, and hustlers of Perdido Street in the old French Quarter of 1930s New Orleans, *A Walk on the Wild Side* found a place in the imagination of all the generations that have followed since. As Algren admitted, *it wasn't written until long after it had been walked... I found my way to the streets on the other side of the Southern Pacific station, where the big jukeboxes were singing something called "Walking the Wild Side of Life." I've stayed pretty much on that side of the curb ever since*".

Perhaps his own words describe the book best: *The book asks why lost people sometimes develop into greater human beings than those who have never been lost in their whole lives. Why men who have suffered at the hands of other men are the natural believers in humanity, while those whose part has been simply to acquire, to take all and give nothing, are the most contemptuous of mankind.*

Cover Photograph: Jason Fulford

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From Reader Review A Walk on the Wild Side for online ebook

Jerod Duris says

I put this one off for a long time, knowing it was Algren's most popular, but then I kept encountering references to it involving Hunter Thompson. It is clearly the most outstanding of the 4-5 Algren books I've read. A brilliant feat of modernism, like a cross between Grapes of Wrath and Naked Lunch.

Anne Simpson says

Though the writing is very impressive - descriptive, ironic, poetic, I couldn't get into the story because none of the characters is developed enough for me to care much about them. It felt long and repetitious. Many of the characters seemed like caricatures rather than real people. Dove Linkhorn, the main character, was somewhat sympathetic though not entirely, as he often contributed to his own situation.

Elliott says

"And the coloured girls say

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doo doo doo doo doo doo doo doo doo
doo"

Brian Engelhardt says

Unbelievable! Pimps, prostitutes, alcoholics, thieves, drug addicts, drifters, abortionists, scam artists, barflies. . . every down-and-out person you're ever likely to meet is in here. Algren wrote about the kinds of people and places that he knew best and his work reads like dark poetry. An amazing command of the English language!

Richard says

Forgot how friggin' GREAT Algren was.

David Bonesteel says

Nelson Algren's novel relates the adventures of Dove Linkhorn, an illiterate young man who leaves poverty and a failed love affair behind him to wander the countryside. He has many adventures along the way until he settles for a time in New Orleans, where he will experience happiness and great tragedy.

Linkhorn is an appealing character, whose desire to better himself makes him easy to sympathize with. The real star of this novel, however, is Algren's prose. Hemingway himself felt that Algren was one of the best writers in America, although their styles couldn't be more different. In contrast to Hemingway's stark, deceptively simple prose, Algren's is full of flourishes and wordplay. I have never encountered a writer that was more adept at breaking my heart and making me laugh out loud on the same page--sometimes in the same paragraph. There are verbal fireworks going off in this book. His characters are extreme types living on the fringe of society, but Algren makes them come alive. Highly recommended.

Ryan Holiday says

A story about the old French Quarter and New Orleans of the 1930s. A story encompassing midget pimps, legless former circus strongmen, Southern aristocrats suffering from "black mammy syndrome," conniving door-to-door salesmen, prostitutes, hustlers, runaways named Kitty Twist, the sane, the insane, the homeless, the insane sane homeless masquerading as eighteenth century admirals, and condom factories. A story of delicate depth and one of those novels that works best when viewed as a whole. The thud of resonation doesn't occur until the last few pages.

The language distracts at points. Sometimes it seems as if Algren was trying too hard for a singsong cadence in his prose -- obvious rhymes, seemingly forced alliteration. But when it works, when it flows naturally, his language of pimps, prostitutes, and Prohibition (one tries anyway), which relates the story of Dove Linkhorn, a naïve 16-year-old from a tiny Texas town who finds his way to New Orleans, is unlike any other before or since.

And: Lou Reed has said his "Walk on the Wild Side" was inspired by Algren's novel. Good book. Algren should be read.

The Literary Chick says

If you like your characters damaged and your prose poetic, this is the book for you. No author does it better.

David Schaafsma says

Walk on the Wild Side, Lou Reed:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4wNkn...>

"Mr. Algren, boy, you are good."-- Ernest Hemingway

Walk on the Wild Side is set in Perdido Street in the old French Quarter of depression-era New Orleans. With its depictions of an array of prostitutes, bootleggers, and hustlers, it is wild, but also warm, passionate, edgy, angry, funny. He wrote it soon after hanging out there for a time, and, "I've stayed pretty much on that side of the curb ever since." Algren never feels like he is slumming. He's with these people all the way.

Walk on the Wild Side is the story of Dove Linkhorn, a wild and naïve and cocky 16-year-old from a small Texas town who finds his way to New Orleans. The book predates and probably highly influenced books with out-of-control wild characters such as Heller's Catch 22 and Kesey's Cuckoo's Nest. Oh, and almost anything by Kerouac, Bukowski, or Pynchon. I read it in part because I had recently read Orwell's Down and Out in Paris and London, which it would be grouped with, as well. Tacks back and forth between black humor and despair, with tolerance for all manner of individuals, a kind of moral map for democracy. Like Whitman, visceral.

"To this lopsided shambles owned by this unlicensed ghost, this speakeasy spook who had been alive once but died in the crash and was now only haunting the thirties, came trudging, some uphill and some down, all those who could not admit that the money was spent, the dream was over; the magic done. They still wore the clothes they wore before 1929 and no one knew when they might buy clothes again."

"Never Come Morning " is my favorite Algren (so far), but this is very good. Hilarious and sad, lyrically melancholy. I listened to it on audiotape, which made the rich language come alive.

Algren summed his book up best: "The book asks why lost people sometimes develop into greater human beings than those who have never been lost in their whole lives. Why men who have suffered at the hands of other men are the natural believers in humanity, while those whose part has been simply to acquire, to take all and give nothing, are the most contemptuous of mankind."

Ethan Miller says

An amazing and beautiful ride! It would seem that Algren's name no longer rings in the counter culture lit canon the way that writers like Kerouac, Hunter S Thompson, Hubert Selby Jr, Bukowski, Pynchon and Burroughs do though you can find elements of all these writers by chance or by influence in Walk On The Wild Side. WOTWS is surely one of the great well springs from which tales of the American underbelly, druggy lit, road lit and even gonzo and many aspects of post modern writing would flow from. It was published 1 year before On the Road, 4 years before Naked Lunch, 8 years before Last Exit to Brooklyn, 7 years before Pynchon's V. and 10 years before Hell's Angels. Where some of the other more famous touchstones of Beat and Post Modern lit show some aging and wear and tear in the overall quality and depth of the work now that the explosion and fan fare of their historical literary moment is beginning to settle, Algren's great work remains a knock out and shamefully under-celebrated. A great story, experimentation with flow and form, timeless characters in hallucinatory technicolor, all executed by a master's hand. This is rich, colorful, underground, funky, twisted stuff and it's a beautiful blast to get inside of.

Julie says

I can't remember the last time I read something so beautifully written. Algren had an ear for the poetry of regional al speech and the wisdom of the uneducated.

the events of the story may depict an ugly part of society but the language is just So Beautiful. I couldn't put

it down.

João Carlos says

Nelson Algren (1909 – 1981)

"Vidas Perdidas" no original **"A Walk On The Wild Side"** é um romance do escritor norte-americano **Nelson Algren** (1909 – 1981) publicado em 1956.

Nelson Algren é referenciado como um dos escritores mais original no panorama literário norte-americano, premiado com o "National Book Award" em 1949 com o romance **"The Man with the Golden Arm"**; com uma vida recheada de problemas, com o jogo, com casamentos desastrosos, com a pobreza, com a prisão por roubo e pela relação amorosa que manteve com a escritora francesa **Simone de Beauvoir** (na altura casada com o escritor francês **Jean-Paul Sartre**).

"Vidas Perdidas" segue os passos de um jovem de 16 anos, Dove Linkhorn, órfão de mãe, analfabeto, com um pai, Fitz Linkhorn, pregador fanático e um irmão, Byron, alcoólico, numa fuga a um ambiente pobre, degradante, sem perspectiva de vida, sem vislumbre de futuro, empreendendo uma viagem de Hicksville, no Texas, para Nova Orleães.

Nessa "viagem" Dove Linkhorn encontra Terasina Vidavarri, uma mulher mais velha que vive nos destroços do que restava do Hotel Crockett, um relacionamento amoroso curto, arruinado pela incompreensão, pelo orgulho, pela mentira e pela violência.

"É uma sorte amar, seja quando for, porque nestas alturas temos alguém para quem viver" pensava Terasina. "Mas não amar também é uma sorte. Porque assim não temos problemas." (Pág. 35)

Já em Nova Orleães, Dove Linkhorn acaba "perdido" em Perdido Street, onde mulheres e homens vivem vidas inquietas, **"Vidas Perdidas"**, escondendo a solidão com o consumo desenfreado de bebidas alcoólicas e de drogas, pobres e famintos que tentam desesperadamente sobreviver; com prostitutas e chulos, numa exploração sórdida de mulheres, um mundo marginal formado por alianças provisórias, num dos períodos mais conturbados da história dos Estados Unidos da América, os anos 30, o período da Grande Depressão, onde a decadência e a amargura dominam, mas onde acaba por existir alguma réstia de esperança e de amor. A narrativa de **"Vidas Perdidas"** não é estruturada de uma forma ordenada, espelhando a vida errática e aleatória de Dove Linkhorn e das várias personagens, numa linguagem inventiva, com um humor negro sublime, por vezes, confusa, entre o passado e o presente, mas com descrições e detalhes fascinantes.

"Vidas Perdidas" é um excelente romance, com um início brilhante, ambientado a um dos períodos mais negro do "Sonho Americano" - com personagens inesquecíveis, com destaque para Dove Linkhorn, Terasina Vidavarri, a prostituta Hallie e Kitty Twist - mas que em determinados períodos a narrativa de torna excessivamente confusa, com a profusão de personagens que desaparecem e reaparecem sem qualquer explicação; numa história de personagens infelizes e desesperadas em busca da "fortuna", do amor e da redenção.

"E sentiu uma sombria apreensão pela possibilidade de estar destinado a só fazer sofrer as pessoas que lhe eram mais queridas.

De vir a sofrer muitas amarguras, umas súbitas, outras lentas, algumas só de passagem, e uma que nunca o iria abandonar." (Pág. 116)

"Há uma vantagem que as mulheres têm sobre os homens: podem descer aos infernos e sair de lá direitas outra vez." (Pág. 132)"

"Tenho a sensação de ter estado em todos os lugares que Deus criou", pensou Dove, "mas a única coisa que encontrei foi gente com vidas muito difíceis. A única coisa que encontrei foram problemas e degradação. A única coisa que encontrei é que aqueles que tinham vidas mais difíceis de levar são mais propensos a ajudar os outros do que aqueles que as têm fáceis. A única coisa que encontrei foi duas espécies de pessoas: as que preferiam viver do lado da rua dos perdedores com outros perdedores a vencer inteiramente por si próprias e as que queriam ser vencedoras mesmo que a única maneira que lhes restava de subir na vida fosse pisando os que tinham tombado. A única coisa que encontrei foram homens e mulheres, e todas as mulheres já tinham caído." (Pág. 384 - 385)

Shelly Soukup says

Great book. I hear of the current events of these fascinating cities and I'm happy I picked this one about Nola so I know some good history.

Adam says

The bruised romantic's Bible: a sagacious tale of melancholy lostness underpinned by a fundamental, indubitable sense of something transcendently positive underlying that hell.

Algren himself described it almost perfectly when he said: "the book asks why lost people sometimes develop into greater human beings than those who have never been lost in their whole lives. Why men who have suffered at the hands of other men are the natural believers in humanity, while those whose part has been simply to acquire, to take all and give nothing, are the most contemptuous of mankind."

GR reviewer Christopher Flynn had a good shot at it, too: "Sort of like *On the Road* if Kerouac had written instead of typed."

Fun fact: Lou Reed was approached, in 1970, in relation to a project that was to turn this book into a musical. Nothing came of it, though the results would have surely been staggering for one reason or another. Reed would go on to name his hit "Walk on the Wild Side" after the book, a book the song shares much in common with. The book (and Algren) seem to have a longer half-life in down-and-out, wounded, sentimental rock music than in literature departments and the general literary fiction circle, which would seem odd but for the book's enduring underdog sensibility, a perfect match for the likes of The Hold Steady's Craig Finn, among others, whose lyrical, complex tales of "lost people" bring Algren sharply to mind.

Stephen says

HEADLINE: Lost American classic rediscovered by me!

How in the world did this American classic come to fall through the cracks? And why? From my point of view it is a novel about the depression that is an amalgam of *Grapes of Wrath* and *Confederacy of Dunces*. It is *Grapes of Wrath* with a profound sense of black humor. And it has sex.

Dove Linkhorn ought to be mentioned in the same breath as quintessential American heroes such as Huckleberry Finn, Holden Caulfield, Dean Moriarty, Jay Gatsby, and the like. The Dirk Diggler of his era.

Perhaps I wax too rhapsodic there, but I do not think so.

For what it is worth and if you are interested in pursuing this further you can find a spirited and enthusiastic discussion of the book here. If you have to do a paper on it or something. Be forewarned about that discussion though. It includes “spoilers.” Everyone around here seems so terrified of “spoilers.”

James Murphy says

I'd not read Algren before. I'd known of him for a long time, but my primary interest in him was his connection to Simone de Beauvoir as her lover. Following her trail I'd read their published letters and then, early this year, the Algren biography by Mary Wisniewski. All that brought me to *A Walk on the Wild Side*. And I found some surprises there and took comfort in them, much like Paul Simon took comfort in the whores of 7th Avenue. First, I thought at times--not always--Algren's style reminded me a little of Cormac McCarthy. This is most apparent in the opening scenes in Texas, where Dove Linkhorn's story begins. And, as I say, I didn't think that quality consistent throughout the novel, which was, I thought, a bit too long.

Algren wrote a novel about people scraping by in the hardscrabble underbelly of Perdido Street in New Orleans in the early years of the Great Depression. It's inhabited by hustlers, prostitutes, and gamblers. They eke out a living however they can on the street. Business on Perdido consists of bars, the counterfeit love of prostitutes, door-to-door scams, and bootlegging. The industry of the street is a mom and pop condom factory, where Dove works for a time. Near the end Algren calls his characters outlaws and derelicts. They're lost, beaten down by the times and their own marginal lives. But he sees their elemental nature as spiritual, even angelic. Algren himself said, "The book asks why lost people sometimes develop into greater human beings than those who have never been lost in their whole lives." His answer is the narrative of Dove Linkhorn's young manhood. His answer was my last surprise. The ending made me remember the end of *Wise Blood*. But where Hazel Motes saw only emptiness, Dove's vision of everlasting promise serves to remind us these characters are at least God's creatures. Here, though, God is Algren, and the final truth is that he had a deep love for his characters.

Phillip says

A really great work from a now underestimated writer. Algren's story of the Depression-era New Orleans underworld is riveting--not only for its depictions of prostitutes, pimps, junkies, and conmen, but because of the enigmatic protagonist. Dove Linkhorn is a paradoxical figure, at once seemingly ignorant and yet strangely talented. Dove is gifted with an unrealistic sexual capacity and a natural talent for math, yet his identity remains incomplete based on his illiteracy.

What's really very interesting about this novel is the thematic death drive return to the site of trauma. Dove rapes his first love, thus symbolically cutting himself off from the world she represents (i.e., the attempt to complete his identity through reading). After leaving her he eventually becomes a peep show performer, acting out scenes of rape and sexual violence--thus recreating the site of his trauma. Only when he is able to return to his first love, having learned to read and then been blinded in a bar fight, is there hope for Dove's redemption.

Teresa Proença says

"...um homem que escreve e que não deve ser lido por quem não aguenta um murro. O Sr. Algren ataca com ambas as mãos, cerca-nos e mata-nos se não formos incrivelmente cuidadosos."

Ernest Hemingway

Não me matou mas deixou-me com cicatrizes...

Comprei este livro por duas razões:

1. Porque foi escrito em 1956...
2. Porque Sartre sofreu com o envolvimento de Simone de Beauvoir com Algren. E, depois de chegar ao fim deste Romance, posso afirmar que a minha lógica estava certa: Nelson Algren era Especial.

Dove é um provinciano do Texas com a cabeça atulhada de sonhos. Aos dezasseis anos foge de casa na busca de um futuro em Nova Orleães.

O ano é o de 1931, o apogeu da Grande Depressão, quando a sobrevivência era o único sonho realizável. Vigaristas, prostitutas, proxenetas, ladrões, bêbedos, loucos, marginais,...sobreviventes. Heróis, de uma saga magnífica, que me fizeram chorar por eles e rir com eles.

Não me é fácil escrever mais sobre este livro sem me arriscar a ser inconveniente, ou desagradável, ao falar de crises económicas, de pobreza, de sofrimento, de Vidas Perdidas...

Recomendo:

1. A quem gosta de um livro a sério: com uma prosa perfeita, por vezes quase poesia (muitas vezes poesia, porque a música está sempre presente);
2. A quem não tem medo de se sentir encurralado; querendo continuar a ler e não querendo saber o que vem a seguir (porque suspeitamos que nada virá de bom);
3. A quem gosta de Cormac McCarthy; muitas vezes me lembrei de **Suttree**, embora o romance de Algren não se centre numa única personagem principal; todas são principais e secundárias;
4. A quem não se importe de ler um livro que não está na "moda". Pouca gente do Goodreads o leu, mas quem leu não se arrependeu;
5. Porque eu recomendo. E sou uma mulher com "bom gosto literário", disseram-me há dias...(~~Só me atrevi com o ponto 5, porque espero que quem se pôs a ler esta opinião tenha parado algures no terceiro parágrafo :P)~~

Sumner Wilson says

What did I think? Thought it was great.

A Walk on the Wild Side by Nelson Algren is a crazy rollick through New Orleans in 1930-'31, in that era. Published in '56. Crest books reprinted it in paperback in '62.

We follow the insane adventures--misadventures--of Dove Linkhorn, a red-neck illiterate from Aurora, Texas, by rail. Freight, that is, in boxcars he jumps on his way out of town. He splits from Aurora because of a fall from grace from the gal he falls in love with, Terasina, his employer. He gets into her undies one morning, leaves her in bed, goes downstairs to the café she owns, and emboldened by his success with Terasina in bed, he figures she can't do without him, and opens her cash register. This is a sad mistake.

Terasina comes tearing downstairs and tosses old Dove out her joint on his head. This, of course, is why he splits.

He meets up with a young seventeen years old gal, but she is more like two-thousand years old in experience. She talks Dove into a B&A., while she waits outside as look-out. She is nabbed, but Dove escapes, and hits the rails again.

In New Orleans his eyes are knocked out by the marvels of this amazing city of all sins. By and by, he links up with a pimp who recognizes Dove's talents as a cocksman, and puts him to work having his way with "virgins" while paid perverts peek through peepholes to watch Dove's expertise with the "virgins." Of course, these are not virgins, but are old-head whores pimped by Finnerty, who goes shares in the cash with Dove.

Dove can't stand up under the weight of his success, however, and is well on his way to the gutter via the bottle. He is saved by an octoroon beauty, Hallie, who goes into hiding with Dove, and among other things teaches him to read. The problem is, Hallie has a jealous boyfriend. A cat name of Schmidt who has one leg off at the knee, the other one off at the hip, and gets around right fine on a flat-board scooter he straps himself onto. Before he lost his legs, Schmidt had been an awesome athlete who was employed as a stooge in a wrestling team making decent dough. Schmidt still has enormous strength in his shoulders and arms, and is feared from one end of old Perdido Street to the other. He starts on a search for Dove and Hallie--well, he couldn't care less about Dove, but just wants Hallie back.

In the meantime, Dove gets tossed into jail, which saves him temporarily. When he gets out the jug six-months later, Schmidt still hasn't found Hallie. He does find Dove, however, in Dockerty's Dollhouse, a saloon that bills itself as the last speakeasy in the country. A wild and hellish place. What happens next I'll leave to those who want to read it for themselves. It isn't pretty. But it is a great read.

A fellow by name of E. Hemingway--who'n hell is he?--claims that Algren is a man's writer, plus a few more words that I'll not bother to go into here. It's late and time goes by too damned fast as 'tis, and I've spent way too much of it on this review. Jeez, how many words have I wasted?

Sumner

Reid says

I owe Algren a review. He's definitely skilled, and attuned to the bittersweet, to the chasm that occurs between feelings and behavior, especially when it comes to romance or dalliance, and perhaps especially with the down-and-out and poor. The sympathy comes across, but it feels not as if it's the narrator's sympathy, but only our own. Algren rides a fine line, as if it's simply his element, the stuff he breathes, and he places us right there, in the dried dirt of Texas and anything-goes New Orleans during the great depression, amidst the bars and whorehouses and poverty stricken streets. Some passages and scenes are just perfectly expressed, and his penchant for rhyming words is a kick. The personal give and take, and conflicted feelings, between the 16 yr old illiterate hero Dove Linkhorn and the beautiful cafe/bar owner, Terasina, 20 years his senior, - who is still psychologically recovering from one of the most memorably despicable characters that could be described in just a page or two - is pretty special, as is his acquaintance with a lonely hobo girl dressed as a boy who seems fairly desperate for a friend:

Dove got a slab of cornbread in molasses and a stack of beans piled so neatly they appeared to have been counted one by one. When he considered how many he had picked he felt that,

percentage-wise, he was getting a bad count. "Everyone always gets more than me," he complained, and the girl pushed her plate before him again. "Why you so good to me?" Dove asked. "Because I want YOU to be good to me," she told him so frankly that he felt he must be doing her a favor and cleaned up every crumb.

In part the book is about the education or maturation of Dove, but it's a tough path and he's on his own, being essentially a runaway from his dead end life with his preacher widower father and his drunken brother.

The novel itself falters a bit, seemed to get sidetracked with some other characters that were not nearly as interesting, but there are plenty of scenes that continue to make it worthwhile - like a scene depicting their hard scrabble life as a huge pile of turtles on a butcher's block, scrambling over each other in a bloody slipping mess - and some really nice writing, like the two unconnected quotes that I'll close with...

While the moon that could never wane looked on, on brandy, silver comb and wine... Keeping time to the rolling man lashed fast between those black-meshed thighs, breathing her breath as she breathed his till she moaned his lips apart... Her eyelids fluttered in the drains of her passion - it had not happened to her before like this. Fitz had felt the flutter against his cheek. The pianola roll whispered on and on, it had not happened to him before so heart-shakingly as this. And the moon that could never wane dimmed down to no more than a gas lamp's leaning glow. Drinkers and dancers, gaffers and gamblers, all had gone.

"There's a hundred or so under your comb and brush," he told her - "that's one way to anywhere. See you in jail." And so, having salvaged his pride at the cost of his heart, he left.

See you all in jail!
