

THE NIGHT TRAIN BY CLYDE EDGERTON

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by Clyde Edgerton

Reviewed by Niles Reddick

Once again, former Guggenheim fellow Clyde Edgerton has delivered a pitch-perfect piece of fiction that will delight readers. This time, his tenth novel *The Night Train* will prove to audiences that Edgerton's creative genius is as good as ever in delivering Southern fiction that is tough to put down. A Creative Writing professor at the University of North Carolina Wilmington, Edgerton certainly has a great deal to share with his students to help them hone their own craft, and *The Night Train* offers readers lessons in history, music, and humanity.

Set in a segregated North Carolina in 1963 (except for a 2011 reflective music interview dispersed throughout), *The Night Train* proves that small Southern towns are not immune to issues because of their rurality and that life is about survival, whether it's working at the furniture store in town or at the beef slaughterhouse or dog food factory that uses the animal entrails to produce the food. This realistic glimpse of black-white relations reflects the undercurrent of danger at every turn with sit-ins, the KKK, and segregated movie theatres and drive-ins, just to name a few, but *The Night Train* is about much more. It's about good music—its birth and development, its influence on all people from the musician to the television viewer, its permeance in all of culture from the comings and goings of a train to language to church.

Despite the broader culture orchestrated throughout *The Night Train*, what appeals to this reader is the never-ending colorful cast of eccentric characters who we come to love—Larry Lime Nolan, whose real name is Larry Lime Beacon of Time Reckoning Breathe on Me Nolan, named so by his grandmother Aunt Marzi who has named most all of his relatives this way; a jazz musician who is a hemophiliac named Bleeder; furniture shop foreman Flash Acres and his mama who looks like a mole with glasses; Dwayne Hallston and his band, the Rumlbers; and many more.

Couple the characters with noodling for catfish, a musical variety show where the host Bobby Lee Reese pops dog food in his mouth between his story-telling and musical acts, and taking a concealed rooster to the theatre to toss off the balcony to frighten viewers of *The Birds*, and with *The Night Train*, readers are in for a great ride.