

small press review

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Bunny

Second Acts: A Novel.

By Tim W. Brown
2010; 208pp; Pa; Gival Press,
PO Box 3812, Arlington, VA
22203. \$20.00.

John Jacob

Tim. W. Brown's fourth novel arrives at about the same time Charles Portis is being praised to the skies and beyond for his 1968 novel, *True Grit*, apparently because the Coen brothers, who directed the most recent film version, chose to use the dialogue that Portis employs through his narrator in the book. Careful viewers of Westerns will note that the 1969 film that won John Wayne his only Oscar used the same language.

Tim W. Brown has been lauded as a writer in the picaresque tradition, and certainly Cervantes and Fielding come to mind when reading this latest novel, but many readers seem to have missed the richly comic elements of the novel, certainly on a level equal with Portis.

The story is a kind of *Back to the Future* piece, to continue the cinema discussion, of Dan Conner who lives in the future and goes back in the past to find his wife Rachel and her lover, encountering along the way the important character of Listening Rabbit, or Bunny. There is much discussion of historical landmarks and events, and how they can survive in the currency of the day, wisely taking pure gold with them to buy items. Eventually, of course, Dan finds Rachel and all is coherent, but only after some classic narration regarding Bunny's martial abilities: "While holding the robber's other flailing arm at bay, Bunny wrenched his hand, which still

clutched the knife, against the side of his head. With a quick flick of his wrist, she caused him to slice off his own ear.

'You Bloody Red-Skinned Bitch!' he screamed, dropping the knife and frantically patting the snow in search of his severed ear. Who he calling bloody redskin?' Bunny asked me. 'Him the one with bloody red skin.' Then she let out a blood-curdling war whoop...."

Brown handles the deadpan humor with a mastery that will get lost because readership will be limited. I doubt that anyone will want to make this story into a film, though it would be interesting to see. Bunny sits at the core of many of the funnier scenes, but Brown's ability as a story-teller extends beyond that. The chapters are told from his point of view and in intersecting chapters, from Rachel's diary accounts, which are much saltier.

Certainly Brown is to be considered an American original of the magnitude of Charles Portis. Perhaps the dialogue lacks some of the loquacious qualities of Portis, but the story makes up for it.