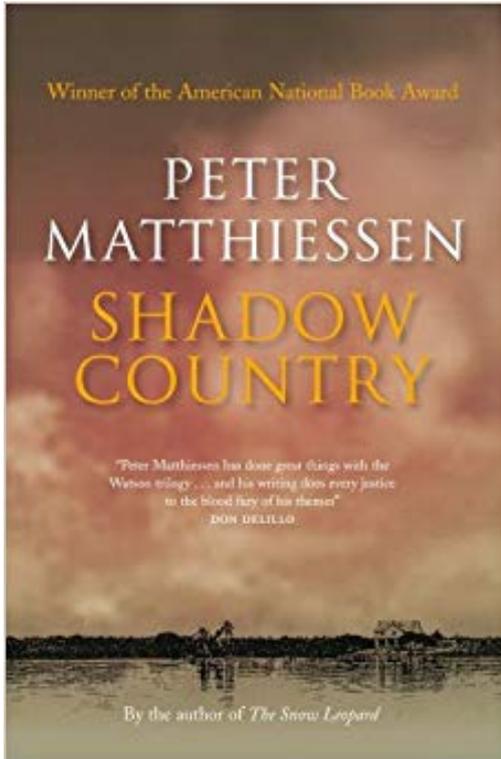


Shadow Country *by* Peter MATTHIESSEN



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ISBN: 085705015X

ISBN13: 978-0857050151

Author: Peter MATTHIESSEN

Book title: Shadow Country

Publisher: Maclehorse Press; First Edition/First Printing edition (2010)

Language: English

Size PDF version: 1427 kb

Size ePUB version: 1419 kb

Size FB2 version: 1725 kb

Other formats: azw docx rtf mobi

2008 NATIONAL BOOK AWARD WINNER Peter Matthiessen's great American epic—Killing Mister Watson, Lost Man's River, and Bone by Bone—was conceived as one vast mysterious novel, but because of its length it was originally broken up into three books. In this bold new rendering, Matthiessen has cut nearly a third of the overall text and collapsed the time frame while deepening the insights and motivations of his characters with brilliant rewriting throughout. In *Shadow Country*, he has marvelously distilled a monumental work, realizing his original vision. Inspired by a near-mythic event of the wild Florida frontier at the turn of the twentieth century, *Shadow Country* reimagines the legend of the inspired Everglades sugar planter and notorious outlaw E. J. Watson, who drives himself relentlessly toward his own violent end at the hands of neighbors who mostly admired him, in a killing that obsessed his favorite son. *Shadow Country* traverses strange landscapes and frontier hinterlands inhabited by Americans of every provenance and color, including the black and Indian inheritors of the archaic racism that, as Watson's wife observed, "still casts its shadow over the nation." Peter Matthiessen's lyrical and illuminating work in the Watson narrative has been praised highly by such contemporaries as Saul Bellow, William Styron, and W. S. Merwin. Joseph Heller said "I read it in great gulps, up each night later than I wanted to be, in my hungry impatience to find out more and more." Praise for *Shadow Country* "*Shadow Country* is altogether gripping, shocking, and **brilliantly told**, not just a tour de force in its stylistic range, but **a great American novel, as powerful a reading experience as nearly any in our literature.** This magnificent, sad masterpiece about race, history, and defeated dreams can easily stand comparison with Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men*. Little wonder, too, that parts of the story of E.J. Watson call up comparisons with Dostoevsky, Conrad, and, inevitably, Faulkner. **In every way, *Shadow Country* is a bravura performance, at once history, fiction, and myth—as well as the capstone to the career of one of the most admired and admirable writers of our time.**" — *The New York Review of Books* "Magnificent and capacious.... I'll just say right here that the book took my sleeve and like the ancient mariner would not let go. **Matthiessen has made his three-part saga into a new thing... Finally now we have these books welded like a bell, and with Watson's song the last sound, all the elements fuse and resonate.... a breathtaking saga.**" — *The Los Angeles Times* "Gorgeously written and unfailingly compelling,

Shadow Country* is the exhilarating masterwork of [Matthiessen's] career, every bit as ambitious as *Moby Dick*.**" — *National Geographic Adventure* magazine "Peter Matthiessen consolidates his **epic masterpiece** of Florida -- and crafts something even better...[He] deserves credit for decades of meticulous research and obsessive details and soaring prose that converted the Watson legend into critically acclaimed literature....Anyone wanting an explanation for what happened to Florida can now find it in a single novel, **a great American novel.**" — *Miami Herald* "Matthiessen is writing about one man's life in *Shadow Country*, but he is also writing about the life of the nation over the course of half a century. Watson's story is essentially the story of the American frontier, of the conquering of wild lands and people, and of what such empires cost....**Even among a body of work as magnificent as Matthiessen's, this is his great book.**" — *St. Petersburg Times* "Shadow Country* is a magnum opus.** Matthiessen is meticulous in creating characters, lyrical in describing landscapes, and resolute in dissecting the values and costs that accompanied the development of this nation." --*Seattle Times* "***Shadow Country* is an ambitious, lasting, and meaningful work of literature** that will not soon fade away. It is a testament to Mr. Matthiessen's integrity as an artist that he felt compelled to return to the Watson material to produce this work and satisfy his original vision....a multifaceted work that can be read variously or simultaneously as a psychological novel, a historical novel, a morality tale, a political allegory, or a mystery. -- *East Hampton Star* "Matthiessen's Watson trilogy is **a touchstone of modern American literature**...this reworking...is **remarkable**...**Where Watson was a magnificent character before, he comes across as nothing short of iconic here; it's difficult to find another figure in American literature so thoroughly and convincingly portrayed.**" — *Publishers Weekly*, starred review, Pick of the Week "Matthiessen has reinvigorated and rejoined the trilogy's novels...a mosaic about the life and lynch-mob death of a turn-of-the century Florida Everglades sugar planter and serial killer named E. J. Watson — into the 900-plus-page *Shadow Country*. This is no mere repackaging: Four hundred pages were cut from the novels, previous background characters now trump to the foreground, and the books' rangy, Faulknerian essence is rendered more digestible. **Deliciously digestible**, that is; **this is a thick porterhouse of a novel.**" — *Men's Journal* "The fiction of Peter Matthiessen is the reason a lot of people in my generation decided to be writers. No doubt about it. **SHADOW COUNTRY lives up to anyone's highest expectations for great writing.**" -- Richard Ford "Peter Matthiessen is a brilliantly gifted and ambitious writer, an inspired anatomist of the American mythos. His storytelling skills are prodigious and his rapport with his subject is remarkable." -- Joyce Carol Oates "Peter Matthiessen's work, both in fiction and non-fiction, has become a unique achievement in his own generation and in American literature as a whole. Everything that he has written has been conveyed in his own clear, deeply informed, elegant and powerful prose. The Watson saga-in-the-round, to which he has devoted nearly thirty years, is **his crowning achievement. SHADOW COUNTRY**, his distillation of the earlier trilogy, is his transmutation of it to represent his original vision. It **is the quintessence of his lifelong concerns, and a great legacy.**" -- W.S. Merwin



Reviews of the **Shadow Country** by Peter MATTHIESSEN

Brakree

Peter Matthiessen's *Shadow Country* is an extraordinary literary achievement by one of this country's best authors of recent times. Enormous in scope as well as page count, it is really three books in one. Book one is told variously by the people who "knew" him (and ultimately killed him). His estranged son, an historian determined to learn and share the "truth" of his legendary father narrates Book Two. The third book is told from the viewpoint of the man himself, the enigmatic, mercurial E.J. Watson, who is an historic figure with many volumes written about his real-life exploits in the Ten Thousand Islands region of southwest Florida.

I had read "Killing Mr. Watson" many years ago, and I have always regarded Matthiessen's writing to be exemplary. He was one of those authors who had the skill to write beautiful prose, meticulously researched and in accurate vernacular, liberally populated by sentences, passages and paragraphs of such clarity and beauty that one simply has to read them over and over again. Even so, I was left with many unanswered questions when I finished that first volume, and the book never fully left my mind.

"Shadow Country", at more than 1,400 pages, is, I believe, the author's own attempt to answer those questions for himself as well as for us, the fortunate readers.

I cannot recommend this book highly enough.

Snowskin

An amazing epic, not for the faint of heart, but so beautifully written at times, so ambitious in scope, it will break your heart. The second book (this was originally three separate novels) is the least engaging of the three, but only because the first and third parts are that much greater in comparison. The second portion was fantastic, too, don't get me wrong, but at times, and because this novel is a monster in length, clocking in at nearly 900 pages, some of the minor characters swirled together for me. Again, this is an epic historical American novel. Well worth your time if you're a fan of literary fiction, but be prepared to hang out with it for some time to come.

Dead Samurai

This is a long book in three parts. The first part is the story of EJ Watson as seen from the point of view of the community. The second part is seen by one of the sons of EJ as he does research to write a biography about his father. The third part is the story as seen by EJ himself. Occurring in the early 1900s in the south mostly in Southwest Florida we are confronted with the story of a murderer. EJ Watson is also known as Jack Watson and this is the clue that we are dealing with a dual personality. EJ is a man with a good deal of potential but Jack is a killer. This is a brutal work that captures the hard life in the Everglades and Florida Keys.

Bliss

Shadow Country only further establishes Peter Mathiassen as one of America's greatest writers, historians, philosophers and naturalists. As the story of Edgar Watson unfolds, we soon learn that point of view informs reality. Part one reads like a crime novel, each witness telling their own perception of events in their own unique voice. Part two is the historian trying to reconcile what are now memories of events into a narrative that fits his own desire to shape the family history. Part three is told in the voice of Edgar Watson, himself.

Shadow Country is more than a family history or psychological study. It directly confronts the reality, present since the settlement and founding of the United States, unbridled capitalism, and the consequences of that unbridled capitalism on the American psyche, people, and landscape. From the exploitation of its people to the exploitation its resources. the topics are as timely now as they ever have been. It is the story of a shadow country, and until Americans understand how the past influences the present and how point of view influences the narrative that is our history, we will

continue to live the myth of a glorious past.

Ylal

This is it...the "Great American Novel." It is a grim tale, of crime, passion, racism, the environmental and personal cost of economic development on the last frontier in the Lower 48 states. The story of Edgar Watson's life, death and family is not always easy reading. Though Watson has admirable traits--he is hard-working and in his strange way, loves his family--his willingness to use violence to advance himself is the ultimate Faustian bargain. Death lurks around every corner and every page. The story is told three times, with the mysteries of Watson's life at least partially clarified in the final volume, told by Watson himself as the narrator. Matthiessen excels as a descriptor of nature and of the interactions between avaricious men and the natural world, and you will want to book a trip to the Everglades once you've finished this. A wonderful, challenging novel.

Ubranzac

I struggled to get through this book. I had high expectations based on the reviews but I didn't like it. It was hard to follow in the beginning but then the author repeats the story from different perspectives which eventually helps understand what is going on. I finally gave up 65% of the way through the book. While the storyline is based on a true legendary character from the Everglade region, I did not find the author's rendition of the story engaging.

the description of that region of SW Florida was interesting - perhaps the best part of the book

Gribandis

I love this book. Its not a fast or particularly easy read, but it keeps you engaged and wanting to keep reading.

I like to get invested in a book, and this is one of those. The characters are complex and this is a multi-generational saga telling a fictionalized account of the "Watson Legend". I love the descriptions of the "outlaw" life of the pioneers of the ten thousand islands in South West Florida during the late 19th and early 20th century.

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