

■ PATERSON LITERARY REVIEW ■

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Bill Conroy; DISPATCHES FROM THE HOUSE OF DEATH (MOONSHINE COVE PUBLISHING, LLC, 2024); ISBN: 9781952439636; 340 pages.

I have a GONZO tattoo on my calf and a writer friend of mine looked at it and asked me if I'd ever heard of a guy named Charles Bowden. He'd just written a cover story for the May 2009 issue of *Harper's* magazine titled, "The sicario: A Juarez hit man speaks". My friend said, "Bowden is true GONZO." I read the article and quite frankly was shocked that I hadn't heard anything about the carnage on the border. But I live in South Dakota—important news like this wasn't broadcasted in 2006 or 2009, not until recently when our former Governor Kristi Noem said Mexican cartels are infiltrating SD Indian reservations. Kristi Noem was trying to be Trump's running mate, but was not selected. She was also banned from all tribal lands in the state now. And rightly so.

There is an American dream millions of immigrants reach for that Bowden and other investigative reporters like Bill Conroy, then a correspondent at *The Narco News Bulletin*, had been chronicling for decades. GONZO journalism, authentic journalism, investigative reporting—immersing one's self in the story. I think there are few inimitable reporters with a captured heart—blood that pumps in overdrive—who bare the brand.

The brutal conflict began on the border and Bowden and Conroy were engulfed in it when then Mexican president Felipe Calderón declared a war against the drug cartels days after taking office. There have been over 400,000 murders in Mexico since 2006 when Felipe Calderón *professed* this—and an additional 100,000 victims have been "disappeared," most since 2006, many likely buried in mass graves like the one discovered in the backyard of the House of Death in Juarez.

Additionally Conroy added: "But there are many, many more mass graves out there holding dark secrets of death. Some of their bodies were boiled in acid or fed to pigs first, so the remains are likely little more than bone fragments by now, but these disappeared exist, they matter, and they need to be put to rest properly, with dignity, and offered some measure of justice, even if this drug war continues to add to their numbers."

And we know Calderón's former Secretary of Public Security was caught and convicted in early 2023 for working with and taking bribes from the Sinaloa Cartel—the evil he had sworn to protect innocent Mexican citizens from.

So you have to ask yourself, why is it allowed to continue? Let me tell you—it's because drugs are illegal. Criminalizing drugs makes them very fulfilling and people have to weigh the reward against the risk. By de-criminalizing drugs then we can study ways to fight addiction, instead

of sending all "drug criminals" to prison. We have to look to the root problems and fix them. Now that would be a humane thing to do and it would overhaul our entire approach to the way we look at things, run our justice and medical systems, and treat all people—the wealthy, middle-class and the poor.

Fast forward to present day—According to the United States Department of Justice:

Ex-Mexican Secretary of Public Security Genaro Garcia Luna Convicted of Engaging in a Continuing Criminal Enterprise and Taking Millions in Cash Bribes from the Sinaloa Cartel "Garcia Luna, who once stood at the pinnacle of law enforcement in Mexico, will now live the rest of his days having been revealed as a traitor to his country and to the honest members of law enforcement who risked their lives to dismantle drug cartels," stated United States Attorney Peace. "It is unconscionable that the defendant betrayed his duty as Secretary of Public Security by greedily accepting millions of dollars in bribe money that was stained by the blood of Cartel wars and drug-related battles in the streets of the United States and Mexico, in exchange for protecting those murderers and traffickers he was solemnly sworn to investigate. Today's verdict is a shining light for the rule of law, right over wrong, and justice over injustice for all those who have suffered as a result of the defendant's deplorable crimes."

"Today's conviction of Genaro Garcia Luna clearly shows that DEA will stop at nothing to pursue corrupt political officials who engage in drug trafficking and violence," said DEA Administrator Anne Milgram. "Garcia Luna, the former Secretary of Public Security in Mexico, received millions of dollars in bribes from the Sinaloa cartel in exchange for protecting its drug trafficking activities and facilitating the importation of cocaine and other drugs into the United States. This case affirms DEA's dedication to target and bring to justice those that enable the Sinaloa criminal drug cartel to flood the U.S. with deadly drugs that are killing Americans at unprecedented rates. It should send a clear message – to all political leaders around the world that trade on positions of influence to further transnational organized crime – that DEA will relentlessly pursue drug trafficking organizations that threaten the safety and health of the American people."¹

¹ <https://www.justice.gov/usao-edny/pr/ex-mexican-secretary-public-security-garcia-luna-convicted-engaging-continuing>

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That's a very bold PSA from the DEA. Are they relentlessly pursuing drug trafficking, murder and corruption? Or are the two government enterprises on both sides of the border working together in the wrong ways? For example, Bill Conroy's book *Dispatches from The House of Death—A Juarez Cartel informant, a DEA whistleblower, mass murder and a coverup on the edge of the Empire* uncovers bodies—a place where “human beings were tortured and then murdered by Mexican cops on the payroll of a narco-trafficker, all with the help of a U.S. government informant, all to make a drug case that never went to trial...”

It's been reported that Charles Bowden's article in *Harper's* “The sicario—A Juarez hit man speaks” sat on President Obama's oval office desk for months after its publication. No other president since has truly addressed these criminal enterprises. These atrocities and killings have become a living for so many adolescent young men and no one seems to be doing a damn thing about it. It's no wonder everyone wants to flee. No living wages and fear for your life. All of it is a manifestation of evil enterprises. And these organizations of corruption—one could argue, of genocide—are allowed to continue because of the revenue this “War on Drugs” is generating on both sides of our border. Who is benefiting besides the cartel? I'll tell you who—those who are presumably fighting against the cartel—those seemingly in control of their countries and in control of protecting their nations—and also, these are the same people who oversee laws and the distribution of wealth to the various systems in place in their respective countries.

In the article “AP report: Former DEA agent tells his own story of corruption before jail time” Jose Irizarry, now known as the most corrupt agent in U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration history, says, “We had free access to do whatever we wanted.” The 48-year-old Irizarry also told the AP in a series of interviews before beginning a 12-year federal prison sentence: “We would generate money pick-ups in places we wanted to go. And once we got there it was about drinking and girls.”²

It's important to know that when Mexican reporters get too close or report the truth they are often murdered. American reporters live in fear of such atrocities, too—but their lives, at least most of them, have been spared. Thanks to investigative reporters like Bill Conroy, *Narco News*, *The Freedom of Information Act* and the heart that drives good people—some stay on the beat, uncovering the truth by exhaustive asks and relentless digging. I can tell you there aren't many writers left who would put their life on the line—or put in the time.

2 <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/the-drug-war-is-a-game-collaborating-with-cartels-money-laundering-how-a-dea-agent-became-the-agencys-most-corrupt>

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Jim Reese, continued

At the heart of *Dispatches from The House of Death* is truth and helping concerned, innocent people find a better way of life in which they are not controlled by drug cartels and the corrupt powers that be. At the heart of *Dispatches from The House of Death* is a notion that one day Mexican citizens will have a better life and will no longer have to live in fear.

I want to end with a dedication from Bowden, whom I was able to become friends with and who taught me a lot about investigative reporting before he passed away. The quote is actually a dedication—one that appeared in Bowden's book *Dreamland: The Way Out of Juarez...* "For Bill Conroy of narconews.com, who stood his watch when others turned away and pretended none of this had happened."

Bill Conroy has written a monster of a masterpiece. We can only hope Conroy's book finds the right home and exposure so it doesn't just sit on a desk—that it is read and re-read and inimitable action is finally put in place.



Adele Kenny

Howard Berelson; SHADOWS (BARNES & NOBLE PRESS, 2024); ISBN: 9798331403577; 70 pages.

Harold Berelson's, *Shadows*, is a unique and compelling collection of poems, prose, and original artwork. It speaks to memory—the people, places, and experiences that, in every life, frame who we become. He begins at the kitchen table, a familiar place with which most readers immediately identify:

For some, life is opened impatiently at the kitchen table, for others life is opened slowly, the memory of what went before, and what matters.

The table is not unique, we have all seen it if we can remember. (p.2)

It's as if Berelson is inviting his readers to sit down with him at that table to reminisce, to define and clarify, and to share.

The poet's childhood figures strongly in many of the poems in this collection as he calls back the specifics of his life.

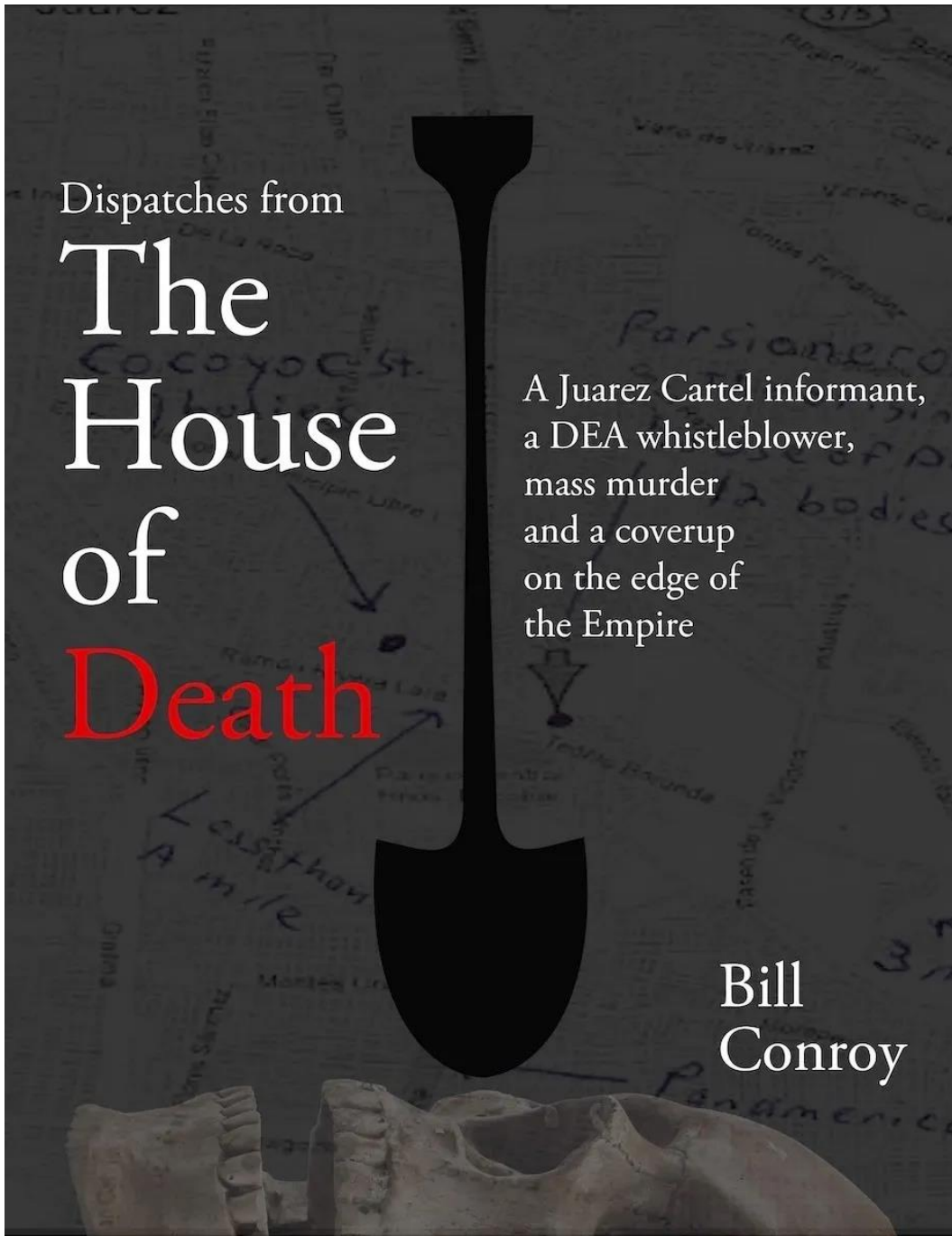
Website: <https://houseofdeath.org>

Dispatches from

The House of Death

A Juarez Cartel informant,
a DEA whistleblower,
mass murder
and a coverup
on the edge of
the Empire

Bill
Conroy



"Fernando and I got out of the truck, him with his camera and me with a chill up my spine. This was it, the house that had consumed so much of my life's energy, the house where 12 corpses were found buried in the backyard; the house where human beings were tortured and murdered by Mexican cops on the payroll of a narco-trafficker, all with the help of a U.S. government informant, all to make a drug case that never went to trial; the house that spawned a major coverup by the U.S. government. It seemed too small to be that big."

Dispatches
from the House
of Death dives
into the dark
heart of the
drug war.
It's a true tale
of murder,
corruption and
betrayal in the
borderlands.

"Bill Conroy literally does know where the bodies are buried because he has doggedly reported on the United States' failed drug policy for two decades, and now he brings it all together in this important book." — Megan Kamerick, KUNM public radio news director; independent producer

"Bill Conroy's groundbreaking reporting on the 'House of Death' scandal is a must-read for anyone seeking to understand both the hypocrisy at the root of U.S. policy in Mexico and the absolute horror of its consequences south of the border." — Nicholas Schou, veteran investigative reporter and author of *Kill the Messenger*.

"For Bill Conroy of narconews.com, who stood his watch when others turned away and pretended none of this had happened." — author and journalist Charles Bowden, a dedication from his book *Dreamland: The Way Out of Juárez*

"It is a giant of a story. There is simply no way to understand the 'war on drugs' without reading this book." — Al Giordano, author, journalist and founder and publisher of *The Narco News Bulletin* [narconews.com]



Journalist Bill Conroy has covered the "war on drugs" for decades, following the money, murdered and injustice in U.S. cities, in the borderlands and beyond. His investigative journalism has been featured on numerous radio shows, major TV networks and in a range of publications—including daily newspapers; alternative and business weeklies; magazines; and national and international online publications.