***Never Come Morning* (2021 Edition) by Nelson Algren**

**Reviewed by Josh Sopiarz, Governors State University**

*Never Come Morning* is Nelson Algren’s novel about a group of young Polish street toughs who play against other teams of street gangs in an unsanctioned baseball league on Chicago’s Northwest Side during the Great Depression. The team’s star pitcher, Bruno “Lefty” Bicek, is also skilled in the boxing ring. While baseball provides him with a team, camaraderie, and even support and protection in a tough neighborhood, it is boxing, he believes, that will grant him exit from the slums. If there is anything we can learn from Gerald Gems’ recent book on sport and civic identity in Chicago, it is that the city and its sports during the early and middle twentieth century were severely segregated. This new edition brings that point to bear, emphasizes others, and collects new features not seen in previous iterations of the novel.

On April 19, 1942—between its initial publication and Algren’s deployment to France—a review in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* described the characters in his most recent and otherwise “poignant” novel, *Never Come Morning*, as “completely without morals, completely without morale” who “personify only brute force, brute will, and brute instinct” (17). Upon publication of the book, the President of the Polish Roman Catholic Union petitioned to have it banned as anti-Polish propaganda whose author was a “product of a distorted mentality” (xi). These are, with the benefit of hindsight, somewhat brutish assessments of Algren and his novel since, although it is true the novel is mostly bereft of sentiment, its characters and its author are not so inhuman as the *Tribune* and the Church would have readers believe. This is evident in the novel’s opening epigraph comprised of lines from Walt Whitman’s poem “You Felons on Trial in Courts” from *Leaves of Grass*:

I feel I am of them—  
 I belong to those convicts and prostitutes myself—

And henceforth I will not deny them—

For how can I deny myself?

Algren’s characters may very well have been facsimiles of real people trapped in the all-too-familiar and vicious cycle of poverty and violence in urban America. And even if they are whole-cloth creations, their struggles reflect those of the material world and Algren demonstrates that just as expertly. Without question there is brutality here, but empathy also lurks just beneath the city’s grit and corroded patina.

This edition adds noteworthy material not included in previous reprints to the cleanly reproduced text of Algren’s novel. Richard Wright penned a lengthy introduction to the novel that was “lost,” has since been recovered, and is included in the new edition. Other material like Kurt Vonnegut’s introduction from 1986, are reprinted, too. This is a novel that Jean-Paul Sartre translated into French and, depending on the edition you hold, the frontispiece brags that Ernest Hemingway called it either “the greatest novel” or “the best book” to “come out of Chicago.” Hemingway esteemed Algren, whom he dubbed the “Bard of the Stumblebum,” so maybe it is true he called the work both. In any case, today, for the first time since 1996, a new edition of the novel is available for readers to see for themselves what the hullabaloo was, and still *is*, all about.

Given boxing’s relatively low standing in contemporary America and the scant attention paid to the extant body of boxing fiction, it is a surprise Algren’s *Never Come Morning* received yet another reissue at all. The Richard Wright introduction is interesting and a beneficial addition most notable for its contemporaneous Marxist critiques of pre-War America, but it alone does not seem enough to merit a reprint eighty years after its initial publication. Also, there is no explicit mention of this being an anniversary printing even though its release coincides with such an occasion. Between 2015 and 2017, it is true, Routledge published a series of three “Lost Urban Classics” including *The Golden Vanity*, *Philadelphia: Patricians and Philistines, 1900-1950*, and Aben Kandel’s boxing novel from 1936, *City for Conquest*. *Never Come Morning* might seem a good candidate for that series, but is instead republished here, without Routledge affiliation, by Seven Stories Press which, according to its online mission statement, publishes “works of the imagination and political titles by voices of conscience.” Although this reissue owes in part to its politics, its republication extends beyond the strictly political and stands as an unheralded and superb example of the role of sport in mid-century American culture. It is sure to pique the interest of any reader for whom that kind of work is important.

Algren, Nelson. Never Come Morning. Seven Stories Press, 2021. Paperback, $16.95.