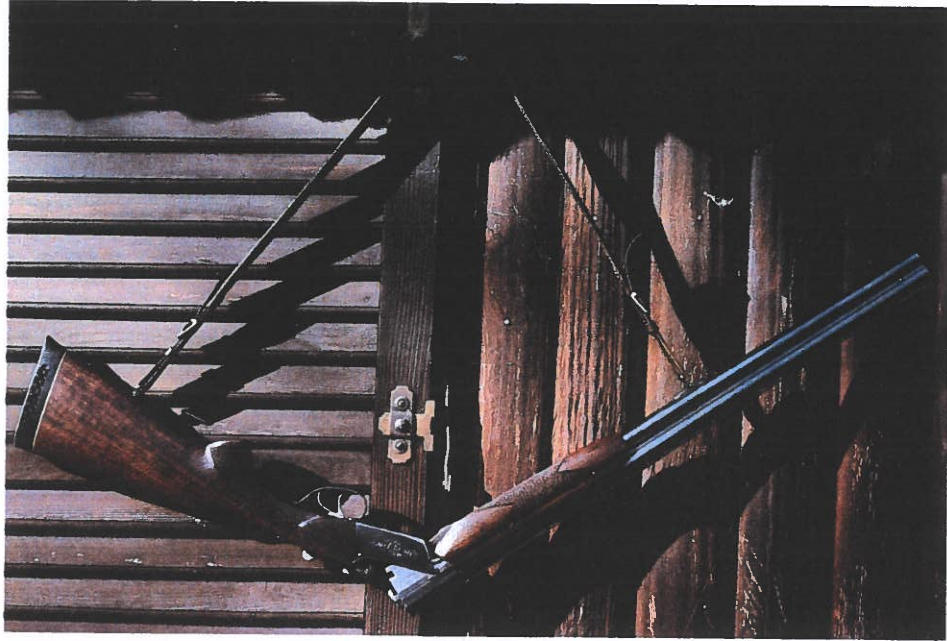


Tom McAfee: This is My Living Room (1966)



Hunting gun hung on a wooden wall

Tom McAfee (1928 – 1982) was a professor, writer and poet. In some of his stories, a man is thinking (writing) about himself. His thoughts are overheard (read) by the reader. Sometimes the man is reacting to his immediate surroundings and sometimes his thoughts are memories. McAfee's characters are often ordinary Americans, with characteristics such as mistrust, betrayal, greed, contradictions and so forth. Semi-satirical or simply matter-of-factly?

PRE-READING: THIS IS MY LIVING ROOM

Find your prejudices: What would be a redneck's or hillbilly's attitudes to:

- guns
- gender*
- race
- the law
- authorities
- education
- religion
- politics

gender sb køn

Tom McAfee: This is My Living Room (1966)

it ain't big but big enough for me and my family – my wife Rosie setting* over there reading recipes in the Birmingham* News and my two girls Ellen Jean and Martha Kay watching the TV. I am setting* here holding *Life* magazine in my lap. I get *Life*, the *News*, and *Christian Living*. I read a lots, the newspaper everyday from cover to
5 cover. I don't just look at the pictures in *Life*. I read what's under them and the stories. I consider myself a smart man and I ain't bragging. A man can learn a lots from just watching the TV, if he knows what to watch for and if he listens close. I do. There ain't many that can say that and be truthful. Maybe nobody else in this whole town, which is Pine Springs.

10 Yonder* in the corner, to the other side of the Coca-Cola calendar, is my 12 gauge*. When I go in to bed, I take it with me, set it against the wall, loaded, ready to use, so I can use it if I need to. I've used it before and maybe will again. The only one to protect you is yourself and if you don't you're a fool. I got me a pistol and a .22 locked up in the back room. I could use them too.

15 Rosie can shoot, I taught her how, but she's afraid. The noise scares her. She said, Don't make me shoot that thing one more time. We was in the forest. The girls was waiting for us in the car. Don't make me shoot that thing again, she said, and started to cry. I slapped her face and told her to shoot the rifle. She did. Then I took it and told her to go back to the car with the girls. She started to cry again, but I stayed a long
20 time – till it was dark – and shot the rifle and pistol and shotgun.

You can't tell what people are going to do in a town like this. They want your money and they're jealous of you. They talk about you in front of the courthouse and plan up schemes*. You can't trust the police or sheriff. You got to watch out for yourself.

My Two Girls

are fourteen and sixteen year old. Both of them want to go on dates but I won't let
25 them. I know what the boys will do, what they want to get out of a girl.

Ellen Jean, the oldest, is a right good-looking girl but sassy* and you can't hardly do anything with her. She started to paint her face at school, so I took her out. I've got her working at my store.

I seen her passing notes to Elbert. I seen her get out of his car one night. She said
30 she was going to the picture show by herself. She's a born liar and sassy*. Like as not he's had her. Like as not she's got a baby starting in her belly right now. She's a sassy* bitch-girl and don't take after her ma or me. Sometimes I wonder if she's mine.

setting = sitting • Birmingham sb stor by i staten Alabama • yonder adv derovre, derude • gauge sb måleenhed, her størrelsen på et haglgevær • scheme sb (ondsindet) plan • sassy adj næsvis, fræk

Martha Kay is like her ma. She cries all the time, minds good*. I let her stay in high school and will keep on letting her as long as she can act right. The first time I see lipstick, out she comes. She can work at the store too. I could use her to dust and sweep up. You can always use somebody to keep things clean.

5 I ask Martha Kay, Why're you late gettin' in from school? Where you been? Off in the woods with some boy? She starts to cry. She's like her ma.

Martha Kay helps at the store on Saturdays but can't add up figures* good.

Ellen Jean is watching that man on TV make a fool of hisself and she's laughing. She'll end up a Birmingham* whore. Her sister is laughing too and they look like a

10 bunch of fools.

People

in this town are like they are in any other town on earth. I was in the World War I and seen a good many places. Since then I've stayed here most of the time. What's the good of moving? People are as mean one place as they are another and they're always out to get you. They won't get me because I won't let them.

15 Take Sam Coates who owed me twenty dollars for that fencing*. Sam wouldn't pay. I said to him pay up by first of the month or I'll make you pay. He says how will I make him. Sue him for twenty dollars? Won't no lawyer in town take it anyway, he says, because they're all looking out for election. You pay, I told him.

When first of the month come I got in my car and rode out in the country to his
20 front door. Where is your husband? I said to his wife. Milking, she said, and I went around to the barn* with my .22, stuck it in his face, and told him to pay me or I'd blow the hell out of him. Sam turned as white as that bucket of milk. Him and his wife counted me out the money.

There ain't a one on earth that wouldn't try to cheat you if they could.

25 I use to think that women was worse than men but now I think just the opposite. Women are easier to handle. About the worst they can do is talk and what does that matter?

Niggers are better than anybody because you can handle them. They don't hardly ever give you any trouble. Except that one time with Ezmo. I didn't have no trouble

30 handling him.

minds good id er omhyggelig • **add up figures** id lægge tal sammen • **Birmingham** sb stor by i staten Alabama • **fencing** sb hegn • **barn** sb lade

My Store

is about the best thing I know of. It seems like a human being sometimes except a lots better because you can trust it.

I've got as much business as I need and make more profit than some people I know of. Maybe they've got better houses and ride in finer cars, but maybe they didn't make
5 all their money like I did. Honest. I ain't earned a cent crooked*. I didn't inherit* my money. I worked for it.

Country folks and niggers is my customers. Saturday is my big day. Ellen Jean helps me all through the week and Martha Kay helps out on Saturday. They're not much help. Don't take the right kind of interest.

10 I like the smell of my store from the time I open it up at 7 in the morning till the time Ellen Jean throws oil sand on the floor when it's time to sweep up. I like everything about that store.

I sell canned goods, fresh meat, bread and crackers, flour, fencing*, nails, hammers, guns. I sell all the things a body could need.

15 Not like at Admore's where it's just women's hats and dresses, or Taylor's where it's just for younguns*.

I want to know what the world is coming to.

If Rosie ever dies and the girls go off I'll sell this house and sleep in my store. I'll put up a cot*, take my guns and my clothes and that's all. Maybe the TV.

20 What do I care about this house?

This Living Room

ain't no part of my body or my mind. The lace* on the mantelpiece*, what's it for? That nigger youngun setting* on a commode* with Mobile* wrote* on it, what's it for? Them pictures of movie stars in silver frames. This light-colored linoleum you can't step on without it leaving a mark from your heel. Them silky-lace curtains.

25 One time I took my hand across the mantel and knocked off Rosie's big clock and a vase full of flowers. Rosie set in here and cried half the night - till I got up and told her to get in bed with her husband where she belonged.

crooked adj med snyd • **inherit** vb arve • **fencing** sb hegn • **younguns** sb dialekt unge mennesker • **cot** sb feltseng • **lace** sb blonde • **mantelpiece** sb kaminhylde • **setting** = sitting • **commode** sb en slags stol med en natpotte under • **Mobile** by i Alabama • **wrote** = written

People

your own flesh and blood, will try to run over you, stomp* you, steal from you, kill you if they can.

Take the law. A body would think – if he wasn't very smart – that a man of law was a good man. It ain't so. Ninety per cent of the time it ain't so. A body says then, if the law ain't good, who is? Nobody.

5 Sheriff Claine is a good example. He used to be always poking* around my store, making hints. Standing outside the front window part of the time. One evening late I got in my car and followed Sheriff Claine down the highway towards Brushwood, then off down the country road towards Glory Church, and then he stopped. I stopped a
10 good piece behind him and followed him through a pine thicket* to a liquor still*. A whole big wildcat* setup. Sheriff Claine was the ringleader of the bunch.

Next time he come to my store, I said, Sheriff, finding much wildcat* whisky? He grunted and pulled up his belt and let on* like business was slow. Somebody said, and I eased it to him, they's* a big still down towards Glory Church, off in a pine thicket*.

15 Sheriff Claine couldn't talk for a minute and squinted* his eyes. I'll have a look, he said.

Oh, probably ain't nothing to it, I told him. I ain't gonna mention it to nobody, nosir, not to a soul.

The police is just like him. They hide out at night and sleep when they're suppose to
20 be patrolling. I've caught them at it.

Sheriff Claine didn't give me no trouble about Ezmo. He listened to what I said here at the house and that was that.

Old Ezmo

was what you'd call a low class of nigger. He'd come into the store and say, Give me a pound of sugar and I'll pay you Saturday evening. I wouldn't do it. I'd say, You give me
25 the money. I give you the best prices in town. You give me the money.

One time Ellen Jean let him have a loaf of bread on credit. I smacked her for it and told her she was a fool, which she is. On Saturday Ezmo come in and wanted some side meat* for cooking greens. Pay me off, I told him, for that loaf of bread. What loaf? he wanted to know.

30 Ellen Jean, didn't you charge this nigger a loaf of bread? She said yes and he said she didn't. You ain't calling my girl a liar, are you? Naw, he said, but he didn't get no loaf of bread. Somebody's a liar, I told him, and it ain't my girl.

stomp vb trampe ned • **poke** vb snuse • **thicket** sb krat • **liquor still** sb brændevinsdestilleri • **wildcat** adj illegal • **let on** id lade som om • **they's** = there is • **squint** vb knibe øjnene sammen • **side meat** sb, dialekt bacon

He said he wouldn't pay me. You're a crooked*, low-down nigger, I told him, and they ain't nothing much worse than that. You ain't fit for making side meat* out of. I told him if he had any younguns* he better watch out. I didn't want lots of black bastards like him growing up in my town. You get out of here right now.

5 That night I was setting* in this chair where I am right now – this same chair. The girls was watching TV. Rosie was shelling peas*.

I heard somebody outdoors and knew right off who it was. I got better ears than most people. Any time somebody sets foot in this yard, I know it. Even if I'm asleep.

10 That's Ezmo, I said to myself. I got up, picked up my 12 gauge* over in the corner and said I was gonna clean it, went through the house without turning any lights on, then eased out the back door.

There wasn't much moon but I spotted Ezmo right off, standing behind some hedge* bushes over by my bedroom window. I got just this side of him without him hearing. EZMO! I hollered, and up he come with a knife about eight inches long. I was ready for him. I triggered my 12 gauge* and got him square in the face.

15 Rosie and the girls come running to the back door. Get me a flashlight, I told them. I never seen such a blowed-up face. The girls started getting sick and Rosie started crying. I want you to take a good look, I told Rosie and see what this world is coming to. You see that knife he had. I held Rosie's arm and made her stand there till Ellen
20 Jean could get Sheriff Claine.

Rosie

ain't exactly good-looking. She's got to be dried-up but once was on the fat side. She makes a good wife. I've been married to her for going on thirty years. Sometimes I get fed up with her and go to my woman in South Town. I take her a couple of cans of beans and some hose or a pair of bloomers*. There ain't nothing much a woman won't
25 do for food or clothes.

Rosie knows about her, all about her. I talk about it sometimes when we're in bed. I wouldn't trade Rosie for her but Rosie don't know that.

Tomorrow's Saturday and I got to get some sleep.

"Turn off the TV, girls. Get in yonder* to bed. Tomorrow's Saturday."

30 I stand in front of Rosie. "Go in yonder* and get in bed." She starts to cry and that's all right. It wouldn't be a bit like her if she didn't.

Tom McAfee: This is my livingroom, 1966. Here from: American Scenes © 1978 by Gyldendalske Boghandel, Nordisk Forlag A.S. Copenhagen. Reproduced by agreement with The University of Missouri, Department of English, represented by Dr. Patricia Okker

crooked adj med snyd • **side meat** sb, dialekt bacon • **younguns** sb dialekt unge mennesker • **setting** = sitting • **shell peas** id bælg ærter • **gauge** sb måleenhed, her størrelsen på et haglgævær • **hedge** sb hæk • **bloomers** dameunderbukser • **yonder** adv derovre, derude

COMPREHENSION: THIS IS MY LIVING ROOM

1. The setting*: When and where is the story set?
2. How does the first-person narrator introduce himself?
3. What does he tell us about his wife and his two girls?
4. What does he tell us about his living room and his store?
5. What does he tell us about the people of Pine Springs?
6. What is the story about Old Ezmo?

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION: THIS IS MY LIVING ROOM

1. This story is told by a first-person narrator, an *I*. Discuss what consequences this has for the presentation of "life in Pine Springs".
2. Characterize the narrator: What values does he have, and how does he see himself? How do you see him?
3. How does the author see his main character? Why has he created him, do you think – what is it he wants to show?

POST-READING: THIS IS MY LIVING ROOM

1. Go back to the pre-reading assignment. Were any of your prejudiced ideas of a redneck* or hillbilly* confirmed*? Discuss.
2. It can be argued that the main character in "This is My Living Room" is a typical macho hero, holding the values that were ascribed* to the pioneer. Discuss this idea.

setting = sitting • **redneck** sb US slang bondeknold; fattig, hvid person fra Sydstatene • **hillbilly** sb US slang bondeknold, fra Sydstatene • **confirm** vb bekræfte • **ascribe** vb tilskrive