

## Deadwood's Al Swearingen: Manifest Evil in the Gem Theatre

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our own stories around the image and the cultural-historical context it springs from." She cautions, "This is a process of making choices, for the world in itself is not a bearer of meaning. Events of the past, like those happening in the present, contain an abundance of single episodes and meanings. What we do as historians is to reconstruct a kind of order and connection within this chaos through language" (105). Throughout the book, Lien guides readers in this continuing work (or perhaps pleasure) of making meaning with photographs. *Pictures of Longing* will reward both the casual viewer and the serious student of photography and Norwegian immigration.

*Deadwood's Al Swearingen: Manifest Evil in the Gem Theatre*, by Jerry L. Bryant and Barbara Fifer. Helena, MT: Farcountry Press, 2018. x, 142 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$14.95 paperback.

Reviewer Terrence J. Lindell is professor of history at Wartburg College. His research interests have included a wide range of topics in Iowa and South Dakota history.

Ellis Albert "Al" Swearingen, the subject of this brief work, was born in Oskaloosa, Iowa, in 1845 and buried there after his mysterious death in Colorado in 1904. He spent much of his adult life in the West hunting his fortune by supplying entertainment, alcohol, and prostitutes to the inhabitants of mining towns, most notably Deadwood in Dakota Territory's Black Hills. Fans of the HBO 2004–2006 series *Deadwood* will recognize him as the inspiration for the central character "Al Swearengen." Jerry Bryant spent years researching Swearingen and his principal business, the Gem Theatre, but died before this book reached completion. Barbara Fifer took up Bryant's work and brought it to print.

Through six chapters Bryant and Fifer trace Swearingen, his businesses, and characters with whom he associated in Deadwood. A final chapter recounts the life of Al's twin brother, Lemuel, an Oskaloosa businessman. The Deadwood chapters are chronological and are divided into multiple segments that recount loosely connected incidents in Swearingen's life or Deadwood's history. Bryant's research—overwhelmingly in local newspapers—clearly reveals Swearingen's disreputable nature as brawler, abuser, cheat, and human trafficker. The book does not make links to relevant scholarly work on Deadwood such as Watson Parker's *Gold in the Black Hills* and *Deadwood: The Golden Years* or to the larger body of scholarship on life in mining towns. The book will appeal primarily to individuals interested in the colorful figures of the Black Hills gold rush.