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First Draft is a journal for writers, readers, editors, publishers, and those who support and work in the literary arts. Contact The Alabama Writers' Forum, P.O. Box 4777, Montgomery, Alabama 36103-4777.

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Cover: "I have been printing from my moment of conception. I shall be printing until I die. My life is building books. All my experiences are printing experiences." So says Amos Kennedy of Kennedy and Sons, Fine Printers. The York, AL-based artist is devoted to "the preservation of Negro culture by building unique containers for the words of our peoples." For more information about Kennedy and his work, go to www.kennedyandsonsfineprinters.com.

FROM THE PRESIDENT



Linda Henry Dean

ALABAMA WRITERS GET AROUND.

In April, as part of the **Alabama Art at 55 Water Street** exhibition in Manhattan's financial district, nine Alabama writers were presented alongside sixteen fine and outsider artists whose work was on display.

The exhibition had been curated by Fairhope artist and Troy native Nall, supported by the Alabama State Council on the Arts, the Alabama Bureau of Tourism and Travel, the Retirement Systems of Alabama, Troy University, Alabama Southern Community College, and others. Although H.S.H. Prince Albert of Monaco, a longtime admirer and patron of Nall's work, gave his High Patronage to the event, he was unable to attend due to the sudden death of his father, Prince Rainier.

Alabama dignitaries in attendance were Dr. Jack Hawkins, president of Troy University, and his wife Janice and their daughter Kelly; Dr. John Johnson, president of Alabama Southern Community College, and his wife Laurie; the Honorable Sen. Wendell Mitchell, (District 30, D-Luverne); the Honorable Ella Bell, Alabama State School Board, (District 5, Montgomery); Albert Head, executive director of the Alabama State Council on the Arts (ASCA), and his wife Judy; ASCA Gallery Director and Visual Arts Program Manager Georgine Clarke, and her husband Jack. ASCA members Elaine Johnson, Frank Helderman and his wife Jennie, and former council member Wiley White also made the trip to support Alabama arts in New York.

Nall had prevailed on Jake Reiss to locate some Alabama writers either living in New York, or able to travel there, and to leave his perch at the Alabama Booksmith long enough to come north for the event and present the writers. And Alabama master chef Frank Stitt was there to serve trays of southern palate pleasers, featured in his cookbook *Frank Stitt's Southern Table: Recipes from the Highlands Bar and Grill* which pairs regional stories with recipes from the Highlands Bar and Grill.

After Dr. David Bronner, executive director of the Retirements Systems of Alabama, and Nall had presented Alabama artists Chip Cooper, Bruce Larsen, Charlie Lucas, Clifton Pearson, Yvonne Wells, Kathryn Tucker Windham, and eight others with work on display, Reiss stepped forward and introduced Alabama's contemporary writers. Admittedly, this was a selection, but it represented award winners, memoirists, poets, novelists, and journalists in a range of ages.

Wayne Greenhaw, Cassandra King, Diane McWhorter, Michael Morris, Barbara Robinette Moss, Albert Murray, Warren St. John, Jeanie Thompson, and Kathryn Tucker Windham each took a bow. In his usual style, Jake had pithy aphorisms describing each writer.

How does this translate to encouragement back home?

For one thing, young writers can see that Alabama writers achieve success and that they can leave home—even if not permanently—and make a name in the Big Apple. Oddly, it also translates into greater fellowship among Alabamians, as the artists, educators, and business people all participated in this exuberant celebration of Alabama talent. Sometimes we have to go a long way from home to *know* our home.

Alabama writers are continuing to make names for themselves both at home and abroad. At the Alabama Writers' Forum, we salute all Alabama artists, and everyone working in the literary arts. Our state is rich in writers, and we want the world to know it. Being a part of an event like Alabama Art at 55 Water Street is a great opportunity to tell our story.

Linda Henry Dean

President



1997 Harper Lee Award Recipient Albert Murray and memoirist Barbara Robinette Moss [story on pp. 14] were part of the writers' contingent at Alabama Arts at 55 Water Street in April in New York, New York. (Photo by Jamie Martin)

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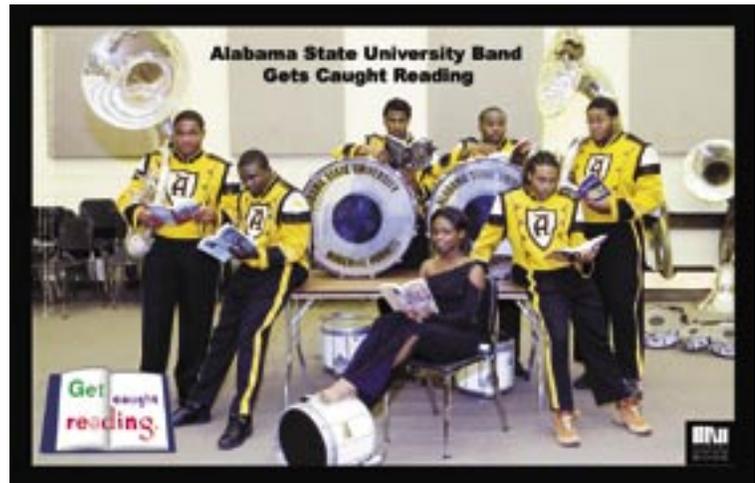
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FINDING A WRITERS' CRITIQUE GROUP

Numerous critique groups exist online, but many writers prefer the face-to-face contact provided by a local group. Check at privately owned and chain bookstores and the local library for group listings or ask for information at college and university human resource and English departments.

FORMING A WRITERS' GROUP

- ◉ Seek sponsorship and meeting space at bookstores and library branches. Invite several writing acquaintances to bring other writing friends to an organization meeting.
- ◉ At the first meeting, decide on the group's focus—fiction, non-fiction, poetry, romance, children's literature, etc. It's usually better to group specific genres together, like poetry, magazine, non-fiction, or children's stories, but many general fiction writers like the diverse comments and opinions gained from a multi-genre group. Set frequency of meetings, time, place, agendas, and whether or not to combine meetings with meals or refreshments. Some people range widely in their conversation topics when around a dinner table, while others want to discuss only writing projects.
- ◉ Select leaders or someone who will act as the secretary to create and update rosters and notify others of meetings.
- ◉ Set the ground rules for submissions and determine if the consensus prefers text or reading aloud or both. Decide if suggestions will be presented immediately or at the next meeting after everyone has had time to read and consider presented drafts.
- ◉ While honesty is necessary, it does not have to be spiteful or brutal; anyone who offers criticism must also offer solutions. Appoint someone to act as a referee.
- ◉ Grammar is important, but save the nit-picking for the final draft and concentrate on plot and character development. Good readers are as important as good writers; ask editors or proofreaders to participate.
- ◉ Assign the responsibility of searching out writing clinics or seminars and contests to several participants. Designate someone to assemble lists of Web sites that offer jobs or project possibilities and news in the publishing world.
- ◉ Develop an imperturbable attitude and don't take criticism personally. Consider suggestions carefully; you can accept or deny changes as you see fit.
- ◉ Above all—be kind and obey the Golden Rule.

WRITERS' GROUPS THRIVE

by Elizabeth Via Brown

Carolyn Haines is a nationally known, multi-genre author with more than fifty titles to her credit, including many written with the pseudonym Carolyn Burnes, yet before she sends a manuscript to her publisher, it must first be read by five of her very special friends. For more than fifteen years, Haines, of Semmes, AL, has been a member of the Deep South Writers' Salon, a group of six writers who critique each other's works.

Not a new innovation, online and individual writers' groups are growing in substance as more people seek to market their material. "It's not like it was in the old days," said Haines, "when an author shipped off a manuscript to a book editor and expected it to be returned proofed and marked in the margins with corrections."

Improved computer technology, mergers between large publishers, and a surge of small, regional publishing houses have forced writers to present more precise first drafts. With so many offerings from which to choose, editors no longer wade through weak manuscripts, Haines said, even if they show promise.

The Writers' Salon meets in the home of a host every two weeks for what Haines calls "an intense cooking contest" and discusses work distributed at the previous gathering. While some in the group prefer to put up full chapters for critique, Haines, author of the highly successful Mississippi Delta Mystery series—all with "Bones" in the title—says her writing buddies keep her on track. She usually presents several chapters for consideration.

Her focus was so riveted to one aspect in a recent storyline that Haines hurriedly inserted a fight between a character and a very large alligator. Not until her fellow writers critiqued the passage did she realize the ludicrousness of the action.

"At the next meeting of our group," Haines says, "Aleta Boudreaux came in, threw a big pillow down on the floor, fell on it, and pretended to 'rasel' with it. Obviously, that couldn't really happen and after a good laugh, I saw how that one inconsistency could threaten my accountability to my readers."

A creative writing professor at the University of South Alabama in Mobile, Haines also taught romance and general fiction in continuing education classes before her own increasing writing schedule demanded that she simplify her life. She approached several strong writers about forming an independent writers' group and they began by meeting in local restaurants. When some of their sessions turned into marathons, the members shifted their meetings to each other's homes, and though scattered geographically, they all make every effort to attend. They combine their skills for writing with another shared interest—gourmet cooking—and chose the name "salon" to add a little southern humor to their very serious desires to write.

More than twenty years ago, the Fiction Writers Group of the Huntsville Literary Association began with five members and now has about twelve regulars. Ginger Nelson, who was one of the first members, said searching for publishing outlets is an important function of the group. A few members have had short stories printed in regional magazines, but most participate because they want affirmation of their writing. Some in the group also participate in



Clockwise from the top: East Alabama Writers' Group, Auburn; Fiction Writers Group, Huntsville; Deep South Writers' Salon, Mobile and surrounding areas.



Tanner's daughter, also of Lucedale, and Renee Paul, of Mobile, keep the others in touch with audiences by serving as readers. The mother of a toddler, Chisholm is a critical reader, but recently returned to work part-time and has very little energy left over for writing. Paul has a demanding job as associate director of public relations at the University of South Alabama and is skilled at editing.

Each of the writers in the Deep

South Salon is totally different, said Chisholm, and she is more familiar with some topics than are others. "That's where the critique part comes in," she said. "If I don't understand the approach the writer is taking or how characters are developing—will the average reader?"

Another of Alabama's numerous writers' groups is the Poetry Writers Group, also an affiliate of the Huntsville Literary Association. It meets monthly at Shaver's Book Store, where refreshments are shared with announcements, news of contests, and available writers' markets. Each year on a Sunday afternoon in February, the group presents a formal reading to invited guests. "Our goal is to motivate and to help writers clarify and improve," said Jimmy Robinson, a long-time member.

Each person brings something special to a writers' group, Haines said. There may be some "deviling," or jesting, but there must be trust and a genuine sharing of spirit.

"We must all behave toward each other with kindness," she said. "Writers need room to make repairs."

Elizabeth Via Brown is a freelance writer in Montgomery.

the North Alabama Science Fiction and Cake Appreciation Society, known as NASFCAS.

"Everyone has twenty minutes to make a presentation," Nelson said of the group that gathers in private homes. "We can't be hurtful and must remain friendly," she said. They stay in touch by e-mail, meet for lunch between monthly critiques, and spend two hours a month at a local bookstore writing uninterrupted on subjects of their choice.

"The goal of all writers is to get published," Haines said. "I'm not an authority on everything and neither is anybody else. To become a better writer, you must be willing to educate yourself in all types of writing and to see different points of view. You can't break rules without first knowing what they are."

A former owner of a small publishing company, Aleta Boudreaux of Grand Bay writes historical fiction and said the Deep South Salon helps her keep track of the detailed research required by her genre. She likes the face-to-face relationship of a small critique group.

Susan Tanner lives in Lucedale, MS, and has been a member almost since the

group's inception. Like several others, she is also associated with the Romance Writers of America and the Mystery Writers of America. Straightforward critiques are necessary in a writers' group, Tanner explained, and suggestions for changes should always be backed up with thoughtful explanations. "In our group, no one can say something critical without also presenting a solution."

With five older sisters, Thomas Lakeman of Magnolia Springs, the group's only male, is used to women's propensity for analyzing any given topic. "I like it," he said. "The members of the Salon have shown me how to stretch and really push the envelope. It's a very cooperative group—honest, logical, supportive."

An American literature and screenwriting teacher at the University of South Alabama, Lakeman had almost completed a mystery/thriller manuscript when he joined the Salon last year. It didn't take long for the women to help whip the manuscript into shape and St. Martin's Press has it on its summer 2006 publishing schedule.

Both Stephanie Chisholm, Susan

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Confessions of an Unread Reviewer

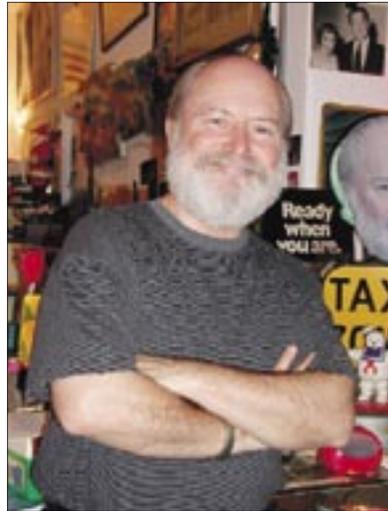
by Jim Reed

As a reviewer, it's hard not to cheat. Some publisher or hopeful author sends me a package of material, including a book, and hopes that something within that package will inspire me to write a review. Actually, that's not quite true. Said publisher or author hopes that I'll write a *favorable* review, something that will inspire readers to rush out and purchase the book. That's not quite true, either. Often, said publisher or author wants me to say something that makes people—whether or not they are readers—rush out and purchase the book. That, too, may not be the whole truth and nuttin' but. Said publisher and author would be happy (mostly) if the book became a million-seller, even if *nobody* read it!

Non-readers often buy books to give to people who accept them but never get around to reading them. Nothing sadder than a stack of unread books.

This is nothing new. In my rare book loft, I have lots of century-old books that have never been read. The proof is irrefutable. The unread volumes are full of uncut pages—pages that the publisher has failed to trim so that the book can be fully opened. These unread books are a joy to read, because it's fun to take a bone letter-opener and slit each page open as the book is read. It's a nice romantic notion, the notion that this author's book lay there for a century before anybody took the trouble to open it. *And I am the first to read it!*

Anyhow, as I say, it's hard to refrain from cheating when I receive a book to



Jim Reed

review. First of all, it may come into my hands because my editor has heard great things about it, or because the author has been annoyingly persistent (this often works, fellow authors!) and I feel I have to review it just to be freed of this person, or the book may be by someone the literary world has deemed godlike—the writer who is *good*, therefore, everything written by said writer *has* to be good and don't *you* the reviewer be the one to think differently! And so on.

There are other factors that can influence the unwary reviewer. If you're in a hurry, you're tempted to skim the book or just read the jacket or the blurbs or the extensive synopses accompanying the book. Truth is, these synopses are designed to help the lazy reviewer get the job done, or to make sure the reviewer doesn't miss the *point* of the book. Heaven forbid the reviewer should find great meaning in the book

that nobody else, including the author, has found!

So the reviewer has choices. Read the book cover to cover without looking at the cover or the jacket or other reviews or synopses or blurbs, without regard to reputation and track record and age and sex and background.

This is almost impossible to do, so most reviewers don't do it. *But it can be done*, fellow reviewer, just in case you are tempted to try it.

Try walking blindfolded up to a table of books to be reviewed, and pick the first one your hand touches. Have someone remove the jacket and tape over the title and author information. Then, for once in your life, read a book about which you have no preconceived notions.

What do you think would happen?

There are all kinds of possibilities: you might pan a book everybody else loves (your social life will be diminished), you might make inappropriate assumptions about the author (female, male, old, young, experienced, unknown?), you might mistake fiction for autobiography, you might lose a friend (Yipes! I just trashed a book written by someone whose company I cherish!), or, for once in your career, you just might write a review of great integrity, freshness, insight, and importance.

You might start a trend.

Probably not.

Jim Reed is editor of the Birmingham Art Journal and owner of Jim Reed Books and the Museum of Fond Memories in Birmingham.

EACH YEAR THE ALABAMA STATE
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ASCA Fellowships

Anita Miller Garner

Anita Miller Garner won the Hackney Award for fiction when she was twenty three. She holds the MFA in Creative Writing from The University of Alabama, attended the Writers' Workshop at The University of Iowa, and taught at Virginia Commonwealth University where she served as poetry editor of *The New Virginia Review*. Her manuscript *Delectable Waters* was selected runner up for The Virginia Prize. A founding member and past president of the Alabama Writers' Forum, Garner is a former Laura Harrison Professor of English at the University of North Alabama where she will teach a graduate course in "The Short Story in the Deep South" in the spring. She has been a tireless promoter of the fiction of Alabama women writers, twice touring the state with the Alabama Humanities Foundation's Speakers Bureau and currently traveling the Southeast presenting papers on the work of writers such as Michelle Richmond and Phyllis Perry.



● According to Miller,

I know the high caliber of writing being done in this state right now from writers on all levels. I have coordinated the High School Literary Arts Awards entries since the contest's inception, and the quality of writing is unbelievably strong and impressive. My bookshelf overflows with novels, memoirs, and short story collections and anthologies written by Alabama authors. This state has a great literary tradition. Being selected as the recipient of an Alabama State Council on the Arts fellowship in creative writing is an honor that puts me in good company. Like many women authors before me, I have put my creative work on hold, writing on yellow legal pads at baseball fields and McDonald's parking lots, then transcribing my work if and when there was ever a lull at the family computer. I truly look forward to being a writer among writers.



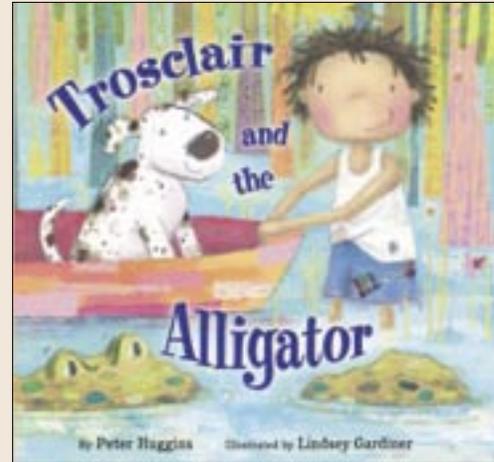
Peter Huggins

Peter Huggins teaches in the English department at Auburn University. His books of poems are *Necessary Acts* (River City Publishing, 2004), *Blue Angels* (River City Publishing, 2001), and *Hard Facts* (Livingston Press, 1998). His poems have appeared in more than 100 journals and magazines. Peter is also the author of a forthcoming novel for middle readers, *In the Company of Owls*; his first picture book, *Trosclair and the Alligator*, will be out in October 2005 from Star Bright Books in New York.

● Huggins notes that

This fellowship comes as a welcome surprise; it's wonderful to be honored and recognized in such a way, and I'm very grateful to the Arts Council for this grant. To my way of thinking (and to use a Louisiana notion and expression) it's lagniappe--a little extra. The joy for me is in the words; beyond anything else, beyond any bad or good thing, the words and what the words make bring joy. I would not do what I do were it not for that. The commitment I make then is to that process which brings joy. Hard work, yes, but ultimately it is the most rewarding work of all.

Trosclair and the Alligator, published by Star Bright Books.



AUDUBON'S ENGRAVER

by Peter Huggins

At the end Audubon didn't know his name.
He couldn't remember birds.
So many of them. My favorite prints:
Louisiana Tanager and Scarlet Tanager,

Blue Jay, Indigo Bird, Summer
Red Bird, Yellow-throated Vireo,
Rose-breasted Grosbeak. I could
Come up with a new list tomorrow.

He killed them, you know. So many
Songbirds, waterfowl, birds of prey
Gone. I know he killed them,
His specimens, he said, to render

Them more precisely, to make them
Come alive. *Havell*, he said,
*You are tender-hearted and do not
Understand the process. You have not*

*Walked the woods or slogged through swamps
For days on end to see what I've seen.*
He was probably right and I
Didn't hesitate to admire or profit

From what he produced.
I gave him the fame he wanted,
Yet I wonder, as the dementia that
Took his life tightened its grip on him,

FUNERAL

by Anita Miller Garner

It is mid-afternoon when Mama calls, an unusual call, sad news.
"It's Susan's youngest one," she says. "They were looking at their daddy's
loaded .45 in the dresser drawer. Heard someone coming in the room and
threw it back in the drawer too fast."

"When?" I asked.

"Happened yesterday. Funeral's tomorrow."

I go to the closet and find no proper funeral clothes for heat stroke weather
for the funeral of my friend's son. Nothing sleeveless in black or navy. I settle
for drab. I'll make the drive early tomorrow.

The earth never cooled during the night, so the sun feels like heat on a burn.
I wear my darkest shades for this, the white hot light of an Alabama August.

I zoom down the interstate and get off at the peach exit, my exit. At the su-
permarket-style peach stand, tourists eat samples of watermelons and the late
peaches, the white-fleshed freestones leaving an aftertaste of perfume. Even
the fruit flies are sluggish.

"Where is the corn?" insists a loud-voiced woman wearing a halter top that
can hardly contain her sun-burned breasts. She is obviously a half day's drive
north of her Florida vacation.

Look around, I think. Look at the fields, parched pale as ashes. Better ask
for okra, cotton. Ask for something cool to drink.

The two-lane road I take now leads into the country where the tourists never
go. There are no restaurants, no hotels, no movie theatres, no doctors. The
road follows the up and down hills like a roller coaster. It was built slowly,
hill by hill, with mules. The only improvement over the years has been an oc-
casional long-overdue resurfacing.

The last time I saw my friend was only a year ago. She had built a new
house and had invited all the old girl friends for a reunion of sorts. She had
called all bubbly, excited. "Bring pictures," she said.

She had meant pictures of then.

I thought she meant pictures of now.

I got there late and the all-girl party was in full swing, the table filled
with ice box cakes and melons cut to resemble baskets. They were disap-
pointed that I had not brought pictures from the good old days of cheerlead-
ing for them to borrow and show their daughters.

Huggins continued

Did he dream of hawks or songbirds,
Of waterfowl in the long V of winter?
Did he return those birds to the wild?
Did he remember sky?

JAZZ FUNERAL FOR CYNTHIA

by Peter Huggins

In New Orleans the cemeteries
Are walled medieval cities.
The houses of the dead, whitewashed
A brilliant Mediterranean white,
Are built above the ground
To keep the water out
And the dead safe.
The procession I see

Makes me think of a bell
Tinkling before a corpse,
The latest plague victim.
Cynthia's death was quick:

A speedboat ran over her
On the Atchafalaya
Before she was thirteen.
Now she's out there in Metairie

Cemetery and the drunk
Who killed her lives comfortably
Uptown, the fine whiskey
Charring her memory.

I call the Behemoth Brass Band
To wander up Carrollton,
Then out to the cemetery.
Their two-step and eight-step

Send her on her way.
Their playing voices my grief.
The trumpet, the one lone trumpet,
Heals and makes whole my wounds.

Garner continued

"I didn't like it much the first time," I remembered aloud, a mistake.

No one said anything for a minute, then they turned to admire a red-haired classmate who looks just exactly like their favorite country singer, they decided. They all have her latest. She can really tell men off, they said. She can really belt it out.

At this point, two young men walked through the front door.

"Oh, these are my boys," our hostess said proudly, but I already knew from the portraits on the walls, the coffee table, the TV.

It was the only time I ever saw him. He was the younger son but was the bigger of the two. He was only twelve, but the definite fuzz above his lip made him look as if he needed to shave, yet he was not embarrassed to be there, but was sure of himself, self-assured, easy. I reached out and shook his hand, and he shook mine back firmly. His mother adored him. She pretended to scold them out the door.

The funeral home is in a large old thicket of tall pines. The man directing parking has me leave my car right under a tree since the paved parking area is already full. I step out of the car onto a thick blanket of long pine needles. Inside, people are sitting and standing everywhere, some queuing up to see the family, others talking quietly among themselves. For me, there is a strange dream-like quality as I see about four hundred people I have not seen for twenty years. I get in line to see the family, and it is a blur of hugs and tears, of whispered words, of nothing anyone can say.

The service overflows out into the labyrinth of hallways where the minister's words can be heard over a speaker. "Closed casket," I hear someone whisper. Other than that, no one speaks.

I ride alone the twenty miles back into the core of these hills to Damascus Primitive Baptist Church near Susan's new house to bury the dead. The cars, in a long, low procession, all have their lights on and follow the sheriff. Oncoming cars we meet pull over and temporarily stop on the shoulder of the roadside out of respect. Workmen take off their caps until we pass.

I am near the end of the long funeral procession, so when we arrive at the churchyard, I must park about a quarter of a mile away on the edge of this narrow county gravel road with no painted lines. After the last of the cars is parked, its motor turned off, I notice how quiet it is. So quiet I can hear the sigh of the slight breeze in the pines. So quiet the whirl of insect wings in the full sun is louder than the people, for the people are silent, not talking, not even crying, the few late stragglers closing their car doors more softly than I thought humanly possible. In the distance I see the family, seated already under the canvas tent, perfectly still and waiting. In the field across the road from the church, eight or so cows, witnesses, have come right up to the barbed wire. They stand chewing their cud, tails slowly swishing the occasional fly.

The family mercifully sits on folding chairs under a large canopy, but the rest of us stand unprotected from the bright white light of mid-afternoon. This part of the cemetery is near the road. I notice the red haired country singer look-alike, her black patent high heels sinking into the bare red clay. People softly cry. The cows keep their vigil standing there silently, watching us.

People file back to their cars to leave, but I do not want to get in a tangle of traffic. I want to wait a while. I want to watch.

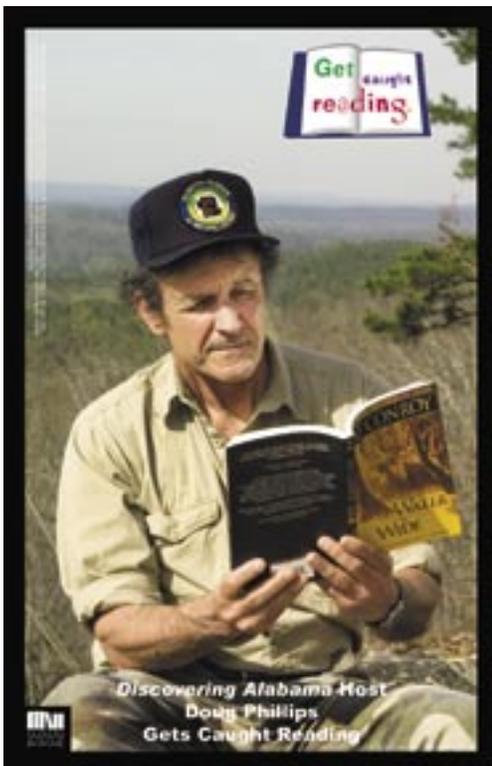
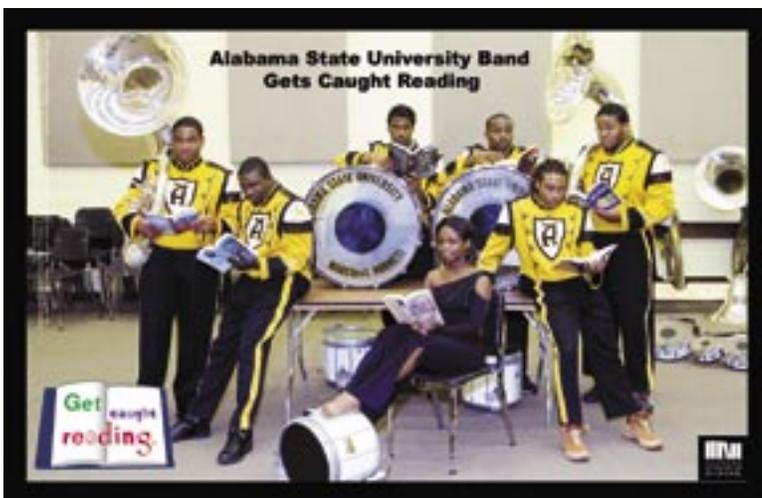
I am drawn to the church and the cool, deep shade of the trees behind it where the older part of the cemetery rests. *Why this church?* I think. *Why bury him here?* Growing up, I had been to many funerals for Susan's family—a grandmother, a favorite aunt, a young cousin our age—but none were at this

Continued page 10



ALABAMA GETS CAUGHT READING

by Connor Henton



The Alabama Center for the Book has finally completed a year-long project focused on catching famous Alabamians reading their favorite books. Whether they are at work, home, lounging in the park, or on the go, notable Alabamians understand that reading is an integral part of a happy life and they are happy to promote the benefits of reading for children.

Beginning in the spring of 2004, the ACFTB set forth on a mission to contact notable Alabamians and persuade them to participate in the initiative. Celebrities were contacted on a six-degrees-of-separation basis: who knew who and how we could get to them. Photographer Mike Cortez was responsible for setting up the shots and either shooting the pictures or communicating with photographers how the shoot should go.

Charles Barkley worked us in during the playoffs at the TNT studios. Kathryn Tucker Windham met us at her favorite cemetery in Selma, where she swears she sees Jeffrey now and again, and Doug Phillips trekked us up and down the roads of Oak Mountain until he had scouted the perfect spot. Jay Lamar, director of the Alabama Center for the Book, went to the Bobby Allison shoot and has since become a race fan for life.

The more than 20,000 posters created in phase one of Alabama Gets Caught Reading will be distributed to every public and school library in the state as well as every independent bookstore. This project was brought to life by a generous grant from the Alabama Public Library Service.

Phase one includes nine individual posters, each one reflecting the diversity of Alabama's sons and daughters, their interests, their accomplishments, and their personalities, all of which have a part in the vast landscape of our state. Each picture represents an Alabamian who is a treasure for students to learn from, for teachers to teach about, and for the public to admire. We are grateful for their time and commitment to our project.

For more information on Alabama Gets Caught Reading, please visit www.alabamabookcenter.org or call me at 334-844-4948. I look forward to hearing from each of you and hope that you will join me in promoting reading in your area.

Connor Henton is the program coordinator for the Alabama Center for the Book and the Auburn University Center for the Arts & Humanities.

Huggins continued

SLEIGH BED

by Peter Huggins

Before I go to sleep,
I touch my walnut bed,
The headboard usually.
Sometimes I nuzzle
The siderail or rub my toes
Along the footboard.

I gather myself for sleep,
Which is not easy for me.
I resort to tricks:
Read, count backwards,
Or listen to my breathing.
Often I use all three.

My wife has no such troubles.
She goes to sleep faster
And sounder than our children.
She could sleep through hurricanes.
Floods and earthquakes
Would not bother her.

When I was twelve the man
Next door died in a fire.
This was on Walnut Street
In New Orleans,
Houses ten feet apart.
No sleep for me that night.

No sleep this night either.
Once fire is in my head
I find it hard to put out.
My grandfather said
If he had owned a stand
Of walnut trees he'd have been rich.

Garner continued

church. I look for Susan's mother's grave (I was in another country when she died). I seem to remember my mother telling me something about Susan's mother and a different church.

My eyes adjust to the shade. I find no recent graves back here. *Nonnie M. Parker—1898 - 1918—Beloved by All*. I remember that 1918 was the year of the influenza epidemic. *James Lee Virgil -- 1873 - 1932*. I notice that many graves are marked by piles of stones or slabs of anonymous slate, no markings to tell who lies buried.

The heat is unrelenting until a small breeze stirs. I look up and there is the side door to the church, stark and unadorned. I walk up the two stone steps and take the handle of the unpainted door. It is unlocked, so I walk in.

The wooden shutters are drawn, making the inside of the church dark but hot. Bright pinstripes of light break through the front shutters as I look around at the wooden floor, wooden pews, wooden walls, wooden ceiling, all with very little paint.

I take off my sunglasses. Am I looking for something? There is no piano; there are no hymnals. The heels of my shoes make a hammering sound as I walk down the one center aisle. *Why has she buried him here?* A circle of wasps slowly chase each other through the tangle of cord and chain of the long, hanging light fixtures.

I stand there for a long time. A drop of sweat runs down the back of my neck, then another. I hear cars leaving with a crunch of gravel, the men in the distance removing the metal folding chairs. I picture them stacking all of those store-bought flowers, heap upon heap of them, on top of the fresh mound of red clay. The family will return later to view them. Weeks later, they will not even remember them being there. Weeks later, they will look at the snapshots they took to assure themselves the flowers were once there.

I start to leave by the same way I entered, but I think—if the back door was not locked, the front probably is not either. I turn the knob of the double front door, and it is not locked, but it is stuck a bit. I jiggle the handle slightly, push on it, then harder, and when I do, both doors jar open, filling the dark church with the afternoon glare, causing me to briefly stumble out onto the solid but very uneven top step made from a slab of stone, forcing me quickly and painfully to focus my eyes.

In that one faded instant I see it all—road, cows, trees, crossroads. On the other side of the crossroads, I know, behind the stand of pines that seem to never lose their needles, is Susan's house. This is the road she will travel to work each day, gray and winding, no lines. This is the road that is always waiting for her.

Perhaps the men who were there looked up, startled, to see me stumble out of the church. Perhaps they thought I'd gone in to pray, or maybe they thought I was a thief. Perhaps there were others still there, lingering, who saw me there, as surprised as anyone else to find myself standing on the threshold of this deserted church, understanding with my eyes the answer to a question that, until that moment, I did not even know I'd asked. I do not know. The bright hot light from above had stolen my vision, and I was feeling my way down the steps slowly, just one stone at a time.

River of Words 2006

An environmental art & poetry contest for Alabmama's youth

GUIDELINES

Students' art and poetry must be sent to the River of Words national headquarters by February 15, 2006. All poems and artwork must be original.

CATEGORIES

1. Kindergarten-Grade 2
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Entry Form

River of Words' Contest Entry Form Note: If we can't read your handwriting, you can't win a prize and you won't get your Watershed Explorer Certificate. So, please print carefully and use a pen!

Date: _____

I am entering as an individual____, OR, as part of a class/group____. (IMPORTANT! If you are unsure, please see the Frequently Asked Questions section of our website at www.riverofwords.org, or call 510-548-POEM!)

Name: _____ Email _____

Age: __ Grade: __ Male: __ Female: __

Title of Submission: _____ Art: __ Poem: __ (Check one)

Note: If you are entering as part of a group you MUST indicate whether you are entering through your school, scout troop, summer camp, park district, library, or other organization below.

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I, _____, being the parent or guardian of the above-named minor, hereby consent to and join in the foregoing release and consent on behalf of said minor.

Pledge of Originality: I declare and avow that the poem(s) or art I am submitting to the River of Words Contest is my own original work.

Student's signature _____

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Top: Sarah Elizabeth Rogers, Florence AL, 2003 National ROW Honorable Mention
Bottom: Morgan Pier, Florence AL, 2004 National ROW finalist

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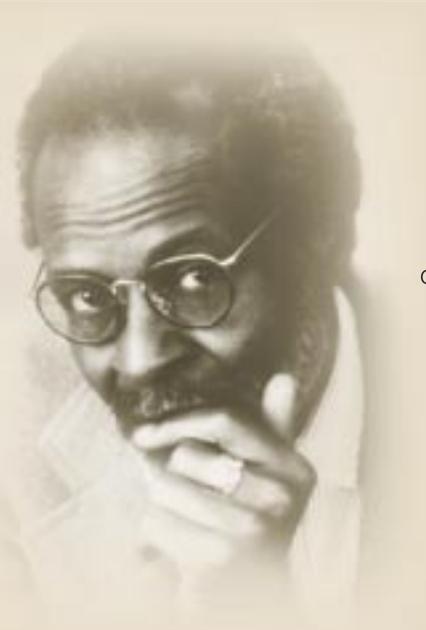
Memorial

Jim Haskins

I knew Jim Haskins all his life and his recent death in New York touched me deeply. We were both from Demopolis, and growing up in the Black Belt in the fifties prevented us from being the close friends we became in later years. Both of us writers. We'd see each other in New York or at one of the numerous writers' conferences or book fairs we happened to be attending at the same time. We spoke on the phone often, usually reminiscing about old times and old people we remembered in Demopolis. Our friendship over the years transcended the racial divide that once came between us and stands for me as a symbol of my own and my region's growth.

One of my fondest recent memories is the evening when four old Demopolis boys, Jim and his brother Albert and Bert Hitchcock and I, got together over dinner in Monroeville at an Alabama Writers' Symposium. Rarely have I done so much laughing. We talked about them all: Joe Bynomo, an old black hermit; Greensboro, who walked up and down the streets of Demopolis beating on a bass drum; Pet-jack, from out at Salt Well, who sold vegetables up and down the cinder alleyways of the town, calling out "Ole man on his job today...seeellin Okry!" (I'll never forget the night, some years ago, that I was having dinner with Jim and a bunch of English professors. We got to talking about Demopolis, Jim and I, and they were astonished that all these characters they'd read about in my novels had actually existed; they all thought they were so weird that surely I'd made them up!)

Don Noble and Wendy Bruce got wind of our carryings-on, and we all got together and planned a show for APT about two writers, one white and one black, returning after many years to Demopolis. Don and Wendy planned to shoot the climactic scenes at the old library in the town square, where I as a child went often and where Jim as a child was forbidden to enter. It would have been a wonderful experience. Wendy had already shot a lot of footage of Jim in New York and of me giving a reading at the new Demopolis Library and had interviewed various people in Demopolis who knew us both. But alas, Jim be-



came too sick to continue and the project had to be scrapped. I'm saddened that the program was never completed, as it would have been for me a permanent record of our friendship.

Jim was a good writer, and a prolific one. He published over a hundred books, ranging from the history of The Cotton Club in Harlem to biographies of Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King. His first published book was *Diary of a Harlem Schoolteacher*. He sometimes called upon his own life for his material, but, unlike me, he never went back to old Demopolis in his writing, except perhaps in his book *Voodoo and Hoodoo*, when he writes about an old Voodoo woman he knew there. His subject matter was far-ranging, and he left a legacy of fine writing for the generations to come. Most writers, I think, want to be remembered primarily for their work, and Jim's work will unquestionably stand him in good stead.

But Jim was so much more than a writer: a Freedom Rider and Civil Rights activist in Alabama in the sixties; a college teacher of creative writing with a legion of former students; a raconteur who enjoyed a few drinks and could tell stories with the best of them; a devoted lover of jazz; a man who rose from the segregated Deep South and, like so many of his brothers and sisters, fought tenaciously to become a successful American who commanded the respect and affection of a wide group of friends and admirers.

I feel privileged to have known him.

—William Cobb

Fiction writer and playwright William Cobb is author of *A Spring of Souls*, *A Walk Through Fire*, and *Somewhere in All This Green*, among many other titles.



Call to Adventure

A MEMOIRIST TRIES HER HAND AT
SCREENWRITING IN NEW YORK CITY, AND
LEARNS A FEW LESSONS ALONG THE WAY.

by Barbara Robinette Moss

PHOTO BY MARION ETLINGER

Last summer I moved into a shoebox-size apartment in Hell's Kitchen, a refurbished neighborhood near the theater district in New York City. I relocated to the Big Apple looking for something I desperately needed but couldn't find, a kind of magic, maybe, or divine energy, a balm for my fears. My fiftieth birthday was on the horizon and I had a list of things I hadn't accomplished—a long list, which included “live in New York City for one year.” Being an overly responsible person, I had to come up with a good reason to move there. Consequently, I decided to write a screenplay of my memoir *Change Me Into Zeus's Daughter*. A well-known screenwriter had already written a screenplay of *Zeus's Daughter*, but I hated it. Not being a Southerner, he must have assumed I had simply forgotten to include the usual Hollywood clichés about Alabama in my story. His manuscript read like he'd watched back-to-back episodes of *The Dukes of Hazard* all day and then popped in the movie *Deliverance* for a nightcap. I would rather be treed by hounds than let a movie be made from his manuscript, so I ended our business relationship and determined to write the screenplay myself—a perfectly logical excuse to spend a year in NYC.

I enrolled in a class at NYU, *Writing a Screenplay in Ten Weeks*. Our instructor, a feisty New Yorker, helped us find our premise, the gist of our stories. The premise that evolved for *Zeus's Daughter*, written in the form of a question for screenwriting purposes, was “Do you have to resolve the past before you can have a future?”

That unarticulated question had been haunting me for years. As a memoir writer, I'd spent an incredible amount of time thinking about, crying about, and shaking my fist at the past. The premise for the screenplay stopped me in my tracks. Did I have a future? Did I have a life? Would my tumultuous past ever become the past?

Life reveals itself to be remarkably

productive when looked back on. Examining the past decade revealed that I'd accomplished a lot. Still, on any particular day, I feel like I'm paddling a leaky canoe with a fly swatter. Truly, I didn't know if I really needed to move to NYC, or if being in the city was yet another diversion to keep me from writing. Let's see: should I write, or go see John Patrick Shanley's new play, "Doubt"? Of course, I went to that play. And dozens more. The theaters were just outside my front door, and museums and galleries were within shouting distance. When I was a little girl, I dreamed of being locked in the Birmingham Art Museum overnight. I wanted time to admire each work of art and to contemplate the wonder of it all. NYC was like that, like living in a wonderland. Still, to answer the question the premise of my screenplay presented, I had to write. Oh, God....

Adapting a book to a screenplay is difficult because the possibilities are endless. A book is 300 plus pages and a screenplay is 120. Important events are going to be left out, especially if the book traverses a number of years. Also, books tell a story with words and films tell it with images. No one had to guess what Hepburn thought of Bogart in the *African Queen*. Her expression said it all. Still, the events of that film took place in a few days. My book covered a couple of decades. To help make the decisions of what to leave in, what to leave out, I used a map, a guideline of a hero's journey. It goes like this: the hero is called to adventure but refuses the call; shortly, the hero is again called to adventure and for whatever reason is unable to refuse the call; many struggles ensue where the hero's character is tested and developed. By some twist in the plot, a crisis occurs, which the hero survives, but he is forever changed. Due to his strength and fortitude, he is ultimately rewarded and returns home with a pot of gold.

I feel like I did just exactly that: returned home with a pot of gold. On my fiftieth birthday, I saw a street person pick up a cigarette butt from the gutter. He had rags wrapped around his legs, and his head and shoulders were covered with snow. He dusted the butt, but before he could put it to his lips, a young man in a suit ran over and handed him a new pack of cigarettes and a book of matches. I witnessed unexpected kindnesses on the street all the time, and it melted away fears that I'd been holding onto for a lifetime. In my own small adventure, I fought off the terror of being alone in a very large city, figured out the subway system, managed to dodge a few muggers, and as a reward saw fantastic theater and film and brought home a pretty good understanding of screenplay writing.

And I am forever changed: humbled. I often think of the gentleman's adaptation of *Zeus's Daughter* that I hated. I feel a kinship with him now. Minus the clichés, I'm not sure my adaptation is any better. And I don't know if anything will ever come of it. But that's okay. It's in the process of *writing* that we find our way. For me, it's the desire to create something lovely from what appears downtrodden. I don't always know if I'm on the right road, but the important thing I've learned is to accept the call to adventure.

Barbara Robinette Moss is the author of the memoirs Fierce and Turn Me Into Zeus's Daughter. Originally from Anniston and Birmingham, Alabama, Moss now resides in Iowa City, Iowa.

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UNIVERSITY PRESSES

A Lifetime of Value

by Linda Busby Parker

In bygone days, university presses operated almost exclusively as bastions for the publication and distribution of scholarly works. Today, most university presses continue to publish books intended for limited academic markets, but many have expanded their acquisitions to include books for more general audiences—fiction, creative non-fiction, and poetry. I chatted with two university editors to learn more about their current operations and to gain an insider’s view into the future. I chose the University of Alabama Press because it’s our home-grown variety and SEMO Press (Southeast Missouri State University) because I know it well (it published my first novel).

Dan Waterman is an acquisitions editor at the University of Alabama Press and Susan Swartwout is the director/publisher (Jack-of-all-trades) at Southeast Missouri State University Press. In at least four ways, the backgrounds of both editors are similar—they are well educated, they teach or have taught at the university level, both have prior experience in publishing, and both are writers themselves.

Dan Waterman grew up in Louisville, Kentucky, earned his first degree from Yale, and went on to gain the M.A. from Hollins College and the M.F.A. from the University of Alabama.



Dan Waterman

Prior to earning his graduate degrees, he moved to New York where he worked for *ARTnews* magazine and as a book editor for Rizzoli International Publications, a publisher of fine art and architecture books. After earning his graduate degrees, he taught for a couple of years in the English department at the University of Alabama before becoming an editor at the press. In his spare time (never enough), he continues his own writing.

Susan Swartwout, who spent part of her childhood in New Orleans, earned her undergraduate degree at Knox College and her M.A. and Ph.D. at Illinois State University. She serves on the English department faculty at Southeast Missouri. (This past year she chaired the faculty senate.) She’s also a prolific writer. Her poems and short stories are published in literary journals such as *Nebraska Review*, *The Laurel Review*, *River Styx*, *Negative Capability*, *Mississippi*



Susan Swartwout

Review, and *Spoon River Review*, among others. She’s a recipient of the Rona Jaffe Writers’ Foundation Award, the Dillinger Good Award, and the St. Louis Poetry Center Award. Swartwout has also authored two poetry collections and edited an anthology of American poetry. Prior to establishing SEMO Press, she worked at Dalkey Archive Press and as an assistant editor for *Spoon River Review*.

Historically, the University of Alabama Press and SEMO are radically different. Age is a major indication of their differences. The University of Alabama Press was founded in 1945, publishes 55 to 60 new titles each year, and has a world-class list in archaeology/anthropology, southern history, American literature, and a growing list in military history. The press has established and continues to develop a list of books by Alabama writers as diverse as Mary Ward Brown’s short story collections and Wayne Flynt’s *Alabama in the Twentieth Century*. Plans for the press include continuing to be *the press* for Alabama’s arts, letters, and history.

SEMO Press was established in 2000 and is the publisher of *Big Muddy: Journal of the Mississippi River Valley* as well as books. To date, the press has published seven books—two historical fiction, two biographies, two collections of poetry, and a translated historical reprint that describes the onset of the American Revolution

from the viewpoint of a German scholar, with eighteen rare copperplate engravings.

SEMO has received its biggest national recognition for historical fiction. *The Gold of Cape Girardeau* by Morley Swingle has sold over 6,000 copies. Swartwout says, "That's monumental for an author's first book by a small press's first attempt."

Growth areas for the two presses are also different. The University of Alabama Press will continue to publish a wide variety of non-fiction. "Frank Sikora's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Women* and Viola Goode Liddell's *Grass Widow* come to mind as two terrific recent titles," Waterman says, "as well as popular history such as Frye Gaillard's *Cradle of Freedom* and narrative-driven journalism such as *Satchel Paige's America* by William Price Fox and *The Ballad of Little River* by Paul Hemphill. Almost nothing is out of bounds if it's well-written, the story is compelling, and we believe there is a strong audience," Waterman adds.

While fiction has not been a major growth area for the University of Alabama Press, it has established a fiction imprint, Deep South Books, and has been the publisher of classic fiction reprints such as T.S. Stribling's novels and the stories of William March. Deep South Books has recently published George Garrett's *Double Vision* and Madison Jones' *Herod's Wife*, as well as Mary Ward Brown's *Tongues of Flame* and *It Wasn't All Dancing*. "Our fiction is generally set in the South or focuses on issues of southern identity, family relations, and social change. But," Waterman adds, "we're always looking for fresh voices, fresh subjects, and new visions of life in the South. We hope to be surprised by works we haven't yet imagined."

With rare exception, the press doesn't publish poetry, although it has published two collections by George Starbuck and a collection of experimental and avant-garde poetry titled *Another South*. "Poetry, in general, is very difficult to market and many other presses publish in that area very well. There are some areas best left to other publishers and this is one of them," Waterman says.

By contrast, SEMO press will expand as a publisher of poetry and has added an imprint specifically for that purpose, Copperdome Press. Plans include the publication of a chapbook series via an annual contest and the publication of one or two full-length selections of poetry each year. Because SEMO serves as a laboratory for students in the publishing curriculum and is a new press, it has more leeway for experimentation than might an older press with a lengthy history. "Contemporary poetry is an acquired taste for most readers," Swartwout says, "but its roots are in ancient forms of storytelling and it needs to be preserved and nurtured as part of the human story."

Historical fiction is another growth area for SEMO Press. "I think of historical fiction as a narrative that is heavily researched to use recorded history as the stage of the narrative and as one of the characters, in a sense," Swartwout says. "About 70 percent of the manuscripts we receive are fiction," she adds.

Both presses welcome submissions. For non-fiction, Waterman suggests the author submit a detailed and carefully prepared proposal that outlines the nature of the manuscript, its

subject and approach, as well as its scope. Some background information on the author and a short analysis of the audience are also helpful. Proposal guidelines are available on line (www.uapress.ua.edu). Fiction submissions should be sent directly to Waterman.

Swartwout prefers to see a complete manuscript—especially for fiction and poetry. "Writers should always do the market analysis to determine if their manuscript fits a certain press," she says. SEMO's Web site is www6.semo.edu/universitypress.

Writers of fiction, non-fiction, and poetry may want to look to the university presses as markets. Swartwout paints a nice gloss on that outlet for publication: "One advantage of being published by a university press is the prestige," she says. "The author has passed the scrutiny of the press's editorial staff—scholars and writers themselves—and is being endorsed as valuable by the university." Waterman adds another attractive advantage: "The books we publish generally remain available for life, not just one season." That's a significant difference from the New York publishing houses. Authors of fiction, non-fiction, and poetry may want to take a fresh look at university presses.

Linda Busby Parker's first novel, Seven Laurels, won the James Jones First Novel Prize.



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2005 HIGH SCHOOL LITERARY ARTS AWARDS AWF

by Lovelace Cook

On April 27, 2005, the twelfth annual Alabama Writers' Forum 2005 High School Literary Arts Awards ceremony was held at the State Capitol Auditorium in Montgomery, Alabama. The Honorable Representative Billy Beasley (D-Clayton) gave the awards address and recognized the young writers, their teachers, and their schools for their accomplish-



Rep. Billy Beasley, D-Clayton, addresses the Alabama Writers' Forum 2005 High School Literary Arts Award winners at the State Capitol on Wednesday, April 27, 2005.

ments in the literary arts. Members of the House and Senate joined Rep. Beasley to congratulate the winning writers in their districts.

Recognizing young writers in creative nonfiction, drama, fiction, poetry, and senior portfolio at Alabama high schools across the state, the HSLAA had a host of prestigious judges—published poets and authors, playwrights, professors, and directors of arts centers, as well as award-winning fiction writer Mary Ward

Brown. Brown sees great things on the horizon for Alabama's young writers. Harper Lee Award recipient and author of short story collections *Tongues of Flame* and *It Wasn't All Dancing*, Brown says, "It was my privilege to judge the five contest finalists in fiction. Their teachers and schools can be proud of them."

First, second, and third place winners received cash prizes in the amount of \$150, \$75, and \$75 respectively, and Judge's Special Recognition recipients received a book; certificate winners received a certificate. In addition to awards and prizes in each of the literary categories, a scholarship competition was open to all graduating high school seniors. Scholarship winners received \$500 cash awards. Teachers received plaques listing winning students on behalf of their respective schools.

Thanks to a generous donation by AWF Board Member Philip Shirley, the AWF added a new feature this year. One

of the five portfolio winners received a named scholarship—the first Mozelle Purvis Shirley Senior Scholarship Portfolio Award. Mozelle Purvis Shirley inspired her son, Philip Shirley, by reading aloud to him every night when he was young, and, in turn, Shirley endowed the scholarship award in his mother's honor.

"Everything I've accomplished during my formal education, as a published writer and in my advertising career, has its roots in my mother reading to me every night as a child. My love of literature and writing grew from those seeds she planted and nourished to make reading not simply interesting and fun, but as natural as breath itself," said Shirley, who is President and COO of the Godwin Group, an advertising agency in Jackson, MS.

Graduating senior Misty Caruthers of Prattville High School received a \$500 cash award as winner of the 2005 HSLAA senior scholarship portfolio, and she also met the woman for whom the award is named. Mozelle Purvis Shirley presented the award to Caruthers at the awards ceremony. Shirley noted, "Misty Caruthers, who received the writing award given in honor of Mozelle Purvis Shirley, should know that her work represents a high calling and a talent to be cherished and nurtured by the perfection of the craft."

"Support for the HSLAA comes from a variety of sources, including funding from the Alabama 'Support the Arts' car tag and the Alabama State Council on the Arts, with whom we work in partnership," says Jeanie Thompson, Executive Director of the Alabama Writers' Forum. "It is our goal to endow the entire High School Literary Arts Awards and name each senior portfolio scholarship through corporate and individual donations."

For a complete listing of winners by genre, with teachers and schools, as well as guidelines for the 2006 High School Literary Arts Awards (deadline February 2006), and to learn more about how to endow the Alabama Writers' Forum educational programs, call 334-242-4076, ext. 233, or email awf@arts.alabama.gov.

Writer Lovelace Cook lives in Fairhope, Alabama, and is the owner of Lovelace Cook Communications.



Alabama Writers' Forum executive director Jeanie Thompson congratulates editors T.J. Martin of Opelika High School and Naomi Wolf of Alabama School of Fine Arts. Opelika High School's literary magazine *Perspectives 2004* won for Exceptional Graphic Design and the Alabama School of Fine Arts literary magazine *Cadence 2004* won for Exceptional Literary Content. Thompson, who was founding editor of *Black Warrior Review* literary journal at the University of Alabama, said she is especially proud of these young editors.



Misty Caruthers, left, of Prattville High School, is congratulated by Mozelle Shirley for receiving the 2005 Mozelle Shirley Senior Portfolio Scholarship. Caruthers, a student of Christine Alexander, received the award.



From left, Shaina Strom and Marcus Peavy of the Alabama School of Fine Arts, Alabama Writers' Forum treasurer and board member Derryn Moten (Montgomery), and Samuel Cooper and Meagan McDaniel of Briarwood Christian pose for a photograph at the 2005 High School Literary Arts Awards on Wednesday, April 27, 2005, at the State Capitol.

Mark your calendar now for the ninth annual

ALABAMA WRITERS SYMPOSIUM

Action! Adventure! Alabama!

May 4-6, 2006

Monroeville, Alabama

The Literary Capital of Alabama

Plan to spend May 4-6, 2006, in Monroeville for the 2006 Alabama Writers Symposium. Members of our state's rich contemporary literary family will gather at Alabama Southern Community College for a weekend of readings by Alabama writers, with the thoughtful guidance of some of our best literary scholars.

2006 Featured Writers and Scholars include Daniel Alarcón, Allen Barra, Sonny Brewer, Cathy Day, Joe Formichella, Tom Franklin, Homer Hickam, Joshilyn Jackson, Leah Nielsen, Warren St. John, Natasha Trethewey, Brad Vice, Jake Adam York

Thursday, May 4 – Opening Banquet Speaker
Rick Bass

Friday, May 5 – Luncheon Speaker
To Be Announced

Saturday, May 6 – Brunch Presentation
and Reading

Harper Lee Award for Alabama's Distinguished Writer 2006 and Eugene Current-Garcia Award for Alabama's Distinguished Literary Scholar 2006

The symposium is a project of the
Alabama Center for Literary Arts and is
sponsored by Alabama Southern Community College

For more information call Donna Reed,
(251) 575-3156, ext. 223 or email dreed@ascc.edu
Visit our online literary journal Thicket at www.athicket.com



TAKING THE TIME

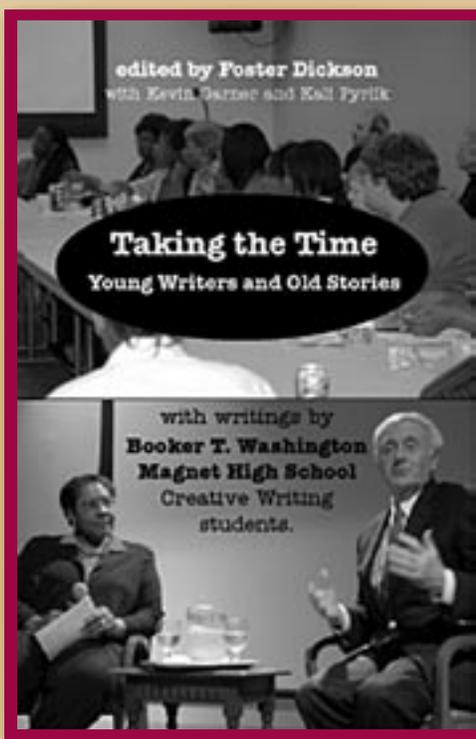
Young Writers and Old Stories

by Foster Dickson

At the Creative Writing magnet at Booker T. Washington Magnet High School in Montgomery, I teach that writing is activism. Writing is choosing not to remain silent. Moreover, writing is more than just complaining and more than talking to friends about what we see. Writing is reaching out beyond our own circles; it is actively responding to the world around us.

The *Taking the Time* project was centered around that idea. On a trip to the 2004 Associated Writing Programs conference, I encountered a program where writers helped local Chicagoans from all walks of life to record their stories, which they put in a periodical, *JOT: the Journal of Ordinary Thought*. With 2005 looming—the 40th anniversary of the Selma-to-Montgomery March, and the 50th anniversary of Rosa Parks’ arrest—initiating a similar project, with high school students, made sense. More important than simply recording the stories of those who took part in or witnessed the events of 1955–1965, a discussion with Alabama Writers’ Forum director Jeanie Thompson early in the development convinced me that the right choice was to have the students write about their experiences rather than simply have them transcribe taped interviews. The product should, of course, be a book. Fortunately, our project was funded by a Southern Poverty Law Center Teaching Tolerance grant and a Gannett Foundation grant, and a book and accompanying Web site were made possible.

The students experienced ten perspectives on the Civil Rights movement. The first was Claudette Colvin, the woman who as a fifteen-year-old girl was arrested prior to Rosa Parks on a bus and who was also a plaintiff on the bus desegregation test case, *Browder v. Gayle*. The second meeting involved Rev. Robert Graetz, the only white minister to openly support the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

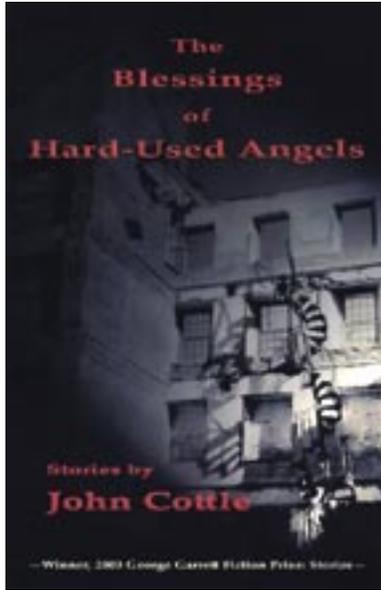


Journalist Alvin Benn, who covered Birmingham for the UPI from 1964–1996, came next. Another journalist, John Seigenthaler, came via the Rosa Parks Museum and the *Montgomery Advertiser* to speak on his role in the 1961 attack on the Freedom Riders at Montgomery’s Greyhound bus station. We ended March with a visit from retired educator Thomas Bobo, who played a large role in the integration of Montgomery’s public schools. In April three students and I traveled to Perry County to interview locals who were at the mass meeting when Jimmy Lee Jackson was shot and killed. The next week two students interviewed Judge Truman Hobbs, who as a young lawyer became the bus company’s lawyer right after the boycott; four students visited Dr. Gwen Patton’s archives at Trenchholm Tech’s library; and finally eight students interviewed residents of John Knox Manor, a nursing home in south

Montgomery. On April 16, we visited Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church and the Southern Poverty Law Center’s Civil Rights Memorial.

The result is *Taking the Time*, which was completed during the summer, after a student-assisted editorial process. I believe that this project bridged a gap between the history the students get from textbooks and the reality of what happened in their community not long before they were born. In many cases, the interviewees were also quite pleased to share their experiences with young people. For me, the importance was engaging my students with powerful role models whose selfless actions prompted the creation of a better world for everyone. For more information or to obtain a copy of the book, see www.takingthetime.org.

Writer and editor Foster Dickson teaches at Montgomery’s Booker T. Washington Magnet High School.



The Blessings of Hard-Used Angels

by John Cottle

Texas Review Press, 2004

\$16.95, Paperback

John Cottle practices law by day, but from what I can tell, he spends the rest of his waking hours not just writing fiction but studying the craft as well. This pursuit of the art of writing fiction has paid off in his first book, a fine collection of stories entitled *The Blessings of Hard-Used Angels*, 2003 winner of the prestigious George Garrett Fiction Prize. Cottle's dedication to his craft, combined with his willingness to treat complex themes and his ability to create beautifully drawn characters, is evident in the particulars of all of the stories in the collection. But when he is at the top of his game, as in

"The Girl at the Fountain" and "Sailing to Orion," he is capable of producing masterpieces.

One of the joys of reading John Cottle is observing a serious writer at work. His stories, often extremely lyrical, are an impressive fusion of elegance and imagination. He uses similes and metaphors everywhere in the stories, often with great success. For example, he says of a callous judge, "His heart is as cold as a dead Eskimo." He plays around with point of view to good effect, and I was repeatedly amazed by his ability to create external atmosphere to reflect the internal weather of his stories. In "Clyde and Jake," for example, he describes the sky this way: "It was late afternoon and the sky was thick with the grayness of spoiled beef. The nearly obliterated sun winked sickly through the overcast heavens like a woozy, bloated eye." This is a perfect backdrop for a character struggling painfully with moral questions that are well beyond the clear comprehension of mere mortals.

But it is not John Cottle's artistry—or artistry alone—that accounts for his success. It struck me several times as I read the stories that, in his struggle with big moral questions, he is a descendant of Dostoevsky. Particularly interested in the question of good and evil and of truth and falsehood against the background of the law, he explores in great dramatic detail the inner workings of conscience. In several stories he explores the attorney's obligation to defend to the best of his ability a client he knows to be guilty, a situation in which truth and falsehood, good and evil become games to be played, often with startling effects. More than once he shows us the guilt experienced by sensitive lawyers as well as the outrage of those harmed by the arguments that lawyers make.

I suspect that it is not Cottle's treatment of important themes, however, that will draw most readers to his stories, but rather his remarkable ability to create fully realized characters. In "The Girl at the Fountain," he paints a masterful portrait of a feckless, timid man, Bradley Biblow, who fits nicely into the tradition of Eliot's J. Alfred Prufrock and Joyce's T. Malone Chandler. But, unlike Eliot and Joyce, Cottle leaves you with some hope that Biblow will make good on his dreams. In "Sailing to Orion," he describes a dying man who has been estranged from his only child for over fifteen years but in his last days is reunited with her. This is no vapid happy-ending story, but it does show the capacity of people to forgive and to be generous to the faults of others. Throughout the stories in the collection, Cottle presents acts of charity and generosity in places they might not at all be expected.

If John Cottle continues his new vocation of writing—and I feel sure he will—I feel confident he will make his mark. This volume establishes him as an especially shining light in the literary world.

Norman McMillan is the author of Distant Son: An Alabama Boyhood, published by the Cahaba Trace Commission. He lives in Montevallo.

As Hot as It Was You Ought to Thank Me

by Nanci Kincaid

Back Bay Books, 2005

\$12.95, Paperback

The southern coming-of-age novel is such a well-trod tradition that even tiptoeing into a territory defined by classics like *Delta Wedding*, *A Member of the Wedding*, *Ellen Foster*, and, of course, *To Kill a Mockingbird* requires both confidence and a certain chutzpah. In previous novels, Nanci Kincaid proved adept at raising ostensibly familiar characters, whether the long-suffering wives of college-football coaches in *Balls* or sixth-grade teachers in *Verbena*, above the level of stereotype. Her earlier foray into maturation fiction, her 1992 debut *Crossing Blood*, met with mixed success, however, proving the weakest entry in her otherwise enviable oeuvre. With its storyline of an interracial friendship during the tumult of the 1960s Civil Rights movement, *Blood*'s teenage protagonists seemed less like real people than ciphers of good progressive intent. Thankfully, *As Hot as It Was You Ought to Thank Me* suffers no such fault. Kincaid has produced a portrait of southern adolescence that captures the confusion and disappointments of the *paysage moralisé* while avoiding the form's more treacherous tendencies. The tone is deadpan rather than sentimental, the Florida setting (a Kincaid specialty) nuanced rather than nostalgic, and the mood—as the title suggests—more heated than whimsical.

Thanks to the prevalence of initiation novels, it seems safe to say that what entertains readers isn't their originality or innovativeness but the deftness with which they manipulate the conventions of the genre. *As Hot as It Was You Ought to Thank Me* has them all: a thirteen-year-old, vaguely androgynous main character; a plot centering upon the revelation of adult deception and hypocrisy; wayward foils and rival siblings; intimations of awakening sexuality; philandering ministers and cuckolded husbands; repressed mothers who suddenly decide to exercise their sensuality; the prudes who gossip about them; Old Testament-style natural disasters (in this case, a tornado and rattlesnakes); and, most delightfully, given its relative absence from modern incarnations, the chain gang. Some of these elements may, at first glance, seem overly familiar; with all due respect to Old Yella, I could have lived without a family cat named Our Yellow Cat. That is a minor complaint, however. For the most part, Berry Jackson's insights into the outbreak of odd occurrences that crumble the placid façade of her sleepy

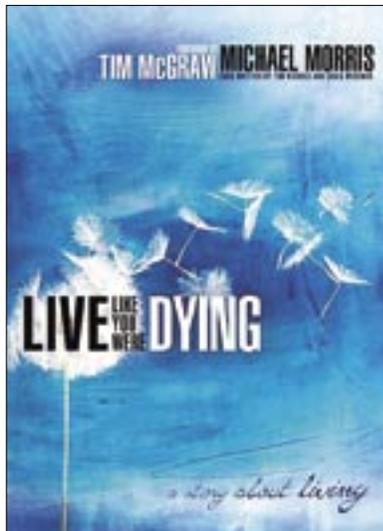
hometown of Pinetta aren't tired, and the plot unravels in a manner that is more than sufficiently dramatic to carry the book to its conclusion.

On one level, the suspense revolves around Berry's growing awareness of her parents' failings. A third of the way into the story, Berry's father, Ford, principal of the local school, disappears during a tornado with the teenage drama queen, Rennie Miller; the implication, of course, is that the two have run off. Such are the rumors, anyway, that begin swirling through the small town, forcing Berry and her brothers, Sowell and Wade, to wonder whether their father has abandoned them. Berry's mother, Ruthie, has her own issues; when Butch Lyons, pastor of the Method Church, is exposed as the adulterous lover of Jewel Longmont, she inadvertently reveals her own affections for the disgraced preacher, only to fall later for Jewel's husband, Jack. In the novel's final pages, a series of revelations calls these alliances into question; as Berry learns, romantic intrigue in the end isn't all that intriguing—it's just complicated and painful, leading her to pose Kincaid's overarching question: "Why are people so interested in messing up love?"

It's a question Berry will have to ask of herself, one senses, as she grapples with the implications of her affection for Raymond Lee, the chain-gang prisoner who is bitten by rattlesnakes when a careless teenage stunt endangers Berry. In a scene reminiscent of the final image of *The Grapes of Wrath*, Berry tries to repay the sacrifice. Even more striking is the realization to which Raymond compels Berry: "I knew then, in that small moment, that all my life I would be the kind of woman that inspired weakness in men. It was like my future stretched out in front of me and I could see it, a future of men turning to me for comfort, not passion." To say that the novel insists that men are weak and women depend on being disappointed by their frailties is perhaps reductive, but it nevertheless suggests the quandary of growing up as Berry struggles with the burdens of learning that no one goes through life unflawed.

An earlier passage—this one evoking Toni Morrison's *Be-loved*—suggests Berry's idea of the perfect community, which happens to be the chain gang: "Something happened to the men when they wore the chains. It was like a lot of men who did not belong—loners, lost-types, losers, in Raymond's case a lover—stopped being individuals who didn't belong the minute they put on those chains. They transcended just simple belonging and became absolutely essential to each other. It was like lots of bad individuals hooked together made one good whole out of themselves...." As Berry seems to intuit, the problem with Pinetta—and, by implication, the world at large—is that too few adults are capable of transcending their selfishness to become equally essential to each other. As good as these passages from *As Hot as It Was You Ought to Thank Me* are, we ought to thank Kincaid.

Kirk Curnutt is chair of the English Department at Troy University Montgomery and author of Baby, Let's Make a Baby Plus Ten Other Stories, published by River City Publishing.



Live Like You Were Dying
A Story About Living
by Michael Morris

Westbow Press, 2004
\$16.99, Hardcover

Second chances are rare. Some seize the moment. Others, out of fear, let it pass.

Nathan Bishop is a man at the crossroads of his life.

In his third and latest work, *Live Like You Were Dying*, writer Michael Morris intro-

duces us to Nathan Bishop, a man on the move. Obsessed with managing every precise detail of his career, Nathan lives his life climbing the corporate ladder. Yet the remainder of his life is a blur. Morris writes, “The smell of money turned out to be an axis between my soul and my family.”

So committed to the job, Nathan is always missing out on those little family happenings. Choosing work over his daughter Malley’s kindergarten graduation and her gymnastics events, Nathan’s life eventually takes a traumatic turn. An accident one night at the plant leaves him fighting for his life. His lungs filled with blood, he soon finds himself counting ceiling tiles in the hospital.

A mysterious spot is subsequently detected on his lung. Diagnoses and possible treatments are sketchy at best, and Nathan is eventually released by the doctors. A frightened man, he is faced with the choice of either going back to his previous workaholic existence or taking on the uncertainty of a new order in life.

Still weak, Nathan drives himself back to work. Twenty years at the paper mill has bought him self-perceived job security. However, as he pulls into the lot, Nathan discovers that a young Georgia Tech engineering grad has already laid claim to his special parking space. Upon entering his old office, Nathan finds Brad Livingston sitting in his chair, his boots propped up on the desk. When Brad proceeds to offer him a simple millwright opening, Nathan loses it.

Shaken, Nathan returns home to his manicured lawn in suburbia Atlanta and begins to feel an inner voice calling him back to his rural upbringing in Choctaw, Georgia. Packing up the family, Nathan heads back to his roots. His maternal grandmother, Grand Vestal, is waiting on the porch as the family pulls up. Yet, with going home, Nathan is forced to come to terms with not only the fears surrounding his mother’s untimely death but an even worse trepidation—facing the lifelong nonexistent relationship with his angry and noncommunicative father.

The world begins to slow down to a moment-by-moment trickle as Nathan and his father take young Malley fishing at

Brouser’s Pond. Instead of looking for a corporate paycheck loaded with zeros at the fishing hole, Nathan pulls out a simple dollar and tucks the bill into an old coffee can hanging by a rusted nail from a pine tree. This scene is rich with the fluidity of language that Morris is known for.

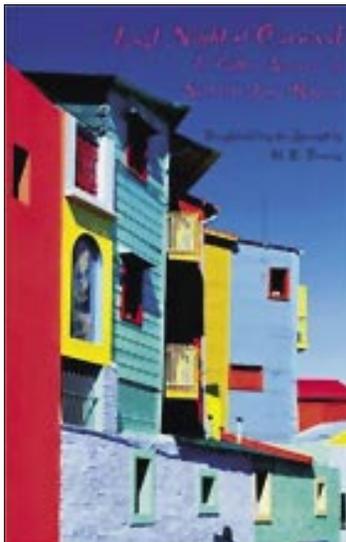
Through Nathan’s grandmother, Grand Vestal, Morris creates a well-developed character. His clear, polished prose and whispers to the senses shine through in such lines as “Grand Vestal opened up the box, and the smell of aged cedar flowed through the living room.”

After two weeks in Choctaw, Nathan reluctantly agrees to a tiring journey with his father; a man who he has always felt was dead in both body and spirit. The two men hitch a camper to the back of a rundown pickup and ride off on a winding cross-country trip. From stopping for meatloaf at a Birmingham diner to a rodeo in Oklahoma City to an aerial adventure in New Mexico to their sighting of the Grand Canyon, narrative tension between father and son builds as the actual meaning of life and relationships are revealed.

True to songwriters Tim Nichols’ and Craig Wiseman’s lyrics and Tim McGraw’s blockbuster recording “Live Like You Were Dying,” Morris takes the reader to a place of second chances where real living occurs. From a small press and a small book comes a powerful story.

Live Like You Were Dying is poignant, humorous, and a smooth read. Alabama-based author Michael Morris gets the voices just right. Exhilarating and refreshing from beginning to end, this book hits nothing but high notes.

A native Mobilian, Elisabeth A. Doehring serves as book editor for the Gulf Breeze News and Splash! Magazine. Her reviews appear in various publications throughout the states of Alabama, Florida, and Kentucky as well as in her ancestral country of Ireland where she writes book reviews for the Sligo Champion.



Last Night of Carnival & Other Stories

by Norberto Luis Romero
Translated by
H.E. Francis

Leaping Dog Press, 2004
\$16.95, Paperback

Over a dozen of Norberto Luis Romero’s short stories, many previously published in magazines, have been compiled in his most recent collection, *Last Night of Carnival and Other Stories*. H.E. Francis, an exemplary scholar of Argentinean

culture in his own right, has provided a masterful translation of the original Spanish text, *El memento del unicornio* (1996).

Romero's stories feature characters who indulge themselves (in one way or another) before the Lenten fast begins. The stories are served up like separate dishes, some pared down to lean descriptions, others almost cloyingly rich in sensory detail.

In the title story, Flavia laments her predicament as a married woman, trapped inside a sweltering apartment building with a tantalizing view of the Carnival below. There, she remembers the last time she disguised herself as a child, reveling in "that kind of usurped personality which the disguise conferred on her, that sensation of being another, of for some hours liking a stolen life without her own will and tending to lead her down disquieting paths." Flavia dons a silver mask, a red satin bow, and blue bracelets, then immerses herself in the crowd, only to find a masked figure whose words carry her to "lost confines beyond night and time."

Virtually all of Romero's characters share a similar inclination to assume new identities that liberate them from their routine obligations in the normative world. In "Snipers," the narrator confronts a nightmarish scenario: snipers have been assigned to roost on the rooftops of every house in his neighborhood, including his own. No one seems to flinch, however, as neighbors are picked off, one by one; it's as if Shirley Jackson hired a team of hit men to restage "The Lottery" in downtown Buenos Aires. Early on, we discover that the narrator was once rejected by whatever security company hires snipers (we never find out; they don't advertise). Why? His right index finger was "insufficient," a defect that could only mangle the precise form of an expert marksman. To compensate, he begins to study the sniper assigned to his house, observing and mimicking his every gesture and pose. The narrator eventually identifies so closely with "his sniper" that he *becomes* one. His first target is the sniper, a victim of the narrator's artistic form.

Like Italo Calvino, Romero has that rare ability to distill our nightmares to stark, archetypal images that are at once particular and universal, surreal and real. The concept of a sniper perched on one's roof might seem absurd, but the fear and excitement that this provokes in all of us are not. Another story, "The Seizure," picks up where "Snipers" left off. A businessman finds himself trapped on a subway circling a loop interminably. Like Gregor Samsa, he desperately wants to fulfill professional obligations, but circumstances beyond his control ensnare him. Lost in the labyrinthine subway system, he peers out the window, glimpsing "all those cables and intermittent signals so incomprehensible to me, but which I have the comfort of knowing constitute a secret language to the plotters of this infamy." Romero vividly depicts contemporary man's anxieties with the instruments of technology in the hands of the State. Aptly, the narrator is kept in the dark, far away from the surface world where "profitable negotiations" are made officially at the expense of individual lives.

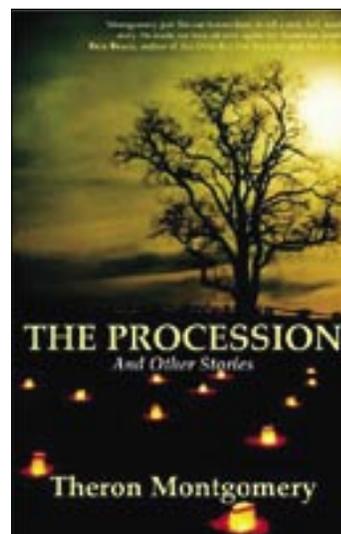
Delving even deeper underground, "Jewels" explores the subterranean world of jewel hunters. Inhabiting the sewers, the narrator guides himself only by sound—specifically, the sound of his rake sifting through tons of refuse. Ordinarily,

this setting would seem gruesome, but in Romero's hands, he describes spectacular septic "galleries" that scavengers navigate through precise signs. In these dark depths, the author provides us with the "keenest sense of orientation" to the underworld, where lost gems are finally reclaimed. On a more doleful note, "The Lost Mourner" highlights Eulogia, a self-proclaimed keener who charges widows for her somber funeral songs. She assures one customer that her laments are genuine, and reveals the source of her own sorrow: her daughter, refusing to become a keener herself, has left for the city. Eulogia, facing the absence any memories, passes away, but leaves her daughter with a revelation: "a chorus of cries of many keeners who, surely, had been buried in this very cemetery and were keening for one another."

In "The Tunnel of Horrors," an older man named Rafa encounters Blanca, a.k.a. "The Skeleton," a circus girl who never seems to age. When Rafa goes through the tunnel, he witnesses a psychedelic collage of colors. A boy appears in his vision, and gradually becomes masked by time, aging into adolescence, adulthood, and old age. Rafa meets the boy halfway, perceiving "in each child the future old person and in each adult the child that once was."

Although not every reader will find all of Norberto Luis Romero's stories to his or her taste, sample each one first before making up your mind. If you can endure the heady rites of Carnival—initiations, transformations, withdrawals, and returns—then you'll feast your senses on this collection. *Last Night of Carnival* sheds light on characters haunting the dark, narrow margins of our own lives.

Gavin Spence teaches English, creative writing, and film studies at Chattahoochee Valley Community College in Phenix City.



The Procession and Other Stories

by Theron Montgomery

UKA Press, 2005

\$14.99, Paperback

This book reads like random chapters of a novel; characters roam from one story to another and share the same topography. According to the credits, an earlier version of the title story, which is the longest and the end-piece of this impressive collection, received an award in the James Jones

Novel Writing Contest of 1998. Most of the ten stories have appeared over the last thirteen years in literary journals; this seasoning of a little age on the original work probably gives the compilation an added dimension of depth and luster.

POETRY FIGHTS HUNGER



The Auburn University Center for the Arts & Humanities proudly announces a national poetry contest to fight world hunger. In 2004, Auburn University was selected as the first partner by the World Food Programme to establish a student-led “War on Hunger” campaign. Since then, every school and college across campus has been contributing to this worthwhile mission.

The winning entry will be chosen by Kevin Pilkington, author of *Ready to Eat the Sky*, awarded a \$500 cash prize, and will be published in the *Birmingham Arts Journal*. All remaining monies benefit the World Food Programme, a United Nations organization that provides food to more than 80 countries. The WFP and Auburn hope to educate the next generation about global hunger and the poverty associated with it through a grass-roots student campaign to conquer world hunger and malnutrition.

TO SUBMIT:

- Send up to 3 poems with an SASE for contest results to:
Poetry Fights Hunger Contest
Pebble Hill
Auburn University, AL 36849-5637
- Include your name, address and email on the back of each page of each poem.
- We do NOT accept previously published poems.
- Do not send your only copies as poems will not be returned, but recycled. Please send your poems only by regular mail.
- Entry fee: \$12/up to 3 poems.
- Make checks payable to Auburn University (indicate in subject space: War on Hunger)
- Deadline: March 1, 2006.
- For more information, please visit us at www.auburn.edu/hunger

Whether or not the author intended it, there is a subtle irony in naming a fictional town for a symbol that, when placed over a musical note or rest, indicates that note or rest is to be held and released at the performer’s discretion. Fermata Bend, Alabama, maintains a strangle-hold on those who grew up there (even the ones who think they’ve successfully moved on) and exerts an insidious hold on others who end up there through accident or foolish judgment. In Faulknerian tradition, Theron Montgomery, who teaches English and creative writing at Troy University, has developed his make-believe town as though it is a character. The landed gentry are referred to with casual pride as “pecan families,” and the citizens take ceremonies very seriously, especially those involved with burying their dead. “It’s a beautiful day—for a funeral,” an elderly woman says hopefully to her son, whom she doesn’t see much of anymore, as they walk together in a municipally trumped-up procession to the cemetery.

The book opens with “The Lieutenant,” an almost whimsical tale of a cocky, former RAF pilot who “came all the way from England seven years after the war with a converted Spitfire to crop dust in Fermata Bend, Alabama... The story in common is that he came, not because he needed money—it seems he had money from somewhere—and not because he wanted to become an American, he didn’t; or from a desire to see America or the Deep South. He did not. The reason he came was that Fermata Bend had no aerial regulations and he wanted to keep flying dangerously.”

In the electrically Gothic “The Motherhead,” a young boy matter-of-factly describes a visit with his parents to Tuscaloosa. He’s really bored; they’re going to see his grandmother, as they did last week, and the week before that. His mother admonishes him to tuck his shirt in: “We want you to look nice.” Hayden, the boy, remembers the grandmother “sitting large on the piano bench in a house dress, her head tilted back, and her mouth opened wide as she pounded the keys and sang, ‘When the Saints Go Marching In.’” But the woman is dead now, and “The Motherhead is smiling in the center of the dining table, just as we left it, standing on its neck in the cake pan Mother gave the mortician when he brought the head back from the funeral.”

UKA Press—the acronym stands for United Kingdom Authors—is a British publisher.

Julia Oliver is the author of two novels, a collection of short stories, and two stage plays. Her current project is a literary novel based on historical people and events.

The Battle for Alabama’s Wilderness
Saving the Great Gymnasiums of Nature
by John Randolph

University of Alabama Press, 2005
\$26.95 Paper

With urban green space on everyone’s mind these days, and rightfully so, it’s the perfect time to pause and reflect

on how metro areas such as Birmingham and its surrounding suburbs have come to be so active in developing outdoor spaces for their residents.

City, county, state, and national leaders not only know about the health benefits of getting folks outside, walking, hiking, biking, roller blading, and just plain relaxing, they also know about the revenue generated by such activities. Although crass and not in the least sentimental, green dollars follow green spaces. A city that reeks of economic health is a city with vibrant and active outdoor parks, landscaped walking paths known as greenways, and larger outdoor destinations such as nature preserves and nearby state parks.

How did we get here? With the ongoing development of two huge urban green space initiatives in Birmingham—Five Mile Creek and the US Steel corridor—the city is poised to become the number-one keeper of urban greenspace in the United States. And new wild green spaces, such as land in the Tensaw Delta near Mobile and the Jericho's Wall tract along the Tennessee/Alabama state line, are being bought and protected at an amazing pace by the Forever Wild program. It's really quite an astounding, wise, and invaluable phenomenon that owes much to the people who led the fight to set aside Alabama's three wilderness areas: the Sipsey, Cheaha, and Dugger Mountain Wilderness Areas.

Precisely documenting the struggle to save these three invaluable "Great Gymnasiums of Nature" is author, lawyer, and environmental activist John Randolph. A lifelong Alabama native, Randolph's new book, aptly titled *The Battle for Alabama's Wilderness*, gives us an inside look at what it took him and many others to accomplish on our behalf.

A brief overview cannot adequately communicate the relentless adversity faced by those battling to spare a tiny but incredibly valuable fraction of Alabama's wilderness areas, but the great value of what has been granted to us must be emphasized. Although numerous agencies, businesses, and political groups all joined the fray, it's the key players—individuals representing diverse interests within a complex political process—who stand out in Randolph's account.

By book's end we have an enlarged Sipsey Wilderness of 25,000 acres, a 7,500-acre Cheaha Wilderness, a 9,200-acre Dugger Mountain Wilderness, and 52 miles of the West Fork Sipsey designated as Wild and Scenic. What we also have are precedents, experience, and a history of determination that give today's environmental supporters a real leg to stand on.

Major barriers to the protection of our wild lands still exist, but many things have changed. Two prominent figures in Randolph's book, Senator Howell Heflin (the "bane of environmentalists" according to Randolph, although Heflin's support was ultimately required to pass the Eastern Wilderness Areas Act) and Representative Tom Bevill (an ambivalent supporter of environmental issues), died within 24 hours of one another this March, shortly after Randolph's book was released.

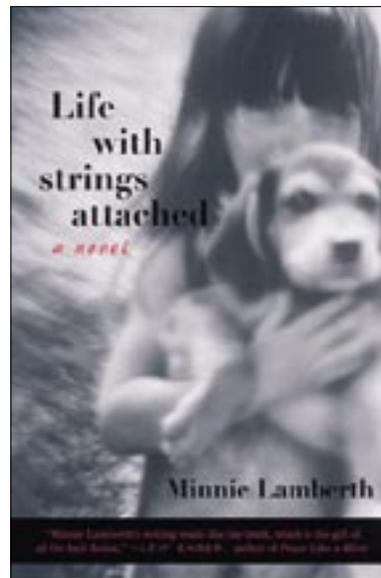
But what will not change, without an Act of Congress, is the legacy of 42,000 acres of priceless protected wilderness within our state. Representing less than 1 percent of all the

forest land in Alabama, the protection of this 42,000 acres has not created a single hungry belly nor put rust on a single chainsaw. In fact, just the opposite is true. Without scenic East Bee Branch Canyon or the many waterfalls along the West Fork Sipsey, we would have little reason to drive nearly 90 miles from Birmingham to a sparsely populated area of our state. We certainly wouldn't go there to see clear-cut hills or to visit where the state's tallest tree "used to be."

With an increasing appreciation of green spaces, and a serious effort to protect lands that surround creeks and rivers that feed our water supply, we are now bringing the wilderness home, opening it up right here in our own backyards in the form of urban parks and greenways. Not only will we have the wilds of the Sipsey, Cheaha, and Dugger to count on, but we will also have tamed examples to enjoy at home.

This is all to the good, and it all goes to show you how much we owe to folks like John Randolph, Mike Leonard (a key player in the acquisition of protected lands), Mary Burks (founder of the Alabama Conservancy), and the many others who set the stage for such a rich outdoor arena in Alabama. Read the book. Then get out there and enjoy.

Russell Helms is acquisitions editor with Menasha Ridge Press in Birmingham and the author of 60 Hikes within 60 Miles: Birmingham.



Life with Strings Attached

by Minnie Lamberth

Paraclete Press, 2005
\$21.95, Hardcover

This book, the Alabama author's first, won Paraclete Press's inaugural competition for literary novels with Christian themes. Not being familiar with the popular genre of religious faith-based fiction, I was apprehensive. Would these 230-plus pages read like a long sermon? Would

the "lessons" overpower the story? No, and no. In an assured, forthright style, Minnie Lamberth has written an eloquent, gentle novel about good people in a good place.

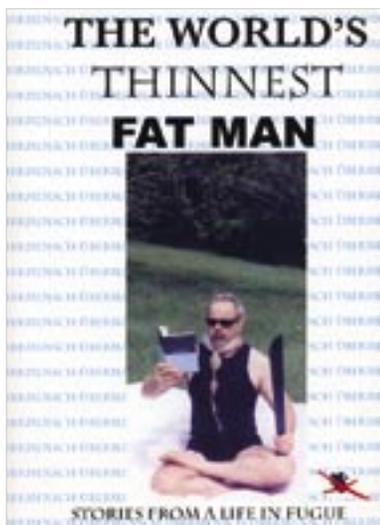
In smooth, first-person narration, the central character, Hannah Hayes, looks back on a pivotal year of her growing-up time in Wellton, Alabama. The year was 1972; Hannah was seven. If the reader hasn't been hooked by the wonderful title or well-crafted opening sentences, this segment on page 2 should do it: "In one moment, I was convinced I had seen the Second Coming; in the next, I was at the concession stand buying a hot dog, vaguely aware of the presence of knowledge and

the absence of clarity. There is nothing more elusive than religious faith: it can be the most real thing you've ever known, the brightest light you've ever seen. And at any moment, you may wonder if it was only a mirage, a ball field in the distance."

The Hayes family's approach to religion is less rigid than that of some of their neighbors. When she tries to add a friend's daughter to the prayer chain list, Hannah's mother gets a firm rebuff from the group's leader: "We don't pray for cheerleader tryouts. That is vanity." Hannah's father says, "I didn't realize Myra Hamilton's prayer chain had bylaws. What is it okay to pray for, if not cheerleaders? A winning football team? A good day in the stock market?" Hannah recalls: "Momma's reply was empty of spirit. 'I think she favors world peace,' she said."

Let us hope a sequel is in the works.

Julia Oliver



The World's Thinnest Fat Man: Stories from a Life in Fugue

by Joe Taylor

Swallow's Tale Press, 2005

\$14.95, Paperback

Not many writers can get away with putting their photos on their jacket covers; even renowned humorists such as David Sedaris, Augusten Burroughs, and Chuck Klosterman generally avoid being seen any-

where but on the back flap of their latest hardback or the endpaper of a softcover edition. Readers who already know Joe Taylor, the amiable and erudite editor who has in recent years given the University of West Alabama's Livingston Press a distinct literary identity, will thus have a good chuckle when they come across *The World's Thinnest Fat Man*. On the front cover, a sunglassed and beard-binded Joe assumes the lotus position in what looks like a yoga outfit, reading what is presumably a deep philosophical tome (my poor eyesight prevented me from deciphering the title) while wielding... a machete? The back cover features a decidedly less odd—but no less funny—pose: gulping from a bottle of wine and sucking on a lollipop, he is surrounded by chicken bones, his midsection noticeably enhanced to strain the stitching of his Hawaiian shirt. As big a hoot as the photos inspire, they do have a point: they dramatize the extremes of discipline and indulgence that are the main theme of this short-story cycle, which traces the spiritual and libidinal adventures of its central character, Josey, from childhood to middle age.

The intriguing subtitle suggests the motif that gives collective shape to these tales, which are set in various locations and times. Musically speaking, a fugue is a composition constructed out of an interwoven set of themes and motifs; there is the less appreciated psychological meaning, too, referring to (according to my friends Merriam and Webster), "a disturbed state of consciousness in which the one affected seems to perform acts in full awareness but upon recovery cannot recollect the deeds." This definition would seem to contradict the retrospective nature of Josey's narration, but, more broadly, *fugue* also implies a dream-state, the sort of heightened consciousness whose transcendental pursuit inspired DeQuincey to scarf opium and Kerouac and the Beats to blow their minds with Benzedrine. Those comparisons aren't gratuitous. *The World's Thinnest Fat Man* belongs to that genre of hipster Romanticism in which the quest for enlightenment is pursued through illicit pleasures that the anesthetized world can't bear the thought of. Josey's adventures are chock-full of philosophical talk, eager women, mysticism and martial arts, and the twin stimulations of chicory coffee and Sneaky Petes (i.e. "a mixture of cheap sparkly Rhine wine and even cheaper bubbly beer"); there are exotic locations (the New Orleans of "The Woman Who Wouldn't Talk, The Man Who Wouldn't Listen" is especially well done) and family ghosts to contend with. For a reader whose idea of a wild time is dosing his sweet tea with extra sugar cubes, all this constitutes a long, strange trip—but it's nevertheless ribald, funny, poignant, and lots of fun.

The strength of the stories lies in the controlling metaphors Taylor employs to mark various stages of Josey's journey. In "My Life as an Imaginary Number," Josey, having previously "been grasping the number line for twenty-seven years, sometimes as a fraction, sometimes as a mixed number, sometimes as a negative... [but never as] a positive, whole integer," suddenly realizes that the coefficient he's wooing might be more homicidal than simpatico. The collection's best story, "Alpha and Omega," employs the Greek concept of beginning and end to question the impossibility of closure for Josey when, upon his mother's death, he encounters the priest who abused him thirty years earlier. "Closures offer only more beginnings," Taylor writes. "More alphas with their entangling rhizomes. Who but the most myopic would prescribe *appropriate*, who but the most myopic would desire *closure*, when the in-between of *alpha* and *omega* is what binds us all." And in "The Evening Star," the distant luster of Venus (yes, as the story points out, it's a planet, not a star) symbolizes the burst of intensity Josey covets as he recalls how a now-deceased friend once dove from a pier.

There are moments of delightful oddity, especially "A Perfect Stranger," in which a mocking recreation of Hitler's Beer Hall Putsch and a cameo from Bear Bryant manage to make a pointed political statement about the reactionary right. Taylor also loves to experiment with form; many of the stories employ apostrophes, metatextual conceits, and structures ("Meanwhile on Limestone Street" is divided into three parts—Id, Ego, and Superego—and ends with a self-de-

scribed “Jungian Postscriptum”), and enough literary allusions to pack a *Bartlett’s Familiar Quotations*. Indeed, much of the entertainment of the book comes from these references; *The World’s Thinnest Fat Man* harkens back to a day—c. Richard Fariña—when characters could have a serious conversation about John Paul Sartre without being accused of being pretentious.

Josey’s adventures offer abundant wit and insight to merit repeated reads. Sample a story or two and you’ll come back for more.

Kirk Curnutt

The Bossuet Conspiracy

by Bill Goodson

iUniverse, Inc., 2003
Paper, \$17.95

Bill Goodson’s *The Bossuet Conspiracy* combines international intrigue, religious quests, and good old-fashioned southern politics in a suspense novel that makes an interesting and satisfying read.

Turning partly on the life—or, more accurately, the death—of Trappist monk and author Thomas Merton, the book opens with psychiatrist Winton Sevier “Trey” Crockett

III trying to pull his life together after a nasty divorce and a stint at the Alcohol and Drug Treatment Unit at Oak Valley Retreat in Memphis. Now a regular at his local AA meetings in Nashville, the good doctor is drawn into international hijinks thanks to his close relationship with his uncle, U.S. Senator Jonas Crockett.

Where does Merton fit in? The monk, from the Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky, was a prolific writer and highly influential figure in the Catholic Church. Toward the end of his life, Merton became keenly interested in Asian religions and in fact was attending a conference of Eastern monastic leaders in Bangkok when he died, in 1968, supposedly of accidental electrocution.

His interest in the East brought him into contact with others who shared his broad view of spirituality. Among them was the mother of Manuel Matsaku, now chairman of the board of Matsaku Enterprises and the man behind a plan to create the largest entertainment venue in the world. The location for the project: the military base at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, which, if Trey can swing his uncle’s vote, will soon be closed.

Toss in a few DEA agents, some Mexican mafia, a romance between Trey and the first female speaker of the Tennessee House, who knows more about Matsaku’s plans than she lets on, and it is hard to know who is on which side. This keeps Trey guessing, but equally compelling is what he learns

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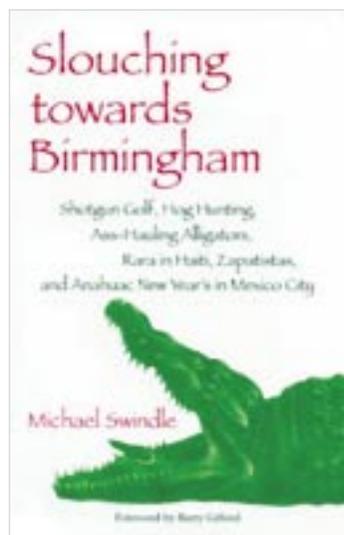
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of “La Societe de Bossuet,” a secret society of priests and monks dating from the 18th century that aimed to “undermine... excessive papal authority and to stem the tide of liberalism wherever it appears in Church circles.” It is possible that Merton’s death has something to do with the Bossuet society, but Goodson keeps the mystery ball in the air until the very end.

Some of Goodson’s best writing is to be found in descriptions of the Abbey of Gethsemani, which surely is a place he knows well. The place is well visualized and both its physicality and its spirituality nicely rendered: “There was a distinctive odor in the church difficult to define, a curious admixture of the brick and wood interior and incense. Trey thought it probably the smell of God.”

Goodson also develops a compelling storyline involving Trey and his children, a college-aged son with whom he is close and a teenaged daughter from whom he is estranged. Young people are among the well-developed characters of the book, which makes this a novel that young adult readers would also enjoy.

Jay Lamar is interim director of the Auburn University Center for the Arts & Humanities and Alabama Center for the Book.



Slouching Towards Birmingham
Shotgun Golf, Hog Hunting, Ass-Hauling Alligators, Rara in Haiti, Zapatistas, and Anahuac New Year’s in Mexico City

by Michael Swindle
Foreword by Barry Gifford

Frog, Ltd., 2005
\$11.95, Paperback

Michael Swindle’s subtitle alone is enough to make cursory readers stop and take notice.

Slouching Towards Birmingham: Shotgun Golf, Hog Hunting, Ass-Hauling Alligators, Rara in Haiti, Zapatistas, and Anahuac New Year’s in Mexico City takes readers on a wild ride through the primitive backwoods South, dumps them off slap dab in the middle of revolution in Haiti and Mexico, and leaves them behind with a trio of eulogies that cause even the most cynical reader to pause for reflection.

Divided into three parts, *Slouching Towards Birmingham* begins its journey in Swindle’s birthplace, the north Mississippi hill country, where the author joins his Uncle Oren to learn the lost art of trapping. With an eye toward sickening detail, Swindle describes the art of baiting deadly steel traps with a homemade concoction of decomposed minnows and dissected muskrat glands. The lone beaver the two catch must be dispatched with a hickory killing stick, leading the

author to conclude, “The furbearers of Mississippi have nothing to fear from me.”

Uncle Oren, 67, retired, and downright ornery, pretty much typifies the “occasionally wild-assed, sometimes mean, often wise” characters who people this section of the book. Swindle’s companions are good ol’ boys who have struck “a pretty good bargain between civilization and country life.”

For better or for worse, this “country life” generally involves some type of blood sport, rituals most southerners have abandoned for air-conditioning, DSL, and satellite TV. Not so, Dovie Naquin, the accordion-playing Cajun who “fishes” for alligators in the south Louisiana bayous. Nor the folks who make cockfighting a family affair and justify their bloodlust by saying that roosters “kill each other in the wild.” Nor Jose and Mexican George who track wild boar with pit bulls and trained curs through the palmetto fronds north of the Everglades. “Guns are for sissies,” one of the hog-hunting party says. These men wrestle the swine, hog tie them, and raise them for slaughter.

Written in sharp, photographic prose, Swindle’s witty essays neither celebrate nor condemn these wild men of the waning South. Swindle dives into each adventure gonzo-style and usually comes away with an appreciation for the creature comforts afforded by his adopted home of New Orleans.

But not all is blood and guts in Swindle’s South. He also experiences some good clean fun with the “rhubarbs” and “nabobs” in the infield at NASCAR’s Charlotte Motor Speedway, shields his ears from the participants in the Annual National Hollerin’ Contest in Spivey’s Corner, South Carolina, and receives tips from the three-time champion of the Annual Interstate Mullet Toss at the Flora-Bama Lounge. The title essay examines the Alabama–Auburn football rivalry and expresses the hope that one day a savior in a hound’s tooth hat will arrive, slouching toward Birmingham, to save the Crimson Tide from its embarrassing defeats in recent Iron Bowls.

Part 2 of the book finds Swindle first in Haiti and then in Mexico City among the paranoia and intrigue of third-world revolution. These settings recall smoky bars, hushed conversations, and open sewers. Swindle appears right at home, complementing his keen wit with snatches of *Kreyol* and *espagnol*, while he traverses the crowds of Carnival in Port-au-Prince and the ZapaTour rock concert in Mexico City.

Swindle ends his book with three eulogies mourning the deaths and celebrating the lives of three of his influences. First comes Gene Crutcher, proprietor of what Allen Ginsberg dubbed the City Lights Bookstore of Birmingham. Crutcher, one part political radical and one part bohemian huckster, nurtured a generation of writers in Central Alabama, Swindle among them.

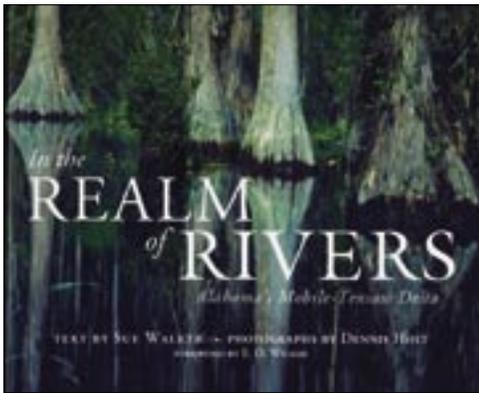
He next recalls Willie Morris, memoirist, novelist, and the youngest editor in *Harper’s Magazine* history. Swindle recalls Morris’ “unbounded generosity, steadfast loyalty, and hilarity of his practical jokes,” including a prank phone call to the campaign headquarters of Louisiana gubernatorial candidate and KKK Grand Wizard David Duke to page Eva Braun.

Swindle leaves readers on November 30, 2001, the day

George Harrison died. Waking in Mexico City, Swindle heard the news on a college radio station usually dedicated to cultural interviews and news and commentary, but on this day dedicated to Harrison's music. Swindle acknowledges that George was not his favorite Beatle, but Harrison's death instills in him some sort of wistful nostalgia for home and an aging generation, Swindle's generation.

At times hysterical, at others poignant, and always well researched, Swindle's fifteen essays take readers on a bumpy swamp buggy ride through the Deep and even deeper South. Swindle best describes his book when he recounts his round of shotgun golf in St. Clair County: "It is perfect for the sensitive guy who likes the outdoors, male bonding, and shooting guns, but doesn't want to kill anything. Sort of like a photo safari, but noisier."

Danny Gamble teaches in the AWF/DYS Writing Our Stories: An Antiviolence Creative Writing Program.



In the Realm of Rivers: Alabama's Mobile-Tensaw Delta

Text by Sue Walker

Photographs by Dennis Holt

Foreword by E. O. Wilson

NewSouth Books, 2005

\$39.95, Hardcover

You can't get any more prestigious than having the foreword of your book written by Edward O. Wilson, Alabama's elderly boyish genius. You get to go around saying, "Well, my book was introduced by somebody who's won two (count 'em), *two* Pulitzer Prizes and one Nobel Gold Medal! Who did the foreword for *your* book?"

Of course there are no two more humble people than Sue Brannan Walker and Dennis Holt, so you'll never hear such words coming out of their mouths. This entire book project is a humble one. Elaborately prepared (the photographs were taken over a twenty-five-year period) and lovingly narrated in both poetry and prose, you might dismiss it as just another lush coffee-table book. But this book is not only eye candy, it's immensely readable. And by the time you've completed this journey, you've been sold on something—maybe on the need to look beauty and fear in the eye simultaneously, perhaps on

the need to stop for a moment now and then and just look up close at things, and listen to what they have to tell you.

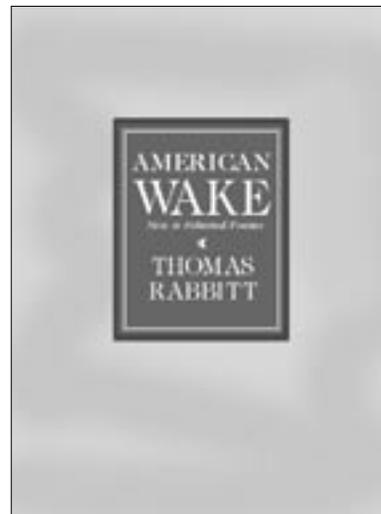
The real test of this book is to place it in the hands of a grandson, in this case, Reed Montgomery Hutton, age 8, who lives on the Fish River outside Fairhope, and just watch what happens. Reed doesn't have any idea that he's holding in his hands the work of Alabama's Poet Laureate, an Emmy-winning photographer, a world-renowned Ant Man...he just looks intently at the photographs and reads a few lines here and there, and falls in love with the book.

"Can I have this book, Poppy?" he asks me. It's the copy Sue Walker has signed for me. The fact that a child craves the company of a book that doesn't contain kickboxing and exploding heads and crashing vehicles is reason enough to hand it over.

"Tell you what, Reed," Poppy (yours truly) says, "I've got to review this book, but when I'm through, it's yours." Reed has no idea what a "review" is, but he does recognize the last two words and smiles ear to ear.

The book has passed the test. Reed is knowledgeable about snakes and spiders and bears and alligators and owls, because he lives near them and is in constant awe of them. Reed names every animal in the book and much of the details of the book are familiar to him. Now he can clasp this book to his chest and lie in bed, gazing in wonder at what you and I will be gazing at in wonder (as soon as I purchase a replacement copy for myself)—a book that makes you feel the timelessness and universality of nature...right here in Alabama!

Jim Reed lives in Birmingham.



*American Wake
New & Selected
Poems*

by Thomas Rabbitt

NewSouth Books, 2005

\$25.00, Hardcover

I once overheard Thomas Rabbitt say that although not every poem can be a great one, every one should at least *try* to be. In *American Wake*, the much-anticipated collection of Rabbitt's selected and new poems,

there is ample evidence of the author's sense of poetic ambition, his belief that poetry should be a grand, not a casual, endeavor. And in poem after poem, from both his oldest work and his newest, we see Rabbitt's fulfillment of that ambition.

The judicious selections the author makes here from his previous five books of poems demonstrate that he is well aware

of where he has most fully succeeded in his poetic ambitions. It must have been difficult for him to choose poems from his first book, *Exile* (1975), since the 52 poems in it are so integrally related in a single narrative. But the ten poems he has selected stand on their own surprisingly well and give the reader a tantalizing glimpse of the whole. The poems culled from the second book, *The Booth Interstate* (1981), are equally strong. As a long-time admirer of this collection of sonnets, I am pleased to see such favorites as “Gargoyle,” “Duchess Booth,” “Views from the Bridge,” and “Teaching My Horses to Read.” *The Abandoned Country* (1988) stands as a pivotal work in Rabbitt’s career—his first collection in which the poems were not bound to a single form. While the results might have been more uneven than the first two books’ achievements, the freedom allowed the poet to discover some of his most memorable poems, among them the striking opening poem “Tortoise,” which is selected here.

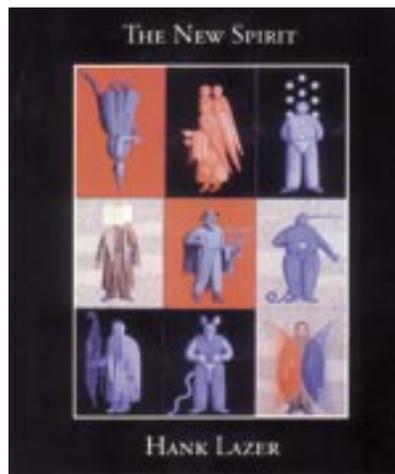
Twelve years passed between *The Abandoned Country* and Rabbitt’s two most recent books, *Enemies of the State* (2000) and *Prepositional Heaven* (2002)—a gap caused primarily by a publisher’s unacceptable delays. But the wait, as they say, was well worth it. I believe these two books are Rabbitt’s most accomplished, containing such extraordinary poems as the deeply affecting “Bernadette Murphy, 1943–1955,” the moving sonnet “The Black Wine of Li Po,” the playful and poignant “On the Old Pop Charts,” the wise and broadly imagined “The Cave of the Winds,” and the equal-parts learned and felt “The Beasts of Coole Park” (interestingly, a return to the 15-line form of *Exile*). All of these poems, as well as a generous selection of others from the last two books, are included in *American Wake*.

Rabbitt’s artistic vision has been appropriately described as “dark.” Among his themes are dysfunctional human relationships, violence, hatred, physical and emotional deterioration, spiritual despair, and exile. So it should come as no surprise that such darkness pervades the fourteen new poems at the end of this volume. The selection is framed by two poems about death, in this case animal death. “To the New World” is about the carcass of a neighbor’s cow that floats down the Clare in Ireland after being unceremoniously dumped in, and “A Field in Tennessee” gives us a dead doe caught in a fence while “[h]er fawns—cute as can be—wait in the weeds / For her to untangle herself from this.” Dark indeed. And yet, as is the case with all of Rabbitt’s work, there is a redemptive undercurrent flowing beneath the surface of these new poems. “A Field in Tennessee” ends with a hint of this: “Like dried blood on barbs deflecting light, / Like the swarm of flies promising new life, / Nothing’s pointless under the spinning sun.” Through poetry, Thomas Rabbitt finds meaning, a “point,” in the most unlikely places. Despite the dismal realities of the world as it is—realities that are unflinchingly reflected in the poems—he finds the beauty of poetry and gives it to his readers as a balm. His work, time and time again, illustrates the capacity of art to redeem.

Rabbitt’s work has been of interest to Alabama readers since he began teaching in 1972 at The University of Alabama in

Tuscaloosa, where he initiated the MFA program in creative writing. Those readers’ interest should be further raised now, as should that of the national poetry community. *American Wake* is an important collection of contemporary American poetry by one of the art’s most underappreciated masters.

Dan Albergotti teaches at Coastal Carolina University in South Carolina. He is the recipient of the 2005 Randall Jarrell/Harperprints Chapbook Competition.



The New Spirit
by Hank Lazer

Singing Horse Press,
2005
\$14, Paperback

Thinking and singing. Thinking about how words induce associations, how the sound and rhythm of poems simulate emotion, how language casts images within a reader’s mind. It’s a music meant to be

read/sung aloud. Lines stretched holding a note—long pauses.

Hank Lazer’s twelfth book of poetry, *The New Spirit* (just nominated for a Pulitzer Prize), presents 10 poems across 70 pages. Four images from *Black and Red I* by Grisha Bruskin interrupt the text—although, thinking about Ezra Pound, language induces imagery and vice versa.

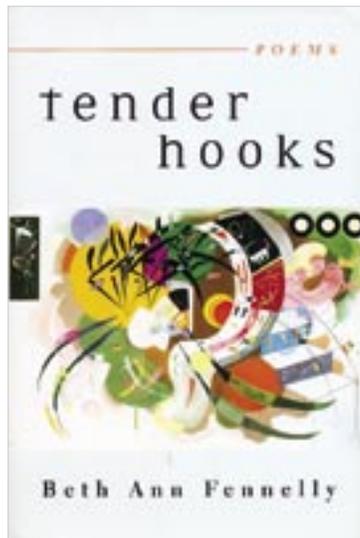
The first square from the Bruskin piece depicts an older man holding a menorah with seven candles instead of eight. The second image depicts a man holding a book of prayer that obscures his face—an intensity of divine words. The third image shows four figures facing left and, perhaps, speaks strongest to Lazer’s journey—a process of facing a spiritual life that is, according to Lazer, “first-hand.” The final image shows a young man overlain by two circles that touch but do not overlap. The man speaks to what is common to the circles, both the old and the new.

what does not change is the
will or disposition to listen
what does change is
which rhythms which combinations of sounds what music one
in his or her time is inclined to listen
to

The old and the new thus have not parted ways but have recognized one another—the lyric of “spirit” within avant-garde writing. To yield completely to the self-absorbed rhetoric often associated with spiritual writing is not Lazer’s course, but neither is he avoiding engagement with the process of inwardness.

Referring to a line from John Taggart's *When the Saints*, Lazer says that what the poet always needs is "the next word." Read *The New Spirit* once, twice, seven times, and it becomes clear that Lazer has indeed been thinking/singing about the next word, the next image, painting word by word symbols of spirit finely unleashed in his innovative style.

Russell Helms



Tender Hooks

by Beth Ann Fennelly

W. W. Norton & Company, 2004

\$23.95, Hardcover

The title of Fennelly's second collection of poems, *Tender Hooks*, is derived from a youthful mishearing of the word "tenterhooks," a word which connotes something hard and binding. The relationships Fennelly describes in this collection—primarily motherhood, but also marriage, daughterhood, and friendship—can be both "tender hooks," as well as "tenterhooks," as Fennelly clarifies in sometimes new and risky visions of the love-pain of connection.

Some may find the poet's language about the birth of her daughter, Claire, somewhat shocking: "I pushed, I pushed so hard I shat, / pushed so hard... my asshole turned inside-out like a rosebud" ("Bite Me"). I admire what I think of as her fearless, "episiotomy" voice, reminiscent of Sharon Olds, but without the confessional heaviness. And whereas Olds often looks back, Fennelly, for the most part, is in the recent past or looking forward: "Whither shall I go? / (Come to Mommy, Claire.) / Whither? / Whither?"

Fennelly's depiction of childbirth is also metaphorical—the struggle between mother and daughter that begins at birth and perhaps never ends. Beyond this, her language is not nearly as visceral or raw as the experience of childbirth itself, which can indeed be "terror and blood spatter," as well as the day "she could swell my breasts with milksong... all meter, music changed."

These poems will not "return home to shame" the poet, as she might fear. Fennelly says in fresh, passionate language what mothers feel but may never be able to express, or never dare. True to psychological study, we are indeed our children's "first lover," said in song in Fennelly's poetry: "I whispered in her see-through ear / I'd keep her safe forever—" ("Once Did I Kiss Her Wetly on the Mouth").

In my favorite long poem in this book, "Telling the Gos-

pel Truth," Fennelly's powers as a poet/mother are on fire in re-creating the Gospel in order to "womanize the Bible" (and perhaps humanize, desanitize it?): "I'd been looking for Mary / like that, / her robes spread, / her knees by her ears, / her veins rivering / the cracked and leaking / bowl of her belly that can hold no more, / and the baby crowning, skulling / through that fringe—" she writes, "let her take the name / of her own sweet son / in vain." In another part of the poem, Fennelly relates a parable, about the loss of her own first child through miscarriage. A bluebird rebuilds its nest in the same place, season after season, although a snake devours the eggs, every time. She wants to tell the bird, "It's okay to move if your home's gone bad."

Fennelly's poetry, however, jolts the reader into the memory that we do come back to create, no matter how many times the snake appears. Perhaps we will write another poem or go on living with the not-so-tender hooks stuck in our "rippling, red gill." And no matter how many times our baby bites us—"six-teeth-brooches" on the collarbone—perhaps we will "have another," live briefly in that "island for two," "single-bodied," where not even Father is allowed in.

I look forward to another of Fennelly's collections. In the wisdom of *Tender Hooks*, I ask in her own words: "Love, / come find me, / and teach me" again.

Bonnie Roberts is a guest poet and lecturer for the University of Alabama in Huntsville, an adjunct English professor at Calhoun Community College, and author of *To Hide in the Light and Dances in Straw with a Two-Headed Calf*.

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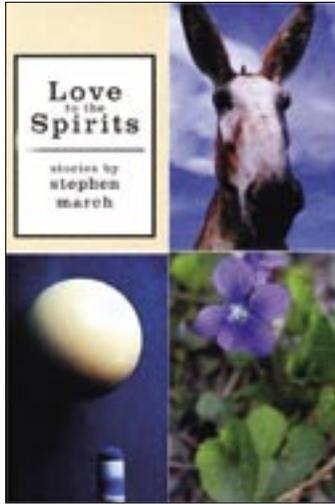
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Love to the Spirits

by Stephen March

River City Publishing,
2004

\$23.95, Hardcover

What do readers get when an author brings together pool sharks, grave-diggers, heartbroken and hopeful mothers, hunters searching for lost high school glory, drivers and the driven, addicts and cold-turkey abstainers shaking with DTs, and children stepping out

of innocence into frightening adulthood? Stephen March's *Love to the Spirits* answers this question with a cacophony of voices that sounds decidedly southern but is ultimately universal. In this collection of short stories, March creates a community of characters founded in reality and entrenched in the traumas of life. Draping these characters in southern accents and colloquialisms like Spanish moss hanging from

live oaks, March imbues his world with a sense of realism that both tantalizes and horrifies, reminding his readers of the cold truths of poverty and the necessity of escape.

Within sixteen tales of human triumph and heartache amid adversity, March carries readers through the gamut of human emotion, helping them to understand what it means to be both human and humane. Revealing feelings that are often kept quiet, as well as predicaments more often open to scrutiny and gossip than to productive analysis, each of March's characters reminds us that, as humans, we all hurt, cry, and dream. Although not all of his characters realize their dreams, each demonstrates the powers of the human spirit to conquer fears and obstacles.

March is fully aware of the duty and power of the storyteller. The opening story of the collection, "Sharks," tells the story of twelve-year-old pool hustler Jenna and her good-intentioned rather than model grandfather, Roy. Rooted in a believable yet heart-wrenching snapshot of Jenna's twelfth year, "Sharks" prepares the reader to grow up and old as Jenna does. With the jaded perspective of one who has been forced to watch a child he loves grow up too fast, Roy opens the voyeuristic eyes of the reader, saying, "America is a big country. People disappear all the time here and are never heard from again." Perhaps March perceives this as his writer's

After three years of hosting an annual storytelling festival, the Alabama Center for the Book made the decision to ramp up its festival programming. This year's festival will feature a variety of authors, storytellers, and performers. The festival will be a great opportunity for book lovers across the state to meet authors and performers in person. The festival will be an opportunity to expose them to the rich literary culture of Alabama.

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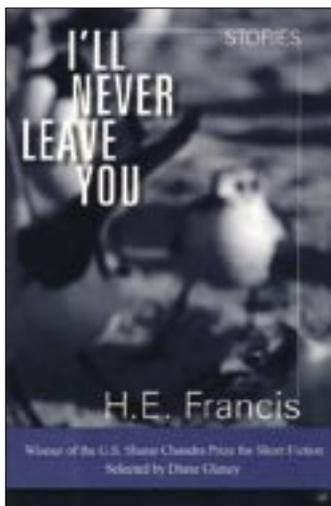
task—harnessing the voices of American figures who are often forgotten and at a risk of being lost.

While there are many affecting moments within this fine collection, the most poignant tale of all is “Starlene’s Baby.” In this tale, March demonstrates his amazing affinity for all people, but particularly women, as he describes one woman’s heartache at not being able to conceive a child and another’s at giving birth to child who is disabled. He approaches this tightrope task with sensitivity and insight, celebrating the mother who can love any child even as he explores this peculiar heartache.

In the final tale of *Love to the Spirits*, March reminds readers of their personal mortality and the importance of seizing each moment. Focusing on the tenuous relationship between fraternal twins Caleb and Brett and their mother, March tackles the question of legacy. What will this mother, who has apparently loved one son too much and the other too little, leave in her wake? She leaves two sons, who, while scattering her ashes into the coastal waters of North Carolina, realize what they need is “a whole new language, one we had never used before.” March’s play with southern culture and language illustrates the necessity of evolving communication.

Despite the heavy themes and trauma-laden tales, March provides a clear window into a southern world that exceeds its regional air and approaches universality with humor and insight. Readers who appreciate skillfully developed characters and stark realism will find themselves engaged by this honest tour of the American South.

Treasure Ingels is a student at the University of Montevallo.



I'll Never Leave You

by H.E. Francis

BkMk Press, 2004

\$14.95, Paperback

I'll Never Leave You, a new collection of short stories by H.E. Francis, stands as a testament not only to the significance of individualism, but the necessity of human contact as well. Francis, winner of the G.S. Sharat Chandra Prize for Short Fiction, creates lively and realistic characters and diverse settings. From the pain that

accompanies the mother of a serial killer to the consequential joy of devoted relationships, this collection explores family, friendships, and romantic love in stories that are unique and heartfelt.

The title story, “I’ll Never Leave You,” attempts to tear down the social constructs that are used to define love. The story centers on Alan, a man who, in his youth, had

the promise to become a renowned opera singer. The reader learns that in the present day, Alan suffers from a terminal illness and is living with Steve and Elsa, who take care of him. What makes the chronology of this story effective is that it functions to highlight the simultaneous importance and impotence of memory—as Alan succumbs to his illness, he, Steve, and Elsa remember their lives together. In the retrospective story, a love affair between Alan and Steve is detailed. Alan gives up his singing career in New York in order to move to Connecticut to be close to Elsa, but more importantly Steve. Elsa discovers that she is pregnant shortly after Alan makes this move; Alan, in turn, becomes a sort of third parent to their kids. All of their lives seem to hinge on this character that most people might see as an interloper on the family, but Francis writes, “Alan is the nucleus here.” The story deals primarily with Steve learning how to let Alan go, as the latter sinks deeper and deeper into his illness. It is a not only a touching story of love gained and lost, but one in which the reality of relationships is explored. Francis suggests that the boundaries of relationships may not be nearly so clean cut as they seem.

“The Boulders” details the highly unlikely friendship that develops between the mother of a serial killer and a victim’s brother. As the story opens, Randolph, Minna’s son, has already been executed for his crimes. Minna struggles with being the mother of a man who killed a number of women as well as one man. One day, Minna notices a man watching her home from the boulders that line the beach. This setting proves vital to the story. Minna explains, “Waves remind me of grief, and then peace—how they come again and again and never cease coming—and how your own grief doesn’t matter except to you, and how ultimately perhaps no grief matters. The boulders have seen it all, and they’re still here.” The man observing Minna from the boulders is Ralph Ridley, the brother of Randolph’s male victim. He refuses to approach her home; the two do meet, however, and discuss his reason for being there—he wants to get to know the mother of the man who killed his brother. Ralph feels that she can come closer to understanding how he feels than anyone else—and he is right. The two form a new and odd version of the mother–son relationship. “The Boulders” is at once a disturbing and moving story.

In another story that explores familial relationships, “The Battered Shore,” Francis delves into the intricacies of brotherhood. The setting is a family picnic by the shore, a reunion for three brothers, their wives, and their parents. The brothers, Chet, Ron, and Ben, had another brother, Dean, who drowned twenty years earlier. This reunion is the first since that death. While waiting for lunch to be served, Ben, Chet, and Ron get into a discussion that grows into an argument over Dean’s death. The four young men had been swimming together, and Chet dared Dean to swim a treacherous area, knowing that Dean never turned down a dare. As in most of the stories in *I’ll Never Leave You*, memory becomes an integral factor in the dialogue and the characterization. After Ron claims that he cannot remember all the events of the

day Dean died, Ben accuses, “Some moments are *never* too far back to remember, Ron. Dean said—let me remind you what Dean said. He said, ‘I guess I can’t swim that cauldron.’” Ben’s anger has been simmering for all of these years, culminating in this argument and resulting in some of Francis’s most compelling dialogue. The writer sympathetically denotes the realism of such a crisis and the fact that there are some events that can even tear brothers apart forever.

At some points in the nine stories of *I’ll Never Leave You*, Francis offers the reader mere glimpses into the psyches of his characters; at other times, he provides full-on voyeuristic gapes at their lives. The intrigue is in never knowing which is going to be the case when.

Meredith Hubbard is a graduate student at the University of Montevallo.

Double Vision

by George Garrett

University of Alabama Press, 2004
\$24.95, Hardcover

George Garrett probably enjoyed imagining the ironic position *Double Vision* would create for its reviewers.

Released as a novel under The University of Alabama Press’s Deep South Books imprint, *Double Vision* features two characters who are in the process of writing book reviews. One of these characters is Garrett himself, struggling with personal and professional angst as he considers the task of reviewing a biography of fiction writer Peter Taylor. Taylor, who died in 1994, had been Garrett’s next-door neighbor in Charlottesville, Virginia.

The other review-writer is Frank Toomer, a hypothetical character Garrett conceives as he worries and otherwise distracts himself from his current assignment. Like Garrett, Frank has been asked to review a biography of a deceased neighbor and fellow writer. And also like Garrett, Frank is a 70-something professor emeritus and writer of literary fiction who is recovering from a serious illness and feeling intensely aware of his mortality.

The book Garrett is reviewing is real, and a copy of the review that was published in *The Washington Times* appears near the end of *Double Vision*. However, the distinction between what’s real and what’s fictional is blurred for pretty much everything else in the novel, making for a powerfully cerebral—and surprisingly touching—reading experience.

“Can you legitimately tell a whole story about a man who is writing a book review?” This question opens the second chapter of *Double Vision*. Garrett certainly can tell such a story legitimately. If nothing else, the position of reviewing a deceased acquaintance’s biography is one of distinct privilege. On the most basic level, there is the fact

of the reviewer’s own continuing life. Further, there is the unavoidable recognition of how much biographers omit, along with the inevitable forecasting of what one’s own biographers will gloss over, get wrong, ignore, or completely overlook. And finally, in Garrett’s particular case, there is regret about his never fully realized relationship with Taylor.

Garrett freely admits that writing *Double Vision* may be his attempt to “do the impossible—to replay, to rerun the sequence of my relationship to Peter Taylor one more time in one more version, in order to assuage my commonplace guilt at not being a better friend, or at least a better next-door neighbor....”

Whether *Double Vision* gives Garrett a version of himself that is more satisfying than the “real” version may be the motivating concern of the novel; however, the book is ultimately about a writer’s reverence for his subject, whatever that subject might be. For Garrett, Henry Hoyns Professor of Creative Writing Emeritus at the University of Virginia and author of thirty-four books in multiple genres, even the seemingly impersonal task of writing a book review becomes an activity teeming with context.

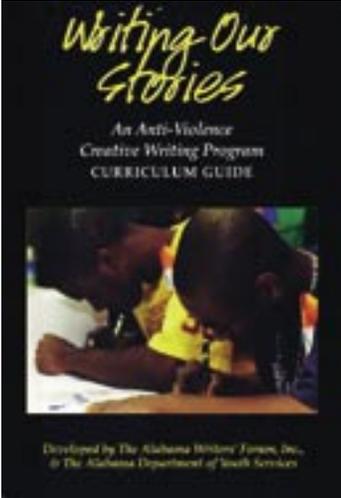
Frank Toomer, *Double Vision*’s fictional reviewer, seems to exist as an outlet for Garrett’s creative impulse as he contemplates how to write about a book that disappoints him. Frank, like Garrett, engages in a great deal of reflection and self-questioning as he avoids his assignment; however, unlike Garrett, Frank eventually decides not to write the review that so troubles him. He apologizes to the *The Washington Times* book editor with affecting simplicity and sincerity: “this is one that I just couldn’t handle, though it took me a long time to admit this to myself.”

While *Double Vision* is far from a celebration of the book reviewer’s position, it is definitely a notable work that recognizes the complexity of the kinds of judgments reviewers are expected to make.

Double Vision is also about how a writer develops a fictional character, his world, and his history. Garrett’s meta-discourse provides an authoritative account of the creative process’s simultaneous realness and artificiality. “I want to give Frank a brother,” Garrett writes at one point. “It is the brother (younger or older?) who, like my own Uncle Fred, could be far away from all this, living in a driftwood shack nestled amid sand dunes on the upper East Coast...of Florida.... He would bathe his lean, tanned old body in the surf of the beach. He would have a long, shaggy, tangled gray beard and wild white hair.”

There is something very endearing when someone confides his wishes, weaknesses, and fears to us. *Double Vision* offers a very real and very generous human connection, as well as a version of authorship that is breathtakingly rich with meaning.

Glenda Conway is an associate professor of English at the University of Montevallo.



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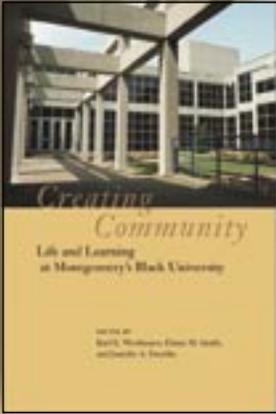
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EDITED BY KARL E. WESTHAUSER, ELAINE M. SMITH, AND JENNIFER A. FREMLIN

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BOOKS RECEIVED

Gone Home
 Southern Folk Gravestone Art
*by Jack and Olivia Solomon, with
 photography by Suzannah Solomon*
 NewSouth Books, 2004
 \$19.95, Paperback

Four decades ago folklorists Jack and Olivia Solomon began visiting and documenting southern cemeteries. In this volume they reveal their love and respect for the “final respecting places” of this world.

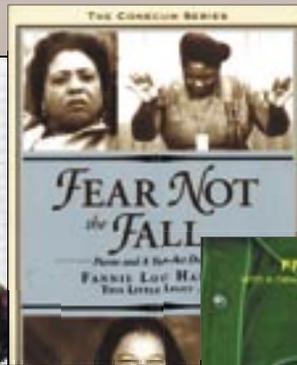
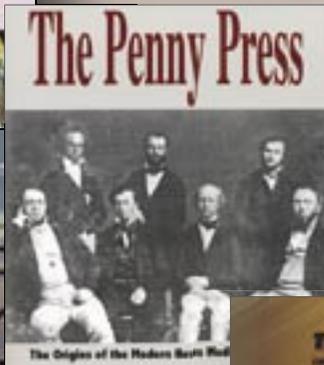


Course of the Waterman
by Nancy Taylor Robinson
 River City Publishing, 2004
 \$23.95, Hardcover

Set on the Chesapeake Bay’s Eastern Shore, this powerful tale is the coming-of-age story of a seventeen-year-old boy, his tough and determined little sister, his best friend, and his best friend’s bitter, alcoholic father.

Fear Not the Fall / Fannie Lou Hamer This Little Light...
by Billie Jean Young
 NewSouth Books, 2004
 \$13.95, Paperback

In three dozen poems and a two-act play, Billie Jean Young honors the tradition of struggle, resistance, and survival common to generations of women descended from African slaves.



The Indestructible Man
by William Jablonsky
 Livingston Press, 2005
 \$14.95, Paperback

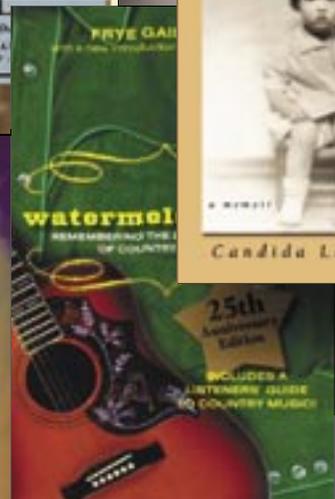
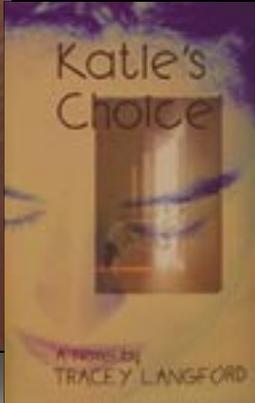
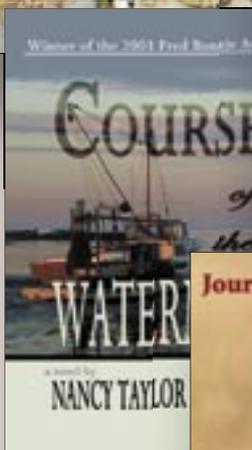
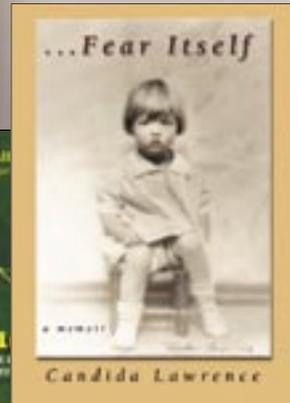
This volume of short stories by Jablonsky is marked by fabulously unbelievable plots and his own brand of magical realism.

...Fear Itself
by Candida Lawrence
 Unbridled Books, 2004
 \$19.95, Hardcover

The third of Lawrence’s memoirs, *Fear Itself* rises from her life-long awareness of human fragility. Unwittingly exposed to low-level radiation in the 1940s, Lawrence learns to believe herself into wholeness and survive her disappointments until there is nothing left to fear—but fear itself.

Katie’s Choice
by Tracey Langford
 Cladach Publishing, 2003
 \$14.97, Paperback

The story of a young woman’s choice to have an abortion and the consequences thereof, this novel is a moving tale of



redemption that chronicles an emotional journey out of self-loathing and spiritual denial into hope and life-changing love.

Journey to Bom Goody

by Karen Heuler

Livingston Press, 2005
\$14.95, Paperback

Karen Heuler's new novel carries us to the Amazon River where a retired electronics salesman is conducting a "social experiment" by delivering VCRs and portable electric generators to isolated natives along the river.

A Rogue's Paradise

Crime and Punishment in Antebellum Florida, 1821-1861

by James M. Denham

The University of Alabama Press, 1997/2005
\$39.95, Hardcover; \$39.95, Paperback

Denham traces the growth and social development of this sparsely settled region through its experience with crime and punishment.

The Penny Press

The Origins of the Modern News Media, 1833-1861

by Susan Thompson

Vision Press, 2004
\$21.95, Paperback

Susan Thompson chronicles the rise of the first mass circulation newspapers, a history marked with the establishment of journalism's preoccupation with news of crime and crisis.

Your Lolita

by D.B. Wells

Livingston Press, 2004
\$14.95, Paperback

This intriguing collection of short stories follows the relationship between a young woman and an older man and proves that the line between seducer and seducee can quickly blur.

Tartts: Incisive Fiction from Writers

Edited by Joe Taylor with Debbie Davis, Gerald Jones, and Tina Jones

Livingston Press, 2005
\$14.95, Paperback

A collection of the finalists from the First Annual Tartt Fiction Award Contest, the stories in this volume reveal the richness of the American short, running from bizarre to harsh to drolly comic.

Mother Was a Rebel

In Praise of Gentle People

by Helen F. Blackshear

NewSouth Books, 2004
\$17.95, Paperback

Within her world in the South in early to mid-20th century, the future poet shows us love, loss, happiness, grief, and perhaps above all, zest for living and wisdom to endure.

Watermelon Wine

Remembering the Golden Years of Country Music

by Frye Galliard

NewSouth Books, 2004
\$19.95, Paperback

Originally published in 1978, Galliard's history has been praised for its honest, unsentimental examination of the compassion as well as the passion behind authentic country music.

When We Were Saints

by Han Nolan

Harcourt, 2003
\$17, Hardcover; \$6.95, Paperback

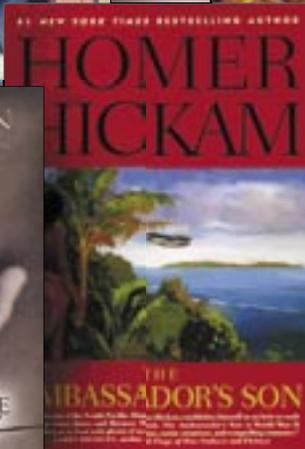
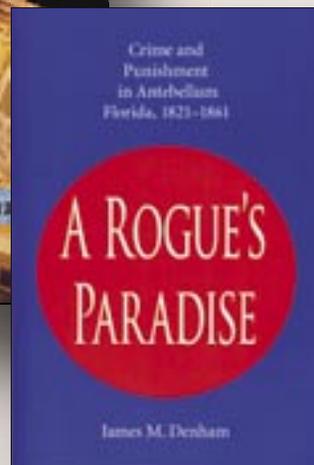
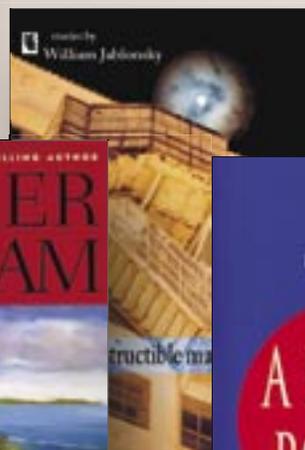
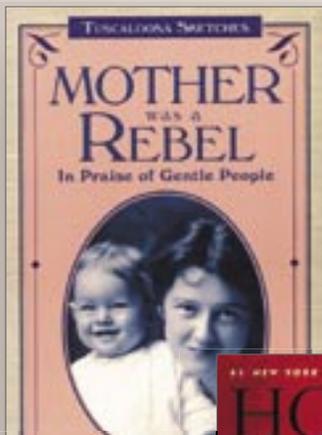
The story of a young man fulfilling a challenge bestowed upon him by his dying grandfather, Nolan deftly plumbs the divine ties of faith and forgiveness that connect us all.

The Ambassador's Son

by Homer Hickam

St. Martin's Press, 2005
\$24.95, Hardcover

In this second book in Hickam's World War II adventure series, Captain Josh Thurlow teams up with PT Boat Commander Jack Kennedy on a devil-may-care mission in the South Pacific.



Here's to You

MOHAWKS FOUNDATION CELEBRATES PUBLICATION OF JOE FORMICHELLA'S *HERE'S TO YOU JACKIE ROBINSON: The Legend of the Prichard Mohawks*

by Lovelace Cook

On May 27 and 28, 2005, the Mohawks Foundation and MacAdam/Cage Publishing celebrated the publication of Joe Formichella's book *Here's to You Jackie Robinson: The Legend of the Prichard Mohawks*, which chronicles the history of the Prichard Mohawks all-Negro Baseball Team. Former players, family members, and friends gathered on Friday night for the Mohawks Foundation banquet at Mobile's Admiral Semmes Hotel where Formichella signed books and received a commemorative plaque from Stephani Norwood, president of the nonprofit foundation. MacAdam/Cage publisher David Poindexter hosted a gala dinner-dance on Saturday night at the historic Museum of Mobile. Poindexter received a silver champagne cup from Jesse Norwood Jr., son of Jesse Norwood, founder of the Prichard Mohawks. The following photos tell the story.



Mohawks Foundation Board Member Suzanne Hudson watches AWF board member John Hafner give author Joe Formichella books to sign during the Mohawks Foundation reception on May 27, 2005.



MacAdam/Cage Publisher David Poindexter receives an engraved silver champagne cup from Jesse Norwood during the dinner-dance the publisher hosted to commemorate the debut of Joe Formichella's novel.



AWF board member and Springhill College English professor John Hafner joins Mrs. Marion Brown, wife of former Mohawks catcher Marion Brown and director of the Baldwin County Boys & Girls Club, and Jesse Norwood, son of the founder of the Prichard Mohawks.



Former Prichard Mohawks player Leroy Bennett autographs a baseball for Mohawks Foundation President Stephani Norwood.



Author Joe Formichella; Stephani Norwood, President of the Mohawks Foundation; Jesse Norwood Jr., and David Poindexter, Publisher, MacAdam/Cage Publishing, celebrate the Prichard Mohawks at a dinner-dance held on May 28, 2005, at the Museum of Mobile. ALL PHOTOS BY LOVELACE COOK

Juvenile Offenders in Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi Create **ART CAR FOR CHARITY**

In an unprecedented initiative, juvenile offenders from Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi worked together to design and create a traveling work of art for charity.

Named "ArtCarTraz," the art car began at the Alabama Department of Youth Services facility at Mt. Meigs, Alabama, on May 2, traveled to the Oakley Training School outside of Jackson, Mississippi, and was completed at the Bridge City Correctional Center for Youth outside of New Orleans, Louisiana several weeks later.

A mobile work-in-progress mural, ArtCarTraz was created using paint donated by Auto Air Colors one section at a time by the juvenile offenders housed at these correctional facilities. The Southwest Correctional Arts Network (SCAN) served as fiscal agent and advisor to the project.

Once ArtCarTraz was completed, project creator Anne Kristoff of New York, New York, drove the 1998 Buick LeSabre to Houston, Texas, where it took top honors in the youth division of the city's much beloved annual Everyone's Art Car Parade, now in its 17th year. The parade was produced by the Orange Show Center for Visionary Art on May 14. Prior to the parade on Saturday, several of the art cars toured neighborhood schools, letting youngsters see art cars up close.

Kristoff, a former recording industry executive, envisioned a project that would be created by incarcerated youth to benefit children of incarcerated parents. Before the project was launched, Kristoff said, "ArtCarTraz hopes to raise awareness about the important benefits of institutional arts programming." Kristoff used her contacts in the recording industry to garner contributions to the project, including cash gifts from recording artists Cindy Lauper and Simply Red.

Following the parade, ArtCarTraz was



ANNE KRISTOFF

purchased through donations, and the proceeds donated to Skip, Inc., a Montgomery, Alabama-based organization that provides programs and assistance to children of incarcerated parents.

According to SCAN board member Grady Hillman, a project involving a portable arts project that was created by youth in three states is unique as well as powerful. "Arts-based programs for juvenile offenders are highly em-

powering and transforming for the participants," said Grady Hillman. "These programs reduce the risk factors that cause youth to be susceptible to crime by increasing communication skills, conflict management techniques, and positive peer associations. Evaluation studies in this area confirm that arts programs are as effective in deterring juvenile crime as any other juvenile justice treatment methodology."

By designing and painting the car in order to raise money to benefit a specific population of at-risk youth, kids who participated in ArtCarTraz engaged in the process of restorative justice, using their work and talent to give back to the community, according to Hillman.

In addition to SCAN, the Alabama Writer's Forum, Inc., Communities in Schools Greenwood/LeFlore (Mississippi), the Louisiana Office of Youth Development, and the Orange Show Center for Visionary Art in Houston, Texas facilitated the creation of ArtCarTraz.

For more information about ArtCarTraz, contact Anne Kristoff at akristoff@nyc.rr.com. See pictures of the process of creating an art car at www.artcartraz.photosite.com/ArtCarTraz.



JEANIE THOMPSON



ArtCarTraz rolled in the Everyone's Art Car Parade in Houston, TX, on May 14, along with 200 other art cars. Thousands of people, young and old, lined the parade route and cheered the unique car painted by incarcerated juveniles in three Southern states. ArtCarTraz won top honors in the Youth Division.

A student at the Mt. Meigs facility paints the ArtCarTraz Web site on the bumper of the art car during the first phase of the painting project. As the car drove from one facility to the next, the creators hoped people would visit the Web site.

Literary News



Rick Bragg

Pulitzer Prize winning journalist RICK BRAGG will join

the University of Alabama journalism department in the College of Communication and Information Sciences as a professor of writing. Bragg, a native of Piedmont, Ala., has worked as a

reporter for the *Anniston Star*, the *Birmingham News*, the *St. Petersburg Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *New York Times*. Bragg was awarded a Pulitzer Prize in 1996 in feature writing for his “elegantly written stories about contemporary America.” He is a recipient of the Clarence Cason Award for Nonfiction Writing, a nationally distinguished prize that is presented annually by the UA journalism department. Bragg’s best-selling memoir, *All Over but the Shoutin’*, recounts his days growing up poor in rural Alabama. His other books include *Ava’s Man*, *Somebody Told Me*, and *I’m a Soldier, Too: The Jessica Lynch Story*.



Sena Jeter Naslund

NASLUND named Kentucky Poet Laureate, 2005-2007

Governor Ernie Fletcher recently appointed Sena Jeter Naslund as Kentucky Poet Laureate. She will be responsible for promoting the literary arts in Kentucky through

readings of her work at meetings, seminars, and conferences across the state. Naslund is Distinguished Teaching Professor at the University of Louisville and Program Director of the Spalding University Master of Fine Arts in Writing. She is also the editor of the literary magazine *The Louisville Review*. “The purpose of the Kentucky Poet Laureate Program is to honor outstanding Kentucky writers and promote the literary arts of the state,” said Gov. Fletcher. “Considering Dr. Naslund’s impressive background and passion for the written word, we believe she is an exceptional candidate for this appointment.”



Dan Albergotti

ALBERGOTTI Wins Randall Jarrell/Harperprints Poetry Chapbook Competition

Dan Albergotti’s *Charon’s Manifest* won the 2005 Randall Jarrell/Harperprints Poetry Chapbook Competition. The chapbook will be published later this year by Harperprints of Henderson, NC. Albergotti will also receive a prize of \$200, and have a reading and reception in his honor in the Greensboro area. Albergotti is a native of South Carolina with BA and MA degrees in English from Clemson University and a Ph.D. in English from The University of South Carolina. After teaching stints at Alabama and Auburn, he moved to Greensboro in 2000 where he completed his

MFA in poetry at UNC-Greensboro and served as the poetry editor of the *Greensboro Review*. Since the fall of 2003 he has taught English at Elon University. During the summer of 2004 he was a fellow at the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts and the Richard Soref Scholar in Poetry at the Bread Loaf Writers’ Conference. Beginning in the fall, he will be assistant professor of English at Coastal Carolina. His poems have been published in *Ascent*, *Mid-American Review*, *Meridian*, *The Southern Review*, and the *Virginia Quarterly Review*.



Norbert Butz

Norbert Butz Wins Tony

On May 5, Norbert Butz, a 1993 graduate of the Alabama Shakespeare Festival's professional Actor Training/Master of Fine Arts Program MFA in theater program, accepted the Tony Award for Best Performance by a Leading Actor in a Musical for his role in *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*.

Now a successful Broadway actor, Butz is best remembered by Alabama audiences as the actor who brought to life the lead character in Dennis Covington's young adult novel *Lizard* as a resident member of the ASF company. *Lizard* was a Southern Writers' Project production and was staged again in the 1996 Olympic Arts Festival in Atlanta.



Charlie Rose and Randy Shoults

River City Publishing Garners Awards

River City Publishing announced that three of its titles have won awards. Stephen March's debut collection of short fiction, *Love to the Spirits* [reviewed in this issue], won a 2005 IPPY (Independent Publisher Book Award) for short fiction. Nancy Taylor Robson's *Course of the Waterman*, a coming-of-age novel set on Chesapeake Bay, was named a ForeWord Magazine Book of the Year Bronze Winner for Literary Fiction. *Course of the Waterman* was the 2004 Fred Bonnie Memorial Contest winner for best first novel. Kevin Pilkington's collection of poems *Ready to Eat the Sky* was an IPPY semi-finalist in the poetry category. Andrew Hudgins edits the River City Poetry Series. These awards were announced on June 3rd at Book Expo America in New York.



Priscilla Hancock Cooper

HANCOCK COOPER Nominated for 2005 Children's Advocate Award

Birmingham poet **Priscilla Hancock Cooper** was nominated for the 2005 Children's Advocate Award by Child-care Resources and was honored with 19 other nominees at a luncheon March 30, 2005, in Birmingham. Cooper has taught in the Alabama Writers' Forum's "Writing Our Stories" program at Sequoyah School in Chalkville, Alabama since 1998. She is a writer, performing artist, and consultant and coordinates the Birmingham Cultural Alliance that strives to enhance cultural literacy and academic achievement of disadvantaged inner city students through afterschool programs.

Alabama Artists on the Radio Every Tuesday at 7:00 P.M.

Each week, staff members with the State Arts Council will be visiting with Alabama's musicians, painters, sculptors, writers, and other special individuals who contribute to the state's rich artistic traditions. This special radio series will air every Tuesday evening, from 7:00 P.M. - 7:30 P.M., on the State Public Radio network. The Troy State Public Radio network consists of WTSU 89.9 (serving Montgomery and Troy); WRWA 88.7 (serving Dothan); and WTJB 91.7 (serving Columbus and Phenix City). WTSU broadcasts news, cultural and informational programs and is affiliated with National Public Radio, Public Radio International, the Associated Press and the Alabama Broadcasters Association.

Hear 2004-05 ASCA literature fellowship award winner Charlie Rose this fall on Alabama Artists on the Radio. He was interviewed by ASCA literature program officer Randy Shoults at the offices of the Alabama Center for the Book in Auburn in July.

With this issue of First Draft, we thank outgoing editor Jay Lamar

Jay Lamar has written for *First Draft* since 1994 when the Forum relocated to Pebble Hill, home of the Auburn University Center for the Arts and Humanities. A few years later Jay agreed to take on the role of book review editor. One of the most cumbersome jobs on any magazine, book review editor requires the organizational skill of an air-traffic controller combined with the tact of an ambassador. Jay has deftly matched titles matched with reviewers and has presented a rich view of Alabama writers and publishers.

Around 2000 she began editing the magazine in earnest but kept herself quietly in the background much of the time. During Jay's tenure as editor, the magazine's editorial content has grown in depth and breadth. Jay has developed a stable of book reviewers and genre editors, as well as other freelance writers. Before each issue, we always put our heads together about the magazine's overall menu, but Jay has been the one to pull it all together with assignments and details, and working tirelessly with our talented, resourceful designer Faith Nance (also of Auburn) to create the magazine you read today. The first issue of *First Draft* was a black and white eight-pager. Need I say more?

One of my favorite collaborations with Jay was for cover story on Kathryn Tucker Windham. We drove to her house in Selma with Jay's sister Katie who shot the photographs of Kathryn lying in a hammock and working with her camera. Kathryn took us to her favorite local barbeque restaurant where we had lunch and she showed us how to make a snake out of a straw wrapper. Another favorite was the Daniel Wallace issue, with a feature story on the making of Tim Burton's film *Big Fish* based on Wallace's novel, and the writer/



KATIE SMITH

Jay Lamar

artist's priceless drawing of "Little Known Alabama Writers" on the cover.

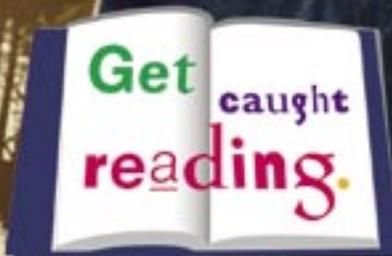
What Jay Lamar has done for the Alabama Writers' Forum is help to establish a standard of excellence for *First Draft*. People read the magazine to find out what is happening with writers and writing in Alabama. I like to call it the "journal of literary record" in our state. Because of budget constraints we are only publishing twice a year, but the magazine is 48-pages long, and all issues are archived on our Web site.

For the past year, Jay has served as interim director of the Auburn University Center for the Arts and Humanities and the Alabama Center for the Book. She has given the Forum the best of her editorial ability, her talent, her patience, and her tremendous moral support. She'll maintain a presence in these pages with a regular column about the work of the Alabama Center for the Book and other matters of literary interest.

Jay, I know you dodge the limelight, but please, step out and take your bow, accept this bouquet from the Alabama Writers' Forum, and know that we will try to do what you would do—produce a magazine that is anticipated, and *read!*

Jeanie Thompson, Executive Director of the Alabama Writers' Forum, is author of three collections of poetry, and co-editor with Jay Lamar of The Remembered Gate: Memoirs by Alabama Writers.

**Emmylou Harris
reads
*Pilgrim at
Tinker Creek***



Support the Arts

Purchase a "Support the Arts" car tag and help support the Alabama Writers' Forum and other organizations offering arts education programs in Alabama. Your \$50 registration fee is tax deductible.



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