

FIRST DRAFT

THE JOURNAL OF THE ALABAMA WRITERS' FORUM • FALL 2007

WADE HALL

An Afternoon Visit in Union Springs

THE STATE OF SOUTHERN FICTION
Forty-five Years Later Faulkner Still Looms Large

THE PROFIT OF PERSEVERANCE
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THE YEATS SUMMER SCHOOL
Alabamians Study in Ireland



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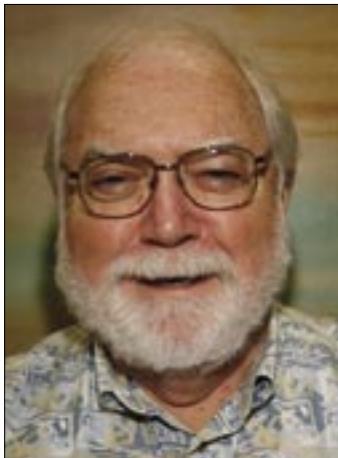
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First Draft is a journal for writers, readers, editors, publishers, and those who support and work in the literary arts.

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Alabama Writers' Forum

A Vibrant Literary Community

People join organizations for many different reasons: for fun: bridge groups, gourmet dining clubs; for knowledge: book clubs, lecture series, libraries; for adventure: a cruise to Bora Bora, a trek in Tibet, a safari in Kenya; for money: an investment club, an IRA; for philanthropy: the Salvation Army, the friends of the opera, an art museum.

Readers of this column have joined the Alabama Writers' Forum for all the above reasons: for *First Draft* with its interesting and enjoyable articles and for its promotion of new books and the many literary programs

throughout Alabama; for our Writing Our Stories: An Anti-Violence Creative Writing Program for juvenile offenders under the care of the Department of Youth Services; for our support of literary festivals in Birmingham, Montevallo, and other places throughout the state; and for the honor of selecting the recipient of the Harper Lee Award, given every year to an outstanding Alabama writer at the Alabama Writers Symposium in Monroeville; and, best of all for me, for the pleasure of reading about books and writers and the insights received from perceptive commentary on the Alabama literary scene.

Several days ago I was urging a new colleague to join the Alabama Writers' Forum and mentioned the stimulation I receive as a member of a vibrant literary community centered on participation in the Forum and the activities it sponsors or co-sponsors in the state. It was the "vibrant literary community" that convinced her to join. "That's what I've missed in the other places I've lived," she said. "And I'm glad to know I can find it here."

The Alabama Writers' Forum is a fun and stimulating club for people who read and write, for people who enjoy talking and laughing and worrying and commiserating and laughing some more about the human condition, and for people who enjoy ideas and the beauty of language in expressing those ideas and thereby bringing us closer to understanding what it means to be human.

John H. Hafner
AWF Board Member

Founded in 1992, the Alabama Writers' Forum is a not-for-profit, statewide literary arts service organization whose mission is to advance the art of writing by promoting writers, educating young writers, and cultivating Alabama's literary arts. The Forum partners with other not-for-profit arts organizations, schools, libraries, and like-minded entities across the state in a range of public programs and educational endeavors. Some of its partners include the Alabama Alliance for Arts Education, the Alabama Center for the Book / Caroline Marshall Draughon Center for the Arts and Humanities, Auburn University College of Liberal Arts, the Alabama Department of Youth Services, and Alabama Southern Community College. In addition, the Forum works in communities to promote local literary arts programming and to support teachers of creative writing.

Sustaining funding for the Alabama Writers' Forum comes from our major partner, the Alabama State Council on the Arts, with additional funds from our extensive membership base, education contracts, individual contributions, and corporate commitments. Additional funds for special projects have come from the Alabama Children's Trust Fund, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Southern Arts Federation, and the "Support the Arts" Car Tag Fund.

In This Issue

Vol. 14, No. 1 • Fall 2007



Conecuh Person 4

An Afternoon Visit With Wade Hall

MARIANNE MOATES

Turning 8

One Poet's Story

JANICE HARRINGTON

From the Lake Isle of Innisfree 10

Alabamians Study Yeats in Ireland

JENNIFER HORNE

Bronze Sculpture in Tuscan Town Symbolizes New Friendship 12

JEANIE THOMPSON



2007 High School Literary Arts Awards 14

Alabama's Talented Young Writers

Waving Our Hearts Out to the Dixie Express 16

Writing Southern Fiction Forty-five Years After Faulkner's Death

ANITA GARNER

Network, Read, & Write, Write, Write 18

The Profit of Perseverance

ELIZABETH VIA BROWN

An Unthinkable Generosity 22

Twenty Years of Poetry by Dennis Sampson

LOUIE SKIPPER

Thank You 25

A Fond Farewell 26

Jimmy Lee Sudduth and Nora Ezell

GEORGINE CLARKE

Executive Director's Journal 30

How We Talk To You

JEANIE THOMPSON





Wade Hall in front of the Log Cabin Museum in Union Springs.

Conecuh Person

AN AFTERNOON VISIT WITH WADE HALL

by Marianne Moates

WADE HENRY HALL awakes each morning in the country to the calls of bobwhite quail. A rooster crows and sunlight streams through the windows of the simple white farmhouse his father built many years before. The front bedroom is Hall's. "Built with love," Hall says. It includes floor-to-ceiling shelves with books squishing out. "This from a man who never read a book," Hall says with a warm smile and eyes that glisten in reminiscence of days that belong to the past. Hall reaches for a few of the books he has written, co-authored, or helped shape into publishable form. He is particularly proud of his new play, *One Man's Lincoln*, and of his book, *Conecuh People: Words of Life from the Alabama Black Belt*. They are indeed words of life, dear to Hall because in this book he preserved the people he knew as a boy—from his beloved grandmother to aunts, uncles, and neighbors.

"Every person has a story," he says, and their stories form the basis of Hall's play, *Conecuh People*, performed each April in Union Springs. The book almost did not get published because big city publishers and editors who read it said the people in the book "are not important enough" to be published. Hall was incensed. "How can people in other parts of the

country be important, and *our people* down South not be important?" Enter Randall Williams of NewSouth Books in Montgomery who read it and told Hall, "I may lose my shirt, but I will be glad I published this."

The book is redolent of home in the Black Belt, and the places sacred to Hall. The house Hall calls home has stained glass windows installed here and there, brought from his travels and former homes he shared with his friend and companion of more than thirty years, Gregg Swem. It is a home filled with antiques, overstuffed furniture, rocking chairs, quilts on the beds, art work and photographs on the walls, books and more books. One bedroom that he refers to as "my mother's room" has the bed she was born in and birthed four of her five baby boys in. In the kitchen with knotty pine paneling, tomatoes freshly picked from their garden await chopping, grinding, and steaming into a delicious concoction known as "Wade's Homemade Tomato Soup." It is to die for! Hall serves the steaming soup with a dollop of sour cream, and on the side, a BLT made with crisp bacon, tiny garden lettuce, and thinly sliced tomatoes on toasted bread. Hall and Swem could open a restaurant and draw a crowd from as far away as Atlanta.

But edible food is not what Wade Hall wants to deliver

to the masses these days. His quest is to give homespun, down-to-county intellectual food through his writing and thus preserve a culture that is disappearing. Technology has arrived in the far corners of Bullock County. Miles that once separated city from country no longer exist. Today SUVs zip up and down the highway with drivers talking into headphones. The first time Hall talked on a telephone was his freshman year at Troy State Teacher's College (now Troy University). He was sixteen, the same age his mother was when she birthed him.

As he neared retirement, Hall felt more and more drawn to the soil and people that nurtured his youth near Union Springs. "It was time to come home," he says, after nearly three decades of living in Kentucky where he taught at Kentucky Southern College and Bellarmine University, a Catholic school where he teased the nuns, fathers, and brothers by saying he had joined their faculty to "bring them some religion." He says he did not fear the Catholic Church. "It is not the monolithic monster most people think it is. It's not as well organized as the Southern Baptist Convention," he says with a laugh.

"My Kentucky friends do not understand why in the world I would want to leave Kentucky to come to the backwoods of Alabama, but this is where I am from." Hall is grateful for the opportunities he had teaching English then chairing the English and Humanities/Arts programs at Kentucky Southern and Bellarmine. "I got to know the richest of the rich and poorest of the poor in meaningful, creative ways." Books, plays, a television interview program, and opportunities to influence the brains of young college students sprang from his Kentucky years. But the soil and the blood of his ancestors formed Wade Hall as surely as the conjoining of the Pea and the Conecuh Rivers formed Union Springs.

Hall had an epiphany of sorts when he began to think that the culture of the region that formed him was slipping away. As a country boy, he knew the ways of the farmer and small store owner, knew the language, music, and religious convictions of his people. He remembered his youth and the challenges he had overcome to make a new life. "Most of my senior year at Inverness High School, I was fifteen years old. My parents didn't know much about college. I never fit in and I knew it. I was interested in reading and writing."

His great-aunt Emma O'Steen offered to take him in and let him live with her in Troy while attending college. Hall jumped at the chance. "Troy was the gateway out," he says. "A lot of the students in Troy in those days were from families who had no tradition of college. They were the first in their families to attend college. It was cheap and you could immediately get a job teaching when you got through."

He taught school in Opp, served two years in the military where he was stationed in Germany, and then returned to the University of Alabama for a master's degree. He eventually earned a Ph.D. at the University of Illinois. He took his

talents to the University of Florida, then ultimately to Louisville, where he spent the bulk of his esteemed career. He wrote hundreds of articles, poems, essays, and reviews. He served as editor of the *Kentucky Poetry Review* and for fifteen years, he hosted a weekly interview program at WKPC-TV, the public television affiliate in Louisville.

Hall was always interested in religion. His answer to people who ask how a liberal like Hall can be a Southern Baptist, he said he is not one. He is a "radical Baptist."

Hall has had years to mull over his roots and form his life philosophy. Descended from hard working, resourceful, literate Anabaptists, he is well aware of their blood that flows in his veins. "My ancestors were the radicals of the time," he says.

The Catholic college where he taught was fertile soil for Hall to become even more rooted in religious thought. He mulled over the characters from his past and what was important enough in their lives to preserve. He interviewed each person, and from this plethora of words, characters for *Conecuh People: Words of Life from the Alabama Black Belt* emerged to tell a story. It is Hall's story.

During interviews, "Words of Life," a Baptist hymn, kept playing around in his head. He realized then that the people he knew as a child and whom he interviewed in the book were saying their words of life to him. "They are building monuments to themselves with their words," he says.

Hall and Swem transcribed the tapes. With this raw material, he wrote a "creative history" book. "No one tells a story orally in a straight, narrative line," he says. "So I put it all together and rewrote it." He compares his technique to the difference between art and nature. He cites Alexander Pope: "Art is not nature. Nature is the starting point. In a state of nature, the pine tree is beautiful in itself. But if you want a house you have to have material to build it. Nature is just the starting point. This is where the log sawing and design enter."

After the book was published, an opportunity presented itself for the words to become a play. He credits Dr. David Dye, former chair of the Department of Speech and Theatre at Troy University, for showing the book to the Tourism Council of Bullock County and for saying, "This is the story, and Ty

Continued on page 7

Wade Hall lounges in the bed in which he was born.



JAMIE MARTIN

BOOKS BY WADE HALL

The Kentucky Anthology: Two Hundred Years of Writing in the Bluegrass State, The University Press of Kentucky, 2005.

Waters of Life from Conecuh Ridge: The Clyde May Story, NewSouth Books: The Conecuh Series, 2003.

The Outrageous Times of Larry Bruce Mitchell, a play, NewSouth Books: The Conecuh Series, 2002.

A Song in Native Pastures: Randy Atcher's Life in Country Music, Harmony House Publishers, 2002.

Sacred Violence: A New Edition in Two Volumes, Texas Western Press, 2002.

High Upon a Hill: A History of Bellarmine College, Bellarmine College Press, 1999.

Conecuh People: Words of Life from the Alabama Black Belt, Black Belt Press, 1999; reprinted by NewSouth Books, 2004.

James Still: Portrait of the Artist as a Boy in Alabama, King Library Press, 1998.

One Man's Lincoln: Billy Herndon (Honestly) Represents Abe, Kentucky Humanities Council, 1998.

Complete Conviction: The Private Life of Wilson W. Wyatt Sr., Bellarmine College Press, 1997.

Passing for Black: The Life and Careers of Mae Street Kidd, The University Press of Kentucky, 1997.

A Visit with Harlan Hubbard, The University of Kentucky Libraries, 1996.

Hell-Bent for Music: The Life of Pee Wee King, The University Press of Kentucky, 1996.

Sacred Violence: A Reader's Companion to Cormac McCarthy, Texas Western Press, 1995.

Greetings from Kentucky: A Post Card Tour, The University Press of Kentucky, 1994.

The Rest of the Dream: The Black Odyssey of Lyman Johnson, The University Press of Kentucky, 1988.

The Kentucky Book, The Courier-Journal and The Louisville Times, 1979.

Louisville 200, Friends of the Louisville Free Public Library, 1978.

This Place Kentucky, The Courier-Journal and The Louisville Times, 1975.

The High Limb: Poems, The Kentucky Poetry Press, 1973.

The Truth Is Funny: A Study of Jesse Stuart's Humor, Indiana Council of the Teachers of English, 1970.

The Smiling Phoenix: Southern Humor 1865-1914, University of Florida Press, 1965.

Reflections of the Civil War in Southern Humor, University of Florida Press, 1962.

Bleeding Blue

Wade Hall's *Kentucky Anthology* Showcases Writing in the Bluegrass State

Reviewed by Jessica Hume



Before leaving Kentucky to return to his birth state, Alabama, Wade Hall composed a work of honesty and devotion for what he left behind. In this case, however, what he left behind was not a lover, but an intimate relationship with the craft of writing in Kentucky, and Hall's *Kentucky Anthology: Two Hundred Years of Writing in the Bluegrass State* is not simply a love letter. The anthology, which includes a wonderfully articulate and sometimes pleasantly surprising selection of historical, literary, and creative works spanning the entire history of the commonwealth, is a prime example of Hall's inspired and meticulous work. Hall, it would seem, has trod the "dark and bloody ground," smelled the black heft of coal silt, heard the echo of Appalachian voices off dripping limestone, and seen new generations dawning across the bridges of

the Ohio River, all through the words set down by Kentucky's writers. His gift to us is that he, like any master craftsman, brings all the elements together in one work which sings the gritty harmonies of Kentucky's dark and beautiful past so that we, too, may experience Kentucky as both history and home.

Hall's bluegrass tapestry, which includes 179 notable writers, also offers some remarkable features. The most integral of these is his understanding and acknowledgment that a writer need not be an original citizen of a state in order to appreciate and expound on its unique history or lush and sometimes tragic beauty. In his introduction, Hall defines a "Kentucky writer" as one who "has lived in the state long enough to relate intimately to the Kentucky land, heritage or history and whose writing...reflects this relationship." He is quick to clarify that this definition need not always apply, thus allowing him to include works by writers such as Charles Dickens and Harriet Beecher Stowe, which create a multi-dimensional understanding of the evolution of writing in and about Kentucky. These voices are complimentary to the hearty melody of classic Kentucky writers ranging from Abraham Lincoln to Robert Penn Warren, from Jesse Stuart and Thomas Merton to Wendell Berry and Bobbie Ann Mason, and from Sena Jeter Naslund and Barbara Kingsolver to Silas House and Frank X Walker.

Another harmonic element in this chorus is Hall's attention and homage to the wealth of students, teachers, publishers, occasional poets, and writers who have truly fleshed out Kentucky writing for the last several years, and perhaps many more to come. Of these are Jeffrey Skinner and Sarah Gorham of Sarabande Books, Frederick Smock, Maureen Morehead, John Gatton, Kathleen Driskell, and the up-and-coming Abigail Gramig.

Other lovely elements of this volume are the unique pieces which open and close the collection. In the first section of the book, a selection of historical writing by authors such as John Filson and John James Audobon creates a brilliant foundation for the rest of the compilation, an invaluable foundation which could not be found collected elsewhere. The final element of the anthology, an index of writers' biographies, adds yet another rich and complex dimension which completes the history of writing in Kentucky.

In demonstration of his unfailing fidelity, Hall has left no chunk of limestone unturned and no hollow unsounded, and in this anthology he presents us with the most perfect examples of the voices of Kentucky.

Jessica Hume is a poet, a teacher, and a graduate student in the MFA program at Spalding University.

Conecuh Person *continued from page 5*

Adams, a graduate of Troy and a playwright living in New York, is the one to write it.”

E-mails flew furiously among the men and soon a script emerged. The play is staged each year in Union Springs on what Hall refers to as “the Holy Corner” where Trinity Episcopal Church has been standing for nearly a hundred years.

On any day around noon, church bells peal in the distance. Wind carrying a scent of magnolia blossoms singsongs in the pines. A few cars drive by. “At first these roads were dirt,” says Hall during a walk downtown. “There was a livery where people could come park their wagons and horses and go shopping in Union Springs. There used to be so many people in town you could not get through on the sidewalk.”

Up the street is the bird dog statue, its manliness prominently displayed. Hall sweeps his hand toward the monument to the bird dog then to the cemetery behind Trinity Episcopal Church with its Confederate monument to the gallant dead. He muses, “The South lost the war but they won the commemoration. This statue used to stand in front of the courthouse, but it became a traffic hazard. The bird dog statue is not a traffic hazard,” Hall says with a wry grin.

Hall hopes that he can use his influence and years of teaching and writing experience to good advantage in his retirement. He recently established the Hall-Waters Southern Prize, named for his father Wade Hall Sr. and mother Sarah Elizabeth Waters Hall. The award recognizes significant contributions to our Southern heritage by people who exemplify the rich cultural environment fostered by Troy University. Past recipients include Shirley Ann Grau, Rick Bragg, and Sena Jeter Naslund.

This past year, the award went to The Honorable John Lewis, a Georgia congressman, who grew up in Saco, near Troy. Hall says Lewis applied to Troy State when the campus was rigorously segregated. His application was denied. “It was poetic justice to have him back on campus and have him honored. Here is a man who stuck his neck out and it got bloodied. It could have gotten chopped off,” says Hall. “In those days you didn’t have anybody on your side except a few Blacks and some liberals. Even Lister Hill and John Sparkman (two of Alabama’s great Senators) had to vote the segregationist ticket to get elected. We were all penalized by slavery and segregation.”

Hall continues to enrich his life and the culture of his childhood. He is doing something he has always wanted to do—learn to play the piano. “I’ve had three lessons!” And he is working on a new play about the Black Belt. “There is nothing more sacred than the sound of the human voice,” Hall says. Thankfully, Wade Henry Hall continues to give voice to those least likely to be heard.

Marianne Moates is a freelance writer and hospice social worker living in Montgomery. She is the author of Truman Capote’s Southern Years



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TURNING

ONE POET'S STORY

by Janice N. Harrington

*In the side yard, this small hub: a child
clasping a cotton string bound to a June bug's legs.*

*Maybe the iridescent minstrel will weary and die.
Maybe its leg will shear and cast off its bridle.
Unfortunate machine, maybe it doesn't know
we are held and bound by prescribed orbits.
Yet the child will never weary...*

Maybe this poem from *Even the Hollow My Body Made Is Gone* (BOA Editions, 2007) helps explain my path as a poet, or at least it helps answer the question in an African folktale about a man who finds a skull in the branchings of a tree and asks the yellowed, weathered bone, “What brought you here?” We might ask of any writer—what brought you here?

I might answer memory. Although I have a career spanning over twenty years as a classroom teacher, school librarian, storyteller, and public children’s librarian, I found my way into writing poetry after a poetry workshop for children at the library led me to write about my grandmother Lillian. The workshop leader, Michael Madonick, asked us to write about a first memory or a person who mattered to us. So I chose a beloved grandmother who spent her mornings listening to my stories when I was a child. What sustains a writer? Having someone who takes the time to make you believe that your words are important enough to listen to and, by doing so, teaches you the power of words.

After the workshop, I started writing—not for the first time. I had written stories and poems before. I had won a small contest or two and had a few publications, and then I stopped writing. But this time I found a commitment, a passion that I couldn’t release. I wrote every day. I filled reams and notebooks. I wrote on slips of scrap paper and napkins. I filled file after file on my computer. My work started before dawn, and I would write until I had to ready myself for work, or sometimes I would write during sleepless nights. I brought poets home with me from the library—Kinnell, Yeats, Eliot, and many, many others. There were poets in my bed, poets on the couch, poets around the dining room table. Dickinson took up residence in the living room. I read them. I began an apprenticeship with each poet that I brought home, and I kept writing. There were dry spells and oh-no-I’ll-never-write-again spells, but this time I kept plugging away: sitting at the computer, working on an old draft that defeated me, adding to the pool of drafts to work on, reading work by other poets, and continuing to write. Slow and steady. Slow and steady. The child in “Turning” never wearies, never lets go of the cotton string. I never let go either, fascinated by the brightness of what I held, and by its singing:

*not of a June bug's hums, the way it strums the air
like a sawmill in the distance or the low murmur,
m-hmmm, of a Baptist Church on Sunday morning,
nor will she tire of its turning. How many times
around? Never enough. Turn*

I use poetry to rediscover memories and to preserve cultural and family history. My work as a poet is what I have to pass down in the same way that my grandmother's doilies and handiwork were passed down to me. In a sense, I've found a way to expand the meaning of my work. More than the possibility of publication, the poems represent heirlooms. Again, that belief drives my work, and it sustains passion and commitment. But a pivotal word in the poem is "turn." There are turns in anyone's growth as a poet, just as there are in any life. To help with the turns—the rejection slips, the struggle to write and hold down a fulltime job—I built a support system, bringing together a small group of women writers. We share our work, encourage each other, untangle scrambled syntax, keep each other motivated, and keep each other focused on the bottom line: writers write.

*and you are that cotton string, a well's rope,
an unraveling doily, or the yellow thread
that cinched Webster's tobacco pouch. Turn
and you are a June bug's dolorous drone.*

When I write, I enjoy offering readers unexpected perspectives or shaking how readers might see themselves. You are a June bug's dolorous drone, or maybe you are a writer. Such frightening words—I couldn't even say them aloud: I am a poet. I didn't tell anyone at the library that I wrote poetry. It was a secret: shhhh. But becoming a writer, and sustaining yourself as a writer, means coming out and telling the world at last, even though you may receive blank looks, or worse, outright discouragement: Yes, I write. Worse still, I write poetry. You have to believe in yourself and in what you do enough to sing, enough to make a dolorous drone.

*Traveler, believe the stars are bright beetles
tied to strings of light. Believe that a brown girl wields
these lambent arcs, that wild vibrations
tremble the tips of a brown girl's fingers. Believe*

*that you are a June bug tethered
to a cotton string, ceaselessly turning
but never enough, held by implacable delight,
your blue-black wings flared and ringing.*

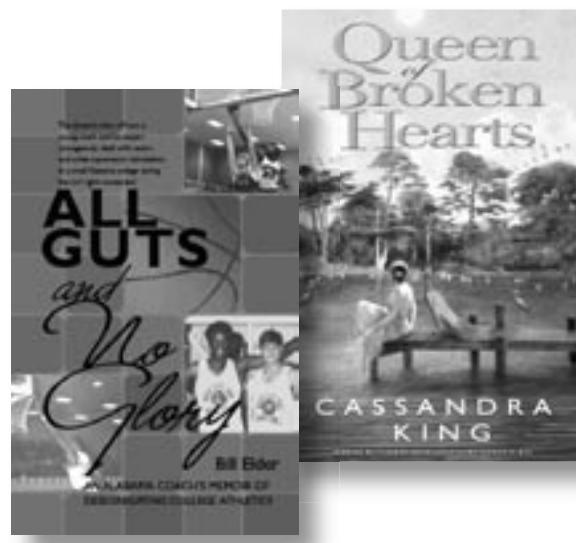
Learning to believe in myself, to hold onto the drive to write a good poem, to keep ceaselessly turning (reading poetry, learning about craft, imitating favorite poets, sending out work, revising and revising and revising) is finally the sustaining delight that keeps me pecking away at the word processor when the rest of the world is asleep. I am a traveler. I am a tenacious girl stunned by the machinery of language. I am a June bug, wings wide, singing.

Janice N. Harrington, a Vernon native, is a poet, an award-winning children's writer, and the author of Even the Hollow My Body Made Is Gone.

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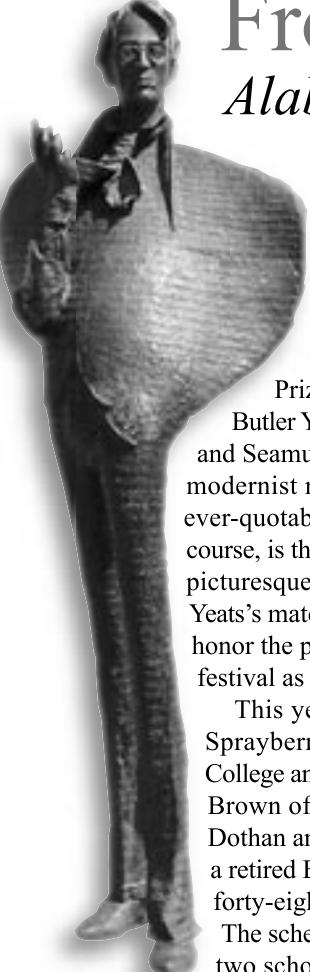
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From the Lake Isle of Innisfree

Alabamians Study Yeats in Ireland

by Jennifer Horne



The island of Ireland, relative in population to Alabama and smaller in size, has produced four Nobel Prize winners in literature—William Butler Yeats, G. B. Shaw, Samuel Beckett, and Seamus Heaney—as well as that major modernist novelist, James Joyce, and the ever-quotable Oscar Wilde. Their work, of course, is their greatest memorial, but in the picturesque coastal town of Sligo, home of Yeats's maternal grandparents, the citizens honor the poet with an annual international festival as well.

This year, five Alabamians—Sandra Sprayberry of Birmingham-Southern College and her husband Sam Munyer; Drucie Brown of Wallace Community College-Dothan and her mother-in-law, Nell Brown, a retired English teacher; and I—attended the forty-eighth Yeats Summer School in Sligo. The schedule was packed, beginning with two scholarly lectures each morning followed by an early afternoon concert, play reading, or art opening; a seminar in the late afternoon; and a reading or musical performance each night—an exhausting but exhilarating plunge into all things Yeats as well as explorations of Irish folklore, Irish drama, and Yeats's tremendous

influence on contemporary Irish poetry. The events are held at several different venues in Sligo. One, the Yeats Memorial Building, home to the Yeats Society, sits next to the Garavogue

River, which flows through the center of town and into Sligo Bay.

People come from all over the world to attend this intimate, welcoming “mini-university,” 170 participants from twenty-two countries this year. I will never forget hearing a South Korean Yeats scholar perform an impromptu version of “O Sole Mio” during a singing session at an Irish dancing class.

Although I held the perhaps romantic notion that the Irish people are somehow more poetically inclined than the rest of us, I have to confess I didn't meet one taxi driver who expressed an interest in Yeats. All the same, the *Irish Times*, one of Ireland's major newspapers, found newsworthy a paper delivered by Patrick Crotty, director of the 2007 Summer School and editor of a major anthology of modern Irish poetry, in which he criticized other critics' readings of Yeats's poem “Easter, 1916.” Furthermore, Terry Eagleton writes in *The Truth about the Irish* that “the Irish buy more volumes of poetry per head than any other English-speaking people.”

My attendance at the Yeats school this summer brought home to me the tremendous influence of that one poet on all Irish poets to follow. Like the mountain of Ben Bulben that dominates the Sligo landscape, Yeats, who died in 1939, is impossible to ignore, as though all American poets wrote in response to Robert Frost, and Frost alone. From Paul Muldoon to Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill to Seamus Heaney himself, contemporary Irish poets feel the necessity of responding to the major Irish poetic figure of the twentieth century—and many of us still feel the necessity, and pleasure, of studying him.

Further information on the Yeats Society Sligo can be found at <http://www.yeats-sligo.com/index.html>.

Jennifer Horne is the poetry review editor for First Draft Reviews Online, the editor of Working the Dirt: An Anthology of Southern Poets, and co-editor, with Wendy Reed, of All Out of Faith: Southern Women on Spirituality.



JENNIFER HORNE

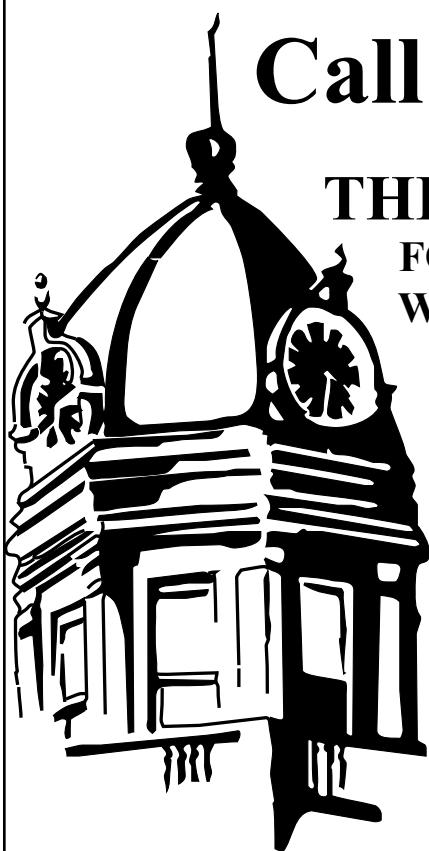


SAM MUNYER

Top left: A statue of William Butler Yeats outside the Ulster Bank in Sligo, Ireland.

Far left: Drucie Brown stands behind Yeats' headstone in the Drumcliff churchyard near Sligo.

Near left: Drucie Brown, Jennifer Horne, and Sandra Sprayberry attend the 80th birthday party for Irish poet Richard Murphy at the Yeats Summer School.



Call for Nominations

THE HARPER LEE AWARD FOR ALABAMA'S DISTINGUISHED WRITER OF THE YEAR 2008

THE ALABAMA WRITERS' FORUM invites nominations for the Harper Lee Award for Alabama's Distinguished Writer of the Year 2008. The award will be made to a living, nationally recognized Alabama writer who has made a significant, lifelong contribution to Alabama letters.

The Harper Lee Award carries a \$5,000 stipend and an original Frank Fleming bronze rendering of the Monroeville Courthouse Clock Tower. The Harper Lee Award for 2008 will be presented with its sister award, the Eugene Current-Garcia Award for Alabama's Distinguished Literary Scholar 2008, at the Alabama Writers Symposium at Alabama Southern Community College in Monroeville, May 1-3, 2008.

To nominate, write a letter telling briefly why the writer is eligible to be considered for the award. List her or his books, awards, and other credentials as a published writer. Please include the nominator's daytime phone number. E-mailed nominations will be accepted if they are sent in an MS Word attachment.

Nominations must be received by November 15, 2007. All nominations and all deliberations of the awards committee are confidential.

Call the Forum office toll free at 866-901-1117 for further information about the nomination process.
Email: writersforum@bellsouth.net.

Mail letters of nomination to: The Harper Lee Award Selection Committee, The Alabama Writers' Forum, PO Box 4777, Montgomery AL 36103-4777.

For complete guidelines, visit <http://www.writersforum.org/programs/harperlee.aspx>.

PREVIOUS HARPER LEE AWARD RECIPIENTS

1998: Albert Murray; 1999: Madison Jones; 2000: Helen Norris; 2001: Sena Jeter Naslund;
2002: Mary Ward Brown; 2003: Rodney Jones; 2004: Sonia Sanchez; 2005: Andrew Hudgins;
2006: Wayne Greenhaw; 2007: William Cobb

The Harper Lee Award for Alabama's Distinguished Writer and the Eugene Current-Garcia Award for Alabama's Distinguished Literary Scholar are made possible through a generous grant from George Landegger.

Bronze Sculpture in Tuscan Town Symbolizes New Friendship

by Jeanie Thompson

A monumental bronze *Peace Frame* by the Alabama artist Nall has become an over-sized friendship magnet in a small Italian town.

Nall, who maintains a home and studio in Fairhope, recently saw an edition of his *Peace Frame* installed prominently on a square in Pietrasanta, Italy, a small town in the Tuscan province of Lucca that has been the home to artists and artisans for more than five hundred years.

Nall's frame is embellished with mosaic tiles, polished bronze, and castings of familiar images from his repertoire—pomegranates to symbolize life, bones for death, and Alabama pine cones as homage to his home state. Nall was recognized with the 2007 Distinguished Artist Award from the Alabama State Council on the Arts in May. He is the first American to have work installed permanently in Pietrasanta, a Mecca for artists and collectors alike.

During the festivities for the frame's installation on August 19, members of the Alabama arts community who had traveled to Italy opened discussions with arts administrators and elected officials in Pietrasanta and the region about possible arts exchanges. Among those present was Albert B. Head, Executive Director of the Alabama State Council on the Arts.

"We are looking at taking Alabama artists to Pietrasanta in June 2008," said Head. "And we hope to host artists and artisans in Alabama from Pietrasanta in June 2009." Head said that representatives from the literary, visual, and performing arts would be included in the exchange.

"Seeing an Alabama artist's work so prominently displayed in this city known for the best in marble, bronze, and mosaic work makes us all very proud of our Alabama artistic talent," said Head. "We look forward to continuing

these discussions and will have more information forthcoming for the entire arts community in Alabama about opportunities for participation."

Head said that there will probably be some arts education opportunities, including internships for emerging artists from both Alabama and Tuscany to study with masters from the respective host countries.

Pietrasanta's bronze foundries have been run by the same families for generations, with the techniques of casting and creating patinas passed on in this way.

Other Alabamians have had bronze work cast in Pietrasanta, including Elizabeth McQueen of Birmingham and Glenn Dasher of Huntsville. Dale Chambliss of Birmingham has also studied preservation techniques and worked in the marble laboratories of the

Carrara area. Each of these artists has work in public spaces in Alabama.

Some thirty other works of art by sculptors from around the world adorn the streets of the small town of Pietrasanta. In front of the train station, at each entrance to the city, and even in nooks inside public parking lots, large scale art is a prominent feature of the cityscape.

Now Nall's *Peace Frame* has become a symbol of friendship and arts exchange between the people of Alabama and the artisans and artists of the Italian coastal area where Pietrasanta lies nestled between the Mediterranean coast and the Apuane Alps. Another edition of the frame has been permanently installed in the Principality of Monaco and one is on view through 2008 at the Pisa Airport.

The frame is expected to be installed permanently at the Puccini Festival Foundation in Torre del Lago Puccini, Italy, when the new open air theater opens next summer. Nall has participated in the Festival's "Sculpting the Opera Project" twice, first in 2005, and this year by designing sets and costumes for Giacomo Puccini's *La Rondine*.

Perhaps the most famous artist of all time to take up residence in Pietrasanta was Michelangelo Buonarroti, who is said to have spent eight months searching the marble quarries in Carrara above Pietrasanta for the perfect piece of white marble for a pope's tomb. Columbian artist Federico Botero has work in several prominent Pietrasanta squares, including his *Warrior*, which is at the opposite end of a short street from Nall's *Peace Frame*.

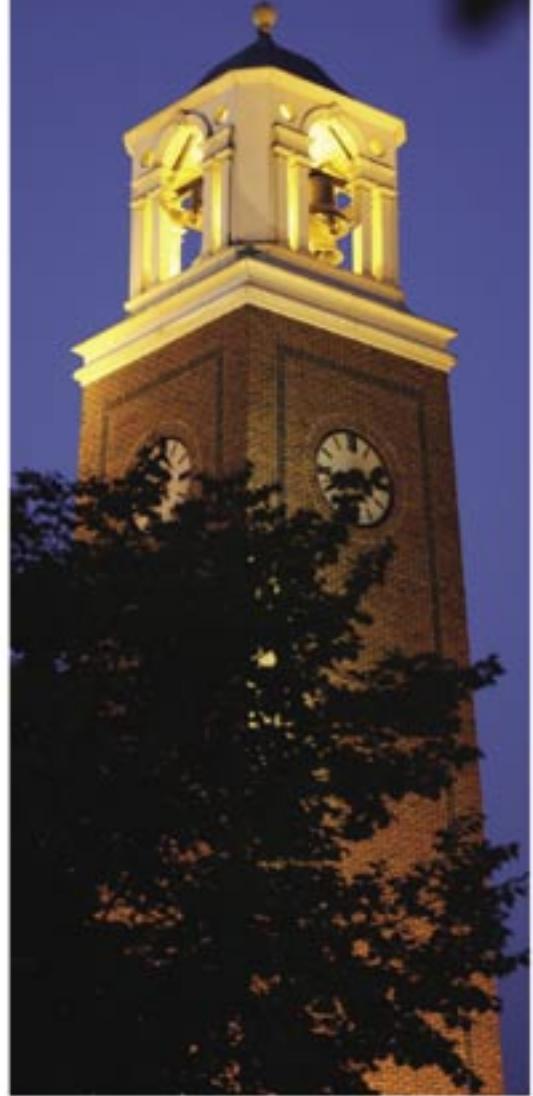
Head said that more information about the arts exchange will be forthcoming over the next few months. The Alabama Writers' Forum will have more information about the project as it develops. On the web: www.tuscany-charming.it/en/places/pietrasanta.asp.

Jeanie Thompson is AWF Executive Director.

At the installation of Nall's *Peace Frame* in Pietrasanta, Italy, officials from both countries symbolically joined hands within the monumental bronze. L-R: Daniele Spina, Minister of Culture, City of Pietrasanta; Al Head, Executive Director of the Alabama State Council on the Arts; the artist Nall; Massimo Mallegni, Mayor of Pietrasanta.



2008



GRAND MASTER 2008, TOM ROBBINS, internationally known for his wildly popular and influential fiction, is the author of eight novels, seven of which have been *New York Times* bestsellers. Robbins has been named by *Writer's Digest* one of the 100 Best Writers of the Twentieth Century.



FRANK DEFORD is the Senior Contributing Writer for *Sports Illustrated*, a commentator on NPR's *Morning Edition*, and a correspondent on HBO's *RealSports* with Bryant Gumbel. Deford has received the U.S. Sportswriter of the Year award six times and been elected to the Hall of Fame of the National Association of Sportscasters and Sportswriters.

JULIANNA BAGGOTT (aka N.E. Bode) is the author of four novels, including the bestsellers *Girl Talk* and *The Miss America Family*, as well as three books of poems, including *Compulsions of Silkworms and Bees*, winner of the 2007 Lena-Miles Wever Todd Poetry Series from Pleiades Press.

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2007 HIGH SCHOOL LITERARY ARTS AWARDS **Recognizes Alabama's Talented Young Writers**

Photos by Jamie Martin

On April 25, the Alabama Writers' Forum presented cash awards, books, and certificates to seventy-three students during its annual High School Literary Arts Awards presentation at the State Capitol Auditorium in Montgomery. *First Draft*'s photo essay gives an idea of the geographic diversity of our students, as well as the variety of schools and communities—urban and rural—from which they hale.

Guest speaker Bradley Byrne, who later that week made his transition from the Alabama State Senate to Chancellor of the two year college system, noted that writers were an integral part of his home community of Fairhope. He even admitted that in high school he wanted to be a writer.

"Every other person on the street in Fairhope is a writer—Rick Bragg, Winston Groom, Sonny Brewer. The other people are artists," said Byrne.

"Some of you are working on your own art—stories, plays, poems—and you may not know today where that's going to end up," he added. "I doubt if Nell Harper Lee knew where her little story set in Monroeville would end up."

Byrne noted that "family stories are at the heart of whom we really are. We learn from those stories. Storytelling in the South knits us all together."

"Good stories come out of the human experience," he said. "Good storytellers know how to recognize a good story. There are great stories out there. There are great truths out there. Whether the stories you tell will bring you great wealth or not, they will bring a greater quality of life to all of us."

Continued on page 21



Ruth Ott, Alabama Writers' Forum Board Member, with Caroline James, Booker T. Washington Magnet High School, recipient of the Ruth and Jay Ott Senior Portfolio Scholarship.



Stacy Oliver, Alabama School of Fine Arts, recipient of the Mozelle Purvis Shirley Senior Portfolio Scholarship, with Mrs. Shirley.



Second Place Fiction winner Elizabeth Locker, Florence High School, with Representative Tammy Irons (D-Lauderdale, District 1). ANITA GARNER



Writing Our Stories teachers and officials (l-r) Sandra Whatley-Washington, Lurleen B. Wallace School; Marlin Barton, teaching writer, Lurleen B. Wallace School; Principal Cheryl Bufford, Sequoyah School; Queen Barker, Department of Youth Services; Danny Gamble, teaching writer, Adele Goodwyn McNeil School.



Representative Paul Demarco (R-Homewood, District 46), (front left) with Alabama School of Fine Arts students (l-r) Emily White, Heather Covington, and Mo Fiorella. (Front right) Representative Greg Canfield (R-Vestavia Hills, District 48). (back) ASFA Teachers Stuart Flynn and Anne-Wyman Black.



(Mary Katherine Foster, Briarwood Christian Academy; Ashlyn Kirkpatrick, BCA; Teacher Jon Carter, BCA; Rep. Greg Canfield (R-Vestavia Hills, District 48); Sarah Kathryn Heines, BCA; Ashley Jones, Alabama School of Fine Arts



Back row: Booker T. Washington Magnet High School creative writing teacher Foster Dickson, Alabama Writers' Forum President Derryn Moten, Alabama State Council on the Arts program manager Randy Shoults. Front: Nicole Peacock, Fiction Judge's Special Recognition.



Reed Milewicz, First Place in Drama, Mt. Brook High School



Stuart Flynn, teacher, and Hannah Irvin, Poetry Certificate of Recognition, Alabama School of Fine Arts.



Justin Adair, Poetry Certificate of Recognition, Weaver High School

Deadline Change and New Focus at Awards Ceremony Announced

Several important changes are being instituted for the 2008 High School Literary Arts Awards.

Teachers and young writers should mark their calendars now for the January 11, 2007 deadline.

Also, materials are being sent to the Alabama Writers' Forum office and the contest will be managed by AWF staff.

"Anita Miller Garner has managed our contest since it's inception in 1994," said Jeanie Thompson. "This year we are giving her a much needed break from the contest as she and her colleagues at UNA undergo some office moves that make managing the volume of contest entries impossible. We are indebted to Ms. Garner for her years of service and we look forward to having her back on the team in 2009."

Finally, the Forum is planning a workshop with a nationally known writer for the winners prior to the legislative greeting and awards ceremony, Thompson said. Lunch will be provided between the workshop and the awards.

The workshop, lunch, and ceremony are scheduled for Wednesday, March 12, 2008, at the State Capitol Auditorium, 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

"We hope that announcing the event this far in advance will help schools plan to attend when they have winners," Thompson said.

Full details of the awards day changes are being mailed to all former participating teachers. In addition, all English, language arts, and creative writing teachers will receive guidelines via e-mail to their schools.

Guidelines for the 2008 High School Literary Arts Awards are online now at www.writersforum.org/programs.

WAVING OUR HEARTS OUT TO THE DIXIE EXPRESS

Writing Southern Fiction Forty-five Years after Faulkner's Death

by Anita Garner

July 7—yes, 7-7-07—marked the forty-fifth anniversary of William Faulkner's death. As we read and write Southern fiction today, we continue to look over our shoulders for the stern ghost of Faulkner, not the grubby, friendly shade of Whitman who taunted readers with the promise of such a visit in *Leaves of Grass*. Let the rest of America worry about the apparitions of other literary predecessors. We have our hands full with Faulkner.

Flannery O'Connor claimed she didn't read Faulkner. "He makes me feel that with my one-cylinder syntax I should quit writing and raise chickens altogether," she wrote in a letter to novelist John Hawkes. O'Connor dubbed Faulkner "The Dixie Express," as if his larger-than-life literary reputation formed a multi-cylindered juggernaut locomotive barreling full-speed through the Southern landscape, slowing down for no other writers who ambled onto the tracks, monopolizing by his sheer size and momentum the world's view of the literature of the American South.

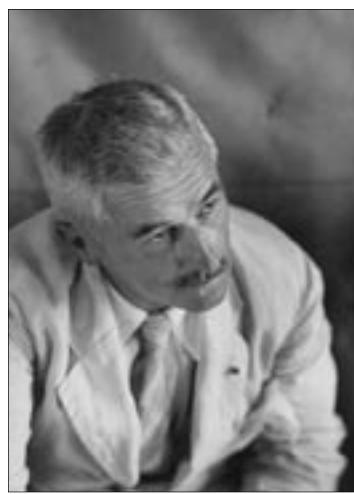
While O'Connor's library reflected her

passion for Catholic theology (which, evidence shows, she actually read), pop culture brokers such as Wikipedia list O'Connor first in the star-studded list of direct literary descendants of William Faulkner (whose works, remember,

she claimed *not* to read). From a secular standpoint, O'Connor's works were more directly influenced by Greek tragedy than by Faulkner. The pop culture flawed logic seems some literary form of *post hoc ergo propter hoc*: Faulkner wrote Southern Gothic fiction chronologically before O'Connor wrote Southern Gothic fiction; therefore, O'Connor followed in the great Protestant father's tradition.

Yeah. Right.

Not only were the two authors' styles a study in contrast, even the two tracks of Southern Gothic fiction they traveled were separate and distinct. Faulkner showed how convoluted Southern society was. O'Connor showed how lost and damned. Yet Faulkner branded Southern fiction the way Coca-Cola branded soft drinks. All colas were not only



William Faulkner, 1953, Bern Keating Collection, Special Collections, University of Mississippi Libraries

compared to Coke, but all soft drinks in some circles came to be called "Coke." As O'Connor wrote, "Anything that comes out of the South is going to be called grotesque by the Northern reader, unless it *is* grotesque, in which case it's going to be called realistic." At the height of her career, the dust had not even settled yet from the Dixie Express.

Do today's authors share O'Connor's fate? O'Connor was, after all, Faulkner's contemporary, the two authors dying within thirteen months of one another.

In a 2005 interview, the Harper Lee Award winner Mary Ward Brown described a literary trip she was invited to make to Russia. She was delighted to go, delighted also to visit Chekhov's house and estate, like "entering a shrine." Yet upon her return she reported, "The only American writer in evidence in Russia was Faulkner. His books were everywhere." Brown claims her short fiction was influenced by the Russians. Yet when she won the PEN/Hemingway Award, critics compared her...well...to Faulkner.

Sena Jeter Naslund's *Ahab's Wife* stayed on the best sellers' list long enough to sell more than 200,000 copies in hardcover and paperback. Neither *Ahab's Wife* with its clear parallels to Melville nor Naslund's 2006 novel *Abundance: A Novel of Marie Antoinette* are set in Yoknapatawpha County. Still, in reviews of Naslund's work, Faulkner's name appears with predictable frequency.

I have recently begun reading fiction for *storySouth* magazine, and so have seen a cross-section of stories written by living authors who, according to their cover letters, think they are writing fiction connected to the American South. Some stories were sent from Europe, but the majority come from writers living south of the Mason-Dixon Line, writing about deer hunts, beauty shops, Sunday dinners, and bloody shotgun murders. Lots of bloody shotgun murders. Or at the very least, bloody injuries caused by shotguns, the shotguns usually wielded by relatives. Last week I caught myself writing in my notes about one story. "Fairly decent coming-of-age story about hunting," I wrote, "but the story seems like a shallow re-telling of 'The Bear'."

It's not that we can no longer write about things Southern without facing comparisons with Faulkner, O'Connor, and even Welty. It's just that it's simply not enough to slap together a clever plot with a character named Bubba and his dog Junior. Tony Earley said it best in his essay that served as the preface to *New Stories from the South*. "It is easy," he wrote, "to make up characters who live in double-wide mobile homes, wear beehive hairdos and feed caps, never put a 'g' on the end of a participle, have sex with their cousins...; who aspire only to own a bass boat...eat something fried, speak in tongues, do anything butt nekkid." Hey, look around. Even a trip to the grocery store when you live in the South is ripe with details, the



Mary Ward Brown



Tony Earley

shelves goldmines of pickled okra and snuff, pigs' feet and Martha White cornmeal. "What is difficult," Earley continued, "is to take the poor, the uneducated, the superstitious, the backward, the redneck...and make them real human beings, with hopes and dreams and aspirations."

The advice I give beginning fiction writing students is to go online and read flash fiction in publications such as *Pindeldyboz*, *SmokeLong*,

and many others, publications including Southern fiction in their rich smorgasbord of stories published in English. Get a feeling, I say, for the concise current edgy voice in fiction that sounds particularly authentic with a Southern overlay. Then expand the reading to other online magazines. The objective is not for students to mimic other authors but to develop an ear for what they like. The end result is that they will establish a list of

favorite authors who are not quite to the midpoint of their careers, some working just beneath the radar.

Michelle Richmond with her online magazine *Fiction Attic* is a good example, an award winning author with Mobile roots transplanted to California, a fearless writer unafraid to tackle either Southern history or female sensuality. Similarly, Shay



Michelle Richmond

Youngblood is a sensual writer whose *Black Girl in Paris* is a blueprint for the Southern writer who sees herself a part of a larger, global literary picture. Silas House and Ron Rash offer new voices for Appalachian literature and are finding a large readership. Both Anthony Grooms and Ravi Howard have revisited the Civil Rights movement with fresh insights, Grooms' *Bombingham* showing parallels between growing up in a besieged Southern city and being a soldier in Vietnam, while Howard's *Like Trees, Walking* is set in the Mobile area in 1981 and chronicles the events following a late twentieth century lynching. For the sheer joy of embracing all that is Southern, readers might also explore books by Michael Knight, Brad Watson, Jennifer S. Davis, and Phyllis Perry, all with Alabama connections. However, Marlin Barton, another Alabama author, may win the blue ribbon for being the author whose critics and reviewers most often invoke the ghost of Faulkner. Then throw in a few fast-paced authors whose books can be found everywhere. Greg Iles and Donna

Continued on page 24

& NETWORK, READ, WRITE, WRITE, WRITE

The Profit of Perseverance

by Elizabeth Via Brown

If it were not for two novels that remain unprinted and out-of-sight in her desk drawer, Joshilyn Jackson would not have published *gods in Alabama* and *Between, Georgia*, nor have a deal for a third book to be released by Grand Central Publishing in March 2008. The rejection of the second book left her broken-hearted, but not enough so that she couldn't continue to write.

"Writing is what you are," said the author, who lives outside Atlanta with her husband and two small children. "You become emotionally involved. It's like your child."

Looking back on the experience, Jackson, who has roots in Alabama, said she had a series of "good rejections" before her work was finally accepted. Pinpointing ways to improve her manuscripts, the letters also encouraged her to continue writing. In different forms, storylines and characters from those first two projects appear in her published books.

To remain a stay-at-home mom, she babysat for other children while learning about the writers' market. From a how-to book, she picked-up the finer points of getting published, finding an agent, and selling herself.

"You can't approach publishing emotionally," she said. "You have to write for yourself or for the love of writing. With each project, you learn new lessons and once they are finished, you must divorce yourself and become immersed in the next one."

Buy publishers' directories and send letters to those who

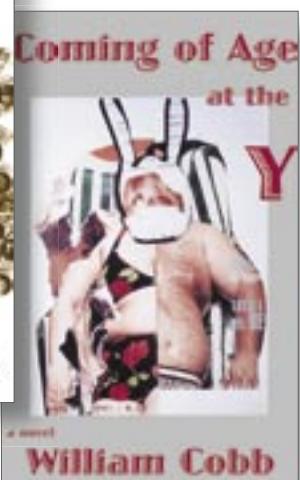
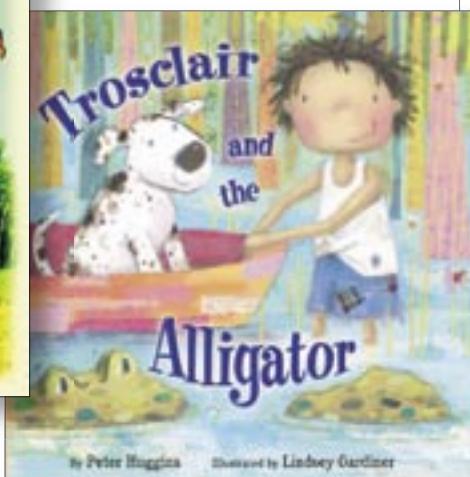
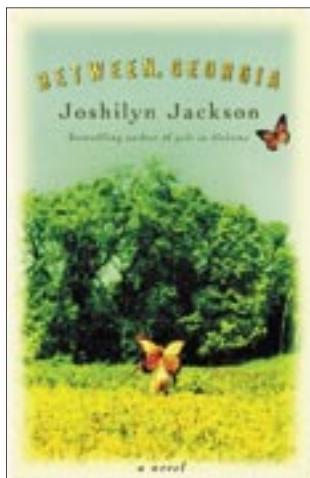
would be most likely to accept your particular style of writing, said Carl T. Smith, author of *Nothin' Left to Lose*, *Lowcountry Boil*, and *Louisiana Burn*. Don't get discouraged by multiple rejections.

Attend book festivals, like the annual Alabama Book Festival in Montgomery, sponsored in part by the Alabama Center for the Book, and talk to representatives of various publishers, he added.

At the suggestion of a writer friend, Smith turned to River City Publishing (RCP) in Montgomery when the publisher of his first book went bankrupt on the same day the book debuted. Because the staff supports its writers, Smith said he is very satisfied with RCP.

"Self-promotion is certainly key these days," said Jim Gilbert, editor of RCP and also an occasional contributor to the Mobile *Press-Register*'s Sunday book review page. A writer should have a clear view of what he/she is getting into, he said. "You think the hard work is done when you finish a book, but in truth that's when the hard work really begins."

Now living in Hilton Head, South Carolina, Smith is at work on his third novel, *In Plain Sight*. An expert at self-promotion, he logged 26,000 miles by auto and 18,000 by plane making personal appearances for his second book. A single customer bought a book at one signing, but the store sold more than thirty copies the following month.



"Ask the staff to put your book on their in-store review shelf," said Smith.

Be willing to self-judge with a proper perspective, said Gilbert, and "read everything—books, magazines, the backs of cereal boxes—the more ideas floating in a writer's head, the more ingredients there are to work with and the higher the probability that something unique will eventually get cooked up."

Smith prefers not to get caught up in what he calls the minutiae of details, and he does not write from an outline. On the other hand, Jennifer Paddock, author of *A Secret Word* and *Point Clear*, finds that the more detailed the outline, the better her writing. Paddock, who lives in Fairhope with her husband Sidney Thompson, also a writer, maps out her characters, the plot, and number of chapters before beginning a project.

"Finish your book," cautions Paddock. Her latest book was a few chapters short when her publisher wanted to see the finished project and Paddock had to hustle to finish it in the specified time.

"Contact agents of your favorite writers," she said. "There is always a chance that they are looking for similar styles."

"To me," said William Cobb, winner of the 2007 Harper Lee Award for Alabama's Distinguished Writer of the Year, "a professional writer is one who writes constantly and takes what he's doing very seriously. He would do it whether anybody ever read it or not or paid him anything for writing it or not."

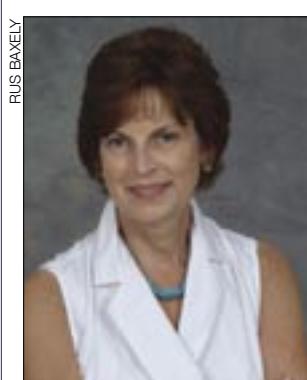
Retired from the University of Montevallo, where he was writer-in-residence and a professor of creative writing and Southern literature, Cobb now devotes his time to writing. First published in 1987, Cobb's debut novel *Coming of Age at the Y* will be reissued next spring by Livingston Press.

"Write," said Todd Dills, who lives in Birmingham, where he is senior editor of *Overdrive* and *Truckers News*, publications for long-haul truck drivers. "It's a cliché, really, but the writer cannot truly become what he/she desires without doing the work and failing miserably again and again."

His novel, *Sons of the Rapture*, is the result of nearly five years of sporadic writing then two years of daily and numerous rewrites. His next book is shaping up much quicker, he said.

Read, said Dills, and publish. He attributes his success to his willingness to take his work directly to the reader in a free literary

Continued on page 21



RUS BAXLEY
Elizabeth Via Brown

ADVICE TO THE FREELANCER

These days, I'd rather work from home with my two cats as my closest companions. After years covering the social scene and writing feature stories for the *Montgomery Advertiser*, I'm fortunate to be able to accept the assignments I like while writing a monthly column for *Montgomery Living* magazine.

I don't make much money and probably break even on expenses, but I have the opportunity to donate my time and talent to local organizations that I support. If I really wanted to work at it, I could consult numerous books and Web sites and even apply for a grant or fellowship to supplement my income.

Randy Shoultz, Literature Program Manager for the Alabama State Council on the Arts, describes my style of writing as "creative non-fiction." So in awe am I of "real writers," I didn't know my journalistic category actually falls into a genre until Shoultz told me in a telephone conversation. Like most writers, I once wanted to compose a best-selling novel, but I came to the realization that I like exactly what I'm doing. I'll never have a book-signing, but interviewing people who do and capturing personal stories, no matter how brief, suits me fine.

If I wanted to supplement my income while locating more outlets for my work, I could apply for a fellowship through the Arts Council. I don't even have to have a project underway, said Shoultz. There are many cash awards given to writers just to work at their craft.

Local and online bookstores offer volumes of publishers' and writers' directories and a Google search reveals bazillions of Web sites for writers, independent publishers, and writing critiques. Finding the right sources takes time.

When I decided to be a freelancer I found information online pertaining to my needs and composed my own contract and invoice. While many magazines and publications have writing guidelines, many don't offer a contract, but I like to have the assignment spelled out before I begin research and interviews.

After speaking to the editor, I restate what we said in written form so that we both are on the same page. My form includes the length or number of words expected, whether I provide photography or help locate pictures, the deadline, form of submission (an e-mail attachment in Word, for example), and agreed upon payment. There are Websites that tally a national average for freelance writers.

Once I have completed the project, I send it to the publication with an e-mail invoice, which basically restates the contract with the actual date of submission. Printed, I staple the article, notes, contract, and invoice and file them in my freelance folder ready to hand to my accountant at tax time.

When you determine what your time and effort are worth, it's amazingly easy to negotiate with a client. I'm never paid enough, of course, but I do get to ask people lots of fun questions and my professionalism shows that I'm serious about myself. Plus, my cats are delightful coworkers who rarely invade my space.

Elizabeth Via Brown

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HSLAA continued from page 14

For the 2007 awards, all five of the senior portfolio scholarships—\$500 cash awards—were underwritten by generous individuals who believe in the talent of young writers. Underwriters include Bill Fuller, in honor of Kathryn Tucker Windham; Charles Gaines, in honor of his mother Margaret Shook Gaines; Ruth and Jay Ott; Philip Shirley, in honor of his mother Mozelle Purvis Shirley; and Katherine Thompson, in honor of her late husband Byrd T. Thompson Jr.

Jeanie Thompson, executive director of the Alabama Writers' Forum, noted that her mother, Katherine, had underwritten one of the scholarships in memory of her husband and Jeanie's father because writers were always an important part of their family.

"My parents read everything from the *New York Times* to *Mechanics Illustrated* to A.A. Milne," Thompson said. "Without a houseful of books, and parents who loved reading as a totally natural, vital experience, I know it would've taken me a lot longer to find myself as a writer, if at all."

Senior (Class of '07) Mary Katherine Foster, student of Jon Carter, Briarwood Christian Academy, who received the Margaret Shook Gaines Senior Portfolio Scholarship, said, "As a writer, I believe this scholarship validates every inspired moment when I stopped what I was doing to write in my notebook. This scholarship proves that I'm not crazy."

"The maniacal typist in my home—me—often thinks I am," she added. "I want to dream like Silverstein, purge like Plath, and love like Shakespeare."

Funding for the annual High School Literary Arts Awards is provided by the Alabama State Council on the Arts, the Jemison Investment Company and the Jemison and Day Families, and the Support the Arts Car Tag Fund. The Alabama Shakespeare Festival provides tickets to productions for playwriting winners.

Anyone wishing information about underwriting scholarships or other components of the High School Literary Arts Awards is invited to call the Forum toll free at 866-901-1117.

For a complete list of the 2007 winners, their teachers and schools, contest judges, and guidelines for the 2008 awards, go to www.writersforum.org/programs. Scroll down to High School Literary Arts awards for links. Anyone without access to the Internet may call toll free at 866-901-1117 to request a printed set of guidelines.

Write Write Write continued from page 19

broadsheet, *THE2NDHAND*, which he founded while living in Chicago. His writing occasionally appears in the publication and still pops up on its online version. Whether starting a magazine or giving numerous readings, writers must be willing to make their work public even if that means finding alternative means of publishing.

"Given the nebulous dividing line between professional/amateur status, it might just be your confidence that puts you over the top toward whatever level of success you want," said Dills.

Philip Shirley, president and CEO of GodwinGroup, a seventy-year-old advertising and marketing firm in Jackson, Mississippi, said he uses writing as a tool. "I think of it this way: the purpose of a shovel is not to move dirt, but to help us grow flowers and tomatoes."

Writing is a choice, said Shirley and not an uncontrollable urge. "It allows me to explore events, personalities, and landscapes I might not otherwise visit."

As a tool, writing must be done often, he said, so that it becomes a comfortable task. "Writing is more craft than art. It may take a little sweat and a sore wrist to learn the proven techniques."

He is looking forward to the publication of a collection of short stories, *Oh, Don't You Cry for Me*, to be published by Jefferson Press in the spring of 2008.

"Apply, apply, apply," said Randy Shoultz, Literature Program Manager for the Alabama State Council on the Arts. The agency offers a large selection of grants, fellowships, and cash awards which allow artists to buy more time as they enhance their careers, he explained.

"Do the research on what's available, read the guidelines, and follow them to the letter," he said, and always submit samples of your best work.

Writing can be an insulated career, he added, so you must stay connected to other writers through organizations that support writers such as the Alabama Writers' Forum. "Network," said Shoultz.

"If you are writing to win prizes or awards or if you think you're going to get rich, don't even start," said Peter Huggins, who teaches in the English department at Auburn University. Until he succeeded, he applied numerous times for fellowships from the Arts Council. The competition is intense, he said, and it's an honor and a great recognition to get a grant.

"It's wonderful confirmation that what you've been doing—sometimes with very little encouragement—is meaningful and worthwhile," he said. "The money's not too bad either."

Huggins, whose books include *Trosclair and the Alligator*, *Necessary Acts*, *Blue Angels*, and *Hard Facts*, said writers should challenge themselves to do something they've never done before. His imagination is always at work, and he often makes notes on scraps of paper. Currently, he is working on two new books.

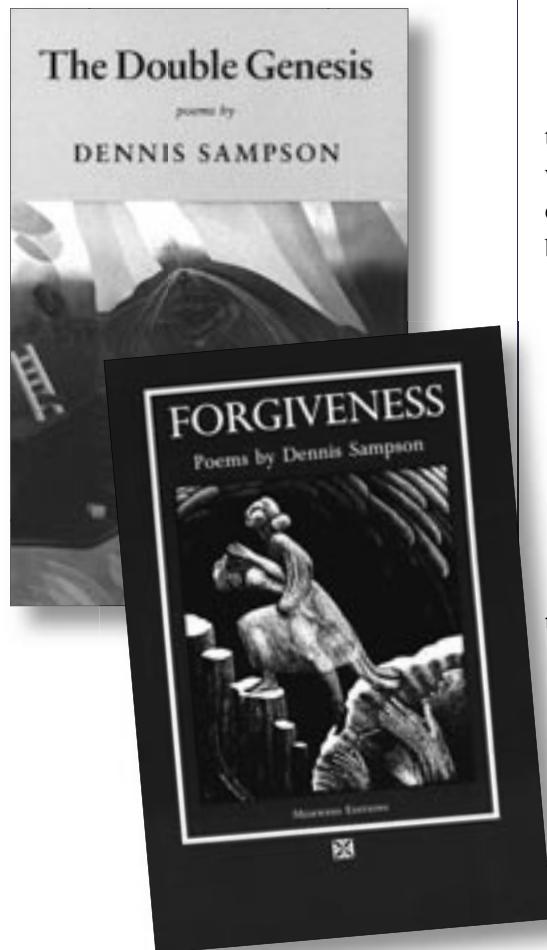
"Write for the joy of it—because you must," said Huggins. "If you absolutely have to do this crazy thing called writing, then you're probably okay and will be able to withstand all the many rejections, difficulties, hardships, and stupidities you must endure without giving in or giving up."

Elizabeth Via Brown is a freelance writer in Montgomery and a columnist for Montgomery Living magazine.

An Unthinkable Generosity

TWENTY
YEARS OF
POETRY
BY DENNIS
SAMPSON

by Louie Skipper



You shall stand by my side and look in the mirror with me.

—Walt Whitman, Preface to *Leaves of Grass*

As humankind scrambles into another bloody century, poetry is often one of the last hopes we have for healing. Dennis Sampson published five books of poems from 1985-2005, and his poems continue to give us good cause to believe we have not lost the will to heal.

In 1985, Sampson published *The Double Genesis*. He was thirty-five and working skillfully with celebrations of his own life. *The Double Genesis* is largely a collection of epiphanies:

*I love to look at laundry in late autumn,
long underwear, sailing against the breeze,
blouses and dresses, dripping with wet,
and those big baggy overalls, fading light to blue,
negligently left out under the stars all night.*

—Falling in Love with Laundry

Over the next twenty years, Sampson would confront isolation and suffering, and they terrify, confound, and temper his poetry. Yet, his early joy seems playful, in the way I might imagine a child off on his own, with little sense of danger, enchanted by creatures trying to work their way around him. He returns to such creatures in every book as icons of what eventually offers him a sense of shared exile, as in “The Turtle”:

*...And while I look
at you now, at the mythological strangeness of your belly,
butter-colored, the scripture written there*

*comes clear to me—that you are unknowable to me
as to yourself, yet truth abides in you....*

The poems in *Double Genesis* are seldom intimate. When people appear, they tend to vanish, vanishing being that theme nearly all poetry eventually seizes.

In 1990, *Forgiveness* took to memories with the earlier vividness of turtles and bats:

*I watched two women make love once
when I lived in Iowa City
and the wind and snow blew
in January like the absence of mercy.*

—Need



Poet Dennis Sampson at home.

Introducing *Forgiveness*, Philip Levine asserted, “If I had to characterize these poems with a single word that word would be ‘unblinking.’ ... Sampson believes in the unthinkable generosity that creation offers us a second chance.” That second chance is at least yearned for in this second book, as in the elegy, “Robert Lowell: ‘In that season of joy...’”:

*I wear myself out in a world now
so bizarre
I wouldn't be surprised if you were right,
our children 'exploding into dynamite.'
Go forward? Or go back?
I wish for the voice of heaven....*

Ten years passed. Sampson was fifty and his poetry brimmed with the aftershocks after those experiences common between thirty-five and fifty—divorce, unexpected deaths, and realities that face all who begin to accept limits when a few years earlier it seemed the sky was the limit. His third book, *Constant Longing*, appeared then, and it is one of the most fiercely defined collections since Robert Frost’s *North of Boston*. Here, Sampson explores themes of inner darkness, pressed into an unhurried, uneasy, defiant voice. The turtle that had been turned over and played with in *The Double Genesis* is less animal in *Constant Longing* and more the maw of darkness forcing Sampson to back into choiceless likeness:

*...I am what I am and have
no choice. If you want me to be a god
you should have told me
and I would have dragged you down into the dark.*

—The Snapping Turtle at Templeton Pond

Constant Longing introduces elegies for poets, painters, a young friend racked with cancer, a houseplant, failed marriage, and his own wounded innocence, all in need of summation, as in the self-revelation in the long sequence “Holy Waste”: “I would like to spend one year intently watching. / Then I would not be afraid of what I have become.”

Sampson’s tone continually demonstrates amazing

empathy, as in “From One Who Knew Him Intimately,” for the tortured Primo Levi:

*Here is the word and what it stood for,
clear nights and the whole world listening.
You will know the end. What the bones know.
And there is pity. And there is long forgiving.*

“In the Light of My Lamp” commissions a spider’s existence to be certain that it actually *is* on the white page in hand. That “second chance” Levine found a decade earlier here shifts into anamnesis, the past becoming present, and with the calculation of Frost, Sampson “provides” history, faith, and love as in “Litany”:

*When Thomas Hardy let himself be dragged
to a local tavern...
he looked out a window for hours

at a cemetery while they roared with laughter,
prodding him to join in.

Let this simple blessing remember him.*

In 2005, Sampson published two new collections—first, *Needlegrass* and then *For My Father Falling Asleep at Saint Mary’s Hospital*. *Needlegrass* uses *Song of Myself* as a kind of copybook in cataloging the part of the country closest to his heart, the Great Plains. Sifting his South Dakota childhood, Sampson sings of the search for belonging and the discoveries of exile “in this place below the dark” (“For the Dawn”). Dogs, meadows, aunts, uncles, moths, snow, grasses, trees, silkworms, and squalls “fling themselves in a violent arc against the dark and are gone” (“Midnight of the Word”).

Immersion, redemptive for Julian of Norwich, whose *Revelations* Sampson echoes, had, fifteen years earlier, held him as he considered the world. Again, the work of *Needlegrass* is to hunt the always vanishing, revelatory instant:

*I can identify for you the various weeds, read the minds of
flowers,
show how the liturgy of the cardinal
exemplifies that love is nearly enough. It never is.
For once the world can't be betrayed by the beautiful lie.*

—If You Were Here

Struggling for the hope assumed throughout *The Double Genesis* and *Forgiveness*, *Needlegrass* draws on the solitude of *Constant Longing*, but with a more generous and spirited embrace: “And you let that truth come at you. You let it sing” (“What the Rising of the Dead Shall Mean”).

In his latest book, *For My Father Falling Asleep at Saint Mary’s Hospital*, Sampson either stays at the side of his dying father in South Dakota, or he is alone in North Carolina.

Continued on page 24

Unthinkable Generosity *continued from page 23*

Because of the necessities of attending his father and then returning to his own home before going back again, every observation is a failed sanctuary and defeated stay against restless reorientation and inevitability:

I plunge my face into my pillows.

*I beseech the gods for a little peace.
I curse their cajoling, their infinite screams,*

*let myself be provoked by the politician of the mulberry—
tormented by the critic of small please. I exclaim,*

"Let me sleep. Let me sleep." *And that crow
answers back:* "You will, and for longer than you think."

—When the Crows Start Up With Me This Morning

Just as Sampson intuitively understood twenty years earlier in *The Double Genesis*, in *For My Father Falling Asleep at Saint Mary's Hospital* memory and presence blur, fraught with unforeseen significance, if not sanctuary, the way his father's death will never leave him. "On the bed the exquisite sculpted figure glows," he writes in "Going Home."

In the two decades between *The Double Genesis* and *For My Father*, Sampson never lost interest in great objective truths—perhaps for his having been thrown into the midst of so many—but through his own wholehearted devotions to accounting for his life he gradually becomes more of what William Butler Yeats calls in his *Autobiography* one of the "subjective men...who must spin a web out of their own bowels."

What is the worth of the poet's or anyone's life? Only in these last two collections does Sampson affirm that worth as an ultimately impossible mystery, impossible for its final and inexplicable reality: that the dying of those of whom we are a part somehow unavoidably redeems both the dead and the living. The affirmation that Levine spoke of as second chances in life would be challenged in these decades—challenged, examined, and accepted.

Hopefully, Sampson has many more poems ahead of him, for his is poetry that I need in order to continue believing that—past all indifference, cruelty, and cunning—the enduring truths do not stop until the bearer is convicted and compelled by beauty. I know of no higher calling, and I wait eagerly to see where Sampson will take us next.

Louie Skipper's third book of poems, *The Work Ethic of the Common Fly*, will be published this fall by Settlement House Press.

BOOKS BY DENNIS SAMPSON

*For My Father Falling Asleep at
Saint Mary's Hospital*,
Milkweed Editions, 2005.

Needlegrass, Carnegie Mellon, 2005.
Constant Longing,
Milkweed Editions, 2000.

Forgiveness, Milkweed Editions, 1990.
The Double Genesis,
Story Line Press, 1985.

Waving *continued from page 17*

Tartt, for instance. Reading a few best-sellers never hurts.

Whether writers imitate Faulkner, admire him, ignore him, or pretend he never existed, we're all in some way waving our hearts out to the Dixie Express. Maybe waving fondly, maybe waving the dust and cinders out of our eyes, maybe just waving out of habit at a passing train. Yet Southern writers inventing themselves and their stories cannot afford to overlook the obvious. We should be aware of where we are and the time in which we write, all while establishing our distinct voices.

Rodney Jones in an essay wrote, "The paradox of region is that it is too large to produce great art." The artist who tries to encompass the entire region by using the shorthand of the stock, standard image, the tried-and-true plot, the clichéd character is lazy, unimaginative, and misguided. The South is too large to have only one great writer—even one as complex and prolific as Faulkner—to capture it or its influence on the human condition. We need honest writers. Many. Different.

In an interview, Tony Earley was asked about his plans for writing. "My artistic goal is to write the way Earl Scruggs plays the banjo."

One man's essence of the South.
Hard, precise, and fast.

Anita Garner, winner of the 2005-06 Alabama State Council on the Arts Fellowship in fiction, writes and teaches in Florence, Alabama.

The Alabama Writers' Forum,
a statewide literary organization promoting writers and writing, wishes to thank
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A Fond Farewell

by Georgine Clarke

In September 2007, in the space of only four days, Alabama lost two beloved, legendary artists. Georgine Clarke, Visual Arts Program Manager for the Alabama State Council on the Arts and founder of the Kentuck Festival in Northport, graciously provided these obituaries to First Draft.



Jimmy Lee Sudduth

help of substances like honey, Coca-Cola, or ordinary sugar. Added ingredients ranged from coffee grounds, tobacco, and elderberries to crushed leaves and flower petals rubbed directly on the surface. In later years he added commercial paint to his palette. Sudduth's well-known images include cabins, the courthouse and churches in Fayette, cityscapes, self-portraits, dancing figures, celebrities, and many varieties of his dog, Toto.

Stories of the beginning of Jimmy Lee's art-making tell of a childhood trip (perhaps at the age of three) to the woods, gathering plants with his adoptive mother, a medicine woman. He drew a picture with mud on a tree stump. When he and his mother returned to the spot a few days later, the picture was still there, an indication that he must keep painting.

Jimmy Lee had worked in a local gristmill and lumber mill, but was known by many in Fayette as a gardener. Perhaps the most important influence in his art career was Jack Black, a neighbor and

JIMMY LEE SUDDUTH

The paintings of Jimmy Lee Sudduth were made with a mud mixture applied to boards with his fingers. He said he could locate mud in thirty-six different shades. The mixture adhered to boards with the

newspaper publisher. Black founded the Fayette Art Museum, a surprising institution housing significant collections of Sudduth's works as well as pieces by other local folk artists: Fred Webster, Lois Wilson, Brother B.F. Perkins, and Sybil Gibson.

Jimmy Lee was an institution at the annual Kentuck Festival in Northport, responsible to a great degree for the significant reputation it holds. Visitors would wait for his arrival, almost as an opening bell. In early years, he would arrive at the front of the park, unload his paintings, and lean them around a tree. In later years, the frenzy for buying the pieces meant they never got officially unloaded.

The State of Alabama honored Jimmy Lee in 2005 with the prestigious Governor's Art Award, given biennially to a select group of individuals. He has been the only one of the state's many legendary self-taught artists presented this award. His unique approach to both life and art was featured at the Smithsonian Institution's 1976 Bicentennial Festival of American Folklife in Washington. His works were included in many exhibitions and publications including *Passionate Visions of the American South: Self-Taught Artists from 1940 to the Present*, organized by the New Orleans Museum of Art. In 2005, the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts organized *The Life and Art of Jimmy Lee Sudduth*, a retrospective

exhibition and publication, curated by Susan Mitchell Crawley, Associate Curator of Folk Art at the High Museum of Art in Atlanta. Sudduth was not able to travel to the exhibition, but he delighted in remembering the paintings, like lost friends, as he turned the pages of the book, selecting a momentary favorite for his signature.



Jimmy Lee Sudduth enjoyed the company of other artists at the Annual Kentuck Festival each year. He and the late Brother B. F. Perkins (also of Fayette) are shown here at Kentuck, circa 1991. Photo: Jeanie Thompson

The Homegoing Service at the West Highland Church of Christ in Fayette on September 6, 2007 noted Jimmy Lee's life: from Sunrise 3/10/1910 to Sunset 9/2/2007. Born in Cains Ridge, Alabama, he was 97 and had been living in a Fayette nursing home for several years. The church program noted that Sudduth is survived by a daughter, Annie Jemison, three grandchildren, two great-grandchildren, four great-great grandchildren, special caregivers O.C. Sudduth and Dorothy Blackburn and a host of nieces, nephews, cousins, and friends. Members of the church graciously served dinner after the burial. A reception at the Fayette Art Museum gave a chance to remember, tell stories, and see his art.

Jimmy Lee was a charismatic man. People loved him, and he returned that love. At surprise moments he would sing and bring out his harmonica for a session of traditional blues. He was exuberant about the process of making his art. “Look at that,” he would say as a picture emerged on the board. “I got people coming to see me from New York and California—from the end of the world.”

Indeed you do, dear friend.

NORA FZFU



Nora Ezell

Her quilts showcased traditional patterns, but they also told stories of the Civil Rights Movement, pictured Children of the World, featured pockets to hold newly minted quarters from the United States series, and celebrated the University of Alabama. Nora Lee McKeown Ezell made quilts in an African-American tradition, but her designs were very much her own. She said, "I created my own style to do quilts in because I didn't want to do what nobody else did. I wanted to do something different. I never plan on making a pattern. I do whatever comes off the top of my head."

Ms. Ezell was born in Brooksville, Mississippi in 1917, one of ten children. Her seamstress mother taught her to sew, a path that moved from making her own clothes and discovering that quilts could be made from scraps of feed and flour sacks

to working in factories in New Jersey to eventually returning to Alabama—and to quilting.

A 1992 National Heritage Fellowship from the National Endowment of the Arts and 1990 Folk Heritage Award from the Alabama State Council on the Arts celebrated these quilts, made with creative freedom and considerable skill at appliqué and embroidery. They hang in museum collections and are showcased in the Year of Alabama Arts Folk Art Exhibition at the Birmingham Museum of Art.

As she quilted, Ms. Ezell kept a diary, writing about her daily life, her house, a grandchild—and keeping track of the hours she worked on each quilt. She recorded that a Bible story quilt took 1,800 hours to complete. That diary, *My Quilts and Me: The Diary of an American Quilter*, was published in 1999 by Black Belt Press.

Ms. Ezell died September 6, 2007, survived by four granddaughters, five sisters, a brother, seven great-grandchildren and eleven great-great grandchildren. Recorded in an interview for the Alabama Folkways Radio Series, she said, "I like to put a little bit of me in my quilts because I think this is one thing that lives on after us."

And you will live on, Nora.

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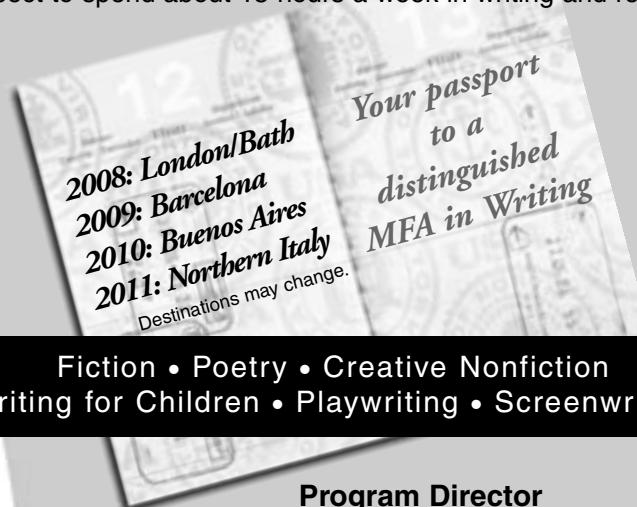
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The symposium is a project of the Alabama Center for Literary Arts and is sponsored by Alabama Southern Community College.

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Visit our online literary journal Thicket at www.athicket.com

How We Talk to You

This fall we enter a new phase of conversation with the Alabama writing community.

For starters, we have expanded our borders significantly through the Internet to include the global community of readers. Our *First Draft* Reviews Online launched September 10, presenting twelve reviews accessible at www.writersforum.org (click the "Book Reviews" tab in the top tool bar). Each month we will post twelve more reviews, all of which are archived by author, title, reviewer, and genre. Over the course of one year, we'll review 144 books, rather than the fifty plus titles we've reviewed previously in the print edition of our journal *First Draft*. Links to the publisher, the author, and the reviewer allow readers, students, and teachers more access to information about Alabama's growing literary community. Our previous ten years of reviews in *First Draft* remain online in a PDF format.

By now you've also received our e-newsletter, the Alabama Writers' Forum *Literary News*, in your inbox since April. Refining how we present literary news, will, we trust, keep you up to date on literary events in Alabama. Our e-newsletter will frequently point you to the Forum's Web site for further information or to other Web sites. Again, we think this Web-based communication tool allows us to bring you considerably more current news of Alabama writers and writing.

Finally, *First Draft* will become a journal of literary thought, with articles about writing, writers, and reading by some of our best Alabama writers. With reviews and news shifted to an electronic format, we can dedicate all



the pages of the journal to prose that you will want to spend quality time with at your leisure. Of course, these articles are posted at www.writersforum.org in the PDF section of *First Draft*.

In this issue, we are especially happy to feature an Alabamian who has come home to Union Springs and re-enters our literary family in a major way. "An Afternoon Visit with Wade Hall" by Marianne Moates will

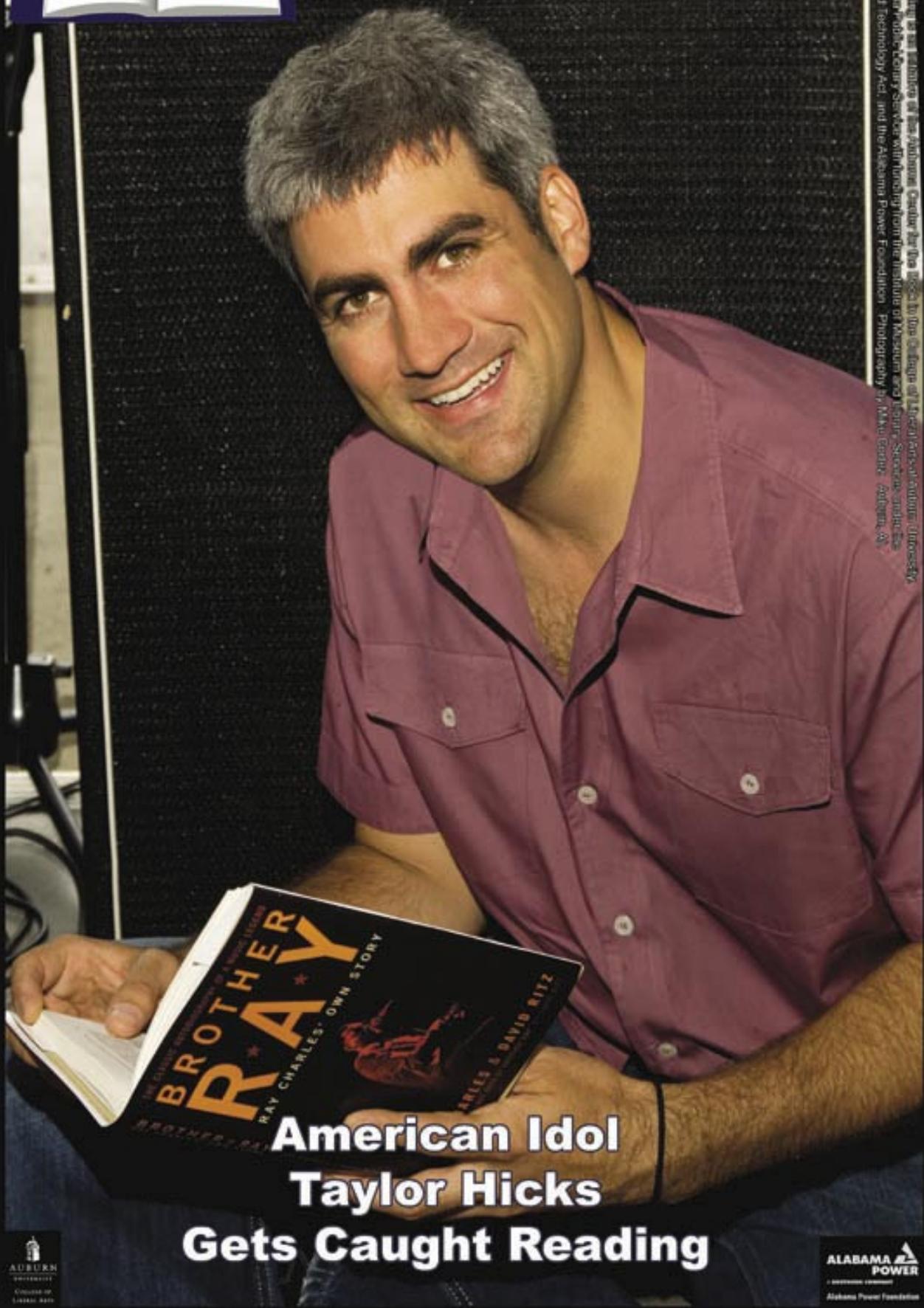
introduce you to—or remind you of!—Hall's enormous contribution to Alabama and Kentucky letters. We asked award-winning fiction writer Anita Garner to ruminate a bit on contemporary fiction in light of historical mega-figures such as William Faulkner, and we invited Janice Harrington to talk about the shift in her life recently to working full-time as a writer/teacher after a career in library service. Jennifer Horne tells about her trip to study Yeats in his homeland, and features by Alabama writers working abroad will be a regular aspect of *First Draft* as will craft or career-oriented pieces such as Elizabeth Via Brown's compendium of advice from writers and arts administrators. Finally, we will invite writers to stretch out and talk about writers they have learned from as Louie Skipper does in his twenty-year retrospective of the poetry of Dennis Sampson.

We hope you enjoy the new way that we are talking to you, and we want to hear from you, too! Please send any letters to the editor to writersforum@bellsouth.net.

Enjoy the conversation—on the Web or in the quiet of your living room or front porch—and let us hear from you.

A handwritten signature in cursive ink that reads "Janice Harrington".

Get caught reading.

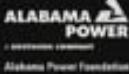


American Idol Taylor Hicks Gets Caught Reading

Auburn University's Reading is an Initiative of the Alabama Center for the Book in the Office of Special Collections and University Archives, supported by the Alabama Public Library Service with funding from the Institute of Museum and Library Services under the Federal Library Services and Technology Act, and the Alabama Power Foundation. Photography by Maku Goto for Auburn University.



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