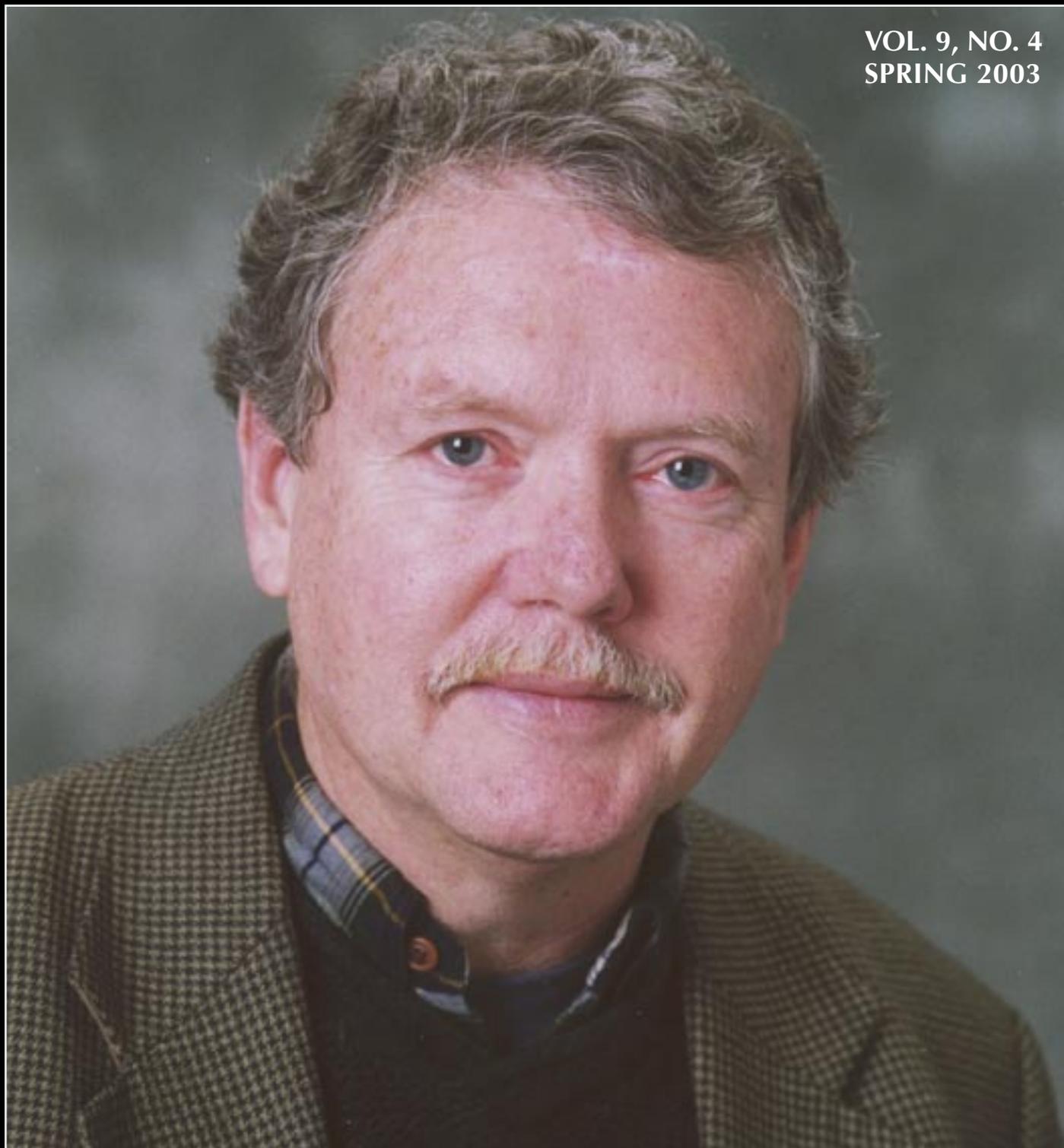


The Journal of the Alabama Writers' Forum

FIRST DRAFT

VOL. 9, NO. 4
SPRING 2003



Harper Lee Award Winner Rodney Jones

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From the Executive Director The Alabama Writers' Forum

*Join us May 1-3
in Monroeville for an
Alabama Literary Milestone*



Jeanie Thompson

As you open the spring issue of *First Draft*, I invite you to enter what poet Rodney Jones, our 2003 Harper Lee Award recipient, calls “The Kingdom of the Instant.” Take a few minutes to read about Jones, a native of Falkville, Alabama, who has published a shelf-full of books—seven collections in all, with six from Houghton Mifflin Company, no small feat for an American poet barely into his 50s—in Dan Kaplan’s interview / story on p 2. Jones has lived away from Alabama for many years and now makes his home in Carbondale, Illinois. But in poem after poem he returns to the Alabama landscape that formed him to portray the people of his home state and the changes that the homogenization of America have wrought on them.

In *The Remembered Gate: Memoirs by Alabama Writers*, Jones tells about “One Mile of Dirt Road” where he grew up in Morgan County and opines that there may not be any regional writing left. But if you read his poems, hear that Southern cadence, and see how the images of biscuits, mules, old mattresses, and boys in cars careening around the countryside simply will not leave his work, you’ll get a different impression. He speaks with the voice of the South and the wisdom of the world.

Generously funded by George F. Landegger, the Eugene Current-Garcia Award for the Alabama’s Distinguished Literary Scholar and the Harper Lee Award for Alabama’s Distinguished Writer 2003 sends a letter to the literary world about the best of Alabama’s best writers.

I hope you will join us in Monroeville May 1-3 to take part in the Alabama Writers Symposium where we will celebrate not only the sixth annual gathering in Alabama’s literary capital, but also the 10th anniversary of the Alabama Writers’ Forum. An Alabama literary milestone in its literary capital! I couldn’t be happier that an Alabama poet who grew up in my home county will be with us May 2 to accept his award. We are holding this event for you, our associates and literary friends, and we will be most pleased if you can join us! (*See opposite page for conference schedule and registration information.*)

Jeanie Thompson
Jeanie Thompson
Executive Director

The Alabama Writers’ Forum is generously funded by the Alabama State Council on the Arts, with additional funding from corporate, institutional, and individual associates.



*Join us for the sixth annual
Alabama Writers Symposium
May 1-3, 2003
in Monroeville, Alabama*

Schedule of Events

THURSDAY, MAY 1

6:30 p.m. Reception

7:30 p.m. Opening Banquet: An Evening with Rheta Grimsley Johnson, interviewed by Don Noble

FRIDAY, MAY 2

8:15 a.m. The Power of the Written Word: Dr. Elaine Hughes

8:45 a.m. Readings by fiction writers Brad Watson and Michelle Richmond, personal essayists R. Scott Brunner and Rheta Grimsley Johnson, and poets Natasha Trethewey and Frank X Walker

10:45 a.m. Book Signing

11:30 a.m. Dedication of the Monroeville Writers Fountain and Courtyard

12:15 p.m. Awards luncheon honoring Harper Lee Award and Current-Garcia Award winners

2:30 p.m. Breakout sessions

Writing for Younger Readers: Aileen Henderson and William Miller

Writing Historical Fiction: Sena Jeter Naslund, Julia Oliver, and Marvin Rogers

Four Authors and Their Publishers: Suzanne Hudson, Paul Gaston, Paul Hemphill, and Carolyn Haines with their publishers

3:30 p.m. Reading by Mark Childress

4:15 p.m. Book Signing

5:30 p.m. Picnic

7 p.m. *To Kill a Mockingbird* performance

7:30 p.m. Light Jazz and Heavy Conversation

SATURDAY, MAY 3

At Monroe County Courthouse

9 a.m. Novel to Film: How Alabama Landed *Big Fish* with Daniel Wallace and Brian Kurlander

10 a.m. A Novelist Tells All: Cassandra King

11:15 a.m. Poetry Reading by Rodney Jones

At ASCC

9 a.m. Becoming the Best Writer You Can Be: A Conversation Among Teachers and Students, with Sena Jeter Naslund, Brad Watson, James White, Michael Martone

12:15 p.m. Luncheon with the Honorable John Lewis, U.S. House of Representatives

2 p.m. Book Signing

For more information call Donna Reed, (251) 575-3156, ext. 223/ email: dreed@ascc.edu. or Lee Taylor, (251) 575-3156, ext. 265/ email: ltaylor@ascc.edu

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RODNEY JONES

WINS 2003 HARPER LEE AWARD First Poet to Be Selected

RODNEY JONES is the recipient of the 2003 Harper Lee Award for the Distinguished Alabama Writer, given annually by the Alabama Writer's Forum (AWF) to a nationally recognized author of fiction, poetry, nonfiction, or drama from the state. Jones will receive the award, which carries a \$5,000 prize and a Frank Fleming sculpture of the Monroeville clock tower, on Friday, May 2, as part of the Sixth Annual Alabama Writers Symposium (May 1-3) at Alabama Southern Community College in Monroeville. The event also celebrates the 10th anniversary of the AWF.

Jones is no stranger to literary accolades. His first collection of poetry, *The Story They Told Us of Light*, was selected by Elizabeth Bishop as an Associated Writing Programs Award Series winner; his third, *Transparent Gestures*, won the National Book Critics Circle Award; his sixth, *Elegy for the Southern Drawl*, achieved Pulitzer Prize finalist status; and his poems have been included in six volumes (count 'em: six!) of *The Best American Poetry*. He has also received the Jean Stein Award in Poetry from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, the Lavan Younger Poets Award from the Academy of American Poets, the Kenyon Review Award for Literary Excellence, a Guggenheim Fellowship, a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship, and many other awards. He is the author of seven collections of poetry.

Born in Hartselle in 1950, raised in Falkville, Jones earned his BA from the University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, in 1971 and his MFA from the University of North Carolina, Greensboro, in 1973. Since 1985, he has been a member of the English department faculty at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. Although he has lived outside the South for many years, he has never lost touch with where he's from. "I've always felt very

much like one of the people of Alabama," says Jones. "Receiving this award feels like a welcome home."

The South—Alabama in particular—has always been a subject of Jones's work, but it is certainly not the exclusive one. "The South will always be a part of me," says Jones. "It's funny, though: if I'm writing about any place, critics will call it the South. I'm offended in some ways by how I'm labeled. But I'm also proud of it."

What distinguishes Jones's poems? Above all, the language. Whether exploring his home state, family, the natural world, poem-making, literature, politics, or cultural static and flux, whether elegizing, satirizing, or celebrating, he transforms his subjects into clear, fluid, precise, insightful, ear-pleasing lyrics.

While in good company as a Harper Lee Award winner—the previous recipients are fiction writers Albert Murray (1998), Madison Jones (1999), Helen Norris (2000), Sena Jeter Naslund (2001), and Mary Ward Brown (2002)—Jones is the first poet to win the award, which makes receiving it all the more gratifying to him. "Poets, in general, have a tougher time getting recognition," Jones explains. "Poetry is subversive, posed against recognition, so it makes sense that poets would be less recognized. They're asking for it. Many people aren't paying attention to what's around them, so poets are plumbing the depths of originality. And there's not much of a market for that."

Clearly, success hasn't spoiled Jones, who knows that things don't get any easier for a writer who doesn't tire of the challenge. "Right now, I'm just trying to write individual poems," says Jones. "I've been working hard at it. I'm always in a position to be partially blocked, partially thrilled. But I suppose all writers are."

Dan Kaplan is Editor of Black Warrior Review.

A Defense of Poetry

If abstract identity, philosophy's silhouette, authorless, quoted,
and italicized, governs by committee the moments
of a mutinying, multitudinous self, then I'm lost.

But let a semi loaded with bridge girders come barreling
down on me, I'm in a nanosecond propelled
into the singular, fleet and unequivocal as a deer's thought.

As to the relevance of poetry in our time, I delay and listen
to distances: John Fahey's "West Coast Blues," a truck
backing up, hammers, crows in their perennial discussion of moles.

My rage began at forty. The unstirred person, the third-person
void, the you of accusations and reprisals, visited me.
Many nights we sang together; you don't even exist.

In print, a little later is the closest we come to now: the turn
in the line ahead and behind; the voice, slower than the brain;
and the brain, slower than the black chanterelle.

The first time I left the South I thought I sighted
in an Indiana truck stop both Anne Sexton
and John Frederick Nims, but poetry makes a little dent like a dart.

It's the solo most hold inside the breath as indigestible truth.
For backup singers, there's the mumbling of the absolutes.
Du-bop of rain and kinking heat. La-la of oblivion.

Sheep-bleat and stone-shift and pack-choir.
There is a sense beyond words that runs through them:
animal evidence like fur in a fence, especially valuable now,

self-visited as we are, self-celebrated, self-ameliorated,
and self-sustained, with the very kit of our inner weathers,
with migraine, our pain du jour, our bread of suffering.

If poetry is no good to you, why pretend it can enlighten you?
Why trouble the things you have heard or seen written
when you can look at the madrone tree?

—Rodney Jones, from *Kingdom of the Instant*
("A Defense of Poetry," from KINGDOM OF THE INSTANT by Rodney Jones.
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BOOKS BY RODNEY JONES

*The Story They Told Us of
Light* (1980, The University
of Alabama Press)

The Unborn (1984, The Atlan-
tic Monthly Press)

Transparent Gestures (1989,
Houghton Mifflin)

*Apocalyptic Narrative and
Other Poems* (1993,
Houghton Mifflin)

Things That Happen Once
(1996, Houghton Mifflin)

Elegy for the Southern Drawl
(1999, Houghton Mifflin)

Kingdom of the Instant (2002,
Houghton Mifflin)

Writer in the Family

by Martha Huie

William Bradford Huie, my late husband, was, obviously, the writer in this family. Now, like Elvis, in whose town of Memphis I now live, Bill “has left the building,” and we who survive have their legacies, for better or for worse. You decide.

I know where I stand with regard to the legacy of Bill Huie’s 60-year career as “writing man,” which is the way he referred to himself. He was impatient and dismissive of his chosen career being called an “art.” He would say flatly, “It’s just what I do. I get up every morning and face that blank sheet of paper in my typewriter. It’s what I’ve done all my life, and I really don’t know how to do anything else.”

He was right about that, as he was right about many other things—no matter how many others of us did not want to agree at times. “Controversial” has always been the word used most frequently by reviewers about him, as well as about his work. Every day that I knew him, up to and including the day he died one week after his 76th birthday in 1986, he wrote. He wrote what he believed needed saying, even when he was saying it “ahead of his time,” another over-used but useful “crutch” for trying to describe or explain something or somebody too troublesome to easily understand—like Bill Huie.

Now that he is not here in person to talk back, debate, explain, or rebut, academicians and others have a quieter (safer) advantage for expressing opinions on Huie. (I know from experience, along with *Life* magazine, presidents, and politicians, et al., the hazards of debating Bill Huie.) More to the point, with the wealth of extant Huie material covering people and events in our history for virtually three-quarters of a century, and with the advantage of our “20/20 hindsight,” a new and different usefulness of William Bradford Huie’s record is possible.



Martha and William Bradford Huie

I the non-writer was unsuspectingly, and more or less innocently, going about my role of Art Instructor at Snead College when Bill Huie and I met. The rest is the old story of the Irresistible Force and the Immovable Object. My own greatest talent has turned out to be outliving a whole bunch of people, including dearest rascal-renegade Bill.

In 1975, we at Snead were already at work with the Alabama State Council on the Arts to establish an “Alabama Authors Collection.” A small room in the library was reserved to hold works and photographic portraits of our original core choices of fiction writers: Babs Deal, Borden Deal,

Elise Sanguinetti, W. L. Heath with Bill Huie getting in “just under the wire”! Today, additional Alabama authors materials have overflowed that room, and the recent conference on Huie at Snead included dedication of a special new space for the expanded collection, the Aubrey Carr Room at McCain Learning Resource Center. It is exciting to spotlight the best of past, present, and future Alabama talent and achievement.

Although I regularly cooperate with contemporary writers on their projects involving WBH properties and willingly share information, my role as the Widder Huie is not to attempt to explain, protect, defend, describe, promote, or memorialize any of it. Through the years, without any help from me, I have seen Bill’s personal example inspire and encourage people to produce their own very valuable work. For me, this is the most important aspect of any focus on William Bradford Huie: the ongoing motivation that he continues to furnish. Proof and manifestation of

that are new publications of the 1990s, 2000, ’01, ’02, and even 2003 in which he and his works are personal cultural documents. But at the same time, Huie’s work stands on its own in its original conception, as it always has.

Now that you have endured my non-writing thus far, I want to reward both you and myself. I will share here for the first time some unpublished William Bradford Huie writing. If it does for you what it does for me, I will be satisfied. It is a reminder of the indomitable spirit of a little North Alabama county boy growing up very much affected by the Great Depression and wars, the son of parents who did not themselves get to finish high school but who believed in education. What’s more they passionately believed in their boy. And he did not disappoint.

Here are a few rearranged excerpts from the typed draft of three chapters, 154 pages, of memoirs that I had plagued Bill to begin. Notes in brackets are mine. I copyrighted the unfinished manuscript as “Recollections of a Loner.” He was writing this when he died.

In May 1927...I graduated from Morgan County High School in Hartselle, Alabama. The president of the Bank of

Hartselle presented me a five-dollar gold piece for being valedictorian. Then I delivered my valedictory, and while I was speaking, Lindbergh was landing in Paris....

Then came the Monday morning in September when Dad and I would board the Accommodation [railroad train car] and ride to Tuscaloosa where I would enroll at the University of Alabama....As I had been doing for the last eight years, I was up by sun up milking Rosie. When I finished milking her, I set the milk pail down, put my arms around Rosie's neck, laid my check against her warm-soft hide and cried.

Soon after I entered the University...I decided that I would not become a doctor or a lawyer, I would become a storyteller....

[Here he rewrites "an example of the sort of story which earned me a worldwide audience," relating the conviction of a black defendant, whom he believed to be not guilty, by a white justice system. Then comment continues.]

You never heard of Roosevelt Wilson. I never saw him but twice in his life [at his trial and at his execution]. But Roosevelt Wilson continues to disturb me. Whenever I try to feel that I was an honest supporter of individual human rights, Roosevelt Wilson perches on my shoulder and reminds me that once [in 1933 as young newspaper reporter] I had had a chance to strike a blow for the ideal of individual human rights, but that I turned aside with the Pontius Pilates and whimpered, "What the goddam hell can I do!"

At the University...what I [had] considered my most important hours...were the ones I spent in the library. Since I had traveled nowhere outside Alabama, only in the library could I decide what I believed in. Only there could I choose which individuals or movements I wanted to support, and which ones I wanted to oppose.

Naturally, I wanted to support whatever Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, James Madison, George Washington and Abraham Lincoln had supported. And, if I had understood correctly, what they had supported was the revolutionary idea of individual human freedom. Aren't the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States magnificent expressions of the idea of human freedom? That's what I wanted to live for, work for, endure for, and, if necessary die for.

Those who know Huie's works will see the seeds of some of it in there, and that can be of academic interest and usefulness. And we might agree that William Bradford Huie did not do the Pontius Pilate thing many more times in his career, if any. Those not familiar with his work of all those years following his Roosevelt Wilson experience will relate anyhow in a human way. I find it hopeful now to present to you those words of an old man at the end of life, one of us, remembering. We are his heirs. The belief in *individual human freedom* is a mutual birthright and our legacy. Terrorists beware!

William Bradford Huie

In early April, Snead State Community College hosted "William Bradford Huie/Alabama Collection Week," a major five-day conference focusing on Huie.

Martha Huie, scholars Wayne Flynt and Don Noble, writer Wayne Greenhaw, filmmaker Brent Davis, newspaper editor and writer Sam Harvey, and others discussed Huie's work and life. Also featured were several films, including "The Americanization of Emily," based on Huie's 1959 novel; "I'm in the Truth Business: William Bradford Huie," a documentary by Brent Davis and Don Noble; and a new documentary on *The Advertiser-Glean*, the north Alabama newspaper whose editor Porter Harvey was, along with Huie, inducted into the Communication and Information Hall of Fame.

Snead State faculty member Cynthia Denham, coordinator of the conference, noted that the conference was designed to appeal not only to scholars and students but also to writers. Special sessions focused on writing for publication and finding a publisher. Denham stressed that the conference also aimed to encourage further interest and research in Huie's work.

WBH Bibliography

- Mud on the Stars (1942; University of Alabama Press reprint, 1997)
- Can Do: The Story of the Seabees (1944, Naval Institute Press reprint, 1997)
- From Omaha to Okinawa (1945, Naval Institute Press reprint, 1999)
- The Case Against the Admirals: Why We Must Have a Unified Command (Dutton, 1946)
- The Revolt of Mamie Stover (Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1951; 1956 motion picture)
- The Execution of Private Slovik (Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1954; 1974 television movie)
- Ruby McCollum: Woman in the Suwannee Jail (Dutton, 1956)
- Wolf Whistle and Other Stories (New American Library, 1959)
- The Americanization of Emily (Dutton, 1959; 1964 motion picture)
- The Hero of Iwo Jima and Other Stories (New American Library, 1962; 1961 motion picture, "The Outsider")
- Hotel Mamie Stover (Potter, 1963)
- The Hiroshima Pilot: The Case of Major Claude Eatherly (Putnam, 1965)
- Three Lives for Mississippi (1965, University Press of Mississippi reprint, 2000)
- The Klansman (1967, Dell reprint 1975; 1974 motion picture)
- He Slew the Dreamer: My Search with James Earl Ray for the Murder of Dr. Martin Luther King (1970, Black Belt Press reprint, 1997)
- In the Hours of the Night (Delacorte, 1975)
- A New Life to Live (Nelson, 1977)
- It's Me, O Lord (Nelson, 1979)

SONGS OF HERSELF

New Books and New Facts About Zora Neale Hurston



Zora Neale Hurston postage stamp, 2003

Since Alice Walker initiated the revival of Zora Neale Hurston's literary reputation in 1973, Hurston scholarship has flowered. She was the subject of a Modern Language

Association session in 1975 and a scholarly biography by Robert E. Hemenway in 1977. Her work is taught and anthologized at all levels from middle school through college. Now three recently published books by and about Hurston broaden our view of this important American writer.

Hurston is so strongly associated with the community of Eatonville, Florida, that few readers know she is in fact an Alabama writer. This misconception stems from Hurston's autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, in which she says that she was born "in a Negro town. . . . Eatonville, Florida." She was in fact born in Notasulga, Alabama, the year before her parents moved their family to the all-black community of Eatonville, near Orlando. Later, her anthropological studies brought her back to Alabama to collect folk tales, and her brother Joel lived in Montgomery in the 1930s. One of many "new" facts discussed in the three new books is Hurston's Alabama origin.

Alabama can take pride in this native daughter. In

all Hurston's writings we can read introspection and self-expression, modes vital in American literature since pre-Revolutionary days. In those early days, African-Americans contributed their life stories in the form of slave narratives, many predating even Benjamin Franklin's more famous autobiography. As white residents of the new country struggled with defining themselves in opposition to their country of origin, African-Americans had to establish a space for themselves within their new, *unchosen* home without losing spiritual connection with their own origins. Ambiguity and contradiction, like the question of Hurston's birthplace, reflect the disparities African-American were forced to incorporate into their new cultural identity, not least maintaining personal and racial pride in humiliating circumstances. Hurston, like her people, walked this tightrope with brilliant grace.

Hurston's unique solution to the ambiguities she found herself living through has troubled readers from her earliest publications. Her contemporaries worried in the 1930s that the folk tales she recorded and novels she wrote in dialect would perpetuate "primitive" black stereotypes. Reviewing the letters and Valerie Boyd's *Wrapped in Rainbows: The Life of Zora Neale Hurston* (Scribner, 2002), *New York Times* writer Ann duCille alludes to "the inexplicably backward things she actually did say and do" and suggests "the old folks would say Zora was two-faced." The greatest contribution of Boyd's book and two other new books, *Every Tongue*

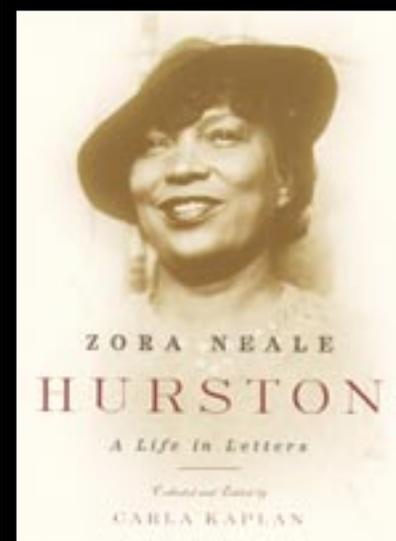
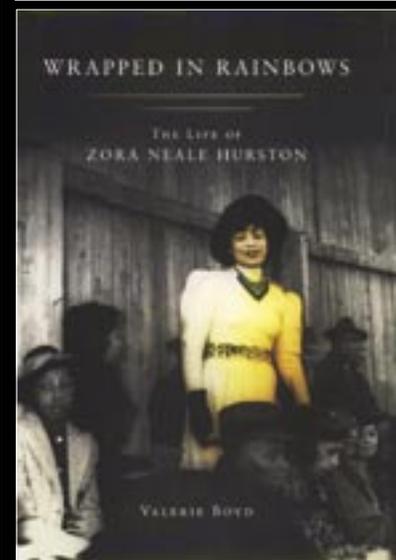
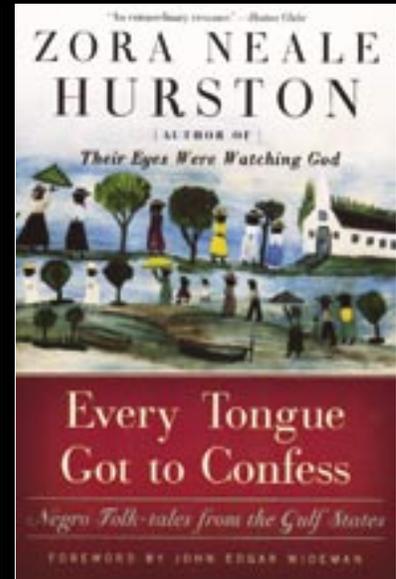
Got to Confess: Negro Folk Tales from the Gulf States (Perennial, 2002), stories Hurston collected in her field work edited by Carla Kaplan, and *Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters* (Doubleday, 2002), also edited by Kaplan, is to give us Hurston's own perspective on these so-called "backward" actions. In her letters, for example, we learn why she did not support the Supreme Court's 1954 school desegregation decision, why she thought it was "insulting rather than honoring" her race.

Every Tongue Got to Confess gives us the fruit of Hurston's original anthropological fieldwork in Alabama, Florida, Mississippi, and Louisiana in 1928 and 1929. After studying anthropology at Columbia with Franz Boas and Margaret Mead, she applied their methods to groups within American culture. On this trip, she recorded and preserved for study a rich folklore that includes elements of myth, religion, kinship, and daily life. The only published use of these materials during Hurston's lifetime is *Mules and Men* (1935). Intended for a popular audience, it includes a "frame narrative" travelogue featuring Hurston herself, as well as structured contexts for the storytellers. The original stories that Hurston collected and transcribed were lost in archives for fifty years until resurrected and edited by Carla Kaplan. Now the tales stand on their own for readers to interpret. In addition, readers can see Hurston's methods in her list of sources and other appended material.

The unmediated language might startle modern readers, as it did Hurston's contemporaries. Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison felt that she perpetuated racial stereotypes, comparing her work to a minstrel show for white folks. In a sensitive foreword, John Edgar Wideman confronts this contemporary complaint: he contends that, rather than perpetuate racist images, her transcribed tales "expanded the idea of what counts in literature," refusing to accept "marginal inclusion within the framework of someone else's literary aesthetic." Thanks to Kaplan, now readers can judge for themselves.

Boyd's *Wrapped in Rainbows* also has a connection to one of Hurston's own books, her autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road* (1942). This is the source of the erroneous idea about Hurston's birth, just one of many inconsistencies in her version of her life. Unfortunately, Boyd depends heavily on Hurston's own account for her early years, a serious weakness, and goes beyond simply accepting Hurston's version of her life, making excuses for known inconsistencies. For example, Boyd suggests, "perhaps her parents never told her she was actually born in Notasulga, Alabama." Later, she speculates that in Harlem, "Zora surely paid a visit to the Tree of Hope" and confided in it "the same way she had shared her girlhood longings with Eatonville's 'loving pine'." Such extrapolation may stem from research facts too good to waste, but they blur the line between biography and historical fiction.

Fortunately, Boyd's admiring immersion in Hurston and her work becomes a strength in the latter part of *Wrapped in Rainbows*. She smoothly weaves biographical facts with literary commentary, so that Hurston's writing and her life illuminate each other. Boyd's shrewd assessment of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston's most lasting novel, answers questions about both Hurston's writing style and her racial attitudes: "It protests white oppression



by stripping it of its potency, by denying its all-powerfulness in black people's lives. Hurston's literary method was not confrontation but affirmation."

Carla Kaplan's edition of Hurston's letters is the most valuable new addition to the Hurston library. At over 800 pages, the volume is worth reading for the insight the letters give into Hurston's thoughts. Kaplan's biographical essays introducing each decade of Hurston's life establish a meaningful context for that decade's letters, and Kaplan's graceful prose is also a pleasure to read. One paragraph, for example, closes with Hurston's cry for telling the truth about minorities, "Let there be light!" and the next opens with Kaplan's observation that a story written at the same time "is not very illuminating." Later, Kaplan describes Hurston in her last years as a "flamboyant and flirtatious speaker [who] was also a sixty-year-old woman exhausted from hellish ordeals, homeless, and broke." Without embroidering the facts, Kaplan paints a picture.

Unlike Boyd's, Kaplan's admiration for Hurston and her work seems based on careful and critical thought. Where Boyd blithely assumes that Hurston's claim of love for her autocratic patron Mrs. Osgood Mason was "genuine," Kaplan explains that all letters are "addressed to readers whose particularities they take into account." Thus when we read in a 1930 birthday letter to Mrs. Mason, "Spring means birth, but the real upspringing of life comes on May 18, when you renew your promise to the world to shine and brill for another year," we can only assume that Mrs. Mason wanted and expected such hyperbole. Kaplan goes beyond reiterating Hurston's own phrase "featherbed resistance" to explain the lack of political issues in *Dust Tracks on a Road* by quoting from the strong political passages cut by the publisher (and now available in the Library of America edition). Such thorough scholarship in her essays prepares readers for the complexity of the letters.

Hurston's letters reveal her reactions to the many controversies in her life and are expressive of the complexity of her personality and, indeed of the Harlem Renaissance itself. While Boyd devotes a clear chapter to the sensational—and totally false—charge of child molestation that Hurston faced in 1948, the letters convey her shock and grief in touching detail. Boyd does,

it is true, quote from many letters, but those phrases combined with Boyd's projections—"This thought surely crossed Zora's mind". . . "Searching her mind". . . "Zora was struck"—create a fictional impression. In contrast, Hurston's letter to Carl Van Vechten about an early hearing vividly describes her feelings:

Then the horror took me, for I saw that the lawyer was not seeking truth, but to make his charges stick. Horror of disbelief took me. I could not believe that a thing like that could be happening in the United States and least of all to me. It just could *not* be true! I must be in a nightmare.

Another letter to Fannie Hurst repeats this combination of personal hurt and political disgust. Hurston says she writes from "my cave so dark and deep that it seems that all the suns of the universe could not light it up," painful emotions exacerbated by the fact that "this foul thing did not happen to me in the Deep South, but in enlightened New York City."

Hurston also discusses professional issues in the letters. We see her professionalism and competitiveness as an anthropologist in letters to Boas and Ruth Benedict. She writes to Langston Hughes about her books, planning them, asking for his advice, and predicting that "some are likely to object to my work." To William Stanley Hoole at Birmingham-Southern College, she sends a summary of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* many months before she wrote the book, closing proudly, "I do feel that the south is taking a new high place in American literature." (This letter to Hoole notes in a postscript, "I come of an Alabama family. Macon County.")

Finally, we have to thank Kaplan for collecting and editing Hurston's letters because they show a vibrant, lively, irrepressible personality. In her last year of life, moving between a rent-free house and the St. Lucie County Welfare Home, she still brimmed with ideas for survival. She writes to a friend of her plan to grow greens for local florists. The last letter in the book, amazingly, is a query to Harper Brothers about publishing "the book I am laboring on at present." Writer to the last, her letters show that we can all take pride in Alabama daughter, Zora Neale Hurston.

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Thank you!

ANOTHER SOUTH, An Other Place

by Russell Helms

I read it once. I read it twice. Like the shrimp criollo I'd had recently at the Globe in Northport, *Another South* is something new and completely surprising. The latest release from the University of Alabama's Modern and Contemporary Poetics Series (series editors Hank Lazer and Charles Bernstein), *Another South* is a fabulous and much-needed collection of experimental Southern writing. *Another South* caught me completely off-guard, but pleasantly so, like the Globe's spicy jumbo shrimp, Andouille sausage, and finely chopped vegetables and peppers, with a fluffy scoop of white grits on the side. Edited by Bill Lavender, proprietor of Lavender Ink Press and coordinator of the low-residency MFA program at the University of New Orleans, *Another South* is Southern fusion at its best: shrimp and grits gone experimental, and with good cause.

Says Lavender, "I think the publication of this anthology will lend some hope to Southern experimental writers who have given up on Southern publication venues. I also think the anthology will greatly increase the sense of community among the Southern avant garde and begin to establish a conversation between the more traditional Southern poets and the experimentalists."

Southern Fusion

Thirty-four poets from ten states compose, in 300 pages, the only anthology to date of experimental Southern writing. There are other anthologies of Southern literature, such as the *Norton Anthology: Literature of the American South*, but what they lack—inclusion of the Southern avant garde—is entirely what *Another South* is about.

In his introduction to *Another South*, Lavender describes the experimental as "poetry that pushes at a boundary, that attempts to cover new ground, that transgresses stylistically, semantically, socially, or politically." Lazer, in *his* introduction, claims experimental writing is characterized by "a wide range of relations to voice, to cross-genre activity, to the visual, to the surreal, to states of possession, and a wide range of expressions to musical affinities (particularly with the blues and jazz)."

Taken from his latest book, *Days* (a collection of short-line poems written over the course of a year), Lazer's poem "28" appears in *Another South*. "28" is characteristic of the personal, tight, and jazzed writing that appears in *Another South*. Subsumed with an unobtrusive numerology, the poems lean into the avant garde yet retain enough lyric quality to appeal to an audience beyond the experimental.



Bill Lavender



Honorée Jeffers

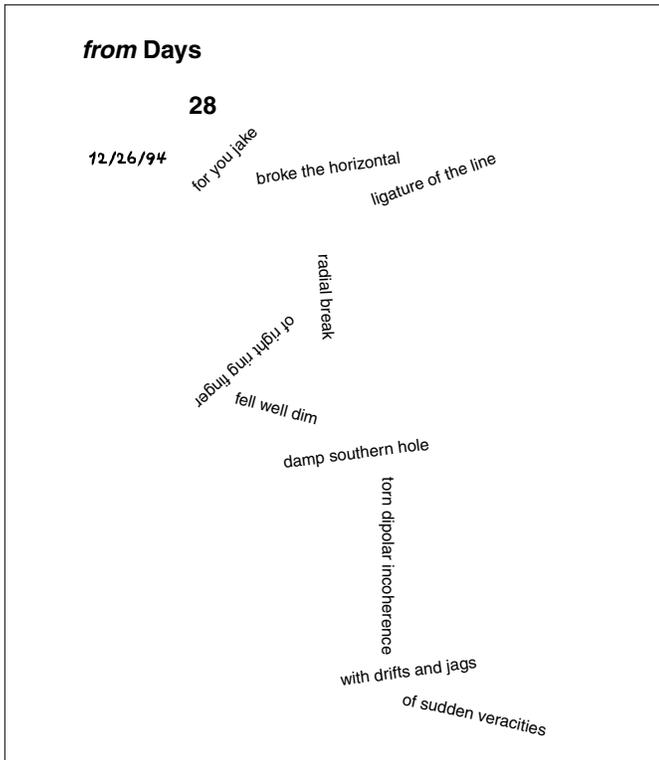


Poetic Series, Hank Lazer



Poet and artist, Jake Berry

Along with the jazz-infused lines, breaks, pauses, and breaths of Lazer, Honorée Jeffers' contributions to *Another South* reflect a writing she calls "informed by the blues metaphor." She says that "the blues, the history of the music, the sassiness and the tragedy of it, just got into me and never left. I always have the music in my head even when I am trying out new things in my work."



Sample these lines from her poem "You Don't Know What Love Is."

She's sniffing the perfume of homemade
cigarettes, chitlin plates, hair grease one
grade above Vaseline & the premature
funk wafting up from the rowdy kids
with no home training. Can't even pee
straight much less recognize a silver lamé
dress. All they know to do is demand
one song because they risked a certain
butt whipping to be in this joint, in these woods.
Dinah won't sing it, though.
She just won't sing the song.
I'm an evil gal, she hollers out instead.
Don't you bother with me!

"Black folks will know what I'm talking about," she says, "when I talk about cheap hair-grease—just a cheap grade that sticks to your scalp and leaves pimples in its wake! Seriously,

though, that poem is in my second book, which is very much about the blues, and, you know, the blues is just loud. Just real, real loud and raucous and relentless—and when I wrote those poems about the blues, I didn't just want to write some intellectual representation of the blues, I wanted to evoke the blues and make the poems sly, yet in your face ironies—just like the music."

Grounded firmly in detail that washes the mind's screen with vivid images, Jeffers' poetry is testimony to the variety of innovation contained in *Another South*. Although there are bonds of style and matter that hold the book together as a whole, like the shrimp criollo, the end result is surprise. The blend is distinct, marvelous, zesty.

Becoming Southern

Lazer has lived in Tuscaloosa since 1977 and is both a professor of English and an assistant vice president at the University of Alabama. Although born and raised in San Jose, California, Lazer considers himself a Southern writer as do the other writers in this anthology not born in the South. In addition to Lazer, two other poets who call Alabama home appear in *Another South*. Poet, artist, and musician Jake Berry, referenced in Lazer's "28," is a native and life-long resident of Florence. Poet and assistant professor Honorée Jeffers, who teaches English at the University of Oklahoma in Norman, is an Alabama native, a University of Alabama graduate, and writer with strong family ties to Talladega College (where her father taught, where her mother teaches and is an administrator, and where Jeffers herself taught).

Lavender's criteria for a writer to be considered "Southern" is simply "writers currently living in the South." His minimalist approach to defining a Southern writer certainly opens up the playing field, which is a good thing. As he states in his introduction to *Another South*, the South is more of a genre than a place. Lazer affirms this idea in his own introduction, tracing early notions of what the South is supposed to be like not to Southerners, but to people living outside of the South.

He gives the example of the Southern anthem "Dixie," which was written not by a Southerner, but by an Ohioan named Daniel Emmett. Although played at Jefferson Davis' inauguration in 1861, "Dixie" was written in 1859 for a minstrel group performing on Broadway in New York City. Playing faithfully to what New Yorkers wanted and expected to see and hear about Dixieland, the song fully endorsed popular notions of what life in the South should or ought to be like.

In an important way, *Another South* exists to say of the South what popular notions cannot. Aptly titled, the anthology does not deny the South its mainstream identity, but rather supplements it with an often-ignored vitality. As a practitioner of experimental writing that embraces diversity and cross-genre influences, Lavender is not out to "mount a revolution" but to fill a non-referential void that the traditional Southern literary establishment often appears to overlook.

“Let there be some discourse across the divide so that we can see how both sides are connected to the larger world,” he says.

The Art of Possession

Poet Jake Berry spends his evenings and nights connecting across great divides, using jazz, tea, intense reading, and meditation to dispel personal voids, brush aside intellectual boundaries, and “bring the full creature forward.” Yet another surprising element of *Another South*, and one Jake himself epitomizes, is the unabashed belief in possession as a valid path to inspiration. Although primarily a secular possession by ideas, Berry’s experiences drift into a spiritual realm often accompanied by visions.

“In order to be possessed,” says Berry, “one’s self must be displaced by something else. All of us experience this on occasion. Something dramatic happens and we say we are ‘beside ourselves.’ Part of the apparent difficulty stems from our idea of the self, that it is somehow constant and perpetual. But if we pay close attention we’ll see that this isn’t the case. So perhaps possession is about being aware of these shifts, these displacements, and giving them voice in some way. Of course, sometimes the ‘possession’ is dramatic in the usual theatrical sense; one is overwhelmed by something distinctly other. Possession, however it might be interpreted, is much closer to us than we imagine it to be.”

Jeffers, who views herself as “laboring in an established tradition of black literature,” affirms the role of possession not only in the experimental but also within Southern literature in general. According to her, this “issue of possession” is interesting because it “runs all through my work and other Southern works as well. My first book of poetry, *The Gospel of Barbecue*, was very much about family and the land, how they both possess a child of the South.”

Lazer notes that not all authors included in *Another South* find the “vocabulary of ‘possession’ as at all applicable.” However, he acknowledges the presence of possessive notions including that of “possession by a certain form or rhythm or sequence or phrase.” In addition to Berry’s rich, deep writings and Jeffers’ fertile word riffs, Andy Young’s poetry exhibits the fluid, organic manifest of possession. From “In Anguish, the Heart Finally Prays:” she writes:

in the way things burst forth

hear me

in milkweed pod and in silky threads slitting it open

hear me

in defiance of atrium, ventricle

in the pumpity-pumpity even when body lies still

hear me, please...

Compare Young’s eerie call and response to a brief haunting passage (excerpted from *Another South*) from Berry’s *Brambu Drezi, Book III*:

Overwhelmed in this spiraling jet of ancestors
that seize the levees and drag them
back to the mountains
and drag the mountains into the abyss.
Their pulsing flesh-blue figures dominate
the boundless sky that lies between the vertebrae
whose long electric veins
pour a half-ape angel into old winds and hollows.

Not that the art of possession is always spirit-informed or surreal, but there is a purposeful otherworldliness to much of the writing contained in *Another South*.

Southern Wordscapes: A Tension, A Place

Within this important work there is reflected a *de facto* tension between the experimental South and the mainstream Southern literary establishment. Two instances of this tension within the collection involve the ideas of place and emotive force. Perhaps nothing stereotypes a “Southern” poem or “Southern” story like the ritual baroque showing off of place. A sleepy town, a dusty bus stop, a cotton patch simmering in the summer sun, a small white church near a shallow, muddy river: you know the South when you read it. But do experimental Southern writers necessarily have to minimize or eliminate a traditional imagery of place in their work?

A. di Michele’s poems in *Another South* offer one answer to this question. His work reflects well the sum of spirit, structure, and content of the Southern experimentalists in *Another South*. His smooth surrealist tone and abstract imagery defines place as an interior entity—the psyche, the soul. From di Michele’s poem “Archipelago (Interra Diocesan)”:

everything is light
even the cane syrup glaze on murderous eyes
is an instant
of shine-through mathematics
etched on a brain of rewired
pulse and misfed acculturations

Although an experimental effort that projects a distinct vacuum of place, the poem’s “cane syrup glaze on murderous eyes” recasts the South as a psychological region.

For Lazer, the poem itself is a place: “When I say the poem constitutes a place—I mean literally the words, the page, the physical site of the text, and, most crucially, the moment/site of the poem’s making.” For him, the “external place—the actual physical location—is always already implicitly there in the writing.” As he says, “the words come out of our residence here—which includes the sounds and vocabularies of who we are and where we are.”

But the sounds and vocabularies of who the Southern experimentalists are do not fit the popular established billing of what constitutes Southern literature. This, fittingly, is precisely the case for the importance of discovering and nurturing the voices of this other South.

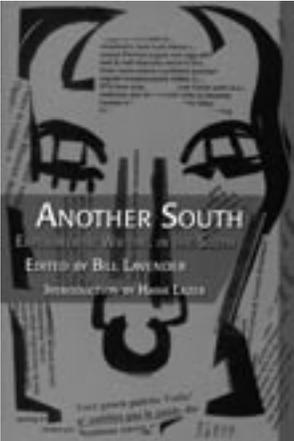
Where Do We Go from Here?

It's worthwhile to stop and glance at the status of Southern experimentalists within the larger national and international bodies of experimental writers. Where does this collection of regional experimental writing fit? In February, this very question came up during a visit to the University of New Orleans by the venerable critic Marjorie Perloff. At an informal discussion of *Another South*, Perloff praised *Another South* and was fascinated by the variety of work she read in it. But she questioned the application of "experimental" to the anthology, claiming that the term was "overused."

"I agreed with her," says Lavender, "but argued that it still seems a valid designation for this particular anthology at this particular time and place. The South has been dissociated from the avant garde and experimentation now for so long that I believe the term still has value here. This isn't by any means to say that I think the South is lagging behind the avant garde in the rest of the country. Frankly I don't see another part of the country with an experimental poetry community any more vital and intelligent than the one currently developing here in the South. I don't think it out of the question that the South, in ten or five or even three years, might come once again to be considered a leader in innovative literature, in a way that it hasn't been since Faulkner."

Lazer affirms Lavender's optimism: "What's next? More writing, more conversation, more manifestations of how to write here and now, more instances of the complex and beautiful interaction of 'our' writing with this place."

Russell Helms is an editor with Menasha Ridge Press in Birmingham.

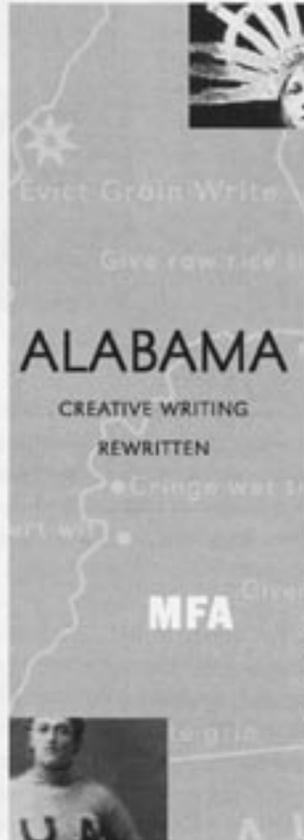


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Joyce Dixon

Making a Field of Dreams

JOYCE DIXON established the web magazine *Southern Scribe* “to provide a clearinghouse of information for working writers in the South and for those writing about the southern region.” Dixon and her work at *Southern Scribe* have been singled out by readers and critics for praise. The *Atlanta Journal Constitution* named the ‘zine “Best Site of the Week,” Margo Hammond interviewed the editor for the Southern Book Critics’ Circle’s newsletter, and *Writer’s Digest* featured *Southern Scribe* in the “Zine Scene” column. Pam Kingsbury recently talked with Dixon about her work.

Q How did *Southern Scribe* come to be? I was editor of *The Rock*, a weekly e-mail magazine for *Painted Rock* (www.paintedrock.com), and covering writing of all genres including international. As the magazine covered others outside our region, I realized that I wanted southern regional writing to be my focus. Carmel Thomaston, owner of *Painted Rock*, suggested I form a mailing list through her site to see if there was interest. The Southern Writers List was born in October 1998. It grew like a fire in a dry field. For years I had been reading the book sections of Sunday papers across the region looking for books to add to my “to buy” list. I had been sending links to articles to friends for years. One of the first features of the list was a compiled list of links to articles and reviews dealing with southern writing or culture. Another habit of my frustration was looking for literary events to attend. I would surf the English departments at college/university sites for public events. This information would be shared with the list. Likewise, I encouraged member authors to promote their books on the list. By October 1999, I knew this is what I was meant to do. I resigned as editor of *The Rock* and created *Southern Scribe*. The Southern Writers List became the *Southern Scribe* List in November 1999 while I started building the web site. The site went on line in December 1999 with several interviews I had done at The Rock—Kelly Cherry, Deborah Smith, and John Jakes. I broke my collection of bookmarks into two pages. Resources for Southern Writers offers links to organizations, state humanities commissions, university and regional publishers, regional magazines, literary journals, and newspaper book sites. The Events for Southern Writers is a calendar of literary events in the South with links to the event organization. The first issue of *Southern Scribe* [February-March, 2000] featured interviews with Ronda Rich and Mary Saums. The first issue had seven book reviews (six by me and one by Joseph Sackett).

Q What kind of reception has the website received? *Southern Scribe* has been my “Field of Dreams.” The words “if you build it, they will come” are like a chant as I sit with blank paper trying to plan the future of *Southern Scribe*. The list grew by word of mouth as readers would forward it, and those receiving would subscribe. The web site has had the same experience. Often an interview will turn into a windfall of contacts. After his January 2000 interview, Robert Inman sent several authors in my direction -- Wayne Greenhaw, Brewster Robertson, and Jerry Bledsoe. Likewise, each gentleman has sent others (authors, publishers, event planners) to *Southern Scribe*.

Q What kind of people subscribe to your Sunday papers link? People who love southern regional writing—college English professors/instructors, graduate students, writers, readers, book reviewers, publishers, bookstore owners, teachers, librarians, etc. There are 300 members on the *Southern Scribe* mailing list. At one time there were over 700 when the list was unmoderated. I was away for the weekend, and returned to a mailbox overflowing with e-mail. It seemed that two wild women (a journalist from Arkansas and an award winning author from northern Florida) decided to liven up the place. It was a tale about a gay dog that sent many of the members unsubscribing and running for the hills. I immediately made the *Southern Scribe* List announce-only, then created the Southern Porch List for wild abandonment.

Q Can you say a little more about the Southern Porch List? The Southern Porch List is friendly place much like the front porches that you remember from family reunions; and like family, we don’t censor what you can say, as long as you don’t attack a member personally. Like family, we may shake our heads at Uncle Andy’s comments or debate the issue, but

we will fight for his right to say it and give anyone who makes a comment questioning his parentage the boot.

Q How do you select books for review? In the beginning, there was Amazon.com. I discovered that by doing a search for, say, “southern+states+memoir,” followed by “arrange by publication date,” I could get a great list of upcoming releases with publication dates. I also use *Publishers Weekly* and catalogs from university presses, regional publishers, and major houses. C-Span Book TV is excellent for nonfiction releases. Another source is the authors list for upcoming events. I fax requests on a quarterly basis. Some of the major houses and universities have put *Southern Scribe* on auto send, if the book is southern. Often an author will write me to request a review. And I do accept self-published books. Sometimes these are authors who have banged their head against the major houses’ doors, only to discover their square peg doesn’t fit the house’s round hole. This is often the case for southern fiction. At other times, the author doesn’t understand the process of getting published or is insecure, so s/he publishes through one of the growing number of POD sites. In either case, sometimes these self-published books are diamonds in the rough.

Q How do you find contributing writers/reviewers? Well, it’s still that “if you build it, they will come” principle. Almost everyone associated with *Southern Scribe* wrote me offering their services. Most have excellent credentials as writers and reviewers. Several are members of the Southern Book Critics Circle. Two are reviewers for *Publishers Weekly*. *Southern Scribe* also welcomes independent submissions.

Q What’s the advantage of a webzine? Webzines allow for total editorial control without fear of meeting a bottom line and are fairly cheap to produce and easy to edit/correct/update. Zines are great for young people to be introduced into magazine production from feature writing to layout. They allow for fringe topics to have a published voice. Those reaching a large enough audience will become print magazines.

Q How did you become interested in southern literature and what motivated you to pursue this particular “field of dreams”? I have a B.A. degree in English Education from the University of South Carolina. I also had extensive studies in Broadcast Journalism and Media Arts there. I studied creative writing under William Price Fox and B. F. Dunlap. Though I considered going back for master’s in Southern Studies or Creative Writing, I find myself unable to pull myself from “life” in southeast Georgia. My career path has been unique. I taught high school English at inner city and private schools. I have worked as a country music morning



Joyce Dixon and Lee Smith

DJ as well as news/program director for a small market FM station. For the past fifteen years, I’ve been involved in the family John Deere dealership (computer focus person, service manager, and operations manager). No matter what I did in the “nine-to-five,” writing has been my release.

Q Do you have any advice for writers/teachers/academics/journalists based on your experiences as editor? Yes! Teachers/academia: Aid the future of southern literature by offering creative writing courses and publications. Promote regional authors. Writers: Make yourself available to classrooms and libraries. Share your experience and inspire others. Journalists: Enrich the community with stories on the craft of writing, southern culture, and current book reviews (not limited to those with a big publicity budget).

Q What are your long term goals for the webzine? Eventually, I plan to publish a hard copy version of *Southern Scribe* magazine. I would like to see the site become more interactive.

Pam Kingsbury is a freelance writer in Florence.

State of the Art

READING AND WRITING IN DIXIE

Joyce Dixon talks about the state of southern literature

Southern literature seems to travel in cycles where it is in vogue, though an element of southern writing (play-writing, novel, journalism, screenwriting, poetry) appears strong in some form during all literary periods.

In the past twenty years, the literary world in general has made itself more available to the public through book events and literary conferences. Oprah's Book Club brought national attention to some authors who were known only regionally. The Internet has connected readers to new authors by word of mouth in book chat lists, web magazines, and author/publisher sites. Because of the ease of word processing and self-publishing, more people are writing. Remember when the Internet was supposed to be the death of the printed book? I believe that the Internet has brought new blood to literature in the form of readers, writers, and publishers.

When I was teaching high school English, I was frustrated by the limited choice of southern literature in American literature textbooks. Limiting it to Poe, Twain, and Crane was not a good overview of the topic. For one month in American literature, we put the textbook on the shelf. The class was given a list of southern novels to choose one to read and write a critical essay. We read plays by Tennessee Williams, and watched feature films based on southern novels/plays. A good deal of time was spent on discussing authors/poets from my state [Georgia]. This is something that each state needs to make a part of their curriculum in much the same way that state history is part of social studies.

What is the condition of southern literature by each state in the region? I draw my southern region south of the Mason-Dixon Line and east of I-35.

Alabama: At this moment Alabama is producing more than any other state in the form of small publishers, new writers, and community support/enrichment.

Arkansas: It looks promising. The home state of prolific writers Ellen Gilchrist and John Grisham has now become the home of *The Oxford American*. It can be assumed that Arkansas will be featured as heavily as Mississippi was in the past. Of course, if *OA* doesn't expand throughout the region, then it may face the recent problems again.

Florida: Strong in organizations and conferences for writers. The mix of culture (Panhandle, south Florida, Hispanic, Space Coast, and transplanted seniors) allow for a unique blend of writers/readers. Florida is strong in mystery/thriller authors.

Georgia: Strong in organizations and conferences for writers. Savannah and Valdosta need literary events to support local authors and promote local reading.

Kentucky: Strong in organizations and conferences for writers, producing a growing number of authors with strength in folklore and history.

Louisiana: New Orleans has two excellent book events, and the LSU Press is the strongest university producer of southern literature.

Mississippi: Held the top position in southern literature for some time, but I fear time has taken many authors without producing a significant number to follow. Larry Brown and Barry Hannah could use some fellow authors. The state has some excellent literary events and a major food writing event.

North Carolina: Has produced a large body of authors through a strong focus on regional writing at colleges/universities. Has the only 2-week book event in the South with Novello.

South Carolina: The Hub City Project has been producing books from its writers and would be an excellent organization for others to copy. The SC Book Festival finally moved from April to February, which proved to draw a larger number of authors without book event conflicts. Authors seem to seek the mountains or the coast. The Low Country authors include Pat Conroy, Lois Battle, Fern Michaels, and John Jakes to name a few.

Tennessee: Nashville draws the largest southern literature event with the Southern Festival of Books. There is strong support in community enrichment programs. Knoxville, Chattanooga, Nashville and Memphis all have strong writing groups/events.

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Reviews

Haunted Places in the American South

by Alan Brown

University Press of Mississippi, 2002

\$18 Hardback

This must have been one fun book to write since it is based wholly on things you can't prove and stories largely made up by imaginative people. Kind of like a book on flying saucer sightings: the stories may be true, but how is anybody ever going to be able to prove it?

Reality aside, the reader can romp through the South, reading tales of things that go scary in the night, safe in the knowledge that it's only a book.

Alan Brown, who teaches English at the University of West Alabama and is also author of *Literary Levees of New Orleans*, *The Face in the Window and Other Alabama Ghostlore*, and *Shadows and Cypress: Southern Ghost Stories*, takes us from Carrollton, Alabama's famous Face in the Pickens County Courthouse Window to Birmingham's Downtown Library ghost.

Since just about everybody who is alert and bristling with caffeine has seen things out of the corner of the eye, movements in peripheral vision that can't be viewed head-on, this book can compel and entertain. And since everybody's been frightened at one time or another by a nightmare after a spicy taco dinner, everybody can identify with the implications of these ghost stories. You just have to be in the mood. If this is your Day of Pragmatism and Reality Check, forget it. If this is a dark and stormy night with the power out and a candle illuminating an H.P. Lovecraft book, you just may want to pull that copy of *Haunted Places* off the shelf and dive in.

If you're going to scare yourself, why not learn a little history at the same time?

Jim Reed runs Jim Reed's Books and Museum of Fond Memories in Birmingham. His most recent book is Dad's Tweed Coat: Small Wisdoms, Hidden Comforts, and Unexpected Joys.

Her Kind of Want

by Jennifer S. Davis

University of Iowa Press, 2002

\$15.95 Paperback

Jennifer Davis grew up in Tallassee, Alabama, around Lake Martin and the Tallapoosa River. She finished her MFA

in fiction writing at the University of Alabama in 2001, and this book, *Her Kind of Want*, has won the Iowa Short Fiction Award for 2002 and is already published. This is a career leaving the launching pad.

Her Kind of Want is a collection of nine substantial short stories. Each one is told from the point of view of a small-town white girl or young woman, usually lower-middle-class or lower, and not living in a state of happiness.

These girls have dreams, most of which will never be realized. They feel trapped, misunderstood, uneasy with their own sexuality yet aware that it is their great weapon in the ongoing struggle with men—but that, in the end, men leave anyway, one way or another.

The story "Tammy, Imagined" serves as a kind of roadmap for the volume of stories, of the possible life routes these girls might take.

Tammy Wynbrite is fifteen. Her mother and father get along badly, with her mother in a nearly psychotic menopause—she is described as no longer beautiful, suffering hot flashes in the kitchen with her hand up the backside of a chicken—and her father a well-meaning but obtuse owner of the only car dealership in town. Tammy reads in Dear Abby that there are soldiers abroad who will be away from their homes at Christmas and might receive little or no mail. Tammy writes.

Her first letter is fairly sedate and honest: "My name is Tammy Wynbrite. I am a sophomore at Midland High in Midland, Alabama. . . . My favorite subjects are sociology and English, although my school is rather poor and we don't have the best teachers and my fellow students are drunken idiots and I don't have any friends and I wish I could take foreign languages but they don't offer any in my sucky school."

Tammy looked upon this letter and saw that it was good and wrote another. "My name is Tammy Wynbrite. I am a twenty-one-year-old student at the local community college. . . . I also teach Sunday school at Willing Baptist. . . . Both of my parents died in a car wreck when I was ten, so I have learned to appreciate the guidance of a heavenly father."

And then: "My name is Tammy Wynbrite. I am a twenty-one-year-old dancer at the Thirsty Kitty in Midland, Alabama. I am currently dancing to put myself through school where I am studying to become a poet." And so on. She writes ten of these, all different, and mails them. These letters seem to me an emblem for this volume as a whole. Each story in *Her Kind of Want* illustrates a different kind of wanting. Wanting to escape, wanting to love and be loved, wanting happiness, maybe adventure, maybe security, maybe education, sophistication, life.

In “What Kind of Man,” Elsie lies to Jimmy, telling him she’s pregnant. Several weeks after a hasty marriage, she comes out of the bathroom with another lie: she has just had a miscarriage. You know that can’t work.

In “The One Thing God’ll Give You,” the mama, Addie, who works at the Rodeo Club, tells her daughter Hula, “There’s one thing you can count on from a man, and that’s him leaving.” When Hula becomes pregnant by her boyfriend Willie, Mama cocks her shotgun, points it at Hula’s head, and declares they are going to Birmingham. This may be Southern literature’s first shotgun abortion. But of course that doesn’t work either.

If anything might work, it is found in the last story, “When You See.” Dana, at 38, has three dead husbands and foresaw, in three separate visions, their deaths. She is now living alone on Lake Martin and learning slowly to love herself, her hometown with its honkytonks, and her childhood friends, for what they are—provincial, “sometimes racists and ignorant and unforgivable,” but who could bring tears to your eyes with their stories and how deeply they want.

Don Noble is host of Alabama Public Television’s BookMark and Alabama Public Radio’s Alabama Bound. This review aired on APR in January.



The Day the Picture Man Came

by Faye Gibbons

Illustrated by Sherry Meidell

Boyd's Mills Press, 2003
\$16.95 Hardcover

Faye Gibbons begins her story of delightful mayhem with heroine Emily’s discouraged realization that “it was

one of those days....” Emily is rescued from minor catastrophes like a bonnet-grabbing goat and the chore of bug-stinging blackberry-picking by the arrival of Mr. Bramlett, the itinerant photographer.

He easily convinces Papa that “A family picture would be nice,” especially if it includes the pets. As the camera clicks, chaos erupts: goat nips cat, which scampers off, chased by dogs. After Papa rescues one of the dogs and the cat lands atop Mr. Bramlett, the picture man takes another photo—this time without animals.

Gibbons’ language moves with storytelling directness, including her deft use of a few colloquialisms: Mr. Bramlett refers to the “sweaty kids” as “handsome young’uns” and

immediately wins Emily’s favor by calling her “the pretty redhead.” The action moves quickly, and characterization, centered around Emily, includes a fussy big sister, animal-loving brothers and baby sister, a fainting goat and a tree-climbing dog.

The color drawings are by Sherry Meidell, who also illustrated two of Gibbons’ previous five picture books: *Emma Jo’s Song* and *Full Steam Ahead*. Meidell uses earth tones and humorous expressions for the rustic characters to depict the family and their years-ago farm. Soft brown, green, and beige predominate except for the next-to-last two pages, which are in sepia, true to the photos taken by the picture man, which they purport to be. The illustrations flow with movement to match Gibbons’ words, from the kitty chase to Papa’s rescue of Bo, the dog.

With likeable mischievous characters and boisterous well-resolved commotion, Gibbons has told young readers a story of a time when picture-taking was an exciting event. And happily, at the conclusion Emily feels “mighty good,” despite her straight hair and freckles.

Joan Nist is Professor Emerita in Children’s Literature at Auburn University.

Seasoned Theatre

A Guide to Creating and Maintaining a Senior Adult Theater

by Martha Haarbauer

foreword by Ann McDonough

Heinemann, 2000
\$12.95 Paperback

If the “written word” was just that—a clump of alphabet letters printed against a light background (or vice versa) and strung together with other clumps of written words designed to make some kind of statement or some kind of sense—the world would be a very dry place. Fortunately, for the sake of variety, we humans tend to do more with the written word than just stamp it on paper. We tend to read words aloud, act them out, add movement and gestures and facial contortions to help bring those words into three-dimensional life.

Martha Haarbauer has spent decades yanking and coaxing Alabama’s words off printed pages and taking them to those of us who live outside of books and papers and reading rooms. Haarbauer has organized and orchestrated two groups of “senior” citizens who spend their volunteer time traveling Central Alabama and entertaining the troops—folks who don’t or can’t get out very much. The Seasoned Performers and The Seasoned Readers are the troupes. Seasoned Performers dramatize various writers’ works, while Seasoned Readers do dynamic readings.

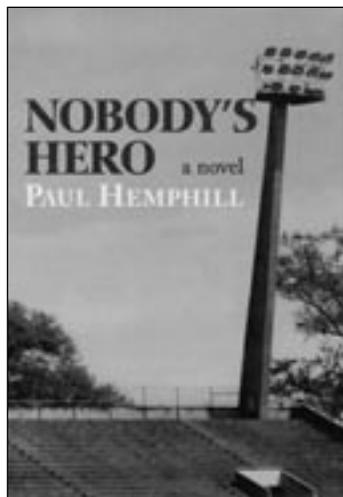
Haarbauer’s troubadours go to nursing homes, hospitals, civic clubs, schools, study groups, literary gatherings,

conventions, retirement facilities, restaurant backrooms, wherever they're invited to perform. The second wonderful thing is these seasoned troubadours do it out of love for the spoken word—they don't receive payment, just occasional applause and gratitude.

Haarbauer's performers and readers have been so successful that similar groups are springing up all over the country. Rather than remain secretive about how she's run this program so successfully all these years, she has put together a handbook to help organizers learn from what she's learned. Thus, *Seasoned Theatre*.

Don't ignore this book. If we're lucky, we're all going to be "senior citizens" someday, or, better still, "seasoned citizens." Folks in Central Alabama just may want to volunteer for Martha's group and help spread the words that people long to hear spoken. Or even better, readers who live elsewhere in Alabama may wish to begin their own groups to celebrate the written word.

Jim Reed



Nobody's Hero

by Paul Hemphill

River City Publishing,
2002
\$25.95 Hardback

As coincidence would have it, Paul Hemphill's *Nobody's Hero* fell to my lot just as I finished Harry Crews' 1976 novel *A Feast of Snakes*. Not that the two invite comparison in much beyond the premise they share: the ex-jock

at odds with the world. There is in Hemphill's novel nothing like the raw power of Crews, nor the audacity of such a horrific ending. But in a generation drifting stage left in the pageant of life, the theme of ex-jockness—lost youth in general—seems inevitable. What is to be done? The novels might serve as the two extremes of possible answers: combustion or rebirth.

Embodying the latter theme, *Nobody's Hero* is something of a fairy tale—as much in its inevitable ending as in its guiding myth, if the two are different. The un-hero of the title is Billy Ray "Gunslinger" Hunsinger, a 1961 All-America high school quarterback from Atlanta's Forrest High. A quarter century later, following further heroics at North Alabama State (where his life peaked one Saturday afternoon in a near victory over Bear Bryant's Crimson Tide), and a respectable pro career, "Gun" has bottomed out and Forrest High has

become the all-black McGill. With the steady company of his pal Jim Beam, and a standard-issue redneck racial outlook, he loses his job as politically incorrect radio talk-show host about the time his politically correct wife kicks him out of the house. Beginning there, the story chronicles a personal renaissance as complete as it is sudden. Indeed, Gun often seems more an idea who became a character than vice versa as he sequentially submits to the story's key turning points. Moving into one of his own slumlord apartments, he hooks up with a new cast of characters, including his lesbian artist next-door neighbor of the green today, purple tomorrow hair, gets a new talk-show gig, stops drinking, rediscovers football, and takes on a protégé in McGill's raw-talented black quarterback Mavis Jackson. Then he helps bring the hapless Panthers to an undefeated season climaxing in the Big Game with the evil white suburban Robert E. Lee High (where his daughter is a cheerleader and his wife a teacher crusading to banish the playing of "Dixie"), which comes out—well, happily.

So that's what the book's really about: second chances, rebirth, a man finding himself after a dark night of the soul—though another theme is equally insistent: racial awakening, or more crudely, white guilt. Gun's tutelage of Mavis Jackson reaches the heights of surrogate fatherhood—the fatherless boy moves in with the sonless man (whose real son he tragically lost), and something like love develops. But the ironic reversal operating here is so striking one wonders why its implications are left so unexplored. Most of the novel's sarcasm is reserved for the white suburbs, the "Crestwood" where his wife and daughter remain—"Disney World," "never-never land," where men "count the days until Saturday when they can suit up and tackle the lawn and the hedges." As Gun tells Mavis when he first takes him there, "All this can be yours if you're dumb enough to want it, kid." And yet it is a return to precisely this world that serves as the story's redemption. Gun has brought the black boy into the white world (where he vehemently protests Mavis bringing his mean streets vocabulary into the shrine of his lost son's room)—and not the other way around. In fact, one of the most threatening scenes in the novel is when a possible imposter, a black man, claims to be Mavis' father and tries to pull him back into the black world. Even the Big Game at the end features the black world venturing into the Mordor of white suburbia, and overcoming it.

All the same, *Nobody's Hero* does possess what matters most: the power to pull the reader into the momentum of its story. Hemphill, a seasoned writer, spins a good yarn, writes from the authority of experience, and has a sharp eye for detail. Any story about being adrift from one's past implies the dimension of that past saturated in one's present—so not only do we get a vivid portrait of 1985 Atlanta—Manuel's Tavern, Plaza Drugs, Little Five Points, Grady Stadium—but also a strong evocation of Gun's glory days, the world of pre-crazy Atlanta, "the mannerly overgrown Southern town of Billy Ray's childhood." *Nobody's Hero* is also clearly the work

of a writer who loves and understands football, and the like-minded reader will find good entertainment—maybe even to the extent of Mavis, for whom the showdown with Lee High “is nothing more than an extension of life as he knows it. Football is life; life is a football game.” At the same time, the book reflects an earnest desire to empathize, to understand. As Gun tells one of his radio listeners, “Things look different when you get up close for a look.”

Johnny Williams is the author of Lake Moon, a novel published by Mercer and reviewed in the winter issue of First Draft.

Blind Faith

The Story of Lula Mae Hardaway

by Dennis Love and Stacy Brown

Simon & Schuster, 2002

\$24 Hardback

Anniston native Dennis Love displays fine interview skills in this biography of Stevie Wonder’s mother, Lula Mae Hardaway. It’s obvious they understood each other, writer and subject. Her story is intimately told; Love’s interpretation, tenderly written. So uplifting is the tale of overcoming odds that the biography could almost be classified in the category of “inspirational.”

Little girl Lula had a happy, but hard-knocks childhood growing up in the Black Belt of Alabama near the town of Hurtsboro. She was born in 1932 to an unwed, teen-aged mother who left the spirited baby in the care of Henry and Virge Wright, heads of an extended family of sharecroppers. The Wrights were poor but honorable people who gathered their family and friends nightly to sing and tell stories.

“We are all kings and queens, [Henry] would say, though we may not have a throne or a kingdom. Riches come from within. And then Virge’s pure voice would start up, and the little congregation joined in and the clapboard house bulged with the sound.”

Lula thrived. So joyful was her childhood that after the Wrights’ deaths when she was thirteen, she created a place of escape in her mind of Alabama nights with swirling fireflies and sparkling stars. It served her well for what lay ahead.

Her estranged father, Noble Hardaway, took her into his East Chicago home, a comfortless place. Lula failed in school, which gave him an excuse to send her away. She moved to Gary, Illinois, where she found stability and acceptance from her Aunt Ilona. Her uncle, the Rev. Robert Morris, a known philanderer, told her to leave a year later when he found out she was pregnant.

Lula and her first child moved to Saginaw, Michigan, where she met and married a street hustler named Judkins. He was a handsome, volatile husband who fathered her next two children, the second of whom was blind. Judkins wouldn’t

work a regular job and, instead, coerced Lula into prostitution. His dominance ended when she one day grabbed his knife, stabbed him, and did not regret that he fled, leaving bloody tracks in the snow.

The weary but wise mother reunited with Judkins long enough to use his help in moving her and the children to Detroit, a place where she vowed life would be better. She took a job at a fish market, saved enough money to buy a house and watched her children flourish, especially Stevie, whose interest in rhythm and soul music was growing along with nation’s. Stevie, as it turned out, was in the right place at the right time.

The last half of the book is dual. It’s Stevie Wonder’s biography, told from his mother’s perspective, and it’s an historical account of Motown’s development during the 1960s and ‘70s.

The book, co-authored by Stacy Brown, who introduced Love and Lula Hardaway and assisted in research for the book, is a first for Love. A writer now living in Sacramento, Love is a former reporter for *The Anniston Star* and *The Birmingham News* and is a freelancer for *Pages* and other San Francisco magazines as well as *The Atlanta-Journal Constitution*.

Sherry Kughn is executive secretary at The Anniston Star and co-director of Accent on the Author with the Anniston-Calhoun County Public Library.

A Broken Reed

by Ron Miller

Mayhaven Publishers, 2002

\$17.95 Paperback

Ron Miller based the book *A Broken Reed* on a well-known Calhoun County murderess, Viola Hyatt. She was convicted in 1959 of chopping off two men’s limbs and scattering them throughout the county by way of her car window. Although the story gained national attention, it lingered longest in the minds of Calhoun County’s children, for whom the story became a spooky legend. The author was one of those children. He says he loosely based the story on actual facts.

The story opens with Ollie, an adolescent boy who finds a rotting arm wrapped in newspaper along the highway. Ollie’s world is altered as he struggles to make sense of the other body parts, inside knowledge he learns, and the effects the murder has on his family, friends, and community. The book’s point of view switches frequently from various law enforcement officers, reporters, community members, perpetrators, and victims. It always comes back to Ollie, though, which gives the book unity.

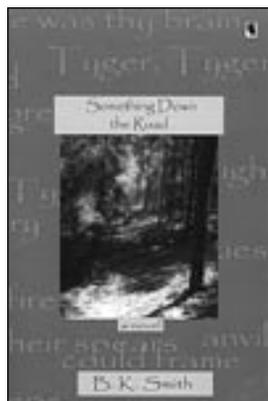
The themes of *A Broken Reed* are the hypocrisy of the civil rights era, sexism, and in Ollie’s case, coming of age. The South’s mixed-up world during the 1960s and early ‘70s

taught children lessons in reverse: don't be this way. Thankfully, Ollie matures in spite of his struggles. He gains knowledge of right and wrong, and learns that grownups cannot always be trusted and that telling the truth takes courage. The chain of bizarre events did not inhibit Ollie's thrill of growing into manhood as evidenced by his return to the love of riding in fast cars with older buddies.

"Billy Rand and I were sorta heroes 'round the dinner table after the captain told Momma how brave and all we were that rainy night. She must've taken on a new spirit because she let both of us go off with Weldon that next Saturday night, knowing full well...we would wind up at the outlaw drags."

Miller, now retired, was a longtime educator in Calhoun County. He self-published his first book, *Moonleaf*, and has another book accepted by Mayhaven Publishing. He has a strong interest in cars and has written for several auto magazines. *A Broken Reed* won the publisher's Award for Fiction in 2000. Some of the characters are stereotyped, and the story would have been simpler without the frequent switches in points of view, but those interested in Alabama's history and setting will enjoy a story that records a dark era.

Sherry Kughn



Something Down the Road

by *B.K. Smith*

Livingston Press, 2002
\$14.95 Paperback

Thrillers seem to have more resonance when they take place in the backwoods--especially the Deep South backwoods of Alabama. Every novelist who wants to thrill and chill and puzzle a

late-night reader should spend a few days walking about in a small town on the edge of a big wooded area deep in the heart of Alabama. Something's bound to happen if you hang around long enough.

This novel presents a good/bad little slice of somebody else's life--a life you might want to know about but certainly would never want to live. Such lives are best left inside books for us to peep into but never get too close to.

It's easy to look down on the people who inhabit this book--until you realize that some of them have experienced the same things as you. The character Holly is tortured by her sadistic first-grade teacher and redeemed by her benevolent second-grade teacher. Strange, so was I. Holly's best friend Billy turns into a fugitive from justice. Funny, I had friends like that, too--even though I was not what folks in the 1940s called a "country hick." I even knew friends who had seen UFOs, just as Holly

and Billy did. And so on. Even though this is a backwoods story, a "city" reader like me can begin to realize that we all share very similar backgrounds. It's just the locations that are different. I even knew a serial killer-to-be in high school, perhaps as demented as the killer in this little Gothic novel.

Holly's friend Billy is a serial killer, but the reader never quite understands why. Just like real life: the more we study folks who don't behave properly, the less we understand them. Some people are just plain beyond explanation. Billy's murders are a bit too lovingly described by the author, who shows more compassion for the killer than for any of his victims. Guess that's what makes for interesting reading. The writer Robert Bloch had that talent--his demented characters and their actions were lovingly described, while things the "good guys" and "gals" did seemed bland by comparison. Bloch's Norman Bates was by far the most intriguing character in the novel *Psycho*--and Smith is more interested in Billy Raston's activities than in the goings-on of other people sprinkled throughout this novel. Go figure: we remember Hannibal Lector, Jack the Ripper, and Norman Bates in great detail, but we seldom dwell on the victims and their families. It's easy to try and understand someone who exists only on paper. Nice and encapsulated between covers, nice and imprisoned so that we don't have to deal with that person, in person.

Nice little story. Horrible, a little sexy, a little sad, and just enough in touch with reality to make you think it might have happened.

Jim Reed

Keeping Hearth and Home in Old Alabama

by *Carol Padgett*

Menasha Ridge Press, 2002
\$13.95 Hardback

At first glance, this seems to be one of those pre-packaged books of old-time advice and recipes that could be reproduced for each state in the Union--just change the name "Alabama" to whatever state you want to insert.

In spite of its wise marketing strategy, this book is somewhat personalized for Alabama, making it worthwhile for the historical footnotes it contains, as well as for its entertaining recipes and bits of wisdom.

Where else would you be reminded that because of the power of "White Privilege" many old Southern recipes developed by black slaves and domestics were credited to the white families who passed them down the generations? This is something to ponder.

Where else would you find advice from Harriet Beecher Stowe on how to boil water properly? Or learn that a dining table "should be firm and solid and not so shaky that the guests fear some catastrophe." So much for the advice I got

from my wife: always carry a matchbook to dinner in case the table wobbles and you have to level it.

In other words, this is a browser's book, a book for the waiting room or the bathroom. You can pick it up and learn something totally useless almost anywhere in the book—and once in a while you'll be startled by a really useful piece of information: "Many children form habits which are not nice, such as spitting on the floor...and yawning." It is pretty clear: some things never change.

Jim Reed

The Road South: A Memoir

by *Shelley Stewart with Nathan Hale Turner Jr.*

Warner Books, 2002
\$23.95 Hardback

Autobiographies are by definition egocentric and sometimes even egotistic, but why shouldn't they be? Most of us want to tell our stories but are discouraged by fear that our lives are not interesting, or fear of catching readers in the act of rolling their eyes and/or yawning.

This is one autobiography that definitely contains some indigenous egocentrism, but that makes it all the more fascinating to read. The rollercoaster ride of Birmingham broadcaster Shelley Stewart seems as real as a 1968 newspaper headline and as fun and sleazy as a telephone-stapled flyer promoting a late-night blues club.

Well worth the effort is this read. The first portions of the book are heart-wrenching and disturbing, as Stewart walks us step by step through his childhood as a poor, often destitute African-American trying to survive in small Birmingham neighborhoods of the 1940s.

The communities of Rosedale, Irondale, and Colleville are seen as hotbeds of domestic violence, racist brutality, and broad-based bigotry for the young Stewart. After watching his father murder his mother with an axe, Stewart and his brothers have no one to turn to. The authorities do not listen, and relatives who might be rescuers turn out to be sadistic child abusers, too. Finally, subsisting at times on rats and the garbage of white people, one by one the boys begin to run away from home. Stewart is six years old when he escapes, eventually connecting with a white family that shelters him in return for menial chores. Amid descriptions of what it is like to live on an open back porch without mattress or toilet facilities, what it is like to be tortured without reason by family members, what it is like to be invisible in the eyes of the white-controlled legal system, the reader marvels at how young Shelley Stewart is able to endure. Through sheer willpower, he even sends himself to school each day: a two-hour walk to elementary school is worth the effort, since he finally pieces together

his own education, with very little help from anyone.

This sounds like a gruesome tale—and it is—but it's a story you must follow through to the end, primarily because it's fascinating to see how Stewart manages to climb out of his repressive and seemingly hopeless circumstances and find success and redemption as a broadcaster in Birmingham.

This book is unforgettable. The reader begins to have a great desire to meet this man who has met impossible challenges, just to look into his eyes for clues as to how one person endures while many others fall or are felled by the wayside.

Jim Reed

Thirty Years a Slave—from Bondage to Freedom The Autobiography of Louis Hughes

NewSouth Books, 2001
\$15.95 Paperback

NewSouth editor Randall Williams, in an editorial note entitled "Publication History," explains how he came to be publishing a slave narrative 157 years after the Emancipation Proclamation.

There is no shortage of slave narratives. Although teaching slaves to read and write was against the law in most Southern states, so was trying to escape to the North. Nevertheless, Henry Louis Gates, America's best-known scholar of African-American literature, tells us that more than sixty thousand slaves did escape successfully, and of these six thousand and six told their stories, their autobiographical narratives, to someone, orally or in writing. Of these, more than one hundred wrote full, book-length narratives.

It seems that most of those in bondage didn't like slavery and got away if they could, despite the enduring myth of the master who treated his slaves kindly because he had such a large investment in them and the plantation mistress who was down at the quarters at dawn with hot soup and home-brewed medicines for the unwell. Hughes tried four times before he succeeded, finally escaping to Memphis when it was held by Union troops.

Slave narratives run to a pattern, and it is probably not the result of plagiarism but rather the similarity of conditions that causes this. Louis Hughes's story is thus a familiar one. Born in 1832, in Virginia, Hughes, his mother, and two brothers belonged to a man named John Martin, but Martin died. When Hughes was six, they were all sold to a Dr. Hughes. So far so good, but when Louis Hughes was eleven, Dr. Hughes died. At this time, the family were put on the auction block in Richmond and sold separately. Louis Hughes never saw his mother again. The family on the auction block is a trope of slave narratives, but you can never read of it without a shudder.

The punishment of slaves is another familiar element in the narrative. Hughes, who was sold to Mr. Edward McGee

of Pontotoc, Mississippi, was half-white, from his father, and served indoors as a butler, but he saw plenty and was not spared himself. Slaves were stripped, tied to a post and whipped, tied face down on the ground to four posts and whipped, forced to run in circles inside a “bull ring” of slaves and whipped, by thirty or forty people at a time. Other unpleasantnesses and mutilations were commonplace, especially on large plantations.

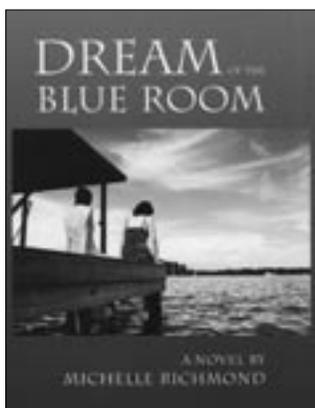
But the masters were, we should remember, God-fearing Christians, so often the overseer, the Simon Legree, did the punishing, or, Hughes tells us, “owners who affected culture and refinement preferred to send a servant to the [slave traders’] yards” to be whipped by professionals, people who whipped slaves for a living. Much nicer. Such a slave traders’ yard was owned and operated by one Mr. Nathan Bedford Forrest, later a general.

When the Yankees threatened north Mississippi, McGee moved his family and slaves to Alabama, around Mobile, where the slaves worked, in what any review writer must welcome as a heaven-sent metaphor, literally in the salt mines.

Hughes writes, or narrates, as the case may be, eloquently. The details of everyday life are here—food, clothes, weather, work, holidays, church, the cycles of the seasons. His story is perfectly believable.

Thirty Years a Slave was originally published in 1897, in Milwaukee, then reprinted in 1969, but had recently come to the attention of the Clarke County historian Jackie Matte, who recommended it to NewSouth. Matte and Williams are right; this book deserves to be in print again.

Don Noble. This review aired on APR earlier this year.



Dream of the Blue Room

by Michelle Richmond

MacAdam/Cage, 2003
\$23 Hardback

Mobile native Michelle Richmond’s well-crafted first novel varies in tone from calmly reflective to elegiac. The framework is a journey to China, where Jenny, the

narrator, will scatter the ashes of her beloved friend, Amanda Ruth, the daughter of a Deep South mother and Chinese father. Thirty-two-year old Jenny has lived in New York since she left her hometown on the Alabama Gulf Coast to attend Hunter College. Her retracing of events that led to Amanda Ruth’s brutal murder fourteen years before is interspersed with detailed observation of the exotic places along the Yangtze River where the cruise ship stops.

Although she had hoped this trip with her estranged husband Dave would bring them back together, Jenny sees him gravitate toward a young woman passenger whose vulnerability he cannot resist, as she herself becomes involved with Graham, who has ALS.

Richmond has an amazing gift for writing poignantly and unflinchingly about intimacy. Here is Jenny’s recollection of her reaction when her husband told her he was leaving: “I took the camcorder from its case. I sat in the big leather chair by the window, pressed record, and made a movie of him sleeping. I wanted to capture every detail: the placement of his legs, the graceful arc of his hand draped over the mattress, the pattern of his breathing.” And here Jenny strives to come to terms with her grief about the loss of her best friend: “Day after day, when I am alone, I find myself talking to her, not just in my mind but aloud, the way lunatics do on the streets of New York City, as if, in the barren air beside them, they can see the face of someone they once knew. They pause and laugh and nod their heads, as if they fancy themselves one half of a lively conversation. I envy them this illusion, the sound of other voices filling up the awful silence.”

Michelle Richmond is also the author of an acclaimed 2002 collection of short fiction, *The Girl in the Fall Away Dress*.

Julia Oliver lives in Montgomery. Her work-in-progress is a historic novel.

Bellocq’s Ophelia

by Natasha Trethewey

Graywolf Press, 2002
\$14 Paperback

Bellocq’s Ophelia, with its refined language and adherence to a turn-of-the-century epistolary style, may be overshadowed by Natasha Trethewey’s first book, which was less formal linguistically. Former poet laureate and Pulitzer Prize winner Rita Dove selected Trethewey’s previous book, *Domestic Work*, as the 1999 Cave Canem Poetry prize. In *Bellocq’s Ophelia*, Trethewey, currently an assistant professor of Creative Writing at Emory University, focuses on the imagined life of an early twentieth-century prostitute. Trethewey calls her Ophelia, the tragic figure in Shakespeare’s play *Hamlet*.

In the periods before and after World War II, E. J. Bellocq photographed prostitutes from a section of New Orleans called Storyville. Trethewey gives the women in these photographs a voice. Fittingly, the title poem, “Bellocq’s Ophelia,” invites us to wonder what that voice might be have been as we peer at Bellocq’s photograph through the speaker’s eyes, at an (until now) unnamed prostitute, “Her body limp as dead Ophelia’s, /her lips poised to open, to speak.”

In this title poem, Ophelia has yet to *invent herself*. Trethewey merely gives her the possibility of speech. From this beginning, the collection rises in a narrative arc through a series of letter and diary poems, to the inevitable completion of Ophelia as a living being.

The fourteen letters and ten diary entries, to a modern ear, might sound too impersonal. For example in the first letter to Miss Constance Wright, Ophelia writes, “I have no doubt my decision will cause you/ much distress...” Trethewey may have adopted this tone to relate the distance her speaker requires to keep her soul intact in such an environment. Making a sympathetic yet reserved persona is a difficult balance. Given Ophelia’s concealment and the formality of the early-twentieth century letter, her voice in these poems lacks the sense of the rhythm of language and the play of the vernacular.

Ironically, I felt more sympathy for Ophelia when she was not given a voice, when I identified with her through another, as when Trethewey describes Bellocq’s photographs and imagines how the women in them must have felt. Not many of the poems in the *Letters* section made my “hair stand on end.” But overall I did find the book intellectually pleasurable.

Take for example one case, Millais’s painting to which Trethewey refers at the beginning of the title poem: Millais was dedicated to detail. His paintings were also highly luminous. I cannot imagine that Trethewey was unaware of these connections. Such detail reinforces the dominant theme of light, reflection, and interpretation. Photography and identity are a perfect match, for Bellocq’s photographs prompt questions about the self.

Trethewey’s use of photography is not surprising when one considers the interplay between reality and light, and say, reality and poetry—itself a kind of illumination. Photography as well offers a deep metaphor for the relation between the self and the external world. The opening poem and the last, both reflections on actual photographs, act as a frame for the book: In the title poem, the Ophelia of Millais’s painting seems to say “Take me,” and in the closing poem, “Vignette,” Bellocq “takes her”—but as a living being surrounded by life. Trethewey invites us to move beyond the “elegant image,” beyond “the ravages of this old photograph” to wonder “How long did she hold there, this other Ophelia...?”

These women, though perhaps scorned by polite society, blunt the power of their “takers” by reserving some mystery for themselves. Ironically we see ourselves best in what is hidden here—the terrible secrets. We all survive these by seeing the Other, that other girl in the last poem, who steps out of the frame... and by so doing partakes in the real world which is not idealized: it is both ugliness and beauty—and is in full color.

Bruce Alford teaches writing at the University of South Alabama in Mobile and has published both fiction and poetry.

A Right to Read

Segregation and Civil Rights in Alabama’s Public Libraries, 1900-1965

by *Patterson Toby Graham*

University of Alabama Press, 2002

\$37.50 Hardback

Of all the hallowed civil rights battlegrounds where blacks once marched and protested for racial and economic justice, America’s public libraries have received scant attention until now. Patterson Toby Graham’s *A Right to Read: Segregation and Civil Rights in Alabama’s Public Libraries, 1900-1965* correctly characterizes libraries as paragons of American democracy, particularly for their championing the right (freedom) to read, and for ultimately offering their services free to the public. Even urban planners who recognized the cultural efficacy of public libraries did not necessarily want to pay for them. Public libraries were not always egalitarian; Baltimore’s Enoch Pratt Free Library has kept “free” in its name as a reminder of a time when the library served only paid subscribers or patrons.

In the Progressive Era, public libraries were important mechanisms of self-help and social uplift. Racism vexed white middle-class decisions about how or whether to provide public library services for blacks in a couple of important ways. Some white industrialists felt that ignorant and poor Blacks best served white business interests. We see this with the steel companies of Birmingham and the mining companies of northern Alabama. Other white social reformers opined that public libraries helped eradicate black ignorance and indolence, a position shared by some black middle-class leaders.

When Mobile’s city fathers wrangled over the feasibility of building a separate Negro reading room within the main branch—white only—as opposed to an exclusive Negro branch, one Negro leader supported the Jim Crow reading room because blacks, he argued, “would be inspired to live up to the highest ideals of citizenship... increas[ing] the self-respect and deportment of my group.” This ostensible effort to placate whites failed. The Mobile Board of Commissioners decided to construct a Negro library branch. Racial mores trumped fiscal frugality, and when it opened in 1931, the Davis Avenue Branch maintained the separate racial protocol mandated by Alabama law. Thirty years later, after experiencing some of the first sit-ins to occur during the civil rights movement, Alabama’s oldest city became the first to integrate its public libraries. The last major Alabama city to offer public library service to blacks was the capital city of Montgomery. While the city’s Carnegie Library for whites opened on Perry Street in 1901, black residents would not have a library of their own until 1948. The City Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs readied their Union Street community house, and Bertha Pleasant became its librarian. A native daughter, Pleasant received her library degree from Atlanta University,

the nation's oldest historically black (HBCU) graduate school in library science, and her undergraduate education degree from Alabama State University, the oldest publicly supported HBCU teachers' college. The innovative Union Street Branch of the Carnegie Library established reading programs for public school teachers, offered books for the blind and, foreshadowing the bus boycott, used private cars as bookmobiles.

Scholar and librarian Derryn Moten teaches in the Department of Humanities at Alabama State University.

Monteith's Mountains

by Skip Brooks

High Country Publishers, 2002
\$21.95 Hardback

Tuscaloosa resident Skip Brooks lived for several years in Gatlinburg, Tennessee, where he hiked trails and camped in the Smoky Mountains. His first novel convincingly recreates that terrain as it was a hundred years ago. The main time frame is a five-month period in 1902, with flashbacks to the 1800s. According to the Author's Notes at the end of the book, towns and settlements, peaks and hollers, creeks and ridges are real, as are some of the characters.

The Prologue's introduction of Goodman Brant, a young

Canadian of Mohawk-Cherokee parentage who has come to the Southern Appalachians to "seek his past and find his future," indicates Brant will be the protagonist. However, it becomes apparent in Chapter Two that the narrative is powered by a riveting antagonist.

A literary high point is the development of the character Walker Tom Monteith, a serial killer who can hold his own with famous psychopaths of history and fiction. Some other characters who get considerable space and attention add Appalachian ambience but have little if anything to do with the central storyline.

The text is sprinkled with genealogical sequences and unusual names like Matthew Mark Luke John Brown, Friendly Pennsylvania, Fundamental Delaware, Elegant Virginia. The latter three are siblings of Fair Carolina Monteith, the villain's mother and last survivor of seven women who shared a polygamous lifestyle with Black John Walker, a hellfire and brimstone mountain preacher.

Brooks leaves a few loose ends dangling, but he certainly has a canny instinct for writing psychological suspense. The leisurely, around-the-campfire style shifts to another level whenever Walker Tom Monteith, who loves the women he murders, comes on the scene. At those times, the prose becomes electrifyingly taut, and the writer is at the top of his game. Or mountain, in this case.

Julia Oliver

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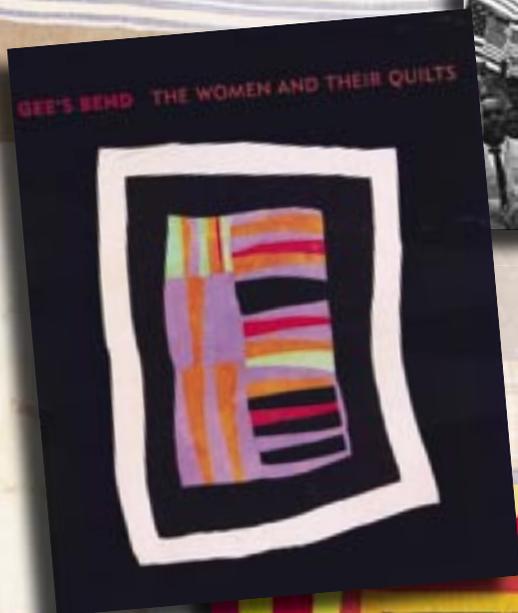
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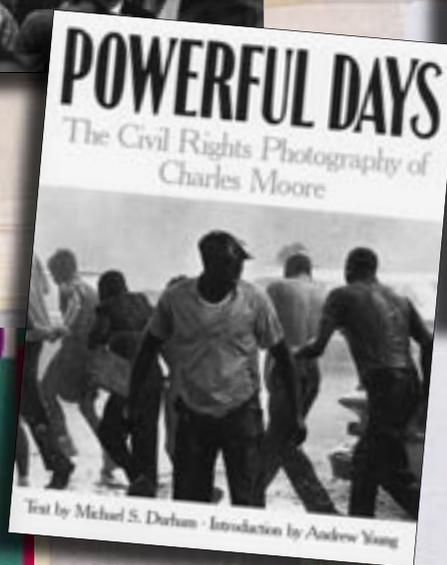
Gee's Bend

The Women and Their Quilts

The art event of the year happened at New York's Whitney Museum of American Art. There the "Quilts of Gee's Bend" exhibit drew huge crowds and attention from the likes of *The New York Times*, National Public Radio, and CNN.

More than sixty quilts made by forty-two African-American quilters over four generations were a sensation. If you missed it in New York, don't despair; the exhibit will travel to Atlanta, Mobile, and Auburn between now and 2005. In the meantime, two stunning books—*Gee's Bend: The Women and Their Quilts* and *The Quilts of Gee's Bend* (both by John Beardsley, William Arnett, Paul Arnett, Jane Livingston, and Alvia Wardlaw and published by Tinwood in 2002)—document the artists and their work.

Gee's Bend, Alabama, is a small slice of land five miles long and eight miles wide in a bend of the Alabama River in southwest Alabama. Isolated and impoverished, women in the community used materials at hand—often denim, mattress covers, or flour sacks—to create quilts for everyday use. Bold designs and colors characterize quilts that depend less on traditional patterns than on the creativity and innovation of their makers. The books include large, beautifully reproduced photographs of dazzling pieces and biographies and interviews with many of the artists.



Powerful Days

The Civil Rights Photography of Charles Moore

Charles Moore's civil rights photographs have become icons. His shots of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s congregation at the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church and of King being led to jail in handcuffs were distributed by the Associated Press and catapulted all involved into the national spotlight.

During the turbulent years of the civil rights movement, Moore documented the struggle for *Life* magazine and in so doing created a history of the movement. His assignments took him to the integration of the University of Mississippi; to Birmingham during the days Bull Connor ruled with fire hydrants and police dogs; to Mississippi where he recorded the images of blacks registering to vote and the aftermath; to Ku Klux Klan meetings in South Carolina; and on the Selma to Montgomery March.

Moore considers Tuscumbia to be his hometown because his earliest memories are there. With his current home in Florence as a base, Moore continues to photograph, travel, exhibit, and give lectures on the work that made him famous.

Last year, *Powerful Days: The Civil Rights Photography of Charles Moore* was reprinted by the University of Alabama Press. Painful and familiar, Moore's photographs continue to speak to us.

—Pam Kingsbury



Calhoun Celebrates LITERATURE AND THE ARTS

by Randy Cross

In April of this year, Calhoun Community College in Decatur sponsored a series of literary and cultural programs. In early April Albanian playwright and actress Jonida Beqo presented her one-woman show, *Saints and Sinners: Women I Know*, in the Fine Arts Building's Black Box Theatre.

Later in the month, Calhoun hosted its Second Annual Writers' Conference, which focused on modern poetry. Returning for her second appearance, poet Donna Holt read poems of power and beauty. Often shocking in their unique voice and economy of language, Holt's works elicited approving gasps and spontaneous applause from the audience.

The conference also featured Stuart Bloodworth, whose poems have appeared in the *North American Review*, *The Connecticut Review*, *The Laurel Review*, *Poem*, *The Wallace Stevens Journal*, among many others. Bloodworth, who served for several years as editor for the literary magazine *The Distillery*, currently teaches writing at Motlow State Community College in Tullahoma, Tennessee.

The distinguished poet Len Roberts, author of eleven books of poetry, concluded the program. His latest collection is *The Silent Singer: New and Selected Poems* (University of Illinois Press, 2001). His works have been published in numerous anthologies and journals, including *Paris Review*, *The American Scholar*, *Antioch Review*, *Hudson Review*, and *North American Review*. Among his awards are a John Simon Guggenheim Award, two National Endowment for the Arts Awards, six Pennsylvania Council on the Arts Awards, and a Witter Bynner Award. Sharon Olds chose his fourth book, *Black Wings*, for the National Poetry Series. His work has also been selected for *The Best American Poetry* and Pushcart Prize Awards. Currently, Dr. Roberts, a two-time Fulbright Scholar, is Professor of English at Northampton Community College in Pennsylvania.

Last year's conference drew a crowd of over 600 students, faculty, and community members to hear Mary Ward Brown, Howard Bahr, and Donna Holt. The success was due mainly to the English faculty's willingness to incorporate the writers' works into their classes. For weeks, students read, studied, and discussed *It Wasn't All Dancing*, *The Black Flower*, and numerous poems by Ms. Holt. Most of our students had never met writers, but hundreds were eager to do so. Instructors stressed that attendance was strictly voluntary. We preferred ten students who wanted to be there over 100 who were coerced. It worked. When Donna Holt took the stage to open the conference, we were delighted and amazed to see our students--most of them in coats and ties and pretty dresses--filling the auditorium and standing in the aisles. Until nearly midnight, the authors sat chatting, signing books, answering questions, and posing for photographs. It could not have been better.

On April 26th, 2003, the arts at Calhoun will shift from the dramatic and literary to the culinary and musical. "Dumplin' Days," the College's first folk festival, will take place from 10 a.m. until 8 p.m. on the Decatur campus. The event will feature great Southern food, arts and crafts, story-telling, children's

events, and music. Kathryn Tucker Windham, Alabama's best-known storyteller, and Mississippian Diane Williams will present story-telling sessions for both adults and children.

Throughout the day, visitors can enjoy a variety of music from the Delmore Brothers' Memorial Stage, named in honor of Country Music Hall of Fame members Alton and Rabon Delmore, local musicians who remained the most popular act on the Grand Ole Opry during the 1930s. Dr. Bill Foster and his wife, Ann, members of the Alabama Music Hall of Fame, will perform from 4 until 5 p.m. Dr. Foster, Chairman of the Department of English at the University of North Alabama, has won thirty-three championships for his old-time and bluegrass banjo, appeared in several motion pictures, and been a featured comedian at the Festival of Appalachian Humor.

At 6:00 p.m., the Grand Ole Opry's Mike Snider String Band will take over the Delmore Brothers' Stage. In addition to his seven years as a comedian on *Hee Haw*, Mike Snider is known around the world as a virtuoso on the banjo and mandolin. Those present at Calhoun on the evening of April 26th will receive a double treat: the funny stories Mike tells throughout his performances, and some of the finest old-time

music being played today. Grand Ole Opry announcer and WSM DJ Eddie Stubbs calls Mike Snider and his group "the finest string band in the nation." The admission price for "Dumplin' Days" is only \$3 per person. Children under six get in free. All profits will go to the Calhoun Foundation for scholarships, faculty development, and other programs sponsored by the College.

The largest community college in Alabama with almost 9,000 students, Calhoun has planned an extraordinary celebration of the arts for April. Drama, literature, story-telling, children's events, arts and crafts, music, and great Southern food are only a few reasons people should plan trips to Calhoun Community College in Decatur this spring. North Alabama is proud of its contributions to arts and letters and boasts artists as diverse as Helen Keller, W. C. Handy, T. S. Stribling, the Delmore Brothers, and George Washington Harris. This April, Calhoun celebrates our state's artistic heritage with a series of events designed to enlighten, entertain, and fascinate. For further information, call 256-306-2713.

Dr. Randy Cross is professor of English at Calhoun Community College and an expert on the work of T. S. Stribling.

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A More Satisfying PMS

by Linda Frost

Sometime during the fall of 2000, my friend Bob Collins caught me in the halls of the English Department at the University of Alabama at Birmingham where we both teach and where Bob directs our Creative Writing Program. He said he wanted to run something by me, something that, had I known where it would lead, would have caused me either to fly into my office and slam shut the door, or leap into the UAB Minipark and holler halleluia. As it was, I just asked him what was up.

“Would you be interested in editing *Astarte*?” *Astarte* was the journal our recently retired colleague, Jim Mersmann, had launched in 1989. With him gone, the magazine’s future was uncertain.

“I might,” I told him. Actually, I’d already given some thought to what I might do if someone ever asked me what Bob just had. UAB already had several solid literary journals to its name: Bob’s long-running and well-respected *Birmingham Poetry Review*, the award-winning undergraduate *Aura Literary Arts Review*, and *Sanctuary*, the magazine published by UAB’s Honors Program. What could I do to make another journal somehow

distinct in such an already overcrowded literary environment?

It was in that moment that *PMS* was conceived.

I took Bob up on the offer with the understanding that I’d want to make some changes to help the magazine stand out more. I started with the journal’s focus, making it the only all-women’s literary journal in Alabama, as well as the only one to focus on three specific genres. To highlight that, I gave it a new name: *PMS*, short for *poem-memoirstory*.

Now in its third year, *PMS* has taken on an energetic—if often editorially exhausting—life of its own. Generously funded by Birmingham’s corporate and creative communities, UAB’s English Department and School of Arts and Hu-

manities, and the Alabama State Council on the Arts, *PMS* has been able to attract some of the finest women writers not only in Alabama but in the nation at

large. Vermont-based poet Ruth Stone, for instance, had two poems appear in *PMS 2* only a month before she won the National Book Award, while the poetry of National Book Critics’ Circle Award winner Amy Gerstler will appear in *PMS 3*. (Other non-local hotshots include Allison Joseph, Kat Meads, Lynn Powell, Paisley Rekdal, and Harriet Zinnes.) But we on the *PMS* editorial staff have a firm dedication to bringing not only the best of the nation’s women writers to Alabama but also the best of Alabama’s women writers to the nation. So we’ve been fortunate to feature work by such favored ’Bama daughters as novelist and memoirist Vicki Covington, poet Honorée Fanonne Jeffers, and poet Lynne Burris Butler, as well as the more nouveau Wendy Reed Bruce, Melissa Dameron, Tina Harris, Mary Carol Moran, and Michelle Vessel.

To give *PMS* a different kind of significance, we also featured a memoir in each issue written by a woman who would not necessarily describe herself as a writer but who has experienced something of historic import. We were inspired to do this by a memoir we published in our first issue by Emily Lyons who was critically injured in the 1998 bombing of the New Woman, All Woman Clinic in Birmingham. *PMS 2* featured “A Day in September” by Nancy Johnson-Oberwanowicz, a mem-



Writer Tina Harris with Lucy Frost-Helms, daughter of the editor at the *PMS 2* Publication Party in 2002.

oir detailing her experiences as an employee in WTC 2 on the morning of September 11th, and *PMS 3* highlights the work of Civil Rights foot soldier Carolyn McKinstry who appeared, among other places, in Spike Lee's *Four Little Girls* to talk about her experiences as a fourteen year-old protester in 1963 and as a witness to the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church.

And because even the most literary of girls really just want to have fun, each spring when the magazine is fully cooked, we host a *PMS* Publication Party, where everyone can come and enjoy good music, fine readings, and free refreshment. This year, the event, co-sponsored by the UAB Creative Writing Program, *PMS*, and the UAB Honors Program, will take place on April 26, 2003, from 7-9 p.m. at the Honors House at UAB. The evening will feature readings by *PMS 3*'s Alabama contingent, including Honorée Jeffers and Carolyn McKinstry, as well as music by Garland Burnette and the Cinders.

PMS is available for general sale at various Birmingham bookstores, and by subscription for seven dollars a year (just twelve dollars for two!). For more information, contact us via the Department of English at UAB at (205) 934-4250, or drop us a line at *PMS*, Dept. of English, UAB, Birmingham, AL 35294-1260. For submissions, send up to 5 poems OR 15 pages of prose with an SASE anytime during our September through November reading period. You can also check us out on the Web at www.pms-journal.org.

We hope to hear from you soon and we promise: *PMS* has never been so good!

Linda Frost is Associate Professor of English at the University of Alabama at Birmingham and editor-in-chief of PMS poemmemoirstory.

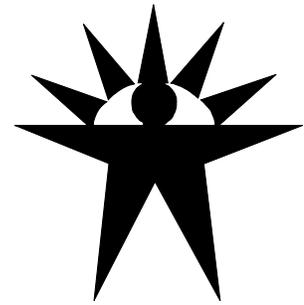
Continued on page 32



L to R: Assistant Editor Heather Martin with writers Cheryl Stiles, Wendy Reed Bruce, and Lynne Burris Butler at the PMS 2 Publication Party in 2002.



PMS 2 Staff Members at the PMS 2 Publication Party in 2002. L to R: Monica Ssenkoloto, Robert Bruce, Margaret Harrill, Karen Williams, Delores Carlito; in front, L to R: Christina Hall Nettles (with baby Emmeline) and Linda Frost, Editor.



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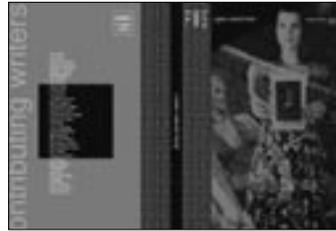
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Excerpts from
A More Satisfying PMS

“In M’am Maw’s Hands” *from Tina Harris’s memoir*

M’am-Maw’s purse was full of mystery to me. The leather was crossed with wrinkles, and M’am-Maw wouldn’t allow me to go through it like I was able to go through everything else she owned. Mom said it was because a lady’s purse was private.

M’am-Maw eased her hand into that purse when a biker stopped by the yard sale one day. Dressed in faded denim, he swaggered around the tables, but looked at us and at the road more than he looked at the merchandise. After a while he began circling a table of lamps and picture frames, even though it was obvious it would be difficult to carry anything on that table on his motorcycle. After the other customers left, M’am-Maw didn’t ask him if he needed any help; she asked if he was in her son Sam’s gang. He said “No.” From the reflection in his sunglasses, I watched her hand drop down into her purse, which sat beside her lawn chair. I thought she was feeling for her keys, so I picked up my library books in case we were going to make a run for the car. The biker left, I guess because he figured out or was afraid of what I didn’t find out until after she died: M’am-Maw kept her pistol in her purse.

“Emu” *Mary Carol Moran*

Am I a flightless ratite
(with unkeeled sternum),

bound to earth and children,
swollen-bellied

kin to self-blinded ostrich?
Often.

But today, I’m a
turtle, euphoric in mud,

plodding on strong legs,
pond in sight.

“Beauty and the Beast” *Gail White*

I disliked children, even as a child—
those vexing, nattering, excluding things.
Animals, on the other hand, were mild
and tractable. I loved the tapered wings

of birds, the softness of the household cat,
the slender flanks and melting eyes of deer.
Animals need our tenderness. And that
is why imprisonment is pleasant here,

where the rough beast attends my every need
and only asks to see me twice a day.
I brush my coat and warm his bed and feed
him chocolate drops, and I’m content to stay.

He’s kindly natured, though his face is grim.
He won’t risk children who might look like him.



*Writers, performers, and
staffers at the PMS 1
Publication Party in 2001,
L to R: Libba Walker
(singer-songwriter), Linda
Frost (editor), Emily
Lyons (writer), Delores
Carlito (Assistant Editor),
and Margaret Harrill
(Assistant Editor).*

New leaves, new grass, new flowers. New books!



It Wasn't All Dancing And Other Stories

MARY WARD BROWN

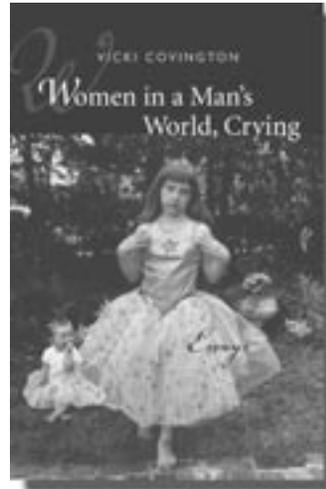
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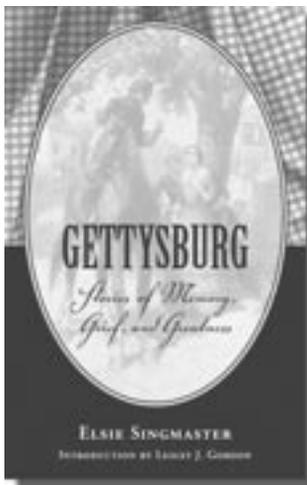
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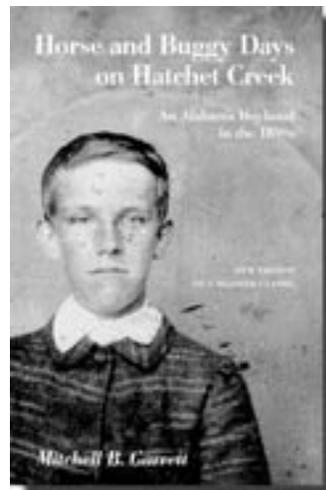
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CONTESTS AND CONFERENCES

The **Alabama State Poetry Society Spring Luncheon** is scheduled for Saturday, April 26 at the University of Montevallo at 11:30 a.m. Reservations are \$15 for the day and include lunch, a guest speaker talk, and poetry awards. Attendees who have published books are invited to bring copies for the book table. Luncheon checks should be mailed to Joe Whitten, ASPS Treasurer, PO Box 125, Odenville, AL 35120-0125.

“**Southern Legends: From Eudora to Elvis**” is the name of the Arts and Education Council’s Conference on Southern Literature held April 24-26, 2003, in Chattanooga, TN. The gathering features **Yusef Komunyakaa**, **Tony Earley**, **Romulus Linney**, **Beth Henley**, **Horton Foote**, **Alan Gurganus**, **Madison Smartt Bell**, **Kaye Gibbons**, **Ellen Douglas**, and **Louis Rubin**, among many others, in lectures, panel discussions, readings, and residencies. The conference is held in conjunction with the biennial meeting of the Fellowship of Southern Writers. For registration and more information: www.artsedcouncil.org.

Robin McDonald, author of *Black Widow*, the story of Marie Hilley, and *Secrets Never Lie*, the story of Sarah Tokars, will speak Thursday, May 8, during the evening at the Public Library of Anniston-Calhoun County. Exact time to be announced. Call 256-237-8501, ext. 2.

The **2003 Summer Institute of Christian Spirituality** will convene on the Spring Hill College campus in Mobile on June 1 and end June 14. Session courses include Spirituality in a Violent World: Christian Responses to War; Hildegard of Bingen: Voice of the Living Light; The Spirituality of Pilgrimage; and two series on Flannery O’Connor and Gerard Manley Hopkins. Please contact the Office of Graduate Studies (334-380-3094) or www.shc.edu/Academics/Graduate for more information.

New from The University of Alabama Press

Dividing Lines: Municipal Politics and the Struggle for Civil Rights in Montgomery, Birmingham, and Selma by J. Mills Thornton III has been selected as the winner of the 2003 Liberty Legacy Founda-

tion Award by the Organization of American Historians. This award is given annually for the best book on any aspect of the struggle for civil rights in the United States from the nation’s founding to the present.

PRIZES AND PUBLICATIONS

The Humanities Division at Wilkes University and the James Jones Literary Society recently named the 2003 James Jones First Novel Fellowship winner. **Linda Busby Parker** of Mobile was awarded the \$5,000 first prize. Her manuscript, *The Sum of Augusts*, chosen from 665 submissions, is set in rural Alabama in a mythical community between Montgomery and Birmingham during the years 1954-1994. The novel was praised by judges as “one of the most moving we have seen in the ten years of the Jones Fellowship.”

Diane McWhorter received the 2003 Clarence Cason Writing Award, which recognizes exemplary nonfiction and is given by the University of Alabama Journalism Department. McWhorter’s book, *Carry Me Home: Birmingham, Alabama, the Climactic Battle of the Civil Rights Revolution*, won the 2002 Pulitzer Prize for nonfiction. The awards ceremony was followed by the sixth annual Press and Public Symposium, which this year

The Alabama Library Association has announced its award winners for 2003. Two of the Association’s three awards will go to publications from The University of Alabama Press. Author Mary Ward Brown receives

REPORTS FROM THE FIELD



Diane McWhorter



Wayne Greenhaw

featured **Wayne Greenhaw**, **Roy Hoffman**, and newspaper editor **Eugene Patterson**.

University of Alabama history professor **George C. Rable** was awarded this year's Lincoln Prize for his new book *Fredericksburg! Fredericksburg!* (University of North Carolina Press). Administered by Gettysburg College of Pennsylvania, the Lincoln Prize recognizes works about Lincoln or the Civil War period. With a \$20,000 award attached to it, the prize is one of the best funded book awards in the nation.

Several Alabama School of Fine Arts students took home prizes from the ARTS (Art Recognition and Talent Search) awards and workshops held this year in Miami. **Lee Steely** was a finalist in fiction and received honorable mention for her poetry. Both **Katie McGriff** and **Reggie Powell** were finalists in fiction. Powell also received honorable mention for his poetry.

the fiction award for her 2002 publication, *It Wasn't all Dancing and other Stories*. Co-editors Samuel Webb and Margaret Armbruster receive the nonfiction award for *Alabama Governors: A Political History of the State*, a 2001 publication.

Back at the Blue Moon Café

Southern Writers Reading

Nov. 22-24

Fairhope, Alabama

Behind his genial smile of welcome, **Sonny Brewer** was teeth-gritting mad. Each lunch table held a copy of a feature article from the *Washington Post* claiming that Southern Literature has “lost its compass” and is “Gone with the Wind.” According to *Post* writer Linton Weeks, “Since 1985 most books written by Southerners and/or set in the South can be boiled down to: American stories with a Southern accent, such as [Lee] Smith's, and the local-color variety, such as Anne Rivers Siddons and anything by Fannie Flagg.” It took only a few hours of reading over a couple of days in Fairhope, Alabama, for Brewer and his friends to put this notion to rest.

The fourth annual SOUTHERN WRITERS READING weekend in Fairhope, co-sponsored by Over the Transom Books and the University of South Alabama-Baldwin County, gathered some of the country's best writers, all with southern roots. Many, of course, were Alabama writers of particular interest to *First Draft* readers.

On Friday, most of the assembled writers and some interested friends gathered for lunch at Faulkner State Community College's Dahlgren Hall, including *First Draft* poetry editor **Jennifer Horne**, Alabama Public TV “Bookmark” host **Don Noble**, and Bay Minette librarian **Charlotte Cabaniss**, founder of the Alabama Athenaeum. All agreed with **Michael Morris** that “some things will never change” in Southern culture, and that makes it something worth maintaining.

There were two “official” readings scheduled on Saturday afternoon and evening, but Friday night's “Alumni Grille” opened the weekend with bonus readings from writers represented in Brewer's anthology *Stories from the Blue Moon Café*. Several Alabama writers have books due out this year: **Frank Turner Hollon** read from *A Thin Difference*, and **Tom Franklin** read the powerful opening chapter of *Hell at the Breach*. **Suzanne Hudson** read from the novel that is growing from her Blue Moon story, “The Fall of the Nixon Administration.”

On Saturday, Fairhope writers **Jennifer Paddock** and **Michael Morris** read about quite different young women facing life in their own ways. Paddock's *A Secret Word* will be published by Simon & Schuster. Morris's *A Place Called Wiregrass* is in its third printing. **Bev Marshall**, who lives now in Louisiana, qualifies as an Alabama writer from her periods in Montgomery as an Air Force wife. The child narrator of her “literary mystery” *Walking Through Shadows*, Anita Cotton, is a memorable southern voice. Marshall's next book is *Right as Rain*. The highlight of Saturday night's readings for *First Draft* readers was the triumphant return of **Brad Watson** from New York, where his novel *The Heaven of Mercury* had been nominated for the National Book Award.

The weekend definitely established southern writers as powerful voices, with work we can all anticipate eagerly. As if that were not enough, Sonny Brewer also promises a second anthology of *Blue Moon Café* stories to come from this year's weekend. Southern literature is definitely not “Gone with the Wind”! —Karen Pirmie



The Blowing Rock Stage Company in Blowing Rock, NC, will present the world premiere of “Crossroads,” Bob Inman’s new comedy, on June 12th. Set in the small fictional town of Crossroads in the early 20th century, Inman describes the play as “a musical comedy about dreams.” A train carrying Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show derails near Crossroads, and buffalo, giraffes, cowboys, and Indians scatter. One mysterious stranger shows up at the Potter family homestead. Inman has said that the play shares with his other works of fiction the “notion that time and place sometimes intersect in ways that compel us to decisions that have profound consequences.”

Elba native Inman is a novelist, former journalist, screenwriter, and now playwright. His books include *Captain Saturday* (Little Brown, 2002), *Dairy Queen Days* (Little Brown, 1997), and *Home Fires Burning* (Little Brown, 1987). He wrote the book, music, and lyrics for “*Crossroads*.” Although this is his first play, Inman, who lives in Charlotte, NC, notes that in fiction, journalism, and theater “the basic thing, storytelling, remains the same. Characters drive a story and if the characters are honest and true, the result will be a compelling story.”

The summer issue of First Draft will report on the premiere of Crossroads.

In February AWF executive director Jeanie Thompson accepted the 2003 University of Alabama Alumni Fine Arts Award in Tuscaloosa. Given by the UA College of Arts & Sciences, the award recognizes exceptional contributions to the arts. Here Thompson displays the award, designed by UA graduate students.



BILL FULLER

The Back Page

Writing the Book I Wanted to Write

by Glen Browder

When I left politics a few years ago, I found that publishers were interested in kiss-and-tell books—but I wasn’t. I wanted to talk seriously about what I considered the most important issue of contemporary public life—the future of American democracy—but apparently nobody in the publishing business shared my ideas.

Over time, I would learn many realistic, sometimes discouraging, sometimes rewarding lessons about the writing and publishing world—and, retrospectively, the most useful lesson I learned was pretty simple: I wrote the book that I wanted to write rather than what other people told me to write; and I’m happy with the outcome.

Publisher Disinterest

Due to my twin backgrounds as politician and political scientist, I fancied myself uniquely qualified for articulating an important message about our national democratic experiment. This message—that America is changing in important and unsettling ways for American democracy—has been my primary interest over the past few years as Eminent Scholar in American Democracy at Jacksonville State University (and as Distinguished Visiting Professor at Naval Postgraduate School in California).

Numerous publishers respectfully passed on my book proposal with kind remarks that it did not fit their publishing interests. Admittedly, my analysis, while constructive, was normatively unpleasant and pretty difficult to read; in

the first place, how do you sell a book that drearily asks “Is America dying?” I recall one young literary agent who said candidly and sheepishly that she just couldn’t understand it and didn’t know what to do with it.

Writer’s Dilemma

Of course, I didn’t help my case with an initial inability to define exactly what I wanted to say and how my book would fit commercial objectives. Is it an autobiographical account of my political career or is it an essay about the challenges of American democracy? Would it be a popular trade book or a textbook for the academic community? A political scientist friend assessed my dilemma, accurately, by remarking that the book lacked market focus, it was neither fish nor fowl.

I really didn’t know which way to go—until I concluded that I didn’t care, in this case, about commercial success. It would be nice to write a popular political commentary or a quality civics textbook; but I wanted most of all to encourage unconventional public debate about the uncertain future of American democracy. So I decided to promote that debate however and wherever I could—my way.

Modest Publication

Eventually, I contracted with a small publisher of academic books for classroom usage—University Press of America, Inc.—for *The Future of American Democracy: A Former Congressman’s Unconventional Analysis* (Sept. 2002). My book would be a modest paperback publication with only modest prospects that anybody would ever read it unless I pushed it under his or her nose (along with an immodest price tag of \$41).

But this arrangement, while lacking in literary prestige and big bucks, worked very well for me. I had freedom to write whatever I wanted to say without worrying unduly about editorial pressure or profitability. Although I had to take care of tedious manuscript preparation, a streamlined printing process

produced an attractive book within four months of submission.

Aggressive Promotion

More importantly, this arrangement worked well for me because my political background and academic assignments allowed me to pursue my mission to the extent of my interest and inclinations. As the following points show, I promoted my book pretty aggressively through personal appearances, media events, electronic postings, mailings, and otherwise.

- ① Of course, I used the book in my class, “The Future of American Democracy,” at Jacksonville State University; and the students responded very well to its provocative analysis.
- ② I also presented my unconventional thesis through the JSU Eminent Scholar Public Lecture Series in American Democracy; this popular series was marketed throughout the area as public lectures, televised lectures, and televised seminars.
- ③ I established a website—(www.futureofamericaanddemocracy.org)—through which I disseminated news releases and other information regarding my work and the book.
- ④ I embarked on a speaking tour, mainly at schools, throughout Alabama.
- ⑤ I scheduled guest lectures and appearances at various institutions in the Washington, D.C., area (and I even presented one lecture at a Russian university).
- ⑥ I found book-signing events ineffective, mainly because my book did not excite the general public. I did have a very successful autograph session in Washington, D.C., because my friends and former associates showed up and bought books (Trovers bookshop actually sold all forty copies in one hour).
- ⑦ I promoted the message through various electronic media outlets. Alabama Public Television and Alabama Public Radio ran interesting programs featuring the book and my analysis.
- ⑧ The print media were responsive in

covering these events; and some wrote positive book reviews.

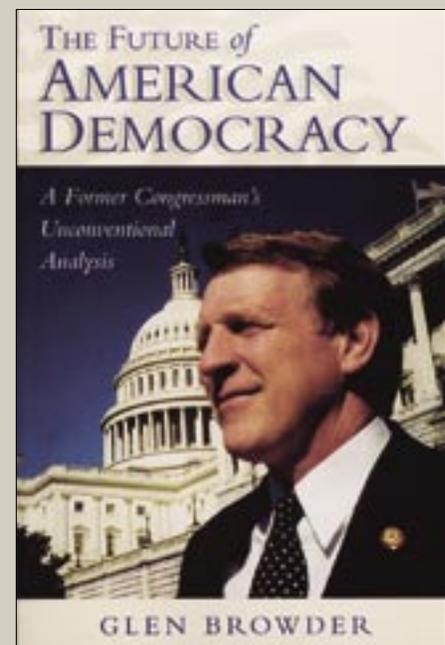
⑨ I sent out promotional flyers to libraries in Alabama and the Southeast; and various libraries throughout the country added the book to their holdings.

⑩ Finally, I’m still actively promoting the book, now more nationally. I’ll present a variation of the thesis (“Southern Politics and the Future of American Democracy”) as Visiting Fellow at Harvard University; and I’m scheduling more speaking appearances in California and perhaps a return to the Washington area.

A Success for American Democracy

My book will never be a bestseller. All in all, however, I consider it a success despite limited commercial sales: the future of American democracy is being discussed wherever I journey into resonant corners of public life.

Thus I’m pleased with my experience; and I hope that my generalized conclusion about “writing the book I wanted to write” speaks encouragingly to those facing similarly daunting dilemmas in the world of writing and publishing.





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