

FIRST DRAFT

THE JOURNAL OF THE ALABAMA WRITERS' FORUM

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*Pictured above with Helen Norris (center),
author of "The Cracker Man," are actors (l-
r) John Dossett, Patrick Cranshaw, and
Ashley Crow.*

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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Rus Baxley

Transitions are taking place in Alabama literary life.

Fiction to film, scripts to spoken dialogue, the passing of one of our literary heroes, and long-due recognition of another.

And a quieter change also. The anthology from "Writing Our Stories," a collection of poetry and prose written during the first creative writing program for incarcerated boys at Mt. Meigs from

December through July of this year, is taking shape. The book will be published later this summer. Look for a complete story about its publication, excerpts from the work, and news of the next year's contract with the Department of Youth Services to help some of Alabama's troubled young men and women tell about their lives.

In this issue of *First Draft* we bring you *many* stories of the triumph of Alabama writers' works.

Helen Norris's "The Cracker Man" has been adapted by Alerion Film producers Bruce Kuerten and John DiJulio as part of the PBS "American Stories" series. Filmed on location in Auburn, LaFayette, and Opelika, Alabama, with a number of talented Alabamians in the cast and crew, "The Cracker Man" promises to be one of Alabama's points of pride for 1999.

In part one of a two-part series on Alabama playwriting, writer Sunshine Huff profiles some of the state's playwrights, taking an in-depth look at Randy Hall, whose *Grover* was featured in the Alabama Shakespeare Festival's Southern Writers' Project. ASF's literary associate in the Southern Writers' Project, Jennifer Hebblethwaite, speaks in "The Back Page" about that innovative venue for playwrights' new works about the South. In the fall *First Draft* we'll look further at Alabama's playwrights and include an "up close" segment with Keith Glover.

We're also pleased to bring you news of the Harper Lee Award presentation in Monroeville to Albert Murray, the International Hemingway Society's strong Alabama connection in Provence, France, and a wide array of important Alabama literary news happenings.

Finally, the Alabama literary community deeply mourns the passing of Eugene Walter, Alabama's most notable writer from the Gulf Coast. Four writers give us a perspective on his artistic contribution: Cy Wood (Valley), Sue Walker (Mobile), Bert Hitchcock and Jay Lamar (both of Auburn), lovingly remember that dear, rare bird. We include some of Eugene's drawings to flavor the gumbo.

As always, we welcome your ideas for stories and we hope you will keep us posted on the literary happenings in your part of the state. Alabamians are richly blessed with literary abundance, and it is my distinct pleasure and privilege to watch this evolution unfold.

Jeanie Thompson

First Draft is a vehicle for communication among writers and those interested in literature/publishing in Alabama and elsewhere. We encourage publication news, events information, and story suggestions. *First Draft* will grow as the needs of writers in Alabama are identified. Contact: The Alabama Writers' Forum, Alabama State Council on the Arts, 201 Monroe Street, Montgomery, AL 36130-1800; 334/242-4076, ext. 233; Fax: 334/240-3269; email:jeanie@arts.state.al.us

COVER STORY

by Jeanie Thompson

Alerion Films has adapted Helen Norris's short story "The Cracker Man" for the PBS series "American Stories" and filmed it entirely in Alabama, with a lot of native talent. At the invitation of Alerion Films producers Bruce Kuerten and John DiJulio, *First Draft* escorted Helen Norris to one location of "The Cracker Man," a farmhouse outside Auburn.



(Left to right) Director Rudy Gaines, producers John DiJulio and Bruce Kuerten, and author Helen Norris in the kitchen of the Nunn House, the main film set for "The Cracker Man."

Katie Lamar Smith

Scene: An 1830's farmhouse outside a small Alabama town. It's a few days before the fourth of July, Grandpa's 100th birthday. His great-granddaughter, Gloria, is planning a birthday surprise, complete with a fireworks show set personally by Hank, a cracker man she has just met. She's coming home to tell Grandpa, who believes he's still fighting the Civil War. They live alone in the farmhouse, which is all she owns. She is fiercely dedicated to him.

When filming begins after a short walk-through and a couple of rehearsals, the cantankerous 1940 Ford won't start and must be pushed into the frame. One of the crew members doesn't remove his hands quickly enough from the back of the car, and the scene is ruined. The director is frustrated, the crew sweltering in the near 100-degree heat. But everyone—actors, director, producers, and even the technical crew busy with cables and lights—remains gracious to a special visitor on the set: Helen Norris, author of the "The Cracker Man," the short story upon which the film is based.

In the farmhouse on Wire Road, everyone bunches up around Rudy Gaines, the director, and his monitor screen to watch the scene being filmed in the adjacent room. Helen sits near the director and dons a headset so she can hear all of Gaines's instructions. "Grandpa" (played by Patrick Cranshaw) dozes on the iron bed in the heavy summer heat as "Gloria" (played by Ashley Crow) pulls up in the driveway,



Extras for "The Cracker Man" on location in LaFayette.

Jeanie Thompson

bounds up the steps, then spills a bag of hardware, waking him. She approaches his bed, sits down and speaks to him lovingly, charmed by his rare moment of lucidity.

Over the director's shoulder, the group can watch how the camera in the next room moves up for a tight shot of the actress's face as she connects with grandpa. Even to the untrained eye, it feels right.

When we had met Crow an hour before, the Birmingham native said, "This is the scene where Grandpa says Gloria's name." Her reverence and feeling for the script were palpable, the same reverence she showed writer Helen Norris when

they embraced outside the farmhouse where the scene takes place. The actress thanked Norris for writing the story, and commented that it is rare to get to act in a film with such resonance for her home state.

"The Cracker Man" is an hour-long film which will be aired in early 1999 on public television. Alerion Film's script was selected from more than 400 submitted to the "American Stories" series. Only three were chosen.

Kuerten and DiJulio, who have produced historical documentaries and worked on feature films such as "Under Siege," wanted to do a dramatic narrative. During the research process, they found Norris's story in her collection *The Burning Glass* (LSU Press, 1992). The adaptation took about a year and included a reading in Montgomery at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival. Norris sat unobtrusively in the back during the reading, and had to be coaxed to speak when Kuerten and DiJulio asked for audience reactions to the script.

On the day she visits the farmhouse location, Norris has not seen the final script, but says she is fairly confident she will like the finished product. This is not her first time to have a story adapted for film. “The Christmas Wife” became a successful HBO movie starring Jason Robards and Julie Harris and was nominated for an ACE Award.

Norris laughs and recounts a long tale of how Harris made a point of calling her, saying she planned to mention “the writer” at the ACE Ceremony. “I was sick with the flu but I stayed up to watch the awards,” Norris said, “and when Julie Harris got up to speak she said,” ‘I want to thank the author, *Mary Norris*, for writing the story.’” Her resigned chuckle underscores how often the writer loses touch with his or her work that is adapted for another medium.

Kuerten says the script of “The Cracker Man,” follows Norris’s story closely. He characterizes the story as “an off-beat drama that explores the ties that bind us to past and place. It is about the emotions and actions that break those ties, and the redemptive, transforming power of grace,” Kuerten said.

The story revolves around Gloria Turner, a single woman in the 1940s




Helen Norris

who lives with her great-grandpa on a farm she has inherited. “The main action involves Gloria’s getting ready for her great-grandpa’s 100th birthday on the fourth of July,” said Kuerten. “She is planning a cake with 100 candles and fireworks. This brings in the other main character, Hank, the fireworks salesman, or “cracker man,” for whom Gloria quickly develops feelings.

“Hank offers to set up the fireworks display himself at Gloria’s farm,” Kuerten continued. “It ultimately destroys everything Gloria

owns and loves. At this same time it opens a new world for her with Hank who declares, ‘I ain’t takin’ off,’” Kuerten said.

Today at the Nunn house on Wire Road producers, actors and crew members are re-creating scenes from Norris’s short fiction and she is here to watch it come to life. She can walk around her imaginary farm house, smell the hog pen (producer Kuerten made sure the hogs had a bit of shade), and stroll out to the tree where the opening scene takes place. Surrounded by her characters, she sits for photographs. In one of those rare moments of artistic collaboration and harmony, the one who got the whole thing going, the writer, communes with those who are taking her story over the threshold into another medium—film. And writer, actors, director, producers—and actor hogs—are one on an Alabama afternoon. 

Read about
THE ALABAMA CONNECTION
on page 24

HELEN NORRIS: SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Something More than Earth.
Atlantic/Little, Brown, 1940.

For the Glory of God.

The Macmillan Co., 1958.

More than Seven Watchmen.
Zondervan, 1985.

Walk with the Sickle Moon.
Birch Lane Press, 1985.

Short Story Collections

The Christmas Wife.

University of Illinois Press, 1985.

Water Into Wine.

University of Illinois Press, 1988.

The Burning Glass.

Louisiana State University Press,
1992.

Poetry

Whatever is Round.

Curbow Publications, 1994.

Rain Pulse.

Timberline Press, 1997



Ashley Crow as Gloria

ANNOUNCEMENTS

HACKNEY AWARDS DEADLINES ANNOUNCED

Prizes have increased in the prestigious Hackney Awards. The competition offers a \$5,000 award for the novel category winner and \$5,000 in prizes for poetry and short stories (\$2,500 for national and \$2,500 for state level; \$600 for first, \$400 for second and \$250 for third place). Winners will be announced at the Birmingham-Southern College Writing Today Conference on March 12-13, 1999.

Novel Guidelines. Postmark deadline is September 30, 1998. Length is open. The winning novel will be considered for publication. \$25 per entry.

Short Story Guidelines. Postmark deadline is December 31. Length not to exceed 5,000 words per story. Poetry not to exceed 50 lines per entry. More than one poem may be submitted, but the total lines may not exceed 50. \$10 per entry.

Poetry and short story entries from Alabama will be entered in the state contest unless specified for the national competition. Entries can be judged in only one category, not both state and national.

Short story and novel manuscripts should be typed and double-spaced. Poetry entries should be typed. Each entry submitted must have two copies of the cover sheet listing the title of the work, author's address and telephone number and category of the work. The author's name must not appear on the actual pages of the manuscript.

Enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope if you wish to receive a list of the winners. Refunds for withdrawn entries will only be given through December 31. Please do not send cash. Call 205/226-4921 for more information. Mail entries to:

Hackney Literary Awards
Birmingham-Southern College
Box 549003
Birmingham, AL 35254

WORKSHOPS, MEETINGS AND CONFERENCES

CONCLAVE MEMBERS "TAKING CHANCES"

"Writers Taking Chances" is the theme of the fall gathering of the Alabama Writers Conclave which is scheduled for August 5-7 at the University of Montevallo. Members enjoy socializing, contests, poetry readings and informative sessions. A copy of *Alalitcom*, the annual publication of winning work from the Conclave's literary competition, is included in the registration fee. The Alabama Writers' Conclave was organized in 1923 at Alabama College, now Montevallo, and is the oldest continuing writers' organization in the country. Annual membership is \$15. To join or to register for the August meeting, write Harriette Dawkins, Treasurer, Alabama Writers' Conclave, 117 Hanover Road, Homewood, AL 35209.

WRITING THE REGION WITH RAWLINGS

The second annual Writers Workshop Honoring Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings will be August 5-9 at the Thomas Center in Gainesville, Fla., and at Cross Creek, Rawlings' home. The workshop will explore the question: "How does one write about the people and the area most immediate in a way that appeals to readers everywhere?" Nationally-known experts will hold sessions dealing with a wide variety of topics, including fiction, nonfiction, humor, publication and marketing techniques, poetry, writing for screen and theatre, African-American stories, nature writing and writing with a sense of place. For more information call Norma Homan, workshop director, at 888/917-7001 (toll free) or 352/378-9166. Write for a brochure to Homan in care of the Gainesville Association for the

Creative Arts, P.O. Box 12246,
Gainesville, FL 32604.

CREATING NONFICTION

Workshops, readings, panels and lectures that focus on the writing, teaching and marketing of creative nonfiction will be featured at the Goucher College Creative Nonfiction Summer Writers' Conference, Aug. 11-16. Faculty includes Barry Lopez, Joyce Carol Oates and George Plimpton. The annual event is sponsored by Goucher College Center for Graduate and Continuing Studies (Baltimore, MD) and the magazine *Creative Nonfiction*. For registration information, call 800/697-4646 or 410/337-6200.

ELF TO MEET

IN THE MOUNTAINS

The Eastern Literary Fellowship will hold its annual writers' conference October 2-4 in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, at the Smoky Shadows Conference Center. Writing competitions and workshops will be held in the categories of fiction, nonfiction, poetry, screenwriting, playwriting, short fiction, children's literature and essays.

The registration fee is \$80, but groups of eight or more receive a discount. August 15 is the deadline for registration, submissions for competition and a special rate for lodging. For further information, call Bonnie A. Jones at 864-833-5991. Fax your query to 864/833-9790 or write her at 205 S. Holland St., Clinton, SC 29325.

30 YEARS OF POETRY

To celebrate its 30th anniversary, the Alabama State Poetry Society (ASPS) will hold a day-long poetry festival at the UAB Honors House on the University of Alabama at Birmingham campus on Saturday, October 17. Bonnie Roberts, Jeanie Thompson, Bob Collins and Jim Mersmann will read from their work along with members of the Alabama Writers Conclave and ASPS. Contests, workshops, an open mike

ANNOUNCEMENTS

contest and poetry slam are also on the agenda, according to Barry Marks, programs vice president of the ASPS. For more information, contact Marks by email at bsm@blik.com or write to him at 1600 SouthTrust Tower, Birmingham, AL 35203-2404.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

SOUTHERN EXPERIMENTS

New Orleans Review has announced a February 1, 1999 deadline for its next special issue about "The Other South." Editors Bill Lavender and Ralph Adamo are seeking experimental poetry, fiction, nonfiction and graphic arts by southerners, as well as essays on southern writing and regionalism. Works selected will be published in an expanded issue next spring. Queries may be sent to wtlmc@uno.edu, but submissions should be hard copies sent to: The Other South, *New Orleans Review*, Box 195, Loyola University, New Orleans, LA 70118.

LONZIE'S HOT AND CRISPY

Lonzie's Fried Chicken, which bills itself as "a Journal of accessible Southern fiction and poetry," welcomes submissions of short fiction, self-contained novel excerpts and poetry with a feel for the Southeast.

Send up to 10 pages of fiction and up to 40 lines of poetry with name, address, phone or fax number and word count on the title page. Manuscripts should be clear, double-spaced and previously unpublished. *Lonzie's* acquires first-time rights and pays three copies. The first issue is due this summer; the second is planned for next winter. Mail submissions to E.H. Goree, editor, *Lonzie's Fried Chicken Literary Magazine*, P.O. Box 189, Lynn, NC 28750.

AMARYLLIS BLOOMS

Published by the Chunnenugee Literary Society, Inc., *Amaryllis* is

looking for poetry, reviews, short fiction, "experiments" and non-scholastic essays. Manuscripts are read year-round. Send three copies of previously-unpublished work to *Amaryllis*, P.O. Box 6330, Carolyn Station, Montgomery, AL 36106-0330. Be sure to enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope if you want your writing returned.

HARMONIOUS PROGRESSIONS

Alternative Harmonies Literary and Arts Magazine needs poetry, short fiction, prose, photos, essays and drawings to fill about 40 pages quarterly. Send \$1 per entry or 50 cents a page for stories, or send \$10 for unlimited entries and receive a copy of the upcoming issue. Pay for contributors is one copy for each submission used. Annual subscription is \$15. Send submissions and inquiries to: New Dawn Unlimited, Route 1 Box 219C, Brierfield, AL 35035. The first in a series of chapbooks from New Dawn is a collection of poetry by Jerri Dawn Buckingham Hardesty called *Bloom of the Muse*. It is available for \$5, including postage.

A CLASS ACT

The first issue of *Hector Street: Alabama's High School Literary Journal* will be out this fall, said Editor Joseph Halli, a Tuscaloosa high school student. Halli was very pleased with the work submitted and plans for a wide distribution, possibly including direct mailing the magazine to orthodontists' offices statewide. Submissions of poetry, short fiction, drama and creative nonfiction are sought for the next volume. Send \$5 for a copy and submissions guidelines to *Hector Street*, P.O. Box 71628, Tuscaloosa, AL 35407.

LITERARY MARKET NEWS

The Literary Network News, Canadian and international online market publication for writers, publishes monthly and offers up-to-date market listings. The Literary Network also publishes poetry, short fiction, articles, essays and reviews. Printouts

available to those not on the internet by sending a SASE to: The Literary Network, Box 31, 2060 Queen St. E., Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4E 3V7. Requests may be sent by email to tplantos@idirect.com

WOMEN'S WORK

Shatter the Glass Ceiling, a bi-weekly women's business magazine on the internet, is soliciting manuscripts, both fiction and nonfiction. The magazine covers "all aspects of a woman's life, except romance." There are sections on health, current events, business, family, humor and literature. While the publication does not have the financial backing to pay writers, it does offer an international readership in 27 countries. All articles from past issues are placed in the "Shatter Archives." Review the magazine at: <http://www.theglassceiling.com/shatter> or look at the entire website at <http://www.theglassceiling.com>

HYPertext CONTEST

Salt Hill is looking for solid literary hypertext fiction, poetry and design. Works may be text only or incorporate multimedia including video, animation, images and sound. Submissions must be viewable over Internet browsers such as Netscape 3.0 and Microsoft Internet Explorer. Accepted work will be posted on the Salt Hill site, which can be found at <http://www-hl.syr.edu/cwp>

Send your url address, or your work as an attachment to jsparker@mailbox.syr.edu or address an envelope with floppy disks to Salt Hill Hypertext Contest. All entries will also be considered for regular posting at the site. A \$30 payment will be made to authors whose work is selected. There is a reading fee of \$10. Send checks made payable to Salt Hill to the Salt Hill Hypertext Contest, Syracuse University English Department, Syracuse, NY 13244-1170. The deadline is January 31 annually.



LITERARY NEWS

Murray Receives First Harper Lee Award for Literary Excellence

Alabama native Albert Murray was honored with the first annual “Harper Lee Award” for a Distinguished Alabama writer at the Alabama Writers’ Symposium in Monroeville the last weekend in May. The award recognizes the lifetime achievement of a nationally-known living writer who was either born in Alabama or whose literary career developed in the state. AWF President Brent Davis introduced Murray as “one of the finest novelists, essayists and critics Alabama has produced” and Jeanie Thompson, AWF executive director, presented the award.

“There was an excellent turnout of nearly 300 participants and a fine group of writers at the inaugural Writers Symposium,” said Thompson. Among the writers on the program were Mark Childress, Rick Bragg, Cynthia Tucker, Terry Cline, Judith Richards and Charles McNair. “Participants got to talk with the writers about their work in a really casual, comfortable atmosphere. That was something very special about this conference,” commented Marion Carter, assistant director of the Alabama Humanities Foundation.

Coordinated by Alabama Southern Community College, the two-and-a-half day conference included readings, presentations of scholarly papers, panel discussions, speeches and a production of *To Kill a Mockingbird* staged at the Monroe County Courthouse. The next Alabama Writers Symposium is set for May 6, 7 and 8, 1999.

ALBERT MURRAY’S REMARKS UPON RECEIVING THE HARPER LEE AWARD

In the remarks I made on 16 April, 1988 at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa where I was a



Albert Murray

participant in a symposium on *The American South: Distinctiveness and Its Limitations*, I began by stating that as a writer of fiction which I hoped would be read as a serious literary statement of universal appeal above all else, my primary concern was not with recording, reporting or documenting socio-political data about the South.

But then I went on to point out that the universally appealing in art, which is to say aesthetic statement, is always achieved through the extension, elaboration and refinement of the local details and idiomatic particulars that impinge most intimately on one’s everyday existence. So the point was not that I was not at all concerned with writing about the south, but rather that I have always been more interested in ultimate metaphors about the south than in social science surveys about it. Because whereas socio-political reports in effect give circumstances which amount to predicament all of

the advantages over incentive and ambition, the metaphor may be employed as a pragmatic device that functions as our most basic equipment for living, by which of course I mean self-fulfillment.

The metaphor represents how we *feel* about whatever facts and figures are used to describe or define the concrete circumstances of our existence wherever we are. And how we *feel* adds up to our *outlook or horizon of aspiration* which is the source of our incentive or lack of incentive.

In brief, how I felt about the socio-economic and political circumstances in the Alabama in which I grew up during the 1920s and the 1930s added up to me thinking of myself as having to be as ever nimble and ever resourceful as the ever nimble and resourceful mythological Alabama jack rabbit in the no less actual than mythological Alabama briarpatch. Thus I have never thought of myself as a victim or a villain. I was always, *but always* the fairy tale hero who would marry the fairy tale princess.

All of which is also why I’ve written so much about the blues (and about jazz which is the fully orchestrated blues statement). To me blues music has never been the misery music that the ever so benevolent social science survey oriented do gooders and uplifters of the downtrodden seem to think it is. To me it has always been good time music, music that inspires you to stomp away lowdown blue feelings and stomp in an atmosphere of earthy well-being and affirmation and celebration of the sheer fact of existence.

Yes the ever so blue lyrics are indeed about problems, troubles, disappointment, defeat, loss, and unhappiness. But the music with its

Jeanie Thompson

LITERARY NEWS

locomotive beat and onomatopoeia not only counterstates and counteracts the complaint that life itself is such a lowdown dirty shame, it also goes on to transform the atmosphere (of the jook joint, honky-tonk or even the rent party) from that of a purification ritual to a fertility ritual! A jook joint, honky-tonk or any blues dive is a good time place, and I've never seen, heard or heard of a blues musician who was not primarily interested in making the good times roll.

Anyway to me blues music is an aesthetic device of confrontation and improvisation, an existential device or vehicle for coping with the ever changing fortunes of human existence, in a word entropy, the tendency of everything to become formless. Which is also to say that such music is a device for confronting and acknowledging the harsh fact that the human situation (*the human situation as such*) is always awesome and all too often awful. The blues lyric never lets you forget that.

And yet the blues statement is neither a matter of commiseration or of protestation as such. According to Kenneth Burke's book *Attitudes Toward History* aesthetic statement falls into one or the other of two rhetorical frames of reference. On the one hand there is a frame of rejection within which the basic statement is that life should not be a matter of tribulation. Hence the plaint, the complaint, the protestation, the grotesque, the burlesque, the satire, the caricature, the elegy, and so on. But on the other hand there is the frame of acceptance of the obvious fact that life is always a struggle against destructive forces and elements whether seen or unseen. Thus the aesthetic statement takes the form of the ode, the hymn of praise, the epic, the tragedy (of noble defeat), comedy (of insightful resolution), the melodrama (of resolution through effective engineering); and then there is farce, which is where I place the blues and jazz because it presents life as a matter of perpetual readjustment

and improvisation. Such is the context within which I place my blues-derived literary statement. When Scooter, the protagonist of *Train Whistle Guitar*, *The Spyglass Tree* and *The Seven League Boots* says, "My name is Jack the Rabbit because I was bred and born and brought up in the briarpatch," he is speaking in terms of the idiomatic particulars of a brownskin boy from Alabama, but his actions add up to anecdotes that represent the basic ancestral American outlook on what life is all about.

As a frame of acceptance the blues as literary statement also func-

tions in terms of the dynamics of *antagonistic cooperation!* In a blues composition or anecdote a key structural device is *the break*, a cessation of the established rhythm and tempo which jazz musicians regard and respond to not as a detrimental or trauma inducing disruption not unlike the abrupt intrusion of the villain or some other personification of disaster but rather as an opportunity to exercise their personal best.

What makes the Alabama jack rabbit so nimble, so resilient, so elegantly resourceful? The briarpatch!

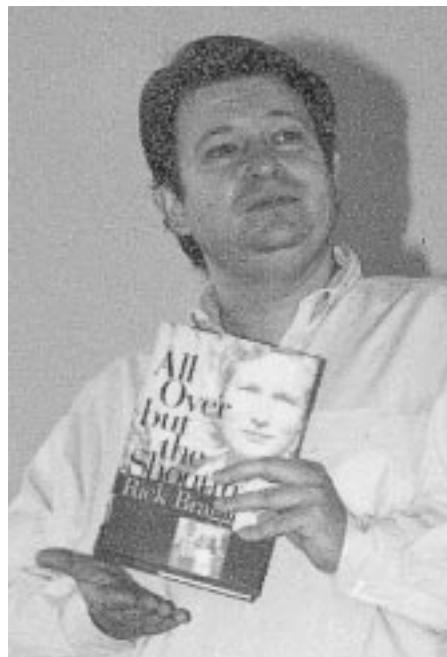
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Jane Martin



Marilyn Culppepper



Marilyn Culppepper

Top left: Monroeville Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Sandy Smith presented a key to the city to novelist Mark Childress; AWF Executive Director Jeanie Thompson is on the left. Top right: Terry Cline autographing his books. Bottom right: Albert Murray, Alabama Humanities Foundation Executive Director Bob Stewart, Jeanie Thompson, and Alabama Southern Community College President John A. Johnson, holding the Harper Lee Award. Below left: memoirist Rick Bragg.

CONTEMPORARY ALABAMA PLAYWRIGHTS:

Words to be Seen ...and Heard

A playwright hears voices, voices that tell a particular story. For that's what a play is—a series of conversations that instruct us, the audience, about events that have gone before, or are unfolding as we watch. The key to being able to write a play is having the ability to write dialogue that advances the action and fills the audience in on all the information it needs to understand the story being told.

"I've known excellent writers who fail miserably at playwrighting," says Alabama novelist and playwright **Wayne Greenhaw**. "It's very difficult to pack all the description and history necessary to the story into the conversations among the actors. Yet, that is the only device you have."

This challenge notwithstanding, many Alabamians have succeeded to the point of seeing their work produced on the stage in front of a live audience. Writers know (or imagine) the thrill of being published in an established print forum with as large a readership as possible; for a playwright, that reward comes from having a play produced, from having live actors speak the carefully-crafted words. That means a playwright often has to wait even longer than other writers for a payoff.

Anne George is a novelist who started out as a poet, then took a playwrighting class at UAB. She achieved the dream: her one-act play was produced in a drama class there. She says of the experience, "It was funny. It seemed strange that these were my words, because the actors did such a great job. Having that



Norbert Butz in the title role of *Dennis Covington's Lizard* at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival.

additional artistic input was a nice surprise."

Dennis Covington adapted his award-winning novel, *Lizard*, for the stage, and said of the process (in an interview with Don Noble for Alabama Public Television's "Writing Today" series at Birmingham-Southern in April of 1995), "It was extremely difficult. The writing of the script for the stage was very demanding. And, in fact, my first draft was a disaster, I thought. It was too long; it was unwieldy; it required too many different scenes, too many different characters who were delivering these long speeches that didn't have any dramatic punch, any value in terms of stage craft. But what I think happened over the process of writing and rewriting and working with the director and working with the actors and getting advice from theatrical people is that it found itself as a play. There are certainly theatrical moments in it. . . . It was just a matter of trying to mold it and manage it in such a way that it would have unity of time and place, and that there would be dramatic action that would occur on the stage."

More often, a novel is adapted to the stage by someone other than the author. A case in point is *Company K*,

written by Mobile native **William March** about World War I, and adapted by **John Woodson** for the stage. (March had earlier written *The Bad Seed*, which made him famous after the book was adapted, first for the stage, then for the movie screen.) According to advance publicity from the Southern Writer's Project at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival (ASF) in Montgomery, where the play will be part of the 1998 season, "Woodson has combined March's poetic language and linear storytelling with a fresh episodic structure, allowing the characters' individual adventures to mesh into a critical look at mortal dignity. Transcending World War I, the play crosses generations with historical significance and compelling storytelling."

Certainly, there are Alabamians who have made playwrighting their focus, not arriving at the stage by way of adaptations. Notable among these is **Randy Hall**, of Anniston, who has seen several of his plays on the stage, not only in Alabama, but in other states as well. *Grover*, Hall's story of the brave Montgomery newspaper editor who used his position to further the cause of civil rights in Alabama during the 1960s, was a smash hit at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival. Another of Hall's plays, *The Widow's Best Friend*, was recently given a reading at a theater in Atlanta as one of several plays being considered for production for this fall or winter. His *Heartaches: The Unauthorized Biography of Patsy Cline* was presented at Birmingham's City Stages weekend in June. Because of

by Sunshine Huff



Stuart Culpepper played the title role of Grover in the 1994 Alabama Shakespeare Festival production.

sell-out crowds it was held over through the following the weekend at the Birmingham

Museum of Art. *Heartaches* is scheduled to be performed this fall at The Willows in Concord, California, which also mounted a production of *Grover* before it played at ASF.

Ed Howard is one of several Alabama playwrights who hail from the Florence/Tuscumbia area. His popular works include *Greater Tuna*, about a radio show in the fictional town of Tuna, Texas; *A Tuna Christmas*, which premiered in 1989; and the newest in the series, *Red, White, and Tuna*, on which work started in April of 1998 in Austin. Howard grew up in Tuscumbia and returns frequently to visit his mother. Howard's friend Terry Pace said "Ed will tell you there's a lot of Tuscumbia in Tuna, Texas." In 1998, the University of Alabama Theatre premiered another of his works, *Tempest Tossed*, a satire based on Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.

Will Stutts, now of Philadelphia but originally from Sheffield, is a playwright and director, as well as an accomplished actor. His new play, *The Gift*, based on the childhood friendship of Nelle Harper Lee and Truman Capote, has been highly praised. One of Will's recurring roles

as an actor is that of Atticus in the stage adaptation of Harper Lee's world-famous book, *To Kill A Mockingbird*. A second cousin of Alabama's own infamous Tallulah Bankhead, he has appeared in seven Broadway and twelve Off-Broadway plays, in addition to acting and/or directing at virtually every major regional theatre in the United States. He has written or "devised" some sixteen "one-person plays," including *Tallulah*, *Barrymore!*, *Noel Coward at the Cafe de Paris*, and the 1996 Barrymore Award Nominee, *Frank Lloyd Wright*.

Heather McCutcheon of

Florence has been called "the unacknowledged love child of playwrights Beth Henley and Sam Shepard" in tribute to her extraordinary talent. Her *Alabama Rain* was performed at the Segue Theater in Florence this summer. She has also seen her work mounted at Lincoln Center and at the Shattered Globe Theatre in Chicago. "It is, quite simply, the best script New Horizons has staged," raved Jerome Weeks in *The Dallas Morning News* when *Alabama Rain* was presented there in the summer of 1993.

Near Double Springs, in Winston County, a series of plays has been staged since 1989. Written by Lanny

McAllister, they deal with "the free state of Winston" whose citizens seceded from Alabama when it seceded from the Union. *The Incident at Looney's Tavern* was the first of the plays. This is the first season for *Looney's Tavern: The Legacy*. Another play vested in Alabama is the Helen Keller story, *The Miracle Worker*, in its thirty-seventh season at Ivy Green, Keller's birthplace in Tuscumbia. William Gibson wrote the play.

The Birmingham-Bessemer area is a fertile ground for artistic talent. Witness **Keith Glover**, who is from Bessemer, and had the unbelievable

good fortune to have his first play, *Dancing on Moonlight*, produced by the New York Shakespeare Festival. His second play, *Coming of the Hurricane*, was produced by the Denver Center Theatre Company in 1994 and at the



Playwright Charlotte Higgins performing *Exiting I-59: On the Back Roads with Some Edgy Southern Women*.

Arena Stage in Washington D.C. in 1996. His third play, *Thunder Knocking On the Door: A Bluesical Tale of Rhythm and the Blues*, was produced by the Southern Writer's Project at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival in Montgomery. He became the Festival's first resident playwright, and in 1997 won the Osborn Award from the American Theatre Critics Association.

Charlotte Higgins, a native of Fairfield who currently lives about two hours outside of San Francisco, draws deeply from her Alabama roots for her plays. (By contrast, she sets her novels in California; *Blue Monday*, which she wrote a couple of years ago, is a murder mystery set in the Bay Area.) A one-woman show that Higgins wrote, produced, and performed, *Exiting I-59: On the Back*

IN THE FALL


Look for more information on production venues and opportunities for teaching and studying playwriting in Part Two of "Contemporary Alabama Playwrights."

We will also profile Keith Glover and include Barbara Lebow, writer of *Lurleen*, Bill Cobb and others.



Randy Hall's Arts & Leisure at ACTheater in Anniston.

Roads With Some Edgy Southern Women, was one of 22 works showcased at the Solo Mio Festival in San Francisco, one of the oldest and most prestigious solo performance festivals in the United States. Her play, as suggested by its title, presents a melange of darkly funny characters: a woman who lives with her mother-in-law; an 84-year-old inmate of a nursing home; a "911" operator. Her work has been characterized as risky—her characters

are not typical heroines. "They're working class, poor, stressed out, and funny. They are, also, uniquely Alabamian," says the playwright, who visits her home state several times a year. 

Get "Up Close" with
PLAYWRIGHT RANDY HALL
on page 27

WRITING AND PUBLISHING FOR THE THEATER

Playwriting is the highest form of theatre art, because it is the creative aspect—everything that follows is interpretive, believes **Paul Castagno**. He talks about a play as a process. The first step is the first draft—what Castagno refers to as "writer's work;" often, he says, the work is "overly written at this point. The second step is the collaboration with the actors. Actors show what a script can do; it is important that the writer grasp what the actor can bring to the piece. A playwright must hear the play to know what it needs; there is an aural, physical dimension to a play."

Plays develop in many ways. Some begin with a story that must be told; others are character-driven. Of her "edgy Southern women" **Charlotte Higgins** says "I really like the women who pop up off the page. They're forceful. They demand to be heard." She believes that if you give the characters an opportunity, they will appear on the page and direct the course of action.

A play goes through many, many drafts. **Randy Hall** speaks of "desperate last-minute re-writes;" Charlotte Higgins admits that although talent is certainly required, it's also a lot of hard work to write a play.


Even someone as successful and as well respected as **Romulus Linney** must go through the process of writing and re-writing. Jennifer Hebblethwaite, director of the Southern Writers' Project, is work-

ing with his current play at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival: "Although Linney has cut his play, *A Lesson Before Dying*, from a longer play to one long act, it will probably go through several more changes before it's finished."

Vastine Stabler, director of Southern Playworks and a playwright himself, believes that a successful playwright must be able to write for a small venue theater. "What you are writing is not a novel; it is not a screenplay. With a play, there are a limited number of sets, a limited number of characters. In a screenplay, you can have a blimp going to the Super Bowl; that is not possible in a play." From a practical standpoint, Stabler says that the most desirable play has no more than eight actors, and should have twice as many roles for women as for men. He also believes that there are many unrecognized opportunities for playwrights in children's theatre. Because the theatres like to own their scripts and produce the same work every three years or so, they will often hire a writer to produce a piece specifically for them. The writer will be paid for his work, and is often able, as well, to obtain the rights to have the work produced elsewhere.

An interesting difference between playwriting and other kinds of writing is that a play doesn't have to be published to be protected. When a playwright finishes a script, he/she adds a "Copyright ©

by" and his name and the play is protected by U.S. copyright laws. However, if a playwright does want to publish his play to make it available to producers looking for new works, the two primary publishers of plays are Samuel French and Dramatist's Play Service, both of New York City. The author retains the rights to the plays, and receives royalties as they are produced. A playwright receives two royalties on published plays: he gets one on the sale of the script (usually 25 copies or so per production), and he gets another on the production itself, based on the venue of the production, the size of the audience, the number of performances, and other considerations.

The act of publishing a play is secondary to producing it. When a play is finally published, it indicates that re-writing is finished; you have written a production that needs very little work. In fact, Dr. Castagno points out that publishing may not help to get a play produced. "If a work is published too prematurely, a producer might have a problem with making changes. It also might make people think that the play has already been produced, and theatres like to do premieres," he says. However, once the play has been produced, it can be published, and the stage directions and any desirable background material can be included. 

Don Noble

FROM THE FIELD

“Papa” in Provence

Donald R. Noble, professor of English at the University of Alabama, recently attended the International Conference of the Hemingway Society, of which he is a co-founder. First Draft asked Dr. Noble to give a taste of the meeting, held in Provence, and he gladly obliged.

On the rainy, cool morning of May 28, two buses loaded with the 175 participants in the eighth International Conference of the Hemingway Society wound their way north from Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, up through Provence to a Shangri-la valley at the head of which, high on a volcanic peak, stands the castle fortress of Les Baux, the place where, arguably, romantic love was invented. In this picturesque spot or some similar place, in the twelfth century, the Provencal troubadours wrote and sang of romantic love.

Until that time, “love,” was unknown and marriages were arranged for political or economic reasons. But in these feudal strongholds were assembled numbers of landless impoverished knights who stood no chance of marrying in their own class and could not marry commoners, and so dedicated themselves to the lady of the castle, worshipping her as if she were an earthly Mary, singing her praises in poems, running her tiniest errand, laying down their cloaks across mud puddles and praying fervently for her sexual favors. They were courtiers. Although the lady was married (Guenevere) and the love was therefore adulterous, there was still good reason to hope. Her husband didn’t “love” her and these knights believed that God answers prayer. Thus was born romantic, passionate, illicit love and its association with adultery, which has endured in fiction and poetry ever since.

Hemingway visited these Provence sites and what could be

more appropriate? Hemingway shows us “modern” love in most of its forms: the frustrated love of Brett and Jake in *The Sun Also Rises*, the brief but eternal love of Robert Jordan and Maria in *For*

Whom the Bell Tolls, the passionate married love of Harry and Marie in *To Have and Have Not*, the doomed love of Catherine Barkley and Frederic Henry in *A Farewell to Arms*, not to mention the Colonel and the Contessa, the Maccombers, and lots of others.

The Hemingway Society, first conceived at the 1976 Hemingway Symposium in Tuscaloosa (the first conference ever dedicated entirely to the work of the Nobel Laureate Ernest Hemingway, was founded by a couple of dozen scholar/aficionados in Houston, Texas, at the Modern Language Association (MLA) meeting in December of 1979. Since that time, we have grown to 550 members and this year in France we had participants from fourteen countries.

We meet at an international Hemingway site every other year. In the past the conference has been held at Pamplona, Paris, Venice (site of *Across the River and Into the Trees*), Schruns, Austria (where Hemingway took his winter skiing vacations in the ’20s), Madrid, and twice in the U.S. The next conference will be in Bimini, site of much of *Islands in the Stream*. This year’s conference was held in Provence because in 1927 Hemingway and his second wife, Pauline Pfeiffer, took their honeymoon in the port town of Le Grau Du Roi, which would later become the setting for the posthumously published novel *The Garden of Eden*. Ernest and Pauline also stained their



Don Noble toured the main street of Les Saintes-Maries-De-La-Mer with students Carey Bronstein and Sara Barry.

skin with walnut juice and bicycled to the Gypsy pilgrimage at Saintes-Maries, pretending to be Gypsies and probably fooling no one.

Saintes-Maries has itself been a mythological/historical place for centuries. Legend has it that about the year 40, a boat was either launched from Jerusalem or set adrift from a fishing boat in the middle of the Mediterranean by a frightened skipper. This boat contained Mary Jacobe, the mother of James and sister to the Virgin Mary; Mary Salome; Lazarus and his two sisters, Mary Magdalene and Martha, and Sarah, their dark-skinned servant, who becomes in legend the black Madonna and patron saint to the Gypsies. (Thus their annual pilgrimage on the last weekend in May). They landed safely here on the south coast of France. It was to say the least, a miracle, and a shrine, now a church, was built on the site. In the fourteenth century, “projecting machioliations” were added to the already fortified church, allowing boiling oil and dropped projectiles to be used against attackers.

The Hemingway Society assembled to worship, not make war, and we made it through our six-day meeting with no violence.

For me, highlights of the conference were talks by Valerie Hemingway and A.E. Hotchner, author of *Papa Hemingway*, one of the first Hemingway “biographies.”

continued on page 25

REVIEWS

Jay Lamar, Book Review Editor

Dairy Queen Days: A Novel
by Robert InmanLittle, Brown and Company, 1997
288 pp. Cloth, \$21.95

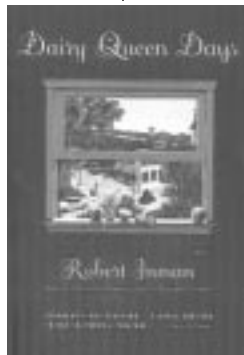
It's shaping up as a most peculiar summer for Trout Moseley, the protagonist of Robert Inman's bit-ter-sweet yet funny third novel, *Dairy Queen Days*. Trout's mother remains in a psychiatric hospital in Atlanta. His father, Rev. Joe Pike Moseley, is newly installed at the Methodist church in the family's ancestral home town of Moseley after hightailing it on a Triumph motorcycle and leaving his previous flock and his son in the lurch.

Aunt Alma, the resolute president of the family's cotton mill, is grooming Trout to take her place and run this small company town. Enigmatic Uncle Phinizy is either the drunkest man in town, or he's the smartest.

And there's Keats, the alluring but impossible girl with him behind the counter at the Dairy Queen whose father is organizing the mill workers to challenge the family that has ruled the town since Broadus Moseley bought the land cheap in 1885. (Broadus boasted on his deathbed that he never laid off one of his workers. True enough, but he never gave them much to live on, either.)

Robert Inman, an Alabamian who was raised in Elba, attended the University of Alabama, and anchored the news in Charlotte, N.C., since quitting a couple of years ago to write full time, has filled his novel with likeable but complicated characters. Not the least of which is the town itself, which, in 1979, has not yet been eviscerated by Atlanta, the city that ate the South. Here is a town struggling with its past and unprepared for the future. Spend some time with Inman's book and you'll hear the mill whistle blow for lunch and feel the desperation of the workers who know no other life.

Heaven help the townspeople who think Joe Pike Moseley will lead them from the pulpit. Only now, well past middle age, has the town's three hundred pound former high school football hero realized he was called to the ministry for the wrong reason, if



there was a calling at all. Elvis and The Bear, for whom he played college ball, muscle their way into the Trinity and appear prominently in his sermons. Joe Pike's real temple is the Dairy Queen, where he finds peace and solace amidst the whipped cream and maraschino cherries.

This book is not only about Trout's coming of age in his sixteenth summer, which is complicated by his mother's breakdown and his father's recurring absences as he wrestles with his many doubts and shortcomings, but the town's, as well. And to whom should the town turn? Perhaps Trout will be seasoned enough after sorting out his troubled family and coming to terms with Keats, the wounded girl he alternately loves and can't stand.

A peculiar summer, indeed. And a very satisfying book.

Brent Davis is public information manager at the University of Alabama Center for Public Television and Radio and president of the Alabama Writers' Forum.

A-Train: Memoirs of a Tuskegee Airmanby Charles W. Dryden
University of Alabama Press, 1997
421 pp. Cloth, \$29.95.

Until 1941 official United States Army doctrine held that African-Americans lacked the physical skills, intellect, and emotional makeup to engage in air combat. The flying skills and exploits of several black aviators, including Eugene Bullard, who flew for France in World War I, and Bessie Coleman, who earned her pilot's license in France, had already unmasked this unfounded dogma. Under intense pressure from champions of racial equality, including Eleanor Roosevelt, the Army Air Corps reluctantly began recruiting African-Americans to fly and maintain military aircraft in a segregated fighter squadron on the eve of America's entry into World War II.

African-American cadets who boarded trains in cities across America to go into the Deep South to a newly



constructed army airfield outside Tuskegee, Alabama, were filled with excitement and apprehension. They were going off to fight two wars—one against the Axis

powers in Europe and Asia and a second against racism at home and in the service.

Charles Dryden, son of Jamaican emigrants, and a graduate of Peter Stuyvesant High School in Manhattan, was one of 992 African-American cadets to receive their wings at Tuskegee during World War II. In *A-Train: Memoirs of a Tuskegee Airman*, Dryden recounts his early interest in aviation, his two decades of military service, which included combat missions in Italy during World War II and, later, in the Korean Conflict, until his retirement as an Air Force colonel in 1962.

Although the story of the Tuskegee aviators in World War II has begun to enter America's historical consciousness through the memoirs of Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., West Point graduate and 332nd Fighter Group commander, and a popular 1995 made-for-television film, Dryden's account adds several unique dimensions to the black experience in military aviation.

Perhaps most significantly, Dryden's memoir chronicles the bumpy road for African-American aviators and support personnel from the segregated World War II Army Air Corps into an integrated Air Force whose postwar transformation began with an executive order of President Harry Truman and was hastened considerably by the Korean Conflict.

Although Jim Crowism lingered, Dryden and many other Tuskegee airmen received advanced training and rose through the ranks. In 1957, Dryden's skill as a flier earned him the coveted wings of a command pilot. Only sixteen years earlier, military service dogma had decreed African-Americans unsuited for combat aviation. *A-Train* eloquently describes one airman's role in helping to

REVIEWS

transform the United States military services into arguably the most color-blind institution in American life today.

Allen Cronenberg is author of Forth to the Mighty Conflict: Alabama and World War II. He is director of the Auburn University Center for the Arts & Humanities.

Rain Pulse

by Helen Norris

Timberline Press, 1997

116 pp. Paper, no price listed

South by Candlelight

by Sue Scalf

Elk River Review Press, 1997

113 pp. Paper, \$12.00

In reading these two substantial books of poetry, one has the feeling of being drawn into a longstanding conversation between them: the poets are established women writers, members of Alabama's Kitchen Poets; both delve deeply into memory, loss, familial ties, and the sure, deep correspondences they discover between human nature and the natural world. It is a powerful and familiar conversation, strongly rooted in the Southern landscape, in the traditional structures and confessional modes of twentieth-century free verse. One obvious example of the kinship between these poets, and of the differences between them, suggests itself in Norris' "Summerscape" and Scalf's "Winterscape." Norris brings us to a "town laced/With sea," where "We watch the mist erase" the defining "lines" of "the huddled island houses," and even time itself. We move from these carefully blurring details into a (highly articulate) abstraction. The syntax of the last sentence is—characteristically for Norris—drawn out in play against the line endings:

Perhaps they have
Not even come to pass
Like light from distant stars
Long dead and past
That travels toward a sea-dream
Summer a century from now
And reaches it when we are grown
Too dry, our summers gone to dust,
To claim it for our own.



In response, Scalf's "Winterscape" sets up a color-laden sunrise (ocher, "a stain of peach," mauve) in an Alabama pasture, where it reveals

A slash of pines,
cedar, spruce
stand tangled
in a snarl of vines,
and in the distance a barn
sags red with sun.

In contrast to Norris, Scalf provides little commentary, little explication apart from the choice of words; but in this—as so often in her poems—there is a second voice, sometimes ironic, sometimes simply taking a different tack. In "Winterscape" it is a voice of human stories, human failures—a deer-hunting, kinslaying Cain, a lynching, and finally the speaker's father, weathered hands "cracked like pine": "When the calf died,/he held it and cried like a girl." Again, very little commentary. What matters for Scalf is the gap between, the unresolved, ambivalent relation of these two voices that is suggested but remains unstated, and thus stronger.

With more space, one could multiply such examples from these two volumes. Norris, especially at the ends of poems, has a striking syntax, but perhaps too often evades the more difficult questions that she raises. Scalf more insistently brings us back to face the same question again, again (often that hardest one of our own complicity and guilt).

Both volumes are attractively produced. The rain-splashed leaf of the cover design for *Rain Pulse* is particularly striking, even though it makes the title hard to read. *Rain Pulse's* alphabetical table of contents, on the other hand, is distinctly unhelpful. Both books are sizable, containing about a hundred poems, which to me seems almost too many. The individual poems—like Norris' fine "Elegy for the Chinaberry"—threaten to jumble together in the reader's mind, losing their deserved impact. *South by Candlelight*, divided into five loosely thematic sections, handles this rather better, so that a strong poem like "A Gift of Potatoes" stands out more clearly. But even so, and even with



such gifted, prize-winning writers, one is tempted at times to complain of a superfluity of riches, and to wish for just a touch more reticence in this ongoing conversation.

Jeremy M. Downes is Associate Professor of English at Auburn University. His Recursive Desire: Rereading Epic Tradition, was published by University of Alabama Press in 1997.

For I Heard Them Say: An Alabama Odyssey

by Barbara Ritch Jackson

Birmingham Printing and Publishing Company, 1998

91 pp. Paper, \$18.95

Growing up in Dothan in the 1930s and 1940s was idyllic as seen through the eyes of Barbara Ritch Jackson, the only child of Florence Ellis Ritch and Van A. Ritch. Much of her book, *For I Heard Them Say: An Alabama Odyssey*, is the story of her family; some of the book is the story of any small Southern town of the era. Her desire to capture her memories for her eight grandchildren was the catalyst for this walk down memory lane. Detailed descriptions of her grandmother's home, even down to the floor plan, will be of interest to her family and friends. Early business owners had names still held in high esteem in Dothan: Malone, Spann, Blumberg, Holman, Porter, Carmichael, Solomon, and others.

Part autobiography and part community history, *For I Heard Them Say* explains the origins of the title and Dothan's name. Still today, as in Mrs. Jackson's childhood, the Dothan Eagle, carries a line beneath its banner stating: "For I Heard Them Say, 'Let us go unto Dothan,' " Genesis 37:17.

Bettye Forbus is director of the Houston-Love Memorial Library in Dothan.



REVIEWS

Continued from page 15

Pretending the Bed Is a Raft
by Nanci KincaidAlgonquin, 1997
241 pp. Cloth, \$17.95

In Nanci Kincaid's story "Just Because They've Got Papers Doesn't Mean They Aren't Still Dogs" from *Pretending the Bed Is a Raft*, Cada—wife of a college football coach called Brother whose career depends upon wins and the whims of a political dominatrix named "California" Martha Carter, wife of the athletic director—reflects on the hovering anxiety of her existence: "I was swollen with it, the mystery, pregnant with a huge empty space that I wanted to be freed of. It was like hoping to give birth to a beautiful answer to your prayers, but instead, no matter how you labor, you only deliver a small and quivering question. There is something of Cada's lucid yet inconclusively naive self-awareness present in each of the lives hinted in this volume. From the estranged mother's eerie long distance congratulations to her son Jimbo upon killing his first snake in "Snakes," to the next door to incestuous liaison with a married man shared between mother and daughter in "Won't Nobody Ever Love You Like Your Daddy Does," to "Pretty Please" where Lee sees her mother's love for Jesus as the failure of feminine sexuality: "That was when I first began to suspect that it was possible to be so Baptist that you rendered yourself totally unlovable," to the exquisitely, painfully funny farewell gesture in the title story where the cancer stricken housewife Belinda, in completion of her death wish list, has herself baptized in a bubble bath by her frenzied, Christ-haunted mother with family members and one dinner guest crowded into the bathroom of the trailer to witness this strange sacrament—Kincaid's stories move through often quirky, viscerally absurd human situations as she constructs that small and quivering question inhabiting, sometimes uncomfortably, the mystique of female sexuality. Her characters' awakenings are often stranger, and certainly truer, than expected.



Kelly Gerald teaches English at Auburn University while pursuing a Ph.D. with specialization in Southern literature.

First Draft welcomes publication news. Please let us know of books and journals – your own or those by others with connections to Alabama – you would like to see reviewed. Contact Jay Lamar at 334/844-4947 (334/844-4949, FAX) in Auburn.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Aug. 5-7 Alabama Writers' Conclave Annual Meeting, Montevallo

Authors' Reception, Awards Banquet, contests, readings and workshops. Write Harriette Dawkins, AWC Treasurer, for information: 117 Hanover Road, Homewood, AL 35209

Aug. 21—Reading and Book Signing, Birmingham

Anne Cheney will read from *The Burg and Other Poems* at 4 p.m. at Highland Booksmith, 2255 Highland Avenue. 205/939-3164.

Aug. 26—Reading and Book Signing, Birmingham

Sheldon Webster will read from his new book, *The Voyage of The Encounter*, at 4 p.m. at Highland Booksmith, 2255 Highland Avenue. 205/939-3164.

Sept. 10—Northeast Ala. Regional AWF Associates Meeting, Huntsville

Meet AWF board members and other associates; 7-9 p.m. at the Church of the Nativity. No charge. Call AWF office for details, 334/242-4076, ext. 236.

Sept. 10—Bankhead Visiting Writers Series, Tuscaloosa

John Keeble, Coal Royalty Chairholder and author of *Out of the Channel*, the story of the Exxon Valdez oil spill, will read in Room 205, Smith Hall at 7:30 p.m. Call 205/348-0766.

Sept. 24—Bankhead Visiting Writers Series, Tuscaloosa

Reading by American Book Award winner **Janet Campbell Hale** in Room 205, Smith Hall at 7:30 p.m. Call 205/348-0766.

Sept. 30 DEADLINE

Hackney Literary Awards - Novel postmark deadline. \$25 per entry. Mail to Hackney Literary Awards, Birmingham-Southern College, Box 549003, Birmingham, AL 35254. Call 205/226-4921.

Oct. 1—Bankhead Visiting Writers Series, Tuscaloosa

Reading by **Bruce Smith**, author of four books of poetry, in Room 205 Smith Hall at 7:30 p.m. Call 205/348-0766.

Oct. 5—Reading and Book Signing, Birmingham

Dr. Wayne Flynt will read from his *History of Southern Baptists* at 4 p.m. at Highland Booksmith, 2255 Highland Avenue. 205/939-3164.

Oct. 9—Alabama Humanities Foundation Awards Luncheon, Birmingham

The Tenth Annual Awards Luncheon sponsored by the AHF will kick off the organization's twenty-fifth year. For ticket information, call Nancy Carmichael at 205/930-0540.

Oct. 14-18—Writers Conference, Seaside, Fla.

Packed with panel discussions, readings and class sessions, the **International University/Seaside Institute Writers Conference** is limited to 75 writers. Apply early to Seaside Institute, P.O. Box 4730, Seaside, FL 32459. Call 850/231-2421.

Oct. 17—PoetryFest, Birmingham

Activities include poetry readings, workshops, young poets contest and open mike contest. For more information, contact Barry S. Marks, 205/250-8333 or bsm@blik.com

Dec. 31 DEADLINE

Hackney Literary Awards - Short Story and Poetry postmark deadline. Mail to Hackney Literary Awards, Birmingham-Southern College, Box 549003, Birmingham, AL 35254, call 205/226-4921.

CALENDAR

LITERARY JOURNALS

RESERVE THESE DATES

Feb. 4, 5, 6, 1999—24th Annual Symposium on English and American Literature, sponsored by the UA English Department, Tuscaloosa.

Magical Muse: The Drama of Tennessee Williams is the topic. For additional information contact symposium directors Ralph Voss, 205/348-8523 or Don Noble, 205/348-4507.

Feb. 12-13, 1999—Alabama Writers' Forum Associates Meeting, in conjunction with the Sixth Annual Colloquium for Writers at Auburn University at Montgomery. Contact Jeanie Thompson at 334/242-4076, ext. 233.

ONGOING EVENTS

BIRMINGHAM

Birmingham area coffeehouses and clubs offer regular readings. They include Celestial Realm Coffee House, 2827 Highland Avenue, 205/327-5505 and The Highland Booksmith, 2255 Highland Avenue, 205/939-3164.

The Great Poetry Slam continues on the second Friday of each month through September at 7:30 p.m. at Doodles, 715 21st Street South. 205/251-5558.

HUNTSVILLE

Huntsville Literary Association members' groups include the Literary Discussion Group which meets the first Thursday of each month at 7:30 p.m. Call 205/881-2114 for information. The Fiction Writers' Group meets at 7 p.m. on the third Wednesday of the month. Phone 205/882-2348 for details. On the fourth Tuesday of the month, the Poetry Writing Workshop is held from 7 to 9 p.m. at Shaver's Book Store at 2362 Whitesburg Drive. For information, call 205/536-9801. Huntsville Literary Association membership is open to anyone. Contact Susan Anderson, 8019 Navios Dr., Huntsville, AL 35802, 205/881-2935.

MONTGOMERY

For information about the **Alabama African-American Arts Alliance** or readings at **Roots and Wings: A Cultural Bookplace**, contact Georgette Norman, 334/263-2787 or Gwendolyn Boyd, 334/262-1700; Fax 334/262-8498. Monthly events of the Alabama African-American Arts Alliance are held at Eight Thirty House, 830 S. Court Street. The Nommo Study Group meets the second Tuesday evening from 6 to 8. The Creative Writers Gathering is the third Saturday from 10 a.m. until noon. Poetry readings are included in the Music in de House/Voices program, 6 to 8 p.m., third Sunday of the month.

Montgomery Creative Writers meets the third Sunday of every month from 2-4 p.m. at the Vaughn Park Church of Christ on Vaughn Rd. The meeting is open to anyone interested in writing. Dues are \$12 annually. Contact Donna Jean Tennis, P.O. Box 230787, Montgomery, AL 36123-0787, 334/244-8920; e-mail poettennis@the-link.net

TUSCALOOSA

The Guild of Professional Writers for Children meets on the second Saturday of every month (except August) at the Tuscaloosa Public Library from 9-11 a.m. Dues are \$6 annually. Contact Aileen K. Henderson, Vice-President, GPWC, 10924 Big Hurricane Spur, Cottondale, AL 35453, 205/556-0861.

ALABAMA
LITERARY JOURNALS

Alabama English

The scholastic journal of the Alabama Council of Teachers of English
253 Smith Hall
Troy State University
Troy, AL 36082
334/670-3286

Alabama Literary Review

Theron Montgomery, Editor
253 Smith Hall
Troy State University
Troy, AL 36082
334/670-3286

Amaryllis

P.O. Box 6330
Montgomery, AL 36106-0330
E-mail Anderson@strudel.aum.edu

Astarte

The English Department
University of Alabama at Birmingham
Birmingham, AL 35294

The Auburn Circle

Publications Suite
Foy Union Building
Auburn University, AL 36849
334/844-4142

Beyond Doggerel

A Poetry Journal for Four-Year and Community College Instructors
Claire T. Feild, Editor
1141 Knollwood Court
Auburn, AL 36830-6126

Birmingham Poetry Review

Bob Collins, Editor
UAB English Department
Arts & Humanities Building
Birmingham, AL 35294
205/934-4250

Black Warrior Review

The University of Alabama
Box 2936
Tuscaloosa, AL 35486
205/348-4518

Copper Blade Review

c/o Troy State University-Dothan
P.O. Box 8368
Dothan, AL 36304
334/983-6556, Ext. 397

Elk River Review

John Chambers, Editor
606 Coleman Avenue
Athen, AL 35611-3216

Negative Capability

Sue Brannon Walker, Editor/Publisher
62 Ridgelawn Drive East
Mobile, AL 36608-6166

Noccalula

Shelby Cochran, Editor
Gadsden State Community College
P.O. Box 227
Gadsden, AL 35902-0227

POEM

Nancy F. Dillard, Editor
c/o English Department
UAH, Huntsville, AL 35899
Subscription: POEM, c/o HLA
Dale Griggs
1009 Brookridge Circle
Huntsville, AL 35801

Southern Humanities Review

Dan Latimer, Dave Haney, and Margaret Kouidis, Co-editors
Department of English
Auburn University, AL 36849

LITERARY NEWS

Continued from page 9



Ron Council

Jake Reiss of the Highland Booksmith visited with Rosemary Daniell, author of *The Woman Who Spilled Words All Over Herself*, during *Writing Today*, Birmingham Southern College's annual writers' conference.

YOUNG POETS WRITE THE BLUES

The first W.C. Handy Poetry Contest was a grand success reported Terry Sledge Terry of the Florence-Lauderdale (County) Public Library. There were 83 poems submitted for judging on themes related to jazz, blues, or the music of Handy. First Place winner in the high school division was Leah Katherine Cox, an eleventh grade student at Brooks High School. Second place went to Adam Bickhaus a tenth-grade student at Bradshaw High. Middle school winners were eighth grade students at Hibbett, Beth O'Bannon, first place, and Matthew Gunter, second place. First place winners will read their poems during the Handy Festival in August. The contest is sponsored by the Music Preservation Society, in conjunction with the library.

TEACHERS THRIVE ON SUPER EXPERIENCE

"The response to our writing workshops has been so great that we've had to schedule extra sessions to accommodate all the teachers who wanted to attend," said Beth Hairelson, educational programs coordinator of the Alabama Humanities Foundation (AHF). The workshops are part of the SUPER (School and University Partners for Educational Renewal) program, which is Alabama's only statewide



Katie Lamar Smith

Charles Ghigna's animated reading of his children's poetry delighted a packed house at an *Alabama Voices III* presentation in April. Sponsored by the Alabama Writers' Forum and the Lewis Cooper, Jr. Memorial Library (Opelika), the program was held in the library.

interdisciplinary professional development program specifically for secondary humanities teachers.

Writing instruction is also part of the SUPER one week and two week summer residential programs taught by leading scholars. This summer, teachers are exploring the values, beliefs, cultural traditions and historical development of the Deep South. In seven years, the Alabama Humanities Foundation has reached over 1,200 teachers who collectively teach nearly 160,000 students. Programs are provided free to Alabama teachers and they receive continuing education credits.

WRITERS WED

An email message to First Draft from Loretta Cobb contained the following social/literary note.

Bill Cobb introduced Sandra King Ray to Pat Conroy at Hoover's Southern Voices in 1995 as one of



Bill Fuller

Celebrating the publication of Andrew Glaze's poetry retrospective, *Someone Will Go On Owing*, at Bob Ely's home "pub" in Montgomery are (left to right) publisher Randall Williams, Ely, Ted Haddin, Birmingham; and Glaze.

the best writers he'd ever taught. Conroy offered to read her forthcoming novel for a blurb, and over the next two years they occasionally talked. The calls became more frequent and more personal after they met again at *Southern Voices 1997*.

Recently Sandra and Pat were married in Charleston by his long-time friend Judge Alex Sanders, president of the College of Charleston. Sanders' wife Zoe, the only other person at the wedding, filled their home with white roses,



Rus Baxley

Alabama Writers' Forum members browsed through books on display in the lobby of Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts during a regional Associates' Meeting in March. Among them were AWF board member Ed George, second from left, and, at right, Wayne Greenhaw and board member Randall Williams.

Sandra's favorite, and prepared a small wedding cake. Sanders was the source of several "unbelievable" stories in *The Prince of Tides* such as the one about the tiger who was carried to football games.

Both writers are hard at work on new books, saying the new relationship nurtures their creativity. They live on an island in South Carolina.

POET/EDUCATOR HONORED

Betty Spence of Mobile was named Poet of the Year by the Alabama State Poetry Society during its spring awards luncheon in Birmingham. Spence teaches as well as writing poetry. She is immediate past president of the Alabama State Association, National League of American Pen Women and a member of the Alabama Writers' Conclave.

IN MEMORIAM

The Literary Legacy of Eugene Walter



Mary Alma Durrett

Everyone who ever met Eugene Walter has a “Eugene story.”

Since his death in March, many of those stories, like a child’s pocketful of treasured marbles, have been lovingly handed around among his long-time associates to be compared for size, color and uniqueness.

Without a doubt, his legend will increase.

First Draft’s tribute to the life and art of Eugene Walter takes a different tack. In the following reflections, we are introduced to the art he left as his legacy.

It is well worth the search to find these works, a number of them long out of print, for the opportunity to meet Eugene Walter through his own vivid word pictures.

continued on page 20



Menthe was a nymph,
daughter of a river-god,
P Pluto fell for her his wife
Proserpine promptly pliant
her into the mint plant
on a stream bank. Menthe
was crushed. And still is so.

READER, MEET EUGENE

Visitors to my office see a pen-and-ink drawing hanging on the wall as they enter the doorway. It's by Eugene Walter. It's clever. It's suggestively naughty. It's sophisticated. It's worldly. The drawing was a gift from a relative, the handiwork of a talented Southern wordsmith given to one who toils in the world of words.

I never knew Eugene Walter personally. He came to my attention late in his career, primarily because he was an acquaintance of the relative who gave me the drawing. I'd read his published works, and I enjoyed them. I'd heard a few anecdotes about him, but that's about the extent of my exposure.

I mourn his passing as I mourn all those who make a ripple in the pond of Southern literature and then depart too soon. I'm reminded that so many Southern writers, whether well-known or obscure, achieve their literary notice while absent from their native soil.

Walter may not have been a great Southern novelist, but he was an intriguing Southern character. He cut a dashing figure on the New York literary scene. He wrote novels that people could read, understand and enjoy.

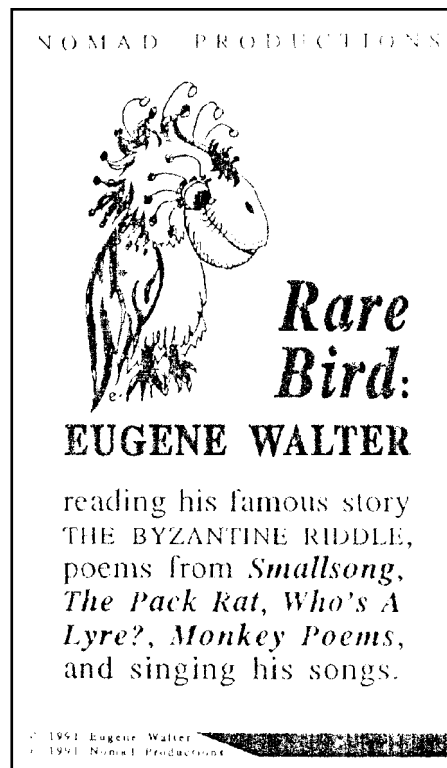
Eugene was an artist, and not because he dabbled in pen and ink. He wrote with autobiographical intensity and insight. He was a fixture on the literary scene of his time, if not a shining light in its firmament,

because he was authentic and perhaps a tad eccentric.

It's hard to pay tribute to someone you never met. In a way, though, I did know Eugene Walter. He introduced himself to me through the printed page. He shared with me his observations on life and love, on the quest for truth and beauty, on the essence of existence.

Perhaps I know more of him than I know of myself. That's not a eulogy, but it's sincere praise for a gifted writer whose departure leaves the literary world noticeably diminished.

Cy Wood is editor and publisher of The Valley Times-News in Lanett.



EUGENE WALTER: PUTTING US IN OUR PLACE

The true legacy of Eugene Walter is the body of work that he has left to re-present the world in which he lived. The poems, stories, and novels that he penned like roux rich gumbo not only satisfy our hunger but serve us up a landscape that says who we are is where we are. It is the South that is in the mouth, the slow, easy drawl of it. Walter is a master at handling dialogue; characters speak with exactness. What they say and who they are coalesce into unforgettable portraits as real as life. They teach us to revel in being Southern, in being "crazy, because the Gulf Coast is the kingdom of monkeys, the land of clowns, ghosts and musicians, and Mobile is sweet lunacy's county seat" (*The Untidy Pilgrim*).

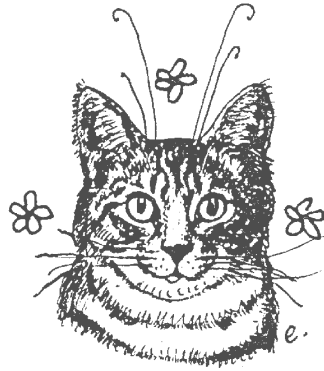
When Eugene Walter writes of the South, he celebrates place. Jennie the Watercress Girl lived "on Broad Street, in Mobile, in the early nineteen-twenties." The Bergerons of *Love You Good, See You Later* lived in a "big gray wooden house with classical pediment and four Doric columns on Church Street." He speaks of Dog River, of Spring Hill, of Termite Hall, suppers of Bayou Street Hash, Eggs Tallulah, Black-eyed Pea Patties, Persimmon Parfaits,—and "[w]hile music from the spheres is blown" relays the cavortings of a cockroach cotillion. Names, sites or sightings are more than points of interest on a map; they delineate connections and tell of the relationships between persons and places. In a poem, "Je Viens De Ce Pays," translated from the French, he tells us:

We're not like other people,
here on the Gulf of Mexico. Our
mystical realm, full of mysteries,
half mad, not completely real, is
founded on phantoms, on fakes
and frauds, on puppets, on long
twilights, on friendly demons.
With us, fragile English roses

Left: The cover of Eugene Walter's first cassette tape recording made in 1991.

grow on the banks where alligators sleep. Our clouds are higher, more castle-like. Love or hate, ah we are very capable in those fields. In the evening, we are very watchful for our ghosts, for our perfumes. Here, on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico, Myself, I'm really not like other people, because I come from this place. Ah!

Though memories of Eugene abound and offer treasured recollections of lunches and dinners, of times when the author barked in restaurants and played tunes upon an air harp, his endowment is his work. It includes the delightful but little known *Hamlet* for monkeys, *Singerie-Songerie* which appeared in Rome in 1958. *The Untidy Pilgrim* (1954) won the Lippincott Fiction Prize and was reissued as a "neglected classic" by the University of Alabama Press in 1987. The second novel, *Love You Good, See You Later*, published by Charles Scribner's Sons in 1964 was followed by a collection of stories *The Likes of Which* and by *The Pokeweed Alphabet* where the letters A through Z "make mystical merriment by mixing moonlight, mushrooms, mint juleps, and muck-chucking (with Many Meaningful Motions) in the very Midst of Merciless Modernity," and by two collections of verse: *The Pack Rat & Other Antics 1937-1987* and *Lizard Fever*, published in 1994 by Livingston University Press. It seems, in retrospect, all too little of this polyfarious writer's work, but as he tells Jo Brotz in a 1988 interview published in the issue of *Negative Capability* devoted entirely to Eugene Walter: "I hold by Renaissance ideas . . . I really think your authentic genuine honest-to-God spit-in-your-eye poet should be able to create a fête, create theatrical works, lay out gardens, improvise couplets, write in classical modes and meters, design a carnival, speak several languages, dance a little, mime a little, sing a little. . . . The world, or as Eugene would say, this planet, was not large enough to contain him. He



The Willoughby Institute was one of Walter's art ventures.

created his own place, and it is here—that we may learn more about the music of his poetry, the playful and yet serious play with place where folks like Mrs. Grenier know that things fit according to your whim—like a party with color-coordinated sandwiches: "blue mayonnaise with yellow egg salad, and a bright yellow mayonnaise with slices of breast of chicken colored blue."

Eugene Walter's landscape is universal to the lived existence of all he brings into its ken with gentle humor that is appreciative of quiriness and human foible. As readers, we laugh at ourselves because Walter has a singular ability to love us, and let us love ourselves, warts and all. The South is a place that may seem crazy at times, where "the joggers, the sloggers, the hoppers, the poppers, the leapers, the creepers, the hikers, the pikers, the boaters, the moaters, the hunters, the punters" assorted possums, monkeys and cats—even of the human kind—all dwell in a sort of byzantine riddle—the terrain of imagination and celebration and of what must be—in order to preserve it—studied joy.

Sue Walker is chairman of the Department of English at the University of South Alabama in Mobile.

THE WILLOUGHBY INSTITUTE, INC.

EUGENE WALTER: IN THE LINE OF CANON FIRE?

Deep in his essential, language-loving heart, Eugene Walter was, as he believed and desired, essentially a poet. He was a poet by his own definition—a multi-talented, multi-faceted social individual who is pro-psyche and anti-all else except spirit—and in the old root meanings of the term—a maker, doer, verbal creator. By historical category he was a *troubadour*: a traveling, entertaining man of feeling and music who writes of and because of love, and whose life and verse promote those causes.

Henry David Thoreau's famous couplet was perhaps truer for Eugene than for Thoreau: "Life is the poem I would have writ/But I could not both live and utter it." But both Henry and Eugene did write, of course. Both wrote in forms ordinarily differentiated as poetry and prose. And it seems likely, although arguments can be presented in opposition and qualification, that both realized their poetry in what the world calls prose.

I speak now, I am aware, from deep within academic critical tradition, a position that Eugene helped me recognize clearly. (And wouldn't he delight in that irony?) As a professional scholar and literary historian, anthology editor, professor of English—acknowledging that some (*vive Eugene!*) idiosyncratic tastes and personal preferences are very much still operational—I will,

however, venture my candidates among Eugene's literary work I believe will prove most enduring.

Which Walter pieces may the literary canon best accommodate? *The Untidy Pilgrim*, of course. And, small, wonderful blossoms which may surpass the bloom of that novel: the short stories "I Love You Batty Sisters," "The Byzantine Riddle," and "Troubadour." (All three can be found in the collection *The Byzantine Riddle and Other Stories*.)

For these four works contemporaneous praise came in the form of literary prizes, reprinting in prestigious anthologies, and adaptation for film. Thus, I will cite only a single supporting reason, either textual or extratextual, for choosing each of them. For *The Untidy Pilgrim*, it is the first sentence which is repeatedly selected in creative writing program class surveys around the country as among the best of any novel in English. (Remember? "Down in Mobile they're all crazy, because the Gulf Coast is the kingdom of monkeys, the land of clowns, ghosts, and musicians, and Mobile is sweet lunacy's county seat.")

For "I Love You Batty Sisters" there is the central narrative concept, the driving dramatic force, the decision of the Tolliver "Girls" "never to return to a place where they'd had a really good time." What greater praise could there be for "The Byzantine Riddle" than that the mere recollection of hearing it read in a university class causes fresh paroxysms of laughter to a non-English major years after graduation? And, lastly, here on its own behalf, the opening paragraph of "Troubadour":

"In the country along the Gulf Coast in summer, the period of time between the setting of the sun and total black night is full of sweet mysteries and has the effect of making the world with all its traffic stop dead still. Minute the sun drops out of sight, a hush grows, plants and trees visibly relax. This is the hour of perfumes and emanations:



Writing to "Dear Jaybelle" Walter frequently added colorful stickers and closed with an affectionate "Mille fleurs, Eugene."

moonvines bloom, and pale ghosts grieve at the windows of vacant houses—invisible to some, and painfully visible to others. One smells strongly and suddenly the scent of green grass, of dust, the fecund richness of ditches and ponds; and after, all the white flowers that open at night. Under the oak trees the lightning bugs commence their play: Dogs and even children are briefly awed. One feels that all the genii of the ancient world who wait on the mind's back porch could easily, if they chose, break the screen door and run in barefoot, stealthy but gleeful."

A poet, yes.....

Bert Hitchcock is professor of English at Auburn University.

RED-LETTER DAYS RECOLLECTED

Lately I've been rereading my correspondence with Eugene Walter. I never got a plain, ordinary letter from him. Instead, his missives came in multicolored envelopes, decorated with stickers and drawings and covered with messages and songs and poems scribbled for postperson and recipient alike. And in those wonderful, crazy packages came program notes, more poems, advertisements, articles, lists of books I should have read, cards, drawings, cooking advice, music. Mostly they delivered Eugene himself—lively, droll, full of play

and worry and joy and hope. Because he did lots of programs for the Center, many of his letters are accounts of his travels. For instance,

In S-, I stayed with a most charming and amusing lady BUT the guest bedroom, off to one side, was unheated, and it went down to 39 the first night and only a fancy bedspread, no blankets. There was a gas heater but no matches. Upon arrival I had not been taken on a tour of the house, and so I was not about to go looking for a kitchen and matches when the hall went by the hostess' bedroom and she'd told tales of robbers breaking in. I took a hot shower, got fully dressed and stretched out under the bedspread. The next night somebody started firing a pistol down by the river and all the dogs in the neighborhood (everybody has one) started a ruckus. Three full days: arrived for a joint Episcopal-Presbyterian dinner where I was introduced and folks encouraged to come hear me. After that a gathering in a private house. Nine next morning a Radio interview then a meeting with library ladies and off to check mike, podium, etc at theatre, and start hanging show. Then off to picnic in graveyard with club ladies then back to theatre to finish up. That evening did my performance. Afterwards reception, then late dinner....Next morning off to theatre to take down pictures, then pack and set out. No sleep.

In B- the hostess' mama broke her leg the night before and the college son came home with a crew of fellow hell-raisers, the pet dog was bitten by a coon or possum, the driveway flooded, and the caterer was late: SO THEY PUT ME IN A MOTEL, thank God, Jesus, Joseph, Mary and the ghosts of Napoleon and Louisa May Alcott!

In rereading his letters, I am struck by several things—his persistence, his hard, hard struggle

to keep working and eating, his love of the things that make our numbered days interesting, full, worth suffering. His letters are generous, as he was always with me, and detailed and funny even when relating the horrors of health problems, Republican politics, and personal funding crises. And they overflow with his delight in words, learning, and ideas:

I'd love to do a programme on a spirit we have in the English language which just isn't in other languages: the word-play, the onomatopoeic, the nonsense rimes, nursery rimes which are

satirical, word music, etc. Lear, Carroll, Thomas Hood, Don Marquis, Edith Sitwell, etc. A wild gallimaufry of word-drunk dolphins sporting in the waves of grammar and rhetoric. Anything we can do to indicate that learning English is FUN as well as profitable, the more we shall have cathedrals named after us.

Here's to Eugene's cathedral. May it rise, brick by brick, on Alabama's shores. "Mille fleurs and more later" to you too, dear Eugene.

Jay Lamar is the assistant director of the Center for the Arts & Humanities at Auburn University.

SUBMISSIONS SOUGHT FOR A MEMORY BOOK

KaliOka Press has issued a call for stories for a proposed 1999 collection featuring memories of "meetings, lunches, dinners, conversations, collaborations or some shared experience with Eugene Walter."

Walter died March 29 in Mobile, where he was born. An award-winning novelist, poet, lyricist, film actor and editor, Walter developed friendships and working relationships throughout the United States and Europe.

"The stories can be funny or serious, but they should be true," explained Carolyn Haines, president of the press. Rebecca Barrett, vice president of KaliOka, said the collection will be called *Moments with Eugene* and all profits will go to the Eugene Walter Memorial Fund.

"Eugene touched so many lives," Barrett said. "He was incredibly generous with literary encouragement, and with his passing, the art of stimulating conversation has dropped considerably in this world."

"We're taking submissions now," Haines said. "There is no word length and no specific style. What we want to do is capture Eugene in the mirror held up by his friends." Submissions should be typewritten, double-spaced and sent to KaliOka Press at 2486 Ellen Drive, Semmes, AL 36575. For more information, Haines can be reached at 334/649-9456 and Barrett at 334/666-6529.

The Eugene Walter Estate is accepting donations to defray costs related to the estate, including purchasing a headstone.

Those wishing to make donations or find out more details should write:

Eugene Walter Estate in care of Don Goodman,
5421 MacDuff Circle, Virginia Beach, VA 23464.

Checks should be made payable to the Eugene Walter Estate.

The Alabama Connection

The Alabama Writers' Forum, whose mission includes promoting writers and writing in Alabama, consulted with Alerion Film's producers throughout the "Cracker Man" project. The Forum also assisted with publicity to local newspapers during the filming in Auburn, Opelika, and LaFayette. The Forum's executive director Jeanie Thompson said, "The Alabama Writers' Forum is very proud to see the work of Alabama writer Helen Norris brought to PBS in this format. We hope that the filming of the "The Cracker Man" will bring further recognition to Helen Norris, one of the finest fiction writers working in Alabama today."

"Providing some modest assistance with publicity for Alerion Films gave the Forum a chance to promote a new genre—screenwriting—in a way it had not done before. We learned a lot about collaboration from this experience," Thompson said.

Many of the talented "Cracker Man" crew hail from Alabama. These include:

Ashley Crow ("Gloria"), a Birmingham native, who has appeared on Broadway in "Prelude to a Kiss," and has worked for network television in "Orleans," "Middle Ages," "Dark Angel" and "Champs." Crow's feature film work includes "Little Big League" and "The Good Son."

Rudy Gaines, director, also from Birmingham originally. Gaines is a screenwriter/director with credits at MGM, Fox and New Line. "The Cracker Man" is his directorial debut.

Production Designer **David Crank** who has worked with the Alabama Shakespeare Festival and has also designed such films as "Mississippi Masala," and "Heart of Darkness."

Composer **Mike Davis**, an Alabamian who currently works in Nashville, and whose films include "Men Seeking Women," and "Joe and Joe" for Sundance Films. Davis has played keyboards with Dolly Parton and is the Sound Designer for the Garth Brooks World Tour.

Literary consultant **Winston Groom**, whose novel *Forrest Gump* was adapted into an academy award-



Director Rudy Gaines and actress Ashley Crow on location in LaFayette.

winning film of the same name, consulted with producers Kuerten and DiJulio on the adaptation of Norris's short story into the script of "The Cracker Man."

Other cast members include: **John Dossett** who has appeared opposite Ms. Crow in "Prelude to a Kiss." On TV he has been seen in "JAG," and "Homicide, Life on the Streets." His movies include, "Clover," "Nick and Jane," "That Night," and "Longtime Companion."

Grandpa is played by **Patrick Cranshaw** whose many feature credits include "Nothing to Lose," "Everybody Says I Love You," "The Hudsucker Proxy" and "Bonnie and Clyde." Cranshaw's TV credits include "Ellen," "Coach," and "The Drew Carey Show."

"With the talent that Alerion Films has assembled for the filming of "The Cracker Man," including literary consulting from Mr. Groom, Alabama will shine on PBS," Thompson said. **Michael Boyer**, director of the Alabama Film Office in Montgomery agrees. "We're seeing more of these independent film projects shot in Alabama," he said. "That 'The Cracker Man' was shot entirely in Alabama will do a lot to promote the state."

Look for air dates of "The Cracker Man" in the Fall '98 *First Draft* and in public television listings.

Photos by Jeanie Thompson



Extras filming "The Cracker Man" in LaFayette.



Extras waiting on the set.

Continued from page 13

Hotchner told of his relationship to Ernest in the 1950s, right up to the final days, and especially their car trips through Provence, with Hemingway in the front passenger seat mixing the drinks and giving authoritative lectures on the history of the countryside, including the troubadours. Valerie Hemingway was Ernest's private secretary in the late 1950s while he was traveling through Spain from bullring to bullring following the fights and writing *The Dangerous Summer*. (She later married Ernest's son Gregory; hence the surname.)

I say these talks were the highlights of the conference, for me, because the eyewitnesses to the writers of the twenties are growing old and dying. Recently I had heard and spoken with Honoria Murphy, Gerald and Sarah Murphy's daughter, who lived at Villa America on the Riviera as a little girl, when Hemingway and Fitzgerald and Picasso and Cole Porter were house guests. (Honoria is the model for Honoria in Fitzgerald's brilliant story

"Babylon Revisited.") I had also spoken with Francis Ring, Fitzgerald's last secretary and Budd Schulburg, author of *On the Waterfront*, *What Makes Sammy Run?* and *The Harder They Fall*, who collaborated with Fitzgerald on movie scripts and knew and disliked Ernest. Soon there will be no more first-hand accounts. The twenties will indeed become history, and students of the twenties will never again be able to ask a living person, "What was it like?"

During much of the time Ernest and Pauline were married, they lived at Key West and made frequent long car trips to her hometown of Piggott, Arkansas. Each time they drove across Alabama, but there is no record that Ernest ever slept here. The "Alabama connection" to Hemingway has grown stronger, lately, however. Besides Jennifer Horne and me, there were ten other Alabamians at the conference this year—enough to arouse curiosity and comment.

During a Hemingway graduate seminar in the spring of 1997, I encouraged my six students to

rewrite their papers and submit them to the program director. Two did, and read their papers at the meeting. Sara Barry's "Tough Love in the Garden" examines the novel *The Garden of Eden* and Carey Bronstein delivered an amusing paper, "Shaken, Not Di/stir/bed . . . the Martini in Four Hemingway Novels."

Other Alabamians attending were Diane and Johnny Dunn, Huntsville; Charlotte and Cecil Ponder, Decatur; and their friends Diane and Stan Belsky. An independent scholar, Charlotte is writing a biography of Ernest's mother, Grace. Kirk Curnutt of Troy State in Montgomery gave a paper on youth culture in *The Sun Also Rises*. He was accompanied by Kelly Freeman. So there were twelve Alabama nametags in the Camargue. Paul Montgomery, an ex-*New York Times* reporter who covered Civil Rights stories in Alabama in the '60s and who now lives in Switzerland, was adopted by the group as an honorary Alabamian.

Don Noble reviews regularly for First Draft and is the host of Alabama Public Television's "Bookmark."

Next State Poet Laureate to be Selected in 1999



Helen Blackshear

A year from now at the August meeting of the Alabama Writers' Conclave, the membership present and voting will elect the state's new poet laureate to replace Helen Blackshear. An eloquent emissary for the craft of poet, Blackshear uses every opportunity to bring the experience of well-chosen words to others. She makes "five to fifteen" appearances monthly and, at age 87, drives to most of them by herself. "It keeps me busy and impresses my grandchildren," she said.

Poet Laureate Emeritus Ralph Hammond also keeps a busy schedule of readings and presentations at schools, colleges and civic clubs. As president of the National Federation of State Poetry Societies, Hammond encouraged other states to get away from the lifetime political appointment of poets laureate and to adopt Alabama's system of selection. "Alabama has operated under a Legislative Act since 1931 which says the Poet Laureate is nominated and elected by the Conclave. This gives the poets of the state the opportunity to select a person who will be active and represent them well," he said.

The Poet Laureate must have been a resident of Alabama for the past 15 years and be able to fund his or her own expenses of office. Quality and quantity of published work and length of service in the fields of poetry, literature and the arts are also considered. For complete information on qualifications, send a self addressed stamped envelope to Barbara McClary, P.O. Box 1110, Calera, AL 35040. Only Conclave members are allowed to make nominations, but suggestions are welcomed from others. Nominations should be made to: John Curbow, P.O. Box 277, Wetumpka, AL 36092.

UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

Randy Hall, Playwright

Randy Hall of Anniston has had major victories in the plying of this difficult art. He's wanted to write for the theatre since he was as young as ten, when Town & Gown Theatre of Birmingham toured a production of *The Man Who Came to Dinner* to Anniston and Randy's mother took him to his first play. The next play Randy saw was *The Boyfriend*, again a T & G production. The musical form was at first terrifying to the young boy. The very notion that someone could come out and sing their part in front of all those people! He kept his hands over his eyes for most of the first act; then he peeped between his fingers, and finally, by the third act, he had forgotten his fear for the actors and fallen in love with musical theater.

In high school, he tried performing, but found, in his words, that he was a "rotten" actor, and gave it up. However, writing plays seemed to come natural to him. He even had a couple of his "funny ideas for musicals" produced at his high school's assembly programs. When he got to college he deserted playwriting to take up the short story. "Real art was not in the theater; it was in novels, short stories, or poetry," he said. "You just weren't taken seriously if you were in the theater; I even had friends who said they loved *A Streetcar Named Desire*, but only as literature, not as a performance piece."

After taking a B.A. and an M.A. in English from the University of Alabama, he moved to Washington, D.C., where he began to feel that it was "put up or shut up" time for his love of the theater. He went back to writing plays, found friends in the theater and turned out two full-length plays, which were given readings. As luck would have it, the Alabama Shakespeare Festival formed in Anniston, and Randy was invited by the *Anniston Star* to be its theater critic, so he went home and took up

his pen, both as critic and as playwright.

After a stint at the paper, Randy decided to seek a Master of Fine Arts in Playwriting. He specifically did not want a M.F.A. in theater, which was easy enough to find with a specialty in playwriting, but he wanted his next master's degree to be in playwriting.



Randy Hall

He found the course of study he wanted at Temple University in Philadelphia, and completed it in 1983.

Randy Hall has had six plays produced: *Human Interest*, *Grover*, *Chopin Live*, *The Widow's Best Friend*, *Black Warrior*, and *Heartaches: the Unauthorized Biography of Patsy Cline*. Although he has had the help of many friends and acquaintances along the way, Randy is quick to acknowledge the support and special friendship of Josephine E. Ayers of Partnerships, Inc., an arts management firm in Anniston. It was she who commissioned the play *Heartaches*, and she directed its recent performance at City Stages. She and Randy are collaborators in The Occasional Theater, which gives them an artistic home for the projects they develop together.

(Not only was *Heartaches* unauthorized, the production was sued by the Cline estate. Randy, as playwright, joined Mrs. Ayers and the other defendants in the suit, arguing that any biography, including his play, is simply an interpretation of an individual's life. He won.)

"I find the limitations placed on writing a play to actually be freeing," says Hall in discussing the discipline that must be applied to the process. "It's an excessively concentrated form of storytelling. The art of plotting is most important. You can't

wander off onto tangents. It's grueling, but it's good. Every single line, every single minute of the play has to work. Plays are about the human heart, not about 'the meaning of it all.' You can't be broad; you must focus completely on the character."

Asked about the difficulties facing new playwrights, Hall mentions "dead rivals" like Shakespeare, who don't get royalties. And there is immense competition among new playwrights for venues; it is hard to get a play produced. It is a daunting profession: a hard, competitive world. And the money is not good. Since 1982, his career as a playwright has made Randy Hall the equivalent of one year's salary as assistant features editor at the *Anniston Star*; his regular job. According to *Writer's Guide*, he said, the average income of a writer today is \$4500, and he's hitting the average. He has also been the happy recipient of two Individual Artist Fellowships from the Alabama State Council on the Arts. One was for \$9,000, and the second one for \$5,000. He used some of the money to buy a computer.

In spite of the lack of monetary rewards, Randy feels that he has no choice but to write plays. He says he gets to feeling sort of nervous, or physically sick, if he doesn't write for a few days. Of course, he comes by that genetically—his dad and mother are both writers. His mother reviews books for the paper, and his dad writes human interest stories. However he comes by it, it's our good fortune that Randy Hall submits to his passion for writing for the stage.

While living in New York City, writer Sunshine Huff worked as costume director for the theatre department of Barnard College. Among the plays she dressed was Murder in the Cathedral, performed in New York's Cathedral of St. John the Divine.

Southern Playwrights Take the Stage

In the last two years, the Alabama Shakespeare Festival's Southern Writers' Project (SWP) has seen a steady increase in the number of scripts submitted for its new play development program. The 300 to 400 scripts that arrive each year are a welcome sign of future growth for this eight-year-old project.

Created in 1991 by Artistic Director Kent Thompson, the Southern Writers' Project is an exploration and celebration of the South's rich cultural heritage. Through a workshop and reading process, SWP promotes the growth of a 'new' voice for Southern writers and artists, encourages new works dealing with Southern issues and topics including those that emphasize African-American experiences, and creates theatre that speaks in a special way to ASF's unique and racially diverse audiences. Attempts to reach these lofty goals have been fruitful. SWP has developed over thirty scripts, produced eight in the regular ASF season, participated in the 1996 Olympic Arts Festival, supported its first playwright-in-residence, Keith Glover, and developed the Young Playwright's program for teenagers.

In seeking out new playwrights, ASF is one of the few new play programs in America that still accepts unsolicited scripts. That means playwrights do not need to have a literary agent or send letters of inquiry before submitting their play for consideration. SWP also commissions established playwrights whose styles and interests support SWP's goals and ASF's place as the State Theatre of Alabama.

Once a script is selected, the workshopping process matches the playwright with a director and group of actors. Over the course of several rehearsals, the script is read aloud and studied, with the playwright making constant revisions and adjustments based on discussions with the participating artists. Workshop rehearsals and text revisions culminate in a public reading, followed by an audience/playwright 'talkback' about the work. The presence of an audience brings a fresh perspective to the process and offers valuable feedback that the playwright will use while continuing to shape the play. In this way the playwright is able to fortify his/her new play by receiving feedback from a variety of sources.

While some workshopped texts never make it to the stage, the ultimate goal of the Southern Writers' Project is to give a play a full production, and ASF strives to include at least one SWP developed script in its main stage season. In 1994, the first work to receive a full production was *Grover* by Randy Hall. The second production was *Lizard* by Dennis Covington, followed by John MacNicholas' *The Moving of Lilla Barton*, *Ain't Got Long to Stay Here* by Barry Scott, and *Thunder Knocking on the Door: A Blusical Tale of Rhythm and Blues* by Keith Glover. This year SWP produced two new works,



Greg Thornton (left) and Norbert Butz in rehearsal for ASF's Southern Writers' Project world premiere production of *Lizard*.

The Coming of Rain by Richard Marius and Vernon Early, a world premiere production by Pulitzer Prize winning playwright Horton Foote.

Through ASF productions, Southern Writers' Project plays provide a window into the complexities and beauty of the South. They are also beginning to have a national impact. Yale Repertory Theatre, Northlight Theatre in Chicago, San Jose Repertory, Meadow Brook Theatre in Detroit, The Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis, and A Contemporary Theatre in Seattle have staged *Thunder Knocking on the Door* since its world premiere ASF production. Likewise, Dennis Covington's *Lizard*, which was remounted as part of the 1996 Olympic Arts Festival, has been seen from Farmville, Virginia, to Fort Worth, Texas. *The Moving of Lilla Barton* by John MacNicholas has received at least four other productions and the motion picture rights were optioned last year by Bonneville Worldwide Entertainment. ASF and SWP hope for similar success from this year's productions of *The Coming of Rain* and *Vernon Early*.

What can you look for from SWP in the 1998/99 season? Last January, SWP workshopped two other scripts which will be produced next year. At Christmas, you can see an adaptation of Lee Smith's beloved Appalachian novel *Fair and Tender Ladies* with folk music by Tommy Goldsmith, Karren Pell and Tom House, and text by Eric Schmiedl. During the 1999 Repertory season, ASF will stage *Lurleen*, an original play by Barbara Lebow that delves into the life of Lurleen Wallace, the only woman to serve as an Alabama governor.

I open a package and pull out a new script hundreds of times a year; and each time I treasure the opportunity to visit a writer's imaginary world and I wonder, where will this playwright's story take me?

Jennifer Hebblethwaite directs the Southern Writers' Project at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival in Montgomery.

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