

The Journal of the Alabama Writers' Forum

FIRST DRAFT

VOL. 8, NO. 3
WINTER 2002



**Southern Voices
Celebrates Ten Years
as Literary Season in Alabama Begins**

FY 02
BOARD OF DIRECTORS

President
PETER HUGGINS
Auburn

Immediate Past President
KELLEE REINHART
Tuscaloosa

Vice-President
BETTYE FORBUS
Dothan

Secretary
LINDA HENRY DEAN
Auburn

Treasurer
ED GEORGE
Montgomery

Writers' Representatives
AILEEN HENDERSON
Brookwood

DARYL BROWN
Florence

JOHN HAFNER
Mobile

WILLIAM E. HICKS
Troy

RICK JOURNEY
Birmingham

FAIRLEY MCDONALD
Montgomery

DERRYN MOTON
Montgomery

DON NOBLE
Tuscaloosa

STEVE SEWELL
Birmingham

RICK SHELTON
Sterrett

LEE TAYLOR
Monroeville

FRANK TOLAND
Tuskegee

DENISE WADSWORTH TRIMM
Birmingham

ASCA Liaison
RANDY SHOULTS
Montgomery

Executive Director
JEANIE THOMPSON
Montgomery

First Draft is a quarterly journal for communication among writers and those interested in literature/publishing in Alabama and elsewhere. Contact The Alabama Writers' Forum, Alabama State Council on the Arts, 201 Monroe Street, Montgomery, Alabama 36130-180. Phone: 334/242-4076, ext. 233; FAX: 334-240-3269; email: awf1@arts.state.al.us. Website: www.writersforum.org.

Editor: Jay Lamar
Editing and Graphic Design:
Bob and Faith Nance, Auburn

From the President The Alabama Writer's Forum

January 2002

The Reverend John Fritschner, Rector of Holy Trinity Episcopal Church in Auburn, wrote recently in his weekly newsletter that the gospels are about moving forward. The Alabama Writers' Forum is also about moving forward, and one of the ways the Forum has been able to do this is through Judge Charles Price's one-time allocation of special funds—in the Forum's case, \$50,000—to organizations and schools that work with young people and the arts.

Specifically, these special funds are "to be used to support the Forum in implementing educational programs at the Alabama Department of Youth Services." This timely allocation will allow the Forum to maintain and continue the "Writing Our Stories" programs for adjudicated youth at Mount Meigs, Chalkville, and Vacca. On behalf of the Alabama Writers' Forum, and the Dept. of Youth Services staff who work with us in "Writing Our Stories," we express our deep appreciation to Judge Price for this encouragement.

The Forum will continue its support of the high school literary arts awards and of *First Draft*, which is packed with information—reviews, articles, announcements—that writers need. We plan to continue developing the website. One day we even hope to develop a literary trail that will match the Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail. Along the way, we will seek to expand our funding base and our membership as we increase our staff and our office space.

Moving forward also means welcoming new members to the Board. You should know them. These members come from all over the state and include Daryl Brown, John Hafner, Rick Journey, Fairley McDonald, Derryn Moton, Don Noble, Lee Taylor, and Steve Sewell. Continuing board members are Linda Dean, Bettye Forbus, Ed George, Aileen Henderson, Frank Toland, Denise Trimm, Ed Hicks, Kellee Reinhart, Rick Shelton, and Randy Shoults, ASCA liaison to the Forum, ex officio. These people give freely of their time and energy, and I am grateful and thankful for all they do, will do, and have done. They are a great group to work with on literary business.

May this year bring with it the bounty of words and peace. Fare forward.



Peter Huggins

Peter Huggins
President, Board of Directors
The Alabama Writers' Forum

In This Issue

One Is Not Enough 2

Bethany A. Giles covers the Alabama literary season in three related articles.

Reunions, Parties,
Picnics, and Academics 4

UAB Writers Series 7



Daniel Wallace and Don Noble at the 2001 Alabama Writers Symposium in Monroeville.



Priscilla Hancock Cooper at Sequoyah School in Chalkville.

Writing Our Stories 10

AWF's partnership with the Alabama Department of Youth Services begins its fifth year.

ASCA Grant Writing Workshops 27

Bay Minette and Montevallo are sites of two grant-writing workshops to be led by ASCA Literature Programs Manager Randy Shoults.

Southern Writers Reading 2001 32

Jim Gilbert recaps last fall's SWR program held in Fairhope.

Departments

Elements of a Publishing Contract 8

Attorney Ed George helps negotiate the complex world of contracts.

Charting the Course 12

Alabama School of Fine Arts creative writing teacher Denise Trimm finds reward, recognition.

Book Reviews 14

Profile 28

Su Ofe interviews screenwriter Michael Ritz.

Alabama Literary News 34

The Back Page 36

Rage and Beauty... Poet Bruce Smith on September 11

One Is Not Enough

There's a place for every kind of literary fan in this year's conference season

By Bethany A. Giles

We're all attracted to greatness in one way or another.

Even if the most jaded of readers affirms time and again that he or she cannot—will not—be affected by an author's star power, the magnetism of accomplishment cannot be denied.

Perhaps we long to hear a favorite author tell stories of hardship overcome or fortunes made. Or maybe we seek to catch a glimpse of the pri-

vate person whose words compelled us through hundreds of pages in one sitting.

Whatever our place in the audience, as autograph hound, serious reader, or budding writer, we all can find activities to entertain and enlighten during Alabama's spring literary season. It is scheduled to be filled with experiences as varied as the venues that play host to them.

Sherry Kughn of Anniston compares some of her experiences at writers conferences to such places as a

festival, a coffee house, a tourist destination, or a classroom. "I like them all, but every one is different," she notes. "I don't think you could find two conferences exactly alike."

On the Brink, because it's based at Jacksonville State, has the collegiate feel, Kughn said. "They have lecture and panel formats, and they try to space writers during lunch so you can sit at a table with a writer. There is a difference there between the lecture feel and the coffee shop feel. Since this is local, I'll see a lot of people I know—I'll be reacquainted with old friends there."

Alabama Bound, on the other



Sena Naslund and Patricia Foster (left) and Nancy Anderson and Kathryn Tucker Windham (right) talk at the 2001 Alabama Writers Symposium in Monroeville. Groups of authors are featured at Alabama Bound (far right).

hand, is like a huge festival housed in one room. There she could sit in a quiet corner and read, go into one of the adjoining rooms to chat with friends, listen to the lecture or strike up a conversation with a writer who's not sitting on the panel at that time. "Sometimes its overwhelming—I don't know where to go first," Kughn said.

If her enthusiasm spoke for anything, Kughn showed the greatest affinity for the Monroeville experience, where she said she feels like a tourist. "They have the wonderful play, the walking tour. It's like being a coddled guest," she said.

Anyone would be hard pressed to discover a better experience at a writer conference than Gail Davis of Calera did at Alabama Bound. She spoke first about how smoothly the event ran, how the timing of the speakers and breaks was just right, and how interesting everything was at her first conference experience.

But what impressed her the most was how the authors treated the audience.

"The speakers were so personable," Davis said. "I felt they were talking to me." She was impressed that some speakers stepped away from the podium and walked among the first rows of seats and "Anne George and Kathryn Tucker Windham especially seemed to be talking to me like old friends. That's the way I felt," she said.

"I've been to a lot of book signings, and lots of times you're literally pushed through. But there, after the talks and while they were signing books, I felt I could stand to the side and talk to the authors while they signed others' books. I was

made to feel welcome. (The authors) seemed so comfortable—not stiff or harsh."

The naturally shy Davis did not find the imposing personalities she expected.

"I was scared to death, because of the names of the people I've read," Davis said. "I told myself I wouldn't get near them. But it wasn't that way at all. It was one of the best experiences I've had."

Davis said the closeness she felt at that conference led her to a series of visits with Anne George at other events before the author's death in 2001. Davis' voice changed from bubbly excitement to a hushed tone: "I was absolutely crushed. I'm glad I met her at Alabama Bound and got close enough to know her."

Davis may have gone to Alabama Bound to just be in the moment, but she left with much more than stars in her eyes.

"The authors encouraged me," she said. "They inspired me to get some of my piddly things on paper. It was encouraging when Kathryn Tucker Windham told me one of her first pieces was a cookbook. That was one of the first things I ever wrote, and it was for my children. It's a book of my children's favorites, and I sprinkled among the recipes some funny stories from their lives. Talking to (Windham) encouraged me to finish the cookbook and begin some short stories. It was great for her to stand there and say to

me, 'you can do it,' and 'write it down.' It'll be there forever."

After years of writing for newspapers and magazines, Kughn was inspired to write what she says is her only permanent piece of writing—a book. Five years and 15 revisions later, she's planning to seek a publisher for her novel as she attends conferences this year. "It's ready. I think it's publishable," she said.

Davis called her first writers' conference a day of adventure. "I was so high when I left that even if I had not gotten to talk to them, just seeing them and being with them in the same room was so inspiring. It was a very special day. Nothing will keep me away this year."

Kughn indicated that even one conference a year really is not enough.

"It's like going to church every Sunday. You don't get enough to live by at any one sitting, but you get a little something from every lesson and it adds up after a while," Kughn said.

Bethany Adams Giles writes free-lance articles from her home in Sheffield.



REUNIONS, PARTIES, PICNICS, AND ACADEMICS

This year's slate is full of faces
new and familiar.

ON THE BRINK, Annual Conference on Emerging Southern Writers, February 9, Jacksonville State University, Huston Cole Library. Writers at this event will read from their works and discuss personal reasons for working in their chosen genres, as well as respond to questions from the audience. The conference is on the 11th floor of the Huston Cole Library. The 2002 conference, called "House Parties, Family Reunions, and Dinner on the Ground," will feature writers such as **Howard Bahr** (*The Year of Jubilo*), **Marlin Barton** (*The Dry Well*), **Anthony Grooms** (*Bombingham*), **Ellen Edwards Kennedy** (*Irregardless of Murder*), **Michael Knight** (*Dogfight*), **Julia Oliver** (*Music of Falling Water*), **Carroll Dale Short**, (*The Shining, Shining Path*), and **Jeanie Thompson** (*White for Harvest*). Registration begins at 9 a.m., and the first session begins at 10:15.

For conference information, contact Steven Whitton, 256-782-5414. Pre-register by February 1 for a discounted price.

For ticket information call Gena Christopher, 256-782-5441.

SOUTHERN VOICES Tenth Year Reunion Conference, February 21-24, Hoover Public Library. Surrounded by art events, a concert, and a reunion banquet featuring **Pat Conroy** (*Beach Music, Prince of Tides, The Great Santini*), and in 2002, *My Losing Season*), the reunion event in Hoover promises

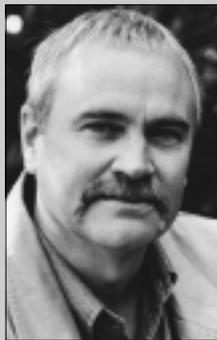
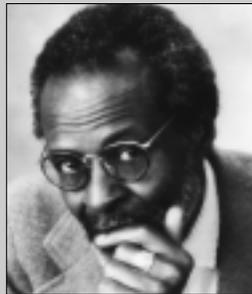
to entertain, delight, and inform. Conroy is expected to share the premise and his personal comments concerning *My Losing Season*, his first nonfiction work in nearly 30 years. The book was inspired by Conroy's senior year as point guard on the Citadel varsity basketball team. It encompasses his graduation, the war in Vietnam, and other events. One review of the work says the reader will find in this work how a writer turns experience into art.

The author conference will span two days, Friday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Saturday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., featuring concurrent sessions with more than 40 participants from each year of Southern Voices.

Confirmed guests include **Connie May Fowler** (*When Katie Wakes, Remembering Blue, Before Women Had Wings*), **William Cobb** (*Wings of Morn-*

ing), **Jill McCorkle** (*Creatures of Habit*), **Robert Morgan** (*This Rock, Gap Creek*), **Nanci Kincaid** (*Balls*), **Tony Earley** (*Jim the Boy*), **Lewis Nordan** (*Boy With Loaded Gun*), **Mike Stewart** (*A Clean Kill, Sins of the Brother*), **Dannye Romine Powell** (*At Every Wedding Someone Stays Home*), **P.S. Wall** (*My Love is Free But the Rest of Me Don't Come Cheap*), **Robert Inman** (*Captain Saturday*), **Vicki Covington** (*Night Ride Home*), **Chip Cooper** (*Common Threads*), **Sandra Conroy** (*Making Waves in Zion*), and others. Registration begins each day at 8:30 a.m.

The artist reception on Thursday night in the Hoover Public Library Friends Gallery honors Southern Voices artists **Chip Cooper**, **Bruce Crowe**, **Bill Hill**,



Top to bottom:
Marlin Barton, Dr.
James Haskins, and
Michael Chitwood

Donna Leigh Jacking, and **Judith Taylor Rogers**. The exhibit, "The Art of Southern Voices," is on exhibit Feb. 18-March 31. The reunion banquet on Friday night is at the Wynfrey Hotel.

Concerts featuring contemporary folk-pop artist **David Wilcox** will be Saturday evening and Sunday afternoon in the library theater. Tickets go on sale at 10 a.m. on Saturday, Jan. 12.

For ticket sales, call 205-444-7888. For conference information, call 205-444-7820.

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH ALABAMA Spring Writers' Conference, April 4-5, the Performance Center of the Guillot University Center on the UNA campus.

This year's guest authors at the Florence venue are poet **W.D. Snodgrass** and award-winning novelist **Manuel Martinez**. Snodgrass is expected to read from his most recent work, *De/Compositions: 101 Good Poems Gone Wrong*. Martinez is known not only for his first novel, *Crossing*, but also for his book reviews and literary essays in the *Chicago Tribune*. He has a new work out soon, *Countering the Counterculture*. Events are free.

Call 256-765-4238 for more information.

SOUTHERN LITERATURE SYMPOSIUM, April 5-6, University of Alabama in Huntsville campus. The event is titled "Many Voices, Many Forums: A Symposium on Contemporary Southern Literature—The New Southern Literature: Critical Perspectives." Invited authors include headliner **Diane McWhorter** (*Carry Me Home*), as well as **Scott Romine** (*The Narrative Forms of Southern Community*), **Anne Goodwyn Jones** (*Tomorrow Is Another Day: The Woman Writer in the South*), **Kelly Cherry**, the university's visiting eminent scholar in the humanities (*Rising Venus, The Society of Friends, Death and Transfiguration*), **James H. Watkins** of Berry College (*The Autobiographical Writing by Contemporary Southern Women*), **Mab Segrest** (*Memoir of a Race Traitor*), and **Natasha Trethewey** (*Domestic Work*).

The UAH Humanities Center is sponsoring this event with the assistance from the Alabama Humanities Foundation and the Huntsville Literary Association. Most events are free to the public. Tickets will be available for the Saturday evening event with **Diane McWhorter**.

For more information, contact the Humanities Center

at UAH by calling 256-824-6583 or emailing Deborah Nelson at nelsond@email.uah.

WRITING TODAY, April 11-12, Birmingham-Southern College campus. Promoted as one of America's oldest writing conferences, this event offers seasoned writers and beginners alike the opportunity to attend workshops with publishers, editors, agents, and writers in a variety of crafts and genres. Featured writers have included **Eudora Welty**, **Ray Bradbury**, **Ernest Gaines**, **John Barth**, and **Erskine Caldwell**. The Writing Today committee, made up mostly of published authors, also selects the winner of the Grand Master Award. Traditionally, the conference chairman makes the Grand Master presentation of a crystal book and a \$10,000 honorarium. This year, however, chairman **Jake Reiss** will relinquish the honor to former Grand Master Award recipient **Pat Conroy**, who will introduce the 2002 Grand Master, **Anne Rivers Siddons**.

ALABAMA BOUND, April 27, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Birmingham Public Library. More than fifty Alabama authors and publishers will gather to talk about their work, sign books, and speak one-on-one with the public. The day is divided into four sessions of ten authors, each with a book signing after each session. Some authors already confirmed for the upcoming event include **Carolyn Haines** (*Splintered Bones*), **Charles Ghigna** (*Haiku: The Travelers of Eternity*), **Paul Hemphill** (*Ballad of Little River*), **Melinda Haynes** (*Chalktown*), **Mike Stewart** (*Clean Kill*), **Tim Dorsey** (*Orange Twist*), **Rick Bragg** (*Ava's Man, All Over But the Shoutin'*), and others.

For more information, contact Linda Wilson, 205-226-3746.

The fifth annual **ALABAMA WRITERS SYMPOSIUM**, May 2-4, Monroeville. Offering small-town Southern culture, history, and academics, this event offers something for everyone who loves to get to the story behind a good story. Banquets, luncheons, picnics, interviews, debates, panels, and more will fill the better part of three days and an evening.

Thursday evening's opening banquet features **George Plimpton** (*Truman Capote: In Which Various Friends, Enemies, Acquaintances, and Detractors Recall His Turbulent Career, The Paris Review*) as the keynote



Carolyn Haines



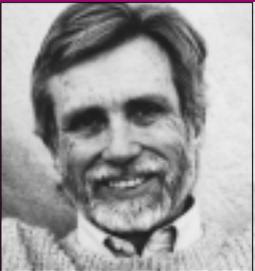
Vicki Covington



Julia Oliver



Chip Cooper



Lewis Nordan



Diane McWhorter



Anthony Grooms



Kelly Cherry



P. S. Wall



Jill McCorkle

speaker. Friday's schedule includes a panel in the morning featuring **Wayne Greenhaw** (*My Heart Is in the Earth, A State of Mind*, and *Beyond the Night*), **Judith Hillman Paterson** (*Sweet Mystery: A Book of Remembering*), and **Mary Ward Brown** (*It Wasn't All Dancing, Tongues of Flame*) and moderated by **Jeanie Thompson** (*White for Harvest*) and **Jay Lamar** (co-editor with Thompson of *The Remembered Gate: Memoirs by Alabama Writers*). Continuing through the day are **Diane McWhorter** (*Carry Me Home*) with **Amilcar Shabazz**, an assistant professor and scholar at the University of Alabama; **Rick Bragg** (*Ava's Man*) interviewed by **Pam Kingsbury** of the Alabama Humanities Foundation Speakers Bureau; **Janet McAdams** (*The Island of Lost Luggage*) with **Linda Frost**, associate professor at the University of Alabama and editor-in-chief of the journal *PMS poemmemoirstory*.

The finale on Friday features **George Plimpton** and **Katherine Clark** (*Milking the Moon: A Southerner's Story of Life on this Planet*) with a discussion on oral biography treatments moderated by **John Sledge**, book editor for *The Mobile Register*.

The Friday luncheon will include the presentation of the 2002 Eugene Current-Garcia Award for Distinguished Scholar of the Year, which includes a bronze of the Monroe County Courthouse clock tower and a \$5,000 honorarium. Also awarded during the luncheon is the presentation of the \$5,000 Harper Lee Award for Alabama's Distinguished Writer of the Year.

Friday evening offers a number of activities, including a tour of historic downtown Monroeville, a picnic with authors and scholars on the courthouse lawn, and a performance of the play *To Kill a Mockingbird*, based on the novel by Harper Lee. Saturday in Monroeville will begin with academic papers, followed by mystery writer **Mike Stewart** (*Sins of the Brother, Dog Island*, and the forthcoming *Clean Kill*) with Auburn University professor of American literature **Bert Hitchcock**; and later, short story writer **Marlin Barton** (*The Dry Well*) with **John Hafner**, professor of English at Spring Hill College. An interview with George Plimpton also will be conducted by **Don Noble**.

The luncheon on Saturday features **Dr. James Haskins**, professor of English at the University of Florida, Gainesville, and contributor to *The Remembered Gate: Memoirs by Alabama Writers*. Among his other books are *Diary of a Harlem Schoolteacher* and *The Cotton Club*.

For questions about programs or participants, call Dr. Judy Wilson, 251-575-3156, ext. 226. For questions about registration and fees, call Donna Reed 251-575-3156, ext. 223.

Additional information on the symposium is available on Alabama Southern Community College's webpage, www.ascc.edu.

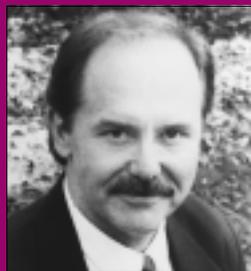
Authors All Year Long

The UAB Writers Series

By Bethany A. Giles

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA at Birmingham's Writers Series is an annual offering of the Program in Creative Writing. Readings are free, open to the public, and cosponsored by the Department of English, the Honors Program, BACHE (Birmingham Area Consortium for Higher Education) Visiting Writers, UAB Student Government Association, the Alabama State Council on the Arts, and Friends of the Writing Program. Unless otherwise noted, all readings start at 7 p.m. at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, 1024 South 12th Street. Free parking is available in lot 16E (entrance off 10th Avenue South).

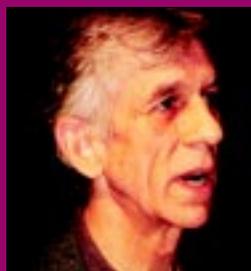
FEBRUARY 13, 11 a.m., Brown Hall, Miles College, **Honorée Fannone Jeffers** is the author of *The Gospel of Barbecue* (Kent State University Press, 2000), winner of the 1999 Stan and Tom Wick Prize for Poetry chosen by Lucille Clifton and a finalist for the 2001 Paterson Prize. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *African American Review*, *Bma: The Sonja Sanchez Review*, *Callaloo*, *Catch the Fire!!!!: A Cross-Generational Anthology of African American Poetry* (Riverhead/Putnam, 1998), *Identity Lessons: Contemporary Writing About Learning to Be an American* (Viking/Penguin, 1998), *Kenyon Review*, *The Massachusetts Review*, *Obsidian II and III*, and *Poet Lore*. She has won awards from the Academy of American Poets, the Barbara Deming Memorial Fund, the Cleveland Center for Contemporary Arts, and the Rona Jaffe Foundation for Women Writers, and she has been a Poetry Scholar at the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference. She is currently visiting assistant professor of English at Knox College in Illinois.



Charles Ghigna



Amilcar Shabazz



Paul Hemphill



Pam Kingsbury



Mike Stewart



Rick Bragg



Judy Patersen



Janet McAdams



Mary Ward Brown



Wayne Greenhaw

MARCH 20 (place and time to be announced), **Judith Kitchen** is the author of *Distance and Direction* (Coffee House Press, 2001) and *Only the Dance: Essays on Time and Memory* (University of South Carolina Press); and co-editor of *In Short: A Collection of Brief Creative Nonfiction* (W.W. Norton, 1996) and *In Brief: Short Takes on the Personal* (W.W. Norton, 1999). Her nonfiction has appeared in various journals, including *The Georgia Review*, *The Gettysburg Review*, and *Prairie Schooner*. Her critical study of William Stafford, *Writing the World*, was reprinted by Oregon State University Press in 1999. She has been awarded an NEA Fellowship, a Pushcart Prize, and a nomination for the National Magazine Award. She is writer-in-residence at SUNY Brockport.

APRIL 2, Comer Auditorium, University of Montevallo; April 3, St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, **Michael Knight** is the author of *Dogfight*, which was an L.A. Times Notable Book of the Year and a finalist for the PEN/Hemingway Award, and a novel, *Divining Rod*, which was awarded the Dictionary of Literary Biography Best First Novel Prize and the New Writing Award from the Fellowship of Southern Writers. Both were published in 1998. His fiction has appeared in numerous journals, including *The Paris Review*, *The New Yorker*, *Esquire*, *GQ*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, and *Playboy*, and has been anthologized in *New Stories from the South: The Year's Best, 1999*. He grew up in Mobile and received his MFA from the University of Virginia. He currently teaches creative writing at the University of Tennessee. ▲

Elements of a Publishing Contract

By Edward M. George



Ed George

This article on publishing agreements is the second in a series of *First Draft* articles on some of the business aspects of being a writer. These articles are not meant to be legal advice or the final word on the given topics; but they are intended to give writers (or prospective writers) general information on various business topics with which serious writers should be familiar.

What Does a Publishing Contract Do?

As all professional writers know, a publishing contract is the legal document that establishes the duties and obligations that a writer and his/her publishing company have toward one another, with the underlying intent being an agreement on the part of the publisher to print and sell a book written by the author. However, publishing contracts can take many different forms and contain any number of different provisions. Some contracts are only a page or two long; others are many pages. Some are easily understood; others are almost incomprehensible in their complexity.

Is There a Universal Publishing Contract?

Even though the term "standard publishing agreement" is often used to make a writer feel more comfortable with an offer, the fact is that there are numerous variations of "standard" agreements depending on such considerations, among others, as whether the publisher is regional, national, or international; whether the book is to be hardback, paperback, or both; the type of book (fiction, non-fiction, text book, religious book, specialty book, coffee-table book, holiday book, children's book, etc.); the timeliness of the subject matter; the name recognition or clout of the author; the number of the author's books that have been previously published by the same company; whether or not the book has potential to be bought as a TV or movie project; whether or not the book is perceived to have an international market; whether or not it will have a long-term sales life; and (perhaps most important) will Oprah like it?

What Elements Are Usually Included in Publishing Contracts?

Even though there are many types of publishing agreements, most of them will have the following elements: the names and addresses of the parties who are to be bound by the contract; the effective beginning date and ending date of the contract; a list or description of the types of rights which are being granted by the writer to the publisher; the amount or rate of money to be paid by the publisher for the rights; a statement as to when or how often the author will be paid; and what happens in the event of a claim of copyright infringement, or other related wrongdoing, against the author?

What About Royalties?

With regard to the payment to be made for the book, that generally takes the form of “royalties” based on a percentage of some definable sum. Publishing contracts usually provide for royalties to be paid on a periodic basis, such as quarterly, semi-annually, or annually. Royalties for trade books are usually computed as a percentage of the retail list price of the each book sold by the publisher that is not returned by the retailer or wholesale distributor. However, royalties can also be based on other factors, such as a percentage of the gross or net sales receipts of the publisher. This kind of arrangement would not be uncommon in a contract for a textbook. Depending on the perceived marketability of the writer or the book, the writer may get one or more “advance” payments. An advance can be in the form of an advance payment against incoming royalties, which the author will be obligated to repay if the royalties are insufficient to cover the advance; or it could be a payment to the writer that the publisher will attempt to recoup from incoming royalties, but which will not be otherwise refundable by the author; or, much less common, it can be a direct payment to the writer that will not be refundable at all. Obviously, whether or not there is an advance payment, the amount of any advance, and the factor(s) on which incoming royalties will be based, will all influence the percentage on which royalties will be calculated.

The parties may also agree on a variable rate for incoming royalties. For example, a contract may provide a certain royalty rate for the first 10,000 copies sold, a higher rate for the next 20,000 copies, and an even higher rate for all subsequent copies. The rates applicable to royalties can vary from 4% of the cover price of a trade paperback to perhaps 15% or more for a big-selling hardback.

What Are Some Other Provisions That a Contract Might Have?

In addition to the basic agreement for a certain book to be published at a certain rate of compensation, a publishing contract may contain numerous other provisions addressing related matters. For example, if the final draft of the book has not already been written and agreed upon, the publisher may want the right to have final editing and approval authority. The contract can also include agreements relating to such matters as cover design; the size and format of the book; the date by which an acceptable manuscript must be delivered; the date by which the book must be published; promotional and advertising rights and obligations; how revised editions will be handled; an option for a sequel or follow-up book; how many copies the author will receive; a discount rate for purchases by the author; a warranty that the author (or the publisher) has obtained, or will obtain, the right to use material copyrighted by another party; the purchase of liability insurance; the right of the author to examine the relevant business records of the publisher to verify royalty statements; an obligation of the writer not to produce

a competitive product; and the reversion of all publication rights to the author in the event of a designated period of time that the book is taken off the market by the publisher.

The contract may state that the author retains all subsidiary rights, such as television and movie rights, foreign publishing rights, serial rights, book club rights, audio rights, etc. But in almost all cases, the publisher will insist on having subsidiary rights, subject to an obligation to pay royalties to the writer in the event of the publisher’s exercise of any of those rights, or the licensing or assignment of any of the rights to a third party. Generally speaking, the author’s royalties for rights licensed to another party will be in the form of a percentage of the publisher’s receipts. If the percentage is to be based on the publisher’s “net” receipts, the contract should be very specific as to what that term will mean. The split between the writer and publisher of such receipts is entirely negotiable, but it would not be uncommon for a publisher to retain 10% to 25% of receipts from licensing television or movie rights, or 25% to 50% of proceeds from the assignment of foreign rights. In the case of an agreement for the publisher to receive a percentage of net revenues, the publisher’s percentage would be smaller.

Can the Contract be Terminated for Non-performance by a Party?

A comprehensive publishing contract will include the right of either party to terminate the agreement in the event of the failure or inability of the other party to meet the obligations of the contract. For example, if the writer becomes disabled and cannot deliver the book, or if the publisher goes out of business, the contract should allow for the contract to be terminated and the parties to release one another from any further obligations other than those already incurred, such as expenses to be reimbursed or royalties to be paid. However, there have been cases where a writer whose publisher went into bankruptcy was prevented from regaining the rights to his or her book because, under Federal Bankruptcy Law, the publishing rights are assets that are subject to being leased or sold to pay the debts of the bankrupt party.

Should the Writer Have a Lawyer or Agent Negotiate a Publishing Contract?

No one should enter into *any* kind of binding written agreement that he or she does not fully understand or about which he or she does not feel fully comfortable. At the very least, a writer should take a proposed publishing contract home and study it at length before signing it. If, after carefully reading the document, the writer has questions, the questions should first be presented to the publisher for an answer or explanation. If, after discussing the contract with the publisher, the writer stills needs clarification of the agreement, or wants to propose a revision to the agreement, it might be advisable to seek the help of a literary agent or

Continued on page 32

Writing Our Stories

Begins Fifth Year, Celebrates New Anthologies

Alabama's juvenile justice and the arts partnership, "Writing Our Stories," began its fifth year in October 2001. Shortly thereafter, schools at each of the three campuses – Chalkville, Mt. Meigs, and Vacca – debuted the anthologies from the previous school year.

The publication of McNeil School's *Lock Down*, Sequoyah School's *Look Into My Soul*, and Lurleen B. Wallace School's *Open the Door IV* brings to nine the total number of anthologies published by the Alabama Writers' Forum and the Alabama Department of Youth Services.

"Writing Our Stories" began in 1997 with one teacher on the Mt. Meigs campus teaching creative writing to a single section of students in the Lurleen B. Wallace School. As of spring 2002, three teaching writers teach two classes each on three DYS campuses. Also this year, a curriculum development project is underway with funding from the Children's Trust Fund of Alabama.

According to Marlin Barton, teaching writer and assistant director of "Writing Our Stories," the program has become an integral part of the DYS experience for juvenile offenders.

"Of course, the boys and girls we teach don't want to be incarcerated at a youth detention facility. But by the time they have experienced a creative writing class and have seen their work published – and often praised – they

have a different view of themselves, and perhaps even of their stay at DYS," said Barton. "We're always gratified to see how many return former students for the publication party and how proud they are as they sign their names in the books. They

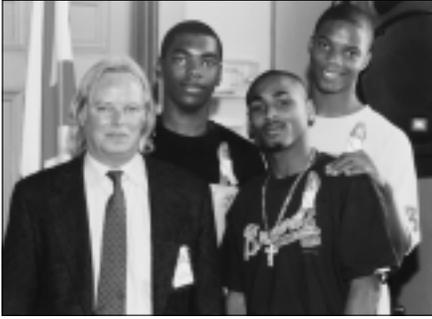


Photography by Jay Sailors

Open the Door IV authors review their poems one last time before reading their works from the anthology on the Mt. Meigs campus.



(l-r) Mr. J. Walter Wood, Jr., executive director of the Alabama Department of Youth Services (DYS), along with Ms. Tracy Smitherman, DYS curriculum supervisor, Dr. John Stewart, DYS school superintendent, and Linda A. McQueen, teacher, pick up their autographed copies of Lock Down.



Teaching writer Danny Gamble (left) with three of the Lock Down writers.

really shine when they are spotlighted for the *right* reasons,” Barton said.

For the fall 2001 book event at Mt. Meigs, Troy King, assistant attorney general of the state of Alabama, was guest speaker. King admonished the students to remember the effect and the power of words. King said, “Words have a ripple effect and can come back



The Honorable Andre Sparks, Birmingham Family Court, spoke to Lock Down writers and the faculty, staff, and guests at the Vacca campus book publication event. Writing while incarcerated will “help you gain clarity,” Sparks said.

to haunt us.” He commended all involved in “Writing Our Stories,” and congratulated “Alabama’s new writers.” After the program, everyone lined up for an autographed copy of *Open the Door IV*.

For the Vacca campus book event, students read from *Lock Down*, the second anthology produced as a result of “Writing Our Stories.” Teaching writer Danny Gamble believes that the work these young men put into their poems

and stories in his class will serve them well in the long run. “Sometimes it takes a while, but once they start to apply themselves, they can write some amazing things,” says Gamble.

Three of the Lock Down students read for the assembled students, faculty, and guests in the Vacca chapel. Guest speaker the Hon. Andre Sparks spoke eloquently about the heritage of writers from prison. Referencing the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., who penned the famous “Letter from the Birmingham Jail,” Sparks reminded the young men that what they are doing allows them to “gain clarity” on their situations.

Chalkville Writers Study Creative Dramatics

On the day of Chalkville campus’s book debut event, excitement was high. All girls currently on campus filed into the chapel as faculty, staff, and guests anticipated the dramatic readings from *Look Into My Soul*.



Learning to present one’s work dramatically is an important part of the Sequoyah School “Writing Our Stories.” Students in Priscilla Hancock Cooper’s creative dramatics class learn about the importance of “acting out” in a positive way.

Teaching writer Priscilla Hancock Cooper has edited three anthologies during her teaching residency at Sequoyah School. Working alongside DYS teacher Janet Dixon, she has become a valued member of the Sequoyah School family.

For the fiscal school year 2002, Hancock Cooper, an accomplished performer and poet, is teaching creative dramatics as well as writing. For the *Look Into My Soul* event, Hancock Cooper and her beginning dramatics class presented representative poems and stories from the volume.

“Creative dramatics helps students appreciate, interpret, and share the written word,” says Hancock. “Performance requires interpretation. Therefore, students read and discuss writing. And an extra benefit is that performance builds self-confidence and provides an outlet for students who may be unable to express themselves on paper.”



Janet Dixon has incorporated creative writing into her classroom as a result of the “Writing Our Stories” program. She believes it is valuable for the young women at Chalkville. “Being the cooperating teacher for ‘Writing Our Stories’ has been invaluable to me as a teacher. I have my own personal professional development course in teaching writing! Since I’ve been working with Priscilla, I’ve gained specific skills in teaching areas like short story writing and letter writing. The girls are getting a great deal out of the program, and so am I.”

After working on poems and stories at their desks, the girls at Sequoyah School move to the keyboard to polish their work for publication. Here, Hancock Cooper assists one of her students with page layout for a poem.



The Master of Fine Arts in the Book Arts Program at The University of Alabama is now in its sixteenth year. We accept up to eight new students per year for the sixty credit hour program which emphasizes the art and craft of making books by hand: bookbinding, letterpress printing, hand papermaking, and history of the book. Our students are highly motivated and come from various undergraduate backgrounds and work experiences. We have four graduate assistantships available on a competitive basis. To find out more about the Book Arts program contact Steve Miller, Program Coordinator at 205.348.1525, stevemiller@bookarts.ua.edu, or write us at The University of Alabama/SLIS, Box 870257, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0257. www.bookarts.ua.edu



Charting the Course

One More Day

by Denise Wadsworth Trimm

When I returned from teaching class on the Tuesday before Thanksgiving, I had a message to call the National Foundation for Advancement in the Arts (NFAA) in Miami.

Each year the NFAA honors students from various fine and performing arts through the Arts Recognition and Talent Search (ARTS) program. A select group of young artists are chosen from all over the country to receive scholarships, prizes, and an all-expense paid week in Miami where they attend master classes and share their talents with the other honorees.

Because my seniors had only recently mailed their packets of poetry and fiction to this contest, I assumed the call was to tell me we had done something wrong. I expected to hear that a student had labeled her work improperly or that the postage came up short.

"What can I do for you," I asked.

"It's what we can do for you," the representative said, his voice almost singing. "I have great news."

I scrambled through my desk looking for a pen and paper. Apparently, one or more of our students had won ARTS, and he wanted me to let them know.

"You have been chosen as our 2002 Distinguished Teacher of the Arts."

I had no idea that I was being considered for this prestigious award, so hearing that I had won left me standing there, mouth agape, pen and paper in hand with nothing to say.

As most educators will attest, formal recognition in our profession is rare. To be honored statewide is an incredible feat, but nationally, well, it's something I never expected would happen to me. To be perfectly honest, I never would have guessed that at this time in my life I would be teaching at all, much less be honored for it.

My husband can tell you that in the thirteen years I have taught, not one year has passed that I didn't tell him I wanted to do something else. I'd love to say that I have always wanted to be a teacher and there is nothing else in the world that I would rather do or be, but I cannot.

When I was a senior in high school my English teacher, Mrs. Bessie Dunn, told me that I was destined to be an English teacher. "No way," I said. "I'm going to be a lawyer, a broadcast journalist, a novelist, anything but an English teacher!" She had just nodded at me with that knowing look on her face.

The first year I taught, I found myself asking how exactly it was that

I ended up in the classroom. When I got my first paycheck, I sat at my desk and cried. As a teacher, I was earning only one hundred dollars a month more than I was making as a secretary before I went back to school. One hundred additional dollars to testify for four years of hard work, and now there was a two hundred dollar a month student loan to repay.

By Christmas break that first year, I had discovered two kids having sex in my classroom after school hours, the principal had asked me to change a basketball player's semester average, and I had been warned that if I didn't contribute to the principal's campaign for state legislature my contract would most likely not be renewed.

A few days before Christmas that first year, I broke the news to my husband that I was done with teaching. I didn't even plan to go back the second semester having already written six weeks of lesson plans for the substitute and having packed up my personal belongings in one small box.

He reminded me that there was a contract to honor and bills to pay, and if I wanted to do anything else, I'd have to wait until summer. I cried every day until January fourth, when I showed up with my box under my arm and my eyes red and swollen.

I left that school at the end of the year when we moved to Birmingham. Not knowing what else to do with a teaching degree, I interviewed for a position at Jess Lanier High School in Bessemer, where I taught English, journalism, and speech. This time, however, I was determined not to be defeated. If teaching was my profession, then I was going to be the best teacher I could.

I adored the students of Jess Lanier. They were warm, loving, and grateful for consistency and high standards. I soon learned, however, that the actions of few affected the lives of many. Gang fights in the lunchroom sent chairs flying. A couple of phoned-in bomb threats cancelled pep rallies. Fires set in bathrooms led to lockdowns. Weapons brought to school made teachers fearful to demand the best from their students. Hoodlums prevailed. The best teachers left. Good kids suffered. I left after three years, disgusted with an administration that cared too little and feared too much.

Then came the Alabama School of Fine Arts. I was not the person they originally hired to teach and chair the Creative Writing Department after Charles Ghigna left. I interviewed but was turned down. I interviewed other places too—dozens of places. After each interview, I was told it was between one other person and me. They always hired the other person. You see, politics is alive and well in education. I had rocked too many of those proverbial boats with the administration at Jess Lanier, and once the reference call was made, my phone ceased to ring.

James R. Nelson called my house on the Saturday after the first week of school, but I was not there. I was attending a Mary Kay Cosmetics brunch, where I had just signed up to become a consultant, even though I was allergic to their

makeup and had never sold so much as a pack of chewing gum. Desperate times, desperate measures. Mr. Nelson, it turns out, was taking desperate measures himself, because the teacher he had hired quit after one week. "Can you come on Monday?" he asked.

I assured him I could, thanked him, and then thanked God for intervening on my behalf.

Fresh from the thrill of scaring off one teacher, the students set their sights on me. It was obvious they underestimated me. I told them I had dealt with worse than them, and I wasn't going anywhere. Battles ensued, and I quickly learned which ones to fight and which to leave alone. One by one, they put down their arms and took up their pens. Before long, I was able to address the more serious issue at hand. I didn't have a clue how to teach creative writing.

I was a few courses away from earning my Master of Arts degree in English from UAB, but I had only completed a few writing courses, and they were all fiction classes. There I was in the position of teaching poetry, and I hadn't even read much contemporary poetry, much less written it. Dennis Covington, who was my advisor and teacher at the time, encouraged me to apply to the MFA program in Creative Writing at Tuscaloosa. I applied and was turned down.

Here I was a teacher of creative writing in one of the most prestigious schools in the country, and I couldn't get into a creative writing program. Not to be deterred, I did what I have always done when backed against the wall. I fought my way out.

I read everything I could get my hands on, enrolled in poetry classes at UAB, and pretended every day that I knew what I was talking about as I taught, borrowing from the adage, "fake it until you make it." I read the students' work carefully and listened closely as they discussed their own poetry as well as each other's. I relied on the seniors to teach me what it was I should be looking for. Every night I spent hours preparing for the job I didn't deserve, determined to earn the right to keep it.

The next year I reapplied to the MFA program in Tuscaloosa and was accepted. They too had a new chair and a new attitude, for which I was grateful. I taught during the day and attended evening classes, leaving home at seven in the morning and returning around eleven at night. I drank coffee to stay awake for the drive then took Melatonin to help me sleep. I graded papers between my MFA classes and wrote while I drove, composing my thoughts on a tape recorder.

My students and I learned together. As I discovered something, I passed it on to them. When they taught me something, I applied it to my own writing. I had great admiration for them, and they grew to respect me. We were, after all, in the same boat. We were exhausted and overwhelmed, but our passion for writing fueled us. Together, we could make it.

Nine years later I am receiving an award—an award that was prompted by the number of students I have taught who

Continued on page 32

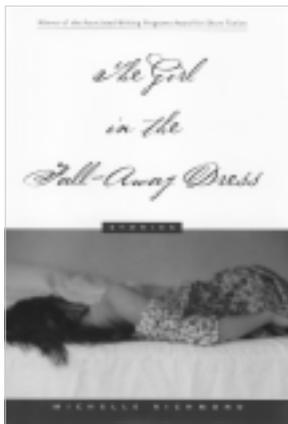
Reviews

The Girl in the Fall-Away Dress

By Michelle Richmond

University of Amherst Press, 2001

\$24.95 Hardback



At the outset, let me announce that this review will be a rave. I was hooked from the first sentence of the first story, which reads, “Angel’s mother makes red velvet cakes and talks about the prowess of God.” When I got through with *The Girl in the Fall-Away Dress*, winner of the 2000 Associated Writing Program’s Short Fiction Award, I knew I had completed one of the best short story collections I have read in quite a while. Like Eudora

Welty’s *The Golden Apples*, Michelle Richmond’s collection, a beautifully arranged series of nineteen inter-related stories—nine full length and ten short-shorts—might arguably be read as a novel. In both cases, the unified wholes the authors have created greatly enhance the pleasure of reading the individual parts.

The central intelligence of the collection is Grace, the oldest of four sisters, the product of a Christian school and a college graduate. Grace tells fourteen of the stories, and the other five, also first-person narratives, are told by her sisters—Celie, Darlene, and Baby—and by two of her childhood friends, Angel and Myla. All the narrators have grown up in Mobile, and though most of the full-length stories are set in other places—New York City; Bandera, Texas; San Francisco; Fayetteville, Arkansas; Atlanta; Knoxville, Tennessee; and even Reykjavik, Iceland—Mobile is never far away from the consciousness of the narrators. Through memory, there is an almost constant juxtaposition of the past and the present.

Richmond’s characters all seem to face a “burning, beat-you-up life,” as she puts it in the opening story, a life with an ever-present danger of being blindsided. In this world, people can be struck by lightning, have arms ripped off in car accidents, or get raped behind the Dreamland Skating Rink. Here people also often find themselves saddled with natures they would not have chosen for themselves. Celie, for example, a mother now living in Atlanta, feels inadequate as she looks at her seven-year-old daughter, who appears to have just stepped

out of a Charles Addams cartoon. She cannot relate to this stranger she wants so desperately to love.

Almost all of the characters we encounter in *The Girl in the Fall-Away Dress* want to kick their traces, to avoid the oppression and repression they are experiencing. But even the escapes are only temporary and have their own measure of pain. Yet they continue to dream of a world where “love and enlightenment pour down like fresh water.”

These stories are masterful. Even the least successful story, “Fifth Grade: A Criminal History,” which is less distinctively imaginative and original than the rest of the stories, is itself quite good. Richmond knows exactly what she is doing. Her expert powers of language are quite sufficient to invest her surfaces with fascinating depths. Cliffs and tides of the Pacific coast, volcanoes bubbling underground in Iceland, a cold front moving in from Mississippi—all become objective correlatives for the internal machinations of the characters. In the final story, Richmond even breaks away from the surface realism of the other stories and moves into fantasy. But by then readers are well prepared to understand even better the conflicted psyches they have encountered in the previous stories.

Richmond is an expert at giving the exact right detail in her descriptions. Conrad said somewhere that the job of the writer is the accurate naming of the things of God, and Richmond lives up to that calling. Did you know that those Styrofoam pieces in the boxes you receive in the mail are called packing worms? And who does not have an immediate sense of recognition when he or she reads about “filthy little grocery stores with big white banners in the windows advertising pork roast and Pampers” or about a girl wearing “red vinyl pants so shiny they looked as if they had been waxed at a car wash”?

I can anticipate one criticism on the part of some readers: that the voices of the narrators are not adequately separated. Even given similarities of background and geography, it is indeed doubtful that six girls would sound so much alike. And it certainly strains credulity that all would have such powers of description here demonstrated. But had Richmond attempted to be more realistic in the manner of speech of her characters, she would have sacrificed the texture that makes the book such a remarkable achievement. I conclude that the reader is lucky that individualized voice did not loom as a great issue with her.

In conclusion, I say enthusiastically and simply: go out and buy this book. If you are half as knocked out by it as I am, you will not have made a mistake.

Norman McMillan lives in Montevallo.

Messenger

By R. T. Smith

Louisiana State University, 2001
\$16.95 Hardback

After two decades of painstaking crafting, R. T. Smith delivered *Trespasser* to LSU Press in 1996, his first major-press collection, which both brought some of his best work to long-time readers and introduced his elegant music to many new ones. *Messenger* continues the work of *Trespasser*. Combining new poems, which evidence enviable maturity, with hard-wrought songs from his small-press volumes, Smith makes his most complete statement of poetics—one that rewards the new as well as the abiding interest.

Messenger opens with poems that develop Smith's intimacy with nature and nature's other intimates. Ostensibly, "Sourwood" meditates on the "the bee father's demise," which "kept secret, could cause / the death of the hives / in the coming winter." But in the poem's attention to "the sweetness of his voice, / his dependable hymns," we hear Smith's own. If the poem wonders, "*Who will tell the bees?*" it strives to understand how any of us understand or communicate anything to the world in which we live. So also Smith delights in the spectacle of "Hardware Sparrows," which he finds "safe from hawks // and weather under the roof / of Lowe's amazing discount / store." He wonders "How // they know to forage here," and his wondering enables him to feel that the sparrows ask us

to float once more on sheer
survival and the shadowy
bliss we exist to explore.

The message is that of A. R. Ammons and Wendell Berry and James Dickey, well delivered in these new lyrics and in those some readers will remember from Smith's 1991 collection, *Cardinal Heart*, "Rushlight," "North of Spruce Pine," and "Cardinal Directions."

The second section of *Messenger* focuses on the human world, remembering a childhood—in "Alphabet," the beginning of the poet's love of language; in "Reading Groups," registering his tendency to be "elsewhere, wind-borne, flying"; or in "Messenger," recalling an early vision. In every poem, Smith moves closer to asking, as he does in "H A N G M A N," "how can a grown man // be saved by games?" These poems, which deal with every game from daydream to religious apprehension, meditate upon the offices of childhood in an attempt to find something that would allow the poet to return to his dialogue with nature or feel at last at home. This is his beginning, remembered in "Horse" as the child's carving that remains, to the adult, clear as a try to "make beauty local, / to bring something graceful // close to the language of home."

As such questions and the evidence of his answering persist, it is only fitting that Smith should, in the volume's final section, return to his ancestral ground, Ireland, visited memorably in *Trespasser*. The attention of these poems is extremely refined, and the inclusion here of a poem entitled "Lilting" suggests that the concern of this writing, precipitated by the conversations with nature in the first section and by the remembrances of youth in the second, enable a powerful music. Here the singer is a young woman, in whose song "Not even / the barman dared / clink a glass, // and every villager / listened." But the poem's notes come also from "such a supple // tongue." And it is in such voicing that Smith extends his continuing questioning of himself, finding that, as a "Spectator" in Ireland, he is "self-tortured beyond the snow's / tenebrous *Ego te absolvo*, / spoken softly to the world."

The difficulty and seeming impossibility of such absolutism keeps Smith coming back to such places to ask of himself why and why not, to imagine himself, however obliquely, like the bees in "Sourwood," wondering if he will be capable of making honey if he were to remain ignorant of his keepers' deaths. Confrontation and recognition remain the modes of these plainsongs, and Smith is here more again the monk of his memory. *Messenger* is essential for anyone who would feel the plaint of a country's music, raised strong by one of us, no better or worse, just brave enough to speak once touched with fire.

Jake Adam York is a poet who teaches English at the University of Colorado-Denver.

Horizon Note

By Robin Behn

University of Wisconsin Press, 2001
\$18.95 Cloth/\$11.95 Paper

Robin Behn's finely tuned third collection of poetry is in one sense a dénouement in that it unflinchingly traces the last stages of a father's Alzheimer's-induced decline (a project already underway by 1993's *The Red Hour*, and most evident in "On Giving My Father a Book About Roses"—a poem from that earlier effort now reprinted in *Horizon Note*.) But in another sense, the poems in this book represent a new beginning. As never before, Behn's poems in *Horizon Note* show an incisive, interrogative quality that pushes the limits of the lyric to great effect. Witness to the many slips, jumps, gaps, and omissions in memory created by Alzheimer's, Behn as a poet has incorporated this unpredictable electricity into her own writing. Where once there was a refined, almost too-smooth music, now there is a frenetic energy in her lines, born of difficult experience, to be sure, but by no means blunted by it. Her always lucid writing has received a high-

voltage technical jolt—and is all the more powerful for it.

One of Behn's greatest achievements in *Horizon Note* is the success with which she negotiates her father's fall into increasing silence, while at the same time exploring her family's rich history of musicianship and her son's early attempts at self-expression, at times also through music. It's the varied sound of all of these experiences that forms her central interest—the "horizon note" of the collection itself—above and below which she plays her other subjects. This "music" perhaps has a metaphysical basis, as Behn notes in her epigraph for the collection, taken from the hymn, "This is my Father's world, / and to my listening ears / all nature sings, and round me rings / the music of the spheres." Behn's engagements of such matters in *Horizon Note* range from that rather majestic evocation to this no less significant set of observations from "Interlude: Still Still":

Inside the hole, where it's yellow,
the boy has dropped a quarter
so that the guitar rattles

when he shakes it by the neck.
Knocks, scrapes, scars.
So this is what music is.

The wooden body is no longer
bigger than his body.

The strings, which, when

he strums them,
go on forever, are forever
wound around small pegs

shaped like the big ones
they wrap ropes around,
there being an absence of

able-bodied mourners
to lower, with the softer machines
of their bodies, the coffin down.

The imaginative leaps of this poem are typical of Behn's work in *Horizon Note*. In "Vigil: Dwindle," she traces half-remembered bits of famous affirmations into a frank portrait of her father's face, then into further flights across the landscape and across family history:

*Honor thy
To thine own
Be of good
Do no*

but *harm* is already in the background,
a hum attuned, though we are not, to
the recent hue: his face becoming gradually blued

the way, if you watch, in slow evening-time, distant
mountains will somehow purple-up,

but closer, like indigo velvet in the box
beneath his Navy Flying Cross,
a little darkling sea in there, patriotic, roiling...

This is poetry that springs from difficult and uncomfortable circumstances. Rather than presenting her readers with difficult and uncomfortable poems—often the actual path of least resistance for poets who are interested in testing the bounds of language—Behn never forgets the compromised promises at the heart of lyric poetry, as is abundantly apparent in these lines from "Postlude for Pennywhistle, Spoons, and Drum":

I've heard it spoken of as the other side
as if it were a record to flip over.

I've heard it called a gate
as if there were a creak and then a creek

MFA

supple curriculum
3 or 4 years of financial assistance
lively local culture

home of the BLACK WARRIOR REVIEW

www.as.ua.edu/english
205.348.0766
writeua@english.as.ua.edu

resident faculty
robin behn
sandy huss
michael martone
wendy rawlings
bruce smith

Alabama

THE PROGRAM IN CREATIVE WRITING department of english BOX 870244
UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA tuscaloosa al 35487-0244

and then a bridge and then they lie, say you will lie
amid flowers instead of sores,

and levitate, as now, but there will be
no harness...

They don't speak of the weather.
They never speak about the weather

or whether anyone misses anyone
there. Or is it *then*

Here, summer. God-awful.
Too hot to tuck the boy in.

Books stuck to the shelf.
Thinking ripening its own intolerable self.

Confronted with what amounts to a world of loss, this poet has nonetheless opted to keep playing. The intense and edgy music of this collection might not please all ears, but for those who are interested in following Behn through the changes, it's an invigorating experience. *Horizon Note* represents a major turning point in her aesthetic development; it's a worthy recipient of the 2001 Brittingham Prize in Poetry.

Poet Jim Murphy teaches creative writing at the University of Montevallo.

The Other Lover

By Bruce Smith

University of Chicago Press, 2000
\$26 Hardback

Whenever I hear a New Formalist argue that free verse is an inherently inferior form of poetry, that it is "too easy," that it is "just prose cut up into lines," I can't help but imagine the same person arguing that Pavarotti is a better singer than Mick Jagger. From one perspective, the argument is ridiculous; Mick would certainly struggle with Mozart or Wagner. But thinking about it another way, just imagine how lame Pavarotti's attempt at "Jumpin' Jack Flash" would be. My point is not that a discussion of formal and free verse is an apples-and-oranges argument, but that judging each style against the other ignores their very different contexts. In the stately, restrained, intensely structured lines of traditional formal verse, we see the Old World; in the wild, audacious, playful lines of free verse, we see the New. Simply put, free verse is the American poetic idiom. And in his fourth book of poems, *The Other Lover*, Bruce Smith masterfully works within that idiom. This is a very fine and very American book.

Good free verse is never sloppy and never flat. Instead of shedding the poetic devices of formal poetry, the free verse poet puts them all on the table at once, to be used in various combinations of infinite possibility. Good free verse does not turn its back on rhythm; it employs multiple rhythms, using backbeat and variation and syncopation as does another American art form, jazz. The book's cover features the blurred picture of a saxophone, and the poems contain many references to popular music, from jazz to rhythm and blues to rock and roll. And the rhythms of the lines conveying those references are just as free and unrestrained.

In "Flight," titles of Rolling Stones songs dance into the middle of a fourteen-line poem that begins with exact-rhyme couplets, breaks away from rhyme entirely, reintroduces it across stanzas, and ponders a rhyme used in a Bob Marley song within a poem that employs no rhyme itself. And in "Groove and Break: His Voice at Fifty," a white speaker vividly remembers his childhood listening to the rhythm and blues of black musicians on his radio in lines that reveal their debt to that music.

The book's allusions show that Smith knows American music, and the book's poems show that he knows the music of language, meter, and rhyme. And the following lines from "The Clearing" suggest to me that he knows well the value of the irregular music he has chosen for his poems:

Sometimes the autistic panic from the changing shapes
of clouds. They want eternity with bounds, they want it
now. Heaven's four beats to the bar and no cheating,
otherwise heaven's another name for the pit.

It was difference not divinity I wanted.

In the playful, inventive, and masterful free verse of *The Other Lover*, Smith has not only achieved difference but has approached the divine. After all, Pavarotti's voice may be beautiful, but a good rendition of "Jumpin' Jack Flash" is nearly nirvana.

Dan Albergotti is completing an MFA in poetry at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. He is the current poetry editor of The Greensboro Review.

A Writer's Tool Kit

By Carroll Dale Short

Court Street Press, 2001
\$15.95 Paper

At a certain season in their careers, many writers seem moved to write a book about writing. John Gardner, Anne Lamott, Annie Dillard, Ray Bradbury, Stephen King—and now Dale Short, a professional writer for thirty years, who

offers his own seasoned meditations on the art of narrative prose. Grateful for his own mentors, chiefly Jesse Hill Ford, Short operates from the premise that certain techniques of writing can be conveyed and, with obvious passion for the subject, conveys twelve.

The result proves livelier than “tool kit” might suggest. For though the publishers compare the book to *Strunk and White*, and though it does share that oracle’s preference for clarity, directness, and partiality to the reader, *Tool Kit* lacks its dictatorial mood and seems more a friendly sharing of tips. And Short follows that most venerable of writing seminar dictums — show, don’t tell—filling the pages with excellent examples and anecdotes from an array of twentieth-century writers and his own career. To whom is *Tool Kit* addressed? Well, anyone interested in writing—but as the chief service of the book is an overview of the style currently in vogue, and occasionally waxes into pep talk, it appears directed to someone serious about writing but not yet published: a bit like telling a recent immigrant to lose the Bermuda shorts. Good advice—unless of course the immigrant turns out to be brilliant and keeps the shorts, in which case a year later we’re all wearing them. Short knows this, and his awareness tempers everything he says. “You can do anything you want on a page,” he says, “as long as you can *make it work* for the reader.”

Those of us convinced successful writing grows from having something to say and a deep desire to say it—and can be learned through only two things, reading and practice—will find a kindred spirit in Short, though for the first half of that formula he leaves us on our own, making us vow not to think about any of his principles until the second draft. And he frequently reminds us of what we’re trying to achieve: using language that “sings” to create the state of mind where “the ink-on-paper words suddenly seem to fall away, and the reader is transported into the place and time of the narrative.” I don’t think anyone ever claimed you could really teach somebody how to do that; but there is inspiration in knowing that’s what we’re after, and solace in realizing how hard it is.

“The meaning of a sentence should be as obvious as a grizzly bear in a well-lighted kitchen,” Short quotes John Gardner, and this insistence on clarity is the keystone of Short’s stylistic credo. He points out that authorial omniscience, like purple prose, is simply out of style, exposition must be handled with subtlety through scene and dialogue, and point of view is no place to get cute. It’s a buyer’s market out there; we must accommodate the reader, who is more comfortable with a single line of moral commitment, and has about a billion other books to read if yours doesn’t get snapping from page one.

Out the window, too, must go the indefinite and the abstract. William Carlos Williams’ imagist maxim “no ideas but in things” still holds up, Short argues, in the visually prejudiced atmosphere of contemporary fiction. And just in case anybody thought any of this was easy, Short gives us a peek into the writer’s workshop—the re-reading, the re-writing, the cutting: the slow process of “compression” that builds writing

into “muscle.” As for dialogue, don’t use it for exposition, avoid dialect, and remember, as William Sloane said, that if dialogue doesn’t do more than one job, it is “too inert for the purposes of fiction.” The discriminating audience has evolved with the art form. “The basic principles of narrative structure have been created and honed by writers over the centuries, by trial and error, to match the ways that we, the audience, most naturally take in information.” Ignore them at your peril.

Short distinguishes between “bone” writers—those prolific, outline-following word factories we all hate, and “flesh” writers like himself, who work instinctively, follow hunches, and are as surprised as anybody by where the story takes them. Just do what you do, he urges—and herein lies the best advice in the book: work every day. The voice of experience.

That such a manual as this can even be written attests to the hyper-refined nature of writing—the very idea of identifiable, reproducible techniques. A sad reality, actually, for any beginning writer—inheriting a medium so aware of itself. But *Tool Kit* is not trying to create clones so much as clarify for the beginner, and remind the veteran, where the starting point is. What we all love the most (Short too) is the one who comes along disrupting the entire apple cart of do’s and don’ts. But manuals aren’t meant for that one. Writing is fully alive and well—one of those too-useful things like ladders or scissors that, once invented, will never be outgrown. And people will always have stories to tell. As the good, specific advice in *A Writer’s Tool Kit* is the product of experience, it is well worth listening to.

“[A]n audience exists for anything that you, as a writer, can make *fresh and interesting* to a reader. Period.”

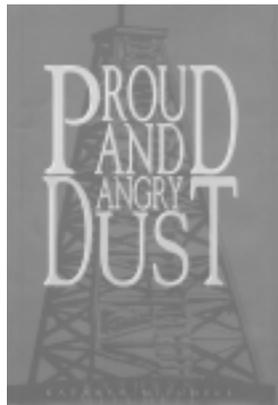
John M. Williams is an associate professor at LaGrange College.

Proud and Angry Dust

By Kathryn Mitchell

University Press of Colorado, 2001

\$24.95 Hardback



Anniston native Kathryn Mitchell’s first book, *Proud and Angry Dust*, is about how black people fared in Texas during the middle years of the last century. It is a little-known topic and an interesting one.

Her main character, Moose O’Malley, is a black teen during the late 1920s in the fictional town of Knox Plains, Texas. He grows up in a happy community that changes because of an

upheaval brought on by the discovery of oil.

Moose's story is of a town's sudden prosperity and how it attracts an evil and destructive crowd. The strangers corrupt several of the hard-working, kind citizens of Knox Plains through a scheme of marriage, murder, and theft.

Moose tells of funny times in elementary school with his best friend and cousin, Barnett. Moose follows Barnett into mischief more than once, and through the years, Barnett's antics get worse. He eventually pays for his trouble.

Before that plot begins, though, Moose tells stories about helping his widowed mother run their store. The customers are colorful characters, such as the town sourpuss, Miss Violet Nesbet, not liked by Barnett or Moose because of her shrewd shopping habits. She's also known for winning a ham each year at the town's annual hamming, an odd activity during which folks gather around a ham and try not to smile.

Others living in Moose's household are his Uncle Will and Barnett, who is the uncle's son. When Barnett gets a little older, he upsets the family by slipping out at night. He is curious about the lifestyle of the newly rich, and this leads to his witnessing a murder of one of Knox Plains' citizens. Moose is dismayed at Barnett's preoccupation with dangerous living but gets involved when they travel to Kansas City.

They visit a speak-easy where, coincidentally, they see some familiar characters plotting against several folks in Kansas City. Barnett wants to learn more about this evil crowd but Moose is hesitant. They argue.

"You're such a goody-good!" Barnett shrieked. "Are you planning to never have any fun in your whole life?"

"The trouble with trouble," I (Moose) answered, "is that it usually starts out as fun."

"That sounds like something Miz Davenport (their teacher) would say. I might as well have come to Kansas City with her."

While in Kansas City, Moose meets a black lawyer from Harvard University, Elliot Singer. The two become friends when Singer learns of Moose's desire to go to college and become a research scientist. Singer helps Moose get a summer internship at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama.

The following summer, Moose travels to Tuskegee, where he meets his idol, Dr. George Washington Carver. Moose's good manners gain him an inside view of the lives of the elite at the school. He develops a new vision for himself and he also falls in love with the sister of his benefactor. He struggles with trust, though, because she's a light-skinned girl and reminds him of the light-skinned women involved in the murder schemes. As any good hero would do, he resolves his feelings and, at the end of the novel, gets the girl.

Moose's link with the black lawyer leads to the resolution of the murder. Eventually, Barnett testifies, with the support of Moose, and the two help bring evil to justice.

It's admirable that Mitchell wants to tell a clean, wholesome story. She protects her main character a little too much instead of letting him experience life's troubles first hand.

Moose is what Barnett calls him, a "goody-good." He gets good grades, scores big in football, rises above the corruption around him. There are a few exceptions: Moose has one minor incident with a state trooper. He lies once or twice in the story, and he experiences a kiss of passion with his girlfriend. Here is his confession: "Conflicting emotions wrestled inside me until common sense, at least for a moment, got the upper hand." Most characters in fiction let emotions have the upper hand, which usually drives the story.

The book's story of "southern boy comes of age" is similar to many recent books, *Jim*, *The Boy* by Tony Earley, *The Painted House* by John Grisham, and *An Hour Before Daylight* by Jimmy Carter. This is a black child's perspective, though, and a thoughtful one with a great title. Little Knox Plains is a dusty place with many reasons to be angry about the evil, outside influences but it is always proud of what it is. Moose's life echoes that sentiment.

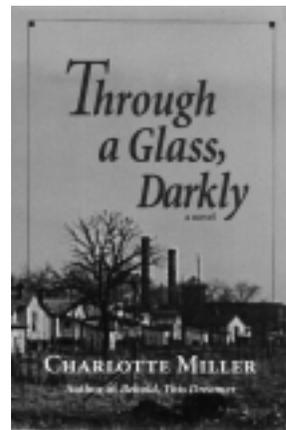
Sherry Kughn is a writer who lives in Anniston, where she is executive secretary at the Anniston Star.

Through a Glass, Darkly

By Charlotte Miller

NewSouth Books, 2001

\$27.95 Hardback



Readers of Charlotte Miller's first novel, *Behold, This Dreamer*, should enjoy reading her second, in what might be termed the Eason County trilogy. Like her first novel, *Through a Glass, Darkly* is a good read, a page turner, with suspense generated on almost every page.

The novel continues the ongoing story of Janson Sanders, the son of an Alabama tenant farmer who dreams of owning his own land, and his wife,

Elise, the pampered daughter of a self-aggrandizing Georgia planter. The action takes place in the late twenties and thirties. Escaping the vindictiveness of Elise's father, who resents Elise's having married a poor white with Cherokee blood, Janson is obliged to seek work in the cotton mill owned by Walter Eason, who runs Eason County with an iron hand. Janson struggles with the harsh exigencies of a mill worker's life, with the bigotry of the townspeople, and with Eason's vicious grandson, Buddy. In the Depression he turns to sharecropping, then gets a job with the WPA. The aging mill owner ultimately recognized Janson's worth, and

at the novel's end, Janson has a better job at the mill, with some hope for the future.

On one level, *Through a Glass, Darkly* renews the naturalistic novel's emphasis on economic exploitation, from Emile Zola's *Germinal* through John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*. The rich and powerful, driven by greed and lust, are the evildoers; the tenant farmers and mill workers are the salt of the earth. Miller complicates the paradigm by implying that the rich and powerful, falling into materialism, erecting William Blake's "dark, satanic mills," are self-blinded, seeing through a glass darkly, like those they exploit.

The story is told in third person subjective, shifting from character to character, without losing the impetus of a strong narrative line. At times, the tone becomes strident ("all that hope, all his dream gone again"). The last section is diffuse, wavering from Janson's struggle to make ends meet to his son's alienation, before culminating in a melodramatic succession of shocking episodes involving Buddy Eason. I would have preferred having the novel end earlier; on the other hand, given the passage of time necessitated by the trilogy form, implying ongoing experience instead of closure, I can understand the author's procedure. The problem, as I see it, with Buddy's viciousness lies in its implications. Buddy's obsession with fire and burning, his compulsive need to get back at his enemies are close to psychopathic. His father and grandfather are accountable for letting him run loose—far too long, it seems to me—but we don't know in what ways they helped shape him.

For me the novel's primary appeal lies in its re-creating of the times, its relevance as a slice of life, a chronicle of what southern poor white mill workers and sharecroppers went through in the twenties and thirties. Miller shows us what it's like to live in a mill house, lacking electricity and plumbing, canted on a hill, stone pillars supporting the skimpy porches, cordwood stacked against one wall. These details are not inert, as in a researched period piece. The cordwood is for the wood stove Elise burns biscuits on. Elise sees, and responds to, "gaudy flowered curtains" hanging in one window of a mill house, "sedate lace ones in the other."

Janson's attempts at sharecropping are also powerfully realized. We are shown how hard it is to get through the winter without money or credit, the nagging worry about making the crop, the backbreaking labor. "With spring came work, hard work with seemingly no end, plowing, planting, later chopping the cotton to remove the weeds and thin out the cotton plants, running around the rows with the plow then going back to bust the middles and uproot any weeds still there, poisoning the fields to keep the insects from destroying the plants." Here we see a committed writer at her best.

Charles Rose has published many short stories and reviews. His reviews have appeared in the Georgia Review, Southern Review, Southern Humanities Review, and the Chattahoochee Review.

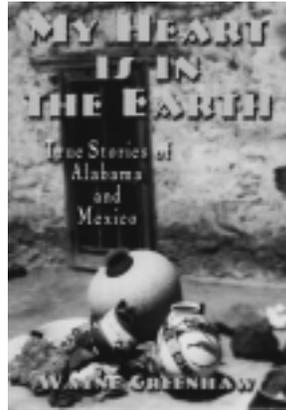
My Heart Is In The Earth

True Stories of Alabama and Mexico

By Wayne Greenhaw

River City Publishing, 2001

\$25 Cloth



In this wide-ranging collection of essays, Wayne Greenhaw takes the reader with him on some of the journeys he's made in his richly lived and well-remembered life. Journalist, novelist, teacher, and raconteur, Greenhaw himself comes vividly to life in these pages, as when he writes in "Goodbye, George," "As I stood in the chambers of the Alabama House of Representatives in the Capitol on Goat Hill and listened to the re-

sounding voice of George C. Wallace, I cried."

My Heart Is In The Earth: True Stories of Alabama and Mexico is evenly divided between the two places Greenhaw loves most. He sees his home state and beloved Mexico as astoundingly comparable and brings the reader to the same conclusion: "I have found many mysteries in both places. Both are laced with myths true and untrue. Both are filled with delightful people who amaze and confound."

The first section of the book is composed of previously published columns and essays that detail an Alabamian's very personal take on the state's social, economic, cultural, and political history. Newcomers to Greenhaw's unique brand of journalism will discover a state of bitter poverty, profound beauty, and an unbounded capacity for personal and political redemption, which softens its painful race history.

The collection opens with "In Search of the Past," in which a boyhood encounter with Hank Williams becomes a metaphor for a growing definition of Alabama manhood. Greenhaw is at his most eloquent when he describes the emotional connections he makes between memory, art, and human relationships:

"When a man wakes alone in an old-time tourist court on a lost highway in the middle of nowhere with a hangover and memory, last night's cigarettes sour in the roof of his mouth, the sound of a sweet thing's laughter echoing sadly in his ears, and a faded picture of Jesus staring down from the rain-stained wall, he knows the resonance of a Hank Williams blues song . . . I feel his hurt, the deep-down hard tones, the knowledge of my own hurt, my own pain in a technicolored world. I remember my father's hurt eyes in his last years, before he died at age fifty-three, long-suffering and lonesome."

The essays in this first section are dominated by profiles of Alabamians, ranging from Robert Shelton, Imperial Wizard of the United Klans of America (whom Greenhaw remembers as a gas-pumping teenager in Tuscaloosa), to “Nub,” the Crimson Tide’s “ultimate fan.” The essays reveal little-known and long-forgotten bits of history and restate well-known facts in refreshing ways. Greenhaw unmasks Forrest Carter, author of *The Education of Little Tree* as “Asa Earl Carter: The Man With Two Identities” and tells the story of how Steve Young came to write his hit song in “The Sunday of *Seven Bridges Road*.” Greenhaw’s family stories reveal both personal affection and the universality of loving remembrance. In “Bub Able” and “Regular Work, Meat on the Table,” Greenhaw’s granddaddy comes to life to further define manhood. Personal or global in scope, the past is always in the picture in these pieces. Perhaps the most poignant essay in the collection is “Lottie Lett. 90 Years. Alabama. Never ‘Bed Sick.’ Gone Now.” Published in *The New York Times* in 1976, this brief portrait of a slave’s daughter, told mostly in her words, reminds us of how short the span of history truly is.

In the second half, Greenhaw turns to Mexico, a land he fell in love with at age 18 and has returned to throughout his life. At 18, he traveled by train to study writing at the Instituto Allende in San Miguel de Allende. Expatriates and locals mingled there in what must have been a magical place and time, for it has never lost its hold on Greenhaw’s imagination. Over the past forty years he has written frequently and powerfully about the country he finds “*muy simpatico* . . . filled with mystery and wonder and tragedy.”

Like the Alabama essays, the pieces set in Mexico mix personal experience, observation, history, and research. The result is exotic, engrossing, informative, and totally believable. “Ordinary” locals drink *cuba libres* with the likes of Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac in bars where art, politics, passion, and sudden death are both topics of discussion and everyday experiences. Readers only marginally familiar with Mexican art and history will come away hungering for more after Greenhaw’s telling the story of “*el maestro*,” Don David Alfaro Siqueiros, and his unfinished masterpiece in “Behind Another Wall” and the love between Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo (in which the unlikely place and manner of Leon Trotsky’s death are discussed) in “Diego Rivera & Frida Kahlo: Gentle Giant, Tortured Soul.” At the center of this section is “William Spratling: Alabama’s Mexican Connection,” a tightly written biography of the legendary silver artist of Taxco whose Alabama connections included Auburn University.

As intriguing as these stories are, the best writing in the second half of the book is personal. Readers who write and those who are fascinated by the writing process will appreciate the spots in which Greenhaw, the professional, remembers his youthful struggles to become a more accomplished wordsmith. He describes his early days at the Instituto: “I

wrote. I read my stories in class. My teachers did not like my Southern way of writing. They chided me for having my characters ‘yell’ or ‘holler’ and their faces soured at some of my descriptions. I was clumsy, too Alabama, too country. They instructed me to read F. Scott Fitzgerald’s stories about growing up. All of these teachers were from the Midwest or West or New York.” He recounts writing a story about “a cousin back home in Alabama . . . who loved his coon dog more than moonshine or money” and reading it to his class at the Instituto, feeling “pangs of embarrassment.” Fortunately for his readers, Greenhaw crossed paths in Mexico with Ashmead Scott, who helped him use his background and true voice, to use “the real people who made up my world back home in Alabama.” These people “breathed and laughed and cried and loved in my memory,” he writes.

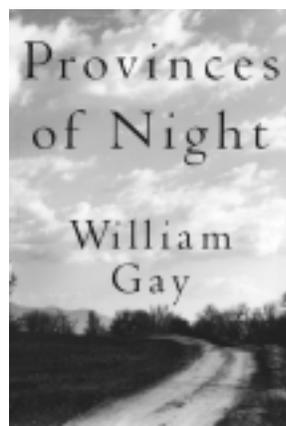
In *My Heart Is In The Earth*, many of these people live for readers, too. At the close of this collection, Greenhaw expresses his desire to “learn more” about both Alabama and Mexico. Let’s hope he learns more and writes it all down.

Jackie Payne is an instructor of English at Alabama State University.

Provinces of Night

By William Gay

Doubleday, 2000
\$23.95 Hardback



William Gay writes about a hill-pocked stretch of Tennessee southwest of Nashville in the pre-Kmart, pre-sun belt forties and fifties. Here unregenerate white men, xenophobic, doom-driven “men who kill each other over being called a son of a bitch with the inflection of the voice a shade wrong or over looking at the wrong woman the wrong way,” blindly follow outworn codes without losing their connection to nature and the land. There is a church in Gay’s world, but little Christian piety. Eccentric old ladies, decadent aristocrats, decent country folk, precocious children, you won’t find them here, or blacks either, although something of African-American travail is perpetuated in the blues, a recurring thematic motif. The women are low-rent Loreleis, boozy slatterns; some run off; others turn into benighted crones. One grotesque tale concerning the promiscuous Hixon girls

goes that they buried their born-dead babies in wide-mouthed Mason jars. In the prologue to *Provinces of Night*—the land is being bulldozed to make way for an artificial lake—a swamper shows the superintendent “diminutive human bones of a marvelous delicacy” interred in one of the Mason jars, abomination becoming relic. In the epilogue, the dead have been dug up and hauled away in their coffins; then the water is cut from the river through a creek; the land is inundated; the old ways and the old voices are “silenced forever.”

Gay’s first novel, *The Long Home*, is presided over by a vicious juke-joint proprietor, a cracker-barrel Mephistopheles, Hardin. Although Hardin gets his comeuppance, his nemesis, William Tell Oliver, cannot save the youth Hardin has damaged and driven away. One has to say darkness prevails, for Oliver can only find comfort in recurring patterns of nature. “At night the moon traced its accustomed course and the timeless whippoorwills tolled from the dark and they might have been the selfsame whippoorwills that called to him in his youth.” In *Provinces of Night*, Gay strives for a significance lodged in provisional human choice, without discounting the power of death, lust, and human meanness. His main character, Fleming Bloodworth, calls to mind a familiar literary archetype, the sensitive youth in search of a calling. But there is a difference. Although he is a fledging writer and something of a romantic (he’s read *Of Time and the River* and is taken with Alfred Noyes’ poem “The Highwayman”), Fleming knows his way around the boondocks. He can plant pine seedlings and chop wood, and when he has to, he measures up to what necessity demands of him.

As the novel opens, his father, Boyd, has deserted him, has run off to track down Fleming’s wayward mother and her lover (Boyd finds them in Detroit and kills the lover). Fleming tolerated the Bloodworth family’s faults and idiosyncrasies but refuses to live in his conniving Uncle Brady’s house, preferring the solitude of his father’s house, a solitude, he later learns, ridden with family ghosts and crazy tribal ways. When his grandfather, E. F. Bloodworth, a banjo picking, blues singing reprobate wasting away in Arkansas, comes home, Fleming finds a mentor well versed in the primordial. He won’t follow in the old man’s footsteps, but he’ll remember Bloodworth singing the blues, his tall tales and pithy remarks on life. One feels E. F.’s arrival has something to do with Fleming falling in love—with a free and easy, sharp-tongued town girl, Raven Lee Halfacre, who, although she has a trashy, alcoholic mama, has attained considerable self-awareness. She cares for Fleming but isn’t willing to have sex with him.

I won’t spoil this novel for the reader by revealing how it comes out, beyond saying that Fleming *may* become a writer and he *may* have a life with Raven Lee. Fleming’s story is not the only story in the novel, which moves by fits and starts with numerous points of view shifts. E. F.

Bloodworth’s return and last days, Boyd’s bleak sojourn in Detroit, Fleming’s buffoon-buddy Junior Albright’s misadventures, and much else are part of the mix. Gay’s writing is uneven but never listless. Risking the rhetorical phrase, the audacious, at time overwrought metaphor or simile (“the strewn lights of a mountain town like spilled jewelry,” “his seed that had bloomed finally in poisonous and evil flames”), Gay pushes his prose as far as it will go, sometimes a little farther. On occasion, he evokes an eerie beauty, an airplane plunging through “the tips of furs and cedars, the air full of chipped greenery and the smell of pines,” fireflies glowing on dark waters. He has a gift for dark comedy—a roof crimper, momentarily left untended, edges off a roof, “crimping sheer air” before crashing to the concrete below. The local worthies gather around the wreckage, “hands on knees, peering down at it like soldiers gathered around a comrade.” Without splashing on local color or ridiculing cretinous caricatures, which we see a lot of in southern fiction these days, Gay’s fiction calls into question certain melioristic, deceptively reasonable “civilizing” sureties we get by on from day to day.

Charles Rose

The Island of Lost Luggage

by Janet McAdams

The University of Arizona Press, 2000
\$13.95 Paper

Winner of the 1999 First Book Award of the Native Writers’ Circle of the Americas, as well as winner of a 2000 American Book Award, *The Island of Lost Luggage* wasn’t what I expected it to be. “Boulevard of Heroes” and “The Door of the Devil” refer to, as McAdams puts it, “events that took place in El Salvador during the late 1980s” and they led back to Carolyn Forché’s transformative *The Country Between Us*, a book relating her experiences in El Salvador in the late 1970s. It didn’t take long for me to see, though, that the ground McAdams covers defies any particular nation’s borders or history—as well as the ideas of boundary and history themselves. “Carry a map so worn/ it is open to possibility,” she tells us in “Advice to Travelers II” and she herself wears out many a map in this book, opening cracks hope and possibility might just squeeze through.

In “News from the Imaginary Front,” McAdams takes her experience and adds to it the additional sophistication of a post-modern sensibility:

Reader, come closer.
I’ll tell the story
the way
I know you want to hear it.

Think this:
It could have been me
Think this:
It could have been any
one of us. It wasn't.

Think chocolate, think coffee.
Reader, it's such a special pleasure—
a return ticket and danger.

Are you pleased about the danger?
Hold tight to your ticket, we're moving
quicker than history.

And these poems do move quicker than history. We go from the Mexican Revolution, to El Salvador in the '80s ("Remember this, Reader," McAdams says, shaming us for our trendiness, "Central America was hip/in those years. . . . We softened the g in Nicaragua./We learned to call it Salvador/without the article" to Columbus in the 15th century, to the Korean Airlines Disaster—and that's all in the first section. But McAdams isn't interested in whether we can keep our dates straight for the quiz at the back of the book (there isn't one). Rather, she wants us to see the world and our history in it in all its not-so-glorious dimensions. In fact, McAdams' poems three-dimensionalize history, layer it in ways that, as the book jacket says, forge "surprising links among seemingly unrelated forms of violence and resistance in today's world."

Of course, the dimension that most intrigues McAdams is the fourth—time. As she says in "A Woman Speaks to Her Past," "I write this letter to tell you everything,/but it is you who must speak." This seems to be the task in *The Island of Lost Luggage*—to make the past, and the future, speak to us. And it's the latter that steps up to the podium in the second and most free-ranging section of the book. According to McAdams' notes, "The Thousand-Year War" is "a sequence of poems set in a post-environmental holocaust landscape." Now, I'm as post-modern as the next gal, but I had no idea what a "post-environmental" landscape could be. So I let McAdams tell me:

The ash, gray and fine as silk,

is drifting like the past we hold onto—
trees shrills with blackbirds, the memory of corn,
of whole bodies of clear blue water.

Or better, this description of an imagined trip to the once-grand Grand Hotel where the speaker's companion finds the "delicate bones of an animal" behind the altar of a "dark cathedral":

At the sound of our voices,
the skeleton collapsed into itself, the way

a house of cards falls when the table is jostled.
Bits of fur rose like fine mist from the animal
we could not identify, and drifted, casual
as the spurs of wild daffodils we blew away
as children, those summers near Anuncio. Sister,
do you remember?

It is the act of speaking, of writing this history that dissolves the thing that is direct evidence of the past, the remains of life depicted here as merely "a house of cards." When those remains drift away, they do so like the speaker's own unwritten history, daffodils casually blowing away, until the final question is put: "do you remember?"

McAdams writes about and from memory and she makes it clear that every memory is stitched to a loss. The trouble is that it's hard to tell if that's a good or a bad thing. The speaker in "After the War" suggests that it depends on the memory. The war of the title refers to both the speaker's battles with her ex, and his Vietnam-embattled psyche. "I loved you in ways you/cannot begin to imagine," the speaker says, having left the abuser finally behind—or not: "Memory crawls from every muscle in my body./I wake with a fist in my stomach/as the sky rows down/the difficult hours toward dawn." A bad memory, no doubt, and one better lost—which is just what the speaker attempts to do. Leaving behind "the woman with my face," she drives past the cemetery "thick with the graves of women who stayed," rolling down the window and opening her hand to the wind. "I let them go. I let them all go," she says, in what is as nearly perfect a conclusion as anyone could possibly devise to such a story, or book. On the Island of Lost Luggage, the imagined afterlife of the title poem, "no one mourns for the sorry world that sent them" there. For those of us still waiting to arrive, though, *The Island of Lost Luggage* is a complex rendering of that world—our world as McAdams chooses to remember it.

Linda Frost is associate professor of English at UAB and editor-in-chief of PMS Poemmemoirstory.

Encanchata

By Robert Ely

Court Street Press, 2001
\$8.95 Paper

Robert Ely's *Encanchata* is a very slender book of poems. He begins it with a "Note – Encanchata, also spelled 'Ikantchati,' was a Creek Indian village on the high bluffs of the Alabama River near the site that eventually became the city of Montgomery." The Note sets the tone and sense of place for the poems that follow. As Ely has a law practice in Montgomery, it is that place from which he writes.

The opening poem, “Seed,” has a haunting quality that evokes a sense of the ephemeral that ties the past to our present. “Brown magnolia leaf, / Young brave’s skidding mocasin / (Writes no one’s long name). . . Did I imagine stream, or / Did a thought / Of autumn lakes at dawn / Escape my empty cup?”

In “Affinities,” Ely takes the everyday interaction of anyone, anywhere in work-a-day America, and addresses the space between each of us. That space is the star of this poem and gives a person pause. The ordinary interactions of people are rendered extraordinary as we consider “If the instant accident / That arcs the gap between two bodies / Is aware of loneliness or love.”

Reaction to poetry is usually visceral, and it should be. Poetry is the personal interior conversation of one person made public. You either relate to it or not. You either like it or not.

There are eleven poems in this slim volume – I like it.

Artist and writer Perle Champion lives in Birmingham.

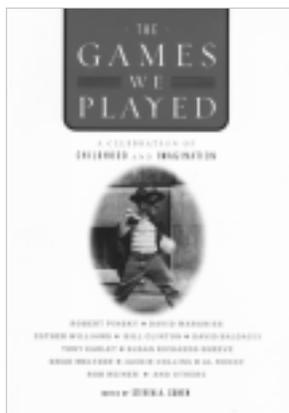
The Games We Played

A Celebration of Childhood and Imagination

Edited by Steven A. Cohen

Simon & Schuster, 2001

\$20 Hardback



The Games We Played is a collection of essays by authors ranging from David Maraniss and Al Roker to Bill Clinton and Jackie Collins and including Tony Earley, George Plimpton, and Daniel Wallace. Given the vast experience of the contributors, you can expect a wide range in the quality essays.

The collection is based on the premise that the games of childhood have forever changed in our new technologi-

cally advanced society. Cohen recognizes, however, that the imagination was (and possibly still can be?) the key to fabulous childhood games. The included essays range from traditional narratives to Robert Pinsky writing in verse and Judd Winick’s essay as cartoon.

Cohen scores points in my book by quoting Willie Wonka in the Introduction: “We are the dreamers of dreams” and continues to have my attention with some of the games he played—games such as Turbo Ball, Roof Baseball, Sumo Soccer, and Swamp Man. I am quite sure that all of us can remember the made-up adventures we played with siblings

or neighbors, or even just ourselves. These are the games celebrated in this book.

One of the best essays is David Maraniss’s “The Sweet Long Days,” in which he recalls losing his autographed baseball to Winky the elephant. Porter Shreve’s “Ping-Pong Palace” is a wonderful recollection of children’s competitive natures—his, in particular, being exercised in a orange and white garage that looked like a Dreamsickle. The book finishes with a fine essay by Rob Reiner about growing up in New York and the joys of a pink Spalden ball.

These are traditions of childhood that we remember with a particular celebratory glow about them. And we should. In the essays of *The Games We Played*, they mark a world on its way out, being replaced by one that some think is new and more exciting.

That, I guess, just depends on your point of view.

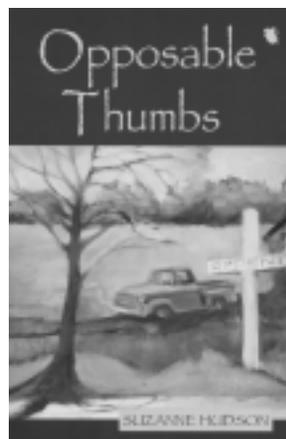
Poet Kyes Stevens teaches writing to inmates at the Talladega Federal Prison.

Opposable Thumbs

Suzanne Hudson

Livingston Press, 2001

\$12.95 Paper



The opening lines of the title story of Suzanne Hudson’s collection of short stories, *Opposable Thumbs*, reminds me of the opening lines of New Zealand author Ronald Hugh Morieson’s novel *The Scarecrow*. Hudson’s stories mine that same rich vein that Morieson found in 1960s rural New Zealand, that is, small town family life dominated by religion and fissured by desire, guilt, and bodily mutilation. However, rather than the portrayal of unrelenting

misery and struggle, Hudson infuses many of these stories with welcome touches of black humor and wicked irony.

Hudson’s stories center on small-town or semi-rural characters encompassing elements of the Southern gothic that are evocative of Flannery O’Connor, but the actual setting is not as significant as the themes that dominate and mar the collection. “LaPrade,” an early story published in *Penthouse* after she won a short story contest judged by Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. and Toni Morrison, tells the story of a simpleton incestuous father who after getting his daughter, Missy, pregnant can not deal with the arrival of a new rival for her affections. The story centers on the daughter’s decision as she notes her father’s

animosity. “At first she was sure that LaPrade would get over his jealousy of the baby, but the jealousy was fading into hatred now, and Missy was afraid – especially when she thought of how her father used to be.” During the Easter hide-the-egg hunt LaPrade hides the baby and Missy must choose between escaping her predicament, which means leaving her father or staying and possibly losing her baby.

One of the other most affecting stories of the collection is “See Ruby Falls,” which again mixes family guilt and sexual longing with political frustration for cataclysmic results. Essentially the story of a family vacation to see the underground Ruby Falls, it involves Eustace, an out-of-work miner, who had followed in his dead father’s footsteps in organizing for the union at a time when unionism was losing its grip. The family history and the collapsing labor movement come together as Eustace remembers the strike he organized. “Eustace had watched his father go through strikes, knew the sacrifice. What he had not known was that the company would manage to hold on, that his friends would be out for ten months, then eighteen, then had to move on or give in. By that time another thing had become clear: things were coming apart so fast Eustace did not have enough hands to keep them together.”

The frustrations of a former union man, faced with the downturn in labor militancy, the faltering economy and the rise of non-unionized labor is directed to his brother’s wife, the detestable Marble, with her consumer demands and her disgusting fecundity. As he surveys the children of his brother’s wife he muses, “And they all whined, just like Marble, with exception of Crystal, who had not yet learned how. He glanced at the baby. The long, brown nipple popped from her tiny pink mouth. When Marble was seventeen, she had used those breasts to tease; now he watched a droplet of milk ooze from the same place his own tongue had touched and enjoyed until she decided that Jole would be the more malleable brother.”

Finally as the family tour the underground site that contains the waterfall Eustace’s fury builds to murderous intent as he wishes Marble dead, imagining the limestone “crushing down upon her massive breasts” and “pulverizing her ribs into sharp pebbles.” Only with her death does Eustace believe “he could ever get back his family history, his honor, and his brother.”

“See Ruby Falls” embodies elements and themes that recur in just about all of Hudson’s stories: family relations or friendships fissured by frustration, guilt, and sexual longing dominated by the ever-present element of death. There is also in many of the best stories a palpable sense of loss amongst the characters that comes from being on the margins. They are not exactly losers, but they profoundly feel their isolation as well as a sense of missed possibilities and lost opportunities. This is something we can all understand.

Grant Pheloung teaches in the English Department at Auburn University.

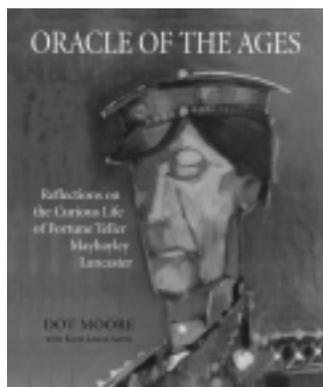
Oracle of the Ages

Reflections of the Curious Life of Fortune Teller
Mayhayley Lancaster

By Dot Moore with Katie Lamar Smith

NewSouth, 2001

\$23.95 Hardback



Dot Moore, with Katie Lamar Smith, has written a delightful story-biography of one of the South’s most mysterious and legendary characters, Mayhayley Lancaster. This fantastic woman—freakish and authentic, glorious and grotesque—was fortune teller, school teacher, lawyer, politician, snake charmer, numbers runner, wealthy businesswoman,

informer, performer, and a champion of the downtrodden.

Moore’s approach to this complex woman is an effective one: that of using the various views of those who knew her best. There is the view of Willis Hemmings who as a youngster worked for Mayhayley, recalling a time Mayhayley saw God balling up a big wad of mule turds and hurling it down the road so hard “it didn’t stop until it killed seven preachers.” And then a glance at J.C. Otwell of the State Patrol seeking audience at midnight with the reclusive guru: “after a lot of blam, blam, blamming on her door, Mayhayley finally lit a kerosene lamp and appeared in its light at a small window. The gaunt, long-nosed face with its reflecting glass eye...”

And then there was the first time Wayne P. Sewell of the entertainment industry saw her – “a bizarre looking woman walking toward him. She wore garish colors and a dress shorter than most women dared to wear at the time, for it actually showed her knees above her high-topped Victorian shoes. Her tall figure was crowned with a big hat that seemed as if about to fly right off her head, with all the feathers that dangled from its brim...and as she drew closer he saw she was wearing a patch on one eye and looked more like a man than a woman.”

And there is a clip of insightful dialogue about the murderer John Wallace, whom Mayhayley, by her testimony, doomed to the electric chair. Wallace had once remarked that he expected to see Mayhayley in Heaven or Hell. To which Mayhayley declared, “Well, he’ll surely not come to my funeral.” And after a long pause, “and I’ll be damned if I’ll go to his.”

And there is the view of “The Preacher’s Wife” and, of course, Moore’s own penetrating exposition, and more –

right down to the audacity of Mayhayley's epitaph, the old prophet alluding to herself and Jesus: "Neither did his brethren believe in him" (St. John 7:5).

But Moore's skill is not limited to her technique of presentation; she has a direct and unpretentious style, plus a sure ear for "country" talk: lawman Otwell checking up on Mayhayley's numbers racket – "Can you beat it? Here it is as cold as a titches witty...all these cars...how you suppose those nuts get that kind of money to throw away?" And note that little spoonerism — "titches witty" for "witch's titty."

Finally, giving this biography its inner tension and cohesion is Moore's constant awareness of Mayhayley's mystique, which in turn carries the reader along on the crest of belief and exasperation – the same intriguing powers that corralled and enthralled Mayhayley's clients and beholders almost a century ago. What a gal this Mayhayley Lancaster!

Though worlds and wardrobes removed from the likes of Queen Elizabeth and Cleopatra, Mayhayley was made of the same indomitable stuff that, indeed, made her an "Oracle of the Ages."

Oxford Stroud's new novel, To Yield a Dream, will be coming out in 2002.

B-Four

By Sam Hodges

University of Alabama Press, 2000
\$16.95 Paperback

B-Four by Sam Hodges is a funny book. It is comic from start to finish and has no snideness or meanness in it. It is pleasant to read, amusing, delightful.

Have I repeated myself?

Well, yes, on purpose, because comic fiction in Alabama is not all that common. We could use a lot more of it. It's not that there hasn't been any at all. Johnson Jones Hooper's tales of Captain Simon Suggs are funny if your taste runs to eye gouging. Forrest Gump was an amusing idiot, and the clandestine cannibalism of *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe* has some entertainment value. Eugene Walter was unfailingly funny and Mark Childress is clever and whimsical. Elise Sanguinetti taps the funny side of the civil rights struggle in *The Last of the Whitfields*. Recently, *Eating the Cheshire Cat* by Helen Ellis was a riot. I acknowledge all this and more. But Alabama fiction has been, for the most part, serious business. There are few chuckles in Huie's *The Klansman* or Stribling's *The Store*. William March of *Company K*, Borden Deal, even Harper Lee in *To Kill a Mockingbird* are not exactly lighthearted.

Why? The easy answer is that issues of poverty, hunger, corrupt politics, racial tension, and violence are not amusing

subjects, and do not inspire novelists to write amusing tales. With all the necessary qualifications, I do believe this to be the case.

B-Four is, then, all the more welcome. The title of B-hyphen-F-O-U-R is the place to begin. Young Beauregard Forrest of Birmingham, just out of high school, has decided to postpone college and work for the local newspaper, called here the *Birmingham Standard-Dispatch*. He is given the job only because his father, a prominent banker, approves loans for the paper. Beauregard's beat at the paper is minor obituaries and the Pet of the Week "Adopt Me Please." So his pieces never get published any closer to the front page than section B, page four. B-Four.

Beauregard serves in a confederate reenactment unit led by his father. A good deal of the humor in the novel concerns their maneuvers. Beauregard is a skilled reenactor, even a specialist. He takes a hit. He falls. Hodges writes, "He knew he was a good dead man. Others—including his father—had told him. For one thing he didn't overdo the death itself, as did so many... he could go long stretches without opening his eyes or blinking, depending whether it was a closed or open-eyed death. He had great tolerance, too, for field discomforts. Neither anthills nor chiggers fazed him."

Beauregard's older brother, Jackson Forrest, has started an extremely successful business named Get Down, Inc., using the skills he learned as a frat boy in Tuscaloosa. His company

FOSHEE & GEORGE, LLC
ATTORNEYS AT LAW

Jeffery A. Foshee
Edward M. George

- Employment Law / EEOC
- Education / School Law
- Administrative Law
- Civil Rights
- Literary / Music
- Mediation



No representation is made that the quality of the legal services to be performed is greater than the quality of legal services performed by other lawyers.

265-1960

900 S. PERRY ST., SUITE B • MONTGOMERY, AL 36104

organizes, for clients, wild parties. Hodges is also very good at describing and satirizing the staff at the paper. Everybody catches some. There are reporters who graduated from midwestern journalism schools who “with their out-of-tune-guitar-string-voices couldn’t quit talking about how popular the tractor pull was in Birmingham, as if it wasn’t anywhere else, as if the midwest had no tractors.” And the local boys greet each other, endlessly, mindlessly, with “Roll Tide,” as in Roll Tide, good morning. Roll Tide, how are you? Roll

Tide, fine, thanks. Roll Tide, see you later.

Beauregard is moving along contentedly until he falls in love with a kind of hippy chick. Now he wants to impress her with journalistic success. A mobile classroom has been stolen from a local school. Can he find it, solve the mystery, write up the story and get it printed on the first page, above the fold, and win the heart of the fair Lorena? You bet.

Don Noble is host of APT's BookMark.

ASCA

Grant Writing Workshops

The Alabama Writers' Forum and the Alabama Center for the Book will co-sponsor two grant-writing workshops led by Randy Shoults, Literature Programs Manager at the Alabama State Council on the Arts.

The first workshop will be held at the Bay Minette Public Library from 10 A.M. to 1 P.M. on Friday, February 15. The second will be March 7, 10 A.M. to 1 P.M., at the University of Montevallo.

Both workshops will offer an opportunity for people involved in literary programming to learn about applying to the Alabama State Council on the Arts (ASCA). That includes but is not limited to writers and teachers and staff and board members of

- local arts councils
 - public libraries
- colleges and universities
 - bookstores
- and publishing companies

The mission of the Alabama State Council on the Arts is to “promote Alabama’s diverse artistic and cultural resources.” Shoults will discuss what that means in terms of the agency’s funding interests, as well as what it seeks in a proposal and the actual nuts-and-bolts process of making an application. ASCA would like to see an increasing number of applications for grants from the literary branch of the Council. “Increased requests,” notes Shoults, “often lead to increased funding.

Besides offering information about ASCA and its grants programs, the workshops will give

participants an opportunity to learn about one another’s present and planned projects and to share ideas.

Both workshops are free. Each will conclude around noon, with lunch and time for discussion following. Lunch will be provided but participants must call to reserve a meal. To do so, please call the Alabama Center for the Book at 334-844-4946. For information on the content of the workshops, please call Randy Shoults at 334-242-4075, ext. 224. For more information about ASCA, check out its website at <http://arts.state.al.us>.

Profile

Picture graduating from high school with Richard Dreyfuss and Rob Reiner, living two doors down from George Burns, and having Betty Grable as your godmother. Such is the real life of Colonel Michael Ritz, an instructor for the Air War College at Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery. Ritz is also a Hollywood screenwriter.

Michael Ritz grew up in the entertainment community of Southern California. His father, Harry Ritz, was one of the Ritz Brothers, whose vaudevillian-style comedy act predated the Marx Brothers in film and in Las Vegas. Harry Ritz is said to have been one of the most influential teachers of comedian Jerry Lewis, and was reportedly Mel Brooks' favorite comedian. Ritz's mother and father met at the famed Hollywood hang-out, the Brown Derby. In short, Ritz grew up in a place where the stars on the ground are as bright as those in the sky.

With so many connections, it's not surprising that Ritz found himself working for NBC-TV in guest relations as a young man. He worked on such shows as *Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In*, and various Bob Hope specials, where his job as a liaison between the studios and the production company introduced him to leading players in the entertainment game. By his senior year in college, he was working steadily on the set of *The Dean Martin Show*.

But the United States was engaged in the Viet Nam war, and Ritz's National Guard unit was called up. "In those days, you either found a way to get out of it or you got into it. I got into it," says Ritz. His involvement proved to be the beginning of a dual-career lifestyle that endures to this day.

In the 1970s, Ritz landed a job as the assistant to the head of production at Columbia Pictures, working on pictures such as *Bob and Carol and Ted and Alice*, *Funny Girl*, and *Funny Lady*. He says that although the job was somewhat that of a "glorified gopher," he learned all he could learn during that experience. Every day, he'd head to the sets early to meet with the actors, and then make sure the needs and wishes of the producers and writers were in tune with those of the actors. "That's how you learn production," he says.

He met producer Aaron Spelling on the studio lot one day, and mentioned his interest in working with him, then a part of the Spelling/Goldberg production team, a division of Desilu Productions. Throughout his career, Ritz had written small segments of scripts, and he found that writing was one of his main interests. He wrote a full episode for the television show, *The Flying Nun*. Soon after this experience, he set up shop as an independent screenwriter, working on such

A Picture of Success



Michael Ritz

programs as *Police Story*, *Love American Style*, and *Police Woman*.

Most of his writing since that time has been as a ghost writer, a "script doctor." "It's lucrative, but you don't get any credit," says Ritz, who isn't bothered by the trade-off. "When a film wins Best Picture, lots of people don't get any credit."

His parallel career in the military currently has him living in Montgomery and teaching at the Air War College, while offering some enrichment seminars on screen-writing with Huntingdon College. For the government, Ritz produces documentary short-subjects and instructional films which are viewed by thousands of people, including those in the military, government and politics. "Getting your work on screen is the main thing. It's writing, it's making films. That's the most important

thing—to keep working your craft. If your soul is working in film, you can do it. There are many creative avenues."

Ritz's own small production company is working on two films at the moment, including *Blue Fire*, a bio-terrorist thriller put on hold for a while because of recent events. Ritz takes every opportunity to share with young writers the mechanics of the screenwriting craft, to boost writers' resolve, and to teach. He is planning a one-day screenwriting workshop at Huntingdon College in February through the college's Continuing Education program, and will teach high school students in Huntingdon's summer Writers' Workshop. At the Air War College, one of his upcoming courses will examine the image of the U.S. military as depicted in motion pictures and television. For this course, he will use clips from more than 200 films and shows, focusing on WWII and Viet Nam. He'll also be the featured speaker for Huntingdon's Patron's of the Library dinner in April.

Ritz recognizes that his parallel careers are both unique and special. "My father always told me to have another job. A large amount of his career was behind him when I was born. By then, he was 39 and had been in films and vaudeville. But he made so much more money by reinventing his career and being one of the first Las Vegas comedy acts. I'm fortunate that in my work I can integrate both the military and Hollywood backgrounds. I tell students all the time that there are so many opportunities to work if you look for them." Ritz believes in making them happen.

Su Ofe is director of Communications at Huntingdon College. For information on screenwriting courses at Huntingdon, call (334) 833-4522.

Master of Fine Arts in Writing

brief-residency

Spalding University offers a two-year, brief-residency Master of Fine Arts in Writing. Features of this program are

- concentrations in fiction, poetry, creative nonfiction, and writing for children with an option of including study in a genre other than the concentration area

- 10-day residencies in May and October in Louisville, an easily accessible city
- prize-winning, publishing teaching faculty from all parts of the country
- one-on-one individualized study throughout the semester by correspondence
- an optional editing/publishing component with *The Louisville Review*
- opportunities to experience the interrelatedness of the arts through attending Louisville's outstanding cultural events
- five-to-one student/faculty ratio

Program Director

Sena Jeter Naslund

Administrative Director

Karen J. Mann

Faculty • Dianne Aprile • Julie Brickman • Louella Bryant
Charles Gaines • Roy Hoffman • Robin Lippincott • Sena Jeter Naslund
Greg Pape • Melissa Pritchard • Jeanie Thompson • Luke Wallin

Recent and Upcoming Guests • Ernest J. Gaines • Maura Stanton
Richard Cecil • Frederick Smock • Yusef Komunyakaa
Molly Peacock • David Gessner • Barry Moser

For information contact:

Graduate Admissions-MFA
Spalding University
851 S. Fourth St.
Louisville, KY 40203
502.585.7105
800.896.8941, ext. 2105
gradadmissions@spalding.edu



COMMENTS FROM OUR STUDENTS

I feel so fortunate to be a part of Spalding's program. There was not a single workshop, lecture, or presentation I felt I could do without. They all were valuable and enriching. Our workshop leaders set up a positive, nurturing, but helpful environment.

—Maryann Lesert Lewis, Michigan

Every day of the residency was more fruitful and inspiring than the last! The cross-genre, multi-discipline approach to writing is nothing short of brilliant. Like all good ideas, one wonders why this philosophy wasn't instituted at the very inception of all MFA in Writing programs. Lucky for us, we have undertaken a program with true vision!

—Kaylene Johnson, Alaska

I think the structure of the program is brilliant. Every layer works. I couldn't find a single thing that I would have wanted to miss. Overall I would rate this new MFA an A+. I made the right decision.

—Linda Parker, Alabama

In a perfect world, where you could have anything, and you wished to have the best of the best, the ideal being an encouraging, generous, inclusive, graceful, fantastic, on-fire creative writing program: ask for a Spalding MFAW.

—Lloyd Kelly, Kentucky

mfa@spalding.edu

www.spalding.edu/graduate/MFAinWriting

The Louisville Review and Fleur-de-Lis Press announce a poetry competition for a \$1,000 prize and book-length publication. Deadline: May 1, 2002. See www.louisvillereview.org for details.

Southern Writers Reading 2001

Southern Writers Reading is a self-described “annual reading and literary slugfest” sponsored by Over the Transom Books and the Fairhope Center for the Writing Arts and held every November in Fairhope. Jim Gilbert, a founding board member of the Center, narrates this photo essay on last year’s program. For information on SWR 2002, check www.overthetransom.com.

FRIDAY EVENING NOVEMBER 16 – The Alumni Grille



Tom Franklin begins the first annual Alumni Grille with an excerpt from Poachers.



Melinda Haynes read a bawdy section from Chalktown, possible only because her father wasn't in attendance.



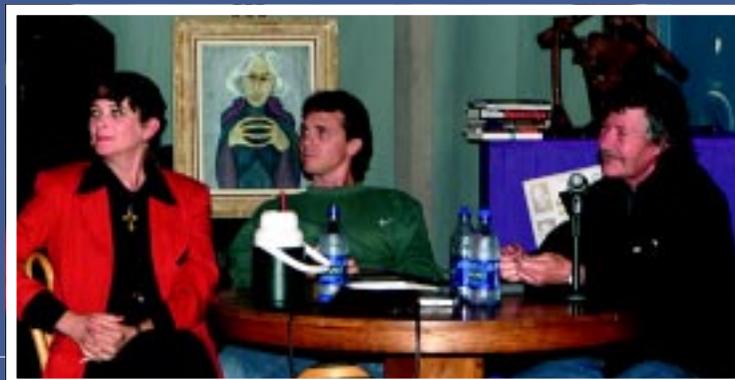
“I won't read anything that nasty,” Suzanne Hudson joked as she took the mike to read from Opposable Thumbs.



Frank Turner Hollon debuted his new novel, The God File, with a section in which the main character confesses his love for a TV weathergirl.

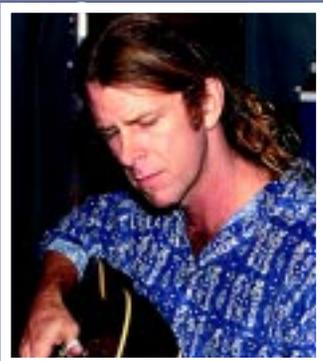


Mediated by Sonny Brewer, the alumni authors grilled each other (Frank Hollon: “What’s the worst thing that’s happened to you at a signing?”; Tom Franklin: “A homeless man threw up on me.”). Melinda Haynes, whose Mother of Pearl was an Oprah Book Club Pick, offered insight into the Jonathan Franzen controversy.



Arriving fresh from Hohenwald Tennessee, William Gay (far right) read of the discovery of a “specialized inflatable” by a couple of reprobate characters from Provinces of Night.

SATURDAY AFTERNOON NOVEMBER 17 – Southern Writers Reading



Grayson Capps, Troubadour Extraordinaire, warms up the audience on Saturday afternoon.



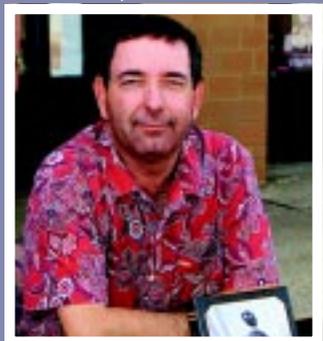
*Beth Ann Fennelly wowed the crowd with poetry from her upcoming collection *The Room of Everywhere*. Sidney Thompson, this year's representative of *Voices Soon To Be Discovered*, read excerpts from his children's book.*

SATURDAY EVENING NOVEMBER 17 – Southern Writers Reading



*Barbara Robinette Moss smiles for the camera before treating the audience to a scene from *Change Me Into Zeus's Daughter*.*

SUNDAY NOVEMBER 18 – Author's Alley



"Wasn't somebody supposed to bring me some lunch?" Doug Kelley asks during the Author's Alley event.



*First-time author Doris Cahill, age 100, signs copies of *Nina*, a story based on her own life as a young girl in Mexico.*



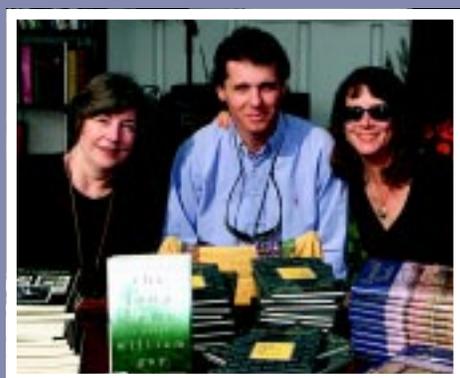
Melinda Haynes and Barbara Robinette Moss shoulder-to-shoulder outside Page & Palette in downtown Fairhope.



*Michael Knight reads the dreamlike "*Killing Stonewall Jackson*," from his forthcoming collection.*



Joe Taylor of Livingston Press displays his wares on De La Mare Avenue, transformed into Author's Alley, to close out the SWR.



*Mary Lois Timbes, author of *Meet Me at the Butterfly Tree*, which includes her correspondence with Robert Bell, signs with Frank Hollon and Suzanne Hudson in front of *Over the Transom Books*.*



Sonny Brewer announces that the Fairhope Center for the Writing Arts will publish a collection of stories, representing all participating authors of SWR, past and present. Copies should be available by November 2002.

Trimm (Continued from page 13)

have won national creative writing awards. More important than that, it was from their recommendations that I was chosen. In an interview with the publicity director from NFAA, she asked me who is my inspiration. That one was easy. "My students," I told her. If not for them, I would not still be in education." It was an epiphany for me.

Numerous times I have asked myself why I stay in education when there are so many reasons to leave. My reasons to stay, I realize now, are not reasons at all, but names. Names and faces etched in my memory. From that first year until now, I remember the students who—if only for a fraction of a moment on any given day—made me believe that what I was doing was worth it.

On the second week in January, I will arrive in Miami to receive an award. But it will not be the plane that takes me there. I will arrive on the shoulders of hundreds of students who have taught me the greatest lesson of all. I am a teacher because of them, and no award I receive is worth half as much as those moments when I look at their faces and find a reason to stay... just one more day.

Denise Trimm is chair of the English Department at the Alabama School of Fine Arts. She has an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Alabama.

Birmingham Public Library presents

ALABAMA BOUND

Celebrating Alabama Authors and Publishers

Saturday, April 27, 2002
10:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.
Central Library

Meet over 50 Alabama Writers,
Book and Magazine Publishers
Buy books
Have them signed
Hear authors read and talk about their work

This event is FREE and open to the public!

Birmingham Public Library
2100 Park Place • Birmingham, AL 35203
email: lwilson@bham.lib.al.us 205/226-3604

George (Continued from page 9)

attorney who has experience in reviewing and negotiating publishing contracts. However, the writer should be realistic in projecting the likely income from the book and not spend more money retaining professional help to negotiate the agreement than the deal would justify. The guiding consideration of the author should be that the ultimate outcome of the contract process should be an agreement that is fair to both sides and that will serve as the foundation for a constructive, positive business relationship.

Ed George is a member of the Alabama Writers' Forum board and an attorney who practices in Montgomery.

THE ALABAMA WRITERS' FORUM

welcomes **Tess Ware** to the staff. As executive assistant, she will oversee membership, organize events, provide administrative



support in all areas of the Forum's mission, and manage the Forum's office. Before coming to the Forum, Tess was membership director for Old Alabama Town and had worked as a travel consultant for Cloverdale Travel, editor for *Montgomery! Magazine*, and associate director of the Montgomery Civic Ballet. Tess holds a B.A. with honors in Dance from Butler University in Indianapolis. Forum director Jeanie Thompson notes, "We are so fortunate to have someone of Tess's calibre and commitment. She has already had a huge impact on the running of the Forum and brings so much knowledge and so many ideas with her." Tess may be reached at the Forum office (334-242-4076, ext. 233), where she welcomes calls regarding membership, events, and information about other Forum activities.



FIFTH ANNUAL

Alabama Writers Symposium

MAY 2-4, 2002

MONROEVILLE, ALABAMA
THE LITERARY CAPITAL OF ALABAMA

Award Presentations - Friday, May 2

HARPER LEE AWARD
FOR ALABAMA'S DISTINGUISHED WRITER 2002
Recipient Selected by Alabama Writers' Forum

EUGENE CURRENT GARCIA AWARD
FOR ALABAMA'S DISTINGUISHED
LITERARY SCHOLAR 2002
*Recipient Selected by
Association of College English Teachers of Alabama*

Opening Night Speaker:
GEORGE PLIMPTON

Featuring noted Alabama writers including:

MARLIN BARTON
RICK BRAGG
MARY WARD BROWN
KATHERINE CLARK
WAYNE GREENHAW
JAMES HASKINS
JAY LAMAR
JANET MCADAMS
DIANE MCWHORTER
JUDITH HILLMAN PATERSON
MIKE STEWART
JEANIE THOMPSON

HOSTED BY:

ALABAMA SOUTHERN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

(251) 575-3156, EXT. 226 • EMAIL JWILSON@ASCC.EDU
(251) 575-3156, EXT. 239 • EMAIL LRHEA@ASCC.EDU

Literary News

LORI ALLEN SIEGLEMAN'S "BOOKS GIVE US WINGS—Help Our Children Fly" Alabama Family Reading Calendar was announced at a reception at the Governor's Mansion on December 4th, 2001. Designed to help parents encourage their children to read and love books, Books Give Us Wings—Help Our Children Fly features tips on reading with children and special dates relating to literacy and books on pages that highlight artwork by Alabama students. The calendar also includes bookmarks featuring four Alabama children's writers, **Aileen Kilgore Henderson, Charles Ghigna, Kathryn Tucker Windham, and James Haskins**. In addition to the **Alabama Center for the Book** and the **Alabama Writers' Forum**, the host of sponsors of the project included the **Alabama State Department of Education Classroom Improvement-Arts Education** and **Even Start Family Literacy Program, the Alabama Reading Initiative, the Alabama State Council on the Arts, the Children's Trust Fund, and the Alabama Institute for Education in the Arts**. Corporate sponsors **Knology** and **Books-A-Million** were joined by **Lewis Communications**, which produced the calendar.



PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF KNOLOGY



FOR INFORMATION on conferences and events of interest, be sure to check the AWF website at www.writersforum.org. Also check Southern Scribe at www.southernscribe.com/resources/events.htm.

Prizes and Awards

VIRGINIA GILBERT was named the Alabama State Poetry Society's State Poet of the Year 2001. Author of one collection, *That Other Brightness*, and a chapbook, *The Earth Above*, Gilbert is professor of English at Alabama A & M in Huntsville. Over the last year, she has read at the Chicago Public Library, the International Women's Writers Guild in New York, and the Emerald Coast Writers Conference in Pensacola, Florida. Her work was included in the anthology *Claiming the Spirit Within*.

DR. CLEVELAND HARRISON'S *Unsung Valor: A GI's Story of World War II* has won the 2001 Forrest C. Pogue Prize given by the Eisenhower Center for American Studies. Harrison, professor emeritus of theater at Auburn University, was featured on BookTV and praised for an important, accessible memoir that offered the story of a "kind of everyman, whose experiences could apply to everyone."

Open House by **Beth Ann Fennelly** won the 2001 Kenyon Review Prize for a First Book. The prize includes publication by Zoo Press, a new literary publisher whose goal is to publish quality books of poetry, drama, fiction, and essay by emerging writers. *Open House* will be out in spring 2002. Deadline for next year's prize is April 15 (Henry James' birthday), 2002. For information check www.zoopress.org/zoo.springcontest.html.

Announcements

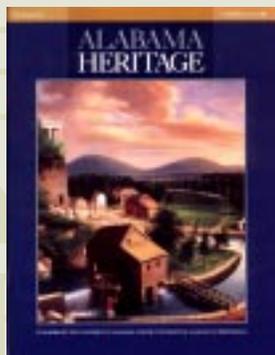
THE ALABAMA STATE POETRY SOCIETY Mid-winter meeting will be held in Montgomery at the Sahara Restaurant on Saturday, February 23. The luncheon meeting will begin at 11 a.m. Attendees are invited (but not required) to bring one of three items: 1) a poem about September 11; 2) a poem about spring or winter; 3) a favorite poem written by another poet. Guests are welcome.

THE SOUTHERN BREEZE SOCIETY for Children's Book Writers and Illustrators will hold its Springingle on February 22-24 in Gulf Shores, Alabama. This year's program will feature author **Larry Dane Brinner**; illustrator **Karen Stormer Brooks**; **Wendy Lamb**, publishing director of Wendy Lamb Books and vice-president of Random House's Children's Trade Book Group; **Paula Morrow**, editor of *Babybug* and *Ladybug*; and **Alison Keehn**, the associate editor for Barefoot Books. For more information, check <http://www.southern-breeze.org/sconfrnc.htm>.

LUMINOSITY LLC, a targeted marketing and event management company, announces its opening. Staff includes **Moises (Moe) Vela, Jr.**, former senior advisor on Latino Affairs for former Vice-President Al Gore; **Gabrielle Wagener**, former senior event coordinator at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts; and **Lanier Scott Isom**, published author and journalist. Luminosity is particularly interested in writers and writing events. Its website is <http://www.luminosityllc.com>.

KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY Department of English announces **Poetry of the Golden Generation: A Competition and Celebration of Southern Poets 50 Years of Age and Older**. Designed to enhance existing talents and interest in writing poetry, the contest will award one \$500 and four \$100 prizes, judged by Georgia Poet Laureate **David Bottoms**. Deadline for entries is February 4, 2002; notification is March 15th, 2002. For more information check www.kennesaw.edu/english/Announcements/GoldenAgePoetry.htm.

NEW DIRECTOR NAMED AT UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA PRESS: **Daniel J.J. Ross**, director of the University of Nebraska Press since 1995, is the new director of The University of Alabama Press. Ross has 25 years of university press publishing experience in acquisitions, editing, marketing, sales, production, and administration. He joined the University of Nebraska Press in 1989 and served as history editor and as editor-in-chief before being named director. Prior to his work at Nebraska, Ross served in various positions at Duke University Press, the UA Press, and the University Presses of Florida.



T. J. Beitelman was recently appointed editor-in-chief of **ALABAMA HERITAGE MAGAZINE**, a joint publication of the University of Alabama and the University of Alabama at Birmingham. He holds a graduate degree in English from Virginia Tech and a Master of Fine Arts degree in creative writing from the University of Alabama. Prior to taking his

new position, he worked at *Alabama Heritage* as associate editor under the magazine's founder, **Suzanne Wolfe**, who retired in August.

Established in 1986, *Alabama Heritage* is an award-winning, four-color quarterly historical magazine dedicated to bringing the state's rich and varied past to life for a general audience.

For subscription and submission information, see the magazine's website at www.AlabamaHeritage.com.

Calendar

FEBRUARY

LIBRARY LOVERS MONTH

MARCH 1

READ ACROSS AMERICA DAY

MARCH 16

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION DAY

APRIL

NATIONAL POETRY MONTH

APRIL 2

INTERNATIONAL CHILDREN'S BOOK DAY

APRIL 14-20

NATIONAL LIBRARY WEEK

APRIL 15-21

YOUNG PEOPLE'S POETRY WEEK

The deadline for the **ALABAMA WRITERS' FORUM LITERARY AWARDS 2002** entries, the Scholarship entries, and the Literary Magazine Competition entries is February 11, 2002. For information and guidelines contact Anita Garner at 256-765-4889 or email agarner@unanov.una.edu.

Readings and Programs



Bill Cobb

NEW BOOKSTORE IN MONTEVALLO: Eclipse Coffee and Books held its grand opening on November 8-11th with **William Cobb** reading from his new novel, *Wings of Morning*. The bookstore is located at 1032 Main Street in Montevallo. For information, call 205-665-4234.

THE AUBURN UNIVERSITY LITTLETON-FRANKLIN LECTURES will feature journalist **Clarence Page** on March 6 at 4 p.m. at the AU Hotel and Conference Center. A Pulitzer Prize-winning writer, Page writes a nationally syndicated column and is a commentator on National Public Radio and PBS. His books include the critically acclaimed *Showing My Color: Impolite Essays on Race and Identity*. For more information call 334-844-4043 or check www.auburn.edu/franklin.

BACHE Visiting Writing Series will feature poet **Honorée Fannone Jeffers** on Wednesday, February 13th and fiction writer **Michael Knight** on Tuesday, April 2. For specific locations and times, call 205-975-2721.

READ ALABAMA! The Tradition Continues is an annual series sponsored by Bevill State Community College. This year's schedule includes **Marvin Rogers** (*The Bermuda Adventure*) on January 29; **Marlin Barton** (*The Dry Well*) on February 12; **Patricia Foster** (*All the Lost Girls*) on February 26; **Sena Naslund** (*Ahab's Wife*) on March 12; and **Dot Moore** and **Katie Lamar Smith** (*Oracle of the Ages: The Curious Life of Fortune Teller Mayhayley Lancaster*) on March 19. For time and location and other information call 1-800-648-3271, ext. 5706.

THE BAY MINETTE PUBLIC LIBRARY'S Alabama Athenaeum series will feature **Jeanie Thomsson** (*White for Harvest*) on January 13; **Robert Inman** (*Captain Saturday*) on February 3; **Sena Jeter Naslund** (*Ahab's Wife*) on March 17; **Bert Hitchcock** lecturing on *William Bartram* on April 21; **Frank Turner Hollon** (*The God File*) on April 28; **Carolyn Haines** (*Splintered Bones*) on July 14. Other authors in 2002 will include **Michelle Richmond** (*Girl in the Fall Away Dress*); **Dr. Reginald Martin** (*Everybody Knows What Time It Is*); a Eugene Walter panel featuring **Katherine Clark** (*Milking the Moon*); **Frank Daugherty** (*Isle of Joy*); **Sonny Brewer** (*A Yin for Change*); **Sidney Thompson** (*The Good Lie*); **John Sledge** (*Mobile Cemeteries*); **Barbara Robinette Moss** (*Change Me into Zeus' Daughter*); **Daniel Wallace** (*Big Fish; Ray in Reverse*); **Ann Vaughan Richards** (*Miss Woman*); **Michael Knight** (*Divining Rod; Dogfight*); **Ace Atkins** (*Crossroad Blues*); and **Lucy Baxley**, Alabama State Treasurer. For time and more information, call phone 334-580-1648 or check www.library.ci.bay-minette.al.us.



Melanie Rae Thon

THE BANKHEAD VISITING WRITER SERIES will feature **Melanie Rae Thon** on March 21 at 7: 30 (location to be announced). Thon is the author of *Sweet Hearts*, *Iona Moon*, and *Meteors in August* and two story collections *First, Body* and *Girls in the Grass*. Her fiction has been included in *Best American Short Stories*, and she has received grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Massachusetts Artist Foundation, the New York Foundation for the Arts, and others. A native of Montana, Thon teaches at the University of Utah. For information call 205-348-0766.

THE 2002 SUMMER INSTITUTE OF CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY will convene on the Spring Hill College campus in Mobile, AL, on June 2 and end June 15, 2002. Session I (June 2-8) courses include Reconciliation as Christian Vocation; John Cassian: Desert Wisdom; Baptismal Spirituality; Solidarity, Justice & Sin; Gospel Parables as Story Spirituality; Spiritual Exercises Part I. Session II (June 9-15) courses include Eucharistic Prayer; Psalms as Prayer and Liturgy; Broken Marriage as Spiritual Challenge; Denise Levertov: Poet of the Spirit; Violence and the Presence of God; Spiritual Exercises Part II. Two directed retreats (5 and 8 day) will be offered, May 24 (27)-June 2, plus two workshops (Sacred Dance and Icons: Windows to Heaven). Please contact the Office of Graduate Studies (334-380-3094) or visit the Spring Hill website at www.shc.edu/Academics/Graduate for more information.

The Back Page

Rage and Beauty

*How with this rage can beauty
hold a plea*

*Whose action is no stronger than
a flower?*

Shakespeare, sonnet 65

One

Like you, I watched. A friend, a fellow poet, called to tell me to watch. From Tuscaloosa, I watched the astonishing broadcasts and rebroadcasts of the aircraft banking and the aircraft disappearing, silently, mercilessly into the Towers. The small, muffled voice from a handheld camera and then the scream or a call to God. I stood and stared. This was not something to be viewed from your La-Z-Boy. It was an occasion for standing as if before a judge or a minister. It wanted witness and wailing, and should the price for looking been blindness we would have looked. For a moment I tried to believe that the time difference between Alabama and the East Coast would somehow erase the vast and terrible scene. Then I had to lie down, a patient to myself, before I could get up and continue. I had to prepare for my graduate students, a poetry workshop. I had a class to teach.

Two

I searched for an analogy for this "event" while the jet-fueled fires billowed and the Towers collapsed in on themselves and the sun blackened. I thought of the scene in the Luis Buñel film, *Un Chien Andalou (Andalusian Dog)*, in which a razor blade is drawn across an eyeball. In that act the very means by which we perceive the world is destroyed. It is an analogy for looking at the unlookable, for the destruction of our perception. Yet there was

no analogy. There was no mercy in words finding their likenesses. What was it like? Like a surrealist film, like a nightmare, like a Hollywood simulation, like an apocalyptic video game? I searched for anything that would give me purchase. Anything to give the mind the ability to hold the event turned disaster, to give it a tenderness — tender from the Latin, to hold. Only certain passages from the Koran or the Bible served to tell the equivalent story of dread and terror, of plots and tactics, of policy and disbelief. A plane in Pennsylvania? The Pentagon? My work of words seemed paltry against the work of hands trained to kill. My work seemed like nothing compared to what was now evident on the screen — bona fide acts of selflessness and sacrifice at odds with suicide. I watched the screen: the work of hands nursing the wounded and putting out fires and pulling bodies from ash and rubble. Anonymous hands giving out water and clean tube socks and masks. I was in Alabama, shaking, weeping for those who have yet to be wept for, as Homer says. I had a class to teach.

Three

But would my class show up? I wouldn't blame them if they retired into their grief and sought the church of their own thoughts. How did I know September's brilliance, strewn with the remnants from Saturday's football game, was any more or less real than the televised event I just witnessed and rewitnessed? Longhaired female students walked head down across University Boulevard. Clean-shaven male students in khakis, Ralph Lauren shirts, and cologne wore the identical costumes of the hijackers. How could life go on in this way? "Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer's horse/ scratches its innocent behind on a tree," Auden said about the world's indifference to Icarus falling out of the sky. The world's indifference to suffering. Already there were reactions — flags lowered or raised. And reactions from the reptile brain — a turbaned effigy hung on the spare tire of an SUV. I considered the collision of signifiers. I composed a note, "Did you hang a camouflaged US Army doll

from your car after Oklahoma City?" I thought better of it. I too wanted the relief of a simple, cutthroat remedy to this condition of unscathed victimhood. I wanted direct, brilliant, piercing compassion. I wanted expansive sympathies that could reach to the survivors, not a teacherly correction. I wanted to call the hospital in New Haven, Connecticut, where helicopters were delivering casualties to my daughter working there. I was in Alabama. I wanted to be in class.

Four

So did my students. Not one of them was absent. They arrived to take their unvarying places around the seminar table in room 212 of Morgan Hall. Twelve people who would spend four years of their lives writing poems. Paul, who cannot stand, arrived early as he usually does in his wheelchair. "Did you lose anybody?" we asked each other as if it were a matter of our careless misplacement. Gregory drove the fifty miles from Birmingham and his job at the National Labor Relations Board with a box of Krispy Kreme doughnuts. Dan, the father of a young girl, Stella, was sullen and bewildered. The grandson of sharecroppers and former slaves, Tyrone spoke in his well-modulated voice; I found his response reassuring and measured and necessary. I looked back at Erika, whose childhood was foster homes of outrageous violence and trauma, to see if she had a privileged insight into the moment. Elaine from Memphis, Molly from Michigan, the punk-rocker Geoffrey, Shanna from the West Coast stared back at me with the same astonished and wounded look I gave them. We were separated by enormous geography and sensibility but by 2.7 people from the disaster of the day. James corrected me gently when I mistold the story of the Irish poet, Seamus Heaney, who in a time of political extremity, recorded Irish folk songs and poems. Eliot was tied to the world of Islam through his middle name, Kahlil. I began by reading a couple poems. Rilke's poem from his *Sonnets to Orpheus*,

*O you lovers that are so gentle,
step occasionally*

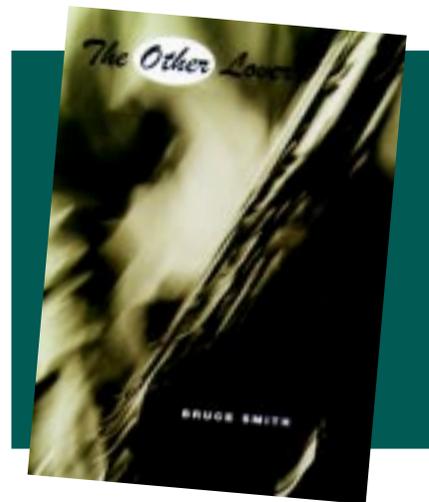
*into the breath of the sufferers not
meant for you*

I read Dickinson's "After great pain, a Formal feeling comes," and Yehuda Amichai's heart-breaking poem, "The Diameter of the Bomb." I mentioned Theodore Adorno's dictum, "After Auschwitz, no poetry." When I asked the class if poetry was superfluous in the face of the disaster, if we needed poetry, Brandy answered, "Do we need beauty?"

Five

I needed them. Perhaps they needed me, or at least they needed an occasion for belief. We all needed the place where attention is paid and where the soul steps forward and utters its truths in the face of ruin. Against the work of the terrorists is the work of poetry whose action is no stronger than a flower. We went on with our work. We spent the rest of the two and a half hours here in Alabama in September talking about their poems. Poems of loss and longing, poems of place, poems of umbilical connection and sundering division, poems of humor, poems in the voices of someone they are not — all our unrealized possibilities, idiosyncratic visions and songs, spells and chants against the demons of this world.

Bruce Smith's most recent collection of poems is *The Other Lover*, a finalist for the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize. He teaches in the Writing Program at the University of Alabama.





www.writersforum.org

**Log-on and get connected to
Alabama's Literary Community.**

Learn about the programs and services of the Alabama Writers' Forum at our website. On the front page, we offer a calendar of the literary season, featured writers, and links to our programs and resources.

Watch for the updated *Alabama Literary Resources Directory* on line, too. You can even join. Find current and back issues of *First Draft*, filled with news about Alabama's literary community, book reviews, and other research ideas for students or teachers.

**If you are a writer, a reader, a teacher, or a student of writing,
this is your site. We hope to see you there.**

FIRST DRAFT

The Alabama Writers' Forum
Alabama State Council on the Arts
201 Monroe Street
Montgomery, AL 36130-1800

PRSR STD
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 147
Montgomery, AL