



# FIRST DRAFT

THE JOURNAL OF THE ALABAMA WRITERS' FORUM • FALL 2006

**THE GEORGE LINDSEY-UNA  
FILM FESTIVAL**  
Filmmakers Gather in Florence

**THE LIFE AND TIMES OF MARIE ANTOINETTE**  
A Conversation with Sena Jeter Naslund

**ESSAYS ON THE WRITING LIFE**  
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*First Draft* is a journal for writers,  
readers, editors, publishers, and those  
who support and work in the literary arts.

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I cannot imagine the weight of the yoke of illiteracy. I've long considered having learned to read my greatest accomplishment. I have no memory of this momentous rite of passage; it seems as though I have always been able to read. I recall the Dick and Jane stories, the shenanigans of the Cat in the Hat and the Bible verses I struggled to memorize, enticed by my great-grandmother's habit of slipping me some folding money after reciting the books of the Old Testament or the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm.

It seems my life didn't truly begin until I was able to decipher the regimented lines of characters found between the covers of a book and understand their meanings. I haven't been able to stop since. My mother would drive me to the public library, and I would take home piles of books—the adventures of Ramona and Henry Huggins and anything with the gold Caldecott seal. A thick tome titled *Boy Meets Car* led me to a fascination with vehicles and my distinction as the only eight-year-old on the block with a subscription to *Hot Rod* magazine.

Reading taught me things I didn't know I wanted to know. It transported me to far-flung points on my hand-me-down globe and unfolded foreign lands. It tossed me backward and forward through time, revealed what was and what could be. In a very real sense, it delivered me.

After years as a reader, I was pulled to the other side of the page and became a writer. For more than two decades, I have written thousands of stories, essays, and editorials for newspapers and the occasional magazine. It's not considered "creative writing," but it stretches the legs of the imagination just the same. Stories must inform, essays illuminate, and editorials persuade.

In the last few months, I have been spending time with younger writers, hoping to sharpen their skills and rekindle their excitement over the written word. The experience has given me a greater appreciation for the mission and programs of the Alabama Writers' Forum, particularly its efforts to teach young people to express themselves through our written language.

I have found my own task immensely challenging. I can discuss misunderstood or misused words all afternoon and hold forth on the serial comma until the cows come home. The mechanics of grammar are easier to teach than they are to learn.

The nuances trip me up. I stumble trying to explain how the pace of rhythm and cadence set a subtle undertone to any prose, from reportage to fiction. Illuminating the sparkle of metaphor is as elusive as a firefly chased by a child with a mayonnaise jar after dusk. My clumsy attempts to quantify the magic of *three* usually fail to add up.

I decided to have such minutiae reveal themselves to my "students" as they continue to reveal themselves to me—through the work of others who have made greater strides toward the unattainable mastery of writing. I bury workshop participants beneath a snowdrift of exemplary writing wherever I find it—in the lyrics of a Tom Waits song or a passage from J.R. Moehringer's *The Tender Bar* or any profile from *The New Yorker*. Even effective advertising copy can shimmer.

As a member of the board of the Alabama Writers' Forum, I hope to contribute to the larger mission of promoting the written word in our state. It's a task I gladly welcome.

*Bill Perkins*

DOTHAN EAGLE

*Bill Perkins is editorial page editor of the Dothan Eagle and a contributing writer for Paste magazine. His work has also appeared in the New York Times, the International Herald Tribune, Sports Illustrated, Nation's Business, and Business Alabama Monthly.*

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

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# THE ART OF STORYTELLING

## *Filmmakers Gather in Florence*

by John Anderson

Film professor Emily Edwards finds it hard to believe that writer's block still lurks in Alabama.

"I grew up hearing stories about haunted bridges, even a root doctor. I had a relative who actually practiced," said Edwards, a Florence native who teaches film production and media writing at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

"I can remember going with dates to the haunted bridge to see the ghost of Civil War soldiers. There are all the stories about the old graveyard. I don't know if I'll live long enough to get all the screenplays down I want to write."

With its turbulent history, Gothic culture, and lush and diverse natural environment, Alabama offers any aspiring screenwriter a universe of material, say writers familiar with the state.

"There's something about Alabama," said filmmaker Tonya S. Holly, also a Florence native and president of the Alabama Screenwriters Association. "It's produced a lot of great writers, especially in music, all the way back to Native Americans. Legend has it that when they were forced to leave the land, they had to leave it on the (Tennessee) river. They called it the Singing River.

"I'm thinking about doing a movie on the Trail of Tears," Holly said of the forced

expulsion west of the area's Cherokee Indians. "Time is so short I need about ten lifetimes for all my visions and dreams."

Jeff Stephenson, a director and screenwriter with the American Film Institute in Burbank, California, immediately noticed the state's rich potential for movie scripts while attending the George Lindsey UNA Film Festival in Florence last March.

"There seems to be a wealth of so many powerful experiences that the South can draw from," said Stephenson, whose film *Chasing Daylight* won the festival's Best of Show award this year. "There's such passion in the South. There's so much important history."

A big part of that history, of course, is the cultural upheaval wrought by the civil rights struggle, the aftershocks of which still rattle the Southern psyche.

Stephenson noted that *Charles Moore: I Fight with My Camera* won this year's Sweet Home Alabama Award. The film pays tribute to news photographer Charles Moore, whose vivid photos of police abusing civil rights protesters

helped sway American public opinion toward the movement.

"He is the utmost gentleman, so modest. But at the same time he had this incredible effect not only on the South but everywhere," Stephenson said. "And he's from Florence."

But more than the simmering cauldron

*Jeff Stephenson accepts the award for Best of Show for his film Chasing Daylight.*



WAYNE SIDES



*Filmmaker Tonya S. Holly, cinematographer Mario Di Leo, and assistant director Dana McDuff discuss a scene from When I Find the Ocean aboard the tugboat Anna Marie.*

of race makes Alabama's culture a spicy mix to scoop from, Stephenson said.

"There are even different cultures within the state," he said. "You have the hill country (traditional home to the state's rural poor) right next to the rich bottomlands (where most of the state's wealthy planters resided).

"When you have different lifestyles and different classes, and when you have all of that close together, it doesn't always result in conflict," Stephenson said. "Sometimes it binds together the best of influences and creates a new thing, a beautiful art form."

The city of Florence is a good example of this cultural mosaic, he said. Mixed in with its King Cotton—and during the twentieth century industrial—heritage is a vibrant music scene and a respected liberal arts college, the University of North Alabama.

"It's cosmopolitan but also rural," said Stephenson, a Toronto native whose only trip to the Deep South before the Lindsey Festival was a lone visit to New Orleans.

"In a lot of ways I was sort of blown away," he said. "I came in green and was sort of floored by how much incredible experiences had been born in that area. I went to Helen Keller's house and the home Frank Lloyd Wright designed. I went to the W.C. Handy house. I have a real appreciation for the golden age of rock and roll (much of which was recorded at the legendary Fame and Muscle Shoals Sound studios).

"I had no idea the area was so steeped in history and has contributed so much to the recent cultural history of the country."

A Gothic fabric dramatically interwoven into this colorful Southern tapestry makes it an even more compelling source for screenplays, Edwards said.

"Dark stories come out of being defeated in the Civil War," she said. "The losing side also had the shame of their forbearers owning slaves, or having had been slaves."

From that Gothic legacy sprung another Southern trait that translates well onto the screen, a tendency toward the eccentric.

"How many schools have real live lions as mascots right next to the president's office?" asked Edwards, referring to UNA, where she earned her undergraduate degrees. "I had a college professor who wrestled bears."

Alabama's oral tradition has preserved a lot of its folklore and conditioned native writers to the art of storytelling, said Edwards, whose academic publications include "The Incubus in Experience, Folklore and Film," published in *Southern Folklore*. "I keep my ears open to the kitchen-table raconteurs," she said.

"When I was growing up we were not yet captives of TV. We could get only one TV station, so we didn't watch it that much. I fished on the (Tennessee) river and on Shoals Creek. And when you fish, you tell stories," she said. "If you're cooking out at a family reunion, you tell stories. We have eccentric stories and we tell them because we don't have a lot to do.

"Even UNA's biology teacher and algebra teachers are storytellers," she said.

Both Edwards and Holly draw on family stories and local folklore that made up a big part of their childhoods for screenwriting ideas. Edwards' short film, *Root Doctor*, won this year's best faculty production award at the Lindsey festival. Holly's *When I Find the Ocean*, a full-length movie with a \$10 million budget, premiered in Florence during the festival weekend.

Holly based her coming-of-age movie—which includes elements of Cherokee folklore and the Selma-to-Montgomery civil rights march—on a childhood obsession with seeing the Gulf.

"When I was little and living in Red Bay, there was a branch down in the woods," she said. "I used to play down there all the time. One day I had this brainstorm. I would walk to the ocean. I managed to get deep in the woods. It was the first time I had really known fear. I got in a lot of trouble then."

Holly and her husband, Richard Holly, a musician who performed at the festival with Little Richard, wrote the movie's score. They recorded it at Tonya's Cypress Moon film studio, the same complex that once housed Muscle Shoals Sound.

Alabama screenwriters credit the Lindsey festival for igniting a renewed interest in screenwriting in the state.

The nine-year-old festival, which received over 200 submissions this year from as far away as Japan, encourages native work by awarding the Sweet Home Alabama prize for the best film that either features the state or was made by Alabamians. The festival also hosts free workshops for aspiring moviemakers.

"It started small but has really grown," Edwards said. "There's sort of fascination with the George Lindsey Film Festival because it's Southern."

"We're showing more films this year than ever before, and we're expecting more filmmakers to attend than ever before," said Lindsey, a veteran screen actor best known for the role of Goober on the long-running and much syndicated *The Andy Griffith Show*, before the festival. "If something like this had existed when I was in school, I wouldn't have had to go to New York to learn my craft."

Stephenson is already planning a feature film that begins in the South and follows a Southern boy's coming of age during a summer stay with relatives in Vermont.

"I will of course want to get back to Florence," he said. "I got great vibes from that place."

To visit the George Lindsey Film Festival Web site, go to [www.lindseyfilmfest.com](http://www.lindseyfilmfest.com).

RUSSELL CLEMMONS



Tonya Holly and George Lindsey

*John Anderson, a former reporter and editor for the Huntsville Times, is a freelance writer whose clients include People and Off The Cuff, a men's quarterly published in Huntsville.*





Writer-director  
Jeff Stephenson on the set  
of his award-winning short  
feature *Chasing Daylight*.

PHOTOS BY HARRIS CHARALAMBOUS

## MAKING MAGIC From Script to Screen

by John Anderson

Jeff Stephenson needs only one word to describe his philosophy on what movies should be all about—*magic*.

Stephenson, a Toronto-born director and screenwriter, won the Best of Show prize last March at the Ninth Annual George Lindsey-UNA Film Festival for his short narrative *Chasing Daylight*.

“Sometimes a sort of magic comes together when a story is really crafted well, and there is this sort of intangible you can neither predict nor control,” Stephenson said.

“You connect with the theme and character, and if you do, that’s where that magic happens. You feel sort of golden.”

Stephenson, 31, works for the influential American Film Institute in Burbank, California, where he earned a master’s degree in film directing in 2004.

A life-long moviegoer, Stephenson defines movie magic as the rare ability of a screenwriter and director to convey an intensely personal vision, yet also make that message universally felt.

“I think film is an incredibly powerful medium. It’s a shared touchstone for a lot of people,” he said. “Some of the biggest moments in my life I can equate to a movie I saw at that time.”

Getting it right requires “a sort of a balancing act,” Stephenson said. “Sometimes a story is so personal, there’s not enough room for people to connect. Sometimes it’s so personal you’re almost alienating that audience.

“That’s where the craft element comes into place,” Stephenson said. “It’s a craft of hopefully finding ways for people to bring their own perspective to the story,

a lot of strangers in one room sharing an experience together.”

Movies that reach Stephenson’s ideal of a delicate balance between the personal and universal, he said, “help me get informed about life. They help give me perspective on my life.”

Perhaps not surprisingly, one of Stephenson’s favorite movies is *Field of Dreams*, the fantasy baseball film starring Kevin Costner. Costner’s character, a Midwestern corn farmer, builds a regulation-size baseball field after he dreams that long-dead baseball greats would come to play ball in his fields.

“A lot has been written about the magic and supernatural aspects of it,” Stephenson said. “For me, it is about a relationship between father and son. Kevin Costner is trying to reach out to his father, who is still alive.

“It’s about the need to not leave things unspoken, especially with guys, who don’t usually express affection with one another.”

*Chasing Daylight*, Stephenson’s short film, conjured up some of its own magic with film festival critics across the country. The movie also won the Grand Remi Award at WorldFest-Houston in 2005.

*Chasing Daylight* is so personal to Stephenson because it came from a dream. The dream, and the film, opens with two adolescent best friends—a girl and a boy—playing in a prop-airplane graveyard.

In the next scene the boy, riding on a school bus beside his friend, watches as a road sign decapitates her while she pretends to fly.

The boy is inconsolable until he goes back to the old prop-planes where they had often pretended to fly one of the planes. His friend appears and assures him she’s with him spiritually.

As he walks over a field toward home, the plane takes off, dips a wing toward him as it flies over, and disappears into the horizon. The boy finally accepts his friend’s death and finds peace.

“It is a film about warmth, about relationships,” said Stephenson. “In some ways it’s quite scary putting yourself out there, letting people look in and peek at you.

“It was nice when people in the audience there (in Florence) were crying at the end. That was gratifying. I feel like the story connected.”

*Chasing Daylight* seems especially to play well in the South, Stephenson said. “I’m not sure exactly why. People there seem to appreciate the sensibility of the movie.

“It isn’t trying to be so cool. Hopefully it’s a warm, inspirational, magical film.”

**JEFF STEPHENSON’S** latest feature film, *Flyerman*, premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival. He has also directed a comedy series pilot and a rockumentary for the Crash Test Dummies, *Crash Test Dude*. His short films have won numerous international awards. His undergraduate thesis film, *Time Machine*, was nominated for the 1998 Student Academy Awards Honorary Foreign Film Award. He has served as a chairman and juror for the Genie and Gemini Awards, Canada’s highest entertainment honors. Stephenson holds a master’s degree in directing from the American Film Institute, where he directed two multiple award-winning short films. He has completed co-writing and directing a project for Bravo! Network, *Just Visiting*. Stephenson recently placed first in *Now* magazine’s “Canadian Filmmakers To Look Out For.”

CHARLES GAINES is a journalist, novelist, screenwriter, and the author of twenty-three books, three of which were made into movies. His books include the bestselling *Stay Hungry*, finalist for the National Book Award (1972); international bestseller *Pumping Iron* (1974); the biography *Yours in Perfect Manhood: Charles Atlas* (1982); the creative non-fiction book *A Family Place: A Man Returns to the Center of His Life* (1994); and the novel *The Next Valley Over* (1999). He has written a number of movie-length features for PBS, including an adaptation of Edith Wharton's *Summer*. Gaines recently co-authored a screenplay with Ethan Hawke, and he has written a series of books for children with Arnold Schwarzenegger, *Arnold's Fitness for Kids*. He has won two Cine Gold Eagle Awards and three Emmys. His work has appeared in *Town and Country*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Harpers*, *Esquire*, *Architectural Digest*, *Men's Journal*, *GEO*, *Audubon*, and *Sports Afield*, among others. Gaines formerly taught creative writing at New England College. Gaines holds the MFA in Writing from the University of Iowa. He currently teaches in the Spalding University brief-residency MFA in Writing program in Louisville, Kentucky.

## WRITING WITH BOTH HANDS

### A Conversation With Charles Gaines

*AWF executive director Jeanie Thompson asks Charles Gaines some questions about screenwriting as literary art.*

**Jeanie Thompson:** How is writing a screenplay different from, or similar to, writing a novel?

**Charles Gaines:** Well, in both forms you are dealing with the same central fictional concerns of premise, story, conflict, character development, etc. But I believe on the whole the differences between the two forms are more notable than the similarities. First of all, a novel's final form is what you have written. But a script, no matter how well conceived and executed, is just a blueprint of its final form. And as with a blueprint, a lot of people are going to screw around with it before and during the achievement of its final form as a movie. This can be either very frustrating or very satisfying, depending on your attitude toward it and the quality of the people you are working with. A second major difference is in what you might call the aesthetic deliverables of the two forms. A good novel delivers its aesthetic satisfaction in what Henry James called "felt life," a sort of mental empathy created between a reader and the life of the book. But a movie happens to you on your retinas, as "seen life," so to speak, and it has to work in that way first or it doesn't work at all, no matter how good the dialogue, characterizations, etc. Another important difference is that you can't really live inside a character's head in a film the way you can in a novel, or not without boring an audience stiff. That is not to say you cannot write good films that are intensely from one character's point of view—*Taxi Driver* is one such film—but the method of getting that point of view across in film has to be visual rather than verbal.

**JT:** Are there also differences for you between the two forms in preparation and execution?

**CG:** I do a lot of plot outlining and character development notes for both a novel and a script, and I never start either until I know my people and my story pretty well. With a novel, I don't take preparation any further than that, and research if the book needs it. But with a script, I want to know in advance what the three acts are, the major turning points in the action, the climax. Like a lot of scriptwriters, I do scene cards for the entire script before I begin, with notes on them about what the scene looks like, what happens in it, etc. A lot of time these cards get shuffled around or thrown out while you are actually writing, but I find them a very valuable structuring tool, as well as a way to sort of see your movie before you write it. As far as execution is concerned, a script is usually much more subject to revision than a novel because, among other things, more people have to be satisfied with it. It is basically just your editor with a novel. With a script, a director, a producer, actors, all kinds of people are going to have their say. So I don't polish as much as I go on the first draft of a script as I do on the first draft of a novel.



*Charles Gaines divides his time between Tadpole Lake near Trussville, Alabama, and his home in East Tracadie, Nova Scotia.*

JEANIE THOMPSON

*Continued on page 7*





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*Gaines continued from page 5*

**JT:** When you are writing a script, do you feel you are writing “literature”?

**CG:** That’s a good question. I guess the answer is both yes and no. No in the sense that practically no one reads scripts as literature. In fact, aside from scriptwriters, practically no one reads scripts period, which is too bad because a lot of scripts make for good reading, and some for a genuine literary experience.

**JT:** What are some of the latter?

**CG:** *Lawrence of Arabia*, *On the Waterfront*, *Chinatown* or almost anything else by Robert Towne, *Amadeus*. I could go on.

**JT:** What about the “yes” part of your last answer?

**CG:** Well, yes in the sense that you try to bring the same rigor of imagination and skill to the writing of a script that you do to a novel, and that it is very difficult to write a good one and requires in order to do so all the humanity you can bring to it in addition to technique and craft.

**JT:** Do you think screenwriting has anything in common with poetry, since both are about compression of words?

**CG:** Well, they certainly have that in common. And the compression, it seems to me, works toward the same end in both cases: to try to show rather than tell a reader or viewer what it is you are getting at. Many good poems seem to me to have a cinematic quality to them—much of Auden, for example. And many good films, of course, are truly and deeply poetic.

**JT:** Can you say anything about your current projects?

**CG:** Over the past three years I have finished two feature film scripts, one written with Ethan Hawke, and the other intended for him to act in. These are the first two feature films I have written since the eighties, when a few bad experiences with studio projects put me off of them. When I first came to screenwriting in the mid-seventies with *Stay Hungry* and *Pumping Iron*, I believed, as a lot of novelists do, that it was sort of a lower order of writing, something a competent novelist could do with his left hand. Consequently, I did do it with my left hand, and not very well. When I decided to give it another shot a few years ago at Ethan’s urging, I determined that this time around, for his sake and mine, I would try to learn what the hell I was doing. So I read everything I could find on the form, as well as dozens of scripts. I am a little better at it now, I suppose. More interestingly, I have developed a considerable respect for the art and craft of the form. I now have the privilege of working with very good young people on very good, independent film projects, and for as long as that happy situation lasts I plan on bringing both hands to it.

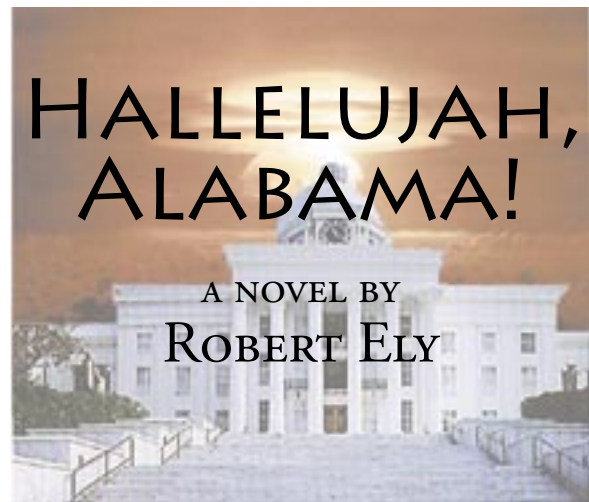
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# Violata Pax

*An artist journeys into his  
very human past*

by Jeanie Thompson



Nall with Rosa and Shorty

Artists know instinctively that art heals. Since the first cave paintings were scratched out to depict illusive animals hunted for food and warmth, artists have envisioned what all humans seek.

The Alabama-born artist Nall's *Violata Pax*—a multi-media exhibition created for multiple sites in Europe which culminated at the Mobile Museum of Art on August 4—implies that contemporary artists scratch their own messages, too. *Violata Pax* (“Wounded Peace”) asserts that as humans, we must seek shelter from the storms of our own making: poverty, hunger, global warming, and genocide.

After being put in touch with Father Vincenzo Coli, Custodian of the Patriarchal Basilica of the Sacred Convent of St. Francis in Assisi, Umbria, Italy, Nall recast images from more than thirty years of drawing, etching, and water-color mosaic work into “fifty-two icons of the wounds of humanity.” The artist “rebaptised” portraits of friends and acquaintances, even historical figures such as Helen Keller and Martin Luther King, with names like *Abortion*, *Birth Control*, *Decadence*, *Obesity*, *Disabilities*, and *Power*.

When Father Coli saw Nall's book *Technique and Symbol*, and others, he said he perceived that Nall's portraits capture the essence of what the Franciscans had wrestled with from the beginning—to reconcile man's nature, both good and evil, with God's creation. Father Coli saw the images as an exorcism of Nall's own pain, an analogue to the pain of all humankind.

Speaking through an interpreter in July in his office adjacent to the lower Basilica in Assisi, Father Coli said Nall's *Violata Pax* was accepted for a summer-long installation this year “because of its realism, beauty, and the educational force of it, especially in the context of Assisi.”

Especially keen for young people to interact with the art work, Father Coli said, “The message for young people to consider is the fact of being a man or woman in the world. . . .

“For the adults, I hope that they can express in their family life and in their social lives—through their behavior and their values” beliefs that will stop “the dying of hope within their hearts.

“Man can do beautiful things but he needs to be helped to think and to reflect. This art work helps us think, through its beauty and the profound reading of what is depicted,” Father Coli said.

“Every man and woman can ask a very serious question in



*Genocide* is one of 52 icons of *Violata Pax* adapted from Nall's previous work.



front of these icons, a question that could spark the thought: Am I a reflection of a positive experience or am I the expression of a wounded peace, a *violata pax*?

“This question could be the beginning of becoming a [more] positive human being.”

When asked how he felt being asked by Father Coli to bring Violata Pax to Assisi, Nall said, “I have been humbled by the request and obviously very touched that someone as devout and giving as Father Vincenzo Coli has immediately understood the pain that I have gone through witnessing the twentieth century,” he said.

“Having lived the nightmares I’ve illustrated as postcards to my past, I am happy that these icons are presented in the spirit of Cimabue, Giotto, Bosch, or Breughel as visions reflecting man’s frequent state of wounded peace,” Nall said.

A group of Alabamians including Alabama State Council on the Arts Executive Director Al Head, his wife Judy, Nall Foundation President Corley Chapman, and others from the Eastern Shore, Mobile, Montgomery, and Troy made the “pilgrimage” to see the variations of Violata Pax in five European locations on July 20-22 that culminated with a visit to the N.A.L.L. Foundation—the physical grounds of the Nature Art and Life League—in Vence, France.

The pilgrimage began in Assisi at the Franciscan Basilica and Convent and included

Nall’s tour of the two monumental bronzes—a frame and a dove—and the fifty-two icons or “wounds of humanity.” Following a lunch in the papal dining room within the Franciscan convent itself, the pilgrims boarded buses for Pietrasanta, Tuscany. At the second stop they toured the fully-installed Duomo Sant’Agostino and saw another set of the monumental bronzes within the city’s center. At a presentation ceremony at the Gallery Barbara Paci reception, Dr. Daniele Spina, Commissioner of

Culture for Pietrasanta, Provincia di Lucca, Tuscany, Italy, and Al Head exchanged gifts and promised to foster a continued international art dialogue between their respective countries.

The next pilgrimage stop was Mentone, France, where pilgrims toured the Musee des Beaux-Arts–Palais Carnoles where Nall’s retrospective *Alchemy* was exhibited. As people entered the museum grounds, they saw the entire fifty-two icons of Violata Pax lining the garden walk. The next morning they visited the Monaco Cathedral of the Principality of Monaco where freestanding icons and mosaic crosses were placed throughout the sacred space. One of the crosses that

included a showing of Nall’s early work: the suite of drawings based on Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* and the collection called Alabama Art, a group of works by Alabama folk and fine artists, with Nall portraits of each artist. A third bronze, titled *Bible Belt*, not seen in Europe, was cast and shipped to Mobile in July. The exhibition was on view through September 24, 2006.

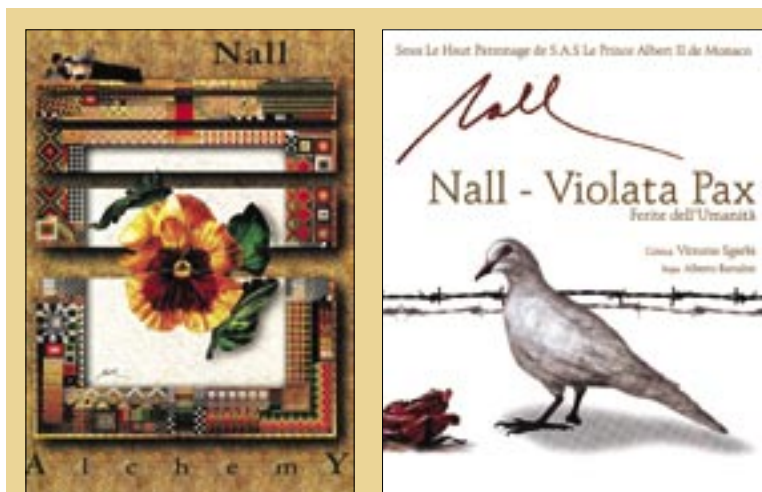
Without a doubt, Nall’s intersection with Father Coli and the resulting Violata Pax concept of fifty-two icons of the “wounds of humanity,” as well as the three monumental bronzes that have resulted, make a pivotal turn in his life and work as an artist. Like a writer who finally breaks through with a bestseller that critics certify for the literary canon, Nall’s new works in bronze are monumental in every sense of the word.

Those who saw the bronzes commented on the new direction for Nall, the sheer beauty of the frame, and the presence of the wounded dove that attracted people young and old in Assisi and Pietrasanta. Several pilgrims on the tour commented on the appropriateness of a monumental frame or a wounded dove of peace as public art somewhere in the home state of the artist who conceived and created them across the water.

Violata Pax is a collaborative project with the support of The Puccini Foundation (Torre del Lago Puccini, Italy); the Musee des Beaux-Arts – Palais

Caronles; His Serene Highness Prince Albert II of Monaco; Italian architect Albert Bartalini; Father Vincenzo Coli, custodian of the Patriarchal Basilica of the Sacred Convent of Saint Francis of Assisi; Father Philippe Blanc, Canon of the Cathedral of Monaco; the City of Pietrasanta with its Cultural Council; and the Mobile Museum of Art.

Jeanie Thompson is executive director of the Alabama Writers’ Forum and author of *White for Harvest: New and Selected Poems*.



Two large format books have been produced to commemorate the work: *Violata Pax*, a hefty catalogue featuring large format black and white photographs by Mario Mulas, tells the story of the conception, execution, and delivery of the Violata Pax icons and bronzes at the five locations. *Alchemy*, a compilation of Nall’s life, work, and people in his home state of Alabama and his adopted homes in Europe, brings everything up to date and served as the catalogue for the Musee des Beaux-Arts–Palais Carnoles retrospective in Mentone. Privately printed, both books are available at the Mobile Museum of Art and the Alabama Booksmith in Homewood.

Nall says was inspired when he saw St. Francis’ patched cloak in Assisi will be permanently installed over the high altar. The European leg of the pilgrimage culminated on Sunday, July 22, with a lunch at the N.A.L.L. Foundation where pilgrims and other local guests had the opportunity to lunch in Nall’s museum and understand more fully how Nall has created an artist’s working life in Europe.

The Mobile Museum of Art exhibition formed a coda to the European pilgrimage. Unlike those in Europe, this exhibition also

# ROWAN OAK and the Art of Deception

by Michael Knight

When I was a junior in high school, I wrote a term paper, my first real research paper, called something like “The Use of The Grotesque in the Fiction of William Faulkner and Flannery O’Connor.” My teacher, a good one named Nancy Strachan, handed me both the subject matter and the official sounding title. I had aspirations even then, though my writing at the time consisted of painfully melodramatic poetry and slapstick, slice-of-life short stories. Even so, Mrs. Strachan was encouraging and I assume she thought it would do me good to read Faulkner and O’Connor, two of her favorites, to know something about the history of letters in what was roughly my part of the world.

I don’t really remember much of what I had to say. I do remember that what I came away with was an abiding love of Flannery O’Connor and serious doubts about this Faulkner guy. O’Connor was at least funny. And her stories managed to be mysterious and beautiful without being a pain to read. I mentioned none of this in my paper, of course. I parroted the critics on Faulkner, knew enough even then to understand that I was young and that mine was not the last word, and it was just possible that Faulkner was as brilliant as everybody said.

Almost twenty years have passed since then. I don’t have time or space here to chart the book by book details of how my relationship to Faulkner, as a reader, began to change. Suffice it to say that it has. I would, however, like to get a few words on paper about how living in his hometown has led me to a new fondness for Faulkner as a man.

For ten months now, I’ve had the pleasure of serving as the John and Renee Grisham Writer-in-Residence at Ole Miss. Everybody knows about Oxford, right? Square Books? How literate and literary this town is? Barry Hannah, a hero of mine, has made Oxford his home for a long time now and turns heads like a movie star. Tom Franklin teaches here and Brad Watson preceded me as the Grisham Writer. Both, incidentally, are from Alabama and for my money are the two best Alabama writers working today, maybe the two best in

the South or anywhere. The great Larry Brown died last summer, but people talk about him like he’s still around. Patsy and Brenda, the ladies who cut my hair, know as much or more about Mr. Brown than any scholar you will find. They also have the inside dope on his life because they cut his wife’s hair, too. And Faulkner, of course. He’s who I’ve been working up to. His likeness is everywhere, in photographs and paintings on the walls of nearly every restaurant in Oxford and there’s his bust in an art gallery and here’s his statue on a park bench. His house, in fact, the famous Rowan Oak, is just up the street from where my family has been living here in town.

Bill Griffith, the curator at Rowan Oak, does a beautiful job humanizing Faulkner, makes his life feel like good gos-

sip without sacrificing literary reverence. There’s the story about the Nobel Prize banquet, how, when confronted by the absence of bourbon at the bar, Faulkner paraphrased Hamlet: “Between scotch and nothing, I’ll take scotch.” There’s the story about Faulkner’s daughter Jill (also my wife’s name) breaking her ankle while leaping out the kitchen window onto her horse like a cowboy in a western. More than any other detail about Faulkner’s life, I love that he invented a war story for



Michael Knight

himself—as an RAF pilot because he was too short for the U.S. Air Force—that he limped around Oxford suffering fictitious wounds.

A famous writer told me once that he has always and likely would always feel like a fraud. How on earth, he wondered, had he deceived people into believing he had talent? And who was he to presume that he had anything worthwhile to say in the first place? What an ego! What a phony! At the time, I thought he was being falsely modest, but more and more I find his words a comfort, especially here in Faulkner’s shadow.

If you’ve never seen it, Rowan Oak is too perfect. Right out of the novels. Big columns. Tin roof. Driveway lined with towering cedars. Magnolias blooming even as I write these words. I have a theory that its purchase was connected to the same part of him that invented a war story for himself. He bought the house in 1929, the year after *The Sound and the Fury* was published. But just a year before that, he was nearly broke, with three poorly received novels and an awful book of poems to his credit. Even after *The Sound and the Fury*, he still couldn’t afford the \$6,000 he paid for Rowan Oak. He



had to rewrite *Sanctuary* to make it more accessible and thus more profitable and contracted himself out to Hollywood to pay his mortgage. I wonder sometimes if he felt compelled to reinvent himself as a southern planter because he very precisely was not one, if all his self-mythologizing wasn't born of doubt, if the confidence required to take such enormous chances on the page wasn't shored up with self-deception. Writing anything requires an amount of vanity and delusion, but *The Sound and the Fury*—imagine writing that! I wonder if Faulkner himself ever worried he was a fraud.

There are forty acres of woods behind Rowan Oak and I'm a regular back there. I take my dogs. If nobody's around, I'll let them off the leash so they can stretch their legs. If I'm lucky my oldest daughter, Mary, age three and one-half, will join me. She loves Oxford, too, loves her school and her friends and walking to the square, but as much as anything else, I think, she loves Rowan Oak itself. If the weather's nice, she and her mother will picnic on the lawn and Mary turns the portico into a stage for ballet or charades. She knows that William Faulkner was a writer, understands that his house has been converted into a kind of museum, knows that I'm a writer, too, and I swear our proximity to Rowan Oak has raised her estimation of me. She's gotten used to the idea that we'll be returning to Knoxville soon, but she loves Oxford enough that, for weeks last fall, she asked me

every night, "Daddy, can we please stay here forever." And I answered, "Yes, sweetheart, of course we can." Because I didn't want to disappoint her. Because I felt lousy about dragging her from place to place. Because I don't want her to realize—not yet!—that I can't give her everything she wants, that certainly nobody will ever make a monument of her father's house.

I've finished the short novel I was working on when we arrived in Oxford and written a draft of a new one, so my time here has been productive. And Mary shows no signs of holding my deception against me. She seems excited about heading home, in fact—and so am I—but I still feel a little guilty about the lie.

In their way, little kids, like writers, are perfect frauds. When Mary tells herself that something is a fact—that she knows how to play piano, say, or scuba dive or do kung fu—she believes it to be true, no matter how absurd. If I could have invented a town, it would look a lot like Oxford, Mississippi. Lying is a kind of wishful thinking. Maybe when I was deceiving Mary, I was also deceiving myself. Maybe I hoped that if I told the lie with enough conviction it might come true.

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*Michael Knight is the author of the novel Divining Rod and two collections of short fiction, Dogfight and Other Stories and Goodnight, Nobody.*

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# Young Writers Draw Applause

## *The 2006 High School Literary Arts Awards and Scholarship Competition*

Alabama's young literati sat anxiously as they listened to distinguished speakers sing their praises. Some students wore jackets and ties or stylish dresses. Others dressed casually in jeans, T-shirts, and flip-flops.

"I usually don't look forward to reading a stack of short stories," said Wayne Greenhaw, fiction judge, keynote speaker, and winner of this year's Harper Lee Award for Alabama's Distinguished Writer, "but I picked up the first story, read it, and put it in the winners' stack. The second was even better than the first. And the third was better than both. I want to thank you for giving me a pleasurable afternoon."

The writers, their families, guests, and teachers assembled in the State Capitol Auditorium on April 18 for the eleventh annual High School Literary Arts Awards and Scholarship Competition.

Greenhaw was not the only speaker to applaud the students. State Senator Quinton T. Ross, Jr. (D-Montgomery) brought congratulations on behalf of the Alabama State Legislature.

"I want all you students and parents to know how proud I am of you," he said. "You young writers are putting intriguing thoughts down on paper that will take you to places unknown."

Al Head, Executive Director of the Alabama State Council on the Arts, continued the praise. Quoting Theodore Roosevelt, he said, "Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs even though checkered by failure, than to rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy nor suffer much because they live in the gray twilight that knows neither victory nor defeat."

"Writing is a bit of a solitary art form," he continued. "Even though you work in solitude, you still need a support system.

The Writers' Forum has been a tremendous support system for writers in our state."

In its partnership with the Alabama State Council on the Arts and the Support the Arts Car Tag Fund, the Alabama Writers' Forum offers annual awards to high school students in the genres of creative nonfiction, drama, fiction, and poetry. First place winners receive \$150. Second and third place receive \$75. Students may also place in the Judge's Special Recognition and Certificates of Recognition categories.

Exceptional seniors receive a \$500 cash scholarship to use toward study at the college of their choice. This year five students won these scholarships for their outstanding portfolios.

In addition, the Forum grants \$150 cash awards to outstanding high school literary magazines in the categories of literary content and graphic design. The winner of overall literary content and graphic design receives \$250.

Over the years, the High School Literary Arts Awards and Scholarship Competition has accumulated many generous benefactors.

This year, the Jemison Investment Company, Inc., and the Jemison and Day families began a multi-year commitment to fund the awards in creative nonfiction, renamed the Marie Stokes Jemison Creative Nonfiction Awards in memory of Marie Stokes Jemison, a Birmingham native and widely recognized Alabama author.



PHOTOS BY JAMIE MARTIN



*Derrichia Reezer of Ensley High School receives congratulations from her father after receiving a Poetry Certificate of Recognition.*

*State Senator Quinton T. Ross, Jr. takes time to congratulate Booker T. Washington Magnet High School students Nichole Peacock, First Place winner in both drama and fiction, Johnna Dominguez, Poetry Judge's Special Recognition, and Nikki Davis, Second Place winner in drama, and teacher Foster Dickson.*





*Poetry award winners Metia Harris of Booker T. Washington Magnet School, Thomas Pennington of Briarwood Christian School, Erin Blumenthal of Auburn High School, Meredith Wiggins of Austin High School, Nikki Davis and Johnna Dominguez of Booker T. Washington Magnet School, poetry judge Juliana Gray, Daniel Jordan and Joanna Carter of Briarwood Christian School, and Clifton Gardner of Crossroads Christian School gather after the awards ceremony.*

Also this year Ruth Ott, an AWF board member, and her husband Jay funded a Senior Portfolio Scholarship.

AWF board member Philip Shirley continues to underwrite the Mozelle Shirley Senior Portfolio Scholarship to honor his mother.

Other benefactors include Bill Fuller, who makes his donation to honor Alabama storyteller Kathryn Tucker Windham. The Alabama Shakespeare Festival annually grants an in-kind donation.

AWF also recognizes its many generous associates, including high school and college students, writers, readers, public libraries, college English and Continuing Education departments, and individuals who believe in Alabama writers and writing.

In addition to Greenhaw, this year’s judges included Daryl Brown, Assistant Professor of English at the University of North Alabama and an award-winning writer; Juliana Gray, a poet and Instructor of English at Auburn University; Eric Schmiedl, a playwright and member of the Playwrights’ Unit at the Cleveland Play House, Cleveland, Ohio; Kelly Cherry, an award-winning writer with twenty-seven published books of fiction, memoir, poetry, and translations of classical drama; and Lisa Roper, 2005 editor of the University of North Alabama’s award-winning literary magazine *Lights and Shadows*. Each judged in his or her respective genre.

Anita Miller Garner, Assistant Professor of English at the University of North Alabama and an Alabama State Council on the Arts Literary Fellowship recipient, served again as chairperson of the event.

The awards presented, the photographs taken, and the young writers ready to take their leave, Linda Henry Dean, former AWF Board President and Director of Education at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival, left them with a final insight.

Alluding to the poem “The Writer” by poet and translator Richard Wilbur, Dean said, “All writers, I think, are in fact translators, for they take the world around them and see it in a different way. They ‘translate it.’ Gifted young writers such as you can aptly ‘translate’ something so vividly that someone of any age and background can connect with it.”



*Editors Glynnis Ritchie and Mark Wadley of the Alabama School of Fine Arts received awards for Exceptional Literary Content and Best Overall Literary Content and Graphic Design in the Literary Magazine Competition for the student-produced Cadence.*



*Portfolio judge Anita Miller Garner with scholarship winners Sarah Black, Mark Wadley, and Shaina Strom of the Alabama School of Fine Arts; Daniel Jordan of Briarwood Christian School; and Kristin Stickland of Eufala High School.*

# WRITING MOBILE BAY

## *Arts Relief Project Launches Community Writing on the Gulf Coast*

by Jeanie Thompson

The culmination of an eight-week creative writing experience dubbed Writing Mobile Bay: The Hurricane Project resulted in an anthology of stories, poems, and reminiscences that evoke the Alabama Gulf Coast and the aftermath of the 2005 hurricane season. A project evaluation and a second series of workshops carried the arts relief project into the beginning of the 2006 hurricane season.

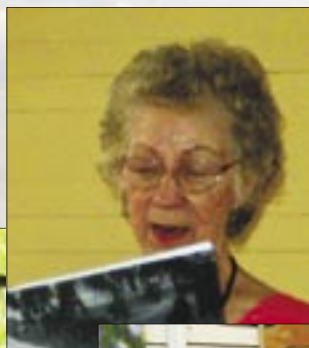
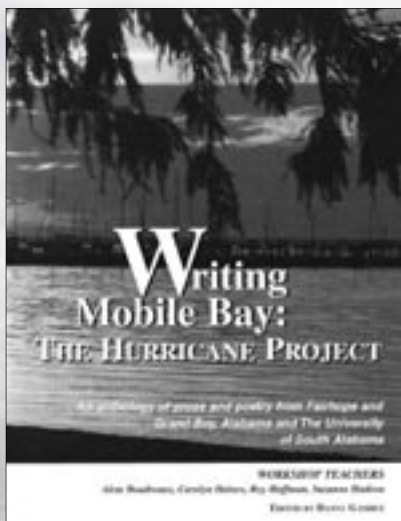
The anthology, also titled *Writing Mobile Bay*, debuted at the Alabama Book Festival April 22 in Montgomery and was later presented to local audiences in Grand Bay and Fairhope, the sites where the classes met January through March.

On May 13 during Heritage Day at the Grand Bay Community and Senior Citizen Center, writers published in the anthology read from their work and signed copies. The next day, writers from the Fairhope, Spanish Fort, and Elberta communities who participated in the workshop at the USA-Baldwin County Campus read from their published works at Page and Palette. More than fifty copies were sold that day, with many going to relatives of the writers who wanted mementoes of the personal pain and triumph of Hurricanes Ivan and Katrina.

A portion of proceeds from the book will be donated to the Bayou La Batre Mose Tapia Public Library later this year.

A project of the Alabama Writers' Forum with hurricane arts relief funds from the Alabama State Council on the Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Southern Arts

*Ester Nicholson of Grand Bay read from her work in Writing Mobile Bay: The Hurricane Project during the inaugural Alabama Book Festival in April.*



AMBER DICKINSON



AMBER DICKINSON



BETH BOYES KNOX

Novelist Carolyn Haines taught a creative writing workshop in Grand Bay as part of the hurricane arts relief project and appeared with the published authors at the Alabama Book Festival at Old Alabama Town in Montgomery.

Authors from the Eastern Shore workshop of Writing Mobile Bay: The Hurricane Project signed the self-titled anthology at Page and Palette Bookshop in Fairhope in May. L-R, seated: Wilma Albers, Julie Moon, Beth Boyes Knox, and Katherine Thompson. Standing: Workshop teacher Suzanne Hudson and Mary Ardis.



Federation, the creative writing workshops targeted anyone on the Alabama Gulf Coast who had suffered damage—physical, emotional, or psychological—through the 2005 hurricane season.

Local writers were recruited and trained to work with the unique community population. According to project consultant and community arts specialist Grady Hillman, workshops like this can serve a vital role in helping people regroup following a natural disaster. He cited work in Florida following Hurricane Andrew as a model.

“The Miami-Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs found that restoring cultural institutions and providing ongoing community arts programs for impacted citizens provided a way for communities to come together and stay together through the recovery process,” said Hillman.

Authors Carolyn Haines and Aleta Boudreaux taught the Grand Bay class for the first sessions, and Boudreaux led the second set of workshops. About a dozen writers gathered once a week to put stories and poems to paper about the experience of living through a hurricane and its aftereffects. Grand Bay authors touched on the physical aspects of the storm—sights, sounds, and memories of other hurricanes still etched in survivors’ memories.

Haines, who teaches creative writing at the University of South Alabama, also included work from her students in the anthology. Their works of fiction depict various themes of love, abandonment and rescue, and survival.

In Fairhope, the class averaged eight students the first session and about ten for the second workshop. They met first with author Roy Hoffman and later with Suzanne Hudson twice a week. During the second round, Hudson served as lead teacher, with local writer Joe Formicello helping out as guest writer. Both novelists and creative writing teachers, Hoffman and Hudson led the community writers through a series of experiences. Project partner USA-Baldwin County facilitated both classes.

Hoffman and Hudson encouraged their students to focus on aspects such as memories of childhood storms and the storm from an animal or a building’s point of view. The results ranged from the humorous piece “Laddie’s Ivan Adventure” by Jule Moon to Beth Boyes Knox’s rendering of the damage to the Grand Hotel.

Hillman interviewed many of the participating writers as part of an evaluation of the effectiveness of Writing Mobile Bay after the conclusion of the first workshop and the anthology publication. Funded by the Southern Arts Federation grant, Hillman’s evaluation made recommendations about how to continue the program in a second workshop and noted the Forum’s unique readiness to implement an “arts relief” program in creative writing.

“Every participant and instructor interviewed found the writing workshops to have been a great experience,” said Hillman. “They built a lot of camaraderie and they wished to continue meeting on a weekly basis—though not necessarily to write about Katrina.”

According to Hillman, the publication of the anthology brought the project full circle. “The Alabama Writers’ Forum started this project by answering a call for proposals from

the Alabama State Council on the Arts in December and, remarkably, they were putting a book in the public’s hands three months later,” Hillman said.

“This has been an extraordinary community arts project. A writer’s organization rallied the literary community to respond to a natural disaster. Participants from impacted areas were speedily gathered with the assistance of local partners. Professional writers led high-quality workshops, and the participants had the almost immediate gratification of seeing their work in print. Better still, the public has a way of understanding the social impact of Katrina, and others impacted by the storm have the stories in hand as an inspiration to remember and share their own,” Hillman said.

A limited number of copies of *Writing Mobile Bay: The Hurricane Project* are still available for \$10 plus \$3 shipping and handling.

Contact the Alabama Writers’ Forum at 334-265-7728 or [writersforum@bellsouth.net](mailto:writersforum@bellsouth.net).

Jeanie Thompson



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After you have followed these simple steps, the Forum will send you an e-mail confirmation so you may proof your listing for accuracy.

**Let the Alabama Writers’ Forum help you make your literary event a success.**



# Private Thoughts on a Public Person

## An Interview with SENA JETER NASLUND

by Pam Kingsbury

**S**ena Jeter Naslund's excitement about Marie Antoinette is contagious. Anticipating *Abundance: A Novel of Marie Antoinette*, readers have asked Naslund questions about trends—ranging from gardens to the arts to French underwear—during Marie Antoinette's lifetime, knowing Naslund can answer questions about the period with great anecdotes and great authority.

As in her earlier works, *Sherlock In Love*, *Ahab's Wife*, and *Four Spirits*, Naslund loved the research, the writing, and the revisions. Calling herself “an equalist,” her writing gives voices to women who lived their lives in times of great upheaval and who learned to survive on their instincts, intellect, and integrity.

### Your new novel—the much anticipated *Abundance*—takes Marie Antoinette as a subject. What was your attraction to her?

I take a revisionist view of Marie. She was *not* clueless. She was a caring person who lived life in a compassionate manner. She's been portrayed as extravagant, but she was no more so than anyone else of her time. I had the feeling she had been maligned, treated like Eve.

This novel is highly researched, using contemporary scholarship. Antonia Fraser's biography (*Marie Antoinette: The Journey*) was most helpful. Fraser's approach was to debunk the idea that Marie Antoinette was not generous. She was actually quite generous. For example, Marie Antoinette never said, “Let them eat cake.” Fraser gave us a new image of Marie Antoinette's life.

As a child, I knew about Marie Antoinette's story. She was a princess and a cautionary tale. Her story was a fairy tale turned awry and it cost her her head. We're never safe. We never achieve a position where we're safe. We're all so vulnerable. We can do our best to be kind—morally and spiritually—the existential human condition. Marie Antoinette was acting out of kindness, yet she became a scapegoat for all of the perceptions of the French monarchy.

I wanted to envision a new side of her. She faced her death with sublime courage.

With *Abundance*, I wanted to get inside of her head by giving the novel a first-person point of view and writing it in present tense. It's a recreation of her life.

### How long did it take to research and write *Abundance*?

Around three years. I started the book around 2003, after *Four Spirits*. I visited Versailles a number of times and spent

a month living there. I tried to catch the spirit of place during many seasons. Versailles is a vast estate and I wanted time to absorb it. I believe “body research”—a going to a place—is as important as scholarly research.

### What does the book's title mean to you?

One might think about the material aspect of court life. I wanted to suggest a queen who embraced life and lived fully, a woman with plenty of compassion and full of caring. She was naïve to a certain extent.

Marie Antoinette loved music, dancing, theatre, and flowers. The Shakespearean tragedy is that she did not like to read. Had she read more, she would have been less naïve. She would have understood more deeply.

Fraser's biography suggests how important women's friendships were to Marie Antoinette.

Despite the opulence of the court, Marie developed a taste for simple chemises with slim sashes, causing an uproar in the fashion world. The people were outraged to see the queen in her underwear.

She wanted to live a simpler life, less governed by protocol.

Only fourteen-and-a-half when she left her home to marry—she had never met the man—she naturally made mistakes in the sophisticated world. She was a person who tried to—and did—encourage. In the face of mean-spiritedness, she refused to bow. She acted with kindness and consideration until the end. On her way to the guillotine, she stepped on the foot of her executioner, saying, “Pardon me. I did not mean to do it.” She faced death with grace and dignity.

### It's impossible not to be aware of the weather, the placement of the stars, and the changes in landscape in your work.

I have a great interest in science. My bedtime reading is often in physics or astronomy.

When I was around ten years old, I was reading Laura Ingalls Wilder. It was over ninety degrees in Birmingham and I



Sena Jeter Naslund

MARION ETTLINGER

felt cold. I was shivering with cold. Knowing that words made me feel that way made me think, “I want to do that.” One of my major goals is to transport the reader.

**You’ve mentioned being a cello player in various interviews. Do you still play and do you see a connection between the discipline needed to be a musician and the discipline needed for revising fiction?**

I played in grade school and in high school. I no longer play, but I enjoy classical music and it’s mentioned a lot in my work.

I love revising. I love having something to work with. I’ve often compared revision to a woodcarver who returns to polish a piece of wood. The woodcarver’s hands fall into it and love it. With *Ahab’s Wife*, I revised the entire book four times and parts of it were revised countless times. I never got tired of it. Not for a single minute. I loved the book.

**The MFA program at Spalding University is credited with being a very nurturing program. After your years of teaching do you still feel the need for a mentor? And, if so, who are your mentors?**

The mentor’s friends become her mentors. Women are very good at swapping in role playing. Women’s friendships don’t have such rigid definitions. There’s a back and forth exchange.

**Excerpt from *Abundance: A Novel of Marie Antoinette***

Like everyone, I am born naked.

The stern French require that I step forward, naked, with no ribbon, memento, ruby, or brooch of Austrian design. To my ladies, I display my open palms so they may witness and affirm that I leave empty-handed and am beholden in no way to my native Austria. Clothed nobly in nothing but my own skin, described as pearly by some in its translucent sheen, I begin the donning of French clothes, no longer Maria Antonia, Archduchess of Austria, daughter of Maria Teresa, Empress of Austria, but my French self, now named: Marie Antoinette...

My women mentors—from a distance—have been Laura Ingalls Wilder, Anne of Green Gables, Jo March from *Little Women*, the Brontë Sisters, George Eliot, Virginia Woolf was particularly inspiring, Flannery O’Connor, Katherine Anne Porter, and Toni Morrison.

I learned an enormous amount from all of my teachers, both male and female. Leslie Moss Ainsworth of Phillips High School encouraged my writing.

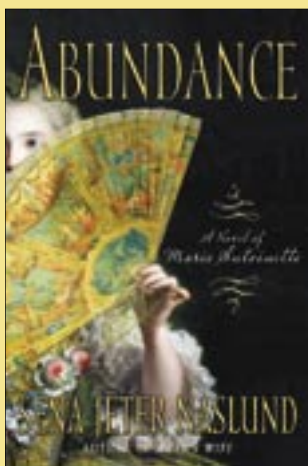
**What do you believe lies at the heart of your work?**

The belief in the value of personal relationships and the redemptive power of beauty in nature and of the arts.

Sena Jeter Naslund, who grew up in Birmingham, currently resides in Louisville, Kentucky, where she is writer-in-residence at the University of Louisville, program director of the brief-residency MFA in Writing at Spalding University, and current Poet Laureate of Kentucky. She is cofounder of the *Louisville Review* and of the Fleur-de-Lis Press. She is a recipient of the Harper Lee Award and the Southeastern Library Association Fiction Award. *Ahab’s Wife* was a *New York Times* bestseller.

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*Pam Kingsbury, author of Inner Voices, Inner Views, teaches at the University of North Alabama.*



*Abundance: A Novel of Marie Antoinette*

by Sena Jeter Naslund

William Morrow, 2006

\$26.95, Hardcover

As in her earlier novels, *Sherlock In Love*, *Ahab’s Wife*, and *Four Spirits*, Sena Jeter Naslund’s *Abundance* has created an immediately familiar story, giving the feminine characters a more feminist role. Written in first person and thoroughly researched, *Abundance:*

*A Novel of Marie Antoinette* presents a very different—and much more humane—portrait of Maria Antonia, the fifteen-year-old who married the future King of France. Trained by her mother Maria Teresa, the Empress of Austria, Maria Antonia, Archduchess of Austria, who would become Marie Antoinette, had excellent manners, a sense of decorum and protocol, and—despite her age—a sense of self and style. She wanted to please her mother, the king

(her future father-in-law), and her future husband. Naslund presents Marie Antoinette as a woman who was unfailingly polite up until moments before her death. She may not have had a long life, but she did have a life filled with abundance.

Fans of Naslund have come to expect a genuine sense of place and time in her fiction, and *Abundance* does not disappoint. Whether it’s the subtle change in a garden from season to season, the slight change in the air while traveling by horseback, or the best angle necessary for viewing a painting, the author selects the exact detail necessary for the reader to share her vision.

Revisionist in nature, *Abundance* confirms Marie Antoinette’s love for her adopted country and its citizens, her compassion and empathy for her subjects, the difficulties of balancing being a public person with marriage and family, and the necessity for women to have friends and the ways that those friendships offer sustenance. Sena Jeter Naslund offers a richly textured epic tale designed to debunk certain myths and open up discussion regarding Marie Antoinette’s life.

*Abundance* is also available as an unabridged book on CD from Harper Audio (ISBN: 0-06-115091-6) and as a reader’s edition. The reading group guide will be offered online.—P.K.



# The Sacred and the Profane

## VOICES OF THE URBAN EXPERIENCE

by Edward Reynolds

Who would have guessed that downtown Birmingham has a verbal pulse after sundown? It's not an easy pulse to locate. But once it's found, it's a startling revelation.

The beat thrives at the Carver Theater the third Sunday night of each month when a poet named Moon hosts spoken word celebrations. Urban spoken word wrestles for life in a town often indifferent to the most fundamental of creative arts. Sundays at the Carver Theater in the Civil Rights District are a rhyming confrontation with brutal honesty between artists and audience, and between the artists and themselves. Sometimes at the Carver the audience remains in the observation seats, jostled and soothed by the spontaneous flow of syllables. But on this particular Sunday evening, the audience joins performers onstage. Why, it's almost a hootenanny!

On the second Tuesday of each month, the pulse shifts a few blocks east to the Urban Echo, a dimly-lit club illuminated only by flickering candles and the flicking of cigarette lighters in bursts of approval for poets delivering their deepest emotions. The Urban Echo is located in the 1800 block of 3rd Avenue North in a building whose windows are emblazoned with "Jewel's" in big pink letters. A block away, the Alabama Theater's neon marquee advertises an upcoming B.B. King show.

The coffee shop vibe is mysterious indeed, an oasis of a trance tucked in the midst of deserted downtown streets and alleys. A DJ spins soft jazz led by meandering flutes. The whoops of the audience and the click of lighters provide percussive accompaniment. If you don't smoke, don't worry; cigarette lighters are distributed before performances by Kanika Wellington and Kibibi Jones, the women who host the Urban Echo spoken word evenings.

The crowd drifts in slowly. Urban Echo is competing with *American Idol* on this Tuesday evening. "What's up, y'all?" Wellington asks the audience of a dozen or so, an overwhelmingly African-American crowd in their twenties and thirties. The jazz flutes give way to seductive percussion as poets preach menacing, hypnotic rhymes that detail everything from the daily grind of black economic and social frustration to stanzas proclaiming God as the perfect guide through life's bitter roller coaster ride.

"Our vision of the Urban Echo is to be open mic and not limited. Your style, whatever you bring if you are a poet or an artist, we want to hear it," says Wellington. "You'll have one poet who is very aggressive, and is very much what we call 'street' or kinda 'hood-like.' And they're talking about

the everyday life of drugs in their community and how their mother was a drug addict. And then you may have somebody come right behind that and talk about what God has done for them and where they are now and how God has moved them and how they're on this quest for motivation and elevation."

Dee Smith introduces "a very, very, very, very old piece" in a soft, lush voice. She and her partner, a poet named Kkoall (pronounced "coal"), are billed as the Ike and Tina of Poetry. She recites the Pledge of Allegiance in a poem she wrote that repeats the refrain "I'll be damned if I'll die for the Taliban." Smith recites her version of "God Bless America," with references to slavery, the Confederate flag, and bomb threats on her elementary school as a child. Kkoall performs his "Burn D.C., Burn" and the moving "Father's Kinetic Energy."

Several miles west of Birmingham lies Fairfield, home to the Red Carpet Lounge. Inside the bar in an adjoining room is the Lyric Lounge. A couple dozen people sit at tiny tables on a Thursday night at eight o'clock. The walls are painted black. The carpet is blood red. On the night I attended, Smith and Kkoall were three months shy of shutting down the monthly poetry night. It's a shame. The Lyric Lounge is more cocktail bar than the Urban Echo. Red vinyl couches are scattered about the room. A spotlight illuminates the lone microphone in one corner of the lounge. Above, a ceiling fan casts a Tennessee Williams-inspired shadow onto the stage. Smith walks from table to table lighting candles. She approaches the spotlight at center stage and demands, "Respect this mic."

In a chat a couple of weeks later, Smith thanks her mother for her childhood love of creative writing. "My mom used to implement a lot of reading. We'd just read all the time," remembers Smith. "Out of that I used to just write stuff down. Creative writing, little short stories, and things like that, but I never pursued it actually until I got older."

Smith continues, "They tried to get me to change my name to Political Dee. I just like telling the truth. For the most part, I like telling the truth and that's it. Everything else pretty much is always simply how I feel or I think somebody else's emotions, and, you know, speak from the mind of other people in certain situations and things like that."

Smith was never shy of a microphone. "No, never... Me? (Laughs) That's funny... No, I don't feel nervous... I was the kid that would always get up in front of the class and read or recite something. That was me."

Smith has performed her spoken word at some unusual



events. “I do perform at different churches. I’ve done retirement centers, elder care centers, weddings, funerals. I do poetry at funerals! Believe it or not... I’ve done poetry at two funerals, as a matter of fact.”

On the phone a couple of weeks later, Kkoall’s down-home friendliness and warmth remind one more of Andy Griffith than Ike Turner. “Well, it just depends on what mood I’m in, when I’m in the mood to write,” Kkoall says of his inspirations, drawing out the word “well” in a smooth southern drawl straight out of Mayberry. “Sometimes it just depends on what’s going on in my life... I think the things that I enjoy writing about the most are mostly, I guess what most people call ‘love jones.’” He explains that a “love jones” is “writing about a person that you’re in love with or someone that you’re infatuated with.”

Kanika Wellington will never forget her first time to perform spoken word. “I was so nervous. I remember when I did my first poem, oh my goodness. I was reading off a paper and stumbled through the whole piece. It was awful,” she recalls. “But I’m very comfortable. I’m so in love with this right now. I am addicted to the microphone. Poetry is my everything. I still get nervous. I don’t think

I’ll ever get rid of that. And I think that’s a good thing. I don’t ever want to get too confident.

“Birmingham is kind of limited,” explains Wellington of the prominence of African-American participation

*Dee Smith and Kkoall at the Lyric Lounge in Birmingham. The Lyric Lounge closed in July after a nearly two-year run.*

in urban spoken word events. “But nationwide, spoken word is very diverse. You have it from all kinds of cultures—Korean, Puerto Rican, Spanish... It’s just here in Birmingham that the scene right now is predominantly African-American.”

Yolonda Carter, an African-American woman in her thirties and known as Yogi EC (Eternal Communicator), is not surprised that the secular and the God-fearing co-exist on the same stage. “I think it’s just a respect for what people believe to be their own truth... I have heard some stuff that offended me and I walked out until that artist got done. If it’s just absolutely vulgar, I’ll walk out.”

She wrote her first poem at age five. “I wrote my first poem in purple crayon. It was called ‘The Day.’ It was like ‘The day has passed me,/the day loves me,/I love you day...’ Something like that (laughs).”

Yogi EC elaborates that poetry has been an outlet. “It’s been an avenue for my own feelings; it’s been an avenue to explore the truth; it’s been an avenue to give me a voice to say things that I feel I couldn’t say in another arena; it’s been an avenue for anger.”

Yogi EC grew up in New York and moved to Birmingham at age seventeen. “It was a big culture shock. I did go through a lot of racism—from black and white people. I was very isolated. So poetry really kind of gave me a voice to say stuff.” She started doing spoken word in 1996 at age twenty-four.

Yogi EC offers her perspective of the black experience’s contributions to spoken word. “It’s kind of a two-sided coin to me. With African-American poetry I feel a real passion. There’s an intensity because what most poets are talking about they’ve lived,” she explains. “On the flipside, though, to me black poetry kind of got redundant. I’ve heard a lot of black poets say, ‘I’m angry about the social situations and stuff.’ But now that they’ve identified a problem, what is the solution? Let’s start talking about a solution in our poetry and living it...I’d say maybe twenty percent are talking about different things besides being an angry black person. And the other ones are talking about the ghetto, and ‘the man’s got his foot on your neck’ and all that. OK, we get it! What’s next?”

For information contact:

**Carver Theater**

1631 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue North, Birmingham, AL 35203  
205-254-2731; tours@jazzhall.com; www.jazzhall.com

**Urban Echo at Jewel’s**

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**What’s Up Wednesday** has opened to fill the void left by the closing of the Lyric Lounge. Wednesday nights at 7 p.m. at Funny Bonez, 427 20<sup>th</sup> Street South, Birmingham, AL 35214; 205-616-3841; Aisha@afrocentricbooks.net; www.afrocentricbooks.net

*Edward Reynolds is a journalist in Birmingham.*

PHOTO BY AVERY CARTER



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# How It Started

by Daniel Wallace

**W**hen I turned sixteen my mother gave me the keys to a car and I haven't seen much of her since. Everything I needed a mother for appeared to have been replaced by a black and white 1974 Monte Carlo—which, at the time, seemed like a pretty good trade.

I was out in that car all night long sometimes, so late my mother would be asleep by the time I got in and gone by the time I got up.

She worried about me, though, so each night I'd slip a note beneath her bedroom door which, if she woke up wondering, she could see and read and know that I had made it home alive again.

They were just notes at first. *I'm home. Go back to bed!* But it wasn't long before I got bored with that and did something I'd never done before: I started writing a story. Out of nowhere came this couple, Carla and Dwayne. I wrote a little bit about them every night. Dwayne was an ex-con who couldn't go straight, and Carla was his understanding woman. They had that kind of love that transcended common sense—destined to die together in a hail of bullets or accidentally kill themselves snorting detergent. In a trailer in the woods behind a boat shop, Dwayne drank beer like water and whapped the dog with a rolled-up newspaper and watched television slouched in a La-Z-Boy, lids half-drooped over his bloodshot eyes. Carla just loved him and wanted her dream of love to come true.

But they had it tough. Just when you thought things would brighten up for them, *bam*, Dwayne would rob a 7-11 or bring one of his weird friends home, and things would fall apart again.

Every night there was a little more to this story, and every night my mother woke up to read it. Eventually her waking up



*A fictional town Wallace drew for his writing class. During the course of the class, all of their stories had to be set somewhere within the city limits.*



had as much to do with discovering what happened with these two sad people as discovering whether I was home or not. What kind of trouble would Dwayne get into next? How long would Carla put up with it? She woke to read it and would call me from work later the next day and ask me, *What's going to happen tonight?*

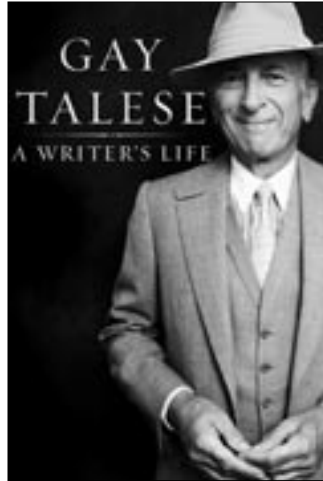
I wouldn't tell her of course. I liked the idea of her having to wait for the next installment, but...the truth was, I really didn't know. Like everything else in my life, I had no idea what would happen next.

This is how it started, my becoming a writer, and this is the goal I've been going for ever since: To make a story so compelling that a woman who is not necessarily my mother will get up at three o'clock in the morning to read it.

---

*Daniel Wallace lives in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Doubleday will publish his new novel, Mr. Sebastian and the Negro Magician, next year. Drawings © Daniel Wallace*





## A Writer's Life

by Gay Talese

Alfred A. Knopf, 2006

\$26, Hardcover

In the 1980s, Gay Talese signed a much-discussed, lucrative deal for a three-volume autobiography. After twelve years —Talese is a thorough, meticulous, slow writer—the first volume, *Unto the Sons*, was published. This book tells the story of Talese's father, from his childhood in the south of Italy to his emigration to Ocean City, New Jersey, where he was a fine men's tailor and his wife, Gay's mother, ran a dress shop. We then follow Gay Talese through his childhood, World War II, and his early experiences in journalism for his

school paper and the local paper.

*Unto the Sons* was published fourteen years ago. Volume two was to cover Talese's student days at the University of Alabama, 1949-1953, as a journalism major, perhaps the school's most famous journalism alum ever, then as a lieutenant in an armored division in Germany, then his ten years as a *New York Times* reporter, especially covering the Selma to Montgomery march, his last major assignment.

Volume two never got written, exactly. *A Writer's Life* is not that book, exactly. This book, all 430 pages of it, is the story of several false starts, books begun but not finished, from 1992 until the present. Talese may have been suffering from an ailment we might call "perfectionist's block."

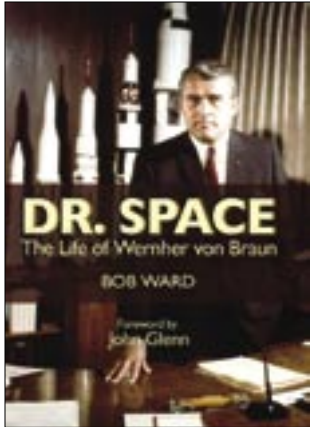
Talese wrote most of a book about John Wayne and Lorena Bobbitt, she later acquitted of dismembering her husband. Talese wrote part of another book about the travails of Liu Ying, a female Chinese soccer player. Convinced that the restaurant was both the modern melting pot and the ladder upward for the world's immigrants to New York City, Talese set out to do another book first about Elaine's, and then a building on East 63<sup>rd</sup> Street, but over time eleven different restaurants opened and closed at that address. One of the many owners is quoted as saying, "The restaurant business is an oxymoron."

For Alabamians, the most interesting sections of *A Writer's Life* will probably be Talese's years in Tuscaloosa and covering Selma. He came here to school because he couldn't get in anywhere else and his family doctor had influence in the admissions office. He tells a wonderful story of coming from New Jersey on the train, into "foreign territory." Talese was sports editor for the *Crimson White*, had a column entitled "Gay-zing," and was a stringer for the *Birmingham Post-Herald*.

Perhaps because he had lived in Alabama, and understood it a little, no national reporter gave Selma any gentler treatment than Talese. In his intimate, first-person account, Talese remarks that "police brutality, after all, could be found almost anywhere" and that Selma "in the spring of 1965 was demonized like no other place in America." He reminds readers that on Bloody Sunday, however horrific it was, "no one died."

Talese's career was thriving through the sixties and seventies. His early, in-depth profiles of celebrities such as Joe DiMaggio, Floyd Patterson, and Frank Sinatra are considered the first examples of "The New Journalism." He had bestsellers such as his history of the *New York Times*, *The Kingdom and the Power* (1969), his study of the Mafia, *Honor Thy Father* (1971), and *Thy Neighbor's Wife* (1980), his study of America's changing sexual morés.

And, of course, in *A Writer's Life*, Talese tells how he writes: in pencil, on lined yellow pads. He bought a computer once, but was dismayed at how quickly it became obsolete. "The new technology," he says, is "close to being a misnomer."



Dr. Space: The Life of  
Wernher von Braun  
by Bob Ward

Naval Institute Press, 2005  
\$29.95, Hardcover

After the Soviet Union launched Sputnik on October 4, 1957, I became aware of the brilliant leader of our space program, Wernher von Braun, who became an increasingly mythic presence for my friends and me.

Then in the mid-sixties some friends played me a song by Tom Lehrer called “Wernher von Braun”:

*Gather round while I sing you of Wernher von Braun,  
A man whose allegiance  
Is ruled by expedience...  
Some have harsh words for this man of renown,  
But some think our attitude  
Should be one of gratitude,  
Like the widows and cripples of old London town  
Who owe their large pensions to Wernher von Braun.*

Upon investigation, I found that as a young man von Braun joined the Nazi party, became a Schutzstaffel officer, and built the V-2, which killed over 5,000 people in Europe. My hero was tarnished.

Bob Ward, former editor-in-chief of the *Huntsville Times*, examines these contradictory pictures in *Dr. Space*, and his portrait is appropriately sympathetic. Von Braun was a visionary who was always more interested in the positive benefits of exploring space than in making weapons, and he certainly was unaware of some of Hitler’s horrific practices. Though courted by the Soviets and the British, he came to America in 1945 because he thought it the best place to realize his dreams. Here he remained until 1977, when he died of cancer.

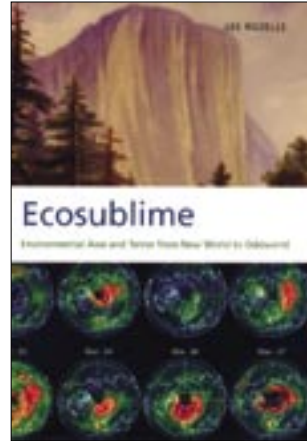
Readers looking for a seamless narrative of von Braun’s life will discover, in fact, chapters that read more like essays. For example, one of my favorite chapters, “Nobody’s Perfect,” stops the narrative to catalogue some of von Braun’s foibles: he would forget to put on his belt and wore mismatched socks, he was a klutz with everyday gadgets, he kept his pockets full of pills for any eventuality, and he liked to tell dirty jokes.

Ward’s best narrative comes late in the book, especially in his description of the launch of Apollo 11 and his account of von Braun’s final days.

I suspect that most readers will finish this book grateful for their increased understanding of this remarkable man.

---

*Norman McMillan is author of a memoir, Distant Son, and two plays, Truman Capote: Against a Copper Sky and Ashes of Roses, based on stories by Mary Ward Brown.*



Ecosublime: Environmental  
Awe and Terror from New  
World to Oddworld  
by Lee Rozelle

The University of Alabama  
Press, 2006  
\$29.95, Hardcover

In *The Sand County Almanac* Aldo Leopold makes the point that human culture is shaped by human ecology; that the character of the land, with all of its attendant physical and

biological relationships (i.e. ecology), determines the character of our social relationships, even as we, in turn, affect the character of the land through our activities. Given the centrality of ecology in determining the character of culture, there is an unfortunate absence in our culture of a unified referentiality to ecology; one person sees an undisturbed woodlot as an important piece in the lifecycle of game animals for food while another sees it as source of lumber for shelter. Both views are ecologic, but they are also mutually exclusive—harvesting the timber damages the game-producing capacity of the land; preserving the game-producing capacity of the land precludes the harvest of the timber. In our postmodern age the two views are given equal validity, equal merit, without deference to the manifold nature of Nature. The insensible forces of the market place determine which view wins out.

In his book, *Ecosublime*, Lee Rozelle proposes a new cultural perspective of ecology, a new referentiality of place, which he calls the “Ecosublime” and defines as “the awe and terror of a heightened awareness of the ecological home.” Ecosublimity is a transcendent and, presumably, universal experience, in which an ecocentric perspective of the world subsumes our egocentric perspectives. Rozelle proceeds to elucidate his notion of the ecosublime with a scholarly analysis of nineteenth century and modern literature, contemporary film, and even a videogame.

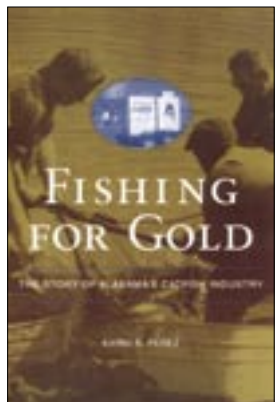
Rozelle’s idea of the ecosublime has great heuristic potential. Given that we have now entered an age of anthropogenic effects on the environment that are unprecedented in scope (e.g., global warming, ozone depletion, globe-trotting pests and pathogens, habitat destruction on massive scales, and wholesale species extinctions) and that promise to have profound impacts on human culture, this book could not be more timely.

Unfortunately, the breadth of readership may be limited due to the book’s scholastic nature. Readers not schooled in literary criticisms will likely find *Ecosublime* challenging. Rozelle’s book, however, does merit due consideration by a wide audience.

---

*Mike Hardig is an Associate Professor of Biology at the University of Montevallo.*





**Fishing for Gold: The Story of Alabama's Catfish Industry**

by Karni R. Perez

The University of Alabama Press, 2006

\$22.95, Paperback

In *Fishing for Gold: The Story of Alabama's Catfish Industry*, Karni R. Perez has provided a thorough, masterful, and easy-to-read historical account of the development of

the catfish industry in the U.S., with particular reference to Alabama. The book is a tribute to the risk-taking entrepreneurs who frequently "engineered" in their barns methods and equipment which led to the development of this industry. Perez names many individuals, and she describes their means of improvising in detail. She also notes the governmental agencies and educational institutions that assisted and often helped to guarantee the success of these early fish farmers.

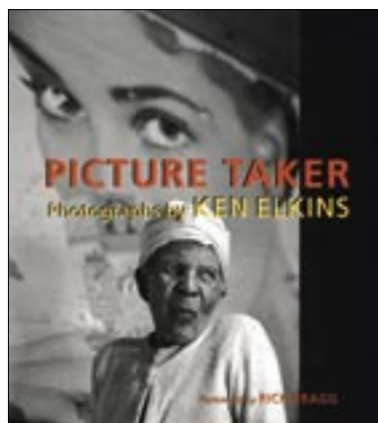
According to Perez, fish culture existed in Asia for thousands of years, but the Alabama catfish industry began in 1960 in the Black Belt region in Greensboro. Through a curious set of circumstances, three men began the STRAL Company catfish hatchery there. Through trial and error, they produced the first Alabama fingerlings for stocking farm ponds in 1961. Greensboro was also the site of the first catfish processing plant in Alabama in 1966. Over the years, Perez writes, farmers and researchers developed catfish egg hatching troughs, feeds, pond designs, treatments for parasite and disease control, skinning machines that worked on the fish rather than the people operating them, harvest methods, transportation, and public relations to publicize the benefits of eating what many people considered an ugly, bad tasting, bottom-feeder.

Perez notes that the market for Alabama's catfish has grown substantially. She writes that from 1993 to 2003, the number of Alabama catfish sold in the U.S. nearly doubled to almost 23% of the total sold. But while some farmers found success, many others failed for various reasons. High costs, catfish predators, poor water quality, competition from here and abroad, and other problems continue to make Alabama's aquaculture a challenging proposition.

Much of *Fishing for Gold* depends on oral accounts from those involved in the development of the state's catfish industry. The average reader should enjoy this well-written account and gain a better appreciation for the labor that went into the development of an industry that provides a Southern food staple.

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*Malcolm R. Braid earned his MS and PhD from Auburn University's Department of Fisheries and Allied Aquacultures and is Professor Emeritus of Biology at the University of Montevallo.*



**The Picture Taker**

by Ken Elkins

foreword by Rick Bragg; afterword by Basil Penny

The University of Alabama Press, 2005

\$35, Hardcover

Award-winning photographer and photojournalist Ken Elkins uses his camera to capture the pure essence of the lives and landscapes of rural Alabama in *The Picture Taker*. Elkins has been called a consummate photographer, his works have hung in many galleries, and his photographs have won many awards and much recognition. He retired as chief photographer for the *Anniston Star* in 2000 after a forty-two year career in photojournalism.

The foreword to *The Picture Taker* was written by Pulitzer Prize-winning author and journalist Rick Bragg. Bragg has worked beside some of the very best photographers, but he proclaims that there is only one picture taker. "When [Elkins] turns his lens on the mostly poor pockets of native Alabama, something beautiful happens," he writes.

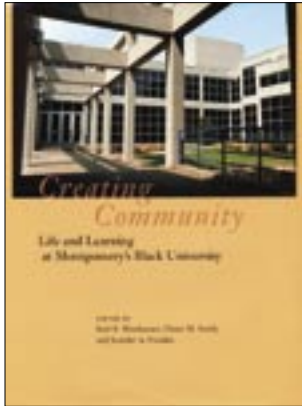
The afterword was written by retired associate editor of *The Anniston Star*, Basil Penny. Penny reveals that one of Elkins' primary inspirations is local Montgomery artist Mose Tolliver, who creates his own unique renditions of the South through folk art.

*The Picture Taker*, a collection of one hundred of some of the most honest moments captured on film in Alabama, reveals Elkins' creative brilliance. These large-format black and white images define themselves with baffling presence of small-town living and the people's truthful daily existence. These people have found refuge in the simplicities of the slow southern pace in places with names such as Lineville, Centerville, and Fruithurst, Alabama.

Bragg further writes, "The people do not like to be pushed or hurried. They do not care how you do it up North. The very old still care more about how to make a good whisk out of broom sage than whether or not they get a Wal-Mart. You catch a breath in the city, here you breathe."

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*Amber Dickinson, a photographer who lives in Montgomery, is the assistant to the executive director of the Alabama Writers' Forum.*



**Creating Community: Life and Learning at Montgomery's Black University**

edited by Karl Westhauser, Elaine Smith, and Jennifer Fremlin

The University of Alabama Press, 2005

\$29.95, Hardcover

In a conservative political milieu where public discourse about higher education is fraught with allegations of dominating

liberal ideologue professors, historically black colleges and universities—or HBCUs—have largely escaped this stigma. Given their pedagogy challenging racial injustice and creating equal opportunity, HBCUs are hardly apolitical. *Creating Community: Life and Learning at Montgomery's Black University* is a poignant collection of essays about Alabama State University, a pivotal player in the Montgomery Bus Boycott and cardinal source of black teachers. In the wake of *Brown v. Board of Education*, critics question HBCUs' legal feasibility and social efficacy. These critics assert Alabama State University and other HBCUs are anachronisms that foster self-segregation. Conversely, for the authors of *Creating Community*, these schools are vital academic villages, refuges for many students for whom without a school such as Alabama State University a college degree would be out of reach. Half of the book's authors are HBCU graduates, one, Kathy Dunn Jackson, literally grew up on Alabama State University's campus. Jackson describes the Alabama State of her youth as a "secure black world where [one] never felt inferior..."

Another misnomer is that HBCUs eschew diversity and are inhospitable to minority—read white—faculty and students. According to *Creating Community*, Alabama State University did not envisage itself as a segregated institution. When it was known as the Alabama State College for Negroes, that designation was state dicta not Alabama State University's desire. The state officially dropped "Negro" in June 1954, one month after the United States Supreme Court declared that "Negro" schools violated the Fourteenth Amendment's Equal Protection Clause.

Today, Alabama State University has one of the most racially diverse faculties and growing minority student populations of any Alabama public university. Nevertheless, the playing field is far from level, *a la* *Knight v. Alabama*, the desegregation lawsuit during which a federal court found the state guilty of *de jure* segregation in financial disparities for its flagship public white universities, namely Auburn University and the University of Alabama, when compared to its two flagship public black universities, Alabama Agricultural and Mechanical University and Alabama State University.

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*Derryn Moten is an Associate Professor of Humanities at Alabama State University.*

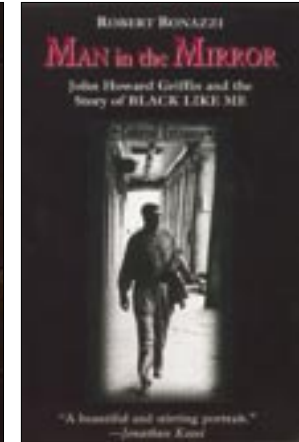


**Black Like Me**

by John Howard Griffin

Wings Press, 2003

\$24.95, Hardcover



**Man in the Mirror**

John Howard Griffin and the Story of Black Like Me

by Robert Bonazzi

Orbis Books, 1998

\$10, Paperback

JOHN HOWARD GRIFFIN'S *Black Like Me* is as much about what *Black* does not mean as much as it is about what *Black* does mean. My comment should not be misconstrued; Griffin's work is a snapshot of a great tumult in our nation. Although white, Griffin ventured where few white social scientists, southern or otherwise, dared to go. His foray into Jim Crow's racial abyss as a racially altered colored man required tremendous pluck and verve. In 1959, the Deep South states all rightly deserved the moniker of "Closed Societies." Before post-modernists espoused that race is socially constructed and before anthropologists agreed that biologically-determined races are scientific fiction, most people intuitively knew long after *Homer Plessy* the pseudo science of Louisiana's law and that 1/8 so-called Negro blood did not make one a Negro. Lest one feel that such thinking is anachronistic, consider the brouhaha over pro-golfing phenomenon Tiger Woods' declaration that he is not Black.

Both *Black Like Me* and its author have experienced a renaissance of sort thanks to the Spring 2006 debut of the FX network's *Black White*, a six-part television series in which two families, one white, one black, switch race with the help of a Hollywood makeup artist to experience and to learn what it is like being clothed in someone else's racial skin. *Black Like Me* presupposes that the verisimilitudes of Black identity can only be ascertained if one is "raced," to borrow phrasing from Toni Morrison. A "Negro" has been variously defined in history "based on physical characteristics without respect to language or culture," yet it is erroneous to assume that culture and linguistics do not matter to our identities, especially in the United States where Americans define themselves by race. Black identity, therefore, is not strictly and simply a matter of pigmentation, so while John Griffin successfully "passed" during his southern sojourn, he was never really Black. Forty



plus years later, the continued value of *Black Like Me* is its proving that the ontology of race is immutable. Race posits profound interracial attitudes that through fiat once resulted in the marginal and circumscribed lives of most Black Americans. As Griffin surmised, “When all the talk, all the propaganda has been cut away, the criterion (racial prejudice) is nothing but the color of skin. My experience proved that.”

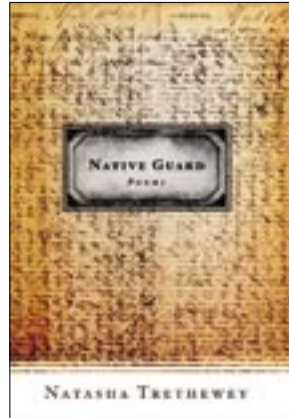
*Black Like Me*, like FX’s *Black White*, may disprove race as biological, but book and show reveal our nagging individual and collective racial instincts.



ROBERT BONAZZI’S *Man in the Mirror: John Howard Griffin and the Story of Black Like Me* is an important critique of an important work. Bonazzi offers a needed subtext to a perplexing book and perplexing time. Many readers of *Black Like Me* today may wonder what would persuade an educated, sane, economically secure white man to disguise himself as a black man and spend six weeks covertly and figuratively dredging racial undercurrents in a Deep South universe bifurcated into “White” and “Colored.” Native Texan John Griffin had little contact with Blacks before his sojourn. Bonazzi reveals that Griffin was no thrill-seeker nor did he seek vain glory or have a martyr complex. Griffin trekked in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia with trepidation. Griffin doubted his ability to hoodwink blacks: “I had never anticipated for one moment that I would pass as a black man in the black community...” Bonazzi notes that Griffin felt it important that the blacks who befriended him know his true identity and intentions, although once told some blacks regarded Griffin’s confessions as a ruse.

Because of his experience with Nazism in World War II, keeping his kids from becoming “little Nazis” partly motivated Griffin’s interest in American racism, says Bonazzi. But as his journal writings concede, white racism— notions of white supremacy and superiority—were difficult to deconstruct, notwithstanding, as a white or black man. Perhaps the biggest surprise was Griffin’s assessment of Montgomery, Alabama, a city with its own vexed history as the Cradle of the Confederacy in the Heart of Dixie. Griffin saw hope in the birthplace of the Montgomery Bus Boycott. His ingress and egress around the city, first as a black man, then as a white man offered Griffin some relief from the deluge of white racism. Sometimes the experiences were almost comical such as when a white woman at the city bus station mistook Griffin as a porter. Sometimes the experiences were quite revolting such as the sordid banter white males engaged Griffin in about the sexuality of black women and men.

Montgomery served as another turning point for Griffin. Bonazzi tells us that Griffin decided to “end his experiment” during his bus trip from Montgomery to Atlanta. “I had had enough,” writes Griffin. “Suddenly I could stomach no more of this degradation—not for myself but for all men who were black like me...”



## Native Guard

by Natasha Trethewey

Houghton Mifflin, 2006  
\$22, Hardcover

Recalling a first sting of self-consciousness “In the Waiting Room,” Elizabeth Bishop famously wrote, “You are an *I* / You are an *Elizabeth*, / you are one of *them*.” Such awareness of one’s interwoven relationship to the world is at the thematic

center of Natasha Trethewey’s impressive third book of poems, *Native Guard*.

Writing from a tense and difficult position as the biracial child of hard, loving parents and the unloving, hard state of Mississippi in the 1960s, Trethewey’s own family history is a major concern. Yet here, as in her prior volumes *Domestic Work* and *Bellocq’s Ophelia*, the justifiable angers, confusions, and injuries involved in living the drama of “race” in America are sharpened to subtle points through formal precision and are nuanced through the presence of much well-researched American history.

The result is three interwoven sequences of poems, all equally elegiac: poems for a departed mother, poems that engage the social history of the Mississippi Gulf Coast, and poems that position a figure not unlike Trethewey herself in the imaginative space opened by the other two sections. It’s an ingenious arrangement, articulated in “Theories of Time and Space:” “[...]Bring only // what you must carry—tome of memory,/ its random blank pages. On the dock // where you board the boat for Ship Island, / someone will take your picture: // the photograph—who you were— / will be waiting when you return.”

Indeed, multiplying images of identity accrue to nearly all of Trethewey’s subjects here. For instance, the *Native Guard* itself is explained in the judicious end notes as “the first officially sanctioned regiment of black soldiers in the Union Army.” A lesser poet would have contented herself with a single engagement of the subject. Not so for Trethewey. We get not only the title poem with its facsimile of a trooper’s journal, but also an oblique reference in the opening poem, dual elegies at the close of the book that recast the *Native Guard* in contemporary lights, and even subtler hints of their presence elsewhere.

In the same way the legacy of the *Native Guard* involves distance and nearness, past and present in a single fabric, so do Trethewey’s many other subjects thread the state of Mississippi—a place figured alternately as birthplace, battlefield, gravesite, and, ultimately and ambivalently, as the poet’s true home ground. If there’s a weakness in the book, Trethewey’s superb interweaving of identities stops too soon.



### Charon's Manifest

by Dan Albergotti

The North Carolina Writers' Network, 2005  
\$9.95, Paperback

When the North Carolina Writer's Network awarded this chapbook winner of the 2005 Randall Jarrell/Harper Prints Competition, it opened readers to the fresh voice of a discerning and determined poet. The nineteen pieces here range from elaborations on Dante ("The Boatload") and the

Jonah myth ("Things to Do in the Whale") to an incredible poem about a boy and the death of a dog ("Notes for a Poem in Which God Does Not Appear") to two *persona* poems, one about Cane and Abel ("The Testimony"), the other about the buzzing sarcasm of an insect ("What the Yellow Jacket Said"). Between are poems that rewrite the Adam-Eve story, play with language, call up Methuselah, present a contemporary maenad who will destroy a man, and re-render the desolation at the end of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

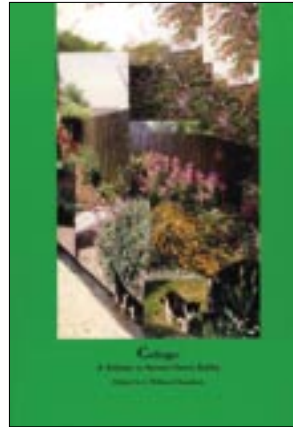
Several of the poems approach or exceed sonnet length, but none are sonnets. Their line lengths vary roughly between five, six, and seven beats, causing the poet to rely on sudden images and thoughts with little or no rhyme. The exception is the very fine piece "The Present," in which internal rhyme masters the reader's attention in a dream-like sequence of seven three-line stanzas, over the shadow-selves of a grandmother and a boy. The rolling motion of "Turning Back" is another worth our attention from its very beginning: "We turn back, always bowing to that urge / to return, to revise, to be certain. What do we want? / Everything we can never get."

Swift is Albergotti's wit as he telescopes through the meanings of words in "Bad Language" as he plays with double meanings of *ravish* and the Biblical *to know*. His "In the Era of the Sentence Fragment" makes a serious poem of sentence fragments, cleverly borrowing from T.S. Eliot's "These fragments I have shored against my ruins." After describing "that glorious digit" in "Thumbs," he can ask, "With what else could we dare / to offer figs to God?"—and then explodes an incident where his father cuts a blood blister under his thumb.

Albergotti has done more than render new metaphor from tradition here, and through succeeding poems readers will discover true mettle of the best poets in his strong and original writing.

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Theodore Haddin is a poet, editor, reviewer, and Emeritus Professor, The University of Alabama at Birmingham.



### Collage: A Tribute to Steven Owen Bailey

edited by J. William Chambers

Negative Capability Press, 2006  
\$22, Paperback

Steven Owen Bailey, who died at the age of forty-five in August 2004, must have been an amazing person to know: artist; interior and graphic designer; cook; gardener; and loyal, affectionate, lively friend. This volume, gathered to-

gether in Bailey's memory by J. William Chambers, his friend of twenty-some years, is a tribute to Bailey's generosity, creative energy, and, one gathers, genuine appreciation of life.

The volume is divided into four sections. The first is a single long poem by Chambers, titled "Collage in Green," a poignant poem rich in natural imagery that serves as both introduction and retrospection. Next comes a set of journal entries by Bailey from his college years, probably of most interest to those who knew him. The third section includes poems by many of Bailey's writer friends, a number of whom worked with him and Chambers on the staff of the *Elk River Review*. The volume concludes with a section of poems by Chambers detailing the last years of Bailey's life.

Published only a year-and-a-half after Steven Bailey's death, most of the poems in this volume quite naturally focus on the still intensely-felt loss of a friend. Some simply mourn; others seek to find acceptance of that loss and a way forward.

Of course, there is not room to mention every poem, but memorable works include "Garden, Garden" by Kennette Harrison, which figures Bailey as a "memory visitor" and catalogues the plants in his "garden of old fragrances"; "Ode in Limestone While Thinking of Steve: His" by Tom McDougale, with the repeated refrain of "His is a heart that"; and "Radiance Man" by Bonnie Roberts, a chant in praise of Bailey's "Creek shine. / White-rose shine. / Pear shine. / Blue-eye shine. / ...Steve shine. // Forever shine."

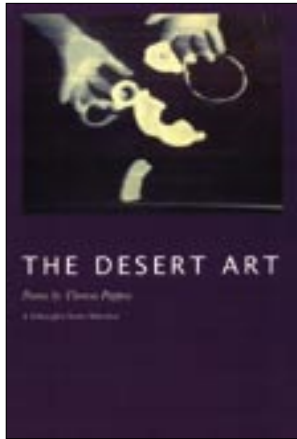
This volume joins the shelf of Alabama tribute volumes along with *Moments with Eugene*, edited by Rebecca Barrett and Carolyn Haines, in memory of writer and *bon vivant* Eugene Walter, and *In Light Apart: The Achievement of John Finlay*, edited by David Middleton.

Celebrating the life of a departed fellow artist not only helps to preserve his or her memory, it reminds us that we belong to a community of people who value the book, the painting, the symphony, the sculpture, the dance—those who choose, as Kathleen Petersen writes in "Trio for Steve," "A life lived well."

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





### The Desert Art

by Theresa Pappas

WordTech Editions, 2005  
\$17, Paperback

Theresa Pappas' second book, *The Desert Art*, is an accomplished collection that meditates on the relationship of the self to the world in varying landscapes and situations.

This book, composed of forty-eight poems and divided into three sections, uses the seeming

aridity and bleakness of the desert as a guiding metaphor. Through this metaphor, Pappas explores how what we typically think of as art (writing, painting) and the art of daily life take place. With references to the Desert of Maine, an actual desert and tourist attraction, Pappas suggests that, as Frost wrote in "Desert Places," "They cannot scare me with their empty spaces / Between stars—on stars where no human race is. / I have it in me so much nearer home / To scare myself with my own desert places." Unlike Frost's speaker, however, the woman in the title poem of Pappas' book creates art out of the desert itself: sand paintings of "murky waves, / dunes splashing the glass." The woman "brings a scientific ardor / to her art, passion / for a precision others / won't ever notice . . ." but which is worthwhile because it "will never slip away."

Pappas writes with precision and careful attentiveness, observing minute details and missing nothing. A number of the poems in *The Desert Art* chart interior landscapes in which all that "happens" is a subtle but important shift in mood or understanding, as in the fine "Whistle," a winter poem that evokes a moment of connectedness in an otherwise dreary day.

This book also charts exterior, literal landscapes. The first section consists of twelve poems that take place in Greece, from the weird mountains of Meteora to the defensive house-towers of the Mani. My favorite of these is "The Night, These Men," the story of one couple's night out drinking with shepherds and how it threatens to take a dangerous turn.

Pappas also writes well of relationships between men and women. In a pair of poems, "Watching the Men" and "Not Watching the Men," wives watch their husbands play baseball, seeing them "as boys who wanted / to be men who want to be boys again" and noting how, after the game, "They stroke their injuries / vaguely, pretending not to be proud."

Characterized by range of subject, formal assuredness, and existential attentiveness, *The Desert Art* makes art of small, often overlooked moments and asks us to be more observant ourselves.



### The Man Under My Skin

by Juliana Gray

River City Publishing, 2005  
\$20, Hardcover

The fifth volume in the handsomely designed River City Poetry Series—a series edited by Andrew Hudgins and featuring "rising stars in the world of poetry"—is a deft and capable volume by Alabama native Juliana Gray. *The Man Under My Skin* opens with two pro-

vocative poems that investigate "the lies of history." In the first, "Anniston," the speaker questions why she "had to learn from a Yankee college prof / that a Freedom Rider bus was firebombed / in my hometown." In the second, "Berman Museum of Military History, Anniston, Alabama," the speaker finds more threatening than the assembly of pistols and swords the shelf which displays "Adolph Hitler's silver tea service." These poems introduce two of the book's themes—the intersections between the personal and historical, and the landscape and inhabitants of the South. These themes deepen as the poems progress through the book's three sections, with poems about shrimpers, a panty thief, and several quite tender and moving poems which address an aging father.

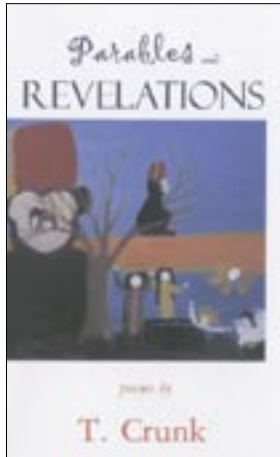
The book's middle section, "Winter Birds," is a grouping of thirteen poems that take birds as their main subject but are charged with a subtext of loss and failed love. Two dialogue poems, inspired perhaps by Louise Glück, convey isolation through detached observation and a judicious use of white space. When Gray turns her attention to personal, at times painful, relationships, the reader never feels the burden of unwarranted, uninvited confession, perhaps because Gray is at ease in the iamb and her poems often display a skillful formal complexity.

Gray also displays in these poems her understated sense of humor. Gray can playfully mine the possibilities of a fruitful poetic trope, as in "The Editor's Dog." She can also wryly address a situation that benefits from a humor that keeps the speaker from taking herself too seriously.

Gray's sense of humor, yoked with her accurate observing eye and skillful formal poetics, will make this volume a welcome addition to any poetry lover's bookshelf.

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*Beth Ann Fennelly's most recent books are Tender Hooks and Great With Child: Letters to a Young Mother.*



## Parables and Revelations

by T. Crunk

Finishing Line Press, 2005  
\$14, Paperback

Light and darkness move through these poems as do the wind, the ant, the crow, and the snail. In *Parables and Revelations*, T. Crunk takes continuous trips to the well of mystery via surprising linkages as in the opening poem “Night Studies”:

Each grain of salt  
a seed

of light  
each seed

a thorn  
in the heart of the fruit

Haiku-like couplets create an openness. Breaks between stanzas invite pauses that make the fleeting images all the more surprising, and Crunk’s preference for enjambed lines and minimal punctuation emphasizes connection, a touchstone of haiku.

Haiku can sometimes feel abrupt to readers with modern sensibilities. Crunk circumvents this criticism through poetic variation: successive statements of a theme altered. He uses this mechanism in “Night (Studies),” divided into seven sections:

(1) Etiology; (2) Mummings’ Play; (3) Pastorale; (4) Tale; (5) Still Life; (6) Homily; and (7) Lullaby. Certain motifs appear throughout the book:

fire, darkness, angels, wings. In effect, reading *Parables and Revelations* is like reading one long poem. A reader would be hard-pressed to find a more coherent book. The only caveat he might put forth is that Crunk uses stock poetry images: the moon; night; angels. However, when these things appear, they don’t seem “used.” Rather they emerge out of genuine experience.

The use of the personal pronoun “I” is scarce. When it does appear it seems bereft or out-of-place as in “Mummings’ Play” from “Night (Studies)”:

. . . a slight ruffling  
from the aviary in the attic

as night begins  
unraveling

window to window  
about the house—

the poor coat  
I abandoned long ago

swirling through the trees  
still seeking an afterlife.

Many of the poems, like parables, illustrate some moral or spiritual lesson

accessible only to the chosen. Such is the case with “Proverb” from “Crows”:

One crow sorrow  
two crows mirth

three crows death  
four crows birth

five crows poor  
six crows rich

seven crows curse  
eight crows wish

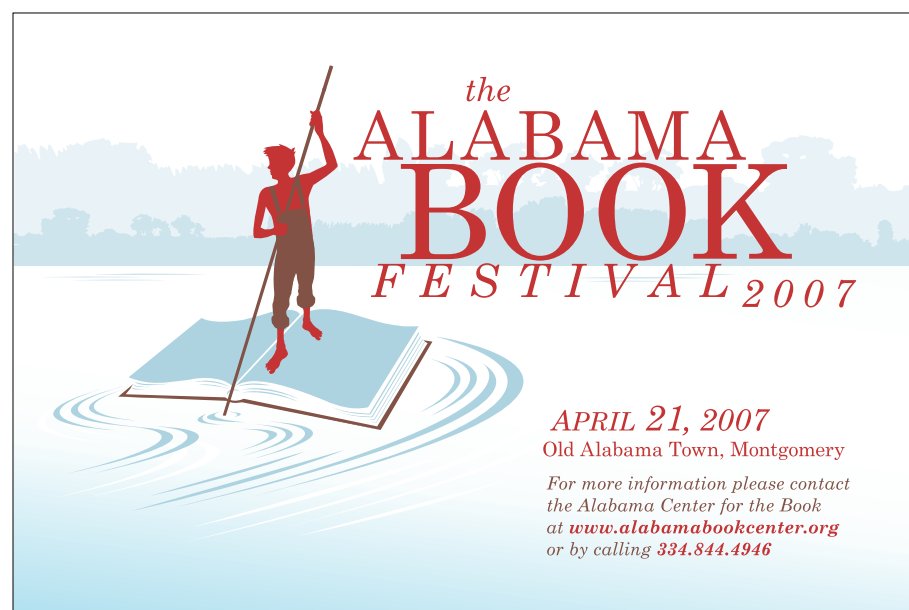
Others have the feel of a fable. “Tale” from “Night (Studies)” is such a poem:

Grandfather clock  
mends his coat by the fire

Grandmother candle  
stirs the pot. . .

Crunk’s kindred spirits are Thoreau and the Chinese poet Li Ho, and certainly his muses are Zen and Haiku. With *Parable and Revelations*, he has created a beautiful, meditative work of art.

*Bruce Alford is an assistant professor of creative writing at the University of South Alabama.*



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### The Blessing Box

by Maria Morrison

Finishing Line Press, 2005  
\$14, Paperback

Is Maria Morrison's *The Blessing Box* a memoir told in poems or pieces of other lives glimpsed and absorbed into her soul and retold in first person? I don't know. I do know what reaches me in every poem is the "I" and the "my."

This feeling is most poignant in the poem "The Hours":  
"my mother photographed / the hours we had / each day  
between / my father leaving the house / and my father returning...I pull them out / to remember what we were / supposed to be."

In "Constellations": "Each night, / crystals of frost form like stars / on our bedroom windows / from our warm breath asking—/ When should we go for help? When / can we come back in?"

The lines are as simple and straightforward as a child telling us her secret. We lean close and say, "yes," or "oh, no!" This is not an easy childhood Morrison invites readers to witness. This slim volume is a life told in vignettes stripped achingly bare. It seduces us in the early pages with sunshine and prayer, and then it takes us farther into dark corners and asks us to read between the lines. This is poetry *noire*. It opens up parts of our own soul we do not know we have until a turn of phrase echoes deep and resonates throughout our being. It reminds each of us of our own fragile childhood and how it shaped our lives.

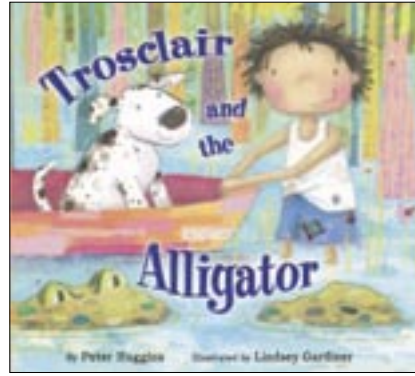
Morrison wears no rose-colored glasses as she looks back on this childhood and then at the woman it created. The naked words seem stark with a matter-of-fact and childlike narrative voice that flashes back to past hurts that repeat in each generation. We witness innocence flee before love that hurts, and hope hangs by a slender thread. In "Monastic," Morrison tells of siblings, each named for those who came before and how the cycle continued, but she ends with "I am their last. / I have my own name."

I hear an echo here of the women in Amy Tan's *Joy Luck Club*. There, An-Mei says, "My mother not know her worth until too late—too late for her but not for me."

If this is Maria Morrison's story, she tells the full tale between the lines. I read *The Blessing Box* and know it's not too late. I see you; I see me. I have my own name.

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*Perle Champion is a writer and artist in Birmingham.*



### Trosclair and the Alligator

by Peter Huggins

illustrated by Lindsey Gardiner

Star Bright Books, 2006  
\$15.95, Hardcover

Writing for children seems a natural attraction for many poets. The signature traits of much of the best poetry—conciseness and concentration, the elusive magic of imagery and metaphor, a seeming simplicity embodying multiple riches of meaning—also distinguish much of the best children's writing. And there is, in fact, a fine tradition of accomplished poets—from Eve Merriam and Randall Jarrell to X.J. Kennedy and Lucille Clifton—producing equally accomplished work for children.

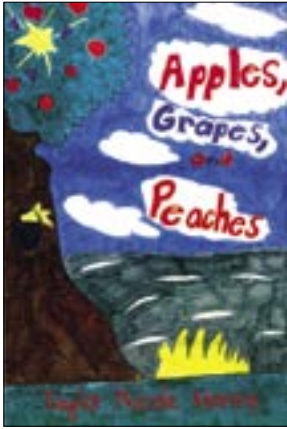
Auburn poet Peter Huggins contributes admirably to this tradition with his first children's book, *Trosclair and the Alligator*. The book's story is as elegantly sparse as the best of Aesop's, with a climax that is appropriately surprising (and vice versa). It relates the adventuresome title character's encounter with the title beast, the alligator Gargantua, in which the former must outwit the latter in order to save his trusty, and trusting, dog friend, Ollie.

The story is deeply enriched, though, by its settings, both cultural and physical. It takes place on "Bayou Fontaine in Louisiana" and is thus a delightful introduction to some of the folkways and landscapes of Cajun culture. Trosclair toodles about the bayou with the pluck and confidence of any kid exploring his own backyard, but he does so in his pirogue—visiting his cousins for a gumbo dinner, hunting turtles in the swamp, and, of course, eluding fearsome reptiles. Children will readily identify with his sense of curiosity and independence, and non-Cajun readers will be fascinated by the unfamiliar aspects of his world.

Lindsey Gardiner's engaging illustrations evoke this world in equally fascinating ways. The integration of muted collage with a broad palette of dense pastels captures both its immense lushness and its endlessly rich textures. As with all good picture books, this story will unfold at a leisurely pace, as readers linger over the subtle delights of the artwork.

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*Tony Crunk is on the creative writing faculty at the University of Alabama in Birmingham and is the author of three books for children.*



*Apples, Grapes, and Peaches*  
by Taylor Nicole Morris  
Banner Press, 2005  
\$12.95, Paperback

*Phenomenology* may seem like a big word for a twelve-year-old, but in her first novella, *Apples, Grapes, and Peaches*, young Taylor Nicole Morris offers a tale more psychical than physical, more unconscious than conscious, more spiritual than material. In her book,

Morris explores themes important to tweens like herself—the nature of death, the pangs of a first unrequited crush, and fitting in with the older, popular kids.

The novella focuses on seventh-grader Paul Wiggums and his reaction to the death of his mother. Mama dies suddenly one evening, and Paul, his younger brother Ollie, and their father must cope with their loss. Shortly after Mama's funeral, Paul bumps his head. Here Morris begins her psychological inquiry.

Shortly after her funeral, Mama resurrects. Paul must determine if her appearance is actual or simply a pleasant dream, a memory of Mama's daily serving of apples, grapes, and peaches, the novella's central conceit and symbol of the relationship between Paul and Mama.

Morris positions Paul between two worlds—the spirit world of Mama and the material world of Ollie and Papa. Between the two, he falls for Sarah McGathrey, “the most beautiful girl in the seventh grade.” Paul also goes through an initiation of sorts with Aaron, Sarah's cousin, and his group of socially elite eighth-graders. He receives his first pair of eyeglasses, and he goes blind.

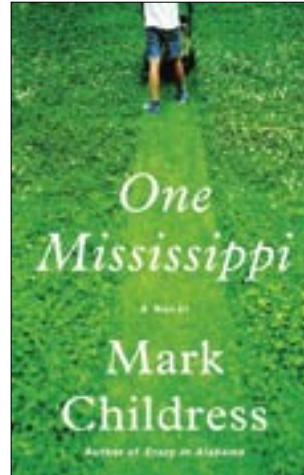
Readers may find themselves flipping the pages backward to determine which realm of consciousness Paul occupies at any given moment. Paul himself wonders if “someone pressed the rewind button on his life.” Time and space are irrelevant here, though.

Ultimately, Morris informs her readers that the dead are always among us. “[Mama] lives in you,” explains Papa. “That's why you heard her.” And no matter the social pressures of middle school, young people can endure if they “have a positive voice and laugh all day long.”

Morris publishes her first novella with one of the now popular author-subsidized presses, and it sometimes shows in a lack of editorial guidance. Readers should applaud, however, Morris's keen powers of observation, attention to detail, and perseverance in seeing this book to completion.

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Danny Gamble is managing editor of *First Draft*.



*One Mississippi*  
by Mark Childress  
Little, Brown and Company,  
2006  
\$24.95, Hardcover

In his sixth novel, after a foray into allegorical farce with *Gone for Good*, Mark Childress returns to the Southern coming-of-age tradition of *Tender* and *Crazy in Alabama*. The year is 1973, the hero, Daniel Musgrove, is sixteen, and his initiation experiences evoke just enough absurdity to make *One Mississippi* funny but not preposterous.

Despite several chuckle-worthy jabs at traditional Southern targets—Baptists, rednecks, racists, etc.—most of the humor arises from the time period, with references aplenty to the Carpenters, Chicago, and even *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*.

One purpose of the Southern *Bildungsroman* is to teach life lessons in racial tolerance, and *One Mississippi* is typical of the genre in protesting taboos against interracial romance. The twist here, however, raises this subplot above the obligatory. Daniel and his buddy Tim are involved in a car accident that briefly leaves African-American prom queen Arnita Beecham in a coma. When she awakens, she is convinced she is Caucasian. The conceit could have been risky, but Childress never sacrifices his characters' humanity.

A few regrettable anachronisms slip into the depiction of the cultural landscape: one wishes an editor had caught the mentions of Elton John's “Pinball Wizard” period and Starland Vocal Band's “Afternoon Delight” that postdate 1973 and puncture the fabric of Childress' verisimilitude.

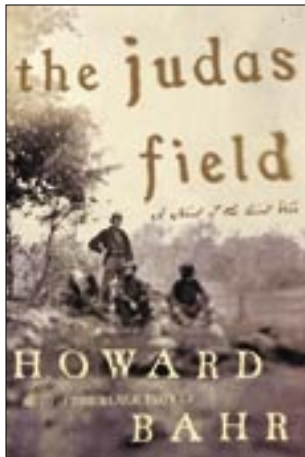
*One Mississippi's* major false note is a subplot involving a Christian rock opera called, blasphemously enough, *Christ!*, which features songs like “Hey Mary, Guess What?” (sung by God) and “Joseph, You've Got to Believe Me” (sung by Mary). As ripe a target as such early 70s schlock as *Jesus Christ Superstar* and *Godspell* might seem, they are not easily parodied—in part because for all their God-is-groovy exuberance, these works were cynical takes on hippie spiritualism, and Childress' *Christ!* chapters come and go without any real punch.

Ultimately, *One Mississippi* is a pleasantly nostalgic period piece. If its insights into growing up are a little obvious, it is because Childress has settled comfortably into the coming-of-age niche. One hopes he will someday take a few more risks—it has been twenty-two years since the Faulknerian experimentation of his debut novel, *A World Made of Fire*—yet when he tempers his comedy with genuine pathos, the results are effective.

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Kirk Curnutt is a former Peter Taylor Award finalist whose novel *Breathing Out the Ghost* is forthcoming in 2007.





### The Judas Field

by Howard Bahr

Henry Holt and Company, 2006  
\$25, Hardcover

With a command of the facts and a storyteller's talent for weaving drama and compassion, Howard Bahr in his latest Civil War novel, *The Judas Field*, revisits the 1864 Battle of Franklin, setting of his critically acclaimed first novel, *The Black Flower*. Although set in

1885 as three veterans and a dying, bereaved woman go to Tennessee to bring home to Mississippi the remains of her father and brother, victims of the hellish fray, much of the story centers around the men's memories as they struggle with their own pasts.

In flashback, Cass Wakefield and Lucian, an orphan, meet outside Decatur, Alabama, as John Bell Hood prepares to attack its Yankee fortification on his way to "rescuing the ladies of Nashville." Cass takes charge of the boy, gives him his name and a home after the war. Their battle experiences haunt both. Cass finds some relief in liquor; the younger fellow turns to Black Draught, heavily laced with laudanum, to dull both physical pain and mental quandary.

Alison Sansing knows the pain will set in as her cancer progresses, but before it consumes her, she must bring the men home to her family plot. She asks Cass to accompany her on this sad mission, one that will bring her some final peace.

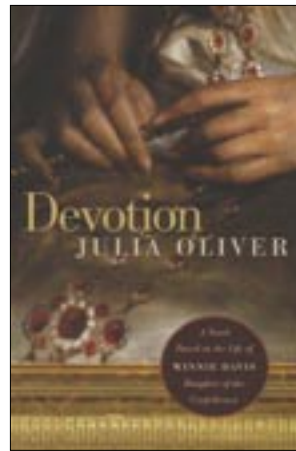
Cass agrees to accompany his friend Alison on this pilgrimage to retrieve her dead. Although ordered by Cass not to go, Lucian follows behind, as does Roger Llewellyn, who also had been at Franklin. Thus the stage is set for another tragedy.

Remembrances—in dreams, visions, and conversations—reflect on the experiences of these men, Confederates who participated in America's attempt at national suicide, but Bahr's eloquence lends a universality to the nature of this war as some primitive forebear to what is transpiring in Iraq today. He writes, "Cass had never heard such a sound before—pitiable cries and prayers, screams of the wounded, coughing and gargling of men drowning in their own blood, the ravings of men gone insane...."

In addition to the novels cited, Howard Bahr is the author of *The Year of Jubilo*, another major contribution to readers' continuing interest in the Civil War.

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*Mary Anne Neeley, former Executive Director of Landmarks Foundation of Montgomery and the author of several books on Montgomery and Alabama history, is currently editing and annotating the forthcoming The Writings of Matthew Blue, Montgomery's First Historian.*



### Devotion

Based on the Life of Winnie Davis, Daughter of the Confederacy

by Julia Oliver

University of Georgia Press,  
2006  
\$24.95, Hardcover

Wow, I say. Julia Oliver, in a single leap of historical and literary imagination, has given us a novel of the life of Jefferson Davis' youngest daughter Win-

nie, born in Richmond in 1864, and a complex, passionate, intelligent, and willful turn-of-the-nineteenth-century American heroine if there ever was one: herself a novelist, it turns out, when she was not being carted about to veterans reunions as "The Daughter of the Confederacy." Much of Oliver's novel we get in Winnie's own voice. Some of it, as in the beginning, takes the form of interior monologue. Later, we hear it from the page of an extended journal of her last months before her death from a fever in 1898. But in discrete, intertwined sections, we get other voices as well. Narrators include Winnie's friend, Kate Pulitzer, the young wife of the immigrant newspaperman Joseph Pulitzer; the Irish maid, Margaret Connelly, attending Winnie at her death and preserving the manuscript journal; Maggie Hayes, Winnie's older, married sister, serving as an interlocutor of the complicated relations among the family in their strange post-Civil War limbo; Alfred Wilkinson, the grandson of a notorious abolitionist, her lover, and intended husband. And yes, we see and hear *them*: Varina and Jeff—as Winnie herself calls them.

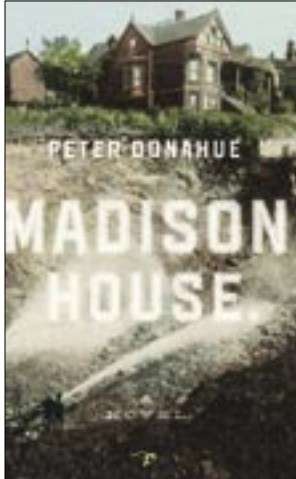
We also meet Joseph Pulitzer and Louisa May Alcott; the sturdy, forthright Emily Mason, Winnie's chaperon while she studies in Europe; and Winnie's friend and confidante, the exotic young New Orleans courtesan, Claudia Leveque. We listen in on family and literary conversations, read letters, see crucial events from various temporal perspectives and multiple points of view, not least Winnie Davis' final illness and death.

Winnie constantly catches Varina up in her manipulations of private and public persona. She goes through the world in every sense, what Henry James—whose contemporary heroines she often resembles—would have called a passionate pilgrim. It all adds up to an extraordinary, compelling *tour de force*—wise, hard-nosed, and not the least bejasmined or fraught with Confederate or Victorian nostalgia.

In the circus this is called working without a net. Oliver gets things right by getting Winnie's voice right, right from the beginning, and then getting all the rest. Her characters sound like people thinking out into language about what it means to be a person in history.

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*Philip Beidler is a Professor of English at the University of Alabama.*



### Madison House

by Peter Donahue

Hawthorne Books and Literary Arts, 2005

\$16.95, Hardcover

This debut historical novel of early twentieth century Seattle chronicles the transformation of a sprawling outpost into a major American city. The reader falls quickly under the spell of Maddie Ingram, owner of Madison House, a large boarding home atop Denny Hill in a neighborhood that lies in the path of the city's re-grading project.

Many properties already have slid into the muck that was once a fierce water stream and eroded the earth beneath them.

The widowed Maddie Ingram has nerves of steel and is determined to save Madison House. After purchasing the house, she takes in Clyde Hunssler, an albino, whose handyman talents help keep it in top shape. Other boarders include James Coulter, owner and publisher of Seattle's *Sentry* newspaper. In his prominent role as a journalist, Coulter profiles the people who would be affected if their homes and businesses are demolished. These are not the bankers or department store owners, but small shopkeepers whose livelihoods depend upon neighbors for viability. Coulter, who is black, also writes boldly of Jim Crow practices, so blatant in the South, that are now encroaching into Seattle. As each blast of the hose washes away the earth and tears down the hills of Seattle, Coulter exposes the hidden truths behind racism in America. Through Coulter, Donahue offers startling parallels between the situations in Seattle a century ago and in New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

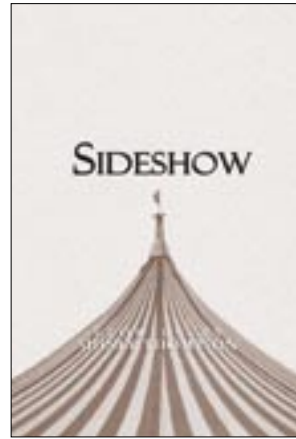
Representing another underground world in this fiction is Chirdah Simpson, a vaudeville actress, prostitute, and drug addict. Like the other misfits at Madison House, she has found a place to call home.

What would happen now? Would society miss these quirky folk who live on the fringes? This compelling novel of people caught up in events beyond their control shows how one's stability can be rocked and lives destroyed when the ruthless disregard the little people in order to exercise eminent domain.

*Madison House* was awarded the 2005 Langum Prize for Historical Fiction by the Langum Project for Historical Literature, founded by David Langum, a law professor at Samford University.

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Marianne Moates, a freelance writer in Sylacauga, is the author of Truman Capote's Southern Years.



### Sideshow

by Sidney Thompson

River City Publishing, 2006

\$22.95, Hardcover

The remarkably fertile waters of Fairhope have washed up yet another fine new book in Sidney Thompson's story collection, *Sideshow*. Readers who can ignore the title and lurid jacket blurbs will enjoy hours of intelligent and funny reading.

Thompson's epigraph invites comparison with Flannery O'Connor, but his people, unlike O'Connor's, are freaks only in the sense that we all feel alien at times. They're people we recognize—a son who needs to know why his father moved out, a man trying to win his wife back with his art, a teenaged girl flattered by the attentions of a twenty-four-year-old misfit, the lonely guy striking up conversation at the bus station, jealous husbands seeking revenge—and most of them eventually find relief from their obsessions. In the process, Thompson raises deeply moral questions about class, race, education, and ultimately art itself.

The opening story, "The Floater," closes with the protagonist, who smooths sheetrock walls for a living, gazing "at the unfinished ceiling of the night, with all its irregular clouds and clusters." A casual reference to "government cheese sandwiches" tells us even more about "Ernest, the Bicyclist" than his cashing in aluminum cans. The brilliant opening paragraph of "The Counterfeiter" moves smoothly from Van's "wife-looted house" to "the many boxes crammed with air-brushed curios he hadn't been able yet to sell," building sympathy for this artist of popular culture.

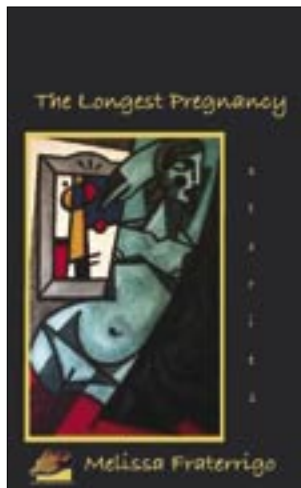
In "The Husbands," auto mechanic Harold can't hate Don, even though he "shaved every day and wore pants with cuffs" because "he was also somebody who read books and didn't rub it in." "The Aristotelian" opens with a classic first line: "Sandy hopped out of the moving van, and Carl sucked in his gut." Like all the best humor, Thompson's real theme is deception. Carl's conversations with Sandy's bedridden seven-hundred-pound husband, who arrives inside a moving van, lead us along with him to a new understanding of honesty between friends and lovers.

I hope Sidney Thompson has been writing while these stories have moved from reviews and journals to book form, so we can have another helping of his work soon. Perhaps next time he'll forget about invoking an icon of Southern literature and, like his artist figure Van, "admit the beauty and draw it big."

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Karen Pirnie is retired from teaching college English and now lives and writes in Montgomery.





### The Longest Pregnancy

by Melissa Fraterrigo

Swallow's Tale Press, 2006  
\$25, Hardcover; \$14.95, Paperback

*The Longest Pregnancy*, winner of Livingston Press' first Tartt Fiction Award, features fourteen short stories that allow the reader a glance of the contemporary grotesque. In these works, women are the heroines of their own narratives. An older woman gives birth while

swimming with sharks; a younger woman married to a man she doesn't love discovers a chair that spits expensive jewels at her; another makes her living wrestling in a cheap bar. These characters aren't sweet or sweet-smelling. They lead complicated lives surrounded by men, children, friends, and a society where women are rarely allowed the luxury of asking, "What if ..."

The judges for the Tartt Prize praised Fraterrigo's work for creating "characters of gritty realism" and "thoroughly entertaining fictions about people whose ever-expanding dreams—or nightmares—come true."

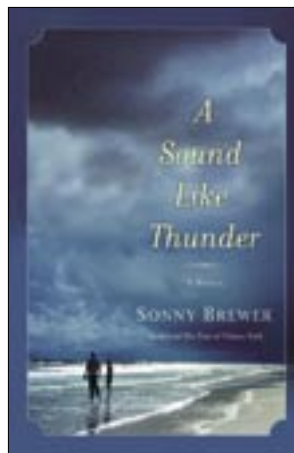
In "The Attached Couple," one of the more surreal stories, a honeymooning couple becomes physically attached to one another. Julia, who "had waited six and one-half years to become Mrs. Kip Kiplinger," believes that through her sheer force of will "nothing was going to ruin the beginning of their married life." Kip finds the translucent flesh repugnant, telling Julia, "This isn't what I meant by until death do us part," while their co-joined state gives Julia "goose bumps." Even though the couple has not returned home at the end of the story, the reader is left with the knowledge that the groundwork has been laid for years of marital discord.

Many of these stories have appeared in slightly different forms in various literary magazines, including *Arts & Letters*, *the Massachusetts Review*, *South Dakota Review*, *Confrontation*, *Carolina Quarterly*, *Black Ridge Review*, *So To Speak*, *The Emerging Writers' Network*, and *Notre Dame Review*.

Fraterrigo's stories have been nominated for the Fountain Award from the Speculative Literature Foundation and for a Pushcart Award. She has been awarded the Charles B. Wood Award for Distinguished Writing from the *Carolina Quarterly* and the Sam Adams/Zoetrope: All-Story Short Fiction Contest. *The Longest Pregnancy*, also a finalist for the *Other Voice Books Contest*, is Fraterrigo's debut collection.

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*Pam Kingsbury interviewed Sena Jeter Naslund for this issue of First Draft.*



### A Sound Like Thunder

by Sonny Brewer

Ballantine Books, 2006  
\$23.95, Hardcover

The second novel of Fairhope's literary guru, Sonny Brewer, shares that terrain with his first, *The Poet of Tolstoy Park*. The publisher's press release succinctly defines *A Sound Like Thunder* as "a novel of family, betrayal, and forgiveness set in an Alabama town (Fairhope)

during the onset of World War II."

The story focuses on sixteen-year-old Rove MacNee, whose immediate goal is to leave home and live on his boat while he makes the craft sea-worthy for adventure farther afield. "Rove" is short for "Rover"—his father, the adversarial Captain Dominus MacNee, named him for a dog. Near the end of the book, the symbolism is pointed out in a quotation from Emerson: "...let us not rove; let us sit at home with the cause."

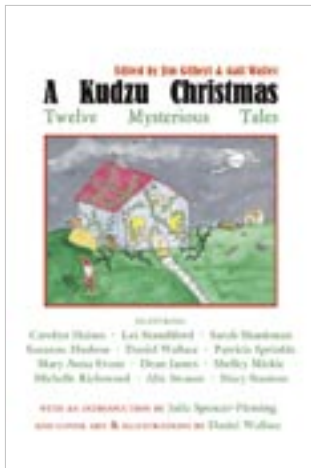
Any notion that this fiction is a metaphorical, coming-of-age journey in the "young adult" genre is dispelled by the opening lines of the Prologue, dated November 2003: "*It is a privilege*, this promontory of years—the heart grows looser and hurts are faster forgiven, the grip on grudges comes uncurled and things fall from view and we don't even look to see if a dust cloud is raised at our feet..."

In first person narration, Rove MacNee philosophically and tenderly revisits a period of family upheaval and its effects on the boy he was, not from a distance of a few years or in mid-life, but from the pinnacle age of seventy-plus. The recollection convincingly portrays that vulnerable, scared but determined younger self through the wisdom of his twilight years. I would have liked some inkling of what else happened to this promising, attractive protagonist along the way to the dotage he's obviously achieved, but perhaps that story will be revealed in a sequel.

This is a book to keep and to give. The imaginative description of the 1940s Alabama Gulf Coast charms and lulls with words and phrases that lilt like the waters they relate to: *bowsprit, headsail, mainsail, starboard jib, pitch and yaw, lee shore, barrier island, companionway, riverine.*

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*Julia Oliver, a founder of the Alabama Writers' Forum, is the author of three novels, a collection of short fiction, two award-winning stage plays, and numerous articles and reviews.*



*A Kudzu Christmas*  
Twelve Mysterious Tales  
edited by Jim Gilbert and  
Gail Waller

River City Publishing, 2005  
\$24.95, Hardcover

*A Kudzu Christmas* is a fine collection of short stories, not quite as cute and faux-Southern as the title suggests. Most of the stories are first person narratives and all of them achieve their effect through the use of a distinctive narrative voice.

Les Standiford's "Wonders of the World" presents a young man on a tour of Turkey who finds in a tourist gift shop that "reeked of straightforward deceptiveness" the perfect gift for his beloved. In "The Year Bobby Do-Wop Whacked Santa" by Shelly Fraser Mickle, a very funny and perceptive narrator (she describes a girl "with yellow hair like scrambled eggs around her heart-shaped face . . . already heading for the cheerleading team") relates how Bobby tells all the neighborhood kids that Santa was whacked by two elves in an argument over overtime pay. In "Secret Santa Secret Santa" by Sarah Shankman, the third person narrator relates what may be the collection's most fascinating story, one filled with memorable characters and with a brilliantly appropriate and unexpected ending.

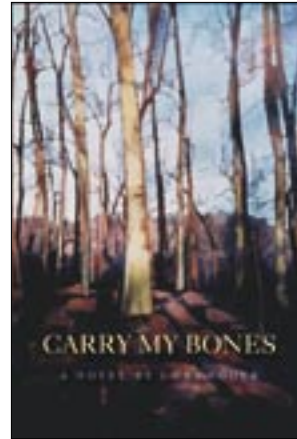
"P.S. You're Mine" by Michelle Richmond with its chance encounter with a woman who may have saved yet probably killed the narrator's gay brother, "A Singularly Unsuitable Word" by Mary Anna Evans with its elderly Southern lady narrator remembering a time when she was eight years old and helped convict a murderer by quoting him using an inappropriate word that rhymes with "Love your truck," and "Miracle Bones" by Carolyn Haines with its wonderful cast of characters from Haines' *Bones* detective series and a missing live baby from a living crèche scene are all effective, well-told stories.

So are Suzanne Hudson's "Yes, Ginny" and Daniel Wallace's Edgar Award winner "Welcome to Monroe." Both have a sadness to them, even a sinister tone in their treatment of poverty and meanness and abduction, and Wallace's story, fine as it is, unusual as it is in its second person point of view, doesn't really fit the Christmas spirit present in the other stories, though it does end by reminding us that "love was better."

The reader will enjoy this collection and accept the few stories that are more cliché ridden than original, more cutesy than funny because they are far outnumbered by the excellence of the others.

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*John H. Hafner is a Professor of English at Spring Hill College in Mobile.*



*Carry My Bones*  
by J. Wes Yoder

MacAdam/Cage Publishing,  
2006  
\$23, Hardcover

Merit, the name of J. Wes Yoder's first novel's protagonist, suggests achievement and purpose. Ironically, the book's two paternal characters, neither of whom is Merit's biological parent, give the young man a more fitting nickname, Junior, which

is a standard for boys whose fathers want them to grow up and be like them. That appellation also mirrors the universal young male who is lost between youth and manhood.

Most of the story is a journey along the back roads of Alabama and Georgia. Merit's guardian, Gid, thinks he has murdered someone. Merit and his other surrogate father, an elderly black man named John Frederick, flee the police with Gid because of their loyalty to him. The three meet with adventure as they sneak away together in John Frederick's car, which eventually gives out; then they travel on foot and depend on the charity of strangers, representative of many types of people who make up the rural South—including those who scrape by with little but are willing to share it; the religious, who equate godliness and hospitality; and the homeless, who are a little scary.

Merit's journey toward being less of a lost boy and more of a man culminates in a two-day period in Birmingham when he loses both of his "fathers" and must stand on his own. That alone would have been a great ending, but instead, the young man meets a wealthy young woman akin to his own free spirit who desires, as he does, to evaluate life's materialistic bondage. The lost-prince-rescued-by-a-princess ending ties up Merit's search for manhood in too tidy a bundle.

*Carry My Bones* has the beautiful language and sharp imagery that attracted the attention of Pulitzer Prize-winning author Rick Bragg, who became Yoder's mentor. Bragg's complimentary words appear on the cover of *Carry My Bones*, a testament to their continued professional relationship.

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*Sherry Kughn is a news assistant/part-time writer for The Anniston Star and is also writing creatively.*

**Correction:**

Larry Moffi's review of *The Last Coach: A Life of Paul "Bear" Bryant* in *First Draft* 12:2, Spring 2006, first appeared in the *Washington Post Book World* on October 2, 2005.



# BOOKS BRIEFLY NOTED

**Fountains of Youth**  
by *Stephen Ausherman*

Livingston Press, 2006  
\$14.95, Paperback

Set in Stillwater county, the “redneckest county in America,” and full of characters as colorful as its bottle trees and strangely turbulent swamp waters, this comic novel brings together a twenty-something-year-old orphan, three lovely American-born Hindu sisters, a blind seer, a crazed Amerindian wrestler, and a jaded journalist, and the ever-rising swamp waters that churn the bones of the dead despite those talismanic bottle trees.

**Louisiana Burn**  
by *Carl T. Smith*

River City Publishing, 2006  
\$24.95, Hardcover

Sam Larkin, former environmental law enforcement officer and ex-con, is no stranger to violence. He is coaxed—under false pretense—from the serenity of his lowcountry home in South Carolina by Karen Chaney, a federal officer and Sam’s erstwhile lover. Sam soon finds himself drawn into an investigation of Louisiana Senator Thornton Hunnycutt, the man about to be tapped for a vice-presidential candidacy and the former judge who unjustly sent Sam to prison.

**Slow Road Home**  
A Blue Ridge Book of Days  
by *Fred First*

Goose Creek Press, 2006  
\$15.95, Paperback

If you live in or long for the southern mountains, if you find yourself drawn toward the pace and pleasures of unhurried, out-of-the-way places, if you hope for a home you are waiting to find, then you will feel at home in the pages of this memoir of place.

**Luna**  
by *Richard Matturro*

Livingston Press, 2006  
\$14.95, Paperback

Zach, at forty, hopes for a romantic fling when he answers a personals ad. He gets more than he bargains for when he meets Luna, a boyish young woman who never smiles, who has a passion for roller coasters, and who bluntly offers herself to him. Zach faces his own life and learns at great cost that myth can be as vital to existence as reality.

**Teach Me**  
by *R.A. Nelson*

Razorbill/Penguin Young Readers Group, 2005  
\$16.99, Hardcover

From the very first page of *Teach Me* by R. A. Nelson, the young protagonist Nine speaks in a voice that is at once raw, honest, direct, and unusually eloquent. “There has been an earthquake in my life,” she says, inviting readers inside an experience that fascinates everyone—an affair between teacher and student.

**Penumbra**  
by *Carolyn Haines*

St. Martin’s Press/Minotaur, 2006  
\$23.95, Hardcover

Departing from her usual cozy mysteries, Carolyn Haines has crafted a much darker, literary novel. *Penumbra* is a lyrical, passionate, and deeply suspenseful thriller set in 1950s Mississippi.

**The Education of Douglas Finney**  
by *Jeffrey Stewart*

Livingston Press, 2006  
\$15.95, Paperback

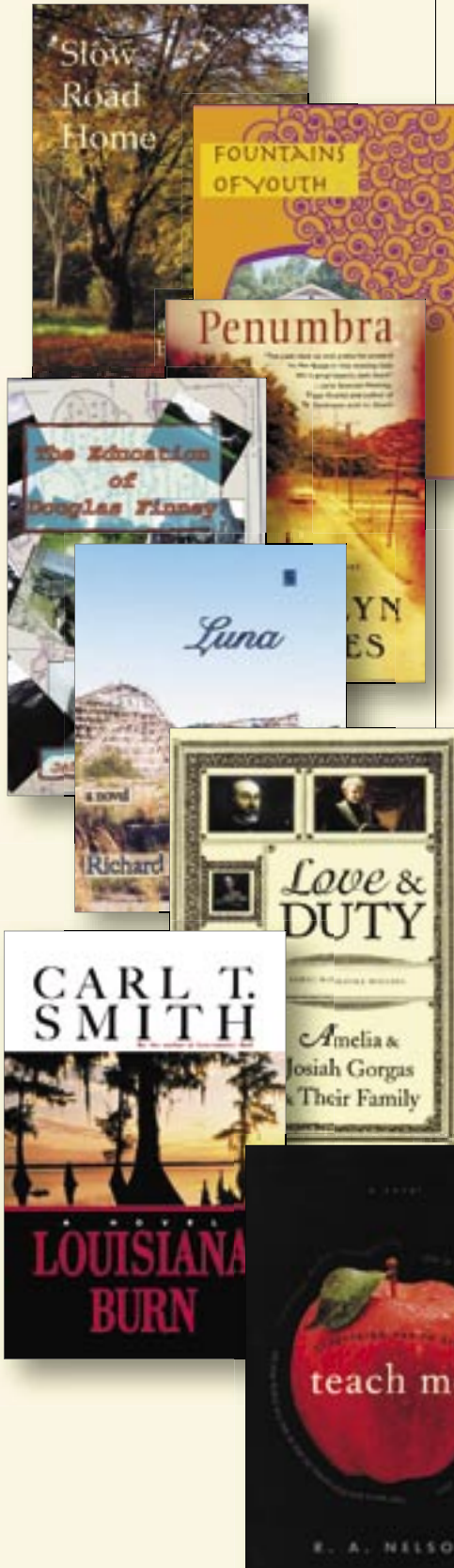
What happens when three unruly American servicemen far from home meet three conventional English women? Follow Douglas Finney and his friends as they cause one disaster after another across Europe. Doug has contracted severe extroversion, acute egotism, and persistent wisecracking. When put together, these three disorders cause his friends to suffer—primarily the symptoms of irritation and hostility toward their friend.

**Love and Duty**  
Amelia and Josiah Gorgas and Their Family  
by *Sarah W. Wiggins*

The University of Alabama Press, 2005  
\$19.95, Paperback

Known respectively as the chief of the Confederate Ordnance Bureau and as the university librarian, Josiah and Amelia Gorgas were important members of the University of Alabama and regional communities. Their marriage spanned the Civil War and its aftermath and epitomized the Victorian concept of separate spheres for husband and wife. They were two strong personalities who deeply respected and complemented each other.

with Jim Reed, co-author of *I Wish I Was in Dixie*



## FEATURED REVIEW

## SALVATION BLUES

One Hundred Poems, 1985-2005

by Rodney Jones



GLORIA JONES



Rodney Jones

Rodney Jones's *Salvation Blues* draws from six of his seven volumes published over seventeen years. Alabama's only native winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award, Jones over two decades has become one of America's most accomplished poets. Jones harvests his upbringing. Yet his genius is to derive from any landscape or circumstance the wondrous questions he must ask. What is memory if not the history and failure of moral choice? How are we to live? What is to be said for our hour? Such is the childhood memory of listening to those around him worrying over Korea:

Now I wish I were Li Po  
with a Yangtze and plum blossom  
to praise, with a poem  
hard as jade to lay  
on the threshold of annihilation.

—“For Those Who Miss the Important Parts”

His poetry builds argument by image and memory, declarations Jones makes on humanity at large:

Once I was embarrassed to have to read for you  
A letter from Shields, your brother in Detroit,  
A hick-grammared epic lie of northern women and money.

All I want is to get one grain of the dust to  
remember.

Houghton Mifflin, 2006  
\$25.00, Hardcover

I think it was your advice I followed across the  
oceans.

What can I do for you now?

—“The Work of Poets”

Constructing a South of rage, personal fears, great yearnings, and off-handed elegies quickly overrun by religious and philosophical musings, Jones's longer view equals any writing done in our time. Where Wallace Stevens added such layers over his sense of location, Jones offers soliloquies on his birthright, recollecting one of the local oracles explaining the deaths of high school friends or a strident Christian aunt:

What are words? Words teach the soul  
to remember, and what is unknowable.  
Many philosophies rubbed against my ear.  
“You've been brainwashed,” my aunt said.

She began that line when I learned the twist.  
“Evil,” she said, “sin.” I think of her now  
as my country lurches toward Baghdad,  
big, dumb, smug, murderous, and born again.

—“My Monastery”

There is no simple way to solve the horror America is becoming. If justice and beauty can save us, Rodney Jones' *Salvation Blues* is a tool for salvation. Let these poems nourish you with their craft and justice.

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*The author of two books of poems, Louie Skipper is an Episcopal priest and college chaplain in Montgomery.*



# Literary News

BETTY WATT



Norman McMillan

## Theatre AUM to stage new one-act play by Norman McMillan

Theatre AUM will stage *Ashes of Roses*, a one-act play written by **Norman McMillan** and based on stories by **Mary Ward Brown** on November 9-11 and 16-18 at 7:30 p.m. with

a matinee on Sunday, November 19 at 2:00 p.m. in Taylor Center on the campus of Auburn University Montgomery. Robert Gaines will direct.

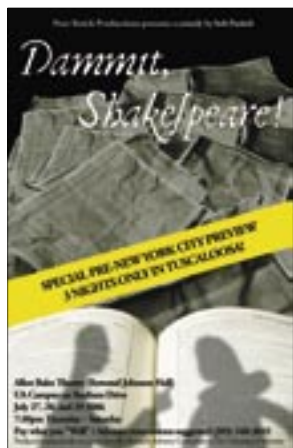
According to McMillan, when actor and director **Stuart Margolin** was named a Weil Fellow at AUM in the fall of 2004, he wanted to direct a workshop production of a new play based on writings by an Alabama writer. When Margolin approached Brown about adapting some of her stories for a play, she replied no, that she didn't want to rehash anything. Margolin then contacted McMillan, who had earlier done plays based on the lives and work of Flannery O'Connor and Truman Capote.

McMillan adapted the play from three of Brown's stories—"It Wasn't All Dancing," "New Dresses," and "The Amaryllis."

Born in the Hamburg community near Selma, Brown is the author of two collections of short fiction. *Tongues of Flame* won the PEN/Hemingway Prize for Fiction and the Alabama Library Association Award in 1987. She was awarded the Lillian Smith Award in 1991 and the Harper Lee Award for Alabama's Distinguished Writer in 2002.

Theatre AUM will produce *Ashes of Roses* along with Horton Foote's one-act, *A Young Lady of Property*.

To reserve tickets, phone the box office at 334-244-3632. Tickets are \$6 for general admission and \$4 for senior citizens and non-AUM students. AUM faculty, staff, and students are admitted free. For more information, see [www.aum.edu/theatreaum](http://www.aum.edu/theatreaum).



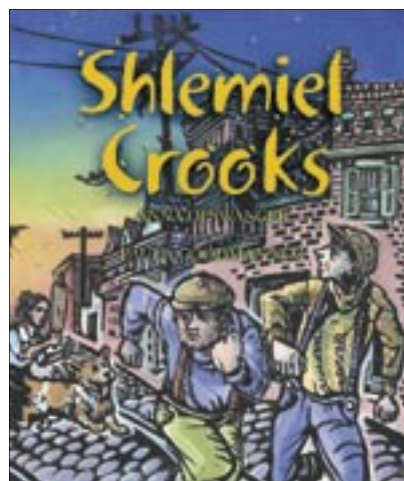
## Play written by UA professor staged in New York

A play written by University of Alabama assistant professor of theatre **Seth Panitch** was staged in New York in August at the Urban Stages Theatre.

*Damnit, Shakespeare!* is a comedic look at the world's greatest playwright's struggle with fame, obscurity, stage fright, and the burgeoning ego of his leading man, Richard Burbage.

Panitch teaches acting and movement at UA, directs mainstage productions, and co-directs the Master of Fine Arts program in acting and pedagogy.

For more information, see [www.bama.ua.edu/~spanitch](http://www.bama.ua.edu/~spanitch).



## Books by NewSouth win significant awards

Four recent titles by Montgomery publisher NewSouth Books have received major national and international honors.

*Shlemiel Crooks* by **Anna Olswanger** with illustrations by **Paula Goodman Koz** has been selected by *Internationale Jugendbibliothek*

(International Youth Library, an associated project of UNESCO) as one of 250 books in thirty-two languages from forty-seven countries for the White Ravens 2006. The titles so honored will be presented at the upcoming Bologna (Italy) Children's Book Fair, the largest international event for publishers, booksellers, agents, and others involved in the industry of children's books.

*Shlemiel Crooks* has also earned the 2006 Sydney Taylor Honor Award for Younger Readers, given for especially distinguished titles with Jewish content.

The book was published in 2005 by NewSouth's Junebug Books imprint for children and young adults.

Three titles published by the company's NewSouth Books imprint for general readers have also been honored.

*Junior Ray*, a novel by Memphis-based **John Pritchard**, was selected as a 2005 Top Ten Sensational Debut Novel by the national Barnes & Noble Booksellers chain. The book is a nominee for the Mississippi Council of Arts and Literature Award.

*Corina's Way*, a 2003 novel by Texas author **Rod Davis**, has won the PEN/Southwest Award for Literary Excellence.

*Hugo Black of Alabama*, by Atlanta-based author **Steve Suitts**, an Alabama native, is a nominee for the Lillian Smith Book Award. The book was recently honored with a program at the Library of Congress, co-hosted by the U.S. Supreme Court Society.

For more information, see [www.newsouthbooks.com](http://www.newsouthbooks.com).

## Fairhope to host Southern Writers Reading

LAURA SHILL



Rick Bragg

Fairhope will again welcome writers from throughout the South to its annual Southern Writers Reading on November 17-18.

Friday Night will feature readings from *Stories from the Blue Moon Cafe V*, an anthology of Southern writers edited by **Sonny Brewer**, and a performance by the Alabama Readers' Theatre, produced by *Bookmark* host **Don Noble**.

On Saturday, **Rick Bragg**, **Carl T. Smith**, **Karen Zacharias**, **Joshilyn Jackson**, **Warren St. John**, and **Charlie Geer** will read from their work.

The event is organized by the Fairhope Center for the Writing Arts and sponsored in part by the University of South Alabama-Baldwin County.

Tickets are \$20 for all events with proceeds going to the new Performance Arts Center on the campus of Fairhope High School.





## State Arts Council announces fellowship recipients for 2007

The Alabama State Council on the Arts (ASCA) awarded fifteen fellowships totaling \$75,000 in support of the arts and artists in Alabama. The Council awards fellowships for artists working in crafts, dance, design, music, literature, theatre, and visual arts. ASCA also awards one fellowship to an individual working in the field of arts administration.

All of the individual fellowships are for \$5,000 and are designed to help an artist further his or her career and particular art form. The new fellowships coincide with the "Year of Alabama Arts" beginning in the fall of 2006 and encompassing 2007.

ASCA awarded two Literature Fellowships. **Marlin Barton** of Montgomery and **Thomas Worozbyt** of Tuscaloosa received these awards.

Barton is the assistant director of Writing Our Stories: An Anti-Violence Creative Writing Project for juvenile offenders. A recipient of the O. Henry Award and the Andrew Lytle Prize, Barton also received the *Dictionary of Literary Biography Yearbook* Award for the best first volume of short stories for *The Dry Well* in 2001. Barton has also published a second collection of stories, *Dancing by the River*, and a novel, *A Broken Thing*.

Worozbyt has received grants from the NEA and the Georgia and the Alabama State Councils for the Arts. His poetry has recently appeared or is forthcoming in *Alice Blue*, *42opus*, and *American Poetry Journal*, among others. His first full-length collection, *The Dauber Wings*, won the first American Poetry Review Book Prize and will be published in 2007. His chapbook, *A Unified Theory of Light*, won the 2005 Annual Dream Horse Press Chapbook Competition.

Other ASCA fellowship winners include: **George Culver** of Talladega, arts administration; **Lillie J. Mack** of York and **Frederick Stacy Norman** of Auburn, design; **Thaddeus Davis** of Montgomery and **Monique Ryan** of Huntsville, dance; **John Scalici** and **Charles Tortorici**, both of Birmingham, music; **Quinton Cockrell** of Birmingham, theatre; **Nancy Goodman** of Mobile and **George T. Jones, Jr.** of Florence, crafts; **Dustan Creech** of Winfield, photography; and **Dori DeCamillis** of Birmingham and **Rachel L. Wright** of Mobile, visual arts.

ASCA is the official state arts agency of Alabama. The Council staff administers the grants program and provides financial assistance in planning and programming. ASCA receives its support through an annual appropriation from the Alabama Legislature and funding from the National Endowment for the Arts.

For more information, see [www.arts.state.al.us](http://www.arts.state.al.us).



## Alabama Center for the Book wins national award

On May 1, the Alabama Center for the Book (ACFTB) was selected as one of five state centers in the country to win a 2006 Boorstin Award for innovative reading promotion projects.

Center for the Book Director **John Cole** presented the awards at the 2006 State Center for the Book Idea Exchange. Cole expressed his hope that the award-winning projects would stimulate new reading promotion ideas and partnerships across the nation.

Each award includes a \$1,000 cash stipend. Funds to support the awards were donated to the Center for the Book by **Ruth F. Boorstin**, wife of the former Librarian of Congress **Daniel J. Boorstin** (1975-1987), who established the Center for the Book in 1977. Dr. Boorstin died in 2004.

ACFTB received its Boorstin award for the *Alabama Gets Caught Reading* initiative, a poster series funded by the Alabama Public Library Service and the Alabama Power Company. The Association of American Publishers adopted the program as a national model for a grassroots movement for promoting reading in each state. ACFTB also received commendation for its strong statewide partnerships with the Alabama State Council on the Arts and the Alabama Writers' Forum.

For more information, see [www.alabamabookcenter.org](http://www.alabamabookcenter.org).



ADAM KAMMERER

Jim Murphy & Jim Harrell

five \$100 honorable mentions. Winners will be recognized at the Montevallo Literary Festival, held every year in April.

"I promised Jim that Montevallo has the commitment and the drive to bring his vision into reality," said **Jim Murphy**, creative writing professor at the University of Montevallo. "Jim is confirming with us that we share the same dedication, and he's entrusted us with a very important gift."

Additionally, Mr. Harrell will donate to the libraries of every Alabama high school and college, public and private, a copy of *These I Would Keep*, an anthology of verse by Alabama's poet laureates, edited by **Helen Blackshear**, eighth poet laureate, and a Civil War novel, *Their Last Ten Miles*, written by Harrell. This gift represents a total of 1,182 books. Both titles were published by NewSouth Books.

Harrell said he had long wanted "to find an opportunity to encourage the interest of students in Alabama in the written word."

For more information, see [www.montevallo.edu](http://www.montevallo.edu).

## Alabama businessman endows poetry prize at UM

Thomaston native **James N. Harrell**, a retired businessman and resident of Sarasota, Florida, has established and endowed an annual poetry competition for high school students, the Harrell Poetry Prize, to be administered by the University of Montevallo. The Harrell Prize will award a scholarship in the amount of \$1,000 to an Alabama student who is the first-place winner for an original and previously unpublished poem. The poetry competition will offer six other monetary awards: a \$500 prize for second place and

five \$100 honorable mentions. Winners will be recognized at the Montevallo Literary Festival, held every year in April.

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## UA Cason Award honors WINSTON GROOM

Winston Groom, renowned author of *Forrest Gump*, received the 2006 Clarence Cason Writing Award from the journalism department at the University of Alabama last March at a banquet in his honor.

Born in 1943, Groom grew up in Mobile. He graduated from UA in 1965, was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Army, and served in Vietnam. He then spent the next eight years working as a reporter and columnist for the *Washington Star* before becoming a full-time author.

*Forrest Gump* was on the *New York Times* bestseller list for twenty-one weeks, sold more than 2.5 million copies in the United States, and was made into a blockbuster movie starring Tom Hanks. The book has also been reprinted in at least thirteen countries. George Plimpton, late author, former editor of *The Paris Review*, and good friend of Groom, wrote *Forrest Gump* is “a wacky and funny nuthouse of a book. May Gump’s tribes increase!”

In addition to *Forrest Gump*, Groom’s novels include *Gump & Co.*, *Better Times Than These*, *Gone the Sun*, *Only Such a Pretty, Pretty Girl*, and the award-winning *As Summers Die*, which was made into a movie starring Bette Davis. He has also written *The Crimson Tide*, a pictorial history of football at UA, published by the University of Alabama Press in the fall of 2000. He has recently finished a novel, *El Paso*, set in 1916.

Groom has written for numerous magazines, including *Vanity Fair*, *Southern Living*, *Conde Nast Traveler*, *Newsweek*, *Esquire*, and the *New York Times Magazine* and contributed editorial articles to the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*.

The journalism department in the College of Communication and Information Sciences at UA established the Cason Award in 1997 to honor exemplary non-fiction over a long career. All of the recipients have had strong connections to the state of Alabama.

For more information, see [www.uanews.ua.edu](http://www.uanews.ua.edu).



Winston Groom

TIM GORCORAN



## River City Publishing wins several awards at BookExpo America

River City Publishing received several awards at BookExpo America, the publishing industry’s largest North American trade show, held in Washington, DC, May 18-21.

*Outbound: the Curious Secession of Latter-Day Charleston*, a satire by first-time novelist **Charlie Geer**, earned the 2006 Independent Publisher Book Award for Best Regional Fiction: Southeast. The IPPY awards spotlight titles from around North America, based on quality and regional significance.

*Lies*, the fourteenth novel from veteran author **William Hoffman**, was an IPPY finalist in the category of General Fiction.

Several other River City titles received IPPY Honorable Mentions: *Judas Burning* by **Carolyn Haines** in the category of Mystery/Suspense; *The Man Under My Skin* by **Juliana Gray** in the category of Poetry; and *The Life and Art of Jimmy Lee Sudduth*, by **Susan Mitchell Crawley** (co-published with the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts) in the category of Regional Nonfiction.

*Judas Burning* by Carolyn Haines also received the Silver Certificate for Best Mystery in *ForeWord* magazine’s Book of the Year competition.



Sarah Campbell

## ASFA students recognized for special achievement

**Sarah Campbell**, a recent graduate of the creative writing program at the Alabama School of Fine Arts, was named Presidential Scholar in the Arts in May for the work she submitted to the Arts Recognition and Talent Search Competition last year.

Campbell was invited to attend a White House ceremony where she joined 140 other high school students who received the Presidential Scholar honor. Campbell is the fourth ASFA student to be named Presidential Scholar in the school’s thirty-five year history.

Other ASFA students who received recognition for their writing include **Glynnis Ritchie**, Senior Award in Creative Writing; **Mark Wadley**, Creative Writing Spirit of the Community; and **Hannah Klinger**, Ron Casey Award in writing. **Mo Fiorella** was awarded the Sewanee Book Award.

For more information, see [www.asfa.k12.al.us](http://www.asfa.k12.al.us).



*From the Executive Director's Journal*

# A Lesson in Community Arts

It was 11:30 p.m. in Pietrasanta, Italy, a small town wedged between the Mediterranean coast and the Apuane Alps in southwestern Italy. Carrara, known for the marble from which Michelangelo Buonarroti sculpted his *David* and other masterpieces, is a few miles north. Young musicians at an outdoor concert had just taken their final bows after performing arias from Puccini in the courtyard of the adjacent sixteenth century Sant'Agostino Duomo in honor of the artist Nall, whose work filled the Duomo and the Piazza.

During the concert, sounds from a gallery reception across the brick wall had floated over occasionally as we felt the pulse and swell of Puccini's melody. But now the concert was over, the reception with dignitaries from Italy, Monaco, and the U.S. was past, and we were all wandering down through the Piazza to have a gelato.

Spilling into the night, we saw again Nall's *Last Supper* displayed in giant forex panels—a silkscreen on plastic process. A small *atelier* had been set up to emulate where the artist might work or sell some of his paintings and other wares. Inside the Duomo, the entire Sant'Agostino had been transformed by Nall's work—original watercolor mosaics, as well as the forex panels, altar pieces, carpets, chairs, and other sculptures. As we walked by, tourists and locals continued to stroll in and out.

In the center of the Piazza, Nall's monumental sculptures dominated the space: a giant wounded dove and a symbolic monumental frame—each rendered in bronze cast a few miles away in one of the Pietrasanta foundries—took their place in the city center. Children played around the feet of the bird. A young couple lingered in the inviting bronze frame. A mother carried her toddler to one of the smaller doves, encouraging the child to touch it.

Probably none of these citizens thought anything that was happening in their town merited an editorial comment. Yes, the artist was an American, and yes, Nall's work was installed for the entire summer (a first), but this was what they expected to have in their community—art for the people, of the people, and by the people.

We continued to the other end of the square and found the bustling gelato stand. Weary from the public spotlight, the artist got his favorite two scoops, then sat and continued



JEANIE THOMPSON

*Nall's monumental 15' x 15' bronze frame reveals the *Violata Pax* bronze dove, and the *Sant'Agostino Duomo* in Pietrasanta. A selection of his fifty-two icons of the Wounds of Humanity are mounted on the Duomo's façade.*

conversation with several dignitaries. Perhaps he had wanted to wander among the people, savor his treat and be lost in the crowd.

In Pietrasanta, in the high summer season of travelers to this historic town of arts and artisan workshops in marble, bronze, and mosaic, the business of art continues till the wee hours. All galleries reopen at 6:00 p.m. and don't close till midnight. Along two streets perpendicular to the Piazza del Duomo, the staff of Gallery Barbara Paci, which represents Nall and others, were busy talking serious sales with clients. I marveled at the way this community lived and breathed art. Granted, it has the history and the reputation of craftsmanship, not to mention the marble in the hills behind it, but it also has a spirit of art that is palpable.

As a result of the international exhibition by an Alabama artist, an international relationship was taking shape. Dr.

Daniele Spina—Commissioner of Culture for Pietrasanta, Provincia di Lucca, Tuscany, Italy—soon traveled to see Nall's opening at the Mobile Museum of Art and talk with officials in Alabama. Afterwards, Dr. Spina and his son Simone drove up to Montgomery, lunched with Mayor Bobby Bright, took in a show at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival, and toured the Museum of Art and Civil Rights Institute in Birmingham.

All of this reminded me that in the United States those of us who manage not-for-profit arts organizations constantly struggle to raise



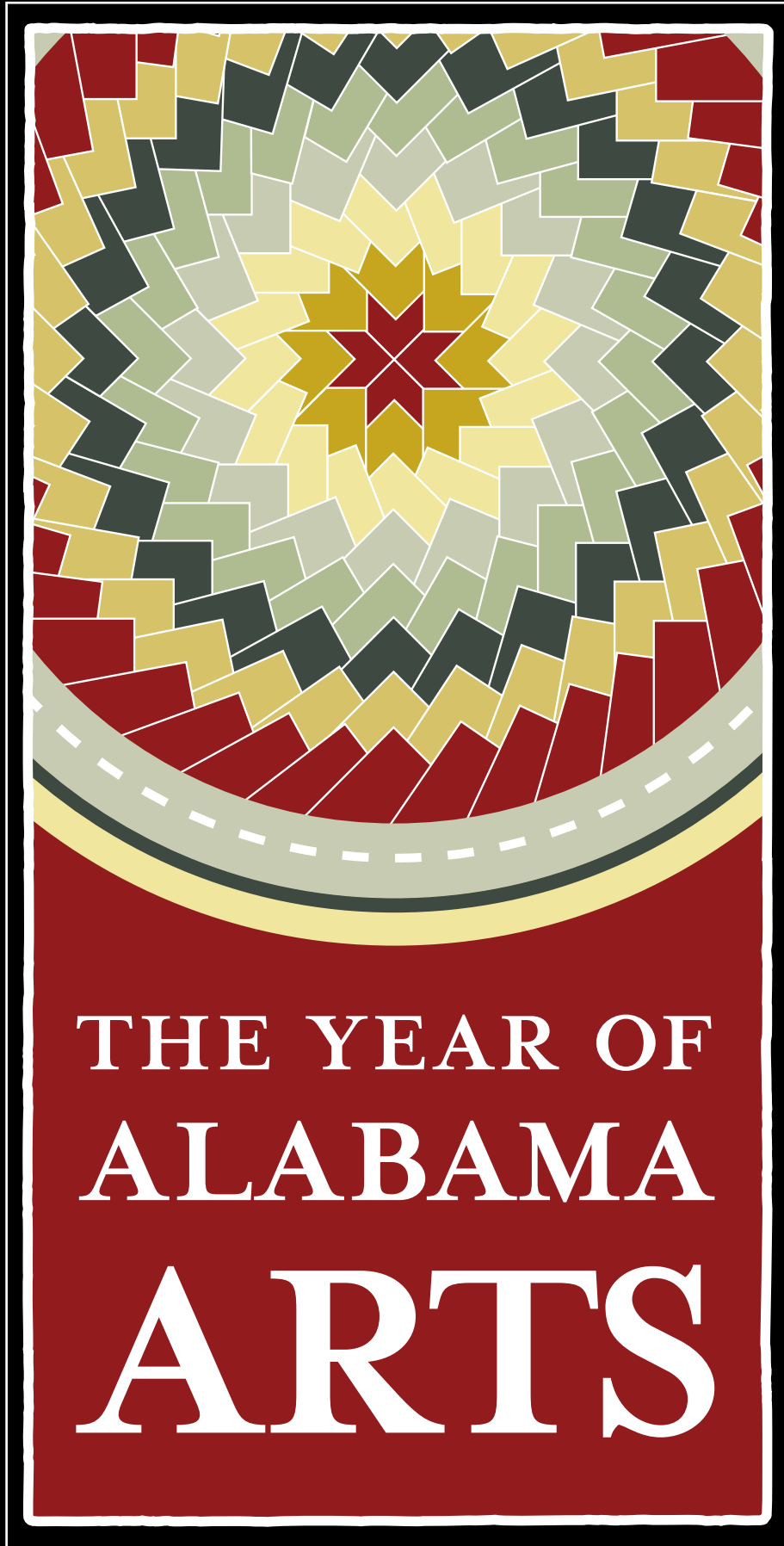
AMBER DICKINSON

Jeanie Thompson

*Continued on page 44*







THE YEAR OF  
ALABAMA  
ARTS

**THE YEAR OF ALABAMA ARTS**

HIGHLIGHTS ARTS ATTRACTIONS  
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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

Alabama Bureau of Tourism and Travel  
[www.800Alabama.com](http://www.800Alabama.com)

Alabama State Council on the Arts  
[www.arts.state.al.us](http://www.arts.state.al.us)

Alabama Writers' Forum  
[www.writersforum.org](http://www.writersforum.org)

# ***Support the Arts***

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



For further information visit:  
**[www.arts.state.al.us](http://www.arts.state.al.us)**  
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