

*The Journal of the Alabama Writers' Forum*

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# FIRST DRAFT



KEVIN GLACKMEYER

Harper Lee Award Winner  
**MARY WARD BROWN**  
*It Wasn't All Dancing*

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## From the Executive Director



*Jeanie Thompson*

Recently the Alabama Writers' Forum teamed up with the Alabama Center for the Book and the Alabama State Council on the Arts (ASCA) to present grant-writing workshops in Bay Minette and Montevallo. Our agenda was simple: we hope to generate more literary arts grant proposals to ASCA.

The turnout at both workshops was encouraging, and people came from towns as small as Atmore and as large as Birmingham. Clearly, people want to understand the process better. The nuts and bolts of state arts grant writing are pretty simple, and the ASCA staff – Randy Shoults is your literature guy – will walk you through every step of the applications. There's no need to throw up your hands and fret – it's relatively straightforward.

If you do plan to request ASCA funds for your literary venture, be it a magazine, a reading series, a visiting writer in your community, or even a fellowship, please remember to canvass your Alabama literary resources. The Forum staff make it our business to keep up with the location of writers, magazines, presses, and conferences. We can tell you if there's a market in your area for your event, to the best of our knowledge and experience. We can help you think through a program schedule or even price certain aspects of your budget. Call on us.

The Alabama Center for the Book, housed at the Auburn University Center for the Arts and Humanities, also serves as such a reference point. Allen Cronenberg and Jay Lamar, who switch hit for both Centers, know about literary arts and other programming. Between the Forum's files and information, and these two Centers, you should be able to get most of your literary programming questions answered. At the very least we can point you in the right direction for the answer.

Finally, if you are successful with a grant, or if you are developing local literary arts programs, please keep your local and state elected officials informed. They will ultimately be resources, too, and they like to know what is happening in their districts. Share news of exciting books or magazines with them. Offer to take your state representative or senator to a poetry reading – don't laugh, I know one poet who met her husband that way.

Those of us in the arts have an obligation to help everyone know what we are about. The more the statewide community knows about literary arts, the stronger we all will be.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeanie Thompson". The script is fluid and cursive.

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Mary Ward Brown



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Barbara Robinette Moss signs a copy of  
her book at Accent on the Author

# MARY WARD BROWN

## *Truth-teller*

by Susie Paul

*“Her face was like a good piece of sculpture to which the artist returned year after year, deepening a line, smoothing an angle, but always for the better. At the café, when she had a few minutes to spare, she still went up front and sat on the stool to look out the window. Her expression, though, was different. Her gaze was no longer dreamy but thoughtful. In her eyes there were no regrets” (“Once in a Lifetime” 33).*



Did you begin writing as a hobby?” a very young man, probably a college student, asked Mary Ward Brown after her reading from her new collection of short stories, *It Wasn't All Dancing* (University of Alabama Press, 2002) at Square Books in Oxford, Mississippi. Present in that audience, I was dismayed, maybe horrified, reminded that our culture's attitude toward aging has the same power to diminish us as does sexism or racism. Her response was more measured than mine would have been: she had been a serious writer for a long, long time; she had “studied”; that was that. Thus, when I talked with Mary just a few weeks later, I asked her whether she wanted to tell the story of her “return” to writing, culminating in the publication of *Tongues of Flame* in 1986, winner of the PEN-Hemingway prize for fiction. Her response was “everybody knows that story,” but, she reiterated, “I have been a serious writer” for a long time.

“Old age is hard,” one of her characters says. Mary's stories are unerring in their truth-telling as they deal with lives circumscribed, perhaps, by place and circumstance but cosmic in significance. George Garrett writes that her stories emerge “out of a deeply assimilated knowledge and experience of small-town life in the South. She has a genuine compassion for her characters without an ounce of unearned sentimentality.” In a recent review of *It Wasn't All Dancing* Steven Yates observes, “Getting at the truth with lean skill is Brown's great strength, and her plain, straight-to-the marrow prose is her scalpel” (*Clarion-Ledger*,



Feb. 17, 2002). My admiration for these qualities in her work—its tough-mindedness; its honed, clean style—guides many of my questions in the interview here following.

*Would you agree that many of your stories bring clarity to what separates us in this life—religion, class, race, growing old?*

Yes! I do write about class, as well as race. “Once in a Lifetime” in the new book. Also “A Good Heart,” where good intentions go wrong because of class differences; “The Barbecue” and “The Amaryllis” in *Tongues of Flame*. In “A New Life” the religion of the Vineyard people puts Elizabeth off, but it also saves her. She has a moment of grace. She finally cries because of these people. I have at least seven stories about aging in the books. “It Wasn’t All Dancing” is about aging and race. Characters like Rose Merriweather, like Fern in “The Birthday Cake,” the grandfather in “The Parlor Tumblers,” know it’s [aging is] just a fact of life. They just face it one way or another.

*“Also, after Henry, he couldn’t help wondering how Easter had really felt about him all those years, at night on her lumpy mattress. If her faithfulness hadn’t been three parts necessity at that time. Things had been worse for her*

*then than they were for him now.*

*“He looked at her grandson across a no man’s land of silence. Behind them on the flat Black Belt prairie, the sun reddened and glared before starting to set. There was no sound except the lonely, drawn-out lowing of a cow soon to be slaughtered” (“A Meeting on the Road”).*

*Both collections end with stories about race. I’m thinking about “Beyond New Forks” and “A Meeting on the Road.” The latter story is especially courageous, but it seems to me less hopeful about the racial climate in the South.*

Race is the number-one problem in the South, in this country, although second to terrorism at the moment. I’m worried about it. Look how many stories I have about race in my books. I worked on “A Meeting on the Road” off and on for four years, writing off on tangents, thinking—that’s not right, reading it out loud. I wanted to tell the truth about the way things are now. The races are more polarized, more hostile to each other than they have ever been. I had trouble knowing how to begin that one, trying to make it work. I didn’t know at what point to start it. At one point it began with Ben Neighbors walking down the road. Curtis [Clark, editor] arranged the stories in *It Wasn’t All Dancing*. In *Tongues of Flame*, except:

for “Beyond New Forks,” race relations are sweeter. But, yes, “A Meeting” may be darker than “Beyond New Forks.” Ben feels such a sense of injustice. He is hurt, mad, blindsided by all this. No one is telling this story, can tell it, but someone of my generation. I have to tell it. And I have two more stories about race I want to write. I can’t tell you what they’re about; that would spoil them.

*Is there a larger relationship, beyond these two stories, between the two books? Did you think of It Wasn’t All Dancing as a progression in any way?*

Not really. I just wanted to write more stories. It took so long to finish even one. Some of the stories are from the past, and I rewrote them a good bit. “Once in A Lifetime,” “No Sound in the Night,” “A Good Heart.” “The House that Asa Built” was the first story I ever had published, in the University of Kansas City Review in the fifties. The editor there, Arthur Kaplan, liked my work, responded to it whether he took a story or not, made suggestions. Bunny in “No Sound in the Night” was fine, but the boyfriend just wouldn’t cut it. He was a stick figure. I had to rewrite him entirely. I think of revising a story as “making it work.” You make it do what it’s supposed to do, tell a story so you [the reader] will understand it, so you will be touched, affected by it. I spent a whole year finishing up and polishing the stories for *It Wasn’t All Dancing* once it was accepted.

*“Strange. Before she came, she’d read about Tolstoy and his night at Arzamus. A thought, not a sound, had caused his terror at the inn. It was the thought of his own death, whenever that might be. He’d waked up his servant and ordered a coach, to get him away from Arzamus. While waiting, he’d fallen asleep until morning, but he was never to get over that night. It would haunt and affect him for the rest of his days, would change his whole life and his art” (“Alone in a Foreign Country”).*

*Is there a question you haven’t been asked in an interview or at a reading that you wish had been?*

Not really. But there is a story no one ever mentions. All my stories are set in the South except this one [“Alone in a Foreign Country”]. It’s about a young woman’s realization of her mortality. She doesn’t realize it when she’s scared to death, but now she will, that some time she will have to die. She hasn’t thought about that before. The recognition is so overpowering, she is just overwhelmed. No one else wants to talk about it. The story implies it will change her life. And so I wonder, Freud says when you ask the ultimate questions you’re already sick? When I was younger I had panic attacks. They didn’t happen like in the story, but I was about that same age. I wondered. I kept wanting to write a story about this universal experience, a traumatic first time. The story is set in Russia because I got scared in a hotel room there more recently. But why don’t people ask about the story? Was I mistaken that this is a universal happening? Now this girl will know she’s alive and mortal, her time limited. She must ask herself what she’s going to do with that time.

*I know you admire the work of Cormac McCarthy, think his work very important. What is it about his writing that so appeals to you?*

He is a magnificent stylist. He uses the language better than any writer I’ve read since Faulkner. He takes you through such troubled territory, places you wouldn’t go if it weren’t for the beauty of the language. The details of his places, he brings setting to life. His people are real—intelligent, fearless, brave.

*Which of your characters are brave?*

Lots of them. Pearl Oates [in “The House that Asa Built”] because she suffers through this personal trauma and brings it to a brave resolution. She is brave enough to change, then change back to what was better to begin with. She saw that material things weren’t the greatest things in the

world. Edith [in “Once in a Lifetime”] because she could love and give it up if necessary. Rose Merriweather faced her past and her present, her future. Bunny is brave because he knows his limitations. He faces the way things are. He faces his situation.

*Is Mr. Peterson of “The Parlor Tumblers” brave? I know you read this story aloud recently at Lemuria Books in Jackson, Mississippi. You told the audience something about where it came from.*

When my husband [who raised all kinds of pigeons] and I would go driving out in the country around where we lived and greet the people we saw, he could tell who had pigeons; he could recognize them. Mr. Peterson is like these folks. He liked children, flowers, birds. He never amounted to much in this world, just had a simple good life. I started that story years ago. But had to figure out how to end it. Yes, Mr. Peterson is brave.


*“Looking back, she’d done a few things right, Rose thought. She’d stood by Allen till the end and hadn’t faltered. She’d watched him go down year after year, no matter what they did or didn’t do, and had braced him up as best she could. Though he couldn’t speak at the last, his eyes had lit up when she came into the room. It hadn’t all been dancing” (“It Wasn’t All Dancing”).*

*Finally, what do you think your stories teach us about the meaning of life? You know this question comes to you from my mother. She and I chuckled about it, but out of a sense that you are wise as a writer.*

I don’t think my stories add up to any conclusions about life. They don’t come up with any formula or conclusion. They leave questions hanging. What they do add up to is its importance—human life, its importance.

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*Poet Susie Paul is professor of English at Auburn University at Montgomery.*



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# Southern Exposure

Its mild climate and geographic diversity have historically drawn filmmakers to the South. By providing economic incentives and state-of-the-art resources, southern states such as North Carolina and Georgia have attracted hundreds of millions of new dollars each year through the film industry. While Alabama's film economy has typically only generated between \$20 and \$30 million annually, times are changing as word spreads that Alabama is becoming a film-friendly state.

Since 1998 Alabama has been host to more than fifteen movies. The *Rosa Parks Story*, a CBS movie that was filmed in Montgomery, aired in February. But until recently, filming in Alabama hasn't been affordable or feasible for most filmmakers, and we have lost countless book-based movies set in Alabama, like *Forrest Gump*, *Fried Green Tomatoes* and *Crazy in Alabama*, to our more progressive neighbors.

Brian Kurlander, director of the Alabama Film Office, says perception is changing as people in the film industry realize how cost-effective it is to film here. The new Sales Use and Lodging legislation is an example of a recent tax incentive to help recruit industry to the state. This tax break, which was considered for almost ten years, was one of the first challenges Kurlander tackled when he took his position in July 2001.

Attracting filmmakers to the state serves the same economic development purpose as the industrial recruitment of such high-profile companies as Mercedes and Honda. Kurlander sees the Film Office's future efforts focusing on strengthening distressed communities around the state. One \$3 million film can generate up to a \$2 million cash infusion into an area. He says Governor Don Siegelman has been instrumental in supporting this non-traditional sector of economic development and observes that the film industry has continued to boom in a declining economy, unlike more traditional "bricks and mortar" industries.

Alabama, along with California, Kurlander also notes, is one of the most geographically diverse states in the country—we have mountains, beaches and plains, as well as rural and urban settings, all within reasonable driving distances—but he says his goal is not simply to

bring the film industry here as an economic generator. He wants to promote a new image for Alabama.

Scott Lumpkin of Lumpkin Productions in Mobile has spent the past seven years promoting Alabama by traveling to Los Angeles twice a year to find partially funded projects, usually independent movies under \$10 million, to bring to Alabama and the South. Last year he produced *Love Liza*, a film starring Philip Seymour Hoffman and Oscar winner Kathy Bates, which was shot on location in Mobile and won the Sundance Film Festival Jury Award for best screenplay this year. He also filmed *Hometown Legend*, shot on location in Mobile as well, which premiered in January. He says he now spends nine months of the year working in Alabama.

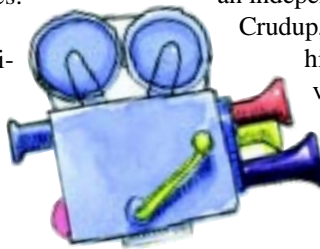
Lumpkin says it can be hard to convince people to come here, but once they do, it's not hard to convince them to return. Despite current progress, however, Lumpkin says he will continue to lose business this year to other states with better tax incentives.

His current goal is to use local money, local talent, and local scriptwriters so when a film is produced here, the project can be highlighted as an Alabama production. Often when films are made here, Alabama is not given credit. Lumpkin, who contracts to make sixteen pictures a year, has seven projects in development, including a screenplay, *Goodnight Sweet Ponytail*, written by Mobile writer Murray Robinson.

Michele Forman, a Birmingham-based documentary filmmaker, is currently in the early stages of development for a documentary, *Big Yellow Mama*, which explores how stories of crime influence our view of the justice system. Forman, a Harvard graduate, spent four years after graduation as director of development for Spike Lee's production company.

During this time, she met Tim Perell, a producer in New York. When Tim was scouting locations for *World Traveler*, an independent movie that follows Cal, played by Billy Crudup, a charismatic, self-centered man who abandons his family and hits the open road, Forman convinced him to consider Birmingham as a possible location.

At the time, Perell was considering Memphis, Portland, Oregon, and parts of Virginia





as possible locations for the film. Though Birmingham has historically lacked the necessary infrastructure to accommodate filmmakers, the combination of industrial and rural areas makes Birmingham an unusual Southern city with distinct advantages.

For six weeks in fall 2000, Perell and Bart Freundlich, the writer and director who is married to Julianne Moore, one of the film's stars, shot 90 percent of the interior scenes in different bars, restaurants, and homes around Birmingham before they went west to finish shooting the exterior scenes. One scene set in a New York apartment is even shot in Birmingham, and the Birmingham Airport doubles for the Minneapolis Airport.

During their stay here, Perell and his production team faced many challenges in a city and state with a fledging film industry. Since there are no equipment houses, they rented equipment from out of state, hoping they didn't encounter any technical difficulties. They also had fifty people on the production crew who needed housing, transportation, and food.

Birmingham is set up to handle business conferences where people stay in town for a day or week, but everything from renting cars to lodging had to be negotiated with individual vendors who typically haven't handled accommodating filmmakers or their unique needs and schedules. However, after filming last fall, Perell says he now has a healthy appreciation for grits, Dreamland barbeque, and Alabama's incredible golf courses.

But even before production begins, the route from a finished screenplay or book-based script can be a long and

arduous road. Many say it's easier to write a screenplay than a novel, but like a novelist, a screenwriter must find an agent. Once the writer finds an agent, the script may then be optioned to a particular director or producer who might keep it for a year or two before it is produced or released for someone else to produce.



Daniel Wallace

Novelist Daniel Wallace, author of *Big Fish*, said that when he wrote this novel he never imagined it as a movie. In fact, when the publisher bought the book, he jokingly said this is one novel that wouldn't be made into a movie because of the particular structure of the story. Daniel's agent, however, who has a strong connection with several Hollywood agents, sent the book around, and John August, the screenwriter who wrote *Go* and *Charlie's Angels*, liked it. August has a deal with Columbia to buy his screenplays so he wrote a script based on *Big Fish*.

"Once I sold the book to the publisher, it was out of my hands. I was sent draft versions of the screenplay to look at and I made some small suggestions," Wallace says. After the script was written, the producers of *American Beauty* said they wanted to produce it. Then it was sent to an "A" list of directors and Steven Spielberg optioned it. After holding onto the screenplay for the last two years, Spielberg has released his option. Now the script is in the hands of Ron Howard.



Erik Jambor, Festival Director, at Sidewalk 2001 awards presentation @ Workplay



Corey McCabe, writer/director of *The American Astronaut*, and Denise Bryant, Sidewalk 2001



Julianne Moore and Billy Crudup in a scene from *World Traveler*, directed by Bart Freundlich

Wallace has learned a lot through this experience. “This is a Byzantine process, and it’s hard to say what is going to happen.” But he has no real worries about the movie being bad or good because he views the book as his and the movie as someone else’s. And regardless of how the movie turns out, he says the experience is ultimately positive because he writes “quiet, little books that generally don’t attract much attention.” He’s even decided to try his hand at writing a screenplay in the near future.

Alan Hunter of Hunter Films and co-founder of Workplay, a multi-function entertainment and production facility in Birmingham, says the time it takes to produce a film is typically five to seven years. Hunter moved back to Birmingham from Los Angeles in 1994 and started Hunter Films in 1995. He initially focused on commercial films with the plan to transition into feature films. As a film development company, Hunter Films has optioned two scripts, both now in development. Hunter says the variables involved in orchestrating a film’s production from start to finish are endless: funding, building a team to produce the movie, and finding the right talent, to name just a few. He compares the logistics of producing a movie to a military operation.

Once a film is produced, it must find a channel of distribution. Access is the name of the game, and that is why writers

and producers flock to New York and Los Angeles where it’s common to bump into important people in coffee shops and restaurants and the key players are socializing at the same events. The sheer number of important industry events staged there doesn’t hurt either.

The best avenue for access to acquisition is the festival circuit. Three main festivals dominate the industry: The Toronto Film Festival, the Sundance Film Festival, and South by SouthWest in Austin, Texas. Last year 2,000 films were submitted to Sundance, which had thirty-six places available. Of that thirty-six, maybe fifteen were picked up and distributed. Hundreds of other festivals exist, and the options exist of selling to video or self-distributing.

A new festival gaining recognition within the industry is the Sidewalk Moving Picture Festival in Birmingham. The Alabama Moving Image Association, an organization formed in 1998 dedicated to promoting the film industry in Alabama, held the first Sidewalk Moving Picture Festival in 1999. Last year the festival showcased more than one hundred films and during the past few years has seen a steady rise in attendance as well as a noticeable improvement in the quality of films submitted by Alabama filmmakers, says Erik Jambor, the executive director. The festival gives audiences a chance to view movies they might never see, and “folks in the industry love coming here to such welcoming, appreciative audiences,” Forman says.

If a film isn’t picked up at a festival, “often unofficial routes get things going in the film world. Word of mouth can create a buzz and launch a person’s career in the industry,” observes documentary filmmaker Forman. The Internet, for instance, has played a critical role in providing a non-traditional method of access, especially for short films. Forman says two Alabama School of Fine Arts graduates—Chris Garrison and John Walker—made a short film, *The Electric Heartbreaker*, last year, and so many people downloaded it that it was reviewed by Chris Gore of filmthreat.com, a key player on the independent movie scene. The ASFA grads are now involved in making a new movie.

Forman believes Alabama can certainly reach the point where it can compete with Mississippi, Georgia, and Tennessee, and she would love to see Alabama filmmakers have the resources in their own backyard to create “films presenting Alabama in a new and interesting way to the world.”

The Alabama Film Office’s Kurlander, whose goal is to establish Alabama as the central location for the film industry in the South, concurs: “I want people in the United States and the world to view Alabama the way Alabamians do and to realize the extraordinary resources that we have as a people and as a region.”

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*Writer Lanier Scott Isom lives in Birmingham where she works as Director of Public Relations for Benton Newton Advertising.*

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# MFA

## *With a Southern Accent*

Flexibility—and Alabama Connections—Are Key to Low-Residency MFA at Spalding University

In October 2001, writers from all over the country converged in Louisville, Kentucky, for the inaugural residency of the Spalding University Master of Fine Arts in Writing program. A brief-residency program, the Spalding MFA is designed to serve a geographically diverse student body, and students and faculty came from as far away as Alaska and Vermont. Yet there was a distinctly Southern feel in the air, and one didn't have to listen long to pick up the cadences of Alabama speech.

The Alabama connection begins with Sena Jeter Naslund, the program's director and co-founder with Karen Mann. A Birmingham native and critically acclaimed author of the bestselling novel *Ahab's Wife*, Naslund was named Alabama's Writer of the Year for 2001 and received the Harper Lee Award.

Naslund has been affiliated with traditional MFA programs at Iowa, Montana, and Indiana University as well as brief-residency programs. She believes the brief-residency format lends itself best to the needs of writers. An intense ten-day residency brings students and faculty together each semester for a fast-paced, intellectually stimulating learning period (lovingly dubbed "literary boot camp" by some students) filled with workshops, lectures, panel discussions, faculty readings, and other cultural and social events. After the residency is over, everyone returns home, and each student begins a period of one-on-one correspondence with his or her faculty mentor, who gives detailed critiques of each student's work. The intimate student-faculty ratio of five to one makes it easy for participants to maintain close working relationships regardless of geographical location.

Faculty member Roy Hoffman, a noted journalist and novelist based in Mobile, finds the program's depth and unconventional structure well-suited to the writing life. "I think it's tremendously helpful for any writer to have a reader who will turn his or her entire focus to the creative work at hand,"



*Back: Kathleen Thompson, poetry student; Front: Linda Parker, fiction student, and Roy Hoffman, faculty member*

Hoffman says. "For a student, having a teacher be what I term 'a deep reader' is especially valuable. That's what the Spalding MFA brief-residency program offers.

"I wish I had found a program like this one when I was coming of age as a writer many years ago, an academic program that allows the greatest freedom and flexibility for students, and respects the fact that the act of creative writing is best accomplished with a vigorous support group but, ultimately, alone."

As Hoffman hints, while each semester's residency period is exciting, collegial, and intense, it's when the students return home that the bulk of the actual writing gets done. Students are expected to spend twenty-five hours a week on their writing and reading for the program. Fiction student Linda Parker of Mobile says she finds the time require-

ment manageable and appreciates the fact that she can learn without disrupting her home life. "Spalding has been one of the best things I have ever done for myself professionally," Parker says. "The low residency allows me to acquire a body of knowledge, improve my writing, [and] share in collegiality with fellow students and faculty at Spalding. I am able to remain at home raising our children, participating in their school activities, helping with homework—all of those things—and still I am learning and I am writing. For me Spalding works beautifully."

Birmingham poetry student Kathleen Thompson notes that the program has added purpose to her writing and her life. "Before, I felt so isolated sitting here at my computer writing, sending out poems to little magazines that I might hear back from in six to nine months. Or again I might not. Now I have a professor of poetry reading my poems and essays each month very carefully, giving me the benefit of his years of experience in study and teaching and writing poems.

*Continued on page 32*

## Harper Lee Essay Award

# “Only My Mama’s Mockingbird?”

Earlier this year, novelist Harper Lee was inducted into the Alabama Academy of Honor. The academy, established in 1965, honors living Alabamians for their outstanding accomplishments and services. Inspired by Lee’s induction, Mr. Tom Carruthers, a 1993 inductee to the academy, was moved to initiate a high school essay contest on *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Mr. Carruthers, a highly respected lawyer and former chairman of the Southern Federal Tax Institute who has served on the boards of the Alabama Shakespeare Festival, the Birmingham Museum of Art, and Children’s Hospital in Birmingham, sought and obtained support from the Hugh Kaul Foundation and the Hill Crest Foundation to fund the contest, which was administered by the University Honors Program at the University of Alabama.

The *To Kill a Mockingbird* essay contest was open to all public high school juniors in the state. Each school selected a winner, and a panel of judges at UA selected the statewide winner from among them. In this inaugural year, there were thirty-eight entries. According to Dr. Fran Oneal of the University Honors Program, “Most of the entries came from high schools in small towns...towns not unlike the fictional Maycomb in *To Kill a Mockingbird*.” An awards ceremony on January 25th at the University of Alabama President’s Mansion was hosted by President and Mrs. Andrew Sorensen. Guest of honor Harper Lee joined the thirty-eight essay writers and their parents. State School Board member Sandra Ray, Assistant Superintendent Dr. Joe Morton, Mr.



*Katherine Garner and Harper Lee*

Carruthers, UA faculty, and the panel of judges also attended.

The statewide winner was Katherine Garner of Coffee High School, Florence. Joined by her family—including her mother, Anita Garner, a founding member of the Alabama Writers’ Forum—her English teacher, and her assistant principal, Garner was on hand to receive a \$500 prize for “Only My Mama’s Mockingbird?: A 21<sup>st</sup> Century Look at *To Kill a Mockingbird*.” Garner’s school received a \$1000 award, and all other school-level winners received a \$100 award.

Contest winner Garner explains that she “was born a writer.” She adds, “I’ve always been interested in the written word. Both of my parents are writers, and they introduced me to Harper Lee and others at a young age. I believe that while the spoken word is powerful,

the written word lasts forever.”

In many ways “Only My Mama’s Mockingbird?” is the culmination of years of dedicated work. Katherine says, “I began entering contests in middle school. I’ve won over twenty essay contests and literary awards since that time.” And why was she moved to write about *To Kill a Mockingbird*? “I write so that people will ‘hear’ me,” Garner says. “Sometimes people understand the message better when they read it instead of hearing it. When I wrote that essay, I felt that I (like Harper Lee) had something important to say.”

Readers can “hear” for themselves in Garner’s essay, published on the following page by permission of the author.

## Only My Mama's Mockingbird?

A 21<sup>st</sup> Century Look at Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*

A Personal Essay by Katherine Garner

When I was nine years old, I announced to my mother that my class was going on a field trip to see a live performance of *To Kill a Mockingbird* at the Ritz Theatre in Sheffield, Alabama. Her response was more visibly emotional than when I was baptized. She became giddy, shoved a dusty tape into the VCR, and sat down beside me on the sofa with the Kleenex box between us as we watched Gregory Peck play Atticus Finch in black and white. Later, the Christmas I turned twelve, a 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition of *To Kill a Mockingbird* was under the tree. By the time the novel was actually assigned in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, Jean Louise Finch seemed like a personal friend who had perhaps told me at sleepovers of her adventures in Maycomb, Alabama.

Although *TKAM* was originally published in 1960, the time period depicted in the novel was the period of the Great Depression. Obviously, Alabama's roads and cities have expanded since that time; our population has grown and become more diverse, our schools (though perhaps not our churches) have been successfully integrated, and our curriculum barely resembles that which Scout had to master (no computer-assisted reading programs at Maycomb's elementary school). As I now read the chapters describing the disturbing trial of Tom Robinson, a little voice in the back of my mind tries to comfort me: that could never happen today, that could never happen in today's Alabama.

And perhaps Tom Robinson's unfair trial could not happen in today's Alabama, but the hatred that can erupt in a split second that caused the crimes in the first place is still with us. Billy Bob Thornton's film "Sling Blade" seems a re-make of the film version of *TKAM*, set in the 1990s South. When I saw this 1996 film just last year, I was immediately struck with the similarities. Thornton's version of Boo Radley is Karl, a simple-minded man who was sent to the state mental institution for killing his mother when he was still very young. Now released, Karl befriends a young child, Frank (played by North Alabama's own Lucas Black), and takes on the unspoken duty of looking out for this child, just as Boo did for Scout and Jem. The villain in this film is another drunken, over-bearing man with a twisted mean streak. But this time the object of his fear and distrust is not a black man. In Billy Bob Thornton's version of the 1990s South, the homosexual is now a catalyst for violence.

In reality, in the late 1990s, Billy Jack Gaither, a gay man, was in a bar in Sylacauga, Alabama, and decided to go for a ride with a couple of men. Billy Jack ended up being beaten to death because he was gay, his body then placed upon a stack of old tires right over the county line in Coosa County on a creek bank where rubbish and household garbage was often thrown. These men poured gasoline over the tires and the body and set fire to the evidence. But this was the 1990s, and gathering evidence had become de-tailed and scientific. These men were caught and went to trial—but only after one of them went to the police and admitted involvement. This trial did not turn out like Tom Robinson's trial. This time the guilty ones were on trial, not the innocent, and this time the guilty ones are in jail serving life sentences for murder.

My mother's family is from Coosa County, and my grandmother used to work in that courthouse in Rockford where the trial took place. For some reason, my mom went to the hate trial, almost all of it. Each night when I would ask her what went on, she would not have much to say. Finally after several days, though, she had an answer. She said that it had been a bad day with a lot of horrible photos and details. But when the cameramen were busy filming other people at the end of the day, the dead man's mother, Mrs. Gaither, and a grandmother of one of the accused murderers met at the bottom of those twin winding stairs on the front of the Coosa County courthouse. They had not meant to meet. It just ended up that way. They knew each other, my mom said. They spoke briefly, with kindness. Then they gave each other a hug. "And that was it?" I asked. She nodded her head "yes." But she did not go back the next day. I think she had seen what she had gone there to see.

What Scout has taught me is that although the world may constantly change, some things remain with us always. Violent prejudice is a recurring nightmare, and ignorant people can always find someone to hate. It is the role of some of us, however, to be standing there with our eyes open, ready to see the good as well as the evil, ready to tell the Heck Tates of the world exactly what we see.



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



Denise Wadsworth Trimm

# Charting the Course

## The Secret Potion

by Denise Wadsworth Trimm

Potential students and their parents often ask me what they can do to have a better chance when auditioning for the creative writing department at the Alabama School of Fine Arts. I am also asked, on occasion, what a teacher can do to help the budding writers in her classroom achieve their full potential.

After nine years of pondering the inquiries of those eager to learn the *secrets* of becoming a writer and/or a teacher of writing, I have compiled several commonsensical steps that have advanced me in my journey.

**Read often and read well.** Can you believe that I once had a parent ask me if it was necessary that her child like to read in order to be a writer? I had to use my best acting techniques not to insult her with my facial expression. And it's not enough to be a reader of magazines, newspapers, and cereal boxes. Likewise, it is not enough to exclusively read Stephen King. Nor is it enough to have read a few Edgar Allen Poe stories.

Writers must read widely. To limit oneself to a particular genre of writing or particular writer is like limiting one's diet to one kind of food all the time. I don't think I have to tell you how unhealthy, not to mention boring, that can be.

And while it is important to read the works in the literary canon, it is also essential for writers and teachers of writers to read contemporary works. As I write this, I am not referring to Hemingway as contemporary, since that is where some of the textbooks end. I'm talking about reading what is out there right now.

Get familiar with the periodical section of the library or better yet, purchase a few literary magazines off the shelf at your favorite independent bookstore. Or order a sample copy on line. My favorites include: *Glimmer Train*, *Ploughshares*, *The Paris Review*, *Black Warrior Review*, *Atlantic Monthly*, *The Gettysburg Review*, *Shenandoah*, and *The New Yorker*.

By reading what is getting published, you can start to get a feel for the different styles, voices, forms, and subject matter of the true contemporary writer. In reading and becoming familiar with the choices a writer makes, one learns one's own personal style, voice, form, and desired subject matter.

As in all areas in life there is a need for balance and good sense. Reading often and reading well strikes such a balance. And if you are totally lost as to where to begin, I suggest subscribing to or checking out *Poets & Writers* magazine.

In addition, buy any of the “best of” anthologies out there on the bookshelves. There are several notable books that compile quality poems, short stories, and essays year after year. My favorites include Shannon Ravenel’s *New Stories from the South* series; *The Vintage Book of Contemporary American Poetry*, edited by J.D. McClatchy; *The Best American Poetry*, edited by David Lehman, and *The Scribner Anthology of Contemporary Short Fiction: Fifty North American Stories Since 1970*, edited by Alabama’s own Michael Martone and Lex Williford (my beloved teachers).

**Read like a writer.** The first time one reads a story or poem, he is entertained, informed, or moved. The second, third, and fourth time he reads, he studies the choices the writer made. Why did the writer choose a specific word over another? What about the setting helps to enhance the work? What stylistic choices are made? Why?

I repeatedly tell my students that a writer does not read anything *once*. We are to constantly study the craft of other writers, asking the questions that all artists ask when looking at a work created by another artist. One can learn from genius as well as failure. But one never learns from what one overlooks.

**Think like a writer.** This is an especially important mindset for teachers. I have not always taught small classes. There were times when I had 150 students a day. The thought of reading that many creative works overwhelms me even today.

So what would I do differently now? I’d try to find every opportunity possible for my students to write. Think of yourself as a missionary looking for any chance to spread the gospel of writing to a world of lost souls. Even if you can only squeeze in a short assignment every other week, choose that option over a true/false quiz or a Scantron test.

In every lesson plan ask yourself this simple question: Is there a way that I can incorporate a fun and creative writing assignment into this lesson? I can hear the follow up right now: *How am I supposed to grade it?* Simple answer: If they do it, they pass; if they don’t, they fail.

*But how can this be? How will I derive a numerical score? How about 100? Then what will the principal say when my students have all A’s?* Surely this is not the only assignment you give. Surely you have other, more objective work that balances out this one good grade.

*How do I make time to read them all?* There are several options here. One, you could rotate when assignments are handed in, having one class or even a portion of a class per week turn in their writing assignments. Secondly, you could use peer editors to read them for you and then write a summary of what they read and how it affected them. Remember, if they completed the writing assignment they passed anyway, so why not get more bang for the buck? Have the students write creatively, read each other’s work for comprehension, and then write again—this time analytically. Think of all the course-of-study objectives you can knock out with

one assignment. And the best part of all is that they completed the objectives in a creative way.

**Write like a writer.** By that I mean...*write*. Sit down with pen and paper or computer in front of you and write. Don’t wait for weeks on end for a muse to knock on your door and offer to bleed onto the paper. Don’t tell everyone your idea for a great novel. Simply sit thee down and write. Period. Do it as often as you say you are going to start a new diet.

I say this to potential students. Sometimes they listen. Often times they do not. Then when they are required to turn in three to five pieces of their *best* work, many of them turn in their only work.

You do the math. If for every sixty pages that you write, five of them are of decent quality, and it takes you two hours a day to write ten pages, then how long will it take to write a first draft of a novel that contains 350 pages? I have no idea, as I have no skills as a mathematician. What I do know, however, is that it’s easy to talk the writer’s talk, but it’s hard to walk the writer’s walk.

Writing means sacrifice. Sacrifice of time. Many writers work a full-time job. Most have families. Some go to church. Several of them do all the above.

Second, there is the sacrifice of socialization. One does not write in the middle of a football game. While one can gather writing material there, absorbing the dialogue, noting the sensory provocations, making a mental note of people’s particular quirks, eventually it’s all about you and the computer...alone for hours.

Third, there is sacrifice of ego. People will tell you that they love creative writing and will ask: How do you write those fancy letters so pretty on invitations? They will ask you what you are currently working on only to brush it off and tell you they have an idea for a “really” good story. When you tell them you write poetry, they will recite their favorite “roses are red” poem.

Think you can teach writing without writing yourself? Can a preacher preach without believing in God? Sure he can. But who’s going to believe him?

Remember. You are a believer, a missionary, one called to both spread the gospel of writing and to live your life according to this gospel. No, writing is not for everyone, and there are no magic potions or secret incantations to becoming a writer or a teacher of writing. It requires time, hard work, training, and disappointments.

“So why do it?” an acquaintance once asked me.

I looked at her with bleary eyes and said, “You act as if I have a choice.”

She shook her head, indicating that it didn’t make any sense to her, then she told me she had a really good idea for a novel that she was sure would some day be a bestseller, right up there with Stephen King and Danielle Steele.

I listened, nodded, and made a mental note to use her receding gum line for a character in my new short story.

Oh, the cycle of life.



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# From Novel to Movie

By Edward M. George

*This article on the adaptation of novels to movies is the third in a series being published in First Draft on some of the business aspects of being a writer.*



Ed George

## How Common Is It for a Novel to Be Made Into a Movie?

It has been estimated that about half of all movies are derived from books, plays, or short stories. Judging from that statistic, it would be very common for a movie to have been adapted from a novel. A review of the "Modern Library's List of the 100 Best English-Language Novels" will disclose that around half of the books listed have been made into movies, including such classics as *The Grapes of Wrath*, *A Passage to India*, *All the King's Men*, *Howard's End*, *The Maltese Falcon*, *A Room With a View*, and *The Magnificent Ambersons*.

## Do Good Novels Always Make Good Movies?

It is said that the difference between novels and movies is that novels "tell," and movies "show." Novels tend to be reflective, while movies have a tendency to be demonstrative. Because film is a visual medium, not all great novels can be turned into great, or even average, movies, particularly where a given novel is focused heavily on the emotions or inner thoughts of the main character. For example, there have been two film versions (1950 and 1986) of *Native Son*, but neither was more than ordinary; and in 1967, a less than stimulating movie version of *Ulysses* was released. *The Sun Also Rises* is another example of a movie that couldn't capture the essence of the novel on which it was based. In contrast, *The Godfather*, which is not great literature, was made into two exceptional movies, and one other pretty good movie.

## How Common Is It For a Novelist to Write a Successful Screenplay of His or Her Novel?

Because novel writing is a very different art from screenwriting, it is pretty rare for a novelist to produce a successful screenplay of his or her book. There are, of course, a few exceptions to that rule, such as William Kennedy's Oscar-nominated adaptation of his novel *Ironweed*. However, for the most part, it is better to leave screenwriting to screenwriters.

## How Does a Novel Get Selected to Be Adapted Into a Movie?

In most cases, a novel gets made into a movie because a screenwriter, a producer, or a motion picture company believes that the novel has film potential and purchases a "license" to adapt the novel. As an alternative, the interested party might pay for an "option" to purchase a license within a designated period of time, usually six to eighteen months. For example, if a screenwriter thinks that Sheldon Webster's novel, *House of Sugar*, could be made into a profitable movie, the screenwriter might offer to pay Sheldon a certain amount for the option to purchase screen rights to *House of Sugar* by no later than the end of 2002. The



screenwriter would then spend the balance of 2002 working on a “treatment” of the story and attempting to either sell his yet-to-be-written-screenplay to a third party or put together the parties and finances to make the movie. In the event that the screenwriter is successful in selling his screenplay or putting together a film group and raising the necessary funding, he could then exercise his right to purchase the screen rights to the novel. If the screenwriter fails to exercise his option, Sheldon would still keep the option payment. If Sheldon’s screen rights are purchased, the price could be a designated sum, a percentage of the revenues to be derived from the movie, or a combination of the two. Over the years, movie companies have hedged their investment risks by contracting to pay actors, writers, and other participants a percentage of “net profits.” While this method may seem fair at first blush, because it would appear to give all contributors a share of the financial success of a good movie, the process by which net profits are calculated in the film business has developed into something equivalent to a combination of alchemy and voodoo. Under current Hollywood accounting, it would not be surprising for a movie to gross a hundred million dollars and have no “net profits.” The factors that lead to this kind of result are too involved to discuss in this article, but suffice it to say that the convoluted way by which movie profits are computed is why big stars such as Julia Roberts and Tom Hanks only sign contracts that guarantee a specified amount, regardless of the financial success or failure of the movie. What this means for a novelist who is selling film rights is that it is best to get as much money as possible “up front,” either as an advance against movie revenues or as a cash partial payment.

#### How Much Should a Novelist Expect to Make From the Sale of Film Rights?

The amount that might be offered for film rights to a novel could range from a few hundred dollars (particularly if it is an independent film producer making the offer) to a few million dollars, if the writer’s name is John Grisham or Stephen King. The amount of the offer could also be influenced by such factors as whether or not the license is to be permanent or only for a designated period of time (say, ten years or twenty years). A license agreement may also include a right of first refusal of film rights to future books or, if the novel has a strong, unique lead character (such as Forrest Gump, Superman, or Tarzan), the purchaser may want the right to use the character separate from the novel. And there is always the issue of licensing other products derived from the movie, such as Darth Vader masks, ET dolls, or *Star Trek* uniforms.

#### How Does a Writer Shop a Novel With Movie Potential?

There is a saying in the movie business that a good screenplay will find its own agent; and the same might be

assumed for a novel with good film potential. However, for a novelist who prefers not to wait for Karmic eventualities, there are other possible routes to take as part of his or her attempt to sell movie rights. These routes could include everything from sending a copy of the novel to a film mogul on the chance that it would pique the mogul’s interest to consulting with a management agency that deals in the sale of screenplays. One approach that seems reasonable, if the novel can create the necessary level of interest, is for the writer to sign on with one of the several large agencies that represent both authors and screenwriters. If it has an interest in the novel, the agency could not only represent the writer in the literary arena, it could also help determine whether or not the screen rights to the novel would be marketable.

Regardless of what approach (or approaches) the novelist may take in attempting to sell his or her film rights, it must be remembered that when it comes to financial matters in the world of the arts, perseverance and nerve count at least as much as talent.

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*Ed George is a member of the Alabama Writers’ Forum Board of Directors and an attorney who practices in Montgomery. He is also a songwriter and poet whose second book of poetry, Espresso Evenings, was recently published by NewSouth, Inc.*

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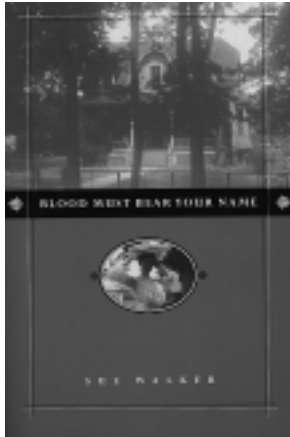
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# Reviews



## Blood Must Bear Your Name

by Sue Walker

Amherst Writers & Artists Press,  
2002

\$14 Paperback

Sue Walker's latest book of poetry, *Blood Must Bear Your Name*, peels open an introspective mind at work in poems that are penetrating and passionate. She transforms honest introspection into art as she examines

aspects of blood and family.

The volume opens with a group of letter poems written to an imagined brother named Martin. The emotional terrain covers paternity, friendship, and disease. The poems are equipped between the real world and an imaginary one, and beautifully so in "Cleave-age" (where the poet examines how breast cancer has altered her life):

This is a story of once-upon-a time, Martin,  
when the word *cleavage* broke in two./

I am narrating loss.

Then, in a spontaneous updraft of imagination, she affirms:

I make my way with words,  
take what was dismembered/  
and say it is well."

Throughout this section humor anchors much of the sensibility. At first she is curious: "Will we drink together,/meet unconcealed?/But when? Where?/." Then, in a deft jab of ambivalence, she says that she may not be ready "to meet [him] in the flesh," and decides: "Let's keep our paper words/the only link between us./I don't want to meet you,/shake your shifty hand." With these masterful shifts into her interior spaces, she centers us on the sentiment of each poem. Layered beneath the surface of these poems, a struggle for identity through blood lineage is subtilized in lines always enhanced by freshness and inventiveness.

The poems of the second section do not point to a single interior landscape. Instead, ideas dominate and move us toward the universal—historical, political, moral, and esthetic questions, yet they maintain an underpinning of the relative weight and significance of the blood motif of the volume. Images and ideas crackle with tension.

In "Imaginary Letter from Alvar Nunez Cabeza De Vaca Concerning the Seven Cities of Cibola," the very first line lodges firmly in the reader's mind: "My tongue floats on a river of blood." Equally impressive is the ending of the short poem "Van Gogh: Rust into Red": "Vincent fingers his absent ear/and waits the red explosion/of a gun."

A superb long poem, "Hammering Virgins: The Dream of Female Signs in James Dickey's (Un)Broken Hungering," composes the third section of the volume. Here Walker's mind operates expansively as she enriches, elaborates, and subtilizes her progression of images and associations to focus on James Dickey's idealization of women. She quite literally "hammers" Dickey's conception of women with intensity: "A woman is not/a spectacle/to be scrutinized in falling,/to be peered at through a window,/to be toyed with/to be played with like a doll./Listen Jim,/let a woman be . . ." These powerful sequences energize this long poem, taking us deep into the poet's thinking process so that we end up in places we might not have perceived.

The poems in the fourth section deal with one's impulse to be accepted, to be a part of this world, and the capricious tug of emotions and politics. External images are probing, often shifting to an internal landscape. In "Mama Said," the speaker reviews her mother's admonitions, then ends with a jolt: "Mama died without ever/revealing my birth mother's name." Walker links her images with emotion so effectively that we are pushed toward some comprehension of the complexities of her life, and, by doing so, find some part of ours illuminated.

The title poem, "Blood Must Bear Your Name: A Letter to Billy," is the sole poem in the final section of this volume. This letter poem gathers up heartbreak, grief, and memory with intensity in a narration based on an actual murder trial and hanging of a slave in 1855. The narrator states that she is writing this letter "to tell you the truth/of all you may come to hear." There is no degree of distance; instead Walker achieves remarkable intimacy with the feelings and thoughts of her character. The poem concludes by returning us to the blood motif: "I owe you the truth,/for blood has reasons/we can't understand."

Every poem in *Blood Must Bear Your Name* gives evidence of a mind that is as sensitized as the eye is sharp. Spinning off her memorable lines in "Cleave-Age," she has made her "way with words" and has said "it...well." Eminently well, I should add.

---

Poet and writer J. William Chambers is editor of the Elk River Review Press in Athens, Alabama.

## The Blue Guide to Indiana

Michael Martone

FC2 Normal/Tallahassee, 2001

\$12.95 Paperback

The sticker on the front of Michael Martone's new book, *The Blue Guide to Indiana*, leaves you in no doubt how the publishers of "real" travel books and the tour operators of Indiana feel about it. A white square with large red lettering contains the following important information.

NOTICE! *The Blue Guide to Indiana* is in no way affiliated with, endorsed by, or in association with the series of travel books titled Blue Guide, or with its U.S. publisher, W.W. Norton Inc., or with its U.K. publisher, A & C Black. *The Blue Guide to Indiana* in no way factually depicts or accurately represents the State of Indiana, its destinations and attractions, its institutions or businesses, or any of its residents or former residents. This is a work of fiction.

In many ways the sticker is the perfect introduction to *The Blue Guide to Indiana*, and if it had not been provided by the publisher, Martone would have had to invent it. Who knows? Maybe he did. For all its vehement denial, the information on the sticker is not accurate, for while Martone's travel book may not depict any actual places in Indiana, its judicious mixing of travel guide and work of fiction gives a truth to the landscape and attitude of the Midwest.

Born in Fort Wayne, Indiana, Martone is currently a professor of English and director of the Creative Writing Program at the University of Alabama, a midwesterner exiled in the deep South and that sense of the exile comes across in Martone's writing. Affecting the style of an authoritative travel guide, *The Blue Guide to Indiana* cunningly deconstructs, in a straight-faced comical style, claims to truth made in language, the veracity of the actual, and even the accuracy of history. Sweeping from practical travel information, such as getting there ("by packet boat and rail handcar operated as a concession by the remnants of the Miami tribal council") to holy sites of Indiana (including "Our Lady of the Big Hair and Feet"), Martone has created a hilarious satire both on the travel industry and the Crossroads of America.

One of the funniest sections of the book describes Eli Lilly Land, a theme park created by a giant pharmaceutical company that had "been quietly purchasing a wide swath of swamp land and marginally profitable farms near the town of Martinsville." This section of the travel guide not only gently satirizes a kind of fifties faith in the rising tide of technology and its ability to improve all our lives (better living through chemistry) but also parodies the extent to which drug companies and corporations in general insidiously control our lives and dictate our every activity. The park includes such attractions as "The Organic Chemistry Bumper Cars," which "painted as carbon, hydrogen, or oxygen proceed to crash into each other...forming elaborate and elegant chains of or-

ganic compounds and, more rarely, even polyesters and esters when the occasional inorganic vehicle, a bright yellow sulfur say, is released into the comical chemical collision." "The Possible Side Effects Funhouse" is another attraction not to be missed at Eli Lilly Land (named after the inventor of the gelatin capsule). Made to "look like a Victorian asylum...[t]he lethargy, impotency, weeping spells, cotton mouth, blindness, unexplained elations, delusions of grandeur, shingles, yeast infections, excessive ear wax, malodorous breath, memory lapses, multiple personalities" are all "part of the games in store."

Martone's deadpan satire sometimes raises real belly laughs, especially for people who know Indiana. But anyone familiar with the occasionally portentous prose and wildly inaccurate descriptions of some travel books will get a chuckle from this virtual tour of an Indiana that exists on the page and is only accidentally affiliated with the "real" State of Indiana. Remember this is a work of fiction.

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*Grant Pheloung teaches English at Auburn University.*



## The Blue Angels

By Peter Huggins

River City, 2001

\$20 Hardback

Only with great difficulty will you find a volume brimming with more sympathy than *The Blue Angels*, Peter Huggins's second book of poems. Among the sixty-five pieces collected here, we are invited to witness the resurrec-

tion of fighter pilots, Alabama's ancient moundbuilders, long-buried Pompeians, and Plymouth Rock Pilgrims who share their living resurrection with composers, explorers, hunters, immigrants, and ordinary citizens. In every figure, *The Blue Angels* pursues some reparation or preservation, some sanctification, seeking to bestow its finest benediction.

Huggins's interest in persistence is clear in the volume's opening poem, "Blackberry Winter," where the season "tries to outlast / The first of May," and lives long enough to provide Huggins occasion to reflect:

in recurring, the past lives,  
If only as the stain of blackberries  
On a white shirt.  
It is the taste that does not remain  
The same, that mocks  
The memory with sweet not sour.

Much of Huggins's power is dedicated to discovering, in the life of the past, the sweetness that rises from, and effaces, the sour. So, in "For the Man Who Struck a Small Boy One Wednesday Afternoon in Auburn," Huggins's attention fixes immediately on this man's difficulty—"Nothing prepared him for this"—and works quickly to ease this pain: "Bless this man then...." As in many of these poems, the good word enables a repair, and we are asked to let his man "Not live a life of memory and regret. / Let him finish his delivery. // Let the small boy reach the park."

Throughout, Huggins imagines the world aright, even when it seems otherwise, and through his imagination shows us how to remake our own troubles. In the title poem, the sight of the U. S. Navy's trick flying team sparks a thousand images of "Kingfishers or herons / Scooping up fish in their long bills," but finally occasions a kind of apocalypse: "I hope / God's going to roll heaven // Over and tell the missing to fly / Like Blue Angels, to scoop up / Their lost lives and fly right." As long as Huggins keeps writing poems like this one, God won't have to tell us.

At the core of Huggins's gospel is a deep and abiding sympathy, not only for those who suffer, but also for those who excel. So in meditating "On a Print of Piranesi," Huggins is drawn to the superior vision in a wish to be subsumed within it: "I wish I could see things // In black and white / Like Giovanni Piranesi. // I wish I could be / One of the people he drew / In the interior of Saint Peter's." This wish seems an extremely modest mode of understanding, which is followed immediately by one of Huggins's moments of extreme capacity. In "Taking My Cuts," the speaker, considering that falling angels have no one to catch them, decides to "rush in," to "take / Responsibility for them."

In taking such responsibility, Huggins's eyes are blessed, and he begins to see angels everywhere, "in the pines / Across Highway 43" and later, having "migrated to Tuscaloosa." Many of the poems in *The Blue Angels* evince the poet's deep devotion, one which refreshes and enriches the world about him. In "Webster's Bar," our speaker reaches out to the adulterer: "I know what he's in for. / I wish I could make it easier / For him. / I wish he, / I wish I, could stay warm." And in "The Meditating Man," the Japanese immigrant who is worshipping the sun in the driveway of the adjacent house is allowed to fulfill, even if for only a moment, his wish for a life of glory and service.

As almost every poem of *The Blue Angels* makes apparent, Huggins's sympathy is enormous and enlarging, giving voice to common citizens reluctant and regretful, hopeful and reminiscent, living and dead. In the clean, honest language of these poems, Huggins communicates his judgment that we should embrace the world about us in all its forms. Finally, if we embrace such embrace, we may be able to watch, as Huggins does in "The Dead Shall Be Raised Indestructible," the fireflies rise from the lake. We may be able to

catch them with him and watch as "They turn into swans, into stars."

Such poems make me think that, if the stars did fall on Alabama, they might be raised again, and we with them, wonderful, full of life, indestructible.

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**Personal Encounters**  
with WILLIAM FAULKNER,  
CARL SANDBURG, GERTRUDE  
STEIN, WILLIAM SPRATLING,  
PABLO PICASSO, ERNEST  
HEMINGWAY, T.S. ELIOT  
by Ralph Hammond

Livingston Press, 2000  
\$12 Paperback

Ralph Hammond quotes Carl  
Sandburg as saying:

*While very young  
I learned that America loves to sing!  
We all sing when we fall in love,  
We sing when we fall out of love,  
We sing when we're happy  
We sing when we're sad.  
For the drop of a hat,  
Americans will start a song!  
And I feel the same way.*

Hammond's latest book, *Personal Encounters*, is a paean to the famous and fascinating artists whom he interviewed as a U.S. Army military war correspondent in the European theater during World War II. With canticles on his tongue, Whitman on his mind, and the noble spirit of poetry in his heart, Alabama's former Poet Laureate and very soul of verse in the State invites the reader to come along and share the experiences. Citing the words of Ezra Pound in the preface of the book, Hammond says, "Let there be commerce between us." His "Introduction in Song" ignites the flame "that sets a glow/upon the poetic voice" that thrills in muse-making. We are awake at 4 a.m. as Hammond records "on paper/ what the whirling mind was saying/in its roundelay of creation." We sit with him "in a distant Huddle House" and watch the poet compose, write with his "favorite Cross pen"—though his fertile mind has previously composed "with beet juice, pokeberry juice/and even with the brown/of spilled coffee," singing "the wonder of the word in uplifted grace."

Following the lyric introduction, there are seven impres-

sive interviews. The first is with “Picasso–In Black and White.” The time is October 25, 1945, and it is the artist’s sixty-fourth birthday–“a low-cloud, gray day in Paris” as Hammond’s “camouflaged Jeep” arrives at “7 Rue des Grands-Augustins” and he is escorted into Picasso’s “third-floor sculpture atelier.” With a deft flourish of pen, it is not just an account of Hammond’s meeting Picasso (and the other celebrants in the book) that unfolds before the eye of the reader. There is a transformation through the rendering of artistic verse that enables the reader to share the joy of being in the painter’s presence.

The charm of the Picasso section lies in a marvelously creative twist in which Hammond tells of taking his son to New York. The child is watching the evening news and calls to his mother, “Is Picasso still alive?” “Yes, he is,” Mrs. Hammond replies. “Well, Daddy had better tell him to get to painting/for the Museum of Modern Art/is burning down/and his black and white painting/is going up in smoke!” “Guernica” was damaged, but not beyond repair.

Encounters with Gertrude Stein and Hemingway are followed by “T.S. Eliot of Waste Land Fame” and “Carl Sandburg in Alabama.” Hammond met the latter “for the first time on the seventh floor/of Montgomery, Alabama’s Jefferson Davis Hotel/and subsequently served as “official state escort” and “man Friday” during the author’s stay in Alabama. Hammond conveys not just the magnitude of Sandburg’s reputation, but renders the small talk that makes the famous author accessible and human. “Mr. Sandburg,” Hammond says:

it was early on in 1916  
that you wrote “Fog”—  
Is that your most widely known poem?

And Sandburg replies:

Well, if you say—  
I don’t know.  
But if it is  
I think it’s because it’s so short!

The final encounter is with William Spratling, a world-famous silversmith, when he returned to Alabama to receive an Honorary Doctor’s degree from Auburn University, December 14, 1962. Spratling knew Faulkner in New Orleans, and Hammond tells him he’ll be bombarded with questions. “They’ll all want to talk about Faulkner!” he says. Spratling replies that he thinks

. . . folks have gone crazy over Faulkner  
just because he got the Nobel prize!  
Not long ago I had a letter from a professor  
doing research on Faulkner,  
And she said if I’d give her only fifteen minutes

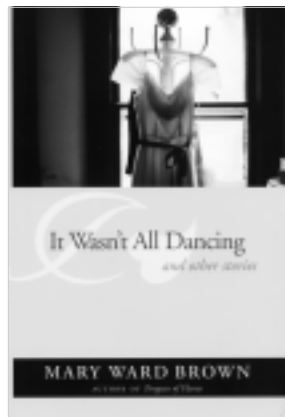
of my time for an interview,  
she’d fly down to Taxco!

Can you imagine flying four thousand miles  
just to talk about Faulkner for fifteen minutes!

We don’t have to travel four thousand miles, or venture to Taxco, Paris, Key West, or Birmingham to meet with Spratling, Faulkner, Picasso, Sandburg, Stein, Eliot, or Hemingway—and though the acquaintance will be more than a mere fifteen minutes, the pleasure is long lasting, as splendid as silver that Spratling collected. Ralph Hammond’s book is a rare collection of memorable moments: “of gold rings/set with fire opals and rubies, and necklaces of ebony”—the words of a master painter whose pen has brought his unforgettable encounters to life.

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*Sue Walker is a professor of English and Chair of the English Department at the University of South Alabama.*



## It Wasn't All Dancing

by Mary Ward Brown

University of Alabama Press,  
2002  
\$24.95 Hardback

Mary Ward Brown of Marion, Alabama, is probably the finest Alabama writer of literary fiction practicing today. She postponed her writing career most of a lifetime, first dedicating herself to careers as wife and mother and then, in

her full maturity, exploding onto the scene with her first collection of stories, *Tongues of Flame*, in 1987. This volume of work, set in Alabama’s Black Belt, won the 1987 PEN/Hemingway Award and the Lillian Smith Award. Then there was what seemed to her new fans an intolerable wait. Brown published a handful of stories in assorted magazines and now has collected these and a few more in her second book, *It Wasn't All Dancing*.

This slim volume comprises eleven stories of about thirteen pages each. The stories are intense. Each one brought this reader to a full stop. Each one must be savored and digested before it is possible to move on. In the opening story, the title story, Ms. Brown hits several of her major themes: the relation of man to woman, husband to wife, of black southerners to white, of the generations, in this case mother and daughter to each other, and the irresistible passage of time, which leads, of course, to mortality and death.

Rose Merriweather lies in bed, old, dying, lucid for long

periods and then lapsing into a kind of coma for hours or even days at a time. When alert, she has plenty of time to examine her life, and she mainly finds herself wanting. As a young woman, she had been spoiled, flighty, frivolous. Her middle-aged daughter is not attentive or even loving. She threatens Rose with a “change-up,” meaning the nursing home. Rose tells Henrietta, her black nurse, “Do you know what she remembers most about me, as a child? . . . A few smells, she says. Gardenias from my corsages. Hot cheese in the canapés I served at parties . . . Chanel Number Five as I went out the door, then alcohol and cigarettes when I came in her room late at night.”

Henrietta asks about Rose’s marriage. Had she loved her husband? Had she pleased him at night? Pleasured him? Rose was taken by surprise: “I guess I did, sometimes.” “You didn’t cheat on him, did you?” Rose doesn’t answer, for it had all been flirting, except once. Rose has fine china, Spode, and silver and crystal, but no cash. She has Henrietta dig out a ring Rose had never worn publicly, given by “Him,” the man she truly loved but did not leave her husband and daughter for. He had a wife and three children. She had her little family. Now the sale of the ring might bring a few more weeks of independence. This is a strong story on a strong topic: the summing up of one’s own life. Rose contemplates. “She’d done a few things right. She’d stood by Allen till the end and hadn’t faltered.” As he is dying, year after year, unable to speak, “his eyes had lit up when she came into the room. It hadn’t been all dancing.”

Set in the Black Belt, this story could have taken place in Dublin, Ireland, and been in Joyce’s *Dubliners*. Brown generates emotion without sentimentality or melodrama. Great fiction is like that. Elemental. Simple lines. Brown is indeed the Chekhov of Alabama.

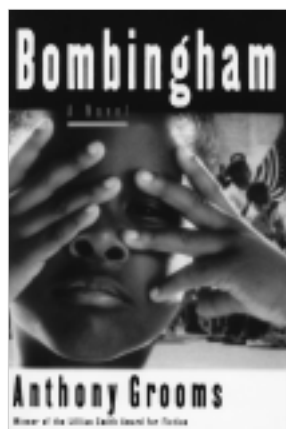
As the large sapphire carries so much meaning in “Dancing,” it is a birthday cake that stands as the endowed object in the story of that name. In this piece another older woman, Fern Wilson, has buried her unfaithful husband, whom she loved dearly. After long years of widowhood, Fern has met 69-year-old Dr. Charles Albright from Decatur, Alabama, and they care for each other. He is to visit that very day, his birthday, when her oldest friend dies. Fern must attend Sadie at her home, at the funeral home and the graveside, canceling Charles’ visit. But she does NOT take the cake to Sadie’s house. As she returns from the funeral, the next day, her phone is ringing. Charles still wants to visit. He will propose, we know, and although Fern feels that she must have been inadequate to her first husband, Robert, she will accept. They will share his birthday cake, the name of which is Dark Decadence. It sits on her counter, “pristine white over that dark chocolate heart.”

What does it mean, the cake? It means time, it means make a wish and have it granted. It means seize the day, it means many happy returns. In Mary Ward Brown’s fiction, objects vibrate with meanings, not just one, but many.

Rose in “It Wasn’t All Dancing” asks Henrietta to call her Miss Rose or Ma’am. Henrietta declines. “No. I just call you Mrs. Merriweather right on . . . That other stuff all over now.” Indeed, after the civil rights movement a lot of stuff is happily All Over Now. But along with all that has been gained, Brown suggests, some things have been lost. Brown explores the old relationships in “Swing Low,” specifically between the black servant William and his white mistress Miss Ward. He is her servant. She is his protectress. She protects William from the wrath of Mr. Ward when William shows up hung over or even when he steals. It is clear he is devoted to her, but how deeply isn’t known until Miss Ward dies and William is genuinely bereft. “‘I ain’t got nobody now,’ he says . . . ‘Nobody.’ He repeated. ‘Not in this world.’” And every reader knows it is true. Of course, no review can cover all eleven stories. In some, class distinctions are explored, tenderly, for this is also sensitive territory. In others, the place of religion is examined. In “Alone in a Foreign Country,” an Alabama girl finds herself frightened in a hotel room in Moscow and the next day, takes a tour of Chekhov’s house. Mary Ward Brown puts the signs up for those who can read them.

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*Don Noble is host of Alabama Public Television’s BookMark and book reviewer for Alabama Public Radio, where this review first aired.*



## Bombingham: A Novel

by Anthony Grooms

Simon & Schuster, 2001  
\$24 Hardback

This truly is a book about metaphorical bombs...the bombs that explode only after a long, slow fuse becomes too short to measure; the land mines that can surprise you for the last time, at any moment;

the bombs that are dropped in your lap when you least expect it; the time bombs that may never explode but are always hovering in your thoughts.

Anthony Grooms takes us on a trip that, to me, a resident of Birmingham, Alabama, feels all too genuine, all too familiar. The landmarks and neighborhoods and icons of this Southern city are present everywhere in the book. If you’ve ever sat in a pew at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, if you’ve ever seen a trained-to-attack police dog unleashed, if you’ve ever walked down Fourth Avenue North on a warm Saturday afternoon, if you’ve ever wanted to climb to the top

of the iron statue Vulcan, this book will take you back in time, to the height of the Civil Rights Wars.

Only this time, you're a young black schoolchild who does not know what is happening, who is not politically astute, but who is able to observe and feel the violence and anger and frustration of the 1960s firsthand. This is *Huckleberry Finn* updated.

The Mississippi River is replaced by the rivers and furrows cut by fire hoses. The camaraderie between Huck and Jim is undercut and replaced by white adults who only see small black children as pathetic reminders that a race they hate is still growing and reproducing and marching toward freedom. The "N" word is replaced by the "C" word, "Cracker." And fellow blacks who are fighting to win their rights in a city gone slightly crazy are admiringly called "race men" by their fellows-in-arms, and by those too afraid to join the fight.

Through all the battles and strife of the Back-Then Birmingham, one thing remains more important to the young black child who lends us his eyes: family. In *Bombingham*, the reader becomes part of a black family living in segregated Birmingham and, like the writings of Anne Frank, the words and emotions of a small black citizen make us feel the pain of an entire group of people. It helps us remember that history is merely biography—the life of each person living each generation is what's really important here. When people get to tell their stories, they become whole for a moment. Those stories must be told to someone, anyone, in order to heal.

The story demonstrates that, back then, you did not have to be a "race man" to get blown up: "You just had to be colored." And it is full of concrete—and revelatory—images:

...Lamar raised the improbable idea that wet white people smelled like wet dogs. This was just one of a slew of reports about white people that filtered down to us from adults...white people never washed their hands...they kissed their dogs on the mouths...they ate fried chicken with knives and forks.

And at school, black children were taught that slavery was mutually beneficial for master and slave. "After all, the slave never worried for provisions, always had a home, and was cherished by his master. Masters were never cruel to slaves; it defied logic that a man would cause injury to his own valuable property," and so on.

Through the eyes of the black child Walter Burke, we see how his photographic memory retains all these images so that, later in life, on a battlefield in Vietnam, he can relive them and start to deal with them—in sometimes dreadful ways. I invite you to feel this book. It will make your mind turn over once or twice, and hopefully land jelly-side-up.

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*Jim Reed is the author of Dad's Tweed Coat and Christmas Comes But Once a Day.*



## Captain January

by Robert Inman

Little, Brown, 2002  
\$24.95 Hardback

There is a certain positive grace that permeates this novel about a TV weatherman who is forced to face himself in a mirror he did not design. In the hands of some other Southern novelist, the character Will Baggett would probably be just another drunken, self-destructive

Good Ol' Boy who ends life in a pile of rubble, with lots of angst and sordid passions uncovered along the way.

But through the craftsmanship of Robert Inman, Will Baggett becomes a real person—not a Southern hick that people in other parts of the country can snicker at—a real person whose pain and confusion and infrequent joy we can really feel.

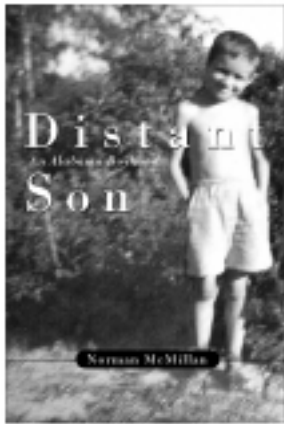
When I first met Robert Inman in 1963, I was his boss and he was a college student working part-time at a radio station in Tuscaloosa. Even at that tender age, it was evident that Inman was a clear, positive and calm communicator, a young man who would do well in life, regardless of his career choice. As it turns out, his career choices refined him and provided him with the experience he would eventually need to turn out such a mature and delightful narrative. *Captain January* is a good read, in the tradition of great popular storytellers such as John D. MacDonald. In Inman's hands, characters we would ordinarily ignore come alive and surprise us with their vibrancy and reality. The story sparkles with inside knowledge of how television stations work and how just plain folk can be boosted into fame and sometimes not know what hit them till decades later. Then decisions have to be made...and sometimes a leap of faith has to be taken.

There's just enough Southernness in this novel to please those who like to read Southern Novels: the natural mysterious subtleties of being gentry, which include the craft of tolerating those considered to be non-gentry...the nobility of trailer-park trash who turn out to be fascinating and unpredictable...the humid ambience of the Carolinas. But this is not a Southern novel: it is merely a graceful and straightforward telling of a handful of stories that need to be told. These are stories about small people with big lives. Thanks to writers such as Robert Inman, we can appreciate—without being threatened—the separation that can come to a married couple who are too close for too long, the eggshell dance that a parent has to learn when dealing with an unhappy and confused son, the feeling in all of us that, as one character says to Will Baggett some 300 pages into the book, "there's something missing with you."

*Captain January* is several books in one, but each book intertwines nicely with the others, and in the end, there is much satisfaction and some hope to be found in the lives of people we've grown to understand. Through this book, we just might learn to be less judgmental about people we run into in real life. After all, everybody is somebody's child—and it is that child in us who needs to be tended to, even into old age.

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*Jim Reed is author of Dad's Tweed Coat and Christmas Comes But Once a Day.*



## Distant Son

An Alabama Boyhood  
Norman McMillan

Cahaba Trace Commission,  
2002  
\$24.00 Cloth

I opened *Distant Son: An Alabama Boyhood* with all of the anticipation with which I begin any new book. What does it hold for me? Will I like it? Will I find a new treasure, a new favorite for personal reading

or for teaching Southern literature classes? With the anticipation, however, came wariness, trepidation, even fear. Will this be a sensationalistic, tell-all autobiography, or will it be a saccharine, nostalgic, romantic reminiscence? After all, I have known the author personally and professionally for fifteen or twenty years, and I was not sure that I wanted to meet a different or new persona.

The questions quickly disappeared as I began reading the opening scene of “The Beginning,” the account of the birth of Norman McMillan, son of Lucille and Albert McMillan, on August 13, 1942, a scene made immediate with the use of present tense (the rest of the book is written in past tense). The author creates a sense of calm and satisfaction in Lucille as she looks at her eighth child, her fourth son. But that mood gradually drifts into loss as the new mother remembers her firstborn son, who died ten years earlier at the age of four: “...she dreams that the boy’s body becomes calm, she sees the breathing stop, and then she knows she is holding a dead baby.” But the dream ends as older children interrupt her musing to see their new brother. The conclusion of “The Beginning” prepares us for stories to come: “I am the baby in the bed....I do not know that it is hot, that the house smells bad, or that the world is at war. All told, I feel pretty good.”

Thereafter, *Distant Son* becomes more than the story of a boy growing up in west central Alabama in the 1940s and

1950s; it is also the story of a way of life in that time and place, a microcosm of the lives of hundreds, even thousands, of individuals who survived difficult times in the rural South.

It is the story of a family descended from an “exalted tribe” that settled in Alabama in the early 1800s. The first of a number of letters quoted in the book is from the brother of McMillan’s great-grandfather, written in 1830 to entice his 18-year-old brother to come from “crowded” North Carolina to this newly opened land: “Here in Alabama the land is abundant and rich, with fields of cotton growing almost as high as a grown man’s shoulder, and there are nearby rivers to transport it easily to market. As the demand for cotton so greatly exceeds our capabilities to produce it, premium prices are to be gained for it. And David, best of all, I have begun the manufacture of cotton gins, and this, God willing, will make our fortune. It is for this enterprise that I most desire your presence.” But the fortune no longer existed when Norman was born into this family in 1942. The family had gone from being slave owners to having sharecroppers on their own land to being sharecroppers on the land of others.

It is the story of a courtship and marriage of a man and woman who, however different they might be, genuinely cared for each other. A letter Albert wrote Lucille in 1925, shortly before their marriage, records that love, but foreshadows problems to come: “Sweet Heart if you drive the car any do be careful for you don’t know what time you will meet some drunk person.” And Albert became just such a “drunk person.” He signed the letter “I am yours forever.” McMillan reflects that “Forever is a long, long time, but — despite the rough and often unhappy life they lived in the years that followed — Daddy did belong to Lucille and Lucille belonged to him.”

It is, thus, the story of a father and mother and nine surviving children in the mid-twentieth century, moving from one location to another to support a large family. They struggle with poverty and with alcoholism. As McMillan concludes at one point, “I was as proud of [Mama] as I was ashamed of Daddy.” But there is also love and there is frequent laughter. And there are numerous special moments, resulting from the kindnesses of members of the family, of neighbors, and of acquaintances. An older sister writes home and sends a plastic car to the baby brother. A beautician who likes Lucille takes Norman shopping for new clothes the day before he starts to school. A teacher takes the young Norman aside and gives him half of an apple because he is doing well in school. These gestures underscore both the poverty and the thoughtfulness and the love that existed in the world of the McMillan children.

Some of these incidences take on an importance of their own as they become defining moments for the McMillans, especially the young Norman. Evelyn, Norman’s oldest sister by 16 years, wins the first statewide Phi Beta Kappa essay competition in Alabama and receives a scholarship to Birmingham-Southern College. McMillan creates the scene of Evelyn’s notification in all of its drama: two men “in



pinstriped suits and striped ties” come to the house to tell her in person. They find her in the front yard, barefooted and wearing overalls. When they tell her they are looking for “Miss Evelyn McMillan,” she rushes in the house, changes clothes, and returns, telling them that her brother said they wished to see her.

*Distant Son* is, finally, the story of a way of life and a time in history. McMillan gives us details of religion, culture (movies, songs, magazines, newspapers, books), schools — from the rural two-room schoolhouse to the “city” school of Northport—clothes, food, games, holiday traditions, complete with photographs from the family albums. He also records the contradictions of race at that troubled time in the South: people who believed all people should be treated equally, but still were not willing to go to school with them or sit down to a meal with them.

From the scene of his birth in “The Beginning” to his move to Texas after graduation from high school in “New Beginning,” McMillan shares his family and his world with us. For those who care about the people introduced in these pages, he summarizes their lives post-1960 in an “Afterword.”

Back to the initial questions of concern: rather than introducing me to a “different” Norman McMillan, *Distant Son* gives me his past, his heritage. More important, the story is neither sensationalistic nor romantic; rather, it is the story of a childhood of tears and laughter candidly and vividly and evocatively told.

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*Nancy G. Anderson is an associate professor of English at Auburn University Montgomery and director of Actions Build Community: The AUM-Taulbert Initiative.*

## Invited Guest

An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Southern Poetry  
 Edited by David Rigsbee and Steven Ford Brown

University Press of Virginia, 2001  
 \$17.95 Paperback

Ranging from James Weldon Johnson to Allen Tate to Sonia Sanchez to Rodney Jones, this ambitious and meticulously prepared collection is a striking document of a signal feature of southern culture that’s alternately been the cause of hope and alarm throughout the South’s last century: relentless and hard-driving change.

The creative responses of southern poets to the pressures and opportunities of such change are arrayed here according to well-grounded editorial principles. In their succinct and thoughtful preface, Rigsbee and Brown present two literary visions of the South, taking shape according to “the extent to which poets tilt toward the South as an ‘image’ (to use Allen Tate’s term) or as an ongoing historical entity.”

This arrangement seems at first to be simply another bipolar view of southern writing: Agrarian vs. Urbanite, Gentry vs. Folk, White vs. Black, Beau vs. Belle— such oppositions have been too easily installed and maintained, and the editors of the volume know it, stating plainly “We hope that *Invited Guest* will promote a sense that the diversity and simultaneity of southern poetry have been at all times present, even as the tradition has been largely the product of a one-eyed orthodoxy.” In this way, instead of recirculating the idea that a culture war of sorts existed between the likes of John Crowe Ransom and Sterling A. Brown, the editors propose that the wealth of poetry in the volume springs from a shared basis in experience, and in the concrete evidence of a changing southern society.

Viewed in this light, southern poets coming of age after the Second World War elaborate on and respond to the concerns of those writing before mid-century, often in surprising ways. It’s refreshing to join the editors in reconsidering writers as diverse as James Dickey, Etheridge Knight, and C.D. Wright as poets whose work, steeped in the rhythms of southern speech, is created in partial response to the weighty idea of the New Critical poetic text as put forth by Ransom and Tate a few decades earlier.

It’s energizing to trace the passage of southern culture northward through the outmigration of African-Americans in the early and middle decades of the century, invoked by writers like Jean Toomer, and then to see it reflected back in sophisticated ways by poets of diverse ethnic backgrounds and experiences, like Charles Wright, Ellen Bryant Voigt, and Yusef Komunyakaa, as they engage the South on new terms in later years.

Rigsbee and Brown have also done a thorough job of contextualizing these poets in their introductory passages for each writer, addressing questions of how biography, critical influence, and changing tastes lead to lionization or neglect. Detailed bibliographies are provided for each writer as well—a useful feature that highlights the larger field beyond what the editors call the “snapshot” takes afforded by any anthology.

This sense of widening perspective is buttressed by the introduction to the volume. It looks at the socioeconomic conditions that prompted change and prompted poetry—from lingering resentments and divisions in the early decades of the century, through the total collapse of the Great Depression, to economic prosperity and the drive for Civil Rights in the ‘50s and ‘60s, then finally to the suburbanization of the ‘80s and ‘90s, right up to the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as much of the South uneasily verged on assuming a corporate identity as one part of a swath of indistinct territory known as The Sun Belt.

If ever a single volume of writing could serve as a block to that last ugly vision, it’s this one. *Invited Guest* is a superb introduction to the richness of the South’s poetic heritage, in all its diversity of forms and perspectives. Within its pages, readers will find testimony involving how poets have loved, challenged, and constantly re-created the South through the tumult

of one hundred years of change around them. It's a vivid and distinctive record, impressively gathered in *Invited Guest*.

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

## Wings of Morning

by William Cobb

Crane Hill, 2001

\$15.95 Paperback

William Cobb's *Wings of Morning* is strewn with magic both real and surreal. It is 1965 in Hammond, Alabama – any Alabama small town of that time. It begins slow, as a simmering southern summer morning with the prodigal – here daughter – returned to the fold. Gone is the youth and innocence, which were her gold. Yet Rachel Taylor is full of life and has a quiet confidence in herself and her magic. She attends the birth of her nephew, Eshu, and sees her mother to and through death's door. These steps along the measured path of her life set the tone for what's to come.

The stage is set for the dance of life and death, and they take many forms at Cobb's hand. He creates a cast of ordinary people leading ordinary lives, a healer, a 'Mam'bo, a hoodoo', a ghost, and more. Each is a fully rounded character bringing every part of their nature to bear to survive the rapidly changing times. There is the crisis of identity for some, and everywhere there is the intolerance of closed minds, all laced with violence, hate, lust, fear, and hope.

Set against the backdrop leading to the historic march from Selma to Montgomery, the key players are two families – one white, one black – inextricably bound by sin and secrets, race and culture. They walk a path begun long ago when one did not acknowledge aloud what everyone knew in whispers, and the children were always the last to know.

As with most journeys, these people don't know how long the road is nor, with all its turns, its destination. Never do they imagine the full impact of taking the trip at all. Choices made at each juncture shape the person and the future this way or that: harden the heart or soften it, give up or press on. In the end, each choice, each step upon their chosen path tosses this small group from small-town Alabama into the current that feeds the tide in the affairs of men. This was and is the Civil Rights movement.

New ideas are being born and struggling to stand upright; an old way of life is in its death throes. As the old guard rails against the tide, the marchers take it at the flood looking for a new way, toward a better day, and their hopes are borne on the wings of morning.

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*Perle Guzman Champion lives in Birmingham.*

## A Sense of Place

Montgomery's Architectural Heritage 1821-1951

by Jeffrey C. Benton

River City Publishing, 2001

\$39.95 Cloth

This meticulously prepared volume is a journey in more ways than one. It is a walk through the streets of present-day Montgomery with a very knowledgeable guide pointing out buildings and regaling his audience with stories of their histories and details of their interiors. On another level, it represents the author's journey of discovery.

Jeffrey Benton began a systematic examination of Montgomery's architectural heritage in 1993. In 1994-95, he wrote a series of *Montgomery Advertiser* articles about historically significant structures. That series was the genesis of *A Sense of Place*, a roughly chronological collection of essays detailing the history, design, and significance of 79 structures.

When Benton began his work, he believed Montgomery had lost more than it had retained. In his introduction, he comments that Montgomery is "known for demolition and rebuilding" and notes that interest in architecture in the Capital City has historically been tied to fashion and "the socioeconomic statements that buildings might make." The cycles of building, destroying, and rebuilding have caused the loss of not only individual buildings but also streetscapes and entire neighborhoods.

"I could not see the city's treasures because I was distracted by vacant lots, parking lots, ugly or mediocre in-fill, and gross differences in scale," he writes.

As he worked from building to building, Benton discovered, however, that Montgomery does indeed have an architectural legacy worth saving and that many people living and working in the city understand its relevance: "not because it is old, but because it is relevant to our understanding of who we are and who we can become; it is relevant because its preservation is necessary if we are to establish a community based on continuity and permanence."

Elegantly presented in an oversized volume with generous margins, rich paper, and a useful index, Benton's 79 short essays go beyond mere description of buildings and their styles. The structures include residences, public buildings, churches, schools, military structures, and businesses. In his effort to reveal the significance of each place, he tells the story of a city: its people, commerce, religion, education, and values. Jim Goodwyn's simple black-and-white photographs identify the buildings and many of their interesting and remarkable details but also make the reader long to see them as they stand. The only thing missing is a map of the city, which might reveal something about the locations and clusterings of the buildings to non-Montgomeryans.

Of necessity, the book covers many of the structures familiar to locals and tourists alike, including the State Capital, the

First White House of the Confederacy, Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church, Union Station, the Davis Theater, the Governor's Mansion, St. John's AME Church, First Baptist Church, and Knox Hall ("the finest Greek Revival mansion in the city," located on South Perry Street). However, the truest delights are in the essays about Montgomery's lesser-known architectural and historical gems.

Take, for example, the Davenport-Harrison Shotgun house, located in the Centennial Hill neighborhood of southeast Montgomery on Hutchinson Street. This tiny house, built sometime before 1901, is still a rental residence in this predominantly black section of the city. Benton describes the house effectively and gives its ownership history; however, the real value of the essay is its discussion of the etymology of the term "shotgun house" and its rather lengthy analysis of the living conditions of free blacks in Montgomery after the Civil War. Benton presents the house as an example of an architectural aesthetic with African roots, emphasizing "novelty, improvisation, whimsy, and spontaneity," at odds with the Anglo-American designs favored by whites.

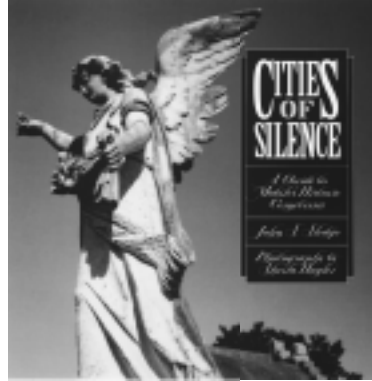
Another notable essay describes the Church of the Holy Comforter on South Goldthwaite Street, a Carpenter Gothic building that once housed one of Montgomery's most affluent congregations and then became home to the Montgomery Little Theater for thirty-five years. Returned to its original owner, the Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, in 1996, the building is now used as an interdenominational community center. Benton describes the deconsecrated church and its history in loving detail, comparing it to similar Carpenter Gothic churches in other parts of Alabama and connecting it with its former congregation's new building on Woodley Road. In one of the book's many delightful anecdotes, Benton describes how prominent Montgomery architect Frank Lockwood frequently read Agatha Christie mysteries while sitting in the choir loft of this small, elegant structure.

Such details linger in the reader's mind, and each essay contains some piece of information that will forever mark the place and make its meaning real. Garrett Coliseum will, perhaps, be known to some as the revolutionary design of Betty Robison, the first woman to graduate from Auburn with a degree in architecture.

While it can be argued that Montgomery's "sense of place" is hard to pin down, Benton gives voice to the individual sense of each small plot he describes. In Montgomery's case, the whole may not, in fact, be greater than the sum of its parts, but Benton surely shows the greatness of those parts.

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



**Cities of Silence**  
A Guide to Mobile's  
Historic Cemeteries  
by John S. Sledge  
with Photography by  
Sheila Hagler

University of Alabama  
Press, 2002  
\$35 Hardback

John Sledge's *Cities of Silence* is more than an elegant compilation of pictures and words. It is the history and cultural study of the diverse people who lived, died, and came to their final rest in one of Mobile's historic cemeteries. The book focuses on the City's most prominent 19<sup>th</sup>-century cemeteries: Church Street Graveyard and Magnolia, Old Catholic, Sha'arai Shomayim, and Ahavas Chesed cemeteries.

This is no dry academic tome. Sledge offers far more than mere facts and dates. He explains the trends in practice, ceremony, and funerary stones and sculpture of the times and ponders their meanings. He also offers biographies in miniature of the people and their era. We glimpse their diverse religions, their lineage. The yellow fever epidemic and the Civil War, which took so many young lives, become personal.

We are also treated to some myth and peculiar traditions. Each year at Church Street Graveyard on Joe Cain Day, the Sunday before Shrove Tuesday, the graveyard is the site of a huge alfresco bacchanal. Members of one of Mobile's most unusual mystic societies, the Merry Widows, gather at the grave of Joe Cain. There is also the Goddess of Magnolia Cemetery: "Some insist that she summons storms when attempts are made to move her." Many more such stories and asides are offered throughout the book.

From culture to culture and through every age, people create all manner of ritual to send forth the dead and comfort their own still-earthbound selves. The historic maps and photographs, as well as the excellent contemporary photography of Sheila Hagler, greatly enhanced this reader's tour along the narrow avenues between the stones large and small, and allowed me a glimpse of lives in Sledge's cities of silence.

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*Perle Guzman Champion*

# Book Notes

In its **Deep South Series**, the University of Alabama Press ensures that worthy new books are published. In the same series, it also makes available selected classics. Along with such new works as Mary Ward Brown's *It Wasn't All Dancing* and Helen Norris's *One Day in the Life of a Born Again Loser*, the series has recently brought back to our attention Lee May's *In My Father's Garden*, his touching story of rediscovering his father after almost four decades of separation, and Julia Oliver's *Goodbye to the Buttermilk Sky*, a novel that was a featured selection of the Quality Paperback Book Club when it was first published in 1994. May, an award-winning journalist who is the food and garden columnist for the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, details visiting his father, awkward until the two men, one in his eighties, the other in his forties, discover the literal common ground of a garden.

Oliver's *Goodbye to the Buttermilk Sky* is the story of 20-year-old Callie Tatum's growth into womanhood, which comes at great cost. Lee Smith describes *Oliver's Goodbye to the Buttermilk Sky* as a novel "about identity and community as much as it is about passion and morality." Oliver, she adds, "captures those hot days of Alabama in the '30s better than anybody, and all the complications of race and class and place." Oliver's most recent novel, *Music of Falling Water*, was published last fall by John F. Blair.

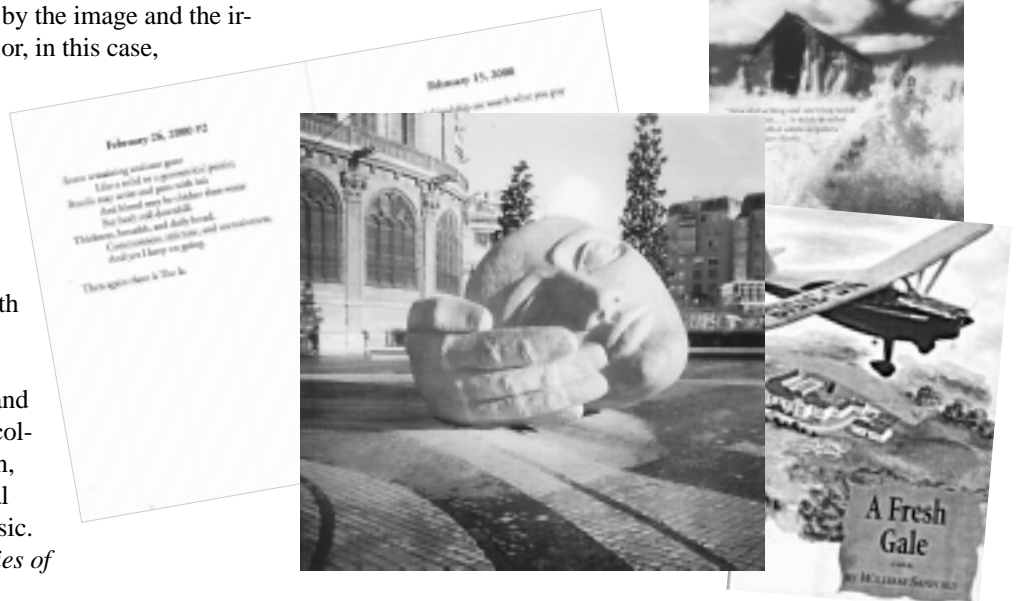
"In those days the old men used to speak in circles. They measured their lives in acres of dust. Abandoned by renegade children and coal-eyed wives, they continued the story alone. So the moon held its rain and rats kept to the thickets and the branches of Eden grew heavier still." So begins poet Jake Berry and photographer Wayne Sides' most recent collaboration, *Silence and the Hammer* (9th Street Laboratories, 2001), a collection of photographs with captions. But what captions: the lines are more like improvisational riffs—appropriate for songwriter/musician Berry—sparked by the image and the irresistible urge to play with your food or, in this case, language. Occasionally the results hint at some fundamental truth, suggesting whole cycles of myth and categories of archetype may be just out of the range of our experience. Profound meditations they are not as much as explorations of possibilities.

*Silence and the Hammer* is the tenth collaboration between the two artists. Sides, whose work includes *White Knights*, a photo essay on the KKK, and *Litany for a Vanishing Landscape*, a collaboration with poet Jeanie Thompson, has also worked with Berry on several CDs, including two of folk-based music. Berry's books of poetry include *Species of*

*Abandoned Light* and Books One and Two of the long poem *Brambu Drezi*. Both live in Florence, Alabama.

William Sanford's *A Fresh Gale* (Court Street Press, 2001) concerns Barton Sandeau, orphaned and in search of his origins, which he is determined to find against all odds amid the backdrop of a rumor-filled small southern town. Mistaken identity, murder, and young love contribute to a plot full of twists and turns. According to one reviewer, "a common thread throughout this novel" insists that "man will somehow prevail despite illness and health, life and death, and happiness and despair." Sanford's characters "establish that humanity will live on in joy and sorrow, pain and pleasure, tears and laughter, and all those vices and virtues to which the flesh is heir." The author describes the book as a "love story mystery" and says its main theme is "about finding the truth beneath the illusion." Sanford is a native of Bessemer, Alabama, who lives in Troy. A licensed pilot, he draws on his knowledge of planes and aviation in *A Fresh Gale*. Sanford's next book is due out later this year.

In January 2002, the Montgomery-based Writer's Group inaugurated a series of quarterly publications of work by its members. The first in the series, *Kindling Not Yet Split: Writer's Group Series, Volume One*, is a collection of poems by Foster Dickson. The author is the production manager of NewSouth Books and a co-founder of the Writer's Group, as well as a book reviewer for *King Kudzu* and a freelance writer. Many of his poems focus on finding happiness and contentment in the everyday. The Writer's Group meets on the first and third Tuesdays of each month at NewSouth Bookstore. Membership is open. The group plans to sponsor a national poetry contest this summer.



# Profile



EVE DOMINGSIL

## JOY HARJO Tracking the Ancestors

*Poet and musician Joy Harjo traces her family to Alabama. In an interview last year with her friend Pam Kingsbury, she discussed her personal history and her work.*

When did you realize you wanted to be an artist?

I knew from the beginning that I wanted to be an artist. My first urges were to draw and sing. My grandmother Naomi Harjo was a painter, and we had her paintings in our house. I found great refuge in the act of drawing—to move into that creative space engaged my spirit in a way nothing else did at that very young age. I got in trouble for decorating the walls of the garage with chalk drawings ... My mother was the singer, so we had music and her voice often holding our home together. I loved listening, and loved singing—privately.

You have family connections to Alabama.

I was brought in to read and speak by Auburn University a while back [1996]. The first place I sought out was the Battle of Horseshoe Bend grounds at the bend of the Tallapoosa River. My great-great-great-great grandfather was Menawa, or Monahwee, as we spell it in Oklahoma. He and the Redsticks fought Andrew Jackson at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend....I found grief there. And layers of stories.

Monahwee was later removed to Oklahoma, despite his attempts to keep his people in their homelands in what is now known as Alabama and Georgia.

My cousin George Coser, Jr. says he's buried near Eufaula, Oklahoma, but recently I received an email from someone from Alabama, I believe, claiming descendency, who says Monahwee was buried in

Kansas. Monahwee's story is a story I wish to pursue for a full-length feature Film.

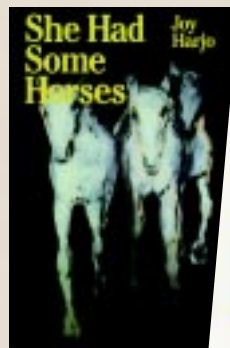
You studied at the Institute of American Indian Arts, University of New Mexico, and the Iowa Writers' Workshop, right?

IAIA was an Indian boarding school run by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. In 1967 IAIA was a high school with a couple of years of postgraduate study. Students came from all over the U.S., from Alaska, New York, Florida, everywhere. Many of us were from Oklahoma. We were all art majors from many different disciplines. I was there because of my artwork and at that time (my mother reminded me recently) I was drawing fashions. Later I became a drama and dance major and toured with one of the first all native drama and dance troupes. This was a time of a tremendous awareness of ourselves as native peoples. We questioned...came to the conclusion that our cultural knowledge and exploration and creativity were our strength, and eventually I came to the conclusion, as did many others, that the wars within ourselves—whatever their source: colonization, the pressure of acculturation, and the ensuing family problems—were our ultimate strength, made us allies.

I went [to the Iowa Writers' Workshop] because it was considered the best writers' workshop in the country. It became immediately obvious that I spoke a very different language, arrived in Iowa from a sensibility that was tribal,

western, female and intuitive, a sensibility different

than most of the other workshop participants. I envied their excellent educations, their long study of poetry, their confidence in their knowledge, their art....Several of us organized a Third World Writing Workshop, which included Sandra Cisneros, Kambon Obayani, and Pam Durban ... I also occasionally took part in a feminist writing workshop at the university's women's center. Other workshop students and faculty were inspiration and support, including Dennis Mathis, a brilliant fiction writer and painter; Jayne



Anne Phillips, also in fiction; and Rosalyn Drexler, a playwright, painter, and novelist from New York who was a visiting writer in the fiction program. I also spent most of my time the first year with the writers who were part of the International Writing Program. They included Leon Agusta, a poet from Indonesia, and Danarto, a playwright also from Indonesia. Being with them felt like home.

I always tell students that the workshop was a useful technical school, probably the best.... I recommend that students read and hear poetry, from contemporary back through ancient times...that they listen to poetry, too, the poetry read from books, poetry performed, poetry that never finds its way into books. Most literature of the world isn't in books.

You've published with large and small publishers.

My first book, *The Last Song*, was a chapbook from Puerto Del Sol Press. The next two, *What Moon Drove Me to This?* and *She Had Some Horses*, were published by independent presses, I. Reed Books and Thunder's Mouth Books, respectively. The next two were issued from university presses: *Secrets From the Center of the World* with the University of Arizona Press and *In Mad Love and War* with Wesleyan University Press.

I've been lucky as all the publishers, from *She Had Some Horses* on, have kept the books in print. I did try to first publish both *Horses* and *Mad Love* with Norton, but both were rejected, rather eloquently. The third manuscript I sent them, *The Woman Who Fell From the Sky*, was accepted. I have been publishing with them ever since. *How We Became Human, New and Selected Poems* will be out July 2002. A book of stories is forthcoming. I am also working on two new CD projects. *Crossing the Border* will be out next spring.

Talk about making the move from writing poetry and putting your poetry to music.

Poetry and music belong together—they came into the world together, they will leave together. If you want to get technical, then dance belongs as part of the equation. Every culture has a traditional base configured of poetry-music-dance, some of it secular, much of it sacred. At Iowa the prevailing rule was that to embellish a poem or poetry with emotive expression was to tarnish the expression of it, to get in the way of the words. This has become the text-without-human-connection mode of thinking about poetry, about the making of literature. Sad, I think. It must be a lonely world, that world.

Adding saxophone is another thing—and I took up saxophone in my very late thirties. Like writing, it's a demanding discipline. Demands practice, study and more practice. And faith, maybe faith is the prevalent force. And a love for the music, for the poetry, for the complexity of this strange and terrible place.

What books do you recommend for readers who may be unfamiliar with Native American writers and writing?

Where do I start? For fiction there's Leslie Marmon Silko, everything from her stories in the collection *Storyteller to Ceremony* to her *Garden in the Dunes*; Greg Sarris, *Grand Avenue* and *Watermelon Nights*; James Welch's novels, Louise Erdrich, especially *Love Medicine* and *The Last Report on Miracles at Little No Horse*. For poetry, one of my favorite poets is Ray Young Bear, a Meskwaki poet; Simon Ortiz; there's Sherman Alexie, who is a good poet, a better poet than fiction writer or screenwriter. I like Elizabeth Cook-Lynn's most recent book of poetry. Roberta Whiteman is excellent, too.

Where do you see yourself in your career?

I feel like I'm just beginning to find my way to my best work. Each book of poetry, each CD is a movement of sorts, each different. Some artists stay within the same house, the same country and style and dig down. I tend to roam and dream in a wide area.

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

Compassion.

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*Pam Kingsbury is a reviewer and lecturer who lives in Florence.*



## *Hollywood Comes to Huntingdon*

### Summer Creative Writing (Screenwriting) Workshop

*For High School and College Students*

Featuring Hollywood Screenwriter  
**Michael Ritz**

**June 10-June 14**

*(Residence Hall Space Available)*

For more information, call (334) 833-4522

# All Mobile READS

*Richard Weaver is assistant professor librarian at Spring Hill College. As a member of the “Mobile’s Book. Share the Experience” committee, he is also a citywide reading promoter. He talked with First Draft about the genesis of “Mobile’s Book” and what he hopes it will accomplish.*

## What is the Mobile book project?

Nancy Pearl, who is the executive director of the Washington Center for the Book at the Seattle Public Library, is credited with the first citywide reading project idea, which has spread to at least eighteen states. Her original concept was to select a book with “enough substance for discussion.” It was just that simple. She understood from the beginning that being entertaining or a good read wasn’t enough. It is what lies beneath the story line, or off the radar, that leads to good discussion. She hoped that people would somehow come together through the medium of literature in a way they might not otherwise.

We sought to model ourselves after the original Seattle project called “If all of Seattle read the same book.” As happened elsewhere around the country in similar efforts, the project title evolved to meet our particular needs. After much debate, we finally settled on “Mobile’s Book. Share the Experience.” We wanted to be sure that it incorporated the idea of a shared reading experience within a community. It was absolutely critical to us from the beginning that the book chosen be as widely accessible as possible, that it cut across region and generations. Only later did we join with the Mobile Tricentennial, a celebration of the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Mobile taking place over the next year.

And that book would be *Ava’s Man* by Rick Bragg. How was *Ava’s Man* chosen?

After a single meeting it became clear that we could spend a lifetime reading books and debating their merits. We looked at other sites that had already been through the selection process—Seattle, Syracuse, Buffalo—but none offered a clue about the process. We decided to go

it alone and so put together a suggested list of selection criteria, which the committee then refined.

These were general guidelines, not written in stone, but meant to act as subtle directives. They included an arbitrary length limit (200-300 pages). It was felt that some people might balk at a truly large book. (The latest *Harry Potter* is more than 700 pages, for example). We felt that the subject matter should first and foremost engage our humanity without being merely topical or controversial. We thought it was essential that the book have a good plot, if fiction, without being too interior or introspective, and that its characters confront issues of living. Ideally, we wanted it to be available in an affordable edition with clear print, good paper, and adequate line spacing.

It was considered essential that the author be accessible, meaning that he or she would be willing to support promoting the book, be able to talk to a wide audience, and have a publisher willing to actively participate as well. It was never seen as an effort at mirroring any best-seller list, supporting an existing curriculum, or as promoting regional talent. If we could bring to the forefront the work of someone unknown to many, but worthy of discovery and discussion, and do that together as a community, then we would be enlarging the community’s sense of itself.

In some ways the book chose us. After weeks of looking at fiction, Nancy Bolton suggested a book she had just catalogued for the Spring Hill College library. Even though it was nonfiction, she thought it might be “the book.” The committee was unanimous in its agreement. Nancy Pearl said in a recent interview that “acceptance, perseverance, rebuilding, home” were compelling themes for her. Each of those words is a strong undercurrent in *Ava’s Man*. The character of Charlie Bundrum is wholly compelling and primary in its appeal to readers. He is human, all too human. But somehow larger than life. The fact that as a book of nonfiction *Ava’s Man* reads like a work of fiction was *lagniappe*.

## What activities does Mobile’s Book include and over what time period?

Our initial event involved Mayor Mike Dow reading a proclamation declaring it Rick Bragg Day. This was held downtown at Government Plaza as a way of emphasizing the inclusiveness of the project. Two early morning TV interviews and a newspaper cameraman provided further coverage of the event. Rick read from his book and fielded questions from the audience before signing books. This was the first of three signings for the day. Afterwards he went to the Moorer branch of the Mobile Public Library.



*Rick Bragg*

*Continued on page 33*

# Accent on the Author

By Sherry Kughn

As a volunteer I'll take credit for having the idea to reestablish a visiting author's series at the Public Library of Anniston and Calhoun County. I had attended a few such events in the past and had enjoyed them. During a daily walk past the library a couple of years ago, I stopped in to ask Bonnie Seymour, the library's director, about the possibility of inviting more authors. I even had a suggestion: Barbara Robinette Moss, whose book, *Change Me Into Zeus's Daughter*, had just been released. It is about growing up in Anniston. Ms. Seymour agreed the book might have strong appeal, and we'd try a luncheon featuring the author.

The event held in August 2002 drew sixty-five attendees, many more than we expected, and the author's stories captivated the audience. We decided on another Alabama author, set a date, and had a second successful program with sixty-two in attendance. Enthusiasm from the crowd propelled us forward. We named the program Accent on the Author, suggested by the library's webmaster and computer technician, Teresa Kiser, and Bonnie and I called ourselves co-directors.

Since then we've hosted about ten writers through the program and have been amazed to find all but two have close ties to Anniston and Calhoun County. We've discovered a gold mine in our own yard!

Author Patricia Foster spent her early years in Lineville and remembers shopping in Anniston. Poet Jeanie Thompson is an Anniston native and has kin here. Newspaper reporter and author Clyde Bolton is a Wellington native who worked in the circulation department at *The Anniston Star* where I work. Short-story writer Theron Montgomery Jr. says his motivation for writing comes from having heard great storytellers while growing up in Jacksonville. Poet Honorée Jeffers' mother lives nearby in Talladega, where Honorée grew up. Linda Howard is a best-selling romance novelist from our next-door county of Etowah. The two with scant Anniston connections are Pat DeVoto, who lives in Atlanta but places her stories in Alabama, and Sena Jeter Naslund, who grew up in Birmingham, sixty miles from Anniston and has at least one childhood friend here.

We have others we're dreaming about with close local ties. Pat Conroy either has or has had relatives in Piedmont and has visited there. Would he ever visit us? Everyone knows about Possum Trot's Rick Bragg, the Pulitzer Prize winning author of two books set in Calhoun County, *All Over But the Shoutin'* and *Ava's Man*. President Jimmy Carter, who is also an author, plans to visit Anniston this fall



*Sena Jeter Naslund signs books for Jeter Manners of Jacksonville and others at the March, 2002, meeting.*



*After each luncheon, attendees chat with friends or gather their books for signing.*





*Clyde Bolton visited the Anniston library in January and spoke of his days at Jacksonville State University and The Anniston Star.*



*In October, 2001, Pat DeVoto greeted fans prior to the luncheon.*

and again in June 2003 for Habitat for Humanity's Work Week Project. We're wondering if he has lunch plans.

We would not turn down John Grisham, Stephen King (I love his book on writing), or Anne River Siddons. Hello out there, you three and other famous writers.

Part of my volunteer opportunities are possible because I am secretary for The Star, whose owners, the Ayerses and Sanguinetties, have a long history of supporting the local arts. Elise Sanguinetti is a premier Alabama novelist and has encouraged my creative interests. The *Star's* former book page editor,

the late Cody Hall, gave me opportunities early in my career to review books, and the current editor, Bruce Lowry, promotes literary activities however he can. *The Star's* building is only blocks away from the library, so I have been able to work closely with Bonnie in making decisions about the program and in contacting authors.

Bonnie is a one-woman band for creating enthusiasm for library programs and has a bright, funny personality. She has the support of city officials behind the library and often brags about her excellent board of directors. Her staff of twenty helps extensively with the program. They order books, sell tickets, maintain the website, send out promotional fliers, post posters, and even attend the luncheon as their schedules allow, paying for their tickets out of their own pockets. Bonnie heads a library that defines how effective a city library can be, and she heads a staff who might as well be public relations directors for literature, especially Alabama literature. In addition, she is president this year of the Public Library Division of the Alabama Library Association, and works promoting literary interests throughout the state.

Other librarians or volunteers might want to start a program of their own. Here are a few tips:

#### HOW THE PROGRAM IS FUNDED:

- the Friends of the Library group funds the program with a \$250 stipend to each author.
- the \$10 cost of each ticket goes to the caterer.
- the library gets a small percentage of each book sold at the luncheon.
- the library's general fund pays for miscellaneous expenses, plus communications costs, such as fliers, the website, postage and a few phone calls.

**HOW EACH PROGRAM WORKS:** On a weekday at noon the crowd of between thirty to fifty

*On Sept. 11, 2002, poet Jeanie Thompson and the director of the Anniston-Calhoun County affiliate made the decision to proceed with the scheduled program.*



*Attendees at the first Accent on the Author luncheon listen as Barbara Robinette Moss (seated in foreground) is introduced.*



*Mrs. Moss signs Dr. Reynolds' book as others look on. Her book, Change Me Into Zeus's Daughter, mentions Dr. Reynolds. Dr. Reynolds died several months afterward.*



enters the Ayers room of the library for a catered lunch. Tickets are sold in advance and taken up at the door. We've had a few extras show up a time or two, which so far we have accommodated. At 12:20, the visiting author speaks for forty minutes. Audience members can then meet the author or get a book signed. Bonnie has made arrangements in advance so books can be bought at the author's table. Sometimes audience members must return to their jobs, so they can pick up their signed books later. Each program ends between 1:30-2.

**HOW WE FIND AUTHORS:** Bonnie and I are avid readers of Southern literature and are always on the lookout for writers, especially those with local ties. We read *All the Lost Girls: Confessions of a Southern Daughter* and "discovered" Patricia Foster. Plus we browse newspapers and literary magazines, and we take suggestions from patrons who at times have informed us about local talent. We hope to bring in within the year Anniston native Kathryn Mitchell and Roanoke native Charlotte Miller, the former referred to us by a library patron and the latter we read about in *The Star*. We attend conferences, such as On the Brink in Jacksonville, where we learned that Ellen Edwards Kennedy has a sister in Anniston whom she visits often. Marlin "Bart" Barton and I discussed his father's ties to Anniston, and we're just off the interstate where Michael Knight of Knoxville, Tennessee, could possibly visit on his way to Mobile where his parents live.

**HOW WE SCHEDULE AUTHORS:** Ms. Seymour and I usually meet for lunch and discuss possible dates and compare our own calendars with those of the library and the community. We try to avoid major holidays and weekends. We've been able to schedule about six authors a year.

#### TIPS WE'VE LEARNED:

- Contract with a good caterer because everybody wants delicious food. Make a deadline for purchasing tickets about one day prior to the event so the caterer can have an expected total.
- Gain the support of the local newspaper editors who can promote the event through free calendars and in the arts pages and news articles. Our features editor, Cathi Downing, helps us.
- Begin advertising at least four weeks in advance with the largest item running a week before the event.
- Send fliers about ten days in advance. Make a mailing list of book clubs, loyal library patrons, aspiring authors, supporters of the arts, friends, kin, and unsuspecting spouses!
- Most tickets sell about three to four days before the event, so don't panic the week before (like we always do).
- Pray a lot that the writer arrives on time, the food is good, people respond to the advertisement.
- Be prepared to suffer a few setbacks now and then, and keep a positive attitude.

- Make a commitment to quality writers. Be careful about inviting those with only a vanity press book or an author who would not be compatible with your crowd. A string of boring or negative experiences with a crowd can ruin a program no matter what the topic.

For more information about Accent on the Author, you may email me at skughn@hotmail.com or Bonnie at bseymour@anniston.lib.al.us or visit the library's website at anniston.lib.al.us. ▲

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*Sherry Kughn is executive secretary at The Anniston Star.*

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#### *MFA continued from page 9*

This immediate and positive feedback is just the incentive I need to write more and more."

Thompson also plans to take advantage of the program's flexibility, which will allow her to study fiction for a semester even though her concentration is in poetry. (The Spalding MFA program offers concentrations in creative nonfiction and writing for children as well as fiction and poetry.)

Flexibility is a key component of Naslund's plan for the program. "We encourage students to experiment in genres other than their own," Naslund says. Not only can students spend a semester studying a genre outside their area, as Thompson plans to do, but during each residency, all students are required to experiment within a "featured genre." In the October 2001 residency, Naslund delivered a lecture on poems about art objects, the whole program visited the Speed Art Museum, and everyone wrote a poem about a painting. In the May 2002 residency, Naslund will lecture on writing for children, the program will visit Churchill Downs, and each student will write text for a children's picture book. By exposing students to genres other than their chosen one, the program broadens students' literary horizons and gives them insights into the rewards and challenges their fellow students face.

The cross-pollination continues outside Spalding's lecture halls. Louisville, a city of about a million people, is noted for the richness and diversity of its cultural life and arts, and the Spalding MFA program takes full advantage of that richness during the residency periods. Students attend theater, concerts, and art exhibits as a way of "placing writing in the context of the sister arts," Naslund says.

Spalding's Master of Fine Arts in Writing program kicked off in October 2001 with forty students and nine faculty members from nineteen states. Those numbers will grow each semester until the program tops out at roughly 120 students, while the five-to-one student-faculty ratio is maintained. Amid that growth, the Alabama connection continues to thrive. Joining the faculty in May 2002 are other notable Alabama writers. Charles Gaines, a professional journalist,

novelist, essayist, screenwriter and author of twenty-three books, is from Birmingham. Jeanie Thompson, poet and director of the Alabama Writers' Forum, will be traveling from Montgomery to teach at the Spalding residency.

Admission to the MFA in Writing Program is based primarily on the quality of the applicant's original creative writing. Writing samples, which are read masked, are judged by a committee of MFA faculty and the program director.

For further information, please check out the program website at [www.spalding.edu/graduate/MFAinWriting](http://www.spalding.edu/graduate/MFAinWriting) or email [mfa@spalding.edu](mailto:mfa@spalding.edu) or call (800) 896-8941, ext. 2423. ▲

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*Katy Yocom is a freelance writer and novelist living in Louisville, Kentucky.*

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### **Mobile Reads** continued from page 29

Our focus was on making him available to everyone, all of Mobile. Later that evening he signed books at Barnes and Noble.

It is hoped that book clubs and reading groups around town will adopt the book and take advantage of the discussion questions that were developed and made available through public libraries across the state. Our plans include having Rick return at least once to do a public reading, perhaps in late April or early May; he will be one of the feature speakers at a literary conference being held at the University of South Alabama that involves a first-time partnership of Spring Hill College, the University of Mobile, and USA. At least one high school has adopted *Ava's Man* as summer reading; others are actively considering it for their curriculum. Should we receive one of the grants we have written, we hope to put as many as 5000 copies in the hands of the public high schools here in Mobile. The culmination of our yearlong celebration will be in October with the Family Photo Essay Contest when Rick returns to announce and perhaps read portions of winning essays about a grandparent. There will be five divisions of participation: Elementary, Middle School, High School, Enrolled College Students, and Adult. The idea is for students of all ages to do in miniature what Rick did in *Ava's Man*, build a grandparent from the ground-up using words.

**Q.** Who in the community is involved—as a sponsor/partner? as a participant?

Many, many people and groups have come forth to support our efforts, from printers to retailers, the newspaper and public radio station, the mayor's office, colleges and universities, high schools, the Alabama Center for the Book, the Alabama Public Library Service, the Dow Foundation, bookstores citywide as well as outside Mobile County, the Tricentennial Commission, Ann Bedsole, and many, many volunteers.

Did you intend that the project have a Southern or Alabama flavor?

It does have a scent of the South to it, particularly North Alabama, the Appalachians, and western Georgia, because of the book choice. But not intentionally. We did not limit the time, place, or region in our search for the right book. You can in fact judge a book by its cover, but only by reading its contents can you truly discover the world of others within yourself. Although Mobile's Book is envisioned as an ongoing (annual) event, we were happy to be able to choose a book by an Alabama author for the Tricentennial.

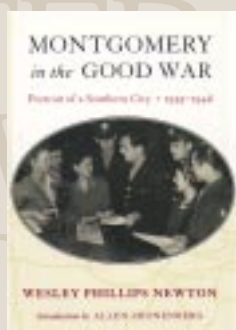
What is the long-term goal of Mobile's Book?

Phyllis Feibleman, chair of the Tricentennial book selection committee, said it best: The purpose of all Mobilians reading the same book is for all Mobilians to have a shared experience and that, in turn, is to fulfill the hope that we can come to know one another better in the sharing. We feel that then sharing our own stories will be "more so." And, we hope, our stories will become a legacy for those Mobilians who will celebrate the next centennial, when Mobile will be four hundred years old!



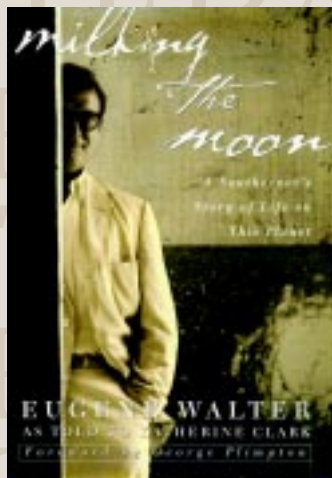
# Literary News

**Michael P. Howley** has been named the *Montgomery Advertiser's* acting theater critic, replacing the late Allan Swafford. Howley is the former chairman of the theater arts department at Alabama State University, where he teaches English and humanities. He serves on the board of the Directors of the Southeastern Conference of Theater and Speech and is the State of Alabama coordinator for the American College Theatre Festival.



**Wesley Phillips Newton's** *Montgomery in the Good War: Portrait of a Southern City 1939-1946* (University of Alabama Press, 2000) was named by the **American Library Association** as one of the best books of 2001.

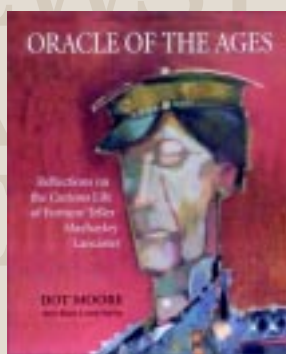
*Milking the Moon: A Southerner's Story of Life on This Planet* (Crown, 2001), **Katherine Clark's** oral biography of Mobile writer Eugene Walter, was nominated for a **National Book Critics Circle Award** this spring. *Milking the Moon* is one of seven titles competing in the biographautobiography category.



**Theron Montgomery** of Troy State University has been named fiction editor of *The Blue Moon Review*, an international e-zine based in Blacksburg, Virginia.

Nationally recognized poet **Maurice Manning** received the **Alumni Arts Award** from the University of Alabama. Manning received his master of fine arts degree in creative writing from UA in 1999 and is the author of *Lawrence Booth's Book of Visions* (Yale, 2001),

winner of the **Yale Series of Younger Poets Competition**. Manning teaches literature and creative writing at DePauw University in Greencastle, Indiana.



*Oracle of the Ages: Reflections on the Curious Life of Fortune Teller Mayhayley Lancaster*, published by NewSouth Books, is the winner of the **Georgia Historical Society's 2002 Lilla M. Hawes Award** for the best book in Georgia local or county history published in 2001. The award was presented at the Society's 163rd Annual Meeting on Saturday, April 6, 2002, in Savannah.

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## Conference Notices and Community Literary News

**April 11-14: The Ninth Oxford Conference for the Book**, featuring **Beth Ann Fennelly, Tom Franklin, Ace Adkins, Mary Hood, Barry Hannah**, and many others. [www.olemiss.edu/depts/south/ocb/](http://www.olemiss.edu/depts/south/ocb/)

**April 12-13: Birmingham-Southern College's Writing Today** with **Anne Rivers Siddons** headlining and including **Nevada Barr, Peter Jenkins, and Jill**

Please send your notices and calendar items to First Draft, Alabama Writers' Forum, 201 Monroe Street, Montgomery, AL 36130. Every effort is made to include timely information. For the most current information on events in Alabama, check the Forum's website at [www.writersforum.org](http://www.writersforum.org).

**McCorkle. Pat Conroy** will make a special appearance. Call 205-226-4921. [www.bsc.edu/events/specialevents/writingtoday2001.htm](http://www.bsc.edu/events/specialevents/writingtoday2001.htm).

**April 18: Chattanooga Conference on Southern Literature** features **John T. Edge, Vertamae Smart-Grosvenor, and Joe Dabney**. <http://www.artsedcouncil.org/index.htm>

**Gulf Coast Association of Creative Writing Teachers** 9<sup>th</sup> annual meeting will be held April 20-21, 2002.

**Bay Minette Public Library's Alabama Athenaeum** series spring schedule includes April 21 - **Bert Hitchcock**: lecturing on William Bartram, April 28 - **Frank Turner Hollon**: "The God File," July 24 - **Carolyn Haines**: "Splintered Bones." More details are available at <http://www.bayminettepubliclibrary.org>.

**April 27: Alabama Bound** at the Birmingham Public Library will feature many authors, including **Jan Willis, Paul Hemphill, Rick Bragg, Alice Bowsher, Jonathan Bass, and Aileen Kilgore Henderson**. [www.alabamabound.org](http://www.alabamabound.org).

**May 2-4: Alabama Writers Symposium** in Monroeville with special guest **George Plimpton** and Harper Lee Award winner **Mary Ward Brown, Mike Stewart, Marlin Barton, Rick Bragg,** and others. [www.ascc.edu/WritersSymposium/symp1.htm](http://www.ascc.edu/WritersSymposium/symp1.htm).

**May 20-26: Georgia College and State University Arts & Letters Journal of Contemporary Culture** includes poetry writing workshop with **Robin Behn**, novel writing with **Brett Lott**, memoir with **Dinty W. Moore, Todd Pierce** on finding an agent, and others. <http://al.gcsu.edu/workshops.htm>

**June 16-22: Southeastern Writers Association** annual meeting features fiction writing with **Gwen Hunter**, nonfiction: **Carolyn and Ashley Grayson**, poetry: **Dana Wildsmith**, and playwriting/theatre: **Heather Heath**. <http://www.southeasternwriters.com>.

## Calendar

APRIL

NATIONAL POETRY MONTH

[www.poets.org](http://www.poets.org)

APRIL 14-20

NATIONAL LIBRARY WEEK

[www.ala.org/pio/nlw](http://www.ala.org/pio/nlw)

APRIL 15-21

YOUNG PEOPLE'S POETRY WEEK

[www.cbcbooks.org](http://www.cbcbooks.org)

MAY

NATIONAL BOOK MONTH

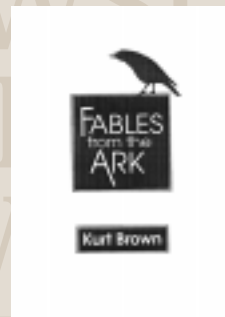
[www.nationalbook.org](http://www.nationalbook.org)

MAY 5-11

READING IS FUN WEEK

[www.rif.org](http://www.rif.org)

## Workshops and Contests



*Fables From the Ark* by **Kurt Brown** of Cambridge, MA has been selected as the winner of **Woodland Press' national poetry chapbook competition**. For more information about upcoming competitions or the press, contact Woodland Press, Box 2423, Florence, AL 35630.

**Poets & Writers magazine** offers seminars for writers throughout the year via email and on audiotape on such topics as Publishing Your Poetry, Pitching Your Novel Manuscript, and Promoting Your Book of Fiction. For fee scales, schedules, and other information check [www.pw.org](http://www.pw.org) or call 212-226-3586, ext. 216.

Deadline for **Writer's Digest 2002 Writing Competition** is May 15, 2002. For rules and entry form visit the Writer's Digest website at [www.writersdigest.com](http://www.writersdigest.com) or fax a request to 513-531-0798, or call 513-531-2690, ext. 328.

**The Alabama Writers' Conclave 2002 Writing Competition** will accept submissions postmarked between May 1 and June 1, 2002. Judges are qualified literary people outside the AWC roster. Categories include but are not limited to Fiction with a Southern Background, Juvenile Fiction, Creative Nonfiction, Traditional Rhymed Poem, Religious or Spiritual Poem, and One-Act Play or TV Script. Members: \$2 per entry; non-Members: \$3 per entry. Send entries with fees to John Curbow; AWC Contest Chair, P.O. Box 277, Wetumpka, AL 36092. Memo your check: AWC 2002 Contest Fees. To join the Conclave: membership dues are \$15 per year and include the quarterly newsletter. Send dues to Barbara McClary, AWC Treasurer, P.O. Box 111, Calera, AL 35040-1110. Mark your check: AWC 2002 dues.

To reach readers of *First Draft* with news about your event, product, or service, consider placing an ad in an upcoming issue. Rates and sizes are shown below, along with the production schedule. For more information, call Tess Ware at the Alabama Writers' Forum office, 334-242-4076, ext. 233.

#### DISPLAY AD RATES

	4x	1x
Full page	\$250 ea.	\$300
1/2 page	\$150 ea.	\$200
1/4 page	\$100 ea.	\$150
1/3 page vertical	\$125 ea.	\$175

#### CLASSIFIED AD RATES

Available in multiples of one inch, up to 4 inches.

Per inch- \$20

#### MECHANICAL ART

Full page	7" x 9"
1/2 page vertical	3 3/8" x 9"
1/2 page horizontal	7" x 4 1/4"
1/4 page	3 3/8" x 4 1/4"
1/3 page vertical	2" x 9"
Classified	2" wide

Artwork should be submitted camera ready. If you would like for *First Draft* to design your ad, there is a \$35 charge regardless of ad size. All ads will be printed as black and white.

For classified ads, attach ad copy on a separate sheet.

For questions about mechanical art call Faith Nance at 334-826-8346 or email to [faith@designforpublishing.com](mailto:faith@designforpublishing.com)

## The Back Page

### *Continued Visibility*

*Remembering Ellison and His Invisible Man on the Novel's 50th birthday*

Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of its publication this year. Ellison attended Tuskegee Institute between 1933 and 1936, and the school and town are among the settings of the novel. Cleophus Thomas Jr. writes about the book in this essay, which first appeared in the February 24, 2002, issue of *The Anniston Star* and is reprinted with permission.

I never knew Ralph Ellison, but I have come to learn that he knew my name. "Trading Twelves: The Selected Letters of Ralph Ellison and Albert Murray," includes a letter that Alabama native Albert Murray wrote to Ellison on "17 Apr 55":

*Dear Ralph:*

*Looks like you got yourself some boy in that Cliofus (also Cleophus, and I also used to know a guy named Cephus, called See First, See First Adams! lives In Plateau right now)[.] Cliofus is a good Southern sounding name (House-nigger classicism) and of course it is also derived from the Muse of History ... Boy you got yourself a cat that blows history.*

Cliofus was to be a “minor character in Ellison’s novel-in-progress.” This novel was never published in the years that followed the triumphant appearance of *Invisible Man* fifty years ago. It is perhaps an indication of the extent to which the posthumous publication of portions of Ellison’s lifelong second literary effort falls short of Ellison’s vision for that narrative that the character Cliofus does not appear in it.

Finding my odd name, or its homonym, in Ellison’s literary corpus illustrates the importance of Ellison, and his path-breaking book *Invisible Man*, not only to American culture but to heretofore excluded members of it. Ellison’s unsurpassed intelligence was able to appraise and appreciate the value of a culture that was presumed to be not a culture at all. The fact that Negro names would not only have high cultural antecedents but would also express high cultural aspirations was as familiar to him as his own name: Ralph Waldo Ellison. He was named after poet and essayist Emerson. He recounts the complexity of his own nominative experience in the classic essay “Hidden Name Complex Fate” from his essential book of essays *Shadow and Act*.

*Invisible Man*, which won the National Book Award, is one of the most celebrated novels of the 20th century. It dramatizes the adventures of an unnamed young man from the provinces. He goes to college, then moves to a great city. The experiences get the best of him and he retreats to his Dostoevskyan underground hole. The protagonist is invisible because no one sees him for

the person he is; each person projects a vision of him onto him, each seeing him as a different character.

A significant aspect of the novel and Ellison’s subsequent literary and cultural pursuits was not invisibility but individuality. The main character’s experience revealed how varied life in America could be, even the socially constrained lives of Negroes in pre-civil rights America. Indeed, it was Ellison’s insistence on his own individuality and his right to explore life as he viewed, lived and imagined it, and not life as others thought it might be, that led to a debate that defined literary battle lines for a generation. In the early 1960s, literary critic Irving Howe compared Ellison unfavorably to novelist Richard Wright, whose novel *Native Son* burst on the literary scene in the 1940s and became a bestseller. It was the violent tale of a poor black boy named Bigger Thomas, who accidentally kills a white heiress, then engages in other crimes for which he is criminally culpable. Howe, who was white, wrote that most black people’s “feelings may be closer to Wright’s rasping outbursts than to the more modulated tones of the younger Negro novelists [like Ellison]. Wright remembered, and what he remembered other Negroes must have remembered. In that way he kept faith with the experience of a boy who had fought his way out of the depths, to speak for those who remained there.”

An irate Ellison replied: “Wright, for Howe, is the genuine article, the authentic Negro writer, and his tone the only authentic tone. But why strip Wright of his individuality in

order to criticize other writers? He had his memories and I have mine ... In his effort to resuscitate Wright, Irving Howe would designate the role which Negro writers are to play more rigidly than any Southern politician — and for the best reasons. We must express black ‘anger’ and ‘clenched militancy.’”

Ellison refused to permit others to limit his right of expression and force him into a crippling form of a stereotype. I have come to conclude that in important ways his literary career reprised the public career of Tuskegee’s founder, Booker T. Washington (who appears in fictional guise in *Invisible Man*). Ellison would become the lightning rod for those who found him insufficiently militant and thought the role of the black writer in mid-20th century America was to protest. Ellison thought the writer’s role was to write well.

Ellison proved that black Americans were up to producing literary masterpieces in the classical mode, not simply folk art, but art of imperial or Mandarin quality. Just as African Americans could not rely on the eloquent paeans of liberty written by Jefferson and Madison to free us, we could not be accepted as artists of the first order until we had produced art of the first order. Ellison produced a great novel, not of protest, but of ideas. It has long since been added to the essential canon of American literature, earning what the hard work of blacks so seldom earns: its rightful place.

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*Cleophus Thomas Jr. is an Anniston attorney and chairman and CEO of the Birmingham-based A.G. Gaston Corp.*

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

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this is your site. We hope to see you there.**

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