



NORTH CAROLINA LITERARY REVIEW

ONLINE

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2013

**NORTH CAROLINA: A STATE OF
CHANGE, A CHANGING STATE**

IN THIS ISSUE An essay on North Carolina Latino/a Writers by Joan Conwell ■ An Interview with Sarah Addison Allen
■ Poetry by James Applewhite, Fred Chappell, and Mark Smith-Soto ■ 2012 Doris Betts Fiction Prize finalists ■
2012 James Applewhite Poetry Prize finalists ■ Book Reviews and Literary News ■ And more . . .

COVER ART

FRONT AND BACK COVER PHOTOGRAPHY
by Mary Shannon Johnstone

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NCLR invites proposals for articles or essays about North Carolina literature, history, and culture. Much of each issue is thematically focused, but a portion of each issue is open for developing interesting proposals – particularly interviews and literary analyses (without academic jargon). *NCLR* also publishes high-quality poetry, fiction, drama, and creative nonfiction by North Carolina writers or set in North Carolina. We define a North Carolina writer as anyone who currently lives in North Carolina, has lived in North Carolina, or has used North Carolina as subject matter.

See our [website](#) for submission guidelines for the various sections of each issue. Submissions to each issue's special feature section are due August 31 of the preceding year, though proposals may be considered through early fall.

Issue #23 (2014) will feature War in NC Literature

Book reviews are usually solicited, though suggestions will be considered as long as the book is by a North Carolina writer, is set in North Carolina, or deals with North Carolina subjects. *NCLR* prefers review essays that consider the new work in the context of the writer's canon, other North Carolina literature, or the genre at large. Publishers and writers are invited to submit North Carolina-related books for review consideration. See the index of books that have been reviewed in *NCLR* on our [website](#). *NCLR* does not review self-/subsidy-published or vanity press books.

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The Changing State of NCLR

Margaret D. Bauer, Editor

The 2013 special feature section about the “Changing State of North Carolina” is perhaps the most abstract special topic we have announced, and we held our collective breaths, wondering how writers would respond – indeed, *if* writers would respond. I exhaled a sigh of relief when I saw the submission from Joan Conwell: an interview with María DeGuzmán, founder of the Latina/o Studies program at UNC-Chapel Hill, which will be in our print issue, due out this summer. In the meantime, read here Conwell’s essay about her search for Latina/o writers in North Carolina. Back in 2004, when we were putting together a special feature section about Ethnic North Carolina, I asked a colleague who specializes in Latina/o literature, “Where are North Carolina’s Latina/o writers?” “Too soon,” my colleague told me. The migrant Latino population had not, in 2004, been here long enough to write about their experiences. Less than a decade later, Conwell reports that exemplary literature is emerging from this immigrant culture. North Carolina’s changing demographic is certainly something we hoped would inspire content for this year’s special feature section, and we thank Joan Conwell for her response, along with the writers who answered her inquiries as she developed her essay in this issue and the interview to come.

One Latino writer who has been in North Carolina – and writing about North Carolina – since 1975 is Costa Rican–raised poet Mark Smith-Soto, who, coincidentally, received *NCLR*’s James Applewhite Poetry Prize in 2012. We include here in *NCLR Online* 2013 two of his poems that were finalists in the competition; his winning poem, inspired by vacationing at Topsail Island, NC, will be published in the 2013 print issue.

Here in our online issue we include another finalist poem from the Applewhite competition, this one

reflecting another aspect of our “State of Change” theme: the emergence of a new generation of writers. Poet Samantha Lee Deal is a student in the MFA program at UNC-Wilmington. Another new writer, Ronald Jackson, was a finalist the 2012 Doris Betts Fiction Prize competition, and his submission was also selected for publication here. This story is the author’s first published fiction. The author credits his writing group for providing the kind of support and feedback that led to his story’s honorable mention. Writing programs and groups have evolved from North Carolina’s history of writers supporting each other. So, as we said a sad goodbye this past year to UNC Creative Writing Professor Doris Betts, as well as *NCLR*’s own patron of literary counsel and connections Jerry Leath (Jake) Mills, we are comforted in the knowledge that their legacy endures in the supportive atmosphere of the North Carolina writing community.

As the spirit of writers supporting writers has been passed down to this new generation, so too might influence be traced from the magic realism in the fiction of literary icon Fred Chappell, to the magical elements in the novels of rising star Sarah Addison Allen. I thank Hal McDonald, who wrote about the magic realism in Fred Chappell’s fiction for the first issue of *NCLR* that I edited (1998), for responding so enthusiastically to my request that he interview Allen for this issue. My experience reading my first Allen novel was similar to my experience reading Chappell’s *I Am One of You Forever*: thinking I was on solid realistic ground, only to find myself suddenly whisked into a world in which supernatural elements are paradoxically realistic.

In the interview, Allen talks about growing up in Asheville, NC, and how much that city has changed over the years. Similarly, Nicole Nolan Sidhu, a



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Canadian transplanted to Greenville, NC, to teach medieval literature in the English Department at ECU, writes about finding a South much changed from the South she had read about in literature.

And speaking of changes, the end of 2012 brought the retirement of Lorraine Hale Robinson, *NCLR* senior associate editor for the past fifteen years. Lorraine offered her services my first year as editor, so I cannot imagine *NCLR* without her. I have introduced her to the student staff each semester with “This is ‘ask LR’” to explain a common notation they would find penciled in the margin of manuscripts. Lorraine may not have had a ready answer for every odd query we directed her way, but she always knew where to look, making “Ask LR” our form of Googling when we didn’t quite know what the search terms were. She has also proofread the content of fifteen issues through each stage, from the original Word file submissions to the final designed issues. I have come to count on Lorraine to recognize (when no one else had even thought to check) the tiniest erroneous detail in stories, including a misidentified aircraft and an anachronistic gun. She also served as my editor, responding candidly to the many author, issue, and event introductions I have written over the years. Her departure is bittersweet; she has earned her retirement, and we all wish Lorraine the very best in the next chapter of her life, but as I draft this issue’s introductions, I already miss her.

Change is often inspired by people like Lorraine Robinson and Jake Mills, just as it is by a new generation coming to a project. In this online supplemental issue and the year’s print issue to follow this summer, you will find ample evidence of how the legacies of dedicated people continue to inspire even after they are gone. ■

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ORGULLOS, *Chicanas* and CHILANGOS, *Y'all*:

Where are North Carolina's Latino/a Writers?

BY JOAN CONWELL



PHOTOGRAPH BY JOAN CONWELL

On September 20, 2012, a sellout crowd gathered at a Regulator Bookshop event at Motorco Music Hall in Durham, North Carolina, to hear Pulitzer Prize and MacArthur Genius grant winner Junot Díaz read from his new short story collection, *This is How You Lose Her* (2012). Díaz is famous for his ambitious 2007 novel, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, whose unlikely Dominican American title character – a virginal, comic book-obsessed nerd – flays open the American experience, revealing a vast fabric of ethnic and cultural strands. The brilliance of the novel is that it is so darn funny and engaging that the reader guffaws her way through shocking revelations about the uncanny link between dictatorial tyranny in Latin America, US power and politics, and teenage love in Paterson, New Jersey.

After the Motorco reading, Díaz posted on his Facebook page:

The Regulator Bookshop reading in Durham was dyn-o-mite! Beautiful mix of folks – a tight Caribbean group, Latinos from all over, all kinds of activists, and of course *Dominicans,* including a 21 year old from the Bronx already in med school at Duke and a flight attendant who claimed to be Wonder Woman. Both were orgullos for our community! And there were so many Chicanas and a couple of straight chilangos too. And the head of the Latino arm of Obama's re-election campaign. So much energy and positivity I left that reading smiling from ear to ear!¹

Orgullos and *Chicanas* and *chilangos*?² This is not Robert Ruark's North Carolina. Or is it?

The state's population of Latinos has skyrocketed in recent decades, growing more than four hundred percent between 1990 and 2000,³ creating new cultural milieus that transcend the black-white binary that dominated in the past. These days, a crowd packs a music store to connect with one of contemporary literature's most celebrated writers, an author whose works revolve

ABOVE Duke University's Latino/a Studies program's "Days of the Dead," Durham, NC, 2 Nov. 2012

¹ Junot Díaz, "The Regulator Bookshop Reading," Facebook 20 Sept. 2012: [web](#).

² *Orgullo* means "pride." Often but not always considered a slur, *chilango* refers to, in common usage, a "person from Mexico City or an "unsophisticated [rural or suburban] person now living in Mexico City." The term "derives from the word 'chile'; presumably these less-sophisticated transplants ate lots of it. . . .

Its tone is slightly pejorative or ironic, having much the same tone as the word 'gringo,' referring to someone from the United States" ("Chilango – slang" [*Mexico Guru* 17 Dec. 2007] [web](#)).

³ "State and County QuickFacts: North Carolina," *United States Census Bureau* (US Dept. of Commerce, 18 Sept. 2012) [web](#); "Voices from the Latino Community in NC," *Spanish Language Department* (Duke University, 2005) [web](#).

around questions of Latino, and particularly Dominican American masculine identity. Nonetheless, *Esse quam videri* (to be rather than to seem) is North Carolina's motto, and local writers reflecting our state's demographic shift are not widely known. Latino/a-identified writers with significant North Carolina ties are, almost exclusively, affiliated with universities. Of course, so is Díaz back at MIT. But few Latino/a writers in North Carolina have achieved name recognition on the national or international stage the way Díaz has, with the exceptions of Ariel Dorfman and Oscar Hijuelos, both affiliated with Duke University.

Ariel Dorfman, who fled Chile during the brutal dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, has authored scores of works dealing with the themes of exile, tyranny, and human rights. He is most famous for his 1990 play, *Death and the Maiden*, in which a woman tries to exact a confession from the man she believes raped and tortured her when she was a political prisoner. The play was made into a 1994 film directed by Roman Polanski and starring Sigourney Weaver. Dorfman has taught at Duke University since 1985 and was interviewed for *NCLR* in 2004.⁴

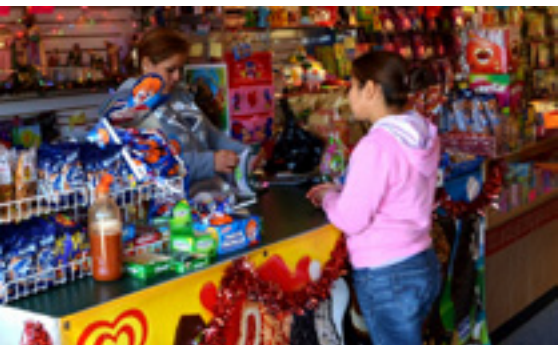
Oscar Hijuelos, a Cuban American New Yorker, was the first Latino to receive the Pulitzer Prize: in 1990 for *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love* – also later made into a film – about two Cuban brothers playing music in New York. For the last several years Hijuelos has taught at Duke during the spring semester. The landscapes that predominate in his writing are the Morningside Heights neighborhood of Manhattan's Upper West Side, Cuba, and Miami, although *Dark Dude* (2008), his novel for young readers, is set in Wisconsin, and another novel, *The Fourteen Sisters of Emilio Montez O'Brien* (1993), takes place in small-town Pennsylvania.

As of yet, North Carolina is not the primary subject or setting for these two prominent writers. Another North Carolina-connected Cuban American who is prominent in the academic community and has written about North Carolina is Gustavo Pérez Firmat. Firmat, who taught at Duke from 1978 until 1999 and still divides his time between Chapel Hill and New York City, was included in *Newsweek's* 1997 list of "100 Americans to watch for the next century." He spoke at the 2012 South Atlantic Modern Language Association Conference (SAML) on being "A Cuban in Mayberry," and his work includes a series of poems entitled "Carolina Cuban."⁵

However, Firmat's simultaneous treatment of both Latino and Carolina identities is the exception rather than the rule, and "Carolina



PHOTOGRAPH BY JOAN CONNELL



PHOTOGRAPH BY JOAN CONNELL

TOP A selection of Spanish-language newspapers available in Wake County, NC

BOTTOM Dulceria El Castillo, a Mexican sweets and piñata shop in a Raleigh barrio, 421 Chapanoke Road

⁴ Robert Siegel, "Origins and Closure: An Interview with Ariel Dorfman," *North Carolina Literary Review* 13 (2004): 99–112.

⁵ Gustavo Pérez Firmat, "A Cuban in Mayberry," South Atlantic Modern Language Association Conference 2012, Durham, NC, 9 Nov. 2012, lecture. This essay is forthcoming in the print issue of *NCLR* 2013. Firmat's "Carolina Cuban" poems are included in *Triple Crown: Chicano, Puerto Rican, and Cuban American Poetry* by Roberto Durán, Judith Ortiz Cofer, and Gustavo Pérez Firmat (Tempe, Arizona: Bilingual Review Press, 1987). For more information about the author, see his [website](#).

PHOTOGRAPH BY JOAN CONWELL



PHOTOGRAPH BY JOAN CONWELL



Cuban” was released way back in 1987. Even the 2008 issue of UNC-Pembroke’s *Pembroke Magazine*, with a hefty section devoted to Hispanic and Latino writers, includes fewer than a handful of writers who both identify as Latino/a and have an explicit connection to the state.⁶ Where are the stories reflecting a wider range of Latino/a experiences in North Carolina? Surely that Dominican flight attendant encountered by Díaz at his reading in Durham – the one claiming to be Wonder Woman according to his Facebook status update – has a novel in her. That’s a North Carolina book I would wait in line to read.

Something urban and hip. Or something gritty and rural. With 8.6% of North Carolina’s population identifying as Hispanic in 2011 (US Census Bureau), even the considerable burdens of class and barriers of language should not prevent the emergence of at least a few rural Latino/a writers giving us a glimpse of agricultural life from a different vantage point.

To find out what I was missing with regards to Latino/a writers in North Carolina, I contacted Hijuelos and three other Latino/a-identified writers – and cultural producers: Director of Latina/o Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Dr. María DeGuzmán; UNC journalism professor and nonfiction author, Paul Cuadros; and North Carolina Arts Council Arts in Education Director, Banu Valladares. The quest was for information about authors writing in either English or Spanish, and I was particularly hoping to find Latino/a-identified writers from rural areas and from outside the university system. None of my sources could name such a writer. DeGuzmán attributes the absence of rural Latino/a writers and writers independent of the university system to economics, saying:

It takes time to write and writing is a luxury to some extent, so that’s why it comes more slowly, but there are Latina/o writers. In North Carolina there are a few; they tend to be associated more with the schools. And that’s again a class question. They obviously have some work at the schools, and they’re doing the writing on the side. Self-supporting, self-sufficient writers, well that’s already hard to come by, so the chances you’re going to have Latina/o self-sufficient writers are even lower.⁷

TOP International Foods, Su Tienda Hispana in Raleigh, 421 Chapanoke Road

BOTTOM María DeGuzmán at Duke University’s Latino/a Studies program’s “Days of the Dead,” Durham, NC, 2 Nov. 2012

⁶ Liliana Wendorff, guest editor, special section on Hispanic and Latino writers in North Carolina, *Pembroke Magazine* 40 (2008). This issue includes an article on poet Mark Smith-Soto, discussed later in this essay.

⁷ Quoted from my full interview with DeGuzmán, forthcoming in the print issue of *NCLR* 2013.



**THERE ARE STORIES
RIGHT HERE IN NORTH
CAROLINA WAITING TO
BE TOLD, STORIES THAT
REFLECT THE DAILY LIVES
OF LATINO/AS FROM
ALL SOCIAL STRATA.**

ABOVE Oscar Hijuelos teaching a class at Duke University, Durham, NC, 2008

Why this peculiar focus on non-academic and rural writers in North Carolina? Because Latino literary movements in the US, such as the Newyoric poets (Puerto Rican poets gathering, performing, and publishing in New York beginning in the 1960s) and Chicana novelists in the West and Southwest, as well as an entire genre of Latin American literature called *testimonio*, emerged in conjunction with popular political protest to document struggles of the poor that went unnoticed by mainstream publishing houses.⁸ There are stories right here in North Carolina waiting to be told, stories that reflect the daily lives of Latino/as from all social strata, that haven't been written yet, or at least, they haven't been publicized or made widely available.

Asked via email what would have to happen for Latino/a literature in North Carolina to better reflect the demographics of the state, Oscar Hijuelos responded:

Having done an event for the Hispanic League in Winston/Salem, I can testify that the majority of young [L]atino students of college age I met are truly first generation in terms of linguistic point of view and culture; I doubt that they have grown up with "literature" in the sense that so many American writers have – that is to say, without books (at least that is my guess, based on my own experience in my home growing up.) So I think a form of outreach that might work would consist of creating workshops in writing through organizations like the Hispanic League of NC, at least to help the kids who might be interested: as for the gangbanger culture in the Triangle – my feeling is that these youngsters would be harder to reach – the same situation (gang mentality) exists around the country – wherein the education thing is generally looked down on: but it's possible that going into the communities and reaching out to them might make some impact, but, again, whatever organization/writers/teachers attempting to do so would face the double task of teaching basic writing and reading as one who attended a NY city public High school, where many of the kids did not always have those developed skills, I know: but again, it's just an opinion, and there are always souls looking for alternative ways of self-expression in any group. (Perhaps oral histories, put down on paper, would work as a starter.)⁹

⁸ See John Christie and José González, *Latino Boom: An Anthology of U.S. Latino Literature* (New York: Longman, 2005), for the history of Latino literary genres and examples.

⁹ Oscar Hijuelos, Re: Quotes, Message to the author, 5 Nov. 2012, email; subsequent quotations from Hijuelos are from this email. For a collection of Latino/a oral histories documenting life in North Carolina, see "Voices from the Latino Community in NC," cited previously.

CPC PRESS, 2005; ILLUSTRATED BY CATHERINE COURTLAND-MCELVANE



Despite this rather sobering assessment and the dearth of non-academic writers, there are other Latino/as writing in or about North Carolina: they are just not well known in the mainstream. Here are a few to discover:

Time magazine and *Salon.com* journalist and UNC journalism professor Paul Cuadros has written about rural Latino immigrants forming a soccer team in *A Home on the Field: How One Championship Team Inspires Hope for the Revival of Small Town America* (2006). Banu Valladares highly recommends Cuadros's work for those interested in nonfiction: "He blends the best of journalism with personal narrative," she said. "The writing is crisp and . . . accessible. *A Home in the Field* is a great read on how passion grabs us when we're not expecting

it. It's also a great way to educate general readers about the plight of the immigrant, focusing on their stories, their strengths and their humanity."¹⁰

Mark Smith-Soto is the name that recurred most frequently when I asked the experts which North Carolina connected Latino/a writers a generalist should read. Smith-Soto is a professor at UNC-Greensboro and longtime editor of *International Poetry Review*, as well as the recipient of a 2005 National Endowment of the Arts fellowship in creative writing and the winner of the 2012 James Applewhite Poetry Prize competition. Valladares (herself an accomplished poet) told me Smith-Soto's poetry is "approachable, musical and real. He can make anyone love poetry" and that she couldn't put down his 2012 collection, *Berkeley Prelude* or his earlier chapbook, *Waiting Room* (2008), which she called a "brilliant glimpse at living with the fear of cancer." Of the poems in Smith-Soto's collection *Any Second Now* (2006), former North Carolina poet laureate Kathryn Stripling Byer said, "they make magic out of language. They play with words, images, emotions, everyday encounters, and in spinning their magic, they seduce and delight me."¹¹

Rodrigo Dorfman and Joaquin Emiliano, Ariel Dorfman's sons, are a filmmaker and a novelist, respectively. Rodrigo is the director of the independent film *Generation Exile* (2010) about four women exiled from their homelands. Perhaps the hip and gritty can be found in the youngest of the Dorfmans, who recently declared himself

RANDOM HOUSE BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS. ©2003



¹⁰ Banu Valladares, "Re: Latino/a Writers in NC," Message to the author, 26 Sep. 2012, email; subsequent Valladares quotations are from this email.

¹¹ Kathryn Stripling Byer, quoted in the Comments on Mark Smith-Soto's *Any Second Now*, *Main Street Rag*, n.d.: web. See this issue of *NCLR Online* for two of Mark Smith-Soto's poems that were finalists in the 2012 James Applewhite Poetry Prize competition. His winning poem will be published in the *NCLR* 2013 print issue.

**AT THE END OF THE
DAY, THE STATE OF
LATINO/A LITERATURE
IN NORTH CAROLINA
IS KIND OF LIKE THE US
ECONOMIC RECOVERY:
PROGRESSING SLOWLY,
BUT NOT ALL THE WAY
THERE YET.**

PHOTOGRAPH BY CLAUDIA MILIAN. COURTESY OF JOAN CONWELL



ABOVE Junot Díaz, author of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, reading at the Motorco Music Hall in Durham, NC, 20 Sept. 2012

“dead” and changed his name from Joaquin Dorfman to Joaquin Emiliano, suggesting a conscious embrace of Latino identity.¹² He is the author of young adult novels *Playing It Cool* (2006) and *The Long Wait for Tomorrow* (2009).

Also highly praised are the works of children’s author, Irania Macías Patterson, whose day job, it turns out, is bilingual coordinator at the Charlotte Mecklenberg Library rather than a member of the academic community. Valladares calls *Chipi Chipi, Small Shells of the Sea* (2005), bilingual stories of Venezuela, and *Wings and Dreams: The Legend of Angel Falls* (2010) “beautiful . . . treasured and personal, blending a bit of the magical realism so many Latino writers embrace with memoir.”

At the end of the day, the state of Latino/a literature in North Carolina is kind of like the US economic recovery: progressing slowly, but not all the way there yet. While I hope we are moving toward a time when we are not identifying writers solely by broad ethnic categories like “Latino” but by nuances in their work, there is a vast array of experiences of North Carolina’s Latino populations that are, as of yet, unchronicled in literature. With all the talent in the state, it appears that there is no one yet writing about the Latino/a experience in North Carolina the way Díaz writes about Dominicans in New Jersey, for example, or at least no one achieving widespread name recognition for Latino/a literature specifically set here in the Old North State. Hopefully that will change with more attention to Latino/a writers in literary journals like the *North Carolina Literary Review*. More promise may rest with the elusive community that came together for a moment at the Regulator Bookshop reading at Motorco in Durham, for although writing is done by a lone sequestered author tapping on his computer keyboard, literary movements are created when communities of like-minded readers and writers come together and exchange ideas. Oscar Hijuelos best expressed the hope for the future of Latino/a literature in North Carolina when he said, “The parents of the Latino kids I have met in [North Carolina] are really wonderful, decent and hardworking folks, whose lives and struggles will surely come out one day in the books that will eventually be written about them.” ■

JOAN CONWELL received a BA in Cultural Anthropology from Barnard College, Columbia University and an MA in English from ECU. She lives in Cary, NC, and is co-editing a collection of essays on transnational literature, gender, and power. Her writing has appeared in *Obsidian III: Literature in the African Diaspora*, *Cary Citizen*, *The Independent Weekly*, *The Columbia Spectator*, and *Carolina Parent*.

¹² Joaquin Emiliano, “Joaquin Dorfman is Dead,” joaquindorfman.com (Sept. 2012) [web](#).

Stone-Bound

BY MARK SMITH-SOTO

2012 JAMES APPLEWHITE POETRY PRIZE FINALIST

Smaller than a hen's egg and just as smooth,
the unremarkable hue of dark grey waters,
no flecks of light or runs of fossil stitching
across the placid surface, nothing to explain
why I kept the thing. Picking it up, enjoying
its heft, I ponder what forgotten shore it might
belong to, what jigsaw of heart and place I
plucked it from, wanting to keep a piece.
Memento of nothing now but memory's
loosening grasp, it no longer justifies its spot
in the drawer of the dear and indispensable,
and should follow the frayed tassel, the odd
cufflink, the four eyeglass cases into the trash.
But a river stone doesn't find a spot among
coffee grounds and orange peels, and even out
in the backyard, everything cries against it,
not ours, not ours! What shall I do with you?
I ask it, nestled in the hollow of my hand.

MARK SMITH-SOTO received the second James Applewhite Poetry Prize for "Last Retreat to Topsail Island," which will be published in *NCLR's* 2013 print issue. In the meantime, you can [watch](#) the award presentation and hear Mark read his winning poem at the 2012 Eastern North Carolina Literary Homecoming. This poet is a professor of Spanish and editor of *International Poetry Review* at UNC-Greensboro. His poems have appeared in *Antioch Review*, *Kenyon Review*, *Nimrod*, *The Sun*, and numerous other literary journals, including *NCLR* 2001 and 2012. Awarded a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship in creative writing in 2005, he has published three prize-winning chapbooks and two full-length poetry collections, *Our Lives Are Rivers* (University Press of Florida, 2003) and *Any Second Now* (Main Street Rag, 2006). He has also published a translation of the selected poetry of Costa Rican writer Ana Istarú, *Fever Season* (Unicorn Press, 2010). And his most recent collection of poems is *Berkeley Prelude: A Lyrical Memoir* (Unicorn Press, 2012).

Fish Store Mural Relocated

BY MARK SMITH-SOTO

JAMES APPLEWHITE POETRY PRIZE FINALIST

A splash of light on the gray bricks, the mermaid lounges in a flowing, horizontal pose, her body – breasts cuddled behind a forearm cross – twisting so her sleepy eyes sweep the length of Lee Street. She might have woken up on this block just in time to see the skinny boy in T-shirt and huge sneakers pay for a gun in the parking lot, glimpse the wheel-chaired figure on the corner waving a sign that says *Vet Out of Work, Can Fix Anything*. Long she flourished here, brightening the dilapidated shops,

until the city felt the need to rescue her, brick by brick, to a more prosperous side of Greensboro. Her elegant tail, perfectly scaled, no longer waves, but since the workers haven't reached her head, her smile's unchanged. And though the coral lipstick's cracked a bit, there's such an openness in her face it's no wonder we want to lead her off to a place untouched by roadside trash, where the homeless won't huddle under her at night and let their dreams trouble the quiet tide of her green hair.



Darted Mermaid (oil on canvas, 39.6x24) by Luis German Ardila

Mint Hill, NC, resident **LUIS GERMAN ARDILA** was born in Bogotá Colombia. He received his MFA, specializing in painting, from the Universidad Nacional de Colombia. He has had numerous one-person exhibitions and has been featured in many group exhibitions. Recently, he participated in an exhibition of works by critically acclaimed North Carolina-based Latino artists at North Carolina Central University. His works are in private collections in the US, Colombia, and France, among many others worldwide. See another sample of his art on his [website](#) and with Mark Smith-Soto's prize-winning poem in the print issue of *NCLR* 2013.

MOUNTAIN

magic

An Interview with Sarah Addison Allen

by Hal McDonald



PHOTOGRAPH BY MELISSA MARKIS

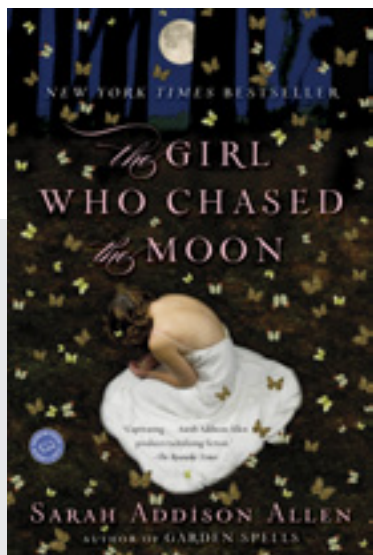
Apple-tossing trees, creeping self-help books, glow-in-the-dark Southern gentlemen. These are just a few of the wonders a reader can expect to encounter when entering the magical world of Sarah Addison Allen. A native and lifetime resident of Asheville, Allen grounds her novels in familiar North Carolina landscapes but imbues the lives of the characters who people these landscapes with a marvelous strangeness through her use of magic realism, a literary technique more commonly associated with Latin American writers such as Gabriel García Márquez and Isabel Allende than with writers from the American South. Not to be confused with its near relative “fantasy,” magic realism – or “Southern-fried magic realism,” as Allen prefers to describe her work – blurs the boundaries between the magical and the real by portraying fantastic elements in a matter-of-fact style, treating such unusual phenomena as books that follow a woman wherever she goes more as quotidian annoyances than as supernatural marvels. Within the framework of this magically real, or realistically magical world, Allen casts a spell of small town Southern romance that has made her four published novels, *Garden Spells* (Bantam Books, 2007) *The Sugar Queen* (Bantam Dell, 2008), *The Girl Who Chased the Moon* (Bantam Books, 2010) and *The Peach Keeper* (Bantam Books, 2011), international best sellers.

“I think the South lends itself very well to magical realism. We are willing to believe a lot of things here – to suspend our disbelief.”

—Sarah Addison Allen

On June 13, 2012, Allen took time away from work on her fifth novel, tentatively titled “*Lost Lake*,” to sit down with me at Malaprop’s Bookstore in downtown Asheville and talk about her life, her work, and the Western North Carolina mountain region that she calls home. We followed this up with a few questions via email. The interview that follows has been transcribed from both, then edited, and organized for clarity and flow, while remaining true to the voices and intentions of the speakers.

HAL MCDONALD: *You worked at your writing for twelve years before getting your “break” with Garden Spells. Was the writing during that period simply apprentice work, or has any of it made its way into your published fiction?*



BANTAM BOOKS REISSUE EDITION, 2010

SARAH ADDISON ALLEN: Everything I wrote led up to what I’m writing now. I found it better as a process to write and then go on to something else. I look back on the books I wrote back then, and they’re not worthy of being published; they are part of the journey. They’re a step, not the destination. I wrote a lot of romances during this time. I desperately wanted to be a romance writer. I wanted to be a Harlequin author. I didn’t care how much I made – it could be paltry; I could live at the poverty level. I wanted to be a romance writer because that’s what I loved to read at the time. But looking back to that writing – not so good. I was trying to follow the market and the Harlequin “formula” – they will not admit they have a formula, but there is one. So I was trying to follow that formula, and it showed in how stilted and unoriginal my writing was at the time.

I actually had one Harlequin romance published,¹ and I thought, “This is it. I’m on my way now.” But they didn’t want a second one. So I went through this really dark blue time. I went back to school because I just needed to do something. I was writing as close to full time

as I possibly could, living with my mother, and I just needed to do something else because obviously writing as a career wasn’t working. I always thought, “I am a writer, I’ll always be a writer, but I’m probably not going to be

“Claire didn’t know why, but every once in a while, the tree would actually throw apples, as if bored.”

—*Garden Spells* (37)



BANTAM BOOKS, 2007

published right now,” and I went back to school for a medical transcription program because I figured I could type – but I hated it. So I decided to give writing one more go. Not to follow the market, not to do anything I thought would sell, but to write the book I wanted to write – if the apple tree threw apples at people, who cares? I was going to put that tree in the book. So that’s how *Garden Spells* happened, and that’s how my career happened – by giving up everything and starting anew.

So you didn’t set out to write magic realism in Garden Spells? The “magic” just happened?

That absolutely happened, yes, and I didn’t resist it this time. I thought, “Who’s going to read that? Everybody’s going to think that’s silly. No one’s going to like that.” But I just pushed through it thinking, “This is how the story’s going.” As I was writing *Garden Spells*, I knew it was *my* voice. It was me. It was my story, and it was the most comfortable I’ve ever written. I wrote that book in four months – the fastest I’ve ever written. And it all happened from there. Oh my gosh, if I could only write that fast now.

¹ Allen’s *Tried and True* was published under the penname Katie Gallagher. It appears in a volume with Delores Fossen’s *Truly, Madly, Briefly* (Duets, No. 102, New York: Harlequin, 2003).

Now that you've firmly established your voice as a writer of magic realism, at what point in the plotting process of your novels do the magical elements enter the picture?

I still just let them happen. I've never, with any book since *Garden Spells*, sat down and said, "Here's where the magical element is going to happen," or "This person sees ghosts," or "This person will have this magic." I've never done that. I'm not a great plotter. I set the story on paper just to know who the characters are and where the setting is and what I think the character arcs are. I usually know the ending, because I need to know where to stop. But otherwise, I make it up as I go along, and sometimes that is the most frustrating thing. My last two books were actually beyond their deadlines because I wrote a story and it wasn't good – an entire manuscript – and sent it up to my editor and she said, "This needs to be changed. This isn't good enough. This doesn't work, Sarah. Try again." So I put it aside and then wrote another book, and that was the story that it should've been all along.

You don't have a detailed outline plotted out before you begin writing a new novel?

"Welcome to Mullaby, North Carolina, she thought, home of ghost lights, giants, and jewelry thieves."

—*The Girl Who Chased the Moon* (11)

I'm always surprised. In the book I'm writing now, there's a character whom I didn't know at the beginning was the main character, and she is now, and her magic has just come about as I've written it. I wish I could see the story *as* a story when I start. It's usually just finding out who the characters are and what they want and who they meet. And who they meet sometimes ends up being a very important character that I didn't even know at the beginning. I wish I could do it differently, but that's just who I am.

I was diagnosed with cancer last year, and I thought that all I went through with that might have changed the way I approach my writing. I went through treatment all last year and I started writing again this year, and now that I'm past that and in a much calmer place, having looked out on the abyss of mortality and the end of the world, what's different – what's not there – is worry over meeting book deadlines. It's not the end of the world. So I approach writing now with a calmer attitude than I used to. And I thought approaching it with this calm attitude I could be more deliberate, that I could plot better, that writing in general would be easier after the year of hell I've had. And it's not. It's the same thing. I'm just not as anxious about it. As of last December I have no evidence of disease, which is good. It was a bad year, but this year so far has been so much better, and I have so much more appreciation and perspective now.

In your daily writing routine, are you an hour counter, spending a given amount of time each day working on a novel, or are you a word counter?

With my first four books, *Garden Spells* through *Peach Keeper*, I was definitely a word counter, because I needed to do that to meet a





BANTAM BOOKS 2011

deadline. These days, I'm more hour by hour. I don't know if it's because of going through what I went through last year, and I'm not one hundred percent yet, but I dedicate a couple of hours to write, and if I don't meet that word count, I'm okay with that. The deadline's here, and like I said, it's not the end of the world if I don't meet it, so I think my process has changed a little since my cancer diagnosis. I don't think my content has changed any; I don't think *what* I write is different, but *how* I write is different.

When you're working on a particular novel, do you think much ahead to your future books, or are you completely preoccupied with the one you're writing at the moment?

It's frustrating. I am a couple of chapters into a book and – Bam! – there's the idea for the next one, and I am already so tired of the book I'm writing that I just want to go on and write that new one. It happens all the time, with every book. I signed a three-book contract last November, for the book I'm currently writing, which is called "Lost Lake" right now, but that could change – titles always change – and also for the sequel to *Garden Spells*, which is the second book, and then the unwritten third book. I don't know what the third book is going to be, but I know what the next book after the one I'm writing right now is going to be. I always start out so hopeful that it's going to be an easy process, and it's not. I have the idea of what I want a book to be, but it's never what I want it to be; it always changes. I have that idea, and those ideas usually happen as I'm writing a book and hating it and wanting to go to that next one.

You seem to have been largely self-taught in your writing career. What's your opinion of formal creative writing instruction – MFA programs, writers' workshops, and so forth?

MFA programs have brought about a lot of great literary works, but I think you have to bring with you a germ of something. I think you have to have something natural within you. I think you have to be a natural storyteller in order to become a writer. I think you can get better. I think if you have this germ of talent, it can be fostered and grown. But if you don't have a natural voice or a natural rhythm, I don't think that can be taught. It can be imitated. You can read lots of books by one author and have that voice in your head and then write something, but that rhythm is not yours. So I think that MFA programs are great for writers in general to get better – just to get them writing and to have a critique of that.

I took a couple of fiction writing workshops in college as part of my literature major, and I still remember to this day that atmosphere of turning in your work and having people critique it and then having that critique in your head for the next time you write, and then you think, "Oh wait, that didn't work last time. This problem was brought



PHOTOGRAPH BY PAUL McDONALD

up last time. Let me not do that this time.” That’s good for a writer if you already have that seed, but if the seed’s not there it’s not there.

Do you write short fiction as well as novels?

A long time ago when I was in high school that’s all I wrote, because I didn’t think I could write anything longer. I liked the aspect that it didn’t have to have a plot; it just had to be a slice of life, a moment in time, and you made it pretty. You made the writing pretty, and it didn’t have to have a beginning, middle, and end. That’s what I liked about short story writing, particularly in high school. And I kept writing short stories throughout college, but I challenged myself when I was sixteen to write something long. I wrote my first “book” when I was sixteen, but it was horrible; we’ll never talk about it again.

I’m not sure what it is about short stories now. Short stories become chapters now. I just can’t completely encapsulate them now, but they were almost all I did through my teens and my twenties, just because I couldn’t do anything longer. I couldn’t see beyond that. I think experience now helps me with the length; it helps me with the vision that what I am writing is a larger work. People want instant gratification when it comes to writing a book, but there’s a completely different mentality.

As someone who’s part of a college community, I identify with the college town of Bascom in Garden Spells and have wondered if you had a particular North Carolina college town in mind when you were writing that book. Was the fictional Orion College fashioned after a real college?

I didn’t realize it was a college town when I was writing that book. It was just a small town someplace outside Hickory. When the love interest Tyler came about. I was trying to figure out what he did. I knew he was a creative sort, and I thought, “He’s a college professor. Oh, there must be a college there.” I named the town of Bascom after Bascom Lamar Lunsford.

Those references to Bascom Lamar Lunsford – the town name, and the Lunsford Reservoir outside of Bascom – made me think that perhaps you modeled Orion after Mars Hill College, because of its historic association with Lunsford.² Even though that’s not the case, I suppose it wouldn’t hurt anything if I went on thinking that.

We bring so much of ourselves into what we read. When I let go of a book after I finish and it gets into the hands of a reader, it’s the



COURTESY OF HUGH MORTON COLLECTION OF PHOTOGRAPHS & FILMS, NORTH CAROLINA COLLECTION PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVES, WILSON LIBRARY, UNC-CHAPEL HILL

ABOVE Bascom Lamar Lunsford with Frieda English performing at “Singing on the Mountain” gospel festival, June 1957

² Mars Hill, NC, native Bascom Lamar Lunsford (1882–1973), nicknamed the “Minstrel of the Appalachians,” was a folk musician, song collector, and “pioneer” of the folk festival. In 1928, he founded Asheville’s Mountain Dance and Folk Festival. According to Charles K. Wolfe, “Lunsford came from and remained a part of the culture he celebrated, becoming one of the most passionate and articulate advocates of authentic mountain culture” (*American National Biography Online* Feb. 2000 [American Council of Learned Societies and Oxford UP, 2000] [web](#)).





COURTESY OF NORTH CAROLINA POSTCARDS; NORTH CAROLINA COLLECTION PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVES; WILSON LIBRARY, UNC-CHAPEL HILL

reader's story, and so much of their perceptions and their experiences are a part of the story. Much of it is not anything that I intentionally put in, but they bring it out, from something they've experienced, something they've lived. I've always said it's not my story after I turn it over to the readers.

A basic premise of reader response criticism is that any work of literature is a different text for each person who reads it. A text will also vary over time for an individual reader, from one stage of life to another. Do you agree with that?

There's a character in the book I'm writing now who just said that endings of books change as you grow up. When you read a book while you're a teenager, and you read it again ten years later, it's a completely different story; the ending has

changed magically and you don't know why. I just finished reading *Dandelion Wine* again when I heard Ray Bradbury had passed, and I remember reading it way back when and thinking, "Oh my gosh, what an incredible story – a story of childhood." I read it again just over the past couple of weeks, though, and it's no story at all. It's just slice, slice, slice, sort of mashed into a story, and I thought, "Why did I think this was such a great novel? It is just a couple of childhood memories put together." The writing is still fantastic, don't get me wrong, but it's a completely different book from the one I remember.

So if you have a book that is a particular favorite, perhaps you shouldn't tamper with the memory by reading it again?

It would be changed because it's that part of your life you associate it with. Some books are best left alone. When you have a good memory of a book, don't pick it up again years later. It will have changed, because you've changed.

Your novels have been published in a number of other languages. What sort of interaction do you have with your translators?

Surprisingly very little. The only contact I've had with a translator was with a Swedish translator. I got an email from my publisher asking me to explain the Southern saying, "old money." They didn't understand what "old money" meant, and I thought, jeez, they had no problem with all those moon pies and Southern candies and Southern foods in my novels, but they had a problem with "old money"? That's the



COURTESY OF NORTH CAROLINA POSTCARDS; NORTH CAROLINA COLLECTION PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVES; WILSON LIBRARY, UNC-CHAPEL HILL

only experience I've had with a translator. There's a definite divide. They don't interact much with their writers. They have their own audience and they know their audience very well, so publishers get their own translators and they do their own cover art. The cover art for my translated books is wildly different the ones in the US. And with some of these I think, "What is this cover? This is godawful." But it's their

market, and it's what their readers expect. It's what sells, so I sort of trust them with that, and I don't have a lot of interaction with them.

Overseas my books have sold the best in the UK, which is not, of course, a

translation, but they have also sold surprisingly well in Portugal. I am a bestseller in Portugal, and I'm not sure why. I don't know if that magical aspect is something that appeals to their culture or what, but their publisher has been in touch with me about touring there. Other than that, though, I have very little contact with the foreign publishers.

Since you don't have a lot of interaction with them, do you ever wonder if your translators are getting it "right" – i.e., staying true to the spirit of your work?

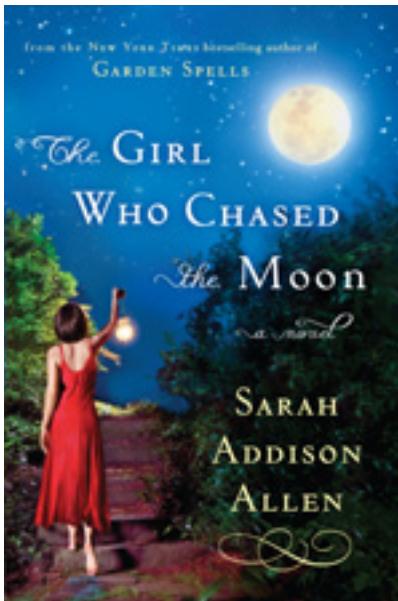
I've often wondered that – how the book ends up. How does it translate? I didn't think *The Sugar Queen* would sell that well overseas simply because it has so much American candy in it that's so particular to the South. But I guess food is universal. The comfort of sweets and the comfort of food are universal, so they made it work.

*I've read that, as preparation for *The Girl Who Chased the Moon*, you did extensive research on North Carolina barbecue. How did you conduct this research?*

I picked up Bob Garner's *Guide to North Carolina Barbecue*.³ It's sectioned into parts of the state alphabetically, and he gives a review of all these little hole-in-the-wall barbecue places from Asheville to Albemarle. When I was on tour with *The Sugar Queen*, I took this book with me, and as I was driving through North Carolina for some bookstore stops, I would stop at some of the places he suggested. I had my first taste of true Eastern-style North Carolina barbecue at Allen and Sons in Pittsboro. I was like, "Whoa!" It was like fire in my mouth. I had never associated that much pepper with barbecue before. Being a Western North Carolina girl, it's always been sweet tomato – barbecue was mild. But then I tried the Eastern barbecue, and it opened up a whole new world. Not my favorite. I prefer the Western North Carolina, Lexington-style barbecue.

"Ha! Blasphemy! In North Carolina, barbecue means pork, child. Hot dogs and hamburgers on a grill – that's called 'cooking out' around here."

—*The Girl Who Chased the Moon* (88)



QUINIA ESSENCIA, 2010. COURTESY OF SARAH ADDISON ALLEN

³ Bob Garner, *Guide to North Carolina Barbecue* (Winston-Salem, NC: Blair, 2002).



Western North Carolina in general, Asheville in particular, has a fairly active writing culture. How much interaction do you have with other writers in the area?

I don't have a very wide group of writer colleagues. I'm not a part of writer groups, and I don't know many writers in Asheville. It's a pretty solitary thing for me. I'm such an introvert that I'm not too much a part of the writing community, really. My writing is more borne out of my imagination instead of the community of writers.

Many Southern writers – William Faulkner famously comes to mind – trace their choice of vocation to the oral tradition to which they were exposed growing up – old folks spinning yarns on the front porch while the kids listened in, and so forth. Did the “oral tradition” of the South form a foundation for your work, or did you learn more about the craft of storytelling from your reading?

I think who I am as a writer is a direct result of who I am as a reader. I didn't grow up with a lot of stories or a lot of tall tales; I grew up with the ballads and the songs. My parents never talk much about their childhoods and I didn't know my grandparents, so there was a loss of storytelling, a loss of history there. I don't know if I ever really thought about whether I made up for that with reading. I've just always been a big reader, and I never considered putting magic realism into my writing until college when I was exposed to the genre. I had never heard of it before, never read it before, and I was enamored, transfixed. That blended well for me as a writer. Also, I was a big romance reader when I was a teenager. That found its way into my writing. Just in little bits and pieces – not so much the oral history, but the reading.

All of your novels contain elements of magic realism. Many magic realist writers (e.g. Isabel Allende and Gabriel García Márquez) claim that they're not writing “magic” at all, but rather are realistically portraying an intrinsically “magical” region. Do you think the region in which and about which you write plays a part in the magic realism elements of your work?

It probably does. I think the South lends itself very well to magic realism. We are willing to believe a lot of things here – to suspend our disbelief. We have faith in things, including the unusual. This extends to religion and other things. So I have been surprised in general that there is not more magic realism set in the South.

What are some of the books that first got you interested in magic realism?

Fred Chappell's *I Am One of You Forever* is one I read eight or nine times. The kind of thought that goes into that kind of writing – that kind of imagination – humbles me. I think, “Oh my gosh, I can't do that.”

How does he do that?" I think I have a vein of it in what I write, but it's never as full as Fred Chappell, or even *Like Water for Chocolate* and that kind of thing. The first book of magic realism I ever read was *The Passion* by Jeanette Winterson. Wow, what an exquisite book. And Fred Chappell's *I Am One of You Forever* was a whole new perspective for me because I saw it set in the South and I thought, this could not happen in the South.⁴ I thought this technique was for other, non-Southern writers.

One of my favorite magic realist plot lines in your work is in The Sugar Queen, where various and sundry books follow the character Chloe around, popping up with just the advice she needs to hear at a given moment. Have you found that books have played, albeit metaphorically, a similar role in your own life?

Let's say, hypothetically, that books literally started following you around, as they do Chloe. What titles do you think would pursue you?

National Geographic. I make my world so small. Sometimes I need the reminder to look up and realize how big it really is.

If your own books took to wandering, whom do you imagine they would follow?

My books would probably anxiously, doggedly follow a person having a bad day. "Maybe this," my books would say, "Maybe this will make you feel better."

Chloe's character, and that magic associated with her character, just happened while I was writing. There was a scene when she had just kicked her boyfriend out and she turned around and there was a book on the floor. I remember thinking, "How did it get there? Did it fall? Where did it come from?" And it occurred to me, "This book is following her." And that's where that storyline came from. I don't think it's been as magical for me, but looking back on my life, there are certain books that came into my life that changed everything – changed who I am as a writer today. I remember some time after college, I picked up on a bargain table *Practical Magic* by Alice Hoffman. After I read that I thought, this is a literary writer, of course, and she's writing a literary work, but it's so accessible and it's romantic and a lot of people could identify with that. That book changed my work in another direction. The first Harlequin romance I read made a difference.

As I was growing up, the children's stories, one at a time, sort of built up into who I am as a writer. You don't know that until later in life. You don't know how that book you just picked up off the shelf, for reasons you don't even know, is going to change your life. Sometimes it just does.

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⁴ Fred Chappell, *I Am One of You Forever* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1985); Laura Esquivel, *Like Water for Chocolate: A Novel in Monthly Installments, with Recipes, Romances, and Home Remedies* (New York: Doubleday, 1992); Jeanette Winterson, *The Passion* (New York: Grove Press, 1997).



COURTESY OF ASHEVILLE AREA PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION, SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS RESEARCH CENTER AND D.H. RAMSEY LIBRARY, SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, UNC-ASHEVILLE

If your own books took to wandering, whom do you imagine they would follow?

My books would probably anxiously, doggedly follow a person having a bad day. “Maybe this,” my books would say, “Maybe this will make you feel better.”

For all the magic realist tendencies of your novels, some of their social dynamics remind me of Jane Austen. Do you see any Jane Austen in your books?

I think socially Jane Austen was very real; her social commentary, of course, was very real. She could make fun of these characters who in real life we tend to be intimidated by, or set on a pedestal, or who we think are better than we are for whatever reason – social standing, money – she was very good at that. And I have found myself doing that quite a lot in my books: sort of demystifying Southern money, Southern society.

There’s a good bit of class conflict in your work. Is that just an inevitable part of the human condition, or is it more of a Southern thing?

I think it’s human absolutely, but in the South we just don’t hide it as well as other people. We are out there in the open. I don’t know if it’s more hidden or more accepted in the North, Midwest, or what have you, but here in the South, it’s right out in the open. There are the people who live in the houses with the columns, the plantation houses. I just think we’re more open about a class system.

Another prevalent theme in your books is the idea of “home.” Even though you have lived here in Asheville your entire life, you have many of your characters leave home and return at some later time in order to fully appreciate it. Do you think there’s an advantage to going away and coming back in fully appreciating one’s relationship with home?

I think there is. I think I have a very definite sense of home and it’s a very comfortable sense of home. I can’t imagine ever leaving Asheville, and I think in general I want to give my characters that same sense of rootedness. I’m so content and so firmly planted where I am that in a character’s journey I want to give them that in the end, and in order to do that I have to push them away; I have to make them from someplace else and bring them here. Or I have to make them see that where they are is where they belong.



PHOTOGRAPH BY HAL McDONALD

ABOVE TOP **Waynesville-Calvary Book Room, Downtown Asheville, 1976–1978**

ABOVE BOTTOM **“Reinvented” downtown Asheville**

Even though Asheville is geographically a part of the Western North Carolina mountains, temperamentally it can sometimes feel isolated from the culture of the region at large. How much “mountain culture” were you exposed to growing up here?

Not a lot. I mean Asheville is this sort of liberal urban nucleus in an otherwise rural and conservative region. I was born and raised in the city – I went to city schools and to UNC-Asheville – and I think the sieve has larger holes in the city, so a lot more of the mountain culture – the superstitions, the stories – falls through, whereas there are smaller holes out in the country and a lot more is preserved there. My

dad, though, is a writer and a musician – he plays a mean banjo – and I grew up going to the mountain dance folk festival, so I was exposed to that which brought the outside into Asheville, like all the old ballads. I remember Sheila Adams Barnhill singing “Young Emily” at the folk festival one year, and that stuck with me forever – that story, that ballad. So I think what I know of mountain culture is what’s come to Asheville from the outside.

Each of your novels published so far takes place in North Carolina, and much of the action occurs in and around the Western North Carolina mountain region. Do you consider yourself a “regional” writer?

I’ve never thought about it. I write from what I know. My next book – the book I’m writing now – is actually my first book outside of North Carolina. It takes place on the Georgia/Florida border. It’s got a Southern feel to it. It’s comfortable for me. It’s what I know. I don’t know if I consider myself regional. I don’t write about real things. I write about real emotions, but I don’t write about real towns. There’s a sliver of reality that runs through it. I think because I’m from Asheville, I am an Asheville writer. Because I’m from this region, I am a regional author. I don’t know if we ever set out to document what we know or document our region for everyone else. There are universal truths that people from outside the region understand and get, so my books are not exclusive to

one region or another. I don’t think regionalism is exclusive when the rest of the country reads something and responds, “Wow, I like that; I can understand that; I can identify with that.”



PHOTOGRAPH BY HAL MCDONALD



COURTESY OF ASHEVILLE AREA PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION, SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS RESEARCH CENTER AND D.H. RAMSEY LIBRARY, SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, UNC-ASHEVILLE



COURTESY OF SARAH ADDISON ALLEN

How is the Asheville of today different from the Asheville of your childhood?

It's grown quite a bit. There's been a great influx of people "not from here." My mom likes to ask people if they're from here every time she goes out because she thinks it's such a novelty that she was born here and we're the minority now. Downtown absolutely has changed. My mom ran a Southern Highlands handicraft craft shop on Wall Street in the '70s, and I remember going downtown when I was a kid, before I went to school, and there was a sort of a crunchy granola culture then. But for a while after that downtown went through this big dark empty time. I've been around to see the reinvention of downtown. I think the influx of the new has recharged us.

"My mom likes to ask people if they're from here every time she goes out because she thinks it's such a novelty that she was born here and we're the minority now."

—Sarah Addison Allen

Recharged in what way?

I think like attracts like, and because we already had a root system of something arty and literary, from that genesis we grew a tree and then attracted the bees. There are a lot of arty people here because of that.

What are your favorite memories of growing up in Asheville?

The favorite part of my childhood, I guess, was summers. I grew up in west Asheville. We lived sort of near to the racetrack so that it is ingrained in my memory. You know, nighttime – crickets, lightning bugs, and the sound of the racetrack. I never lived anywhere else, so I don't have any comparison with the rest of the world. I think childhood is actually pretty universal. On second thought, though, I suppose growing up in the South is special. The South is richer; it's greener; it's tastier; it's more superstitious. There's an underlying something in the heat, in the moisture, in the superstition.

Thank you so much, Sarah, for your time. Best of luck with "Lost Lake" and all those other book ideas that will undoubtedly assail your imagination as you're writing that one. ■



COURTESY OF SARAH ADDISON ALLEN

ABOVE TOP **Zack Allen, the author's father, playing the banjo, far right, at the Mountain Dance Folk Festival in Asheville with The Carol Best String Band, 1983**

ABOVE BOTTOM **The author (left) with her mother and a friend, at her mother's shop, Southern Appalachian Crafts, on Wall Street in Asheville, late 1970s**

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REFLECTIONS

of AN
Accidental
Citizen

by Nicole Nolan Sidhu

of "THE
NEW SOUTH"

WHEN I FIRST MOVED TO GREENVILLE, North Carolina ten years ago after accepting a job as an English professor at East Carolina University, my direct experience of the Southern United States amounted to precisely nothing. I was born and raised in Toronto, Canada and although I had attended graduate school in New Jersey, I had never been south of Washington, DC (unless you count the winter trips to south Florida that are the hallmark of many a Canadian childhood).

North Carolina was unfamiliar, but I didn't care. I had a job in an academic market where only a third of PhDs find tenure-track work. Greenville was offering me a paycheck when no one else was. That seemed like a pretty likeable feature of the place. I packed my car and headed south on I-95.

My friends from Canada and the American Northeast were horrified, regarding my southern migration with something akin to the feelings Jane Eyre had when St. John Rivers departed on his missionary journey to India. There was no doubt in their minds that I was going to a barbaric locale with mores alien to the civilized ways of Canada and the cities of the American Northeast.

Like most Canadians – and, I would venture to say, many Americans – I derived my ideas of the American South primarily from books, television, and movies. A major source of ideas about small-town Southern life for Canadians is Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, a novel that I read in ninth grade in the 1980s and that is still widely taught in Canadian high schools. There was also *The Andy Griffith Show*, *The Dukes of Hazzard*, and *Gone with the Wind*, a work well known to Canadians in both book and movie form. Then there was the popular film *Deliverance*, with its un-kempt, violent, inbred hillbillies.

If pressed ten years ago to imagine life in a small town in North Carolina, I probably would have come up with a patchwork of notions pieced together from these works: warm weather, a slow



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ABOVE Evans Street in downtown Greenville, July 1960 (LEFT) and Feb. 1966 (RIGHT)

TOP RIGHT The original Hardee's, located on 14th St. near Charles Blvd., in Greenville, NC, Sept. 1960

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pace of life, people speaking in thick Southern accents and calling each other ma'am and sir, quaint local shops, fried chicken, grits, mint juleps, pecan pies, bourbon, pickup trucks, and a demographic composed of European whites (sharply divided between the dirt-poor and the plantation-rich) and African Americans (still oppressed by a racist social order). People would be friendly, of course, and polite in an old fashioned way (Southern hospitality), but they would not be terribly educated, and they wouldn't have had much experience of the outside world.

Ten years ago, I would not have associated any of the following words and phrases with the inhabitants of a small town in Eastern North Carolina: polyglot, international, multilingual, technologically advanced, highly educated, middle class, prosperous, progressive. Nor would I have expected to find any of the following in Greenville: organic food buyers, cappuccino and latte drinkers, sushi eaters, and patrons of high-end

restaurants and retail stores. And, indeed, why would I have? It's hard to imagine Scarlett O'Hara, Deputy Barney Fife, or Atticus Finch hooking into their wifi while sipping on a Pumpkin Spice Latte.

And yet, what I have just described much more accurately represents my experience of Greenville, North Carolina, in the early twenty-first century than the list that preceded it. It would probably surprise most of my friends from Canada and the Northeast to know that, according to the US census, thirty-six percent of Greenville's population holds a bachelor's degree or higher. That percentage is greater than the proportion of highly educated people in any of the five largest cities in the United States: New York (thirty three percent), Los Angeles (thirty percent), Chicago (thirty-two percent), Houston (twenty-eight percent), and Philadelphia (twenty-two percent).¹ The concentration of highly educated people in Greenville has produced the world that I, my husband, and our

THE CONCENTRATION OF HIGHLY EDUCATED PEOPLE IN GREENVILLE HAS PRODUCED THE WORLD THAT I, MY HUSBAND, AND OUR THREE CHILDREN INHABIT — A WORLD OF MONTESSORI SCHOOLS, SUZUKI VIOLIN LESSONS, DATE NIGHTS AT A SUSHI RESTAURANT, SHOPPING AT THE VARIOUS NATIONAL CHAIN STORES THAT HAVE OUTLETS IN GREENVILLE, AND SOCIALIZING WITH A CULTURALLY-DIVERSE GROUP OF LOCAL FRIENDS THAT INCLUDE AMERICANS FROM ALL REGIONS OF THE COUNTRY, AS WELL PEOPLE FROM INDIA, PAKISTAN, SENEGAL, ROMANIA, CHINA, AND THE UNITED KINGDOM.



PHOTOGRAPH BY LINDA FOX

ABOVE LEFT **Wasabi 88**, Jan. 2013, one of several restaurants that serve sushi in "new" Greenville, NC



PHOTOGRAPH BY JOHNNY BEEFAU

ABOVE RIGHT **Evans St.** as seen from **5th St.**, in downtown Greenville, Jan. 2013

¹ "State and County Quick Facts," *United States Census Bureau* (US Dept. of Commerce, 10 Jan. 2013) [web](#).

MY EXPERIENCE HERE AS A CANADIAN, THEN, IS NOT THE IMMIGRATION EXPERIENCE OF IMAGINATION. RATHER, IT IS A POSTMODERN MIX OF THE FAMILIAR AND THE ALIEN, THE NATIVE AND THE FOREIGN.

three children inhabit – a world of Montessori schools, Suzuki violin lessons, date nights at a sushi restaurant, shopping at the various national chain stores that have outlets in Greenville, and socializing with a culturally-diverse group of local friends that include Americans from all regions of the country, as well people from India, Pakistan, Senegal, Romania, China, and the United Kingdom.

Living in a country or a region far from home, one may expect a classic immersion experience of immigration. This was certainly my experience during summers spent in my father's native Ireland, where I was plunged into Irish culture, food, and values, all of which were markedly different from those of my Canadian home. Living in Greenville has not been like that for me. Certainly, there are differences. Politically, my views tend to be more liberal than many of those I meet in Greenville. I don't watch football or go to church, which makes me stand out from many of my fellow townspeople. My boys are the only males taking classes at the local dance studio. I would not say I feel "at home" here the way I did in Toronto.

At the same time, Greenville is not consistently foreign to me, either. Globalization, mass culture, and communication have had a tremendous impact here. While, geographically speaking, I may be an immigrant, Greenville itself has immigrated in a sense, moving much closer to Toronto and New Jersey than anyone in either place would imagine. My experience here as a Canadian, then, is not the immigration experience of imagination. Rather, it is a postmodern mix of the familiar and the alien, the native and the foreign.



PHOTOGRAPH BY JOHNNY BEBEAU



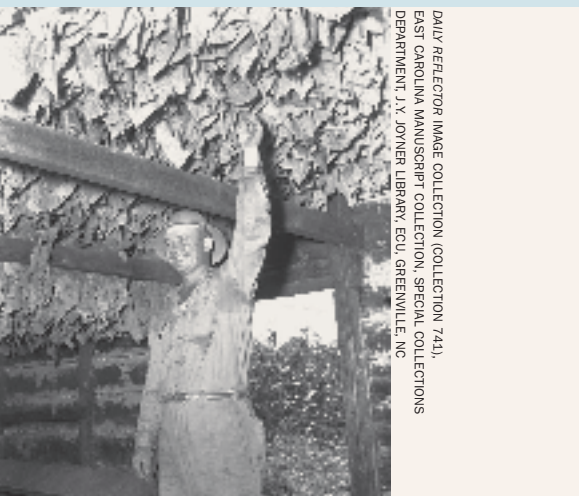
PHOTOGRAPH BY JOHNNY BEBEAU

The Apartment on the Tobacco Field

When I moved to Greenville, I rented an apartment in a brand new complex. Aimed at young professionals, it was built to an impressive standard of suburban American luxury, with walk-in closets, free wifi, a workout center, and a swanky outdoor swimming pool. Those who lived there were a polyglot assortment of medical residents, professors, and students. Hardly anyone was actually from North Carolina.



DAILY REFLECTOR IMAGE COLLECTION (COLLECTION 741), EAST CAROLINA MANUSCRIPT COLLECTION, SPECIAL COLLECTIONS DEPARTMENT, J.Y. JOYNER LIBRARY, ECU, GREENVILLE, NC



DAILY REFLECTOR IMAGE COLLECTION (COLLECTION 741), EAST CAROLINA MANUSCRIPT COLLECTION, SPECIAL COLLECTIONS DEPARTMENT, J.Y. JOYNER LIBRARY, ECU, GREENVILLE, NC

WE SAT TYPING EMAILS ON OUR COMPUTERS PERHAPS IN THE VERY SAME PLACE WHERE, FIFTY YEARS BEFORE, SOMEONE HAD HUNG TOBACCO LEAVES OUT TO DRY IN THE LATE SUMMER HEAT. AND YET THE PAST OF THIS SPACE, AS RICH AND STORIED AS IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN, WAS COMPLETELY UNKNOWN TO US.

The complex had been built on the site of a former tobacco field. Where we jogged on the treadmill, someone had once tilled the soil. We sat typing emails on our computers perhaps in the very same place where, fifty years before, someone had hung tobacco leaves out to dry in the late summer heat. And yet the past of this space, as rich and storied as it might have been, was completely unknown to us. Who had owned that field? What farm had it been a part of? Who had tilled and planted (and probably cursed) its soil? How and why had it come to be sold and developed? Where had they gone, the people who had once owned and worked this land?

None of us had any idea. There were no markers, no memorials, no architecture, no reminders of the land's former incarnations. Nor were there any neighbors native to Greenville whom we could ask. Surrounded by fields on either side, with only an abandoned farmhouse across the road, the complex was fairly isolated. Not that anyone in my apartment complex, caught up as we were in our busy, professional lives, had time to think about the history of the place. I only found out about the tobacco field when I once idly asked the manager why there were no mature trees on the property.

In those days, I was a single woman in my early thirties with dreams of a family and children. I don't suppose that many dating experts would regard moving to a small North Carolina town as a strategic move in the search for romance, but in this case, Greenville's globalized demographics proved the conventional wisdom wrong. In what I have come to regard as a classic new-Greenville occurrence, I met my future husband, another Canadian, on the dance floor of a local salsa event that I was attending with a Puerto Rican friend. Raj had moved to Greenville after being accepted into the residency program at the teaching hospital located in Greenville and allied with East Carolina's University's medical school (now Vidant Medical Center). He and I were both from Toronto and had both attended the University of Toronto as undergraduates, but we had no idea of that when we were randomly paired as partners during the salsa lesson that preceded the dance. Our first conversation went something like this:

Raj: Where are you from?

Me: Canada

Raj: Really? Me too!

Me: Where in Canada?

Raj: Toronto.

Me: Really? Me too! Where did you go to school?

Raj: University of Toronto

Me: Really? Me too!

ABOVE LEFT Photographs from the [Greenville] *Daily Reflector Image Collection* featuring (TOP) a tobacco field, June 1960, and (BOTTOM) a tobacco barn (man not identified), July 1954 (Digital Collections, ECU, J.Y. Joyner Library)



DAILY REFLECTOR IMAGE COLLECTION (COLLECTION 741, EAST CAROLINA MANUSCRIPT COLLECTION, SPECIAL COLLECTIONS DEPARTMENT, J.Y. JOHNER LIBRARY, ECU, GREENVILLE, NC)

It's been a long time since I moved away from my first Greenville home. After our marriage, Raj and I bought a house on the other side of town. But when I think about the life that we and our three children now live in Greenville, the image of that apartment complex built on a tobacco field seems an apt metaphor. For while Raj and I have lived in Greenville for more than a quarter of our lives and have marked some of our most momentous life-events here (our marriage certificate and all three of our children's birth certificates are filed at the Pitt County Courthouse), we have in many ways remained disconnected not only from the town's past, but from its present native communities. It was with shock one day that Raj and I counted up our friends and realized that *hardly any* of them are from the South (just two or three people) and even fewer from Eastern North Carolina. Instead, our Greenville friends come from a rather startling variety of locales: Pennsylvania, Maryland, New Jersey, the United Kingdom, Mexico, Israel, Senegal, India, New Zealand, Finland, Pakistan, and, of course, Canada.

WHAT WE SEE IN OUR SOCIAL CIRCLE IS A SYMPTOM OF GREENVILLE'S RAPID ECONOMIC EXPANSION OVER THE PAST THIRTY YEARS AND THE ENGINES THAT DRIVE IT.



PHOTOGRAPH BY JOHNNY BEBEAU

ABOVE Pitt County Courthouse, Greenville, NC, Nov. 1954 (TOP) and Jan. 2013 (BOTTOM)

It's not as if Raj and I have deliberately tried to hedge off our friendships from native-born North Carolinians. Rather, our social life reflects the demographic composition of the people with whom we work and live most closely. What we see in our social circle is a symptom of Greenville's rapid economic expansion over the past thirty years and the engines that drive it. Since the year 2000, Greenville's population has grown by forty percent, to eighty-six thousand people. Much of that growth has been driven by the medical and educational fields that dominate the town's economy. Vidant Medical Center, a level-one trauma hospital that serves the North Carolina population east of I-95, has grown from employing about two thousand people in the late 1980s, to over eight thousand people today. East Carolina University, also based in Greenville, has a fall 2012 enrollment of more than twenty-six thousand students and has been the fastest-growing school in the University of North Carolina system for six years.² The town itself could not possibly produce the number of professionals required to staff this growing system; therefore, much of professional Greenville is not native to the area.



² "Greenville at a Glance," *Community Development* (City of Greenville, NC, 10 July 2012) [web](#); "Economic History of Pitt County, 1690–2010" (Pitt County Development Commission, Oct. 2012) [web](#); *Fact Book, 2011–2012* (East Carolina University Office of Institutional Planning, Assessment, and Research), [web](#).

Like my friends, most of the people I encounter in daily life are not North Carolina born or raised. The obstetrician who delivered my children is from Austin, Texas. Our dentist is Jamaican. The contractor who built our deck is Mexican. We've had a couple of local babysitters but have also employed women from New York, Brazil, and Colombia for childcare. Inside the houses beside and across the street from me, only one person is from here, and that person, the child of South Asian immigrants, hardly fits the stereotype of the average Southerner. The rest of the neighbors we know hail from New Jersey, Texas, Romania, and China.

... ALTHOUGH I WOULD HESITATE TO MAKE A SWEEPING GENERALIZATION, I HAVE NOTICED THAT NORTH CAROLINIANS AS A GROUP TEND TO VALUE THE AVOIDANCE OF NEGATIVE PUBLIC CONFRONTATIONS MORE HIGHLY THAN CANADIANS AND MUCH MORE HIGHLY THAN MOST NEW JERSEY RESIDENTS.

This is why, when I talk to my Canadian friends about funny differences between North Carolina and Canada, I feel like something of a fake. My discomfort doesn't come from an inability to observe certain cultural differences. For example, although I would hesitate to make a sweeping generalization, I have noticed that North Carolinians as a group tend to value the avoidance of negative public confrontations more highly than Canadians and much more highly than most New Jersey residents. Canadians, and Americans from the Northeast are always amused by a story from my early life in the town when, having been distracted searching my purse for a set of keys, I accidentally sat on a green light in my car. I only realized my mistake when I looked up from my search to see the light turning red. With shock, I realized that although my car had remained motionless throughout the entirety of the green and then the yellow light, the person in the truck behind me did not honk his horn. He also did not in any way scowl or gesture rudely at me for having missed the light. When I caught his eye in the rearview mirror, his gaze was entirely neutral, as if nothing at all had happened. This was quite different from my experience in New Jersey, where even a millisecond of delay on a green light provoked a cacophony of horns.

It is also true that those reared in Eastern North Carolina tend to soften directives to a higher degree than those in Canada or the Northeastern US. "Why don't you go ahead and water that tree?" a landscaper once said to me when I asked him for advice about a yellowed and struggling oak in my front yard. His tone suggested that this might just be one possible option for me, something I would pop out and do on a whim, if I had a moment. In fact, the poor thing needed water so urgently that I should have been hauling out the hose right then and there. The oak episode is a case in point to illustrate how North Carolina sugarcoating has sometimes been a problem for me. Reared on the Canadian manner, which, while famously polite, is also more direct (A Canadian might have said, in a mild tone, "You know, you really should have been watering that tree."), I tend to take gentle directives more literally than they are intended. In the case of the oak, I assumed the landscaper actually meant that the whole watering thing was not that big

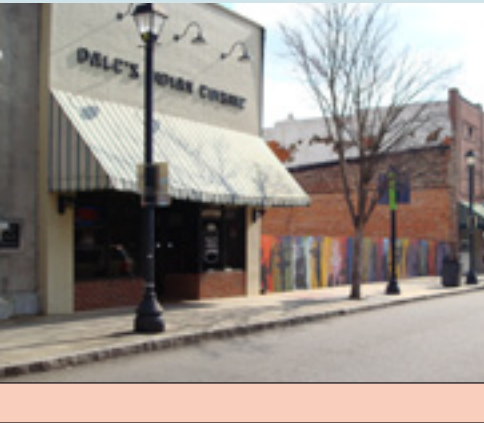


PHOTOGRAPH BY LINDA FOX

ABOVE LEFT A Hockney style photograph of Ledyard E. Ross Hall, home of the new ECU School of Dental Medicine, with, in the right panel, the Laupus Health Sciences Library and, in the distance on the far right, the Brody School of Medicine, Jan. 2013



PHOTOGRAPH BY NICOLE NOLAN SIDHU



PHOTOGRAPH BY JOHNNY BEBEAU

of a deal. The oak died, and it was only during a longer conversation with him during the unfortunate tree's removal that I figured out how desperately it had needed water. So, yes, I have definitely experienced cultural difference, but how much can I really claim an experience of North Carolina cultural immersion when the vast majority of those with whom I live and socialize come from somewhere else?

Of course, communities of North Carolina natives exist in the town; it's just that Raj's and my encounters with them are minimal. That fact was brought home to me this Halloween as Raj and I took our children trick-or-treating through the upper middle-class neighborhood where we'd moved after our marriage. As we approached one large house, a man pulled up in a golf cart and two girls dressed as princesses jumped off. The woman at the door greeted him by name in a marked North Carolina accent and he greeted her back in the same tones. The two joked about the golf cart, in which he had installed a makeshift heater in the front seats to ward off the chill of a fifty-degree evening (This, as much as his speech, was a sure sign that he was from North Carolina. To Canadians, the night would have been considered so balmy that you would probably have seen people trick-or-treating in shorts). At the next house, our golf-cart friend was similarly greeted by someone else with a marked Carolina accent. I stared at them in amazement. So there were people from here in this neighborhood! And they all knew each other!

That experience underlines the postmodern condition of living in Greenville – that the town is not in any way a unified or coherent place. Predominant ideas about small-town life in the South would suggest a kind of uniformity and unity to the experience. It should be like Scarlett O'Hara's Atlanta or Scout Finch's Maycomb – there would be only one town community, to which one had the choice of either fitting in or not. But in Greenville, this is not the case. There is not one Greenville, but many Greenvilles, intersecting and interacting with one another to be sure, but also existing as separate entities. This is how I have managed to have an active social life for the past decade without ever having to master the social graces that I know are highly valued by native North Carolinians – in a town with enough misfits, there's no need to fit in.

THERE IS NOT ONE GREENVILLE, BUT MANY GREENVILLES, INTERSECTING AND INTERACTING WITH ONE ANOTHER TO BE SURE, BUT ALSO EXISTING AS SEPARATE ENTITIES.



COURTESY OF NICOLE NOLAN SIDHU

Gay Bars and Garage Sales: Race and Segregation in my Greenville

Ethnically, my husband is South Asian and I am European. One of the things that strikes me deeply about the fact that our marriage took place in Pitt County, North Carolina, is that, less than forty-five years ago – indeed, just three years before the date of my own birth – our marriage would have been illegal here. It was only when, in 1967, the Supreme Court ruling on *Loving v. State of Virginia* struck down the constitutionality of miscegenation laws that marriages between a white person and any person of color (including South Asians) ceased to be a crime.

Race is the iconic issue related to the South. That connection has just recently been re-cemented in the national (and international) imagination by the popularity of Kathryn Stockett's 2009 novel *The Help* (made into a feature film in 2011). Life in my Greenville shows that racial segregation and a hierarchy that positions African Americans disproportionately at the bottom of the social and economic ladder are still issues in North Carolina. The character of that segregation has, however, changed. As is true of so many other facets of Greenville life, the town's race politics in the twenty-first century are much closer to the American Northeast than many Northerners are willing to admit.

Although the segregation of whites and African Americans has been outlawed for decades, it is, in my observation, still the dominant social practice in Greenville. One of the most disheartening sights I saw in my first semester of teaching at East Carolina University was a scene between classes on a nice day. There, on the university quad, groups of students sat or stood, talking animatedly with one another. These young people were, for the most part, rigidly segregated, black students in one group, standing next to another group that was almost uniformly white. The two groups were in no way hostile – indeed, they seemed for the most part to ignore each other – but their separation was clear.

Puzzled by the persistence of these divisions in what I had been told was the “post-racial” South, I asked my freshman composition students about black-white relations. Did they have friends of other races in high school? Do they now? For the most part, the answer was “no.” Many of the students expressed puzzlement over this fact and were disturbed by it, they said. Such segregation was not what they wanted, and yet they participated in it. The same can be observed about the many churches that populate Greenville, the vast majority of which break down along color lines. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said that the most segregated hour in Christian America was eleven o'clock on Sunday morning, and his statement still holds true for Greenville.

As much as I dislike it, that segregation also characterizes Raj's and my life. While our group of friends is, in many respects, diverse, including those who claim a variety of different national, ethnic, religious, racial, and sexual identities, it includes few African Americans. The fact that we have few close friends who are Black in an area where over a third of the population is African American is an index of how deeply racial divisions still mark Greenville.

ETHNICALLY, MY HUSBAND IS SOUTH ASIAN AND I AM EUROPEAN. ONE OF THE THINGS THAT STRIKES ME DEEPLY ABOUT THE FACT THAT OUR MARRIAGE TOOK PLACE IN PITT COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA, IS THAT, LESS THAN FORTY-FIVE YEARS AGO – INDEED, JUST THREE YEARS BEFORE THE DATE OF MY OWN BIRTH – OUR MARRIAGE WOULD HAVE BEEN ILLEGAL HERE.

ABOVE The author and her husband, Raj Sidhu, on the day of their Sikh wedding ceremony in Toronto, Canada, 2005

THE SAME HOLDS TRUE OF GARAGE SALES. . . . I CAN SAY THAT THEY, TOO, EXHIBIT SOCIAL INTEGRATION: HEAD OUT INTO GREENVILLE'S NEIGHBORHOODS ON A SATURDAY MORNING AND YOU WILL SEE RICH AND POOR PEOPLE OF ALL RACES AND ETHNICITIES STANDING IN DRIVEWAYS, HAGGLING OVER THE PRICE OF CARPETS, LAMPS, AND USED BABY DOLLS. A BARGAIN, IN GREENVILLE, KNOWS NO COLOR OR CREED.

Although no studies have been done of the social integration of blacks and whites in Greenville, the racial composition of the town's neighborhoods bears out my observation. According to CensusScope, an analysis of US census data by a social science group based at the University of Michigan, the average white person in Greenville lives in a neighborhood that is seventy percent white. The average African American lives in a neighborhood that is forty percent white. Segregation also marks Greenville's schools. Just recently, in May of 2012, a US Fourth Circuit Court of appeals found that Pitt County Schools had still not fully complied with desegregation orders issued by the courts in the 1970s.³

In my years in Greenville, I have noticed only two locales that seem completely and fully integrated – the local gay bar and garage sales. Going to the bar with one of my gay friends early on in my life in Greenville, I was struck by its utopian levels of racial integration. Everything that I had hoped to see around me, but had not, existed here as people of black, white, Latino, and Asian heritage mingled, danced, and drank overpriced cocktails together. The same holds true of garage sales. Having held and attended more than a few while in Greenville, I can say that they, too, exhibit social integration: head out into Greenville's neighborhoods on a Saturday morning and you will see rich and poor people of all races and ethnicities standing in

driveways, haggling over the price of carpets, lamps, and used baby dolls. A bargain, in Greenville, knows no color or creed.

But what underlies the continuing segregation of life in Greenville, and to what degree is it different from what is going on in the rest of the United

States? To begin with, my husband's and my experience suggests that Greenville's segregation is not carried out according to strict lines of color. Raj and I cannot recall a single instance of discrimination relating to our mixed marriage. Raj sometimes encounters ignorance about his culture and background, but incidents in which he has experienced overt racism are rare. Indeed, as a person of South Asian descent, Raj has experienced less racism in North Carolina than when he was growing up in Toronto in the 1980s, when negative attitudes to South Asians deriving from the ideology of British colonialism were still influential among white, English-speaking Canadians.

Instead, what I observe about our life and the life of other professionals I know in the town is that the segregation is primarily economic.



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PHOTOGRAPH BY LINDA FOX

As professionals in a former tobacco town that has transformed itself into a medical and educational hub, we live alongside another Greenville, one that suffers from inadequate funding for education, poverty, and joblessness. The same globalization that has benefited us has devastated this other Greenville, hollowing out the prosperity of its agricultural sector and moving its textile manufacturing jobs overseas. The same town that boasts a thirty-six percent portion of highly educated residents also has a poverty rate that stands at a shocking thirty percent – a proportion far above the US national average of less than fourteen per cent. And poverty, in Greenville, is not color blind, affecting a disproportionate number of African Americans. The neighborhood of West Greenville, where more than eighty-five percent of residents are African American, has a poverty rate of forty-two percent.⁴

I have said that in terms of lifestyle, Greenville and the American Northeast are much closer than one might think. This proximity also applies to the patterns of racialized economic segregation. One might assume that New York would show lower levels of segregation in its neighborhoods than Greenville, but that assumption would be wrong. Data collected by the University of Michigan's CensusScope shows that New York neighborhoods are actually *more* segregated. Using what is called a "dissimilarity index," CensusScope tracks the segregation between two racial groups by measuring their relative distributions across neighborhoods within an urban area. A score of one hundred on the dissimilarity index indicates complete segregation: a score of zero indicates complete integration. According to the group's latest statistics, New York City has a dissimilarity index of 85.3. Greenville's dissimilarity index is 58.1.⁵

AS PROFESSIONALS IN A FORMER TOBACCO TOWN THAT HAS TRANSFORMED ITSELF INTO A MEDICAL AND EDUCATIONAL HUB, WE LIVE ALONGSIDE ANOTHER GREENVILLE, ONE THAT SUFFERS FROM INADEQUATE FUNDING FOR EDUCATION, POVERTY, AND JOBLESSNESS.

ABOVE LEFT **Pitt County Memorial Hospital, Greenville, circa 1960**

ABOVE RIGHT **Vidant Medical Center, Greenville, Jan. 2013**

⁴ "Greenville, North Carolina: The West Greenville Neighborhood," in *The Enduring Challenge of Concentrated Poverty in America: Case Studies from Across the US* (Community Affairs Offices of the Federal Reserve System and the Brookings Institution, 2008) [web](#).

⁵ "Segregation Exposure and Dissimilarity Measures," [CensusScope web](#).

Why New York City is more racially segregated than Greenville is a question beyond the bounds of this essay. What one can say, however, is that the current state of race relations in the United States can no longer be characterized in terms of the opposition that fueled the Great Migration, when the cities of the North beckoned as beacons of relative equality to those suffering the injustices of the Jim Crow South. One can also say that the continuance of racial segregation in both the Northern and the Southern United States will never be ameliorated if Americans persist in the assumption that the South is the part of America with the most severe racial problems and that other parts of the country are relatively more progressive. And yet this is precisely the kind of view that is affirmed by a novel like *The Help*, wherein the heroine escapes the racism of the South by moving to New York City. In terms of race, the story that our lives in Greenville tell is of a continuing segregation and disempowerment of African Americans that persists even as a diverse and polyglot community of prosperous professionals grows and thrives in its midst.



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New Identities

After my five-year-old son, Ciaran, stayed overnight with her recently, my stepmother took me aside. Her face betrayed amazement, perhaps even shock. “Did you know,” she said, “that Ciaran speaks sometimes with a Southern accent? And not just a little bit. I mean, it’s really quite strong!”

It’s true. Ciaran does occasionally speak with a pronounced North Carolina accent. Given the fact that he was born in Greenville and has lived the entirety of his five and a half years here, perhaps the more surprising thing is that he does not speak this way all the time. Instead, Ciaran’s normal speech falls into what one might call

generic, mid-Atlantic, North American tones, derived most likely from listening to his Canadian parents, his various babysitters, and the American accents of children’s TV. Still, at least once or twice a day, Ciaran will utter a phrase or two in a North Carolina accent.

Much of Ciaran’s dominant mode of speech signifies the world I have been describing in this essay – the multinational, globalized professional Greenville. His periodic forays into North Carolina speech, however, signify his connection to North Carolina’s past and its native-born citizens, a connection far more intimate and constant than the ones Raj and I



PHOTOGRAPH BY NICOLE NOLAN SIDHU

IN TERMS OF
RACE, THE STORY
THAT OUR LIVES
IN GREENVILLE
TELL IS OF A
CONTINUING
SEGREGATION AND
DISEMPOWERMENT
OF AFRICAN
AMERICANS THAT
PERSISTS EVEN
AS A DIVERSE
AND POLYGLOT
COMMUNITY OF
PROSPEROUS
PROFESSIONALS
GROWS AND
THRIVES IN
ITS MIDST.

have had. This is because Ciaran and his two younger siblings attend a Montessori preschool owned and operated by native North Carolinians. Ciaran's teacher, and the school's owner, Benita Mattheis, was born and raised in North Carolina, but lest I persist in the illusion of locating small town authenticity in her, I should not that Ms. Mattheis is as cosmopolitan as anyone. With a degree in education, she's an expert in an educational system created by an Italian physician and currently runs a school whose student body includes probably most of the nationalities and ethnicities that inhabit professional Greenville.

As a rule, I'm not one for gurus, preferring relationships of equality, rather than worship. If, however, I did have a guru, it would be Ms. Mattheis, whose child-rearing advice actually works and whose insights on education I have frequently applied to my own college-level teaching. One of the things I admire about Ms. Mattheis is that she has held true to her North Carolina accent. "Red" is still very much a two-syllable word in Ms. Mattheis's utterance, and "will," which a Canadian would pronounce to rhyme with "ill," sounds like "wheel" when Ms. Mattheis says it. Needless to say, when it rains, Ms. Mattheis does not reach for her um-BRE-lla, like a Canadian would, she pops open her UM-bre-lla. And if you're talking about protecting your car or home? That would be IN-sur-ance for Ms. Mattheis, not in-SUR-ance, as Raj and I would say.

When our children, *Canadian* children in our minds, were very young, just learning to speak, Raj and I used to be amused to hear them pronounce words like "down" and "ten" with two syllables. And, of course, their umbrellas always had the emphasis on the first syllable. They thought it was odd that Raj and I didn't say it that way.

As I watch my children grow up in this small North Carolina town, I wonder how they will reflect on the issues I have raised here and how they, in their turn, will contribute to the character of the region. I have said that my social circle does not include many people "from here." My family circle, however, includes quite a few. With their Punjabi-Canadian-Sikh-Irish mix, my three children are all also, of course, native North Carolinians. As authentic (and inauthentic) as anyone in Greenville. ■



PHOTOGRAPH BY NICOLE NOLAN SIKHU

ABOVE LEFT The author's children, Ciaran, Sitara, and Naveen, "Punjabi-Canadian-Sikh-Irish . . . native North Carolinians"

ABOVE RIGHT The Sidhu family, 2012



COURTESY OF GREGG WARD PHOTOGRAPHY, INC., CHOCOWINITY, NC

To see more photographs of Greenville, NC, through the years, see the Seeds of Change: *The Daily Reflector Image Collection* in ECU's Joyner Library Digital Collections.

North Carolina, This Will Be The Last Poem

BY SAMANTHA LEE DEAL

2012 JAMES APPLEWHITE POETRY PRIZE FINALIST

I'll write for you, because there's no trying
to tell you anything you don't already know
and I think you like it when I can't think about you

without thinking about my mother
changing sheets and the sweeping lift
of her arms and the slow float of the fabric.

You know how we left things. I moved to Boston
with you dragging behind me like a shadow at noon
on the summer solstice in Alaska.

I missed you all the time and I won't explain it
because it will sound like everything you've heard before
but do you remember what Jeffrey looked like

blowing smoke out his crooked sidewalk smile
and laughing when I tried to explain about us.
Oh, he said, *you miss crickets*. He's married now

and I think that time has to exist
because he wasn't married then
and because our white cat died by the same pond

where I used to catch crawdads. My mother said it took a full day
for the cat to go. It took Uncle Charlie two years
and I can say that all this happened

while I was gone, but I can't say I forgive you.
I'm fairly certain it's because of you that my sadness is never
appropriate. You know how the grass burns

out in the piedmont in August? I know people who want to die
like that, because surviving's not the same
as living and nothing about you is the same



Listening Vessel, 2009 (gum over platinum/palladium, 16x16) by Diana H. Bloomfield

since I came back from Boston. I keep noticing broken doorknobs.
This morning I cried because there was a tiny crack in my cereal bowl
and because my joints hurt. I can feel the weather change

before the temperature drops. I might have forgotten
how to pray. I can't stop thinking about that winter of yours
in 1998 when it didn't get above 20 degrees for 39 days

but it never snowed. Lately, I understand
that kind of disappointment. You don't get cold like that
anymore and I'm tired of always feeling my face.

Remember that boy I loved, the one that didn't grow up with you?
I used to think I could feel the dead skin of my scarred leg
as his fingers trailed along the missing nerves.

SAMANTHA LEE DEAL is originally from Boone, NC, and graduated from UNC-Chapel Hill with Honors in creative writing. Her work has appeared in *The Cellar Door* and *Cold Mountain Review*. She received honorable mention in the 2011 Summer Literary Seminars Contest. Currently, she is pursuing an MFA in creative writing at UNC-Wilmington.

Raleigh resident **DIANA H. BLOOMFIELD** received her MA in English literature and Creative Writing from North Carolina State University. An internationally exhibited photographer, she has won numerous awards for her work in solo and group exhibitions, and she has received Regional Artist Grants from the United Arts of Raleigh. Her photographs have appeared in such publications as *Pinhole Photography: Rediscovering a Historic Technique* (Focal Press, 2004), *Pinhole Journal*, and *Diffusion*. She has taught photography at NCSU's Craft Center and at Duke University's Center for Documentary Studies, and she now teaches private workshops. She is represented by Adam Cave Fine Art in Raleigh. See more of her work on her [website](#).

THE SHOWER

BY RONALD JACKSON

with art by Robert Tynes

**I HELD TIGHT, SMELLED THE
SKIN ON HER NECK AND THE
OILS IN HER HAIR, WHICH I'D
DREAMED ABOUT EVERY NIGHT
OVER THERE WHENEVER MY
HEAD HIT THE PILLOW. HER SCENT
MEANT HOME TO ME.**

Durham native **RONALD JACKSON** has been writing in North Carolina for twenty years. His career includes stints as a sports feature writer for a Philadelphia weekly, marketing writer, ghostwriter for trade journal articles, web copywriter, and speechwriter. A trade article won a Bell South annual award for journal placements. He recently turned his attention to two of his lifetime loves, fiction and poetry. "The Shower" is his first submitted story after two years of intensive learning in a noted Hillsborough writing group, where he honed his craft under the guidance of two newly published novelists and five other exceptional writers.

2012 Doris Betts Fiction Prize finalist

I sit alone in my booth at the Reveille Café, watch Marla wave goodbye from the front counter. She looks like crap, cried for an hour over a bottomless cup of coffee. That's what happens when you get in over your head with someone, not that my record is clean on that count. She got worked up, begged me to tell her something about myself, anything. So I let loose for once, talked about my tour in Afghanistan, about Fiona and me, about the peculiar afternoon we had at the baby shower.

She asked about my lifestyle. I don't go with men. Marla was cool, said some nice things. I don't go with women lately either. I've been a loner too long now. We agreed to meet back here for brunch on Saturday. Just friends, I'm thinking. As the door closed on her back, I bobbed my tea bag in the hot water, coaxing one more cup out of it as I reviewed our conversation.

Afghanistan. Easy to live lean there. Every week, a new focus. Every day, an adrenaline rush. My first mission, clearing a six-block area in Kandahar, I'd managed to act like a professional soldier, be in the right place most of the time. From there, the men took me as someone good to go, had their backs, not just some girl. The daily effort had forced a toughness on me I didn't know I had.

Back here in the world? Different story. My last year at Bragg had all the joy of going home to an empty apartment after the State Fair. Talk about losing focus. Correct that. I had one focal point, and looking back, it wasn't a wholly rewarding one. More pain than gain, much as I hate to say that about Fiona.

The flight home from Afghanistan, I'd wondered if I was leaving the tough girl back there. Waiting for the connecting flight at Gatwick, I jumped a foot when a dark-haired boy tapped me on the shoulder, asked if I was a soldier or wearing a make-believe costume. I told him it was both most times. On the

Explaining her selection of this story as a finalist, *NCLR* Fiction Editor Liza Wieland describes "The Shower" as "a refreshing take on the contemporary soldier's story. Here the soldier is a woman returned home and wondering how to connect with her female friends. The writing is acutely descriptive, close to the bone. The term 'surgical strike' comes to mind: I get what's important. At the end of the story, I feel I know Babs and her friends and understand the complications of their lives."

This story's veteran protagonist anticipates *NCLR's* 2014 special feature section topic: war in North Carolina literature. See the [submissions](#) page of our website for submission guidelines and deadlines.



Acceptance & Denial (acrylic and oil on canvas, 48x66) by Robert Tynes

flight to Raleigh, I couldn't eat. I descended the escalator to baggage claim in my own little fog. At the center of the waiting crowd, coming into view, she stood out like a magnolia blossom. She'd cut her hair and added amber highlights to her caramel blonde, spiked it out. As I stepped off, her silver-blue eyes looked right into the heart of me and a smile slid slowly over her face. She wore a white top, open at the midriff. The platinum double-helix belly ring I'd given her at the same airport eighteen months before decorated her navel. A tall blonde man hovered behind her.

I held tight for a moment, but a great ball of something rose up. My smile erupted, the kind that takes over your face, stretches out into the world. I'd walked many marathons over there, but I could not get my legs under me to reach her with any dignity.

"Feenie." A whisper was all I could get out as I leaned, nearly fell, into her. We stood for long moments. I held tight, smelled the skin on her neck and the oils in her hair, which I'd dreamed about every night over there whenever my head hit the pillow. Her scent meant home to me.

ROBERT TYNES is a Professor of Art in Painting and Drawing at UNC-Asheville, where he also serves as Director of the S. Tucker Cooke Gallery. Born in Chicago, he grew up in Alabama and spent summers as a child in the North Carolina mountains. He received his MFA in Painting from ECU. He has had over twenty-five solo exhibitions of his work and has participated in more than 150 group shows across the US. He is the recipient of several artist-in-residence grants and has completed large-scale commissions for IBM Corporation's Field Engineering Headquarters in Atlanta and the city of Charlotte's Convention Center, among others. See more of his work on his [website](#).

Fiona let out a long breath and purred her familiar *mmmmm*. She drew back, gripped my shoulders, and pushed me to arm's length.

"Look at you, Babette. Best friend. Home safe."

We drank each other in at arm's length, and then she put her palm to her mouth with a shriek.

"Babs, this is Toby. Sweets, you finally get to meet Babs."

And he was nice, in a professional sort of way. You know the guy. Khaki slacks, oxford shirt, hand-shake all business, nice smile. That brought me back to solid ground quick. I had to work to stay connected while we fished for my bags and walked to their car.

"I'm going to need you, girl. Six weeks to the wedding."

"I'm yours, Feenie. Always."

She kept smiling.

The year and three months since had passed slowly – thank God for *Housewives of New Jersey*. This morning, I'd kept Fiona busy over a long catch-up brunch at the Reveille, while Beth and Marla, Fiona's other BFFs, prepared her house for the baby shower. Toby covered for us. Fiona had no clue, just about dropped her baby when she walked in the door.

When the gift-giving got underway, Beth grabbed command from Marla, who had stood to present her gift. "You first, Marla," Beth shouted and came alongside her, channeling Pat Sajak. Marla looked sideways, paused like she was about to shake her head, caught herself, and presented her gift to Fiona. Then Beth proceeded to reach into the pile, read off names, hand gift boxes over. I'd slumped into the least-cluttered chair, legs tossed over an armrest, balanced my Diet Coke on the other, and looked on from my little world.

The earliest party I remember, Mom had invited my fourth-grade class on my birthday. I'd spent the first half-hour hiding in my bedroom closet. Dad ordered me out, but I refused, read *Misty of Chincoteague* by flashlight. Mom brought Fiona in to talk to me. Sitting in darkness, I heard her voice for the first time, calling out, "Babette?" Mom hinted at my birthday present through the door – I'd wanted a Snowball Furby – and I entered the family room with legs locked, propelled by Dad's huge palms on my back and led by Fiona's tiny hand. I locked my eyes on her back, which strained forward as she towed me into the world. I haven't made much progress since, as Beth reminded me.

After gifts and cake, all but Fiona's inner circle made their way home. The four of us sat in the

living room. Beth took a long swallow from her glass, set her sights on me. “Babette Embrey. You stop slouching and join the festivities. Fiona has her first baby only once. No wallflowers allowed!” She smiled, made light of it.

I smiled back. “Best friends since fourth grade, Miss Beth. I’m no party animal.”

“But you haven’t had any cake, sweetie. Is that honoring Fiona?”

“I honor my own way. Excuse me, going to the little girl’s room.” Fiona looked up at me as I passed, gave me her take-it-easy face.

In the bathroom, I pinned my ear to the door before I sat down. Beth was still at it.

“You think she’d lay off the health kick for a day. The cake’s for you, Fiona, and she’s not joining in? What’s that about? And what’s with the fem look? One day Rambo, next day, sex goddess?”

Fiona’s voice slowed down, the way it did when she got irritated. “Okay, Beth. First, Babs hardly eats sweets at all. And second, she’s half hottie, half tomboy, always has been. You’ve been around long enough to know that.

“Tomboy? Is that what you call it?”

Matter of fact, that is what Fiona called me. On our first ski trip together, junior year at Cape Fear High, I’d made it halfway down the slope at Snowshoe Mountain a good minute ahead of her, stood off the trail among some trees. She’d seen me from a distance and labored to slow down, plowed hard into me, pinned me to a tree. We locked for a few moments before we both cracked up, could not stop laughing, even when a crowd of boys came catcalling by.

“You freaking tomboy!” she’d shouted. “You teach me to ski, hear? I need to keep up with you.”

“All right, head start this time. I count to thirty and last one to the bottom gives the other a foot rub. One . . . two . . .”

Her eyes widened, and she grinned as she took off. I counted to forty-five, watched her every second of the way as I closed the distance. Having her tight against me woke something up in me I’d had at the back of my mind for a long time. Seeing her work down the slope, I was sure for the first time. I went slow.

When I returned to the living room, the trio had moved to the dining room to honor Fiona’s bun in the oven the way close-knit Southern ladies do. Around the table. Except for little old Babs, camped on the sofa, listening to the Veronicas on my iPhone,

stewing, sorting out how I fit in here. Whether I fit in at all.

I scanned the living room. Looked like a battlefield. Shredded tissue. Onesies stacked like field dressings. A rattle peeked from under some tissue like a ticking grenade. A baby bouncer dangled in the kitchen doorjamb, ready to launch Fiona’s baby into her future. Blankies draped the armrests of two wing chairs and the back of the fancy sofa I’d plunked my butt onto.

I laid myself down cheek to cushion, ogled the last piece of Fiona’s cake from ground level. It sat plump and yellow in its tray on the coffee table. Birthday cake never appealed to me, but I looked at it differently now. A sloping carpet of white icing covered it like snow, and Babette the tomboy whooshed down on her skis, mouth open to the cold air, not caring where the path led, as long as Fiona was there. Moist crumbs and a bubbling of bright drippings spread at the bottom, like drifting snow.

A familiar titter floated from the dining room and I raised my head. Fiona’s delicate laugh had held true since fourth grade, hovered in the house like wind chimes. I listened around the wall to Marla groan, politely of course. Beth Nielsen had rolled out the same joke she’d told at Fiona’s wedding. Bill Clinton and Tiger Woods on the golf course, swapping sexcapades, something like that.

I looked back at the mess. Did my sweet mother go through this? She’d never mentioned a shower. Would my father have allowed it? He of the starched fatigues, six stripes, the high and tight cut? He’d offer no reliable information on that, even if

COLLECTION OF THE ARTIST



Marked Occurrence (acrylic and oil on canvas, 48x66) by Robert Tynes

**HAVING HER TIGHT AGAINST ME WOKE
SOMETHING UP IN ME I'D HAD AT THE BACK OF
MY MIND FOR A LONG TIME. . . . I WENT SLOW.**

I drove the hundred miles down to Lejeune tomorrow and asked him, which I won't, for sure. Christmas, Thanksgiving, when I have to. But show up to chitchat? That train's pulled out.

I'd have a better chance getting an answer at Montlawn in Raleigh, where Mom rests her bones under wheat-colored Zoysia and a nondescript headstone selected by Master Sergeant Nathan Embrey, her caring husband. **BRENDA EMBREY.** 1958–2008. Talk about sound bites, tweets, and the like. A life. Reduced to name and date.

I'd nodded off. Rose from the sofa to the sound of the front door clicking shut. Fiona came in from the dining room, put a smile on my face. "Feenie Portman, I really am happy for you."

"I'm happy for me, too. Does it show?"

"Bet your ass it does. You glow, girl."

Fiona tossed her head back and laughed. Her hair flowed long today, bounced off her shoulders.

"How about you? What's got you edgy?"

"Not good company, that's for sure."

"Don't mind Beth. She's going through some stuff. Hey, seen Marla?"

"Someone just went out the front."

Fiona scanned the living room. "Look at this mess," she said, a faraway, thin-lipped smile I hadn't seen before growing on her face. She tuned me out, seemed to be picturing something beyond the room, maybe a life unfolding among the gifts. She squatted down for a onesie, shook it out, and draped it over the countertop of her rounded tummy. Looked over to me and smiled big again.

"What do you think? Good fit?"

"Perfect fit, Feenie. You're going to be the world's best mom."

Her eyes moved slowly around the room, then fixed back on me. "Ooh! See that kick? She made the onesie bounce, swear to God!"

I hadn't seen it, watched as she placed her hand on the onesie, feeling for more. She walked over and sat down next to me on the sofa. Picked up my hand and placed it on the onesie. Through the cotton, her tummy felt taut, like a big balloon. She cupped my hand firmly to the roundness, eyes scanning

around with that inward look you get when you're feeling something in your own body. I was about to pull my hand away when there it was. A tremor – a foot, I imagined – kicking out just for a second.

"There she goes!" she said, and her face broadened into an alert happiness. "I am so glad you felt it. So glad you could be here with me." Before I could reply, her face scrunched. "Yikes! Got to pee."

I watched her scamper to the bathroom. Her contentment sat true in her, and it hit me that this was the most intimate moment we'd shared for many years.

The sound of a car starting up caught my ear. I walked to the broad window at the front of the house. Outside, a misty rain thickened the air, and Marla's large, black SUV pulled out, driver's window open, floated down the street like a hearse in a funeral procession. I watched, pulled along by her easy progress down a corridor of ranch and traditional homes, until she disappeared around the corner. What was going on there? I turned back to the mess, tuned into the conversation in the other room. Heard the tail end of something about children.

I heard a car stop outside and looked out again. Marla parking the SUV. I let myself out the front door, circled the car to the driver's side. "Marla? What's up?"

She lurched forward, looked over at me.

I came to the window. "Anything I can do?"

"I need to talk. Don't stand out there, please. Come around."

I went around and got in. The car was warm, even with the window open.

"All ears."

The story came slow, bits and pieces knitted together as she went along. It came to this: Last summer, she'd sat down at a table at the Starbucks over at the mall. A guy at the next table made a comment. She couldn't remember what, but it seemed as natural as nodding to a neighbor, and so did the conversation that followed. Turned out they stopped there to relax on the same day each

**I WAS ABOUT TO PULL MY HAND AWAY
WHEN THERE IT WAS. A TREMOR –
A FOOT, I IMAGINED – KICKING OUT
JUST FOR A SECOND.**

WERE ALL BABY SHOWERS THIS STRANGE?**WEIRD BABY RITUALS, TROUBLED WOMEN****FLOATING ABOUT, INSIDE AND OUT.**

week, and it became a regular thing. And they had the same passion – gardening.

“We never ran out of words. Stories, thoughts and feelings about our gardens,” she said, and her eyes glistened like the misty world outside the car. “Moments of solitude in the back yard, his lantana, my knockouts, just the bees to keep us company. It made me happy.” She paused for several moments, her eyes focused on the world in front of her. “I’ve never had much chance to share that with someone. Babs, I looked forward to those meetings, and hoped he did also. It touched some forgotten part of me. Maybe the thing that takes me to the garden in the first place.”

After the first two months, when they’d established they were both married and the boundaries seemed clear, they began texting, letting each other know when they’d be there, abbreviated comments on some flower they were thinking of bringing in.

Over the last weeks, the unreality of it had worn her down, and she came to understand there wasn’t any future in it. Nothing had happened other than meeting and texting, but the attachment had come on too strong, and she felt she owed him an explanation. She’d left the party to tell the man they had to stop meeting. Only she couldn’t get up the courage and had been circling the neighborhood, trying to work it through.

“You’re going to his place? What about his family?”

“That’s the kicker. It’s Beth’s husband, Dennis. Beth is inside right now, going on about him, how she’s sure he’s having an affair. She knows he’s preoccupied with something. I have to end it, but can’t think what to say.”

I thought how tongue-tied I got whenever I imagined telling Fiona how I really felt.

“Listen girl. You can’t know what to say. Just go. Make an ass of yourself if you have to. But go now, tell him it’s over.”

Some of the tension in her face softened. All of a sudden she said she had to go, then tapped me on the shoulder as I turned away.

“I feel about as alone as you can feel. I can’t tell you how much you helped.”

With that she leaned over, laid her cheek close to mine and hugged me warmly.

“You seem like a good person. I can see why Fiona is fond of you.” She pursed her lips and leaned toward me. For a moment, I thought I was going to get it right on the lips, but as she moved closer, she made a course correction, kissed me on the cheek, the kind of kiss that means thanks, you’re special.

She leaned back and sized me up. “You busy later? Can you meet me at the Reveille for more therapy?”

“Sure. How’s eight o’clock?”

“You’re a life saver. Now get out. I have to do this fast.”

I was out in a second, watched her pull away with some purpose. I slipped in the front door, returned to the sofa. Were all baby showers this strange? Weird baby rituals, troubled women floating about, inside and out. And what was that kiss about?

My last meaningful kiss was in Afghanistan. Off a desert road, two of us sat under a moonless night-sky, passing time. Part of a platoon surveiling a highway known for IEDs. Cheeser was listening to some country shit, the twang leaked from his ear buds. He pulled them off and looked over.

“You lonesome here, Babsy?”

“What the fuck you talking about?”

“Not here tonight. I mean in the Stan. You’re eye Snickers to these grunts. Ever been tempted?”

I drew my head back, glared over. He made cringey eyes, looked away. “Shit. You get that all the time.”

He unclasped his Batman belt and let it drop. Pulled his canteen from the holster, let it rest in his lap. “This gear, you think it’s heavy?”

Cheeser’s didn’t seem all there today. I shrugged. “Lots of shit to carry.”

He shook his head. “Being away from home? It’s heavier.”

I put on my respect face. Like you do in one of those relationship seminars where you’re paired off, someone is telling you their story, risking a lot.

Cheeser cleared his throat. “I haven’t kissed a girl in two years. My mother don’t count. My sister? She don’t count double.”

I shifted my ass.

He fixed his gaze on the highway. “I’d like to kiss you. Kiss a hot girl one time.”

That stopped me. If it were anyone but Cheeser, I’d have smacked his head. But he was the real deal. Old-fashioned manners you’ll find in country boys sometimes. He’d called me ma’am first time we

met. I had to remind him that was how you address women officers, not correct protocol for a fellow grunt. Was Cheeser going goofy on me? I shrugged, made the what-the-fuck face.

“Okay,” I said.

Cheeser nodded, took a swig from his canteen. Worked his tongue around his lips. Slipped off his Boonie cap the offhand way we had, slapping at a gnat. Leaned toward me business-like and lifted mine off. My hair fell over my face and I eyed him up through it. I began breathing harder, too. Not the hots for Cheeser. More that he was getting ready for something big and I was his leading lady. He leaned further, pressed his hair against my brow, let the weight of his forehead grow against me until he rested easy. Our breath mingled, and I drew the warmth of it in through my nostrils, thought of Fiona, shamed to say.

I squared my head as he gently brushed his lips on mine and finished with a plink, a drop of water separating from a faucet. He drew back and breathed through his mouth for a minute, not wanting to lose the taste of it, I guess.

“Thanks,” he whispered as softly as the kiss.

“You’re welcome. Embrace the suck, Cheeser. Only way to get through Groundhog Day.”

That kiss? Under the stars that shine over in Kandahar and right here in Fayetteville? That gets the Silver Medal. If kisses were birds, that was a hummingbird. Something soft and floating in the world, not all weight and burden. You could make some crazy-ass connection in the most God-forsaken place. Maybe it was something similar with Marla.

I rose from the sofa, carried the cake tray into the kitchen, set it on the counter. Fiona was washing dishes. “Leave them for Tony,” I said.

“Care to help? Get done quicker.”

“Can’t. Headed out to the Reveille with Marla.”

She rinsed the dish, placed it in the drain board, then turned and gazed at me for a long moment. “You guys socialize?”

“She needs a shoulder to cry on. Talk to you this weekend, munchkin.”

“Okie-dokie,” she said and motioned with her head toward the dining room where Beth sat by herself. She turned back to the dishes.

Her back put me in mind of the time when she’d hauled me into my birthday party. She worked her elbows and hands, removed something from a dish looked like crusted icing. She raised it to the light, inspected, returned it to the water, scrubbed again.

I fished out a knife from the dinnerware drawer, picked up the tray, and stepped into the dining room. Beth lowered her eyes to the last piece of cake.

“Babette, sweetie, what’s this?”

“I was going to eat it myself, but I thought we’d share. Peace?”

She shouted “Peace!”

I sat down and cut the piece into two small slivers. As we stuffed our mouths, Beth’s eyes teared up.

“What’s wrong?”

“He’s with her,” she whispered.

“Who’s with who?”

“Dennis. My husband. He’s with someone. I know it. He’s been seeing her for months.”

I came around in front of Beth, held her by the shoulders, and locked her gaze.

“What?” she said.

“Don’t live like this. You’re going home tonight to confront him.”

“What do I say? I want to kill him. We were planning a family.”

“Walk in and start moving your lips. Shoot the elephant.”

“What?”

“The elephant in the room.” As I explained, Beth nodded through her tears. After a minute, she looked up at me.

“Yes,” she said. “But I’m scared.” She got up. “It’s now or never.”

I thought of Marla, tried to hold onto to Beth’s shoulders. “Calm down first. Have a cup of tea.”

But she was already moving toward the front door. ■



Drawn Conclusions (acrylic and oil on canvas, 48x66) by Robert Tynes

COLLECTION OF CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL OF ALABAMA, BIRMINGHAM, AL

New Works by Some Old Friends

Margaret D. Bauer, Editor

More and more, we are discovering that the book reviews that *NCLR* publishes are appropriate for this section of *NCLR Online* as authors whose works are selected for publication in *NCLR* go on to write books that are selected for review. Our flashbacks for this issue feature reviews of numerous poetry collections, including a volume by former North Carolina Poet Laureate – and *NCLR* devotee – Kathryn Stripling Byer; two volumes by regularly featured writer Robert Morgan; and another by the first recipient of our own James Applewhite Poetry Prize, John Thomas York. Also reviewed: two fiction volumes that include stories first published in *NCLR* (authors Steve Mitchell and Charles Dodd White); a new novel by Charles Frazier, whose previous books have been written about in *NCLR*, who shared an essay with us in 2012, and who has been interviewed for our 2013 print issue; and a nonfiction novel by regular *NCLR* contributor Bland Simpson. And still more reviews (with even more coming in the North Carolina Miscellany section).

So, too, do many of the state's literary award stories seem appropriate for the Flashbacks section: some awards or recipients reflect themes we have featured in past issues; other recipients are multiple award winners, and, again, they are old friends of *NCLR*, having generously shared their talent with our readers in previous issues.

And speaking of old friends, this issue's flashbacks also include poetry by literary icons James Applewhite and Fred Chappell, who have appeared in several past issues. You'll be able to read more poetry by both in the forthcoming print issue, too.

Poems by two of the 2012 Applewhite Poetry Prize competition finalists are in this section: Susan Laughter Meyers, who is becoming a regularly featured poet in *NCLR*, and Richard Betz, whom we are publishing for the first time, but whose poem is appropriate for this section because it hearkens back to our popular 2010 Appalachian issue. In addition,

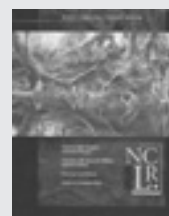
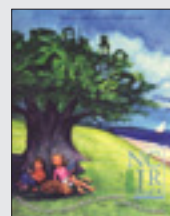
another of the 2012 Betts Fiction Prize honorable mention stories is here because it marks the third time the author, Gregg Cusick, has had his submission selected for publication in *NCLR*.

Bringing to mind last year's special feature section on North Carolina Literature into Film, see in these pages an interview with our own fiction editor, Liza Wieland, and filmmaker Mary Kate Monahan, who adapted one of Liza's short stories into a short film. We thank Tanya Nichols for providing this opportunity for our readers to "hear" from Liza. (Regular readers might recall that back in 2007, we included an interview with our poetry editor.)

Also in the 2012 issue (in the North Carolina Miscellany section), we published Fred Chappell's opening reception remarks about the [Stuart Wright Collection](#) in ECU's Joyner Library. Here, you will learn more about this amazing new source of archival research about, largely but not exclusively, writers of the Southern Renaissance. I thank my colleague Thomas Douglass for understanding our last-minute decision before press-time for the 2012 print issue to hold his essay for *NCLR Online* so that it might reach as broad an audience as possible. I call readers' attention to the Wright Collection's catalog and invite those who explore the materials about North Carolina writers represented in the collection – Randall Jarrell and Fred Chappell, for example – to submit their findings to *NCLR* for publication consideration.

Surrounding this introduction are covers of the various issues in which you can find writing related to or by the authors featured in this section. We invite readers to explore the tables of contents of these issues on our [website](#) to find their work – and so much more. And remember that all of our back issues are [available for purchase](#). Please help us to empty our storage closet by ordering the issues you don't yet have in your own library – or by buying a complete set of *NCLR* issues for a public library near you. ■

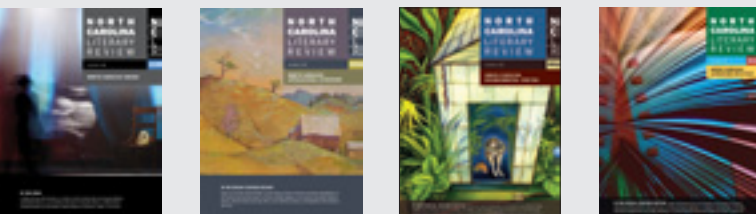
RIGHT *NCLR* 1992, art by Stanton Blakeslee; 1996, art by Stanton Blakeslee; 1997, art by Kent Williams; 1999, art by Tama Hochbaum; 2006, art by Karen Lee; 2007, art by Kelly Adams



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HOMAGE to JAMES APPLEWHITE

Presentation Remarks by Jeffrey Franklin,
NCLR Poetry Editor

**2012 recipient of the
Roberts Award for
Literary Inspiration**

*Eastern North Carolina
Literary Homecoming*

East Carolina University
21 September 2012

PHOTOGRAPH BY PEAT BURNETT



I'm a native Tennessean, and I spent four years in Chapel Hill and, later on, four more years in Greenville as an English professor at ECU. North Carolina is part of who I am. Now I'm an expatriate Southerner living in Colorado, but for going on fifteen years I have had the privilege of serving as the Poetry Editor of *NCLR*. That privilege has allowed me to continue to be a removed cousin in the family of North Carolina literature, which has given me the further privilege of remaining in touch with a poet as accomplished as James Applewhite. For this I am grateful to *NCLR* and especially to Margaret Bauer, who has made ECU a homecoming homestead for the North Carolina literary family.

Thanks to all of you for affording me the opportunity to say a few words in homage to James Applewhite and his poetry. The fewest words I could choose would be these three: *fidelity, balance, mastery*.

Jim's poetry has maintained fidelity to the themes, places, people, and reflections that have pervaded his work from the beginning, though of course he has

Watch the presentation of the Roberts Award for Literary Inspiration to James Applewhite, including this and other words of tribute and the poet's response and a reading.

taken on other themes along the way. Those themes include, but are by no means limited to, heritage, family, and the "historical anachronism" of Southern culture and sensibility, the "atavism of place that's blood deep," as Jim puts it in a 2003 interview.¹ These stanzas from his poem "Documentary," from the collection *A Diary of Altered Light*,² beautifully condenses themes that occupy his body of work:

We suffered a Sunday light, so ideal
we could not act within it, only exist
as a tribute to its history, only feel
a judgment-glare persist

through seasons of mules and tobacco leaves,
Thanksgiving parlors, black men harvesting
in chiaroscuro – perspective that deceives,
unfathomable by remembering.

ABOVE James Applewhite accepting the Roberts Award for Literary Inspiration and reading from his poetry at the Eastern North Carolina Literary Homecoming, East Carolina University, Greenville, NC, 21 Sept. 2012

¹ Todd Verdun, "An Interview with James Applewhite," *Carolina Quarterly* 55.2 (2003): web.

² James Applewhite, *A Diary of Altered Light* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2006).



PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVID POTOFTI, NC ARTS COUNCIL



PHOTOGRAPHS BY PEAT BURNETT



But Jim's obsessions also include far-reaching questions, nothing less than our place in the cosmos, the physics of time and space, the nature of desire, the function of language itself, the sanctity of day-to-day living on this earth as a human being, and, more recently, the prospect of death. Here he writes in his poem "A Sad Heart at the Supermarket," also from *A Diary of Altered Light*,

Astounded by my identity among equivalent
others, I think, "April in Paris," humming -
distinctive as a fingerprint,

I hope - but hardly unique. What is it -
our fate - to be common in uncommonness -
conscious, in an almost-infinite
time-expanding universe?

Obsessions such as these are necessary to sustain the true artist.

Of course Jim's poetry also has kept lifelong faith with North Carolina, eastern North Carolina in particular. If there ever was or ever will be a poetry of the place where you are now, it is James Applewhite's. My suggestion is to cherish it.

ABOVE Mark Smith-Soto, winner of the 2012 James Applewhite Poetry Prize, with James Applewhite at the Eastern North Carolina Literary Homecoming, ECU, Greenville, NC, 21 Sept. 2012 (Watch Smith-Soto read his winning poem; read it in the forthcoming 2013 print issue of *NCLR*; and read two of Smith-Soto's other finalist poems in the special feature section of this issue of *NCLR Online*.)

Here is a passage from "Some Words for Fall," from his *Selected Poems*,³

The language they speak is things to eat.
Barbecue's smell shines blue in the wind.
Titles of Nehi Grape, Dr Pepper, are nailed
Onto barns, into wood sides silvered and alive,
Like the color pork turns in heat over ashes.

I wish I could step through the horizon's frame
Into a hand-hewn dirt-floored room.
People down home in Eastern N.C.,
When they have that unlimited longing,
They smell the packhouse leavings.

³ James Applewhite, *Selected Poems* (Durham: Duke UP, 2005).

ABOVE TOP James Applewhite presenting Laurence Avery with 2nd place in the 2012 Applewhite Poetry Prize competition (Read the 2nd place poem in the 2013 print issue of *NCLR*.)

ABOVE CENTER James Applewhite presenting Grace Cloris Ocasio with honorable mention in the 2012 Applewhite Poetry Prize competition (Read her poem in the 2013 print issue of *NCLR*.)

ABOVE BOTTOM James Applewhite announces Susan Laughter Meyers as a finalist in the 2012 Applewhite Poetry Prize competition (Read all of the finalists' poems in this issue of *NCLR Online*.)

And Jim's life and poetry have kept fidelity to poetry itself, *fidelity* as in trueness of pitch. This does not occur automatically for all who call themselves poets. It is a choice and a long practice of apprenticing oneself to master poets and to the art of poetry, tutoring oneself by the challenges one takes on. This requires a precarious mixture of humility with confidence, confidence enough in one's own voice that apprenticeship will not undermine the ability to write as one's self.

And, though it may sound paradoxical, in part as a result of his service to the art form, Jim's poetry has remained fresh. It has continued to develop from book to book as he has adapted different formal strategies to his own unique voice. Without ever becoming derivative and without ever straining to sound original, Jim has continued to learn and grow through the craft while always writing his own original poetry.

What, you may ask, constitutes the originality of Jim's poetry? There are multiple answers, but, if driven to a short one, I might say that its signature is a certain bent of mind, perhaps a contrariness disguised as patience, that reveals itself in a purposeful tension between line and syntax, unexpected line-breaks, and syntactical elisions and extensions. This feels at times like a personalized and pointed awkwardness, which is coterminous with the meaning of the poem and is all Applewhite.

My second word – *balance* – is exemplified in Jim's poems in many ways. His poetry balances the visual and the aural, an exquisite attention to physical detail and image with an ear for the sound of words chiming off one another, as in his lovely, little poem, "Pine Grove and Railroad," also from *Diary of Altered Light*:

Pine Grove and Railroad

Picking up speed almost
silently a freight
through the forest
slices with immense weight

where light holds particulate
gold in solution. Sun grains
vibrate: time held in panes
of the windows between pines.

Honeysuckle keeps the sense
of me first come to this
sun's home. Crow-call is splendid,
diminishing. Nothing has ended.

Jim's poetry also balances the regional with the universal, Southern speech with the languages of metaphysics and science. It balances emotional honesty and expressivity with intellectual acuity and reflective distance, all while becoming neither sentimental nor pretentious. Many poets drown between those two rocks. And, as I have suggested, Jim's poetry works – or plays – the balance between *vers libre* and the formal traditions of English poetry.

Though I could keep going, I will add only that Jim's poetry balances – miraculously, it seems to me – the elegiac with the celebratory, a sense of what has been lost and of historical failures with a genuine openness in the moment to gratitude and to something akin to praise.

All that I have said thus far are the reasons for my third word: *mastery*.

This is a word I do not use lightly, a word I would not apply to some more famous or more popular poets – though James Applewhite has a goodly share of recognition. As Richard Flynn put it in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, "Applewhite's resolute affirmation of these gestures may not call great attention to itself, but it may well be more enduring than the pyrotechnical displays of more fashionable contemporaries."⁴ James Applewhite's poetry has been and will be enduring.

Jim, in gratitude for your work, your example, and your generosity, I do what I have learned as a practicing Buddhist that the pupil rightly does to the master: I bow to you.

And I wish all of you who are listening the bounty of an East Carolina literary homecoming. You are among kin. ■



PHOTOGRAPH BY PEAT BURNETT

ABOVE Samantha Lee Deal (right), another finalist in the 2012 James Applewhite Poetry Prize competition, at the kickoff dinner for the Eastern North Carolina Literary Homecoming, ECU, Greenville, NC, 21 Sept. 2012; also pictured, NCLR Editor Margaret Bauer (left) and Regina DiPerna, a poetry student in the UNC-Wilmington MFA program

⁴ Richard Flynn, "James Applewhite," *American Poets Since World War II, Second Series*, ed. R.S. Gwynn, vol. 105 of *Dictionary of Literary Biography* (Detroit: Gale, 1991) 18.



World's Shoulder, Turning (acrylic and mixed media on canvas, 24x30) by Tony Breuer

World's Shoulder, Turning

BY JAMES APPLEWHITE

City Art Gallery in Greenville, NC, and *NCLR* have collaborated since 2010 on invitational exhibits of original artwork inspired by the poetry of **JAMES APPLEWHITE**. These three poems from the poet's *Selected Poems* (Duke University Press, 2005) were sent out in the fall of 2011 to the artists represented by the gallery. *NCLR* is grateful to Torrey Stroud, the City Art Gallery owner, for sponsoring this invitational exhibit, an event to be repeated in February 2013. New Applewhite poems were sent to artists in fall 2012, and they will appear with art they inspired in the 2013 print issue, forthcoming in the summer.

Greenville resident **TONY BREUER** was born in Venezuela. As the son of a US Foreign Service officer, he moved often to different countries. His research and study in the field of molecular neurobiology and neurology began at Princeton and continued at Oxford and Harvard Medical School, where he received his MD. At the University of Southern Indiana, he received a BFA. Upon moving to Greenville, NC, to teach at ECU's Brody School of Medicine, he pursued his interest in art at ECU's School of Art and Design, where he earned an MFA. His work has been featured in *Nashville Arts Magazine* and *NCLR Online 2012* (also with poems by James Applewhite) and exhibited in group and solo shows. He is represented by City Art Gallery in Greenville and The Arts Company in Nashville, TN. See more about the artist and his work on his [website](#).

A rock with the bulk of a house leaned out
 From bank across the creek – as if earth were still
 In the making. Through the weed screen, I noticed
 How light had lessened, mountain laurel beyond
 Submerged in slope-shadow. Going back, I felt white
 Quartz and the bone of a bracket mushroom
 Shine their beams at me. The bouquet of huckleberry
 Leaves I picked seemed tiny tropical fish.
 They floated on their stems as I ran, and I
 Added bleached grasses like sea oats, a few
 Fronds of fern. I ran lightened in the gloom
 By the scarlet and tan like a torch in my hand.
 Yesterday I'd seen the sun, a scoured
 Copper pan, shine through pines, from a bend
 Of the high shouldering trail where the horizon
 Falls away. I remembered the light's raying,
 Like magnetized metallic dust. I felt all
 These bright things – huckleberry stems and sea oats,
 Quartz rocks and mushroom – held in the field
 Of sun now down below shoulder of the world's turning.

REPRINTED FROM JAMES APPLEWHITE, *SELECTED POEMS* (DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS, © 2005)



Autumn Equinox (mixed media on hand made mirror, 20x16)
by Louis St. Lewis

Autumnal Equinox

BY JAMES APPLEWHITE

The earth has rotated again on an axis inclined from perpendicular to the plane of the ecliptic by twenty-three and a half degrees. Maple leaves in the canopy lamp back an acknowledging yellow to a source in recession. Oaks higher up give themselves airs in the wind, their lobed leaves handlike, sowers of generations. They plop their acorns on my drive, turning heroically bronze – inadvertent feeders of squirrels, as the dogwoods are of birds, with their scarlet berries. These signals relate to one another, a simultaneous response to progression through the altered rays. Likewise my mind shines back a recognition, seeing these leaves as banners on the billion-masted ship of Earth as it sails in its orbit, with the sun in its galaxy, with the galaxy receding from others. And this mind grows, like the leaves, slightly dizzy, but wakes to a higher intensity, that cannot explain such magnificent, pointless purpose, though glowing within this medium of fruition and perishing. Mind feels itself turn the colors of wonder: scarlet-maroon with beholding, yellow with transiency, green in remembrance – and looking into changes to come, a bronze of enduring. Already, flags of lost summer spin aimlessly as the wind grows chilly. Mind wishes to inscribe its thoughts in a medium like the gold-amber sunlight. The light relates these thoughts, those of squirrels, seeing plenty, those of the leaves, which parachute and spin, and those of this mind, with its memories, which also wobble. The bronze oak stands with nobility, in a firmament too blue for regrets. A maple seed propellers down and lands on the roof of my house, a blessing. The story is a continuing, within changes so tragic, we can hardly believe this other: this tale of sun-angle and colors, of us and Earth in the conscious universe.

REPRINTED FROM JAMES APPLEWHITE, *SELECTED POEMS* (DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS, © 2005)

Chapel Hill resident **LOUIS ST. LEWIS** attended the North Carolina School of Arts and Stanford University. His work is included in private and permanent collections, including the Ogden Museum for Southern Art, the New Orleans Museum of Art, the Morris Museum of Southern Art, the Masur Museum of Art, and the Ackland Art Museum at UNC–Chapel Hill, as well as in *NCLR* 2006 and 2008. He is represented by City Art Gallery in Greenville, Broadhurst Gallery in Pinehurst, and Tyndall Galleries in Chapel Hill. See more of his work on his [website](#).

*Revisitings***BY JAMES APPLEWHITE**

The sky is low and close and light is a mist.
 Sunday makes shine a still more sultry water
 In this summer air. Grass returns prodigal with seed.
 These birds that perk and skip seem living souls.
 Magnolia flowers are reminiscent of childhood and candles.
 Past a line inscribed on leaves by a bobwhite's whistle,
 I suspect a different self like a nobler brother.
 Mimosa trees in flower, piles of clouds
 In an horizon without perspective, help me recall.
 I sit on the hill of an avenue of trees, feeling
 That I want to say hush, hush, to the traffic.
 For a little while I feel close again to a person
 Who one time existed under immensely tall trees.
 A wind from where shadows are generating rain tells me
 This day stands always in pools behind doors I have closed.
 How have I closed away my best self and all of his memories?
 Many of the tongues of grass are speaking to the sun,
 Obscured for a moment, in a language of vapor from underneath.

REPRINTED FROM JAMES APPLEWHITE, *SELECTED POEMS* (DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS, © 2005)*Revisitings* (watercolor on paper, 14x11) by Michael Dorsey

Former Dean of the School of Art and then Interim Dean of the College of Fine Arts and Communication at ECU, **MICHAEL DORSEY** received his MA and MFA in Painting from Bowling Green State University. He is a Signature Member of the Watercolor Society of North Carolina, and he has served as an exhibition juror for professional competitions in North Carolina, South Carolina, Alabama, Mississippi and Illinois. His work is shown nationally and is included in permanent collections at the Muscarelle Museum of Art, The College of New Jersey, the Library Collection of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and the University of Perugia in Italy.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY PEAT BURNETT

GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN: REMINISCENCES OF FAMILY, HOME, LOVE, AND LOSS

a review by Melissa Edmundson Makala

**Sally Rosen Kindred. *No Eden*.
Bay City, MI: Mayapple Press, 2011.**

**John Thomas York. *Cold Spring Rising*.
Winston-Salem, NC: Press 53, 2012.**

MELISSA EDMUNDSON MAKALA earned her MA in English from ECU in 2002 and while at ECU served as Assistant Editor of *NCLR*. She completed her PhD in English at the University of South Carolina in 2007 and currently teaches at USC-Aiken, where she specializes in nineteenth- and twentieth-century British literature.

SALLY ROSEN KINDRED was born and raised in Greensboro, NC, and is a graduate of Duke University, where she held the Margaret Rose Knight Stanford Scholarship in Creative Writing. She has received fellowships from the Maryland State Arts Council and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, and her poems have appeared in *Best News Poets 2009*, *Quarterly West*, and *storySouth*. She has taught poetry writing at the University of Maryland, the Pittsburgh Center for the Arts, and for the Johns Hopkins University Center for Talented Youth. Read samples of her poetry in *NCLR 2011*.

JOHN THOMAS YORK was born in Winston-Salem, grew up in Yadkin County, and now lives in Greensboro, NC. He has an MFA from UNC-Greensboro and has taught English in public schools for over thirty years. His poem "Lamp" received the first James Applewhite Poetry Prize and was published in *NCLR 2012*. (Hear him read his winning poem.) His poems have also appeared in anthologies such as *Word and Witness: 100 Years of North Carolina Poetry* and *The Southern Poetry Anthology, Volume III: Contemporary Appalachia*.

No Eden is a fitting title for **Sally Rosen Kindred's** first full-length collection of poetry, set partly in the rural landscape of western North Carolina. Scattered throughout the collection are bleak images of the biblical flood, isolated children, barren women, distant mothers, and an Old Testament God who metes out punishment more than he comforts or rewards. Several poems in the collection also deal with a daughter's difficult relationship with her emotionally unstable and distant mother and how that relationship is transfigured into the hopes and fears of generations of women. In the poem sequence, "Seven Sorrows," individual female experience is blended with the thoughts of biblical personae such as Lilith, Eve, Miriam, and the Virgin Mary.

One of the most effective images in the sequence involves an unnamed mother and daughter in "Eve on the Far Shore." First, as the daughter, "almost forty," sits by her mother's bedside in a hospital:

. . . She wants
to pick me up from school, back twenty-five years.
Give me the keys, cries her face into mine.
My girl's waiting for me. Tanks of breath
roll by dangling hoses, thump and hiss.
In a schoolyard somewhere, bushes turn gray.
She's waiting for me. We both know she is.

This image is revisited later in the section called "Miriam, Just Out of Egypt," when readers see a little girl waiting to be picked up after school, knowing yet not wanting to acknowledge that her mother is nowhere near. Instead, the mother is "Miles off" and "drifts amnesiac on a black couch, keys / in her pocketbook zipped tight . . . / . . . Could she still / be breathing?" The poem ends with the girl facing this bitter reality: "Right now / I know two things: I love her more than anyone / and I will never be hurt again, which means / my body will stay empty as this gray drive."

The last section of this poem, titled "Mary, Full of Grace," is particularly powerful in its unapologetic bleakness, as the speaker compares her

mother to the biblical mother and reimagines what constitutes “grace”:

... In thirty years
 she will write a note and put it in a porcelain hen, then make
 a sleep she won't wake from all the way. That hen sits
 on this kitchen table, blue and full of grace. Mary,
 I can't climb all the way to seven. But sorrow
 I know: sorrow has mothered me from this day
 in the kitchen when I said *I am hungry*
 and holy silence emptied every spoon.

The image of the “porcelain hen” that holds the written message symbolizing her mother’s sadness is revisited in “Yearn,” which ends with the daughter’s desperate attempt to reconnect with the lost mother: “Blue china chicken / at the center, where is your shine? / Take this grief and feed it back to me, / dark burgundy taste of my mother’s soil and sleep.” The mother/daughter relationship is also treated effectively in “Dreaming Blue Roses” and “A Cold Rain.”

One of the most memorable poems of the collection, “Animal Dark,” successfully combines the Old Testament story of Noah’s Ark with the bitterly learned lessons of childhood and the resulting sadder but wiser adult. But, as with the other poems in the collection, Kindred focuses on what lies beneath the surface – the places of darkness in the depths of the vessel:

... This is no story for children.
 Even the scarlet lamp stones can't fix it.
 This is a world swollen with loss,
 the bloat and rot of bodies bumping
 the ark all night like dumb fruit.

Inside there must be something intended,
 something God wanted
 from the grief, the crooked brays,
 the dark scars of garnets,
 and the living bodies turning against sleep.

Somewhere to the left of this story
 there's a moment where everyone's inside,
 everyone's saved, and it's enough to be alive
 in the warm animal dark,
 alive in the journey through wreckage and Writ -

but back at the center, there's just
 a family awake through a storm.
 There are fists of wind
 hammering walls.
 There are adders in the straw.

These stanzas nicely summarize the collection as a whole. There is always the possibility of hope, security, and peace, but such things remain on the periphery, tantalizingly just out of reach, “[s]omewhere to the left.” The real world, with its disappointments and failures, is indeed “no Eden,” but Kindred’s book reminds us that in spite of a post-lapsarian loss of innocence, there is a compensating knowledge of ourselves that is ultimately gained.

In his first book-length collection of poems, ***Cold Spring Rising***, John Thomas York returns to his childhood in Yadkin County and to the indelible impression those early years left on him. The collection is a paean to a time and place vividly remembered, now temporally out of reach. For all the good memories that York details, there is a parallel sense of loss. The collection also spans the extremes of adolescent memory, from the nostalgic “O Christmas Tree” to the lingering trauma and guilt felt by the speaker in “Substitute.”

In many poems, York examines how the past reverberates in the present. Memories can comfort, but they can also haunt. In “Sharecroppers,” he pays tribute to a husband and wife, Jake and Betty, and how the cycle of planting and harvesting parallels the couple’s own lives. He recounts the different stages in the harvesting of the tobacco crop, from women stringing the green tobacco, to the men hanging the leaves in the pack houses until “the leaf was golden crisp.” In the poem, York recalls these details, but also shows how these images – pieces of memory – become something greater. Yes, there is innocence lost, but as an adult, the speaker can look back with a greater understanding and appreciation. In the creative world of the poem, those who have passed on gain a new life:

And in my dreams they still come to visit,
 though silent now, making slow gestures
 toward the fields, tobacco stumps frosty with starlight -

and the couple joins a long procession,
 the old people, in brogans, bonnets, gingham skirts,
 floppy hats, denim overalls and coats:
 no mud on their shoes now to slow them down,
 they walk free of every curse,
 every cancer, every broken back.

In other poems, such as “The Ghost of Nebo,” “Picking Out,” and “Nebo,” the previous inhabitants of the area are synonymous with the natural world to which York is so close. “The Ghost of Nebo” is “the one who shakes / the windows and breathes / a frosty breath under my closet door.” In “Nebo,” set during a time of drought, the youthful speaker imagines the spirit of the mountain as an old man looking for water: “there he was, / honeysuckle tangled in his long beard, his robe / decorated with mosses and lichen.” While in “Picking Out,” the speaker finds himself

... at home picking burs
 and downy seeds, picking at the fingernails
 of dead men, maybe,
 Cherokees trappers settlers bandits deputies
 bushwhackers members of the Home Guard,
 shades tugging at the legs of my blue jeans.

Birds also figure prominently in the collection, including “Wild Turkeys,” “The Loon,” “Barn Swallows,” and “Egret.” Of the group, “The Loon” is particularly effective and memorable. In the tradition of the Romantic poets, the loon functions for York much like Shelley’s skylark and Keats’s nightingale. The speaker describes a loon trapped in “the circle of chain link” and “rows / of rusty barbs” of Lake Daniel Reservoir. Watching the bird, the speaker imagines:

maybe the loon was a failed poet,
 the reincarnation of one who disregarded his muse,
 a writer too lazy to leave his pond, the wavering reflections,
 too timid to go below the surface and, therefore,
 condemned to rebirth as a loon,
 a squid, a sperm whale, many lives, many
 years, before he could pick up a pencil and try again.

Like the speaker, the reader never discovers if the loon finally escapes the reservoir, but, like an aspiring writer, the speaker “hope[s] the loon, / taking a careful measure of things, found the right angle, / enough

PHOTOGRAPH BY RACHEL YORK



room for a run for the sky, the bird / leaving nothing but a silver wake, the long signature of persistence.”

Despite the reinforcing positive effects of nature and memory, some poems in York’s collection generate disquiet and, indeed, sadness. In “Puzzle,” the speaker describes the gradual selling off of the family farm and how that loss affected his sense of place and identity:

My father quit the farm
 one piece at a time:

Kate, the old mule, gone one day,
 no word of her destination,

then the cows, thirty-five Holsteins,
 sold to a man who didn’t know their names,

The loss of the animals represents a separation from friends. Farm equipment is also sold piece by piece. Without these familiar reference points, the speaker wanders around the farm, losing so much stability that he runs to the nearest hill and faces Mt. Nebo, “looking for a missing piece.”

Family is another recurring theme. In the two-part sequence, “Mowing for Grandmothers,” York subtly highlights the difference in his two grandmothers while again idealizing the agrarian. “Grandma Spencer’s Yard, Rockford Road” has a much more peaceful setting: a grandmother “shells peas in her

kitchen” while her grandson mows the lawn for her. When he comes in for a shower, she “looks out at a window, / turns and says, *Looks mighty fine.*” The poem “Granny York, Irving Street” significantly omits “yard” in the title and suggests a more stressful experience for the grandson mowing his other grandmother’s small lot in town under the scrutiny of the domineering “Granny,” “who stands arms akimbo watching” and “direct[ing].”

“A Stout One” describes the tense relationship of a son with a distant and sometimes violent father, “*Daddus Rotundus.*” By the end of the poem, the two remain just as distant as they were at the beginning, the son wanting to assume a parental role with his aged parent, but ultimately deciding that he is not up to the challenge:

I want to pick him up,
tell how the Sandman hauls away troubles
in a sack, how Jack caught three devils
and why a dipper hangs on the Pole Star.
I want to put him to bed to dream
like a seed unfurling beneath a new moon.
But he is a stout one, and I have no
words, nor the will for such a cutting.

Ultimately, however, York seems to come to a peaceful truce with his father, again with the help of memory and the lessons of years. In the thoughtful “The Calling,” a two-part poem that ends the collection, York

sums up his main theme, opening with the lines, “There’s a landscape that lives, that shines / behind a scrim of suburban neighborhood, / behind blue streetlights, the cars coated white.” The speaker then parallels how, in its own way, his work mirrors that of his father: “I rise early to write, as early as my father, / who always stepped out the back door / at five-thirty sharp, his breath a declaration / floating as he walked among the apple trees.” In the second part of the poem, the speaker finds another way of relating his own work with his father’s:

I spend my days tending poems and paragraphs,
while my father would be mending fences.
He always kept his boundaries sharp, the wires

tuned above standard pitch – but I like
to imagine a few loose nails, a stray
stepping carefully over the dangling barbs,

a runaway taking a stroll into the neighbor’s
corn, the blond rows, loaded with gold, seeming
to stretch beyond the valley, into another country.

And I’m the one that would not return –
for the land lives in me, the kingdom come,
thawing every morning in the hands of the sun.

In *Cold Spring Rising*, York has found a way to reconcile the loss of the past and to situate his own present within that past. In these reminiscences of childhood, York ultimately finds a way to honor his father, along with the people and landscape that continue to inspire him to memorialize such a way of life.

With intimate portrayals of joy, sadness, love, and loss, Kindred’s *No Eden* and York’s *Cold Spring Rising* examine the lasting effects of the past on the present. Both poets give readers glimpses of homes that are often sites of misunderstanding and frustration but are also places that foster powerful memories of familial bonds that cannot be broken by distance or time. In so doing, these writers manage to capture and memorialize aspects of western North Carolina childhoods that, like *Eden* or the source of a rising spring, are beyond reach, yet remain vital places that continue to shape adult identity. ■



COURTESY OF KATHRYN STRIPLING BYER

ABOVE John Thomas York at a City Lights Bookstore reading from his new collection with former North Carolina Poet Laureate Kathryn Stripling Byer (right) and York’s daughter Rachel, who performed old-time ballads, Sylva, NC, 1 Sept. 2012

Banding Hummingbirds

BY SUSAN LAUGHTER MEYERS

2012 JAMES APPLEWHITE POETRY PRIZE FINALIST*San Pedro River, Arizona*

I, who know little of ornithology,
wear sticker number nineteen. This release,
the last of the day, is mine. Under the awning
the ornithologist at the table puts a straw to her lips
and blows, parting the feathers to check for mites.
There are mites.

She cradles the bird in one hand,
sexes it, names the species (Anna's), and figures
the approximate age. Places it in a miniature sling
and weighs it, wraps the metal band around one leg.
I walk over to the designated grassy area,
both hands in my pockets.

The day is raw.
When it's time, I hold out a palm, now warm.
The assistant fits the tubes of a stethoscope
to my ears, pressing the disc against my bird.
I hear a low whir, a tiny motor running in my hand.
Up to twelve hundred beats a minute, she says.

I, who know so little,
barely take a breath. My bird's head is a knob
of red iridescence on the fleshy pad of my hand.
I am nothing but a convenient warming bench,
yet for now I am that bench. Warm.
His breast is thin – bone hollow, she says,

where he should be round.
His eyes are dark and still, his feet tucked
behind his body. He lies there, that tiny motor.
I don't think of years ago, my mother, my father –
those I loved who, having lain down, never rose up.
For once, I know the worth,

at least to me. What is unknown
is whether this bird in hand will rouse
as he did earlier, pinched between thumb
and index finger and tipped toward a feeder,
when he drank with conspicuous hunger.
You could see the tongue.

SUSAN LAUGHTER MEYERS was a finalist for the first James Applewhite Poetry Prize competition, too, and the poems appeared in *NCLR 2012*, print and *Online*. After her award-winning first collection, *Keep and Give Away* (University of South Carolina Press, 2006), her

second collection, *My Dear, Dear Stagger Grass* (2013), received the *Cider Press Review's* Editor's Prize. Her poems have also appeared in *NCLR* 2002, 2007, and 2008, and the editors appreciate the reviews she has written for *NCLR* as well.



Child's Dance (oil on canvas, 30x30) by Wayne Trapp

Beggar's-Lice

BY SUSAN LAUGHTER MEYERS

2012 JAMES APPLEWHITE POETRY PRIZE FINALIST

Mornings at the clothesline I'd cling
 to Mother's skirt and twirl myself
 into the gores. For every step she took
 I took four, green shadow lost in her moves.
 She swayed to the quick mechanics
 of hanging sheets: the shake, reach, drape,
 and pinch her hands had memorized.
 Only at her nudge would I unfurl,
 dancing down the tunnel of towels
 to the song of clean laundry, my fingers
 skimming the sky. Nights of wishing on stars
 I yearned to brave a wider course, to fly

like you, my hitchhiker who's never shy –
 turning wishes into horses to catch a ride.
 To cross a roadside ditch or open field
 of ragweed, rattlebox, and vetch
 is to give you a lift. Dull sequins beading
 my socks, you teach tenacity's best lesson.
 You stay and stay, but go. Is it for the sake
 of the child never picked that you play,
 little stickseed, your one good trick?

Vilas, NC, resident **WAYNE TRAPP** received his BFA from Ohio State University. He also studied at the Pratt Institute, the Arts Students League, and the Institute of Art in Pittsburgh. His works are in the permanent collections of the Mint Museum in Charlotte,

NC, and the Hickory Museum in Hickory, NC, as well as in numerous public and private collections. He is represented in North Carolina by City Art Gallery, Adam Cave Fine Art, and Tyndall Galleries. See more of his work on his [website](#).

STUART WRIGHT:

The Badger of Old Street

BY THOMAS E. DOUGLASS

I first met Stuart Wright on a September day in 2007 after stepping off the train in the medieval town of Ludlow in the west of England.

Dressed in a tweed sport jacket, corduroy pants, a driving cap, tattersall shirt with ascot, some comfortable but durable walking shoes, a jaunty pipe packed with Rattray's tobacco askew in his mouth, he was the picture of the perfect Englishman – or so I imagined. But I soon discovered in his gruff but matter-of-fact politeness, that he was a genuinely unreconstructed North Carolinian, not unlike many whom I knew back home.

We immediately fell into talking about my half-day's train journey from London to Ludlow and the layout of the walled town, with its gate houses still standing and a twelfth-century castle at its center. We walked through the streets, past the shops, the butcher's, the bakery, the fine book binder's shop of Trevor Lloyd, on our way to 28 Old Street, a cozy three-story brick-and-beam abode with a walled and wild English garden stretching away at some length from the kitchen window. His dark green front door with iron latch overlooked a telltale welcome mat that said "Go AWAY!" The church tower and castle in the center of Ludlow town, the train ride through the rolling

Shropshire countryside – it was like a fairy tale, or some green and leafy warren in high summer nearby the land- and river-scapes of *The Wind in the Willows*. It wasn't long before the small talk ended and books were turned open, the tea kettle on the stove.

All I knew about Stuart Wright then was that he had amassed an amazing collection of literary material, much of it from writers of the American South. I had been sent on a mission by East Carolina University to assess the collection's scholarly value. Much of this material had never been seen by scholars in the states except for those who ventured a visit to Old Street in Ludlow, like Faulkner's biographer Joseph Blotner, who completed a Robert Penn Warren biography

in 1997. I knew Wright was a collector of rare books and manuscripts, but it soon became clear that he was also a collector with a clear purpose.

Over the next six days, an amazing parade of books, galley's, manuscripts, and letters passed before my eyes – Robert Penn Warren's heavily annotated ex-libris collection of all of William Faulkner; John Crowe Ransom's personal copy of *I'll Take My Stand*; Eudora Welty's *A Curtain of Green* presented to Cleanth Brooks; William Alexander Percy's copy of *The Mind of the South*; *The Letters of*

PHOTOGRAPH BY LINDA FOX



ABOVE Stuart Wright (left) and Thomas Douglass, St. Leonard's graveyard in Ludlow, England, 2011

Associate Professor of English at ECU THOMAS E. DOUGLASS has been key to J.Y. Joyner Library's acquisition and promotion of the Stuart Wright Collection. See his essay on Richard McKenna in *NCLR* 2011.

James Agee to Father Flye, a presentation copy from Flye to John Crowe Ransom in 1962. These were the titles of the Southern Renaissance, passionately discussed in the halls of academe across the South, literature of a generation that would witness *American* literature becoming a *world* literature.

The depth of associations represented in the many presentation copies was amazing. Many were gifts with personal inscriptions – *The Sheltered Life* signed “For Allen Tate with friendship and admiration, from Ellen Glasgow, August 1932”; Warren’s *Selected Poems 1923–1943* presented to Katherine Anne Porter, “June 1944”; Peter Taylor’s *A Long Fourth and Other Stories*, inscribed to Randall Jarrell; Warren’s edition of *All the King’s Men* inscribed to “Lon” Cheney, Warren’s friend who also inspired the character of Jack Burden. One after another the books were turned open, a few, then dozens, until the filled bookcases in every room made it clear – I wouldn’t have time to look at them all, each a treasure, most for multiple reasons.

At first glance, the center of the Stuart Wright Collection (SWC) was clearly Robert Penn Warren – known affectionately as “Red” – the only American writer to win the Pulitzer Prize in both fiction (*All the King’s Men*) and poetry (*Promises: Poems 1954–1956*) and (*Now and Then: Poems 1976–1980*), a former member of the Southern Fugitives, a Poet Laureate of the United States, editor and co-founder of *The Southern Review*, a literary figure with the pedigree and respect necessary to support and encourage fellow writers, many of whom are also represented in Wright’s collection. Warren was literary mentor and friend to many of the great writers of twentieth-century American literature. His writing embodied the critical compass and social conscience of the nation, and there has not been a figure of American literature who has served so well in that important, deeply significant literary capacity. And it’s through Warren that many of the connections represented in the Stuart Wright Collection are made.

There seemed no end to the variety and richness of the books that passed before me. Dozens were from Warren’s personal library, including those from his college days at Vanderbilt and UC-Berkeley, books that hinted at the evolution of a writer – his copies of Conrad, Hemingway, Eliot and Woolf. The childhood and college books of

Eudora Welty were here on Old Street. Also here were dozens of books from the library of Walker Percy’s adoptive father, William Alexander Percy, and the Agrarians – Andrew Lytle, John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Merrill Moore, Donald Davidson, and more from the libraries of their students Randall Jarrell and Peter Taylor.

Who could own such books, I wondered, unless they came as an inheritance? But that, I finally realized, was exactly what the Stuart Wright Collection was – an inheritance that I hoped might find a new home in North Carolina. Here, so far from where they had been born, were the biblio artifacts of Southern Renaissance history, the evidence of how it evolved and became our great literary heritage.

Who could *own* such books, I wondered, unless they came as an inheritance? But that, I finally realized, was exactly what the Stuart Wright Collection was – an inheritance that I hoped might find a new home in North Carolina. Here, so far from where they had been born, were the biblio artifacts of Southern Renaissance history, the evidence of how it evolved and became our great literary heritage.

Associations between author and friend were furthered in surprising finds, for dozens of the ex-libris books had letters folded within their pages: Welty and Porter to Warren, Welty to Taylor, Taylor to Warren, Lowell to Jarrell, Fred Chappell to George Garrett, and many others, each offering bits of biography, praise, literary news and gossip, letters typed and handwritten, sometimes a mix of both, that personally and indelibly marked their time.

I wondered: how in the world did all of this come to rest in the west of England so far away from home? But pieces of the how and why would come to me only in brief snatches. Slowly, after days of tea and nonstop reading, and nights of walking the bridge over the River Teme for a pint or two at the Charlton Arms, Wright’s favorite pub, and after long talks of the writers Wright had come to know and love (writers I had encountered only on the page), I began to understand the enormity of Wright’s accomplishment as a collector.

One photograph hanging in Wright’s home, in a second story hallway, gave but a small hint at the engaging eccentricities of my host. In it, Wright is hooding Warren as Warren receives an honorary degree from Wake Forest University in 1984. Wright wears the academic regalia that had belonged to J.R.R. Tolkien, the professor who had

signed Warren's diploma from Oxford. Then there was Aaron Copland's baby grand piano sitting in the alcove of Wright's book-lined living room, where a formidable collection of Wright's other interests was also on display: English watercolors crowded the walls, and classical music and jazz filled the house during my stay – Edward Elgar and Ralph Vaughan Williams and a playlist of jazz CDs comparable to

Philip Larkin's *All What Jazz*. In the bathroom, a photo of John Updike raising Wright's Confederate stars-and-bars up the flag pole at the Updike home in Beverly, Massachusetts, and along the second-

ABOVE **Stuart Wright hooding Robert Penn Warren at Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, NC, 1984**

COURTESY OF THE STUART WRIGHT COLLECTION, SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, J. Y. JOYNER LIBRARY, ECU, GREENVILLE, NC



floor stair balcony a stunning array of autographed photos with dedications “to Stuart” from Ammons, Welty, and Warren; Chappell, Garrett, Styron and Updike; Taylor, James Seay, Harry Crews, Barry Hannah, Mary Lee Settle, Shelby Foote, and Walker Percy.

On the third day came manuscripts – Warren's *Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce*, *Brother to Dragons: A Tale in Verse and Voices (New Version)*; *Audubon: A Vision*;

A Place To Come To; *Portrait of a Father* (Warren's last book), some complete manuscript material from holograph notes to typescripts to galley proofs. The manuscript “Poetry and Democracy” was especially intriguing – it would be published in 1975 as *Democracy and Poetry*, a polemic for the political and

EUDORA WELTY: “A Sweet Devouring”

Pulitzer Prize-winning author and protégé of Katherine Anne Porter, Eudora Welty received critical support and friendship from Robert Penn Warren, who wrote an influential review of her collection *The Wide Net*. Along with Porter, Caroline Gordon, and Flannery O'Connor, Welty made a significant contribution to twentieth-century American literature. Her close relationships with “Red” Warren and Katherine Anne Porter are clearly on display in the Stuart Wright Collection.

Presentation copies of Welty's *The Eye of the Story* and *The Collected Stories* to Warren contain lengthy typed letters. Another Welty letter to Peter Taylor (dated 16 February 1947) is folded inside her signed copy of Taylor's *A Long Fourth and Other Stories*. Twenty-two Welty unpublished black-and-white snapshots include one of three young Mississippi girls are inside her copy of *The Plays of Anton Chekhov* translated by Constance Garnett; five photos of Henry Miller and friends at Windsor Ruins from the early 1940s are not the same images published in *Some Notes on River*

by Thomas E. Douglass

Country; two photos depict friends at a picnic near Saratoga Springs, 1940; six photos are from Yaddo of Porter (circa 1940–41); and eight photos are from Lavenham, England, with unidentified companions on the River Brett, (circa 1950–51). Catching the photography bug from her father, Welty was a snapshot enthusiast from the 1930s, when she began her work with the Works Progress Administration, to the 1950s when she lost her camera on a train. Her story “Why I Live at the P.O.” was inspired by a woman she photographed ironing in the back of a small post office. In time, her photography became famous, and several collections of her photographs have been published: *One Time, One Place*; *Photographs*; and Wright's Palaemon Press limited edition of *Twenty Photographs* (1980), which includes prints of previously published photographs from 1936–42.

Ex-libris books in the Wright Collection include Welty's copy of William Alexander Percy's *Lanterns on the Levee*; *The Poems of Charles Baudelaire*, signed “Eudora Welty, New Orleans, March 15, 1936”; a signed, limited

social purposes of poetry, in the name of individual freedom, in the name of social democracy. Warren by then had traveled the long way from the



PHOTOGRAPH BY LINDA FOX

regionalism of the Fugitives and the confines of New Criticism to embrace multicultural voices of the postmodern age, an evolution of the American critical perspective and the conscience of the nation. The notes and successive drafts of this essay lay before me, from first scribbling to galley proof.

ABOVE **Stuart Wright** talking about the Wright Collection materials in his study, Ludlow, England, 2011

Some sunny days do come to England in September, and on those days Stuart and I would leave the books behind to walk around the castle walls and through the town. Into Church's Pub for an afternoon pint we might amble, after an alfresco lunch of pork-filled baguettes from Vaughn's Meats and Poultry, all the while talking books, mutual connections, tales of Faulkner's pipe. But I was always anxious to get back to Old Street and Wright's study to see what else might appear before me. Throughout my days there, he would offer tea and inquire if I had found "anything interesting," all ears, though pretending not to listen as he paused to light his pipe. I would often utter *unbelievable* while reading through the stacks he had put out each morning for me to see.

One day, he showed me Caroline Gordon's short story manuscript "The Fiddles and the Flutes" sent to Peter Taylor for comment and suggestion – a story that would eventually be published in *The Sewanee Review* as "The Waterfall" in 1950 and that would reflect much of Taylor's input. But I was not prepared for what followed, dizzying as the variety already was: on the table in the study waiting for me one morning was a large box of envelopes, handwritten letters, telegrams, and photographs. These were Peter Taylor's wartime

edition copy of e.e. cummings's untitled book of poems published by Covici Friede in 1930; and Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel*, signed "Eudora Welty New York 1935." Several of the personal library books from her college days at the University of Wisconsin, such as Chekhov's *Short Stories*, have significant underlining or comment.

Of biographical interest are several gift books between mother and daughter – a first edition of Welty's *The Bride of Innis-fallen and Other Stories*, to her mother; and Margaret Sydney's *Five Little Peppers and How They Grew*, "To Eudora from Mother, Christmas, 1916." Welty's childhood copy of Robert Louis Stevenson's *A Child's Garden of Verses* includes doodles and sketches throughout.

In 1984, at the urging of Wake Forest University President Thomas Hearn, Jr., Wright invited Welty and Warren to receive honorary degrees, and both were hooded that spring in Winston-Salem.



COURTESY OF THE STUART WRIGHT COLLECTION, SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, J. Y. JOYNER LIBRARY, EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY, GREENVILLE, NC

ABOVE An illustration presumably by Eudora Welty inside her childhood copy of *A Child's Garden of Verses* (New York: Barse & Hopkins edition, 1910)

MARY HATCH THIESEN, who designed the layout of this essay, served as NCLR's art director 1998–2000 and designing the issue covers 1998–2007. She currently lives in Virginia, where she works as a web designer for PETA.

letters to his soon-to-be-wife, Eleanor Ross Taylor, from 1943 to 1945 – hundreds of them, now in the Stuart Wright Collection. These letters are beautiful to read, affectionate but also quite literary in a Jamesian sense, his style the same as in his fiction: elegant, precise, Proustian in its reflection.

Peter and Eleanor Ross Taylor met at Vanderbilt in 1943, shortly before his military tour began, and the letters trace his military experience on a near-daily basis from his stateside training to England, where he was stationed near Devon in preparation for the Normandy invasion. As he waited for orders, he wrote letters recounting his impressions of Ireland and England. He comments on “the countryside which is so like Middle Tennessee” that “I am reminded constantly of my childhood on Franklin Pike, and of my days at Vanderbilt.”

Not so far from where I sat, but nearly sixty years prior, Taylor had written on April 1, 1945, to his future bride, just short of her twenty-fifth birthday:

My life here would be relatively comfortable if I could only stop trying to write. But I cannot. The only compromise I can make is that of being satisfied with making notes on stories instead of writing them. Heaven knows if I shall ever go back and write all the things I make notes on, and I suppose it doesn't matter as long as I get it off my chest. But will I ever, ever, ever be able to really write something again? I must have a year after this war is over in which to do nothing but write. I intend to read no book, listen to no music, regard no painting. That, at least, is how full I feel of things. I am unable to write in a place where there is always a radio or chatter. I don't dislike those or any other sociable pastime for themselves, but it's a real nuisance

never to be able to escape them. Only in Salisbury on an occasional pass can I really get to myself in the library there, and what writing can I, the slowest of mortals, accomplish in one day.¹



ABOVE RIGHT Some of Peter Taylor's wartime letters and photographs

¹ Peter Taylor, Letter to Eleanor Ross Taylor, 1 Apr. 1945, Stuart Wright Collection-Peter Matthew Hillsman Taylor Papers (#1169) Special Collections Department, J.Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, NC.



excerpts from these letters at Peter Taylor's funeral in Charlottesville in November 1994.

On day five came the Randall Jarrell manuscripts – his wartime notebooks with photos laid in and two of his poetry notebooks with entries from his last weeks in Chapel Hill before his death in 1965. The material is lucid and full of creativity, among it a table of contents for a new book of poetry and many unpublished fragments. Jarrell's own copies of his published work with margin emendations and corrections lay before me to see. Especially fascinating was Jarrell's copy of his second book, *Little Friend, Little Friend* – heavily amended by the author. The Jarrell material makes clear his many connections to the literary world. His life-long friendships with Robert Lowell, Peter Taylor, Robie Macauley, and his admiration of Elizabeth Bishop, Allen Tate, and John Crowe Ransom are also apparent in the Jarrell manuscripts, notebooks, and ex-libris books collected by Stuart Wright.

Jarrell's interest in illustration and children's books is represented by sketches, self-portraits, and



correspondence with Maurice Sendak, with whom he collaborated on three books. In addition to presentation copies of two of these, *The Bat Poet* and *The Animal Family*, there is also in the Stuart Wright Collection a presentation copy of the first edition of Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*, inscribed to Randall and Mary Jarrell, with an original drawing of the book's main character, Max.

Also remarkable is the Robert Lowell material in the Stuart Wright Collection. Lowell, a two-time Pulitzer Prize winner and, like Jarrell and Warren, former United States Poet Laureate, was a roommate and friend of Jarrell and Taylor at Kenyon College, where they all would study under John Crowe Ransom. I held in my hands a copy of Lowell's famous *Life Studies* inscribed to his student W.D. "Dee"

Snodgrass, another future Pulitzer-winning poet. I read correspondence between the two (1957-1977) about literary and personal matters. I saw a copy of Lowell's *Old Glory* inscribed to Randall and Mary Jarrell and a typed letter by Lowell, tipped in, a tribute to the poet written after Jarrell's death. Other gems that had me muttering "unbelievable" were Lowell's *Land of Unlikeliness* inscribed to his friend Peter Taylor; Lowell's most anthologized poem, "For the Union Dead," dedicated to "Red" Warren; four photographic prints of Lowell and Ransom from the mid-1960s; and a long letter from

Jean Stafford Lowell in 1944 to the newly married Eleanor Ross Taylor about Lowell and their mutual friends.

Lowell's connection to yet another Pulitzer-winning poet, Richard Eberhart, yields an extensive collection of books and manuscripts in the Stuart

ABOVE LEFT Seated, left to right, Eleanor and Peter Taylor, Anne Glankler Draper, Robie Macauley, and, lying down, Jean Campbell, Virginia Beach, June 1946

ABOVE CENTER Interior dust jacket of Maurice Sendak's *Fantasy Sketches* (Philadelphia: Philip H. & A. S. W. Rosenbach Foundation, 1970), inscribed to Mary Jarrell, wife of the poet Randall Jarrell, with an illustration by the artist

Wright Collection. It was Eberhart, another Poet Laureate, who discovered the Beat poets for the rest of America in his 1956 seminal review in *The New York Times Book Review*. The collection related to Eberhart includes working manuscripts, ex-libris books, and presentation copies and letters from Frost, Warren, Lowell, John Ciardi, and Allen Ginsberg, among others.

The web of connections represented in the Stuart Wright Collection is stunning. All of these literary treasures made me aware of Wright's uncanny networking ability, his collegial demeanor that invited friendship and trust – “how way leads on to way” as Frost described it. In a letter from the Southern writer Barry Hannah to Wright, for example,

Hannah writes, “The air is clear with you and I like it like that.” Karl Shapiro, another Pulitzer poet, dedicated his poem “Poet in Residence” to Wright:

The poet shy and bold as a bullet
Arrives at his residence
Booted and spurred but often with tie.
To some that man is patently impossible,
To others potentiality in person.²

George Garrett's dedication of *Luck's Shining Child* to Wright is also a testament to Wright's steadfast and steady work as a bibliographer, publisher, collector, university professor, and friend.

² Shapiro, Karl Jay. *Poet in Residence: for Stuart Wright* (Winston-Salem: Palaemon Press, 1984).

JAMES DICKEY: “Barnstorming for Poetry” at ECU

by Thomas E. Douglass

In his sophomore year at Wake Forest University, 1967–68, Stuart Wright met James Dickey, who came to campus to give a reading and attend a party held by his former English Professor Lee Potter. Wright admired Dickey's charm, his guitar playing, his poetry,

He moved to Greenville and lived in the university neighborhood, frequently dining out at Darryl's (now a parking lot) across 10th Street from East Carolina University. In the evenings, his book habit would take him to ECU's North Carolina Collection where librarian Minnie Marguerite Wiggins guided him through the material that most interested him: Civil War history, and all things North Carolinian and Southern.

In November of 1973, Dickey came to ECU during his “barnstorming for poetry” tour.* Wright, then twenty-five, served as Dickey's “minder” and brought along his collection of Dickey first editions and other articles for Dickey to autograph. He even grabbed the Gideon's Bible from Dickey's motel room, and Dickey signed it “James Dickey, posing as God.”

Wright compiled and published *James Dickey: A Bibliography of His Books, Pamphlets, and Broad­sides with Pressworks* in 1982. The bibliography includes an amusing foreword by Dickey: “I feel no need to comment on whatever value Mr. Wright's work may have, or that of the writings themselves, but would like to make public my extreme gratitude to Mr. Wright for his trouble, and thank him for the fact that if I ever want to read my own work, I know where to find it” (vi). Wright's Palaemon Press published eight broadsides and chapbooks by Dickey, one of which, “The Shark at the Window” (Palaemon Broadside no. 6), is accompanied by an original woodcut by North Carolina artist Robert Dance.

Palaemon Press was Wright's publishing concern begun in 1976, specializing in limited editions, chapbooks, trade publications, first appearance and commemorative broadsides. Palaemon ceased publishing in 1989, compiling over three hundred titles during its years of operation.



his bravado, and his success with women (especially Dickey's success with the girl Wright himself had taken to the party). Wright then began to collect books by Dickey. Later when Wright became a faculty member at Wake Forest, he would follow Lee Potter's example by extending invitations to contemporary writers to visit campus and read from their work, even without university authority. From his interaction with Dickey, Wright became aware of first editions and first appearances of an author's work.

For the 1973–74 academic year, Wright secured a teaching position at Pamlico Community School.

ABOVE Woodcut by Robert Dance, from a signed Palaemon Press broadside featuring Dickey's “The Shark at the Window”

* James Dickey, “Barnstorming for Poetry,” *New York Times* 3 Jan. 1965: [web](#).

Stuart Wright's career as a *littérateur* began soon after he earned his graduate degree at Wake Forest University. At twenty-eight, Wright was already a published historian of the Civil War and of North Carolina history. Then he met A.R. Ammons in 1976, and thus began an association with many of the great writers of the twentieth century. That year, Wright also established Palaemon Press, for the purpose of publishing his first book on the Civil War, an edited translation of *The Great Cavalry Battle of Brandy Station, 9 June 1863* by Heros von Borcke and Justus Scheibert. Soon after, however, the Press's scope expanded to include the publication of original poems, limited editions of fiction, and poetry collections by Ammons, Chappell, Welty, Richard Wilbur, Karl Shapiro, James Dickey, William Styron, Peter Taylor, and many others.

Among the many notable Palaemon titles included in the Stuart Wright Collection are first appearance publications of Ammons's "Breaking Out," illustrated by the author himself; a limited edition of twenty Welty photographs; a limited edition of Welty's play *Bye Bye Brevoort*; and commemorative broadside folios in limited editions for Warren, Welty, Garrett, Reynolds Price, and Aaron Copland. Palaemon's *Northern Lights* broadside folios included new poems by W.D. Snodgrass, John Updike, James Merrill, John Ciardi, Richard Wilbur, Donald Davie, Mark Strand, Howard Nemerov, Howard Moss and Louis Simpson. Other Palaemon editions focused critical attention on the works of George Garrett, Eleanor Ross Taylor, Barry Hannah, Harry Crews, and William Goyen.³

Beginning in 1978 and for the next fifteen years, Wright compiled bibliographic checklists and descriptive bibliographies for Ammons, Dickey, Eberhart, Garrett, Goyen, Jarrell, Andrew Lytle, Robert Morgan, Walker Percy, Reynolds Price, Henry Taylor, Peter Taylor, John Updike, and Charles Wright for university presses, *The Bulletin of Bibliography*, and *The American Book Collector*. It was in these processes that he would come to own most of the titles he was listing in his published bibliographies.

While a faculty member at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, Wright invited many of these writers to stay at his home on

Faculty Drive and to give readings at the university – Eberhart, Garrett, Updike, Price, Wilbur, Dickey, Ammons, Chappell, they all came. His office in the cupola in Wait Chapel housed a massive collection

The web of connections represented in the Stuart Wright Collection is stunning. All of these literary treasures made me aware of Wright's uncanny networking ability, his collegial demeanor that invited friendship and trust – "how way leads on to way" as Frost described it.

of Southern literature and Civil War history. In the heady collecting days of the 1980s, Wright became a member of the prestigious Grolier Club, his membership sponsored by the grand dame of the House of Books Ltd, Marguerite Cohn. By the time he finally decided to emigrate to England in the 1990s, pieces of his collection had made their way to the libraries of Vanderbilt, Wake Forest, Emory, Duke, the Ransom Center at Texas, the University of North Carolina. But most of what he collected crossed the Atlantic with him and came to rest on bookshelves in Ludlow, before finding a new home in Joyner Library's Special Collections.

Some four years later I returned to Ludlow over the New Year's holiday. Stuart and I sat before the fire, drinking wine and pints of ale, reading Larkin poems out loud, toasting to *auld lang syne*, and I asked my friend if he had any regrets about certain books that had gotten away, the missed opportunities of a collector, pieces he could have had. Several instances came immediately to his mind. Ruefully, he mentioned the manuscript letters from James Agee to Father Flye that were his for the asking (and he didn't ask), and two books he had owned only for a short time – the dedication copy of *Lucky Jim* by Kingsley Amis for friend Philip Larkin; and the copy of Red Warren's novel *All the King's Men* to friend Lon Cheney. "I should have never let them go," he said.

True it is, there are books that are read and admired and put back on the shelf, but then there are books that one never forgets and can never hold tightly enough. That one man could have collected so many of these literary treasures is remarkable. Thank you, Stuart Wright, for both your life in collecting and for this unbelievable collection that has found its last home here, at ECU, to be kept in trust for all time. ■

³ Palaemon ceased publishing in 1989, compiling over three hundred titles during its years of operation.

Read more in Fred Chappell's essay, "The Collector: On the Occasion of the Opening of the Stuart Wright Exhibit," *NCLR* 2011: 178–89.



A Warm Absence, 2006 (acrylic, 24x24) by Herb Jackson

Unseen

BY FRED CHAPPELL

At six o'clock you may look out and say,
 "We would be going for our evening stroll,"
 Recalling the route you took across the hill
 And the corner where you always turned one way
 And not the other every single day
 Because that clearly was your partner's will
 Who owned the closer knowledge of any trail,
 The better record in matter of going astray.

And after a moment of sorrow you may decide
 To walk the journey alone, yet not alone,
 For you shall feel a presence at your side,
 Not quite your old companion but *another one*,
 Unseeable in the gathering dark, yet very near,
 Who will go with you long after stars appear.

Among his numerous honors and awards, **FRED CHAPPELL**, North Carolina Poet Laureate from 1997 to 2002, has received the North Carolina Award for Literature in 1980 and was inducted into the North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame in 2006. He is the author of seventeen poetry collections, most recently, *Shadow Box* (Louisiana State University Press, 2009; reviewed in *NCLR* 2010). His poetry is also the subject of an essay by George Hovis in *NCLR* 2011. Read a new series of poetry and prose by Fred Chappell in the *NCLR* 2013 print issue, forthcoming this summer.



Two Worlds Touch, 2005 (acrylic, 54x72) by Herb Jackson

The Names

BY FRED CHAPPELL

The names we gave them never were their own,
 Merely the ones they learned to answer to
 At promise of a meal of favorite stew,
 A saucer of milk, a stroll, a rawhide bone,
 A jolly romp before the sun went down.
 Never would they call themselves *Old Blue*,
Bojangles, *Fluffy*, *Doc*, or *Honeydew*.
 Their genuine names are known to them alone.

Perhaps they claim their unimparted names
 When they depart our world so limited
 By human feeling and intelligence.
 Perhaps in that place they converse with streams
 And clouds and woodland spirits, where nothing is dead
 And everything alive to every sense.

Raleigh native and Professor of Art Emeritus of Davidson College, **HERB JACKSON** received his MFA degree at UNC-Chapel Hill. In 1999, he received the North Carolina Award, the state's highest civilian honor, for Lifetime Achievement in Fine Arts. He has had over 150 one-person exhibitions and has been featured in numerous group exhibitions in the US and abroad. His work is in the permanent collections of over a hundred museums, including the North Carolina Museum of Art, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, and the British Museum in London. See more of his work on his [website](#).

DOPPELGANGERS: AN INTERIOR DIALOGUE

a review by Fred Chappell

Steve Mitchell. *The Naming of Ghosts*. Winston-Salem, NC: Press 53, 2012.

In addition to his numerous poetry collections and novels, **FRED CHAPPELL** has published three collections of short stories, *Moments of Light* (New South, 1980), *More Shapes Than One* (St. Martin's Press, 1991), and *Ancestors and Others: New and Selected Stories* (St. Martin's Press, 2009). Read poetry by Chappell in this issue and forthcoming in the 2013 print issue.

STEVE MITCHELL was a finalist in the 2009 Doris Betts Fiction Prize competition for the short story "Platform," which was originally published in *NCLR 2010* ([Hear him read from this story](#)). Mitchell lives and works in North Carolina. He has published fiction and poetry in such periodicals as *Two Hawks Quarterly*, *Adirondack Review*, and *Kakalak*, and his plays have been performed in various venues.

The opening sentence of "Dandelions," the first story in **Steve Mitchell's** arresting collection, *The Naming of Ghosts*, reads: "I dreamt his dream again" (1). The abusive-father narrator of the second story, "Ten-Year Stare," says, "For a second then I seen into his world" (13). That world would be the cruel universe of his young son. In "Wednesday," the third story, the narrator looks into "the archive" of her friend's eyes: "I see the single, gentle thread of my life" (24). She almost comes to a realization of a lesbian sexual attraction but does not accept or even consciously acknowledge it.

In most fiction the individuations of characters are established by separation. Here on this side of the room is Joe Bob standing inside his clothing, his skin; over there is Mary Belle in her black dress and her nicer skin. As the story develops, they react with each other, each in accord with their separate interests. But in Steve Mitchell's highly original perspectives, the characters inhabit one another, to greater or lesser extent. Each can know what another is thinking and has thought and will think in the future; each knows the experience of another almost completely. Sometimes the relationship is symbiotic, as in "Trouble in Mind": "You shouldn't try to start a fight with me,' Bun-dee whispers. 'Jesus, between the two of us we're almost a whole person'" (16). In most of the other stories, the connections are not so simple as complementariness.

The black-and-white movies of yesteryear often used a transition device called the "lap dissolve,"



PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDREW MOREHEAD

in which the concluding frames of one scene or sequence were superimposed upon the initial frames of a new scene and then were gradually faded out. The result was strong indication of continuity of narrative and thematic thread. The device was also used to show how and why one character was thinking of another when the overlap used a facial close-up to establish the thinker's identity. In the usual run of films, the lap dissolve was only a mechanism to move from one part of the story to another. But D.W. Griffith, in films like *Broken Blossoms* (1919) and *Hearts of the World* (1918), found a finely nuanced dimension of feeling in it. The most expressive usage probably occurs in Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* (1966), in which separate characters are finally fused as one in a disconcerting image. Bergman's employment of the dissolve lends his drama of entangled relationships a psychological tension as taut as a mandolin string. The atmosphere of *Persona* is claustrophobic; the characters cannot escape the overpowering interior amalgamations of one another.

In Steve Mitchell's "Home," this interior amalgamation situation is compounded into convolute intricacies. A girl named Mariel has experienced dreadful night fears as a child. Her father was able to calm her fears (in a disturbing

manner), but a game of hide-and-seek returns those early terrors to her. As an adult she moves into “a spiritual community” (51) but is disappointed with its regimen that she finds less sacerdotal than she had envisioned. She had wanted to lose herself in a completely spiritual existence: “I imagined myself melting away. I counted on a form of silence and hoped for a revelation that might order the whole of the cosmos around me” (52). That never happens. She slides again into her past, into the inescapable game of hide-and-seek, into the place she knew as a child: “A place I lose and find. Again and again” (58).

My description of the story is incomplete and misleading because so many different interior absorptions take place, the principal ones being Mariel’s dissolving into states of former existence, into episodes of childhood, and into other previous experiences. She enters into her former selves so often and so intensely that she is lost among them. And so, I might venture, is the reader of the

story, even if he takes pains to outline the sequence of incidents insofar as he can make them out. One result of the erasure of character individuation in stories is that the determinant events become hazy and attenuated, and lined chronology is difficult – and tedious – to reconstruct. I understand this difficulty to be purposeful. At one point Mariel asks her friend Will, “Do you want a world without mystery?” (51).

Yet there is mystery a-plenty in stories like “The Naming of Ghosts,” in which the focal point is a suicide (closely imagined almost to point of participation by the victim’s son); in “Margin,” in which a drunken slacker finds himself in an actual desert inferno little different from his daily life; and in “Platform,” in which the narrator is telling about a deadly gas attack in a metro. In fact, it could be argued that “Platform” is the more mysterious because we are apprised in fragmentary fashion of what has been going on. The narrator of “Platform” is, like Mariel in “Home,” a seeker after transcendental truth that will

give meaning to existence: “The world was fading out before me and I could see only a darkness, rolling on forever,” the narrator tells us, then adds: “That was before Mother” (68).

Mother is the leader of a cult. For the cult members deaths are a small price to pay for the great, transcendental, interfusive moment: “This time I’m not walking. I am a still point. This time, I merely sit quietly and allow the full weight of joy, of family, of the love we share, to bear me forward into a moment of glory where for one single and splendid instant I am absolutely one with every soul around me and the terror of it burns me clean” (75). This is perhaps the most telling passage in Steve Mitchell’s impressive volume because it reveals in dramatic though indirect fashion one theme common to almost all the stories in *The Naming of Ghosts*: the unabidable fear of loneliness, the need to escape by any means the solitary confinement of the self.

Albert Camus would admire this book. ■

2012 CRITTENDEN AWARD

The *North Carolina Literary Review* does not usually cover the Christopher Crittenden Memorial Award since it honors significant contributions to the preservation of North Carolina *history*, rather than *literature*. But we do send our congratulations to the 2012 recipient, Jeffrey J. Crowe, taking this opportunity to thank him for all he has done over the years in support of this publication during his service as Deputy Secretary of the North Carolina Office of Archives and History and Secretary-Treasurer of the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association (NCLR’s co-publisher). Dr. Crowe retired in 2012 and was promptly honored with the Crittenden Award, this Association’s highest honor for historians. ■

RIGHT Jeffrey J. Crowe (right) receiving his award from Jerry C. Cashion at the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association’s annual conference, 16 Nov. 2012



PHOTOGRAPH BY NICK LANIER. COURTESY OF NC DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL RESOURCES

A DESCENT BECKONING

a review by Robert West

**Kathryn Stripling Byer. *Descent*.
Baton Rouge: Louisiana State
University Press, 2012.**

ROBERT WEST's poems, essays, and book reviews have appeared in venues including *Southern Poetry Review*, *Tar River Poetry*, *Pembroke Magazine*, *Appalachian Journal*, *Asheville Poetry Review*, *Carolina Quarterly*, *Southern Literary Journal*, *Southern Cultures*, and *Poetry*. His latest poetry chapbook is *Convalescent* (Finishing Line Press, 2011). An associate professor of English at Mississippi State University, he is book review editor for *Mississippi Quarterly*. See his reviews of poetry collections by Betty Adcock in *NCLR* 2009 and A.R. Ammons in *NCLR* 2011.

In 2012, **KATHRYN STRIPLING BYER** was inducted into the North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame and received the R. Hunt Parker Award, given by the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association to recognize significant contribution to North Carolina literature. Poet Laureate of North Carolina from 2005 to 2009, Byer is also the 2001 recipient of the North Carolina Award for Literature. For more information, read James Smith's interview with Byer in *NCLR* 2008, and for a sample of her fiction as well as poetry, see *NCLR* 2010.

* Poems quoted from William Carlos Williams, "The Descent," *Poets.org*, Academy of American Poets, 1997, web; Alfred Tennyson "Ulysses," *Poetry Foundation*, Harriet Monroe Poetry Institute, 2013, web.

"The descent beckons / as the ascent beckoned": with these words, William Carlos Williams begins a meditation first published as part of Book II of *Paterson* (1948), and later as a separate poem titled "The Descent" in *The Desert Music* (1954). Williams reflects on aging, acknowledging the losses and griefs that come after mid-life, but also recognizing the gifts: "Memory is a kind / of accomplishment, / a sort of renewal," he argues, going on to claim that "[n]o defeat is made up entirely of defeat – since / the world it opens is always a place / formerly / unsuspected." Like the old warrior-king in Tennyson's "Ulysses," Williams looks ahead to the discoveries of late life, but his poem eschews bravado: a man in his twenties could make an aging hero swear "[t]o strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield," but the author of "The Descent" was both a physician and a man in his sixties, someone with intimate knowledge of the kinds of yielding that age can require. Young and old may find Tennyson's poem stirring, but Williams's poem is more authentically inspiring.*

When the New Jersey doctor's meditation appeared, **Kathryn Stripling Byer** was a child growing up in south Georgia. Having long ago ascended to the mountains of Western North Carolina, and now in her sixties herself, she offers a *Descent* of her own. In one poem near the beginning of the collection, "Gone," she writes, "I'm middle-aged," but that poem is one of the book's earliest, first appearing (as "June Pastoral") in the 1997 North Carolina Museum of Art anthology *The Store of Joys*. In poems that come later, both sequentially and chronologically, Byer identifies herself as a woman past mid-life: she



PHOTOGRAPH BY NICK LANIER; COURTESY OF NC DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL RESOURCES

mentions getting her "[s]enior discount" at McDonald's (in "What I See Now"), describes herself as "an old woman" (in "Big Tease"), and says she is "[a]lmost the age when memory falters" (in "Last Light"). Of course, many of our writers (Williams among them) have had long and highly acclaimed late phases. Byer's acknowledgment of her stage in life is neither surrendering nor self-pitying. *Descent* does indeed offer a renewal through memory, an investigation of unexplored territory in her past.

The epigraph to the prefatory poem, "Morning Train" ("I'm going home on the morning train"), comes from a song with the same title by Precious Bryant, a singer-songwriter from Georgia whose first album appeared in 2002 – the year she turned sixty. With this title's allusion to a fellow Georgian who had recently made her own triumphant entry into late life, Byer strikes a note that at first seems quite bright. However, in twinning herself with Bryant, Byer, who is white, foreshadows an important aspect of the book: her musician-double is African American, an artist whose life and career have been shaped at least partly by the racism of those on Byer's side of the color line. Byer tells us the morning train is one whose cry "*So long*" is one she never wanted to think was aimed at her: with its name suggesting both illumination and mourning, this is the train of historical

consciousness and its attendant sorrow. In other words, this is the train of collective guilt, and once Byer heeds its call and even makes it her own song – “this slow morning train / of a poem” – she comes to hear that mournful “*So long*” as accusation, as self-accusation: “*What took you so long?*”

After “Morning Train,” Byer organizes *Descent* into three parts. The first is devoted to family elders: “At the End” startlingly imagines her grandfather’s final thoughts; “Retablo” pictures him in his casket in “the whites-only funeral / home”; “Down” evokes her parents’ hurried response (and her own) to news of her uncle’s imminent death; and the sequence “Drought Days” (originally published in *NCLR* 2010) gives a portrait-in-the-round of her grandmother’s life on the farm. Near the end of that sequence comes mention of the “pickled / pig flesh in our grandmother’s jars” that leads Byer back to the self-indicting note of “Morning Train”:

*Soul food, I grew up to hear it called,
as if the collards and side meat
we set on our table had been sanctified*

*but by stories we knew were not ours,
in which we were no more than
bystanders, and not always innocent ones.*

Part I also includes “Outside” and the trilogy “Lost,” evocations of the life and death of Byer’s namesake, Kathryn Campbell, an aunt on her mother’s side who died young. The same aunt is the focus of the title sequence of her 2006 collection, *Coming to Rest* (reviewed in *NCLR* 2007). Indeed, all the poems in Part I can and should be put in dialogue with Byer’s earlier writing about her family, going as far back as her first book, published in 1986, *The Girl in the Midst of the Harvest* – but let that be matter for a lengthier critical essay, where the relationships among those poems can be thoroughly examined.

In Part II, Byer deals most directly with her place in a society shaped by white racism. In “Gone Again,” she recalls her early fascination with the film *Gone with the Wind*, confessing to the way she once pretended to be Scarlett, down to “the loyal slaves hoisting / up sacks full of nothing / but chaff for the wind, that old / Hollywood hack, to keep blowing away.” In “Gladiolas” she tells of wounding herself, early in her marriage, by bending so far to admire her new garden’s flowers that she scratched a cornea; literally blinded by beauty, she has to let an



PHOTOGRAPH BY TED BUCKNER

ophthalmologist “scrape off the crud of that old skin / and let the new grow back again.” What follows is the poem “What I See Now,” in which a present-day Montgomery visit inspires Byer to reflect on the racism surrounding and pervading her time in “*Finishing School*,” a term her use of capital letters and italics emphatically ironizes; in retrospect, those who were truly “finished / beyond comprehension” were the African American “little girls pulled / from the rubble” of the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing.

The most striking work in Part II is the book’s masterpiece: a sequence of sonnets and double sonnets, titled “Southern Fictions.” Opening with an epigraph from T.S. Eliot’s *Four Quartets* (“... human kind / Cannot bear very much reality.”), Byer begins in the recent past, with her late father’s drapery of the Confederate battle flag across his window; despite what she calls her “fury at this flag,” she knows that expressing her disapproval to him would only lead to useless family friction. She ends section one (the first sonnet) by asking, “[W]hat does it mean, / this flag? Refusal to admit our guilt?” In section two (the second sonnet) she investigates the difficulties of her own perspective as an insider:

*... Describing it sounds trite
as hell, the good old South I love to hate.
The truth? What’s that? How should I know?
I stayed inside too much. I learned to boast
of stupid things. I kept my ears shut tight,
as we kept doors locked, windows locked,
the curtains drawn. ...*

In section three (a double sonnet), Byer recalls an episode from her youth, when “good ole [white] boys lit out with baseball bats” and “bullied blacks clear // to the county line, yelling don’t come back / again.” She remembers how her father came home,

ABOVE LEFT *NCLR* thanks Kathryn Stripling Byer for the “shout out” from the podium during her R. Hunt Parker Memorial Award acceptance remarks, 16 Nov. 2012; she reminded the audience to subscribe to this “literary treasure.”

ABOVE Kathryn Stripling Byer speaking at the North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame inauguration ceremony, Southern Pines, NC, 14 Oct. 2012

having apparently witnessed the episode, but also having failed to do anything to stop it; as for her own response, the only “self-examination” she was capable of was a study of her acne in the bathroom mirror. Section four (also a double sonnet) tells another sad story from her youth: how a local white woman hit and killed with her sportscar an African American schoolgirl just off the school bus and then (despite a score of witnesses, mostly African American) was acquitted of the crime.

Byer’s attitude toward herself recalls Seamus Heaney’s self-characterization in his long poem “Station Island”: confronted by the ghosts of friends, relatives, and others who had died in Northern Ireland’s sectarian violence, he berates himself for not taking a committed stance against such killings. In “Southern Fictions,” Byer similarly charges herself with a culpable passivity. Nowhere is this plainer than the sonnet of section five:

When the feminist poet flew down from New York,
I drove her to campus, an hour’s
easy drive. We chatted all the way there,
mostly politics. I liked her so much I shored
up my courage and told her the work
those boys had done, the macho way they
bragged, how no one had the nerve to say
shut up. She misinterpreted my words,
assuming I had suffered in the midst
of bigotry, silently doing my very best
to row against the tide. It sounded so good
I kept quiet, ashamed to say I’d been no activist.
That I’d done nothing, joined no protests,
felt no guilt. Had seen no reason why I should.

The sonnet of the final, sixth section concludes with a second admission – one probably at least as difficult to make as the one above and all the more resonant because of the terrible honesty required to make it:

Does my voice shake when I read my verse
outside the South, for fear I seem a dunce
or worse? Yes, I’m ashamed to say. I’ve stood
beside some famous poets and wished my words
could sound as if I came from somewhere else.

Byer knows her accent betrays her: the very sound of her speech marks her as belonging to a place where many still wave the battle flag of slaveholding secessionists. As in the previous sonnet, she tells us she is “ashamed.” Surely, though, in this investigation of an unjust past, including her own complacency within it, there is what Williams calls “a kind / of accomplishment, / a sort of renewal.” While she cannot relive her life in real history, she can relive it and examine it in memory, yielding to shame insofar as to admit the

feeling, but not giving herself over to it: after all, the result is not mortified silence but a sequence of sonnets, and masterfully turned sonnets at that. (Like the relationships of the family poems here to Byer’s previous work in that vein, a technical discussion of these sonnets and their relationship to the sonnet tradition would make another good critical essay.)

Part III of *Descent* is a miscellany. It begins with “Over,” written after the fulfillment of her father’s wish that a crop duster distribute his ashes over his land. Byer then retreats to a delightful evocation of her farm childhood in “Blackberry Road,” in which she suggests that the ritual of blackberry picking was a more genuinely spiritual experience than church services, which were so dull as to put those in the back pews to sleep. To her, she makes clear in the next poem, “First Presbyterian,” they were positively agonizing. Along with these poems of youth are some in which Byer most confronts her age: here we find “Big Tease” (mentioned previously), a spring poem in which she calls herself

. . . an old woman who knows
that the inkblot of sky on this page
of my daybook will soon begin fading,

because how can anyone, even Great
Granddaddy Death, stay asleep
amid so much awakening?

As Williams closes his poem, he declares that the descent leads to “a new awakening: / which is a reversal / of despair.” Taking a ruthlessly critical perspective on her own past, while also acknowledging her age and the no longer unthinkable prospect of her own death, Byer gives us poems so fiercely (and at times joyfully) alive that we have to count them as “a reversal / of despair.” May this “new awakening” last a long, long time. ■

ANGELOU ALSO INDUCTED

NCLR congratulates Maya Angelou, too, on her induction into the North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame. Angelou has lived in Winston-Salem, NC, since 1981. She has a lifetime appointment as the Reynolds Professor of American Studies at Wake Forest University. Provost Emeritus Edwin G. Wilson presented Angelou for induction at the ceremony, and poet Jaki Shelton Green read Angelou’s poem “Still I Rise” in her honor (Angelou was unable to attend). Read more on the North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame [website](#). ■

PERSONAL SIN/ PUBLIC HISTORY: PENANCE WITHOUT SALVATION

a review by Nick Ripatrazone

Charles Dodd White. *Sinners of Sanction County*. Huron, OH: Bottom Dog Press, 2011.

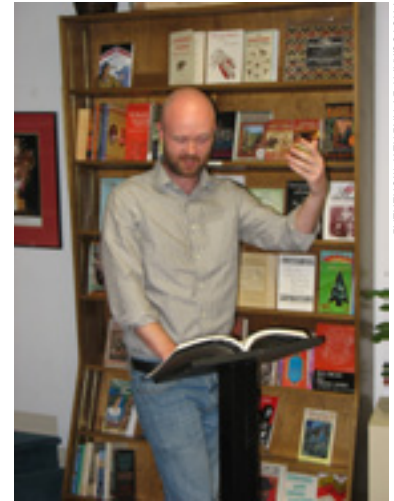
NICK RIPATRAZONE is the author of two books of poetry, *Oblations* (Gold Wake Press, 2011) and *This Is Not About Birds* (Gold Wake Press, 2012), and a book of nonfiction, *The Fine Delight* (Cascade Books, 2013). His fiction has appeared in *Esquire* and *The Kenyon Review* and has received honors from *ESPN: The Magazine*.

NCLR published **CHARLES DODD WHITE**'s short story, "Controlled Burn", in 2010 and reviewed his first novel, *Lands of Men* (Casperian Books, 2010), in 2011.

ABOVE RIGHT **Charles Dodd White** reading his 2010 *NCLR* story at *NCLR*'s publication party at City Lights Bookstore in downtown Sylva, NC, 10 Sept. 2011.

For a collection with the title ***Sinners of Sanction County***, **Charles Dodd White**'s stories are steeped in implicit, regional cultural codes of action and morality, rather than in literalist rhetoric. The book is far more nuanced than single-note depictions of fundamentalist ilk: the characters in White's collection know death is always near but act with the reckless passion of those blinded by the present. The result is a tight and well-chosen collection, with several standout stories and a dynamic sense of place particularly suited to the short fiction form.

White's linguistic strength is in description that bears the weight of individual settings. In "Carrion," a story about a narrator and his father who pick up fresh road kill to sell to butchers, the narrator shows "the bloody back rooms of old trailers and sheds, the wrecked deer corpses dangling from their hind ends, forelegs hanging down towards the floor like they meant to gain solid ground with just one more stride" (33). When White allows simile to refine his palpable description, or the tangible to exist without the figurative, he further engages the reader in the fictional moment. These lines describing a hunt in "Killer" allow the figurative to inform the real: "When the deer appeared, they burst from the tangles in full flight. Their hides swept past like silverfish. Even their stride was fishlike, haunch and foreleg driving one to the other with a seesawing rhythm as they dodged pulped stumps and stones. Dead branches snapped like a line of musketry" (45–46). The same effect occurs in "Confederates" when the narrator describes driving with his friend Charlie: "One radio speaker was out, so he had



PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDREW MOREHEAD

to wrench the silver knob all the way around until the guitar and breath rasped and squawked from the perforations in the passenger side door" (75). Later in the story, the narrator remembers his father and Charlie riding on dirt bikes, "roaring through the woods motocross style with me suckered against one of their backs like some tumor realized full with hair and eyeballs" (76). This simile is admittedly uneven, perhaps reflecting the fact that the narrator has "been out of Copestone asylum for nearly six months" and recognizes that his "[s]anity," gained "by pins and needles" there, was "by now a distant, nostalgic memory" (78–79).

White's prose is precise elsewhere, and he's clearly capable within the short fiction form. Many of the sentences in *Sinners of Sanction County* seem written to be read aloud. White's syntax is taut and airtight, almost refreshingly so, while his characters are comparatively imperfect and stubborn, looser than the words used to represent them. The world of Sanction County is equally unpredictable, as in the final pages of "Carrion," in which a drunk father nearly evades a cement truck

destined to “cut his find in two” (36), and the deer resurrects “from a sleep men would never know” (37). The efficacy of White’s words makes the most outlandish actions believable, including those of the main character of “Hawkins’s Boy,” who reburies his son’s corpse each night after wild dogs “get at the limbs glowing pale as quartz in the shallow ground, gnawing through the shroud of croaker sacks” (7).

The “sins” of these characters exist in a world where the past leans against the present to the point of pain. In “Give Up and Go Home, Jasper,” characters seek a “place [where] we all go when we go down to forget ourselves

and what we lost some place just beyond faithful memory” (54), a sentiment that appears throughout the collection. In stories like “A World of Daylight,” there might not be such a place; revenge dislocates Packer, who is searching for Drema Chase, the woman who caused his brother’s death. Packer’s plans are known: “this ain’t a town for secrets” (89). Another character guarantees an alibi. The plan becomes reality during “the Lord’s weekend” (91), with Packer showing up at Drema’s trailer and playing Playstation with the boy there until she arrives. The surprise in the story’s final act shows that the power of a revenge story often exists more

in well-crafted anticipation than actual vengeance.

“Winter by Heart,” perhaps the most arresting story in the collection, shows White at his best, both in terms of language and content. Luke Messer’s hands are an important part of this tale, as in the image of him pressing “his bare palms to the warmth still living in any such surface” as “car windshields, polished granite, black paint,” and then “his lightly whiskered face” (119). Luke is searching for Old Carter Marsh, but the emotional core of this story is Alice Forester, a woman his father had married three weeks after meeting her.

HIS STORY, HISTORY, AND HOME: GARY NEIL CARDEN RECEIVES NORTH CAROLINA AWARD FOR LITERATURE

by Lorraine Hale Robinson

Gary Neil Carden, storyteller-author-painter-teacher, received the North Carolina Award for Literature at a gala ceremony held October 30, 2012, at the North Carolina Museum of History in Raleigh. The North Carolina Awards, the state’s highest civilian honor, recognize the highest achievement in the fields of the fine arts, science, and public service.

Carden’s life was shaped by his father’s murder, his mother’s abandonment of him, and his hearing impairment, an inauspicious beginning by most measures. He was raised by his grandparents in a then-remote cove in Jackson County, and this mountain milieu was rich in material that Carden has now woven into his writing and storytelling and depicted in his painting. He grew up “listening to a great deal of foolishness about bad blood [his], black Irish curses [his grandfather’s], and the evils of being left-handed [he couldn’t play a musical instrument].”¹ The stories he heard were recounted at family events such as reunions, weddings, and funerals. At the center of these stories is an intensely personal element: relatives or neighbors might be described as



PHOTOGRAPH BY CARL LOBST

ABOVE Jeff Messer playing Horace Kephart in Gary Neil Carden’s play *Outlander*, Swain County Center for the Arts, Bryson City, NC, 25 Sept. 2012

¹ This and the next quotation are quoted from Carden’s [website](#).

While hunting deer, Luke encounters a bear cub. He tries to scare the animal away, but it stays put, so he “fired a shot through the cub’s heart” and brought it back home, where Alice plainly says, “That’s a hell of a thing you’ve done” (122). Alice brings his father’s skinning knives, and White, with a fair amount of literary detail, documents the skinning. The result is much like Tom Bailey’s attention to animal forms in his 2003 short story collection *Crow Man*: human hands become the knives they are using as instruments; the reader feels the blood on his own fingers.

Luke is taken aback by Alice’s power here. He “felt the motion

of the saw shiver up through his hand as Alice bore down” through bone. She can’t think “of a worse sin” than letting meat go to waste (125). Afterward, she showers, and Luke “watched her step out, cased in a short pink towel . . . light catching the spangling traces of moisture along the backs of her long slim legs” (126). What happens next is not a surprise, but the final actions of “Winter by Heart,” in all of their Old Testament violence, are certainly shocking. Luke prefaces the concluding action of the story by saying, “My hands have become too heavy” (135), a sentiment that extends to the collection as a whole.

Sinners of Sanction County dramatizes a setting where personal sins have begun to tip public history to a place where even penance will not lead to salvation. Although Sanction County appears on no map, White’s prose convinces the reader that its landmarks and borders are possible. The goal of most story collections is breadth of action and circumstance; White accomplishes that and more, crafting a collection that opens the reader’s imagination beyond the relative brevity of these narratives toward a world detailed enough to be real. The reader will, in turn, fear for, and be afraid of, these characters, both sinners and saints alike. ■

“legendary,” and tales were spun out of both dreams and memory.

In 1958, Carden graduated from Western Carolina College (now University, which honored him with a doctor of humane letters degree in 2012) and left Appalachia for fifteen years in search of “culture,” teaching in metropolitan areas such as Atlanta, Charlotte, and Raleigh. An early 1970s visit to Sylva, a Western Carolina University Mountain Heritage program by Appalachian poet Jim Wayne Miller, and Miller’s exhortation to “come home” propelled Carden back – to the very house in which Carden had grown up.

Since his return to the North Carolina mountains forty years ago, Carden has been an energetic and effective promoter of traditional culture, particularly as a storyteller. With vivid description and classic self-deprecation, he recounts his start in that art form: “I told my first stories to my grandfather’s chickens in a dark chicken-house when I was six years old. My audience wasn’t attentive and tended to get hysterical during the dramatic parts.” In his wide-ranging career as a storyteller, he has performed at the Weymouth Center for the Arts and Humanities (in Southern Pines) and has taught at elderhostels at Highlands and Lake Junaluska.

Carden’s writing includes the story collection *Mason Jars in the Flood*, which received the 2001 Appalachian Writers Association Book of the Year Award and was the source for PBS’s *Mountain Talk* documentary. His play *The Prince of Dark Corners* (based on the life of outlaw Major Lewis Redmond) won the Paul Green Multimedia Award and has become a PBS film.² Another play, *Outlander* (based on the history of the creation of Great Smoky Mountains National Park), premiered in 2012 at the Parkway Playhouse in Burnsville, NC. As an advocate and presenter of Southern Appalachian culture, Carden also received the 2006 Brown-Hudson Award from the North Carolina Folklore Society.

The multi-faceted artist Gary Neil Carden defines art as “life refined (with all the gross omitted)” and asserts the centrality of art to the depth and richness of human existence.³ This refinement of life, its depth and richness are found, for Carden, in and near that cove where he grew up outside of Sylva. Perhaps in contradiction to his North Carolina fellow writer’s assertion that “you can’t go home again,” Gary Neil Carden may have done just that. ■

² *Mason Jars in the Flood and Other Stories* (Boone, NC: Parkway Publishers, 2000); *Mountain Talk*, dir. Neal Hutcheson (NCLLP Films, 2004); *Prince of Dark Corners*, dir. Neal Hutcheson, perf. Milton Higgins (PBS, 2009).

³ Quoted from [an online interview](#) with Gary Carden.

THE REGIONAL POET AND THE WORLD

a review by Karen K. Mason

Robert Morgan. *October Crossing: Poems*. Frankfort, KY: Broadstone Books, Asheville, NC: The Captain's Bookshelf, 2009.

— *Terroir*. New York: Penguin Poets, 2011.

Scott Owens. *Something Knows the Moment*. Charlotte, NC: Main Street Rag, 2011.

— *For One Who Knows How to Own Land*. Mineral Bluff, GA: FutureCycle Press, 2012.

KAREN K. MASON earned a BA from Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, IL; an MA from Bradley University in Peoria, IL; and an MFA from Queens University of Charlotte, NC. She has published poems in various journals and in her chapbook, *Not From Around Here* (Finishing Line Press, 2013). She currently lives in New Hampshire where she moved after living five years in Luxembourg. She also lived in Switzerland for nearly fifteen years. She has taught English in the public school classroom in Peoria, IL, and history in Geneva, Switzerland. For five years she also taught composition online from Luxembourg for Illinois Central College in East Peoria, IL.

One nice thing about poetry collections is that they're usually small enough to fit easily into a bag when you travel. At those odd moments when you find yourself with some down time, you can pull out the volume and read as many poems as time allows. That was my situation and experience reading collections by Robert Morgan and Scott Owens as I traveled in western Europe. Whether in trains watching the passing countryside or reading in a tiny alpine village, I easily imagined the cows and holy cussing in Appalachian North Carolina (Morgan) or upstate South Carolina (Owens).

These collections brought me fresh awareness of the poet's place in helping to identify the intangibles that connect us. Despite the concrete details that are specific to the Carolinas, reading these four volumes of poetry reminded me that people almost everywhere connect through shared experience of life and the natural world. Characteristics that differentiate one region from another serve – intentionally or not – to clarify a subject for the reader, open a window into the lives of real people and actual places. This clarity adds to our understanding of the larger community.

Robert Morgan is such a regional poet. He has lived in upstate New York since the 1970s, but his inspiration remains the Appalachian region of western North Carolina. The region has been a mine of possibility, and his works, whether poetry or prose, have been critically acclaimed.

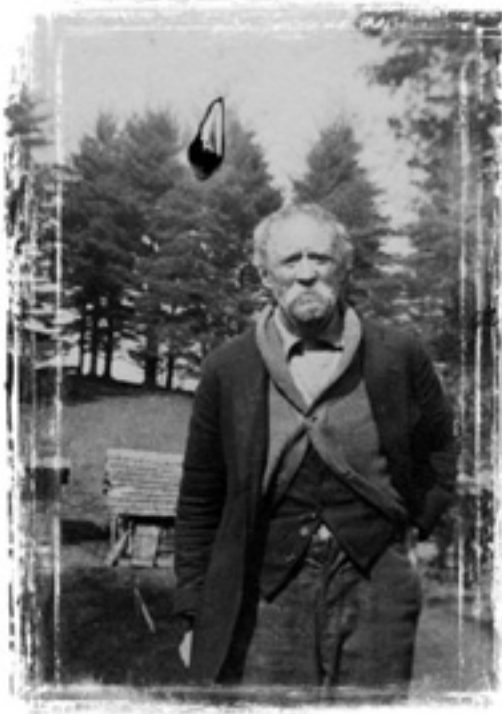
Most of Scott Owens's creative works to date have been written in North Carolina, but he was born and raised in the Piedmont region of South Carolina, a place he

evokes through vivid images and regionalisms. For Owens, place serves as a point of departure to study relationships. In contrast to Morgan, whose standing as a writer and poet is well established, Owens is building his reputation as a poet.

These four books were good company on my journey. While I traveled, the poems took my imagination to other places and spoke to enduring themes, and I want to make some return visits.

Robert Morgan is a native of western North Carolina who has lived in Ithaca, NY, since 1971 when he joined the faculty of Cornell University. His two most recent poetry collections, *October Crossing* and *Terroir*, explore the distinct qualities of Appalachia, the land and people. *October Crossing* is a cohesive unit of thirty-four poems about Appalachia that is almost (with the exception of four poems) wholly incorporated into *Terroir*. However, the interplay of ideas, tone, and point of view based on what comes before or after a given poem, helps unearth new readings in both collections. Reading familiar poems from *October Crossing* in *Terroir* is similar to seeing the chain of mountains in the Blue Ridge in different lights: each view offers a new vista. The seventy-eight poems of *Terroir* effectively carry on a dialogue according to the theme and arrangement of poems. Regarding content, it's clear from the exacting details that this is poetry written by a consummate authority on the region. Titles alone are telling: "Peepers," "Jar Fly," "Purple Hands," "The Mareslide," "Apple Howling."

October Crossing begins with "Clogging," a poem that sets the stage for a long look into the character of the community



COURTESY OF ROBERT MORGAN

that Morgan brings into focus through the collection. “Now we gather in a circle / turning right and turning leftward, / stamping as though threshing barley, / stomping as if crushing wine grapes” announces to the reader that the community has chosen to engage in a dance of life. The poet recreates the sound in the energetic verbals that introduce each line, and each of these verbals propels the movement: “hammering down the seconds firmly, / trampling on the vines that trip us, / nailing note and nailing heartbeat, / stamping out the fires of petty.” This energy appears to be part instinctual and part a learned response to adversity that reveals strong character. It connects human behavior to cycles in nature, to how the seasons dictate planting and harvest, but also to ancient ways, to a mystical conception of how nature and old magic interact: “stepping to the river’s shiver, / cooling down the flames of anger, / summoning of ancient spirits / from the deepest wells and caverns.”

The last four lines of “Clogging” reveal the resilience of the dancers: “from the secret mystery places, / beating back the blackest shadows / raising dust of healing vapors / to the pulse of clap and laughter.” The “clap and laughter” response to life’s hardship is one that Morgan captures again and

again in various poems. For example, in the poems “Concert” and “Craft” (two of the four poems in *October Crossing* that are not in *Terroir*), the reader finds a stoic response to physical labor and dark moods. In “Concert” the poet’s uncle, taking a break from long hours of solitary labor, “wandered to / the edge of the far field” to listen to the “steeple bells spill out the call / to a revival service.” These bells were “the only music of his day, / except the keen of whippoorwill.” In “Craft,” the scene is the dead of night and someone is waking to the sound of wood being planed and sanded by an invisible carpenter. One world collides with another and the individual must choose how to respond:

as though already in the next
dimension wood was being smoothed
and sawed and fitted, joined and nailed,
to build a craft, a sleek canoe,
to launch them on the curving veer
of widest, farthest river.

Two other poems, found in both collections, shine a light on qualities of character. The poem “October Crossing,” describing woolly worm caterpillars crossing the road in the fall, reveals the stubborn nature of the land and its people. The caterpillars are “bears” and inexorably determined: “They inch across the lanes in fur / fit for a monarch, fox or star, / as crows descend and yellow leaves / fly out against the twilight breeze.” No matter what the caterpillars know about their existence, “they seem intent on crossing this / hard Styx or Jordan to the ditch, / oblivious to the tires’ high pitch.” The concluding poem of *October Crossing*, “The Years Ahead,” suggests the quiet strength of the poet’s grandfather who learned how to safely navigate his world. This long poem looks back in time, recalling when Morgan’s grandfather routinely “took his produce / down the Winding Stairs to Greenville / to peddle door to door.” The poems between “Clogging” and “The Years Ahead” are filled with folklore, oral tradition, family stories, recorded facts, throwing a spotlight on a region and leaving the reader more intimately acquainted with the community.

With the collection *Terroir*, Morgan builds on what he has observed, implied, retold in the 2009 collection, but as the French word of the title promises – and the poet delivers – the 2011 publication

explores the broader significance that *terroir* suggests. An underlying question to the material could be, “How does the character of a place or of a person develop?” The collection answers the question. Poem after poem adds layer upon layer of delicate nuances in order to capture the qualities that create the smell and feel and character of a place, and by degrees the people who inhabit these places. Given that Morgan’s career has moved him out of Appalachia, *Terroir* and *October Crossing* are all the more revealing for the role that memory serves in the recreation of familiar people and places remembered from afar.

Terroir is divided into three parts. The cumulative effect of the collection – of reading poems about the land, the atmosphere that feeds it, the people that populate it – is that Morgan is writing about what it feels like to live outside of an Eden. Many of the poems result from observation over many seasons, yet there’s immediacy in the depiction. Perhaps the poem that introduces the collection proper to *Terroir*, “In Memory of William Matthews,” holds a key to the selection process in the collected work: “Even awake, the rest of us / were never as awake as you. / . . . Tradition meant / a lot to you. You were a connoisseur.” Reading the collection from beginning to end brings Appalachia to life by an authority who finds significance in detail and knows what to present for best effect. The poet in these two collections is a human seismograph, someone who notes the “endless picture / of rest and jolt and magnifies / the shivers we don’t recognize” (“Seismograph”). The poems in the collections, if not actually recollected in tranquility, are intriguing for the way they show how memory serves composition.

Part One of *Terroir* explores the natural world of Appalachia. Trees, boulders, animals, develop a mythic quality as the poems accumulate with the turning pages. The natural world maintains its proper qualities, its “thing-ness,” and is neither anthropomorphized nor sentimentalized. For example, “Nurse Log” reflects on the role of downed trees in regeneration of a forest; a dead deer in “Loaves and Fishes” is road kill, a link in the food chain; “Dew” is “minute rain . . . / you don’t know when it came except / at dusk the grass is suddenly wet”; air currents from and around caves are “Inspired”: “The mouths of giant caves are known / to breathe in during winter

months, / then slowly start to sigh out air / as spring slows into summer heat.” In some poems, such as “Soft Mountains,” metaphor suggests the human predicament and the strong association of place and character:

But underneath the thicket swirls
and fallen leaves and stingy soil
they’re granite at the core and hard
as any hill in Cappadocia,
the softness only in the face,
deceptive to the look as steel
encased in velvet, hardness at
the heart, while flanks are petal-smooth
and quaint and blue as old-time music.

Part Two of *Terroir* is about the poet’s personal recollections of family and friends and acquaintances. This is the shortest of the volume’s three sections, but the poems root the poet to the place. The reader meets Aunt Tharmuthias and, in “The Years Ahead,” learns about his grandfather. In “Purple Hands,” classmates try, without success, to hide the stain from potatoes, evidence of their work “dropping taters.” Sometimes people are saved from certain disaster, as in “Brink,” but all are made memorable through the poet’s careful selection of detail that brings the place alive for the reader. The concrete images and dispassionate description are the flint that lights the image, and the use of rhyme echoes speech, as in “The Mareslide”: “The long flat rock that drops so steep / down the mountainside above the creek / with winter ice locked on its face / seems some vast cameo encased.”

Poems in the third and final section of *Terroir* relate stories told by the collective community, past and present. The story behind the tragic, historical event in “Confederate Graves at Elmira” illuminates the role of “a black custodian here / who dedicated twenty years / to finding out the name for each / Confederate grave.” Or, as in “Singing to Make Butter Come,” a story demonstrates how people make the best of adversity. Sometimes people are the object of good-humored fun, sly and dry, as in “Kudzu Cousins,” which raises a question about Appalachians: “What if the family tree was not / a tree but more a wilderness / of vines that curled and interlaced / across the hill of time far back.” People use their ingenuity, like the Reverend Duffy Peyton Corn and his umbrella in “Shield,” to survive.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ALAN WESTMORELAND; COURTESY OF NC STATE ARCHIVES



From poem to poem, there is an inviting regularity in structure. The overall effect, reading poem after poem in the collection, is reading poetry with the feel of emotional bedrock. Each poem carefully fits into and is a necessary part of the whole. Whereas poems in Parts One and Two share a common connection (nature in One, family and friends in Two), the poems in Part Three are not as simply characterized. The sheer variety of material may serve the purpose of bringing the reader to understand what it means to be “Appalachian.” As the collection’s title poem suggests, character is formed from disparate sources:

Terroir

**That quality that seems unique,
as thriving from a special spot
of soil, air flow and light specific,
and also frost and winter sleep,
conditions of particular year,
as every instance comes just once
with mix of mineral and grease,
what Hopkins chose to call inscape,
or individuation, sounds
so close to terror you’d confuse
the two, as if the finest and
the rarest blend would come with just
a hint of fear or pain, the sting
and shiver of revulsion with
the savor of the earth and sun,
of this once, not returning, sung
for this one ear, on this one tongue.**

The collection’s concluding poem, “Mound Builders,” leaves the reader with the thought that Morgan

is reassembling natural elements and vestiges of the past in *Terroir*. The collection itself is similar to what the mounds were for the Creek Indians, their “sanctuaries during floods.” Whatever people hold on to is a source of strength:

. . . the sacred dirt
and relics of their clan, the signs
and symbols of their hearth, beliefs
and arts and holy bundles too,
as all of us rely, and must,
on our traditions and the deep
ancestral memories and ways
to bear us up and get us through
the deadly and uncertain days,
sustaining breath and sight and hope
on residue and legacy
of those beloved who came before
and watch us from the glittering stars.

Scott Owens grew up on farms and in mill villages around Greenwood, SC. Most of his creative works have been written in North Carolina, and currently he lives in Hickory, NC, where he teaches at Catawba Valley Community College. ***Something Knows the Moment***, Owens’s seventh poetry collection, is an engaging and intellectually stimulating reframing of biblical and hagiographical stories. His other recent volume, ***For One Who Knows How to Own Land***, is a powerful extended reflection on family and relationships, occasioned by the loss of the poet’s grandfather. Both volumes basically examine the same questions: Who are we? How did we get here? If people do bad things, does that mean they’re bad? The principal poetic technique common to both is the dramatic monologue. In *Something Knows*, this technique brings a contemporary tone to age-old questions of faith and doubt, whereas in *For One Who Knows*, it lends a timeless quality to a twentieth-century family story.

In *Something Knows the Moment*, dramatic monologue allows the narrator to get inside the heads of Biblical characters to explore motivations and behavior. In this work, Owens probes lack of certainty about basic tenets of faith and religious belief. The collection is neither a rant nor a polemic, but at eighty-nine poems, it is long and sometimes wanders. I want to like *Something Knows* because there is much to like, but it would have benefitted from more ruthless editing to enhance the novel reframing

of old stories. For example, while the section called “The Lives of the Saints and Others” contains many strong poems, it lacks sharp definition. The result is that this second section of the collection seems to shift the focus and therefore diffuses the powerful effect of this ambitious undertaking.

Owens sets conventional teaching to one side as he inventively revisits the stories of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Lot and his wife, Saint Veronica and Saint Francis, and he thoughtfully reconsiders the snake’s role in Eden as well as the serpent’s possible role in “Why Angels Are Always Fat.” *Something Knows* is an unrelenting search for answers, with results that are sometimes humorous and sometimes hard-edged, but always thought-provoking. In addition to explicit allusions to scripture and doctrine, *Something Knows* includes oblique references to those thinkers and artists through the ages who have wrestled with the same questions of existence and faith.

Something Knows has five sections. The volume begins with creation stories, gives way to life after The Fall, and digresses to angels before turning to a long section on faith. The introductory poem to the collection is “Having His Hands Before Him.” A note referencing William Blake follows the poem’s title. The God in *Something Knows* is accessible in human terms, reminiscent of the gods of Greek mythology:

Still, having his hands before him
his forehead shining
his hair hanging about his face
having his ears and nose and high cheekbones
he wanted more
so with his white teeth
he chewed up bits of earth
and molded tiger and lamb
dove and whale, serpent and flea.

Blake’s influence is evident not only in the mention of a tiger and lamb but also in the depiction of God, which recalls Blake’s illustrations for *The Book of Job* or *The Divine Comedy*.

Owens revisits traditional stories by getting inside the characters’ skin. For example, in “Eve Descending,” Owens re-imagines Eve as a fount of tenderness and sensitivity: “Eve descending saw how the willow / wept, the cherry blazed, the apple / kept its heart hidden, heard / the dove’s cry and called it mourning.” And in “Leaving Eden,” Eve is “under



COURTESY OF SCOTT OWENS

the sky and stars / She rolled over, she said the trees / Bore heaven in their arms, / She said the weight was sometimes too much.” Again, the poetic treatment yields an accessible being, and Eve is especially sympathetic. Another intriguing treatment of a well-known biblical character is Owens’s version of the Tempter, a character that appears as Snake in sections one and two, and simply as He in section three. In the first poem of section three, “Why Angels Are Always Fat,” God states that it is the Tempter’s fault: “He took all my pretty ones with him / . . . He never clapped at all, just made his body / like silver, a mirror they’d follow anywhere.” Owens’s representation of familiar characters is fresh; however, their stories remain disconnected and lack a certain depth because the reader doesn’t know enough about the universe the characters inhabit.

Section four, “The Persistence of Faith,” contains the poem “Common Ground,” which gives the collection its title: “But something / knows the moment of sunflower, / the time of crow’s open wing, / the span of moss growing on rock.” The poem seems to suggest that the only certainty is what people make of the present moment. Owens builds on this idea in the final section, “What to Make of a Ruined Thing,” which begins with the introductory note, “who spoke of him / have died / making him extinct,” and ends with reaffirmation of the power that rests in the moment: “in the presence of / not there but here / what could be greater.” The dramatic monologue pulls the reader into intriguing puzzles of logic and emotional ambiguities.

In *For One Who Knows How to Own Land*, Owens has produced a record of the life and death of his maternal grandfather, to whose memory this volume is dedicated. The book is an historical record that does not attempt to analyze or interpret but simply to present a family's experience of being poor and white in red clay farming country of upstate South Carolina. Ultimately, through vignettes of the grandfather working on the farm, later at the quarry, he is shown to be a complicated and central presence in the life of the narrator. These are bleak pastoral poems rendered without a shred of self-pity. The volume is divided into three sections and begins with events that happened during the grandfather's lifetime, in "Leaning Through Darkness"; followed by what transpires just after he dies, in "The Undiscovered Country"; and moves on to a clear-eyed appraisal of existence, in "To Resist Fading."

A recurring theme in the collection is the need to escape uncertain but dire circumstances. At the conclusion of "Between the Rails," the collection's introductory poem, it is not clear which boy is being returned to angry parents, but "He found God between two cars / of the line from Greenwood to Clinton" and was rendered speechless by the experience. Was the boy of the poem the grandfather? It doesn't seem to matter because the characters in this collection have the shared reality of a harsh life. Experience for them contains harsh lessons and sends a shock to the system. In the poem "Americana," the voice is an innocent, and again the situation is anxious:

We arrive again, at night,
nearly as hot as it is in the day.
Candle bats swarm the yellow
porch light. The old woman,
wrapped in flowered gowns,
smelling of Vicks, helps us in.
You wouldn't call her crazy yet,
though we've all seen the signs.

The predominant voices in *For One Who Knows* match the emotional age of the poem's narrator. Some poems are in a voice that registers surprise, wonder, and the helplessness of innocence. More often, a somewhat flat voice reflects a world-weary adult who can no longer feel – or no longer wants

to feel. Seldom is there hope. The poem "The Event Rightfully Remembered" provides a sample of getting the voice – and the story – just right. This poem, from the first section of the collection, is about how the grandfather clears away the carcass of a dead horse:

The redness in the old
man's hands as he dragged
the skin to the pit
of wood and ash
could have been
flakes of rust
from an old wheel,
tree sap bleeding
from the wounded branch,
blood stains clinging
to wrinkled palms,
or just the color
of an old man's
furrowed hands
that handled life
and death like two ends
of the same season.
Anything else
would have been
too weak to survive
all these years
in the mind of a boy
too young to understand.

The second section of *For One Who Knows*, "The Undiscovered Country," creates an elegiac mood and evokes grief by building on images from the natural world. The fourteen poems are about how life continues after the grandfather dies. The only comfort seems to be that, over time, grief diminishes to a cold fact. The concluding poem in this group is the emotionally stark poem "Buzzard."

Buzzard

**Always
when you look up
at white clouds, blue sky**

**you see
that hyphen of a bird,
not flying but floating,**

**silently
keeping two worlds
you imagine apart, together.**

The final section of the collection presents many poems that prompt the reader to reflect on memory and the purposes of memory. Why bother remembering, as Owens does, murder and abuse in “Brock” and “Kendall”? Why remember a home, “a place I lived only between / other homes, once a year, / a month at a time at least till 12”? The poet of *For One Who Knows* writes about these events for the same reason Walker Evans photographed the impoverished cotton sharecropper Bud Field and family: to leave a record.



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“To Resist Fading,” a poem with the same title as the section, references the now-famous photograph, taken by Walker Evans in 1936, of an Alabama cotton sharecropper and his family with their meager possessions. The family sits on a bed and chairs. The mother holds a sleeping toddler; a young girl with a crutch stands next to these two; the crutch seems forgotten as the girl looks squarely into the camera. The father holds a little boy, and next to them sits an older woman, most likely Field’s mother or mother-in-law. The poem asks, “Who can keep them from fading / into walls, floors, their bare feet, / bare shoulders as unwashed / as where they move.” The poem is just as bleak a rendering of family life as the photograph, but the poet finds hope in the straightforward look of “this one”:

with eyes like caverns, a face
round as a question, legs
already scraped and scratched

but standing like none of the others,
a pillar between the walls,
between the doors and windows,
holding all that falls, apart.
There is only this one
I need to believe will make it.

In all of the poems, the mask of the dramatic monologue provides distance and facilitates retelling of family stories. The poet’s use of concrete details, flat tone, and lines of verse that appear truncated at times strengthen the authenticity of the narrative poems of this collection. Short lines and short stanzas are a semiotic typography depicting the spare existence and often brutal behavior described in the poems. Most of the poems in *For One Who Knows* convey the pain of people learning to endure the circumstances of their life. However, the collection is a frank look backward in time in an attempt to understand the past through the loss of the patriarch of the family – and also through the act of writing itself.

For One Who Knows is a chronicle of a family, although not all poems in the collection are explicitly about one family. The woman in “Dowry,” for example, could be the grandmother or mother of the young narrator, or an anonymous woman. The context is unclear, which makes the relationship uncertain. The exact connection doesn’t matter, though, since the point could very well be that each generation has the same hard-luck story as the previous, that some cycles are perpetuated through generations. *For One Who Knows* is a courageous act of remembering and attests to the fact that the narrator, having left the people and the region, hasn’t shaken the pull they have on him or his art. In “Homeplace,” he states about place that “one [is] as good or bad as the other. / It’s the people you care for, / or hate, who keep you / coming back, or never let you go.”

For both Morgan and Owens, sense of place pervades an exploration of human epistemology. These volumes distill the essential from experience and capture the universal thread in the human story. Reading these collections is to be given insights into communities the poets know well and to be invited into the intimacy of persons and places so evocatively rendered. ■

THE TRIUMPH OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT

a review by Willie J. Harrell, Jr.

David S. Cecelski. *The Fire of Freedom: Abraham Galloway & the Slaves' Civil War.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012.

Bland Simpson. *Two Captains from Carolina: Moses Grandy, John Newland Maffitt, and the Coming of the Civil War.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012.

WILLIE J. HARRELL, JR. earned his BS in Mass Communications from Jackson State University in Mississippi and his MA and PhD in English/African-American Literature and Cultural Studies from Wayne State University in Michigan. He currently teaches at Kent State University in Ohio. His publications include articles and book chapters and two books: *Origins of the African American Jeremiad: The Rhetorical Strategies of Social Protest and Activism, 1760-1861* (McFarland 2011) and *We Wear the Mask: Paul Laurence Dunbar and the Politics of Representative Reality* (Kent State UP, 2010).

Read essays by **DAVID S. CECELSKI** in *NCLR* 1995, 2006, 2007, and 2011.

Read essays by **BLAND SIMPSON** in *NCLR* 1995, 2005, 2008, 2009, and 2011. And read more about the author in *NCLR Online* 2012.

David S. Cecelski's *The Fire of Freedom: Abraham Galloway & The Slaves' Civil War* and Bland Simpson's *Two Captains from Carolina: Moses Grandy, John Newland Maffitt, and the Coming of the Civil War*, recently published by University of North Carolina Press, are two books that illustrate the power of the human spirit, especially in its capacity to strive for what is right.

The lives of extraordinary people make great stories. From former slave to Senator, the life of thirty-three-year-old Abraham H. Galloway is no exception. Born a slave on 8 February 1837 in Smithville (later renamed Southport) in Brunswick County, NC, to a slave mother and a white man, Galloway would become a principal African American leader in eastern North Carolina and a renowned orator, even though apparently he could neither read nor write. After hiring himself out as a brick mason and paying his owner fifteen dollars a month toward buying his freedom, Galloway eventually escaped from slavery by hiding in a turpentine barrel on a ship bound from Wilmington, NC, to Philadelphia, PA, where he quickly became a part of the abolitionist movement and became involved in the work of the Underground Railroad, venturing as far as Canada. Later, Galloway visited the White House and was recruited by President Abraham Lincoln to become an intelligence agent. Secretively orchestrating events at the Battle of New Bern in March 1862,

Galloway recruited both enslaved men and free people of color in North Carolina for the new "African Brigade," which became part of the US Colored Troops. He was actively involved in political organizing for the black community and would later play a crucial role in the establishment of North Carolina's Republican Party in 1867. Galloway fervently believed that "the proposition of the Republican party is to allow every man in the nation to be his own master" (198). The following year, Galloway was chosen to represent North Carolina's New Hanover and Brunswick Counties in the state Senate. He died mysteriously in 1870, shortly after serving his second term as a state senator.

In *The Fire of Freedom*, noted historian **David S. Cecelski** has compiled a comprehensive historical analysis of Galloway's life, which, as Cecelski states, "brings flesh and bone to [a] new vision" of black resistance in nineteenth-century America (xviii). *The Fire of Freedom* examines how the life of Galloway "revealed a Civil War very different" from the one we all think we know. Cecelski has painted a "vivid portrait of the war from the slaves' point of view and the saga of a remarkable life whose arc has much to teach about slavery, the war, and Reconstruction" (xx).

Cecelski's previous book, *The Waterman's Song: Slavery and Freedom in Maritime North Carolina* (2000), portrays the world of the slave and free black fishermen, pilots, rivermen, sailors,



FROM WILLIAM STILL, *THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD: A RECORD OF FACTS, AUTHENTIC NARRATIVES, LETTERS, ETC., NARRATING THE HARSHIPS, HARBREATH ESCAPES, AND DEATH STRUGGLES OF THE SLAVES IN THEIR EFFORTS FOR FREEDOM* (PHILADELPHIA: PORTER & COATES, 1872)

ferryman, and other laborers in North Carolina, illustrating the variety of experiences blacks endured under the oppressive system of slavery. Like the black maritime laborers who held crucial positions in the North Carolina anti-slavery efforts, Abraham Galloway became involved in some of the most militant abolitionist activities in North Carolina. According to Cecelski, Galloway “believed that the fire of freedom burned brightest in the contraband camps in the Confederate states.” Because of this belief, Galloway was able to “compel the Lincoln administration to endorse” the “struggle for [black male] suffrage and political equality” (115).

Cecelski begins *The Fire of Freedom* by describing how a self-made man rose above the dregs of slavery. Cecelski describes Galloway as “an extraordinary individual by any measure, but above



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all he embodied and gave voice to a revolutionary generation of African American activists in the South that has largely been forgotten” (xx). Through reading about the lives of men like Galloway, one gets a glimpse of their thirst for justice in their influential role in the “downfall of the Confederacy and to build a United States that might live up to its democratic ideals” (xx). As the reader continues to explore this fascinating and well-researched book, the events of Galloway’s amazing life unfold. “After his escape from bondage and his arrival in Canada West,” writes Cecelski, Galloway “threw himself into the struggle to end slavery in the United States” (27).

As did numerous blacks who crossed the American-Canadian border, Galloway no doubt found that Canada offered the promise of liberty and opportunity to all black Americans. Although he held

liminal citizenships in both countries, Galloway’s passage across the American-Canadian border was not enough to keep him in Canada. “Risking life and liberty,” writes Cecelski, “Galloway made his way back across the border . . . gave antislavery speeches in Ohio, and later testified that white abolitionists saved his life . . . at least once” (27). As a state senator, Galloway “addressed the most fundamental rights of freedmen and freedwomen,” and he was a devoted supporter of “labor rights” (209). Galloway, however, unexpectedly died in 1870, “on the cusp of a conservative resurgence that prevailed across the South from 1870 to 1877” (213).

Cecelski’s enthusiasm is obvious throughout the book, and he never fails to engage. *The Fire of Freedom* is a rigorously researched account of Galloway’s life and resistance.



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The development of the book connects well with its organization and lends itself successfully to deepening the treatment of issues surrounding African Americans' involvement in the Civil War and beyond. The historical context of *The Fire of Freedom* invites wide readership, as it undoubtedly serves as a crucial text for the broadest aspects of slavery and reconstruction in American historical studies. The organization of this work of extraordinary scholarship conducted over a decade permits readers to enter fully into the chronicle of Galloway's life. Readers will find *The Fire of Freedom* to be wholly engaging, especially when it treats familiar themes, such as resistance to slavery. Galloway's "unquenchable fire of freedom" (218) ignites the pages of the book and makes a challenging case for our understanding of the centrality of African American

activists not only in North Carolina, but across nineteenth-century America.

This picture of the power of the human spirit continues in **Bland Simpson's *Two Captains from Carolina***. Former slave Moses Grandy and free Irish American John Newland Maffitt, the subjects of Simpson's latest nonfiction, historical novel, never met, but their destinies, readers will discover, could hardly have differed more. And yet, according to Simpson, the two men were kindred spirits: "[T]heir tales are those of illimitable, striving human spirit and also of human bondage and destruction and the great divide that nearly sundered a nation" (xiii). Grandy, born a slave, captained freight boats on the Dismal Swamp Canal, became involved in the Boston anti-slavery circuit, and ultimately participated in the

General Anti-Slavery Convention in London in 1843. Maffitt, who became an officer in the Confederate States Navy, was nicknamed the "Prince of Privateers" due to his remarkable success as a blockade runner and commerce raider during the Civil War. Both men, although from divergent backgrounds, nevertheless made names for themselves as they navigated very different routes through the turbulent waters of antebellum America.

But why write a book about these two seemingly different figures? In an interview, Simpson put it this way: "They were extraordinary marines, with such different, contrasting tales. I wanted to hold them up to each other, reflect them off each other, and try and capture as much of the passion and adventure of antebellum life as I could through these two great sailors." In *Two Captains from Carolina*, Simpson superbly amalgamates history and creative writing. As a researcher, Simpson collected information from "as many sources, archives, and matters of record as possible." The novelist in him, however, "invented some moments, and shaded others, based on [his] own beliefs and understandings" of the two men, "in order to give them the highest possible dramatic value."* The result of Simpson's endeavor is another fascinating story. Grandy, for example, struggled in a life of enslavement while attempting to manumit himself three times before finally succeeding. Meanwhile, Maffitt sought and

PHOTOGRAPH BY S.W. GAULT, COURTESY OF THE LOWER
CAPE FEAR HISTORICAL SOCIETY, LATIMER HOUSE, WILMINGTON, NC
(CANDACE MCGREEVY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR; COLLEEN GRIFFITHS, ARCHIVIST)



captured illegal slave vessels in the Caribbean just before the Civil War. Simpson writes that Grandy and Maffitt were reputed to be

men of great skill on many waters, and those who wander down to the edge of the land and there regard the inscrutable pacings of the rivers and the sounds and the sea will remember these extraordinary men for that, and will marvel no less at what the Fates made of their lives, till at last letting their cables slip, their ships drift before the wind that blows, each of them outward bound, each crossing the bar that one final time. (168)

It is luminous passages like these that make Simpson's endeavor provocative and deeply poignant.

Simpson draws upon a rich heritage of history. Although the story is focused on North Carolina, *Two Captains from Carolina* draws upon a broader American narrative structure. The lives of both men, Grandy and Maffitt, begin in North Carolina, but their stories end up transcending the state's and the country's borders.

After obtaining his freedom, Grandy, for example, toured the British Isles as an abolitionist and eventually charted the major ports and harbors of refuge along the American coast. During Grandy's British Isles tour, he traveled to England in 1842 to raise funds to purchase his family out of slavery. Maffitt started his marine career by serving in the US Navy at the age of thirteen as an acting midshipman. At the end of the war, he refused to surrender his ship and chose to live in England. Then, after passing the British naval examination, he served for about two years in command of a British merchant steamer. He returned to the US in 1868 and settled on a farm near Wilmington, NC. In 1870, Maffitt commanded a warship for Cuban revolutionaries during the Ten Years' War.

Both Grandy and Maffitt were enterprising, inspired, and driven individuals. "One must purchase his way out of this land and bondage, which is all it offers him, time and time and time again," Simpson writes. "The other, shirked and suspected by the national regime, is drawn and, he must also feel, virtually forced back into the South as his familial land becomes a new, doomed nation" (167). *Two Captains from Carolina* is as important today as the stories were when they were unfolding. The accounts of these two men's lives resonate because of the subject matter: humans struggling in the face of adversity.

Simpson takes readers along on an adventure that never feels overly contrived. Some of the

most interesting and surprising points that Simpson deals with are what he calls "The Wind That Blows." These sections are strategically placed throughout the book, and each deals with a specific historical event that shaped the lives of Grandy and Maffitt in some way (for example, sectionalism fever of the 1820s; the publication in 1829 of David Walker's *Appeal*; the capturing of the schooner *The Amistad* in 1839; and the political climate of the 1850s).

All in all, Simpson's groundbreaking research combined with the impressive narrative structure will shape our discussions of Grandy and Maffitt for years to come. Readers will find that *Two Captains from Carolina* is a result of investigative thoroughness, resolution, and creativity, amalgamating the historical content of the book with narrative fiction and giving readers a deeper understanding of the despairs and triumphs of two radically different men. There is vitality in Simpson's writing, which engages the reader and makes discovering any relationship between the two men interesting, and the thorough scholarship of *Two Captains from Carolina* will make its mark on nineteenth-century studies in the academy.

The Fire of Freedom and *Two Captains from Carolina* are must reads for anyone who is studying slavery, black resistance to slavery, nineteenth-century history – and anyone interested in stories reflecting the triumph of the human spirit. ■

ROANOKE ISLAND HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION RECEIVES HARDEE-RIVES DRAMATIC ARTS AWARD

excerpted from presentation remarks by Bland Simpson

*North Carolina Literary and Historical Association Meeting
Asheville, NC, 16 November 2012*

On August 18th, 1937, the 350th anniversary of Virginia Dare's birth, down from Elizabeth City on a Coast Guard cruiser came President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Wearing a straw hat as he stepped off the boat onto a tumbledown gasoline dock in Manteo, FDR immediately greeted *Lost Colony* producer D. Bradford Fearing with this jaunty remark: "Well, Mister Fearing, we're on time and things are clicking!" That evening, the President watched playwright Paul Green's *The Lost Colony* from his open touring car, perched atop a specially built ramp, and, after the show, the performers crowded around the open car and received the accolades of FDR.

By the end of that summer, forty-five thousand people had come to see Paul Green's drama in its first season, and there was no doubt that the show would run beyond 1937.

In continuing, the production – an educational and economic engine – has engendered a summertime village of both professional and amateur thespians who developed long-lasting relationships with people up and down the Outer Banks, and in the sound-country, coastal-plain towns. Its ties with the University in Chapel Hill were strong from the start – Green's fellow Carolina Playmaker Sam Selden directed, Adeline McCall worked with Lamar Stringfield on vocal settings for the music, and Irene Rains costumed. It has been, and continues to be, a vaunted theatrical training and proving ground – with such Waterside Theatre veterans as Andy Griffith, Terrence Mann, and William Ivey Long – artists who have made the yearly productions at Fort Raleigh so stellar, and who have made major contributions to our national theatre well beyond the borders of Dare County.

We may now observe that – war, storms, fires notwithstanding – things have been clicking for the Roanoke Island Historical Association's *Lost Colony* for seventy-five years, and we note well that its audience over these seven and a half decades has surpassed four million.

Significantly, Paul Green's work has compelled us to explore more deeply the complex early relations between the Europeans and the Native Americans, an ongoing exploration of our common humanity and problematic history that the evolving stagings of *The Lost Colony* reflect. For untold thousands (and I am one), this powerful play offered us not only our first glimpse

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of professional theatre in all its glory, but also a grand symphonic look at the first inspiring and heart-rending moments of the American experiment.

The word on the tree that Governor John White found in the abandoned colony may have been the mysterious "Croatoan," but the words that resound in our hearts are Old Tom's "Roanoke, oh, Roanoke . . ."

Accepting for the Roanoke Island Historical Association, Theatre Manager Brandon Smith responded,

Listening to Mr. Simpson's remarks, I'm reminded of the reason that *The Lost Colony* came to be in the first place. If someone today came to our politicians and said, "We want to build a theatre for a play, on an island that no one can get to, and we want to use tax dollars to do it," they might be laughed out of the room. But the reality is that in its seventy-five years, *The Lost Colony* has created over fifteen thousand jobs and is responsible for well over a half a billion dollars in tourist revenue on the Outer Banks. It is an example of the power of the arts to change lives both in the ethereal and economic sense. We continue to be proud of our organization for its artistic integrity, but also as a realistic application of the arts in the modern day economy. A place like the Outer Banks needs both. On behalf of the board and the entire staff I thank you. We are very humbled by your recognition tonight and we hope to see each of you at the theatre! ■

LEARNING CIVIL RIGHTS ERA HISTORY THROUGH PICTURE BOOKS

a review by
Gabrielle Brant Freeman

Calvin Alexander Ramsey and Bettye Stroud. *Belle, the Last Mule at Gee's Bend*. Illustrated by John Holyfield. Somerville, MA: Candlewick Press, 2011.

Calvin Alexander Ramsey. *Ruth and the Green Book*. Illustrated by Floyd Cooper. Minneapolis, MN: Carolrhoda Books, 2010.

GABRIELLE BRANT FREEMAN has an MA from ECU and has just completed the requirements for an MFA from Converse College in Spartanburg, SC. She teaches in the English Department at ECU and serves as NCLR's Submissions Manager.

In addition to his two children's books, CALVIN ALEXANDER RAMSEY is a playwright. His two-act play *The Green Book* is based on *The Negro Motorist Green Book*, which also inspired one of the children's books reviewed here. He grew up in Roxboro, NC, and serves on the board of the Paul Green Foundation. He lives in Atlanta but will be in Greenville, NC, for the 2013 Eastern North Carolina Literary Homecoming, hosted by NCLR and ECU's J.Y. Joyner Library.

Co-author BETTYE STROUD is the author of several other children's books. She lives in Atlanta where she worked as a library media specialist for elementary schools.

Since my children were born, they have been fascinated by books. I have pictures of each of them, just barely sitting up, surrounded by board books, plush books, and picture books. When I received *Belle, the Last Mule at Gee's Bend* to read and review for NCLR, I left it on the table, sure my daughter who is seven would have read it at least once before I got home from work. I thought we would be able to discuss it and read it again with her four-year-old brother. However, when I got home, the book was exactly where I had left it. My mother was reading a book about dinosaurs to the kids on the couch.

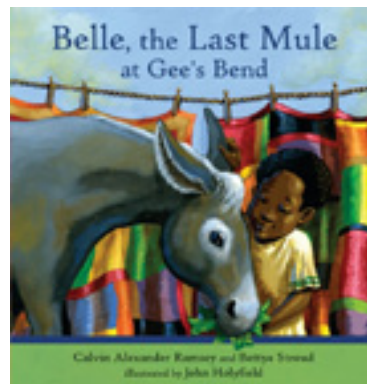
"Did you read this book yet?" I asked.

"Aurora thought it was a special book, something you got from the library, so she wanted to wait for you to get home to read it," my mom answered.

After I settled in with my children on the couch and read *Belle* to them, we found that it is indeed a special book. Calvin Alexander Ramsey and Bettye Stroud manage to make the concept of racism and the story of Martin Luther King, Jr., accessible to children through the story of Belle, one of the mules that pulled Dr. King's casket in his funeral procession. In the story, Miz Pettway explains to a young boy named Alex why Belle is allowed to eat the collard greens in her garden. While Alex waits for his mother outside a store, Miz Pettway tells the story of how Dr. King encouraged the town of Gee's Bend to vote,

regardless of the obstacles put in their way. Alex learns that Belle pulled wagons full of people to a nearby town so that they could vote since the shortest route, a ferry across the river, had been closed specifically to discourage the black people of Gee's Bend from exercising this right.

In the end, Alex learns that everyone counts, "and even an old mule can be a hero." What I realized that day was that my children had not yet learned about Dr. King. More enlightening, I realized they were not yet aware



that people were and continue to be discriminated against because of the color of their skin, and certainly they had not learned yet what great courage it takes to fight against prejudice. This lesson on race relations was continued in the second Ramsey book I brought home.

In *Ruth and the Green Book*, Ramsey shows children the struggles of African Americans traveling through the United States in the early 1950s

through the eyes of his main character, a young girl named Ruth. Ruth leaves Chicago to visit her grandmother in Alabama, and along the way she experiences discrimination in the form of “WHITES ONLY” signs. She and her family are refused access to a restroom, and they have to go out in the woods. They are refused a hotel room, and they have to sleep in their car. My daughter was shocked to learn that this

was accepted as normal once upon a time and that African Americans used the Green Book to find places where they would be allowed to eat, sleep, and shop while away from home.

In addition to being good stories, picture books like *Belle, the Last Mule at Gee's Bend* and *Ruth and the Green Book* make history approachable for children. They also make discussing history with children approachable for parents and educators. ■



2012 NORTH CAROLINA AAUW AWARD

John Claude Bemis received the 2012 North Carolina AAUW Award for Juvenile Literature for *The White City* (Random House), the third book in his *The Clockwork Dark* trilogy and the second of the series' books to receive this award. The 2012 award was announced at the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association's annual conference, 16 Nov. 2012. ■



ABOVE John Claude Bemis leading a discussion with Brentwood Magnet Elementary School students, Raleigh, NC, 2011

**“GREEN LIFE
RUNNING WILD”:
ENVIRONMENTAL
PHILOSOPHY IN
CHARLES FRAZIER’S
NEW NOVEL**

a review by Zackary Vernon

**Charles Frazier. *Nightwoods*.
New York: Random House, 2011.**

ZACKARY VERNON is a PhD candidate in English at UNC-Chapel Hill where he studies twentieth-century American literature and film. His dissertation explores issues of ecocriticism, ecoterrorism, and neo-Agrarianism in several novels and films of the 1960s and '70s.

CHARLES FRAZIER received his second Sir Walter Raleigh Award in 2012 for *Nightwoods*. He also received the Raleigh Award for *Cold Mountain* (Atlantic Monthly Press, 1997), which won the 1997 National Book Award, too. Read an essay on and a review of *Cold Mountain* in *NCLR* 1999, a review of Frazier's *Thirteen Moons* (Random House, 2006) in *NCLR* 2007, and an essay by Frazier talking about the film adaptation of *Cold Mountain* in *NCLR* 2012.

Watch Frazier's keynote address, as well as a panel discussion with Frazier, along with other featured writers of the 2012 Eastern North Carolina Literary Homecoming, and then read *NCLR's* interviews with the author in the 2013 print issue.

The field of Southern Studies continues to foster the exponential growth of “the South” as scholars seek to place the region in ever larger contexts, such as the Americanized South, the hemispheric South, and the global South. The fact that the region has become inextricably linked with national and international networks of social and economic exchange necessitates broader contextualizations, and these scholarly efforts are expanding our critical understanding of the South, both as a geographical space and as a broader cultural production.

At the same time, however, other contemporary scholars in the fields of ecocriticism and environmental studies are usefully narrowing regional definitions and classifications. These scholars emphasize more localized networks of environments and cultures. While ecocritical scholars frequently gesture toward the global when considering the larger ramifications of what transpires at the local level, the emphasis of analysis is often on the micro rather than the macro level of systemic interactions between human and ecological communities. In particular, theories of bioregionalism work to remap regions along the lines of specific ecosystems in order to explore the interchange between cultures and their geographical/ecological contexts.

In his third novel, *Nightwoods*, Charles Frazier similarly emphasizes the narrowing of regional identifications by highlighting the cultural and ontological significance of highly localized engagements within a bioregion. *Nightwoods* is an extension of the philosophical and environmental project that Frazier began in his first novel, *Cold Mountain*. Because of their similar ecocentric emphases, *Cold Mountain* and

Nightwoods share many of the same thematic preoccupations, and both champion the (re)establishment of a connection between the human world and the nonhuman world.

The plots of *Cold Mountain* and *Nightwoods* feature female protagonists who are living outside the normative order of traditionally male-dominated societies. In *Cold Mountain*, the formerly wealthy heiress Ada and her tough-minded agricultural partner Ruby cultivate a subsistence farm while most of the men from their community are away fighting the Civil War. Like *Cold Mountain*, *Nightwoods* is set in western North Carolina; however, the events of Frazier's latest novel occur approximately one hundred years later, and they revolve around a young woman named Luce who exiles herself from her native community after being sexually violated and then receiving no assistance from the police. Luce lives in an abandoned hotel in the mountains, and her living arrangement is reminiscent of a subsistence farm not unlike Ada and Ruby's homestead. Luce's closest neighbor, an aging woman named Maddie, insists on “living in her own world like it had remained 1898 on and on forever” (12), and Maddie's day-to-day activities center “around hog killings, oil lamps, fetching water, outhouses, and all that other old business” (13). Early in the novel, contemplating the atavism of her own subsistence existence, Luce realizes her life closely resembles Maddie's, especially in that she eschews modern conveniences and produces most of her own food. Moreover, a reader familiar with Frazier's body of work will recognize that despite the gap of a hundred years, Luce and Maddie's way of life resembles that of Ada and Ruby.

In *Nightwoods*, Luce acts as interpreter and steward of the closely interconnected worlds of nature and agriculture, and, consequently, she is an amalgamation of the best qualities of Ruby and Ada, fusing the two approaches to the environment that often remain discrete in these other two characters. Throughout much of *Cold Mountain*, Ruby possesses an intimate, visceral connection with the natural world engendered by a subsistence existence in the North Carolina mountains, while Ada thinks about the natural world as an abstract intellectual idea, one which has been formed by her education. Frazier refuses to idealize either approach to nature, instead suggesting that a balance of the two is the ideal state of existence. Although Ada and Ruby work toward attaining this balance by teaching one another the virtues of each approach, the balance is more fully and harmoniously achieved in the character of Luce. In a description of Luce early in *Nightwoods*, Frazier writes, “Ask her what she craved, and she’d get a little frantic about things like books, the woods, music” (34). In this list of Luce’s passions, artistic productions and the natural world are given equal and balanced priority. Similar passages occur throughout the novel, and Luce makes a concerted effort to “to cull daily reality pretty harsh, retaining just landscape and weather and animals and the late-night radio” (24).

Luce’s environmental philosophy derives from a very specific knowledge of her particular bio-region: “She claimed she had observed and learned nearly a hundred such parts of the local world.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANNIE FRAZIER



She said, Imagine holding every bit of it in your head at one time, this whole place, down to what the salamanders are doing every month of the four seasons” (139). This hyper-local understanding of place provides a sense of intimacy that enables Luce to receive emotional and psychological comfort from the natural world. When asked whether she ever gets lonely living in isolation at the hotel, “Luce said sure she got lonely, but there had been many reimbursements. Animals, for example. . . . A great deal of pleasure to be found in the growth of vegetables. And in the fall, birds passing over in waves, their calls singing of distance and other landscapes” (142–43).

Nature assuages Luce’s loneliness, but her isolation is breached when she becomes the guardian of her murdered sister’s children, Dolores and Frank, who come to live with her at the old hotel. As a result of seeing their mother killed by their stepfather, Bud, the children refuse to speak, and they are assumed to be “feeble-minded” by the social worker who delivers them to Luce (9).

It remains unclear for much of the novel whether Dolores and Frank’s muteness and their constant strange behavior are the result of their trauma or whether these behaviors are intentional in order to seem less threatening to Bud, who contemplates killing them so they can never testify against him about the murder of their mother.

Because of the many traumas they have endured, the children possess a sense of sadistic agency, and they seem to relish nothing more than killing chickens and setting buildings on fire. In order to combat the “weirdness they shared and ignited between them” (4), Luce decides that she will have “to be a teacher” to the children (25). The principal subjects of Luce’s teaching are agricultural and environmental, two areas of study with which these former urban-dwelling children are unfamiliar. First, Luce demonstrates to them “how we get our food,” because they lack even a basic knowledge of rural, agricultural life: “Maybe these city kids had never seen live chickens before. Didn’t realize the direct relationship

between the living birds and a fried drumstick or two ecstatic bites of deviled egg.” Luce also demonstrates that the children’s desire to kill chickens “for entertainment” is both “mean” and unsustainable (25).

Frazier calls Luce’s interest in local sustainability “vegetable lore,” which for her is informed by Native American agricultural practices: “Luce explained that she planted like Cherokee people did. One corn kernel and two beans to a hill. The cornstalk makes the

trellis for the bean vines to grow up, and some magic love between corn and beans keeps them from stripping the good out of the soil.” Luce further explains to the children that a garden requires a steward; otherwise, “you end up with green life running wild” (27). Luce’s suggestion here is that people must be mentally disciplined in order to control their destructive impulses; thus, stewardship of interior human nature is analogous to and indeed can be learned from stewardship of outer nature.

In *Cold Mountain* and *Nightwoods*, the audiences present in the narratives – Ada and Ruby for one another, and Dolores and Frank for Luce – parallel the readers of these novels, and Frazier uses this platform to articulate an approach to the natural world that incorporates both empirical experience and intellect. The academic endeavor of reading or studying about an encounter with the natural world may prove cold and overly cerebral without engaging with the natural world firsthand. Likewise,

JOHN LAWSON (1674–1711), NATURE WRITER, INDUCTED INTO THE NORTH CAROLINA LITERARY HALL OF FAME

*excerpted and adapted from presentation remarks by Phillip Manning
Weymouth Center, Southern Pines, NC, 14 October 2012*

I consider John Lawson to be one of our country’s great nature writers, in the same league with William Bartram and Henry David Thoreau. An important indication of his talent is that three hundred years after he took his journey through the Carolina back country, his 1709 book, *A New Voyage to Carolina*, is still in print. Of course, one reason Lawson’s book is still around is because he was the first European to write about the Carolina hinterlands. But Lawson was more than just a first; he was a fine writer.

One indication of his literary skills is how often his work has been copied. If the most sincere form of flattery is plagiarism, then Lawson should be quite flattered. “Many writers have copied Lawson without giving the proper credit – or any credit at all,” writes Hugh Lefler in his introduction to the UNC Press edition of Lawson’s book.¹ The real author of William Byrd’s *Natural History of Virginia* was, according to Lefler, not William Byrd but John

Lawson. One writer that Lefler didn’t mention is Mark Catesby, who was open about his plagiarism of Lawson; in fact, he freely confessed it in his book *Natural History of Carolina, Florida, and the Bahama Islands* (published between 1731–1743). But, as it turned out, he didn’t plagiarize enough of it – which is one reason why Lawson’s book is still in print and Catesby’s is not.

But having a long shelf life and being widely plagiarized do not, by themselves, make a first-rate book. To find out if Lawson’s book meets the standards of good nature writing, I consulted *The Sierra Club Nature Writing Handbook* by John A. Murray.² Murray parses nature writing into discrete elements and gives examples of what he considers to be good writing. I chose three of those elements – the opening, the closing, and the writer’s style – to help judge the merit of Lawson’s writing.

Lawson begins the story of his expedition with “On December the 28th, 1700, I began my voyage (for



FROM THE COLLECTION OF W. KEAN'S AND ELIZABETH SPARROW

COURTESY OF DIGITAL COLLECTIONS, J.Y. JOYNER LIBRARY, ECU

¹ Hugh Talmage Lefler, Introduction, *A New Voyage to Carolina*, by John Lawson (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1967) lii; subsequent Lawson quotations are cited parenthetically from this edition.

² John A. Murray, *The Sierra Club Nature Writing Handbook: A Creative Guide* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1995).

one may not comprehend the significance of an encounter with the natural world without learning through literature and education the potential psychological ramifications that transpire in exchanges between individuals and nature. In *Nightwoods*, Frazier may tend occasionally toward romanticizing the natural world, but a healthy dose of romanticism need not negate the simple yet profoundly important idea that our connections with local human and ecological

communities affect the way we treat those communities.

Frazier's interest in studying the hyper-local to discover globally relevant human-nature interactions parallels broader ecocritical trends, such as bioregionalism. *Nightwoods*, set in the early 1960s, suggests that Frazier's vision of a localized environmental engagement was possible long after the mid-nineteenth century depicted in *Cold Mountain*. However, one question still remains: does Frazier's approach to

agriculture and the environment have any practical relevance to the material conditions of the present? In a description of an antiquated method of milling sugarcane, *Nightwoods* may provide an answer: "A nearly forgotten folkways practice from the past, but not an irretrievable past. Short of poisoning all life or blowing it up, people could keep doing it on and on, if they wanted to. Like when you're on the wrong road, you turn around and go back" (115). ■

North Carolina) from *Charles-Town, being six Englishmen in Company, with three Indian-men, and one Woman, Wife to our Indian-Guide, having five Miles from the Town to the Breach we went down in a large Canoe*" (8). This opening sets the stage for the theme, style, and tone of what follows. The theme is a quest to explore and document the natural history of Carolina and the Indians that inhabit it. The style is first person reportorial; the tone is down-to-earth and practical. The rest of the book follows this pattern.

Throughout his writings, Lawson was sympathetic to the plight of Indians, and this is how he closes his book: In my opinion, it's better for Christians of a mean Fortune to marry with the Civiliz'd *Indians*, than to suffer the Hardships of four or five years Servitude, in which they meet with Sickness and Seasonings amidst a crowd of other Afflictions, which the Tyranny of a bad Master lays upon such poor Souls. . . . This seems a more reasonable Method of converting the *Indians*, than to set up our Christian Banner in a Field of Blood, as the *Spaniards* have done in *New Spain*, and baptize one hundred with the Sword for one at the Font. Whilst we make way for a Christian Colony through a Field of Blood, and defraud, and make away with those that one day may be wanted in this World, and in the next appear against us, we make way for a more potent Christian Enemy to invade us. (246)

This is a powerful closing, startling in its passion for the predicament of both indentured servants and Indians. But Lawson is ever practical. By killing the Indians to convert them, he says, the English may make it easier

for another Christian force (presumably the Spaniards) to invade the Carolina colony. This combination of outrage and hardheaded realism is characteristic of Lawson. And by any measure, his closing matches those found in other books of good nature writing.

The last element that Murray lists as important for good nature writing is style, the writer's imprint on whatever it is he or she is writing. John Lawson clearly has style; his personality comes through strongly. The following passage reveals a lot about Lawson and his style, even though he mentions himself not at all. Remember, this was written during a time when Indians were regarded by most Europeans as subhumans, fit only to be slaves:

They are really better to us, than we are to them; they always give us Victuals at their Quarters, and take care we are arm'd against Hunger and Thirst; We do not [do] so by them (generally speaking) but let them walk by our Doors Hungry, and do not often relieve them. We look upon them with Scorn and Disdain, and think them little better than Beasts in Humane Shape, though if well examined, we shall find that for all our Religion and Education, we possess more Moral Deformities, and Evils than these Savages do. (243)

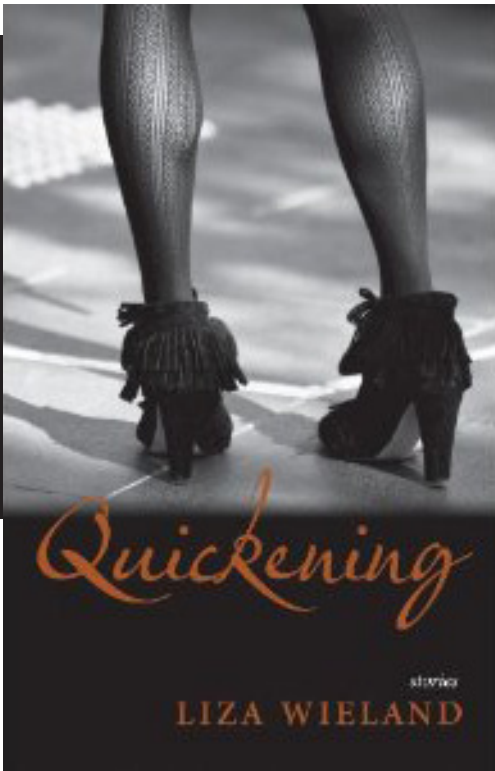
This is pure Lawson, and he is clearly a person we can admire. Fortunately, the words of this remarkable man live on in his book, and this latest honor bestowed on him may reawaken interest in this fascinating man who was far ahead of his time in many of his views – and an inspired nature writer. ■

LEFT Probably from the London studio of Sir Godfrey Kneller, a portrait of a man reputed to be John Lawson (The paper held by the subject holding is inscribed "Sir John Lawson," but there is no record of North Carolina's John Lawson having been knighted.)

Chapel Hill author PHILLIP MANNING has written four books in the Afoot in the South series published by John F. Blair Publishers and five books for the Essential Chemistry and Science Foundations series published by Chelsea House.

“Quickening,” from Fiction to Film: A Conversation with Liza Wieland and Mary Kate Monahan

by Tanya Nichols



It was my good fortune that Liza Wieland allowed me to read her story “Quickening” in advance of its original publication. The story had won second place in the *New South* writing contest and was pending publication in that literary magazine. It would later become the title story to Wieland’s third story short story collection.¹

After reading “Quickening” that first time, I sat in silence for a long while, thinking about Jill and Noah, worrying about their lives as much as if they were the neighbor kids down the street. I imagined bands of teenagers drinking beers and clamoring among the Babson Boulders, about three-dozen carved boulders found just outside Gloucester, Massachusetts, in Dogtown.² It is there, among the inspirational mottoes to, for example, “work,” “study,” “help mother,” “use your head” that fiction writer Liza Wieland imagines a group of high school girls making a “pregnancy pact.” Reading Wieland’s story, thinking about it after, I could feel the chill of the sea, the bitter cold of a snowy night, as these teenagers sat on the boulders and all decided to get pregnant. I immediately called Mary Kate Monahan and told her I had a story for her to read, confident that she would care about these characters as deeply as I did, hopeful that she would give them life on the screen. She didn’t let me down.

Liza Wieland is a multi-genre writer. She has published three novels and three collections of short stories as well as a collection of poetry and numerous personal essays. But, I confess, I am partial to her short stories. Liza’s stories are infused with a nuanced spirituality and vision that compel the reader to stop and reflect on the subject at hand, to see the situation through a wider lens, sometimes with a sharper focus, sometimes with a softening filter.

TANYA NICHOLS received her MFA in fiction at California State University-Fresno where she now teaches. She has published short stories in *Sycamore Review*, *In the Grove*, and *San Joaquin Review*.

¹ Liza Wieland’s story “Quickening” was originally published in *New South* 2.2 (2009). Wieland’s short story collection *Quickening* was published in 2011 by Southern Methodist University Press.

PAMELA COX of *Five to Ten Design* in Washington, NC, designed the layout of this interview.

² In order to create job opportunities during the Depression, philanthropist Roger W. Babson contracted workers to inscribe sayings onto the large stones of Dogtown Common, near Gloucester, MA.

LEFT (AND THROUGHOUT)
Examples of the Babson Boulders



COURTESY OF ERIC BICKENRICKS



PHOTOGRAPH BY CONOR GORDON, SAN FRANCISCO STATE UNIVERSITY

Mary Kate Monahan is a filmmaker. Her production of *Quickening* in 2010 was her thesis film for her MFA at San Francisco State University.³ Her earlier short film, *Flying Lessons*, was the winner of the Aloha Accolade Award at the Honolulu Film Festival in 2009 and screened at various festivals that year. She has worked in production on various films and television shows, including the reality show *Teen Mom* (MTV, 2009-2012). She currently produces and directs nationally broadcast commercials. Before venturing into a life of cameras and screenplays, she was a dancer. Her dance career took her to live in Russia where she toured and saw more of the world than most people can manage in a lifetime. Her own experience with body and movement as narrative forces brings an honest beauty to her films that immerses the viewer in an altered space and time through the lives on the screen.

Here is where I must offer a bit of a disclaimer as the author of this interview. Liza Wieland is a friend, and Mary Kate Monahan is my daughter. I follow closely both of their lives and work and feel honored to have had the chance to sit and talk with them about “*Quickening*” and *Quickening* – how the story and film came to life for each of them.⁴ Though I was there for much of the filming, our conversation shed new light on the characters I had worried over in the beginning. Getting these two busy women in one place at one time to discuss the transformation of “*Quickening*” from an idea to a story to a film was nothing short of miraculous, but both Liza and Mary Kate have taught me to believe in the small miracles of our daily lives.

TANYA NICHOLS: *Liza, what was the idea that drove you to write the story “Quickening?” When did that little nugget of inspiration occur?*

LIZA WIELAND: I was visiting my parents and read in a magazine my mother had there about the whole sort of purported pregnancy pact between these high school girls in Gloucester, Massachusetts, and I was just blown away by the whole idea.⁵ And then it just stayed with me. I was lying awake in bed at my mother’s house and coming up with these names and thinking, “This is a novel. This is a novel.” So really, the names came first.

I didn’t have anything to write them down, so I just kept rehearsing them in my head, like a prayer, kind of the whole night. And then I woke up. My mother’s house is small. We’re surrounded by people when we’re there, so I went out, got into our van, and wrote the first page or so. Of course my mom came out and said, “What are you doing?” So, that was the genesis.

Mary Kate, once you read “Quickening,” what made you think this would be a good film? What compelled you to convert this story into film?

ABOVE Director Mary Kate Monahan (right), her mother Tanya Nichols (holding the umbrella), and Director of Photography Mackenzie Mathis on the set of *Quickening*

This interview was transcribed by Tanya Nichols from the interview conducted 28 March 2012 when Wieland was in Fresno to give the keynote address at California State University–Fresno Young Writers Conference. The interview has been edited for style and clarity and to incorporate follow-up explanations to queries from the *NCLR* staff, all while remaining true to the speakers’ voices.

³ Mary Kate Monahan, *Quickening*, MFA Thesis (San Francisco State University, San Francisco, 2010) DVD. [web](#).

⁴ At the end of the story in the volume *Quickening*, Wieland dedicates it: “for Tanya and Mary Kate” (190).

⁵ Kathleen Kingsbury, “Pregnancy Boom at Gloucester High,” *Time* 18 June 2008: [web](#).



COURTESY OF MARY KATE MONAHAN

MARY KATE MONAHAN: When I read it, I immediately saw it. It was so visual for me. I saw the first scene, and I saw this girl. I couldn't figure out who she was talking to at first. I couldn't figure out who the audience was. That came later. But the first thing I saw was this girl, sort of in a confessional type of setting, trying to explain something that she didn't really understand. And, to me, if you're talking about cinematic quality, that's really attractive.

Liza, as you wrote this story, did it seem cinematic to you?

LW: It did. But no more so than my work does in general. And I think because we're in this culture, we tend to see things as visuals – because we watch a lot of TV and see a lot of movies. So I saw things like the school hallway, the classroom the girls sat in and then left when they weren't feeling well. I saw the Star Market where Jill's mother works. I saw the red barn in nearby Rockport, the one that's so often painted and photographed that it's now called Motif #1 and became a motif for the story. So I wasn't surprised that Mary Kate would be interested in the story as a film.

There is also a cerebral quality to the story – a lot of interior monologue going on that almost defies translation into film. Did you see that differently, Mary Kate?

MKM: Yes and no. I think that was one of the hardest parts about making the film, though what's really interesting is that the story's written through the lens of a teenager. And it's with the teenager mindset of: "Here's a decision I've made, to get pregnant along with these other girls. And I'm conflicted about it, but I'm also writing from my opinion. And I am right." And it's so hard because it is a decision that is so easy to just look at and say, "Obviously, she's wrong. Obviously, these girls are wrong. They're not supposed to do that." But somehow you want to defend the character. You want the characters to defend themselves, but you also want to show that the character is right. Because she feels that she's right, and you want to write it as honestly as she would make it.

LW: And if I can just interject here, that's exactly the heart of the story – to take the situation so obviously problematic at best, that would be frowned on by everybody who says that's just a mistake, a mistake, a mistake, and make it not one – to show why it isn't for these particular characters. That is what makes this so inviting for a short story, taking one particular character and examining those choices through her lens, making the situation presented in a magazine personal.



COURTESY OF MARY KATE MONAHAN

LEFT TOP Jill, played by Madeline Mahrer, documents her life with her video camera for her unborn baby in the film adaptation of "Quickening"; Emily Pando and Jake Gleason also pictured in this still from the film

LEFT BOTTOM From the film version of *Quickening*, the friends walk arm in arm; the actors, left to right, are Madeline Mahrer, Emily Pando, Asha Cofield, Naila Cofield, Faren Clum, and Gabriella Meier

COURTESY OF MARY KATE MOWAHAN



COURTESY OF ERIC BICKERMONS



MKM: Right. That's the heart of the story, and maybe that's hard to translate to film. Maybe it's easier to understand a character that we read. We take a little bit more time with them than we do with a character we watch. It's even harder now, I think, with shows like MTV's *Teen Mom* and *16 and Pregnant*. Pregnant teenage girls and young mothers are glamorized in these reality shows, but in the end, their struggle and pain become entertainment. It's like they're the butt of some private – or actually public joke. So, it's difficult to envision that anyone would ever think that this decision to have babies together is right.

Like most film versions of stories or novels, there are changes to the original story in the film version. It can't be avoided. Mary Kate, can you talk about why some of those changes came to be, and what challenges or limitations confront the filmmaker, versus challenges on the page?

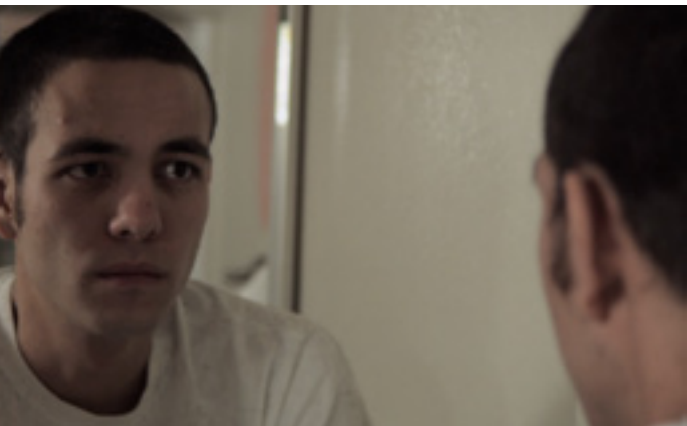
MKM: Well, the biggest challenge is money. When you work with your imagination, you sort of have unlimited funds. In reality, I had to sacrifice what I saw visually when I initially read the story in order to pay for the film so that I could actually get it made. To shoot in Gloucester would have been very difficult permit-wise – traveling, getting a crew there, everything. All of a sudden, a twenty thousand dollar film becomes a hundred thousand dollar film. So that's the biggest challenge – money – and getting permission to shoot in some of the locations that are perfect. You can't always get that.

One of the primary changes I'm thinking about – and I'm interested in how Liza sees that change – involves the Gloucester boulders with bits of wisdom and messages carved into them: since you couldn't go to Gloucester to film, you captured those sayings and put them on benches.

LW: I thought that was brilliant. And I don't know that anybody told me that that's what you'd done before I saw the movie. I can't imagine how you could have done it without the boulders because they're a plot point. The girls and their classmates go around and drink and end up at the boulder that sort of comments on their morals. There's a lot of sitting down in that scene. So it was just brilliant – I'd like to know how you arrived at it.

MKM: I don't remember exactly. I had a lot of ideas for what to do, and I had a lot of turmoil. Because I really wanted *the* boulders.

ABOVE RIGHT One of the benches that replaced Babson Boulders in the film adaptation of "Quickening"



COURTESY OF MARY KATE MONOHAN

And I wasn't going to recreate them. They're historical, and they're solid, and I didn't want to recreate them with styrofoam or something fake and artificial. There was this tradition and the traveling as they drink, and I wanted it to be something that they were involved in – and I didn't want it to be faked. I talked about using street artists' works. There are street artists who kind of tag their stuff. Eventually, I arrived at benches. And then I kept the sayings, so that there still were those little nuggets of wisdom that were supposed to come out. I wish the benches played a bigger role. I wish I'd had more of them. I always wanted to go back and do my transitions more animated – with the

benches, instead of just the titles, to have the benches be the transitions. Time and the world get in the way. But still, I wish they had played a bigger part.

Last semester, there was a faculty member here at Fresno State who taught a course in literature and war. She had her students read the story, then see the film. Does it surprise you that a story that evolved out of a pregnancy pact became the subject of a course that deals with story and war?

LW: No, because Noah's returning to do a third tour in Iraq is such a huge part of that story. It doesn't surprise me at all. And part of the research that I did for it was to watch some of the documentary *Operation Homecoming: Writing the Wartime Experience* on Iraq.⁶ It's soldiers speaking. So some of the lines in the story that Noah actually says – for example, the one about “the tanks don't stop” – come almost directly from a soldier speaking on that documentary.

MKM: It doesn't surprise me either. I think it's interesting that as I was writing the script for the thesis, every professor, every person in my class, everywhere said, “Ditch Noah. Ditch him as a character, and just make it about the girls. Nobody cares about this war vet coming back. Make it all about the girls.” But I couldn't see the story that way. I couldn't love the story without Noah. I needed him. And I also had a very strong actor playing him. But I needed Noah to make this story right for me.

We can talk about war and the grand effects that it has on our country, on our city, on our town, but do we really think about the little, tiny effects of how it really affects four or five girls? And then how that affects a city. So I think, to me, it's not surprising at all. And I wish there were more stories that dealt with war on a one-by-one, individual person basis.



COURTESY OF ERIC BICKERNICKS

ABOVE Jake Gleason as Noah in the film adaptation of “Quickening”

⁶ *Operation Homecoming: Writing the Wartime Experience*, Dir. Richard Robbins (Documentary Group, 2007). Editor's note: NCLR 2014 will feature “War in North Carolina Literature”; find submissions information on [NCLR's website](#).



COURTESY OF ERIC BICKENRICKS

Right. And that's what story is. That specific individual and how that one character is affected.

LW: Also, Noah was a huge part of the writing process, up until the very last stroke that I put on the story – because I didn't know whether he was gonna go for the third tour or not. I really didn't, up until I chose the unhappy ending.

That is something that is different in the film – the film leaves you wondering if indeed he will go back. I'm sure everybody has a different interpretation. But I do think Noah is such a strong point in the story and the film.

*I'm curious, Liza, if the cast of *Quickening* resembled the characters you envisioned as you wrote the story?*

LW: Yes and no. Noah is better than I ever imagined him. I mean that guy's a great actor. He was really perfect in the role. There were moments – for example, when he shaves his head – that are not in the story. That was brilliant – and him looking at himself in the mirror, and it's taking away parts of him, as the war is taking away parts of him. It's just fabulous.

The black twins are not in the story. But they're perfect, too. I mean all those kinds of choices you made, I imagine, based on available personnel.

MKM: Yeah. I was trying to figure out how to represent this friendship that was supposed to be Chantrelle and Toni. I was trying to figure out how, with a side character and limited time – how I was going to show that these two had a closer bond than the rest of the friends. You know? And twins walked into the audition and I was like, "There you go. That's perfect." And so it didn't really need a lot of explanation as to why one would do it when the other one did it. So yeah, a lot of it was availability. And Maddie, who played Jill, I had fallen in love with her and Jake together. I'd used them in other work. So I was really comfortable working with both of them. And so it made the intimate scene easier to deal with. It made Jake's breakdowns easier to direct. Because we knew each other really well.



RIGHT Asha and Naila Cofield as the twins in the film adaptation of "Quickening"

COURTESY OF MARY KATE MONOHAN



COURTESY OF MARY KATE MONOHAN

Since the story behind “Quickening” is true, what do you think those young mothers in Gloucester would think of your story and the film?

LW: Honestly, I think they’d be mystified. I saw one of them interviewed on something or other, when I was doing the research. I also watched a Jane Fonda interview about the story.⁷ Jane Fonda’s even sort of mystified by it. But this young woman – she was with the father of the baby. And he’s a lobsterman, and she’s a Gloucester girl, and they don’t think of themselves as anything but themselves. Not that they’re not deep or not smart, but I don’t think she would have thought of herself as a point of inspiration. I think they’d probably be flattered to be delved into in such a way. But I don’t think they would have expected it.

Would you like to have a screening in Gloucester with a Q&A?

MKM: I’d like to have another screening anywhere.

LW: Yeah. Me too. I’d like to travel to Gloucester.

MKM: I think it’d be super fun to do that. But I’ve wrestled with the idea of what they might think of it, also, after working a bit on *Teen Mom* and seeing some real teen mothers. There’s a lot that goes into their personalities and a lot that goes into defending their decisions. And they often feel very attacked. Like we said earlier, there was absolutely no intent for any sort of attack. And I think that we actually defend them more than shows like *Teen Mom*. But I wonder if they would still feel, in some way, attacked.

LW: Or even – “Can we just let this go?”

As we sit here talking, is there anything you’d like to say specifically about the film, the story, your process?

MKM: I just wanted to say one more thing about changes and Jill’s audience for her videotaping. I realize, after sitting and talking, that when I did decide that her audience was her baby – the unborn baby – that was an important issue. Because you can’t just do direct address unless you do it with voiceover. She had to be talking to someone in order for it to make sense. And so I added the direct to camera approach, with her own home video camera, to, first, serve as: here’s a smart girl who did have a dream of something else out there. She shows us that; we don’t have to talk about it. It’s a character trait we can see. And then it gives us a place to be, as an audience member, a witness.

COURTESY OF ERIC BICKENICKS



“What if it cries?”

‘You pick it up.’

‘What if I’m already holding it?’

‘You rock it or feed it or change it.’

‘What if I’ve already done all that,
and it’s still crying, and it won’t stop?’

‘Then you kiss it.’

‘Kiss it?’

‘Yes. A lot. All over its little face.’”

–“Quickening” (182)

ABOVE Gabriella Meier as Rose looking at the results of her pregnancy test in the film adaptation of “Quickening”

⁷ Fredricka Whitfield interviewed Jane Fonda on CNN on June 22, 2008.



PHOTOGRAPH BY CONOR GORDON, SAN FRANCISCO STATE UNIVERSITY

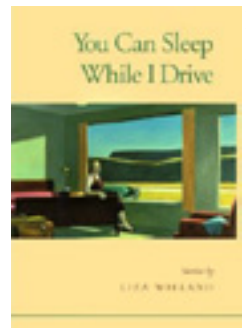
LW: And I want to say a couple of things. First of all, that the lines that I loved the most, you kept. There are two or three passages, one of which is when Jill and Noah are talking about what to do if a baby cries – that exchange. You pick it up. I loved that you kept that. Because I am fond of it. But I also love the way you shot it. They’re talking in bed, and it’s dark, but it’s still very tender. And the other thing was – I guess other people whose work has been turned into movies must feel something like this – it’s almost beyond words – when I first saw the movie, it just brought me to tears. The other life of one’s work, the possibility that one’s work can have some other life, beyond – I mean I’m getting kind of choked up, talking about it now. To be able to be made more of than what you think is a damn good story – it’s revelatory. It’s magic, and it’s sort of beyond hope. And I was really grateful.

MKM: Well, I’m glad. I’m glad. I actually want to do some more work on it, make some new cuts.

So, Liza, tell me now, how did you know the story was finished? And how do you know when a film is at its finest?

LW: Well, there’s all kinds of poetry for that. You know? You hear the sound of a box closing. Raymond Carver said that thing about taking out the commas and putting them back in, and then you know. This is sort of a similar thing, I suppose. It’s when I get to the place that I’ve been swimming toward in a story. And in that story, it’s whether or not Noah goes back. Once I knew that he was going to go, and Jill and her mom were going to be somewhat reconciled, I knew that I was done. In that story, it was about deciding what Noah was going to do. In a lot of stories, though, it is something that I don’t know is going to happen. And then it surprises the hell out of me, and then I back off of it, like it’s something hot, and I really don’t want to mess with it. I’m not always right. There’s a story in *You Can Sleep While I Drive* called “Salt Lake.”⁸ When Lee Abbott read the manuscript, he said, “What’s this last line doing here?” And when he took away the very last sentence, there it was. There was the boom.

Boom. I think I just heard that box close. Thank you, Liza and Mary Kate for today and for giving us “Quickening.” ■



COURTESY OF LIZA WIELAND

PHOTOGRAPH BY DANIEL V. SANFORD



COURTESY OF MARY KATE MONAHAN



ABOVE TOP **Director Mary Kate Monahan and Director of Photography Mackenzie Mathis on the set**

ABOVE MIDDLE **Liza Wieland**

ABOVE BOTTOM **Mary Kate Monahan**

⁸ Liza Wieland, *You Can Sleep While I Drive* (Dallas: Southern Methodist UP, 1999).

LIZA WIELAND is *NCLR*’s Fiction Editor and the author of a poetry collection, three short story collections, and three novels with a fourth novel currently in circulation. Read a story by Liza in *NCLR* 2008.

MARY KATE MONAHAN has an MFA in Cinema from San Francisco State University. See some of her film work, including her short film adaptation of Wieland’s “Quickening” on her [Vimeo site](#).

February 9, 1986

A not-so-bitter-cold day in Norwood, Massachusetts. A day forecasters predicted probabilities of sun, clouds, somewhat less than ideal conditions for viewing the magical passing of Halley's Comet for the first time in seventy-six years. A day nine babies are born at St. Jude's Children's Hospital, in particular in the late morning a boy and a girl, their birth certificates matching, 11:01 a.m.

After nurses' wash-up the boy, named Horace after the ancient poet (and not after Walpole, the British writer and politician whose namesake town is ironically not ten miles from the hospital), is wrapped in a blue towel. And simultaneously, just down the hall and for lack of pink since the laundry cart was running late, again, the girl, Halley (named of course for her auspicious "star"), is also swaddled in a blue blanket. Neither nurse realizes until hours later that both initially had trouble ascertaining "eye color" for the certificate, and then that both had the same simultaneous experience of certainty. It was as if, the nurses would confide to one another later, the babies' eyes had at first *no* color and then, all at once the most definite and lovely deep blue-green; as if the babies themselves had suddenly decided on a color, and when the two are placed side by side the eye color is not identical but somehow strikingly *related*, complementary. But Halley and Horace are separated soon after, and their respective parents, in such proximity all day, even pass in the hallways twice, but never meet.

At the end of one of these hallways, where two corridors converge, is a carpeted, chair-filled room. In it, several related people do what such places are designed for: they wait.

A very old man in a flannel shirt leans toward a table lamp, reading a magazine through thick eyeglasses. Across from him, a couple of college freshmen, a boy and a girl, try to read a textbook and try to appear casual in keeping physical contact with one another. The elderly man, Everett Higgs,

STRANGELY, THE TWO BABIES WHO HAD ONCE BEEN
ONLY MILLIMETERS APART WERE, BEFORE THEIR FIRST
BIRTHDAY . . . ABOUT AS FAR FROM ONE ANOTHER
AS THE EARTH ALLOWED . . .

2012 *Doris Betts Fiction Prize finalist*

ENTANGLEMENT

BY GREGG CUSICK

WITH ART BY JON KOLKIN

is the girl's grandfather, and she alternates between covering her physical attraction to her boyfriend and flaunting it.

In a room down the hall, Etta Higgs lies in a coma from which she probably will not awake. But her breathing is smooth and even, and her fall oak-leaf skin shows high color. Her eyelids ripple slightly at the movement behind them. Even in sleep, Etta seems busy.

Impatient for the start of visiting hours, Everett reads with difficulty from a journal called *Tomorrow's Science*. Given his wife's circumstances, he is naturally distracted, and of course he's not a perfectly fit fiddle himself. He battles vertigo and sometimes disorientation. He also suffers from a common and complicated malady he can only remember to call, generally, a *heart condition*. His weak eyes light on an article involving quantum theory – such a baffling term. About to turn the page, most of his mind on Etta, he reads:

GREGG CUSICK's stories have twice received second place awards in previous Betts competitions and have been published in *NCLR* 2008 and 2009. *NCLR* Fiction Editor Liza Wieland said of her selection of this story as a finalist, "I admire 'Entanglements' for the way it caused me to reexamine my ideas about what makes a story. This piece illustrates the complex relationship between plot and coincidence, and yet the characters are fully realized. It's a brief but useful and intelligent lesson in fiction writing, and I hope to (with the writer's permission of course) use it in my classes."

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Quotations in this story come directly or are paraphrased from John Polkinghorne, *Quantum Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford UP, 2002) and Brian Clegg, *The God Effect* (St. Martin's, 2006). The story's author apologizes in advance for any misreadings of these sources.



Dimensional Wisdom (incorporating sculpture *Gyre*, 1999, by Thomas Sayre), 2011 (pigment on paper) by Jon Kolklin

The word “quantum” needs a little demystifying. A quantum is usually a very small speck of *something*, a uniform building block normally found in vast numbers, whether it’s a photon of light, an atom of matter, or a subatomic particle like an electron.

Everett is surprised to suddenly understand a term that he has avoided as ever beyond his comprehension capabilities. He shakes his large, mottled head, smiling. Like Faulkner, he thinks, whose works he’d ventured to read only recently as an old man and, remarkably, had found not inscrutable but meaningful and poignant human tales.

Then, satisfied that he’s stretched his mind and overcome some fear even, again about to turn the page, Everett has the impulse strike him that he hasn’t taken his beta blocker for his blood pressure or his heart pill, another drug name he can never recall. Yet the reminder comes to him almost audibly – *Dogoxin* – he can taste the word, the pill suddenly – and he can almost hear Etta’s voice prodding him. He pops the capsules into his mouth, rises, shuffles to the water cooler across

the room. Next to the couch where his granddaughter, Crystal, mock-reads her physics text and all the while can’t keep her hands off her young beau, Rosen. Old Everett smiles, remembering back in the day, and returns to his seat to reopen the article about a concept called *quantum entanglement*. Still thirty minutes until visiting hours begin, Everett dozes softly. On the page before him:

It’s a connection between quantum particles, the building blocks of the universe. Once two particles are entangled, a change to one of them is reflected – *instantly* – in the other, be they in the same lab or light-years apart. So counter-

intuitive is this phenomenon and its implications that Einstein himself called it “spooky” and thought that it would lead to the downfall of quantum theory.

1987–2004

Halley spent only a few months in Norwood, Massachusetts, her birthplace. Her father, who worked in communications, took a transfer with his American company to Taipei, Taiwan. Horace, also, spent little time just down the road in Walpole before his father, in international trade, moved the family to Rio de Janeiro. Strangely, the two babies who had once been only millimeters apart were, before their first birthday in February, 1987, about as far from one another as the earth allowed, some 11,700 miles.

The striking little green-blue-eyed Halley was a bright kid and showed remarkable language skills, mastering English and learning passable Mandarin Chinese in the nine years her father worked in Taiwan. From there, in 1996, Halley moved with

the family on another international assignment, this time to Frankfurt, Germany. And from there, five years later, it was on to Sao Paolo, Brazil (which of course is not far, not even two hundred fifty miles, west-southwest of Rio). Halley picked up practical knowledge of German and Spanish and seemed very much a student and resident of the world. She was a funny kid, too, spontaneous and also quixotic, a voracious reader of tales, especially classic romances from *Romeo and Juliet* to *Jane Eyre*, and also had a taste for science fiction. Throughout her first seventeen years, Halley noticed the experience we all have, that sensation felt when something pops seemingly out of nowhere into our minds. But different from most of us, Halley indulged these impulses, acting on them without the conscious thought we most often employ, the rational – “Oh, I couldn’t do such a thing! That’s crazy!”

Her parents first came to notice these decisions in Halley’s clothing choices early on, purples with oranges and plaids atop stripes, assaults to the rods and cones is what her father said affectionately. And as she grew, she became almost famous among family and friends for her irrational – or actually *a-rational*, since reason had nothing to do with them – decisions. So much that when Halley told her father that she wanted to attend college in a tiny town in Maine, in the faraway United States, a place not on any of their world-wide lists but a word – Bowdoin – that just popped into her head, she said, he was less than surprised. And knew better than to try and reason with her about it.

One additional observation that Halley made, quite to herself, thinking upon her decisions and these impulses that prompted them. Never mentioned because it was so simple and obvious: that each decision, one direction set out on at a fork in the road, created a new and different reality from the one that she’d live had she chosen the other path. A whole different world that she now lived in that existed beside the infinite others created by the infinite forks that she, and we all, constantly face.

For his part, his intervening and first seventeen years, Horace, too, admitted and indulged those “ideas that simply pop into one’s head seemingly out of nowhere.” He, too, was labeled impulsive, spontaneous, and a garishly bold dresser. Gifted in language acquisition, he mastered English and Spanish absurdly young, and when his father was transferred from Rio de Janeiro to Brisbane to Marseille, he added to his repertoire both French and, inexplicably in high school, a bit of Mandarin Chinese. (It’s salient to note that Horace and family

were years-gone from Rio when Halley & Co. moved down the road in Sao Paolo.)

And years later still, when his time came to choose a college, Horace was privileged to be supplied a list of the finest education facilities in the world. And as his father related, unsurprised, “from out of nowhere, my son spins the globe and comes up with a tiny college in the northeast United States, in Maine for goodness sakes. Told me the word just popped into his head and he looked it up. Said, ‘Dad, isn’t Colby a kind of *cheese*?’”

So it happened that in the fall of 2004, Horace, who had also had the simplistic vision of a different world entered when he made any decision, boarded a plane from Marseille bound for Boston and then by train up the coast and inland then to Waterville, Maine. And from a not opposite but quite different direction, Halley flew from Brazil up to New York, thought about riding the Amtrak rails the rest of the way, but in the end planed on to Augusta, Maine, and cabbid it then down I-95 the twenty miles to Brunswick. The two were, in August, 2004, as close to their birthplace as they’d been since, well, their births; and so also as close to one another as they’d been ever since.

February 9, 1986

Everett Higgs mumbles to Etta in his half-sleep, wakes sharply, focuses on the wall clock, one of those oversized elementary-school types with a white background and large block numerals and long black hands. Still twenty minutes until visiting hours begin. He gazes down at the magazine open in his

FOR HIS PART, HIS INTERVENING AND
FIRST SEVENTEEN YEARS, HORACE, TOO,
ADMITTED AND INDULGED THOSE “IDEAS
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lap, begins reading a random paragraph entitled “Many Worlds”:

In 1957, a Princeton graduate student named Hugh Everett proposed a theory that explains the quantum world in all its peculiarity by suggesting that each time any event happens, the universe clones off new copies of itself reflecting every possible outcome of the event.

In other words, at every act of measurement, physical reality divides into a multiplicity of separate universes, in each of which different (cloned) experimenters observe the different possible outcomes of the measurement. Reality is a multiverse rather than a simple universe.

This, or perhaps his vertigo, has Everett’s mind whirling. He glances at the clock again and closes his eyes.

Across the waiting room, Crystal and Rosen sit close on a narrow couch, her leg over his knee, on which sits the physics textbook they’re pretending to study from together. She holds the right side of the book, he the left. His other hand rests on her thigh. Coincidentally, the unit their class is studying concerns quantum theory, and the chapter contains some of the very same information Crystal’s grandfather is dozing over.

The two read about the beginnings of quantum theory, and a famous paper released in 1935 by Einstein, Boris Podolsky, and Nathan Rosen, referred to since simply as EPR. In it, the eminent physicists,

amazingly, get it wrong. They declare that either the theory of the day has “holes,” or errors, or that “locality” doesn’t work. Locality, “the idea that two things separated at a distance can’t influence each other without something passing between them,” is a given for Einstein, an assumption he refuses to relinquish, even in the face of Niels Bohr and virtually all other physicists coming after.

Crystal and Rosen – for whom the “R” in EPR of course holds delight and surprise, thinking perhaps a distant relative since he’s named for his grandfather; he’ll have to ask his parents – strain over the concepts. They might be surprised to learn that this locality business is something old dozing Everett has known is flawed since well before E, P, and R sat down to hatch their plans. He has been, he’s thought at times since perhaps 1910 – he’s not exactly sure why this particular year – influencing Etta, and she him, at a distance, without anything visible or measurable passing between them. Why, didn’t she just remind him to take his Dogoxin; and if I’m not mistaken, she’s in a coma, he might offer.

Crystal, however, understands quantum entanglement, erroneously any physicist would tell her, as something like telepathy. She’s suddenly sure that she and Rosen are conjoined, even apart, like the subatomic particles.

“Hey, Rose! Run down the hall and think of something. I’ll sit here and tell you what it is!” Her eyes are charged with excitement. “I’m just sure we’re, you know, entangled!”

Rosen seems not to share her electric intensity, which, shouldn’t he, he thinks, if they are linked in such a way? Still, he tries to draft off of Crystal’s energy, tries to concentrate on her head. Her lovely, sexy head. He walks down the hall – toward the ward where Horace and Hillary had been just recently side by side in the neonatal area, though Rosen of course doesn’t know it – and he tries to think what Crystal is thinking. When she peers down the hall and signals him back, he returns and they sit. She levels her eyes on him intently.

“Well?” she says. “What were you thinking of – or, no, maybe I should tell you what you had in



The Bridge (incorporating sculpture *Gyre*, 1999 by Thomas Sayre), 2011 (pigment on paper) by Jon Kolkin

your mind?” Crystal hesitates, not wanting to blow this. “Okay, I’ll go. You were picturing the two of us as old people together, like my grandparents.”

Her mouth is open expectantly, her lips moist. Rosen is aroused, and he’s a terrible liar. He opts for the truth. “I was picturing a cheeseburger,” he says. “With chili, like we got downstairs here when we visited before, remember?”

Across Crystal’s face float emotions – like wind-blown cumulous clouds crossing in front of the sun – of anger, disappointment, resignation. And beyond Kübler-Ross to rethinking, reworking, something more than acceptance. “Yeah, I *do* remember that burger,” she says. “It was in my head, too, as part of this whole place.” She lets Rosen put his hand back on her thigh then, as the clock reads one p.m. exactly. Her grandfather’s eyes open slowly as if a not-too-loud-at-all alarm had gone off somewhere inside his head.

Everett rises then, the science magazine falling from his lap to the carpet. He bends slowly to pick it up, his eyes lighting on a paragraph in which the term “togetherness-in-separation” is highlighted. And for an electric moment his mind recaptures a time when he and Etta were literally in such positions, with him shipping out to trenches at the German front and her nursing and fighting the influenza back in the tiny Maine town where they’d grown up next door to one another. This was 1917, and they were eighteen years old.

He grasps the magazine and stands, glancing to see if his granddaughter has noticed his slowness, his creaky difficulty. He thinks he’ll take the magazine into Etta’s room, perhaps read to her a little from the article about entanglement. The passage he will read to her, an analogy that ironically would have helped Crystal to explain her trouble concerning the experiment with Rosen, is this:

This togetherness-in-separation takes the form of correlations between what is happening at 1 and what is happening at 2 and no message can be read out of these correlations without knowledge of what is happening at both ends. It is as if a singer at 1 was singing a random series of notes and a singer at 2 was also singing a random series of notes and only if one were able to hear them both together would one realize that the two singers were in some kind of harmony with each other.

And a short time later, Everett is sure Etta likes this harmony idea, as he dozes beside her bed, his hands holding hers between them.

September 7, 2004

They reconnected in a weather-beaten auditorium they would later agree was anything but the warm, charming meetinghouse of old New England images. Drafty and cold it was, as an idyllic crisp fall day had been swept off like leaves beneath a rake, replaced by a sharp bit of winter that even these hardy folk hadn’t dressed for. Horace and four other Colby freshmen had piled into his roommate’s Jeep and driven down to Brunswick from Waterville to crash a Bowdoin College freshman girls’ dance party.

For her part, Halley attended this event at her school with reservations – not exactly the sock-hop type, she’d told a friend – but had chosen to tag along for no reason she could name, just a kind



Into the Earth, 2010 (pigment on paper) by Jon Kolkin

of impulse that for all of her eighteen years she'd been acting on. It was as if each choice was a jump to a parallel track one step closer to one another, so that over time and on this windy almost-winter night in faraway Maine, Halley and Horace found themselves finally back in the same world.

A pretty poor – they'd admit it even at the time – but loud enough local band thrashed through Van Morrison's "Brown Eyed Girl." Groaning, just-engaged radiators couldn't compete with the arctic breezes that slipped between quarter-millennium-aged lathe and wainscoting. As happens in old movies and quantum physics, their eyes met across the crowded room. The lead singer asked, "*Do you remember when we used to sing la la la la la la la la la la la la deeda?*" and Horace's blue-green eyes found Halley's green-blues, like lasers across the packed dance floor they were.

"Hi," she said, holding out her hand when they'd moved closer. "I'm Halley."

"Like the comet," Horace said.

"Uh-huh," she said. "My birthday."

"Mine, too," he smiled, not surprised, as if this was somehow self-evident.

Later, after they danced and stared at one another, after more common and unsurprising information had been exchanged, Horace asked her, "Do you think it's possible that we've been in parallel and converging realities for eighteen years? Can there be such a thing as parallel and convergent?"

"Maybe each decision we've made has been like jumping a track, ever closer. Until now."

"So now we are in the same reality?" he asked.

"Most certainly."

"Then what happens now, with each decision either of us makes?"

Halley had studied a bit of quantum physics in high school. "Each triggers an instantaneous and correlated decision in the other – not the *same*, but related."

"So you think we can stay in the same reality," Horace asked solemnly, after a pause.

"I think it's worth a try," she said.

February 9, 1986

After reading Etta the passage from the magazine about the singers in harmony, Everett is silent for a time. Then, seemingly out of nowhere although this bothers him not at all, he is taken back, way way back, to a scene he remembers like a staticky black and white cinema newsreel, but in a time even before such newsreels. The date is:

April 20, 1910

A cold clear night in rural Maine. Spring has appeared then vanished like a mouse in a hole. Too dry and sharp – old even for snow. A pair of eleven-year-olds gaze upward. And see the streak, the long romantic tail against the starry sky, the appearance of Halley's Comet.

Tomorrow, April 21st, Mark Twain will pass away. Having been born under the famous comet's last appearance in November, 1835, he has said that he entered with it and might just as well leave with it, too.

Quantum theory, begun by Einstein and others in just a few short years, will develop and modify and drastically change the way humans view the cosmos and the microcosmic. And in quantum theory, strangely, the past is the present is the future. Just as it could be simultaneously 1910, and at the same time it is also:

July 28, 2061

Who knows, but perhaps a pair of old Twain-esque seventy-six-year-olds, born entangled and separated and then rejoined together, one named for the celestial passing and one for a poet, might grasp hands and gaze upward and think some correlated thoughts. Impulsive, plaid-on-polka-dotted kinds of ideas that will need not be voiced. Visions that would not occur to one but for, and until, the other's imaginings. ■

... EACH DECISION, ONE DIRECTION SET
OUT ON AT A FORK IN THE ROAD, CREATED
A NEW AND DIFFERENT REALITY FROM
THE ONE THAT SHE'D LIVE HAD SHE CHOSEN
THE OTHER PATH.



Sanctuary, 2000 (acrylic on canvas, 48x96) by George Bireline, courtesy of Lee Hansley Gallery

Picking Blackberries on Yellow Mountain Road

BY RICHARD BETZ

2012 JAMES APPLEWHITE POETRY PRIZE FINALIST

It is Sunday morning and we should be in church
 Instead of here on this unpaved road, cups in hand,
 Picking blackberries on Yellow Mountain Road,
 The succulent hours hanging silent before us.

We park the car under tall shade and wander so far
 That we have to backtrack what seems like miles,
 Going from patch to patch in dappled light:
 The dark alcoves where the gnats drone high and thin

And the sun-drenched openings where the berries
 Are sweet and tiny-hard, only four or five nubs.
 Absorbed and silent we work in peace, returning only
 To pour our offerings into the common bowl.

Fingers sticky and stained wine-red, we wander along,
 When suddenly we come to the mother patch,
 Surprised in a shady place we nearly overlooked,
 Big berries dangling dark beneath the spreading branches,

So tender and ripe for our touch that they tumble
 Into cupped hands at the gentlest bump, like prayers
 Unexpectedly answered, blessings untrammelled by suffering,
 Hands filled to overflowing with humble blackberries.

RICHARD BETZ grew up in New England but has lived in North Carolina for almost fifty years, first in Asheville and for the past thirty years in Highlands. His poetry has been published in college literary magazines, including those of Rollins College (where he graduated cum laude with a degree in English Literature) and Vanderbilt University, as well as regional publications in Asheville and Macon County. Recently retired from a long career as Town Administrator in Highlands, he now works as a real estate broker. He is married and has one daughter.

GEORGE BIRELINE (1923-2002) was born in Peoria, IL. He worked as a scenery technician for *Unto These Hills* in Cherokee, NC, before earning his MFA at UNC-Chapel Hill in 1963. He taught in the School of Design at NC State University from 1955 until his retirement as Professor Emeritus in 1986. His works are in the permanent collections of the Lee Hansley Gallery, the Asheville Art Museum, the Ackland Museum of Art in Chapel Hill, and the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, DC.

Submit, Subscribe, Support: Keys to a Thriving NCLR

Margaret D. Bauer, Editor

Each year, NCLR receives numerous books for review consideration. When we send books out to potential reviewers, we share this criteria for determining if a book should be reviewed: is it worth your time and our space? Much more often than not this year, the answer we received from reviewers was yes, and some of these books' authors are new to us; or the reviewer chose writers both new *and* familiar. Such reviews are here in the North Carolina Miscellany section, where we reserve space for material that either does not fit the current special feature topic or that introduces a new writer (even if only new to our pages). Read, for example, John Hoppenthaler's review of three new poetry collections from LSU Press, a press consistently reliable about publishing high-quality poetry (and it comes as no surprise to us that often those books are by North Carolina poets).

In this section too, we include a third story that received honorable mention in the 2012 Doris Betts Fiction Prize competition, Kathryn Etters Lovatt's provocative story set in a sleep clinic. As we prepare to launch this issue of *NCLR Online*, the deadline is pending for the 2013 competition – with our new, more user-friendly, online submission manager, Submittable, which has allowed us to simplify our submissions process, as well as provides writers the opportunity to subscribe to *NCLR* when they submit, enabling writers to support a publication in which they would like to see their work published. Remember that Betts submission fees are lower for *NCLR* subscribers, and the submission fee for *NCLR*'s James Applewhite Poetry Prize competition is waived for subscribers.

As in years past, another option for subscribing to *NCLR* is to join the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association and receive both *NCLR* and the *North Carolina Historical Review*. *NCLR* solicits readers to also become a Friend – on Facebook, yes, but more important, through making a monetary donation to [our account](#) with the ECU Foundation. During these challenging fiscal times, such donations are particularly welcome and vital.

Finally, I would like to use this space to express my appreciation to *Our State* magazine for David Hall's story about *NCLR* in December 2012. Since that issue's release, we have received about two dozen new subscribers and another dozen orders for *NCLR* 2012, echoing my experience at literary events: when people find out about *NCLR*, they want to participate in our efforts to preserve the state's rich literary tradition. The *NCLR* staff is devoted to this mission – but our resources (time and money) are limited. Your subscription and tax-deductible contribution would help us to add a marketing component that will help us to spread the word about what we do. So please, let us hear from you! ■

NORTH CAROLINA MISCELLANY

- 112** *"Have you found out how to be anything but young?"*
Catherine Carter, *The Swamp Monster at Home*
Claudia Emerson, *Secure the Shadow*
Katherine Soniat, *The Swing Girl*
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“HAVE YOU FOUND OUT HOW TO BE ANYTHING BUT YOUNG?”

a review by John Hoppenthaler

Catherine Carter. *The Swamp Monster at Home.* Louisiana State University Press, 2012.

Claudia Emerson. *Secure the Shadow.* Louisiana State University Press, 2011.

Katherine Soniat. *The Swing Girl.* Louisiana State University Press, 2011.

JOHN HOPPENTHALER's books of poetry are *Lives of Water* (2003) and *Anticipate the Coming Reservoir* (2008), both titles from Carnegie Mellon University Press. He has also published individual poems, essays, interviews, and reviews in various journals, anthologies, and textbooks. He served as Poetry Editor of *Kestrel* for over ten years and currently edits a monthly poetry feature for the electronic publication *Connotations Press: An Online Artifact*. His honors include being named the Gilbert-Chappell Distinguished Poet for the Eastern Region of North Carolina and various grants and residency fellowships.

Swing Girl is KATHERINE SONIAT's fifth collection of poetry. Her *A Shared Life* (Iowa University Press, 1993) won the Iowa Prize and a Virginia Prize for Poetry. *Notes of Departure* received the Camden Poetry Prize. She is the recipient of two Virginia Commission for the Arts Grants, a William Faulkner Award, a Jane Kenyon Award, an Anne Stanford Award, and Fellowships to Yaddo, the MacDowell Colony, and the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference. She currently teaches in the Great Smokies Writers' Program at UNC-Asheville.



PHOTOGRAPH BY JOHN FLETCHER, JR., WWW.FLETCHER.COM.
COURTESY OF LAURA HOPE-GILL, ASHEVILLE WORDFEST

In the title poem of **Katherine Soniat's** *The Swing Girl*, the speaker – visiting the Grecian tomb of a girl buried with her toy swing – announces, “(O, to fly abroad again on her board roped to the limb.) // The territory that girl could cover, her eyes peering birdlike / across the grove. The air, a vector.” This exclamation, suggesting middle-aged desire for what has become inaccessible – the seemingly boundless possibility and innocence of youth – couched as it is within the mathematical notion of the vector, might well serve as an entry point into Soniat's, as well as two other recent titles from the Louisiana State University Press.

The girl in Soniat's poem, though tethered as we all are to fixed points of various cultural and natural imperatives (signified here by the tree limb from which the swing hangs, as well as by the image of the donkey “tied to the thorn tree”), does what all children do on swings: she propels herself forward toward the highest point of an arc. But the poem shifts from that exhilaration and reminds itself that the swing is now a relic, that the girl and her play are long dead. By poem's end, the girl's vector has become

akin to the speaker's own, the speaker's mature age equating to greater magnitude and a more subdued relationship to her orientation in space; ironically, she crawls from the tomb, the passage “as narrow / . . . as the way in,” suggesting that her direction is toward her own death chamber. That is to say, no matter how far the swing goes out, it always comes back.

The major theme of the book, then, beginning (in terms of the speaker's life) in medias res, is passage and return, and the poems are largely elegiac, with – as the final lines of the collection's first poem, “Thoughts at Paliani,” suggest – death seen as a point of departure as well as the fixed end point for all travelers: “That spring you died, the moss on the banks / was greener, spray going farther than thought.” Where these departures and final destinations come together constitutes the volume's landscape, a “world / great with spin and fledgling sadness” (“Hummingbird of Ur”).

Perhaps Soniat's project is best summed up in the wonderful poem “Nightshade”: “She decided to give in, as a painter might, / and let shadows offer direction.

She'd follow with a sponge, // dab gold at the edges" of "all the long-held *misereres*." In the poem, housebound by a rainy month of August and listening to Bach, the speaker, with a "dusty Chevy" standing in for the swing, considers going out for a nighttime drive. The narrative is complicated by odd syntactical construction ("Rain hardly stopped the month of August, kettle boiling / on the stove for tea") and by perception at odds with itself as the car is dusty yet "washed and ready for travel." Non sequitur causes a sort of derailment of perception, an altered vision (the title of the poem is "Nightshade," after all) priming readers for the leap of faith they are asked to take when they arrive at the poem's hinge, the flight of the speaker's imagination as she vectors forth: "Today she found a title for evening made from her dreams, / Baby Elephant in the Choir Stall." The elephant becomes another version of the swing girl and of the speaker, at first an innocent and presumably free "trumpeter of song," but thereafter "came the training, the chaining / and poking at a life to make it fall in step and be quiet." Later lines imply the speaker's own poetry as well as they describe the emotional tenor of *The Swing Girl*: "Imagine how this creature / would sound years from now, fully awake in a cathedral. // Echoes of all the long-held *misereres*." As the poem concludes, there is the wrenching sense that the speaker/poet has accepted the existential nature of art as ephemeral in the face of death; yet there is also the notion that art is a defiance of death, as suggested by the transient nature of the Chinese artist's inferior paints, material he knows will ultimately disappear even as he paints "canvas after canvas / of empty train stations in pre-war Berlin." The poem ends with the speaker musing on life's inevitable decay, the swing's inevitable return to stasis: "How would it be to sit on a bench in one of his depots? She could wear / her favorite black scarf and know with each breath she was fading a bit, / going away." At turns lyrical and narrative, tough and tender, this is Soniat at her formidable best.



PHOTOGRAPH BY KENT IPPOLITO

Secure the Shadow, Claudia Emerson's fifth volume (via Louisiana State University Press's Dave Smith-edited *Southern Messenger Poets* imprint), reveals poetic markers Smith has long preferred as a poet and editor: sinewy narrative lines and sentences and poetry grounded within a genuinely rendered sense of place that is steeped in a proud Southern culture that seems always teetering on the edge of erasure. These tropes continue to serve Emerson extraordinarily well as a poet; her previous four collections have frequently centered on Southern life and loss as her characters follow the vectors of their lives. It remains so in *Secure the Shadow*.

As with Soniat's collection, Emerson's title poem, a sequence of poetic musings on photos of dead children, provides a strong sense of what the volume, as a whole, concerns itself with; that is, it provides a mature perspective on faded youth and mortality, the understanding that there are

... only
 so many ways to look until the light
 changes, fades, is lost, the pane - the lens -
 darkening from glass to mirror, until
 the substance of the eye sees itself
 outside the self, and then can look no further.

Like Soniat's title poem, Emerson's "Secure the Shadow" presents us with youth as relic, the

ABOVE LEFT Katherine Soniat reading at Asheville Wordfest, 2010

ABOVE RIGHT Lee Bollinger presenting Claudia Emerson with the 2006 Pulitzer Prize for *Late Wife* (Louisiana State UP; reviewed in *NCLR* 2007)

CLAUDIA EMERSON earned her MFA from UNC-Greensboro and is currently the Arrington Distinguished Chair in Poetry at the University of Mary Washington in Virginia. She is the recipient of fellowships from the Library of Congress and the National Endowment for Arts.

children's bodies captured, though artificially, in medias res, as if each child remains launched and fixed at some nascent point of its swinging into maturity: one with a "face still round with baby fat"; one with a book in her hand, "her left thumb holding down the page, place marked / as though in a passage to which she will return"; another posed with her living cat, the bell she'd fasten to his neck almost audible with "the small cheerful sounding / of return, the smaller sound of vanishing." Section five presents the reader with gestures similar to those in Soniat's collection. "Some of the youngest children," the poem reveals, "have wasted / into the appearance of the very old," and later in the section, Emerson writes, "And some have their hands tied as though in bondage; / this is, the photographer's notes instruct, / to prevent displacement, the body's slow – / certain restlessness that does not die." This restlessness of the body in its passage to dust is akin to the restlessness behind the poet's continuing urge to write about these passages, and like the tethering tree that restricts the swing's arc, the bondage here is necessary for any outward flight to proceed. It is the friction between momentum (desire) and tether (that fixed point from which our vectoring proceeds) that provides the tension of life and art, and, rendered in these photos as art, the deceased children are captured somewhere between origin and the country of their final destination.

Section II begins with "Animal Funerals, 1964," a poem about children practicing for what comes next, vectoring toward roles they will one day assume, "preacher, undertaker" or "a straggling congregation / reciting what we could of the psalm // about green pastures" This poem segues into "First Death," a poem about the speaker's first experience with human death, and it is at this point of the book that we experience a shift from childhood poems into poems of increasing experience with the poet taking on the job of reportage, as the poet has Walter Cronkite do in "Zenith," "cataloging / the dead nightly in a country we've not yet heard of." "Old Elementary" provides a grim figure for the shift:

the building abandoned

years ago . . .

The utter childlessness of the playground

fronts it, lifeless swings, foot-worn furrows

beneath, once slick from use, almost closed over.

With childhood gone, what remains is memory, grief, and, as she suggests a few poems later in "Ground Truth," an "afternoon's concession / to another dusk – severe, more common truth."

As the Old South continues to give way to the New South, with the contesting and rupturing such transition requires, I'm glad that Emerson's poetry remains a trusted, unflinching, and crucial lens through which to consider what has "fallen away then from the present / tense into reminiscence – the lucid was" ("The Present Tense").



PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDREW MOREHEAD

Though frequently in a more humorous register, the poems in **Catherine Carter's** second full-length collection, ***The Swamp Monster At Home***, also concern themselves with launching out into the future and the inevitable death that marks the end of that vector.

As with the other two volumes discussed, Carter's collection begins at some spot that looks out upon hereafter while reflecting upon origin, the first lines of its first poem, "The Dawn of Time," insisting that

It had always been twilight
and it would always be twilight, God's
hour or the dinosaur's or, more
likely, just the sweet unending
amoeba's, as each split itself
off from the original and eternal
cell. . . .

The poem continues a few lines later, with lines that serve to destabilize the speaker's certainty that there is something like cosmic order in the universe's workings, and the cause of this uncertainty is the speaker's epiphanic realization of time and memory:

. . . Then,
change. Then
some primordial ape-animal
standing out on the sandy
cape of forever looked over
her shoulder and said,
in her clumsy grunt,
"yesterday . . ."

As with children, here is the point where an awareness of mortality creeps into consciousness, and this awareness becomes linked to both the future and the past. "The sea began to heave," the poem explains, "The endless twilight began / to end," the cares of the world reveal themselves, and "atoms everywhere synchronized / their watches for millennia / of slow, precise decay." This poem, like many of the volume's best, are wry at the surface, but below that humorous exterior lurks human fear and certain death, as expressed in "Sump," where metaphorical sump water begins to rise in the speaker's basement like a snake, "licking / harsh walls with its thin black tongue." The poem's closure is the realization that "you can't bail enough; you can't / drain it out; nothing / you can do will stop it now."

Using dark humor this way in poetry is nothing new, of course; Carter, in incorporating strategies similar to those of contemporaries like Stephen Dunn, Thomas Lux, and Bob Hicok, just to name a few, recognizes that black humor, "[w]ith its typical

ambivalence . . . reminds us of the pain and misery beneath what we are laughing at, which is not obviated by the laughter. To this extent it complicates our response to the literature . . . and to the characters we are reading about."* This sort of complex reaction is precisely what Carter is after, and she achieves it effectively in the best of these poems.

In "Leaffall," Carter deftly maneuvers the central metaphorical conceit, the speaker addressing the dying leaves of autumn as if they were human: "Beauties, this is the bright / and burning hour, time at last / for sailing." Giving individual leaves human names, the poem moves forward with mock observations such as,

In the night
Selene was torn away;
you heard nothing. At noon
Rupert next door cried out
a defiant rustle and leapt:
one gleam, gone.

The tonal veneer, however, fades as the poem nears completion with the stark observation that "You're all headed the same / way, into utter / change, into what's under / all those leaves." The final lines ring soberly:

Do you cling on
to your mother as the world
rolls downward, darkward?
Have you found
out how to be anything
but young?

These lines bring us back, perhaps, to Emerson's "Secure the Shadow" or Soniat's "The Swing Girl," with images of children captured in time before they are able to much consider starting points or conclusions. Carter's question to the leaves is really a question to herself, and it's the same sort of question Soniat and Emerson ask of themselves in their own collections, so I write it again: "Have you found / out how to be anything / but young?" ■

CATHERINE CARTER is the coordinator of the English Education program at Western Carolina University. Her first collection of poetry, *The Memory of Gills* (Louisiana State UP, 2006; reviewed in *NCLR* 2007), received the Roanoke-Chowan Award from the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association. She also won the 2009 Randall Jarrell Poetry Competition sponsored by the North Carolina Writers Network. See samples of her poetry in *NCLR* 2001, 2008, and 2011.

* Matthew Winston, "Black Humor: To Weep with Laughing," *Black Humor: Critical Essays*, ed. Alan R. Pratt (New York: Garland, 1993) 257.

AN “INCORRIGIBLE FLIRT” AND AN “UNDERGROUND MISSION”

a review by Catherine Carter

Julie Suk. *Lie Down with Me: New and Selected Poems*. Autumn House Press, 2011.

CATHERINE CARTER is the author of two books of poetry, the Roanoke-Chowan Award winning *The Memory of Gills* (Louisiana State University Press, 2006; reviewed in *NCLR* 2007) and *The Swamp Monster at Home* (Louisiana State University Press, 2012; reviewed in this issue). Her poetry has also appeared in *Poetry*, *Orion*, *Ploughshares*, *Cortland Review*, and *Best American Poetry* 2009, as well as in *NCLR* 2001, 2008, and 2011. She previously reviewed poetry for *NCLR* 2009.

Born and raised in Alabama, **JULIE SUK** (pronounced “Suke”) has lived in Charlotte, NC, since the mid-1960s. Her work has appeared in *Poetry*, and she has won the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association’s Roanoke-Chowan Award for *The Angel of Obsession* (University of Arkansas Press, 1992) and the Brockman-Campbell Book Award for *The Dark Takes Aim* (Autumn House Press, 2003).

Julie Suk’s *Lie Down with Me: New and Selected Poems* extends and builds upon themes that marked her previous books: *The Medicine Woman* (1980), *Heartwood* (1991), *The Angel of Obsession* (1992), and *The Dark Takes Aim* (2003). As the title suggests, *Lie Down with Me* invites the reader to contemplate death, as well as love and sex, and to consider the many connections among them. The title poem of Suk’s earlier *The Dark Takes Aim* offers “blessings on those moments of reprieve / grabbed before dropping into nightmare,” a preoccupation that also haunts the newer poems of *Lie Down with Me* as well.

From the beginning, Suk’s work has been marked by an obsession with coming to terms with the actual; many of the poems are of the genre that might variously be called *carpe diem* or embracing the paradoxical and flawed. This *carpe diem* thread and its concomitant eye on the clock runs through all the books, advocating seizing the moment in the face of looming loss. As far back as 1980, in *The Medicine Woman*, “Remnants” begins, “I’m surprised we’ve come this far.”

Some specific motifs through which Suk funnels these preoccupations return in the new poems of *Lie Down with Me*. For instance, images of stars recur regularly in selections from earlier books – though not in the narrowly romantic way one might expect. In *Medicine Woman*, the star is a small and transitory one revealed by bisecting an apple around its equator. A particularly strong poem from this early work is “Voyager,” which compares the Voyager spacecraft to a Viking burial ship and meditates on the taped whale song it carries, which



COURTESY OF CITY LIGHTS BOOKSTORE

“could overflow / a billion years, sounding / until it drowns” (an excellent pun), “[o]r it could split the sky / and out of the spray / find tongue.” In the new poems of *Lie Down*, the poet is left “like the aura of a burned-out star” in “What We Know Is Not What We Feel.” In “The Stuff of Stars or Why I Finger Your Body,” also from the new poems, the stars are going out. This poem is a punning play between the memory of dancing to “Stardust” (the song) and the usually pleasing idea that all life on earth is comprised of star dust – both undercut by the fact that star dust demonstrates that stars, mortal like everything else, have died and are continuing to die.

Another allusion to mortality in the poems is the motif of archaeology, focused specifically on the Egyptian pyramids, which began in the excerpts from *The Medicine Woman*. This motif is about wanting “to be uncovered,” Suk suggests in “Pieces,” a poem about wanting to be found. She adds in “Something Missing,” “Everything I’ve buried wants out // to taste your breath, / and in your hands / wake spiced and oiled.” This happens again with “Seeds,” a poem that echoes and re-echoes with Suk’s distinctive voice:

Everywhere hunger,
ferryboat seeds going out
coming back
oarless,

the life inside
waiting to be rescued.

The pyramids appear again in “Smoldering,” from *Heartwood*: “Morning, and the street rumbles through a day / like any other. Earth is peopling again / and we unfold, thirsty as lotus seeds / lifted from a tomb.” Suk’s simile reminds us that everything is constantly being discovered, remembered and reborn, that everything comes from the tomb, from the death of other life and other things.

As with her earlier works, the poems in *Lie Down with Me* demonstrate Suk’s gifts for compression and wordplay. One of the best among the new works is “Gone,” which opens with deer as instruments of destruction, devouring the tender flowers of youth and spring before becoming the next stanza’s victims when they are struck by cars: “Doe, fawn, stag – the many who drift by / and on, deserting us for the baleful / underground mission of worms.” These lines highlight Suk’s love for a good pun: the worms both have a baleful mission (to devour) and live underground in a baleful *mission*, as in church. The poem takes a rather odd turn at the end: “Even the bees, gone, taking with them aromas / that drive the senses into rut – //

the earthy, the salty, the gamey / odor I love of a man.” Even in the era of Colony Collapse Disorder, how do bees take with them all the scents of men? Still, “gamey” connects the men to the predators/prey that are the deer, and connects man and deer and death and sex to earth, our baleful mission. Another example is “Sweet Time,” in which the sweetness that opens the poem, “If the day starts sweet / cloyingly sweet,” is from a dead mouse decomposing behind the wall. This unexpected correlative for sweetness barely has time to make readers blink before the pun on “death takes its own sweet time” requires a second blink, of a different variety.

The newest pieces in *Lie Down with Me* are also notable for their strong endings. “Sweet Time,” for instance, inquires,

and if the day is not
one you want remembered –
that drag, your shadow,
continuing to haunt
like an amputated limb –

isn't it better than tomorrow
suddenly bereft of you?

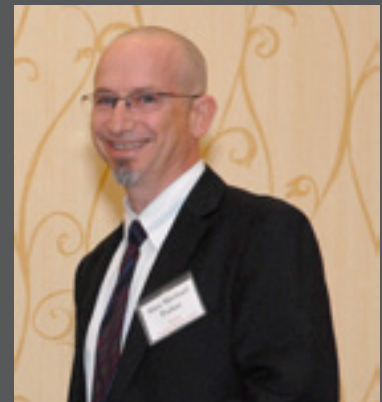
One hopes that it is. If a poem occasionally gives way to a brief surge of abstraction – in the

initial poem, “What We Know Is Not What We Feel,” the speaker finds no direction or path to follow, “nothing / of anger sorrow love / or the foolish wishes / we wept and fought for” – the poem always returns not only to the concrete, but to surprise and even charm. Here, for instance, despite the lack of direction, the poet is left “like the aura of a burned-out star,” but with “the body / that incorrigible flirt, / still leading me on.”

The ending of the collection’s opening poem, one of the new poems of this compilation volume, could be a coda for *Lie Down with Me*: for all their preoccupation with mortality, brevity, the need to take even rotten-mouse sweetness wherever we can find it, the new poems, coming out of the long history they illuminate, are also “incorrigible flirts,” leading the reader on. Their humor and joy balance their fear and despair with exactitude and grace. Their punning is entirely Suk-like, a redolent bazaar encompassing both that which leads us with the knowledge that it must let us fall (like love, perhaps, or like the world at large) and that which leads us onward, building out of star-rubble a path we can follow a little longer, a few more steps. ■

2012 ROANOKE-CHOWAN POETRY AWARD

NCLR congratulates Alan Michael Parker on his 2012 Roanoke-Chowan Poetry Award for *Long Division* (Tupelo Press). This is Parker’s seventh poetry collection. Ruth Moose noted in remarks for the award ceremony, “One of the major tasks of a poet is to make the language new. Alan Michael Parker spins new language like a neon top on the tip of his little finger. In poem after poem he twirls fresh language like a lasso.” ■



PHOTOGRAPH BY NICK LANIER:
COURTESY OF NC DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL RESOURCES

MEANS OF SURVIVAL

a review by Susan Laughter Meyers

Kathryn Kirkpatrick. *Unaccountable Weather*. Winston-Salem: Press 53, 2011.

Leslie Williams. *Success of the Seed Plants*. Durham and Pittsburgh: Bellday Books, 2010.

SUSAN LAUGHTER MEYERS, a North Carolina native, is the author of *Keep and Give Away* (University of South Carolina Press, 2006). Her most recent collection, *My Dear, Dear Stagger Grass*, is the inaugural winner of the *Cider Press Review's* Editor's Prize and will be published in 2013. Her reviews have appeared in such venues as *South Carolina Review*, *The Post and Courier*, *Calyx*, and *NCLR Online* 2012. Read a sample of her poetry in this issue of *NCLR Online* and also in the print issue of *NCLR* 2013.

ABOVE RIGHT Kathryn Kirkpatrick reading at a North Carolina Poetry Society event at McIntyre's Fine Books in Pittsboro, NC, 22 July, 2012

In their recent poetry collections Kathryn Kirkpatrick and Leslie Williams both reveal an intelligent approach to the wide-ranging theme of survival, the intelligence evidenced in large part by their obvious love of language. These are not poets who call attention to their work with pyrotechnics. Instead, Kirkpatrick lays down word after precise word to say the painfully unsayable. She occasionally turns to a variety of voices, modulating the diction, syntax, and tone to suit the persona, while Williams displays an entirely likable leaning toward Middle English diction. Kirkpatrick's book has a decidedly more feminist stance. Williams's poems are notable for the leaps that occur along her book's highly associative path. Both poets know their craft, as they create for the reader an immediacy of place and circumstance, a boldness of spirit that is inviting and ultimately rewarding.

Kathryn Kirkpatrick's *Unaccountable Weather*, her fourth and most urgent volume of poetry, ostensibly delves into the emotions and particulars of surviving breast cancer, the heart of a book that from the very first poem broadens out from its powerful subject. Interwoven among the cancer poems are poems of mythology that portray such characteristics as strength, courage, suffering, and mystery. We're told in an endnote that these poems were inspired by an art exhibit called *The Goddess Paintings*. These goddess poems – "Athena," "Artemis," "Astarte," and others – heighten the power of the cancer poems by relating to them, while at the same time turning the reader in a tangential direction away from the subject of illness.

The poet is also smart in the way she manages time in the collection. The first and last poems

return to the past, the speaker's personal past in the first poem, and a cultural past exhibited in cave paintings mentioned in the final poem. In both poems the voice turns to the collective "we" – speaking in the first poem, "Called Back," for the poet's generation of young girls growing up rootless in suburbs, after the atomic bomb and during an era when everything was touted as *new* and *better*. It was a period, too, of ignorance about a number of habits and behaviors later determined to be health hazards – such as sunbathing in a time before sunscreens. After all, how better to beautify a pale body than slather it in grease before the ritual of lying for hours in the sun for the purpose of attaining a golden tan? It is only in the subsequent poems that the reader sees where the poet is going with a cruel chronology that brings about the eventual diagnosis of breast cancer.

Besides the poems that reach back to the past, there are numerous poems, serious and necessary poems, that take place in the present moment – "Department of Mammography, Because I Want to Live"; "Chemotherapy"; "Physical Therapy"; "Radiation Treatments" – as well as lyrical intervals offered by the goddess poems. But not all of the poems of the present are serious. Several of the persona poems offer comic relief: "Maria Makes Out" and "Donna Goes Dancing," for example, portray women who have come through breast cancer surgeries with a strong, sassy sense of humor intact.

Kirkpatrick is a long-time resident of the mountains of North Carolina, and the alternately lush and harsh Blue Ridge landscape is important to her poems. "After the April Freeze," for example,

PHOTOGRAPH BY SYLVIA FREEMAN



refers to the natural world, when it could just as easily imply a human one. Here is the opening stanza of the four-stanza poem:

The Japanese maple leaves again,
but this time mid-trunk,
as if none of its limbs
can be trusted. Rather,
a cautious, covert showing
as when a risk has been taken
and regretted, the price disastrously high.

The poem “Finding the Heart” depends on a setting near the woods for its story. Here, in its entirety, is a poem that is as moving for what it implies as it is for the words on the page. Throughout is the haunting reminder of what the poem’s speaker is going through with her own body.

Finding the Heart

Under the hydrangea, a heart
the dogs have found, a deer’s
left by a hunter in our woods,
the carcass gutted where it lay, and I,
having never seen anything
like it, larger than anyone’s fist
I know of, fetch the shovel because
it is so newly out of the body,
I am sure it was beating
only yesterday or the day before
and so bare beside the knife’s
fresh cut and so powerful, somehow,
as if it did the work of living
still that I cannot bear
this awful cleaving from
the breath it made
and I dig a small grave.

The collection’s title poem, “Unaccountable Weather,” with its intertwining of the natural and human worlds, is one of those poems that yield more and more with each reading. In it, the poet stays hopeful after several cold snaps in spring: “We have lost a season of blossom and fruit, / but see how the lilac grows back from the ground, spirea / nudge past false starts.”

The poet doesn’t turn away from the medical intrusions that the body must endure to be rid of cancer, but neither does she go on at length about what the spirit must endure. Instead, she opts for spareness. “The language of this new country / is broken branches,” she says in “After Cancer Treatment” near the end of the book; “I am waiting / to hear them speak.”

Leslie Williams’s *Success of the Seed Plants*

winner of the 2010 Bellday Poetry Prize, is a first book, but one would not know it from her agile, accomplished poems. The subject of survival is less overt than in Kirkpatrick’s collection, but the book’s title itself suggests it. Botanists know that seed plants have survived successfully because they’re less dependent on water than simpler plants occurring earlier in plant evolution. The pollen of seed plants can travel by wind and animals to further the survival of the species. This idea of being adaptable and somewhat adrift is an overarching intimation that recurs in wildly different ways throughout the book. As an example, in the poem “In Me as the Swans,” the speaker describes traveling without “guided tours” or “interceding docents” and before leaving

for Madrid, the speaker expresses a wish not to leave yet, “to slow the tempo, hold there longer, / to feel that seedly longing / to be pressed into the soil.” In “Amaryllis Is an Alias” the hothouse bulbs start out in the dark, underground, until the plants break loose: “Now their free flowering goes on // forever: green swords thrust forth from a seed / of shyness; they become and become.”

Botany and gardening are everywhere apparent in the imaginative titles of the poems: “The Brambles, the Glossy Black Fruit”; “Handsome Flowers in Mountainous Regions”; “Pressing Flowers”; “First Fruits”; “The Flower of the Wheat”; “As in the Sidewalk Gardens”; “On Her Knees in the Lettuce Bed”; “To the Chinese the Peach Means Long Life.” These poem titles are significant, in part because they serve to bind the poems loosely together. In a collection that imaginatively takes off in various directions, often making huge associative leaps, to provide an echo from one title to another is a wise move.

Among other themes, the poems are about death, love, language, sustenance, place, and weather. A native of Winston-Salem, NC, Williams writes in several poems of the Carolina landscape – including Marion, Manteo, Doughton Park on the Blue Ridge Parkway, and Chapel Hill. Like Kirkpatrick, she turns often to the natural world, frequently using imagery of snow and frozen ponds.

Williams keeps her ear close to the ground for the sounds of language. “Lonely so close to lovely,” she says in “Handsome Flowers in Mountainous Regions.” And who but a poet in love with sound would give us *cancelled*,

scuppernong, *glassine*, and *besotted* in the same collection? The poem “Repeating Field” begins with a strong image and then moves from one like sound to the next, sounds that need to be read aloud for the full effect:

Innocenti sleep in her body as
embryos float in a jar. Not to be
coaxed into lambs. Never knock-kneed,
nor nicked for wool to be carded into yarn.
No narcotic click of knitting.

Some of the poems contain internal rhymes and an occasional end rhyme. “On Finding One’s Neighbor Dead in His Garden” is a Shakespearean sonnet. The poem “Night Swimming” has lush, lovely slant rhymes.

Night Swimming

**The tartness of winesaps augurs true fall:
a smack and tang of attenuated air
at the top of Brown’s Mountain, sprawled
across the whole ache of sky, where**

**the small pond’s a salver of stars
and for an exquisite instant, I’m an infant
feeling all: each star’s a sliver at the heart,
each minnow an arrow in ink – and**

**how a pond can save stories, stay
starflooded, lightbearing, old,
as we drop through layers of lake
to the bottom: a cold eye.**

Much of the enjoyment of reading Williams’s poems comes from their Middle English diction, which abounds throughout the book. “Small Diaspora,” the second poem, starts with a catalog of Middle and Old English words:

From exuberant hanging gardens
populous with knaves –

rakes, lotharios, libertines,
paladins, princelings, brigands, rogues,
paramours, suitors, swain –

In the last three lines quoted, the etymology of all but *lotharios*, *paladins*, and *rogues* is from either Middle or Old English. There is even a poem titled “Ecstatic Etymologies,” which begins and ends with a nod to the etymology of the Middle English word *tryst*. Robust, deliberate diction and rhythmic syntax are, indeed, at the heart of this collection.



COURTESY OF THE MOREHEAD-CAIN FOUNDATION

Two poets, one art. Kathryn Kirkpatrick and Leslie Williams – each in her own style, with her own experiences to draw from – show the reader more than a thing or two about survival. Both poets go beyond the personal when writing about survival; but for Kirkpatrick it’s personal to the core, as she wills her body to undergo what it must to heal. She is after the sheer urgency of life: “Come back I whisper to the plum trees, / to the pear, to myself,” she says in her title poem. To her, survival is elemental. “Threshold,” an homage to her old dog who has peed on the floor and joined the poet in illness, ends with the lines, “Now this world is in you / and you are in this world.” In “Physical Therapy” the poet knows what it means to feel alive, when “sunlight finds its way / through the latticed glass panes – // I am here.”

On the other hand, as Leslie Williams states in “The Flower of the Wheat,” one can aim “to have both bread and foxgloves.” With her hold on day-to-day life feeling less tenuous than that of Kirkpatrick, she takes a philosophical look at survival in “When the Sky Falls We Shall Have Larks,” where she contemplates whether “To ravish each day as if the last // Or to go about each as if it lasts / In ordinary splendor, on and on, forever.” There’s a certain spirit of wildness, headiness, and abandon in some of the early poems that are about subjects such as spring, night swimming, and eating blackberries. “Light a Candle, Put It Under a Bowl,” a letter to St. Catherine of Siena, asks, “how can austerity be the way / when most of what we know is gained / by saying yes.” Both Williams and Kirkpatrick leave the reader finishing the last page of each book with the feeling that the poems have reached deep to say something that these two poets found impossible to leave unsaid. And isn’t that exactly what we turn to poetry for? ■

ABOVE North Carolina native Leslie Williams at a meeting for Morehead-Cain Scholars during her undergraduate days at UNC-Chapel Hill, circa 1990

LESLIE WILLIAMS received her BA from UNC-Chapel Hill and her MA from the University of Virginia. Her honors include the 2010 Bellday Books Poetry Award and the Poetry Society of America’s Robert H. Winner Memorial Award.

“O, MULTI-COLORED, MULTIFORM”*

a review by Leah Miranda Hughes

Mike Smith. *Multiverse*. Buffalo: BlazeVOX Books, 2010.

LEAH MIRANDA HUGHES has an MFA from Queens University in Charlotte, NC. Originally from Dalton, GA, she currently teaches at the American InterContinental University in Atlanta, GA. She presented a paper on Southern women poets at the 2012 Southern Women Writer's Conference at Berry College.

MIKE SMITH's first collection of poems is *How to Make a Mummy* (WordTech Communications, 2008). *Multiverse* is his second collection.

* This review's title is from the title poem of Edna St. Vincent Millay's collection *“Renaissance” and Other Poems* (New York: Harper, 1917).

Mike Smith, born in West Virginia and living in North Carolina, has grown up in a landscape entwined in kudzu and ivy, lush with history and transmutation. His creative experiment in *Multiverse* challenges a linguistic, semantic mind and succeeds in offering moments of truth and beauty to the reader. The exercise seems to serve as the poet's reflection on being. His poems explore what it is to live in the current world as man or beast, what we are made of, and how we evolve.

In *Multiverse*, Smith plays a scrabble-like game with letters. He applies the anagram form to two sets of poems. Taking the letters in one poem and rearranging them into another is just the first feat of the poet in this collection. *Multiverse* contains sonnets, occasionally rhyming quatrains or couplets, even tercets or octaves, along with free verse. As Smith lines up the letters contained in each poem, he places them in a myriad of words that make a line of any length or sound, resulting in the form that suits that subject.

The first section of this volume, “Multiverse: A Bestiary,” is comprised of twenty-four poems that share an identical letter set. These poems are twenty-four experiments to find the inner workings of advancements, or adjustments, certain creatures have made on the planet – for instance, a new ritual elephants have for burying their dead. He pictures the manatee “in the scattered waters . . . a whiskered thought, / the tattered vision of my torn self.” He bids goodbye to the honeybee. With each poem an anagram of another, the collection mutates some creatures into clones and robops (mechanical birds), showing, for example,

the transformation of a mermaid into a land-loving person (in “Mermaid”) and a woman turning into a turtle (in “The Woman Who Became a Turtle”). The poems suggest the necessary transformations that creatures make in their evolutionary process.

The “Bestiary” poems are followed by “Anagrams of America,” in which Smith writes sixteen anagrams of familiar poems. For example, he takes the words from three Dickinson poems, breaks them into a collection of letters, and creates “Ode to Emily Dickinson.” In his poem “7 False Starts on Living in the Old Neighborhood,” Smith rearranges the title and text of W.H. Auden's “The Unknown Citizen” into a commentary about community. As with the “Bestiary” poems, “Anagrams of America” demonstrates variety in form. Dickinson's short lines and dashes disappear into Smith's free verse stanzas. The poet transforms the letters in Whitman's three regular octaves in “O Captain, My Captain” into nine rhyming quatrains titled “Folksong.” Some poems are more allusive to the original text than others, but overall, the form of the original poem seems to have little bearing on the form of Smith's anagram. In this manner, the anagram allows variety in form rather than restricting it, and also allows for the kind of creativity that defines poetic license.

Smith's poems may not sound like their inspiration, but they are connected on a fundamental level. For example, “Poe,” the anagram of Edgar Allan Poe's poem “Alone,” sounds nothing like the original until Smith uses Poe's word “demon” in the last line. In “Live Ink,” Smith elects to omit

the word “rivers,” a significant difference in the sound Langston Hughes creates by repeating the word in the original, “The Negro Speaks of Rivers.” Whereas Hughes’s poem speaks of a national history, “Live Ink” indicates the love of a young author for his work. Letter by letter, Smith also echoes Bishop, Crane, Frost, and Williams in his “Anagrams of America.”

In the poems of *Multiverse*, Smith takes the fundamental structure of a word – its letters – and reorders them to make a subtle comment on the interconnected nature of the past and the present and of the inter-woven essence of ideas and beings. So subtle is Smith’s work that the introduction plays an important role in the composition of the book. A reader who skips the introduction might see the collection differently, perhaps as two sets of reflections, one on *animalia* and another on selections from the canon of American poetry, but still the reader will likely notice the fearless way Smith wrestles with form. Over and over again in *Multiverse*, Smith turns letters into expressions and sentiments that relay individual messages concerning the strangeness of becoming whole and existing in the modern world. In the last lines of the poem “Clones,” the poet asserts some hope for humanity: “They say something like love sent them / toward our sputtering world, and love, / we are sure, has no end.” In the end, Mike Smith has conducted an experiment with letters, and the experiment yielded forty transmogrifications that stretch the boundaries of form, sound, and anagram. ■

GLOSS AND GLOSSOLIA: POETS OF WIT AND TRANSFORMATION

a review by Jake Adam York

Michael McFee. *That Was Oasis: Poems*. Pittsburgh: Carnegie Mellon University Press, 2012.

Daniel Nathan Terry. *Waxwings: Poems*. Maple Shade, NJ: Lethe Press, 2012.

The NCLR staff was sad to learn of the untimely death of **JAKE ADAM YORK**, in December 2012, soon after he completed this review. Though Southern by birth, York spent most of his career on the faculty at the University of Colorado at Denver. His three volumes of poetry – *Murder Ballads* (Elixer Press, 2005), *A Murmuration of Starlings* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), and *Persons Unknown* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2010) – earned him not only awards but also the admiration of his peers. He will be remembered for his grace and humanity and deep generosity and respect for his fellow writers. Read Daniel Nathan Terry’s testimony to this in “Generosity and Jake Adam York,” *Blog*: 17 Jan. 2003. NCLR is grateful for the opportunity to have worked with Jake, and we send our condolences to his family and friends.

That Was Oasis is **Michael McFee’s** newest book of poems. I’ve read all the others, but I don’t know that I’ve appreciated til now how funny McFee can be. Perhaps it’s more accurate to say that McFee is witty, but in the book’s shorter poems, the whip of the wit can draw more than just a grin.

Consider how, in “Saltine,” McFee glides through sixteen lines of reminiscence on the cracker – “How well its square / fit my palm, my mouth” – to crash on two different Englishes: “the closest we ever got / to serving *hors d’oeuvres*: / the redneck’s hardtack, / the cracker’s cracker.” In “Topsy,” word-play scaffolds the poem about a drunken woman: “She was only lightly lit, not / sloshed or smashed or plastered / but tipsy, a little bit tripful / and bumpish and aslant.” After this run, one can imagine the synonymic string that threads the poem. Nevertheless, the concluding lines laugh even louder: “laughing, leaning on friends / more than usual, her eyes glistening / as she told another tilted story / with a beginning, a muddle, and no end.” These turns seem kin to those of Jonathan Williams or A.R. Ammons in his shorter poems, and perhaps to William Matthews as well; and in that company, McFee’s sharp poems bear further testament to the great humor of North Carolina even as they enliven it.

Like Williams and Ammons, McFee has a knack for the etymologic or thesauric, building chains of association that seem to explode forward and yet maintain restraint. “*Bunk*” is the most brilliant of such poems. It’s occasion is simple, plausible, sly, an offhand remark – “That’s just a bunch of *bunk!*” / I hollered at my windbag teenage cousin” – from which flows:

PHOTOGRAPH BY ALAN WESTMORELAND;
COURTESY OF NC STATE ARCHIVES



I was too young, too American
to say *humbug*, *claptrap*, *balderdash*, *twaddle*;
I might have known to call it
baloney but hadn't yet learned *guff*, *hogwash*,
or what his ripe lies were:
bullshit, *horseshit*, *dogshit*, just plain old shit.

As with Williams, such rhapsodies are not just any old music, but instead the music of home: “I had no clue that *bunk* / came from the same Carolina mountain county / where I continued shouting it.” As McFee explains further, the word derives from “Buncombe,” which “entered the language as *bunkum*, / immortalizing my native place as a synonym / for *piffle*, *poppycock*, and *rot*, / *nonsense*, *horsefeathers*, *flapdoodle*, *hooley*, *hokum*.”

It's hard to read the word “flapdoodle” in such context and not think of Ammons's *Bosh and Flapdoodle* (1996, published posthumously, 2005). Perhaps that is over-associating, but in the pages following, McFee offers a brief paean to Ammons's favorite punctuation mark, the colon, in “:,” and then considers the parallels between Ammons and jazz great Thelonious Monk in a sectioned poem, “Thelonious and Archie.” The structure of this poem reminds one of Ammons's later tape poems, like *Sphere* or *Garbage*, built of sections with a regular number of lines and stanzas through which syntax and argument cascade. McFee tells us that Ammons, like Monk, was a pianist and hymnist. “[T]hey were just two down-east North Carolina kids.” This poem is sharply observed and carefully argued, built on more than coincidence and collocation to a glorious end. I take this poem as the book's signature tune. By invoking Ammons, McFee seems to signal the wit that is not only operative in

MICHAEL MCFEE received the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association's Roanoke-Chowan Award for *Earthy* (Carnegie Mellon University Press, 2001) and R. Hunt Parker Memorial Award for Literary Achievement. See *NCLR's* author and review [indices](#) to read more by and about him.

THE ULTIMATE GUIDEBOOK TO ASHEVILLE & THE WESTERN
NORTH CAROLINA MOUNTAINS. THE ONLINE VERSION OF
THE BEST-SELLING REGIONAL GUIDEBOOK. BY LEE PANTAS



the more humorous poems but is present as well in the sublime – and in the poem's impressive final poem, “McCormick Field,” a sixteen-page ode to a baseball field – an anatomy, a hymn – in twenty-seven sections.

Let's face it: it's hard to write a long poem. Or to put it more pointedly, it's hard to write a long poem that keeps and sharpens a reader's interest. But McFee has done just that, in brilliant measure. The poem pulls, a piece at a time – almost as if in the spaces between the plays in a baseball game – from the name “McCormick Field” description, history, and personal association and experience, weaving them together like a series of riffs into a song that is at once evocative, nostalgic, elegiac, and ecstatic.

We begin with a simple occasion, the opening of a new “McCormick Field” at which the poet watches an old man keeping a box score:

each pitch, each out, each hit, each run
recorded in those blue boxes
whose empty frames his hand will fill,
a system my late father tried
to teach me forty years ago
in the original ballpark . . .

McFee then shifts from present to past, remembering games he watched with his father, but also detailing the history of the ballpark. We learn that the park was named for a local bacteriologist who encouraged kids to swat flies, the expression becoming a description for swinging batters. We learn that Thomas Wolfe was a batboy at the park in 1915, that Ty Cobb played there, as did Babe Ruth, how the Asheville team changed its name from “the Skylanders” to “the Tourists.” These sections

ABOVE LEFT **Michael McFee at the 2008 North Carolina Literary and Historical Association, Raleigh**

ABOVE RIGHT **McCormick Field, Asheville, NC**

accumulate forms as well as facts, ranging from stanza poems to short-line paragraphs to anaphoric sweeps and even to sonnets. McCormick Field is a kind of memory theater.

But most startling is a section near the end that testifies to the power of the poet's memories and is, too, an elegy for the poet's father. It begins:

I don't know how the afterlife unfolds,
but on that cold March day my father died
at St. Joseph's, a couple of blocks south
of the original McCormick Field,
spring training scores already brightening
the hospital TV above his bed,
I hope he made it to that beautiful place,
the domed ballpark that Ruth himself admired,
and lingered in the shady stands a while . . .

As Whitman wrote in his 1855 Preface to *Leaves of Grass*, "folks . . . expect [the poet] to indicate the path between reality and their souls." McFee, as a poet of wit and sublime connection, draws on a deep, abiding, and inspiring faith in the power of the poet to do both, to bring the soul's laughter and the soul's sorrows and all its humors into this world.

Daniel Nathan Terry is also a poet of faith. In the second poem of *Waxwings*, Terry's most recent book of poems, Terry stands up in his self-portrait:

The boy's fear slips away – he releases
his mother. He rises, joins the altar call.
His father's arms open

before him, wafer and wine in his hands,
the congregation sings "Just as I Am."
But the boy, silent, mouth open,

hears only his Savior – a voice
in his chest – saying *Come*,
and I will make you whole.

The title of this poem, "Self-Portrait (Gay Son of a Preacher)," is the first suggestion that Terry's faith seeks not an eternal hereafter so much as a self-redemptive present in which he can accept both parts of himself, the sexual identity with which he struggles in many of these poems (and which he eventually accepts) and conventional hegemonic heterosexuality in which a part of him may disappear.

This struggle is suggested in some powerfully lyric poems, such as "Called colored, in my youth," where Terry writes:

I already knew I shouldn't want to play with those boys, shouldn't

want boys of any color the way I wanted the oldest of them – Tyrell,
fifteen, the one Miss Gaddy spat was so *black he's blue*. Tyrell
who looked like the David I conjured when my father read from the Bible.

But that near-holiness didn't stay my hardness, didn't close my mouth
as I watched him sweat and bend. I wanted to touch Tyrell . . .

"Called colored, in my youth," like "Self-Portrait," also indicates the power of this crossed desire. The speaker watches Tyrell kill a copperhead that threatened his mother. And at the end of the poem, the speaker returns to the ditch where Tyrell threw the snake's body:

Headless, it seemed alive, its body still undulating
like the sea lived inside its brown and pink skin, bucked the way I did
some nights when I came, when I woke with the dark night

dreams across my belly. A closer look exposed this false resurrection –
from the wound in its neck, I could see maggots hollowing
its body. The snake was dead, but thousands of little white lives

wouldn't let it rest.

Terry's faith, deeply fraught, is in transformation: the possibility of change, the possibility of becoming publicly the person he knows himself to be.

This hope, this struggle toward transformation, as well as the complications that challenge this hope, is expressed perhaps most stunningly in "Snow Falls in Hartsville," a crown of sonnets. The first few sonnets find the speaker recalling a teenage girlfriend. In his sister's car, they make out:

I'm happier than I've ever been, coming
in her grip, in my jeans, because the only time
I'd come in someone's hand it was a strange
man's hand. I wanted so much to be
normal like my brother, like my father. Normal
like my girl. . . .



COURTESY OF DANIEL NATHAN TERRY

DANIEL NATHAN TERRY teaches English at UNC-Wilmington. *Waxwings* is his third book of poetry (second full-length collection), and his poetry has been published in several journals and anthologies, including *New South*, *Poet Lore*, and *Assaracus*.

The speaker and the girl had both been molested when they were younger, and the poem suggests that they are trying to work through the trauma or find some kind of control through the sexual. There, they both experience an interesting transformation. Speaking of the girlfriend's toughness, the speaker avers:

. . . I loved her because she was the first
man who loved me too. The first man, at least inside
her bones, who accepted the boy who couldn't be
a proper man, who couldn't be what he wanted
to be. . . .

But this, too, even as a precursor to Terry's transformation, is a prelude to another transformation. Years later, she writes him to say that she has become a man.

. . . Now, I'd like to believe
I'm the man I was always meant to be – leaning in
to my lover, to my life, to the wonder
of having once been a man who loved a woman
who was almost the perfect man for me. But maybe
neither of us is done with becoming what we were
meant to be. . . .

That this meditation is accomplished within a sonnet crown indicates one aspect of Terry's fluent originality: as the last line of one sonnet becomes the first line of the next, we find a formal analogue to the personal transformations the crown narrates.

We can see Terry formalizing his thematic concerns, too, as he alternates between lineated forms and prose poems. As the poetic form transforms, so does the poet. In "The Anhinga of Moccasin Bluff," Terry recalls an encounter with a high school lover:

He brought us to the finger of rock where Lumbee boys once entered manhood with one swift dive into snake-infested blackness. In the shade of the promontory, he got high enough to dare me into nakedness, into diving, into touching him, into going down. One swift submergence into darkness to become what I already was, boat rocking beneath us. Silence and shame afterward. And in my periphery, the crooked neck of an anhinga breaking the surface, a black question in blacker shadows.

In this motion, "to become what I already was," Terry indicates the extreme proximity of his two selves, two

lives that emerge, each from and into one another repeatedly. Terry's vision is Ovidian, bodies are changing to other bodies and lives to other lives.

The gestures of transformation recall, too, Hart Crane, even Reginald Shepherd, though Terry's idiom – his sound – is his own. And this sound, at times, seems to draw from the preacher's deep well, in the devastating roll of refrains in "Photograph, 1984" or reprehending in "Since they put you out" or the rising and falling of both breath and recognition in "Lost." Terry knows, as any orator knows, how sound moves the body and the soul, at times to unadulterated pleasure, at times to shame.

And too, at times, to praise. In "When you touch me," the poet's lost lovers are remembered in the touch of the hands of his present love, and in that intimate communion, this world is a heaven of body and spirit:

When you stroke
my thigh, your hand
is guided by the hands
of these others –
a Ouija scrawling

the answer to the question
that still roams
the dark husk
of our house: *love you?*
yes,

we love you.

Daniel Nathan Terry's voice is clear and strong, vibrating with a terrible beauty, a great beauty that will, I hope, light the pages of many more books of song. ■



COURTESY OF POMEGRANATE BOOKS

LEFT Daniel Nathan Terry's high school senior portrait

RIGHT Daniel Nathan Terry reading at Pomegranate Books in Wilmington, NC, 12 Nov. 2012

A GIANT IN THE MAKING: NEW FICTION FROM SUSAN WOODRING

a review by Tanya Long Bennett

Susan Woodring. *Goliath*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2012.

NCLR Editorial Board member **TANYA LONG BENNETT** is a Professor of English at North Georgia College and State University. Her publications include articles on such writers as Lee Smith, Lorraine Lopez, and Ana Castillo. See another of her NCLR reviews in the 1998 issue.

SUSAN WOODRING has written two previous books, *The Traveling Disease* (Main Street Rag, 2007) and *Springtime on Mars: Stories* (Press 53, 2008). Her short fiction has been featured in such publications as the *William and Mary Review*, *Yemassee*, and *Isotope: A Journal of Literary Nature and Science Writing*. In 2006, she won both the Elizabeth Simpson Smith Short Fiction Award and the *Isotope* Editor's Prize.

"A teenage boy coming in from a morning of lighting fires along far-flung creeks was the one to find the body" (1). So begins Susan Woodring's new novel, *Goliath*, set in a small and dying North Carolina town of that name in the mid-1980s. The discovery made by this teenage boy, Vincent Bailey, turns out to be the train-smashed body of Percy Harding, third-generation owner of Goliath's most important business, Harding Furniture Company. Although the town's spiral toward its demise is not obvious to the residents of Goliath in the beginning of the story, Percy's suicide is only one sign that Goliath's prime, both economic and historical, is past. Through Rosamond Rogers, the novel's independent and resilient protagonist, Woodring chronicles this small town's decline from a once-thriving hive of commerce and social activity to a burned-out shell of memory. In the course of eight months, from Percy's October death until the town parade in May, Rosamond negotiates her own grief over the loss of Percy and reconsiders allowing someone to love her as much as she once loved her husband, Hatley Rogers, before he abandoned her and their daughter ten years ago. In spite of some problems with narrative pacing and thematic development, *Goliath* offers a thought-provoking, and at times eloquent, exploration of humanity's need to be loved and, even more significant, to recognize love when it is present. Woodring's usually adept control of language and her fascination with many of the questions central to human experience suggest that *Goliath* will not be the last of her works to attract readers' attention.

Woodring creates in this novel a wide array of characters, all of

whom are reeling in the aftermath of Percy Harding's shocking suicide. Rosamond is no less impacted by Percy's death than are his wife and his grown son, Ryan, who now takes over the family business. While it soon becomes apparent that Harding Furniture is suffering financially, ostensibly under Ryan's management, Rosamond realizes over time that the company's decline began before Percy died; in fact, it is likely the reason for Percy's suicide. For Rosamond, who worked as Percy's secretary for many years, the loss of her boss and intimate friend – perhaps even her lover – is heavy. She wanders about the town seeking some explanation, some sign of how to move forward. Beyond this grief, however, the company's faltering, and eventually its closing, impacts the town's very viability. Here, Woodring explores the history of many such small American towns that have folded in upon themselves once their central industry could no longer be sustained.

It seems a coincidence that at the time of Percy's death, Rosamond's daughter, Agnes, has recently dropped out of college and come home to work in a local grocery store. Agnes has always been obsessed with maps, with tracing possible paths into unknown places, rather than with her connection to "home," so even she does not really understand why she has come back to Goliath. Yet while she's here, she welcomes the company of her childhood friend, Ray Winston, street preacher and grounds-keeper of the local school. Like her mother, she is recovering from loss. Just as her father abandoned her and her mother ten years ago, Agnes has left James, her pseudo "husband," named

PHOTOGRAPH BY DOMINIQUE MARSHALL



as such in an unofficial ceremony beneath a tree during their time together at college. Ray's companionship stabilizes and comforts Agnes. He does not pressure her to denounce James or to change her atheistic worldview to his evangelical one – he simply keeps her company, and loves her.

Paralleling Rosamond's and Agnes's searches for a way forward is the narrative thread focusing on Vincent Bailey and the other teenagers of the town. While Rosamond and her long-time friend Clyde Winston, sheriff and father of Ray Winston, plan a town parade and a baseball game that they optimistically envision will bring the townspeople back together in mutual healing, Vincent and his friends play with fire, explore the idea of suicide, and steal from their neighbors. Vincent's newfound friend, Cassie Stewart, pushes him to lengths that frighten and exhilarate him, and his journey into ever riskier behavior reveals the gap between the generations: he and his classmates find the parade ridiculous. It falls short, in their view, as a

sign that life can be meaningful, much less joyful.

The variety of characters, along with Woodring's ability to craft language, illustrates her prowess as a writer. She eloquently paints a multidimensional image of small-town life:

There in town it had been a blessedly ordinary summer of modest white nuptials and giant insects and bloated afternoons spent in kiddie pools and backyards, the neighborhoods of Goliath filling with the greasy smells of charred meat and bug repellent. During these months, the heat saturated Goliath and the people sat behind electric fans set on front porches, the ladies' hair tied back in bandannas. . . . They weren't prepared for the sad news when Vincent Bailey found it on the first Sunday in October, the weather just beginning to cool. The sorrow of it went out in glittering gusts like the old-fashioned purple and pink insecticide clouds sprayed through the streets in years past. There was a sheen to a tragedy this grave, this mysterious. (3-4)

Through her best characterizations and near-poetic passages like this one, Woodring movingly conveys the effects of human

relationships as they evolve in rural communities like Goliath.

Even so, this novel is not a complete success. Complicating the work is Woodring's tendency to broach too many existential and social questions at once and her failure to develop sufficiently some of the themes she has introduced. At the conclusion of the book, one wonders (with, perhaps, some frustration), is fate at work in the world, or are we to take responsibility for our effect on those around us? If fate is at work, is it at the hand of the Christian God, or is there a broader force directing human history and dynamics? Is the best love the kind that takes us by storm (like that of Rosamond for Hatley, or of the young philosopher James for Agnes), or is it the steady, subtle kind, which we sometimes do not even recognize (like that of Ray Winston for Agnes or of sheriff Clyde Winston for Rosamond)? Is it possible that Goliath could be saved by the community's coming together in a mutual project, as Rosamond hopes, or is economic viability ultimately the glue that initiates and sustains community? Finally, is it a travesty when close-knit, small towns like Goliath die, or are they traps of a sort that keep people from growth and real fulfillment? Woodring's refusal to offer simple or clear answers to these complex questions is not the problem. The problem is that these themes emerge from the narrative in only partial and vague glimpses, such that, even by the end of the story, one does not feel the exploration has been entirely fruitful, or even methodical.

Further preventing the novel's desired impact, the pace of *Goliath* lapses at times to such an extent that one must doggedly plow on to get from one stage of the narrative to the next. In one segment of about fifty pages, the narrative momentum is nearly lost. Here, Rosamond and her aunt Mia work to recruit townspeople for the parade, while Vincent bides his time between his and Cassie's stealing spree and his final destructive action. Rosamond decides that time spent with Clyde is indeed feeding her spirit, though she says nothing to him about this decision. The furniture factory finally closes, Ray presides over the revival, and Agnes contemplates meeting her father. While the narrative "touches base" with key characters in this section, there is little development of the plot or the central themes. Everyone seems to be caught in a kind of limbo: "Rosamond was growing tired, these weeks of pleading for help, for participation in the parade. Her knees bothered her, walking from work to the Tuesday Diner" (221). And like her mother, Agnes seems to be running in place: "Her father had returned and yet he hadn't. She could try loving Ray, and she couldn't" (246). At times, even the prose's power suffers here, threatening to damage the narrative's ethos: generalizing statements, such as "For years, the town had hated Rosamond Rogers for her scandalous behavior" (212) and "Love was thick. It was quiet and so slow, you never saw it coming" (240), threaten to thwart what seems to be Woodring's goal of revealing the complexity of human dynamics.

Interestingly, "Springtime on Mars," the title story of Woodring's 2008 collection, more successfully traces an incident very similar to that central to *Goliath*. A comparison of the two works reveals that in the genre of short fiction, Woodring has generated a stronger impact than she does, as a whole, in *Goliath*. The contrast is helpful in understanding both the weaknesses of the novel and Woodring's potential to overcome these challenges. "Springtime on Mars" is not only better focused thematically, much more satisfactorily exploring the subject of accident versus individual agency, but it also avoids the pacing problems of the novel. Like Vincent Bailey, the short story's seventh-grade protagonist and narrator, Paige, confronts death. She shares with only two other people the knowledge of how Nathan Price, the new boy in Pilot, really died: trying to walk on his hands in the road to impress Paige's cruel friend, Carla Phillips, and this knowledge isolates the three of them. Carla, Paige, and their friend Timothy Stanley are impacted greatly by their association with the incident. Even more disturbing, though, Paige is haunted by the fact that after the school bus hit Nathan, Elise Stanley, Timothy's mother, lay in the road next to the dying boy, whispering to him and stroking his shoulder as they waited for the ambulance. Until this incident, Paige's only impression of Elise had been through Paige's aunt, who, in a disapproving tone, calls attention to Elise being divorced and frequenting the Blue Tavern in a nearby town.

Years later, as Paige tells the story, she reveals that her relationship with her own husband is suffering because, according to him, she "had turned into a ghost, floating along with no firm conviction that I belonged in my life. John believes in owning yourself the same way you own a car or a house, by the act of possessing" (*Springtime on Mars* 113). When Paige returns to Pilot for her aunt's wedding, she sees Elise Stanley sitting on the porch steps of her house and considers again Elise's actions at the accident scene years ago. From her adult perspective, Paige now recognizes that in her strange behavior that day, Elise showed a commitment to love, to "whispering to [children] in their instances of greatest fear . . . arising from a nightmare or from a simple fear of darkness, of the bleakness of things unseen. Elise had hushed that boy, holding his hurts for her own, same as any of us have done with our own children. She . . . had loved Nathan Price" (*Springtime on Mars* 115). Paige's memory of Elise's behavior and Paige's own feeling of responsibility for Nathan's death contrast with the statement her mother made to comfort her the day Nathan died: "There's no reason this happened" (*Springtime on Mars* 109). The memory of Elise's actions illuminates for Paige one of the most terrifying aspects of being alive: the question of individual responsibility in a cosmos where chance and violence seem to dominate. Ending the short story here, Woodring focuses its impact effectively. She does not attempt to address a broad array

of existential questions. She does not deliberate too long on the issue at hand. Understatement does the job for her, and we are left with the weight of the single terrible question.

Regardless of *Goliath's* weaknesses, Woodring still shines in particular character portrayals within the novel. Vincent and Cassie are extremely compelling figures, as they negotiate the challenges of growing up and finding meaning in their experiences. Both have been numbed by the harsh realities of their lives: Vincent cannot “unremember” the image of the dead Percy lying next to the train tracks, nor can he bridge the chasm that the incident seems to have created between him and his father. Likewise, Cassie has spent many days and nights in the run-down trailer alone with her own father, who takes pain medication and perpetually

lies sleeping on the couch. Both want to feel alive, and their risky antics give them moments of great exhilaration. Vincent is fascinated by lines from one of Cassie’s poems: “*No way to enter or to leave, the house held itself closed. The demons could not depart, the angels could not enter*” (125). Woodring captures well the angst of teens alienated from the adult world and from themselves, as well as the desperation that can arise from this feeling: “For [Vincent], the thieving was about each life, each kiss, each giddy moment of escape, spilling out into the street, watching Cassie skip ahead, her sometimes enjoining him to skip too, grabbing his hand, insisting, ‘Come on, Vincent’” (217). Cassie’s scratching out letters in her skin with a safety pin, Vincent’s cutting his finger ends with a knife and swallowing lit cigarettes and bugs,

and the adventures of their thefts – Woodring conveys all of these as acts of desperation, as the two youths express their yearning for someone to see them, to love them, and thus to bring them into the fold of human life, to save them from their own conflicting fear of and attraction to death.

Despite the issues that mitigate *Goliath's* potentially greater impact, this novel is certainly worth the read, and Woodring merits consideration as a new voice among North Carolina’s best writers. As a portrayal of small town dynamics, as well as of the human tendency to guard our hearts against pain and loss, *Goliath* makes its mark. If developed in the right direction, Woodring’s fiction may yet rival that of significant Southern writers of the last century, reflecting back to us ourselves, our culture, and our values in all of their complexity. ■

PHOTOGRAPH BY DONNA KAIN



ABOVE Josephine Humphreys during her visit to ECU to give the keynote address at the 2010 Eastern North Carolina Literary Homecoming, Greenville, NC ([Watch](#) her discussion of *Nowhere Else on Earth* at this event.)

JOSEPHINE HUMPHREYS RECEIVES 2012 THOMAS WOLFE PRIZE

On 2 Oct. 2012, Charleston, SC, native Josephine Humphreys added the Thomas Wolfe Award to her list of honors, which already include the Hemingway Foundation/PEN Award, the Southern Book Award, a Guggenheim Fellowship, the Lyndhurst Prize, the American Academy of Arts and Letters Award in Literature, and membership in the Fellowship of Southern Writers. Humphreys studied creative writing with Reynolds Price at Duke University. Her first three novels focus on contemporary family life in South Carolina, but her fourth, *Nowhere Else on Earth* (Viking Penguin, 2000; reviewed in *NCLR* 2002), is based on a chapter of North Carolina’s Civil War history, the story of the Lumbee Robin Hood, Henry Berry Lowrie. More specifically, Humphreys imagines a story for his wife, Rhoda, who develops in the course of the novel from a girl looking for romance to a young woman in love with the local hero to a woman who realizes that her greatest loyalty is to her Lumbee community.

The Thomas Wolfe Prize was endowed by Ben Jones of Hendersonville, NC, an alumnus of UNC-Chapel Hill. The award ceremony and lecture, held at UNC-Chapel Hill, are sponsored by UNC’s Department of English and Comparative Literature, the UNC Morgan Writer-in-Residence Program, and the international Thomas Wolfe Society. ■

2012
Doris Betts
 Fiction Prize finalist

the BUSINESS of *dreaming*

by Wendell slid his phone into the
Kathryn glove-box and took out the pistol. The
Etters
Lovatt gun, small and light, felt like a toy in his
 hand, but he knew better. No sense in
 not loading it either. He put the gun in the
 bottom of his bag, beneath the change of
 socks and underwear and the shaving kit, and
 talked himself out of the truck. He knew he
 may as well go ahead and get this over with.

First thing, the smell of jasmine hit him. It was everywhere. White blooms glazed over the green leaves like new snowfall, the whole tangle spilling over a fence that separated the parking spaces from the building. He took a good look, appreciating what a difference brick veneer, pickets, and a pile of money could make.

He pressed the lock button on his key again, just to be sure, before starting up the sidewalk. A hedge of tea olives ran along each side. He looked left to right as he moved toward the entry, checking over his shoulder as he hit the doorbell. The sound, more squawk than chime, brought a man from the back. As the figure drew closer to the glass doors, Wendell – who had a talent for



Auditory Turbulence (mixed media acrylic, graphite, masking tape on canvas, 60x48) by George Scott

KATHRYN ETTERS LOVATT earned a master's in creative writing from Hollins University. She continued graduate studies while teaching at the University of Hong Kong. The winner of the 2012 Press 53 Open Award for the short story, she is also a past winner of the Doris Betts Fiction Prize and a three-time winner of South Carolina Writers Workshop's Carrie McCray Memorial Literary Award for fiction. Both her poetry and fiction have received Pushcart Prize nominations. She is a Virginia Center for the Creative Arts fellow and a previous executive board member of the South Carolina Writers Workshop and the Greensboro (NC) Writers. She has been awarded the 2013 Individual Artist Fellowship for prose by the South Carolina Arts Commission. Before moving to Jakarta, Indonesia, in 1993, Lovatt lived in Greensboro, NC, and served as fiction editor for *Carolina Wren* Press. She remained active in her Greensboro writing group while living abroad. She currently resides in her hometown of Camden, SC, but spends as much time as possible writing in her Southport, NC, home, which is just around the corner from the Robert Ruark Inn – fitting, since she once won a fiction prize awarded by North Carolina's Robert Ruark Society.

Explaining her selection of this story as a finalist, *NCLR* Fiction Editor Liza Wieland said she was “hooked” from the start, “and the story lived up to the promise of its opening. The subject matter is wholly original and deeply moving, and the quiet tenderness between Wendell and Gene feels both true and revelatory.”

details, born with or learned, he couldn't say – took in almost nothing. That the young man was shorter than him by a head, that the close clip of his hair left a golden bristle on his neck, that a tattoo of a crescent moon had been inked below his left ear: all this escaped Wendell. He had fallen blind to anything beyond the artificial leg.

Before Wendell got both feet inside the lobby of the sleep clinic, a hand came at him. "Gene."

Wendell extended his own. "Wendell Sims," he said, certain this fellow knew exactly who he was.

"No electronics, right? Not even your cell?"

"Nothing." Wendell patted his pockets down for emphasis.

"Then I'll walk you to your room."

Wendell followed, staring openly as he brought up the rear. The leg, black as Bakelite and shiny with smooth-working silver hinges, looked like it belonged on a souped-up GI Joe. Gene wore a pair of pressed khaki shorts that exposed the prosthesis right up to the stump. His socks came mid-calf, the one on the lost leg clung like a loose bandage. Wendell watched Gene's offset steps, both feet snug in white tennis shoes. He imagined the leg transforming into a broad spatula below the flex of the ankle.

Gene stopped without a wobble, and the two stood before what used to

*This
is
a
dream,
he
would
tell
himself,
and
the
dream
would
say
no,
not
this
time.
This
time
it's
real...*

be Bay Two. With a flip of the switch, the bedside lamp flashed on. The motor of the ceiling fan clicked into action. Chit-chit-chit. The blades barely stirred the air.

"Any chance you got your insurance card handy?"

Wendell fished his billfold from his back pocket. He pulled the card out from under an outdated picture, Sibby with baby Emma in her arms, and passed it over.

Gene stuck the card in his pocket. "Come on down to the office once you're dressed for bed."

It was too hot to wear pajamas, but Wendell took the new pair from his bag and clamped an eyetooth over the extra large label. The plastic beneath stretched under the grip of his jaw, and he gave a bulldog yank. The wrap whooshed like a Maypop, those green pods he used to stomp under his feet as a boy. Instantly, a foul snuff flew into his face. He stepped into the trousers, cursing the Chinese for their nasty dyes and scratchy sizing.

He freed the top of collar pins and cardboard, shoved in his arms. The color, "indigo" according to the package, made him think of his father's old police uniforms. That was the best he could say for them. His wife had been right, and he wished he'd followed her advice and bought something decent, but he hadn't seen spending the money. Tomorrow, come bedtime, he'd be back to t-shirts and boxers.

But now, he'd have to go out there shrink-wrapped, sleeves and legs short by a quarter. A pucker sprang up around every button except the one at his navel. He couldn't cinch that gap.

This story anticipates NCLR's 2014 special feature section topic: war in North Carolina literature. See the submissions page of our [website](#) for submission guidelines and deadlines.

Raleigh resident **GEORGE SCOTT** grew up in Monroe, NJ. He graduated from North Carolina State University with a degree in graphic design. He spent a few years as a member of the 82nd Airborne and served in the Gulf War. His art has been exhibited in shows in Raleigh, NC, including at the Lee Hansley Gallery. The artist and his wife, Sara Birkemeier, own and operate 8 Dot Graphics in Raleigh. See more of his work on his [website](#).

The breach revealed such a white gush of flesh, Wendell shucked off the top and retrieved the shirt he'd worn in. He combed through his cowlicks and set off, feeling like he was part of the circus.

Gene waved him in, reacting not at all to his get-up or to the red puffiness of Wendell's bare feet. The technician hadn't offered his last name, but before Wendell read his identification badge, he pegged him for an Oates. How could he have missed it?

Every Westfield Oates looked the same. Not one approached six feet; they were sawed-off shotguns, built to act and react. Born with comely noses, the men, scrappers from the get-go, never could keep them straight. They valued their choppers, though, even the gap between the front ones. If anyone was to fight an Oates, he knew better than to bust him in the mouth, else the pack would descend upon him. And then there were the eyes. A band, grey as a goose feather, outlined pupils, big and soot black, not a bit of bluff within them. Those eyes bred unearthly stories: word spread they could burn a hole in a man, burn up a woman. The Oates name kept bandied about like that, laughed at and bragged on. Every tale Wendell ever heard about the clan, who wore those old saws like badges, came down to one part fact and two tons cock-and-bull. That was alright by him. People liked to amuse themselves, make gods and devils they could manage, but as far as he was concerned, the entire family, wary of outside laws and anybody trying to enforce them, was nothing but a pain in the ass.

Apparently, Gene wasn't in the family business, which, with his leg and all, Wendell understood. The family had as big a reputation for laying tile as for their hot-headed charms, but Gene seemed to lack his kin's bluster and bawl. Instead, Wendell saw in Gene the deep-set look of somebody who'd endured a terrible something. Cancer maybe, or war. In his spanking white coat, master to a wall of machines, Gene Oates came as a surprise. Good for him. Wendell believed a man deserved a chance to rise above his station, especially one who'd suffered. Wendell walked deeper into the

People
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and
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could
manage,
...

room, hoping for a truce. If Gene wouldn't hold the fact he did his duty against him, Wendell wouldn't ask which Oates was his father. But, if it so happened to be that rooster-fighting Welch, well, they might have a problem. Two years back, Wendell nabbed Welch and a string of his cronies at a backwoods pit. How Welch begged him to spare his three birds, but they were too mean to put in a yard and too tough for the table. Wendell turned the flock over to animal control and the men over to the courts. Odds were that Welch, who had two, maybe three more years to go on his sentence, was Gene's uncle. Or a cousin.

The leather chair crackled when Wendell put his weight into it. He sank so low his knees drew up in points.

"Got paperwork for you, Sheriff." Gene laid out a batch of stapled pages. Wendell, trying not to stare, leaned over the visitor's side of the desk ready to write, but his eyes veered when Gene stood.

"Iraq." He patted his new leg like it was a small dog.

"Sorry," said Wendell. "Never seen anything quite like it."

"To tell you the truth, I admire it myself. Chafes me some, though, especially if I wear regular pants." Gene drew close. "See?" A fretted ring circled where flesh and bone merged with the man-made. "The skin ought to toughen up eventually; that's what I'm led to believe."

Wendell could not think of any right thing to say.

Gene flipped out his knee and kicked his foot to the floor. "I'll let you get to work while I set the door locks." Wendell came to attention. "Keeps our sleepwalkers in," Gene explained. "And the neighborhood out."

Wendell expected this kid was getting a little kick out of pushing his buttons, but he took the cap off the pen and got started.

Hospital stays, operations, allergies, Wendell put down what he recalled. *Chills* and *night sweats* came up on the second page. Mostly he checked *no*, but at the top of page three stood a bigger question: *How would you describe your sleep?* A block

of open space followed. Wendell wrote that he slept fairly well, but he snored, and although his snoring sometimes woke him up, the real problem was that he kept Sibby awake. *My wife says I sound like a train*, he added at the end but would have erased that bit if he'd been working with a pencil.

Next came: *Are you tired during the day?* To which he answered, *I could use a nap after lunch.*

If you are a passenger in a car, what are the chances you might fall asleep? Wendell scribbled, *If I have a decent driver, 100%.*

What is the probability of you falling asleep while at the wheel? To that, Wendell wrote *Zero* and underlined it.

He usually asked the questions, and the temper of that last one put him on his guard.

His reply was a bold-faced *No* to *Do you have nightmares?* He wasn't about to go on record with an affirmative. Besides, his nightmares weren't so much dreams as memories, one in particular. Even now, it churned to the surface, a twenty-year-old image, the sight of a dying patrolman he'd never get over. Not that he was complaining, not anymore than the Oates kid was.

The final question – *What worries you?* – shut Wendell down. He hadn't come to talk about what worried him, about how it was possible for somebody to beat up grandpa for a bucket of quarters, how the very same somebody might dive into an icy river to save a stranger: thug one day, hero the next. And he was no exception, full of law and order and full of sin. There was no accounting for man, no predicting what he was capable of. That sure as hell troubled him, but it was his own private affair. He set the pen down and looked around. No photos here, not a plant, everything impersonal and in shipshape order.

Gene returned with an armload of wires. "I left your card on the bureau." He laid the wires carefully across the desk.

"You fixing to make a bomb?"

Gene nearly smiled. "These take information from you and send it here to me." He tossed his head toward a line of monitors and printers. One monitor had four frames, three filled with empty beds, another aimed at the door.

"You got cameras, too?" The snip in Wendell's voice showed his disapproval.

"In case there's a problem." Gene put the end of a color-coded wire on Wendell's left temple,

plastered it down with a sticky dot. "Somebody comes up punching, doc wants to have a look."

Wendell felt two more wires dig into his scalp. In rapid succession, Gene attached wire after wire to Wendell's face and head.

"I need to get to your chest."

Wendell reached down and pulled his knit shirt up to his armpits. The folds of his stomach and a thicket of chestnut hair, the balloon of his belly button, all came into full view. After Gene strung him top to bottom, lines even down the legs of his pants, he clamped an oxygen monitor over Wendell's index finger.

"Feels mighty tight."

"One size fits all." Gene looked right at him. "Kind of like handcuffs."

Wendell held up his throbbing finger. "Too much like."

"You'll get used to it as the night goes along."

"Or I'll take it off."

"You're a free man." Gene gathered the mass of wires in his hands.



Holding It Together (mixed media acrylic, graphite, masking tape, rope, twine on canvas, 40x30) by George Scott

Step for step, the men walked down the hall. Wendell marveled again at the leg's facile workings. Without difficulty, Gene held steadily to the strands suspended from Wendell's body. They passed two shut doors. Wendell slowed.

"Am I your only customer?"

"As a rule, we don't schedule weekends."

Gene went into the room, pulling Wendell forward like a fish on a line, and then, in one

move, switching places. Wendell backed up to the bed and sat. "I don't like favors."

"Not doing you one." Gene wrapped a cable with a metal box around Wendell's neck. "I'm on double-time." He hooked the batch of wire ends into the bottom of the contraption and laid it on Wendell's chest. "You can move around if you want. Watch TV. Rest. I'll be back before too long."

"I'll be here." Wendell pulled both pillows behind him and yawned.

Plugs and conductors and the thing that held them steady weighed heavily against Wendell's heart. Wires surrounded him like tentacles; the red eye of the camera blinked when he least expected it. He steeled for a night of gawking at green walls, white ceiling, a print of a tree-ringed lake with its frame tilting a smidgen right, but his eyes closed of their own accord, and there he was, first on the scene again, applying pressure. This time, he hoped to stop the man's blood, but, like every time before, it spread beneath him like a velvet cloth. Under the flash of blue lights, they waited together – the downed man blue-lipped and cold but conscious, Wendell vomiting in the grass. Before help could get there, the patrolman reached up and grabbed hold of Wendell's sleeve.

"I just stopped the man to say he was about to lose a hubcap," he told him. "And here he has went and killed me."

The things Wendell had seen since, God only knew, but that first horror, that was the one that got through and dug in, the one you had to live with. Everybody said so. Wendell wished he could get up and go pour himself a swallow of sweet milk. Instead, he found his baby aspirin and swallowed it dry. He found a *Readers' Digest* in the drawer and went toward the bathroom.

Not two shakes after he came out, Gene knocked. Considering all the surveillance, Wendell suspected this timing but said nothing. Gene reconnected the wires from the portable box to a bedside device.

"Call out if you need anything," he said as he turned off the lights.

The monitor on the bedside shelf set off another rustle of discomfort, but Wendell moved down deeper in the bed. He noticed all of a sudden how the mattress had no give, and for what seemed like hours, he tried punching some softness into one spot or another. If only he could stop the loop of his thinking. But his thoughts kept returning to

this place, to a time before its spit and polish. Back in the day, Hamm's Filling Station sat on this very spot – a three-stall garage used to stay backed-up with business. Hammy's secret, not much of one, was the room in the back. Wendell's father played poker there at least once a month, played and won. Hammy saw to that.

One time, Wendell was sent in to collect his father. A young Wendell had peeped through the crack of the door at hard-drinking men, women rubbing up behind them, a fake blonde on his dad's knee. His father had seen him, too, and Wendell turned and ran back to the car. His mother had reached over and wiped his cheeks with her cuff and told him, "I should have known better."

Even with such memories showing themselves, even with the dig from the clamp on his finger, the night finally wore Wendell down. He felt himself being transported as a last thought scooted by: *How long from sleep to dream?* He had the sense he moved from one straight into the other. Sleep came over him, and, next thing, he found himself in the old debate. *This is a dream*, he would tell himself, and the dream would say *no, not this time. This time it's real*, and time was, he could be persuaded to believe it. But that was before the night he'd relieved himself, convinced he was in the bathroom. The warm brine of his own urine had not brought him to his feet. Only when the soaked sheet grew cold underneath him had he understand what had happened. Since then, he drank the smallest sip of milk after supper and, although shunted between distrust and longing, put no stock in what



Sensations and Perceptions (mixed media acrylic, graphite on canvas, 38x36) by George Scott

any dream, not even this one, might have to say.

This dream told him he was at the bottom of the ocean. True or not, a current of pure pleasure carried him along. In this place, free of noise or ache, free of time, he became weightless, big belly and every care left in the waking world. Nothing here but the glory of floating: he wished he could go on like this forever.

But it never lasted. A tug at his lungs broke the calm. Then the tug turned into a wild burn. He tried to resist, aching to stay, but he couldn't help being human. Time after time, Wendell fought his way up toward a shimmering surface. Tonight, he came awake sputtering for air.

He threw his legs over the side of the bed. "Hello," he said. Nothing. "I know you hear me. I'm getting up with or without you." Wendell heard a click.

"Don't touch anything!" Gene called. In a flash, he was bedside. "You know what time it is?"

"Don't care what time it is."

"4:41."

"I'm done, partner. No sense in me laying here."

Oates rubbed the shadow of his chin. "I don't have much."

"You have enough?"

Oates sighed with exasperation. "Enough to tell you're in trouble."

"Then you got plenty." Wendell held up his arms. "How about deactivating me?"

Gene plucked away the wires like pinfeathers. "We're locked down till six. Part of security. I open those doors, police come flying."

"You got coffee?"

"Instant."

"Milk?"

"Creamer."

"Sugar?"

"I have sugar."

"Give me a few minutes."

Washed and dressed, Wendell came through the sallow glow of the hall into

This dream told him he was at the bottom of the ocean. True or not, a current of pure pleasure carried him along. In this place, free of noise or ache, free of time, he became weightless, big belly and every care left in the waking world.

the office. A mug waited on the desk, but before he could get a taste, Gene wheeled around and faced him.

"You read that brochure we sent you?"

"I did." Wendell sipped. "Far as I can tell, I got every symptom on the list."

"Sleep apnea. That's unofficial, understand, but you stopped breathing thirty-eight, forty times an hour. You got a serious issue."

"I'm taking it serious. My wife already moved to the other bedroom." He emptied another sugar packet in his coffee. "I have a question for you."

"Okay." Gene blew on his fresh cup of coffee. "Shoot."

"I have this dream I want you to hear about. I have it over and over. It starts exactly the same. It starts with me swimming, and then it has this middle part." Wendell leaned in. "That's the good part. I never in my life felt so good as that."

"Euphoria," said Gene. "That's what it's called."

"It always ends the same, too, with me drowned. Or nearly drowned."

"That's your brain working up a story. It needs to make some sense out of why it's not getting oxygen."

"Here's what I want to know. If I let you fix me up with one of those," Wendell pointed to the shelf of masks, "what happens to my dream?"

"You won't need it. A good night's sleep, you'll hardly remember anything."

Wendell fell silent. "The thing is," he confessed, "I hate the thought of giving it up."

"Trust me, dude," said Gene. "That's the one that will kill you."

No one had ever called Wendell *dude*, and here it came out of the mouth of an Oates.

"It's a dream," said Gene. "And that's all it is."

Wendell, feeling the loss anyhow, looked into the empty hall, but, in a minute, he came around.

"All right." He slapped his leg. "Then pull one off your shelf, and let me have a look at it."

Gene moved to the display. "See anything you like?"

"You go on and pick."

He brought one from the line. "A lot of big men like this model."

Gene fit the mask over Wendell's face, adjusted straps, nose guard, tubing. He pulled it all off, let Wendell put the gear on for himself. Two more practice runs and Wendell understood where the straps went and how the nose cup should feel. He stood up to check himself out in the wall mirror.

"Good God Almighty." He went over for a closer look. "Guess this'll put the skids to my love life."

Gene smiled a real smile, the Oates gap on full display. "Your mask is kind of like my leg," he explained. "Snaps off in a heartbeat." He fit the whole works into a case and passed the case to Wendell. "Take this home and give it a whirl over the weekend. Tuesday or so, we'll fix you up with one of your own."

"I'll try, that's what I can promise." Wendell glanced at the clock. "Think I could get by your door?"

"In eleven minutes you can."

Wendell's stomach howled.

"I got a cheese cracker if you want something to tide you over." Gene opened his drawer, and Wendell caught sight of the snout end of a pistol. Gene put a sleeve of crackers on the desk and looked at Wendell. "It's legal."

"Mine, too." Wendell nodded toward his suitcase and helped himself to a nab. The cracker tasted so good, he pulled the label around. "Grilled cheese, huh? Never heard of them."

"My wife. She's always finding something new to send me out with."

"Lucky man."

"For sure," said Gene.

Wendell took the last sips from his cup without making conversation. "It's coming up on that time," he said at last.

They made their way to the front. The two of them stood there, shoulder to shoulder, waiting for the all clear.

"Tell me," said Wendell, not looking over. "What're the chances Welch is your daddy?"

"A hundred percent," Gene replied, and Wendell knew for certain he'd already read every word on those forms.

"How's he getting along?"

Gene didn't look at Wendell either. "Stove up. From laying tile, I guess, and all that wallowing around with chickens. Only thing he talks about now is getting out and sitting on his porch." He shifted his weight to his good side. "Your father," Gene said after a breath. "He the lawman who got hit by a train?"

"The very one."

"Lots of stories about that."

"I've heard a few."

"Some say he didn't see it coming."

"Don't know how."

Gene looked at him and shook his head. "You never really know anything about anybody, do you?"

"I wouldn't say that," said Wendell. "You just don't know everything."


Ping, went the lock.

Wendell stepped out into the morning. It was already hot, and the air was sticky with jasmine. Once he got his hands on his cell phone, he thought he might call down to the prison farm, put in an order for some of those powdered eggs, a piece of fried baloney. He'd get them to save him a spot by Welch. And if Gene's old man would swear not to keep so much as a biddy in his reach, Wendell would see what he could do to help him out. ■



Mended (mixed media acrylic, masking tape on canvas, 34x36) by George Scott

"You never really know anything about anybody, do you?"



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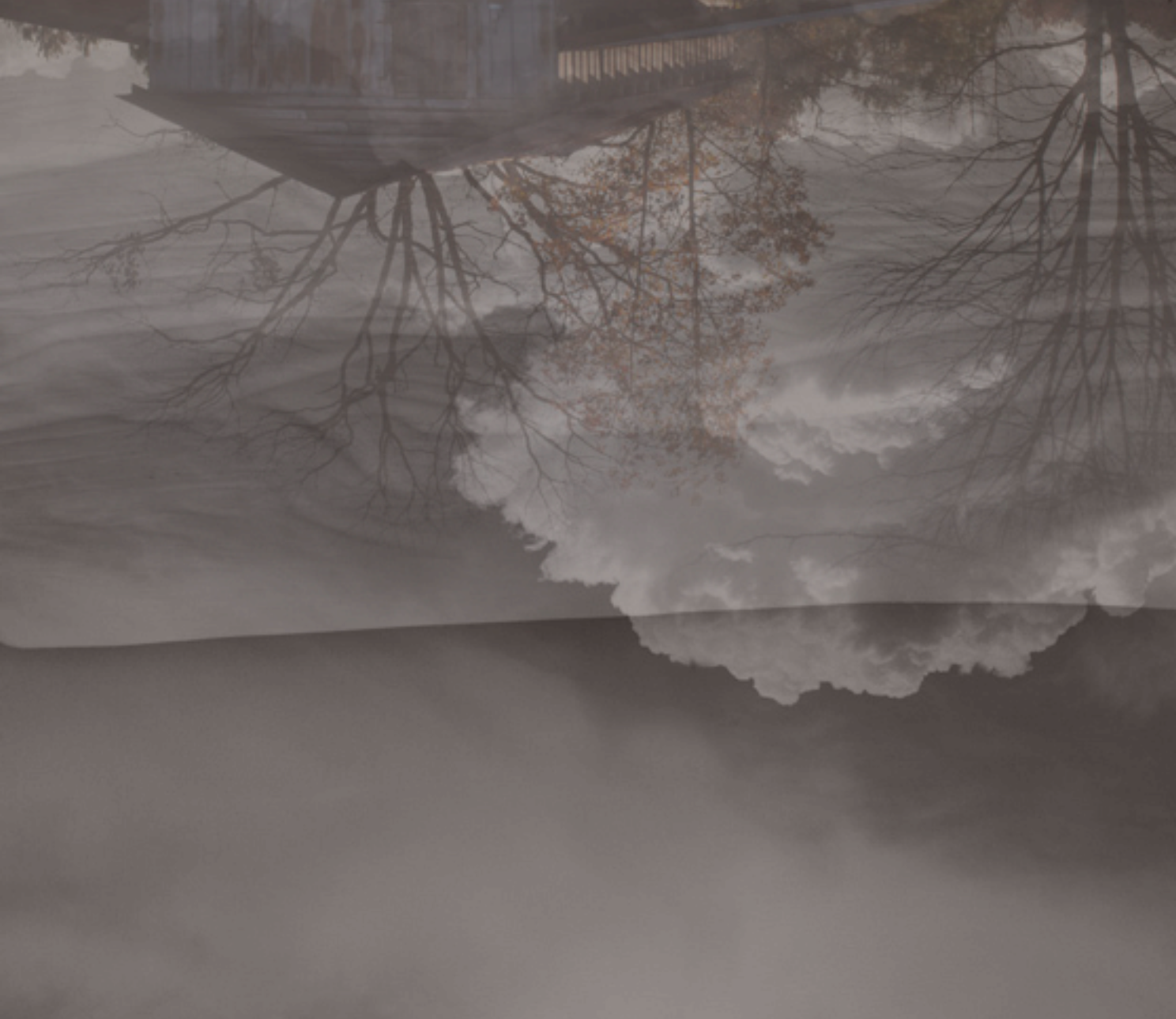
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