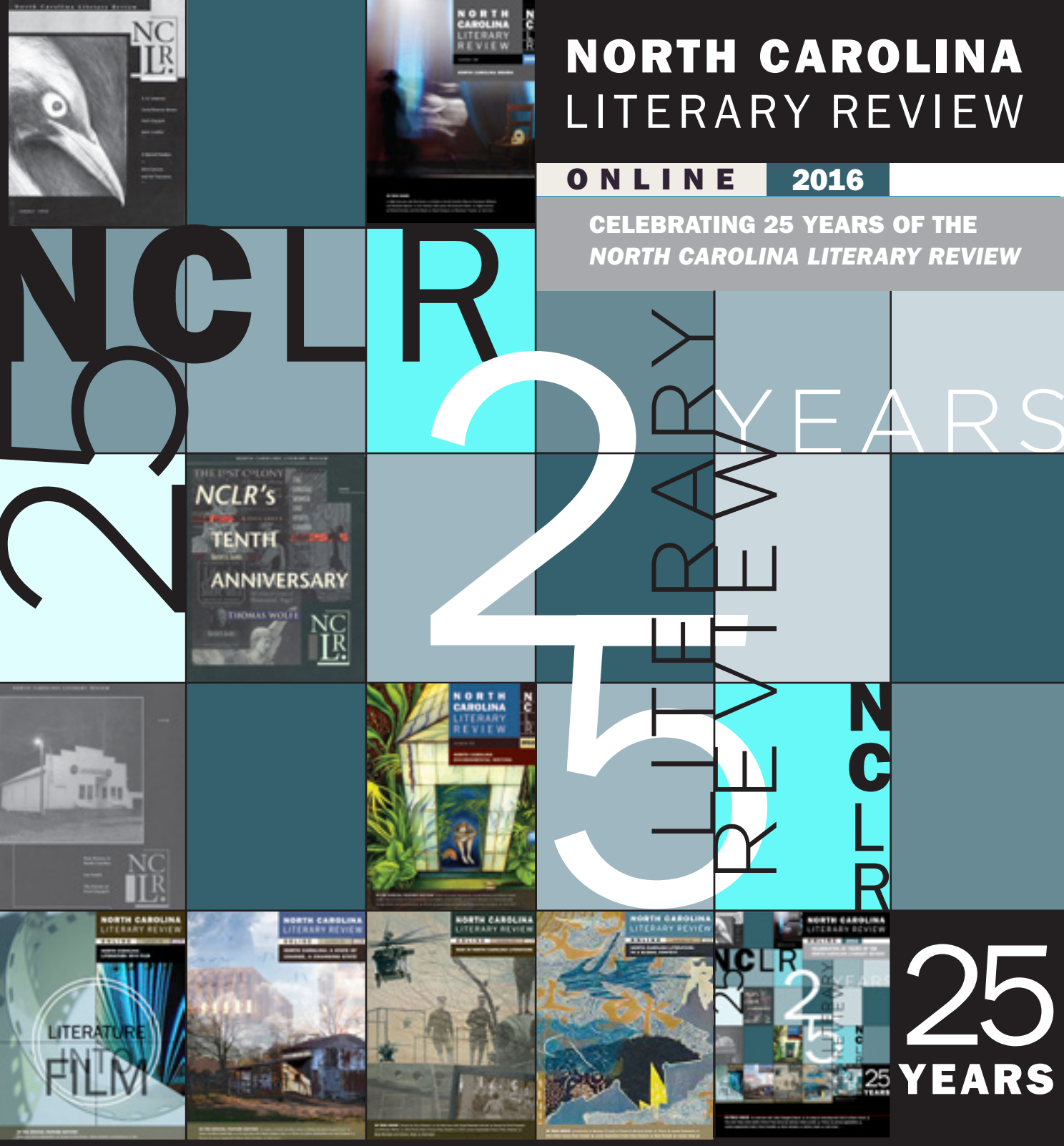

NORTH CAROLINA LITERARY REVIEW

ONLINE **2016**

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF THE *NORTH CAROLINA LITERARY REVIEW*

IN THIS ISSUE An Interview with Editor Margaret Bauer ■ An Essay on Teaching with *NCLR* by Brian Glover ■ The 2nd Place Doris Betts Fiction Prize Story by Kathryn Etters Lovatt ■ Poetry by James Applewhite ■ James Applewhite Poetry Prize Finalists ■ Book Reviews ■ Literary News ■ And more . . .

COVER ART

Besides the five issues of *NCLR Online*, featured on the front cover are milestones in *NCLR*'s twenty-five-year history: the 1992 premiere issue, with art by Stanton Blakeslee; the 1998 issue, the first issue edited by the current editor, with photography by W. Cameron Dennis; the 2002 tenth anniversary issue, with a collage designed by former *NCLR* Art Director Mary Hatch Thiesen; the 2009 issue, the first under the current Art Director Dana Ezzell Gay, with the new look she gave to *NCLR*, featuring photography by Mary Shannon Johnstone; and the 2011 twentieth issue, with art by Joan Mansfield.

COVER DESIGNER

NCLR Art Director **DANA EZZELL GAY** is an Associate Professor at Meredith College in Raleigh. She has an MFA in Graphic Design from the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence. Her design work has been recognized by the CASE Awards and in such publications as *Print Magazine's Regional Design Annual*, the *Applied Arts Awards Annual*, *American Corporate Identity*, and the *Big Book of Logos 4*. She has been designing for *NCLR* since the fifth issue, and in 2009 created the current style and design. In 2010, the "new look" earned *NCLR* a second award for Best Journal Design from the Council of Editors of Learned Journals. In addition to the cover, Dana designed the interview with the editor, the essay about teaching with *NCLR*, and the short story in this issue. To find the link to a presentation by Dana about designing for *NCLR*, go to the staff page of the *NCLR* website.

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NORTH CAROLINA LITERARY REVIEW

ONLINE **2016**

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF THE *NORTH CAROLINA LITERARY REVIEW*

IN THIS ISSUE

■ **25 Years of the *North Carolina Literary Review*** ***includes poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, interviews, book reviews, and literary news***

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Dana Ezzell Gay
Rick Horton
Jim Jacobs
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Caroline Burton Michahelles
Rene Pinchuk
Michael Rhinehardt
Vicky Smith
Robert Tynes
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Address correspondence to
Dr. Margaret D. Bauer, *NCLR* Editor
ECU Mailstop 555 English
Greenville, NC 27858-4353

252.328.1537 Telephone
252.328.4889 Fax
BauerM@ecu.edu Email
NCLRuser@ecu.edu
NCLRsubmissions@ecu.edu

http://www.NCLR.ecu.edu Website

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Advertising rates
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Advertising discounts available to *NCLR* vendors.

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Submissions
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 #25 (2016) will celebrate 25 years of *NCLR*.
Issue #26 (2017) will feature North Carolina literature and the other arts.
Please email your suggestions for other special feature topics to the editor.

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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Scholars for North Carolina's Future

25 Years of *NCLR*, 5 Years of *NCLR Online*
by Margaret D. Bauer, Editor

The weekend prior to starting this introduction, I heard one of my colleagues from ECU's School of Music express his delight over the opportunity in Greenville, North Carolina, to enjoy a Saturday afternoon concert featuring faculty and student musicians from such prestigious programs as Julliard and the New England Conservatory. Almost twenty years on the faculty at East Carolina University, I am not surprised by the various accomplishments and opportunities that take place here. This is the home of the award-winning *North Carolina Literary Review*, after all, and I have had the great opportunity to serve as the editor of this particular gem on ECU's crown. In this capacity, I have the opportunity to work with talent every day, that of both the writers and artists whose creations we publish and of the determined and enthusiastic editorial and design teams that put our issues together. I know what people are capable of accomplishing when it comes to sharing the arts and humanities with an audience, wherever they are, but especially in North Carolina, it seems to me. Greenville is one of many vibrant arts communities in the Old North State.

In response to my noting over the past year or so that we were coming up on *NCLR*'s twenty-fifth print issue, without exception (including founding editor Alex Albright), people have responded something along the lines of, *Already?* Even the original art director, Eva Roberts, whose design distinguished *NCLR* from any other literary magazine or literature journal I'd ever seen before, was genuinely shocked when I mentioned the pending milestone the last time I saw her.

Looking back at the early reviews of the premiere issue, I smile to read, "The only bad thing to say about the first edition of East Carolina University's new venture, the *North Carolina Literary Review*, is that it seems *almost too good*. If the editors and writers can keep this up twice a year, they will have given a very definite gift to the state's readers." Well, it did take twenty years before we were able to produce *two* issues a year, but here – and this surprises me – is "already" our fifth issue of *NCLR Online*, created to allow the book reviews we publish to reach as many readers as possible and to have more space for even more reviews (thirty-one new books are reviewed in this issue), as well as more creative writing (this issue includes twelve of the finalists from the James Applewhite Poetry Prize competition and a poem by Applewhite himself). And we still have over two hundred pages coming in print this summer.

As a way of reviewing and celebrating a quarter century of *NCLR*, this issue opens with an interview with me, introduced and edited by Zackary Vernon, a young scholar who has become one of our regular contributors over the past several years, with questions also contributed by another of *NCLR*'s young writers, Annie Frazier, who has had a story selected as a finalist in the Doris Betts Fiction Prize competition (in 2013, published in 2014) and, more recently, received second place in the 2015 James Applewhite Poetry Prize competition (her poem to be published in the 2016 print issue). Questions also came from my own colleague here at ECU, Donna Kain, who specializes in technical and professional communication and is a long-time member of the *NCLR* editorial board, in which capacity she has worked with us on linking content to (and creating) audio and video for these online issues.

RIGHT ***NCLR* Editor Margaret Bauer with Assistant Editor Randall Martoccia and former intern Bridget Todd, who was the guest speaker at the East Carolina University English Department's fall 2015 graduation celebration**

COURTESY OF MARGARET BAUER

FAR RIGHT ***NCLR* 2015–16 Editorial Assistant Teresa Bryson and 2015 Intern/2016 Editorial Assistant Amanda Smith at the 6th annual Applewhite poetry–inspired art exhibit co-sponsored by the City Art Gallery and *NCLR*, Greenville, NC, 22 Jan. 2016 (art by Richard Fennell)**

PHOTOGRAPH BY DIANE RODMAN

I so appreciate the numerous excellent questions I received on such a wide array of topics. As anyone who has asked me about *NCLR* knows, this is a subject I absolutely love to talk about, and it was great fun to look back over the past almost twenty years of editing *NCLR*. With the talented writers we have in (or from) North Carolina, it is my firm belief that every adult reader in the state should be a subscriber, and I am grateful for any opportunity I have to entice someone else to join our readership.

A second interview in this issue is with William Price, Jr., the brother of a beloved North Carolina writer, the late Reynolds Price, conducted by James W. Clark, Jr. Here again, a second issue allows us the space to publish more of the quite extensive full interview, providing a taste here and the rest of the interview in the 2016 print issue. Both interviewer and interviewee are as happy as I am with the quality job apprentice editors Teresa Bryson and Brianne Holmes, editorial assistants this year and last year, respectively, have done to create these autonomous excerpts for *NCLR*'s readers.

These student staff members are two among numerous students who have found their way onto the staff and then into the pages of *NCLR*. I encourage the teachers and professors among our readership to direct their students to take a look at enrolling at ECU, especially those interested in a career in publishing but also the writers and literary scholars who are seeking publication opportunities. We are proud to report that two of *NCLR*'s past editorial assistants received national writing awards in recent years: Tim Buchanan was a 2014 AWP Intro Journals Project winner, and this year Celeste McMaster won the *Saturday Evening Post*'s Great American Fiction contest.

I call teachers' attention also to Brian Glover's pedagogical essay on using fiction published in *NCLR* in his introduction to the short story classes. I expect that the students in one of Brian's future classes could end up selecting for discussion the short story published in this issue by Kathryn Etters Lovatt, which won second place in the Doris Betts Fiction Prize competition last year. We would happily arrange for your local bookstore to purchase enough copies of available back issues for a whole class to use. And of course, the five issues of *NCLR Online* are open access, which we are happy to provide as part of our mission to introduce North Carolina literature to readers all over the world.

While you wait for the 2016 print issue, due out this summer, please join our celebration of twenty-five years of the *North Carolina Literary Review* with a contribution to the fundraising campaign we are embarking on this milestone anniversary, with Charles Frazier and Lee Smith at the helm as the Literary Captains of these efforts (more evidence of the generosity of North Carolina writers). Our goal is a two million dollar endowment that would ensure another twenty-five years of *NCLR* by providing funding for a managing editor, which we have never had, and the kind of marketing we have never been able to do with our limited budget. In other words, we need your help to get the word out about the literary publication that gets the word out about the talented writers and artists of North Carolina. And while I am planning to continue editing this amazing publication for as long as I can, I do need to start training someone for – let's say towards the end of the next quarter century. Please let us hear from you soon. ■

PHOTOGRAPH BY BRIANNE HOLMES

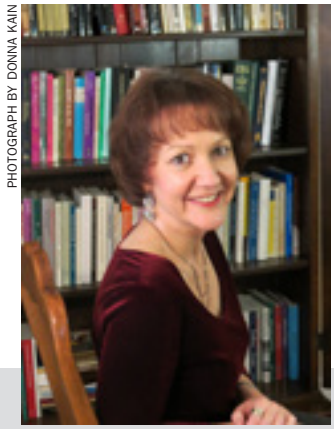
PHOTOGRAPH BY NICKI LEONE

PHOTOGRAPH BY NICKI LEONE

FAR LEFT ***NCLR* Fiction Editor Liza Wieland (right) with Kathryn Etters Lovatt at the reading of the 2015 Betts Prize stories at Pomegranate Books, Wilmington, NC, 29 May 2015**

LEFT CENTER AND LEFT **Charles Frazier and Lee Smith sign a letter inviting writers to join them in supporting *NCLR*, Asheville, NC, Nov. 2015**

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF THE *NORTH CAROLINA LITERARY REVIEW*

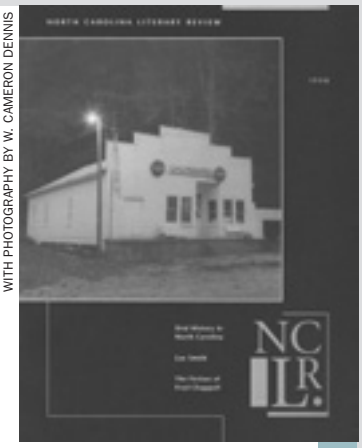


PHOTOGRAPH BY DONNA KAIN

NORTH CAROLINA CONNECTIONS: AN INTERVIEW WITH *NCLR* EDITOR MARGARET BAUER

QUESTIONS BY ANNIE FRAZIER, DONNA KAIN, AND ZACKARY VERNON

INTRODUCED AND EDITED BY ZACKARY VERNON



COURTESY OF *NCLR*; DESIGNED BY MARY HATCH THIESEN WITH PHOTOGRAPHY BY W. CAMERON DENNIS

When I began studying American and Southern literature in graduate school at UNC, I immediately started hearing about the *North Carolina Literary Review*. People, then and now, speak of it in enthusiastic, reverential tones. "I love that journal!" they exclaim, before inevitably saying something like: "That's Margaret Bauer's baby! She's done amazing things with it!" Since becoming editor of *NCLR* in 1997, Margaret has produced nearly twenty issues of the print journal (and since 2012, an additional electronic issue each year), and the quality of each issue has remained of the highest order. Backed by an extraordinarily talented staff, Margaret's fierce dedication to the literature and art of the state has made *NCLR* the premier publication it is today.

Working in tandem with the journal's long tradition of bolstering the creative and academic careers of North Carolinians, Margaret is committed to publishing the work of established, as well as new voices. The state of North Carolina boasts an embarrassment of riches when it comes to writers, artists, and scholars, and Margaret has molded *NCLR* over the years to showcase the most innovative work being done by North Carolinians, both those born here and those, like Margaret herself (a native of Louisiana), with honorary North Carolina status. With Margaret at the helm, *NCLR* will undoubtedly continue to demonstrate to people across the state, region, nation, and globe how the distinctive traditions and landscapes of North Carolina provide material for the state's various cultural and artistic expressions.

LEFT **Cover of *NCLR* 1998, Bauer's first issue as editor**

ABOVE ***North Carolina Literary Review* Editor Margaret Bauer, 2014**

PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDREW MOREHEAD

PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDREW MOREHEAD

Given that Margaret is such an accomplished scholar, with four books and numerous articles published on Southern literature and culture, one may have expected her to steer *NCLR* in the direction of other academic journals in the field. However, since its inception, *NCLR* has been an amalgamation of a scholarly journal, a literary magazine, and a showcase for the visual arts. This blend is precisely what makes *NCLR* so interesting and informative for readers year after year.

In the following interview, conducted via email, Margaret answers questions posed by Annie Frazier, Donna Kain, and myself. Margaret's responses provide a wealth of information about the reciprocal relationship between *NCLR* and the literature, scholarship, and arts of the Old North State.

NORTH CAROLINA WRITERS

North Carolina undoubtedly has a rich and varied literary history, and its contemporary writers likely rival both the quality and quantity of any state in the nation. Why do you think this state has and continues to produce so many topnotch writers?

I haven't actually counted but would not be surprised to find that North Carolina has more writers than any other state, and I know that many of the best writers in the country (in a variety of genres) have North Carolina connections. Of course, many of the writers are not originally from here, and many have not stayed here. But North Carolina continues to inspire those who have left to live and work elsewhere – to name just two, Robert Morgan in Ithaca, New York, teaching at Cornell; Jim Grimsley in Atlanta, teaching at Emory. And North Carolina has become home to Virginia native Lee Smith and Georgia native Kathryn Stripling Byer and then certainly found its way into these women's writings.

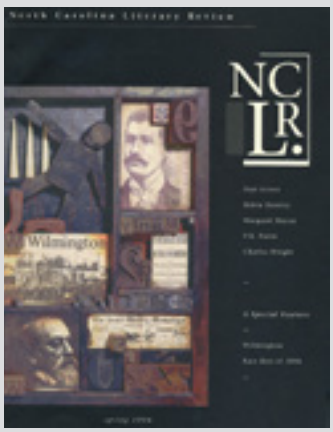
ABOVE LEFT **Bauer with *NCLR* Founding Editor Alex Albright (left), North Carolina writer Jim Gimsley, and *NCLR* intern Max Herbert at the Greenville Museum of Art for a reading by Grimsley from his new memoir (reviewed in this issue), 17 Dec. 2015**

ABOVE RIGHT **Former North Carolina Poet Laureate Kathryn Stripling Byer at the City Lights Bookstore launch party for the 20th issue of *NCLR*, Sylva, NC, 9 Sept. 2011**

There is so much inspiration in our natural surroundings here, from the Outer Banks to the Smoky Mountains. But my theory is that it may be the generous support of the writers for each other in North Carolina that accounts for the number of writers here. They don't seem to see each other as competition. They support each other's desire to write. I notice it at literary events. The "headliner" whom the audience came to hear will at some point recognize some new writer on the program or even sitting in the audience and tell everyone they simply must read that person's new book. I've seen this happen again and again for almost twenty years here in North Carolina. During his remarks upon being inducted into the North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame, Ronald Bayes pointed out how unique it is for writers to support rather than compete with each other.[1] He noted that writers from other states are surprised to witness such camaraderie.

What is it about the North Carolina cultural and geographic setting in literary works that appeals to regional, national, and global audiences?

COURTESY OF *NCLR*; COVER PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANN EHRINGHAUS



COURTESY OF *NCLR*; COVER ART BY RAY ELMORE

As you cross the long state of North Carolina, think about how many different cultures you pass through, from the Outer Banks and coast, which were a first stop for early European arrivals to the New World and now attract vacationers, to the Great Smoky Mountains on the other end of the state, which are also a tourist draw, as well as an inspiration to writers. In between, you pass through agricultural Eastern North Carolina, which once saw large tobacco plantations, the owners of which had a stake in the Confederacy unlike the inhabitants of Western North Carolina, where there were far fewer slaves; Chapel Hill, where you will find one of the oldest universities in the country; and the Research Triangle, which brought people from outside of North Carolina here to settle down, not just vacation.

Think about how our coast and mountains, Research Triangle Park and the UNC system, all draw outsiders to North Carolina – for vacation or a career, from all over the country and beyond. Writers among these visitors are bound to be inspired by our beautiful landscapes and our history. It seems to me that the writers among these non-native and first-generation North Carolinians bring an objective perspective to what they write and expand the audience beyond the state's borders. Philip Gerard, for example, came here to teach at UNC Wilmington, became fascinated by the story of the 1898 coup d'etat that took place in his new hometown, and wrote *Cape Fear Rising*. And readers want to bring a bit of North Carolina back with them – what better way than by picking up books set in these beautiful places.

ABOVE TOP **2005 issue cover, featuring Outer Banks Writing**

ABOVE BOTTOM **The 1994 issue of *NCLR*, which featured the 1898 Wilmington Race Riot and included an excerpt from Philip Gerard's then forthcoming novel, *Cape Fear Rising*, which was inspired by these events**

[1] Bauer quotes Bayes's remarks on this subject more fully in "A Great Day for Poetry in North Carolina: Four 'Global North Carolina' Poets Inducted into the North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame," *NCLR Online* 2015: 125–27.

COURTESY OF *NCLR*; DESIGNED BY DANA EZZELL GAY

We realized with our 2015 issue, which featured North Carolina Literature in a Global Context, that every writer we were including fit that theme in one way or another: some writers have moved here from elsewhere; others have taken their North Carolina stories with them as they found work and made homes in other states. Even native North Carolinians who have lived here most of their lives have some educational or work experiences in between growing up here and settling down here.

Currently, are North Carolina writers dealing with new themes, the "same old," or some combination of the two?

I would say a combination. In that 2015 issue, we published an interview with Vietnam-born/North Carolina raised Monique Truong and an article on her North Carolina–set novel *Bitter in the Mouth*. Truong's character is growing up in the desegregating South of the 1970s, but this story's exploration of race is not focused on blacks and whites. Similarly, I often teach Josephine Humphreys's novel *Nowhere Else on Earth*, which tells the little known story of the Lumbee Robin Hood Henry Berry Lowrie, who formed his gang in part to protect the young male Native Americans of his community from being forcibly conscripted into service with the Confederacy to help with labor that African American slaves were doing for the Confederate Army. Humphreys thereby gives us a new Civil War story and a different angle on race relations.

How have you seen the style and/or prominent subjects of North Carolina literature change over time?

Continuing with the topic of different kinds of war novels, I was struck a couple of years ago upon realizing that both Ron Rash and Terry Roberts published novels in which the World War I German internment camp in Hot Springs, North Carolina, plays a significant role. I've noticed that World War I is a relatively new source of inspiration for other Southern writers as well (Louisiana's Tim Gautreaux's *The Clearing* and *The Missing* are both set just after WWI) – perhaps a sign of moving away from the Civil War as a subject.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARY JANE BAUER

ABOVE TOP **The 2015 issue, which included North Carolina artists (like cover artist Eduardo Lapetina) as well as writers who fit our "Global North Carolina" theme**

ABOVE BOTTOM **Bauer with Louisiana writer Tim Gautreaux, now a resident of Western North Carolina, celebrating the publication of her book on Gautreaux and his Louisiana Writer Award at the Louisiana Book Festival in Baton Rouge, 17 Oct. 2009**

Are there any new trends you've noticed lately?

A recent literary trend related to what I've been talking about is what I've called literary historical fiction. I included a short sidebar about this trend after my interview with Charles Frazier in the 2013 issue's special feature section on "the changing state" of North Carolina. We've published articles on several such books: Rash's *Serena*, Frazier's *Cold Mountain*, as well as the World War I novels I just mentioned, for example. I've also mentioned Humphreys's *Nowhere Else on Earth*, which would fit into this category, along with several of Robert Morgan's novels, Lee Smith's *On Agate Hill* and her recent novel, *Guests on Earth*, in which Zelda Fitzgerald plays a role, Michael Parker's *The Watery Part of the World*. *NCLR*'s Fiction Editor, Liza Wieland, has also written literary fiction inspired by historical events: her novel *Bombshell* imagines what it would like to be the daughter of the Unabomber, and 9/11 plays a significant role in her most recent novel, *Land of Enchantment*.

PHOTOGRAPH BY DAN STANFORD

While I don't have time to read everything, among the books sent to us for review consideration, I have noted a lot (and a variety) of speculative fiction – science fiction, magical realism, alternate histories, post-apocalyptic fiction. Also, 2015 seemed to be the year of the memoir: look at how much attention has been given to the new memoirs by Jim Grimsley, David Payne, and Michael White. All of these are reviewed in *NCLR Online* 2016. And it was for the 2015 global-themed issue that I discovered Elaine Neil Orr's wonderful memoir about growing up in Africa, where her parents were missionaries.

What North Carolina writers do you find most enjoyable to read?

Oh, that is one question I won't answer. When people ask me for a favorite writer, I tell them I'll have to give my non-North Carolina favorites. As *NCLR* Editor, I try not to play favorites with North Carolina writers. When I serve as master of ceremonies for literary events, I usually introduce myself as a writer groupie, and as such, I have the best job.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDREW MOREHEAD

I will add that some North Carolina novels teach really well, and I do reread them every time I teach them, so I must enjoy reading them: Charles Chesnutt's *The Marrow of Tradition*, Ron Rash's *The World Made Straight*, and Kat Meads's *The Invented Life of Kitty Duncan*.

ABOVE TOP ***NCLR* Fiction Editor Liza Wieland with *Cold Mountain* author Charles Frazier and his daughter, Annie Frazier Crandell, also a writer, at the 2013 issue launch party at Malaprop's in Asheville, 31 Aug.**

ABOVE BOTTOM **Bauer interviewing Charles Frazier, North Carolina Botanical Garden, UNC Chapel Hill, 19 Oct. 2014**

PHOTOGRAPH BY MICHELLE EBLE

ABOVE **Bauer with 2010–12 editorial assistants Stephen Mason, Kevin Dublin, and Michael Brantley at a reading featuring creative writers graduating from the ECU English Department's master's program, Greenville, NC, 3 May 2012**

What North Carolina writers do you find most productive for scholars to study?

Since this question might also lead to leaving someone out, I'll answer it this way: If you check out our index of writers as subject (available online), you'll see that *NCLR* is very interested in publishing scholarship on North Carolina writers, and I welcome receiving more literary criticism submissions. As we say in our submission guidelines, we are particularly interested in articles on forgotten and neglected North Carolina writers. We also enjoy publishing extensive, scholarly interviews with new writers, interviews in which the exchange involves substantial delving into the writing. We have an index on our website of writers we have interviewed, so I invite readers to check it out and see who's missing, who should be in that list, and then send me a proposal.[2]

What North Carolina writers, both past and present, do you think are most neglected by popular audiences, communities of writers, and/or literary scholars?

I have often admitted that I would not know about Paul Green if I hadn't moved here. I never came across him in my graduate coursework in Southern literature. First through *NCLR* and then with my own scholarship, I have worked to change that, particularly after discovering his play *The House of Connelly*, which I maintain rivals the work of Tennessee Williams.[3]

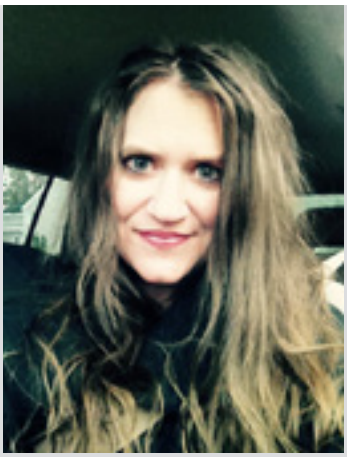
Similarly, I wasn't aware of John Ehle's fiction until Kevin Watson sent me Press 53's new edition of *The Land Breakers* several years ago. I believe that edition inspired the Appalachian focus of our 2010 issue. I once read the scene from that novel that we reprinted in that issue to a class to explain to my students why I love to read. Reading the rest of the books in this Ehle series, I noticed that he employs a variety of historical fiction styles from novel to novel, but no one has really written about that. Terry Roberts has written about Ehle for *NCLR* twice now, and I know that John Ehle appreciates that – as do I.

Some years back Dave Smith mentioned that James Applewhite has not received the kind of attention his poetry deserves.[4] *NCLR* has been publishing his poetry regularly since 2009, but so far we have not received any critical articles on his work. The 2016 print issue does include an interview with him.

[2] Find this and other indices of *NCLR* content on the *NCLR* website. These indices are compiled by the student staff members.

[3] Bauer published an essay on *The House of Connelly*, "Paul Green's South: Gothic Modernism in *The House of Connelly*" by Tanfer Emin Tunc, in *NCLR* 2015, and she edited a critical edition of the play, which was published by McFarland in 2014.

[4] Dave Smith, "James Applewhite's Poetry," Connotation Press.com: A Literary Artifact Feb. 2011: web.



COURTESY OF DANA EZZELL GAY

SHAPING NORTH CAROLINA LITERATURE

In what ways do you think NCLR *helps shape perceptions of North Carolina literature and writers (with the public? the writing community? with literary scholars?)?*

Since it is largely a result of the Art Direction of Dana Ezzell Gay and the quality of the writing itself, I believe I can say that our issues are impressive without sounding too much like I am tooting my own horn. So I believe that when a writer makes it into our pages, he or she gets the public's attention. It could be one sign that the writer has either made it (we've published an interview with her, for example) or is on the way to doing so (having published his first poem in our pages, for example).

As a literary scholar myself, I am often at academic conferences, and I scan the programs for papers on North Carolina writers, then invite the authors to revise their conference papers into an article and submit it to *NCLR*, thereby bringing their essays into this particular regional conversation, drawing attention to the North Carolina connection of the author or the book.

And my own scholarship has been influenced by the writers whose work comes to my attention as *NCLR* Editor. The publisher of a then-new novel by Eastern North Carolina writer Kat Meads sent her *The Invented Life of Kitty Duncan* to *NCLR* for review. We invited Kat to the Eastern North Carolina Literary Homecoming, which resulted in my reading that novel to prepare to meet the writer, and I ended up exploring the title character, which seemed to me like a 1950s–60s Scarlett O'Hara, in my book *A Study of Scarletts*.[5] And that is just one example of the many North Carolina writers I've ended up writing about over the years.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ALAN WESTMORELAND; COURTESY OF THE NORTH CAROLINA STATE ARCHIVES

DESIGNED BY DANA EZZELL GAY

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARGARET BAUER

COURTESY OF UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA PRESS

ABOVE TOP **Dana Ezzell Gay, January 26, 2016**

ABOVE CENTER **Dana Ezzell Gay, *NCLR* Art Director, telling members of the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association about giving *NCLR* a new look, Raleigh, 18 Sept. 2011**

LEFT BOTTOM **Flyer for Art Director Dana Gay's presentation on designing *NCLR* at East Carolina University, 24 Sept. 2015**

ABOVE ***NCLR* exhibit table at the North Carolina Writers' Network fall conference in Asheville, 20–22 Nov. 2015**

[5] See chapter 5, "'Disregarding the female imperative': Kat Meads's Kitty Duncan, a 1960s–Era Scarlett O'Hara" in Bauer's *A Study of Scarletts: Scarlett O'Hara and Her Literary Daughters* (Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 2014).

PHOTOGRAPH BY LENARD D. MOORE

You make a point of publishing established North Carolina writers' work alongside the work of emerging North Carolina writers, which helps bring the established writers' audience to new voices. In this way, you're helping to nurture a new generation of writers. In the past twenty-five years, have there been writers who got an early start in the pages of NCLR*, who then continued on into prominent careers?*

PHOTOGRAPH BY LENARD D. MOORE

My understanding is that Michael Parker got some of his start in the pages of *NCLR*, though he began publishing his books at the same time that some of his essays were appearing in the early issues that Alex Albright edited. Ron Rash published poems in *NCLR* 1997, and his first collection of poetry was published the next year, more poems in 2000, which saw his second poetry collection. One of the regular interviewers of my early issues, Anna Dunlap Higgins (now -Harrell), interviewed Ron in 2004. She revisited him (and her other interview subjects) for the twenty-fifth issue, and notes that in the decade between her interviews with him he has become internationally famous. So while we may not have played a role in his success, we published his work early on, showing, I think, that we recognized what was coming before the big publishing houses did. Over the years, I have enjoyed watching the appearance of books by writers we've published, and I believe that among them will be the next Michael Parker and Ron Rash.

PHOTOGRAPH BY LINDA FOX

Do you feel that bringing new writers into the North Carolina writers' community helps them as they start out?

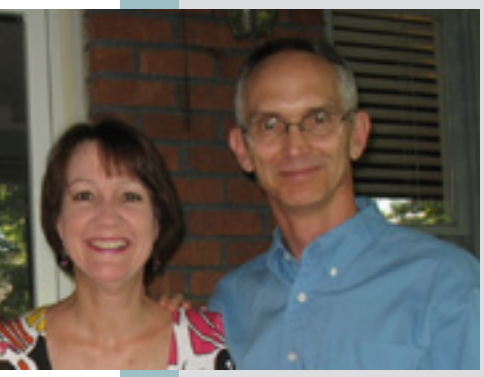
Yes, I do. Introducing them via our pages, which may have been purchased because of the recognized writers listed on the cover, brings readers to their work as well. Also, once we've published a finalist in the short story, poetry, and now creative nonfiction competitions, I tend to notice when they publish books and remind them to send us review copies. Beyond *NCLR*, of course, is the active literary calendar of events across the state, which also introduces them to readers.

I am also interested in helping new literary scholars. I had an incredible mentor in graduate school, Dorothy Scura at the University of Tennessee, and I try to pay that forward by encouraging young scholars to submit to *NCLR*. I invite my colleagues in Southern literature at other universities to recommend strong graduate students to write reviews for *NCLR*, for example. Or, if a submission was not recommended for publication by our outside referees, but the author demonstrates strong writing skills and keen literary analysis, I might invite him or her to review for *NCLR*. And as I said before, I also encourage young scholars who give papers on North Carolina writers at conferences to revise their papers into articles and submit them to *NCLR*.

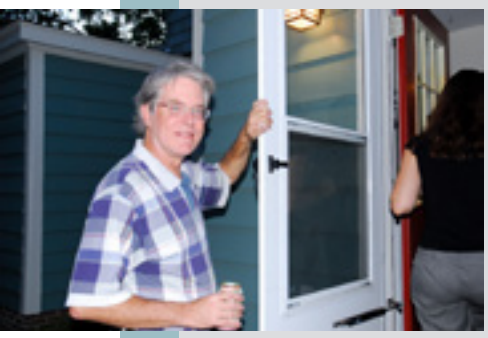
ABOVE TOP **Michael Parker signing broadsides created (by *NCLR*'s art director) on the occasion of his being the honoree of the 2015 North Carolina Writers Conference, Washington, 25 July 2015**

ABOVE CENTER **Alex Albright and one of his former students, Michael Brantley (also a former *NCLR* editorial assistant), at the North Carolina Writers Conference, Washington, 25 July 2015**

ABOVE BOTTOM ***NCLR* intern Brianna Horton with North Carolina poet laureate Shelby Stephenson at the Greenville Museum of Art, 28 Oct. 2015**



PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDREW MOREHEAD



PHOTOGRAPH BY DONNA KAIN

PHOTOGRAPH BY MELISSA EDMUNDSON MAKALA

ABOVE TOP **Bauer visiting with Poetry Editor Jeffrey Franklin at his home in Denver, CO, July 2011**

ABOVE CENTER **Founding editor Alex Albright at the reception before the Eastern North Carolina Literary Homecoming at ECU, Greenville, 26 Sept. 2008**

ABOVE BOTTOM **Bauer presenting a check to Zackary Vernon, winner of the first Alex Albright Creative Nonfiction Prize, at the SAMLA conference in Durham, 13 Nov. 2015**

Have you noticed shifts or changes in the kind of literary submissions you've received and published for your twenty years editing NCLR*?*

Submissions have gotten stronger over the years. In 2015, we broke records in the number of submissions to both the Doris Betts Fiction Prize competition and the James Applewhite Poetry Prize competition. And our art editor tells me that we accepted more poems than usual for publication (she should know since she's now searching for art to complement the poems), which suggests that the poetry is getting stronger. We have no set number of poems or stories we will publish. We'll publish as many as are recommended by our poetry and fiction editors, respectively. A couple of years ago, our toughest fiction screener, someone who sometimes finds no stories to pass on to the fiction editor for Betts Prize consideration, asked me if it was okay to send Liza twelve finalists, and that was in addition to the three or four the other readers would each inevitably select. I said yes. If this particular reader said twelve should be considered for publication and the prize, then they should all be given that consideration.

On the other hand, there has been a significant decline in the number of strong creative nonfiction submissions over the years, and I know that the original editor, Alex Albright, wanted *NCLR* to be a venue for that genre, since there weren't as many places for creative nonfiction as there were for poetry and fiction. So given the success of our poetry and fiction competitions and their increased popularity, I decided to establish a creative nonfiction prize competition, which we've named for Alex. We'll be publishing the first winner in our twenty-fifth issue, as you know, Zackary, as you are the first recipient of the Alex Albright Creative Nonfiction Prize.

ISSUE THEMES

How do you decide on the special focus of each NCLR *issue?*

Some topics were my idea, at least broadly. Some are proposed by others, usually one of the other editors but not always. A couple of years before the 2009 (drama) issue, somebody asked me at the North Carolina Writers' Network fall conference when I was going to do a drama issue, so I said I'd put that in the special feature section queue. Some topics are more specific than others. Regional or genre topics are pretty clearly defined, but sometimes someone will propose something more ambiguous, like the Changing State of North Carolina. Then we see what we get, which can be very interesting. Back in 2004, I'd proposed an Ethnic North Carolina issue, and I thought I would hear from Latino/a writers, but didn't. A colleague who specialized in Latino/a literature said it was too soon then, but Latino/a voices became a major contribution to the 2013 issue.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDREW MOREHEAD

COURTESY OF *NCLR*; DESIGNED BY STEPHANIE WHITLOCK DICKEN

PHOTOGRAPH BY DONNA KAIN

ABOVE TOP **Bauer with *NCLR* assistant editors Christy Hallberg and Randall Martoccia at a party given for the editor's most recent book, Greenville, NC, 25 Oct. 2014**

ABOVE CENTER ***Mirth Carolina Laugh Tracks*, a dual CD audio component of *NCLR* 2008, with art by Dwane Powell**

ABOVE BOTTOM **Former editor Alex Albright with long-time assistant editor Randall Martoccia at the Eastern North Carolina Literary Homecoming, Greenville, NC, 17 Sept. 2010**

One of my favorite stories to tell about deciding upon a theme is when, around the year 2000, Keats Sparrow, then the Dean of ECU's College of Arts and Sciences, called a meeting with my department chair and me. An incurable optimist, I thought maybe *NCLR* had finally been endowed (finally? We were then only eight years old, and we still haven't been endowed – but I digress –). The department chair told me on our way back to the English department after the meeting that he had been afraid Keats was going to tell us the funding we did have had dried up. We were both wrong. Keats had called us in to share his idea that we do a "flight" issue in 2003, for the centennial of the Wright brothers' first flight. I could not imagine how we could make an issue out of that topic, but we certainly did. It included a wonderful interview with Clyde Edgerton, which he says got him started on writing his Ragan Award–winning memoir *Solo: My Adventures in the Air*, about his longtime love of flying and his experience in the US Air Force during the Vietnam War.

Longtime Assistant Editor Randall Martoccia kept pushing for a humor issue, and one day, after listening to Michael Parker read his story "Hidden Meanings, Treatment of Time, Supreme Irony, and Life Experiences in the Song 'Ain't Gonna Bump No More No Big Fat Woman,'" I came out of the room and told Randall we'd definitely do a humor issue, and it just had to include an audio component to preserve the actual voices of some of these writers – people like Michael and Clyde, as well as Jill McCorkle and Allan Gurganus. If you've ever heard any of these folks read, you know why.

Which topics are most memorable to you and why?

Some of the anecdotes I've already shared answer this question, but also, I'd add the 2013 issue, in which we published two interviews with Charles Frazier. The opportunity to talk with him at length on several occasions is at the top of a long list of reasons why I love my job. We had invited him to be the keynote speaker at the Eastern North Carolina Literary Homecoming, and upon learning that he'd prefer a Q&A format to giving a lecture, I thought, well, sure, I think the editor of *NCLR* can handle that. And then on my walk home from school that evening, it hit me that I had just committed to interviewing Charles Frazier before a live audience. What had I gotten myself into? I'd never met him before, hadn't heard him speak since 1997 when he was keynote speaker at the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association, which was just as people were realizing what a phenomenon *Cold Mountain* was turning into. I don't think I've ever prepared so well for any public appearance as I did for that. By this point, I think I know the novel *Cold Mountain* better than anyone in the world, maybe even including Charles and his family, since I was writing about it for the book I was working on at the time. So I read his then new novel *Nightwoods* two or three times that summer and reread *Thirteen Moons* to make sure to give them equal time. I developed questions and got input from Alex, Liza, and Randall. I knew there was no way to get to all of the questions within the time allotted, especially allowing time for others to ask questions. But the

open interview format went very well, and he graciously allowed me to ask him the rest of the questions a couple of months later during a visit to Asheville. I had so much material that we broke it up into two interviews for the issue, putting his discussion of the movie adaptation of *Cold Mountain* into the Flashbacks section since we'd done a North Carolina Literature into Film topic the year before.

COURTESY OF *NCLR*; DESIGNED BY DANA EZZELL GAY

Which issues of NCLR *have generated the most submissions?*

Looking at the issues lined up on my bookshelf, I guess the answer must be 2009, 2010, and 2012, which are the thickest issues – and 2012 was also the first year we published *NCLR Online*, without which that issue would be another seventy-five pages, so I guess that's the one, our North Carolina literature into film issue. We don't really have a set page limit, though our goal is about two hundred pages. We've gone well over that page count several times, which is one of the reasons we created *NCLR Online*. The electronic issues are now almost the same size as the print issues.

Do you feel that having a theme shapes the submissions of poetry, fiction, and scholarship in any predictable way, or are you frequently surprised by the ways in which writers interpret a theme?

COURTESY OF *NCLR*; DESIGNED BY MARY HATCH THIESEN

COURTESY OF *NCLR*; DESIGNED BY MARY HATCH THIESEN

We don't require that the creative submissions respond to the special feature section theme, so I have definitely been surprised when the winning poem or story ended up fitting the theme: This has happened at least three times for the Doris Betts Fiction Prize competition: David McGuirt's 2009 Betts Prize story is set in Appalachia, so it was good timing for it to be published in the 2010 issue. Claudette Cohen's 2013 Betts Prize story is about a veteran suffering from PTSD, and it was then published in 2014, which featured war in North Carolina literature. And Laura Herbst's 2014 Betts Prize story, set in West Africa, certainly fit the 2015 global theme. But again, this is purely coincidental. Liza is not thinking about the special feature topic when she is selecting the winning story. I doubt she is even aware of the pending topic at that point. She is just looking for the best story among that year's finalists.

But yes, we are often pleasantly surprised by the responses we get to a particular theme. I've already remarked upon the 2003 "flight" issue. Not knowing what would be submitted in response to such a theme, I was surprised to find no problem filling the pages. And in 2006, when we featured writers of children's and young adult literature, I realized that it didn't seem to matter what genre we explored; North Carolina had produced plenty of writing. Both of these issues included major coups. Besides the interview with Edgerton in 2003, we also featured on the

ABOVE TOP **Cover of the first issue of *NCLR Online*, released in 2012**

ABOVE CENTER **Cover spread of *NCLR* 2003, featuring then previously unpublished cyanotypes of the Wright brothers' test flights**

ABOVE BOTTOM **Cover spread of *NCLR* 2006, featuring art by Karen Lee**

cover, previously unpublished cyanotypes from the Wright brothers' test flights. And in 2006, along with an article on Mebane Burgwyn, a writer very popular with North Carolina school children in the 1950s, we published an original short story by Burgwyn that the article's author found in the author's papers at UNC Greensboro, along with Burgwyn's own illustrations for the story.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ALAN WESTMORELAND; COURTESY OF THE NORTH CAROLINA STATE ARCHIVES

Which issues of NCLR *have generated the most readers' responses or comments?*

That's hard to say. We typically receive positive feedback from readers. I hold my breath between hearing from the printer that issues have been mailed and the first email I receive from a writer after seeing his or her work in our pages, and then the emails start pouring in. As I've said, North Carolina writers are generous with their support, and I appreciate it when so many take the time to email me after seeing what our graphic designers have done with their writing in our pages. They appreciate the editorial staff, too, I am happy to say. Of course, in 2009, when we unveiled the new look created by then new Art Director Dana Ezzell Gay, we received a lot of publicity and a lot of positive response. And the 2011 issue, our twentieth, which featured environmental writing and included full color graphics in the special feature section, brought a lot of publicity, both for it being the twentieth and for the writing inside.

COURTESY OF *NCLR*; DESIGNED BY DANA EZZELL GAY

Do you have a favorite past theme? If so, what made that theme a favorite?

In hindsight it is hard to say. As I am working on an issue, each one gets to the point where I am having such a good time that it is my favorite. (There are also moments when it is my least favorite, but those incidents are fewer.) I probably have a favorite piece inside each, though I would not be so impolitic as to start naming those pieces! One of my all-time favorite covers is the 2010 issue cover, featuring art by Will Henry Stevens. If you look at the front/back covers of that issue as a spread, you can see an example of Dana's attention to detail in her cover designs. She has lined them up so that the two paintings become one broad landscape. My mother frames the covers for me every year for Christmas, so several of the full cover spreads are on the walls of my home and office.

ABOVE TOP **Long-time Associate Editor Lorraine Robinson (standing) celebrating 20 years of *NCLR* with Bauer and first-issue contributor Janet Lembke at the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association meeting, Raleigh, 18 Sept. 2011**

ABOVE BOTTOM **Cover spread of *NCLR* 2010**

Are there past topics you would like to revisit in the future?

After our 2002, tenth anniversary issue, in which the content revisited themes from the first ten issues, we created a Flashbacks section because, inevitably, after an issue comes out, someone remarks that they wish they'd sent something for that theme. With our Flashbacks section, we can revisit any theme that people want to write about.

PHOTOGRAPH BY LATASHA JONES

What new topics do you have in mind for future issues of the journal?

I am open to suggestions from readers and hope that they will email me their ideas. At the time that I am answering these questions, I have only the 2017 issue special feature topic planned. Inspired by the themes of both the SAMLA (South Atlantic Modern Language Association) conference held in Durham in 2015 and the theme of Methodist University's Southern Writers Symposium in Fayetteville (also in 2015), we will feature Literature and the Other Arts. North Carolina's writers are multi-talented, that is for certain. Think about writer/musician Bland Simpson, star of the page and the stage. Clyde Edgerton, another writer/musician has recently also taken up painting. Stories by Lee Smith and Jill McCorkle have been staged for and inspired the music of *Good Ol' Girls*. And most recently, *Cold Mountain* has been turned into an opera, which premiered in New Mexico in 2015, is going to Philadelphia in 2016, and will be performed here in North Carolina in 2017. There is a lot of excellent material for this topic. And. of course, all of *NCLR*'s creative content is always complemented by the visual arts. That is one of our issues' defining characteristics. Art Editor Diane Rodman is an absolute genius at finding complementary art for the poetry and fiction in our pages.

COURTESY OF KAREN BALTIMORE

ABOVE TOP **The Red Clay Ramblers performing at Quail Ridge Books and Music for the celebration of *NCLR*'s new design with the 2009 issue, 30 Oct. 2009**

ABOVE BOTTOM ***NCLR* Art Director Dana Ezzell Gay (right) at the Meredith College graduation with her student, Karen Baltimore, who is now one of *NCLR*'s regular graphic designers**

ART AND DESIGN

The design of the journal and the inclusion of art are somewhat unique among literary journals. How does the design reflect the sensibilities of the journal and of North Carolina literature?

The design is unique in both literary and scholarly journals, as is *NCLR* overall, as an amalgam of these two kinds of literary publications. And the art director, like the editor, is a perfectionist who insists upon attention to detail, so we work very well together. Our graphic designers and artists, all of whom also have some North Carolina connection, are as talented as our writers. North Carolinians are a talented people. North Carolina inspires talent. That seems to be evident in many of the answers to these questions, doesn't it?

PHOTOGRAPH BY JIM WHITE

When I was first introduced to *NCLR* shortly before interviewing for my job at ECU, I noticed right away that it was unlike any other literary magazine or academic journal that I had ever seen. I do think that the design has had an influence on other publications over the years. I see a bit more design, a lot more art in literary magazines and scholarly journals in the twenty years since then. I believe that *NCLR*'s original Art Director, Eva Roberts, should receive credit for the attention to design that even more traditional scholarly journals are now showing.

How do you acquire the original art, and what are the considerations that go into the selections with fiction and poetry?

PHOTOGRAPH BY DONNA KAIN

Diane Rodman, *NCLR*'s Art Editor since 2008, finds the art, and while we have always featured beautiful art, since she joined the staff, that bar has risen significantly. She spends days looking for the right artist and then the right work for each poem and short story. The combination of her insightful literary understanding and her visual art aesthetics results in amazing synergy between the literature and the art on a spread. I love her explanations as to why she picked a certain piece of art. I've asked her to write about this or if we could publish her explanations, but she says no, that we need to let the readers have their own experience with the art/literature combinations. And I have reluctantly gone along with her on that. I understand her point. I've often said that if a poet has to tell you about the poem before you can understand it, it probably isn't a very well written poem. Diane's art selections can speak for themselves. I just think others, particularly the writers and the artists, would enjoy reading the explanations she gives to me as much as I do.

COURTESY OF MARGARET BAUER

Some graphics are, of course, specific to submissions. Do you make suggestions about those or do authors submit the graphics with their text?

For the interviews and literary criticism that we "illustrate" with relevant photographs and other graphics, I tend to make notes as I read about images we should try to obtain for the piece. In recent years, we have placed more of the responsibility for supplying photographs and other images with the writers in our constant effort to try to cut down some on the amount of work producing an issue of *NCLR* involves. But we still do a lot of this searching as well. I try to assign each student staff member an article or interview to work on with me, and finding images is one of the tasks they take on as we move the piece

ABOVE TOP **Right to left, founding editor Alex Albright, original Art Director Eva Roberts, and former ECU Dean of Arts and Sciences W. Keats Sparrow accepting the Roberts Award for Literary Inspiration from the Friends of Joyner Library in recognition of their team effort in creating *NCLR*, Eastern North Carolina Literary Homecoming, Greenville, NC, 28 Sept. 2007; also pictured looking on from the audience, editorial staff members Jeff Franklin, Lorraine Robinson, Liza Wieland, and (standing) Bauer**

ABOVE CENTER ***NCLR* Art Editor Diane Rodman at the Eastern North Carolina Literary Homecoming at ECU, 23 Sept. 2011**

ABOVE BOTTOM **2012–13 *NCLR* interns Justine McClarren, Margaret (Maggie) Steinhauer, and Rachel Stanley with the editor at the ECU graduation, Greenville, NC, Dec. 2013**

COURTESY OF EMILY GARDINER

through editing. The undergraduate interns and graduate student editorial assistants are also largely responsible for finding images for all of the book reviews. We rarely use the author's book jacket photo or the book jacket itself. Most reviews use those. We seek photographs of the author reading somewhere here in North Carolina, preferably at one of our independent bookstore vendors or at one of the many literary events here in North Carolina. Or, if the book is historical fiction, they are advised to find a relevant historical photograph; if it is a memoir, to get a photograph of the author that relates to some event in his or her life that is focused on in the review; if place is a particular focus of the book, we might just include photographs of the setting.

Do you feel that pairing visual art and literature is yet another way to highlight the creativity and talent of the state's many artists?

Yes, especially since Diane joined the staff and with her work brought to my attention how talented the state's visual artists are (and, like the writers, how many there are), I've become almost as interested in publicizing their work as I am in the writers.

COURTESY OF ABIGAIL HENNON

In addition to NCLR*'s permanent staff, how do the students on the staff contribute to the content and design of the journal?*

In short, undergraduate interns and graduate editorial assistants do the day-to-day production work on the online and print issue content, including formatting and quote- and fact-checking and following up on the queries I mark as I edit. During this time, too, they are assigned with image searches for the book reviews, interviews, and literary criticism. They are also, by the way, largely responsible for managing submissions and maintaining the subscription records. During their period on staff, therefore, the students have some experience in a broad range of publication activities.

NCLR *also stands out among the region's and the nation's many journals in that it publishes critical and scholarly essays alongside fiction, creative nonfiction, and poetry. How and when did you decide to publish all of these forms of writing in a single journal?*

I think it became more academic when I became editor because I am a literary scholar, not a creative writer. Alex published interviews but not literary criticism. In fact, I submitted a critical article on Lee Smith's *Oral History* during graduate school in response to his call for submissions to the premiere issue of *NCLR*. Alex rejected it because it was literary criticism, which he explained in his rejection letter, as I

ABOVE TOP **Student staff members Will Eddins, Sidney Naron, Teresa Bryson, and Emily Gardiner at a presentation given by the art director about designing *NCLR*, ECU, Greenville, NC, 24 Sept. 2015**

ABOVE BOTTOM **2014–15 editorial assistants Brianne Holmes and Abigail Hennon in *NCLR*'s "back issue closet" (Watch assistant editor Randall Martoccia's short video inspired by Poe's "Cask of Amontillado" and this closet.)**

COURTESY OF MARGARET BAUER

recall, was not what he was looking for. The literary criticism we now publish serves, I think, to reintroduce forgotten writers who are now deceased, so they can't be interviewed. It also brings another level of critical attention to a writer to have his or her work explored in a scholarly article, which is something I've done myself for contemporary writers since my dissertation and first book on Ellen Gilchrist.[6] Such scholarship serves to introduce a writer's work to professors who then introduce it to classes of students.

What are the challenges of producing, simultaneously, a literary magazine and a scholarly journal? And what are the benefits?

The first answer that comes to mind is the impossibility of conveying what a *huge* production each issue is, how much time goes into the content. And before one issue goes to press, we've already begun on the next. So it is a year-round production, even though the academic year is August to May for most of the staff members. So for a couple of months a year at least, I am largely on my own.

The next thing that comes to mind is that the variety of our material means that we have to find a variety of experts to review our submissions to make publication recommendations. And also, we are now managing three writing competitions, so here again, as we wrap one up, we're launching the next one, and when the third one wraps up, we've got to get all of the works selected for publication through our significant production process. At the same time that we're managing these competitions, we're working on the other content in the issue, the interviews and literary criticism, which is in various stages of production and involves significant quote- and fact-checking, often multiple revisions, as well as research to find and get permission to publish the images. I cannot tell you how many times each story, poem, essay, review, critical article, and interview is read – over and over at each stage. And we edit all the way to the printer. As I mentioned earlier, we're perfectionists.

As for the benefits of being something of an amalgam, having a little bit of everything means that we have a broad readership, and I hope it means we're the go-to place to find out what North Carolina writers you should be reading. And I never get bored.

ABOVE **Bauer at the ECU English Department's graduation celebration with *NCLR* fall 2014 interns Stefani Glavin and Kami Wilson, Greenville, NC, 9 May 2015**

[6] Margaret Donovan Bauer, *The Fiction of Ellen Gilchrist* (Gainesville: UP of Florida, 1999). The essay on Oral History found its way into her book William Faulkner's Legacy: "what shadow, what stain, what mark" (UP of Florida, 2005).

FUTURE OF *NCLR*

Looking back on these first twenty-five years of NCLR, *what do you hope for its next twenty-five years?*

Put simply and frankly, an endowment. In this year of the twenty-fifth print issue and fifth online issue, we are launching a capital campaign with the goal of raising two million dollars in two years. The second year of the campaign will see the publication of my twentieth print issue as editor, and for those twenty years the management of *NCLR* has largely been a one-woman show. I have excellent help in the *NCLR* office from student staff members, but the undergraduate internship is a single semester and the graduate editorial assistants serve on *NCLR*'s staff no more than the two years that it takes to earn their master's degrees. So the only person who knows about the day-to-day business of producing *NCLR* and managing the sales and subscriptions is me. We are hoping to raise enough money to endow a position for a managing editor, which most comparable publications have. We certainly want *NCLR* to last another twenty-five years and then another twenty-five years and another. . . . ■

PHOTOGRAPH BY NICKI LEONE

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARGARET BAUER

ABOVE TOP **Bauer with Charles Frazier and Lee Smith, the "Literary Captains" of *NCLR*'s capital campaign (Here the writers co-sign a letter mailed out to North Carolina writers asking for their help to ensure another 25 years of *NCLR*.)**

ABOVE BOTTOM ***NCLR* display at the South Atlantic Modern Language Association convention in Durham, NC, 13–15 Nov. 2015**

ZACKARY VERNON grew up in Pawleys Island, SC, and earned a BA in English from Clemson University. He moved to North Carolina for the master's program in English at North Carolina State University, which he completed with a thesis on North Carolina poet and fiction writer Ron Rash. Vernon went on to earn his PhD in English from UNC Chapel Hill with a dissertation on literature and film of the Cold War era. In 2015, he joined the faculty of Appalachian State University as an Assistant Professor of Contemporary American and Southern literature, and he has recently contracted with the University of South Carolina Press to co-edit a book of scholarly essays on Rash. His previous contributions to *NCLR* include an interview with Ron Rash and Terry Roberts and an essay on Allan Gurganus, both in the 2014 print issue.

ANNIE FRAZIER grew up in Raleigh, NC, on her family's small horse farm and now lives in Florida where she attended New College of Florida in Sarasota to study ancient Greek language and literature. She is currently enrolled in the Spalding University low-residency MFA program. Her first published story, "Sakura," was a finalist in the 2013 Doris Betts Fiction prize competition and then published in *NCLR* 2014. She won 2nd place in the 2015 James Applewhite Poetry Prize competition, and that poem will be published in the 2016 print issue.

DONNA KAIN is an Associate Professor in the East Carolina University English Department and the editor of *Technical Communication Quarterly*, the journal of the Association of Teachers of Technical Writing. She has a PhD from Iowa State University.

COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Obsession: Series One **(3 of 3) (digital media epson archival inkjet print, 24x36) by Dana Ezzell Gay**

FINALIST, 2015 JAMES APPLEWHITE POETRY PRIZE

BY NANCY WOMACK

Poet as Stripper

It begins with a bump
or a grind in the mind,
sometimes lingering for
days before taking shape
with words, blocks of
black on white, or words
that dance around the page.

First drafts are often overdressed.
Too many accessories: shawls or scarves of
fuchsia-colored adjectives, purple ones,
or chartreuse; adverbial bracelets;
necklaces of prepositional phrases.

Then the striptease begins.
Take it off! Strip it down!
Discard the scarves; throw the
glittering baubles away.
Get rid of extraneous adjectives,
especially big fancy ones,
such as “extraneous,” or the
pretty ones like “glittering.”
Temptingly toss off the adverbs,
at least most of them.
Keep the nouns – the self – descriptive ones –
like “corsets” and “tassels.” And the verbs
that need no modifiers – the strong ones
like “bump” and “grind.”

COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Obsession: Series One **(1 of 3) (digital media epson archival inkjet print, 24x36) by Dana Ezzell Gay**

NANCY WOMACK is from Rutherfordton, NC, and is a retired educator who served as Dean of Arts and Sciences at Isothermal Community College. Her poems have been published in various journals and anthologies, including *The Widows' Handbook* (Kent State University Press, 2014).

Read more about *NCLR* Art Director **DANA EZZELL GAY** inside the front cover of this issue. These pieces were exhibited in the East Carolina University School of Art and Design 2015 Alumni Exhibition in the Gray Gallery on the ECU campus.

FINALIST, 2015 JAMES APPLEWHITE POETRY PRIZE

BY MARTY SILVERTHORNE

Roots in the Bible

Stalking through this Bible of numbers, births,
deaths, land bought, sold, some lost outright
in this book bound together with electrical tape,
I track my roots, nobody's safe. On the frontispiece
broken away from the binding is the scribble
of a historian, Aunt Clara, deaf mute, the only
one who could write, captured in ink: William
Robert Silverthorne married Elizabeth Avaline
Ange, Fredrick Simon Silverthorne married Sarah
Viola Roebuck who lived at the top of Doodle Hill.

Written in the margin near the list of stillborns
are Jasper and Fred, Fredrick Simon and Sarah's
only sons and their daughters: Clara Musette,
Beulah Mae, Melva (nicknamed Teeny), Evelyn
(nicknamed Tiny), Maudie Isolene, Francis,
and Dorothy. Scarlet fever scars the pages;
some died plain out of poverty. Here the tree
forks off in a new hand, a darker ink on yellowed
edges of this old Bible traces my father, Gene Long,
first born of Daisy Mae and Henry Jasper Leamon
The branches cannot bear the weight of more names.
The limbs break free, ink fades away.

COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

***Outcross*, 2013 (maple and mulberry limb, 44x140x24) by Jim Jacobs**

MARTY SILVERTHORNE earned degrees from St. Andrews Presbyterian College and East Carolina University. He has received the Bunn-McClelland Chapbook Award, the Sam Ragan Fine Arts Award, the Persephone Press Award, and a Poet Laureate award from the North Carolina Poetry Society, as well as regional art grants from the North Carolina Arts Council. He is the author of four chapbooks, and his poetry has appeared in several issues of *NCLR*, as well as *Tar River Poetry* and *Pembroke Magazine*, among other venues. Read another of his poems selected as a finalist for this competition in the 2016 print issue of *NCLR*.

JIM JACOBS is an Art Professor Emeritus at Weber State University in Ogden, UT. He received his BFA from Jacksonville University and his MFA in painting with a minor in wood design from East Carolina University. His work has been shown at the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, the Salt Lake Art Center, and Wellington B. Gray Gallery at ECU and is currently included in an exhibition at Rutgers University Newark. He is represented by Phillips Gallery in Salt Lake City. See more of his work on his website.

PHOTOGRAPH BY LUCAS CHURCH; COURTESY OF UNC PRESS

NORTH CAROLINA WRITERS ROOTED IN PLACE

a review by Joanne Joy

Marianne Gingher, ed. *Amazing Place: What North Carolina Means to Writers*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015.

Marianne Gingher begins this collection of personal narratives by quoting Eudora Welty: "Place is where we put our roots, wherever birth, chance, fate, or our traveling selves set us down" (1). It is a fitting introduction, given North Carolina's rich literary heritage, and reflects how the state offers the gift of place to writers, for both natives and those who are in the state for just a period of time. As Gingher points out, writers who have lived in North Carolina share "time spent soaking up the sensations of this place" (3), which inevitably finds a way from each one's heart onto the page. In this new collection, twenty-one writers influenced by diverse experiences from across the state explain how their geographic roots have shaped their craft. Established writers along with relative newcomers contribute accounts that are as varied as the state's geographic and cultural landscape. As a native North Carolinian, I especially appreciate the sincerity of the recollections as the writers share their profound experiences.

The book is divided into three sections, each representing the regions of the state: "The Mountains," "The Piedmont," and "Down East and the Coast." Gingher explains that her goal was to find out why writers with ties to North Carolina think that the state produces so many writers. She wanted to know why their roots in this soil, temporary or permanent, were influential and everlasting, so much so that they provide a baseline for reference in writing. Welty's belief that a writer's experience fundamentally influences point of view is illustrated time and again in each of these stories. Contributors cite a wide variety of experiences through true stories that reflect each one's unique voice. The pages are replete with details about influential educators, memories of family events, coming-of-age vignettes, the celebration of the power of nature, and homage paid to North Carolina writers who have come before. The timeline of these individual recollections span many decades, from Judy Goldman's account of shopping in uptown Charlotte during the mid-twentieth century to newcomer Stephanie Elizondo Griest's description of present-day Chapel Hill as a magical place. The writing is both entertaining and informative. Reading each narrative is like peering into a secret personal sphere of influence, yet they all

JOANNE JOY is a native of Charlotte, NC, and teaches in the Honors College at UNC Charlotte. She is currently working on a project to document and preserve the cultural history of family recipes across North Carolina.

MARIANNE GINGHER is the author of the novel *Bobby Rex's Greatest Hit* (Atheneum, 1986), which received the Sir Walter Raleigh Award for Fiction in 1987 and was made into a television movie, and a short story collection, *"Teen Angel" and Other Stories of Young Love* (Atheneum, 1988). Both of these books received ALA Notable and Best Book awards. She is also the author of two memoirs, *A Girl's Life: Horses, Boys, Weddings and Luck* (Louisiana State University Press, 2001; reviewed in *NCLR* 2002) and *Adventures in Pen Land: One Writer's Journey from Inklings to Ink* (University of Missouri Press, 2008; reviewed in *NCLR* 2010). Gingher is the editor of another collection of North Carolina writing, *Long Story Short: Flash Fiction by 65 of North Carolina's Finest Writers* (University of North Carolina Press, 2009). She is currently a professor at UNC Chapel Hill where she has been recognized for her teaching excellence.

ABOVE RIGHT **Marianne Gingher (standing) speaking at a book-launching event at the Motorco Music Hall in Durham; behind her on the stage, Michael McFee, Belle Boggs, Bland Simpson, Stephanie Griest, Michael Parker, Jill McCorkle, and Lee Smith**

ILLUSTRATION BY MARIANNE GINGHER

reflect the pull of North Carolina's history, culture, and landscape. Many of the essays are so relatable that the authors transport me into my own memories of growing up in North Carolina and prompt me to reflect on those fundamental experiences that have shaped my point of view.

North Carolina has long been heralded for producing some of the finest writers in the South, and Thomas Wolfe is arguably one of the most influential. Many of the contributors pay homage to Wolfe for embracing North Carolina as a muse but most importantly for grounding his prose in the North Carolina landscape and the place he called home. A native of the mountain region, Robert Morgan leads the collection with "Fertile North Carolina" by calling out the importance of Wolfe as an accomplished writer whose success has influenced young writers who have followed. Wolfe is also heralded by many throughout the collection as a writer whose sense of place – of home – in the mountains and later in the Piedmont, by way of Chapel Hill, was the backbone of his work.

Fred Chappell, who is also recognized repeatedly by contributors throughout for his service to students and friends during his tenure at UNC Greensboro, emphasizes "writing what you know" in his ever-brilliant self-deprecating essay, "100." He points out that our celebrated authors from the state are experts in the culture and the geography of their work. Sometimes enduring ribbing from his friends, Chappell admits that he sticks close to his native Western North Carolina dialect in his own speech to keep the "dialogue patterns secure in aural memory" (33) as he writes about the folkways of the Appalachians. Chappell's essay makes it obvious that he values voice as much as place. Since authenticity comes from understanding the culture that he is representing in his writing, Chappell describes the ease he feels about writing about the places he knows best – the Piedmont and, especially, the Appalachians, where "the mountains have seized upon me, and their spell is over me" (36).

The narrative style of Clyde Edgerton's essay, "My Mind Grinds the Graveyard," supports Chappell's sentiment that it's best to write from the heart. Edgerton is clever as he describes historical events around a graveyard near Umstead Park that are central to his family's storytelling past. He begins to detail the importance of the site, but we are soon tangled among many vines of memory, each intersecting and crossing over the one before. Edgerton uses this device as a perfect example of his explanation that memories like these "thread through my novels and short stories" (86), much like the tangled wisteria vines planted by his great-grandmother near that graveyard. And place for Edgerton, particularly this place of his past, is always where a story begins.

Another common theme throughout is the sense of community that North Carolina offers aspiring and established writers alike. A hub of this community, the town of Chapel Hill, has served as a springboard for some of the state's most successful writers. Celebrated author Lee Smith recounts an old adage in her narrative "Salad Days": "In Chapel Hill, throw a rock and you'll hit a writer" (70). Many of the state's most recognized writers have held academic positions on the campus of the University of North Carolina, cultivating a crop of budding wordsmiths each semester. But as influential as the long list of university professors is, Smith singles out highly regarded Southern literature scholar and professor Hugh Holman, who described the draw of the town as the ideal setting for writers. Smith quotes Holman, 'The primary thing that Chapel Hill gives those who come to be a part of it is the freedom to be themselves' (71). Smith herself describes it as "a town of the mind" (70). The Chapel Hill that many of the writers harken back to throughout the collection seems to support both of these assertions as they recall it as a place of transcendence.

Many of the contributors cite the landscape of the state itself as a muse. In "Relief," Michael McFee writes with passion about the impact of the mountains and hills of his roots in Buncombe County on his poetry: "The daily vertical movement of living at higher altitudes is not unlike the experience of writing a poem, which doesn't so much cross the page as descend it, in a kind

of back-and-forth dance" (58–59). In a poignant ode to the transformative power of nature, "Five Encounters with Vegetation," Will Blythe's "unstinting cacophony" (126) of cicadas, pinecones, leafy streets, sticks, lightening bugs, and red clay in the Piedmont assure him of home. He recalls his first encounter as a boy with the reality of his own eventual mortality, then later as nature plays an important role in his coming to terms with his mother's death. Bland Simpson rounds out the collection with "Water Everywhere," a tribute to the mystique of bodies of water throughout the state, but especially along the Outer Banks where "our many waters are so vast, their magnetism, their spell, their power is so sublime" (206). The influences of the natural world throughout the collection largely begin during youth at a time when memory takes hold.

Writers like Monique Truong, Ben Fountain, and Jill McCorkle write about experiences in North Carolina during these early formative years. Truong details her family's journey to Boiling Springs when she was eight years old as refugees of the Vietnam War. For her, place is not defined by the land of her birth, but rather by her family's good fortune and new beginning, which began in a small trailer in the Foothills. Her father's gift of a used history book called *North Carolina Parade: Stories of People and History* soon after the family settled has been a symbol of home for her ever since. Fountain's recollection of his granddaddy's woods draws the reader in as he describes a magical place on his grandfather's land in Eastern North Carolina. He fondly recalls those woods where he would spend time alone in his late childhood, walking the swampy acreage "out of an instinct that it held something that I needed to understand" (166). Those moments, along with his mother's decision to timber the land years after his grandfather's death, are deeply rooted in his writing. The pull of the landscape is ever-present for Fountain. In perhaps one of the most gripping lines in the collection, he ends his narrative with a reference to the time spent in these woods and its profound effect: "Whatever it was I found out there, I need it still" (176). The rawness of his statement about that place accurately describes the pull the state's landscape has on those who have found it to be formidable – we all need it still. McCorkle, also a native of Eastern North Carolina and long since a resident of Boston, writes about the effect of the dialect of her youth in "Writing by Ear," citing a line from a poem by Seamus Heaney: "*sing yourself to where the singing comes from*." She believes that singing comes from the beginnings of the sights and sounds of early youth that shape a person, flowing through writing as a natural rhythmic muse. Like Fred Chappell, McCorkle is largely influenced by those "auditory triggers" of home (197).

Those triggers and the roots that Welty wrote of begin at the surface then burrow down deeply for each of these writers. As Will Blythe writes, his roots in the Piedmont of North Carolina are part of "the South as the place that refuses to tell all that it knows" (127) and his greatest muse. Clyde Edgerton ends his narrative with the simple statement that explains what motivates writers in North Carolina to keep trying to find out what it knows. The mysteries that are hidden within the landscape, within family history, and with others who share a passion for the place are magnetic. It's far easier to settle down and let the "place" draw us in. That's when the magic begins, as Edgerton claims, "to have a place is to have the start of story" (86).

These contributors bring us stories within stories to attempt to shed light on the gifts of place that North Carolina brings to those who allow themselves to become immersed in them. Through expertly woven narratives typical of the style we expect of North Carolina writers, Marianne Gingher's collection of personal narratives take readers on a pleasurable journey across the state to view firsthand what each region continues to contribute to our literary heritage. ■

ILLUSTRATION BY MARIANNE GINGHER

JIM GRIMSLEY GETS SCHOOLED

a review by Alex Albright

Jim Grimsley. *How I Shed My Skin: Unlearning the Racist Lessons of a Southern Childhood*. Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 2015.

ALEX ALBRIGHT graduated with Graham High School's first completely integrated class in 1969. His book *The Forgotten First: B-1 and the Integration of the Modern Navy* (R.A. Fountain, 2013) was a finalist for the 2014 Montaigne Award. As founding editor of *NCLR*, he received the Best New Journal Award from the Council of Editors of Learned Journals and the R. Hunt Parker Awrd for significant contribution to North Carolina literature from the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association. Read more about him in the interview with him in *NCLR* 2002.

A native North Carolinian, **JIM GRIMSLEY** grew up in Pollocksville, NC, and attended UNC Chapel Hill where he received his BA in English. He now lives in Atlanta. Read more about him in the interview with him in *NCLR* 2009, which also includes an essay about his play *Mr. Universe* (7Stages Theater, 1987). Read a short story by this author in the 2016 print issue of *NCLR*.

The integration of public schools in Jones County produced only two minor incidents, but tensions around Pollocksville and Trenton were part of a regional sense that this final push toward full integration was poised dangerously close to violent racial confrontations. Conflicts throughout North Carolina closed schools and brought out the National Guard to keep and sometimes restore order. Klan activity was resurgent after integration became imminent with the threat, in 1968, that federal money would be withheld from public school systems that didn't completely integrate. In nearby Hyde County, protests by black citizens, mostly junior high and senior high school students, resulted in over a hundred arrests during the 1968–69 school year. David Cecelski's excellent study of the integration-based conflicts in Hyde County, *Along Freedom Road*, is a reminder of how bad it could have gotten anywhere.[1]

That not much happened in Jones County – short-lived walk-outs by black students in consecutive years – might have kept the integration narrative of its schools from being written. But Jim Grimsley attended public schools there during the last days of Jim Crow, the subsequent first pathetic attempts at integration brought on by the Freedom of Choice plan, and the complete integration of public schools that followed.

Grimsley's extraordinary memoir of that time, *How I Shed My Skin*, begins in August 1966 with a first day of school story that features Violet, Ursula, and Rhonda, the three black children selected to integrate Grimsley's sixth-grade classroom. Impulsively, even though he is not usually one to curse, he calls Violet, who had been seated behind him, a "black bitch," hoping "to make the boys at the back of the room laugh" (14). A pivotal scene in the author's life then unfolds:

> That moment inside my head rings down through the years so clearly. I was eleven years old, filled with a vague sense of purpose, and ready to do my part, though for what, I could not have said.
>
> The moment was clear, sunny. Mr. Vaughn had left us unattended for some reason, maybe to smoke a cigarette in the teachers' lounge. . . .
>
> Violet hardly even blinked. "You white cracker bitch," she said back to me, without hesitation, and cocked an eyebrow and clamped her jaw together.
>
> I sat dumbfounded. There had been no likelihood, in my fantasy, that she could speak back. A flush came to my face. (14–15)

Violet tells her young classmate, "Black is beautiful. I love my black skin. What do you think about that?" (15). Grimsley then brings the scene to a close:

> She had a voice so big it pushed me back into my desk. To make such a sound come out of herself caused her no self-consciousness. . . .
>
> She was real. Her voice was big and it reached inside me. (16)

In Jim Grimsley's world, Violet would stay quiet and accept his proclamation, because "she was supposed to be ashamed, she was supposed to duck her head or cringe or admit that I was right, that she had no business being in our white classroom. . . . That moment lingered in my head for the rest of the day" (15–16).

[1] David S. Cecelski, *Road: Hyde County, North Carolina, and the Fate of Black Schools in the South* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1994); subsequently cited parenthetically.

PHOTOGRAPH BY NANCY BARBEE

That one and a handful of other moments frozen from his Jones County life would wind up lingering in Grimsley's head for decades, during which he would become an award-winning playwright and novelist and a professor of creative writing at Emory University. In 2009, he was inducted as one of fifty active fellows in the Fellowship of Southern Writers.

The next day, when Violet asks, "You going to call me any black bitch again?" Grimsley says no, and as the day progressed, "I found ways to be friendly to her, my way of saying I was sorry, and she accepted them" as "school moved forward and the long days of heat melted us into a community halfheartedly united by sweat, learning, and puzzlement" directed at their teacher (19).

That first confrontation with Violet and her reactions – not only does she strike back verbally but "[s]he had not tattled" (16) – begin for Grimsley a recognizing of how racism had become a part of his world view without his even knowing it: "I was taught to believe in white superiority in small ways, by gentle people, who believed themselves to be sharing God's truth" (268–69). Without being told, he had become "a good little racist" who understood that integration "was against the good order of the world" (18, 17).

While Grimsley was learning his lessons in racism in Jones County, teenager Craig White was learning his in Burlington, where a race riot in the spring of 1969 would bring out the National Guard. White was still in high school when he told sports writer Pat Jordan that his had been "a typical white, middle-class, Southern upbringing. The only blacks I ever saw were the maid and her son. I used to play with him when I was small. I was very skinny then, and a coward with all my white friends, but I had enough courage to feel safe in ordering the maid's son around – even though he was bigger and tougher than me. I never actually knew why I could do that, I just knew I could, and for some reason he wouldn't retaliate."[2] Twenty years earlier, Lillian Smith had recalled the "haunted childhood" common to all white Southerners: "From the day I was born, I began to learn my lessons."[3] She explains, "I do not remember how or when, but by the time I had learned that God is love, that Jesus is his Son and came to give us more abundant life, that all men are brothers with a common Father, I also knew that I was better than a Negro, that all black folks have their place and must be kept in it . . . that a terrifying disaster would befall the South if ever I treated a Negro as my social equal" (Smith 28).

The adult world seems in most instances to have failed its students, but Violet, Ursula and Rhonda become a different kind of teacher for Grimsley, and they offer to him a new set of texts: *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines. *Ebony*, he notices, was designed to resemble *Look* or *Life*, which amazes him: "I had never dreamed that black people had their own magazines" (30). In this discovery that blacks "had created a world within my world, and all the categories of my world were repeated there . . . [t]he shell of the all-white world had cracked, and color had begun to spill throughout" (31, 34).

This and other passages echo Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, sometimes overtly: Violet "cracked open the invisibility barrier right away" (272). Those living in the local black neighborhood, Grimsley writes, "were invisible to me. . . . No part of my brain had been trained to see black faces or to try to know them" (114) – that is, until Violet and her friends entered his sixth-grade classroom. His recognition that blacks "had their own magazines" and the stories he tells about the local cobbler and Miss Ruthie, maid to a local white family, also illustrate W.E.B. DuBois's idea that black Americans lived behind the veil, unseen by whites who were thus unable to know or dream the "full power" of life that resided there. It was only when blacks came out from behind the veil, Du Bois insists, and entered the white-dominant world, for matters of economy

ABOVE **Jim Grimsley with his high school classmate Rose Bell (called Violet in the memoir) at a reading at the Trenton Public Library, 17 Sept. 2015**

[2] Quoted in Pat Jordan, *Black Coach* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1971) 70–71.

[3] Lillian Smith, *Killers of the Dream*, 1949, rev. and enlarged ed. (New York: Norton, 1961) 25, 29; subsequently cited parenthetically.

most often, that they were seen.[4] "Like the shoe repair man," Grimsley writes, "Miss Ruthie's narrative had lifted her out of invisibility in my eyes. She had some connection to the white world and thus I had a reason to know her and to remember her" (125).

But Violet and her friends were a new generation of black Americans. They demanded to be seen, heard, and acknowledged. Appropriately, frozen moments with Violet bookend Grimsley's book. Near its end, in their senior year, she stars in the school chorus production, especially in singing Myrna Summers's "God Gave Me a Song": "The song featured a simple, passionate lyric; the choir was powerful and clear, with Violet singing the lead in a voice that simply swelled around us, ringing from the girders of the gym roof. . . . Placed at the center of the choir, Violet's round face, small chin, and intense eyes gave over to the song, the sound pouring out of her like a force" (224).

How I Shed My Skin includes a brief but thorough and provocative historical portrait of our region and the South. It incorporates Grimsley's own family history and the lands they populate, mostly in Jones County, where "old houses fell down into heaps of lumber, overgrown with weeds and vines, while next door, or in the backyard, the family parked a mobile home or built a new cinderblock house. Yards overflowed with old appliances and rusted cars. Torn screens hung from porches on a house crying for paint, unlikely to be soothed" (69).

Grimsley, the narrator of this tale, is aware and alert, a shy intellectual raised mostly by his mother in a childhood also marked by an alcoholic father, "a wife-beater, and a schizophrenic descending gradually into madness . . . in every case a violent man" (68, 105). Young Grimsley's hemophilia has already created a barrier between him and rough-housing boys: by seventh grade, we learn, he was "the sissy who had mostly girls and misfits for friends" (156). Early on, he's only obliquely aware of an attraction to boys that in high school is more pronounced, but because of integration, safer: "In an all-white high school, the fact that I was queer would have caused me problems, and likely I would have started to date a girl, pretending to love her in order to provide a cover for myself. But the fact that the social core of our school had been dismantled prevented the kinds of harassment I might have experienced otherwise" (198). It helps his perspective and consciousness to recognize that the "white narrative of the world excluded people with desires like mine, and this prevented my believing that their ideas applied to me" (150). That's the mature Grimsley speaking, though, about a boy who in high school "had adapted myself to hiding, and my only real ambition for high school, and for Jones County, was to survive and escape" (226).

Although most of the book is about "unlearning the racist lessons of a Southern childhood," background passages recount several personal incidents that show how he had learned to be a racist in small moments, some dramatic but others subtler and meant to sear the message of white supremacy into his being. In one, he's publicly reprimanded by a white woman he hardly knows for talking to a black girl, for whom "the moment was brutal and direct. She was dismissed as a subhuman, a creature to be avoided" (120). But our narrator is no hero: even though he continues to talk to her for a few minutes, to defy the busybody, he will never speak to the young girl again.

This is memoir as it's supposed to be done but rarely is: a carefully crafted and honest looking back at select moments from a past, with the intent of understanding how they connect into a larger pattern and have impacted a mature narrator. It's built around a handful of frozen moments that Grimsley details beautifully, then meditates upon wisely, and then connects to larger narrative patterns. It so thoroughly evokes the time that readers cannot help but become part of this little Eastern Carolina world as it verges on shattering – but doesn't! – in the face of imminent change. In his meditations, Grimsley employs a speculative voice to maximum effect as he plays with the fallibility of memory and the emotional power of what stays "remembered." He captures a child's and then an adolescent's point of view even as he infuses those perspectives with the eye of an artist, the language of a poet, the ear for dialogue and dialect of a dramatist, and the wisdom of a philosopher.

During Grimsley's high school years, most of his white classmates attended a newly constructed private academy: "Miserly white Jones County families," he writes, "somehow scraped

[4] W.E.B DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (Chicago: McClurg, 1904) 152.

together the resources to fund academies for the education of their children, designed to protect them from associating with black children" (165). Grimsley and the few other whites whose families could not afford it become a minority that has to ride in the back of the school bus. The flight to a quickly constructed academy, he wryly notes, divided "what had appeared to be one race" into two: "those white people who would attend public schools, and those who refused" (135). Ultimately, this forces him to comment on a "huddle of white boys laughing about the return of segregation" that will come when George Wallace is elected president: "Those are not my people" (147), and gradually he begins to think of white people as "'they' rather than 'we'" (154).

Still, there are moments when the races mix easily, differences seemingly forgotten: Friday night football games and at the high school's smoking patio, which Grimsley first turns into cultural criticism before demonstrating a stunning visual memory.

> **I had escaped any desire to inhale nicotine, but a large percentage of my schoolmates were smokers, or had friends who smoked, making the patio a lively place. This was the era in which the link between tobacco and cancer was being made explicit, but hardly anyone cared. Many of the students came from families who raised tobacco, or who worked in tobacco in some fashion, its being a reliable and profitable crop. Cancer was our business and our livelihood; tobacco money flowed through the pockets of all our parents one way or another. . . .**
>
> **The patio was a cool place to spend the minutes after we scraped our plates and separated our silverware from plasticware at the dishwashing station. We sat on picnic tables or stood near them, fists shoved into jeans, our hair longer than our parents', even in rural North Carolina where no one wanted to be thought a hippy. We gazed across the flat field adjacent to the school, across the broken cornstalks to a distant line of hedge and a barrier of sentinel pines. (230–31)**

During the time it took to smoke a cigarette or two, race didn't matter. But too often it did, then, as it does too often and unnecessarily, now.

It's easy to forget, so many years after the fact, that these were children being used as pawns in a seemingly never ending move toward full integration, but Grimsley makes it clear: "We were two children," he writes of his first confrontation with Violet, "having an odd kind of fight" (16). She and her friends, had they lived in nearby Hyde County, would likely have been among the kids arrested for "skipping rope on the highway" in one protest and jailed at Snow Hill, over a hundred miles away from their parents (Cecelski 79).

But left to their own devices, these Jones County children find a way to reconcile their differences, to become friends. In the end, Grimsley demonstrates the resiliency of kids to work things out, if adults just wouldn't meddle, wouldn't impose their worldview and narrative on their children: "The school itself, and the community behind it, made no effort to teach us how to see past our differences. Adults were silent on the subject of what it might mean to be black and white together, at least in public. In private, our parents quietly encouraged adherence to some version of the color line" (169). And then later, he writes, "Lawyers, judges, adults declared that the days of separate schools were over, but we were the ones who took the next step" (275). He explains,

PHOTOGRAPH BY NANCY BARBEE

> **White people declared that the South would rise again. Black people raised one fist and chanted for Black Power: Somehow we negotiated a space between those poles and learned to sit in classrooms together. In some cases we made friendships. Some of us fell in love. The heavens neither trembled nor opened, nor did earthquakes crack the ground. God's wrath failed to show itself, and the mixing of the races, as it turned out, was simply one more change that we learned to accept, whether happily or grudgingly. We learned to live in the presence of one another. (274–75)**

For the kids who went away to private academies designed to dodge integration, learning "to live in the presence of one another" was impossible. It remains so today, even as we resegregate our public schools in an oh-so-familiar way, with private academies funded by "vouchers" that take money meant for our public schools. ■

ABOVE RIGHT **Jim Grimsley reading from this memoir at the Trenton Public Library in Jones County, 17 Sept. 2015**

LESSONS IN PERSPECTIVE

a review by Grace Horne

Michael White. *Travels in Vermeer: A Memoir.* New York: Persea Books, 2015.

Part travelogue, part memoir, and part art history and analysis, *Travels in Vermeer* by poet Michael White revisits and examines White's demons – abandonment, addiction, loss, and grief – and shares his discovery of the consoling and healing power of art during a year-long journey to view twenty-four paintings by Johannes Vermeer. White travels to Amsterdam on spring break to put an "ocean behind" him and the nastiness of a pending divorce and begins what he labels his "transformation . . . courtesy of Johannes Vermeer" (13). This transformation begins after viewing Vermeer's *The Milkmaid*, housed in the Rijksmuseum, where White experiences "a shiver all the way up and down [his] spine" and intuits that Vermeer's paintings can help him make meaning of his unhinged life (20). Departing the Rijksmuseum, White outlines an itinerary to visit the seven other museums where the additional Vermeers are on view.

As White journeys to The Hague, Washington, DC, New York, and London to see the paintings that will "transform" him, he obsessively prepares to view each painting by reading and studying the experts on Vermeer, most notably, Sir Lawrence Gowing, Kees Kaldenbach, and Edward Snow. From these experts, White learns about the technical elements of the paintings, such as how Vermeer achieved the luminous quality associated with his paintings as well as how Vermeer transports viewers with his use of perspective. Ultimately, perspective seems to have the strongest hold on White's imagination and

COURTESY OF MICHAEL WHITE

is one of many reasons for the "uncanny solace" (66) of Vermeer's figures and interiors.

Between visits to museums, we accompany White as he reflects on his disrupted childhood, his stint in the Navy, his recognition of and his recovery from alcoholism, his first wife's death, and the relationship of these life events to his perceptions about the power of love and art and of the mystery of Vermeer's paintings, which "broke over [him] like a wave, mercy and equipoise, hit dead center in a soul in serious need of them" (65). This need inspires intense reactions to most of the paintings. Ironically or not, White has the most complicated reactions to the females in the paintings, as if studying them for clues to his own problematic histories with women.

Along White's journey, we are invited to view the paintings with him and his descriptions of them are evocative and detailed. In language that has been described as "lyrical" and "sensuous,"[1] White's descriptions most often focus

GRACE HORNE has a BA in English from UNC Chapel Hill and an MA from East Carolina University where she has taught English since 2004.

MICHAEL WHITE, currently head of the MFA Program at UNC Wilmington, has published four volumes of poetry, *Vermeer in Hell* (Persea Books, 2014), *Re-entry* (U of North Texas P, 2006; reviewed in *NCLR* 2007), *Palma Cathedral* (UP of Colorado, 1998; reviewed in *NCLR* 1999), and *The Island* (Copper Canyon Press, 1993). His honors include the Lexi Rudnitsky Editor's Prize, the Vassar Miller Prize, and the Colorado Prize for Poetry. And this new memoir was among the long-list finalists for the National Book Award. Read some of is poetry in *NCLR* 2004 and 2009.

ABOVE RIGHT **Michael White in front of one of two Vermeers at the Louvre in Paris, France, July 2014**

[1] "A Memoir Exploring How Johannes Vermeer's Paintings Bestow Bountiful Gifts," *Kirkus Reviews* 20 Nov 2014: web.

on the play of light and shadow, on colors, especially Vermeer's preference for blues and yellows, and the position of the assumed viewer of each painting's vignette. His attention is on each painting's nuances: the texture and folds of the subject's linen cap in *Woman Holding a Balance*, the flow of light through the windows in *Officer with Laughing Girl,* the position of the handle on the pitcher in *The Music Lesson,* and the thickness of the instrument's strings in *The Guitar Player.* Without the benefit of reproductions of the paintings, we must rely on White's verbal acuity to capture and represent them to us, and he does so lovingly, attentively but not sentimentally. Indeed, his descriptions inspire us to see beyond the paintings and speculate about what lies outside of our view.

White's memoir, as the title implies, is about experiencing the Vermeers; his travels are to immerse himself in these paintings, not simply to see them; the paintings – what they capture and what they present – are the destinations. Time is suspended while he is absorbed by the repeated motifs, figures, and colors of Vermeer's art and the reactions they provoke: shock at the directness of the young woman's gaze in *Girl Interrupted in Her Music*; unease at the implied threat in *Officer with Laughing Girl*. Moreover, these destinations are imbued with the power of healing – not unlike the healing and recovery that White experiences in his AA meetings and sponsorships. With each stage of his travels, White's narrative reveals details of his own history that inform his particular responses to the paintings. When White describes the results of poor conservation of several Vermeer paintings, such as *Woman with Lute* or *The Girl with a Pearl Earring*, as highlighting "damages [that] can also be a testament to the power of the original version, the deepest source of beauty" (102), he could be commenting on his own fragile state which these paintings help him recognize and acknowledge. Furthermore, White acknowledges that he will not always need or want the experiences and reactions inspired by this year-long journey of (self) discovery, but from them, White emerges with two volumes – a book of poems titled *Vermeer in Hell* and this memoir – both of which capture the luminous beauty and mystery of Vermeer's paintings as well as a deeper understanding of himself.

White's book has been described by one reviewer as "a sort of literary nesting doll"[2] that surprises readers with its relatively ordinary story: a man coping with the end of a marriage and the emotional devastation that follows. However, it's White's honest, not hyped presentation that helps us understand his grief, how he responds to his grief, and how he transforms his grief through his pilgrimage to view Vermeer's paintings that makes this an extraordinary story. ■

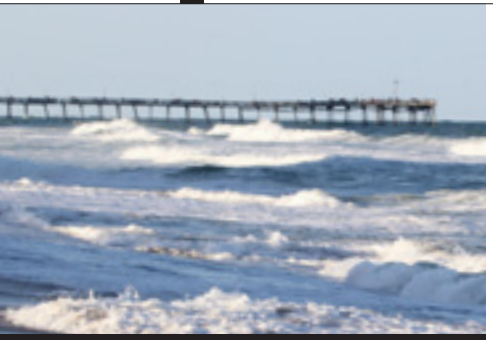
[2] Robert Siegel, "Enigmatic Interiors: On Love, Death, Divorce, and Michael White's New *Travels in Vermeer*," *Los Angeles Review of Books* 19 June 2015: web.

CLYDE EDGERTON RECEIVES THOMAS WOLFE PRIZE

North Carolina native Clyde Edgerton has added the Thomas Wolfe Prize to his list of honors, which already includes the Lyndhurst Prize, a Guggenheim Fellowship, the North Carolina Award for Literature, and five notable book awards from the *New York Times*. Edgerton received his BA in English from UNC Chapel Hill and taught high school English for a time. He is the author of ten novels, three of which have been made into movies. Edgerton is currently the Thomas S. Kenan III professor of Creative Writing at UNC Wilmington. Read more about this award-winning writer in the two interviews with him in *NCLR* 2003 and in an interview forthcoming in 2017, in which George Hovis will talk with this multi-talented North Carolina writer about his music and painting, for the special feature section on North Carolina literature and the other arts. ■

PHOTOGRAPH BY GRAHAM TERHUNE PHOTOGRAPHY

ABOVE **Clyde Edgerton giving his Wolfe Prize lecture, Chapel Hill, 6 Oct. 2015**



JUST SAY PLEASE

a review by
James W. Clark, Jr.

David Payne. *Barefoot to Avalon: A Brother's Story*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2015.

There came a day when David Payne's *big little* brother George A. outran him from the family's fabled Four Roses cottage at Nags Head to the storm damaged Avalon Pier at Kill Devil Hills on North Carolina's Outer Banks. This foot race provides the title of this intentionally disturbing, confessional memoir published in 2015 as *Barefoot to Avalon: A Brother's Story*. Another reversal, one more poignant than George A.'s beating David to Avalon, brings the new book to its conclusion. David's young son Will assumes the role of an adult and suggests to his tipsy daddy that he should say, "'Would you *mind* taking your lunch box out of your backpack, *please*?' instead of 'Take your lunch box out *now!*'" (286). Stunned, David follows the advice of his kid who is fed up with command after command, especially drunken ones. So David also says *please* to Grace, his daughter. This simple strategy is so successful Daddy does not know what to make of it. He writes, "Is saying 'pretty please' the secret of the universe, the one I've somehow missed?" (287).

David Payne has, in fact, missed very little, even though much of what he has experienced is sordid and depressing, beginning early with his Prufrockian father Bill and well-connected mother Margaret in their world of mirrors. He calls the resulting family sickness "hostile dependency." In other words, "the weak and sick and injured depend upon and hold the strong ones hostage, and the strong ones, in the name of goodness and self-sacrifice, help the weak and disable them entirely" (226).

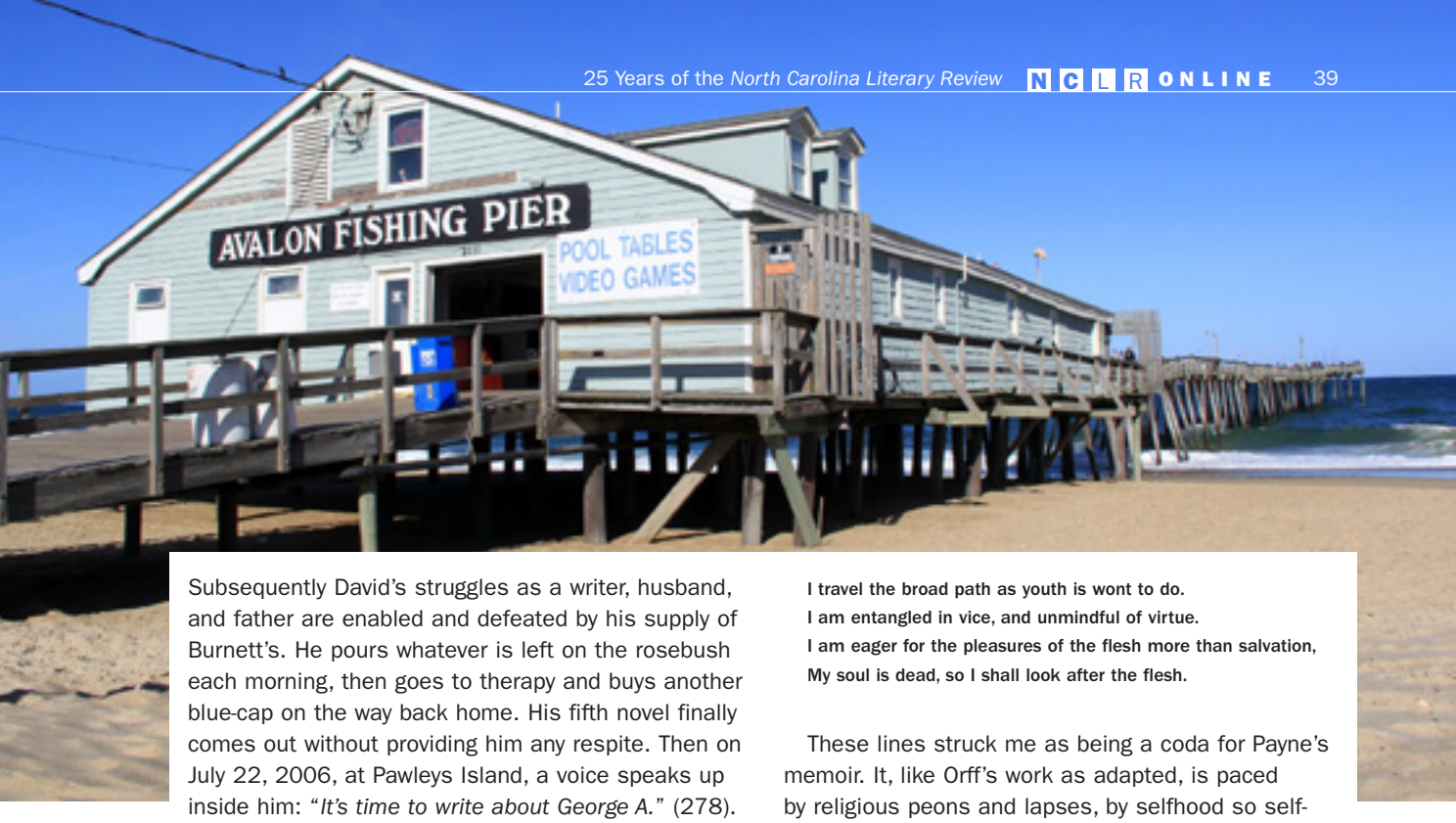
Most people would be too ashamed to write of family troubles so candidly. Payne's Henderson, NC, family trees, his brother's death in a suspicious truck accident on I-81 in 2000, his varied love affairs and first marriage, for instance, are hardly balanced by his excellent education in New England and Chapel Hill, followed by his eventual careers as writing teacher and the author of five semi-autobiographical novels. Four of them – *Confessions of a Taoist on Wall Street* (1984), *Early From the Dance* (1989), *Ruin Creek* (1993), and *Gravesend Light* (2000) – become richer achievements with *Barefoot to Avalon* as background.

Payne's intensity of style and deft character development in fiction and nonfiction consume the reader, who may put any of these books aside to reflect, ponder, and relax. Writer and reader become overwhelmed. For example, the spree of creativity that led to Payne's completion of the "bag of rocks" that became *Confessions* lasted from September 1 until Christmas, 1982 – fifteen weeks of privation and often frigid work at Four Roses at Nags Head. He had not known before that such a state existed. It felt, he writes, "as good as love and conveniently does not require the presence of another" person (205). During this binge of writing he left the real world and did not find it easy or even want to come back to reality.

He later likened his state of being to the hypomania from which George A. suffered personally and professionally from time to time before his tragic death. During the fall of many years, this family inclination, like alcoholism and suicide, was in season for both brothers as it had been for their father. Intensifying it all, George A.'s very troubled adult life ended while he was helping David move back to North Carolina from Vermont in November, 2000.

North Carolina State University Professor Emeritus **JAMES W. CLARK, JR.** spent his childhood in rural Warren County, NC,, where he was very active in the North Carolina 4-H program; his continued service was recognized by the 2011 North Carolina 4-H Lifetime Achievement Award. He has served, increasingly so after his retirement in 2005, on various boards and in many communities and organizations. Currently he is the President of both the Paul Green Foundation and the North Caroliniana Society. Read more about James W. Clark in an interview in *NCLR* 2003, and read his interview with William Price, talking about Reynolds Price, in this issue and the 2016 print issue.

North Carolina native **DAVID PAYNE** has written five novels, most recently *Back to Wando Passo* (Harper Collins, 2009). A UNC Chapel Hill alumnus, he has taught at Bennington, Duke, and Hollins and is a founding faculty member in the Queens University MFA program. Read more about him on his author website.



Subsequently David's struggles as a writer, husband, and father are enabled and defeated by his supply of Burnett's. He pours whatever is left on the rosebush each morning, then goes to therapy and buys another blue-cap on the way back home. His fifth novel finally comes out without providing him any respite. Then on July 22, 2006, at Pawleys Island, a voice speaks up inside him: "*It's time to write about George A.*" (278).

The resulting memoir is organized in six dated parts out of chronological order, plus a prologue and epilogue. The author's Episcopalian upbringing and his deep personal admiration of T.S. Eliot, especially his *Four Quartets*, inform the whole, in addition to borrowings from the Old and New Testaments, Shakespeare, Tolstoy, Byron, Melville, Jung, Frost, Faulkner, Philip Roth, and James Seay. David Payne also dwells in detail on his long love affair with Latin grammar.Always more intellectual than his late, athletic brother, David is the studious Payne who judges some of his female companions by their tolerance of his academic appetites. Not to the exclusion of sex, exactly, but, in the long run, maybe it was a mistake not to have kept the grammar book open. Conjugation got out of hand again and again, as did the vodka and other things.

When I was slowly making my way through *Barefoot to Avalon* this summer during two weeks at Chautauqua in western New York, I needed a respite. I was fortunate to experience one evening a new interpretation of Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana*. In addition to featuring North Carolina's frisky Charlotte Ballet, it included special passages spoken to the accompaniment of early music specialists (each member of the audience was provided with a full script). Wearing a monk's robe, coordinator Wayne Hankin offered this personal confession in a tavern scene:

I travel the broad path as youth is wont to do.
I am entangled in vice, and unmindful of virtue.
I am eager for the pleasures of the flesh more than salvation,
My soul is dead, so I shall look after the flesh.

These lines struck me as being a coda for Payne's memoir. It, like Orff's work as adapted, is paced by religious peons and lapses, by selfhood so self-serving as to be pitiful. Besides looking after his flesh, David Payne's foulest burden is his fear of ancestry – being caught forever in the "like father, like son" trap. Far down the future he sees his son as well as his daughter in that same snare. "Please, Daddy," he must wish for them, "not us too."

David Payne's memoir of numerous footprints and forebears also includes family caravans from Henderson to Nags Head, photographs old and new, and ritualized familial hugs. Whenever David and George A. embrace, they give each other two claps on the back. They are travelling in a caravan when George A. wrecks and dies at the scene. Leading the way, David had had his big little brother in his side- and rearview mirrors almost every mile of the way since leaving Vermont – to no avail. But *Barefoot to Avalon* eventually won its race with cheap vodka, and David Payne learned the power of "Please." ■

PHOTOGRAPHS BY SANDY CARAWAN

ABOVE **Avalon Pier and** RIGHT **Four Roses Cottage in Kill Devil Hills, NC (*NCLR* thanks former intern Sandy Carawan for making a special trip to take these photographs for us.)**

A GLIMPSE of "these extraordinary Price brothers"

James W. Clark, Jr. interviews William S. Price, Jr.

Notes contributed by the *NCLR* staff

COURTESY OF WILLIAM S. PRICE, JR.

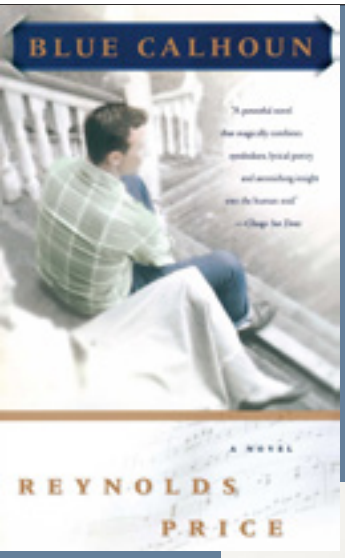
Both of us, Bill Price and Jim Clark, call Warren County, North Carolina, home. We're conducting this conversation in Bill's townhouse in Raleigh during January/February, 2015. Living in Raleigh for years, we are retired from careers as state employees. William Price is Director Emeritus of the North Carolina Division of Archives and History; I am English Professor Emeritus at North Carolina State University. Our focus now is the life and writings of Reynolds Price (1933–2011) in relation to his family, especially brother Bill and their parents. When distinguished historian H.G. Jones heard about our plan, he stated: "I have been unable to think of another pair of siblings that reach the prominence in North Carolina's literary/historical heritage as do Reynolds Price and William S. Price, Jr."

Reynolds is the better known of these extraordinary Price brothers. His thirty-nine books, including a posthumous memoir with an afterword by his brother, reveal an astonishing mastery of literary forms. No other North Carolina author has ever exhibited greater acuity in long and short fiction and nonfiction, drama, poetry, social and biblical commentary, published notebooks, and four volumes of memoir. With a sharp eye for family dynamics and a forgiving heart, a stoutly religious character as well as a gristly funny bone, Reynolds remained a bachelor and did not belong to a church when he grew up. After age fifty, when a tumor was removed from his spine, this Rhodes Scholar and James B. Duke Professor lived in constant pain and used a wheelchair but wrote and taught routinely until the fall before he died early in 2011. The special devotion of William to Reynolds throughout this era of their long and happy brotherhood is a model to cherish, even beyond their professional accomplishments.

ABOVE **Bill Price (holding a portrait of his brother painted by Will Wilson) with his interviewer, Jim Clark, and his daughter, Memsy Price, 2015**

JAMES W. CLARK, JR. is currently serving as President of both the North Caroliniana Society and the Paul Green Foundation. His honors include the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association's R. Hunt Parker lifetime achievment award for his contribution to the preservation of North Carolina literature, for which he was also recognized as an honoree at the 2015 North Carolina Writers Conference (for more about him, watch and read the tributes at this event).

WILLIAM S. PRICE, JR. earned a BA from Duke University and his PhD from UNC Chapel Hill and was a Kenan Professor of History at Meredith College. He co-edited with Jack Claiborne *Discovering North Carolina: A Tar Heel Reader* (University of North Carolina Press, 1991).



COURTESY OF SIMON & SCHUSTER .BIZ

COURTESY OF SIMON & SCHUSTER .BIZ

Maya
by Reynolds Price

Found this note of Einstein's, late
In his life on an old friend's death –
This death
Signifies nothing. For us believing
Physicists, the distinction between past, present
And future is an illusion, even if a stubborn
One.

In adolescence I wrote him
More than once – would he sign a portrait
Drawing I sent?
No answer then;
Now this old-man outright claim,
More useful.

Editor's Note: This interview is part of *A Small Circle: Will, Elizabeth, Reynolds, and Bill Price*, a book project William Price intends to publish in limited edition, which will include his full-length interview with James Clark, as well as essays by both brothers, William Price's daughter Memsy, and Clark. *NCLR* readers are invited to read more of Professors Clark and Price talking about Reynolds Price and his literary and academic career in the 2016 print issue, *NCLR* 25, in anticipation of which, we include here another excerpt of James Clark's interview with William Price, this one selected by *NCLR* 2015–2016 editorial assistant Teresa Bryson. The interview excerpts have been edited for clarity, focus, and flow, with care to remain true to the voices and intentions of the speakers.

JAMES CLARK: *Let's talk about the corpus of your brother's writing career. Perhaps you know if Reynolds had a favorite among his many books of fiction.*

BILL PRICE: Well, you got different answers at different times you would ask him throughout his career. I remember at one point *Love and Work* was his favorite of his books. Near the end of his life, and to the last of it as far as I know, *Blue Calhoun* was his favorite book. And he maintained a very strong attachment to that novel, and even – well as I said, even until the last that remained his favorite. Of his nonfiction works, that really was sort of a situation where the last one he wrote was pretty much what his favorite was, and in that sense, I guess he would say *Ardent Spirits*, although he had enormous affection for *Clear Pictures*.[1]

Something else comes to mind that doesn't necessarily fall into the category of favorite. It's too brief to be a favorite, but this poem had once been enormously important to him. Reynolds specified it in a document that he left behind for me, my eyes only, at his death. It was sealed in an envelope signed across the seal for me to open at his death. "WSP only at my death," it said on the face of it. I opened it in 2011 shortly after he died; he had written it in 1991. It contained directions for his sense of what his tombstone should be, plus suggestions if there were to be a service at Duke Chapel – what form it might take. And he requested that a woman who was a professional actress and a friend of his read at his service a poem of his called "Maya."[2] It's a very brief poem, built around a statement by Albert Einstein about the inability of science to understand mystery. He wanted that poem read, but I considered that what he had written in 1991 had been cancelled out by a conversation I had with him not long before he died in January 2011, a conversation in which I asked him what his final wishes were, and he told me. In some ways I think that Reynolds didn't even remember that he had written this 1991 document, number one, and I was unaware of it before he died. Number two, the idea of a tombstone was done away with because Reynolds wanted to be cremated; and then he told me about

[1] Reynolds Price, *Love and Work* (New York: Atheneum, 1968); *Blue Calhoun* (New York: Scribner, 1992); *Ardent Spirits: Leaving Home, Coming Back* (New York: Scribner, 2009); *Clear Pictures: First Loves, First Guides* (New York: Scribner, 1989).

[2] Price's "Maya" was first collected in his *The Use of Fire* (New York: Atheneum, 1990) 107.

COURTESY OF WILLIAM S. PRICE, JR.

a marker he wanted after the scattering of his ashes on Hawk Hill in Orange County where he had lived for decades. So far as I was concerned, that negated that particular request. I think you're the first person I ever mentioned this to. I don't even remember telling my wife Pia about it.

By the way, Reynolds loved Pia, and Pia loved Reynolds. Pia's was one of the two dozen faces on the wall of heros next to his bed. Pia knew Reynolds was gay before I did; women are so much more perceptive than most men. Pia was enormously helpful to him in periods of his illness and would always come up with little things that would help when the rest of us were floundering about. Remember she had been his student when she was a sophomore at Duke. She had had him as a teacher, and as I said, I don't think I told Pia about "Maya." Maybe she'd correct me if she were here, but I don't want this session to get by without my mentioning the importance of her in his life and his acknowledgement of how important she was. And he dearly loved her Danish mother. Reynolds once told Pia's middle brother on a visit that he had made to Reynolds about a year before Reyn died, that Pia's mother, Inger Kruse Tavernise, was the kindest person he had ever known. And I think that's true, and Pia has a lot of that in her.

DURWOOD BARBOUR COLLECTION OF NORTH CAROLINA POSTCARDS (P077); COURTESY OF NORTH CAROLINA COLLECTION PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVES, WILSON LIBRARY, UNC-CHAPEL HILL

One of the things that struck me when I first began to read his fiction was his interest in writing stories related to camping. There are the stories "Michael Egerton" and "The Names and Faces of Heroes." There is the novel The Tongues of Angels, *which has to do with camping in the mountains near Asheville.*[3] *Did Reynolds enjoy camping? You've spoken already of an excursion to White Lake, but did he go to camp willingly as a kid?*

In a word, no. As Reynolds referred to himself, "I am the Great Indoorsman." But when he had gone away for a week-long visit to a camp, or maybe even two weeks – I can't remember, I was quite young – Camp Vade Mecum in Stokes County, North Carolina, I went with Mom and Dad to pick him up. I guess he was about twelve then. I would have been four, and I remember he was out on a playing field when we arrived, raking what must have

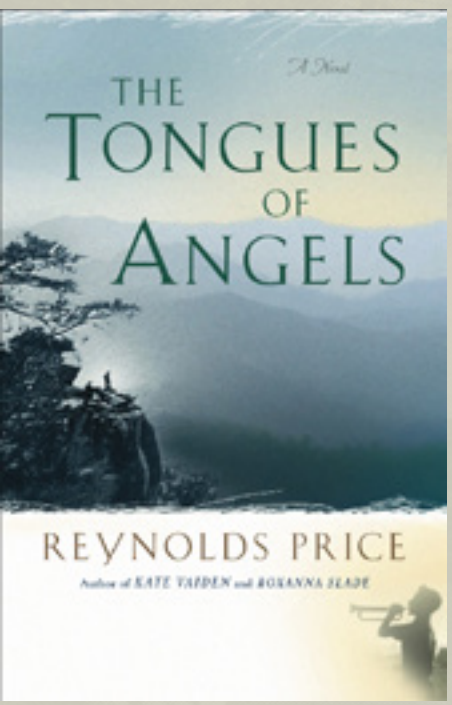
ABOVE TOP **Reynolds Price (right) celebrating his sixtieth birthday with his brother, William, and (left to right) Bill Price's daughters, Memsy and Katie; Reynolds's favorite cousin, Marcia Drake Bennett; and Bill's wife, Pia**

ABOVE BOTTOM **Postcard of the spring and pavillion at the Vade Mecum Springs resort, which later became the site of Camp Vade Mecum**

[3] "Michael Egerton" and "The Names and Faces of Heroes" were originally included in *The Names and Faces of Heroes* (New York: Antheneum, 1963); both stories are also in Price's *Collected Stories* (New York: Scribner, 1993); *Tongues of Angels: A Novel* (New York: Scribner, 1990).

been dirt on a baseball diamond or something like that. He saw us and dropped the rake and came racing to the car. He was so glad to see us and so glad to be on his last day of camp.

I didn't realize until many, many years later that Reynolds was chosen the outstanding camper at Vade Mecum that summer. He said he was miserable; he felt left out of things by more competent boys who were better at sports. Yet Reynolds, as was so often the case with him, painted himself as miserable and you would think very unsuccessful. The misery I'll concede to him, but he mostly kept it inside. He found out a way to make it work, and he found a way to make people relish being with him. He was an enormously successful social animal, as were our parents, and Reynolds and I learned it very early on at Mother and Daddy's knee.



COURTESY OF SIMON & SCHUSTER .BIZ

I want to talk a moment with you about the careers that you and Reynolds taught in college classrooms as professors, and I wonder if you want to distinguish the historian from the author of fiction, or if there's some other way that you would characterize your separate careers in academia?

Let me take the first part of that and move it a little further back, even, while I was in graduate school at Chapel Hill in history, when I talked to Reynolds about what my interests were. And by the way, Reynolds provided Pia and me with monthly help – Pia was pregnant with our first child when I entered graduate school. I subsequently got a small fellowship, but I went there initially on the GI bill, and Pia and I didn't have two quarters to rub together. So Reynolds helped us out some, and Pia's parents gave us a nice bag or two of groceries each week, so we had that to help us along. As part of my independence from Reynolds, after the first year of his giving us a hundred dollars a month – now mind you, this was 1967, a hundred dollars a month was a pretty good piece of change – the next year when I got my little fellowship, I asked him to cut it to seventy-five dollars a month, and he said, "Are you sure?" And I said, "Yeah, I'm sure." The year after that, when my fellowship got a little bit bigger, I asked him to cut his monthly gift to fifty dollars; and then the fourth year, I told him I didn't want any support. He knew he wasn't going to get anywhere with me and my independent streak, but he went to Pia and told her, "I can do this. My helping y'all is not a big drag on me, so don't worry about that. I'm glad to do it." Pia said, "You know Bill." So that was the end of that.

But this is all a long-winded way of saying that when I started graduate school and started conversations with Reynolds about where I might be headed in terms of my research interests and that sort of thing, Reynolds said, "I've regretted not majoring in history." I said, "What?" And he said, "I think in so many ways I'd have been better off not getting that training, that forced feeding, if you will, that English literature majors get in their course of study." He added, "History is something I loved." Under Professor Harold Parker at Duke, Reynolds had done a senior paper on John Milton as Oliver Cromwell's Latin Secretary and thoroughly enjoyed it. He said, "History provides you with so much material for story in ways that English graduate studies just don't. You're so focused on technique and that

sort of thing, that maybe history is better." So that's an interesting insight and until he told it to me, I would never in a million years have thought that might be the case, although I know how he loved history, and he was an avid reader of biography. He remained so until the very end. We very seldom compared notes; we'd talk from time to time about things we were doing, and he had some very specific questions for me as he'd written something about what might be a historical context in his work. But there's very little of that we ever talked about.

PHOTOGRAPH BY LES TODD, DUKE PHOTOGRAPHY; REYNOLDS PRICE PAPERS; COURTESY OF DAVID M. RUBENSTEIN RARE BOOK & MANUSCRIPT LIBRARY, DUKE UNIVERSITY

Now in the classroom, I had two decades of teaching at the college level, and Reynolds had fifty-plus years of it. We did sometimes discuss our approaches in the classroom, and I was very taken by a device he developed once he started teaching his writing seminars and classes, about actually participating with the students in whatever the assignment was. I taught Methods of Research at Meredith, which all history majors were required to take, and there was a certain point in that semester-long course in which I had a three-week segment when I actually participated with the students in a research project. That was very pleasurable, and I learned that device from Reynolds; I wouldn't have thought about doing it otherwise.

So he would write a poem if he was teaching poetry, or a story if he was teaching fiction?

Correct. When I would send my students to a primary source collection that was available online or otherwise, I'd go into the same collection with them. I'd take notes on what the research topic was, and we'd compare them. It worked out very fruitfully. Yet, as with what Reynolds did at Duke, there wasn't any question in the students' minds about who was doing it better. Nor was there any question in Reynolds's writing classes about who was the better poet or wrote the better story. It wasn't a contest with the teacher but a shared experience.

So I took a page from Reynolds's book and just treated my students as though we were members of a team all doing this together. And it was a very fruitful enterprise on my side and on the students' side as well; and I know it from the course evaluations. It was consistently their favorite part of that course, those three weeks. And it

ABOVE **Reynolds Price teaching at Duke University**

"[S]o many people were drawn to Reynolds just for the sheer pleasure of his company and for being able to watch the wheels turn in that mind."

REYNOLDS PRICE PAPERS; COURTESY OF RUBENSTEIN RARE BOOK & MANUSCRIPT LIBRARY, DUKE UNIVERSITY

ABOVE **Reynolds Price in England, Jan. 1962**

was for Reynolds's students as well. That's the only specific instance of which I can think when I plucked something out of his method to transplant to mine; but he was always interested in what I was thinking about and what I was doing. Once I made a mistake in sharing with him the second or third piece of scholarship I eventually published. I was very proud of it. This would have been late in the 1970s, and I sent Reynolds what I considered to be the finished typescript version of the piece. He treated it as seriously as he would have treated a story that Anne Tyler would have sent to him. He pretty much took that early essay of mine apart, and I never sent him another thing of mine to read in advance. That cured me. Yet he always thoroughly enjoyed reading my publications; for example, he was completely entranced by the little Nathaniel Macon book I published (Macon being a Warren County legend and Reynolds's boyhood hero, Nathaniel Macon Thornton, having been named for him).[4] Reynolds was utterly intrigued by that project. I've shared with you the research I did on Grant Terry that he was as engaged by as anything I ever put finger to keyboard about. But no, we didn't do a lot of comparing or sharing.

Would you add a reminiscence or two that makes clear that Charlie Rose and Reynolds Price had some of the same growing up and educational experiences?

Well, Reynolds told me that a staff member of Charlie's told him as they were riding up in the elevator in New York for that *Ardent Spirits* interview, "Mr. Price, you are second only to one other person that Charlie has interviewed in terms of the number of times he's had you on his show." And Reynolds said, "I'm curious to know who that other person is?" The staffer said, "Henry Kissinger." Reynolds exclaimed, "Oh my Lord."[5] Reynolds's recollection and version of this story, including whether the information is correct that the assistant was sharing is another matter, but, in any case, Reynolds did tell me that those words had been said. Charlie grew up around Warren Plains and in Henderson, North Carolina, in Vance County on the western border of Warren. Charlie was a year behind me at Duke. I knew him in passing but not well. I don't think Charlie ever had Reynolds as a teacher, but Reynolds was a big figure on campus, and Charlie knew he was a Warren County man. I think just this natural relationship developed between the two of them.

Reynolds is simply one of the most engaging conversationalists ever, even more so in private than he was in public. In fact, I don't think he comes across on TV all that well, but so many people were drawn to Reynolds just for the sheer pleasure of his company and for being able to watch the wheels turn in that mind. Charlie Rose liked it, too.

[4] William S. Price, *Nathaniel Macon of North Carolina: Three Views of His Character and Creed* (Raleigh: North Carolina Office of Archives and History, 2008). The reference to the Terry research in the subsequent sentence is discussed in the longer excerpt forthcoming in the print issue.

[5] Interview with Reynolds Price, *The Charlie Rose Show* (Public Broadcasting Service, 25 May 2009; Price also appeared on this show 14 Nov. 2003, 3 June 2002, and 25 May 1995.

With respect to Reynolds's public persona, can you distinguish over the years between his public charm and his off-stage personal behavior?

Reynolds was a great charmer in public; you've seen him in public. He was a natural entertainer and loved an audience. That's somewhat true of me as well. And privately – if Reynolds didn't know you well, he still had that charm and humor but could also be guarded. He would not do something that was foolish or embarrassing. In private, Reynolds could be irritating at times, even downright mean on some occasions, but never violent. Reynolds was a very self-centered human being, and he didn't suffer fools gladly. The greatest offense a human being could make was to be boring. With people that Reynolds didn't like, he was easily bored.

There are various longtime friends of Reynolds's who've been stung by his having been so friendly and charming on one occasion, then abrupt and rude on others. And all of us who've known him a long time and been close and intimate with him have experienced that. Even his dearest friends then and now, two of whom – one a man and one a woman, very, very close to him – have acknowledged to me how hurt they were when those occasions took place. But Reynolds was a very severe critic of himself about that; he knew it, and he talks about it to some degree in *Ardent Spirits*. A lot of his poems allude to it. So he wasn't always "hail fellow well met," but I don't know any human being (including myself) who is.

REYNOLDS PRICE PAPERS; COURTESY OF DAVID M. RUBENSTEIN RARE BOOK & MANUSCRIPT LIBRARY, DUKE UNIVERSITY

ABOVE **Memsy and Reynolds Price in Raleigh, NC, 1988**

I gathered from listening to your daughter, Memsy, that it was fun watching him be himself. When she would be on a road trip, just the two of them, he would be indulging his own need to buy something for himself.

Precisely, which is pretty much the way any trip with Reynolds was. But having said what I said about having some resentment about wishing he had done more with my daughters, been more giving of himself – not of money but of himself – Reynolds had a patience about letting time play itself out that I don't have. I'm more like Mother in that regard; Mother wanted it here and now and not think about tomorrow. But some of her misery was a considerable result of having been orphaned, and maybe my lack of patience is a result of my having been left without a father at fourteen, unlike Reynolds.

But Reynolds was just content to let it be – all things are going to become clearer in time.

Read more of this interview in the *NCLR* 2016 print issue. ■■■

This interview was designed by **KAREN BALTIMORE**, a graduate of Meredith College, where she worked with *NCLR* Art Director Dana Gay. She is currently illustrating and designing a series of children's books for the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. See other samples of Karen's graphic design work on her website and in *NCLR* since 2012, including all of the poetry in this issue.

BY JAMES APPLEWHITE

Pine Woods Annunciation

O sane and sacred death.—Walt Whitman

Pines lean alive through a space
aslant as if breathing in distance
foreshadowing the beams of stars
shining through these pine-needle rays.
A bole with its alligator bark
rolls with the Earth into dark
continuing the round of existence.
The strand of a spider is spending
its shining defying oblivion –
as if plucked by light into trilling
first being. A warbler strings
the sun's straight heat
with the drops of its notes,
and modulates time into moments.
Then a sparrow on a wire
waves its wings in fire
of the low sun behind it, a heart-
blood beat in this light.
There was once a pregnance
a nothing before existence.
Now in time so aligned from a weed
by this spider-web shine
I sweat in ignorance –
the beat of my blood
encoded in some first word
I cannot read.
I encounter
the countenance
of sacredness
in each bright breath
and life's erasure.

COURTESY OF CITY ART GALLERY

The Woods **(ceramic and mixed media, 18x18) by Vicky Smith**

VICKY SMITH was raised in Eastern North Carolina and maintains a ceramics studio in Greene County. She earned a BA in Studio Art at UNC Wilmington and an MFA at East Carolina University. She was an adjunct professor in ceramics at UNCW from 2002 to 2013 and a recipient of the North Carolina Regional Artist Project Grant in 2012, which included a solo show at 621 N Fourth Street Gallery in Wilmington. Her work has also been shown in juried exhibitions in 2005 in Minnesota and in 2007 and 2010 in Texas. *The Woods* was inspired by "Pine Woods Annunciation" and included in the Sixth Annual James Applewhite Poetry Invitational exhibit at City Art Gallery in Greenville. See more of this artist's work on her website.

JAMES APPLEWHITE is Professor Emeritus of Duke University and a regular *NCLR* contributor. His numerous honors include a National Endowment for the Arts Award, the Jean Stein Award in Poetry from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, the Associated Writing Programs Contemporary Poetry Prize, and the North Carolina Award in Literature. In 1996, he was elected to join the Fellowship of Southern Writers, and in 2008, he was inducted into the North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame. Read more about the poet in Rob McDonald's interview with him forthcoming in the 2016 print issue of *NCLR*.

MAPPING NORTH CAROLINA, LOCATING LATINIDAD

a review by Kristy L. Ulibarri

Gustavo Pérez Firmat. *A Cuban in Mayberry: Looking Back at America's Hometown*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014.

Mark Smith-Soto. *Time Pieces*. Charlotte: Main Street Rag, 2015.

While many Latina/o cultural texts employ formulaic geographies, such as the US Southwest, or established Latino urban centers, like New York City and Miami, both Gustavo Pérez Firmat's memoir *A Cuban in Mayberry* and Mark Smith-Soto's poetry collection *Time Pieces* negotiate place/space and Latino lived experiences in the diverse cultural ecologies of North Carolina. In this sense, North Carolina is a figure of the globalizing South and offers both these authors a particular setting to critically rethink and creatively navigate Latina/o transnational experiences, capturing the local-global tension within their respective texts. Twenty years prior to writing *A Cuban in Mayberry*, Firmat famously theorized the Cuban American relation to place and space through his idea of the three stages of immigrant acculturation, moving from "we are (still) there" to "we are nowhere" to eventually "here we are."[1] Firmat's early critical theory perhaps influences his claim about "place" in *A Cuban in Mayberry*: "As often happens with Southern fictions, place is crucial" (3). Smith-Soto formulates place quite similarly as he constructs a poetry in movement, where we travel with him from the shores of Topsail Island to the forests of Costa Rica. Both works offer us a way to think about Latina/o experience: one must constantly meditate between "there" and "here," sometimes forming acculturated subjectivities, other times producing hybrid cultural artifacts, and at moments residing in the nowhere land of the hyphen.

Although ***A Cuban in Mayberry*** is primarily cultural criticism on *The Andy Griffith Show* (hereafter *TAGS*) and not on Latina/o cultural production, it extends from **Gustavo Pérez Firmat**'s earlier cultural criticism on *I Love Lucy* and gestures toward Cuban and Cuban American cultural questions of exile and loss that eventually culminates in the epilogue about the show's "traces of Cuba" (147). His book makes us consider the unique and exceptional "nowhere" that is Mayberry in *TAGS*, where the "implicit premise is that what happens in Mayberry does not happen anywhere else" (3). This "nowhere" space alludes to the in-between states of Cuban American experience, best described as a constant nostalgia for (pre-Revolution) Cuba while being exiled to, living in, and acculturating to the US. The book, however, leans toward a more general American Cultural Studies as Firmat undertakes an examination of the public imagination around *TAGS*, a sitcom that has a staunch fan base, ran for eight seasons, has run in syndication ever since, and has enjoyed a few spin-offs. The question of place is so important that Part One of Firmat's

PHOTOGRAPH BY DAWN WAINWRIGHT, ECU JOYNER LIBRARY

[1] Gustavo Pérez Firmat, *Life on the Hyphen: The Cuban-American Way*, rev. ed. (Austin: U of Texas P, 2012); subsequently cited parenthetically.

KRISTY L. ULIBARRI is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English at East Carolina University. She received her PhD from the University of Illinois at Chicago. She is currently working on a book manuscript that considers the contradictory discourses on (national) security and practices of the free market in contemporary Latino/a immigrant and labor narratives.

GUSTAVO PÉREZ FIRMAT taught at Duke University from 1978 to 1999 and is currently the David Feinson Professor in the Humanities at Columbia University and a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. The National Association of Cuban American Educators elected him as Educator of the Year in 2005. He is also the author of several books of literary and cultural criticism and four collections of poetry. For an excerpt of the memoir reviewed here see *NCLR* 2013.

project is titled "The Place." It is comprised of chapters that map the fictional landscape of Mayberry and with that captures what Andy Griffith described as a "feeling of North Carolina" (qtd. in Firmat 9). The second part looks at "The People" as they embody and form our imagination of Mayberry, NC. The cartographic and topological impulses in the book mean to demonstrate the way Mayberry *is* the people and the people *are* Mayberry, irrevocably linking place and subjectivity. Yet this metaphor extends further than a simple character-setting analogy. For example, Firmat makes the point that Mayberry exists within the real North Carolina: "Beyond the immediate vicinity of Mayberry are other towns, most of them real communities in North Carolina. . . . Further out are cities and towns in other Southern states, foreign but still familiar. Helen's niece lives in Wheeling, West Virginia. Aunt Bee grew up in Morgantown. The town choir performs in Roanoke" (24). Mayberry, then, both produces familiarity with its metaphorical "realness" and upholds exceptional and unique setting and character qualities as only existing in the fiction of the weekly sitcom.

Firmat's construct of place, nevertheless, is indebted to the question of Cuban American experience in many ways. In a creative and self-reflexive mode, Firmat presents this question in the Interlude between Part One and Part Two, "The Road to Mayberry," where he considers his own experiences as a viewer of *TAGS* and ponders the similarities between his affective response to Mayberry and his memories of Havana, Cuba, and Little Havana, Miami. This confessional memoir form breaks up the cultural criticism. Yet it also provides a look into why a Cuban American scholar – who taught at Duke University for many years, more recently holds a position at Columbia University, and moves frequently between New York, North Carolina, Miami, and Cuba – would find refuge in the reruns of a television show epitomizing the Tarheel State. He tells us, "I have to confess that, much as I love literature, *I Love Lucy* and *The Andy Griffith Show* have had greater impact on my life than any book I've read or written. Without them, I might never have cut the umbilical cord to Cuba" (81). In this, he captures his movement from "I am (still) there" to "here I am." In almost the same breath and with great ambivalence to the previous statement, he paints Mayberry not so much as a space that allowed him to accept that he would never return to Cuba but as a source for nostalgia and exilic memory, producing the stage of "I am nowhere":

> **At the same time, I realize that the Mayberry of *TAGS* was not so different from the Little Havana where I grew up. Both were tight-knit, self-sufficient communities of like-minded people. When Mayberrians get together in Floyd's barbershop or at the church social, every sentence they utter to one another, whatever its specific meaning and context, also says: we are alike. . . . That's the way things are in Mayberry, and the way they used to be in Little Havana in the 1960s. (83)**

Exile, loss, and nostalgia emerge throughout *A Cuban in Mayberry*. Firmat keeps this conceptual engagement purely on the personal and experiential level, never referencing other scholarship on Cuban American exile and culture, such as José Esteban Muñoz's theoretical work "No es facil" (1995) or María de los Angeles Torres's political study *In the Land of Mirrors* (2001) or Ruth Behar's critical collection *The Portable Island* (2008), to name only a few. Instead, he approaches *TAGS* as a cultural space that has allowed him to deal with his sense of loss upon leaving North Carolina, much like *I Love Lucy* also did for him with Cuba in the 1990s. His lived experience with *TAGS* might not enter the critical conversations in Latina/o Studies, but it offers a creative addition on television criticism, on *TAGS* fan culture, and on North Carolina Cultural Studies. More specifically, Firmat establishes the way a place can become a metaphor for the self.

Firmat's *A Cuban in Mayberry* captures how iconic Americana, distinctively located in North Carolina, informs and affects his specific Latino lived experience. In a very similar mode, in ***Time Pieces***, **Mark Smith-Soto** presents a poetic expression of the self and the everyday that becomes central to making sense of our geographic places and our cultural spaces. Born in Washington, DC, and raised in Costa Rica, Smith-Soto is a North Carolina transplant much like Firmat, and although the Costa Rican–American experience does

LEFT **Gustavo Pérez Firmat speaking on the Latino/a Writers in North Carolina panel at the Eastern North Carolina Literary Homecoming at East Carolina University, Greenville, NC, 21 Sept. 2013**

MARK SMITH-SOTO is a Professor of Romance Languages and Director of the Center for Creative Writing in the Arts at the UNC Greensboro, where he edits the *International Poetry Review.* A 2005 winner of a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship in creative writing, his poetry has appeared in *Nimrod, The Sun, Poetry East*, *Quarterly West*, *Callaloo, Kenyon Review,* and many other literary journals. He is also the author of two award-winning poetry chapbooks, and another full-length collection, *Our Lives Are Rivers* (University Press of Florida, 2003). Read a poem by him in *NCLR Online* 2013.

PHOTOGRAPH BY TERRY KENNEDY

not come from the same politics of exile as the Cuban American experience, it too is marked with a sense of loss and nostalgia. Both of their global migrations capture the particularity of places and spaces, giving meaning to each locale within these critical and creative works. Smith-Soto's *Time Pieces* oscillates between taking pictures at a Costa Rican women's prison and meditating on his relationship with the sea while on Topsail Island, NC.[2] His poetry pays close attention to the artifacts and actions that make up everyday life in these locales: azaleas in full bloom in the poem "April Inventory," "white pajamas scribbled all over / with baby *elefantes* in blue and red" in "Un Beso," and his dog Chico's whining at twilight in "Night Watch." Yet from these everyday minutiae, he extrapolates sometimes political and sometimes humanistic didacticism and prophecy. While the pedantic turns and prophetic one-liners sometimes muffle and distract from the power within these details, Smith-Soto's poetry performs the cultural movements from there to here to the in-between "nowhere."

One particularly emphatic instance that Smith-Soto performs these movements is in his narrative poem "Getting Ready." The poem opens with Uncle Enrique's words of wisdom for the young narrator, stating that we always know where we start but we never know where we end. Immediately, the sense of place is ambivalent, moving from certainty about one's origins and uncertainty about one's telos. This is poetry in movement, to extend Octavio Paz's idea of a poetry that is circular, where the search for the future always ends in the past and the future also reinvents the past.[3] As such, it is a metaphor for the temporal and spatial movements of the self, yet Smith-Soto grounds this abstraction into more tangible imagery. Uncle Enrique's wisdom is a reason to not travel with an empty stomach as they drive to the Arenal Volcano or "sloth-country in the southern forests," justifying their detour to the "brand new / Wendy's, the first in Costa Rica." Rich with both political questions about Americanization in Costa Rica and aesthetic questions about the materializations of abstract metaphor, the poem's second stanza moves from the narrator's memory right before Enrique dies of "cancer, hepatitis, diabetes, maybe / HIV" to the narrator's experience with his terminally ill friend who is refusing to eat. The friend's hunger strike in the face of death presents an "exception" to Uncle Enrique's "general rule." Firmat, too, places great significance on this "state of exception," which he argues is Andy Taylor because he is a single father through the whole series and the unquestionable center of the town, making him the sexless, marriage-less sovereign ruler of Mayberry (94). For Smith-Soto, the motif of food, eating, and consuming becomes the materials in which this exception can be seen, but he ends the poem on his own lived experience: "And watching her / watching me for that second before she turned her eyes away, / I knew she was teaching me just like my uncle had, / back when I was a kid and just beginning my travels." The poem becomes a movement between his past in Costa Rica and his present psychic space, joining together these two experiences and using the poetic form to come to terms with these lived experiences.

[2] The poem "Last Retreat to Topsail Island," included in *Time Pieces*, received *NCLR*'s James Applewhite Poetry Prize in 2012 and was published in *NCLR* 2013. Watch the award presentation and hear the poet read the poem at the 2012 Eastern North Carolina Literary Homecoming at East Carolina University.

[3] Octavio Paz et al, *Poesía en movimiento: México 1915–1966* (México: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1991; rev. ed. 1966) 5; also see Carlos Roberto Conde, "Poesía en movimiento, Caducidad del Instante," *Circulo de Poesia* 15 Oct. 2012: web.

ABOVE **Mark Smith-Soto at the annual "Will Read for Food" benefit, Weatherspoon Arts Museum, Greensboro, 15 Nov. 2012**

Both Firmat's *A Cuban in Mayberry* and Smith-Soto's *Time Pieces* center on the distinct and particular, what I would describe as localizations, as a way to make sense of and reconcile their own many in-between states of being as transnational subjects. Firmat ultimately argues that Mayberry, a world unto itself, is an exceptional place, not only because it is absolutely different from sitcoms such as *I Love Lucy* and *Leave It to Beaver* that present us with both urban and suburban Anywhere, USA, topographies, but also because it dies once the New South entrepreneurs take over and the bus stop becomes a bus station. Accordingly, since the town folks resist Wally Butler's "continental" menu and the only progress in town is the building of a retirement home, the story of Mayberry ends with a deserted and dead town (77–78). What *latinidad* tells us about this narrative, however, is that it only exists within the ambivalent states of being there and here, a sort of allegory for the larger global South. This is perhaps why Firmat ends on his own imaginary *TAGS* episode, where Mayberry never dies but endures as a space for (trans)national negotiations: Opie befriends a "lost" Cuban boy and brings him and his Tía Maria to dinner where they are "found" and, thus, acculturated by the humor and hospitality of Aunt Bee, Andy, and Barney (148–51). In a similar mode, Smith-Soto's poetic particularisms lead him to make universal declarations – such as his proclamation "Television / doesn't know how to blink" after watching the news on the Venezuelan mud slides from the comfort of his Charlotte home in "Slide" – that result in a poetry in movement. The place of North Carolina, ultimately, provides a space for transnational lived experience in these works. ■

FALLING AWAKE

a review by Fred Chappell

Valerie Nieman. *Hotel Worthy: Poems*. Winston-Salem, NC: Press 53, 2015.

Featured regularly in *NCLR*, **FRED CHAPPELL** is Professor Emetirus of UNC Greensboro and a former Poet Laureate of North Carolina. He has received the Roanoke-Chowan Award for eight of his collections. His numerous awards and honors also include the T.S. Eliot Prize, the Bollingen Award, an award from the National Academy of Arts and Letters, as well as the O. Max Gardner Award and the North Carolina Award for Literature. He is in both the North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame and the Fellowship of Southern Writers.

VALERIE NIEMAN is the poetry editor for *Prime Number* magazine and an Associate Professor at NC A&T State University. She received her MFA from Queens University in Charlotte, NC. She has published another poetry collection *Wake, Wake, Wake* (Press 53, 2006: reviewed in *NCLR* 2007). Her poetry, including poems from this collection, has also appeared in *NCLR* 2011 and 2012 and *NCLR Online* 2012. She writes fiction as well as poetry, including a novel, *Blood Clay* (Press 53, 2011; reviewed in *NCLR Online* 2012).

In the title poem of Valerie Nieman's interwoven new collection there is a description of a traveling shot in a movie titled *Charleston WV in 1932.* Included in the shot, "there on the left is the Hotel Worthy and I realize I've been trying to check in for years but not enough hours in the day." The ambition of attempting to improve the condition of oneself is a prominent theme of the collection, and Nieman approaches it from different directions. In "Release," the introductory poem, it is offered as a homily: "lift yourself / through the blue // and swim." But in *Hotel Worthy* a series of moralistic bromides – *"The greatest way to live with honor is" ; "Confidence thrives on honesty"; The purpose of life is not to be happy. It is."; "Better keep yourself clean and bright"* – is undercut by the experience of testing these directives in the world we must inhabit: "always catch the teacher's eye am I doing it right." The abrasive irony of the differences between what we have been told and what we discover or uncover firsthand characterizes the lives of many if not most of us. If we were all required to live up to the ideal standards that our elders promoted and that society pretends to prize, none of us could ever check in to the *Hotel Worthy*.

"The Bride Comes Home to a House Planted in a Field" is a narrative ghazal that dramatizes the situation of a woman trying to come to terms with a new, ungentle husband and a rough, rural way of life. She receives his instruction; she endures the daily discomfort. Finally a rebellious urge arises:

"When the corn stands high, she walks barefoot across red soil, / a stranger to that house. A sinewy part of her begins to re-coil." "Re-coil" is not the same term as "recoil," meaning to shrink back in repugnance, as she did in the marriage bed. Here it means to draw back and re-gather one's strength, as a snake does in order to strike, and it indicates a radical change in the marital relationship.

Nieman does not fear puns. Sometimes they are casual and obvious: "a slattern's house (un)keeping" in "Dark Matter." Sometimes they are sly, as when a couple visiting Paris describes their nights as "loud" and their "mornings rue- / full" in "Second Honeymoon," another poem about an attempt to regroup and start again. A sequence of five pieces called "A Blessing on the Tongue" is launched by the name of an apple found in a farmer's market, "King Lust." *Lust* changes in form and meaning from fruit to literal royalty, to "King Lush," to "King Luscious," to "Lucius, king of the Britons." "Blessing" is a lighthearted series, but its theme, the mutations and permutations of our appetites and passions, is serious enough to give the wordplay point and poise. And this continual transformation from theme to theme, with reprises, is the method of the volume. In "Racial Memory" the experience of falling out of a sailboat into a lake transforms to falling asleep – and then to *falling awake,* "jerking upright in bed," to escape the lake water "black with the dreams of drowned forests."

"Old Story" remarks the penchant for "finding patterns," "sacredness / in passionflower and lotus," and also in "the desiccated head / of a giant catfish," which reveals "a crucified Christ enshrined." In "The Guide: Cave Paintings at Font de Gaume," the tour guide's spiel about the prehistoric artwork gives rise to a personal memory of his grandfather's discovery of the place with a group of other children and the atavism that overwhelmed them: "*We felt the animals rise inside us / until we did not know ourselves.*" The loss of individual personality to the great collective human memory is both alienating and conjoining as an encounter with time. The archeologist in "Stratigraphy" speculates about the lives that once clothed the bones he now examines "with dental pick and bone brush." There must have been flood and famine in the prehistoric period that framed these bones "in time and meaning": "how high the icy water rose / that spring, / how the deer fled, / how we starved." *We* – the pronoun tells us that the speaker "with pick and shovel" has become identical to the personage who lived so long ago, just as the tour guide became identical to the curious child his grandfather was.

"Lore II: Tap's Tips" imagines a person lost in a wilderness. A town or settlement can be reached simply by following any stream downhill. But this lone figure decides to abjure society and find refuge and purpose in the wild, eating fiddleheads, fox grapes, turtle eggs, hickory nuts – whatever the landscape offers. Hygienic aids are at hand: "Honey cleanses wounds / but so do maggots." Why should this loner ever return to society? "Consider that the ones who love you / will not look long enough." This final rejection of human company, because of its placement, seems to bring to a conclusion the instances of separateness recorded in "Laryngitis," "Alienation," "Out of the Ordinary," "Choice of Words," "Losing Ground," and others. "Work in the Morning" seems at first a celebration of clean physical labor, pruning trees, "sawing and stacking." Then we learn that this morning (the inevitable pun), such work is a means of temporary relief from a dire and painful situation: "The darkened room is everyday more familiar, / the worn-out body on the couch, curled like a wood shaving." The mother lies there, "her breath pulled in like a burdened rope, / breath by breath drawing us tightly into the same coil." The speaker has been tending to her dying mother and the weight of this duty is oppressive to an extreme. Her work with the saw has given

COURTESY OF VALERIE NIEMAN

LEFT **Valerie Nieman and poet/playwright Richard Krawiec at their reading at Flyleaf Books in Chapel Hill, NC, 13 Aug. 2015**

refreshment that is only momentary. "I lean the saw against the step. Sun refracts / from the bright, honed teeth, specific for their work of parting." One implication of the last sentences is that her morning work is a preparatory ritual; it helps the speaker to fortify her spirit for the inevitable end, as she saws two branches, one of them diseased, off the red cedar. The labor is salubrious for the sawyer and necessary for the health of the tree, but it also carries a symbolic function.

This subject is treated more directly in "Choice of Words." There are two situations. The speaker's father lost his wife. "He is *bereft, /* robbed of his happiness, a *widower,* or *widowman."* The speaker's situation is different. "But I am *separated,* on the way to *divorce, //* terms for a civilized / coming apart." However different the cases may be, "it's all butchery // whatever the parting: / disjointed, sundered, severed." The use of "parting" here is of course a direct reference to the last word of "Work in the Morning."

But the last stanzas of "Choice of Words" do not dwell upon the fact of separation; they offer a glimpse of the future:

> **A separation is also,**
> **however, embarkation.**
>
> **We stand at the rail,**
> **each waving a white handkerchief**
> **at the sinking shore.**

Interpreting and reinterpreting the events of one's life may be a matter of perspective. When you say goodbye to the shore, you are saying hello to the horizon.

"Watch the Sun Come Up on Your Own Life" employs this sort of perspective as its theme. A tourist in Paris sits idly at a cafe table, taking in the sidewalk scene, the crowd, the traffic, "the diesel exhaust / along famous boulevards." Familiar images these, and maybe a little shopworn. But if she took a glance at the apartments above, she could observe the intimacies of these lives:

> **. . . a mother scrubbing**
> **a child's neck, a youth**
>
> **naked from the shower,**
> **an old man inspecting**
>
> **a worrisome mole –**

If she took a different look, she would no longer be the average, listless tourist, but would find her "dutiful" body "newly not the same."

I have probably insisted too much on the unity of *Hotel Worthy.* It is not one long poem cut into pieces. There is plenty of variety: humor, surprise, landscape, travel, and personae. Nieman also includes the different forms of sestina, pantoum, and ghazal. Yet she has found thematic connections in her materials and has intertwined them in unobtrusive but significant ways. Maybe it is more accurate to call *Hotel Worthy* not a collection but a book of poems, a good book. ■

MICHAEL PARKER HONORED AT THE 2015 NORTH CAROLINA WRITERS CONFERENCE

Michael Parker, Vacc Distinguished Professor in the MFA Writing Program at UNC Greensboro, was the honoree at the 2015 North Carolina Writers Conference, which convened in Washington, NC, in July. Parker is the author of eight books, most recently *All I Have in This World*, which was reviewed and excerpted in *NCLR Online* 2015. His previous honors include the North Carolina Award for Literature, which is the highest civilian honor given in the state. Watch and listen to the tributes paid to this Eastern North Carolina writer by Terry Kennedy, Parker's former student, now colleague at UNC Wilmington; Kathy Pories, his editor at Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill; and Elizabeth Hudson, another former student, now editor of *Our State* magazine. And read more about the North Carolina Writers Conference in *Fifty Splendid Summers: A Short History of the North Carolina Writers Conference 1950–1999*, compiled by Charles Blackburn, Jr. and Robert G. Anthony, Jr. (available online here). ■

PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDREW MOREHEAD

ABOVE **Michael Parker (right) with 2015 North Carolina Writers Conference Chair Margaret Bauer and Secretary/Treasurer Jim Clark, Washington, NC, 24 July 2015**

ROBERT MORGAN'S "BIG TALK"

a review by Randall Wilhelm

Robert Morgan. *Dark Energy.* New York: Penguin Books, 2015.

—. *Sigodlin*. 1990, Winston-Salem, NC: Press 53, 2014.

RANDALL WILHELM is Assistant Professor at Anderson University in Anderson, SC. He is the editor of *The Ron Rash Reader* (University of South Carolina Press, SC 2014), and co-editor of the forthcoming collection, also from University of South Carolina Press, *Summoning the Dead: Critical Essays on Ron Rash*.

ROBERT MORGAN was born in Hendersonville, NC, and is now living in Ithaca, NY, where he is the Kappa Alpha Professor of English at Cornell University. He is the author of numerous books of fiction, poetry, and nonfiction, and his many awards include the James G. Hanes Poetry Prize from the Fellowship of Southern Writers, the North Carolina Award for Literature, and the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association's R. Hunt Parker Memorial Award for significant contribution to North Carolina literature. He was also inducted into the North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame in 2010. Morgan has been featured regularly in *NCLR* over the years.

COURTESY OF *NCLR*; DESIGN BY MARY HATCH THIESEN

ABOVE RIGHT **The first page of Patrick and Resa Bizzaro's interview with Robert Morgan in *NCLR* 2001**

If one listens carefully when reading the poems in Robert Morgan's new collection, one may hear and even feel the "dark energy" of the universe trembling through its pages. For veteran readers of Morgan's poetry this effect is not a new experience; the poet has tapped the winds of comets and the pinging of crickets in previous collections, merging the smallest sounds of the natural world with the acoustics of the cosmos in grand eloquence. The poems in his newest collection, ***Dark Energy***, reverberate with the thunderous rumblings deep inside mountains, the hum of electricity from power lines, the music of the spheres. It is testament to Morgan's brilliance with sound and craft that the poems in *Dark Energy* speak powerfully from deep within the earth and ripple over and through its surface. "Big Talk," the collection's first poem, sounds the note of *basso profundo* that plays throughout the collection:

Big Talk

When mountains boomed and boomed again
returning echoes all along
the chain, the Indians said the peaks
were talking to each other in
the idiom that mountains use
across the mighty distances,
with giant syllables and rests.
White hunters feared it might be guns
or even cannon natives had
somehow acquired to warn them from
the better hunting grounds and streams,
the blasts as loud as thunder on
the clearest days and coldest nights.
Geologists would later hold
the groans and barks inside the ridge
were shelves of massive, restless rock
that slipped or dropped far down within
the mountain's guts, a fracture or
a crashing at some fault as part
of the tectonic conversation
among the continents as old
as planet earth or starry birth,
the gossip of creation's work.

The poems in *Dark Energy* can be seen as companions to those in Morgan's most recent previous collection, *Terroir* (2011; reviewed in *NCLR Online* 2013), and display Morgan's continuous growth as an ever-evolving craftsman of form and sound. The "big talk" in *Dark Energy* is indeed gigantic, beyond human measure except through Morgan's galactic ear and earth-honed voice that sound the conversation of tectonic plates with the mysteries of the universe in "giant syllables and rests." Built mainly on his trademark eight-syllable line, these poems reveal a sense of wonder that shines with cosmic detail like the zircons that crop up repeatedly in his work. In "Neutrino," Morgan celebrates

> **the smallest bit of matter**
> **creation's building speck,**
> **. . . the vast**
> **remoteness of the tiny,**
> **beyond the cell, beyond**
> **the molecule and gene,**
> **beyond the atom with**
> **its nucleus and rings,**
> **electron moons, beyond**
> **the particles, the quarks**
> **. . . to the one elusive, last**
> **. . . suspicion**
> **of substance,**

that "leaves a blink / of sparkle in the dark" that we never see, "just winks where it has gone."

Many poems dramatize similar themes of astrophysical vibrations melded with human wonder that evoke a metaphysics of mystery. In "Even Me," a young boy stands beneath power lines, mesmerized by

their "choral hum" that becomes a "hymn"

> of sky and light and woods and field,
> the voice of time from the beginning,
> before a pulse or heart was beating,
> the sound of space beyond the stars
> and in between the atoms' spheres,
> a voice of primal harmony,
> still audible to even me.

In "Chance," Morgan writes of how

> We feel the volt inside our veins,
> . . . magnetic currents in the earth,
> . . . All oscillate together, or
> they seem to, in this play of chance,
> beneath the stars' indifference.

Other poems reveal invisible forces, as in "Coriolis Effect" "There is no straight and narrow way," he continues:

> Because the earth is made to spin
> and tilted on its axis, none
> can fall or travel in a line.
> For everything that moves is swept
> aside . . .
> . . . the only world we know,
> is warped and sprung and devious
> and turns its face away and throws
> us off the chosen course and off
> the goal, into the arc of gravity.

The four sections in *Dark Energy* are unified by themes of history, nature, loss of culture, land, and family, and also by sounds of natural and subatomic elements. While "Big Talk" merges the human with "starry creation," Section Two slides into memories of youth and family. Morgan writes of his father ("Escape Route"), his grandfather ("Cold Friday II"), his "great-grandpa" ("Fall") and his "great-great-grandpa" ("Equinox"). He also writes of childhood experiences ("Going West," "A Kind of Sacrament"), including the Frost-like "High Horse" where a young boy rides the back of a black pine felled by an ice storm. This section also includes two poignant poems about Morgan's late mother ("The Road to Arcadia" and "Heaven's Gate"). In the former, Morgan's mother is a figure who always "knew just what to do," a figure of comfort "to lay my cheek against her chest / and feel the notes through air and flesh."

Sections Three and Four continue the themes of life and death cycles in the natural world and invisible forces beyond human reckoning. Seeds unlock in their jackets, maples "bleed" and "gall," chestnuts blight, and willows fall. In "Cloud Farm," winds "too vigorous for all" burst powerfully through valleys and crests of hills, while in "Binary," katydids and butterflies "ricochet and then / reciprocate . . . like particles / at love" in "matter's deepest core." Section Four begins with "Noble Metals" that "don't corrode / or fade or rust," signaling the poetic score's triumphant final movement where the natural world, physics, death, and silence reign. The last quartet is a haunting and beautiful meditation on time and mortality. "Widdershins" warns, "To go against the clock is sinister," and blends into "Neutrino" and the titular poem, "Dark Energy," that proclaims "the bits of dust and light we know, / in a disintegrating zero" are "drawn toward the outer silence." The final poem, "Silence," sounds a note of dignified solemnity as "the dialect of perfect calm":

> . . . the stillness at the heart
> of matter . . .
> . . . the pitch of poise, . . .
> . . . . the carol of immanence, . . .
> . . . . and anthem of deep space. It is
> the idiom of promised rest.

Dark Energy is clearly the work of a seasoned master. Replete with the sounds and sights of human, natural, and invisible worlds, each poem speaks in a calm and controlled cadence that imbues the collection with a tone of humble majesty. Morgan's newest poems move in the open spaces "unoccupied and bare," spaces of mystery and of wonder, spaces deep within the human heart that only by living can we fill.

Originally published by Wesleyan Press in 1990, Robert Morgan's ***Sigodlin*** has been reissued in a handsome new edition by Press 53. Along with *At the Edge of the Orchard Country* (1987), *Sigodlin* marks transitional territory in


ROBERT MORGAN'S PERIPHERAL VISION:
"the point beside the point"
IN *The Hinterlands*
BY SYLVIA BAILEY SHURBUTT

COURTESY OF *NCLR*; DESIGN BY DANA EZZELL GAY

LEFT **The opening spread of an article on Robert Morgan by Sylvia Bailey Shurbutt in *NCLR* 2010, which featured Appalachian writers of North Carolina**

Morgan's career as a poet. In early collections, such as *Zirconia Poems* (1969) and *Red Owl* (1972), Morgan had crafted "object poems" written in spare, tight lines under extreme compression. Water tanks, zircon mines, fences, and toolsheds display their lyric materiality through a poetic vision throbbing with intensity. Morgan's shift to more conversational and communal poems in *Land Diving: New Poems00* (1976) and *Groundwork* (1979) allowed him to return imaginatively to the terra firma of his childhood and the tensions between the poet's innate love of nature and his culture's fundamentalist focus on life beyond this mortal coil. *At the Edge of the Orchard Country* and *Sigodlin* show Morgan's balancing of these tensions in a "spirit level" that blends faith and doubt, physical and spiritual leanings, in well wrought poems that break new ground for his poetic expression.

Working with a taut syllabic form (often in eight- or ten-syllable lines) in combination with free verse rhythms, the poems in *Sigodlin* expand in ways beyond the poet's previous work while maintaining their tight construction. In the titular poem – a carpentry term meaning "out of plumb or out of square" – Morgan confers elemental and mystic power to the architecture of his poetic form. "Sigodlin," or rather "anti-sigodlin," which "meant upright and square, at proper / angles as a structure should be, true to / spirit level, plumb line, erect and sure / from the very center of the earth," performs as Morgan's *ars poetica* where syllabic lines, formal design, and common speech "yoked perfectly" show

> **the dimensions themselves, each**
> **mated pair of timbers to embody**
> **and enact the crossing of space in its**
> **real extensions, the vertical to be**
> **the virtual pith of gravity, horizontal**
> **aligned with the surface of the planet at**
> **its local tangent.**

Morgan's desire to believe in a non-denominational spirituality or presence, mostly absent in earlier poems, finds expression through mathematical, geometric, and ancient mysteries couched in construction metaphors in this poem:

> **and what they fitted**
> **and nailed or mortised into place, downright**
> **and upstanding, straight up and down and flat**
> **as water, established the coordinates**
> **forever of their place in creation's**
> **fabric, in a word learned perhaps from**
> **masons who heard it in masonic rites**
> **drawn from ancient rosicrucians who**
> **had the term from the Greek mysteries'**
> **love of geometry's power to say,**
> **while everything in the real may lean just**
> **the slightest bit sigodlin or oblique,**
> **the power whose center is everywhere.**

The poems in Book One of *Sigodlin* run rife with evanescent energies, traces of actant powers, and mysteries of perception, from the blended notes of "Audubon's Flute" to "Jet Trails" and "Inertia" to "Radiator Pressure" and "Spirit Level." Other poems stage the mysteries of human perception, a trope Morgan maneuvers with great lyricism and penetrating imagery. These poems may trace the ethereality of unheard melodies ("Hawthornden Castle"), a momentary glimpse through temporal barriers ("Rearview Mirror"), or intellectual visions of the astrophysical ("Shadow Matter"), but the stamp of Morgan's poetic vision is always firmly rooted in the land itself. The final poem in Book One, "Vietnam Memorial," makes this clear: "What we see first seems a shadow / or a retaining wall in the park," the poet reveals as "a wedge into the earth, a ramp of names driven into the nation's green." Even though the black wall becomes a "mirror of names many / as the text of a book published in stone," Morgan never forgets the sheer physicality of the monument that "runs on and on through the ground in both directions."

Book Two of *Sigodlin* opens with the stark and surprising anagram poem "Mountain Graveyard" that also foregrounds human activity in the natural world.

COURTESY OF *NCLR*; DESIGN BY DANA EZZELL GAY

RIGHT **The opening spread of Rebecca Godwin's interview with Robert Morgan in *NCLR* 2014, which featured North Carolina war literature**

Two word lines shape the poem into a visual diagram of headstones lining a cemetery:

Mountain Graveyard

stone notes
slate tales
sacred cedars
heart earth
asleep please
hated death

"Mountain Graveyard" echoes "Sigodlin" through its formal structure. Both poems express mysteries beyond human understanding, a constant theme in Morgan's work, and both dramatize the "power whose center is everywhere." In "Mountain Graveyard," the center holds in the vertical span of white space despite several leanings "off-plumb" in the right column. The sparse use of words with their carefully rendered sound chimes ("stone" and "note," "slate" and tales") bridge the gap and create a lattice effect where natural world and human body, oral and inscribed speech, metaphor and emotion, lead to the enigmatic statement of the last lines' appeal ("asleep please") and condemnation ("hated death").

Many of the poems in Book Two continue Morgan's probing into objects and their invisible energies ("Jugs in the Smokehouse," "Whiskey Tree," and "Grandma's Bureau"), but the section is notable for its inclusion of longer poems that treat historical, cultural, and familial subjects. Narrative thrusts are shaped to poetic form in "Sydney Lanier Dies at Tryon 1881," "Ninety-Six Line," and "The Body of Elisha Mitchell" and break the book's pattern of single page poems. The longest poem in *Sigodlin* is the penultimate one, "The Road from Elmira," Morgan's memory tale of his father's journey from the mountains to the piedmont to sell his wares "for Christmas cash." The poem runs three pages and displays the most irregular syllabic rhythms in the collection, eschewing formal pattern for jagged free verse thrusts that mimic the steep and perilous trail through outcrops and juts of mountain wilderness. "The Road to Elmira" resonates with specificity of place and emphasizes the hard work of farm life, a theme Morgan has pursued throughout his career. Journeys in Morgan's poetry run over land, space, time, and mind. In the decades-long tracking of Morgan's poetry, *Sigodlin* remains pivotal and indispensible, launching a fifteen-year stretch that Jesse Graves has called Morgan's "major phase." For those interested in the trip, *Sigodlin* is a perfect spot to join the ride. ■

ANTHONY ABBOTT RECEIVES THE 2015 NORTH CAROLINA AWARD FOR LITERATURE

Davidson College poet/professor Anthony S. Abbott received the 2015 North Carolina Award for Literature. The North Carolina Awards are the highest civilian awards given by the state. Abbott received his BA from Princeton University, graduating Magna Cum Laude, and his MA and PhD from Harvard University. He has published seven volumes of poetry and two novels. He has taught at Davidson College since 1964, was named Charles A. Dana Professor of English in 1990, and served as chair of the English Department from 1989 to 1996. He has also taught Sunday School at Davidson College Presbyterian Church for over fifty years. ■

PHOTOGRAPH BY LENARD D. MOORE

ABOVE **Anthony Abbott with his former student Staley Jordan Nance (Davidson College Class of 1977) at the North Carolina Awards ceremony, Durham, 12 Nov. 2015**

HONORABLE MENTION,
2015 JAMES APPLEWHITE POETRY PRIZE

BY RICHARD BETZ

Wide Awake

COURTESY OF ASHEVILLE ART MUSEUM PERMANENT COLLECTION, BEQUEST OF THE ARTIST

***Night Breath*, 1988 (oil painting, 48x34) by Rick Horton**

After all this time
I expected to know more
Than these few lean precepts,
Prized from ordinary days;

I expected to say more
Than merely grace:
Grace for the burning trees,
The shining rain.

This day in October
Reminded me what Broad Daylight means:
Pinching up every crumb of day
With the tines of a rusty fork,

Greedy for the endless solace
Of earthly sustenance,
The taste of the purely physical
On the tip of my tongue.

The empirical sun
Blazed away anything that
Came between us, any impediment
To complete wakefulness.

And even the lopsided moon
Was still awake overhead,
Rising higher and higher and higher
In glorious insomnia.

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. An outdoorsman and an avid runner, he has run twenty marathons, including the 2011 Boston Marathon. He is married and has one daughter. 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. He has been a finalist in the Applewhite competition twice before, and his poems were published in *NCLR Online* 2013 and 2015. Read another of his poems, also a finalist in the 2015 competition, in the *NCLR* 2016 print issue.

New York native **RICK HORTON** (1954–1990), an attorney, lived for a time in Charlotte, NC. In 1976, he won a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship. In 1978–79, he was a participant in the North Carolina Art Society Fellowship in Paris, France. Since his death, there have been at least two exhibitions in his honor: at the Cary, NC, Hospice Center in 1991 and at the Jerald Melberg Gallery in Charlotte, in 1992. His work has been exhibited at museums and galleries throughout the US and is included in the collections of the Mint Museum of Art in Charlotte, the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris, the Puccini Museum in Italy, the Contel Corporation in Atlanta, and the Museum of Modern Art in New York, among others. See more of his work on the Asheville Art Museum website.

ON THE WINGS OF A CAROLINA PARAKEET

a review by Gina Caison

Allison Adelle Hedge Coke, *Streaming*. Minneapolis, MN: Coffee House Press, 2014.

COURTESY OF ALLISON ADELLE HEDGE COKE

Allison Adelle Hedge Coke has returned with a collection of poetry that rivals her previously successful and critically acclaimed work, from *Dog Road Woman* (1997) to *Blood Run* (2007). Furthermore, fans of her autobiographical memoir, *Rock, Ghost, Willow, Deer* (2004), will appreciate her continued focus on place and the connections that she makes between locations that draw humans into a wider cosmology. Likewise, Hedge Coke continues to push poetic form to its limits, engaging time signatures that disrupt received temporalities of structured verse. As many readers of Hedge Coke can attest, she leaves us wanting more, and *Streaming* does not disappoint. It's a thick collection, simultaneously expansive and focused, gentle in its care for the planet and pointed in its critique of human destruction.

As in much of Hedge Coke's work, North Carolina serves as a setting for many of the poems. And yet, the collection does even more in poems such as "Niño de la Calle," where it establishes a great chain of humanity from the streets of Cary and Raleigh to the thoroughfares of Medellin, Columbia, where the author recalls her own battles with drug abuse alongside her brother's struggle for internal peace. Hedge Coke sees the young boys on the street "gone to glue, abandoned here," and she recognizes herself and her family in the boys' eyes. She reminds the reader of a difficult truth, closing the poem with a haunting call to action: "Each boy our son." *Streaming* alights on the wings of one of its most frequently recurring symbols in the Carolina parakeet, carrying us across time and space and, most importantly, the imagined colonial borders that separate us from one another. In this way, Hedge Coke's collection unites North Carolina with a planetary consciousness that streams across the Dog Road Milky Way.

The collection reaches back and pushes forward, setting its clock to an indigenous temporality of the continent. In this time-scape, the poems follow the paths of Native American knowledges. In the section "Where We Have Been," which is dedicated to her father, Hedge Coke works through Dust Bowl imagery, suturing those southeastern Native peoples divided by Indian Removal into a collective history where they all face

Originally from Mebane, NC, **GINA CAISON** is an Assistant Professor at Georgia State University in Atlanta where she teaches courses in Southern and Native American literatures. Currently, she is at work on a monograph titled *Red States: Literature, Native America, and the U.S. South*, which explores the recurrent use of Native history in literature of the US South. Her recent work has appeared in or is forthcoming from journals such as *The Global South*, *Mississippi Quarterly,* and *PMLA*. Read her interview with Eddie Swimmer about *Unto These Hills* in *NCLR* 2010.

ALLISON ADELLE HEDGE COKE spent part of her childhood in North Carolina. She has an MFA from Vermont College. Her poetry collection *Dog Road Woman* (Coffee House Press, 1997) received the American Book Award from the Before Columbus foundation. She has also twice received the Writer of the Year award for Poetry from the Wordcraft Circle of Native Writers and Storytellers. *Streaming* is her fourth poetry collection. Read more about Allison Adelle Hedge Coke in Scott Hicks's essay in *NCLR* 2011, and read samples of her poetry in *NCLR* 2004 and 2011.

ABOVE **Allison Adelle Hedge Coke Wordfest in Asheville, NC, 28 Apr. 2013**

a colonial system bent on turning humans and the planet to dust. In the poem "Rainmaker," Hedge Coke returns to the images of extinct, endangered, and exploited birds: "Carolina parakeets. / Passenger pigeons. / Venezuelan oily birds gone to conquistador war lights. / Canaries, still suffering souls for coal." The end-stops on each line mark a finality wrought through destruction, but her father's shell-shaking ceremony renders a hope in the rain that "holds memory" across time. The poem closes with a repetition of eight enjambed lines until the final iteration of "Daddy called for rain." Then it offers, "Like we all always do. / Always do. / Like we will always do. / Always do." The eight lines of "Daddy called for rain" evoke images of the poet's father circling the four directions, not once but twice, spiraling in and out of his ceremonial call for healing, and the final four lines pull indigenous people together into the ceremony with the collective "all." Even more significantly, Hedge Coke signals a collective future in the change from "all" to "will" in the line's second iteration. This collective future is supported by the repetition of the phrase "always do," signaling these Native lifeways as eternal, forward looking, and most importantly, *active*. In other words, Hedge Coke's poetic use of indigenous knowledges, aesthetics, and structures is not merely a gratuitous window-dressing of authenticity or words that sit on the page in a state of passive being. Rather, they are active linguistic agents; they are words that "always do."

In addition to offering an indigenous perspective throughout the collection, Hedge Coke also works within an American literary genealogy. These two currents of meaning are not mutually exclusive, however. Rather she weaves them together and in so doing, demonstrates how they have long informed one another. Readers will catch a glimpse of William Carlos Williams's plums as they listen to LeAnne Howe shake shells and ponder Robert Creeley's divergences from his Black Mountain peers. In the poem "America, I Sing You Back," Hedge Coke echoes Walt Whitman and Langston Hughes. This poem, though, does not hear America singing, and it does not add to the chorus of "I, Too." Instead, Hedge Coke gathers up the spirit of Whitman and Hughes and takes the song back further. She follows the beat to an indigenous continent that sings to America in its cradleboard: "Before America began to sing, I sung her to sleep." As with several of her other poems in the collection, this movement backward simultaneously opens up future spaces as she offers to America to "Sing you home into yourself and back to reason." In its form, the poem tugs at Whitman's poetics in such a way that reminds the reader that his style has older relatives than the Fireside Poets that came before. Whereas Whitman hears America singing, Hedge Coke offers us the original song.

Simply put, *Streaming* is a gorgeous book from a poet at the top of her game. The central images of the collection float from page to page, and the book achieves a true coherence from poem to poem, telling the story of an American continent that must reckon with some hard truths in order to survive. However, the book is not all bleak. Hedge Coke reminds us that the knowledge that will get us to the next world is already here among us. Most enjoyable is how this book complements the tapestry of our state. I had the pleasure of reading this book on the shores of Kitty Hawk, and I read this book looking out across the sound west to Roanoke Island. I read this book in the shadow of Grandfather Mountain on lands once used as an old mica mine; I read this book on the banks of the Oconaluftee; and I read this book within a stone's throw of the Great Trading Path as it winds its way through the Piedmont. Everywhere I read this book, it read back to me. *Streaming* is a love letter to this planet, and much to our benefit, Hedge Coke carves out a special place for the tiny beautiful bit of it we call North Carolina. ■

COURTESY OF NORTH CAROLINA COLLECTION, UNC CHAPEL HILL LIBRARY

LEFT **Lithograph of Carolina parakeets by John James Audubon**

FINALIST, 2015 JAMES APPLEWHITE POETRY PRIZE

BY MARYLIN HERVIEUX

The Green Wall

1.
Early progressions slip
from the grip of buds; constellations of tint
iridescent in the warming sun.
I watch this slow undertaking
and I'm ambivalent

about the dissolution of what had been
familiar: the back-odor of wood stove fires,
flames growing like winter annuals,
or the wordlessness of gray mornings
when your ghost became incarnate
in my mind.

Winter was unbordered,
a canvas without frame,
sunsets raveling copper
over lineless edges,
and I walked through them
wind raked, aging, a cross-section
of element and exposure
trying not to break.

2.
Trees pawn old expressions
as their congregations mature in green.
Soon they'll wall the small clearing
where my house sits,
leafed tips allowing
a bantam flap of sky.

This will be my world,
identified by reduction.
Everything beyond,
a matter of faith.

COURTESY OF ASHEVILLE ART MUSEUM, BLACK MOUNTAIN COLLEGE COLLECTION, GIFT OF THE ARTIST

***La Foresta*, 2005 (monoprint on paper, 19.5x27.63) by Caroline Burton Michahelles**

MARYLIN HERVIEUX is originally from Upstate New York but has lived in North Carolina for many years. She was also a finalist in the 2014 Applewhite competition, and her finalist poems appeared in the 2015 online and print editions of *NCLR*. Her work has also been published in *Kakalak: An Anthology of Carolina Poets*, *Kalliope: A Journal of Women's Literature and Art*, the North Carolina Arts Council's *Poets-of-the-Week Series*, and *Tar River Poetry*. She received an Artist Project Grant from the Orange County Arts Council to teach poetry workshops to various special needs groups in the community.

CAROLINE BURTON MICHAHELLES is a painter and poet. She lives and works in Florence and New York City. She studied with Josef Albers at Black Mountain College and was influenced by his philosophy of painting. She has published poetry in the *Pennsylvania Literary Review*, and several of her poems are included in Francesco Gurrieri's book *Esercizi di Critica Militante*. See more of her work in the Black Mountain College Collection at the Asheville Art Museum.

A "SENSE" OF SELF: CRAFTING IDENTITY

a review by
Elizabeth F. Oxler

Tina Barr. *Kaleidoscope*. Oak Ridge, TN: Iris Press, 2015.

Grace C. Ocasio. *The Speed of Our Lives*. Buffalo, NY: BlazeVox Books, 2014.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JEFREY STEVENS

On the cover of **Tina Barr's *Kaleidoscope*** is an open slide of a kaleidoscope featuring butterflies, within which appear two quotations about butterflies: "We are like butterflies who flutter for a day and think it is forever" (Carl Sagan) and "The butterfly counts not months but moments, and has time enough" (Rabindranath Tagore). The juxtaposition of these elements – the open slide and the language of time and its fluttering nature – not only invoke obvious thoughts about nature, but also reflect what the poet does in her collection of poems. The butterfly in these examples distorts the view of time, while the kaleidoscope by virtue of its function serves as a distorted object. Through these two ideas, Barr takes the reader on a journey of distortion and creates a milieu of inversion, surrealism, and inclusion. The poems scat as jazz pieces do, moving through consciousness, time, and written form.

Like a kaleidoscope needs a mirror to reflect the pieces inside of it, Barr uses the form of the poem to inspire the senses, crafting within these moments poems that not only reflect her own biography, but are as easily absorbed into the being of the reader. Barr reinforces the concept of kaleidoscope and that feeling of juxtaposition immediately within her first poem, "In the Kaleidoscope's Chamber," a seemingly patterned sonnet that reads as an ode to the namesake object of the collection. However, the turn at the couplet suggests otherwise: "My husband's hands / tab the keys, dicing white and black. My ears / arrange it as music; outside are birds, ushering us in."

Barr immediately "turns" the *reader*, instead of the sonnet, and from then on, her poems continue to juxtapose one idea with another that reads at first as not connected, yet by the end of the poem, seems the most likely fit. "Blue Rose" and "Blue Fawn," poems for and about jazz musicians Sheila Jordan and Herb Robertson, introduce the literal idea of juxtaposition, as both artists are known for their musical versions of this idea. Barr writes

ELIZABETH F. OXLER is a second year PhD student at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. Her concentration and areas of research include folklore and Southern studies. She is currently the Curatorial Assistant at the Paul and Lulu Hilliard University Art Museum, where she works on exhibitions and oversees the educational programming.

ABOVE **Tina Barr reading at Malaprop's Bookstore, Asheville, NC, 15 Sept. 2013**

TINA BARR has received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Tennessee Arts Commission, and the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, among others. She is the former director of the Creative Writing Program and the Charles R. Glover Chair of English Studies at Rhodes College in Memphis, TN. She now teaches in the Great Smokies Writing Program at UNC Asheville.

some of her best lines in these two poems, as she blends the literal heritage of bebop with the metaphorical suggestion of her words: "Someone's picked lettuce from sunlight / brined mussels in vinegar and bruised thyme, / to work against the sweetness of smoked salmon" and

> **Sheila sings as if she has fed off feelings,**
> **her insides transparent. Her voice a fluid.**
> **Like a wound inside my mouth when**
> **a marzipan grape sprayed with color**
> **spurts its brandy. . . . I see my split selves**
> **come back to rest, cast, and whole.**

The idea of "work[ing] against" the image of the grape bursting, and the sense of what it means for someone to "see" their "split selves / come back to rest, cast, and whole" linguistically invoke what Jordan and Robertson do as well as what a kaleidoscope does. Jazz fashions new ideas with each line of scat, in the same ways that new visions are reflected with each turn of the glass inside. Barr drives the rhythm of these poems, conducting the readers to listen and see for themselves.

That is not to say that Barr is fully willing to relinquish interpretation onto the reader, or that she is suggesting that seeing is even infallible. These new visions can be read as an invitation for the reader to interepret Barr's poems in the ways that work for each reader. However, Barr's poems on the American response to Nagasaki and Okinawa as well as the Rwandan genocide complicate the idea of interpretation. All three of these events have at their core interpretations and assumptions of one group being used as a rationale for violence against another. Simply put, interpretation can be as dangerous as it is exhilarating. Barr writes in "Shiny Brite": "I wake at night and think of those blinded / by the bomb, and how we blind ourselves." The word surrealism seems most appropriate in this instance, as the notion of surreal sometimes suggests a melding of visions and ideas that seemingly have no connection to each other. In the case of these two poems, one could wonder the same. How does Barr make the rational leap from jazz to genocide? It is here that Barr's biography lends itself to determining an answer to this question. Though Barr is not from North Carolina originally, her work frequently attempts to make the localness of the South more global.

This idea recurs in the second section of her collection, as childhood memories are commingled with the images found in Henry Darger's paintings. Darger, an "outsider" artist, and the child of these memories live together in the piece, forming a poetic community. This idea of community moves readily through Barr's collection, and through her maneuverings, one begins to see the blending of worlds and ideas: a kaleidoscope of the contemporary South.

The moments in which Barr blends ideas resonate so strongly that the poems in which she navigates the reader to the Middle East ultimately feel out of place. These poems, while still following the structures set forth earlier by Barr – the slight glimpse into a scene, followed by a larger pan-out to another event – lack the gravitational pull that the other poems mentioned possess. That sense of distortion and disjointedness, that "turn" of the kaleidoscope, allows the reader to do much more reflective work and thereby connect them more deeply with the material. However, Barr's collection remains an experimental and tightly crafted body of work that creates a narrative about a place as much as it asks the reader to do the same.

Grace Ocasio's *The Speed of Our Lives* is also very much invested in this question of narrative construction and identity. In the introduction to this volume, Lenard Moore writes that Ocasio has amassed a collection of poetry that is "grounded in history and a sense of place" (13). Ocasio achieves this grounding by crafting poems that explore the lives of important

PHOTOGRAPH BY LENARD D. MOORE

RIGHT **Grace C. Ocasio reading from her chapbook, *Hollerin from this Shack* (Ahadaba Books, 2009) at a Carolina African American Writers' Collective workshop at the Literary Book Post, Salisbury, NC, 5 June 2010**

historical figures from the seventeenth century to the present day. Moore additionally notes multiple comparisons to Rita Dove, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Sharon Olds. Thus, the reader begins the collection with an already saturated sense of Ocasio's identity as a poet: on the one hand, she writes an embodiment of past lives; on the other, she writes in a way that is comparable to other poetic giants of her lifetime. So, the question remains for the reader: where is Ocasio's voice in all of this? It may seem as if Ocasio's voice as poet becomes lost among the more well-known figures and reminiscences of others. Like Tina Barr, Ocasio is at times performing a type of distortion or even inversion, for, in her embodiment of other figures as subjects and her nudges to other poets, the readers of Ocasio's work get a very real sense of self.

Immediately worth discussing is the quartet of Kwansabas that Ocasio includes in section four of her collection: "The Wright Origins," "Deposition," "This is The News," and "Emmett Till Before His Eclipse." These four poems read as mirrored pairs of one another, as Ocasio embodies the figures of both Richard Wright and Emmett Till. The patterned structure, seven lines of seven words and no more than seven letters per word, creates a conversation between the paired poems of Wright and Till, a suggestion of what Wright (in Paris at the time) may have felt or could have said as he watched the coverage of Till's funeral and the ensuing trial. The poems resonate in the way that the subject matter still very much resonated then, and resonates now. The embodiment through language of these persons, as well as the poem's formalism, create this relationship between poem and reader.

Ocasio's embodiment of historical women provides the opportunity for many of the women selected to regain power, even if it is just linguistically. In "Matoaka, One Who Kindles (Also Known as Pocahontas)," the following lines appear:

> **I, a woman**
> **warrior for my people, slap treaties**
> **from your hand. . . . How I wish**
> **I had taunted you, disemboweled your vowels**
> **skinned your consonants, cast your words**
> **away, syllable by putrid syllable, shoved them**
> **into firewood, stirred them until they**
> **exploded into flame.**

This empowered action contrasts immensely with "Walking Sepia (for Michelle Obama)" and even "Alondra De La Parra." In the latter two poems, both women are embodied as purely physical: Michelle Obama "swirls" while de la Parra "undulates." Ocasio deftly highlights the difference or lack thereof between the two generations of women. At first glance, it would seem that Matoaka possesses more agency than Michelle Obama and Alondra de la Parra. However, Ocasio gives Matoaka the power through the form of the poem. Without this, Matoaka faces the same experience that women in the contemporary era still face, a focus on their external and physicality rather than their interiority. Through embodiment, we see the true reality of identity.

Like Barr, Ocasio additionally plays with juxtaposition, and her most powerful poems besides those already mentioned are the ones that suggest something different from what they present. "John F. Kennedy Jr." and "the Lost Boys of Sudan" pose the question of truth and experience, as both poems are narrated from the outsider's point of view. Outside looking in, how much can we ever really know about a subject: "Take, for instance, / the photo / of you / kneeling" and "After I read about you in *Life* / I pictured your frown."

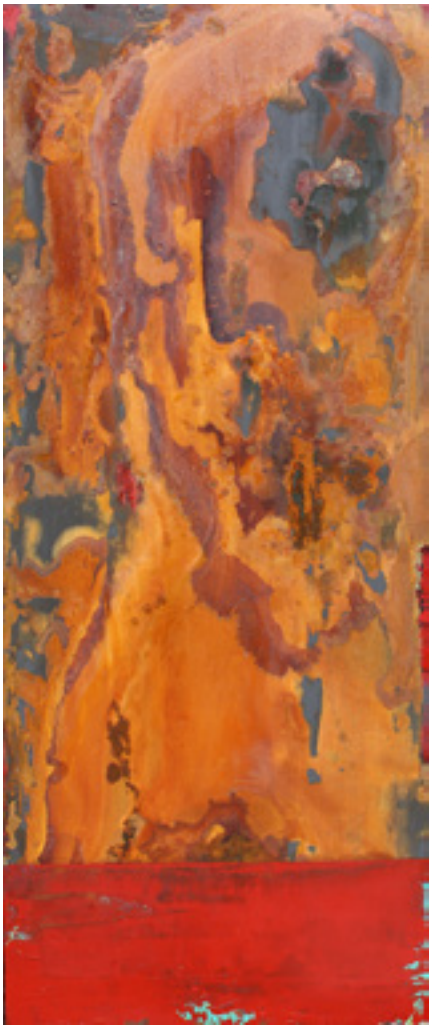
Ocasio's closing poem, "Deeper Than Skin" comments, "Ellison wrote of an invisible / man. I write the world as colorless as ether." The work that Ocasio does in this collection, the work of embodying those who were powerless, all while highlighting the lack of power still felt by contemporaries, connects her to Barr in that she also creates a relationship between the local and the global. Ocasio inverts this idea – using time and geographical setting, or even the notion of disconnectedness of the subject – to highlight the actual closeness the subjects of her poems have to those who read them. To understand "Matoaka" is to understand the plight of women and men who are unable to speak fully today. Both poets ask of their readers that they critically assess their own ways of seeing and interpreting the world that exists outside their locality. ■

GRACE C. OCASIO received her MFA in Poetry at Sarah Lawrence College and lives in Charlotte, NC, with her husband and daughter. Her poetry has also appeared in *Rattle*, *Earth's Daughters*, *Haight Ashbury Literary Journal*, *Obsidian*, and *Broad River Review*. In 2010 and 2013, she was a finalist for the Rash Award in Poetry. In 2011, she won the Sonia Sanchez and Amiri Baraka Prize in Poetry. She was a James Applewhite Poetry Prize finalist in 2012 for her poem "Little Girlfriend" (published in *NCLR* 2013) and in 2014 for her poem "After Perusing Grandma's Scrapbook" (published in *NCLR Online* 2015). And in 2014, she was a recipient of a Regional Artist Project Grant Award funded by the North Carolina Arts Council.

FINALIST, 2015 JAMES APPLEWHITE POETRY PRIZE

BY L. TERESA CHURCH

Tooth Rejected by the Tooth Fairy



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

***Totem One Red*, 2010 (oxidation painting with oil and wax medium on panel, 30x72x3) by Willie Little**

There aren't dimes or nickels enough,
toy cars as prizes to muffle wails
from a six-year-old trembling,
open-mouthed before a liquor-crazed

father who, tired of whines about
"a loose tooth," decides his son's
lament will not ruin the family
vacation this down-home summer.

Readying for pulling,
the father numbs himself,
guzzles a whole pint, mint gin,
pretends he only wants a look,

which turns into a nudge that
becomes an unrelenting grip.
Screams pierce the front room.
Father tightens one broad hand
around his son's slender arm,
lets go only for harder slaps.
Each time he barks: "Shut up!
Shut up! You can't feel nothing.

It don't hurt." Forever-minutes,
slippery with snot, tears, saliva,
blood, intermingle, drip down
the once-white T-shirt's front.

Like a crimson-stained corn kernel,
filaments of damp flesh still attached,
wrapped in toilet paper, a milk tooth
slipped beneath a cased pillow

on a bed fairies won't touch
as they wing night into dawn.

L. TERESA CHURCH is a member (as well as archivist and membership chair) of the Carolina African American Writers' Collective, which she has written about for the 2016 *NCLR* print issue. Her writings have appeared in a variety of publications, including *NCLR* 2004, as well as *Obsidian: Literature in the African Diaspora, Word and Witness: 100 Years of North Carolina Poetry, African American Review,* and *Pembroke Magazine*, among others. Church has earned degrees in English and English/Creative Writing from Radford College and Brown University, respectively. In addition, she holds an MS in Library Science and a PhD in Information and Library Science from UNC Chapel Hill.

Multimedia installation artist and storyteller **WILLIE LITTLE** was born in Washington, NC, and currently resides in northern California. He received a BA from UNC Chapel Hill. He has had solo exhibitions at the Smithsonian Institution, the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University, the American Jazz Museum in Kansas City, and the African American Museums in Philadelphia, Detroit, and California. His work *Juke Joint*, an interactive traveling multimedia installation, was juried into the Smithsonian's permanent collection of the National Museum of African American History and Culture, opening in 2016. He has received numerous grants, including two from the Pollock Krasner Foundation, and awards, including the Cultural Heritage Artist of the Year Award. See more of his work on his website.

TO KEEP IT FOREVER: NATURE AND MEMORY

a review by Sarah Huener

Coyla Barry. *The Flying Days*. Durham: Carolina Wren Press, 2014.

John Hoppenthaler. *Domestic Garden*. Pittsburgh: Carnegie Mellon University Press, 2015.

SARAH HUENER received her BA from UNC Chapel Hill and her MFA from Boston University. Also a musician, Huener has traveled to Croatia and Israel as a Robert Pinsky Global Fellow. She has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize, and in 2014, she was a finalist for the Pocataligo Poetry Contest. Her poetry has been featured in *Four Way Review* and *Journal of Compressed Creative Arts*.

COYLA BARRY earned a physiology degree from Vassar College and worked as a marine biologist for Yale until the 1970s. She then earned a master's in Library Science from UNC Chapel Hill and worked as a research librarian for an international health care company until she retired to Durham, NC. Barry's *Creature and Creature* received the 2001 Harperprints Chapbook competition from the North Carolina Writers' Network. Finishing Line Press published her second chapbook, *Swimming Woman: Poems from Montana*, in 2009. Her poetry has also appeared in *Tar River Poetry*, *Nimrod*, *Pedestal*, *Kakalak*, and *Southern Poetry Review*.

JOHN HOPPENTHALER is a professor in the English Department at East Carolina University. He has served as the Gilbert-Chappell Distinguished Poet for the Eastern Region of North Carolina for two terms, was the Poetry Editor for *Kestrel* for eleven years, and currently serves as Advisory Editor to the cultural journal *Connotation Press: An Online Artifact*, where he also edits *A Poetry Congeries*. His other poetry collections, *Lives of Water* (2003) and *Anticipate the Coming Reservoir* (2008), were also published by Carnegie Mellon University Press.

Writing serves many purposes, but perhaps the oldest and most basic is that of documentation. Keeping a ledger of harvest yields, writing children's names in the family bible, saving letters long after the sender is dead – all these actions serve as a more permanent memory than speech. In *The Flying Days,* Coyla Barry deals closely with memory and nature, fixing in words the moments, visions, days that make up our lives. John Hoppenthaler, too, is concerned with catching hold of a specific past; his *Domestic Garden* is a personal panoply of significance. As Rebecca Gayle Howell put it in her essay on occasional poetry, both these poets "speaks into the forgetting air what should not be forgotten."[1]

From the first poem of ***The Flying Days***, "Fishermen," **Coyla Barry**'s treatment of the natural world gives equal power to nature and to human belief. The unfathomable sea holds not promise for the speaker, but the speaker's faith brings them a magnificent yield. In some ways, this poem is a figure for the book: Barry's scenes don't immediately impart a wealth of meaning, but they shift to revelation if you watch them long enough. In "Rain Crow," a crow crites out as a storm is gathering. Welcoming the storm, desiring "something / I can never name or pray for," the speaker is pulled back to a parallel feeling from childhood. As she watches the real-life, real-time woods *become* caves, the transition is so smooth it almost doesn't exist.

This act of watching feels true to the reader, because that's how

COURTESY OF COYLA BARRY

memory works: it happens to us rather than being an action of thought or intellect. The trigger is buried. This poem quietly embodies the inextricability of cause and sense, of figure and object, of signifier and signified. As it draws to a close, the speaker finally spots the actual crow, "Its mocking eye / the center of a maze, glimpsed and lost." Here Barry overlays image, narrative, and resonance of content skillfully, so that the poem is the crow's eye, or the act of the speaker's observation is the glimpse, or the sycamore and shadow are the world. This is great understated writing.

In the title poem, vultures prove to be an unexpected emblem of hope: near the end, "They crane their scrawny necks / and lift my heart." Like the book, this poem is strongest when it draws the strangest comparisons; it is weakest where it falls back into the familiar or trips over its own mechanics. The poem opens, as many of Barry's do, with a setting of scene: the vultures come

[1] Rebecca Gayle Howell, "The Occasion of Poetry," *Poetry Magazine* 17 Jun. 2015; web.

ABOVE **Coyla Barry at the launch of her new poetry collection at Flyleaf Books, Chapel Hill, NC, 8 May 2014**

every evening "like members of a club," and the speaker sees them through her window and becomes attached to their constancy. This rather staged beginning gives way to strong middle stanzas, in which time melts a bit, allowing the speaker to recall "reading Dickens in the glider," suffering through a statistics class, and living out monotonous middle-aged days on the way to the quiet core of the poem: "No one believes the days will end."

The minor fault with this poem is the ending: "They are my familiars, / promising another blessed day." It is not just explanatory and sentimental, it's unnecessary. Barry could sharpen her editorial knife, and some of the work in *The Flying Days* could benefit from a keener blade. She has well earned the right not to explain herself. The book lingers in the past and the outdoors; but its players are hemmed in, and the reader can't help but feel they should be allowed to roam a little more freely and to cast shadows.

Shadows and ghosts also populate the pages of **John Hoppenthaler's *Domestic Garden***. Past selves, loved ones no longer living, and even Elizabeth Bishop make appearances. Moments of overt communion with the past – friends and strangers who feel like friends, fellow writers, selves past and present – are a common thread throughout *Domestic Garden*.

In "The Garden of Eden," Hoppenthaler hits an early stride, combining solid pacing, thematic scene setting and an effective tone, to create a complete scene. The third-person perspective offers an authority to the narrative, and the almost shorthand account of events pares away the unnecessary to include only illustrative information. The things in this poem belong there; the sequence of events can't be said to be normal, exactly – but is just familiar enough for us to feel at home. The poem opens:

> **He placed one looped end of a thin, white rope**
> **between her ring & middle finger,**
> **closed her hand over it, then walked away**
>
> **with the other end until the line pulled taut.**
> **Soon, wash appeared. A billowing sheet.**
> **Boxer shorts, her camisoles . . .**

The surreal holding of the clothesline – a common object – by the "he" and "she" is the flavor of distance maintained throughout the poem. As aphids appear, so do mortgages. The wash on the line has its own importance – the boxers and camisoles reappear later, "faded" and "threadbare." We aren't sure how much the people in the poem know, or how much they know they know. They had "gained / all the knowledge they'd ever need, as they saw it."

The ending of the poem is a good illustration of how the tone works – the pacing is carefully controlled with a series of full stops and ampersands, leading up to a deliberate connection with the title. The final sentence, though actually a fresh twist on the narrative, is framed as one of clarification: "'It' being the gradual process of growing / old while their children gorged themselves on the ripest fruit."

That central moment – "growing / old" – is a microcosm of this book, with its interest in the process of change and aging – for humans and plants alike – parallel and examined. In "What We Find When We're Not Looking," the speaker tracks a human literally, following the footprints of a woman who preceded him on his hike, who paced under a tree, leaving her watch behind fastened to a limb. One can't help but hear echoes of Larkin – "It pleases me to stand in silence here . . . / Since someone will forever be surprising / A hunger in himself to be more serious"[2] – in Hoppenthaler's "It felt so like a church then / that I knelt." Both speakers find themselves awed and fascinated by a place haunted by others, a place that evokes something elemental and shared with the rest of humanity. Hoppenthaler plays repetition and narration off line and page space to create a rounded, sutra-like poem that embodies its content. His abrupt ending, "She was hiking / and lost her watch," works because it provides a rhetorical approximation of the psychological return to the

PHOTOGRAPH BY AMY LYNN DAVIS

[2] Phillip Larkin, "Church Going," *The Less Deceived* (Marvell Press, 1955) 28–29.

LEFT **John Hoppenthaler reading at Quail Ridge Books, Raleigh, NC, 19 July 2013**

literal, and to the present, from the reconstruction and abstraction of the speaker's thought journey.

Barry and Hoppenthaler alike handle carefully the sacredness of memory, the quiet tending of the garden that is the past. They are poets of detail and domesticity, but also of the wide world. Dorianne Laux, another North Carolina poet of nature and wonder, writes:

> . . . What hasn't
>
> been rent, divided, split? Broken
> the days into nights, the night sky
>
> into stars, the stars into patterns
> I make up as I trace them
>
> with a broken-off blade
> of grass. . . .[3]

Barry and Hoppenthaler too are engaged in this tracing; they outline larger shapes with nature, with crows and vultures, with fishing lines and clotheslines. At their best, they capture a bounty barely effable, lost in the past yet pinned to the page: pressed leaves and flowers. They comprehend Elizabeth Bishop when she writes: "I abscond with a little ivory stick with a sharp point. To keep it forever I bury it under the bleeding heart by the crab apple tree, but it is never found again."[4] As others have before, these poets try, knowing they will fail, to keep it forever. ■

[3] Dorianne Laux, "What's Broken," *Facts About The Moon: Poems* (Norton, 2006) 42–43.

[4] Elizabeth Bishop, "In the Village," *Prose*, ed. Lloyd Schwartz, (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011) 66.

THE ONE AND THE MANY SELVES

a review by
Susan Laughter Meyers

Diana Pinckney. *The Beast and the Innocent.* Lexington, KY: FutureCycle Press, 2015.

Sandra Ann Winters. *The Place Where I Left You.* Cliffs of Moher, County Clare, Ireland: Salmon Poetry, 2014.

SUSAN LAUGHTER MEYERS is the author of two poetry collections: *My Dear, Dear Stagger Grass* (Cider Press Review, 2013; reviewed in *NCLR Online* 2014) and *Keep and Give Away* (University of South Carolina Press, 2006). She has published her poetry regularly in *NCLR*, and in 2013 she was winner of the James Applewhite Poetry Prize.

Charlotte resident **DIANA PINCKNEY** has been published in *RHINO*, *Atlanta Review*, *Cream City Review*, *Cave Wall, Green Mountains Review*, *Tar River Poetry,* and many other journals. She has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize five times and has five collections of poetry. In 2013, she received the Irene Blair Honeycutt Lifetime Achievement in the Literary Arts Award given by Central Piedmont Community College in Charlotte, NC.

SANDRA ANN WINTERS served as a professor of English and Irish studies at Guilford College in Greensboro, NC, from 1989 to her retirement in 2011. She lives part of the year in Millstreet, County Cork, Ireland, where she spends time reading, writing, and presenting workshops and readings.

The Place Where I Left You is Sandra Ann Winters's first full poetry collection, following her chapbook *Calving Under the Moon* (Finishing Line, 2013). *The Beast and the Innocent* is Diana Pinckney's second full collection and fifth book. Winters is originally from North Carolina, and Pinckney is a South Carolina native, now claimed by North Carolina after living in Charlotte for years. Besides their Carolina connection, these two poets have much in common, including – as their poems in the two recent books exhibit – an appreciation of the arts, a strong love of family, and an understanding of the craft of poetry. Yet there is an essential difference between their approach, as any reader will gather from these two books. In her poems, Sandra Ann Winters works to clear away the busy world to get to the depth and core of one individual life. Her poems move toward a singular, up-close focus, as befits one who settles into a rural life in the midst of nature, and the poems gain intimacy for that. Diana Pinckney, on the other hand, works to enlarge her world, inviting different voices, and thus building complexities, to enrich the palette of her poetry's landscape. One poet, like Dickinson, prefers a poem's world as small and intimate; the other, like Whitman, opts for a world with a host of voices.

Sandra Ann Winter's *The Place Where I Left You* is divided into three sections: "Family," "Place," and "Self." The simplicity and directness of this thematic format suit the spirit of a book that moves from the small community of family, to a contemplation of home and neighborhood, and finally to the more introspective exploration of self. The opening

poem, "Death of Alaska," is a poignant contemplation written in the voice of a mother missing her son – "flinging himself, a young man now, into the universe" – and her dog, who has disappeared on the same day. In the format of a contemporary unrhymed sonnet, the poem turns in the final two lines, when the mother ends her restless calls for the son and the dog, admitting they will not return and feeling the reality of her loneliness. The poem prepares the reader for what is to follow: additional poems in which kin is absent in some way and poems of a relatively solitary life, where relationships are typically one to one, where the landscape and everything in it is worthy of attention.

The title of the book's second poem, "Aw Go Away Now," voices a fitting response to the sorrow of the book's many departures, mostly by death. The words "*Aw go away now and again*" – brief and plain and poignant – are spoken by a mother dressing for burial her youngest son who has drowned at sea. In this section, family is the repeated theme. There are poems in which a child yearns for the attention and love of her mother, as well as poems that consider the relationship between a foster child and her foster mother – or multiple foster mothers. Two poems are elegies for the poet's brother, who died at twenty-one. In "Missed," the poet fondly remembers walking in the woods with her brother, who while hunting with his bow and arrow, draws his bowstring and deliberately misses, by half an inch, the buck he has sighted. Her admiration for him, for that compassionate gesture, needs no words of explanation except to say that at that moment both brother and sister are aware of what has just taken place: "we both know you have perfect aim."

Section two, entitled "Place," gives the reader a generous understanding of Winters's love of all that is rural, particularly rural Ireland. The section begins with "Calving Under the Moon," a narrative poem that opens and closes with a mention of classical music. A veterinarian goes to the farm of an old Irish farmer to help birth a calf, a procedure that is mostly mechanical but that also involves tempo – like the music of Mozart in the veterinarian's ear. Winters provides a nice contrast between the practical and the sublime: latex gloves, a jack with rope, blood – all in the midst of music and moonlight.

She also casts a spell with the four poems that frame the rooms of a beloved house – parlour, kitchen, library, and bedroom. Each room has its story. In "The Parlour" a father is brought home to die, whereas in "The Library" the poet plans her own death: "My family / will bring cups of tea; I will slide away here, / where birds slip down the chimney, / land on the soapstone hearth." The poem called "The Kitchen" enchants with its inclusion of both the artistic and the ordinary. An art lover, the poem's speaker has painted her kitchen with the colors that Monet had in his, and she quotes from his late-night conversation with famous artist friends. Yet in contrast to such high art, at the end of the poem she is busy picking lice from a child's head: "attached to the base of each hair shaft, tiny yellow nits." The final poem of the section, "In the Neighborhood," is a narrative that's an odd fit, unlike Winters's other poems, because of its irony. Whereas Winters typically depends on directness in a poem's telling, in this case the poem's strength comes from what is left unsaid in its first half, when the speaker wakes to the commotion of a medical emergency at a neighbor's house – flashing lights, a fire truck, paramedics – while her husband sleeps through it all. She guesses that the neighbor has had a heart attack. What the reader learns later in the poem is that the speaker's exhausted husband is a heart doctor, and this irony is not lost on Winters – nor on the reader, who feels the night's eeriness because of it. Among sonnets and poems of longer stanzas, "In the Neighborhood" also stands alone as a poem of two-line stanzas, which, with their pairing of lines, have the regularity of a heartbeat.

The final section of *The Place Where I Left You* is an exploration of self, which begins with a poem about a master artist taking over, in a controlling way, a student's work and moves from there to the idea of the self's fragility. The considerations include suicide and madness, art and temperament: scenarios of being on the edge of sanity, and beyond. Women,

PHOTOGRAPH BY DOMINIQUE MARSHALL

RIGHT **Sandra Ann Winters reading her poem "Water Signs," published in *NCLR* 2010, at the publication party for that issue, hosted by Press 53 at the Community Arts Café, Winston-Salem, NC, 11 Sept. 2010**

real and unreal, who appear are Virginia Woolf, Frida Kahlo, and Mona Lisa. The poem "Caretaker of the Crazymakers" begins with a description of what it feels like to be a "crazymaker": "You try to sit tight, but I keep slipping away / like a slick fish – moods too oily to make port. You / want to tune me to my main channel."

For Winters, self also means going back to childhood – thus, poems with the intriguing titles of "I Grew Up in a Shell Service Station" and "How I Lost My Skirt While Reciting Hiawatha" (not my favorite poems of the collection but definitely ones with memorable titles).

By the time the reader arrives at the book's end, the theme of absence and leaving has come full circle. In the closing poem, "Talking To Okra," the son speaks to the mother: "I have come back to the place where / I left you." Even he, as close kin, realizes the poet's intensity of focus, the desire to bring the universe down to the singular: "Some would say billions, some millions, / but you saw only one star."

There is nothing gimmicky or pyrotechnic about these poems. They are forthright and grounded in clarity, with enviable variety in both language and syntax. Winters's love of the Irish landscape and culture contributes some lively and less-common diction – *willies, gorse,* and *jig*s, for example. Add to that the poet's willingness to be vulnerable, as well as her fierce fixity – "*You're staring again, Mom,*" her son says in the final poem – and the result is a book that bears more than a single reading.

In **Diana Pinckney's *The Beast and the Innocent,*** the self is a chameleon. Even the poet suggests as much in her choice of epigraph for each of the two untitled sections. "It is myself that I remake," says Yeats in the epigraph for section one. For section two, Lewis Carroll speaks from his *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*: "I know who I was when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then." With a plethora of characters narrating first-person poems in both sections, each epigraph could easily speak for the whole collection. The book's title is not simply a dichotomy – with an individual being either a beast or an innocent, one or the other – but instead the two sides exist within individuals, making for complex characters as well as a varied and complicated world within the poems.

A few of the book's poems are ekphrastic, writing that is inspired by a specific painting, sculpture, or other visual art and that does more than describe the art by somehow taking the reader beyond its borders. One of these, "The Kiss of Water," is also in the form of a sestina – almost a magic hat trick for a poem to meet the goals of both an ekphrastic poem and a sestina, which calls upon the poet to repeat a set of end words in a specified pattern as the poem moves from start to finish. Perhaps the most accomplished ekphrastic poem in the collection is "The Dance," based on Botticelli's religious painting *The Annunciation*. The poet portrays the postural stance of the angel and Mary in the painting as a dance, with its give and take:

> **The virgin turns her body from the news,**
> **smooth palms fending off the Angel**
>
> **of Annunciation. God's messenger**
> **has dipped to one knee as in proposal.**
>
> **Mary's shoulders slope**
> **like folded wings, a bird poised to fly**
>
> **through the open doorway**
> **past a garden and the lone tree**
>
> **splayed out against blue sky.**

Thus, the painting's story gains new meaning from the poem when the poet is able to imagine the feelings of Mary and Gabriel, the motives for their postures and gestures. The comparison of Mary to a bird with folded wings, a bird "poised to fly," gives – in spare and beautiful language – a better understanding of the Annunciation itself. By the end of the poem, Pinckney has subtly brought it into the contemporary era with her language describing Mary as being typical of Boticelli's dazed Madonnas with "eyes downcast or gazing into a future // his fledgling angels, / those dreamy boys, are spared." What a perfect note to hit upon, "those dreamy boys"!

About a dozen of the poems in the book pertain in some way to wolves, poems scattered throughout, accruing thematic heft along the way. In the poems, wolves are not only wild and beautiful, bold and pragmatic, but also maligned by humans – seen as "the other," as Pinckney describes them in her note at the end of the book. It's hard not to see a connection between them and humans who are maligned or harmed in some way, or even killed. Are the war victims "pinned to the hedgerow bluffs / and

tumbling walls of Omaha Beach" like wolves? The girl murdered by "that nice young man"? Rosa's daughter, "my darker sister, / shot in Rosa's yard, / flung like a doll on the front stoop"? Even the runaways in the ekphrastic poem titled after an art installation called *Raised by Wolves* – "girls and boys in black and white photos," those caught up in the wilderness of the streets – are they, too, like wolves? But wolf as maligned is only one facet. There's wolf as survivor, "Winged Wolf" in the sky, and wolf as Spirit Talker for the Pawnee. And there's wolf as predator, the big bad one we all remember from "Little Red Riding Hood," now "Little Red on YouTube" in Pinckney's poem –with its Big Bad, the Wolfie "under the covers with Granny, laughing, cutting up. Man."

"Little Red on YouTube" and two other wolf poems are persona poems, the latter two spoken in the voice of first a gray wolf and then a red wolf. Persona poems, which allow the reader to get to know the speaker through what the speaker says in a monologue, are the most prevalent poems in *The Beast and the Innocent.* The book is filled with characters who reveal themselves, often unwittingly, through their own words: a man who hoards broken things, a woman who is apparently agoraphobic, a snake handler's wife, a spinster who immediately admits, "For a long time now I have tried to think / of a nice way to kill Papa," and a senator celebrating the 1931 ten-million-dollar Congressional bill to control predatory animals. It's evident that Pinckney enjoys writing persona poems, especially the more humorous ones. She is most agile in her writing when the poem is people focused, when she has the chance to "read" people – and their motives, behaviors, and speech patterns.

Because of her astuteness for writing about people, as well as her abilities to tell a good story, my favorite poems in Pinckney's collection are the ones about her family and childhood. Of all the poems – all the voices – in the book, it's her own voice that rings truest for me. "Behind the Kitchen Door" is all the more moving because its violence hits home for the poet, who grew up with Rosa working in her house, who as a child knew something to be true because "Rosa said so." The poem "American Tourist, Normandy" is in second-person voice, but the situation is told from a close-up, firsthand account of a visit to historical ground, a layering of past and present. "The Coal Bin," too, layers the past and present in a surprising way in its ending line. Finally, I can't read "My Brother Sings" too many times. A narrative poem near the book's end, it's a classic story of grace in the face of death, and a classic example of less is more: "There to hear // the results of the lung biopsy, now we know." A poem of only thirteen lines, filled with the just-right details in the just-right tone, it moves with ease back and forth through time, ending with perfect pitch in the present moment.

One of the pleasures of reading a poetry collection is to finish it and ask myself, How in the name of art did the poet do that, create a whole world of poems and keep me in it from the first to the last page? I never know, really, how it happens. But I do know that Sandra Ann Winters pulled me close into her world where a male swan feeds his mate "knotgrass, red goosefoot," returning later to "peck her unfeathered skin between the eyes," and I was there "when the only sound / is the vibrant throbbing of great white wings." Diana Pinckney, too, in her poem "Straightening Pictures," pulled me aside to glimpse the past and to relish the sound play of words:

> **My parents askew, the whole**
> **hall washed in a grainy past. Mother jumps**
> **in black and white from a diving board, her slim**
> **ankles crossed, right arm flung**
>
> **high as she holds her nose.**

Best seat in the house, the reader – near a window – turning the pages of the book. ■

PHOTOGRAPH BY JOHN HOPPENTHALER

LEFT **Diana Pinckney at Malaprops Bookstore, Asheville, NC, 1 Nov. 2015**

FINALIST, 2015 JAMES APPLEWHITE POETRY PRIZE

BY JOAN MCLEAN

Last Days

Two old men,
their jeans loose
around the butt,
skin loose
at the throat,
stand on either side
of your hospital bed.

One, like you,
was a city kid.
Learned to farm –
cotton and beans.
The two of you
used to drink bourbon
on the beach,
talk about women.
You both had the knack
for body surfing –
he in his red Speedo,
you in your cut-off jeans.

The other one
came through the woods
every morning
the summer you built the cabin.
He worked barefoot beside you
skinning pine logs,
hoisting them up
with your homemade rig
as you jockeyed them into place.

COURTESY OF ASHEVILLE ART MUSEUM BLACK MOUNTAIN COLLEGE COLLECTION, GIFT OF THE ARTIST

***Soliloquies,* 1965 (oil on canvas, 24x30) by Rene Pinchuk**

Now two old men
lift your shoulders,
settle pillows
around your head,
careful with the IV.
One brings his hand
to your forehead –
a light touch of calluses.
His eyes make the trip
across your face
again and again.
The other leans in,
his face comes close,
his lips brush your brow.

JOAN MCLEAN is an ecologist who lives, works, and writes in Silk Hope, NC. She holds degrees in Botany from UNC Chapel Hill and in Wetland Ecology from Duke University. She is a founding member of the Pittsboro Poets, a group of writers who emerge on Wednesday evenings from the woods of Chatham County to read poems in the kitchen at the Piedmont Biofuels Plant. She is the winner of the New Millennium Writings Prize for Poetry, and her poems have appeared recently or are forthcoming in *Third Wednesday*, *Via Regia*, *Verdad*, and *Spillway*. Her poem "Up Battle Creek" was also a finalist in the 2015 Applewhite competition and will be published in the *NCLR* 2016 print issue. Read her two finalist poems in the 2013 competition in *NCLR Online* 2014.

RENE PINCHUK studied for a year at the Florence Academy of Art in Italy, spent a summer at the Art Institute at Black Mountain College in North Carolina, and earned a master's degree in Drawing and Painting at the University of Michigan. His work has been exhibited in a variety of locations, including Art Zone 461 Gallery in San Francisco and Expressions Gallery in Berkeley, CA. See more of his work on the Asheville Art Museum website.

FRICTION AS A POINT OF DEPARTURE

a review by
Joshua Clegg Caffery

Joseph Mills. *This Miraculous Turning.* Winston-Salem, NC: Press 53, 2014.

Dannye Romine Powell. *Nobody Calls Me Darling Anymore.* Winston-Salem, NC: Press 53, 2015.

JOSHUA CLEGG CAFFERY of Franklin, LA, has a PhD from the University of Louisiana-Lafayette, and is the author of two books published by Louisiana State University Press, *Traditional Music in Coastal Louisiana* (2013) and *In the Creole Twilight: Poems and Songs from Louisiana Folklore* (2015). He is a founding member of the Red Stick Ramblers and a longtime member of the Louisiana French band Feufollet, which received a Grammy nomination for their album *En Couleurs*. He served as the 2013–2014 Alan Lomax Fellow in Folklife Studies at the John W. Kluge Center, Library of Congress, and has taught as a visiting professor in folklore at Indiana University in Bloomington. He currently lives with his wife and two children in Lafayette, LA.

Recently released by Winston-Salem's Press 53, these two books by two very different poets cover a good deal of similar terrain. Both books deal with, to varying degrees, the anxieties and glories of parenthood and the schism between present and past selves, and both move, in their third and last sections, toward moments of epiphany, redemption, and acceptance.

This Miraculous Turning, by **Joseph Mills**, finds, in its first section, a speaker fraught with guilt, paranoia, philosophical inspiration, and joy, all captured in well rendered anecdotes and tightly aligned ruminations related to child-rearing. Many of these anecdotes and ruminations result from a particular familial situation: the speaker has adopted two African American children, and he has raised them in the South (or is raising them there, depending on the poem's timeframe). These circumstances set the stage for poignant vignettes that weave in and out of the poems, particularly in the beginning of the book. Mills achieves an odd sort of tension with the way he juxtaposes poems about complex and charged issues surrounding racial identity with poems that focus more on the universal emotions, fascinations, and misgivings of parenthood: the fear of not savoring the precious childhood moment, the fascination with a child's sometimes enlightened perspectives, the wonderment about the bizarre things that children say and do. This fluctuation between the exigencies of a particularly fraught specific concern related to race and more general and familiar joys and anxieties delineates an interesting struggle in the mind of the speaker: can and will he set aside trepidation about the future in order to relish the precious pageant of childhood, or will he engage more directly with these worries, meeting them head-on as they arise. Many of the poems take this friction as a point of departure.

In "Wash," for instance, the speaker outlines an uncomfortable exchange (one of many in the book) with a man in his neighborhood who imagines (at least in the speaker's mind) that the children have been adopted from "Haiti or Africa." Another poem is set at a skating ring, with anxious parents watching their children teeter and totter and "strobe past them / faster and faster / just beyond their reach" – a really lovely conceit for every parent's mixed desire to hold on and let go, to send them out but always hope that they loop back safely.

"Wash" is followed by a beautiful poem in which a father figure guides his skating daughter to the safety of the middle of the ring. Once stabilized, secure, and confident, "she moves away / without a glance, then, after a moment, / she pushes herself back out onto the rink." From this tender fable, which could be any father skating with any daughter, we move to another poem, "The Color Wheel," in which the speaker again addresses race directly. His daughter is learning her colors. As she discovers the infinite variety of colors and colors within colors, she also realizes the narrow range of colors marked off for the description of racial identity,

COURTESY OF KEVIN WATSON, PRESS 53

at least in the United States. The speaker's tone in poems like this veers away from universal wonderment to a studied bitterness and disgust: "And there it is, / the education process, the turning of the wheel, / from the complex colors she knows each of us to be / to the blunt ones she has learned we insist on using."

Again, the sharpest tension Mills creates is between these moments of angst about racial constructions to metacognitive guilt about how that angst may be interfering with any hopes of dwelling within the purity and innocence of youth. In some cases, this tension exists clearly and explicitly in single poems. In "At the Book Festival, My Daughter and I Turn Away From the Truth," for instance, the speaker and his daughter leave behind the many books attempting to explain the "truth about slavery" and various "truths" about other things, "turning our backs / on the truth to search for ice cream, a park, / a playground with swings, some kind of pleasure / and beauty we can share in our time together." In the last poem of the first section, a family trip to Gettysburg with children and a "European wife" feels more than a bit over determined, to both the speaker of the poems as well as to the reader, but Mills seems well aware of this, as the poems increasingly (and purposefully, I think) depart from a mode of claustrophobic racial metacognition.

Another wrinkle to this dynamic is occasional poems that appear to be set in the speaker's childhood, and we get more of these as the book goes on. We receive hints of a seemingly misspent – or a least foolhardy – youth, and these are juxtaposed successfully against the puritanical instincts of parenthood. In the second section, race and innocence persist as themes, but they are explored in a new and interesting way: through consideration of the history of Moravian Christians, who founded Old Salem, near where the family drama at the heart of the book unfolds. Like the speaker, the Moravians sought purity and innocence, but, as the poems about how the Moravians dealt with race and slavery in America attest, they were certainly not without sin.

In the last section of the book, we start to get an inkling of why Mills has entitled it "The Miraculous Turning." Here, the speaker appears to have moved on in some ways from the concerns of the first two sections. His children appear to have grown up and moved into life without major disaster. The romantic relationship, perhaps a marriage, which we receive hints of throughout, apparently fades away without much concern to anyone involved, at least not the speaker. The verse, very tight in the early sections, opens up a bit, becoming more imagistic, playful, and roomy. There are even poems about Christmas and Santa Claus and hints of a hopeful future. This appears to be the turning, a more detached phase of acceptance. And in the last poem, we have a distinct celebration of spring and rebirth.

ABOVE **Joseph Mills (center) with Kevin Watson (left), editor of Press 53, and poet Michael McFee, who presented Mills with the Roanoke-Chowan Award for Poetry for his new collection, at the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association meeting, Raleigh, 13 Nov. 2015**

JOSEPH MILLS, an Indiana native, has published four previous collections of poetry with Press 53 of Winston-Salem, NC: *Somewhere During the Spin Cycle* (2006), *Angels, Thieves and Winemakers* (2008), *Love and Other Collisions* (2010), and *Sending Christmas Cards to Huck and Hamlet* (2012). He also co-wrote (with his wife Danielle Termey) *A Guide to North Carolina's Wineries* (John F. Blair, 2003). He currently lives in Winston-Salem, NC, where he is the Susan Burress Wall Distinguished Professor in the Humanities at the North Carolina School of the Arts. Read poetry by Joseph Mills in *NCLR* 2005.

PHOTOGRAPH BY SYLVIA FREEMAN; COURTESY OF THE NORTH CAROLINA WRITERS' NETWORK

While Mills's book seems to conclude from a perspective of age and gathered wisdom, **Dannye Romine Powell's *Nobody Calls Me Darling Anymore*** begins in a reflective mood, with memories resurfacing vividly from a distant past. Most of the poems here are about relationships – between the speaker and her mother, the speaker and her own daughter, the speaker and her lover, or the speaker and her son as the book progresses – and by the end we have a vivid picture of a family unfolding over four generations and of the joys and sorrows attending that unfolding.

The speaker's mother is a dominant figure in these poems. It is she who once called the speaker darling. In the poem that give the book its title, the speaker describes the word's "lighting / on my shoulder like my childhood parakeet, / a smooth green against my cheek." She loves her mother, but the relationship is, of course, somewhat complex. The speaker's mother apparently disapproves of her choice in a mate. Her "red red nails" are "always tapping [her] shoulder," telling her who to pick. And we sense a tone of defiance in these lines: "you should see him now / the wrong one." As soon as we start to fear and distrust the mother, however, other poems flesh out the story, and we begin to understand her motivations along with the speaker. For instance, we learn that the mother's concerns about the "wrong one" may be well founded. *She*, apparently, settled on the wrong one, and the speaker's father emerges as a somewhat malevolent force: fighting to stay at the racetrack while his wife goes into labor, taking the family's life into his hands on reckless late night drives, trying to make the speaker into the son he apparently would have preferred.

Other, equally complex relationships flicker subtly in an out. The speaker's children (or at least two of them) have trying lives. A wayward son struggles with addiction and a daughter, herself a "near-child," lives at home, pregnant with another child. The speaker takes consolation in romantic love, however, and there are a number of alternately tender and passionate poems about different sorts of romantic emotions: the pangs of youthful lust, revisited years later in pregnant images, alongside the deeper, well-worn connubial variety, which we see, for instance, in a poem that draws a relationship between the rediscovered body of King Edward I, and the rediscovery and honoring of her husband's own regal form.

The result of this is a delicately woven, somewhat impressionistic family tapestry – not an easy thing to achieve in a short book of poems. What stands out even more than this achievement, however, is the undeniable aesthetic quality of Powell's verse. She has a keen eye and an even better ear. Never obtrusive, her musicality could slip by if you weren't paying attention, as it almost does in a poem like "The Dream of Chinese Laundry," which is full of deft internal assonances: "Sun . . . lunch . . . hummed . . . up . . . sons . . . everyone." She can also turn a phrase, but she does it sparingly enough and with enough felicity that the reader is caught unawares, as at the end of the short poem "The Glance": "I watched you fold your hand / into the pocket of your navy coat / and caught the glance / that flooded the back pastures of my heart." A simple figure, but note the beautiful restraint.

Taken together, you will find what you're looking for in these two new books by these two impressive poets, whether that be food for the mind, eye, or ear. ■

ABOVE **Dannye Romine Powell speaking on a panel on "Words in Civic Life" the North Carolina Writers' Network conference, Charlotte, 22 Nov. 2014**

DANNYE ROMINE POWELL, a columnist for the *Charlotte Observer*, is the author of three prior collections of poetry, all published by University of Arkansas Press: *At Every Wedding Someone Stays Home* (1994), winner of the University of Arkansas First Book Award; *The Ecstasy of Regret* (2002); and *A Necklace of Bees* (2008; reviewed in *NCLR* 2009). The latter two of these both received the Brockman-Campbell Award for the year's best book of poetry published by a North Carolina writer. She is also the author of *Parting the Curtains: Interviews with Southern Writers* (John F. Blair, 1994). Read poetry by Dannye Romine Powell in *NCLR* 1999.

FINALIST, 2015 JAMES APPLEWHITE POETRY PRIZE

BY PEG BRESNAHAN

The Presence of Wonder

Come out here. Look at the constellations,
how the sky weeps stories that mirror our own.

Or the crescent moon cradling a shadowed pearl
called earthshine. I'm not sure I know

what I'm talking about, but I love the idea
I can see moon's back. Who knows what she's hiding?

Last week I spotted a pouch suspended from a low
laurel branch, half an inch of water in its egg-sized tear.

I marked it with a tepee of sticks, clicked a photo,
sent it to everyone I knew.

Sunday, I led our congregation to a Luna Moth and a cluster
of Imperials. Wind wrinkled the Luna's sleeves

as it clung to a pine window frame. The yellow and brown
Imperials gilded a path like autumn leaves.

PEG BRESNAHAN graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and received her MFA from Vermont College of Fine Arts in Montpelier. She moved to Cedar Mountain, NC, from Sturgeon Bay, WI, twelve years ago. Her second collection of poetry, *In a Country None of Us Called Home*, was published by Press 53 in 2014. Garrison Keillor read the title poem on *The Writer's Almanac*. Peg's recent poems have appeared in *Press 53 Open Awards Anthology*; *What Matters*, published by Jacar Press; *Kakalak*, an anthology of North and South Carolina poets now published by *The Main Street Rag*; *The Southern Poetry Anthology*; *Southern Poetry Review;* and *South Carolina Review*.

COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Mother Earth–The River **(acrylic on canvas, 13x21) by Trena McNabb**

Who needs an angel when miracles surround us?
Up in the Boundary Waters, I woke my tent mate.

We sat at the edge of Knife Lake zipped in sleeping bags,
sipped wine, *oohed* and *ahhed* until Aurora Borealis unplugged.

If I'm the last creature alive, no matter what shape
earth is in, and I discover a wonder hidden or huge,

I know I'll panic, break into an icy sweat with the hunger to share.
My tongue will swell with the intensity of untelling.

TRENA MCNABB attended the University of Tampa and the Art Instruction Schools in Minneapolis, MN. She also studied at the Sawtooth Center for Visual Art and the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, both in Winston-Salem, NC. Her artistic career spans over thirty years, and her work has been featured in over forty-five exhibitions, including several throughout North Carolina, where her work can also be found in a variety of collections. She is represented by Gallery C in Raleigh. View more of her work on her website.

FROM THE SENSORIUM

a review by Robert W. Hill

Joseph Bathanti and Ted Wojtasik, eds. *The Collected Poems of Ronald H. Bayes.* Laurinburg, NC: St. Andrews University Press, 2015.

I have read Ron Bayes's work only piecemeal over the years, a fact I am not proud of, having been reared in Charlotte and schooled at Davidson and UNC. So when *The Collected Poems of Ronald H. Bayes* (selected and edited by Joseph Bathanti and Ted Wojtaski) came my way to review, I welcomed the opportunity to see his poetry as a whole. Perhaps strangely, I have consumed that six-hundred-plus-page book piecemeal, but not so willy-nilly as it may sound.

I have read and re-read it as I now read Scripture, or *Moby-Dick* – knowing that the whole is simply, fully worthily *there*, but that my own interest in books of poetry has always been the poems – the individual poems. And, with a master, an honorable practitioner at hand, I have read all of them out of "order."

My first take was to read whichever poems fell on a fiftieth page (50, 100, 150, etc.) – a dozen or so poems to begin. What I found was, in some ways, a history of twentieth-century poetry. Modernist, Beat, confessional, surrealist, even LANGUAGE poetry, almost everything but neoformalism, I'd say. And I suspect that many of these poems would fare well with good readers at poetry slams. Some of the compendium sequences, *Tokyo Annex* and the *Porpoise* poems (see "Umapine Tetralogy II [A poem in 4 sections and in 32 books]"), even smack of associative epic after the fashion of Pound's *Cantos*.

Bayes's range is impressive, and it affirms his position as a teacher of poetry, one who has come to incarnate – take into his own flesh – all types of poetry as ways in to all types of experience. If "One could do worse than be a swinger of birches," one could do worse than be a lifelong teacher of a hugely eclectic body of poems to students and other poets, a teacher whose academic vocation infused his massive body of poems, and vice versa.

I have resisted the temptation to cherry-pick favorite lines and – that other temptation – simply to mine and quote other poets to help explain what I have discovered for myself in Bayes, engaging in piecemeal consumption – like cigars and Jack Daniels in the kitchen before a poetry reading among knowledgeable friends.

I discovered that the fragmented approach I first took with these poems – "knowing how way leads on to way" – is not really at odds with many of Bayes's poems. In "*Tokyo Annex*: Passus 9," passing thoughts are given form and permanence. Even not-saying – or not saying quickly – becomes

PHOTOGRAPH BY JAN G. HENSLEY

ABOVE **Inductee Ronald H. Bayes at the North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame Induction ceremony, Southern Pines, NC, 12 Oct 2014**

ROBERT W. HILL was born in Anniston, AL, raised in Charlotte, NC, and is currently a resident of Hunnington, WV. Hill received his bachelor's and master's degrees from UNC Chapel Hill and a PhD from the University of Illinois. He has taught at Clemson University, Kennesaw State Unversity, and Marshall University. He is the author of numerous literary essays and reviews, and his poems have appeared in such literary magazines as *Cold Mountain Review*, *Minnesota Review*, *Shenandoah*, *Southern Poetry Review,* and *Southern Review.* He was a finalist in the 2014 and 2015 James Applewhite Poetry Prize competition, and his poems can be read in *NCLR* 2015 and 2016.

Oregon native **RONALD H. BAYES** is an Emeritus Distinguished Professor of Literature and Creative Writing at St. Andrews University in Laurinburg, NC. Bayes earned a BS and MS degree in English and education from Eastern Oregon State University. Bayes has been the recipient of many awards, including the North Carolina award for Literature in 1989 and the North Carolina Writers' Network award for lifetime achievement in literature (also named for Ronald Bayes) in 2002. He was inducted into the North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame in 2014.

Read about **JOSEPH BATHANTI** in a review of his latest book later in this issue.

subject for saying. The poet elevates language from mundane vernacular to the peculiar, the special, the particular, all the while keeping his feet firmly on common ground. It's a poem of stumbling, aspirational phrases in the clutches of puzzled incipient passion:

"Some things I go past,
drive past every day, I go past, & can't
look @; I
came thru the hell of last
year's California
& I'm in town again." Running
yr hands thru yr hair, longish hair, you
weren't hard; I'd met some
you weren't
soft, I'd met many
you weren't this generality, you weren't . . . that
you who were/ were: ***id***
***est*, lapis lazuli,**
turquoise

At one point, I realized that even "Notes: *Tokyo Annex"* – reminiscent of Eliot's notes in *The Waste Land* – felt almost like a found poem, the lingual detritus of the poet's shimmering poetic thoughts.

We see a similar effect in "2nd Porpoise: First Book," with a whimsy of headlines, police reports, wild Irish passion leavened by broad humor. In a Belfast world of Ian Paisley, random shootings, cockfights, and bleeding ulcers, it has parents fist-fighting over insults to children at school, then having to testify in court; flip-flopping accusations of police misconduct as the civilians jockey for favorable position before Justice Barry. A Joycean rumpus brought to common-sense conclusion:

When told at the end of the case that there would
be a civil claim, Justice Barry remarked "I looked
upon this whole thing as a storm in a teacup;
I am satisfied that, to some extent,
Gallagher brought this upon himself."

But while some of these expansive compendia-as-poems create large worlds as seen through playfully serious eyes, many of the poems are crafted toward the interstices of experience – the pauses when we sometimes catch life shifting in unexpected ways, followed by our very human, sometimes nasty, exclamations of *our presence!* "Three Corner Conversations with Nobody Listening" ends with "J. Davis Hawk":

Ah, then! What things so far we cogitate upon!
La, la-la, la, la!
The wench?
She is dead, unh?
That's just a small some!
Practical! Tangible!

But the callousness of Hawk's pitch here is given more humane nuance in the following poem, "J. Davis Hawk at Smokey Joe's," which recalls John Berryman a bit, "I shall stay suicide today." It's a plaintive quality, sensitive to our mortal plight, as we see in other such poems as "Passus 35: He Sat," but Bayes does not collapse into bathos or despair, writing in "Functions," "Having won all races, the race / is elemental joy, / not contortion . . ."

For all his learning from and practicing modernism, Bayes resists the narcissistic contortions of many pretenders. In "Have You Ever Seen?" he suspends, turns, delicately dances in his language for the ineffability of love, the close-knittedness of death and freedom. Speaking of a "real beautiful / hurt / bird," he allows at the end,

And you knew that its dying
or its getting well would free the bird:
Away flying
would be last you'd love of that, see.

But you can't just

And the poem simply stops there, poignantly true to the indefiniteness of the bird's future or our own in relation to it.

Not meaning to give the impression that this huge selection is a mish-mash of no-style, rather, I want to insist on the richness of what Ronald Bayes has given us: a book-load of styles that are experimentations, yes, but are also stylistic moments of experience. That is, Bayes has insisted on finding ways to write about what matters to him as a person – as a whole, thinking, feeling person who has practiced a huge number of ways to say what the world and its people mean to him.

One of my teachers said, blindingly simply, "We are a sensorium," a comment that has stuck with me for over half a century now. It's not terribly profound in itself, but it does go to the heart of poetry, I think, which I see in Ronald Bayes – that beating, sifting, surging organ of our knowing. As he says in an urgent prayer to "Sir," "I become / a resident of my ribs." ■

Connecticut native **TED WOJTASIK** has a BA in philosophy from George Washington University, an MFA from Columbia University, and a PhD in English from the University of South Carolina. He is the author of two novels, *No Strange Fire* (Herald Press, 1996) and *Collage* (Livingston Press, 2004). He teaches English and creative writing courses at St. Andrews University in Laurinburg, NC.

Hitting HOME **with the** New Story Project: TEACHING WITH THE *North Carolina Literary Review* IN NORTH CAROLINA

BY BRIAN GLOVER

IF YOU'RE READING THIS JOURNAL, YOU LIKELY TAKE an interest in writing. You might even think you've got good taste; secretly, you might be a bit of a snob about it. At the very least, you're here to find out what makes *NCLR*'s editors tick. But how did you get that way? How did you first start chasing the good stuff? Maybe your parents passed on the habit at home. Maybe chance threw you a teacher with the rare love of a well-turned phrase or the rarer talent of faking it. Maybe you once found yourself in a cool, air-conditioned public library with time on your hands, a burning summer day outside, and the strong conviction that someplace, some time just had to be better than here. As you read more, your taste twisted and climbed, blossomed and excresced. In your mature judgment, that hero whose slim paperback sustained you through the ninth grade revealed feet of clay and fists of ham. You loved the writer who seemed to have lived in your very skin, and then you got bored with yourself and sought out the new, the different, the ultimate otherness of others. You learned new words and ditched some old ones. You kept reading.

When I teach literature, I try most of all to guide my students onto that path. I toss them my favorites and other people's favorites, hope something sticks, shout like Robin Williams when the situation demands it. But I know my choices on the syllabus will never equal the jolt of the student's own discovery – that writer nobody told her to read, who did that one thing she'd never seen before, that changed everything. In my profession we spend a lot of time showing young people the best that's been thought and said, but not enough helping them find their own ways in. So while I can't require the ECU bookstore to stock its shelves with

You loved the writer who seemed to have lived in your very skin, and then you got bored with yourself and sought out the new, the different, the ultimate otherness of others.

BRIAN GLOVER earned his PhD at the University of Virginia. He teaches English at ECU, where he received the Bertie Fearing Teaching Award in 2013 (and more than one student paper from his composition classes has been selected for ECU's W. Keats Sparrow Writing Award). He writes about British and American autobiography and is currently at work on a book about culturally Northern writers from the US South. He is also a member of the *NCLR* editorial board, and he was awarded a BB&T Active Learning and Leadership Development Incentive Grant for a project related to his use of *NCLR* in his short story classes.

The author has shared his assignment description with *NCLR*'s readers. Read it online, or download it from *NCLR*'s website. *NCLR* editors welcome more essays about using *NCLR* in the classroom.

Featured within this essay are the opening pages of the stories Glover discusses, all designed by *NCLR* Art Director **DANA EZZELL GAY**. All of the back issues are available for purchase from *NCLR*, and there are enough copies of most issues that they could easily be used for a class.

I am not trying to make them into full-time literati. But I do want them to graduate and head out into their North Carolina communities as people who get it.

fierce and proprietary love, I do offer my students the chance to tell me, along with their classmates, what we really ought to read.

In the last several semesters I've been teaching a sophomore-level course on the short story. Most students who take it are there for the core-curriculum credit; they are practical thinkers with what the world calls practical majors, and they're exactly the people I hope to meet again when I need a urinary catheter or a no-load mutual fund. I am not trying to make them into full-time literati. But I do want them to graduate and head out into their North Carolina communities as people who get it. I want them to read whenever they can, to find inspiration in what they read, and to understand why fiction matters. After at least twelve years on a forced march through other people's literary choices, this course is usually their only exposure to literature amid the precious freedom of their college years. I want it to be a good one.

While I don't stint on the classics – W.W. Norton gets paid, and Atwood, Bambara, Baldwin, Chekhov, Maupassant, Melville, O'Connor, and Poe all get a good workout – the heart of the course is what I call the New Story Project. Briefly put, the students spend some time reading very recently published stories and make their cases for their favorites to the rest of us. At the beginning of the semester I choose five or six magazines and journals whose editorial quality I trust; so far, they have included *The New Yorker*, *The Southern Review*, *African American Review*, *AGNI*, *Callaloo*, *Granta*, *Vice*, and, always, the *North Carolina Literary Review*. Those choices reflect both my own taste and what our university library makes available, some in print, others in online databases. Students then choose a group dedicated to one publication and, along with two or three partners, read through the fiction it has published in the last few years. From all the stories they've read (I ask for an annotated bibliography, to keep them honest), the students each choose a single story that they genuinely like.

Then comes the most interesting (and from my perspective, most difficult) part: after the members circulate their chosen stories to each other, the group must come to a consensus on the story they'd like to present to the whole class and on which they'll write their own critical essays. Here's the moment where taste must be revealed. It's no longer a matter of pretending to like what the teacher says you should like; there's no critical tradition to hide behind; now, it's time to show the people around you what makes you feel funny inside. For most people, at any age, the prospect is utterly terrifying. Yet it is also – behind all the learned posturing of academe – the very soul of the humanities. This is how we learn to define ourselves and how we learn to respect the interior lives of others. At first I asked the students to carry out these conversations on electronic discussion boards, but I soon found that the necessary trust can only be gained in person, face to face. So, I ask them to meet up outside of class, record their conversations (smartphones are useful here), and send them to me. I have been consistently humbled by what I have heard: young people talking not just about what matters in their own lives but also about the ways writers use the resources of the English language to thrill, challenge, and delight.

After the group chooses a story and sends it to the whole class, they are asked to present their own takes and lead a discussion about it. To my happy chagrin, their amateur pedagogy quite often gets a more enthusiastic response than my own. It should be no surprise, though: when their peers are taking chances, revealing vulnerabilities by announcing

their own emotional and aesthetic standards to a roomful of near-strangers, a decent sense of human solidarity requires at least a modest repayment. When we sit down to talk about a new story – one I didn't choose and about which I know no more than they – the atmosphere shifts. Students suddenly seem to understand that their ideas matter, that I have no "right" interpretation to offer them – ultimately, that they can stand on their own as thoughtful, competent, and articulate adults. With any luck I can sit back and shut up while the students take the lead, and then watch that sense of agency flower in the students' final essays – in most cases, the first critical responses ever written about that particular piece of art.

What have I learned from their choices? Among other things, I've learned that the *North Carolina Literary Review* does great work for young readers in North Carolina. By and large, my students at ECU are not a privileged or cosmopolitan group; while they can definitely appreciate the international literary scope they encounter in *Granta* or *Callaloo*, it's the *NCLR* stories that really hit home. Twice now, groups have chosen David McGuirt's "Blind Faith" (2010), and in each case I feared that the students would exoticize and (to use an appropriate word) demonize the snake-handling Appalachian characters in that powerful story of family, vision, and love. Its subject, after all, lends itself to the most hurtful stereotypes about the western part of our state. I shouldn't have worried. As the conversation progressed, the distance evaporated. "My grandmother went to a church like that." "My church isn't quite that extreme, but they do believe in literal interpretations of the Bible." "I can see where he's coming from, because my family is important in our church, too, and they expect me to believe what they believe." Bit by bit, the students drew out the knotty questions McGuirt asks us to consider, questions about the interpretation of stories and the meanings of those stories in our lives. What should we *do* with McGuirt's own creation? Is it a parable, or something else? In what sense was our own English classroom a "Church of the Living Word"? At the intersection of the Bible belt and the secular university, a literary exploration of Biblical literalism can bear rich fruit.

If religion is a big part of students' experience in Eastern North Carolina, military life is even bigger. Among every class at ECU, you'll find a significant proportion are either children and spouses of servicemen and women or active and retired soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines themselves. Most of the rest have grown up in communities closely tied to the region's bases. Thus, when a student group presented Robert

Students suddenly seem to understand that their ideas matter, that I have no "right" interpretation to offer them – ultimately, that they can stand on their own as thoughtful, competent, and articulate adults.

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Blind Faith

by David McGuirt

2009 DORIS BETTS FICTION PRIZE WINNER
Final Judge, Kat Meads

Valle Crucis, NC, 1979, by John Rosenthal

DAVID MCGUIRT lives in Charlotte, NC, with his wife, Patty, and three children, Avery, Casey, and Emmy. He is a graduate of Appalachian State University and a past winner of the Garland Reever award for humor writing from UNC-Charlotte.

The 2009 Doris Betts Fiction Prize Final judge, **KAT MEADS**, says of McGuirt's winning story: "'Blind Faith' is fiction that mesmerizingly observes and indicts with the means by which all good fiction indicts: plot, pacing, powerful imagery, and characters who stay with the reader long after the reading is finished."

JOHN ROSENTHAL's photography has been exhibited throughout North Carolina and the Southeast, as well as in the Perception Gallery in Boston. Some of his work is also collected in his book, *Regarding Manhattan* (Jelli Harbor Books, 1998), on Chapel Hill's online Tyndall Galleries (www.tyndallgalleries.com), and on his website (www.johnrosenthal.com), which includes his American Spaces series of photographs featuring his son in Valle Crucis in western North Carolina. The photograph above is from that series. Rosenthal has published essays and lectures in a wide variety of periodicals.

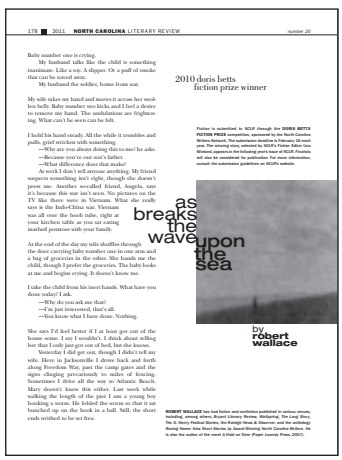
ROB AMBERG's photography is featured here, with the preceding stories and review, and with the Ryer short story. For more information about him, see pages 103, 131, and 141.

COURTESY OF *NCLR*; PHOTOGRAPH BY JOHN ROSENTHAL

Wallace's "As Breaks the Wave Upon the Sea" (2011), a fascinating window into the minds of a war-shattered veteran and his bewildered family, set right down the road in Jacksonville, I had the opposite fear: not that the class would find it difficult to relate, but that the emotional recognition would be too much, hit too hard. Again, I underestimated them. Students told their own stories of fathers, brothers, and cousins devastated by PTSD, of volunteer work with the haunted, addicted, and deranged. People who had stayed quiet all semester suddenly piped up to talk about their experiences. But it wasn't just a therapy session; the students also wanted to talk about the story's changes in narrative point of view, the way it moves us back and forth from the soldier's present, to his wartime memories, and then to his wife's views of her own present and past. They noticed its strongly visualized motifs of nature and death in the familiar environment of a North Carolina fishing pier. They saw the story as a way of dramatizing what it's like to *live* the lives they know are being lived all around them.

Above all, my students have responded to plots about family. Of all the stories *NCLR* has published in recent years, Leah Hampton's "The Saint" (2013), with its intricate mechanisms of time, memory, and bereavement, has raised more enthusiasm than any other. Though it takes place largely in the North Carolina mountains, the scene really could be anywhere. A beloved brother is dead, far too young; a sister tries to remember his life as it was, but finds that the past can only be known through the lens of the present. What matters to students is Hampton's relentless, clear-eyed pursuit of the truth about loss, her narrator's refusal to take the easy, sentimental way out. Perhaps for young people just entering adulthood, leaving home for an unknown future, Hampton's themes take on special relevance: the finality of the past and the fragility of family.

Indeed, it's also worth noting the sorts of stories they *don't* tend to pick. Comic dispatches from the workaday world of the middle-class and middle-aged, such as Daniel Wallace's "Everyone Is Some Kind of Animal" (2013), don't get much traction; for most of my students, the years of laughing away the slow advance of death are yet to come. Nor do I see much love for stories whose energies are concentrated in the narrative voice, such as Joseph Francis Cavano's "The Honey Wagon" (2012). Though it's true that the students simply haven't yet read enough literature to savor the particular rhythms and pungent flavors of Cavano's prose, I think it's also true that for young people who have not yet found their own voices, it's still difficult to appreciate the voices of others. I'm confident, though, that my students will get there, some day – maybe sooner than later. They'll keep reading, talking, and thinking about the world in the literary way. They will be more interesting, more strange, more human than the norm. They will undoubtedly love stories I hate, for reasons I find repellent, and it will be glorious. They'll grow. ■



COURTESY OF *NCLR*; PHOTOGRAPH BY MARY SHANNON JOHNSTONE

COURTESY OF *NCLR*

COURTESY OF *NCLR*

"WANT[ING] *MORE* LESS"

a review by Monica Miller

Pam Durban. *Soon: Stories*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2015.

MONICA MILLER is the Assistant Director of the Writing and Communication Program and a Marion L. Brittain Postdoctoral Fellow at the Georgia Institute of Technology. Her research interests include feminist and gender theory, Southern and Appalachian Literature, Queer Theory, and American Literature. She has a PhD from Louisiana State University.

PAM DURBAN is a South Carolina native who now lives in North Carolina and teaches at UNC Chapel Hill. Her new book, *Soon: Stories*, is her second collection of short stories; her first was *All Set About with Fever Trees* (University of Georgia, 1995). She has also published two novels, *The Laughing Place* (Picador, 1995), and *So Far Back* (Picador, 2001). She has received a National Endowment for the Arts Creative Writing Fellowship and a Whiting Writer's Award as well as a James Michener Creative Writing Fellowship from the University of Iowa.

The story "Forward, Elsewhere, Out" in Pam Durban's new collection, *Soon,* begins with the protagonist, Kate, admitting that rainy nights in October are her "favorite time of day and year" (74). Her fondness for such darkness is a secret which she's never told anyone, even her husband. Many of the stories in this collection take place in the dark: the "moonless night" of "Island" (69), "March 1839, just after midnight" in "Rowing to Darien" (1), or a morning in late fall when "the sky came down like a low gray ceiling" in "The Jap Room" (13). In these stories, the shadows offer safety and solace from immediate dangers and painful memories, enabling different kinds of escape.

The collection opens with "Rowing to Darien," a fictionalized account of the real-life Fanny Kemble, the British actress whose memoirs of her brief marriage to and separation from a Georgia plantation owner in the 1830s formed the basis for her *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838–1839*, an antislavery memoir published in 1863. Durban's story narrates Fanny's escape from her husband and the immense sorrow and horror she discovered in life as a plantation mistress. Alone on the Altamaha River after midnight, Fanny, "an accomplished horsewoman, a hiker in the Swiss Alps; she is no flower," reaches the limits of her physical strength in the "hard, almost desperate work" of fighting the currents of the river in the dark (1). For Fanny, as for many of Durban's characters, darkness provides more than simply a cover for their actions or a place to hide. They experience sadness and pain fully, and then do the work necessary to come out the other side. In these stories, shadows provide a place of rest and preparation, as they reflect on and plan for what's to come.

There are echoes of Bobbie Ann Mason and Clyde Edgerton in these stories, as well as more recent work such as Wilton Barnhardt's 2014 novel *Lookaway, Lookaway* (reviewed in *NCLR Online* 2014). As in these other works, global History (with a capital H) and personal histories (with a small h) intertwine in unromantic alliances. The title story, which was first published in *The Southern Review* in 1996 and was subsequently chosen by author John Updike to appear in the 2000 *Best American Short Stories of the Century*, exemplifies the ways in which motifs of Southern literature – from the loss of the family plantation to the physical grotesque – mutate in the South of the twenty-first century, where family heirlooms are catalogued by scholars and any references to plantations are in the names of subdivisions. Instead, in "Soon," Elizabeth Long Crawford, the heir to the family home Marlcrest, is born with a lazy eye, rather than being a beautiful belle, and when she undergoes surgery at the age of twelve "to fix her so a man would want to marry her someday," she is instead blinded and maimed (98).

The character of Elizabeth in "Soon" evokes perhaps Durban's

strongest comparison – to North Carolina author Doris Betts. Like Elizabeth, Betts's character Violet in the well-known story "The Ugliest Pilgrim" finds her way to love despite her maimed appearance, in a setting that also incorporates the traditionally Southern with the modern day. Durban is currently the Doris Betts Distinguished Professor of Creative Writing at UNC Chapel Hill, an honor that not only highlights her ties to Betts and other Southern women writers, but also the recurring role that North Carolina has played in her life and her writing career, as she earned her bachelor's degree at UNC Greensboro in 1969.

Durban's varied career has included not only stints in academia but also as a textile worker in Atlanta, experiences which enrich her work with the textures of modern Southern life. Although the collection begins and ends with echoes of the antebellum South, any references to plantations and slavery are subsumed under the collection's larger themes of escape and demystification. *Soon* explores the different ways in which people react to the solitude of escape: some bear it, some cling to it, and some savor it. Most of the stories take place in the recognizable, contemporary South, one of suburbs and strip malls. "Birth Mother," one of the few stories to be set even partly in nature, takes place at a camp site, with the young Cody tentatively feeling the safety of his adoptive parents enough to begin reliving the violence he experienced in the hands of his birth mother and her boyfriends, which brought his sister and himself to this place. Although a world away from Fanny in "Rowing to Darien," Cody, too, finds nature at night to be a place where he can trust in his escape enough to begin to remember what drove him there.

The darkness in these stories is not menacing; rather, it is a place to bring grief. In "Hush," for example, terminal cancer patient Jeffrey realizes, "Sometimes it took a while . . . but nature always managed to eliminate the superfluous" (95). In stripping away the superfluous, Jeffrey is able to come to the conclusion that there are no conclusions or easy answers: "Is anyone *prepared* for the actuality of life, which is always more surprising or horrifying or sweet than we could ever have imagined? Not at all. We dream and wish and plan, but something more subtle, more generous, more devious, arranges reality for us" (100–101). Even in "Rowing to Darien," night does not only allow Fanny the cover of darkness for safety, but provides a space for her to begin to work through the horror, sorrow, and regret of the past year: "When the sorrow comes, she lets it carry her. She welcomes the sorrow, because by it she knows that the light of her conscience has not been extinguished" (12).

As these excerpts highlight, the stories in *Soon* dramatize the rich realities that emerge out of loss, escape, and being alone, realities that might be best summarized by the end of the story "Rich." The divorced Lucille watches her awkward, socially challenged son try to flirt while bagging groceries at his job at an upscale grocery store; she then wanders the aisles. She is usually cheered by the store, taking in the "windowsills lined with flowers in pots and twisted bamboo stems set in vases filled with clear glass beads. . . . It was like wandering through a perfect world where no one was ever hungry or sad or lonely" (88). On this day, however, "it made her uneasy, and she couldn't shake the idea that in this universe of food and flowers, hunger was obscene, the unbeautiful were not welcome" (89). The characters in *Soon* who seek out the shadows, who enjoy gray fall days, embody the contradictions that Lucille here encounters in a grocery store, which seems to eschew hunger. These are the people that Lucille realizes "wanted more of what they had and also what they didn't have. Even if they wanted less, they wanted *more* less" (91; emphasis in original). This contradiction – "want[ing] *more* less" – is ultimately what makes Durban's characters compelling, as they grapple with the contradictory nature of survival. ■

PHOTOGRAPH BY LINDA FOX; COURTESY OF NC OFFICE OF ARCHIVES AND HISTORY

LEFT **Pam Durban (right) receiving the Sir Walter Raleigh Award for Fiction for *Soon*, presented by Lisa Bullick of the Historical Book Club of North Carolina at the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association's annual meeting, Raleigh, 13 Nov. 2015**

WHY KELLY CHERRY WRITES NOW

a review by
Matthew Dischinger

Kelly Cherry. *Twelve Women in a Country Called America: Stories.* Winston-Salem, NC: Press 53, 2015.

Discussing her latest collection of stories, *Twelve Women in a Country Called America*, Kelly Cherry recently quipped, "I wrote this book precisely because I was tired of everyone thinking my work is autobiographical."[1] Indeed, the stories feature protagonists of many different backgrounds, races, creeds, and ages in Southern locales ranging from New Orleans to Richmond. Cherry's title links these Southern spaces to the nation, a relationship the collection's epigraph by Norman Mailer emphasizes. Read in this new context, Mailer's statement about bumbling Southerners – that America "is so complicated that when I start to think about it I begin talking in a Southern accent" – is turned on its head. *Twelve Women* offers a rebuttal through its cosmopolitan settings and range of complex characters. These twelve women are distinct from familiar Southern literary figures, one another, and, of course, Kelly Cherry.

To further illustrate her point, Cherry quotes Fred Chappell as saying, "There is no such thing as autobiographical fiction." Indeed, Chappell has said that Cherry's writing reveals "that no personal narration is singular," and thereby no writing is singularly autobiographical.[2] The statements by both Cherry and Chappell offer a rejoinder to those readers and critics who continue to look for the writer in the text even after biographical critical methods have fallen out of fashion in the academy. Rather than reading for the writer, they say, one might read for him- or herself, or for the characters, or for place. Cherry's remarks bring to mind the famous proclamation by Roland Barthes that a work of writing bears little ultimate resemblance to its author. The interpretation of a text, Barthes argues, should better take into account "the total existence of writing": texts do not belong to authors but to cultures, other texts, readers – past and present.[3]

I have rehearsed this brief and familiar history in order to give myself a bit of latitude to make the following statement: Kelly Cherry's latest collection is about Kelly Cherry. Let me explain. I found myself thinking about Cherry's recently published essay, "Why I Write Now," long after I put down *Twelve Women*. The essay explores a question posed by one of Cherry's friends about whether it is better for a writer to attain passing fame in her lifetime or longstanding respect and canonization after death. While Cherry's output is truly prolific – twenty-two works of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry – her work has rarely garnered the sort of literary fame that matches her publishing heights. More writer's writer than bestseller, Cherry briefly reflects on the circumstances that led her away from literary fame in *Why I Write Now*: "I had managed to make every mistake a writer

MATTHEW DISCHINGER is a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of English at Louisiana State University, where he earned his PhD in 2015. His work has appeared in the collection *Race and Displacement: Nation, Migration, and Identity in the Twenty-First Century* (University of Alabama Press, 2013) and *Virginia Quarterly Review*, and he has essays forthcoming in *Mississippi Quarterly*, *Faulkner and the Black Literatures of the Americas* (University Press of Mississippi), and *Small-Screen Souths: Interrogating the Televisual Archive* (Louisiana State University Press).

[1] Quoted in Lady Banks, "Kelly Cherry Talks to Her Ladyship, the Editor," *Authors 'Round the South* 30 June 2015: web.

[2] Fred Chappell, "Introduction: Point of No Return," *A Kelly Cherry Reader: Selected Stories, Novel Excerpts, Essays, Memoir, and Poetry* (Nacogdoches, TX: Stephen F. Austin State UP, 2015) 11; subsequently cited parenthetically.

[3] Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," *Image – Music – Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977) 148.

COURTESY OF QUAIL RIDGE BOOKS

could make in the commission of her career. I'd left New York City just as my first novel was being published. . . . Instead of immediately publishing a second novel, I brought out two books of poems. So I had missed the brass ring. I wasn't even on the merry-go-round. Shoot. I wasn't even at the fair" (*Cherry Reader* 200).

But what if she had been? I want to risk imposing what Barthes would term *a limit* on Cherry's text by suggesting that while the characters in *Twelve Women* may hardly resemble their author, the collection offers a fascinating exploration of the many alternative directions a life can take. That is, thinking about Cherry in relationship to these characters may partially limit the text, but focusing on the way the text delimits the author offers another view on this familiar question. Each story is organized around a protagonist facing either life-altering changes or reflecting back on roads not taken. In "Will Fits Finds Out," Cherry's protagonist is a passive, single working mother who never ventured too far from suburban Huntsville, AL. Cherry zooms in on her protagonist's indecision while also allowing the setting to speak back: her son discovers his grandfather's possible Nazi origins, a scenario that is entirely possible due to the centrality of German scientists to NASA's Cold War-era foundations in Huntsville.

Like many of Cherry's stories in *Twelve Women*, "Will Fits Finds Out" explodes its Southern locales, revealing both national and global pressures, while also retaining a beating heart in its characters' navigation between inertial paralysis and openness to change. In "The Piano Lesson," Cherry pairs a young girl, full of potential, with an embittered, alcoholic woman. The young Jessie arrives for a piano lesson, but after a harrowing encounter realizes that "[t]ime turns into death" (142). She has seen a future that makes her present feel tenuous, unstable. The story "Her Life to Come" not only destabilizes prevailing notions of Southern provincialism (the protagonist is a seventeen-year-old "African-Italian-Cuban-Native American" student at Florida State), but it also meditates beautifully and tragically upon an event that comes to define her life. "The Starveling" offers something of an origin story for an aspiring writer, who faces the choice between motherhood and a relationship with an obvious hack or developing her own quite promising literary chops. Perhaps the most obvious working through of possible fame occurs in "Famousness," which examines the costs of pursuing celebrity through a beauty queen turned aspiring actress.

In each of these stories, we see Cherry working through questions that have interesting implications for her writing life, which might have taken other paths. In "Why I Write Now," she concludes that a writer's "dream is to create an object of beauty and power that gives to the human spirit a home in eternity" (201), and of course her stories do that, too. The final story in the collection, "Autumn Garage," reminds us that Cherry is a poet: "Tires crunch leaves fallen on the concrete skirt. The Arkansas sky is blue, the air as brisk as a busy bank manager. Two fat cats sun themselves on the rush seats of a pair of ladderback chairs set aside beside the driveway. Shift in reverse, she pulls the car over to the curb" (207). These lines are best read aloud, and they uncoil into a story in which the mundane task of cleaning out one's garage is granted cosmic significance. Indeed, the stories themselves might be read as Cherry cleaning out her own garage, giving these differing characters – all on varying paths – a place to remain forever. ■

ABOVE **Kelly Cherry reading at Quail Ridge Books, Raleigh, NC, 17 June 2015**

KELLY CHERRY received her MFA from UNC Greensboro. Poet Laureate of Virginia from 2010 to 2012, she is Eudora Welty Professor Emerita of English and Evjue-Bascom Professor Emerita in the Humanities at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Cherry has published twenty-four books, ten chapbooks, and translations of two classical dramas. Her stories have been selected for publication in several prize anthologies, including *Best American Short Stories*, *O. Henry Prize Stories, Best Stories from the South*, and *The Pushcart Prize*. She was also the first recipient of the Hanes Poetry Prize given by the Fellowship of Southern Writers for a body of work.

WHAT'S LIFE WORTH?

a review by Laura S. Segura

Karen E. Bender, *Refund: Stories*. Berkeley, Counterpoint Press, 2015.

Refund, a collection of thirteen short stories, illustrates Karen Bender's insight into the value of human life while demonstrating how monetary concerns and fear pervade the lives of her characters. Bender's stories contain powerful images that relate her acute knowledge of the modern human condition, everyday people struggling with a volatile economy, emotional upheaval, and traumatic loss.

In "Reunion," the first story in the collection, Bender brilliantly blends together the multiple fears that the Green family is facing: financial ruin, a mass shooting, their child's sleep training, and physical intimacy. Bender describes Anna Green and her family as ones who "behaved as though they were middle class, [while] the money rushed in and out for nothing" (2). A mass shooting at Anna's twentieth high school reunion causes her to wonder how she could have possibly survived and escaped unwounded, yet she dryly realizes that her family "could not [have] afford[ed] to fix her" (7). Bender parallels Anna's fears with those of her child who "had developed a problem going to sleep . . . [and] rejected all offerings of comfort – toys, juice, songs – and stood in the dark light, screaming" (9). Anna's husband recognizes that their children, like themselves, could do anything "if they [could] just shed their fear" (21). While Bender's portrayal of a family's anxiety and conflict is realistically stinging, her writing is also fresh and bold with tactile imagery; this reader's favorite of which was Bender's description of that familiar smell in a neighboring store of a poorly ventilated Subway, which made the rooms smell of "salami and sliced ham" (15).

A vastly different family is portrayed in "Anything for the Money"; instead of struggling lower-middle class, the Weiss family, on the surface, is the epitome of Hollywood dysfunction. Bender crafts a deeply intriguing character in Lenny Weiss, an executive producer of a popular TV game show, who is oddly reminiscent of Charles Dickens's Ebenezer Scrooge with a sprinkling of Kardashian level fame. Bender expertly reveals a deeper side of Weiss as well, through his struggling writing career as a young husband frantically looking for work during the recession of the 1970s. Weiss credits his self-made glory to the desperation he once felt when "his daughter was screaming in pain from an ear infection, but he was afraid to take her to a doctor for what it would cost"; he exploited his own emotions by creating a game show for desperate people willing to do anything for money (53). Bender's depiction of the TV mogul is balanced with honest, raw emotion as Weiss begins to care for his ailing granddaughter Aurora, and Bender thoughtfully illustrates the tragic truth that there are some problems even money can't fix.

In "The Loan Officer's Visit," Bender uses elements of a coming of age story to show her narrator's journey of reconciling herself with her parents' limitations. While the crux of the awareness occurs well into the narrator's adult life, Bender demonstrates the bond some adults have with their parents. The narrator laments her parents' past refusals: "I asked them to visit me in Tucson at eighteen, Seattle at twenty-four, Brooklyn at twenty-seven, Richmond at thirty-five. No. No. No" (106); yet,

LAURA S. SEGURA is a graduate assistant for Women and Gender Studies at University of Louisiana Lafayette pursuing her Master's degree in Literary Studies.

KAREN E. BENDER has also published two novels, *Like Normal People* (Houghton Mifflin, 2000), which was a *Los Angeles Times* bestseller, a *Washington Post* Best Book of the Year, and a Barnes and Noble Discover Great New Writers selection, and *A Town of Empty Rooms* (Counterpoint Press, 2013). This Los Angeles native is on the faculty at UNC Wilmington.

COURTESY OF MICHAEL WHITE

now at forty-three, the narrator is nervously overjoyed that her father and mother have decided to come visit. Bender describes these emotions almost perfectly, combining the narrator's longing for approval with her desire for connection: "I wanted them to see everything they had missed, the events, the recitals, the graduations, all [of it]" (116). Bender complements the narrator's longings with grounded regretful questions as the narrator's parents are about to enter airport security and the narrator wonders, "Why had I moved away? Why had they not tried to come see me earlier? Why had my father become ill? Why had I not been good enough to stay, and why had they not found a way to come? How long would we have, on earth, together?" (118). Bender illustrates this narrator's growing awareness that, as time swiftly flies forward, their human lives only count for what they make of them.

The pinnacle of *Refund* is the title story. Bender weaves the unspeakable trauma resulting from the 9/11 terrorist attacks with a seemingly frank decision by a financially struggling couple to sublet their New York apartment for the month of September. Although Josh and Clarissa, from the safe distance of Virginia, escape the tragic events unscathed, their tenant Kim does not. Bender gently and respectfully guides her characters through their journey of shock, relief, guilt, fear and disbelief. Clarissa poses the gut-wrenchingly honest yet horrifying question, "What did one owe for being alive?" (140). Bender asks the reader, what is the price, the monetary value, of a life? This story was by far the most compelling of Bender's work as she strove to reveal the buried questions many face after tragedy strikes.

Bender's collection demonstrates her powerful writing and unique style as she crafts stories about women. In "Theft," Bender creates Ginger Klein, an eighty-two-year-old swindler nearing mental decline who recounts her exploits to a naïve passenger. Bender expertly mingles the realities of financial hardship with Ginger's youthful adventures. In "The Third Child," Bender tackles emotions of dread, resignation and inevitability with a portrait of a mother who loves her life, husband, and children but knows without a doubt that she doesn't feel "capable of loving a third child" (86). With "This Cat," Bender's approach to explaining death to children brings to mind Donald Barthelme's "The School" while perhaps surpassing it by grounding the story with a realistic mother struggling to cope with the possibility of breast cancer; this mother doesn't try to answer her children's questions but instead guides them through the process of coping with their cat's death.* In "The Candidate," Bender portrays a struggling single mother, who has a strange yet personal interaction with a door-to-door politician. In this story Bender depicts the oddity of life when compassion and understanding come from an unlikely source.

While *Refund* is full of characters who remind us of ourselves and our friends and neighbors, its only flaw, if you could even call it that, is the presence of some secondary characters who are, in a sense, too intriguing. Readers are only provided limited insight into these characters' lives, yet their worldviews are varied and compelling. In "A Chick from My Dream Life," Bender portrays the developing adolescent friendship

ABOVE **Karen Bender with her UNC Wilmington colleague Michael White at a reading celebrating both of their new books being semifinalists for the National Book Award, Old Books on Front Street, Wilmington, NC, 10 Oct. 2015 (Bender's collection was ultimately a finalist for the award.)**

* "The School" first appeared in Barthelme's *Amateurs* (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1976).

between two sisters, one of whom is disabled, along with their family's methods of explaining and affirming each daughter, but Bender's description of these parents is almost too quick. In "The Sea Turtle Hospital," a school shooting disrupts the lives of both the teachers and the students, yet we're only allowed into the narrator's perspective. Bender's honest descriptions and realistic situations just left this reader, simply, wanting more of these characters.

Bender completes her collection with three stories that illustrate the desire for love and connectivity that can be diminished but not expunged by the everyday struggles of finances or personal failures. In "Free Lunch," Bender mingles uncertainty with hopefulness, as a family tries to make the best of their recent unemployment, while in "For What Purpose?" merely the threat of impending unemployment causes the narrator to search for a meaningful connection. Bender's last story, "What the Cat Said," signals the end to *Refund* by focusing on a private thoughtful yet tense moment between a husband and wife; Bender doesn't give us hope for perfection in this encounter but instead demonstrates the couple's ability to acknowledge their imperfect marriage. Bender's stories are powerful because they portray life as it is, messy, complicated, confusing and often undervalued. Most importantly, *Refund* doesn't pretend to have answers to life's imperfection but instead focuses connectivity as the real beauty and worth of life. ■

"TALKING IN CIRCLES," "MOV[ING] THROUGH TIME"

a review by Tim Buchanan

Gregg Cusick. *"My Father Moves Through Time like a Dirigible" and Other Stories.* Livingston: University of West Alabama Livingston Press, 2014.

TIM BUCHANAN is from Kalamazoo, MI, where he attended Western Michigan University earning bachelor's degrees in creative writing and Spanish and the university's Creative Writing Award for Undergraduate Fiction. He received his MA in English with a concentration in creative writing from East Carolina University, where he worked as an editorial assistant for *NCLR*. His short stories have appeared in *Monkeybicycle, Cheat River Review*, *LitroNY, Hypertrophic Literary,* and *Puerto Del Sol*. He received an AWP Intro Journals Award in 2014. Currently, he studies fiction as an MFA student at the University of Nevada Las Vegas.

GREGG CUSICK is a three-time finalist for the Doris Betts Fiction Prize, and these stories have been published in *NCLR* 2008 and 2009 and *NCLR Online* 2013. He is also a winner of the Lorian Hemingway Short Story Competition and the *Florida Review* Editor's Prize. He earned a master's degree in English and creative writing from NC State University and lives in Durham.

ABOVE RIGHT **Gregg Cusick reading at Scuppernong Books, Greensboro, NC, 11 Dec. 2015**

When I was first invited to write a review of this debut collection of short stories by Gregg Cusick, it was the title that initially attracted me. This might be an obvious thing to note as the title of any work is the first inkling any of us get about the quality of what we're about to read. *My Father Moves Through Time like a Dirigible* is both intriguing and perplexing. It's an oddball title for sure, the kind that demands you pick apart its meaning. What does it mean to move through time like an anachronistic inflatable aircraft? And more to the point, what does it mean to be the child of such a man?

I don't know that these stories actually answer those questions specifically, but Cusick does give the impression of a writer trying to puzzle out the significance of time to our human experience. In stories like "My Father Moves Through Time like a Dirigible," "Looking for Things in the Courtyards of Oaxaca," and "Gutted," Cusick does painstaking work to pin down an exact chronology for the reader, fixing events to their specific date and time, so that even when those events appear out of order in the narrative, we know exactly where we are on the timeline.

To that effect, one thing became increasingly clear as I read on: these stories are obsessed with time, whether with history and anachronism or the passage of time itself, even when we don't have a specific timeframe for events. The title story revisits the historic crash of the rigid airship *Shenandoah* in 1925 near Dayton, OH. While recalled through supposed crew logs leading up to the disaster, the event is counterpointed against the recollection of an eighty-three-year-old man

who saw the dirigible fly overhead, one of his last memories of his father before his father runs away. In his memory it seems like the blimp could have been the very thing that carried his father away, though he knows this is not true. Such is the effect of time and juxtaposition on memory.

One of my favorite stories in the collection, "Diagramming Wyatt," uses the suggestion of a Venn diagram to draw in the intersecting histories of a set of characters in rural North Carolina in 1997. Wyatt finds himself at the center of the diagram where the lives of Wyatt (a traveling filmmaker last seen in Hopefield, NC, in 1937), Etta (Wyatt's grandmother), and Will (his estranged father) all meet. Wyatt's discovery of a short documentary film from 1937, featuring a young Etta, brings the past back into sharp focus. Wyatt's own present mirrors the story of Etta and the filmmaker, which she recounts for him. When she says to Wyatt, "I feel like I'm talking in circles a bit here. But that's part of the way time works on an old gray head" (70), what seem like circles to Etta look less like a closed circuit to the reader and more like a spiral, the arms of which wind out to touch and encompass the past with the present narrative.

Cusick deftly utilizes this realistic understanding of the necessarily limited view of his characters at almost every turn. While they are allowed to wrestle with the meanings of the story's events in their lives, sometimes mired in the depressing aspects of life and death and inconsequence, like in the story "Clay Pigeons," the reader is caught in the widening, lazy drift of narratives sweeping back through time, which seldom attach themselves to one driven protagonist but provide a village of otherwise average people – an easy bid for our sympathies. This sort of god's eye view is what I came to appreciate most reading the stories in this collection. Rather than focus in on a specific character or event, Cusick circles his subject, moving further and further out to capture more and more detail. I had a feeling of enormity while engrossed in his world, as if I stood outside of time where I was able to look down long decades in either direction to see what transpired there.

"Looking for Things in the Courtyards of Oaxaca" is dizzyingly atmospheric in this way and purposefully sets out to confuse our sense of the narrative sequence. Featuring a large cast of characters – an American professor and his architecture students; a middle-aged woman, *patrona* of the hotel they stay in; the widower sipping mescal on the hotel roof patio; a local drug Don; and the young writer who watches them all from his balcony across from the hotel – the story contrives a caper to bring all these actors together. It becomes quickly apparent that the story may not be the story after all but instead the work of the young writer watching these characters move about below. The writer struggles to get the story going, admitting to his wife, "'You see I've got this incredible setting . . . some good characters. . . . But the problem,' he laughs under his breath, thinking she knows what's coming, 'I'm looking for the action. But I just can't seem to get the widower off the terrace with his mescal'" (29). From here it is hard to determine whether this young writer is maneuvering the other characters into a story of his own devising or simply witnessing the events as they unfold.

COURTESY OF GREGG CUSICK

Because these stories are always making some attempt to philosophize, some concepts can become overly drawn out and fall into heavy abstraction. More than a couple of times I got lost in a sentence's attempt to explain some romantic notion about life and time and experience when what I really wanted was the character to *react* to the world around him. Cusick quickly returns the patient reader back to the narrative action at hand, but those needing something to happen on every page may find themselves frustrated.

If you're looking for stories with punch, you won't find that here, which is not to say that these stories are boring or that they lack heart in any way. Cusick moves us through his collection with the slow plodding of a dirigible: a pace that can at times seem inefficient in its deliberateness, a method of writing as displaced in time as the rigid airship itself, but ultimately worth the effort. These stories will leave you contemplating your own history and perhaps what marks you have left as you moved through time. ■

2015 Doris Betts Fiction Prize, 2nd Place

EMINENT DOMAIN

by Kathryn Etters Lovatt

WITH ART BY ROBERT TYNES

The kids and I come out of the restaurant, Ella half asleep on my shoulder, and there sits the first moon of autumn, plump and golden as the belly of a Buddha I once discovered on a back shelf at Habitat.

"Look at that," I say, but Mickle's eyes drop to the pavement. Under this generous light, he hunts for treasure: stray coins, beads from broken earrings, a mottled rock. My keys have made their way down to the lint in my pocket, and it takes effort, shifting baby and diaper bag, to fish them out. "It's magic, sweetie," I try telling him. "You don't get to see a moon like this very often."

The word magic makes Mickle's head pop up, and he nearly drops his box of leftover pizza. "Awesome," he says, showing off his first-grade lingo.

"It's called a harvest moon." Two clicks on the fob and the doors unlock.

"Not me. I'm calling it something different. I'm calling it a vampire moon."

The closer we get to Halloween, the more Mickle talks about vampires. Not Count Chocula, mind you, or the one on Sesame Street, but the blood-sucking type. Jay, who accuses me of being a worrywart, thinks we should go to Target and buy enough black polyester capes and wax teeth for all of us, including Ella.

"We can't keep him a baby forever, Amy," Jay reminds me at such times, but he says this for his own benefit as well as mine. We are seniors as far as parents go, a good decade ahead of the median, old enough to know that every blink is a second off the clock.

COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Idealism (acrylic and oil on shaped birch panel, 26x36) by Robert Tynes

I unfasten Ella's arms from around my neck. She mews and shakes her head, but her eyes stay closed. I strap her in, brush the pacifier across her lips till she begins to nibble. I kiss the pale down of her head.

"Amazon has a Tin Man costume," I say. "It comes with an oilcan." After a few seconds of silence, I give it another go. "I could be Dorothy. We could find munchkin tights for Ella."

"You're too old to be Dorothy." Mickle puts his pizza on the floorboard and gets in his seat. "You should be the witch."

"Okay, I'll be the witch, and you be Dorothy."

"Mom," he says in a cast iron voice. "A boy can't be Dorothy."

"Be the great and powerful wizard then."

He shakes his head slowly, exactly the way Jay does when he's exasperated. "Daddy has to be the wizard."

If Jay will play along – wear a towel turban or the Shriner's fez that topped an auction grab box I won – this could go my way. "You got your seat belt good and tight?" Mickle nods, but he doesn't object when I reach over and double check.

I take a good sniff of fall. The air, cool and deeply cedar, makes me Hank Williams lonesome. Why does the scent of one season moving to the next stir things from the bottom up?

"What about a pirate?" I ask as I start the car.

"I've been a pirate."

"Some people like to be the same thing, over and over."

"What people?"

"The kids in my old neighborhood." I could see us tromping up and down our streets in a raucous, rag-tag pack. "Pirates were big then, and gypsies and aliens."

"*Bor-ing*," he says in a sing-song voice and begins to knock his foot against the back of the passenger seat.

"Don't do that, Mickle. It's annoying, and you'll leave prints."

He raises his foot – I know this instinctively – and holds. The desire for a final hard boot is nearly enough to make him deliver, but he backs off.

"Why can't I be a vampire, Mommy?" A light tremble rifts his voice.

You, Lawson, that's why.

Every year, you smeared clown white on your face and donned the black satin mantle your mother ordered from an actors' catalogue. Every year, you added something new: enamel fangs, a scarlet set of glue-on nails, the Morticia wig that dipped like a Victorian curtain across the width of your brow. This one spectacular look carried you through all our serious days of trick-or-treating, whereas every October thirty-first, I made myself into the latest princess – Sci-fi or Disney. Only once did I try something new. I was ten, and my mom bought me a skirt with a hoop. That year I was Scarlett O'Hara, and you traded me your Butterfingers for my Sweet Tarts – that's the day I knew for sure you liked me, because who gives up Butterfingers for Sweet Tarts?

"Hey!" shouts Mickle, startling me and pulling Ella from her sleep. "You went too far."

He's right, but on this particular road, there's no easy way to turn back around.

"Sorry, honey," I apologize. "Guess we'll take the long way tonight." I reach my hand back and pat his knee. "Check out what's going on in town."

"We were supposed to go right home," Mickle protests. Ella squirms.

"How about seeing if she'll take her binky?"

My rearview mirror frames the top of Mickle's head and the neat, natural part that runs through the thick blonde weight of it. My children look alike, a lucky mix of Jay and me: the turned up corners of his mouth, the straight line of my nose; their eyes look browner and bigger than either of ours.

KATHRYN ETTERS LOVATT is a former finalist and winner of the Doris Betts Fiction Prize and the two-time winner of Press 53's open award for short fiction. A recipient of grants from the South Carolina Arts Commission and the Virginia Creative Center of the Arts, she received her MA in creative writing from Hollins University and now resides in Camden, SC. She also spends time at her condominium in Southport, NC, where she often goes to write.

Selecting "Eminent Domain" for second place in the 2015 Doris Betts Fiction Prize competition, *NCLR* Fiction Editor Liza Wieland applied Faulkner's famous lines, "The past is never dead. It's not even past": "'Eminent Domain' illustrates the truth of this statement through deft description and the painful but compelling resilience of the first person narrator, Amy. The ending is the very definition of bittersweet, and will stay in my mind for a long time."

ROBERT TYNES is 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 East Carolina University. 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 and in *NCLR Online* 2013.

I watch Mickle run his hand like a feather over his sister's arm, tempt her with the plug. Ella, whose car seat faces away, is out of my range, but I hear her working on her pacifier again, know how her eyes open and shut trying to keep awake. As she gives in, she hums, a single *Om-like* sound that Jay says is a stuffy nose, but I get stuffy noses and no one would mistake the noise I make for meditation. Nearly everything about the kids astonishes and delights me. Who could have fathomed such a thing, that our dying cat's veterinarian would coax me back to life, that I would marry again and have these two reasonably perfect children?

But right at this moment, Mickle, a boy who likes to keep to a plan and resists detours, isn't happy. "We are going to worry Daddy," he says. "We're going to worry him to death."

"He's still making rounds at the shelter. He'll call when he's done."

"Can I be the one to answer?"

I pull my cell from my other pocket and pass it back.

"Ahhhhhh." Mickle opens his mouth and lets his throat rumble as we bounce over where the triple railroad tracks used to run. Once his voice is normal, he sits high in his seat. "Guess what Connor Baker's going to be for Halloween."

Full of dents and chinks and crumbs of enchantment, the house was made, I believed, for happiness.

"Superman?" He shakes his head. "A cowboy?" A bigger shake. "Rudolph, the red-nosed reindeer?"

"Give up?" He doesn't wait. "Connor is going to be the devil. He's going to have a tail and pointy ears and a flashlight that makes sparks and flames and everything."

"Wow," I say, but according to his mother, who came in the shop for demitasse spoons and left with two saltcellars, Connor will be a pack of M&M Peanuts, his little brother, M&M Plain. I keep this to myself for the time being because, stuck here waiting on the light to change, I think of another Halloween, the one when we ditched the church party and went to the lake instead.

At seventeen, you could reach the key hidden over the door standing flat on your feet. Without a word, without making a sound, we let ourselves inside. We followed the sound of the radio meant to discourage intruders. In the dark and cold, we shivered out of our clothes and crawled under the covers of your parents' bed. How young we were and shy, how green. Our bodies, still a mystery to us then, bristled with secrets and longing.

A slew of warning signs brings back my attention. I knew this was coming, but my fresh sense of loss surprises me. Safety cones stand like soldiers along this strip of West Main. Cars swerve through narrowed lanes.

"A new road will go here," I explain to Mickle. "All the houses on your side of the street will be torn down so trucks and cars can go around town and over the bridge."

"They should blow them up," suggests Mickle. "That would be amazing."

On a whim, without flipping on the blinker, I barrel into the driveway of our old house. We bump right through the yard.

"What happened?" cries Mickle. "Where are we?"

"Nothing happened." Surprisingly, Ella doesn't make a peep as the car jerks to a stop. "I made a turn."

"Daddy says you don't always know where you're going."

"He does, does he?" I turn off the car, unsnap my seatbelt.

"He says you get lost going from the bedroom to the kitchen."

"Don't worry, I know where I am." My headlights shine across the porch and quiver in the waves of old window glass. The moon, higher now and veiled with a thin cloud, has lost some of its shine, but there's light enough. "I used to live here."

"Before me?"

"A long time before. Even before Daddy."

"It's old."

"I like old things. That's why I sell antiques."

He shifts and takes a look around. "I like where we live better."

"But this is a nice place, too, and I'm sorry to see it go."

"How come you moved?"

"A house like this is a lot to keep up."

The four years you and I lived together here, we scraped a century's worth of paint from that front door, waterlogged and heavy as if salvaged from an ancient place. We stripped wallpaper, faced the

COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Configuration **(acrylic and oil on shaped birch panel, 59x60) by Robert Tynes**

perils of mildew and corroded pipes, draped two rooms to look like sultans' tents. Full of dents and chinks and crumbs of enchantment, the house was made, I believed, for happiness.

"I know why you really left," Mickle says with such intensity, my heart skips.

"This house is hunted, that's why you moved. Hunted by ghosts."

"*Haunted* – I think that's the word you're looking for – but there's no such thing as ghosts, remember?" I pass him my iPad. "Don't play anything loud or with guns in it."

Mickle tucks the phone in his jacket and swipes to a game before my feet hit ground. "Don't stay long," he says without looking my way.

"I won't. And I'll be right there." I point to the porch. "Where you can see me."

"Don't worry, Mom." The luminescence of the tablet gives Mickle's face an eerie glow. "Ghosts are scared of vampires. Everybody knows that."

A vestige of sidewalk lies along here. Highway grass has overtaken the zoysia we planted. No azaleas grow by the steps. The closer I get, the worse things look. The barbed creepers of smilax shoot through every picket. I start at the bottom and go up until my gaze lands at the top two windows. The one that's cracked sucks me inside.

In my imagination, our bedroom walls still wear a Blue Ridge haze. Chinese chimes dangle inside the window frame. Those rectangles of painted glass, each the size of a biology slide, each painted with a delicate flower, broke into a bright, anxious tinkling at the first sign of wind. We weathered storms on an old coil mattress, the only one we could find to fit our yard sale bed. *What a steal*, we thought at the time, solid walnut: a big carved headboard of blooms, small footboard of vines. If I wanted, I could call up every room, squeak open medicine cabinets, count black and white tiles checker-boarding the kitchen floor. I could hear Suzy sharpening her claws on the Persian runner.

But a house has to be lived in or it falls apart. I tried to stay. I padlocked the shop and slept here through spring, but when I woke, you were in the plaster walls, in cracks on the ceiling and creaks in the floorboards. My father came. "Baby," he said, crying himself. "Time to come back home," and he packed me and Suzy up and drove us away.

The house seemed to take this to heart. In short order, it looked abandoned, as it was, and although the yard stayed mowed and the lights came on, the truth showed in clapboards that wouldn't hold paint, in a roof that threw off shingles. I returned Sundays, watered the plants and ran the taps. Going room to room took effort. The air wouldn't part for me to walk by. The scent of the house, as if a cabbage lay forgotten in the refrigerator's bottommost bin, began to sicken me.

For a year more, the place sat with its beds made, photos on the shelves. *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* stood open and weighted to the page where you stopped reading, but spiders spun webs quicker than I could pull them down. I had to let go.

Nearly everything inside sold at auction, but not a bid came in for the rococo lounge you and Albert hauled from the Atlanta market. I considered shipping it to the two of you, a reminder of the weekend you first brought him and Walt, his carpet of a dog, to meet me. That visit, and all the ones after, Albert baked and roasted and whisked.

"Lawson," he said one evening, "I believe Walter is sweet on Amy." You laughed, and Albert, as tall but not so handsome as you, flared. "The poor boy is positively love-struck," he huffed. "He can't take his eyes off her."

I yawned, sleepy from too much wine and not enough food. "How can you tell?" I asked. Walt had a set of bangs that went from the top of his head down to his nose.

"Don't be fooled by the fringe," said Albert, rising to check his leg of lamb. "Walt sees all." And just then, the two of you exchanged a glance, the glint of privacy, but I got it. Finally. Even with this twist, I wasn't ready to join the ranks of others, not so very different from us, who tried to share a life and failed. But you were.

The day you left, a hard pain wrote itself across your face. "I still love you," you said. I knew this to be awkward and terrible and true, but I cursed you down the steps, throwing names the way we used to throw rocks at the river. You kept going. You had found someone you couldn't live without. I always thought that I was that person. I know I thought I couldn't live without you. But I did. I have.

You travelled light that day, signing over business and house. Taking nothing more than a suitcase of clothes, you left me and the cat and, of course, that green monstrosity of a couch. It proved too heavy to shove to the curb, a bitch to chop apart. I used its legs as kindling, feeding the flame photos and letters, a thousand things I'd kept. A big piece of my life went into that fire, but not knowing how to sort yours from mine, I let it burn. This crooked little house where I slept in that top left bedroom, slept beside you, is the one thing that survived.

As I walk back to the car, one cricket hiccups behind me, a grocery bag crackles underfoot. I hear Ella laughing. Mickle can make her laugh just crossing his eyes.

"Hey, you," I say as I open her door. She smiles at me with her big goofy milk teeth. "What's this?" I tickle her foot. One of her little leather slippers, a grey cat with pink whiskers, has gone missing. I search by her seat and under it and on the floorboard. "Mickle, have you seen Ella's other shoe?"

"She kicked it off at the restaurant. You put it on the chair."

The waitress will have found it by now, tagged it with my name, or maybe Ella's, and tucked it under the counter. That's the plus and minus of a small town. Everybody knows everybody. Everybody knows everything.

"Light," says Ella and points to the square glow above her.

"That's right, light." She is so smart. I give her two Arrowroot cookies, one for each fat little hand.

"How come you didn't go in your house?" Mickle asks. "You never even went on the porch."

"I saw enough." Ella holds one of her cookies up to my mouth, and I pretend to take a bite. "Besides, your daddy will be getting home pretty soon."

A big piece of my life went into that fire, but not knowing how to sort yours from mine, I let it burn.

Mickle bends his head and looks over the house again. "Did you live here all by yourself?"

"I had a cat. And for a while, someone lived here with me."

"Who?"

"Lawson. His name was Lawson."

Mickle seems to be thinking this over as I close Ella's door.

The temperature is dropping and my sweater is too light, but the inside of the car is still good and warm. "When we were kids," I say as I settle in, "Lawson and I went trick-or-treating together. He always had the best costume of anybody – a vampire costume – and if there was a contest, he was sure to take first place." Mickle is all ears now. "One time, he won a box of licorice cats. Licorice, like those black jelly beans Grandpa buys."

"I know what licorice is." Mickle sounds offended.

Below us, down on the street, nothing is moving.

"Let's sit here a minute or two." I twist around so we can talk face-to-face. "Wait for traffic to thin."

"I never tasted a licorice cat."

"Well, according to Lawson, vampires are allergic to licorice, especially licorice cats. He fed his to a neighbor's Irish Setter. That dog loved Lawson till the day he died. "

Mickle flinches. "Lawson died?"

Oh, I wished you dead. I certainly did. Wished you'd died that time you jumped off Pillow Rock and the river was low. That a truck had hit you on your bike instead of running over my cousin. I dreamed up plenty of ways for you to go, and always, we were young, the best of our time together behind us. We would never have to know that.

"No, honey, the dog. The dog died."

"What happened to Lawson?"

"He moved," I say. "And then I moved."

"And then you got married and you had me and then you had Ella and for Christmas, we will get a gerbil."

Gerbils and vampires: Mickle is obsessed.

"What do you think happened to Lawson's costume?" he wonders.

"He grew too big to fit into it," I say. "But I think I could find you one of your own, if that's what you really, truly want to be."

"I do, I do!" Mickle begins to bounce. "I want to have the best costume ever."

"And you know what? I have a secret formula for blood."

"Real blood?"

"Nah. Even better – play blood."

What a mess the two of us made, a couple of kids with a quart of corn syrup and a bottle of red food coloring.

"I need a lot," Mickle tells me. "A whole lot."

"What about Ella then? What can she be?"

"Something with wings." He pats her arm. "She would look so cute with wings."

I can't tell if anything's really improved, but I turn around and put the car in reverse anyway.

"Ready to go home?"

"My middle name is Ready." Jay and Mickle never tire of saying this.

The grey moon seems so small and spent now, it could hide behind my turned-up thumb. The night begins to swallow everything once we start heading away. I tilt my side mirror but the fretwork is already indistinct. Before we reach Main, where, I hope, some kind soul will let us nudge into traffic, the long bones of our house will dwindle to silhouette.

In its last years, this place fell to good renters and bad, survived the tail of a tornado and some summers of torrential rain, but it will not stand in the way of progress. These lesser homes of downtown – the honeymoon cottages and old maid bungalows – will be sacrificed to a bypass. Ours will collapse to rubble, and even the scent that surrounds it, the sweet smell of clay bricks and acorn hulls, blue juniper and bright spring water, will be lost to tar and exhaust fumes. But I will remember the way it was once, and maybe, Lawson, you will remember, too. ■

COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Question of Balance (acrylic and oil on canvas, 60x84) by Robert Tynes

FINDING JOY IN THE DARKNESS

a review by Leah Hampton

David Joy. *Where All Light Tends to Go: A Novel.* New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2015.

Few visitors ever venture beyond the trails and tourist traps of Jackson County, NC, despite its beauty and uniqueness. Even fewer writers frequent its lush backwoods or attempt to capture in words any of its infuriating dichotomies. Here, in one of the most majestic counties in Appalachia, *nouveau riche* excess mixes with deeply entrenched poverty, and progressive counterculture clashes with traditional values. Stories happen in these mountains, stories that most people ignore or never find.

With his first novel, *Where All Light Tends to Go*, author David Joy peers into the deepest recesses of Jackson County, and he accomplishes something other writers cannot. Using his intimate knowledge of the setting, Joy brings readers to a place they would likely otherwise never see and tells a haunting, brilliantly crafted story of addiction, abuse, and, ultimately, hope.

The novel centers on the downward trajectory of Jacob McNeely, the teenage son of a local drug kingpin, a petty and wily tyrant in the affluent hamlet of Cashiers. Jacob's father runs an auto shop, the money-laundering front for his meth deals. Though it is considered a tony address by outsiders and summer residents, Jacob and his father toil in the thick muck on the darker edges of the town. Where there's muck there's brass, and Jacob's father profits handsomely. "Methamphetamine was a living, breathing body in Appalachia," Jacob tells us in his earnest narrative voice. "The dope came from Mexico, but Daddy was the heart of the body here, pumping the blood through every vein in the region" (18).

The heart of Jacob's father is a dark one, while his son's searches for light and a way out of familial tragedy. Jacob's only sources of light are Maggie, his first love, and the landscape of his home. The novel is essentially a bildungsroman, and as Jacob's responsibilities to his father's organization grow heavier and more adult in nature, he is pulled toward Maggie, despite the barriers to their being together, and to the woods of his childhood. Joy's imagery for Jacob's landscape and affection for Maggie contrasts sharply with the darker details of the story. Early in the novel, Jacob and Maggie meet in the forest to rekindle their romance. Jacob's worries soften as he describes how "in that moment that passed between us, there was this energy in the air that seemed to cup the two of us like lightning bugs in closed hands. . . . It was an old feeling that I had all but forgotten, a feeling that I never knew I'd missed until right then" (72). The young lovers continue to meet, and Jacob's aspirations for Maggie serve to raise his own hopes of escaping his father.

These rare moments of sweetness provide welcome relief for Jacob, who soon gets dragged into the brutal killing of one of his father's associates. After witnessing a horrific scene, Jacob must then finish the deed by disposing of the body on a remote cliff side. The assassination is not a tidy one, however, and Jacob's circumstances quickly deteriorate. There is more killing to come, and Jacob grows angrier and more fearful of his father.

The novel's most violent, disturbing scenes of Jacob doing his father's dirty work are also some of the most memorable in contemporary North Carolina literary fiction. Jacob suffers a waking nightmare, replaying his

LEAH HAMPTON lives in and writes about rural Appalachia. She chairs the Developmental Studies Department at A-B Tech Community College in Asheville, NC. Her work has appeared in such venues as *Appalachian Heritage*, *McSweeney's*, and *The Wallace Stevens Journal*. Read her Doris Betts Fiction Prize–winning short story "The Saint" in *NCLR* 2013.

DAVID JOY earned his MA in Professional Writing from Western Carolina University. His first book, a memoir, is *Growing Gills: A Fly Fisherman's Journey* (Bright Mountain Books, 2011). His second novel, *The Weight Of This World*, is forthcoming from Putnam in 2017. He lives in Webster, NC.

STEPHANIE WHITLOCK DICKEN served as *NCLR*'s Art Director from 2002 to 2008, and has designed for *NCLR* since 2001. For this issue, she designed this review and the review of the Payne memoir.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ASHLEY T. EVANS

crimes over and over. One victim's face "stayed taped up on the backs of my eyelids . . . and the screaming rang back deep in my memory. I wanted it gone, but it was all so fresh. I could still smell his skin burning. . . . Those types of things don't fade away. They are the worms of the living and eat at a man for as long as he's breathing" (118–19).

The memories and nightmares continue, and Jacob's troubles worsen. The plot builds to a crescendo of bullets and body blows, until his whole world tailspins towards an inevitable, but ultimately redemptive climax. The novel's pacing is exceptional, and we are so gripped by the action around Jacob that it is nearly impossible, no matter how gruesome the scene, to look away until we arrive at the explosive resolution.

David Joy orchestrates the swirling, chaotic action of this debut novel with nimble prose and undeniable wisdom. Joy is capable of such a careful balance of light and dark because he lives deep inside the place he has chosen to write about. Born in Charlotte, the author moved to the mountains when he was roughly the same age as his protagonist and quickly developed an intimate relationship with his newfound home. Joy's first book, *Growing Gills: A Fly Fisherman's Journey*, is a memoir about his experiences fishing the region's rivers. This novel is much bloodier than his nonfiction, and its raw power suggests that Joy's knowledge of these locales has deepened as he himself has matured personally and artistically. His forthcoming second novel, *The Weight of This World*, will no doubt show further development and grit. Joy's work thus far has received much positive attention, and his career as a voice in North Carolina literature is surely only just beginning.

Make no mistake, Joy's novel is a dark ride. Torture, desperation, and irredeemable sociopathy thread tightly throughout. Beachfront readers and bluegrass aficionados seeking tales of crocheting mamaws in idyllic log cabins will be shocked by some elements in *Where All Light Tends to Go*. On the other hand, those readers who stereotype the Blue Ridge as a backwoods of banjos and gap-toothed idiocy will find in these pages tenderness, unimaginable beauty, and sharp wit. Either way, Joy gives precisely what his readers need. He helps his fellow North Carolinians abandon their one-dimensional notions of the mountains and face some harder truths. Behind those truths is a deeper, more enlightened understanding of the Southern highlands.

Where All Light Tends to Go teaches us about the hidden realities of contemporary mountain life. Joy knows his characters, and more importantly, he knows the land. He has gone digging for us in Jackson County and found lost stories, lost people. Thus, in between murders and beatings, under the feet of the desperate and the addicted, we find nature; we find air and light. In Jacob McNeely's hopelessness, there is hope for those around him. This includes his audience, who by watching Jacob's struggles can finally begin to understand the causes and consequences of Appalachian poverty, thereby deepening their respect for this lovely, heartbreaking place. ■

PHOTOGRAPH BY ASHLEY T. EVANS

ABOVE **David Joy in Jackson County, NC**

RIGHT **A Jackson County, NC, scene**

FINALIST, 2015 JAMES APPLEWHITE POETRY PRIZE

BY J.S. ABSHER

Biscuits

1963

Mr. Lonny Garr leans, spits on the sidewalk. He's
on 10th Street, North Wilkesboro,
six months before our dashing President
is killed and the world is changed
and the TV shows Jack Ruby shoot Oswald
whose mouth opens in an O
large enough to swallow the country whole.

Lonny steps over the sidewalk crack and slumps off
without speaking. He goes to
the house he put up with Mama's money,
its unfinished drywall still
dimpled by hammer blows. His mama always
lies in bed, blinds pulled, her skin
pale as the white tubes buzzing and flickering

in the kitchen. Sometimes she speaks to Lonny's wife,
in a baby voice asking
for the fluffy middle of biscuits. When
Lonny's wife, bent down to hear,
sees Mama's tongue working in her toothless mouth,
she thinks of the winter her
newborn slipped away, dimly fluorescing

J.S. ABSHER has been a records manager, consultant, freelance editor, offset printer, missionary, bank teller, janitor, and teacher. He co-hosts the monthly Second Thursday reading series at Flyleaf Books in Chapel Hill, NC. His poetry has been published in two collections, *Night Weather* (Cynosura Press, 2010) and *The Burial of Anyce Shepherd* (Main Street Rag, 2006), and has won various prizes, most recently from *Kakalak* and *Big River Poetry Review*. His newest book, a revised electronic edition of *Night Weather*, with music and new poems and illustrations, will be released in 2015. He lives in Raleigh, NC, with his wife, Patti.

COURTESY OF ASHEVILLE ART MUSEUM COLLECTION, GIFT OF MRS. HELEN L. GUMPERT

***Untitled,* 1967 (photograph, black and white silver gelatin print, 13.5x10.63) by Kent Washburn**

then turning blue. Day and night she waits on the old
woman, watches the soaps, gets
up at four to cook the eggs and biscuits
and sit through Lonny's silence.
In June, she starts to cry and can't stop – *these whites
is runny*, Lonny said – then
goes back to her people in coal country.

Mama pulls herself out of bed for the first time
in years, from her bureau drawer
pulls a hat, cocks it forward on her head
like a sailor on a toot,
and walks into town waving merrily at
her strutting plate-glass image
that follows her all the way down Main Street,

cackling aloud, till she strolls into an office
for her new set of teeth. *O!*
she cries, when young Jack Kennedy is shot,
he was a fine-looking boy,
and takes to bed again. Lonny's wife comes home,
fires up the stove, makes biscuits
and grits. Lonny leans off the porch and spits.

KENT WASHBURN, a native of Nashville, TN, graduated from Belmont College in Ohio and then returned to his native state to study at Vanderbilt University. He moved to Asheville, NC, in the 1960s, where he worked with the Redevelopment Commission's Urban Redevelopment project to document residents and living conditions of the East Riverside district. He later left Asheville to pursue a career in law and eventually became a District Court Judge in Burlington, NC. See more of his work on the Asheville Art Museum website.

DARK TALES OF CAMPBELL COUNTY

a review by Wanda Canada

Sallie Bissell. *Deadliest of Sins*. Woodbury: Midnight Ink, 2014.

WANDA CANADA is a Wilmington, NC, author of *Island Murders* (Coastal Carolina Press, 2001), and *Cape Fear Murders* (Coastal Carolina Press, 2003), a mystery series set in southeastern North Carolina. Read an interview with Canada about her novels in *NCLR* 2010.

SALLIE BISSELL, born in Tennessee, found the inspiration for her Mary Crow series in the Appalachian forests. Bissell currently lives in Asheville, NC, and published her first Mary Crow novel, *In the Forest of Harm*, in 2001 with Bantam. She published two more novels, *A Darker Justice* (2002; reviewed in *NCLR* 2002) and *Legacy of Masks* (2005), also with Bantam and *Call the Devil by his Oldest Name* (2004) with Dell. After seven years Bissell continued Mary Crow's story with *The Music of Ghosts*, published in 2013 by Midnight Ink, which then published *Deadliest of Sins* and Bissell's seventh novel, *A Judgment of Whispers,* in 2015.

How did I overlook Sallie Bissell, author of seven suspense novels set in North Carolina's Appalachian Mountains? Just when I thought I knew all our state's mystery writers, I found such sheer, gritty delight in reading *Deadliest of Sins*, the sixth novel in her Mary Crow series, that I vowed to read them all while I wait for the seventh to come out in September. At some point while enjoying *Deadliest of Sins*, I made notes about a brief mention of Mary Crow's Indian heritage and an equally brief comment regarding a former lover who doesn't seem to be coming back – as if I needed any more encouragement to satisfy my curiosity about Sallie Bissell's other six books as soon as possible.

In *Deadliest of Sins*, Samantha Buchanan has one last year of high school before she can escape a cruel stepfather who keeps the family living in fear. It is mid-summer in Campbell County, fields are lush green, and all seems serene in the countryside – only it isn't, not behind closed doors. There's a lot going on that may never be revealed until more tragedy occurs, and even then, the whole truth is often never known.

Despite years of email warnings about people disappearing while traveling a particular road, in an area with no cell phone reception, Sam stops to check on a seemingly abandoned baby crying in a car seat at the edge of a dark, uninhabited road. I first blamed such risky behavior on her age and inexperience; instead, I should have asked myself what kind of person would *not* stop to check. Sam's disappearance leads her younger brother, Chase, to hitchhike on a peach truck to find Mary Crow, Special Prosecutor to North Carolina's governor,

PHOTOGRAPH BY GREG BOSELY

ABOVE RIGHT **Sallie Bissell at a reading for her new book at Malaprop's, Asheville, NC, 20 Apr. 2013**

and report that his stepfather stole his sister. He is convinced his sister would never run away to Charlotte with a boyfriend, despite what their stepfather claims. After all, Samantha swore on the Bible that she would tell him before she decided to leave. What else is a young brother to believe? Or is everyone, including Mary Crow, dismissing him because he's only eleven and they think he's making up tall tales for attention?

There really are boogey men in the neighborhood other than Chase's stepfather, including Russian sex traffickers kidnapping and smuggling young virgins to other continents for the pleasure of rich men. Campbell County is also home to at least one murderer (and he plays on the local baseball team). And Mary Crow is investigating anti-gay activities in the area: a preacher who advises corporal punishment for young children showing any suspicious homosexual tendencies. The governor declares Reverend Herman Trull to be North Carolina's latest embarrassment, a man of God who preaches internment camps for gay people, resulting in a ranting YouTube video that has gone

viral. Just for the record, there is no such Campbell County in North Carolina.

The story thread continues with undercover Detective Victor Galloway from Atlanta, newly hired to investigate Latino-on-Latino crime and the recent homophobic-inspired murder. Mary Crow's job is to untangle the mess because the governor is concerned that a large corporation won't relocate to Campbell County if some of their employees might be in jeopardy.

Sallie Bissell's in-depth characterizations are certainly believable – even characters like the wife-beating, child-terrorizing stepfather and others who don't care what people think and who have more than enough warped justifications for their actions. The writer's depiction of young Chase is splendid (he is my favorite character). His stepfather constantly tries to man-him-up, calling him a coward. The police peg him a liar and a bother. But no matter how bad the abuse and lack of support, Chase never gives up. I was cheering for him all the way, as if he were not only the little kid next door but the bravest one on the planet. He touches a mother's heart. Likewise, the teenage sister looking at a future of unspeakable horror found the spirit and the resourcefulness to keep trying as long as possible.

Deadliest of Sins may focus largely on children, but it is most definitely a strong *adult* suspense novel, which also takes on the tough moral issues people often don't want to talk about. Sallie Bissell sets a fast pace throughout the book. Add to that a cast of both admirable and rotten-to-the-core characters, a smidgen of romance on the horizon, and a satisfying ending – in short, the kind of book suspense lovers are happy to find. ■

MOOD INDIGO

a review by
Anna Jean Mayhew

Moira Crone. *The Ice Garden.* Durham, NC: Carolina Wren Press, 2015.

ANNA JEAN MAYHEW is the author of *The Dry Grass of August* (Kensington Publishing Group, 2011; reviewed in *NCLR Online* 2012), which won the Sir Walter Raleigh Award for Fiction in 2011, was a finalist for the Southern Independent Booksellers Alliance Book of the Year in 2012, is a Blackstone Audio Book, and has been translated into five languages. She is currently working on her second novel, *Tomorrow's Bread*; the first chapter appeared in *27 Views of Charlotte* (Eno Publishing) in the fall of 2014. Read more about her in an interview in *NCLR* 2013.

MOIRA CRONE was born in Goldsboro, NC, and studied writing at Johns Hopkins University. She has published three short story collections and two other novels. For many years, Crone taught in the MFA Program in creative writing at Louisiana State University, directing the program from 1997 until 2002. In 2009, she received the Robert Penn Warren Award for fiction from the Fellowship of Southern Writers for her body of work.

The Ice Garden, Moira Crone's dark, captivating new novel, shows how a child living with two parents can still be an orphan. Crone takes us into a shadowy world where the source of ten-year-old Claire McKenzie's misery is her mentally ill mother, Diana. In the summer of 1961, Connor, Claire's remote father, brings his wife and new baby home from the hospital. Claire notices her father's silence, his mouth in a tight line, and that Diana shows no interest in the baby, immediately retreating to her bedroom for what is the beginning of a prolonged seclusion.

Crone is a native of Eastern North Carolina, the coastal plain, and this tobacco country is reflected in her collection of short stories, *What Gets Into Us* (2006). In *The Ice Garden*, she reprises fictional Fayton, NC, Connor's hometown, where Diana feels that Connor keeps her "in a cage" (69). She is apparently suffering from postpartum depression – a theme also found in Crone's earlier novel, *A Period of Confinement* (1986). The diagnosis is implied by Diana's impenetrable desolation after the birth of her second daughter; however, her erratic behavior has occurred in the past with frightening regularity, signifying a severe emotional disorder that cannot be explained away as "baby blues."

The baby is named Odile, but Claire quickly decides what her sister should be called: *Sweetie*. And Sweetie she becomes. Responsibility for her falls on Claire and Sidney, the "colored

COURTESY OF CAROLINA WREN PRESS

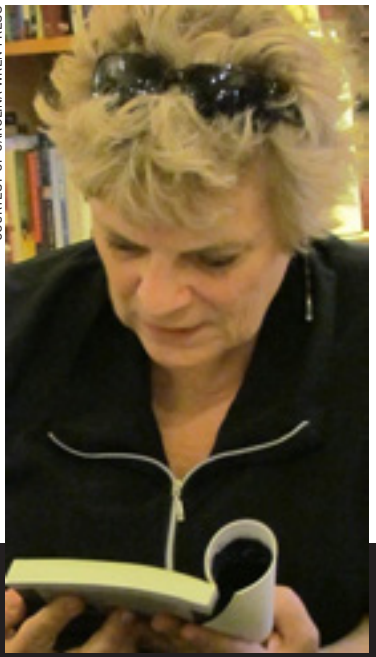
maid." Connor, desperate after five nights when Sweetie wakes at three a.m., asks Sidney if she can move in to take care of the child day and night, offering her fifty dollars a week – about double what household help made in the early 1960s. She responds apologetically but firmly that she cannot, but Claire willingly tends to Sweetie, who, appropriately, eventually calls her big sister "Care." Claire's devotion to Sweetie is her salvation, even as her own life is rendered bleak by her mother's illness. She loves Sweetie not only as a sister, but with a deep, maternal commitment.

The author takes us into the mind of pre-adolescent Claire, who tells the story in first person. There's an occasional shift to second person when Claire speaks in an aside to the reader, which tends to be mildly jolting, and the voice of a young narrator doesn't seem to ring true in such places; for example, Claire thinks of her mother, "I suppose you could say she was a person who advocated for a condition she only barely endured: the condition of being obsessed with one's exterior, one's beauty" (92). However, Claire does seem to be a reliable narrator, and perhaps the whole story is being told by the adult Claire looking back. A clue to an older narrator behind the scenes is in the oft-repeated phrase "I remember" as in the line, "A few nights later I had a dream I still remember" (30). Then, close to the end of the book, we are told, "I know now what anger truly is, but when I was a child, the rage roamed around and nailed me sometimes or dispersed, went into the air, flew out and then entered again through my very breath, made me serious, moody, driven, funny at the wrong times. Love did nearly the same" (189).

The word *indigo* is first used in the novel to describe a bruise. But after a horrific scene in which Claire finds Sweetie alone and about to drown in Diana's tub, indigo becomes metaphor: "The world was . . . uneven, thick and indigo in places" (129). The color is internalized when Claire feels the indigo is tailing her. Ultimately, she is enveloped: "the indigo swooped down at great speed and took me" (184). She is experiencing the deep moods her mother endures, but has no way to articulate what is happening, as the indigo becomes an element like water or air or fire.

Claire's mother is disconnected from her children to such an extent that she cannot fathom that they may also suffer. Diana is an absent mother, though she seldom leaves home. Her only reprieve from the gloom that engulfs her comes from playing classical music on the piano. Claire is adept at deducing from her mother's music – whether she caresses or pounds the keys – fair weather or emotional storms to come. Diana's beauty is emphasized in the book, as in her description as "a blue-eyed, broad-shouldered blonde who went through a room like a magnet, pulling men's heads behind her." But Diana comes home from the birth of her second child, "her hair like straw . . . worn down, soft, even harmed" (3). The way the once-stunning Diana feels about herself is clear when she asks Claire, "What else is there? But pretty?" (91). Diana's deterioration affects Connor, too, but he remains dazzled by her beauty, excusing his wife's behavior in the classic pattern of an enabler.

When Sweetie is twenty-two days old, a ray of light comes into the family with the arrival of Aunt C, Connor's sister, Cecelia. She sweeps into the story like Mary Poppins – in a Rambler instead of under an umbrella – with a tiny dog named Cleopatra, who delights Claire. Aunt C bustles



COURTESY OF CAROLINA WREN PRESS

ABOVE **Moira Crone reading from her new novel at Quail Ridge Books in Raleigh and** RIGHT **at Pomegranate Books, Wilmington, NC**

around the house, goes through the baby's wardrobe, makes shopping lists for practical things like a rubber sheet. "Over the next few weeks, she showed [Claire] how to crochet . . . how to know when to flip a pancake, how to really change a baby" (15). As Aunt C takes charge of the girls and the house, Diana seems to rally, but her upswing is a Band-Aid that covers a festering wound. Ultimately, Diana's explosive anger forces Cecilia to return to her home in Washington, DC, after which Diana is committed to an institution in Raleigh that Sidney describes as a "place for people not right in the head" (58). In the peace that follows Diana's departure, Claire takes hold of Sweetie, and her life starts over.

The reader hopes that Connor would come alive in Diana's absence, be an attentive father, but if anything he retreats even further, showing pleasure only on the days he's going to visit his wife. Throughout most of the novel, he is a cypher for a man whose wife is mentally ill: she gets worse, he retreats; she has a good day, he is foolish in his belief that all is well again. When Diana returns home, the family collectively holds its breath as Connor asserts that she's better, he can tell. Claire is frustrated when Diana pulls her hair out, bangs on things, yells, and curses the town – but never in front of Connor. At fifteen months of age, "Sweetie knew too. She tensed every time my mother walked into a room" (111). When Diana, in a rage, fires Sidney, Claire is left with no dependable adult in her life.

Nature weaves in and out of the novel, underpinning the plot, especially during winter scenes when the cold is persuasive, brilliantly woven into the story. As I read the book on a hot July night, I shivered and sought warmth from the scene of "[a]n entire field of ice under a river of stars, and beyond it all, at the horizon, broken trees like brushstrokes" (194). The weather becomes an enemy as Diana continues to spiral downward and those around her are helpless to stop her descent into madness. Crone weaves Claire's awareness of the outer world into a story that takes place in the inner world of the McKenzie home. Even as her mother is teetering, Claire notes, "ice brought all the beauty out . . . [a]s if the world were getting polished" (145). The reader will wish that Diana could see things that way.

Moira Crone has a gift for the perfect detail to create a picture in a reader's mind, as when Sidney and Claire dress Sweetie to attend a funeral: "a baby in a black dress was the saddest thing there could be" (209). And, in an impeccable description of older women in small Southern towns: "All those widows and old maids . . . knew how to get the florist to work, how to find musicians in a federal disaster area" (210). *The Ice Garden* compels a fast first reading for the story, then a second slow one for enjoyment of the phrasing, the language, the author's style. The complexity of the characters, the myriad themes, and nature as metaphor make this a book that will stay in my personal library. ■

DAPHNE ATHAS RECEIVES THE 2015 R. HUNT PARKER AWARD

Daphne Athas received the 2015 R. Hunt Memorial Award from the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association for her contribution to North Carolina Literature. Athas published her first novel, *Weather of the Heart* in 1947, when she was twenty-two. She published several more novels, two of which received the Sir Walter Raleigh Award for Fiction. Athas also published a collection of poetry, a whimsical book on grammar and stylistics, a play, and a travel memoir about Greece, the birthplace of her father and a frequent summer destination for herself. Her most recent book is *Chapel Hill in Plain Sight: Notes from the Other Side of the Tracks* (Eno Publishers, 2010). It is a collection of essays about the people and institutions of Depression-era and post-World War II Chapel Hill and Carrboro – a time and place of Athas's youth. Her work has appeared in numerous journals and periodicals, including the *Hudson Review* and the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Athas taught at a school for the blind, worked for the Office of War Information, and, from 1968 into the 1980s, was an instructor in the creative writing program at UNC Chapel Hill. ■

PHOTOGRAPH BY LINDA FOX; COURTESY OF THE NC OFFICE OF ARCHIVES AND HISTORY

RIGHT **Daphne Athas with her Parker award, presented by John Blythe, Raleigh, NC, 13 Nov. 2015**

FINALIST, 2015 JAMES APPLEWHITE POETRY PRIZE

BY C.G. THOMPSON

Things I'd Like to Tell My Mother

That the utility company never actually repaired
the gas leak she had, leaving an aging gasket
in place, as well as the possibility of an explosion.
She lived for another year in her house, unaware
(as was I, three states away) of hidden danger

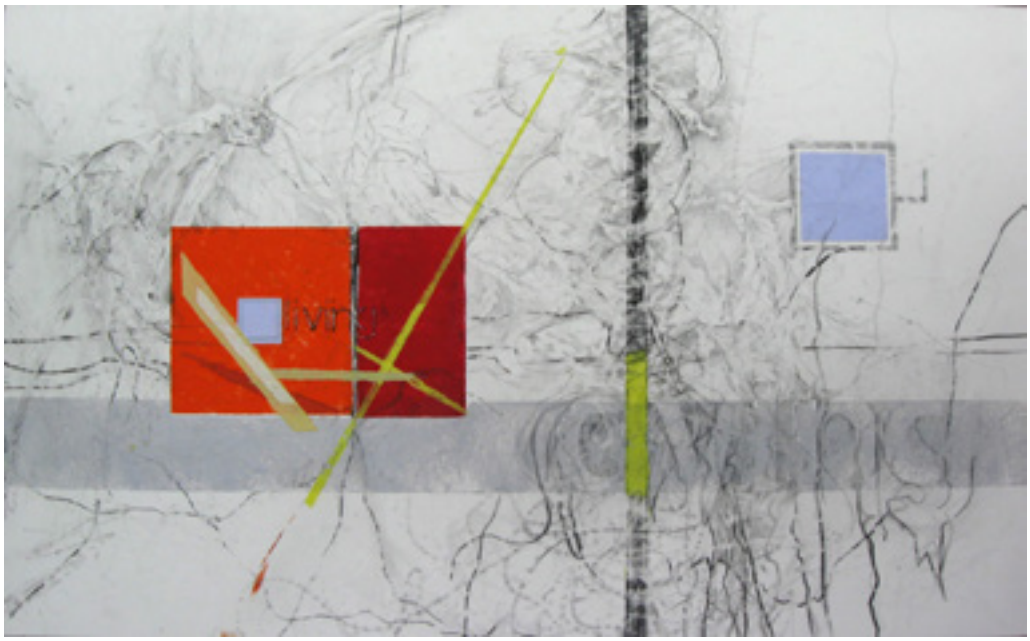
from simply turning on a switch, or lighting a cigarette,
which her doctor never discouraged her from doing.
That I'm sorry she never saw the Pacific, so close by
as we visited Crater Lake, celebrating my graduation.
I was in full teenage mode (in hindsight, inexplicable),

missing my friends, insisting on heading back home,
thinking we'd explore the West Coast some other year,
which never came. That I now get why Sinatra was cool,
why my parents snapped up tickets to his farewell tour,
proudly showed blurry photos of an overweight man

(sole detail I noticed at the time, I'm embarrassed to admit).
One listen to "In the Wee Small Hours" made decades superfluous,
his voice and delivery transcendent. Every word mattered
as he inhabited a song, let the audience reside there as well.
That I found a friend from high school the old-school way,

writing to an address from thirty years before, hoping
his mom or dad would still be alive, pass the letter along.
We talked on the phone once, but his voice was reserved,
offering minimal emotion, telling me all I needed to know,
in his own code, meaning my achievements didn't match his,

C.G. THOMPSON won the NCSU Poetry Contest in 2008. In 2011, she studied in the Gilbert-Chappel Distinguished Poet Program. She was a finalist in the 2014 Blue Light Press Chapbook contest, and her poetry has appeared in such venues as *Tar River Poetry, Sandcutters,* and the *News & Observer*. She has been a finalist in previous Applewhite competitions; these poems then published in *NCLR Online* 2012 and also in *NCLR* 2012 and 2014. She also writes short stories.



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Dying Living, **2012 (graphite and acrylic on claybord, 7.5x12) by Kiki Farish**

no judgeships in my future, no trips to Thailand or Brazil.
That I regret interrupting one of her favorite stories,
Super Bowl celebration going strong, corner bar crowded,
unfamiliar woman tossing off blouse, skirt, underwear,
bra. "Your collar and cuffs don't match!" a man called out,

so she pulled off an ash-blonde wig, flipped it into his lap.
My mother loved this twist, having witnessed it herself,
but I knew every word, stopped her at mention of the blouse.
That I couldn't keep her piano, certain I'd never have room,
now save a wistful space for it, mourn the silent wall.

KIKI FARISH is Professor of Art at Meredith College in Raleigh, NC. Born in Florida, she received her BA in math and art from Meredith College, and she earned her MFA from East Carolina University. Farish is among ten visual artists who received a 2014–15 North Carolina Fellowship Award. She was among twelve artists included in the North Carolina Museum of Art's exhibition "Line, Touch, Trace." In spring 2015, she was the Jentel Artist in Residence at Banner, WY, and the New York Mills Artist in Residence in New York Mills, NM. Her work is collected privately in such venues as Fidelity Investments and the City of Raleigh. She maintains a public studio at Artspace in downtown Raleigh. See more of her work on her website and in the *NCLR* 2016 print issue.

THE WAGES OF SIN

a review by Thomas Wolf

Joseph Bathanti. *The Life of the World to Come.* Columbia University of South Carolina Press, 2015.

THOMAS WOLF has an MFA in fiction writing from the Iowa Writers' Workshop and is a two-time winner of the Doris Betts Fiction Prize. His Betts Prize story "Boundaries" (published in *NCLR* 2012) was also awarded a Pushcart Prize Special Mention. Wolf is the co-author, with his wife, Patricia L. Bryan, of *Midnight Assassin: A Murder in America's Heartland* (Algonquin, 2005), a nonfiction narrative about the century-old Iowa murder case that inspired Susan Glaspell's one-act play *Trifles* and short story "A Jury of Her Peers."

Although primarily known for his service as North Carolina's poet laureate from 2012 to 2014, **JOSEPH BATHANTI** is an accomplished fiction writer, the author of the award-winning novels *East Liberty* (Banks Channel Books, 2001) and *Coventry* (Novello Festival Press, 2006; reviewed in *NCLR* 2008), as well as the short story collection *The High Heart* (Eastern Washington University Press, 2007), which won the Spokane Prize for Short Fiction in 2006, and this new novel. He also writes nonfiction, and his essay collection *Half of What I Say Is Meaningless* (Mercer University Press, 2014) was reviewed in *NCLR Online* 2015.

In the opening pages of *The Life of the World to Come*, the reader meets George Dolce, a young man in deep trouble. It is New Year's Day, 1975, and George, who finds himself in Queen, NC, has become, in his words, "a lammist, a fugitive" (2). George has arrived in a stolen car and soon meets a mysterious, and possibly dangerous, young woman named Crow, a waitress who keeps a red Bible and an unlicensed handgun in her bedside table. Crow's father is a member of the local Ku Klux Klan, and her mother, a voluptuous mountain woman, kills poisonous snakes with her bare hands. But for George, Crow is a dark angel of mercy.

Crow takes George in and gives him shelter. Over the course of the novel, in chapters that alternate between present time and George's backstory about growing up in the rough and economically depressed area of Pittsburgh known as East Liberty, George reveals the circumstances that have forced him to flee his hometown. He has left behind his parents, a girlfriend, and a promising future. While most of George's high school peers have drifted into lives of hard work and poverty or drug addiction, George is one of the few young men from East Liberty with an opportunity to achieve a better life. But in his senior year of college at Duquesne University, as he awaits acceptance into the Ivy League law schools to which he has applied, George's dreams come crashing apart.

The story of George's fall from grace comprises much of the action in the narrative. Simply

PHOTOGRAPH BY LINDA FOX

put, George gets involved in a gambling scheme that involves betting on professional football games, and he becomes a victim of bad luck and miscalculation. To avoid retribution, and possibly death, he leaves town.

Throughout the novel, George encounters an assortment of characters who live on the ragged margins of society: bookies and junkies, ex-cons and future cons. His father is a recently unemployed factory worker. His mother is depressed and painfully crippled by arthritis. When Crow finds George a dishwashing job at the restaurant where she works, George meets the cook, a remorseless woman named Too Bad, who has served a ten-year prison sentence for killing her third husband and reminds people that "I'd do it all over again" (36). A few chapters later, George is introduced to Crow's mother, Wanda.

In a passage that might have been pulled from a short story by Flannery O'Connor or Ron

ABOVE **Bathanti at the Greenville Museum of Art, 26 Mar. 2015, following a three-day poetry writing workshop for veterans sponsored by ECU's Contemporary Writers Series (The broadside he is holding, designed by Linda Fox, features his poem "Saint Francis's Satyr Butterfly.")**

Rash, Bathanti describes Wanda beheading a copperhead. She pins the snake to the ground with the barrel of a shotgun, steps on the creature with her bare foot, and proceeds to slice its head off with a filet knife. Then she says to George, "We live in a topography of snakes. . . . Mischief of the revolting sort is abroad. It is not an accident that the Lord allows the snake to prosper. A reminder to remain vigilant" (94).

Vigilance is a major theme of the novel. Religious symbols and allusions occur throughout the narrative. Notions of sin and salvation are prevalent. The word *purgatory* appears frequently – and, in fact, George travels in a kind of purgatory from the beginning of the novel to the end. In most scenes, he is less an actor than an observer as he recounts various incidents of danger or violence.

Bathanti is a writer concerned with the deep mysteries of existence, the ways in which the past influences the present and how circumstances, often beyond a person's control, take over one's life. In particular, he is sensitive to the defining – and confining – aspects of religion and social class. He is also a writer who delights in the dramatic scene and brings the narrative to life with poetic language and vivid imagery. A phone booth is a "glass confessional" (51); caviar is "black as grease" (140); a switchblade is "an icy hypodermic" (193). In other passages, he evokes place and an acutely felt sense of the past in long, vividly descriptive paragraphs. Late in the novel, George returns to his boyhood home and rummages through a cedar chest that contains the most meaningful artifacts of his parents' lives:

> **Christening gowns and bonnets, bronzed baby shoes, my mother's wedding gown, my parents' wedding portraits, birth and baptismal certificates, my grandfather Giorgio's delicate parchment *Certificate of Naturalization*, 1911. . . . The marriage certificate of my mother's parents, Giovanna and Alphonso, 1915, also parchment, falling apart at the creases, ornate script and outdated gorgeous penmanship. . . . A lush Della Robbia zippered purse. Within a dozen rosaries. One I remember from my childhood somehow: crystal prismatic beads, silver crucifix stamped on its back with *Italia*, the Christ that hangs from it ivory. My mother owns rosaries the way seamstresses own thimbles. (226–27)**

George goes on to find his father's Purple Heart, his parents' marriage certificate, their life insurance policies and wills, the receipts for their burial plots in the Catholic cemetery. All of the objects in the chest speak to his parents' lives, all of them connected to significant life and death moments, many of them symbolic of their religious devotion.

For George, who is on the run and feels he is in danger, the experience raises questions as to what has become of his own life, how one mistake has seemingly ruined his chances for success and happiness. As vigilant as he is trying to be, he doesn't know what will keep him safe. "I don't know if protection is God or a gun" (190), he muses.

In *The Life of the World to Come*, Joseph Bathanti has created a bold and ambitious novel, a narrative of compelling drama, sensitivity and sadness, loss and loneliness. It is also a story that suggests the possibility of both tenderness and mercy. ■

FRANCES O'ROARK DOWELL RECEIVES THE 2015 NC AAUW JUVENILE LITERATURE AWARD

Acclaimed children's author Frances O'Roark Dowell received the 2015 North Carolina AAUW Award for Juvenile Literature for her novel *Anybody Shining* (Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2014), set in the North Carolina mountains in the 1920s. The author of fifteen novels, Dowell has lived in North Carolina most of her adult life. Read more about this author and about her other fiction in the interview with her published in *NCLR* 2006 and on her website.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MATHEW WAGNER; COURTESY OF THE NC OFFICE OF ARCHIVES AND HISTORY

RIGHT **Dowell receiving the AAUW award, presented by Mary Peterson at the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association meeting, Raleigh, 13 Nov. 2015**

FINALIST, 2015 JAMES APPLEWHITE POETRY PRIZE

BY MARLY YOUMANS

From Rave, a sequence of poems inspired by Yoruban oríkì

Anniversary Song

Man of delicate quills for quilting,
Man of cassoulet and 3-day croissant,
Man who repairs antique tin toys,
Man who kills a lion in the bush,
Man who climbs to cliff's ledge,
Skinning the mountain goat and drowsing all night
On the edge of precipice
– I call that *grizzly wrap-sandwich* –
Man who can leap to naming the darks of disease,
Who sets pin lines along the nerves,
Follows the firing like a military map,
Man-once-boy in a valley of blue collars,
Boy told he would never amount, never count,
Boy-man who scaled the world's walls on his fingernails,
Out of the valley's blue-collar humus,
Painted his way, wrote his way, acted his way,
Declaring his future to the mockers,
Wrestling his way, hurling his body upward.

Man who wanders the world, who
Eats fried plantains on Bangkok corners,
Who teaches spinal tap in a Hanoi clinic,
Who muses over bog bodies in Sweden,
Walks volcanic flow in the Pacific sun,
Clambers snowy rocks in Kyrgyzstan.
He is only a man, no longer long haired and blond,
No longer of the beautiful torso,
No longer virile every hour on the hour,
No longer the dream, the Apollo, the boy Sun –
No, but himself in all his strangeness and magic
So that I shake my head, laughing, and say
What a boy, what a trek, what a man.

From Nigeria, Yoruba ere ibeji male figure, with camwood powder, beads, and a fine handling patina (wood)

Read more about MARLY YOUMANS with the review of her latest novel in this issue. More poems from this series were also finalists in the James Applewhite Poetry Prize competition and will be published in the *NCLR* 2016 print issue.

No wonder you were named after a fighter of dragons,
No wonder you were named after the saint of the sick,
(Honored first by the Michaelion at Chalcedon),
No wonder you were a fighter against bureaucrats,
No wonder the electrician's firstborn
Was drawn to become a physician.
They dripped the syllables onto your head –
The name sank into you,
Into your infant hands and heart,
Into the wild tree of veins
And the blood that flies
Like sap to the sun.
Name of boldness,
Name of the sword-wielder,
Name of the angel of death,
Name of the one who weighs our souls,
Helmeted, shield lifted,
The prince of the bright, bodiless
Powers, the serpent-treader, the Archangel Michael.

COURTESY OF WELLINGTON B. GRAY GALLERY, EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF ART AND DESIGN

From Nigeria, Yoruba ere ibeji male figure, with beads

The Yoruba figures featured are located in East Carolina University School of Art's African Art Collection. This art collection combines two smaller collections that were donated to the School of Art by private collectors. The Dr. James W. Lankton Collection of African Art is a group of 240 pieces of masks, sculpture, textiles, jewelry, vessels, musical instruments, ceremonial objects, and utilitarian items. The collection includes a sizable holding of art from the Kuba kingdom, a federation of twenty ethnic groups in central Zaire. In addition, an extensive collection of high quality pieces from western and southern Africa were donated anonymously. These functional and ceremonial works include rare examples of figures and masks, as well as headdresses, weapons, and musical instruments. See more of the African Art Collection on ECU's Wellington B. Gray Gallery website.

RECAPTURING THE SUBLIME

a review by Lisa Wenger Bro

Marly Youmans. *Glimmerglass*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2014.

LISA WENGER BRO has a PhD from UNC Greensboro; her dissertation was on Asheville writer Sarah Addison Allen. Bro is an Associate Professor of English at Middle Georgia State University specializing in postmodernism and American literature, particularly magical realism and fantasy.

The author of poetry and fiction, **MARLY YOUMANS**'s latest novel is *Maze of Blood* (Mercer University Press, 2015). The author was born in South Carolina, grew up in North Carolina, among other places, and now lives in Cooperstown, NY. Learn more in the interview with her in *NCLR* 2004.

A native North Carolinian who now resides in the Northeast, Marly Youmans takes reader and protagonist on a journey of mystery and self-discovery in *Glimmerglass*. This novel is a verbal painting that creates a mental image akin to that of contemporary magical realist painters such as Tomek Setowski or Michael Cheval, delving into a world of vibrant colors where the magical intertwines with the fantastic and mythological to create an idea that is hauntingly real. The novel's protagonist, Cynthia Sorrell, is, in fact, an artist whose life and art are both watered down, not only physically, after a marriage to an abusive, alcoholic husband, but also literally, through the commercial watercolors she creates solely for money, having abandoned the vibrant oils and passion of her youth.

Arriving in the fictional town of Coopers Patent, a town that lies on the edge of Glimmerglass Lake, Cynthia is a middle-aged, broken woman. In the vein of magical realist works by authors Katherine Vaz and Stephen Millhauser, *Glimmerglass*, at its heart, is about reconnecting with that childlike wonder and awe that the world inspires. It's about the beauty, the spirituality, and the mystery often denuded from adult lives and the cost of that loss. In fact, when Cynthia first comes to Coopers Patent, she fears "that she had given over all chance of looking with infant sight at a world made new. And what was that but the beginning of art?" (9). In a sense, *Glimmerglass* defies genre in that it is not purely magical realist and it is not purely fantasy, but a seamless blending of both.

The novel offers a fantastic setting, a town that current resident and native Louisianian Lydia Hale proudly claims is "'the most eccentric place I've ever lived'" (14), a place where "[n]early every street . . . claimed a haunted pier glass or a room enchanted to cold or a picture that could not be moved without upsetting a poltergeist" (51). It is also a place that, through small hints, is vaguely situated in the Northeast. The town's location, much like Cynthia herself and the truth behind the town's past tragedies, is a puzzle to be pieced together. The reader is introduced immediately to the fantastic elements: the griffins at the entrance to the gatehouse that Cynthia might rent, the house itself, a fairytale cottage with seven doors situated in a natural setting that evokes "Snow White," and the "wizened" Isabelle "Iz" Hix, a "creature . . . [who] looked as though all its bones had been broken and then carelessly reset" (3), who greets Cynthia at the door.

Yet *Glimmerglass* also offers realism in the layered descriptions of the town and its inhabitants and most poignantly through the portrayal of human emotions, both light and dark. One of the characteristics that makes the novel so magical, in fact, is Youmans's ability to intertwine allusion with the psychological depths of human emotion, allusions only giving added depth and understanding to the characters they reference. The magical also abounds. In the first part of the novel, "The Gatehouse," there's the apparition of a

boy who becomes Cynthia's muse, and later there's the surrealistic 'vision quest' (complete with guides) that she navigates while trapped in the hill labyrinth that connects to her husband's familial home.

All the pieces of *Glimmerglass* are finely connected, and what could have come across as patchwork instead creates a beautiful whole where the magical, the fantastic, and the real combine, shedding greater insight into the subjects they portray. Much of the magical, in fact, revolves around Cynthia's journey, revealing different aspects of Cynthia's suppressed needs and important ideas about life in general. The tone, allusions, and quest in the first part of the novel vary immensely from that of the latter two parts. "The Gatehouse" largely revolves around Cynthia's broken dreams and the realization that it is never too late to revive those dreams, whether they're related to her art, to her desire for love and family, or to reclaiming the wonder and imagination she feared long gone. In this respect, light and beauty characterize the allusions and descriptions in "The Gatehouse." Fairytales referenced all point to the happy endings, the Romantic art Cynthia views reintroduces her to the sublime, and the angel in the church stained glass window is a "sexless, radiant figure, pieced together from burning gems and – what? – raw energy? Even the string of leaves around the neck seemed to shine with the essence of first spring days. . . . His very step might ignite the ground with strange, otherworldly vigor" (34). Ending with Cynthia's rebirth into a world filled with wonder and love, the first part of the novel is all about the reclamation of those things that make life euphoric and joyous.

Yet "The Gatehouse" also contains dark undertones that are easy to miss, particularly those related to pain and ghosts. As Iz tells Cynthia when Cynthia asks if the gatehouse is haunted, "Ghosts? Nothing but what you bring, I expect" (11). This idea of ghosts, both the literal and figurative, recurs at various points throughout "The Gatehouse," an almost jarring contrast to the otherwise lightness of Cynthia's self discovery. These ghosts move to the forefront in the second and third parts of the novel, "The Door in the Hill" and "The Labyrinth at Sea House," shifting tone and allusions from light to dark. No longer are there happy endings, but instead we find references to Bluebeard's murdered wives and the needles that pierce Sleeping Beauty, forcing her into an unwanted slumber. Mystery no longer arouses ideas of wonder and awe, but instead the "uncanny" and the monstrous.

COURTESY OF MARLY YOUMANS

COURTESY OF MARLY YOUMANS

These sections open with dark mystery. There's a locked door in Cynthia's husband's home that leads into an underground labyrinth in the hill connected to his house. The door has been locked since his cousin, "Moss," was lost in the labyrinth at age seventeen. Unlocking the door unlocks painful answers for Cynthia, but also sends her on another journey, one where she discovers truth about the past and truth about human nature. Trapped inside the labyrinth, Cynthia's guides show her how fragile the human heart is, how easily people shed pieces of themselves or even let their entire soul be consumed. Most striking is Cynthia's first guide, Iz-shadow. Needles forever popping out of her skin, dropping to the ground, scarring her body – this is the "half" Iz that Cynthia encounters in the maze, a woman who, because of the words and deeds of others, is no longer fully alive, her ghost half living inside the hill, her living half only a shell of the person she once was. As Iz-shadow asks Cynthia, "Who'd want to be Iz? Here, at least, the needles are visible. That's clarity. I couldn't bear to be like her, hating most

ABOVE AND LEFT **Marly Youmans at the Southern Indie Booksellers Alliance trade show, Raleigh, NC, 20 Sept. 2015**

everything yet also loving some of what she hates" (145). The angel, the Minotaur, and the long-dead Moss are other figures that serve as guides as Cynthia navigates the maze. These guides, on one hand, link back to ideas about wonder, imagination, and inspiration found in "The Gatehouse," further opening Cynthia's artistic mind. However, as Cynthia scrambles to find her way out of this altered dimension and solve the mystery of Moss, her guides also raise questions about how much darkness it takes to turn a person into a living ghost or to contaminate a soul.

For *Glimmerglass*, the magical and fantastic elements are only another facet of the real, highlighting important ideas and questions about everything from wonder and imagination to passion to the things that haunt a person and those that make a person come alive. Cynthia's journey is an awakening, proving that life is not over at "middle-age," but rather a chance for a new beginning. And, at the heart of the novel is the illustration of how people can navigate the ghosts and find their way without losing pieces of their self. ■

IN "THE SPACES BETWEEN KNOWING AND NOT KNOWING"

a review by

Cheryl Dudasik-Wiggs

Katy Simpson Smith. *The Story of Land and Sea.* New York: Harper-Collins, 2015.

CHERYL DUDASIK-WIGGS is a native North Carolinian who makes her home in New Bern, an hour's drive northwest of Beaufort. She teaches in the Department of English at ECU where she directed the Women's Studies program for ten years.

KATY SIMPSON SMITH, a native of Jackson, MS, earned a PhD in history from UNC Chapel Hill and an MFA from the Bennington Writing Seminars. She teaches at Tulane University in New Orleans, LA, and is also the author of *We Have Raised All of You: Motherhood* in the South, 1750–1835 (Louisiana State University Press, 2013).

Sorrow permeates the pages of Katy Simpson Smith's *The Story of Land and Sea* like a Southern mist, hope and regret battling to co-exist in the small coastal town of Beaufort, NC. Set a decade after the end of the Revolutionary War, the story weaves together the lives of three generations of a family torn apart not by war but by love.

"Tell me something again" (14), begs young Tabitha as she and her father, John, stand at the sound's edge. He obliges by sharing stories of her mother, Helen, the woman whose presence – in memory – is at the center of Smith's premiere novel. John and Helen had eloped eleven years earlier against the wishes of her father, Asa, and had then spent a year sailing on a pirate ship where Tabitha was conceived. They returned to land in order to create a home, but the pull of the sea was and is ever present.

After Helen dies in childbirth, Asa, a plantation master whose own wife died in childbirth, looks to God to be his personal avenger against John. When that revenge does not materialize, Asa becomes "one of those men who comes to church to punish himself, though of course there is pleasure in this penance" (10). Asa buries his daughter in consecrated ground and insists on taking Tabitha to weekly chapel even as he questions whether he – and his wild, heathen granddaughter – are worthy of Christian grace.

There exists an uneasy truce between Asa and his son-in-law. A seaman by trade and by passion, John had served in the Continental Army and as a privateer before settling on land to become a respectable merchant. He is America's future – adventurous, restless – while the devout, often distant Asa clings to a past that is untenable, learning too late how to love. And when Tabitha falls ill with yellow fever on her tenth

birthday, John knows that it is not sacramental water that may save her but the salty air of the open sea. He wraps his child in a quilt and flees the land on a sloop destined for Bermuda.

In her own tenth year, Helen had been given a companion, Moll, as a gift from Asa. Flashbacks reveal the two young girls behaving much like sisters, all but unaware of their contrasting stations in life. They work together to introduce religion to the local slaves; and when Helen states that she and Moll are "handmaids of the Lord," Moll intuitively asks whether that makes them *both* slaves (63). The lives of these two characters continue to intertwine and diverge as the girls mature: Moll is married off against her will to a neighboring fieldhand as Helen takes over the responsibility of running Asa's small turpentine plantation. Moll is held captive by patriarchy and tradition; Helen is transformed by adventures that lay far beyond her father's reach.

But Nature is the true power that governs all of these characters. Like Asa's god, the sea gives and takes, heals and destroys. And on land, native pines – their cones ancient symbols of eternal life – are felled to create pulpits and ships, giving their own lifeblood to establish and sustain the young country. A Southerner by birth, the author paints a faithful depiction of the late eighteenth-century North Carolina coast where rice fields occupied the low-lying swamps and residents – free and enslaved – struggled to find their humanity, "searching for what they used to know" (9).

As does Toni Morrison in *Beloved* (1987), Smith shifts perspective and time throughout her three-part story; and close reading is often needed to follow the narrative, which periodically loses its way. So while the novel is set at the seaside, it is not a casual "beach read." Characters, too, are inconsistently developed, Asa being the fullest while John languishes in reactionary sorrow.

A historian by training, Smith composed her dissertation-turned-book, *We Have Raised All of You: Motherhood in the South, 1750–1835* (2013), as an exploration of Southern women's voices through personal narratives. How ironic, then, that there are only surrogate mothers – teachers of music and cyphering, letters and cookery – to guide both Helen and Tabitha. Their stories are revealed, yet their souls are silent. However, the voice of the enslaved mother – all but missing from the narrative of history – echoes powerfully in the experiences of Moll. She holds fast to all of her children; but it is her son, Davy, who makes her see what no other character has yet to discover: we cannot control the destinies of our children.

Despite the work's minor blemishes, the author is redeemed in her ability to craft prose that often makes one's breath halt with its beauty, crying out to be read aloud. As Tabitha plays by the marshes, for example, the imagery is both haunting and heartbreaking: "Oak leaves pummel each other, and moss bits leap into the shallow salt water, bodies flung out to sea. Cannonball pebbles land on the leaves, dooming them, sending their wreckage to the depths for stone crabs to scuttle over. There are no mercies in this play" (7).

The Story of Land and Sea is filled with such gems; and to say only that "it is good for a first novel" does not do the writing justice. The prose is fluid and confessional with Smith most assuredly inspired by the souls at rest – or not – at Beaufort's Old Burying Ground "in the spaces between knowing and not knowing" (20). And if you listen closely as you walk through the cemetery on a quiet afternoon, you may hear them searching still. ■

PHOTOGRAPH BY CHERYL DUDASIK-WIGGS

RIGHT **A section of Beaufort's Old Burying Ground**

FINALIST, 2015 JAMES APPLEWHITE POETRY PRIZE

BY FLORENCE NASH

Tell Me About the Ocean and I Will Tell You Who You Are

What if I say my nightmares all are drownings,
huge waves that rush up silent in the dark,
Neptune rearing massive from the water,
lost ships and sea-wrack tangled in his beard?

Northeasters shook our cottage, slapped the shingles
loose, sent rockers sliding down the porch.
Cliffs of water toppled and crashed while we
lay playing Go Fish on the sandy rug,
wrapped in our favorite stories of ourselves.

At dawn, I knew its calm before I saw it:
the muffled thump and shush, the silver light
that ricocheted against the bedroom wall.
We ran to give ourselves back to the water,
hurled ourselves into its suck and curl.
Or, belly-warm beside it on the sand,
I swam my own inner ocean, floating
theories of my continental edge.

Walking the beach at night, I give wide berth
to the water's restless, sighing dark,
the deeps that hold the creatures of my fear,
dim shapes swimming below the reach of light.
Still, arms wide for balance, now as then,
by day I push against the giddy surge
to dive into the wave's on-rushing flank,
elated as a child come home again.

COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

The Sea **(oil on canvas, 12x36) by Michael Rhinehardt**

An Eastern North Carolina native, MICHAEL RHINEHARDT earned a BFA in Art Education from East Carolina University. He is in his tenth year of teaching art in the Carteret County Public School System, first in K-8 and now at East Carteret High School. His work is featured at BluSail Gallery in Morehead City, NC, and at Tidewater Gallery in Swansboro, NC. See more of his work on the Tidewater Gallery website.

HONORABLE MENTION,
2015 JAMES APPLEWHITE POETRY PRIZE

BY FLORENCE NASH

At Blue Banks

In the woods above Bell's Bridge
there's a deep-sliced curve of river bank
where old folks string the water
with their trotlines in the day-long shade,
and the warden never comes.
Big shad hover close in season,
and the smell is of clay and leaf-rot.

I know someone who goes there, tools bundled
in his canoe. He slides downstream along
the steep bank rearing from the river,
digs through cross-hatch of root and bramble
for giant shark's teeth, knuckled scallop shells, once
a vertebra big as a bucket, phalanges from big fins
that have not fluttered in two hundred million years.

This is flat fields and plain facts country.
Sunday preachers thump their Bibles,
red-faced and sweating with conviction,
and summon down the unassailable Word,
while the river runs on slow and muddy
through the woods, patiently
carving out its counter-proposition.

FLORENCE NASH, a writer and editor for Duke Medical Center until her retirement, has directed Duke's OLLI poetry workshop since 2000. She is a past winner of the Blumenthal Writers and Readers Award and was an invited Emerging Poet at Vanderbilt University's Millennial Gathering of Writers of the New South. A graduate of UNC Chapel Hill, she is a member of the Black Socks Poets and has published two collections of poetry released by Gravity Press, *Crossing Water* (1996) and *Fish Music* (2010). Four of Nash's poems were finalists in the 2015 Applewhite Poetry Prize competition; read the other two in the 2016 print issue.

WARNINGS OF THE END

a review by
Kathaleen E. Amende

Sean Jackson. *Haw*. Hollywood, CA: Harvard Square Editions, 2015.

KATHALEEN E. AMENDE has a PhD from Tulane University and is an Associate Professor of English and the Associate Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences at Alabama State University. Her scholarship includes the book *Desire and the Divine: Feminine Identity in White Southern Women's Writing* (Louisiana State UP, 2013), and an *NCLR* 2014 essay on William Forstchen's post-apocalyptic novel *One Second After*, set in Black Mountain, NC.

SEAN JACKSON has published numerous short stories in literary journals from the US to Canada and Australia. He is a native of Raleigh, NC, and currently lives in Cary, NC. *Haw* is his debut novel.

In his 1967 seminal work on apocalyptic literature *The Sense of an Ending*, Frank Kermode posits that we are imbued with a sense of the ending of all things. According to Kermode, writing about the end of the world helps give it meaning and provides a framework for understanding both our world and our fears about it. We have an instinctual urge, he argues, to see ourselves in terms of time, and thus in terms of beginnings and endings. Since then, numerous authors and critics have attempted to understand why and when works about the end of our world become more prevalent. A common theory is that, during times of national stress and fear, stories of the apocalypse circulate more widely and are more popular with readers. Given the current state of affairs regarding the economy, the environment, and the political and social systems within the United States, it makes sense to see the large numbers of novels, films, and television series that center on the end of those things. Most people know the narratives in question – *The Walking Dead, Mad Max, World War Z, Pacific Rim, The World's End, Hunger Games*, to name a few. A quick search on the internet uncovers that in the past few years there have been hundreds of post-apocalyptic novels published and as many apocalyptic films in the last fifteen years as there were in the almost seventy years previous to that. And even television is influenced by this trend – the last ten years have seen at least twenty apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic shows. So, whether it's the post-disaster world of *Hunger Games*, the post-nuclear world of *The Road* or even the post-zombie infestation film *Zombieland*, writers are happily destroying America and the world over and over again.

Set in the pre-apocalyptic wastelands near Raleigh, NC, Sean Jackson's 2015 dystopia, *Haw*, clearly intends to stand with these other works as a warning to readers about our current practices and to suggest an extreme possibility of what can happen if such behaviors don't change. The writing is honest and sincere, and Jackson's intentions are clearly good here. A number of elements in this novel could make *Haw* a compelling one for those interested in both apocalyptic fiction and in Southern literature. It's a fast read, and we are drawn to the characters who are, at least in the cases of the protagonist, Lucas, and his son, Orel, relatable characters. The fact that Orel's homosexuality is seen in a positive light by both the author and the characters in the story adds a refreshing element to a genre that tends towards conservative and/or heteronormative ideologies.

Finally, that the novel is set in a real place that is recognizable in its landmarks (the Shearon Harris Nuclear Power Plant and the Haw River are only two of the places that make a visible and obvious appearance) only makes the novel more compelling. Unfortunately, these positive elements of the novel are not enough to save it from some of its more glaring issues. The lack of believable world building, the underdeveloped nature of most of the characters, the noticeable lack of living women characters in the text (there are dead women aplenty), and the exaggeratedly villainous (evil for the sake of being evil) dystopian form of government turn what could be a chilling tale of governmental excess, environmental degradation, and the

politics of fear into a derivative mash-up of *1984* and an old *Dastardly Whiplash* cartoon.

In a country where the water and air have become toxic, the citizenry has become stratified into the Hidden (the rich who can afford to live in elaborate, sealed up skyscrapers), the citoyans (the usually physically deformed "untouchables" who live on the streets and in hovels and huts), and those people who are somewhere between the two (like governmental workers and teachers). Lucas and Orel fall into this third category and are seemingly the only decent people left in the city. The city itself is dirty, polluted, and full of danger. Like the work of the Southern Agrarians in the early twentieth century, this book bemoans the loss of natural beauty and sensitivity to encroaching modernity – but unlike those famous Twelve Southerners, Jackson paints a world in which that loss has already occurred. In fact, truth and beauty have gone "underground" in the form of an "underworld photojournalist movement" whose tenets are that "the truth must be told. Inspiration is encouraged. And beauty, what there is left of it, must play its part" (56). In his beliefs regarding the truth of art, Orel might have found a stratagem for dealing with the world around him, but his photography never seems more than a shortcut to prove to readers that he is both sensitive and out of place in such a toxic world.

Lucas's boss, a government agent, is so stereotypically evil that he might as well twirl a moustache as he orders the immediate deaths or "disappearances" of anyone who even looks at him the wrong way. But the government that he represents is no better: it routinely destroys its own people, rounding them up to kill them or to send them off to labor camps. No one is safe, people are intended to spy on one another, and, of course, children are rewarded for ratting out their relatives. The definite nods to *1984* are appreciated, but there is not much content beyond the homage. We don't understand how or why the government has ended up the way it has, and this can leave readers feeling less frightened and more confused than anything else. The creation of an entire underclass of humans who all seem to have physical and/or mental abnormalities goes completely without explanation beyond a hint that the toxic water has created them. The sections of the novel that discuss the politics of who gets purified water and who doesn't are some of the most interesting, but they don't go far enough, only standing as a way of showing us that the government is truly villainous because it doesn't allow the citoyens access to such water.

It is in his depiction of the citoyens and in his characters' reactions to them that Jackson can leave readers cringing. The citoyens are all described by Lucas as "hordes of citoyens who do little more than smear their presence on history, like feces on a public toilet wall" (6). One of them attempts to sell Lucas a baby's corpse for food, while another urinates with abandon on his shoes – and this is just on his way home from work. As a boy, Orel is beaten by the citoyens for drawing a beautiful picture of a man in drag, and eventually the beatings he receives from them drive Orel to home-schooling. People are randomly murdered by one another in the streets, and no home is safe from invasion by the homeless, broke city dwellers who know nothing of courtesy or kindness. It seems out of place for a novel concerned with the brutality of government and the importance of truth and beauty to have its primary characters so callous and unfeeling toward those who are living such miserable lives. In fact,

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

LEFT **Mill and Bridge, Haw River, NC, from the North Carolina Postcard Collection**

one of the primary villains of the novel is a citoyan who burns buildings, kills dogs, and has as a primary goal "the end of the world, [which] he wants to be a part of" (113). There is, ultimately, no attempt to show this brutalized, desperate class with any sensitivity or nuance. Even our protagonists are unable to see the citoyens as people who exist with real feelings, needs, and lives. Perhaps this is why it is Lucas and Orel's final goal to get Orel to Princeton where he can get out of the South and go to college in the North, what Lucas calls the "last refuge for the young" (60).

Ultimately the problems with this novel are less about Jackson's ability to write and more about sophistication and nuance. In the final, action-packed sequences of the novel, Jackson has the opportunity to make important observations about the nature of a classist system and the problems within our own corporate-affiliated governmental systems, but rather than do so, he paints the lowest classes as brutish and the government as thug-booted jackals. He clearly intends to show the horrors of letting corporations run our government and of letting our environment degrade, and this he does to almost a satiric level. But the sincerity and earnestness of his writing also make it clear that this satirical edge is most likely unintended. Although he is a writer with a story to tell – a story with potential and importance in today's apocalypse and dystopia obsessed society – the novel fails in the end to deliver the chills of *1984*, the feelings of helplessness of *The Road*, or even the action-oriented entertainment of something like *World War Z*. ■

THE BACKSTORY OF THE WORLD

a review by Brianne Holmes

Ernie Wood. *One Red Thread*. Blue Ash, OH: Tyrus Books, 2014.

BRIANNE HOLMES is an MA student at ECU, concentrating in creative writing. She has served on the literary staff of the *Ivy Leaves Journal of Literature and Art* and as an editorial assistant for the *NCLR*. Her stories have been published in *Burningword Literary Journal*, *The Journal of Microliterature*, *The Café Irreal*, and the podcast *No Extra Words*.

ERNIE WOOD, recipient of a National Endowment for the Humanities grant, is an award-winning author of nonfiction books, documentary film scripts, advertising, and newspaper and magazine journalism. Wood was raised in Chapel Hill, NC, received a BA in English literature from Hamilton College in New York, and has resided in Austin, TX, since 1984, where he was a writer and editor for *Southern Living* magazine. He has also taught at the Austin Community College. *One Red Thread* is Wood's debut novel.

Ernie Wood's debut novel, *One Red Thread*, is a historical-literary-science-fiction-mystery of impressive complexity. The novel's protagonist, middle-aged architect Eddy McBride, has been metaphorically stuck in the past for years, having never truly come to terms with the hit-and-run death of his brother three decades before. As the story opens, two long-lost acquaintances arrive unannounced at Eddy's door: his childhood friend Libby and his great-aunt's yardman Walter Lee. Libby's arrival awakens Eddy's unease about his family's tragic past and sends him back in time (literally, not metaphorically), looking for answers. With Walter Lee mysteriously guiding his time travels, Eddy waltzes backward through family history – against the wishes and the better judgement of his wife, Sheila.

In terms of plot, Wood's novel is masterful. As Eddy visits events from his family's past, these microcosmic moments begin to connect and intersect to form a large and complex tapestry. Seemingly unrelated events and people – a flashflood, a hanging, a welcome home party, a World War II sailor, a mysterious uncle – all converge to shape the lives of Eddy, Libby, and Walter Lee. In this sense, *One Red Thread* demonstrates a deeper respect for history than many time-travel novels. At first, Eddy feels secure visiting events before his birth; however, he soon discovers that every moment of history is

ABOVE RIGHT **Ernie Wood talking about his novel on WCHL-FM radio, Chapel Hill, NC, 7 May 2015**

PHOTOGRAPH BY ALEXANDER JULIAN

inseparable from the whole. There are no stray moments. As Walter Lee comments, "The world's about backstory" (288).

Part of this backstory for Eddy is American and Southern history. While the novel does not lay much emphasis on regional anachronisms, the setting of the story is an unnamed Southern city, and Eddy's great-grandfather – whom he visits in the past – is a Confederate veteran. The story's flavor is more Americana than Southern: Cadillac convertibles, Independence Day parades, Babe Ruth autographs, and World War II soldiers.

Somewhat less intriguing than the plot and historical ramifications are the characters. The book's three main narrators, Eddy, Sheila, and their friend Tim, spend most of the novel either privately ruminating or arguing with each other. When Tim and Sheila are not busy berating Eddy for his self-centeredness, aloofness, and foolhardy time traveling, they generally resort to brooding and lengthy conversations. That said, Tim and Sheila do whip out a few surprises concerning their own pasts, and these moments help to address the novel's sometimes lagging pace.

Eddy himself seems a bit like an historical drifter, waiting until page 284 (of 327 pages) to take decisive action. Eddy is a thinker, who ponders so excessively that he thinks about thinking and delights to share his every thought with the reader. This tends to slow and hamper an otherwise fascinating plot. In addition, Eddy's interpersonal distance makes him difficult to sympathize with. Early in the novel, Eddy's wife, Sheila, tells him she is pregnant, but it takes Eddy the entire duration of the pregnancy – and almost the duration of the book – to shake off his ambivalence toward fatherhood. Eddy and Sheila do share tender moments, but they are few and far between.

The more intriguing characters live in the past: Eddy's reclusive great-uncle Hugh, Libby's guilt-ridden father, a woman named Caroline who drowns in 1906, and the man who hangs for her death. The scenes these characters inhabit are rendered with zest and finesse while scenes in the present often become plodding, ponderous, and even boring.

In spite of the dull moments, *One Red Thread* delivers grand splashes of insight. At one point, Eddy, feeling discouraged by the apparent inevitableness of history, says of his own actions, "It doesn't matter," to which Walter Lee counters, "Everything we do matters" (289). This theme works its way through the story, tragically demonstrating that people's actions affect not only their own lives and times but all of history. At the same time, the novel recognizes that the making of history is not merely an individualistic exercise, as many other time travel stories might lead us to believe. "Sure, individuals create history," Eddy considers. "But history that matters is created by a community" (317).

Perhaps the most delightful thing about this novel is the way it guilelessly and unabashedly dances between genres. The unsolved death of Eddy's brother evokes a whodunnit sense of mystery. However, the past is rendered more like historical fiction. But then, of course, the characters are time traveling, and this adds a dash of science fiction to the recipe. On the other hand, the writing style and voice generally adhere to the conventions of literary fiction, employing an intense sense of realism even in the midst of the most improbable events. Where the novel may stumble in pace, it compensates in innovation. ■

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—KATHRYN STRIPLING BYER

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