

The cover art is a composite image. On the right side, there is a close-up, sepia-toned portrait of a woman's face, looking slightly upwards and to the right. She has a serious expression and is wearing a dark, high-collared garment with a ruffled or scalloped edge. On the left side, there is a dark, textured background with intricate, light-colored tree roots or branches extending across the frame. The overall color palette is dark and earthy, with shades of brown, black, and sepia.

NORTH CAROLINA LITERARY REVIEW

O N L I N E

2019

NORTH CAROLINA
AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE

FEATURING Michele Tracy Berger ■ L. Teresa Church ■ Angela Belcher Epps ■ Jaki Shelton Green ■ Sharon P. Holland ■ Harriet Ann Jacobs ■ Randall Kenan ■ Nathaniel Mackey ■ Sheila Smith McCoy ■ Lenard D. Moore ■ Jason Mott ■ Glenis Redmond ■ Crystal Simone Smith ■ Amber Flora Thomas ■ Stephanie Powell Watts ■ Carole Boston Weatherford ■ Gideon Young

COVER ART

by Barbara Tyroler, from the Visitation Series

Read more about the cover art and artist on page 10 and see more from this series on pages 10 a 11.

Published annually by East Carolina University and by the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association

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COVER DESIGNER

NCLR Art Director **DANA EZZELL LOVELACE** is a 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, she designed the Betts Prize short stories, Epps essay, and Ehle memorial in this issue.

ABOVE from the *Visitations Series*, *Gifts for Imani 11, 03, 10* (mult-image composite collaboration with the *Shelton-Green Family Archives Collection*), by Barbara Tyroler

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Individual copies of the annual print issue are available from retail outlets and from UNC Press. Back issues of our print issues are also available for purchase, while supplies last. See the *NCLR website* for prices and tables of contents of back issues.

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 #29 (2020) will feature writing from and about “expatriate” North Carolina writers.

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.

Advertising rates

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Time to “Mak[e] room for the ‘Otherness’”

by Margaret D. Bauer, Editor

The *North Carolina Literary Review* has featured African American writers since the first issue, which included an essay on slave narratives by my late colleague Gay Wilentz and an interview with a writer of our own time, Linda Beatrice Brown, by Eric Weil. Over the years since the 1992 debut, we have published several essays on the works of Charles Waddell Chesnutt, and Randall Kenan has been featured in six issues. In addition to Kenan, we’ve published interviews with Samm-Art Williams, Anjail Rashida Ahmad, Zelda Lockhart, and Jaki Shelton Green, among other African American writers of this state. Race issues have certainly played a significant role in content by and about writers of various ethnicities. To borrow a phrase from Jaki Shelton Green in her remarks to the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association audience the night she accepted the R. Hunt Parker Award, our pages have “[borne] witness to our collective interlocked histories and herstories.” Even so, I agreed readily with Emily Herring Wilson’s suggestion to me during the 2017 North Carolina Writers Conference that it was time for a special feature section on African American literature in North Carolina. Although I did not have the words yet, I recognized what Jaki said during those same acceptance remarks (which we publish in the pages to come): “it is time” to give significant space to African American writers, to “mak[e] room for the ‘otherness.’”

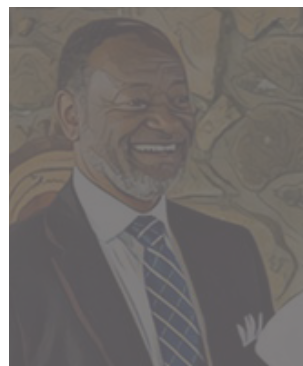
We include in this section, then, several reviews of new books by and stories about recent literary honors received by African American writers of North Carolina. Find here, too, one of the honorable mention essays selected by final judge Randall Kenan for our 2018 Alex Albright Creative Nonfiction Prize competition. Congratulations to Angela Betcher Epps

on her story and thank you to Randall Kenan, as well as congratulations on his induction into the North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame.

Several of the finalists in the 2018 James Applewhite Poetry Prize competition are African American. Some of their poems appear in this issue, with more to come in the print issue’s special feature section. Enjoy here finalists Glenis Redmond, whose third-place poem will be in the print issue, as well as an interview with her; one of the competition’s honorable mention poems, by Crystal Simone Smith, new to our pages; and two poems by L. Teresa Church (another appearing in the print issue), who has been a finalist in past issues. Both Crystal and Teresa have poems in a haiku anthology reviewed in this section, too. Thank you to my friend, colleague, and writing partner Amber Flora Thomas, for serving as the final judge for the 2017 competition. Read a review of Amber’s new poetry collection in this section. Thanks go to another colleague, Gabrielle Brant Freeman, who has served *NCLR* in various capacities, including reviewing Jaki’s new poetry chapbook in this issue.

We appreciate Stephanie Powell Watts for her service as the final judge of the 2018 Doris Betts Fiction Prize, and you will read her first- and second-place selections elsewhere in this issue. Here you will find a review of her novel, and in the 2019 print issue an interview with her and an essay on her novel.

We received more submissions of literary criticism in response to this issue’s special feature topic than we have ever received for an issue. I urge you to subscribe today to make sure you do not miss essays on and interviews with African American writers of North Carolina from George Moses Horton and Harriet Ann Jacobs to Jason Mott (also reviewed here) and Stephanie Powell Watts. ■



NORTH CAROLINA

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NORTH CAROLINA POET LAUREATE MAKING HERSTORY

award presentation remarks by Georgann Eubanks

The R. Hunt Parker Memorial Award for Literary Achievement acknowledges individuals who have made significant contributions to the literary life of North Carolina. Jaki Shelton Green, who has lived most of her life in Orange County, has been a fixture in North Carolina public life for more than four decades. She is an internationally recognized poet, a tireless advocate for social justice, a documentarian, a teacher, a dedicated mother of three, and partner to an extraordinary artist and human. She is North Carolina's first African American poet laureate and the busiest woman in the state right now because of that.

Jaki has for years been a guide in ethical discernment, a musical muse to many, and the best kind of friend to other writers. She has received the North Carolina Award for Literature and been inducted into the North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame. And this year, she is the recipient of the R. Hunt Parker Memorial Award.

Jaki's mother, Ms. Ivory Tate Vincent, just turned 101, and if that is any indication of Jaki's potential, we are barely past the halfway point in her career, and we are in some danger of running out of awards to give her for her intrepid service to the State of North Carolina! ■ ■ ■

COURTESY OF THE NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES



ACCEPTANCE REMARKS BY JAKI SHELTON GREEN

It is historical fact that in 1968 when Julius Chambers began an oral argument before the State Supreme Court, Chief Justice R. Hunt Parker stood up and left the courtroom. The Chief Justice returned after Chambers concluded his presentation.

Today, as I receive this award bearing his name, I'd like to think that his leaving this space this evening, October 26, 2019, would be in the spirit of making room for the "otherness" that he so willfully shunned. I want to believe that R. Hunt Parker and all our ancestors are whispering, "it is time." It is time to bear witness to our collective interlocked histories and herstories.

I am grateful for this honor that resonates a very different history-making for all of us. There is an African proverb that states, "Where you stand in your youth will determine where you sit as an elder." Many thanks to the North Carolina Historical and Literary Association for inviting me to stand in this auspicious moment. ■

COURTESY OF THE NC DEPT. OF NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES



ABOVE Jaki Shelton Green accepting the 2018 R. Hunt Parker Memorial Award from North Carolina Literary and Historical Association President Georgann Eubanks, Greenville, 26 Oct. 2018

NOT A RESTING PLACE BUT AN ABSENCE

a review by Gabrielle Brant
Freeman

Jaki Shelton Green. *I want to undie you*. Durham, NC: Jacar Press, 2017.

GABRIELLE BRANT FREEMAN earned an MFA from Converse College and teaches at ECU. Her poetry has been published in many journals, including *EMRYS*, *One*, *Scoundrel Time*, *storySouth*, *Whale Road Review*, and *Waxwing*. Read a review of her book, *When She Was Bad* (Press 53, 2016), in *NCLR Online* 2017. She was nominated for a Pushcart in 2017, and she was a *Best of the Net* 2014 finalist. In 2015, she won the Randall Jarrell Poetry Competition.

In addition to this chapbook by **JAKI SHELTON GREEN**, Jacar Press published another of her chapbooks, *Feeding the Light* in 2014. Her five full-length collections were published by Carolina Wren Press: *Masks* (1981), *Dead on Arrival* (1983), *Conjure Blues: Poems* (1996), *singing a tree into dance* (2004), and *breath of the song* (2005). In addition to the honors listed in the facing story about her most recent award, this North Carolina Poet Laureate was one of the Tar Hell of the Year finalists named by the *News & Observer*. Read more about North Carolina's first African American Poet Laureate in the interview published in *NCLR* 2016.

At the beginning of September, over one hundred people packed the basement of The Regulator Bookshop in Durham, NC, to hear the state's newest poet laureate, Jaki Shelton Green, read her work. The room was overcrowded to the point that many people, including a state senator, sat on the floor beneath the podium. Others stood in the aisles and sat two by two on each step of the two flights of stairs leading up to the sales floor. It was crowded, it was hot, it was uncomfortable. And it was absolutely wonderful.

Green is a poet whose poems and voice have equal power. When she reads, her audience is compelled to listen, so it should be no surprise that the voice in her chapbook-length poem titled *i want to undie you* is very strong. This is the voice of a mother whose daughter has died much too young, and it is the voice of a poet calling out her lament. Green's daughter Imani died of cancer in 2007 at just thirty-seven years old.

This is no ordinary book of poetry, either in content or structure. The poem is published alongside photographs of Imani taken at different ages that photographer Barbara Tyroler altered with layers of texture and shafts of light to ethereal effect. Richard Krawiec, the founder of Jacar Press and publisher of this book, said that it is a "museum gallery bookwork." The book's size is a little larger than what is usually seen for a poetry collection, and the pages are glossy. The font is also larger than in a typical book, and there is a lot of white space.

In the white space between sections of the poem, the reader becomes physically aware of the holes left in Green's life after her daughter died. In the larger font

and larger, glossy pages, one can see and feel the weight of her death. The physical object of the book enhances the power of the poet's voice.

One of the first things a reader will notice about the text itself is that there are no end-stops until about one-third of the way through the book/poem. At about the same time that a period appears, the reader realizes that there are no page numbers. These two things combine to lend a breathless, desperate quality to the poem. The white space offers the only breaks for the reader, but those breaks are not a resting place. They are an absence. The first section of *i want to undie you* is a visceral, spiritual recounting of Imani's death with multiple references to the ancestors and to the four elements. It describes death as "travel towards the river where blood is born" and as "offering sacrifices to the ocean the wind / to the fires of her uncertainty / not now spirit wails / not now." Neither Imani nor her mother are ready, and yet she goes: "unnamed strangers gathered at your gravesite unnamed faces and familial / faces cried a river of tears as we gently unraveled the strings of our hearts / releasing you and your new wings into a new sky."

The pace of the poem speeds up in the absence of punctuation and capitalization, and the reader is brought into the river of sorrow that flows to the first end-stop: "i want you to un-die. come back said the mother." Green speaks directly to her daughter in a list that is the longest page of the book to that point: "i want you to undie. i want the dust of you un-scattered. i want the hush of you un-hushed." The list of things the mother wants un-done

COURTESY OF BARBARA TYROLER



is heartbreaking. The use of anaphora creates this emotional response in the reader. The repetition of “i want” in reference to things the reader knows the speaker cannot have – “i want to un-morning that morning. i want to un-break the broken of you” – in addition to the repetition of “un” in the second half of the same page – “un-sacrifice the sacrifice of you. un-erase the erasure of you” – is relentless. This is the unending lament of the mother-poet whose child has died.

After this list, there is a brief moment of limbo: “for several hours i watch a straight beam of

light crossing a closing day.” The rest of the page is so blank compared to the page before that the reader is forced to pause, too. She is made to close her eyes, to take a deep breath. To really look at the corresponding photo that shows a very young Imani wearing what appears to be a cowrie shell necklace, whose face and body are obscured by four slanted rays of light as though through window blinds. When the reader finally turns the page, she is thrust back in to what the speaker wants to happen that absolutely cannot: “i want you to un-die.”

Jaki Shelton Green’s poem *i want to undie you* is at once a visual and textual invocation of her ancestors and a visual and textual lament of her daughter Imani’s passage into the ancestral river, into the physical, visceral landscape of her family: “the genetic complexities of your death bear roots. unravel. implode. graft themselves into continents oceans volcanoes of blood-stained bones that will not un-die.” This book is a powerful representation of a mother’s grief delivered by one of “the Writingest State’s” strongest voices. ■

ABOVE From the *Visitations Series*, *Gifts for Imani, 01* (mult-image composite collaboration with the Shelton-Green Family Archives Collection), by Barbara Tyroler

VISITATIONS: A Community Response to Loss and Celebration, an evening of poetry and images with musical interpretation, was held at the FRANK Gallery in Chapel Hill 21 Oct. 2017. See more works from this series on the facing page.

BARBARA TYROLER’s composites of Jaki Shelton Green’s daughter Imani are featured throughout this chapbook. See more of her art in *NCLR 2017* and 2018 and on her [website](#). She earned an MEd from the University of Massachusetts Amherst with emphasis on visual communication and community arts development and an MFA in Imaging and Digital Arts from the University of Maryland where she studied photography and videography, then joined the faculty of the art department and taught traditional wet darkroom, digital imaging, and lens based critical theory. She is the recipient of over twenty-five arts and community development grants. In 2009, she relocated to her hometown, Chapel Hill, NC.

FINALIST, 2018 JAMES APPLEWHITE POETRY PRIZE**BY GLENIS REDMOND***House: Another Kind of Field**For Harriet Jacobs*

This house big, but the way I am held by his hands, I am a tight fist. I tiptoe and flinch around every corner. Over my shoulder is where my eyes live. This body I carry, not mine. My chest heaves all day. High yellow. Light Bright. Almost White. Whatever color they call me – his gaze burns me, so does his hands. I am kept closer than his wife. He leaves me nothing but bruised blue. I, House Nigger – not one step up from, but another kind of down. House be another way to say field. He makes me feel like the dirt he walks on. Upturned and plowed. His teeth metal rakes across my skin. His mouth and his hands don't do nothing, but take: rip, tear, and thrust. I bleed and breed. Chains seen or unseen, my feet, still shackled. This is not the life the Almighty meant for me, but no choice is what I got. The only place I run far is my mind. I keep my lips shut, but every scream I don't shout is loud within me. Every scream adds up to flee. My feet become my mind. They carry me to where Grandma stay. She free. How I'd like to just lie down in her arms and rest for always, but ain't no rest for a hunted slave. Light Bright. Almost White. Whatever color I am called – his gaze finds me. This body I carry, not my own. My chest heaves all day. Grandma attics me away. When I walk through her upstairs door, I don't know if I will ever return. This attic feels like a pine box. My feet can't wander many feet yonder, but a few steps. My hands, my arms, my legs God gifted me can't stretch. I am a bent star dwelling in shuttered light. So small my world. Low roof and tight walls make like my grave this attic a pine box closing. But in my chest, above his reach, the less I feel like a kept thing. I feel an opening. This room dark most days, but I see myself clear. I wiggle. I weave. I work – not seven days, seven weeks, but seven years of bearing heat and cold. Where rats bite – the only touch I know. I am bent by this stay, but I fix my mind for when that door opens. I am ready to fling myself wide and take up any space in this world with head, arms, and legs five-pointed and star-spread.



from the Visitations Series, *Gifts for Imani 11, 03, 10* (multi-image composite collaboration with the Shelton-Green Family Archives Collection), by Barbara Tyroler

FINALIST, 2018 JAMES APPLEWHITE POETRY PRIZE**BY GLENIS REDMOND***Sketch**For Harriet E. Wilson*

With a determined hand, write the wrong.
Right it! Press your free hand upon parchment.

Spill ink like storm clouds
that clot what your soul cannot hold.

Catch what history hurls.
Double your fist in defiance,

unfurl your world into long lines.
Get straight to the point:

Pen every deed. Record the heavy dreams
that woke you each morning.

Press down. The paper can bear your weight.
Make the page speak of back break,

the quill quiver with nothing less than the meat of it.
Whip the naked flesh of the past like you were slashed.

Bleed deep – gash history,
even if it must stand on hobbled legs.

Draw the face, so we may stare
at the rotten-teeth truth.

Give yourself a pristine mouth
to say your piece, a doorway

GLENIS REDMOND, a South Carolina native, travels nationally and internationally reading and teaching poetry so much that she has earned the title “Road Warrior Poet.” She is Poet-in-Residence at The Peace Center for the Performing Arts in Greenville, SC, and at the State Theatre in New Brunswick, NJ. In 2014-16, she served as the Mentor Poet for the National Student Poet’s Program to prepare students to read at the Library of Congress, the Department of Education, and for First Lady Michelle Obama at The White House. The poet is a Cave Canem Fellow, a North Carolina Literary Fellowship Recipient, and a Kennedy Center Teaching Artist. She also helped create the first Writer-in-Residence at the Carl Sandburg Home National Historic Site in Flat Rock, NC. Her poems have previously been selected as Applewhite finalists and then published in *NCLR* 2012 and 2014, and she had two more finalists in the 2018 competition, one of which was selected for third place. These poems and an interview with this poet will be published in the 2019 print issue.

into a home on history's page,
where you're not hemmed in at the margins.

Don't beg or bow.
Stand in your place.

Ink firm your existence out of the shadows.
Make history one deliberate letter at a time

– not as a slave,
but not fully free either.

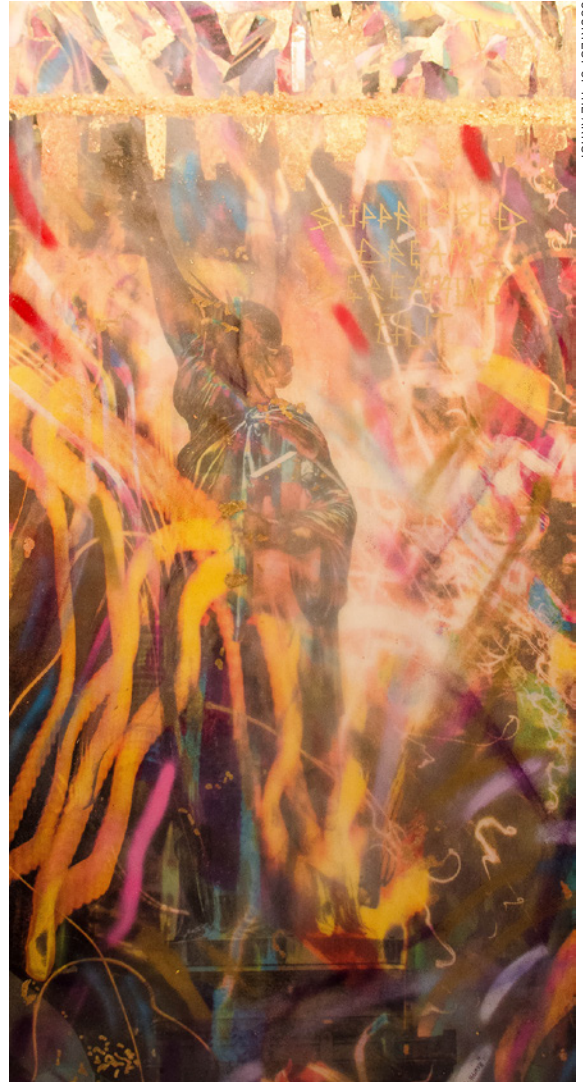
Write it the best you can.
Press your free hand on your heart.

Unbind your mind no matter
how the hand wavers.

This is how perfect penmanship feels:
One liberated turn after the other.

Script your destiny. Weave the story.
Right the sky. Burn through fog, mist, and muck.

Free your eyes. Sketch a new horizon.
Pulled and drawn by your own hand.



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Suppressed Dreams Screaming Out (mixed media on wooden panel canvas, coated in epoxy resin, 36x72) by Darryl Hurts

DARRYL HURTS was born in Alexandria, LA, and now lives in Charlotte, NC. He is a self-taught artist who uses many different methods to create his works, including image transfers, photography, drawing, and acrylic paint, which are then applied to wooded panels or stretched canvases and coated with epoxy resin. His work appeared in the Black on Black exhibit at the Visual Art Exchange in Raleigh, NC, in 2016 and was featured in the Fashion After Dark exhibition in Charlotte, NC. In 2017, Hurts created a mural at Andaz 5th Avenue in New York City, which was featured in *The Fourhundred Magazine*. More of his works can be seen on his [website](#).

THROUGH THE LENS OF THE HEART'S CAMERA

a review by
Janice N. Harrington

Amber Flora Thomas. *Red Channel in the Rupture*. Pasadena, CA: Red Hen Press, 2018.

JANICE N. HARRINGTON's poetry collections include *Even the Hollow My Body Made Is Gone* (BOA Editions, 2007), which won the publisher's A. Poulin, Jr. Poetry Prize and the Kate Tufts Discovery Award, and *The Hands of Strangers: Poems from the Nursing Home* (BOA Editions, 2011). She has worked as a public librarian and now teaches in the creative writing program at the University of Illinois.

AMBER FLORA THOMAS is the winner of the 2004 Cave Canem Poetry Prize, the Ann Stanford Poetry Prize, and the Relia Lossy Poetry Award. She has an MFA in poetry writing from Washington University in St. Louis, and is now an Associate Professor at East Carolina University. Her other books are *The Rabbits Could Sing* (University of Alaska Press, 2012) and *The Eye of Water* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005). Read her interview with North Carolina Poet Laureate Jaki Shelton Green in *NCLR* 2016.

In *Red Channel in the Rupture*, Amber Flora Thomas writes poems about place, her lived experiences within a natural environment, her childhood memories, and her family. Her clear, understated poems describe, recall, retell, and record. Thomas's words also assure the reader that "you are here. Be at home."

Divided into three thematic sections – Stills, Apertures, Reels – *Red Channel in the Rupture* immediately grounds its poetry in the photographic: we peer through Thomas's eyes and see what she sees or tries to recall. Her vision is always lyrical and pointed toward the details that the inattentive will overlook.

Although *Red Channel* frequently draws on and lyrically describes the natural landscape, this is not nature poetry, but rather poetry describing a life that has intersected with natural spaces, objects, places, and events. Thomas does not romanticize or make her natural world into an abstract façade. This is a poet who has held the remains of an owl's pellet, feathered a kayak's paddle, pulled the skull of a horse's head from the sand,

and even seen a mountain lion disappear in "three exact steps." Anchoring her lived experience in a sense of place – Noyo Harbor, Navarro Beach, the Atlantic Ocean, Pungo Lake, Elk, Jack's Creek – Thomas infuses her poems with plants, animals, climates, and forces that shape the natural spaces around her.

Thomas is also a poet of the erotic. In "Orchid," for example, she reveals a sensual intimacy that unsettles and fascinates. Liquid consonants, suggestive description, and exotic details draw readers into the poem. Is it a flower the poet describes? At the very least, Thomas suggests the sensual and seductive world that language can reveal or open to readers:

the frill labellum. The shroud
where the shoot births
unfurling tongues
that couldn't hide their waves
when I brought you
to the nursery.

All around you a light
that put the pearl in there
and kneaded it like a pit
some girl could spit
into her palm.





PHOTOGRAPHS BY AYSISA COLEMAN, NCLR INTERN

Red Channel in the Rupture's second section, "Aperture," might mean the space that light passes through in a camera. It can also mean a vent, an opening, or an interstice of space. Through the aperture of memory, readers will encounter "Neighborhood Boys." In this poem, Thomas recounts a memory of middle-school boys in the midst of a battle tossing pinecone grenades. The boys bargain with Thomas's "five year old self," who wants the marble the boys hold out as reward. The child follows the boys into the woods,

the girl stepping out of the woods,
the bird in her turning its ruddy shoulder
toward the light, thankful she got to live,

that while they tried to kill her,
they could in the end let her live . . .
and on this street
where boys war with pinecones;

somehow, I owe them my life.

The *somehow* snares attention: Disbelief? Anger and scorn? An unvoiced question? "Somehow, I owe them my life."

Thomas does not avoid danger in her poems, including the dangers that children face. In "Passing" she exposes a consequence of living with a biracial identity, where "Blackness rushed after me like / a heavy cloud." In a childhood memory she recalls asking her father not to go to school, because she didn't want the other students to see that her father was black: "Assassinations / begin at home." Yet when her father shows up at school, love proves stronger than the social-shaming:

He stood in the classroom doorway
and said my name three times
before I let myself see his brown face.
I let blackness ripple and then

I went to him, gunned through rows
by spitting bees. Eyes in horror
dashed me to rocks. But, I went to him.

Thomas does not avoid or soften the difficulty of a biracial identity. The child is not left uninjured: she is violently thrown against rocks. Nothing softened. A father's love and presence do not make his child's social relationships easier, and so the poem's turning – "But, I went to him" – grows large and resonant. The child's choice shows her courage and proves that she has the strength to accept her father's difference as well as her own.

As they read *Red Channel in the Rupture*, readers will reconsider their own natural spaces and the stories they find there. They will think of family relationships and the difficulties of identity. But most of all, they will enjoy looking through Thomas's precisely chiseled language. Readers will feel at home and invited into this collection. ■

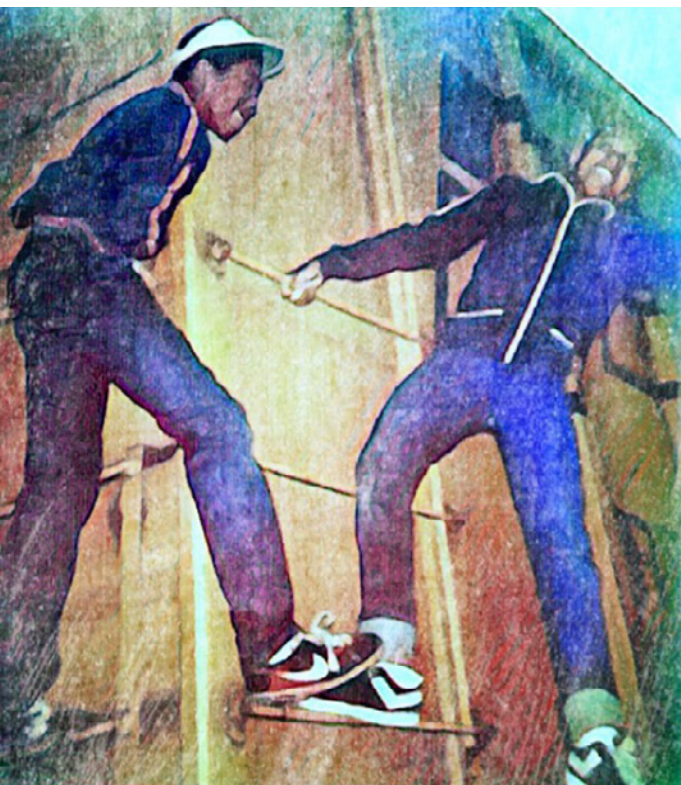
2018
 Alex Albright
 Creative Nonfiction Prize
 HONORABLE MENTION

BY

ANGELA
 BELCHER EPPS

SANDHILL:

A Symphony of Souls



ANGELA BELCHER EPPS'S short stories and creative nonfiction have appeared in a variety of literary and mainstream periodicals such as *Obsidian: Literature in the African Diaspora*, *Pembroke Magazine*, *Gumbo for the Soul: The Recipe for Literacy in the Black Community*, *Essence*, and *Ladies Home Journal*. She is also the author of the novella *Salt in the Sugar Bowl* (Main Street Rag, 2013). She holds a BA in English from Hofstra University and an MA from New York University's Creative Writing Program. She now lives in Raleigh, NC, and is a member of the Carolina African American Writers' Collective.

The photographs, courtesy of the author, feature the author, her grandfather and mother, her cousins, and other neighborhood children playing in Sandhill, NC, in the 1960s and 1970s.

One of my earliest memories about the Sandhill community in which I grew up involves my grandfather, Joe, and his friend, Mr. Aaron. Grandpa Joe stood at the window thinking out loud, "I wonder if Aaron's mind is right." Mr. Aaron had returned from Duke Hospital and was recovering from brain surgery. Rumor had it that the top of his head had been removed and replaced. Grandpa Joe watched skeptically from our sitting room window as Mr. Aaron took halting steps to and from his outhouse several times a day. He wore a hospital gown on top of his clothes and a bandage wrapped around his head. I don't recall how many days it took for my grandfather to gather the courage to cross Sunset Park Road and navigate the wedge of mowed field between our houses. When he finally did, I stood at the window and wondered what Grandpa would encounter and whether Mr. Aaron had, indeed, come back crazy.

To get to Sandhill, a small community in Plymouth, North Carolina, one crossed two sets of railroad tracks then travelled nearly a mile down a dirt road, a road so sandy that a road dragger came through at regular intervals to smooth out the grooves and mud holes. This was the only way in or out of Sandhill. Poor planning left one stranded for fifteen or twenty minutes, watching the freight train hiss, hiccup, inch forward and backward, then finally crawl in either direction laden with whatever was required for or distributed by the pulp and paper mill located at the backside of our neighborhood.

I lived in Sandhill for nine years, and this community defined my values more than any other life experiences. Sandhill, comprised of no more than three or four dozen houses, was a microcosm of



a world population. In essence, it was a gathering of individuals rather than a community of demographics. We lived among preachers, teachers, juke joint proprietors, storeowners, chicken thieves, factory workers, truants, honor students, gamblers, the elderly, petty criminals, the mentally unstable, widows and widowers, introverts, alcoholics, farmers, adulterers, and of course, a survivor of brain surgery.

Our Mr. Aaron had, indeed, come back with his senses intact. My grandfather had probably feared that his friend's status would change to that of the sick and shut-in – a condition that removed a man from the fraternity of his peers. In those days, the Sandhill men stood outdoors with hands in pockets conjecturing about the weather, crops, misfiring carburetors, or stalling engines. They smoked cigarettes and gossiped about the rougher side of life – thieving, indigence, sorryness, and indignities suffered at work and in the world. Occasionally, they gathered around the trunk of someone's car and took swigs of whiskey – especially around holidays.

In a matter of weeks, Mr. Aaron removed his hospital accessories and returned to the fold. He entertained the men with a slew of tales that grew increasingly taller, recollections about angelic surgeons and nurses, mysteriously moving hospital beds, and medicine-induced hallucinations. My grandfather challenged Mr. Aaron's claims weakly because he had never visited a doctor or a hospital. As the chill of winter shortened the men's tolerance for lingering, Mr. Aaron's captivating stories ended, and the men broke the silence of dusk with the repetitive cracks of axes splitting wood.

**“WE LIVED
AMONG
PREACHERS,
TEACHERS,
JUKE JOINT
PROPRIETORS,
STOREOWNERS,
CHICKEN THIEVES,
FACTORY WORKERS,
TRUANTS,
HONOR STUDENTS,
GAMBLERS,
THE ELDERLY,
PETTY CRIMINALS,
THE MENTALLY
UNSTABLE,
WIDOWS AND
WIDOWERS,
INTROVERTS,
ALCOHOLICS,
FARMERS,
ADULTERERS,
AND OF COURSE,
A SURVIVOR OF
BRAIN SURGERY.”**

Sandhill winters brought brief conversations shouted across the yards that ran one into the next without fences. My grandmother's Willing Workers Club members visited the sick, frail, and elderly. These middle-aged women ventured briskly down the roads and paths armed with palliative pots of stew, warmer blankets, or simply their cheerful demeanors. They, unlike the men, bravely crossed the thresholds of ailing neighbors – even those with whom they had next to nothing in common and next to nothing to say. I accompanied the women on such treks, and time passed with the speed of water struggling to boil on a tepid burner. My grandmother sewed baby clothes for families unable to afford newborns' layettes. She sometimes remade old clothes into functional coats and outfits for under-clad children.

**“MOSTLY
THE WOMEN
KEPT HOUSE –
COOKED
AND CANNED,
SNAPPED OUT
WET,
HANDWASHED
CLOTHES
TO HANG
ON THE LINES,
AND TENDED
TO GARDENS,
FARM ANIMALS,
AND CHILDREN.
SOME DID
GO OFF
TO WORK –
CLEANING HOUSES,
PLANTING
AND HARVESTING
ON FARMS,
TEACHING SCHOOL.”**

Winter days were quiet and spent mostly indoors. But grateful for his returned health, Mr. Aaron, who did not drive, began walking the railroad tracks to town several times a week. He broke the cold, palpable silence by whistling four shrill notes as he tread slowly down the road, swinging his cane – carried just in case because he had, after all, been a victim of surgery.

Winter evenings were dark, mostly predictable, but still mysterious. No one welcomed knocks after nightfall. The absence of streetlights intensified the jolt of adrenaline when unexpected visitors came knocking. Doors were opened hesitantly to the eerie blackness with only low-watt light bulbs to illuminate the face of a crying woman, a verbose and inebriated friend or cousin, or a neighbor wanting to use the telephone to call for an ambulance or the law.

Once the isolating chill of winter gave way to longer spring days, we witnessed the comings and goings of our neighbors. Some did day's work at local farms, many worked at Weyerhaeuser and the National Handle Company Factory, and others went God knows where on the flatbeds of trucks. Mostly the women kept house – cooked and canned, snapped out wet handwashed clothes to hang on the lines, and tended to gardens, farm animals, and children. Some did go off to work – cleaning houses, planting and harvesting on farms, teaching school.

In spring and summer, when my grandmother, grandfather, and I sat out at twilight, anyone might happen onto the edge of our porch. Mostly just to speak, sometimes to sit and talk until night fell and swarming, singing mosquitos became unbearable. Maybe a man sweating from the heat of sweat, cheap liquor might stop to ask my grandfather for fifty cents – enough for a liquor house shot to keep the drunk going. Now and then a distressed, unhappily married woman happened into the yard to get her bearings and her morale boosted before continuing on. My grandmother doled out generic encouragement like communion wafers: *Uhn uhn uhn*, and *Lord have mercy*, and *Bless your heart*. Most nights, Mr. Aaron navigated the footpath amid knee-high grass and came to touch base with Grandpa Joe.

In all seasons, we children skipped across yards in a world of our own – running, hiding, screaming, swinging, jumping, wrestling – oblivious to the inequalities that, in a different environment, might have set us apart. Some children wore shoes and shirts only when the weather turned cooler, and

some pants were held up with safety pins instead of belts. Or worse, a child might rely on an incessant hitching up throughout the day because sometimes fit was of no consequence; the point of clothing was simply to cover. In contrast, a preacher's son had far better clothing and way more flesh on his body; his family rode in late model vehicles. Three dainty girls also come to mind – clean, always in socks and shoes, waving and smiling when they passed in the back seats of their grandparents' cars.

One season, our band of friends was expanded when Mr. Aaron increased the size of his household. His relatives lived in their shotgun shack with no amenities. Episodes of the familial discord spilled down Sandhill's arteries. After a tragic accident, Mr. Aaron and his wife, already parents, took in the kin's offspring and raised them as their own. Mr. Aaron's condition kept him from holding down a regular job, and I suspect there were disability payments of some kind. There were, however, no large buffering checks to offset the cost of more than doubling the members of his household.



Mr. Aaron continued to whistle and walk and wander over, in good spirits, in all seasons, and the four children assimilated happily among the rest of us – never revealing any signs that they'd suffered from the dissolving of their nuclear family.

No matter the disparities among us, in Sandhill there was little judgment and no underlying imperative to improve, to overcome, to reform, to fret. Perhaps it was the era or the collaboration and tolerance that grew out of organic community. At any rate, that locale taught me that the world is comprised of a diverse cast of characters. Some are cut from sprawling yards of lush materials and others from scratchy remnants that might easily be cast aside. Regardless of tendencies and idiosyncrasies, everyone's place on Sandhill was as warranted and accepted as that of any other's.

There was no waiting, wishing, or petitioning for the likes of so-and-so to move on. There was no agonizing over two and sometimes three juke joints and liquor houses splattered among us – which meant Friday and Saturday nights, all year long, brought the sounds of heavy bass reverberating through the night from jukeboxes turned up high. Chevy Impalas, Dodge Coronets, and Chrysler Imperials lumbered and weaved down the pocked roads and spun their wheels in our loamy ditches till dawn.

Morning gossip fresh as air-dried sheets travelled across clotheslines about shootings or cuttings or fights from the night before because those juke joints were sites wherein dramas played out: gambling debts, cheating spouses, the unleashing of frustrations. Still, there was no deepening fear about their proximity to impressionable children. There was a natural order even in the chaos. Everyone didn't frequent such places. Everything wasn't for everybody. Individuals picked and chose where they went, as well as the games they played. Such was life.

Decades later, when I was shoulder deep in research and writing grants in support of programs for underserved communities, I realized that Sandhill had been an intervention model beyond replication. The heterogeneous population ranged from the poor and indigent to the solidly middle class. There was a communal sharing of knowledge, skills, expectations, and often resources that gave all the children a leg up. There were real-life role models of all ages and factions: for working hard,

“SANDHILL BECAME MY PERSONAL EXAMPLE OF RESILIENCY IN ACTION BECAUSE, OVER THE YEARS, MANY SUCCESS STORIES EMANATED FROM THOSE RAISED THEREIN: RESTAURATEURS, STORE OWNERS, A PRIVATE DETECTIVE, A MILITARY COLONEL, NURSES, GREAT PARENTS AND HOMEMAKERS, A DOCTOR, BUSINESSMEN AND WOMEN, A PRISON CHAPLAIN, HARD-WORKING CITIZENS, AND, OF COURSE, A WRITER.”

being resourceful, respecting elders, being a good neighbor, and making do on a pittance.

Sandhill became my personal example of resiliency in action because, over the years, many success stories emanated from those raised therein: restaurateurs, store owners, a private detective, a military colonel, nurses, great parents and homemakers, a doctor, businessmen and women, a prison chaplain, hard-working citizens, and, of course, a writer.

Years of living and working in urban communities have shown me what happens when poor and less fortunate families are all relegated to the same camp, when they cull only from the same economic, social, and psychological coffers. I've also seen what happens when more fortunate individuals relish too comfortably in the peace and calm that comes from homogeneous lifestyles. I, like any other adult, desire a certain ease in living, but I challenge myself often, not to get too comfortable with the pursuit of parity. I remind myself to see through the eyes of my foundational years – remembering the assortment of individuals who walked the roads of Sandhill. I remember how clever and ingenious my friends were – regardless of grades or academic standing. Or the comfort of being among my childhood tribe when my grandmother passed away.

For many years, Mr. Aaron remained a daily presence in the life of my family. Two years after I'd moved to New York to live with my mother, Grandpa Joe suffered a medical emergency. He'd never gone to a doctor and was never treated for any condition. When he became incoherent and in distress, my six-year-old cousin ran along the path to seek help from Mr. Aaron who called for the ambulance. My grandfather went to a hospital for the first time in his life. They kept Grandpa Joe alive long enough for his children to make it back to Plymouth to say goodbye – thanks to Mr. Aaron.

When I become too judgmental and analytical about how other people should live, I reel myself in. I recall that it takes all kinds to make a world. And that I am a dot in the big picture, as are all the individuals around me. Together we create a textured experience that honors humanity. When we are hell-bent on designing a blueprint for community, we create a caricature of the world. The Sandhill in which I grew up helped me trust that the world, in all its imperfection, is actually a symphony of souls. ■



FINALIST, 2018 JAMES APPLEWHITE POETRY PRIZE**BY L. TERESA CHURCH***Fire and Brimstone*

Between downpours
we dashed straight
from the church house
to the bootleg house.

White lightning
ran tandem with rain
& 45 rpm records stacked
on the turntable's spindle.

Our teenage
black peppercorn selves we
could grind so fine shave a
melon to the rind

& never lose no juice
between downpours.
We funk'd good dresses sweated
starch from white shirts

stomped love and heartbreak
songs into the plank floor eased
on back to church
& our mamas never guessed

we'd ever strayed
from the sermon's
warning about fire
burning souls in hell.



Club 55 (acrylic on canvas, 36x48) by Ernie Barnes

COURTESY OF ERNIE BARNES ART

ERNIE BARNES (1938–2009) was an African American artist from Durham, NC. At North Carolina College for Negroes (now North Carolina Central University), he majored in art on a full athletic scholarship and went on to play in the NFL from 1959 to 1964. He was the first American professional athlete to become a noted painter. He created album covers for Marvin Gaye and B.B. King, among others, and his paintings were used in the TV show *Good Times*, *The Sugar Shack* appearing in the opening and closing credits and other works as needed for the show's main character, an artist. Barnes's numerous honors include being named "Sports Artist of the 1984 Olympic Games" by the Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee and "America's Best Painter of Sports" in 2004 by the American Sport Art Museum & Archives.

FINALIST, 2018 JAMES APPLEWHITE POETRY PRIZE
BY L. TERESA CHURCH

Forgiveness

Dressed in white: tee shirt, diaper, socks, and shoes,
at age two, you are calmest of all this July night
before your twenty-eight-year-old mother's funeral.

Sudden as the overdose that snuffed your mother's breath,
you arrived from town, a bequest to your grandma,
accompanied by a footlocker of clothes and questions.

Talk swarms about the cause of death and why
your mother stayed estranged from the family so long
before she returned home for a funeral last spring,

the first time your white-haired grandma ever met you.
Some folks say your mother had other babies – secrets,
but her blue footlocker bears one birth certificate, *yours*.

Now, three months widowed and two months past
burying her own father, your grandma lifts you above
her latest grief like relief from black dresses and veils.

L. TERESA CHURCH has been a member of the Carolina African American Writers' Collective since 1995 and serves as archivist and membership chair for the organization. Read her essay about the Collective in *NCLR* 2016. She is an independent scholar/archival consultant and sole proprietor of LTC Consulting in Durham, NC. Her poetry has previously appeared in *NCLR* 2004, 2016, and 2018, and *NCLR Online* 2016. Another poem of hers was a finalist in the 2018 Applewhite competition, and will be published in the 2019 print issue. Her writing has also appeared in venues such as *Simply Haiku*, *The Heron's Nest*, *Obsidian*, *Solo Café*, *Nocturnes: (Re)view of the Literary Arts*, *African American Review*, and *One Window's Light: A Collection of Haiku* (reviewed in this issue), and she published a chapbook, *Beyond the Water Dance* (LTC Publications, 2002).

In this house that smells of scrubbed floors, buffed wax,
potato salad, lemon meringue pies, and pullets fried
for repast, you toddle through the kitchen, retrace

your steps into the front room, look for your mother's face
in faces you've already searched. You listen for her voice,
yearn for mama-arms, as you fight with the sandman.

Birthrights – almond eyes, crinkly hair, deep chocolate skin –
picture you a perfect likeness of your mother, innocent
before she disgraced the family, unwed with big belly.

Leaning against your next-to-youngest uncle's knee
fires the furnace set on pilot in his jailbird soul. He bellows:
“Go somewhere and set down, gal, lookin’ like yo’ mama.”

Without a whimper, you settle into your grandma's lap.
She covers you with prayer, caresses your face
like she'll stroke your mama in the casket tomorrow.



Untitled (Woman and Child), ca. 1950 (painted red oak,
119.6 x 32.3 x 29.8) by Selma Burke

COURTESY OF SMITHSONIAN AMERICAN ART MUSEUM

SELMA BURKE (1900–1995) was an African American sculptor born in Mooresville, NC. She graduated in 1924 from St. Agnes Training School for Nurses in Raleigh but moved to New York City in 1935 where she earned an MFA in 1941 from Columbia University and became part of the Harlem Renaissance. She founded the Selma Burke School of Sculpture in 1940 and the Selma Burke Art School in 1946, both in New York. Also in 1946, she opened the Selma Burke Art Center in Pittsburgh, PA. Her original sculpture of Franklin Delano Roosevelt was adapted for the dime, and her last sculpture is the nine-foot statue of Martin Luther King, Jr., which was placed in Marshall Park in Charlotte, NC, in 1980. Among her numerous prestigious awards is the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Women's Caucus for Art, which was presented to her by President Jimmy Carter.

**HONORABLE MENTION, 2018 JAMES APPLEWHITE POETRY PRIZE
BY CRYSTAL SIMONE SMITH**

Black Girl Magic in Summers Past

for Christina & Sabrina

We were magical even in our worst
dog days of slum nothingness
with no sapphire oceans to plunge,
no lake breezes to breathe. We were
escapists anyway lounging hours
in soap opera fantasies, each burning
supernova-bright with ecstasy & stakes –
the gall of savoring it all with decadent
chocolate ice-cream bars. We could strip
down to underwear – our wild laughter
in cold afternoon showers drowning every
howling siren & world wrong out. Sundown,
the linoleum kitchen transformed into a spa
with stoved hot combs – our hair made good,
the flowy black silk of the most dangerous
daytime villainess. Making magic from molecules
was our trickery – from dust, exhaled glitter.
We were revivers, the days dead, yet alive.



Dancers of Black Skin, 2000 (archival quality ink on water-resistant canvas, 9x12) by Ivey Hayes

North Carolina native **IVEY HAYES** (1948–2012) earned a BA from NC Central University and an MFA at UNC Greensboro. He spent much of his professional life in Wilmington, NC, where he was known for painting abstract figures in bold colors. He received many accolades in his career, including the North Carolina Azalea Festival Master of Arts in 2005 and the Order of the Long Leaf Pine Award in 2006. His work has been exhibited across the state and in such cities as Boston, New York, and Washington, DC (a solo exhibit at the Capitol Rotunda).

CRYSTAL SIMONE SMITH lives in Durham, NC. She is the author of three poetry collections, *Routes Home* (Finishing Line Press, 2013), *Running Music* (Longleaf Press, 2014), and *Wild Flowers* (2016), a collection of haiku, senryu, and haiga made possible by an Absher Initiatives Literary Arts Grant. Her work has appeared in numerous journals, including *Callaloo*, *Nimrod*, *Obsidian II: Literature in the African Diaspora*, *African American Review*, and *Mobius: The Journal of Social Change*. Smith is an alumna of the Callaloo Creative Writing Workshop and the Yale Summer Writers Conference. She holds an MFA from Queens University of Charlotte, teaches composition and creative writing, and is the Managing Editor of Backbone Press.

ONE WINDOW'S LIGHT ON NORTH CAROLINA HAIKU

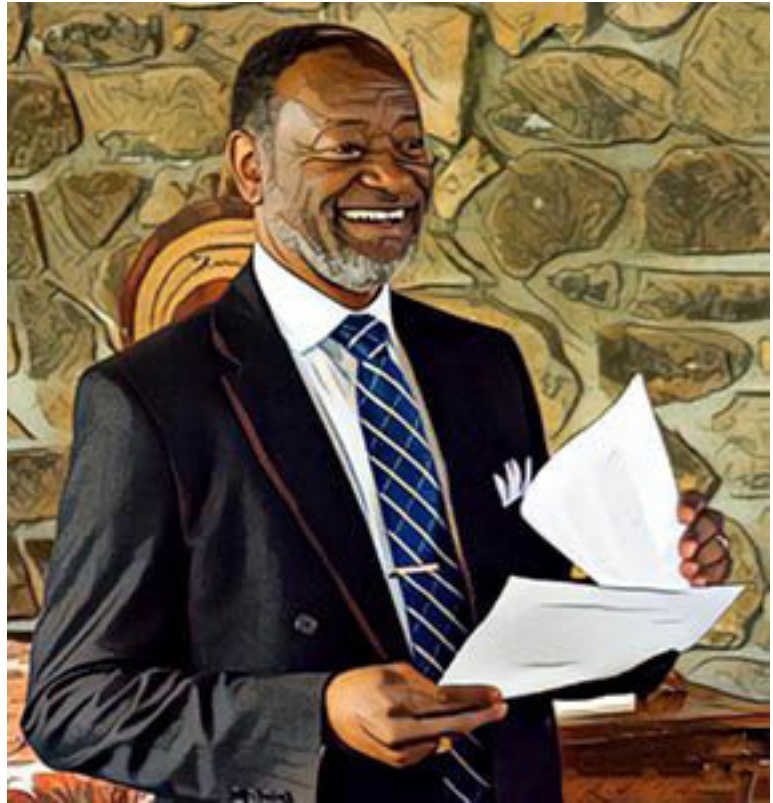
a review by John Zheng

Lenard D. Moore, Editor. *One Window's Light: A Collection of Haiku.* Greensboro, NC: Unicorn Press, 2017.

JOHN ZHENG is Professor of English at Mississippi Valley State University where he edits the *Journal of Ethnic American Literature*. He published two books with the University Press of Mississippi, *African American Haiku: Cultural Visions* (2016) and *The Other World of Richard Wright: Perspectives on his Haiku* (2011). He has published over a hundred articles and reviews in literary journals including *African American Review*, *Explicator*, and *The Southern Quarterly*.

Born in Jacksonville, NC, **LENARD D. MOORE** received his MA degree in English/African American Literature from NC A&T State University. He teaches at the University of Mount Olive. His several poetry collections include *The Open Eye* (1985, rpt. Mountains & Rivers Press, 2015, reviewed in *NCLR Online* 2018) and *A Temple Looming* (Word Tech, 2008; reviewed in *NCLR* 2009). His poetry has appeared in *NCLR*, including haiku in 1996. *One Window's Light* received the Haiku Society of America's Merit Book Award. Among his other numerous honors are the Margaret Walker Creative Writing Award and the North Carolina Award for Literature. In 2008, he was the first African American elected president of the Haiku Society of America.

ABOVE **Lenard D. Moore**



PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVE RUSSO

One Window's Light is a collection of haiku edited with a short but important introduction by Lenard D. Moore, a long time haiku practitioner and ardent facilitator of haiku writing in the African American community in North Carolina. The book is a gathering of 130 haiku by five poets of the Carolina African American Writers' Collective, including the editor himself. Although the other four poets are less known in the haiku world, their poems are exceptional.

What catches my eye first is the cover image of a nine-patch quilt pattern, titled "Pained Glass Window at Mother Emanuel, Charleston, SC." Each square in the quilt looks like light on a stained glass window, as if to urge a reader to turn the page. Mother Emanuel is the African Methodist Episcopal Church established in 1816, where, on June 17, 2015,

nine people were shot to death by Dylann Roof, a twenty-one-year-old white supremacist. L. Teresa Church, a poet in this collection and the quilt maker, uses "pained" rather than "stained" to express her sadness about the dead and her anger about the hate crime. She says in a note "about the cover image" included at the end of the book, "A commemorative window seemed appropriate" with a nine-patch quilt pattern that "allowed me to construct a cross of remembrance for each of the lives lost" (75). Here is a memorable haiku by Church:

one window's light
reflected onto another –
katydid cacophony

This collection is unique in that haiku are arranged under thirteen topics – growth, families, travel, nourishment, language, teachings,



history, lessons, loss, harmony, folklore, belief, and view. Moore explains in his introduction, “This book does not follow the usual seasonal structure for a haiku collection. . . . The topics are non-traditional as well as traditional for the haiku community” (3). However, they are correlative, revealing an interactive connection between nature and human nature, past and present, society and human existence, suffering and joy, thus providing a window light for us to see into African American culture, history, and experience in the South crystallized into the minimal form of haiku. Even though the form is minimal, the haiku in this collection are mindful and bring our attention to various occurrences in history and at present.

The following poems by the five poets are exemplars of mindfulness about African American experiences through

conscious observation and concrete depiction:

upturned cicada
we read slave narratives
row by row (Lenard D. Moore)

statue of a black man
laden with snow
distant bells (L. Teresa Church)

plantation tour
I follow the swallowtail
to the slave house (Crystal
Simone Smith)

balmy Sunday
Wayne Shorter’s saxophone flowing
through the park (Sheila Smith McKoy)

diagonal snow
Wall Street glitters
with afros and badges (Gideon Young)

In reading these haiku, we do not just seek understanding of African American experiences; we also gain aesthetic appreciation of these experiences from each poet’s depiction. For example, Sheila Smith McKoy provides a moment of harmony through the transference of the senses between the visual image of a yellow leaf and the sound of jazz:

around twilight
a yellow leaf floats downward
jazz in the air

The moment indicated in twilight, the feeling suggested in the floating yellow leaf, and the culture expressed in jazz reveal more than harmony. They are full of seasonality and maintain a balance or counterbalance. If the color of the falling leaf reflects sadness, the sound of jazz may help to relieve it. Moreover, a keen eye may see the juxtaposition of the two images that brings out a unity of nature and human nature.



Lenard D. Moore’s haiku also help us to gain aesthetic appreciation of harmony, though they may not be placed under the topic of harmony. The following,

Read about **L. TERESA CHURCH** and poems by her in this issue (pages 21–23).

ABOVE **L. Teresa Church**;

ABOVE RIGHT **Sheila Smith McKoy**

SHEILA SMITH MCKOY, born in Raleigh, NC, is a professor and the department chair of the Department of English at Kennesaw State University. She received a BA from NC State University, an MA from UNC Chapel Hill, and a PhD from Duke University. Her writing has been published in *African American Women Writers 1910–1940*, *Journal of Ethnic American Literature*, and *Obsidian: Literature in the African Diaspora*, among other venues.

under the topic of families, is a good example:

first summer rain
the bride and groom pause
in their dance

Harmony is twofold here. The first one is human harmony implied in the dance of the bride and groom in a societal environment in which people gather together to celebrate the marriage, but this harmony is enriched and intensified by the image of rain under a natural environment. Therefore, the double meaning of rain is that on the one hand it suggests human harmony with nature, and on the other it possesses a metaphorical implication that it is the source to irrigate the field of marriage. That is what the bride and groom long for and why they pause in their dance.

In a short haiku of eight words, Crystal Simone Smith captures a curious moment that provokes reflection and associative thinking. It presents two pleasant experiences from two kinds of views.

after day-long
museum tours
the starry sky

The first aesthetic experience gained by the speaker is through museum tours while the second one comes naturally from star-watching. The smooth transference from one experience to the



PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVE RUSSO

other makes star-watching unintentional and unsentimental; the stars appear at the right moment after day-long museum tours, thus suggesting a continuation of appreciation from art to nature.

As noted earlier, haiku is mindfulness. When one possesses a haiku mind, one's imagination is full of surprises and delights. Gideon Young brings us a delightful surprise with the eco-functional effect of haiku on a bird:

haiku workshop
a ruby-throated hummingbird
peers through windows

The poet transfers human curiosity about haiku to the bird, thus creating an empathetic effect to delight our sensibility visually and mindfully.

In all, this collection is a window light that presents insights into meaningful moments of African

American history and culture. The haiku are fresh for the reader to see, hear, touch, smell, and taste for a growth of sensibility, a moment of enlightenment, a rhythm of creative thinking, and an appreciation of African American experiences. The most impressive part of this collection is its focus on African American life, which suggests that haiku is not just about human beings with nature; it is also about their relations with society. Therefore, this book proves that the function of haiku can be political, cultural, experiential, humanistic, naturalistic, as well as aesthetic. An important haiku collection in American haiku history, *One Window's Light*, as Moore states in his introduction, "extends the tradition" of African American haiku already enriched by Lewis Alexander, Richard Wright, Etheridge Knight, James Emanuel, Sonia Sanchez, Kalamu ya Salaam, and other younger black poets. I believe it does. ■



PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVE RUSSO

Read about **CRYSTAL SIMONE SMITH** and a poem by her in this issue (page 24).

ABOVE CENTER **Crystal Simone Smith**

ABOVE RIGHT **Gideon Young**

GIDEON YOUNG was born in Connecticut and received his bachelor's degree in Literature from the University of Connecticut and master's degree in Elementary Education from NC State University. He is a member of the Carolina African American Writers' Collective, the Haiku Society of America, the Carrboro Poets Council, and the state advisory board for the Gilbert-Chappell Distinguished Poet Series. His work can be found in publications such as *Obsidian: Literature in the African Diaspora*, *The Long River Review*, *Black Gold: An Anthology of Black Poetry*, and *Modern Haiku*.

“HOW / TO MAKE MOMENT MORE THAN / MOMENT”

a review by Robert M. West

Nathaniel Mackey. *Blue Fasa*.
New York: New Directions
Publishing, 2015.

Read about ROBERT M. WEST with a review of his two-volume collection of *The Complete Poems of A.R. Ammons* in this issue.

NATHANIEL MACKEY is the Reynolds Price Professor of Creative Writing at Duke University. He has a PhD in English from Stanford University and an AB in African American Studies from Princeton University. His books of poetry, fiction, and literary criticism include *Nod House* (New Directions, 2011), *Bass Cathedral* (New Directions, 2007), *Paracritical Hinge: Essays, Talks, Notes, Interviews* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), and a CD of his poetry with musical accompaniment called *Strick: Song of the Andoumboulou 16-25* (Spoken Engine Co, 1995). He coedited the anthology *Moment's Notice: Jazz in Poetry and Prose* (Coffee House Press, 1993), and is the current editor of *Hambone*, a literary magazine.

Contemporary American poetry is a diverse, sprawling scene – so much so that even those specializing in the field have only a partial knowledge of it. One may know a great deal about work published by New York houses and other Northeastern presses, but little about poetry brought out by university and small presses in other regions. Another may have an encyclopedic knowledge of confessional and other autobiographical verse, while knowing nothing of eco-poetry. Yet another may know language poetry or other avant-garde movements inside out, while knowing next to nothing about neoformalism. Inevitably, anthologies of contemporary US poetry advertise their editors' limitations. While something similar may be true of other recent American writing as well, poetry's relatively peripheral status – even among the literati – exacerbates the problem. Few of the remaining bookstores have substantial poetry sections if they sell poetry at all. Our large-circulation newspapers and magazines, even those that regularly publish book reviews, seldom review poetry volumes. There seems to be a trend among college and university English departments of minimizing or even eliminating poetry as a required aspect of the curriculum. As a result, when it comes to discovering current American poetry, and especially its breadth and diversity, most readers are very much on their own.

All of which is to say that it's possible for someone interested in the field not to have encountered

the poetry of Nathaniel Mackey – despite the fact that he has won some of the most prestigious honors an American poet can receive, including the 2006 National Book Award, Yale University's 2015 Bollingen Prize, and the 2014 Ruth Lilly Poetry Prize, in addition to an appointment in 2010 as the Reynolds Price Professor of Creative Writing at Duke University. For such a reader, *Blue Fasa* may not be the single best point of entry into his oeuvre, but it would serve well enough; it quickly establishes Mackey's gifts for acrobatic play between syntax and versification and offers a great deal of intriguing meditation and narrative.

First, though, the reader will face the author's preface. It may seem, to borrow a phrase from John Ashbery, “the shield of a greeting,” a welcome that to some may sound like a warning.¹ Mackey points out that the book extends not one but two long poems – one titled *Song of the Andoumboulou* and the other titled *Mu* – parts of which appear in his preceding book, *Nod House* (2011), and the book before that, his National Book Award-winning book, *Splay Anthem* (2006), which in turn picks up from earlier work. Mackey then contextualizes and explains the two poems as they've developed to this point, and as *Blue Fasa* further develops them. Some readers might be daunted by the range of reference: in explaining his aims, Mackey invokes seventeen other poets, musicians, and scholars – from Jalal al-Din Rumi to Louis Zukofsky to Amiri Baraka, from

¹ John Ashbery, *Self-Portrait in A Convex Mirror* (Viking, 1975).



COURTESY OF DUKE UNIVERSITY

Robert Johnson to John Coltrane to Rahsaan Roland Kirk, from Leo Frobenius to Janice Boddy to Kamau Brathwaite. To that contextualization, add discussions of relevant etymologies and wordplay, including the title's references to the Fasa, a west African people left homeless after the fall of the Ghana Empire, and to trumpeter Kenny Dorham's jazz composition *Blue Bossa*; plus, commentary on the book's division into two parts: *Rāg and Rag*. Some readers will be fascinated by all this and eagerly forge ahead. Others, particularly those new to this poet, may feel intimidated.

But they too should forge on. These braided serial poems – both adjectives are Mackey's own – resemble in some ways Ezra Pound's *Cantos*; one is the fact that they don't require you to begin at the beginning. Just as one can enjoy and find much to admire in a middle installment of Pound's poem without having to go all the way back to *A Draft of XXX Cantos*, so one should be able to admire *Blue Fasa* without having to dip back to Mackey's

Splay Anthem or earlier. That Mackey himself is comfortable with discontinuity is made clear by all the ellipses among *Blue Fasa*'s individual sections: the book begins with what it says are the sixty-fifth and sixty-sixth parts of *Mu*, proceeds to the eighty-eighth and eighty-ninth parts of *Song of the Andoumboulou*, then to the sixty-ninth part of *Mu* (skipping parts sixty-seven and sixty-eight), then to the ninety-first part of *Song of the Andoumboulou* (skipping part ninety), then to the seventy-first part of *Mu* (skipping part seventy), and so on. Whether we'll ever see the missing parts implied by that numbering isn't terribly relevant; the fact is, the author views *Blue Fasa* as complete enough to be published and read as it is.

And as it is, it does offer much pleasure. Every clause is sculpted; the unfolding of each sentence from line to line requires and rewards the reader's closest attention, and the play of ideas is always engaging. Like any good book of poetry, it's better read aloud than in silence. Take the

following passage, which, like much of the book, invokes a mysterious "they," sometimes referred to elsewhere as "we." In a 2006 interview with *Publishers Weekly*,² Mackey acknowledges that some might take those pronouns to refer to avant-gardists in general, or to African Americans in general, since he himself belongs to both groups, but he invites any reader to include him- or herself.

Momentary release the most
they'd gotten, liberatory this
or that debated endlessly,
philosophic posse's pet . . .

How
to make moment more than
moment, they kept asking,
how
to make moment not elapse . . .

That's from *Mu*, part sixty-nine, which is titled "Moment's Gnosis" in *Blue Fasa*. The pun ("moment's notice") isn't gratuitous: the word "gnosis" refers to secret knowledge relating to spiritual truth, something certainly relevant to the passage above and, for that matter, to the rest of the book. Here and at other points are echoes of T.S. Eliot's highly "philosophic" *Four Quartets*, where Eliot writes of "the still point of the turning world," telling us "at the still point, there the dance is, / But neither arrest nor movement" – and where he also writes of the possibility of "liberation / From the future as well as the past."³

Another passage reminiscent of Eliot – especially *Four Quartets* – is this one, from part ninety-seven of Mackey's *Song of the Andoumboulou* in *Blue Fasa*:

ABOVE Nathaniel Mackey reading poetry while Vattel Cherry accompanies him on bass, Nasher Museum of Art, Duke University, Durham, NC, 23 March 2015

² Cray Morgan Teicher, "A Conversation with Nathaniel Mackey," *Publishers Weekly* 22 Nov. 2006: [web](#).

³ T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets* (Harcourt, 1943) 5, 36; subsequently cited parenthetically.

What the dead died wanting pro-
pelled us, made us weep, not
to go likewise, not to abide,
trudge though it was, all it
was . . .

We the migrating they again,
scrounge though we did, run
low, wear thin, theirs the new
day
not come . . . History was time's
affliction, eternity's compromise . . .

That sounds like commiseration with the poet (Eliot)
who asked,

What was to be the value of the long looked forward to,
Long hoped for calm, the autumnal serenity
And the wisdom of age? Had they deceived us
Or deceived themselves, the quiet-voiced elders . . .
. . . .

O dark dark dark. They all go into the dark
(*Four Quartets* 26–27)

All of which is to say that this is a fine book, one in
euphonious and thought-provoking dialogue with many
predecessors, even beyond those it invokes by name.
But whether you've read or listened to all of them or
not, *Blue Fasa* invites you to join the conversation. ■

RANDALL KENAN, A TRUE NORTH CAROLINA SON, INDUCTED INTO THE NORTH CAROLINA LITERARY HALL OF FAME

Induction presentation remarks by Sharon P. Holland

What a great honor for me to introduce my friend and colleague, Randall Kenan, on the occasion of his induction into the North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame. I first met Randall Kenan in the summer of 1998 at the University of Mississippi's Faulkner Yoknapatawpha Conference for the centennial of that great author's birth. At the time I was a young literary scholar working on a book manuscript and when I found Randall Kenan's *A Visitation of Spirits*, it changed the trajectory of what was possible for my work. I felt that he had written that novel for black people like me, Southern people trying to find their way back home. I clung to this brilliant work and the main character Horace's world, which comes to us finely wrought and at a price.

When someone told me Randall Kenan would be in residence during the conference, I was beside myself. I would like to say that our meeting was cordial and professional – instead, I made a complete fool of myself. I fawned and talked too fast and followed him like a puppy. Even though I was mortified by my own behavior, I could not stop myself. I wanted to know *everything*. We were both from a long line of North Carolinians, we wrote, we loved this place we call home, though it vexed us so. He was gracious and kind and when I finally realized he wasn't going to be scared off by my obnoxious behavior, we fell into a subtle rapport and talked about

PHOTOGRAPH BY JORGE CORTESE



our deep love of Faulkner and his South, now ours. We traversed the Tallahatchie Bridge stopping to sing a few bars of "Ode to Billie Joe." We drove past the courthouse where Dr. King marched on our way to the Blues and Gospel Festival in Clarksdale, MS. We ate barbecue sandwiches and drank cheap beer on the hill near the railroad tracks while Ike and the Ikettes sang below us. Under the dark peace of a new Mississippi moon we shared our worlds, and I found a kindred spirit to hold close in good times and bad.

SHARON P. HOLLAND is a Townsend Ludington Term Distinguished Endowed Professor of American Studies at UNC Chapel Hill, where she serves as Editor of *South*. Her books include *Raising the Dead: Readings of Death and (Black) Subjectivity* (Duke University Press, 2000), which won the Lora Romero First Book Prize from the American Studies Association.

ABOVE Randall Kenan giving the keynote address at the North Carolina Writers' Network fall conference, Charlotte, 2 Nov. 2018

“I ACCEPT THIS SIGNIFICANT HONOR AS A CHALLENGE, NOT ONLY TO BE A BETTER PERSON AND A BETTER WRITER, BUT TO BE A BETTER TEACHER.”

– RANDALL KENAN



PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVID POTOITI

As I mentioned, by the time we met, Randall Kenan had published his first novel, *A Visitation of Spirits* (1989) and a collection of short stories, *Let the Dead Bury Their Dead* (1992), nominated for the Los Angeles *Times* Book Award for Fiction, and among the *New York Times* Notable Books of 1992. The next year he published a young adult biography of James Baldwin (1993) and wrote the text for Norman Mauskopf’s book of photographs, *A Time Not Here: The Mississippi Delta* (1996). The year after that Faulkner conference encounter, he published his stunning chronicle of the diversity of Black life, *Walking on Water: Black American Lives at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century* (1999), which was nominated for the Southern Book Award. He published his second work of nonfiction, *The Fire This Time*, in 2007.

Like Toni Morrison, Randall Kenan spent his time before his books (1985–1989) as part of the editorial staff for Alfred A. Knopf. In 1989, he began teaching writing at Sarah Lawrence College and Columbia University. He was the first William Blackburn Visiting Professor of Creative Writing at Duke University in 1994 and the Edouard Morot-Sir Visiting Professor of Creating Writing at UNC Chapel Hill in 1995. He was the John and Renee Grisham Writer in Residence at the University of Mississippi in Oxford (1997–1998), Visiting Professor of

“IF YOU THINK ABOUT NORTH CAROLINA WRITERS, THE THING THAT SETS US APART FROM A GREAT MANY STATES AND WRITING COMMUNITIES IS OUR TEACHERS.” – RANDALL KENAN

Creative Writing at the University of Memphis (1999), and held the Lehman Brady Professorship at the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University (2003–2004). Randall Kenan is no stranger to accolades – he is the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship, a Whiting Writers Award, the Sherwood Anderson Award, the John Dos Passos Award, and the 1997 Rome Prize from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He was awarded the North Carolina Award for Literature in 2005. He is truly a North Carolina Son, in every respect.

Toward the end of *Walking on Water*, Randall Kenan turns to reflect upon his own life: “I grew up surrounded by stories and antics and foibles and gossip and artifacts and something like love, though the many feelings engendered by life in a small town are much more complex and tangled than most people who’ve never lived in one, belonged to one, could ever imagine.”* Randall Kenan, I read your work when I am in despair and I read it when I am joyful. It cures what ails me and makes me proud to share breath with you in this place called the North Cack. Congratulations, my friend. ■

ABOVE Randall Kenan with 2016 inductee Clyde Edgerton and fellow 2018 inductee Jill McCorkle after the induction ceremony, Southern Pines, 7 Oct. 2018 (Find a story on McCorkle’s induction in the Flashbacks section, and watch Kenan’s acceptance remarks via the North Carolina Writers’ Network’s [Youtube](#).)

* Randall Kenan, *Walking on Water: Black American Lives at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century* (Knopf, 1999) 606. Holland read here an excerpt of Randall Kenan’s “Chinquapin: Elementary Particles,” from *Amazing Place: What North Carolina Means to Writers*, ed. Marianne Gingher (U of North Carolina P, 2015). Listen to this excerpt via the North Carolina Writers’ Network’s [Youtube](#).

PHOTOGRAPH BY COCO KEEVAN;
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OPEN HOUSES

a review by Garrett
Bridger Gilmore

Stephanie Powell Watts.
No One is Coming to Save Us.
New York: HarperCollins
Publishers, 2017.

GARRETT BRIDGER GILMORE, from Chapel Hill, NC, teaches at the University of Alabama. He received his PhD in English from the University of California, Irvine. His work focuses on race, memory, and negative effects in Southern literature.

STEPHANIE POWELL WATTS, a Lenoir, NC, native, is an Associate Professor of English at Lehigh University. She received the Ernest J. Gaines Award for Literary Excellence for her short story collection *We Are Taking Only What We Need* (Ecco Press, 2012). Her debut novel, *No One is Coming to Save Us*, is the inaugural selection of the American Library Association's Book Club Central and winner of the NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Literary Work. Watts was the final judge for the 2018 Doris Betts Fiction Prize competition. Read her selections for first and second place in this issue. Read an interview with her in the 2019 print issue of *NCLR*.

ABOVE Stephanie Powell Watts with
UNC-TV's *North Carolina Bookwatch*
host D.G. Martin, 29 Nov. 2017

Midway through Stephanie Powell Watts's debut novel *No One is Coming to Save Us*, the collective narrator, "the black people in town" (3), reflects, "one of the tricks of time is that your own ordinary life took on a sweetness in the retelling" (219). The brilliance of Watts's novel lies in the stark, often devastating contrasts between her characters' sense of what sweetness is and which memories it is found in. Hailed as a novel of the American Dream, *No One is Coming to Save Us* explores how the dreams of family – even people who love each other deeply and selflessly – can be fundamentally at odds.

At the heart of *No One is Coming to Save Us* is the return of JJ Ferguson, now calling himself "Jay," who has returned to his hometown of Pinewood, NC, to reconnect with his one-time lover, Ava, after years of amassing a mysterious fortune somewhere along the way. Jay builds a dream home on the prestigious – and historically white – Brushy Mountain Road that overlooks the black parts of town. Exploring the relationship between JJ's massive, empty home and the gaps and fractures in the relationships of mother-daughter pair Sylvia and Ava, their on-the-outs husbands Don and Henry, and the dying Pinewood economy, Watts renders

domestic spaces as multifaceted, multigenerational spaces with contested meanings for their inhabitants. Reflecting on Sylvia and Don's failed marriage, Watts offers, "if [Sylvia] and Don had not had a life, they did have a house. . . . What you got and can count on your fingers can give you a cushion, a bank account, a security against universal losses. Nobody has to know the hollow spaces you shock yourself by living through" (23). In a novel about coming home, Watts renders the complicated financial, architectural, aesthetic, and familial dynamics of houses, apartments, and trailers in brilliant detail.

Witness how Watts's laser-focused description of Sisters, the workplace of Don's much-younger mistress Jonnie, ties the various chronologies of familial, civic, and economic relations together:

A year ago maybe more, Don started going to a neighborhood restaurant called Sisters, a man's place – spare and dirty – run by Mae and Jonnie Norwood. The name sounded good, but Mae and Jonnie were actually mother and daughter, separated by fifteen years. Sisters wasn't a fine dining place, just somebody's converted living room of an old house on Damascus Church Road, with three lightweight dirty tables and chairs bought for a couple of dollars from the recently closed up Chinese place called House of Chow. (118)

Sisters is a space of economic reinvention for Mae and Jonnie, but this reinvention rests on a pretty lie about their biological relationship, the monetization of a domestic space, and the remnants of another restaurant's failure. Nearly every domestic space and personal relationship in *No One is Coming to Save Us* is packed with such layers of refusal and reinvention. As Sylvia explains to JJ, "Whatever you see going on with the very poor is just a few years away for everybody else. People think they outrun it in their little suburbs. You don't outrun nothing for long" (87). With this pronouncement, Sylvia both accedes to the limitations of her own youthful homemaking – "even then she was grown enough to know she was only buying them all a few years' time" (87) – and warns JJ of the hollowness of his own dreams for his new home. At the end of their conversation JJ admits, "I've got nowhere else. This is it, Mrs. Sylvia." Sylvia understands what Watt renders again and again: "the inevitability that only appeared to be a choice" (102).

Watts has received praise for her empathetic characterization, but to understand her empathy as a matter of doling out redemption to even her most difficult characters would be a mistake. Watts writes exasperation

and anger with an acute sense of its often-misdirected expression. In the first of several sections comprised of message board posts on Mommies2B.com, Ava writes, "I AM SO TIRED OF HEARING PEOPLE'S SUCCESS STORIES! LOL. They don't help me" (108), which sets off an argument between other users over the appropriate tone of their online conversation. These women, brought together by their desire to conceive and give birth, work through their anger and frustrations with each other, building the kind of messy intimacy Ava awakens to elsewhere in the novel in her off-line life. Like these other women, Ava views her body as an obstacle to her happiness, undergoing fertility treatments and suffering physical pain and changes in appearance in the hopes of something they all fear will never come. "No wonder they made horror movies about damp basements," Ava thinks, "where the disgraced items of everyday life moldered, not in the bowels, though she could see that metaphor easily, but in the ovaries waiting to reemerge damp and changed" (107). *No One is Coming to Save Us* churns through thoughts like these, neither rejecting them outright nor acceding to the hopelessness they suggest.

Tying together the novel's meditations on past and present, domestic and public spaces, desire and despair is the impending closure of another Pinewood restaurant, Simmy's, a relic of the town's segregated not-too-distant past. The site of the town's most public desegregation struggles, Simmy's closure brings out a final meditation on change from the novel's collective narrator: "We drive through town, glance over at the empty building, look for the sign we think we remember seeing our whole lives" (323). The fate of Simmy's is, like the other long-waged battles in the novel, ultimately not reducible to a clear sense of right and wrong. As this relic of Jim Crow segregation comes down, Watts's characters are left without a clear way forward.

No One is Coming to Save Us maps personal disappointments, violations, and injury into the broader scope of economic and social struggle that, like the person standing across from you, moves outside of your control. It nurtures the intimacy of spaces that are as full of the needs of others as they are of our own. If no one is coming to save Watts's characters, it's because they are already there to save themselves. ■



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THREE-TIME 2018 AAUW AWARD WINNER

CAROLE BOSTON WEATHERFORD received her third American Association of University Women Award for Young People's Literature for *Schomburg: The Man Who Built a Library* (Candlewick, 2017). The story is inspired by Arturo Schomburg, a law clerk who dedicated his life to collecting books, letters, music, and art that chronicled the Black history of the diaspora and to illuminating the achievements of people of African descent through the ages. He brought his substantial collection to the New York Public Library, where he created and curated a collection that was the cornerstone of a new Negro Division, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture

Weatherford received the North Carolina Award for Literature in 2010. She holds an MA in publications design from University of Baltimore and an MFA in creative writing from UNC Greensboro. She is a Professor of English at Fayetteville State University in North Carolina. Read a children's story by her in *NCLR* 2006. ■

ABOVE Carole Boston Weatherford accepting the AAUW Young People's Literature Award, Greenville, NC, 26 Oct. 2018

THE STRUCTURE OF HOPE IN SPECULATIVE (AND WAR) FICTION

a review by *Helen Stead*

Michele Tracy Berger. *Reenu-You*. Astoria: Book Smugglers Publishing, 2017.

Jason Mott. *The Crossing: A Novel*. New York: Park Row Books, 2018.

HELEN STEAD earned her PhD in Creative Writing from the University of Tennessee. She teaches in the English Department at ECU, where she serves as an assistant editor of *NCLR*.

MICHELE TRACY BERGER has had winning entries in the Carolina Woman Magazine Writing Contest, the Science Fiction Poetry Association's Poetry Contest, and the Winston-Salem Writers' Contest. Her fiction work has appeared in *UnCommon Origins: A Collection of Gods, Monsters, Nature and Science* (Flying Monkey Press, 2016) and *You Don't Say: Stories in the Second Person* (Ink Monkey Press, 2012). Even though her main love is science fiction, she has also published creative nonfiction and poetry. She was one of the 2016-2017 UNC Chapel Hill Faculty Mentoring Award winners. She was a columnist for *The Chapel Hill News* from 2012 to 2014. She currently lives in Pittsboro, NC.

Like most apocalyptic work, speculative fiction attempts to understand a disordered world: Elizabeth K. Rosen in *Apocalyptic Transformation*, discusses how “the apocalyptic impulse is, in effect, a sense-making one,” as it not only pushes further than conspiracy or chaos theories, but it also “is an organizing structure that can create a moral and physical order while also holding out the possibility of social criticism that might lead to a reorientation in the midst of a bewildering historical moment.”¹ This reorientation of a disordered, chaotic world is investigated by both Michele Tracy Berger in *Reenu-You* and Jason Mott in *The Crossing* using the organizing structure of hope: Berger unravels racial invisibility and politicized beauty, and her characters find home in surrogate motherhood, and Mott examines the consumption of war memories as a way to keep love. Both of these authors use female protagonists, experimental formats, and viruses in their narratives.

The title of **Michele Tracy Berger's** novella, *Reenu-You*, refers to a hair relaxer, advertised as organic and so-yummy-you-can-taste-it – sounds great, right? Unfortunately for users, the beauty product contains a virus presenting as unique (green and purple) facial lesions, nausea, and vomiting. Throughout the novella, black and Latino women are afflicted by this disfiguring and eerie condition, which is rapidly mutating and spreading, and neither medical personnel nor

government officials seem to be able to help.

Berger's main narrator is Kat, a mid-twenties, black ski instructor living in Aspen, who has come to New York to pack up her deceased mother's things. Kat's rash erupts two days after using the product, and she is unnerved by how familiar the rash feels on her skin: “like the quarter of an inch-long mole I have on my left leg, or the pebbled dark scar on my left hand that I got from a roller-skating accident. Like it belonged there with all the other markings on my body” (13). These disc-like markings continue to bloom all over her face as the virus progresses.

While Kat's narration is the main drive of the novella, Constanica, a nineteen-year-old Puerto Rican woman, whose own mother died when she was young and who is a bit rough around the edges, acts as a secondary narrator. She is a natural counter for Kat, as she is able to do what Kat cannot: freely express herself, “leaking aggression out of [her] pores” (60). Constanica has also lived her entire life around black and Latino women, while Kat often feels out of place wherever she is. When Constanica tries the product, she thinks its warmth is “like your mother tucking you in and giving you a kiss,” but then as it develops on her hair, she gets this “strange feeling, like that white goo was sinking into [her], going through [her] dark, kinky hair into [her] scalp, hunting for the core of [her]” (26).

¹ Elizabeth K. Rosen, *Apocalyptic Transformation: Apocalypse and the Postmodern Imagination* (Lexington, 2008) xiii.

Kat and Constancia converge at the Department of Health's Contagious Diseases, where women of color pile in to find out their fates, all with strange symptoms in addition to the disfiguring rash. Doctors in the clinic act like institutionalized robots, and the women feel unheard, invisible to those in power – this is treated as the norm for black and Latino women in this scene and opens up the possibility for a strong critique of racial invisibility prevalent in medical and government institutions. But this rash forces the women to be visible – an intriguing reversal.

After hours of waiting, most of the women leave to call loved ones while Kat, Constancia, and three other women – Sandra, Doris, and Pearlle – are left in the waiting room. These five women have no one to update, and they feel an inexplicable bond, as if the virus wills them together. Just as there are five women, Kat describes the eruptions on her face as discs “arranged in a pattern of five” (13). Pearlle invites the women back to her house wait for answers; it is an unusual offer, but they are all strangely drawn to each other because they “clicked somehow” (58). Berger weaves in this peculiar bond, creating delicious tension and drawing attention to the need of the virus for its hosts to create a symbiotic relationship with other hosts. This host/alien relationship that highlights the role of surrogate motherhood is reminiscent of Octavia Butler's “Bloodchild”² – these women become psychologically entwined through the virus and, like



PHOTOGRAPH BY COCO KEAM; COURTESY OF UNC-TV PUBLIC MEDIA NORTH CAROLINA

Gan and T'Gatoi, form dependent physical links with one another.

Kat and Constancia's narratives are interspersed with vignettes from the KrystalaVox Corporation (Reenu-You's head company), news stories, and even the CIA that piece together a broader response to the outbreak. These vignettes question whether the virus in *Reenu-You* was an accidental contamination, setting up a larger tension in the novella and introducing the possibility of racial targeting. However, this speculation is not directly addressed in the main narrative, and the virus spreads to those who did not use the product, regardless of their

gender or race, which complicates a racial motivation for contamination of Reenu-You. Berger also starts critiquing politicized beauty, when over the radio, a black leader in Brooklyn says, “black women are ‘chemical prisoners of the hair relaxing industry’” (144); and again, when Constancia is critical of her own “kinky” hair, referring to it as “nappy,” she is compelled to straighten it: “It’s just not something you tell, it’s something you do” (25) – but this warrants a deeper look and more development than Berger provides in her novella.

As the novella closes, Berger leaves much unsaid, the journey

² Find this story in Octavia Butler, *Bloodchild and Other Stories* (Four Walls Eight Windows, 1995; rpt. *Seven Stories*, 2005).

lingers, and many questions about the social critiques are still at play. And while saying less is always better than overwriting, here it feels like itching around the scab of politicized beauty and racial invisibility, when it could be ripped off with more space to develop these ideas. But Berger has crafted unique and compelling voices that carry the reader through this chaotic, apocalyptic world, using raw writing bursting with imagery. And there is beauty in how these women become mothers to one another, and their ties are so powerful that they are grateful in spite of the virus that will kill them. In this strange storyline where there should be no hope, there is warmth and home and love. Berger offers the structure of motherhood to make sense of this chaotic world. She provides hope.

While **Jason Mott's** *The Crossing* dances in the speculative fiction realm with a virus called "The Disease" that is killing older generations in their sleep, this narrative thread isn't assimilated well within the main storyline and has been mostly relegated to vignettes in between chapters. The truth is, this story wants much more to be a war novel that explores the consumption of memory during an apocalyptic war than one about a virus ravaging the United States.

The backdrop of this narrative is that The Disease has been going on for ten years and a global

war for five of these years. The young are being conscripted into and dying for an older generation's war. Virginia, as narrator, unloads the context of the world in the first chapter in a tone that doesn't gel with the rest of the novel. However, the bleak situation of humanity becomes increasingly clear as she narrates the action in subsequent chapters. Virginia and Tommy escape the draft by journeying to Cape Canaveral to witness the probe launch to Europa, Jupiter's moon, something that their deceased father wrote about in his letters to them. Their foster father, Gannon, a police officer, hunts them throughout the narrative, creating another line of tension, but it is not clear what's at stake for Gannon, resulting in his character feeling underdeveloped. The twins stick to the roads, evading law enforcement and rogue groups of embers, and the whole sense of the novel echoes Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*.

Even though the setup of The Disease in combination with the ongoing war helps create a compelling apocalyptic situation, Virginia and Tommy's story is so acutely focused on the war that the vignettes titled "Elsewhere," which discover how the disease is invading increasingly younger generations, appear disconnected and forced despite the passages' eloquent and lyrical writing. And like typical teenagers, Virginia and Tommy aren't worried about

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getting old, especially when the more imminent threat of war presses on their minds. It is for this reason, and the focus on memory and war, that this book is much more a war novel than a speculative one.

Virginia and Tommy have opposite abilities with memory – Virginia can recall absolutely everything she has seen, read, or heard, while Tommy has difficulty retaining memories and can only recall outlines of things. He tries to hold onto the sound of Maggie's singing (Maggie is an old opera singer who harbors the twins for an evening): "Tommy closed his hand into a fist and rubbed his thumb against his forefinger, concentrating, concentrating so hard it hurt. But still Maggie's voice slipped away and

JASON MOTT earned his BFA in Fiction and his MFA in Poetry from UNC Wilmington. His debut novel, *The Returned* (MIRA, 2013), was a *New York Times* Bestseller and was adapted as a television series under the title *Resurrection*. He has also published another novel, *The Wonder of All Things* (MIRA, 2014), and two poetry collections, *We Call This Thing Between Us Love* (Main Street Rag, 2009) and "... *hide behind me* ..." (Main Street Rag, 2011). He was nominated for a 2009 Pushcart Prize. Read an interview with Mott in the 2019 print issue of *NCLR*. He currently lives in southeastern North Carolina.

ABOVE Jason Mott on UNC-TV's *North Carolina Bookwatch*, 24 Jan., 2014

no matter how tightly he clutched at it with his mind, the light that she had lit inside of him grew dimmer and dimmer, second by second. And then the light went out, never to burn in his mind again” (103). Tommy’s tragic inability to keep any memories is foiled by Virginia, who records every detail and calls her stored memories “the memory gospel” because of its unwavering perfect power.

In war literature, authors frequently investigate memory to understand how traumatic experiences are relived or to make sense of war. Most of these interpretations of the consumption of war memories are negative. For example, in Tim O’Brien’s *The Things They Carried*, Lieutenant Jimmy Cross’s memories are consumed through the use of sensory detail and a repetitive narrative structure, which reveal more and more about the trauma as the story is retold. Holding a pebble she gave him under his tongue, Cross thinks about Martha. He feels responsible because “he had loved Martha more than his men, and as a consequence Lavender was now dead, and this was something he would have to carry like a stone in his stomach for the rest of the war.”³ The pebble in Cross’s mouth acts as the sensory input that occurs during the formation of the memory, and now the weight of it is consumed like a stone, and he is unable to forget

or pass the stone.⁴ In the narrative, the event of Lavender’s death is repeated eight times – this repetitive structure of the happenings around the event, told out of sequence, over again, is not only a symptom of postmodernism, but it gives the sense that the memory is being actively relived, with new data added at each recall. Cross is unable, and perhaps unwilling, to let go of these memories, and so they haunt him.

Another example is amplified in *Gravity’s Rainbow* when Thomas Pynchon explores the ritualized consumption of memories to reveal the guilt and absurdity of war. The novel pushes beyond bedlam when Katje performs the ritual of defecation in Brigadier Pudding’s mouth: “the stink of shit floods his nose . . . it is the smell of Passchendaele, of the Salient. Mixed with the mud, and the putrefaction of corpses . . . spasms in his throat continue. The pain is terrible.” Even though it is painful, Pudding relishes this violence done to him, which Paul Fussell argues is a manifestation of “‘tasting’ and ‘devouring’ . . . his memories of the Great War.”⁵ But Pudding has to repeat this ritual, as the relief is only temporary, and his need to consume Katje’s defecation symbolizes his need of physical connection to those memories.

In contrast, Mott investigates holding onto traumatic war

memories, not to do violence to Virginia, but to set her free. He intricately weaves in Virginia’s “memory gospel” throughout the novel, like the unraveling of Lavender’s death, reflecting her inability to escape her memories – this at first is a burden to her, the knower of all things, but then as she becomes responsible to consume all the memories of those that remain, of their traumas, of the war, hope seeps in, the same kind of hope mingled with devastation that the twins’ father talked about as “[a] horror-beauty of a world where planes leveled buildings and lightning became water at moonrise” (40). It is in this place that Virginia is “the world’s keeper. But [she is], above all else, [her] brother’s keeper. Tommy is always alive. That’s what memory is. That’s what love is” (329). This emphasis on the value of remembering all the trauma of war and life in order to hold onto a glimmering moment is a distinctive approach to characters recalling war memories. The novel’s stunning view of the consumption of the terror and the lovely is what makes Mott’s exploration of war memories unique, that “the future was always meant to be a promise, not a threat,” and while we may not be able to forget what is horrid and dark, recalling the terror can keep love alive – a hope the reader needs in a broken world. ■

³ Tim O’Brien, *The Things They Carried* (Houghton Mifflin, 1990) 12, 16 (emphasis added).

⁴ Susan Nalbantian, *Memory in Literature: From Rousseau to Neuroscience* (Palgrave & Macmillan, 2003).

⁵ Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity’s Rainbow* 1973 (Penguin Books, 2006) 239; Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford UP, 1975) 333.

Features and Finalists Redux

by Margaret D. Bauer, Editor

Our online Flashbacks section grows longer every year, since we publish in this section reviews of books by and about writers who have appeared in our pages. And we are proud that so many of the state's literary prize winners have shared their writing in *NCLR*. We are happy to share the news of their 2018 awards. Inevitably, a few of the finalists for the Applewhite Poetry Prize have had poems make it to the publication round of the competition in years past. We are pleased to find poets submitting year after year. And we are grateful to James Applewhite, who allows us to use his name for this prize, for sending us his new poems for our issues every year. Some of his *NCLR* poems have found their way into his new poetry collection, reviewed here along with the newest collection by his (and our) dear friend Betty Adcock. Note that A.R. Ammons, who sent poems for every issue published by founding editor Alex Albright, is also featured here, within a review of Robert West's ambitious and already well-lauded two-volume collection of Ammons's *The Complete Poems*.

In Flashbacks, too, we include content that revisits past themes; for example, Miriam Herin's 2018 Doris Betts Fiction Prize story hearkening back to our [2015](#) issue global theme, and Barbara Bennett's essay examining the adaptation of Daniel Wallace's *Big Fish* from book to film, as well as touching on the newer musical adaptation. This essay expands the content of our [2012](#) issue featuring North Carolina literature into film – for *NCLR* does claim Daniel Wallace as a North Carolina writer, even if *Big Fish* is set in his home state of Alabama. This author has called North Carolina home for many years now, and admirably serves the Old North State by educating new North Carolina writers at UNC Chapel Hill.

Several reviews of Appalachia-set novels also hearken back to one of our most popular issues: the [2010](#) issue featuring North Carolina Appalachian writers. One of the reasons that issue is so popular is its opening with a selection from *The Land Breakers* by John Ehle, followed by an essay on this inspiring North Carolina writer by his protegee-turned-friend, Terry Roberts. After John Ehle's passing last spring, Terry sent me the lovely tribute to his mentor that you will find in this section. To honor this literary icon, whom, I will admit, I had not heard of before editing *NCLR* – and whose novels once read are unforgettable – I proposed to Terry and to Kevin Watson of Press 53 a new *NCLR* prize named for John Ehle, which will go to the author of the best content on a North Carolina writer whose work has been neglected by literary scholars of Southern literature. The first Ehle Prize, \$250 donated by Press 53, will be awarded to the author of one of the essays forthcoming in the 2019 print issue, so be sure to subscribe to ensure that you have the opportunity to read about a writer you've likely not heard about or known much about before. ■



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FROM OMMATEUM TO BOSH AND FLAPDOODLE

a review by Eric Walker

Robert M. West, Editor. *The Complete Poems of A.R. Ammons*, 2 volumes. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2017.

ERIC WALKER, a North Carolina native, is Professor of English and University Distinguished Teaching Professor at Florida State University. He has taught classes at Florida State University since 1984 and specializes in 18th and 19th century British literature. His current research focuses on adoption studies for a book on Romanticism and adoption. His book *Marriage, Writing, and Romanticism: Wordsworth and Austen After War* (Stanford University Press, 2009) was awarded the 2009 SAMLA Studies Book Award.

ROBERT M. WEST's poems, essays, and book reviews have appeared in *Southern Poetry Review*, *Tar River Poetry*, *Pembroke Magazine*, *Appalachian Journal*, *Asheville Poetry Review*, *Carolina Quarterly*, *Southern Literary Journal*, *Southern Cultures*, *Poetry*, and *NCLR*. He has also published two poetry chapbooks, *Out of Hand* (Scienter Press, 2007) and *Convalescent* (Finishing Line Press, 2011). He has an MA and PhD in English and Comparative Literature from UNC Chapel Hill and a BA in English from Wake Forest University. He is a Professor of English at Mississippi State University, where he is an Associate Editor for *Mississippi Quarterly*.

The richly welcomed publication of the capacious two-volume *Complete Poems* by A.R. Ammons is a landmark moment in the history of twentieth-century American literature. Just as histories of poetry in the first half of the century headline the careers of Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams, and T.S. Eliot, so the history of American poetry in the second half of the century now takes its primary bearings from the lifetime achievements of three poets born in the 1920s: Adrienne Rich, John Ashbery, and Archie Randolph Ammons, the lone Southern figure on the billboard. The lives and works of all three poets now belong to the curatorial engines of biographies and collected editions. In the wake of his death in 2017, Ashbery's career is being consolidated in collected volumes published by the Library of America. We have the proudly independent publisher W.W. Norton to thank, not only for serving as the longtime publisher of both Rich, who died in 2012, and Ammons, who died in 2001, but also for the serious investment in posthumous collected editions of both poets, Rich in 2016 and now Ammons in 2017, with these two splendid volumes.

Roger Gilbert's forthcoming biography of Ammons will tell the tale of the farm boy from Whiteville in Columbus County, NC, who, via the wartime Navy, Wake Forest College, Berkeley, Cape Hatteras, and long years on the Jersey shore, wound up writing and teaching in upstate New York for the second half of his life, his two dozen books of

poetry from the mid-'60s onward garnering most of the top-tier laurels in the catalogue: two National Book Awards, a Bollingen Prize, a National Book Critics Circle Award, the Wallace Stevens Award from the Academy of American Poets, the Robert Frost Medal from the Poetry Society of America, the Ruth Lilly Prize, a Guggenheim fellowship, and a MacArthur "Genius" Award. With Reynolds Price, Ammons was the most prominent North Carolina writer on the national stage from the 1960s to the end of the century – Price an Anglophile Orange and Warren County homeboy, Ammons a Yankee expat who in 1966 bailed out after three months from his one attempt at a fellowship year in Europe, where, homesick, he notes in a journal that "I feel here especially that I must return to my home state."¹ But that return never happened except for intermittent visits, including a guest year at Wake Forest in 1974–75. In the late long poem *Glare* (1997), Ammons surveys this geography of self:

I reject the North because it is not

my native ground, and I reject the
South because it rejected me, and I

reject European clutterment because
we fought to put that ocean between

us: I identify with no sort or kind.

In the same poem, however, another section characteristically launches itself from native ground less frosty than Ithaca, NY: "well, it's true, I'm from North / Carolina where there's precious little

A.R. AMMONS has been featured often in *NCLR* since its inception when Ammons served as "Staff Poet" and provided original poems for the first five issues. Read Founding Editor Alex Albright's interview with Ammons in the premiere (1992) issue and essays on Ammons in the 1995 and 2006 issues.

¹ Ammons's journal is in the A.R. Ammons Papers, Reid and Susan Overcash Literary Collection, East Carolina University Joyner Library, Manuscript Collection.



/ ice skating.” Vividly rendered in numerous lifetime poems and passages recalling hardscrabble farm life in southeastern North Carolina from the late 1920s through the early years of the second world war, the depression-era North Carolina of Archie Ammons could not anticipate, among many other incongruous things in the new century, a professional hockey team in steamy Raleigh or a billboard on I-95 touting Whiteville, surrounded now by industrial hog-farming, as a retirement destination.

One of the many enabling gifts of *The Complete Poems* is to witness this geography of selfhood play out across the full archive of the published poetry, assembled chronologically from the obscure debut volume *Ommateum* in 1955 to the posthumous *Bosh and Flapdoodle* in 2005. Before returning to the primary theme of Ammons and North Carolina, let me pause to praise the editor of these volumes, Robert M. West, a Professor of English at Mississippi State University who was trained to high

standards of textual and editorial scholarship in the PhD program at UNC Chapel Hill. West’s exemplary labors have demanded a mastery of superabundant materials: the huge publication record, including not only the two dozen books but a vast set of periodical publications; an extensive archive of unpublished materials at Cornell University, including manuscripts and proof copies; and the smaller but significant archive of manuscripts, proofs, and journals at East Carolina University. It is important to note that the banner title of these volumes, *The Complete Poems*, signifies only published poems; there remains a significant amount of unpublished material in the archives, although dwarfed by the scale of the published work collected here in its full majesty.

Following Ammons’s own method when he published several “collected” and “selected” volumes during his lifetime, West presents the poetry in a chronological (rather than thematic) order – here, the order of book publication, which is the most practical way to supply an overall baseline of compositional order. Although the organizational method of book chronology is a reliable general guide to the long arc of Ammons’s compositional career, it is not unfaithfully reliable, especially with later collections of lyrics such as *Brink Road*, published in 1996, which includes poems written as early as 1965. To supplement the superstructure of book order, West very helpfully supplies dates of composition (when available in the archives) and first publication (often in periodicals) after each poem. In order not to publish any poem twice,

West is forced to tie himself in a few editorial knots when navigating the books in which Ammons himself collected or selected his own work: one section is titled “Previously Uncollected Poems from *Collected Poems 1951–1971* (1972),” a heading that only a textual editor could love.

The bonus of the book-order method is that these volumes allow us to study how Ammons built individual books of poetry, not only the famous longer “tape” poems in single volumes – *Tape for the Turn of the Year* (1967), *Sphere* (1973), and *Glare* (1993) – but also the many lyric collections. West’s edition makes an especially important contribution to this topic in the way he presents the vexed volume *The Snow Poems*, published in 1977. The bibliographical question attending *The Snow Poems* is whether the book is a collection of 120 discrete poems (a “Table of Contents” in the 1977 volume lists 120 titles) or a single long poem. West takes his editorial cue from several later statements by Ammons and presents *The Snow Poems* as one long poem of 7,783 numbered lines, with 120 section titles. This question of form matters because *The Snow Poems* is the book about which Ammons readers still divide, as Andrew Epstein explains in his fine new book chapter on Ammons: “*The Snow Poems* was greeted with disbelief and hostility by many of Ammons’s most supportive readers, and threatened to derail his career just as it reached its apex with the great success of *Sphere*.”² West’s presentation of the poem will facilitate the best new critical work by skilled readers such as Epstein, whose chapter

foregrounds *The Snow Poems* as “by far his most formally experimental” poem to argue “the important but overlooked connections between his work and the *New American Poetry* and other strains of the postwar avant-garde” (112).

Four of the 120 titled sections of *The Snow Poems* are included in an important selected volume of Ammons’s work, *The North Carolina Poems*, edited by Alex Albright (recently retired from the faculty at East Carolina University) and published in a first edition in 1994 and in an expanded edition in 2010.³ Lines from the section “I’m the Type” supply a flavor of these verses:

REDNECK FARM BOY WRITE GOOD
 (doesn’t sell much)
 WRITE VERY GOOD
 (but misses
 farm, etc., also other rednecks)
 MAKE NO MONEY
 BUT
 WRITE NICE
 (tries hard)
 (misses the mules and cows,
 hogs and chickens, misses
 the rain making little
 rivers, well-figured with
 tributaries, through the
 sand yard)

My chief reservation about West’s edition of *The Complete Poems* is the failure to credit fully *The North Carolina Poems* volume. In order to locate poems not only in their first book publication but in their places in a series of “selected poems” volumes published by Ammons, West helpfully includes an endnote headed “Sequences of the Selected Poems” (in vol. 2, 1005-07), which lists the contents of four of the five lifetime selected volumes: *Selected Poems* (1968), *The Selected Poems 1951–1977* (1977), *Selected Longer Poems* (1980), and *The Selected Poems: Expanded Edition* (1986). Simply following his own method, there is plenty of room for West to have included exactly here the 1994 contents of the fifth lifetime selected volume, *The North Carolina Poems*, which otherwise only receives oblique reference in an endnote to three poems in *Brink Road* (1996), buried deep on page 968 of volume two. Here is West’s note: these three poems “had in fact first been collected in *The North Carolina Poems*, a selection of Ammons’s poems assembled and edited (with

the poet’s blessing) by Alex Albright, and published by North Carolina Wesleyan Press in 1994.” By any reckoning, *The North Carolina Poems* is a selection published in the poet’s lifetime, under his name and his copyright and with his knowledge (whatever else West’s term “blessing” signifies). Students will be confused by the fact that the list of “Books by A.R. Ammons” at the front of the Norton tribute collection *Considering the Radiance* includes *The North Carolina Poems*.⁴ If the grounds for exclusion from the contents list are that Albright selected the poems and passages and arranged the sequence, I would point out that such collaborative agency is not an exception in the Ammons canon. As Ammons himself registers by way of a “blessing,” his Cornell colleague Jerald Bullis selected and sequenced, from a larger set of unpublished materials, the verses that constitute the long poem “The Ridge Farm,” published in *Sumerian Vistas* in 1987. To reduce *The North Carolina Poems* to a fleeting shadow is, in my estimation, a lamentable shortcoming of *The Complete Poems*, which disables using the contents of that authorized selection as an introductory guide to Ammons as a North Carolina poet. Such a (missing) tool might have invited certain readers to explore more of the superabundant riches on offer throughout the skillfully curated *The Complete Poems*.

As Albright himself would be the first to acknowledge, *The Complete Poems* offers a map of Ammons as a North Carolina writer that extends far beyond the boundaries of *The North Carolina Poems*. In that book’s new edition in 2010, Albright was able to add poems from the three post-1993 books, *Brink Road* (1996), *Glare* (1997), and the posthumous *Bosh and Flapdoodle* (2005). Re-reading *Glare*, Ammons’s final long “tape” poem, I was struck by how much material is inflected in a North Carolina idiom. Albright includes two of *Glare*’s 117 sections: “when I was young under the apple” (section 7), which features a second-grade lice episode; and “Uncle John was a cap’m at the beach back when” (section 104), which describes a day of fishing labor as honored toil that failed to hook him:

I went to

 grammar school and plowed the fucking clods
 instead, a serious person, little given to

 human life

³ A.R. Ammons, *The North Carolina Poems*, ed. Alex Albright (North Carolina Wesleyan Press, 1994); *The North Carolina Poems: A New Edition*, ed. Alex Albright (Broadstone, 2010).

⁴ David Burak and Roger Gilbert, eds. *Considering the Radiance: Essays on the Poetry of A.R. Ammons* (Norton, 2005).

Beyond these two selections, *Glare* also includes in section fourteen a long tale about Sam Elliott and his family, “a destitute widower” who

... lived in a

shack on our farm for a time with his children . . .

... we had nothing: they had less

In section 54, we hear the four stanzas of the song “my father used to sing” of “old molly hare / whacha doin there,” and in section 74 we catch more of his voice:

... my father used to say

with a cunning air “if the dog hadn’t stopped to shit, he’d have cotched the rabbit”

my father when he was being winky-wise liked to say *cotched* . . .

Section 63 provides a snapshot of how

sixty years ago, I used to hear every Sunday that Jesus was coming: the

preacher wasn’t specific but said it could be any hour or minute . . .

In Section 82, childhood religion is still institutional (“when I was ten about I was called up // to the altar of the Pentecostal Fire-Baptized / Holiness Church to be saved”), but in Section 88 Ammons stages his collision with doctrine domestically, in a marvelous tableau of himself and his two sisters in the kitchen “dancing and singing and speaking / in tongues like the big old women at Sunday // meeting.” His mother shuts down that hullabaloo with the warning that “mocking the Holy Ghost was an unpardonable // sin.” In Section 53, it is his grandmother (“this is my / grandmother poem”) who shuts down a private hullabaloo: “so here I am fist-diddling in the / poot-shanty when my grandmother // appears at the door – surprise!”

But I leave these Columbus County matters to the biographers. I want to turn instead to an important

COURTESY OF THE AMMONS ESTATE AND THE OVERCASH-WRIGHT LITERARY COLLECTION, A.R. AMMONS PAPERS (COLLECTION #1096), ECU JOYNER LIBRARY SPECIAL COLLECTIONS



way in which *The Complete Poems* also facilitates the study of Ammons as a North Carolina writer through a very different lens, at the other end of the state: his connection to the “Black Mountain” school of poetry associated with the latter years of Black Mountain College, near Asheville. Much good criticism is currently mapping Ammons among the various postwar tribes of the New American Poetry (the title of a groundbreaking poetry anthology published in 1960), including the Beats, the New York School, and the poets associated with Black Mountain, such as Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, Denise Levertov, and Robert Duncan.⁵ Although Ammons’s declaration in *Glare* that “I identify with no sort or kind” is an important truth about his career and his very independent sense of vocation, another truth well-documented in *The Complete Poems* is that he kept close watch on his contemporaries and produced a body of work that offers complex filiations with many of these peers. In the long poem “Summer Place,” written in 1975 and published in *The Hudson Review* in 1977 (but not collected in book form until *Brink Road* in 1996), Ammons casts an eye on how he might travel “in the radiantly inaccessible regions with Ashbery” and another eye on “Adrienne,” who “is going to give me the sullen, if understanding and / patient, eye.” This section of the poem offers additional shout-outs to his contemporaries James Merrill, W.S. Merwin, Galway Kinnell, Richard Howard, and John Hollander. But the contemporary both with and against whom

ABOVE *Untitled* (watercolor on paper and foam core, 23.5x17.5) by A.R. Ammons

⁵ Donald Allen, ed. *The New American Poetry* (Grove, 1960).

Ammons worked most significantly in the crucial early years of the 1960s was Denise Levertov, who appears in “Summer Place” in 1975 as “Denise,” who “is off there by herself, now: // . . . how I wish I / would hear from *her!*” A native of Britain who emigrated after the war, Levertov began publishing again in the *Black Mountain Review* in the mid-1950s, and her third book of poetry, *Overland to the Islands*, was published in 1958 by the important North Carolina writer and literary entrepreneur Jonathan Williams, whom Ammons would soon meet. There is already a useful preliminary study of Ammons, Levertov, and Williams by Kevin McGuirk in the *Chicago Review* in 2012, and Gilbert’s biography will supply authoritative information on these connections.⁶ My point in passing is simply this: the study of Ammons and North Carolina literary culture is far from limited to the rich primary topics rooted in Columbus County.

As a major figure, Ammons already belongs to the handbooks and guides. Capsule accounts typically point to Emerson and Whitman as the key nineteenth-century antecedents and often foreground William Carlos Williams as an immediate forerunner. There is good evidence on this front that also includes the biographical, such as a journal account of a day in June 1960 when Ammons took an ill and aging Williams on a car ride around his beloved Paterson, NJ, precincts.⁷ But the full landscape of *The Complete Poems* now enables the best criticism

to tend more complexly to the boxes and labels of partial truths that Ammons himself wrestled with throughout his career, such as “nature poet” or – wonder of wonders – a scientifically literate poet. In the late *Glare*, the poet who is clearly most on his mind is not Williams or Ashbery or Rich but Wallace Stevens, in multiple passages scattered throughout that last long poem (and where the insurance executive is often invoked, with complicated Southern charm, as “Mr. Stevens”). One example may suffice: “some-day / I’m going to write on how Stevens / makes his be buzz: I am: scam.” With signature style, Ammons here salutes one of the supreme poets of mind by nailing Stevens’s signature syntax with a (serious) insect pun that discharges in tribute its own final rhyming buzz of a form of the verb “to be.”

The Complete Poems includes an extensive new introductory essay by Helen Vendler (printed in full in both volumes), who was with Harold Bloom one of the two foremost champions of Ammons’s poetry during his career. We can forgive Vendler for misplacing the collegiate Ammons at Wake Forest University instead of a hundred miles east at Wake Forest College, especially since Ammons’s collaborator, friend, and editor David Lehman fumbles the same fact in his important *Paris Review* interview with Ammons. The Pulitzer-winning novelist Robert Olen Butler is fond of zeroing in on the “white-hot center” that motivates writers at their best.⁸ In her introduction, Vendler singles

out an epiphany during Ammons’s Navy months in the Pacific, when, perched on the bow of a ship, he gazed on the ever-shifting boundary of sea and land, like Stephen Dedalus on Dublin Bay in Joyce’s *Portrait*: “But it was the line inscribed across the variable land mass . . . that hypnotized me. The whole world changed as a result of an interior illumination” (Set 95). I tend to gravitate to what Ammons singled out as “the most powerful image of my emotional life”: “It was when my little brother, who was two and half years younger than I, died at eighteen months. My mother some days later found his footprint in the yard and tried to build something over it to keep the wind from blowing it away. That’s the most powerful image I’ve ever known” (Set 71). The poetry of Archie Ammons takes me to many places, but especially to Bladen County, just up the road from Whiteville, where my mother was born a decade before Ammons on a hot July day in the downstairs dining room, the coolest room in the house. The story I grew up with is that my grandfather, dead long before me, clomped around Clarkton in a wagon, handing out cantaloupes in celebration. As Ammons excavates such roots and their memories in “Easter Morning,” the magnificent lyric about his dead brother, such soil “is life nearest to life which is / life lost.” For Archie Randolph Ammons, what survives is the glorious fruit of *The Complete Poems*, a rich field carefully and devotedly tended now by Robert West. ■

⁶ Kevin McGuirk, “Ammons in Correspondence,” *Chicago Review* 57.1–2 (2012): 167–72.

⁷ A.R. Ammons, “A Visit with WCW,” *Chicago Review* 57.1–2 (2012): 140–41.

⁸ Zofia Burr Ammons, ed. *Set in Motion: Essays, Interviews, & Dialogues*, (U of Michigan P, 1996) 86, subsequently cited parenthetically; Robert Olen Butler, *From Where You Dream: The Process of Writing Fiction* (Grove, 2005) 12.



Script in Flight (oil on canvas, 24x24) by Susan Hong-Sammons

BY JAMES APPLEWHITE

An Abandoned Pasture

Crows fly slow, low over
 this landscape, writing their wings
 against light, anticipating night.
 Crows know November, cawing
 cawing like heartbreak and clotting
 like blots in eyesight. Alighting
 in the pasture and on a dying tree
 they spell Remember. Then looming
 again over the farther homestead
 they force my eyes, down to its form
 in the ground. Like graves without
 stones, these shadows of bygone times
 seem cast by the dead apple tree.
 They spell it out for me by their
 forlornness of tone, as if one or
 other of these were mourning the death
 of a brother – as if this vanishing
 were a wind from the past, again
 curving the broomsedge toward evening –
 mourning this family's leaving, where
 crumpled roof tin from a vanished
 barn is written in my eye like
 the story of all endings, haunting
 and vacant. Now wind whispers
 the grasses alas. And then Remember.
 The rest is loss. Yet a piece
 of glass in the dirt seems part –
 last fragment of a broken eye sight.

SUSAN HONG-SAMMONS earned her MFA at the Pratt Institute in New York City. Her numerous honors include the 2018 Best of Show for the American Impressionist Society's Wet Paint Competition and a 2017 Portraiture Honorable Mention for the Oil Painters of America's National Juried Exhibition of Traditional Oils. The artist's work is featured in many galleries around the world, including [City Art Gallery](#) in Greenville, NC, which has hosted the James Applewhite Art Invitational since 2011. Hong-Sammons has participated in several of these invitationals, and this work was created for the [2016](#) exhibit.

Read about **JAMES APPLEWHITE** within the review of his most recent volume of poetry, up next in this issue.

A MATCHED PAIR, FOR THE AGES

a review by Michael White

**Betty Adcock. *Rough Fugue*.
Baton Rouge: Louisiana State
University Press, 2017.**

**James Applewhite. *Time
Beginnings*. Baton Rouge:
Louisiana State University
Press, 2017.**

MICHAEL WHITE is a Creative Writing Professor at UNC Wilmington. He received his BA from the University of Missouri and his PhD from the University of Utah. He has published poetry and prose in multiple magazines and anthologies, including *The Paris Review*, *The New Republic*, *The Kenyon Review*, and *The Best American Poetry*. His collections include *The Island* (Copper Canyon, 1992), *Palma Cathedral* (UP of Colorado, 1998; reviewed in *NCLR* 1999), *Re-entry* (University of North Texas Press, 2006; reviewed in *NCLR* 2007), and *Vermeer in Hell* (Persea, 2014) and he has also published a memoir, *Travels in Vermeer* (Persea, 2015; reviewed in *NCLR Online* 2016).

Betty Adcock and James Applewhite are revered poets here in North Carolina, and each of their latest books (both from Louisiana State University Press) are grand-slams, written at the height of their distinct, yet equally staggering powers. These are artists who continue to improvise boldly, even after long and glorious careers, with all the wisdom and generosity of a life well-lived. And these are collections to read until the thumb-created pages fall out.

James Applewhite's mind is in the sky; he wants us to join him there. Interested not only in "poetry painting dance and song," which he writes in "Poet Briefly in Office," but in philosophy and every science, what Applewhite's reflective manner signifies is not disengagement or aloofness in his latest book of poetry, *Time Beginnings*. There is, rather, a genuine faith in the redemptive power of poetry, and he means to wield that power for good. His work aspires to the embodiment of consciousness in all its windings, insofar as it can be captured in the weir of meter, syntax, and syllable. If it seems I'm describing an epic poet of inwardness like Wordsworth, I am. But there's a whole pantheon of poets who access the mind and heart through the ear, and this is where Applewhite belongs.

But perhaps it's not that simple. Yes, it's true that Applewhite tends to write passages like in "A Dream of the Sun," when he says, "In these ellipses of time / on an earth that is familiar as my home / my soul dreams a farther circle / as it figures the greater whole." And it's true that he can present himself

as a solitary figure, following the private impulses of consciousness. But it's important to note that Applewhite's persona seldom wanders "lonely as a cloud." The tone is gentle and intimate; the backdrop often domestic; and the mode is typically "we" or "our" rather than "I" or "mine." Marriage is either inferred or addressed in other ways, as well: Penelope and Odysseus appear, as do Adam and Eve – who appear for the first time in the poem "Afterward," whose epigraph is the last line of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*: "Through Eden took their solitary way." Well, the way might be solitary, but it is theirs – it belongs to Adam and Eve, and in the imagination of the poem, to James and Jan Applewhite.

The poet also brings other loved people and places to life in his work, including North Carolina's legendary Randall Jarrell (one of Applewhite's teachers), in the unforgettable poem "Rilke in the Mountains." I've often wondered what Jarrell might've been like in class. Applewhite puts me there by mixing Jarrell's poetic voice with his own: "I remember / his syllables falling musically precisely, / conveying us into a different country / in a century also only a part of history." There's a graceful authority here that is itself a quiet celebration.

Overall, the poetry of *Time Beginnings* is wonderfully nuanced in the mind's ear, but for full effect I think it ought to be read aloud. I don't think it's possible to completely savor Applewhite's ingenious rhymes and cadences and other sound effects without somehow *hearing* them. Another quality

PHOTOGRAPH BY ELLEN FRANKS, COURTESY OF NCLR



to savor is Applewhite's deliberate (and somewhat experimental) drift of meaning, especially over line breaks. Some sentences might not track logically – but associatively, intuitively, and musically, they *feel* exactly right. These idiosyncrasies of style do not exist merely for pleasure or even for the sake of verisimilitude. There's a kind of subjective representation of voice, of consciousness, encoded deep within the sinuous cadences of these poems, and of poets like Applewhite; and in

experiencing this representation of consciousness, the reader can hear and feel his/her own humanity as well.

There's also an obsessive quality to this art, the kind of all-in focus that enabled "Barbecue Service," a poem which has to be the finest of its type. I only mention this because, in Applewhite's world, a poem about empirical science, or a poem about Hollywood, might be focused surprisingly tightly on the given subject ("To Think of it All" and "Film History").

He's also capable of hitting a melancholy note or two, as in "A Survivor," when reflecting on his own life as an artist: "a seldom-read poet I remain." But the majesty of Applewhite's accomplishment remains undimmed. This is a book I'd take to the hospital, for instance, to read to a loved one in those hours when poetry can matter more than anything.

When **Betty Adcock** was inducted into the North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame in 2015, Applewhite penned the introduction. Speaking of Adcock's career as a largely self-taught poet who became one of the most lauded poets in the state's history, Applewhite focused especially on the "union of music and raw fact" in her work,¹ a phrase that ties in with the title of her poetry collection, *Rough Fugue*. It's worth taking a moment to address music and form in Adcock's work, for although Adcock, like Applewhite, is an utter master of form, it's also unlikely that anyone would label either a purely formalist poet.

There's a powerful narrative impulse in Adcock's poetry – very powerful for this day and age. Not only do the poems tell stories, but even the table of contents seems to tell a story of bargaining, mourning, and finally, transcendence (there are even a couple of odes toward the end). And the stories are unforgettable,

JAMES APPLEWHITE is Professor Emeritus at Duke University and the author of thirteen poetry collections, four of which received the Roanoke-Chowan Award for Poetry. His other honors include a National Endowment for the Arts Award, the Jean Stein Award in Poetry from the American Academy and Institute of the Arts and Letters, the Associated Writing Programs Contemporary Poetry Prize, the North Carolina Award in Literature, and induction into the North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame and the Fellowship of Southern Writers. His poetry is featured regularly in *NCLR*.

¹ James Applewhite, "Presentation of Betty Adcock into the Literary Hall of Fame," North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame, 12 Oct. 2014: [web](#).

as when the poet looks back on an almost mythical East Texas childhood, for instance, or when meditating on her marriage of over fifty years to the jazz musician she fell in love with at seventeen. The book's central section consists of her deeply moving *Widow Poems*.² It might be fair to read these poems – clearly the central achievement of the poet's mature work – as an extended meditation on what lasts and doesn't last. Often, as in "Vulpine," the drama centers on otherworldly encounters in the aftermath of her loss – with a fox or a butterfly, for instance – such "beauty, perhaps, / which may be holy and once only / and all we have." All of this poet's stories are so unforgettable, in fact, that her verse can seem almost artless. Adcock's poetry seems to me the perfect example of Yeats's casual admonishment in "Adam's Curse" when he says, "if it does not seem a moment's thought, / Our stitching and unstitching has been naught."³

And when Adcock uses traditional form in this remarkably varied book, it's as fresh as if she grew it in her own back yard. There are poems in rhymed quatrains and variations of blank verse, but more often the formal devices are assimilated into cascading free verse that begs to be scanned, its metrical pulse as certain as a sonnet's. And, speaking of sonnets, here is the sestet from Adcock's marvelous sonnet, "Hold":

Tenacious, tentacled, altogether determined
material spirit: bare hands of the oak tree,
fist of the thunder, little feet of the lizard, all
vying, vying – though none of these can hold,
not summer's golden sway, nor winter's play
on this: *us, dying*.

Look, I'd love to go on and on about this poem, its surreal mix of violence and tenderness, the surprise and force of alliteration, slant and internal rhymes that hold such tension in place so assuredly yet so unexpectedly. I'm also a huge fan of "Survivals," a poem about a traditional East Texas

burial ground, which reminds me a bit of Robert Frost's "Directive." There are many triumphs here, but the book's last poem has especially lingered in my mind. "Articles of Faith" is part litany, part prayer (perhaps all litanies *are* prayers?) – a mantra made of visionary moments. "Has dark a garden? What's given is complete, if only / in our unseeing," says the poet, bringing image after image, animal after animal, silence after silence back through memory and music, into a final ecstasy of song. But all of this book's pastorals, odes, and ekphrastic poems are products of an extraordinary gaze lighting up ordinary subjects. There's a particular nobility here, in the way Adcock tends always to work through affliction toward blessing – which is what Applewhite does as well, his head in the clouds, hers in the earth. This is poetry for the ages. ■



PHOTOGRAPH BY ELLEN FRANKS; COURTESY OF NCLR

² *Widow Poems* was first published by Jacar as a chapbook in 2014; some of the poems from this collection were published in *NCLR* 2017.

³ Yeats's "Adam's Curse" is from *In the Seven Woods* (Dun Emer, 1904).

BETTY ADCOCK served as writer-in-residence at Meredith College in Raleigh, NC, for two decades, held a teaching residency at Duke University, and has twice held visiting professorships in the MFA Program at NC State University. The recipient of two Pushcart Prizes, a Fellowship in Poetry from the National Endowment for the Arts, a 2002 Guggenheim Fellowship, and the North Carolina Award for Literature, the poet was inducted into the North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame in 2014. She is the author of eight poetry collections. Her poems have appeared in *NCLR* 1996, 1997, 2009, and 2017. Read an interview with her in *NCLR* 2009.



COURTESY OF JEFFERY BEAM

A FIRST HARVEST FROM NORTH CAROLINA'S JOHNNY APPLESEED

a review by Savannah
Paige Murray

Jeffery Beam and Richard Owens,
Editors. *Jonathan Williams:
The Lord of Orchards*. Westport, CT:
Prospecta Press, 2018.

SAVANNAH PAIGE MURRAY is a native of Asheville, NC. She is currently in a PhD program in Rhetoric & Writing at Virginia Tech, where her research focuses on environmental and Appalachian cultural rhetorics. She recently served as assistant editor and contributor to the 2018 Black Mountain College special edition of *Appalachian Journal*.

JEFFERY BEAM is poetry editor emeritus of *Oyster Boy Review* and a retired UNC Chapel Hill botanical librarian. His books include *Midwinter Fires* (French Broad Press, 1990), *The New Beautiful Tendons: Collected Queer Poems 1969–2012* (Triton Books, 2012), and *The Broken Flower: Poems* (Skysill Press, 2012; reviewed in *NCLR Online* 2014).

RICHARD OWENS is the author of several volumes of poetry, including *Embankments* (Interbirth, 2009), *No Class* (Barque, 2012), and *Ballads* (Habenicht, 2012; Eth Press, 2015). His poetry has appeared in *Cambridge Literary Review*, *Hi Zero*, *Poetry Wales*, *Shearsman* and elsewhere; his critical comments and essays have appeared in *Chicago Review*, *Colorado Review*, *Open Letter*, *Paideuma*, and *Poetry Project Newsletter*. He currently resides in southern Maine.

In *Jonathan Williams: The Lord of Orchards*, Jeffery Beam and Richard Owens offer an edited collection on the life and work of Jonathan Williams, the Asheville-born publisher, poet, and photographer who founded the Jargon Society Press while a student at Black Mountain College in Western North Carolina. This text, the first to try and focus new attention on Williams's expansive literary and creative legacy, offers four distinct sections. In "Remembering," contributors "remember" Jonathan Williams with "intimacy and affection" (xxi). In the second section, "Responding," authors bring "into focus both new statements" on Williams's work as well as re-published texts of "presently out-of-print introductions" about Williams's work (xxii). The third section, "Reviewing," focuses on Williams's photographic work. Lastly, the fourth section, "Recollecting," "is two-fold, addressing not only Williams as a collector committed to selecting his fruit from the Firmament but also the work involved in collecting Williams" (xxii). Overall, *The Lord of Orchards* offers readers a comprehensive introduction to the diverse publications and productive arts of Williams, an artist who is every bit as varied as the numerous epithets associated with him – lively language ranging from "The Truffle-Hound of American Poetry," to "our Johnny Appleseed," to "magpie," to "America's largest open-air museum" (ix).

In the Introduction, Jeffery Beam credits Richard Owens with "first field[ing] the idea of some sort of memorial festschrift for Jonathan after his death" (ix). Beam and Owens, co-editors of *Jonathan Williams: The Lord of Orchards*, first started an online version of this "memorial festschrift," but as Beam suggests, given Williams's fondness for print books, Beam

promised himself that "one day *The Lord of Orchards* would be an expanded print book and more hybrid festschrift and a first reflective look at Jonathan's Legacy" (x). Furthermore, Beam suggests that the "*Lord of Orchards* is not only printed proof" of the devotion and gratitude he feels for Williams, but also "proof of fidelity and loyalty" to Williams's life's work "and its unique and inestimable value" (xiii). Beam states that Williams is "[l]esser known for his extraordinary letters and essays, and his photography and art collecting," but he is "never only a poet or photographer, an essayist or publisher" (xiv). In order to capture Williams's diverse legacy, then, *The Lord of Orchards* as an edited collection of "essays, images, and shouts aims to bring new eyes and contexts to his influence and talent as poet and publisher, but also heighten appreciation for the other facets of his life and art" (xiv). According to Beam, "One might call Jonathan's life a poetics of gathering," and *The Lord of Orchards* is "a first harvest" (xiv). And I would argue, this harvest is a bountiful one.

Jonathan Williams's productive publishing, photography, and poetry ventures are certainly interrelated to his experiences as a student of Black Mountain College, the acclaimed, eclectic school that operated in Western North Carolina from 1934 to 1957. Richard Deming suggests, "Given the range of Williams's abilities and creative intellect – that he would find traditional university study too confining, too overdetermined and overdetermining – is not at all surprising" (267). Instead, Williams was able to plant the seeds of his own creativity at Black Mountain College, which in the 1950s, "offered a central site of community for figures from Merce Cunningham

to Buckminster Fuller to Stefan Wolpe” and “seemed to be the only place able to accommodate the explosion of possibilities for imagining artistic production that were forming at that moment for the broadening field of the American avant-garde” (267). As Deming suggests, “For those of Black Mountain, the art in any and all forms was inseparable from the person and from one’s way of being in the world,” a philosophy that *The Lord of Orchards* clearly demonstrates for Williams (267).

In addition to fitting his creative, intellectual approach to knowledge and the arts, Black Mountain College was also the birthplace of perhaps Williams’s greatest accomplishment, Jargon Society Press. As John Mitzel states, the “Poets and photographers published by Jargon read like a Who’s Who of alternative and/or avant-garde talent.” Williams himself was among these published authors under the Jargon imprint, authoring over one hundred titles. While Jargon printed a variety of avant-garde artists and writers, “Being of the South” Williams “knew its history and did so much to celebrate its bright spots,” and he was “drawn to the rural, the offbeat, something not-New York” (51). Williams, as the leader of Jargon, was also the “first publisher of Buckminster Fuller, Guy Davenport, Charles Olson,” Robert Kelly asserts, acknowledging that these writers “had other little books,” but with Williams’s press, and the “beautiful big format, lucid printing, visual sense of importance, endurance,” Williams “put their names and work out there where the hungry poets and readers of the late ’50s and ’60s could find it, did find it” (57).

Thanks to *The Lord of Orchards*, a new set of readers in the present and in the future will be able to easily locate a fuller picture of both Williams’s and Jargon’s immense contributions to the literary and visual arts.

I recently became reacquainted with Williams’s robust, revolutionary body of work as a poet and a publisher while serving on the editorial staff for the special Black Mountain College edition of *Appalachian Journal* (vol. 44, 2018). The BMC edition of *AppalJ*, led by Editor Sandra L. Ballard and Guest Editor Joseph Bathanti, aims to reconnect Black Mountain the college with Black Mountain, the nearby Appalachian community. Within this issue, Whitney Jones’s essay, “Jonathan Williams, The Jargon Society and Black Mountain College,” contains a thrilling account of Jargon’s significance, Williams’s role as promoter and preserver of America’s poetry and prose, and a particularly interesting account of Jargon’s publication of *White Trash Cooking*. In many ways, *The Lord of Orchards* is a perfect complement to this new essay about Williams, filling in and adding many new resources for future research.

I like to think of the Black Mountain College Special Edition of the *Appalachian Journal* as a continuation of the *North Carolina Literary Review (NCLR)*’s 1995 issue featuring Black Mountain College (number 2.2). In fact, the *Appalachian Journal* volume contains an account by Alex Albright, founding editor of *NCLR*, about working with Irwin Kremen on the artwork for *NCLR*’s Black Mountain issue.* While *NCLR* offered researchers and fans of Black Mountain College an invaluable

special issue as a starting place for research, *Appalachian Journal*’s BMC special issue hopes to continue the same important work – introducing Black Mountain College to readers and researchers, scholars and students within the Appalachian region. For those interested in Appalachia, Black Mountain College, and poetry, *Jonathan Williams: The Lord of Orchards* is an incredibly significant addition to the research on place, photography, and poetry.

Jonathan Williams: The Lord of Orchards offers a wealth of resources for new and future research on Williams’s varied achievements. As one of the editors, Jeffery Beam, enumerates in the Introduction, there are many new additions to the print version of the text. For example, this print version includes the first publication of letters between Williams and his first partner, Ronald Johnson; a new article by up-and-coming Williams scholar Ross Hair; a new version of the *White Trash Cooking* story of the cookbook’s publication by Thomas Craven, who once served as Jargon’s attorney; and an expansive bibliography of audio and visual recordings as well as transcripts of two interviews with filmmaker Neal Hutcheson.

In addition to these specific new resources, several contributors highlight further possible research opportunities for work on Williams’s rich legacy. For example, Jeffery Beam writes that he looks “forward to the folk, who in the near future . . . will step forward to write what has to be an absorbing Jonathan biography of comprehensive Jargon history” (xiii). As Beam suggests, given that “Jonathan was certainly one

of the best, most remarkable, and productive correspondents of the last century, there are volumes of letters to be published, and unpublished poems, and who knows what else, lurking in the antique spice cabinets” in Williams’s North Carolina home (xiii). While the call to action for a comprehensive biography may be too overwhelming of a task for some younger researchers, Richard Deming provides a call for future research that is a bit smaller in scale, but no less significant. Arguing that there has been “insufficient attention to Williams’ photographs and his identity as a photographer,” Deming suggests that “there is a great deal more to discover in terms of thinking about Jonathan Williams and what his work signifies” (269). As a researcher of Williams and all things Black Mountain College, I was a bit disappointed not

to find an index within *The Lord of Orchards*. However, I must say that this collection merits a cover-to-cover read, so perhaps an index may just detract from the fruitful harvest Beam, Owens, and the contributors offer readers in *The Lord of Orchards*.

Williams’s life and work, as portrayed in *The Lord of Orchards*, offer an intimate, intricate portrait not only of a productive, artistic life, but also what makes a life worth living. Williams’s legacy has much to teach all of us about how to live, even in times as troubled and tumultuous as our own. Williams’s life in the arts “demanded direct and persistent engagement with the world” (xxiii) and his writing “insists on the primary importance of imagination as a foil to ignorance and pinpoints ignorance (whether in the arts, civic, or personal realms) as the source of cultural blight” (xx). Here, it seems

we all have much to be grateful to Williams for, because art, after all, does demand engagement, and within each of us, there is a vast need to cultivate our own creativity in order to oppose ignorance and “cultural blight.” As Ronald Johnson aptly puts it, the “fate of multitalented men” like Williams “is often that their art is not comprehended by more direct minds.” However, “It may be, though, peeping through exactly these so often cranky, cross-grained, quirky minds, that one focuses best on a complex time.” Johnson describes Williams as being “like Ezra Pound and Ruskin before him, that rare breed of proselytizing exemplar to whom each act of art constitutes an impetus for freedom” (245). Williams’s work, as depicted here in *Lord of Orchards*, reminds us all that creativity, the pursuit of imagination, and the preservation of good writing, are all, indeed, liberatory acts. ■

STEPHEN SMITH HONORED AT THE NORTH CAROLINA WRITERS CONFERENCE

Stephen Smith, one of the founding members of the North Carolina Writers’ Network, was the honoree of the 2018 North Carolina Writers Conference, held at the Weymouth Center for the Arts & Humanities in Southern Pines. A Maryland native, Smith earned his BA at Elon College and MFA at UNC Greensboro, then in 1977 moved to Southern Pines and joined the faculty at Sandhills Community College, where he edited the *Sandhills Review*. Smith’s poems, stories, columns, and reviews have appeared in many periodicals and anthologies, including *The Pilot*, *PineStraw*, *Salt*, and *O. Henry*. He is the author of seven books of poetry and prose. His honors include the Zoe Kincaid Brockman Prize for poetry and four North Carolina Press awards. He is also a three-time winner of the Kerrville Folk Festival New Folk Competition for songwriting.

Among those who spoke about the honoree, Clyde Edgerton remarked upon the supportive nature of the North Carolina writing community and noted Smith’s influence on the Weymouth Center and all the writers

who go there: “Something is in the water and in the air and in the walls at Weymouth – and that something in the walls has been mixed and smoothed and crafted by Stephen Smith.

Former North Carolina poet laureate Shelby Stephenson read a poem written for the occasion, in which he celebrates Smith’s years of teaching:

Stephen’s taught school so long he knows
more than we forget. . . .

How fortunate his students are. He

gives them the chance to free themselves up from
constrictions of too much thought. . . .

Like Edgerton, Stephenson noted Smith’s magnanimity saying, “If I could I would give Stephen one big / award, spelled out in gold – *Generosity*.” ■

BANKING THE FIRES OF MEMORIES

a review by *Emily Herring Wilson*

Claudia Emerson. *Claude Before Time and Space*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2018.

Heather Ross Miller. *Women Disturbing the Peace*. Hammond: Louisiana Literature Press, 2018.

EMILY HERRING WILSON's books include *The Three Graces of Val-Kill* (University of North Carolina Press, 2017), *Two Gardeners: Katherine S. White and Elizabeth Lawrence: A Friendship in Letters* (Beacon Press, 2002), and *North Carolina Women Making History* (University of North Carolina Press, 1999). She is a recipient of the North Carolina Award for Literature and the John Tyler Caldwell Award for the Humanities. She lives in Winston-Salem, NC.

HEATHER ROSS MILLER is author of many books of poetry, fiction, and nonfiction, including *Lumina: A Town of Voices* (Louisiana Literature Press, 2011; reviewed in *NCLR Online* 2012). She was a creative writing and literature professor at Pfeiffer University, The University of Arkansas, and Washington and Lee University. She grew up Badin, NC, and, now retired, resides in Albemarle, NC. Read her story "Carmen Miranda in the Twinkling of an Eye" in *NCLR* 1997.

ABOVE **Heather Ross Miller and Emily Herring** in a class taught by **Randall Jarrell** at **UNC Greensboro** in 1948



COURTESY OF RANDALL JARRELL PAPERS, MSS009, MARTHA BLAKENEY HODGES SPECIAL COLLECTIONS AND UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES, UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES, THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO

We were girls in Hinshaw Hall at the Woman's College a half-century ago, a lifetime ago, yesterday's memory, and now **Heather Ross Miller** and I are old arthritic women, doting grandmothers, and long-distance friends, and still sending our poems for the other's approval. How could I not feast in one sitting on the sweet and bitter taste of her new collection, ***Women Disturbing the Peace***?

Miller's poems carry me away like a flash flood, like wildfire, fog, thunder, lightning, hail, brimstone, and snow, "soft as a baby's eyelash." There are no poems like hers, and you may or may not like every one – some are too tough for my own weakness for sentimentality, which does not offend her – but you will be in awe of what she knows, what she remembers, and what she imagines. She has the courage to say what she thinks, and my Phi Beta Kappa classmate, Woodrow Wilson Fellow, is, make no mistake about it, a *thinker*.

The Bible, fairy tales, encyclopedias, old books, new books, archival manuscripts, letters, recipes, maps, superstitions, nightmares, astronomy, medicine, law, song titles, home remedies, and

cultural identities only begin to name the range of her interests. And, I think, if you are willing for her to disturb your peace, you will be changed in a heartbeat, rising from the dead, resurrected, born again – a woman who knows how to survive the best and the worst of what life assigns us, deserved and undeserved, and always mystifying. Miller throws darts with such force and precision that I think if she were blindfolded she'd still hit every bullseye. Her first lines and her last lines have been her most distinguishing characteristic as long as I have read her poems, and even with my every nerve on edge to guess how they will all turn out, I am still surprised – by pleasure and by fear. She already knew how to knit together the lines of a poem before we studied with Randall Jarrell, but he rewarded her for it. He said she was the best poet he ever taught.

Miller must have written thousands of poems, given the fact that she writes every day of every year, which I know because they come to me in plain and fancy wrappers: I can feel the heat in the mailbox, I can hear their groans and sighs and exorcisms.

And here I have a chance to read with you two of my new favorites from *Women Disturbing the Peace*, as old and wise and vicious and tender as her poems have been for me since 1957 in our college literary magazine.

Miller's sources are family history (before she was born and right up to the present), her bourbon-drinking, womanizing father tended by her willful mother, the geography of Bladen County, her much beloved and long dead husband, her two wise children and two adored grandsons, writers, weather, the rural landscape, an old farm house, song birds and wild animals, household cats and kittens, holidays, disease, death, weeping in the night, and joy in the morning.

The book is divided between the thirty-seven poems in "the family way" and twenty-nine poems in "last words." "Fighting Chances" begins the book. Miller's form is usually even and orderly – this poem has two six-line stanzas and ends with a five-line stanza, the last line of each stanza shorter than the earlier ones. It is dominated by a single image: the poet's mother washing her father's hair in a shallow basin. The dominance of one image, to which she returns, is vintage Heather Ross Miller. The first stanza is full of violence: her mother bites, slaps, and hurls an ashtray across the room to hit her husband, "to fix / his ass," the poet says; Miller doesn't back off from strong language. He deserves her treatment, the poet says, because he is "the drinker / of strong spirits, the bedder / of strange women." We recognize her father from many earlier poems. The second stanza is the day after the fight. Now he is "a rogue Jesus," and he grants mercy. In the last stanza the poet speaks in first person: "I have seen love work its stingers." And

there is the lovely surprise: joy comes in the morning with the hair-washing, "the sweet soap / and the tenderly warmed water." Miller always has had courage to look danger in the eye and, sometimes, to find a way through. She has a talent for yoking tenderness and toughness together in a few lines, often defined by repetition.

A poem called "Bathing" is also about a wife's physical care of her husband. We know that it's about Miller taking care of her husband Clyde at home, after he has been diagnosed with terminal cancer. She repeats a ritual for the dying that she observed for the living: "wave sweet steam from the tap, a thing / you always liked when we bathed together." Miller's love poems for Clyde are as moving and as lovely as any love poems I have read and soften the pain of loss.

Miller's "last words" is a section that includes poems about historic women: Annie Lee (a name from an 1862 headstone), Emily Dickinson, Caroline Herschel, and Eliza (from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*). The section, however, begins close to home with "These Old Ladies," about her grandmother, another familiar subject for her ("her cheek the softest rose"). The poem turns terrible as she chops off the hens' heads and their bloody bodies flap about the garden. Miller spells it out explicitly in her last stanza, which she does in other poems. This is the way women really have to live: "Keeping pretty, smelling sweet / and killing things."

The book ends with a poem called "To Find A Lost Daughter," dedicated "For Kay," whom I take to be the former North Carolina poet laureate, Kathryn Stripling Byer, who died unexpectedly in 2017. I like the image that begins the poem: the woman makes a little ship out of folded newspaper

and floats it on the water, but it doesn't last long, "gets heavy / and sinks." But she leaves clues, footprints on the shore among the mountain rhododendron (Kay lived in Cullowhee, NC), and a baited pole, which is bobbing. When you raise it, you catch a fish "with a bright / fierce fight for air." Where is this playful girl? the poet asks. There might have been evidence – perhaps an ad in the newspaper would have located her. "You didn't / look. You didn't free the fish / from the hook." She escapes us, the lost daughter – "the footprint / went back to the river" – only to have one of her sister poets find her.

I think this is a fitting tribute to Kay, whose footprints are in the river, and on the mountain and all the green places (she was a fierce advocate for the environment). Missing her as we do, we find Kay here as a daughter who wrote poems as fragile as paper boats and as brightly alive as a mountain trout. It is a poem for all lost daughters and a consoling ending to a rewarding collection.

When lovely **Claudia Emerson** won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 2006, we all expected that she was only at the beginning of a long career in which her reputation would continue to grow. Besides the Pulitzer, Emerson had already received the Academy of American Poets Prize and a Guggenheim Fellowship. She was poet laureate of Virginia from 2008 to 2010. And she was a very gifted teacher. Then, with her death in 2014 at age fifty-seven from cancer, a shock reverberated throughout the southern writing community like that of the sudden death of Kay Byer. As I observed in my discussion of Miller's poem for Kay, if there is any consolation for the death of a poet, it is another poem. After five published books in her lifetime, **Claude Before Time and Space** is Emerson's third posthumously published book and apparently her last. What makes it bearable is the legacy this collection has for us: a narrative voice with a strong afterlife.

These twenty-six poems are carefully arranged in three sections: “The Wheel,” with an autobiographical theme; “Bird Ephemera,” made of notes from daybooks, ledgers, and a social history; and “Claude Before Time and Space,” poems for her father. I want to take a poem from each section, which will, I think, inspire any reader to read them all.

“Swimming Alone” is a narrative poem set in the country (as many of her poems are), where she and a friend – two divorced women – swim alone in a pond. An old neighbor widow’s admonition that they are “not to be afraid / to do it” emboldens them. Her friend, more fearless than she, swims ahead, considers the turtles, snakes, and catfish (what she has witnessed every day and will still want to see on her last day, not heavenly angels), but following her example, the speaker has become “unafraid / even of lightning strikes.” She learns that her friend is dying, and she knows she will follow her, but still inseparable: the two of them will have to learn to breathe again in an imagined place. It will be a world where they will wait for the new moon to rise. The old widow woman’s advice not to be afraid has served them well.

Many of Emerson’s poems in “Bird Ephemera” spread out across the page; some lack punctuation, are incomplete sentences and often add extra spaces within a line. They breathe. The effect on the reader is dreamlike, drifting through “time and space” (well-chosen for the book’s title), detailed, and seen through a



PHOTOGRAPH BY JAN G. HENSLEY
COURTESY OF UNC GREENSBORO CREATIVE WRITING

glass darkly (“a warbled pane of glass”). Emerson discovers people: from a nineteenth-century daybook, the poet honors Emma Bell Miles, a poet and naturalist in Signal Mountain, TN, who fills up pages with observations (like Emerson) and carries her daybook “in an apron pocket / to the field the spring.”

The last poems are made out of familiarity between Claud and Claudia and bear the mark of a father’s early and late words to his daughter. She has often heard his stories, repeats what we know must have been his speech patterns, knows his peculiar skills – how to pack a tooth, trap and skin a rabbit, fix a clock, and make sure she understands his time is up, and hers will follow. Respect rather than sentimentality settles in the sharply observed details in which knowing how to bank a fire is a ritual without which life cannot be lived.

Claude Before Time and Space is a very original group of poems,

unlike any other father-daughter narrative I can remember. Emerson allows him time and space to have lived his own life, she listens as he tells her about it, and she learns what she must, when she, too, will become one of the ghosts that haunt history. There is so much respect in this poem, respect for the past, for family, the farm, and for what we pass on. “You are disappearing, too” she writes in “Razor,” “the way he means for you to. / You don’t need to say the argument.” The argument may be dying, “an old appointment they keep / with an inescapable place” (from “Vortex”).

“Match” admires the way Claude can light one fire from another, keeping it going for an entire winter. The banking of coals in the evening is called “a ritual of burial,” and in the morning, “a resurrection / of the exact flame. You know, it does look like it.”

Emerson’s poems overcome death and live on. ■

CLAUDIA EMERSON (1957–2014), a native of Chatham, VA, received her MFA degree in Creative Writing at UNC Greensboro in 1991. Her awards include the 1991 Academy of American Poets Prize and the 2006 Pulitzer Prize, and she was named the Poet Laureate of Virginia in 2008. She also taught English at universities such as Virginia Commonwealth University and the University of Mary Washington. Read a review of Emerson’s Pulitzer Prize collection *Late Wife* (Louisiana State University Press, 2005) in *NCLR* 2007.

ABOVE **Claudia Emerson** (right) and **Allison Seay** at the keynote reading for UNC Greensboro’s annual Southeastern Literary Magazine and Small Press Festival, 2009

FINALIST, 2018 JAMES APPLEWHITE POETRY PRIZE

BY VALERIE NIEMAN

Eleanor: Suite

1. My Mother Goes

She went gray early and lost
her eyebrows, tracing the arches
with a Maybelline pencil.

Her belly sagged from births
and butchered surgeries.

Her hands were spotted – I flinched
from their touch, blamed the white blotches
on scrubbing floors for others.

Eventually, it was easier to stop
seeing her at all.

Lately, I am startled by my own hands,
bleached by vitiligo, the ailment
for which I did not have a name,

and, when I sing, to find her
living in my throat.

COURTESY OF THE ARTIST



detail of *Mother's Keeper*, 2017 (deconstructed quilt, cotton batting, hand stitching, India ink, acrylic, and metal leaf, 76x90) by Rachel Meginnes

2. Lessons

What is the proper temperature
for dishwater?

My hands would always
pull back,
my eyes ready to see the skin slip
off red flesh like a scalded peach.

That's the relentlessness
of it,

an education in how to tolerate
what is necessary – fitting your self
to clothes that don't,
to the unceasing needs of others,
parents to tend, a damaged man to prop,

a child whose passage
to adulthood was one long rending.

VALERIE NIEMAN teaches writing at NC A&T State University in Greensboro, NC. She graduated from West Virginia University and Queens University of Charlotte and is the founding editor of two literary magazines. Her work has been anthologized most recently in *Eyes Glowing at the Edge of the Woods* (West Virginia University Press, 2017) and *Ghost Fishing: An Eco-Justice Poetry Anthology* (University of Georgia Press, 2018). Her awards include the 2017 Flyleaf Books poetry prize and the Greg Grummer, Byron Herbert Reece and Nazim Hikmet poetry prizes. She is the author of three novels, including *Blood Clay* (Press 53, 2011; reviewed in *NCLR Online* 2012), winner of the Eric Hoffer Prize in General Fiction; a collection of short stories, *Fidelities* (West Virginia University Press, 2004); and two poetry collections, *Wake, Wake, Wake* (Press 53, 2006; reviewed in *NCLR* 2007) and *Hotel Worthy* (Press 53, 2015; reviewed in *NCLR Online* 2016). Her most recent books are a novel in verse, *Leopard Lady: A Life in Verse* (Press 53, 2018) and a novel, *To the Bones* (West Virginia University Press, 2019). Her poetry has appeared in *NCLR* 2011 and 2012 and *NCLR Online* 2012.

3. Paper House

No house had ever been
solid enough for her:
The house made of straw,
a summer spent bedding down
in a barn after their place burned.
The house made of sticks
couldn't keep out memories
of war or the visible breath of winter.
The house made of bricks
collapsed as the children left,
until at last she came to live in a paper house,
a trailer on a lot not in sight of the sea,
no shelter from the shifting winds.

4. Mother Love

We must give way
on everything,
relinquish each small pride –

my mother's beautiful hair
gone to baldness,
a wig plucked by the wind
rolling down the gray beach,
my hair, my hair,
pursued by the red beam
of a hooded flashlight
where we anticipated
gravid females, hauling themselves
onto the sand, sorrowing at their labor
before vanishing.



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Mother's Keeper, 2017 (deconstructed quilt, cotton batting, hand stitching, India ink, acrylic, and metal leaf, 76x90) by Rachel Meginnes

RACHEL MEGINNES lives in Western North Carolina. She received her BA in Art at Earlham College in Richmond, IN, and her MFA in Fibers at the University of Washington. She spent two years in Morioka, Japan, studying the traditional Japanese textile processes of saki-ori, ikat, and indigo dyeing. In 2012, she was awarded a three-year residency at Penland School of Crafts in Penland, NC, which began her shift to making art full-time. Her artwork has been exhibited internationally in Thailand and Hong Kong and can be found in the collections of the Cameron Art Museum in Wilmington, NC; the University of Arkansas, Little Rock, AR; Fidelity Bank in Raleigh, NC; the Capitol Broadcasting Company in Durham, NC; Samsel Architects in Asheville, NC; and in private collections around the country. She has taught all ages and levels. Her workshops integrating the subjects of art, craft, and design have been offered at craft schools and colleges across the country and in Canada. She has recently developed an arts educational partnership between Earlham College and Penland School of Crafts to promote craft education within the context of academic art. See more of her work on her [website](#).

FINALIST, 2018 JAMES APPLEWHITE POETRY PRIZE

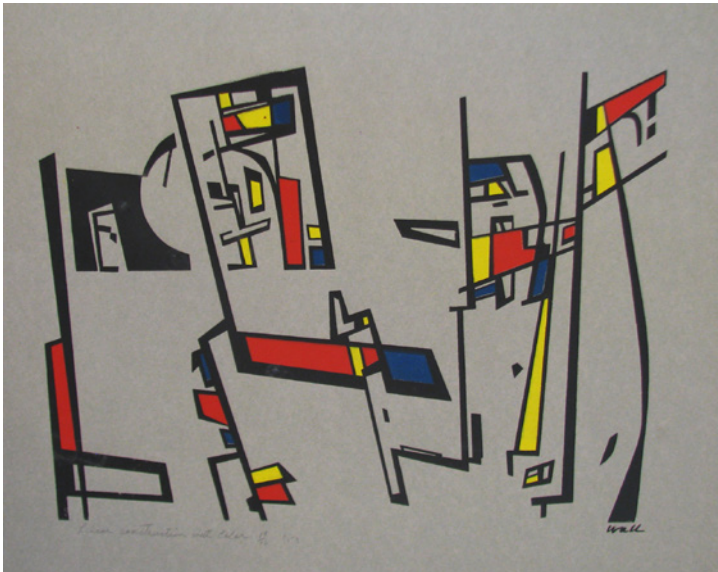
BY JON OBERMEYER

The Ledge

Living in Boston is like nesting on a ledge; it's a transient arrangement.
—Seamus Heaney

Rethink it, your life.
Everywhere you have lived
is just a ledge, a place
you could have tumbled
from. Your hometown
is a precipice, you'll learn
someday. What the realtor
sold to you is merely
a coat hook, an excuse
for the roof to settle
atop your head, like
a butterfly; outpost
for tongue-and-groove
flooring to taste
the sour crawl space
and sweet padding
of your feet. Your bills
can always find another
mailing address;
your foundation cinderblock
won't mind at all
the transient masonry
and someone else's
false siding. Larger
than you, Bermuda
glides like a migratory
transatlantic bird
toward Namibia;
most of California's coast
is no longer where it used to be.

COURTESY OF LEE HANSLEY GALLERY



Linear Construction with Color, 1953 (serigraph, 14x18) by Anne Wall Thomas

ANNE WALL THOMAS is a native of Anson County, NC, and is the first MFA graduate of that art program under the direction of Gregory D. Ivy at Woman's College (now UNC Greensboro). She is a past Professor of Art Education at UNC Chapel Hill and the former director of the Reston Art Center in Virginia. Her work was recently featured in a two-person exhibition at Lee Hansley Gallery in Raleigh, marking her ninetieth birthday. The artist lives in Chapel Hill, NC.

JON OBERMEYER is a graduate of Westmont College in Santa Barbara, CA, and earned an MFA in Creative Writing from UNC Greensboro, where he served as Associate Poetry Editor of *The Greensboro Review*. He lives in Bethesda, NC. A poet, short story writer, essayist, and memoirist, he has published eight books of creative work and makes his living writing grants and editing business books on themes like artificial intelligence, cloud computing, and mergers and acquisitions. This is his second time as an Applewhite Prize finalist. Read his previous finalist poem in *NCLR 2018*.

EVERYDAY SORROWS AND NECESSARY JOYS

a review by Valerie Nieman

Terri Kirby Erickson. *Becoming the Blue Heron*. Winston Salem, NC: Press 53, 2017.

Read about **VALERIE NIEMAN** with her poem published in this issue. The *NCLR* editorial staff is grateful to writers like her who give back after their books are reviewed and their works published in our pages by reviewing for us.

TERRI KIRBY ERICKSON is the author of five full-length collections published by Press 53. Erickson's poetry has also appeared in *American Life in Poetry*, *Asheville Poetry Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Journal of the American Medical Association*, *Literary Mama*, *NASA News & Notes*, *Poet's Market*, *storySouth*, *The Writer's Almanac*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, *Verse Daily*, and *NCLR*, among other publications. Awards and honors include the Joy Harjo Poetry Prize, Nazim Hikmet Award, Atlanta Review International Publication Prize, Nautilus Silver Book Award, Poetry for Their Freedom Award, and the Leidig Lectureship in Poetry. She is a member of the North Carolina Writers Conference, the North Carolina Poetry Society and the North Carolina Writers' Network.



PHOTOGRAPH BY BENITA VAN WINKLE

In her fifth poetry collection, *Becoming the Blue Heron*, Terri Kirby Erickson returns to familiar territory – the complexities of family, the consolations of nature, and human happiness in all its fragility. “Lightning Bugs” opens the collection with a memory of childhood, seen by the light of “little sparks from the earth’s / fiery core, dusk’s tiny lanterns.” Parents sip Tom Collins, and children run safely across mown lawns until they fall exhausted. A memory such as this, unshadowed by loss or regret, can tread into the soft ground of nostalgia, but for every poem that goes down sweet as coconut cake, many have the iron bitterness of pain and loss. We might, in fact, turn to the poem that centers the book, “Nostalgia,” to see how it echoes major notes sounded through this collection:

The past is a set of white curtains, a window
nailed shut beyond which everyone

is happy. There is no death, no disillusionment.
No one is sick. My parents' faces

are filled with light, as if their minds are made
of birthday candles, never blown out.

In her lovely poem “Washing Dishes,” Erickson honors the evening ritual of her aging parents, whose hands may not be sure, but whose long life together is. Her mother soaps and rinses a glass, “Then she passes it to my father, who has / so little feeling in his knotty fingers that a glass could / be a bubble for all he knows.” Later, she closely observes her father, with his damaged eyes and hands, cutting her mother’s hair.

Who could wish for more than what they have,
already? I can see clearly, the perfect

body of my childhood – the girl with black hair
who runs and jumps with ease,

to whom pain means nothing more than skinned
knees or a baby tooth pulled from our mouths

by a string. And look at all the people –
aunts and uncles, grandparents, cousins, friends

and neighbors – my little brother trailing his big
sister like a tracker . . .

A brother's death is dramatized in "After the Explosion," the poem beginning unevenly before finding its footing as the boy's spirit "entered a tool lying on the / garage floor, marveling at the chill of his cold, metal skin. Next, the bee flying over the heads of paramedics / frantically working" and on to "the dog next door that wouldn't stop / barking, the taste of its pink tongue strange and wild / in a mouth that opened wider than any door." His loss darkens other poems, and the presence of cancer stalks this book with the patient tread and lethal potential of the titular blue herons.

A thread of love begins with only "a jigger-full of something close to tenderness" and carries through the end of a pregnancy and finally to a love that endures through illness and danger. Still, Erickson always returns her focus to the light, saying of her grandfather, "Because my Papa's spirit was so / pure and bright, he looked like a railroad lantern moving / along the tracks. Wherever he walked, there was light."

In "Supper time," the house is a frame for the tranquil rituals of her parents, "a sight so serene, if you happened to pass by / their house, you'd want to come in." And in one of my favorites, "Fund Drive," a girl approaches the house while her father watches from the street. As she completes her sale, "she turns / and gives a thumbs-up sign to her father, who / grins like an outfielder to whom the ball has / finally come – his heart like a glove, opening."

. . . Yet, the glass remains cold,

unyielding, impossible to shatter, the curtains
a pair of specters haunting the same small space.

The language of these poems is plain-spoken, colloquial. There is no need for footnotes or a visit to the thesaurus. At times, the line breaks can seem random, and Erickson tends toward alliteration – "pinnacle of performance poultry" – that can be light-hearted but also may become oppressive, the reader becoming too aware of the technique. Close

observation is everywhere, in poems like "Spider in the Sink," in which the creature "settles at last like a hand / tired from gesturing," or "Dragonfly," in which a dragonfly disappears "leaving behind a sonic / boom of silence."

The collection also features a number of portraits, whether of artists' muses or "Granny, Dragged by a Cow" or "Monteen" who "left the lights on and the windows open" but could take a baseball bat to abusers. A widow braves the breakers in "Taharah":

. . . Remember our
first kiss, how my breastbone
broke and my ribs fanned
out, revealing the small red
bird of my heart? . . .

But whatever the approach, a narrow lyric or a dense narrative, Erickson's poems are accessible, a characteristic that has made them a regular in Ted Kooser's *American Life in Poetry* series.

This reviewer wishes that Erickson would push a bit harder at times on poems that come to a too-reassuring close, admit the shadow that underlies every welcoming porch, every well-lit house. A poem that does exactly this, arriving at a kind of chiaroscuro that acknowledges both light and dark in the moment, is "Moon Walk." Erickson evokes a happy beachside holiday in 1969, the family gathered around the television to witness history. "But let's pretend for the length / of this poem, that my brother's blood remains safe / inside his veins, Grandma's darkening mole as benign / as a monastery full of monks."

As the title indicated, birds are found throughout these poems, not only blue herons, which also appear in small drawings dividing the six sections of the book, but gulls and buccaneering blue jays and owls and vultures and bald eagles. Water is another dominant trope, whether for fishing in, swimming in, riding in perilous dreams, or just contemplating. The book closes with a blue heron, a moment when the human spirit enters nature.

The will to flight and the desire to hold onto beauty round out the collection, which is beautiful on the outside as well, with cover art by the author's brother, Stephen White, who wraps a female form in a great blue cloak across which herons lift and fly.

The philosopher Lao Tzu said that he had only three things to teach: simplicity, patience, and compassion. *Becoming the Blue Heron* has all three. ■

FINALIST, 2018 JAMES APPLEWHITE POETRY PRIZE**BY NILLA LARSEN***Post-Date Sunday*

I rip the silk sea you haven't
seen yet. That gorgeous fabric
rattle. I go pee and beat off.

In front of the mirror,
I draw silver gills,
three on each cheek.

I record, share myself
blowing and deflating, changing
hues for my next mix of moods.

Say each emotion has flavor –
which do you suckle first?

With aquarium awe, do you ask
just right: *you the kind of girl
who wants to breathe under water?*

Already, I've missed moments to say
what my body knew and didn't reveal:

hum on the tongue, hot
trickle from exigent cunt.

But I can't just ink and hide.

So I'll lip your earlobes,
kiss the beads of your bent spine,
press down on your chest
while I lap like water.



Late Bloomer (acrylic ink and collage; 9x13) by Nancy Smith

COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Still, it's a risk. Do you cast me
as this week's squishy niche –

somewhere you could forget
yourself into? An unknowable?

Could we writhe and slide in
currents of control? Maybe we'll grow

electric suckers down our arms and legs –

enlace our limbs,
leave our skin buzzed and ringed.

A Denmark native, **NILLA LARSEN** earned an MFA in poetry from UNC Wilmington. She has received poetry fellowships from Rivendell Writers' Colony and Martha's Vineyard Institute of Creative Writing. This is her second time as an Applewhite Prize finalist, and her earlier finalist poem appeared in *NCLR Online* 2017. In 2018, she also placed honorable mention with two poems, one of which will be published in the 2019 print issue (the other was accepted for publication elsewhere before *NCLR's* results were announced). Her poems have also been published in *Midway Journal*, *Quarter After Eight*, *The Boiler*, *Nimrod*, *Crab Creek Review*, *Waccamaw*, *Asheville Poetry Review*, and elsewhere.

Born in Tryon, NC, **NANCY SMITH** made her home in Chapel Hill, NC, twenty-five years ago after completing a psychotherapist degree from UNC Chapel Hill. She dabbled in drawing and painting her entire life but began a serious pursuit of study under the tutelage of mixed media artist Luna Lee Ray ten years ago. Since then, she has shown her work in many group and solo shows in North Carolina. She is currently collaborating with women writers all over the world to give voice to women's concerns and experiences in a 2019 gallery event called *Women Speak*. Find another sample of her art in the North Carolina Miscellany section of this issue and see more on her [website](#).

FINALIST, JAMES APPLEWHITE POETRY PRIZE**BY RICHARD BETZ***Branch Drop*

In the middle of a still night our hemlock tree
 Woke us with a clang on the shed's metal roof,
 So loud we thought it might have been more than
 A single lower branch: Cladoptosis,

The shedding of branches no longer needed;
 They prune themselves, they limb themselves up
 In the dark of the night when it is easiest to let go,
 Before the morning birds can raise any objection.

It reminded me of Barbara, who wanted less and less,
 Who gave away everything these past few years,
 Quietly and without a fuss, starting at the attic
 And moving downward floor by floor, leaving

A gentle trail of broom-swept emptiness behind;
 First her knitting, then her china; boxes and boxes
 Of photographs of Italy, friends who were gone,
 And finally – most difficult of all – her books.

But giving up comes easier with use, like any skill;
 The rooms seemed to empty themselves, one by one;
 Sunlight streamed into the curtainless house
 And the floorboards gleamed brightly with loss.

COURTESY OF HODGES TAYLOR



Peg (#236), 2002 (platinum/palladium print, variable) by Frank Hunter

FRANK HUNTER was born in El Paso, TX, and grew up in the desert southwest. He has an MA in Communications from the University of Colorado and an MFA in Photography from Ohio University where he was the John Cady Graduate Fellow in Fine Art. Hunter is best known for his large format landscape work in rural Appalachia. He makes prints using the nineteenth-century platinum palladium process. He is the recipient of the Bernheim Foundation Fellowship, a Light Works Fellowship at Syracuse University and grants from the Polaroid Corporation. See more of his work through the [Hodges Taylor Art Consultancy](#) in Charlotte and in *NCLR* 2004.

RICHARD BETZ grew up in New England but has lived in North Carolina for almost fifty years, first in Asheville, then 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. This is his fifth time as a finalist for the James Applewhite Poetry Prize, so his poems have appeared regularly in *NCLR* since 2013.

A LOVE LETTER TO WRITING, WRITERS, AND BOOKS

a review by Michael K. Brantley

Michael McFee. *Appointed Rounds: Essays*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2018.

MICHAEL K. BRANTLEY has an MFA in Creative Writing from Queens University in Charlotte, NC, and an MA in English from East Carolina University, where he served as an NCLR editorial assistant. He is the author of *Memory Cards: Portraits from a Rural Journey* (Black Rose Writing, 2015; reviewed in *NCLR Online* 2017) and *Galvanized: The Unlikely Odyssey of a Reluctant Carolina Confederate* (University of Nebraska Press, 2019). He is a Visiting Assistant Professor of English at North Carolina Wesleyan College and currently lives in Eastern North Carolina.

Michael McFee has published eleven books of poetry, a handful of anthologies, and a book of essays. While he's no stranger to words on the page, his latest collection of essays, *Appointed Rounds*, is a departure for him. Technically, it is a memoir in pieces that covers a lifetime of writing and teaching and an examination of "progress" that may not be all that welcome. But above all else, it is clearly a love letter to writing, writers, and books.

Fans of the TV show *Seinfeld* may recall that Kramer once published a coffee table book about coffee tables that itself could be made into a coffee table. McFee's twist on that is his book is, in part, about books. There are seven sections to *Appointed Rounds*, and chapters from three of those are named after the parts of books – everything from "Acknowledgments" and "Author's Notes" to "Frontispiece" to "Cloth" to "Blurbs" and "Manuscripts." The other sections focus on McFee's teaching career and on his past and present self-proclaimed "inner hillbilly" self. McFee's teaching colleague Alan Shapiro offers before the title page, "McFee enables us to shake free of habitual perception and see as for the first time the most familiar things with an abiding sense of wonder."

In a revelation from the author in the book itself, McFee lays out his choice of title in his preface. He credits the US Postal Service as he gives us two of the work's most beautiful sentences:

All of us have "appointed rounds" in our lives, essential things we are given to do and must try to complete, whatever the inner or outer weather, whenever the

time of day or night, however we may approach those duties. This is particularly true for writers, couriers who must fulfill their appointed rounds in words, working out their obsessions on the page, moving toward completion at a not-so-swift pace.

McFee's father, who was a postal worker for over thirty years, has also strengthened this interest in the postal service, along with an unyielding fascination with mail. McFee expresses this fascination in "The Mail," finding complexity in something as simple as a public USPS mailbox which, like writing, is "so accessible and yet so private" (83). These emotional connections are present throughout McFee's book as he writes about persisting topics personal to him that he has repeatedly and fondly returned to.

While the book may be designed to reach a wide audience, it seems clearly directed at writers. Early on, there is a lovely tribute to McFee's friend and North Carolina Literary Hall of Famer, the late Doris Betts, that includes a wild goose chase for a special book.* Without a doubt, a later chapter on his one poetry acceptance into *The New Yorker*, "Snow Goat," will resonate with writers as it addresses success, rejection, and self doubt and victory in just a few short pages. His essay about meeting and correspondence with poetry editor Howard Moss offers a range of emotions that will draw empathy from anyone familiar with literary submissions and struggles.

The last two sections of *Appointed Rounds* cover pieces of McFee's distinguished teaching career, which spans nearly three decades at the University of North

*"For Doris" was first published in *NCLR Online* 2014: 46–53.

Carolina Chapel Hill. The way he speaks of his students, it is clear he's enjoyed his time in the classroom and still favors old school techniques, including use of the blackboard, which gets its own module. He collects postcards from alums as they travel the world, and he displays them in

his office. Like the chapters named for the elements of a book, these essays range from "Handouts" to "Homework" to "Office Hours," but perhaps the best is "Gradebook," where McFee extolls the virtues of the Riggs' 18 – Week College Record gradebook. On the heels of earlier

laments concerning the dying art of letter writing, correspondence, and the fading rewards and joys of the daily trip to the mailbox, the author may seem like a Luddite at heart. He meets that assumption head on in the preface, once again with a nice turn of phrase:

MICHAEL MCFEE, A STROKE OF LUCK FOR NORTH CAROLINA

adapted from event program biography by Michele Walker

"To have been born here was a real stroke of luck as a writer."

—Michael McFee

PHOTOGRAPH BY LINDA FOX, COURTESY OF NC DEPT. OF NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES



Asheville native Michael McFee was raised in south Buncombe County, where he spent his first eighteen years playing baseball, hiking, and camping along the Blue Ridge Parkway, soaking up the places, people, and language that would later inform his acclaimed poetry.

As a student at UNC Chapel Hill, McFee earned bachelor's and master's degrees in English and began writing poetry. The author of sixteen books, McFee has published eleven collections of poems, among them *Plain Air* (1983), *Vanishing Acts* (1989), *To See* (with photographer Elizabeth Matheson, 1991), *Shinemaster* (2006), and *We Were Once Here* (2017). He is the author of two collections of essays, most recently *Appointed Rounds* (2018), and the editor of several anthologies of North Carolina literature, including *The Language They Speak Is Things to Eat: Poems by Fifteen Contemporary North Carolina Poets*

ABOVE Michael McFee receiving the North Carolina Award for Literature from Governor Roy Cooper and Susi Hamilton, Secretary of the North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, Raleigh, 16 Nov. 2018 (For more information about Michael McFee, [watch](#) the video created for this occasion.)

MICHELE WALKER is Public Information Officer at the North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources.

I don't mean it to be of the cranky or rueful "I wish everything could return to the way it was" kind; these prose explorations, like my poems, are meant as appreciations, paying close attention to things that have mattered to me, savoring their details while exploring their larger design, and saving my versions of them even as they may change or fade or disappear altogether.

Throughout this collection, McFee reaches out to the reader as if to say, "Hey writer, especially, you, poet, I've been there, and I know the ups and downs. Ride the ups." No doubt, the author of *Appointed Rounds* is a writer and teacher looking back on a long, rewarding career, knowing

that the years in the classroom are drawing to a close quickly – McFee says he has already purchased his last Riggs' gradebook. It's just as clear, though, he will continue to compose poems, put pen to paper, and help those on their way, if they ask. ■

"As a reader, as a reviewer, as an editor, as a writer, and as a teacher of writers, I am mighty fortunate to have been born in this state at this time and then to have become part of that community of locally rooted and hardworking and fun having authors who revere the almighty written word. What more could a lyric poet ask."
—Michael McFee

(1994), and *This Is Where We Live: Short Stories by 25 Contemporary North Carolina Writers* (2000). His honors include the James Still Award for Writing about the Appalachian South from the Fellowship of Southern Writers, the R. Hunt Parker Memorial Award for Literary Achievement from the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association, the Thomas Wolfe Memorial Literary Award from the Western North Carolina Historical Association, and a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship in Poetry.

McFee served as Poet in Residence at Cornell University in Ithaca, NY, and Lawrence University in Appleton, WI, before returning to North Carolina in 1990 to teach in the Creative Writing Program at UNC Chapel Hill, where he is Professor of English and Comparative Literature. At UNC, he has taught the four levels of poetry writing – Introductory, Intermediate, Advanced, and Senior Honors, and seen students go on to graduate study at many of the finest MFA programs in the country. McFee has also been honored with a Bowman and

Gordon Gray Distinguished Term Professorship, which recognizes College of Arts and Sciences faculty members for their distinguished undergraduate teaching; with the Women's Leadership Council Faculty Mentoring Award, which recognizes outstanding faculty who go the extra mile to guide, mentor, and lead; and with the James M. Johnston Award for Excellence in Teaching, as well as two Students' Undergraduate Teaching Awards.

McFee takes his expertise and knowledge beyond the classroom to North Carolinians. He was a long-time book reviewer for public radio station WUNC-FM in Chapel Hill and for national venues such as Monitor Radio in Boston. In addition to the airwaves, he wrote hundreds of book reviews and features for *The Arts Journal* in Asheville, a monthly publication, and *The Spectator* in Raleigh, a weekly magazine.

For his work as a poet, teacher, essayist, critic, and champion of North Carolina's literary culture, Michael McFee receives the 2018 North Carolina Award for Literature. ■

"I think many of us are raised or taught that poetry is written in a kind of code that you have to have the secrets to unlock. It's true that poetry has a mysterious quality to it, but it's not a secret code. If you're somebody who enjoys words, you can enjoy poetry."—Michael McFee

REVOLUTIONARY REPORTING IN THE TAR HEEL STATE

a review by Dale Neal

Kenneth Joel Zogry. *Print News and Raise Hell: The Daily Tar Heel and the Evolution of a Modern University*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018.

DALE NEAL is a novelist and former journalist living in Asheville, NC. A North Carolina native, he spent three decades on various beats with the *Asheville Citizen-Times*. His novel *The Half-Life of Home* (Casperian Books, 2013) was reviewed in *NCLR Online* 2014, and he published a short story in *NCLR* 2003. His latest novel *Appalachian Book of the Dead* is from Southern Fried Karma Press in 2019.

KENNETH JOEL ZOGRY is a public historian who researches and writes extensively about UNC history. His publications include *The University's Living Room: A History of the Carolina Inn* (University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

ABOVE Front page of March 10, 1965 issue chronicling the struggles of the Civil Rights Movement

COURTESY OF DIGITALNC.ORG



Newspapers, those relics of Gutenberg’s revolution that spread literature in Europe and worldwide, would help usher in the ideas of the Enlightenment and democracy. Their relevance remains critical even as they evolve alongside competing media, from radio to TV to social media. Yet, that Fourth Estate, our Free Press enshrined in the US Constitution’s First Amendment, feels itself under attack these days – derided as “fake news” and an enemy of the people by a US president, short-changed by shrinking corporate economic scales as print and editorial oversight are replaced by pixels and social media algorithms. We may have more news options today, but trusted voices remain rare.

In his exhaustive and well-illustrated study, *Print News and Raise Hell: The Daily Tar Heel and the Evolution of a Modern University*, Kenneth Joel Zogry reminds us how the *Daily Tar Heel* for the past 125 years has charted both North Carolina political history and the societal changes represented at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the nation’s oldest public university and long considered the Tar Heel State’s gem.

Thomas Wolfe, later celebrated as a giant of American literature, got his start as editor of what was then called “The Tar Heel” in 1919, filling its columns with his broad literary style. Many journal-

ists began their storied careers at the *Daily Tar Heel*, from Charles Kuralt to the Pulitzer Prize recipient Edwin Yoder to *Raleigh News & Observer* editor Robyn Tomlin and *New York Times* columnist Frank Bruni.

In their daily dispatches, the *Daily Tar Heel* staffers create that first draft of history. Played out in its pages, decade after decade, would be the contentious issues of the culture, from the Red Scare of the 1920s to McCarthyism in the 1950s, to the notorious Speaker Ban of the 1960s that sought to censor just who could speak on campus. The *Daily Tar Heel* also chronicled the tempestuous times of the Civil Rights struggle for desegregation and the loosening of sexual mores during the ’70s. Looking through microfiche and archives, Zogry gives us that sense of déjà vu. The battles of the past look surprisingly like our contemporary controversies, even in the age of Facebook and “Fake News.”

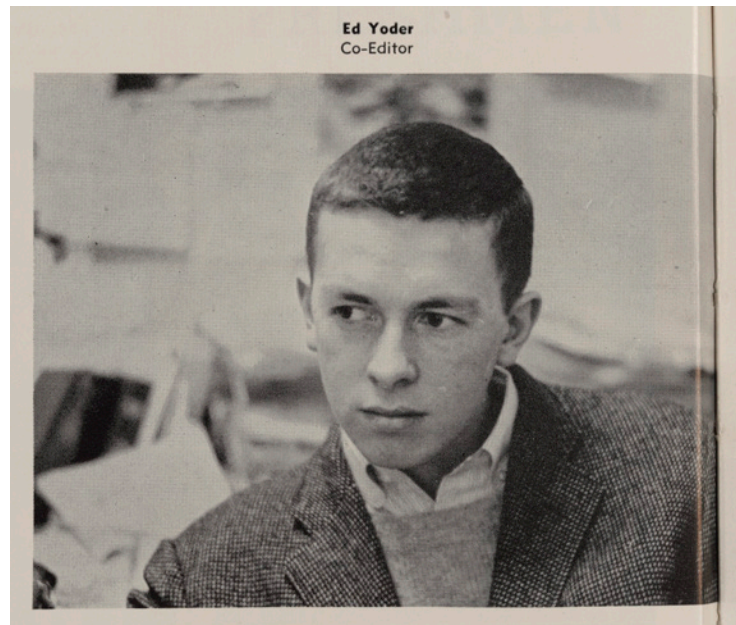
North Carolina’s politics have always been schizophrenic with hard-core traditionalists at war with progressives who wanted to try new ways to rouse the Old North State from its reputation as the “Rip Van Winkle” of the South. Think Democrat James B. Hunt versus Jesse Helms in 1984 – at that time the most expensive campaign ever mounted for US Senate, and a harbinger of things to come. Helms got his own

start as an ultra-conservative commentator (sort of the Rush Limbaugh of his day). Often his easy target was the university and its liberal tendencies, as he saw them in the student-run media.

It is easy to paint journalists as only liberals, but the *Daily Tar Heel* has had its share of conservatives on staff. Armistead Maupin rankled many on campus as the “campus mouthpiece of Jesse Helms,” questioning what would later be called political correctness. Maupin found later fame as the author of the novel *Tales of the City*, set in San Francisco.*

Editors often made poor judgments from the 1929 editorial that breezily argued “Stock Market Crash a Benefit to Public” to more egregious errors that would raise the hackles of most journalists. For most of its history, the editor of the *Daily Tar Heel* was elected by the student body, much like the homecoming court with the attendant dangers of popularity contests. Following that fickle herd, one editor tried to defend his dismissal of a columnist who was an avowed Communist: “As a newspaper, the *Daily Tar Heel* is in an almost unique position. It does not belong to its editor nor to the University. Because of this, its editorial position is to please as many of the students as much of the time as possible” (126).

More often, editors and staffers showed real spine, unafraid to take on sacred cows, not merely the politicians but also the sports programs beloved by fanatic alums. Yoder had the temerity to write an editorial denouncing the hiring of a new football coach, warning that academics would be



COURTESY OF LOUIS ROUND WILSON SPECIAL COLLECTIONS LIBRARY, THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHAPEL HILL

sacrificed for “big-time athletics”: “We do not believe that a football coach should receive more money than the President of the University” (154). In 1956, editors faced a recall election, which they handily won, preserving the editorial independence of the newspaper.

It would not be the last time the newspaper came under fire by standing for academic rigor against “big sports” corruption. Most recently, the NCAA has investigated Chapel Hill after charges surfaced that pampered student athletes had been enrolled in fake classes through the African American Studies program. The university is still reeling from that scandal, and future journalists will likely be writing stories about the tensions between academics and winning ball games.

In the 1990s, editors were no longer elected by students, but selected by staff and the paper’s

management. The newspaper has weaned itself off student fees but has faced other economic pressures like the rest of the industry. The *Daily Tar Heel* has downsized in some ways (Zogry points out that at least in print the paper has dropped its Tuesday edition, but overall the newspaper is finding more readers, growing in the 125 years from 500 to 56,000 in print and digital subscribers.)

In his history, Zogry has done yeoman’s work, documenting what student journalists have accomplished in their daily battle to find and report a little bit more of the truth day to day over the past 125 years. What shape that news coverage will take in the next century will likely depend upon changing technologies, but Zogry reminds us that we will still need the news – the scoops produced by journalists unafraid to write the truths they can see and to raise hell. ■

* Editor’s note: *NCLR 2020* will feature “expatriate” North Carolina writers like Armistead Maupin, and an interview with this Tarheel would be a most welcome submission.

FAMILY MAN

a review by Randall Martoccia

David Sedaris. *Calypso*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2018.

RANDALL MARTOCCIA works in the English Department and serves as *NCLR* Assistant Editor at East Carolina University in Greenville, NC, and has an MA in creative writing. His fields of interest include contemporary literature, screenwriting, filmmaking, and film criticism. In 2004, Martoccia created a short film entitled “Charlie-Go-Round” through his company Lawn Chair Productions. He has also gone on to create several shorter films including two zombie movies, a movie full of continuity errors, and an adaptation of Kate Chopin’s “Story of an Hour.”

Humorist **DAVID SEDARIS** was born in Johnson City, NY, but grew up in Raleigh, NC. In addition to his numerous books, he is a regular contributor to *The New Yorker*. Sedaris generously shared a recording of his essay “The Ship Shape” (read by him) for the 2008 *NCLR Mirth Carolina Laugh Tracks CD*. [Read more](#) about his North Carolina connection in Brian Glover’s essay “De-Located Yankees: David Sedaris and Growing Up Northern in the South, 1965–1983), published in *Southern Cultures* in 2018.

PHOTOGRAPH BY SANDY CARAWAN



Since 1992, when he premiered “Santaland Diaries” on National Public Radio, David Sedaris has published well over one hundred essays in nine collections, and together these essays constitute an autobiography. Readers have come to know Sedaris in these three and half decades as David the awkward child, the isolated teen, the bohemian, the expatriate, the boyfriend, the brother, the son, and the elf. In his latest collection, *Calypso*, Sedaris takes on a new role, David the family patriarch.

Calypso has twenty-one essays, some of which cover recent events, such as the ascendancy of Donald Trump and the legalization of gay marriage. Other topics include his obsessive experience with a FitBit, his partner Hugh’s prolific sexual history, his own diminutive status, and language quirks of those in the travel industry. These topic-driven essays tend to be self-contained. The book coheres around the half dozen essays set in David and Hugh’s Emerald Isle house, The Sea Section. These stories feature Hugh; David’s father, Lou; and his siblings Gretchen, Lisa, Amy, Paul, and

Tiffany – all of whom longtime readers will recognize as recurring characters.

The first of these Sea Section essays, “Now We are Five,” takes place in the days after the family learns of his sister Tiffany’s suicide. The toxicology report tells them that she had suffocated herself with a bag. Sedaris considers the family’s blame: “Doesn’t the blood of every suicide splash back on our faces?” (30). He concludes “A House Divided” with imagining the thoughts of someone passing by their beach house’s “gaily lit windows” and wondering “what we had done to deserve all this” (65). He is being ironic here with “this” referring to the sadness and confusion and possible family guilt. Note the first-person plural. If blame is cast, it is to be shared with the family.

Only much later in the book – in the essay “The Spirit World” – do readers learn a reason for his personal guilt. When Tiffany visited him at a Boston reading, Sedaris had a security guard remove her. Sedaris writes, “[The guard] shut the door in my sister’s face, and I never saw her or spoke to her

* Jina Moore, “Sister in a Glass House,” *Boston Globe* 15 Aug. 2004: [web](#).

again.” He then lists other times he did not support Tiffany, concluding, “She was, I told myself, someone else’s problem” (236). Although he gives an account of Tiffany’s eccentricities, her poverty, her signs of mental illness, he does not write about the part of their history that is most relevant to David’s career. Tiffany told the *Boston Globe* in 2004 that she was the only sister to not let him write about her: “I don’t trust David to have boundaries.”*

Sedaris has long used his family as material, writing of his siblings with candor and humor and exaggeration. In *Calypso*, Sedaris writes about his father, sisters, and brother with tenderness and poignancy perhaps brought out by Tiffany’s death. In “Company Man,” his sisters Gretchen, Amy, and Lisa visit him and Hugh in England. After they leave, he hugs the sheets they had slept in. The story that begins with the news of his sister’s death ends with a realtor taking in Sedaris and his siblings: “That makes five – wow. Now, *that’s* a big family” (31). David seems to find reassurance in the word “big.” The family will persevere. In another story, while walking with Lisa, he is overcome with the feeling that he is “so grateful to have her alive and beside me” (62). If in the past Sedaris could be accused of mocking his family – “These are cartoons of us,” Tiffany said in that 2004 interview – in this collection he treasures them.

Sedaris’s kindred spirits – his loyal readers – have no problem with his mockery. His irreverence, his satirical sensibility, even his gleeful misanthropy are some of

the qualities that make his work so vivid and enjoyable. Despite the somber tone of some of his essays, even the ones that feature his sister’s suicide have humorous passages. For example, in “A House Divided,” just after learning about the bag Tiffany used to asphyxiate herself, Sedaris wonders if a person contemplating suicide has to work to find the right bag: “SAFEWAY. TRUE VALUE. Does a person go through a number of them before making a selection, or, as I suspect, will any bag do, regardless of the ironic statement it might make” (62). One suspects that the inappropriate comic reaction is a reflex, but the reflex’s purpose is either to avoid pain or to avoid sentimentality or pretension. Sedaris’s willingness to record those thoughts that reveal him to be cold or petty or worse has always been one of the most charming parts of his writing. His readers might be more disappointed if his thoughts were more appropriate.

In the story “The Spirit World,” just after Sedaris describes his last encounter with Tiffany and after he lists the other times he

did not help her, Sedaris seeks his family’s absolution, and they (communally) give it to him: “Don’t be too hard on yourself.” Sedaris clearly appreciates their forgiveness, but he adds a qualifier: “Perhaps, like the psychic, they were all just telling me what I needed to hear, something to ease my conscience and make me feel that underneath it all I’m no different from anyone else. They’ve always done that for me, my family. It’s what keeps me coming back” (237).

In “Silent Treatment,” Sedaris is stung when his father refers to the family in the past tense. “I couldn’t deny the truth of it,” he writes. “Our mother was the one who kept us all together” (133). The beach house, the Sea Section, gives his family a place to come together. The essays set there have an underlying urgency, as Sedaris works to keep his family in the present tense. He needs his family because they are the only ones in the position to forgive him. Cynics might add that he needs the house because he needs his family for material for his stories, and if that is the Sea Section’s purpose, his loyal readers hope the house stands a long time. ■



PHOTOGRAPH BY SANDY CARAWAN

THE DRAMA OF REGION

a review by Gina Caison

Cecilia Moore. *The Federal Theatre Project in the American South: The Carolina Playmakers and the Quest for American Drama*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017.

GINA CAISON is an Assistant Professor of English at Georgia State University where she teaches courses in Southern literature, Native American literatures, and documentary practices. She is the author of *Red States: Indigeneity, Settler Colonialism, and Southern Studies* (University of Georgia Press, 2018) and co-editor of *Small-Screen Souths: Region, Identity, and the Cultural Politics of Television* (Louisiana State University Press, 2017), and she hosts the weekly podcast, *About South*. Read her interview with Eddie Swimmer on his revival of the outdoor drama *Unto These Hills* in *NCLR* 2010.

CECILIA MOORE is a North Carolina historian, as well as a member of the Chancellor's task force at UNC Chapel Hill. As a long-time resident of North Carolina, Moore holds a BA in Theatre from Barry University (in Miami, FL), an MA in Public History from NC State University, and a PhD in History from UNC Chapel Hill. She is also the co-author of the upcoming book, *UNC A to Z: An Encyclopedia of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill* (forthcoming from University of North Carolina Press).

ABOVE Members of the Carolina Playmakers, 1941

COURTESY OF PLAYMAKERS REPERTORY COMPANY, DEPARTMENT OF DRAMATIC ART, UNC CHAPEL HILL



Cecilia Moore's *The Federal Theatre Project in the American South* covers the period of the late 1930s when the Works Progress Administration attempted to merge artistic economic relief efforts with cultural revitalization in the country's southern and rural areas. Centered largely around the theater activity of Chapel Hill, NC, and Frederick Koch's Carolina Playmakers, the book outlines the impetus, evolution, and limitations of the large-scale cultural studies experiment of the era. Moore's book focuses on important Southern playwrights such as Paul Green and Zora Neale Hurston, as well as a careful history of more locally-known figures such as Joseph Christmas, an African American community theater leader in Raleigh, NC, and Martha Mathis, an actress and director from the eastern part of the state, all of which demonstrate that there is yet more to be understood about Southern drama, Southern literature in the 1930s, and the relationship between the nation and the region.

Studies of Southern literature have long been dominated by the Depression era and the 1930s. Many of these studies tend to feature figures such as William

Faulkner or the ideological school of the Agrarians, who published their manifesto *I'll Take My Stand* in 1930. Additionally, Southern literary studies has long suffered from a neglect of the region's dramatic literature. Despite having luminaries such as the aforementioned Green and Hurston (whose own dramatic output often takes second-stage to her fiction) as well as Lillian Hellman and Tennessee Williams, rarely do scholars pay much attention to the relationship between theater and the US South. Williams, arguably the most famous Southern playwright, is often considered an American writer, as if "regional" is an adjective one should happily rise above. This surrounding critical context makes Moore's work all the more refreshing and important. Imagine: a book on the 1930s US South without one mention of the Agrarians or William Faulkner.

Instead, Moore elucidates in direct prose a complex story about efforts to transform the region through theater and the paid employment of artistic talent, not in merely fantastical terms of some Southern accent-laden "mute inglorious Milton," but rather through the minutia of what it

takes to support the arts: financially and politically. And indeed, Moore is a historian, not a literary studies scholar, so the story she tells is about the history of the movement, not an analysis of the work itself or its larger artistic implications. However, in opening the conversation about what was happening on the ground as regional and national players struggled over the labor and meaning of the theater, she has potentially knocked down a door through which literary studies scholars should (if they're smart) flood.

One of the enduring legacies of the Federal Theatre Project for North Carolina is Paul Green's *The Lost Colony*. As Moore outlines, in many ways it was the crown jewel of the Project, and she devotes an entire chapter to the incredible nexus of national and regional efforts to ensure the production's success. Whereas local apocrypha would lead one to believe that the impressive 1937 first season was grown solely out of home-spun determination and a sort of "speaking for themselves" ethos among Eastern North Carolina common folk, Moore appropriately and convincingly shatters those illusions. While indeed many locals from Roanoke Island and the surrounding area labored intensely for the production, Moore's research leaves little room to doubt the fact that *The Lost Colony* happened

(and continued into following seasons) because of federal investment and the input of trained "historians, artists, and public relations people" (113). In other words, the US South needed the nation more than regional mythology typically allows.

One of the stars of Moore's work is Hallie Flanagan, the first woman to receive a Guggenheim fellowship and a proponent of the importance of a regional theater not dominated by the tastes of New York. As Moore explains, Flanagan's appointment to direct the Federal Theatre Project signaled the program's commitment to cultivating talent and storytelling beyond an imagined artistic elite. When the Project came under fire from House conservatives who wanted to level charges of "un-American" and "communist" activities within its ranks, Flanagan challenged them directly with stories of regional people who found pride and employment in the local theater supported by the Project's initiatives. Ironically, as Moore explains, the Project's undoing was largely carried out by conservative Southern politicians, unable or unwilling to see the economic value of artistic labor or appreciation among their own constituents.

Moore's book leaves the reader rooting for the Federal Theatre

Project as if it's the hardscrabble protagonist of a novel. However, she also complicates this affection by showing how the theater of the period was still limited by the nation's ideological ceiling. Despite Flanagan's efforts to support African American playwrights and theater workers, the truth remained that these production companies, including the Raleigh Negro Unit headed by Christmas, had to overcome decades of misrepresentation in the theater in order to stage stories relevant to their contemporary struggles. Additionally, during this time many white directors and actors refused to work with their black peers, so despite the hope that the American theater might offer an instructive space to move the national dialogue on race forward, it remained encumbered with the prejudices of the nation.

Ultimately, Moore manages to tell a new story of the 1930s US South and of the region as an organizing artistic concept. She dispenses with the mythically coherent region simultaneously beleaguered and ignored by the larger nation. Rather, she demonstrates just how interdependent the region and the nation were – and are today – for one another's material and mythological survival. High drama, indeed. ■

ANNOUNCING A PAUL GREEN PRIZE

sponsored by the Paul Green Foundation

To inspire scholarship on the works of North Carolina's preeminent playwright, the author of *The Lost Colony*, the Paul Green Foundation has provided a \$250 honorarium for the author of the best Paul Green-related content accepted for publication in *NCLR*. Submit for prize consideration using the [Flashbacks](#) category in Submittable, unless your submission is relevant to the

year's special feature section theme. Submissions will be blind reviewed by appropriate Green experts.

Scholars interested in this opportunity might consider applying for an [Archie K. Davis Fellowship](#) for funds to visit the Southern Historical Collection at UNC Chapel Hill, where the Paul Green Papers are located (Davis fellowship applications are due by March 1 each year).

CAST, CREW, AND DIRECTORS: BEHIND THE SCENES AT THE LOST COLONY

a review by E. Thomson Shields, Jr.

Dwayne Walls, Jr. *Backstage at The Lost Colony*. Purcellville, VA: Coquina Press, 2018.

E. THOMSON SHIELDS, Jr., is an Associate Professor of English at East Carolina University, where he teaches undergraduate and graduate courses, particularly on early American and frontier literature. His scholarship focuses on Spanish and English literature and culture of colonial North America, early North Carolina literature (including *The Lost Colony* and John Lawson), and on Latin American and Hispanic American writers.

Born and raised in North Carolina, DWAYNE WALLS, Jr., has worked in theater in the Southeast for many years, including five seasons with *The Lost Colony*. Walls then worked in New York City, building sets for several productions, including NBC's *Saturday Night Live*. Currently, Walls lives in Pittsboro, NC, and is a member in good standing of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees Local One.

COURTESY OF COQUINA PRESS AND THE LOST COLONY



Most of what has been written about Paul Green's symphonic drama *The Lost Colony* has focused on Green's script, either as it was first produced and published in 1937 or as it was revised and republished over the years. What is not often looked at is the actual production of that script every summer. Green himself did not see his script as sacrosanct, but as a guide for presenting the drama to the public. Green revised the script throughout his life not only to meet the needs of his own changing vision, but to include changes in what was available for producing the story, things such as changing

technologies.¹ Each year's production meshes the evolution of the script; the current director's vision along with those of the musical director, choreographer, production designer, lighting designer, and sound designer; and the skills of the performers and technicians, including the actor technicians, who both perform on stage and make such things as scene changes happen. *Backstage at The Lost Colony* by Dwayne Walls, Jr. is one of the first books – if not *the* first – to give readers some idea of how these elements come together each summer. He does this by following the 2017 production of *The Lost Colony*,

ABOVE One of the numerous glossy photographs included in *Backstage*

¹ See, for example, my article "Into the Vast Unknown: The Changing Ending of Paul Green's *The Lost Colony*," in *NCLR* 2018.

the show's eightieth anniversary season, from pre-opening rehearsals in mid-May to post-production strike in late August.

Walls is a theater professional and alumnus of *The Lost Colony*, having worked as an actor technician in 1983, 1987, and 1990, and as a carpenter in 1997 and 1998. His view is definitely backstage – there is hardly a mention of what it is like to watch the show from the audience's point of view. Walls's perspective is what makes the book work. Aside from Laurence G. Avery's introduction to his 2001 edition of Green's script,² in which Avery uses a night in the audience and a night in the control booth as a central feature, *Backstage at The Lost Colony* is the lone work I know of that uses this point of view. Walls tells about the production from not only the perspective of the booth, but also from throughout the entire theater complex. And he uses not only a single performance (or two) for its setting, but an entire season. He watches as the sets are brought out and repaired in the late spring and as the lighting crew works into the night to get set up. He visits the costume shop to see how the costumes are prepared for the new season as well as how they are washed and repaired as the summer goes on. He attends dance rehearsals and discusses the difficulties and dangers of doing movement on sand. This is a work that looks at what everyday life is like for the performers and technicians who spend some three months together putting on six performances a week.

In addition to writing about the performers and technicians,

Walls writes about the director and designers as well. It is here that the show's history comes in. To tell about current director Ira David Wood's vision for the show, Walls has to tell about Wood's having acted in the show from 1968 to 1970 under director Joe Layton. When Wood became director in 2013, his desire was to return the show to what Layton had done, updating the production to contemporary theatrical standards, meeting current audience expectations about such things as pacing, length, and even action seen on stage.

involvement with the show starting before Long was born and even before World War II. It also must include mention of Irene Smart Rains, the show's original costumer and Long's mentor, who worked on the show into the 1980s.

One last part of *The Lost Colony* that *Backstage at The Lost Colony* captures which can't be found elsewhere in print is Walls telling about the things connected with but outside of the show. These include *The Lost Colony's* Professional Theater Workshop productions as well as days on the beach and sometimes even day jobs at



PHOTOGRAPH BY JAMIL ZRAIKATI. COURTESY OF COQUINA PRESS

Similarly, *The Lost Colony* production history comes in when telling about production designer William Ivy Long. To understand Long's work redesigning the costumes starting in 1988 and continuing as he became the show's production designer in 1995, a position he still holds, means having to go back to Long's family

local tourist-oriented businesses. Just as interesting are glimpses into life in Morris Grove, where much of the cast and crew live during the summer. In fact, it is here, in the world within *The Lost Colony* culture but outside the production itself, that I wish Walls had given just a bit more. Saturday night post-production parties

² Laurence G. Avery, "Introduction: At The Lost Colony," *The Lost Colony: A Symphonic Drama of American History*, by Paul Green, ed. Laurence G. Avery (U of North Carolina P, 2001) 1–19.

ABOVE Director Ira David Wood, III (center) with actors Robert Hooghkirk as Old Tom (left) and Kole Mitchell McKinley (right, understudy) during rehearsal, Waterside Theatre, Manteo, NC, 2017

are written about, but no pictures of Morrison Grove are included in the book. And while Walls includes a chapter on the Maria Louise Lander statue of Virginia Dare in the Elizabethan Gardens next to the Waterside Theatre, I know from various sources that there are *The Lost Colony* cast and crew traditions associated with Landers's statue; no mention of these are included. That I want more that adds to my knowledge of *The Lost Colony's* past and present culture

is a way of saying that *Backstage at The Lost Colony* does what it should – provide information not available elsewhere and make readers think about what else we might want to know.

Offstage life and traditions are found not only in Walls's text. Short interviews with *The Lost Colony* alumni from the 1950s to the present day are given in sidebars throughout *Backstage at The Lost Colony*, reminding readers that the show has a long history.

But the main storytelling is done through two main features of the book. Walls's highly readable short chapters, mainly in first person, give readers glimpses backstage through his eyes as both a theater professional and an alumnus of the show. Alongside Walls's text and just as central are pictures. Included are production stills and promotional, archival, and backstage candid photographs. Almost every page includes some photograph either

MEMORIES OF THE PLAYWRIGHT'S SON: A CONVERSATION WITH PAUL ELIOT GREEN, JR.

by Dwayne E. Walls, Jr.

Paul Eliot Green, Jr. (1924–2018) son of North Carolina playwright Paul Green and his wife, Elizabeth Lay Green, served as a trustee of The Paul Green Foundation since its beginnings in 1982. The Foundation helps to support human rights and the arts. Green, Jr. was passionate about music and encouraged a love of the arts in his children. He was well-loved and will be greatly missed by his family and friends.

This interview was conducted in June 2017 at The Cedars of Chapel Hill, NC, his hometown.

Although Paul Green has been gone for many years, on a tip from an old family friend I find his son, Paul Jr., retired and living in Chapel Hill. He still remembers the energetic attempts by his father and the native islanders to promote simultaneously both *The Lost Colony* and the Outer Banks as a destination.

"They were just in time," he says about the show and the locals. "*The Lost Colony* brought the tourists and the tourists brought development. They were in the right

time together. They had a symbiosis." Then he adds thoughtfully, "I think I know why it has lasted; it's a good play. I think it's my father's best."

Paul is over ninety now, with feathery white hair, and clear white skin like wrinkled blank paper. He steps quickly enough with the assistance of a rolling walker, and a personal helper, Abdul, walks him to and from the places he needs to go outside of his apartment. He vaguely remembers making trips to the island in the

COURTESY OF SERENA EBHARDT



ABOVE Paul Green, Jr. (middle row center) with the cast of the 2014 production of his father's play *Johnny Johnson*, directed by Serena Ebhardt (front row center)

illustrating the text or taking the story a step further.

While *Backstage at The Lost Colony* is not an academic book by any means, it is a useful record and a reminder for those studying Green's script that *The Lost Colony* is not just a script, but a public presentation in which Green's script is filtered through directors, designers, actors and technicians, all necessary for audiences to experience the symphonic drama as intended. Even so, there are

some elements of the production that one wishes were addressed. For example, Walls never discusses casting a show in which Native American characters are a major part of the cast and yet are rarely played by Native American actors.

Finally, the very format of *Backstage at The Lost Colony* is another of its merits. Not fully a picture book and not quite big enough to be a coffee table book, *Backstage at The Lost Colony* edges on being both. For that reason,

it is definitely the sort of book that anyone who has been part of *The Lost Colony* production would want. It is also the sort of book that someone like me might buy as a souvenir, having sat in *The Lost Colony* audience more than once on family vacations to the Outer Banks. And for academics, it is a source that should be reviewed when writing about Paul Green's script to keep in mind that *The Lost Colony* is a production, not just a script. ■

1930s, but when I ask him if he ever spent a summer doing the show, he pipes right up, speaking with the assurance of any show veteran: "My parents parked us there in the summer of 1941, me and my sister, Byrd. She danced in the show and I spent the whole summer working with the three lighting guys. I was just beginning to get interested in electronics."

Paul stuck with electronics, eventually earning a PhD from MIT after serving in the US Navy. He helped work out the theories behind the Doppler radar mapping techniques used by NASA's Magellan space probe to survey the surface of Venus. Among his many honors, in 1982 he was elected to the National Academy of Engineering, and he is also a Fellow at the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers. But in the summer of '41 he was a teenager fascinated by radio whose heroes were Reginald Fessenden and Alpheus Drinkwater. He lodged with Keith Fearing and his family in Manteo: "I hung around with all the Fearing boys. They ran Manteo. It was hot summertime and there was the causeway over to Whalebone, so we did a lot of swimming on the beach."

Looking at him from across the table as we have lunch together, I try unsuccessfully to imagine this snowy white man with a tan. His retirement facility's dining room is both opulent and spacious, but when I mention that I neglected to bring my wallet from the car, he says, "Your money's no good here."

As we wait to be served, I hand him the souvenir program I have with me. A sweet smile instantly emerges, his eyes narrowing as the toothy grin spreads across his ancient face. I never knew his father, who died two years before I first did the show, but from old photographs I can tell he has his father's eyes. "This brings back a lot of memories," he says gently as he slowly turns the pages. The program is from this year, not 1941, but that seems to make no difference to him.

"I remember at home as a boy when my dad was working on writing the play: One afternoon my mother said, 'Go fetch Doogie and tell him --'"

"Doogie?" I ask, cutting him off.

"That's what the family called him. We in the family. She didn't call him Paul, she called him Doogie. My mother told me to 'go fetch Doogie and tell him dinner is ready,' so I went to the little office where he was working on writing the play and I said something to him, but he hurled back some angry retort, because I had interrupted him, and I quipped, 'What's the matter, Dad? Still can't find 'em?'"

Over sandwiches, he talks between bites about trips down to the island. His memory is good, but he tires easily and wants to keep our interview down to an hour, so I ask him about traveling from Chapel Hill to Manteo: "To get to Manteo, we drove to Elizabeth City. We recited the play to each other word for word on the drive down. And there was no road at all below Whalebone; it was just sand. There was nothing down there all the way to Hatteras."

Then a fresh memory hits him. "I helped Dad with the music. I was his assistant when we drove up to DC to do research in the Library of Congress. Dad read music, and I did a little, so he ensconced me in a back room and brought me sheet music, saying, 'copy this' and 'copy that.' He was pulling out all these public domain English folk songs." Then he adds, "I was his Xerox machine." My hour is up, so we walk back to his rooms. As we walk, he asks to see the program again; when I ask him if he would like one for himself, he immediately says yes, giving me his mailing address.

"I could drop it off," I say.

"That might interfere with my new vocation," he replies, and I remember that I woke him twice in the middle of the day to arrange our lunch. ■

COLLABORATORS AND TEAM PLAYERS: TWO 2018 NORTH CAROLINA LITERARY HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES, “PEOPLE WHO HELP US DO WHAT WE HAVE DONE”

ON BEHALF OF THE MANY WHO APPRECIATE JAMES W. CLARK JR.

presentation remarks by Margaret D. Bauer

I appreciate so much being offered the privilege of introducing our first inductee today, Professor James W. Clark, Jr., whom I was blessed to meet about twenty years ago. Knowing Jim allowed me to meet Bonnie, which, as we say in Louisiana, is *lagniappe*, an extra, unexpected gift.

During his time as North Carolina State Professor Clark, Jim trained countless future English teachers, who have taken their literature lessons across the Old North State and beyond. He also incorporated the university's Humanities Extension Program into his classroom, and in that program worked with others to produce such documentaries as *Their Native Earth: A Celebration of North Carolina Literature*, which could then be used by other educators to teach their students about one of North Carolina's most valuable resources: its literary treasures.

Just a few years after I met Jim, he “retired” from his almost forty-year-career as a beloved English professor, although the benefits office at State apparently forgot to explain to him what “retired” means. Still, these many years since his “retirement,” Jim continues to teach within NC State's Encore Center for Lifelong Enrichment. In these classes he encourages older North Carolina citizens to write down and thus preserve their stories for future generations, thereby expanding our literary treasures to include voices that might otherwise be lost in time. Allow me to quote a student in such a class, Frannie Ashburn, retired director of the North Carolina Center for the Book.

When she could not attend the North Carolina Writers Conference when we honored Jim in 2015, she sent a tribute, within which she remarked, “The best thing about teaching is that it is life-changing for everyone involved: the teachers, the students, and the communities where we work and live out our daily lives. The best thing about having Jim Clark as your teacher is that

“No one – no one – is more deserving of our praise and our thanks for good work in promoting the study of this state's literature, history, and folklore and in teaching and encouraging others to try their hand at creative writing, autobiography, and memoir writing than Jim. He has spent a lifetime personally studying the humanities and has built a remarkable career developing opportunities for others to seek the more meaningful and fulfilling lives that the humanities offer us.”—Robert Anthony

he'll open your eyes and your mind and launch you into lifelong learning, whether you are eighteen years old or eighty.”¹ According to Frannie, “Jim has changed lives for the better from the time he first stood in front of a class and opened a book.” I agree.

Frannie also noted in those comments how it did not take her very long during her twenty years of traveling with Jim for the Humanities Extension Program to realize, “in every audience and every gathering he knew somebody and most often multiple somebodies. He had taught them or he had taught their children or he knew their parents or he had worked with them somewhere in some capacity.” I know what she is talking about. As editor of *NCLR*, I have often benefited from these connections. I first met the active Thomas Wolfe scholar James W. Clark, Jr., editor of the first unabridged edition of Wolfe's novella *The Lost Boy*, when he directed LeGette Blythe to *NCLR* for his edition of a story by Thomas Wolfe's mother for our tenth anniversary edition. And Jim is still sending significant literary North Carolina artifacts to *NCLR*, most recently his own interview with Bill Price, brother of North Carolina Hall of Famer Reynolds Price, for our twenty-fifth issue.

And so many in between, including young scholars like Gina Caison, a North Carolina native who was then working on her PhD in California. Her dissertation

¹ Find links to the North Carolina Writers Conference tributes to James W. Clark, Jr. on *NCLR's* [website](#).



PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDREW MOREHEAD

included Paul Green, so Jim connected her with me to talk about our mutual interest in Green, and *NCLR* ended up with both her important interview with Eddie Swimmer about his revival of *Unto These Hills* and later, thanks to our discussions of Green while she visited, an essay on Green's play *The House of Connelly*, written by a student of hers.² By then Gina was Georgia State Professor Caison teaching *The House of Connelly* in her classes. Her student, by the way, wrote the essay in her next step toward becoming a professor, as a PhD candidate at LSU – so you see how Jim has helped North Carolina literature to reach beyond our borders – another example of his continued and continuing influence on the preservation of North Carolina literary history.

I know that so many others would have appreciated the opportunity to stand before you all and say, thank you, Jim Clark, on behalf of the whole state. So I will borrow from another such person, as I've done from Frannie, and read to you a likely incomplete but still overwhelming list of just Jim's leadership roles in public and community service, that Bob Anthony compiled when we honored Jim back in 2015 (and I'm going to cut Bob's already selected list down to just Jim's roles related to the liberal arts): President of the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association, the Thomas Wolfe Society, the Paul Green Foundation, the North Caroliniana Society, and the Friends of the Gregg Museum of Art and Design; Co-chair of the North Carolina Freedom Monu-

ment Committee; very active past Chair of the North Carolina Writers Conference; and Chair of the Selection Committee of the North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame (speaking of which, I'm on that committee and will admit unapologetically that we went behind Jim's back to add him after he led the committee through selecting inductees this year. His name has been on our list of possible nominees for years, of course, but since he never seems to get any closer to really retiring, we just had to take matters into our own hands).

So, Dr. James W. Clark, Jr., I appreciate the privilege of introducing you as a 2018 North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame inductee, and I want to assure you that we have learned your lesson. I, for example, in my capacity as *NCLR* editor, will continue to make those connections you taught me to make, which encourage the next generation to preserve one of North Carolina's treasures, its literary history, and I will continue to do everything I can to support writers like the other inductees here today, who create that literature. Congratulations to you all. ■■■

REVISITING THE SPIRITS OF NORTH CAROLINA LITERATURE

acceptance remarks by James W. Clark, Jr.

As a literary historian, I think of Weymouth as the great expression of North Carolina's literary culture, a culture that shows who we are, a culture that is transformative, and it is a special pleasure to be inducted into the Hall of Fame that's located here in Weymouth.

I want to think of a group of people whose collaboration with me makes today possible for me and for them, and these are the videographers and script writers and authors who agreed over many years to be a part of Humanities Extension's effort to spread the news about North Carolina's writing all across the state and beyond on television, in videography, in classrooms, who have been absolutely indispensable to the effort we've made to make North Carolina's literary culture get the attention it so richly deserves.

We started this work in the late 1970s, when the literary revolution that Guy Owen had brought to NC State by joining its faculty a decade before got underway. And some of you know that Sam Ragan, who was instrumental in the preservation of this fabulous place, taught poetry workshops at NC State in addition to his job as publisher of the *News & Observer*.

² Find Kelly Vines's "A Drama of Class and Race: Southern Progressivism in Paul Green's *The House of Connelly*" in *NCLR* 2016.

ABOVE James W. Clark, Jr. at the ceremony, Weymouth Center of Arts & Humanities, Southern Pines, NC, 7 Oct. 2018 (Watch Bauer's presentation and Clark's acceptance remarks.)

I can go on and on and name countless people who have been indispensable to the growth of North Carolina's literary culture and the simultaneous growth at North Carolina State University of a degree-granting undergraduate and master's level English program. NC State is a land grant university. Though I have degrees from Chapel Hill and Duke, I want to spend the last minute or two of my celebration of this afternoon praising the land grant impulse that by the late 1980s NC State felt confident enough to begin to come forward with the Humanities Extension program that could spread the writers' news and images and works across the state. No one else in North Carolina in public education has an office in every county. No one else in the higher education system of North Carolina is thus equipped for classroom space to be devoted to the showing of video tapes that we had made about our writers or sometimes to have the writers themselves travel to these counties across the state to speak with their readers face to face.

Many of you have taken part or have benefitted from this astonishing place, so what I want to leave with you is the sense that Weymouth and North Carolina State University say to the people of this state, "May we help you? May we have your permission to introduce you to the writers who celebrate in most ways the North Carolina culture, the North Carolina language, the North Carolina sense of place, the North Carolina sense of history? All of these things come to bear upon what's happening here this afternoon. And for those of you who are writers, this house behind you is a place where writers can come and spend a day or two or three or four working on a manuscript, and the work gets done here.

Now before I came up here, I told Randall Kenan that I was going to steal one of his titles, *A Visitation of Spirits*. Some of you have read that book that Randall put out in the late 1980s. What I'm going to use it for this afternoon is to assert that this house is haunted. There are many people of credibility who can swear that when they have been here, the house has spooked them, but two spirits in particular, I want to visit upon you in saying thank you. The first is Sally Buckner, a great lady of this place and of North Carolina poetry and of North Carolina education and former head of the English department at Peace University. Sally died just this past January.³ She had not

been inducted into the Hall of Fame, and so I want to animate her spirit here with you this afternoon.

The other person I want to bring to your attention is Richard Walser. He was inducted in the first class on a hot May afternoon in 1996. Mr. Walser was at NC State when I arrived there in 1967. He became my mentor. He taught me a lot. We travelled together across the state to talk about North Carolina writers. He even was settled enough in his reputation to include the best sentimental romances of the day in his lectures to North Carolina high school teachers. He was broadminded in that sense of inclusiveness back then, but Professor Walser had no doctorate. When he was a student at Chapel Hill, he told the faculty members that he wanted to write his dissertation on North Carolina writers, and do you know what they said? "You can't do that Dick, because there's been no scholarship worth a damn about North Carolina writers, and so there's nothing to make a dissertation out of." And he set himself the course after serving in the second World War to create the scholarship on Paul Green and Bernice Kelly Harris and Thomas Wolfe and other writers, so that today I and other people can stand in his stance. So I leave you with the image of Sally Buckner and Richard Walser as people who help us do what we have done.

I thank you very much. ■■■

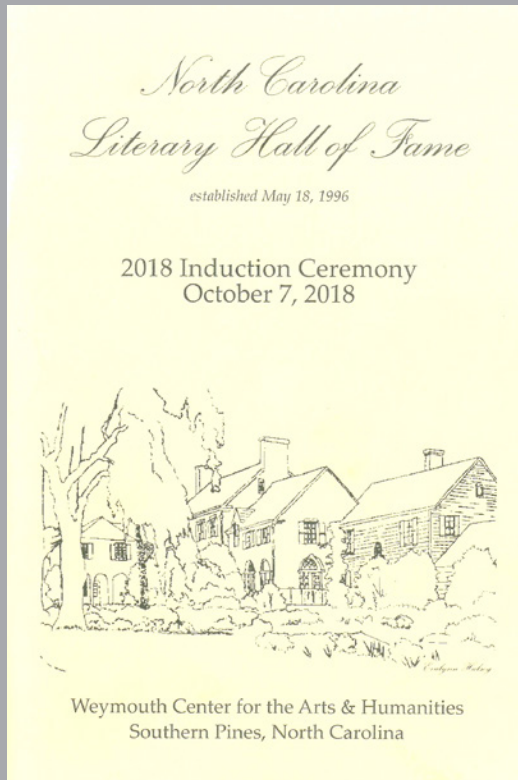
MARSHA WHITE WARREN, ALWAYS ASKING, "WHO'S MISSING?"

presentation remarks by Georgann Eubanks

When she first came to North Carolina, Marsha Warren took a job as a first-grade teacher. By 1987, the fledgling North Carolina Writers' Network had barely passed Kindergarten. It was a perfect match.

The Network was a sound concept. Judy Hogan, Margaret Booth Baddour, Paul Jones, and I had spent many evenings sitting cross-legged in a circle just like children on Judy's living room floor in Chapel Hill. We hashed out the by-laws, the statewide mandate, our desire for the North Carolina Arts Council to pay more attention to literature and writers. We had been to the NEA to solicit funding. We went to The Bethesda Writers Center to

³ Read tributes in memory of Sally Buckner in *NCLR Online* 2018.



explore the model of a place-based literary center where writers could come and write, get their chapbooks printed, take classes. But that could not be our model. The greater DC area had a population close to that of the entire state of North Carolina back then. We needed a traveling show. And after the good work and relatively short tenures of our first two directors, Robert Hill Long and Phil Hines, we found our leader for the long haul, Marsha White Warren.

She carried us from first grade to graduation, building a true statewide network of writers, establishing contests, finding financial support and distinguished advisors, and always asking, *Who's missing?* Five middle-aged white people started the Network. Marsha saw that we needed to do better than that. African American voices and Native American voices became a priority – better reflecting the full history of North Carolina literature.

Our annual conferences were grand affairs with the likes of Alex Haley, Li Young Li, Sharon Olds, Rita Dove, and Patricia Cornwell. Marsha worked tirelessly and on a shoestring. Sometimes I'd be coming back to Carrboro on Highway 54 at night and see the lights still on in the White Cross School at ten or eleven o'clock. This was

after the Network had moved out of the spare bedroom in Marsha's house where she could work in her pajamas.

Marsha navigated and won the allegiance of book groups, local bookstores, writers' groups – always honoring geographic differences and multiple genres and reckoning with territoriality and artistic quirks. Making new writers feel welcome and honoring them at whatever stage in their development of craft has been the key. Marsha firmly secured the ethos of hospitality and fun that characterizes the Network to this day.

The one thing I worried about in all this was that Marsha could never be replaced. She did so much. How could anybody else really fill her shoes? We never paid her enough. But in hindsight, I realize that the care and feeding required of a first grader is very different from that of a full-grown being, which is what she nurtured and what the Network has become. Now we have our routines. We are mature.

Case in point: we are here today honoring the newest among the sixty-plus inductees already in the North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame, which Marsha and the Network also helped establish with her dear friend Sam Ragan and the North Carolina legislature. Diplomacy, grace, perseverance, grit – these are the traits of Marsha Warren. We know what to do now. We have been taught well. We had a sterling mentor. Friends, let us now praise Marsha Warren for all she has given us. ■■■

IN PRAISE OF TEAMWORK

acceptance remarks by Marsha White Warren

I'd like to begin by saying that if everyone who should be up here with me, were here, we wouldn't fit behind this lectern. I'm a member of a team and I'd like to tell you about just a few of my many teammates from those early, formative years at the Network. But before I do that, I'll tell you how I got to know them, so I get to tell you about the Red Barron Restaurant in Carrboro, NC.

After my mother died in 1977, I was inconsolable and for some unknown reason – as I had not been a writer before – I began writing. I began writing sad poems – not about her – I couldn't do that – yet. I wrote a poem about Beatrix Potter's lonely little life in the top floor nursery of her home, while her parents went about their fancy London lives and how she had her butler, Cox, bring her a mouse from the pantry to play with and to draw. And I wrote a poem about the time young Edward Albee, whose dream

it was to be a poet, got up the courage to take his poetry to W.H. Auden. The famous poet responded to Albee's poems by tossing them one by one into the river as they sat drinking coffee. And I wrote a poem entitled "Even Root Cellars can Burn" about my friend's house that burned to the ground. I wasn't very cheerful in those days.

Then six months after Mother died, I saw a tiny announcement in the *Chapel Hill Weekly*. It reported that the Friday Noon Poets would be meeting as usual at the Red Barron Restaurant in Carrboro, and that all you had to do, was to come and bring something to read. So I took up with the Friday Noon Poets, joined the North Carolina Poetry Society and, as a charter member, joined the brand-new North Carolina Writers' Network.

When I retired as director of the Network, there was a great gathering at White Cross School, and I was presented with a scrapbook full of good wishes and wonderful memories. So to prepare for today, I decided to open up that scrapbook and be reminded how the literary community of North Carolina – its writers and readers, its funders and audiences – had benefited from Georgann's motto that she created for the North Carolina Writers' Network: "Writing and Reading, Everybody's Art!" We really believed it – it would become our mission. Writing wouldn't be just for a few – it would be for everyone. I'd seen that firsthand, how writing had played a seminal role in my life.

Now, about some of those teammates! When you look inside the scrapbook, you see a picture of Marty Silverthorne there in front of the lovely old 1928 White Cross School, but what you don't see, is that at the back entrance to the school is a ramp. As we were reaching out to writers in our wide "mountains-to-the-sea-shaped state" we got a letter from a group Down East who called themselves "Bards of a Feather." It was from Marty. I was enchanted with their name so I called them up. Later when Marty came on my board and we had meetings at my house or here in the Great Room at Weymouth, he could get inside. But not at White Cross. Well, badger isn't quite the right word for Marty, but I can tell you that he made it crystal clear that he was going to get inside that building on his own power! I knew he meant business, so I made a pitch to Tom Whisnant and Gary Phillips,

PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVID POTORTI



owners of White Cross School and to Mary Reagan, Nancy Trovillion, and Debbie McGill over at the state Arts Council, that we needed to be ADA accessible. We needed a grant to build that ramp, and build it we did.

Marty is one of those teammates, as well and Tom and Gary and Mary, Nancy, and Debbie. Let me also add Betty Ray McCain and Betsy Buford at Cultural Resources, to our list of teammates.

In the early years, we knew that the key to building membership was the newsletter – the *Network News* – and in its pages was a column, "Submit It," that gave the writers valuable publishing opportunities. Nancy Peacock was the person who perfected it by contacting, by US snail mail, national journals and magazines for updated information. But the *Network News* required funds so I tramped over to see Frank Daniels, Jr. at the *News & Observer* and he funded the newsletter for three years then turned us over to Rolfe Neill at the *Charlotte Observer* for three years who passed us on to Joe Doster at the *Winston-Salem Journal*. All members of the team.

ABOVE Marsha White Warren with Eastern North Carolina poet Marty Silverthorne at the induction ceremony, Weymouth Center of Arts & Humanities, Southern Pines, NC, 7 Oct. 2018 (Watch Eubanks's [presentation](#) and Warren's acceptance [remarks](#).)

“Marsha lives by the 3H’s – History, Heritage and Human Rights. . . . The main theme of her life and career is Diversity.”—Margaret Booth Baddour (North Carolina Writers Conference, Southern Pines, NC, 2018)

One day Susan Simone came into the office at White Cross and said she wanted to volunteer but didn’t want to “stuff envelopes and enter names in the database.” She wrote in the scrapbook, “Little did I know that my resistance to the routine would launch me into a whole new world when you asked me to organize the Prison Pen Pals program. I entered into the world of communication with prison writers, men and women writing out from isolated cells in a place where creative achievement is not a first priority.” Susan paired up lots of writers and inmates as Pen Pals.

As it turned out, about that same time, Stephen Barefoot was ready to move on as director of the Paul Green Foundation, so he and I came up with a plan. We convinced our respective boards to move the Foundation in with the Writers’ Network at White Cross and I would be its director for one day a week – it was a small foundation in those days. Now I had the perfect solution, I could use Paul Green grant funds to support our work in the prisons and soon Susan and Dick Krawiec, Jaki Shelton Green, and many others were teaching men and women in prisons around the state. We made all the inmates – now, not just Pen Pals, but also in our English classes and writing workshops – complimentary members of the Network.

This letter in the retirement scrapbook is from David, a Network-member inmate: “I remember thinking of how at ease you and the writers you brought were, sitting in the room at Central Prison, with a rapist at one side and a murderer on the other. Across the table sat a child molester, a bank robber and a wife-abuser, but you treated us all as human beings, something most of us in prison don’t have reason to expect. One man who normally spoke less than four words without interjecting obscenities, didn’t utter a single four-letter word during the hour-long session – now that’s what I call respect.”

I can report that the Foundation continues to support efforts through the Hidden Voices’ prison programming. We also support Student Action with Farmworkers’ “Theatre in the Fields” annual summer program for migrant workers in Eastern North Carolina. Since its founding, the Founda-

tion has granted over a half a million dollars in support of numerous arts and human rights projects.

So, Susan, Dick, Jaki, and all the others involved with our prison work – including those incarcerated men and women who had the courage to write their stories and poems, are all members of the team. I’d also like you to know Debra Kaufman, my first president those thirty years ago. I imagine we probably talked five times a day, in those uncertain times; we just had to figure out what to do, together.

Now for one more teammate – the mate who has been my mate for fifty-nine years and without whom I couldn’t even have been on the team – David Warren.

So, I’ve given you a quick glance of what we were up to in those years when we were building a literary community: accessible venues for literary programs; supporting Network membership with the newsletter and gathering up everyone else under the sun we could find to tell them that writing and reading is *everybody’s* art. And it continues to this day under the skill and dedication of Network Director Ed Southern. Everybody’s Art operates on the premise that writing can enrich, and it can heal.

Writing gets done at lofty writer retreats and at kitchen counters and sometimes gets stuffed into an apron pocket. Sometimes writing goes on the back of a receipt as you leave the grocery store. And stories can be written on death row, can tell the story of a life that would have ended without being recorded, had it not been for our dedicated writer and teachers who protected those stories and brought them to the outside.

I thank you very much for this honor. It’s because of all of you that I’m here – being champions of literature and literacy has been, and will always be, a team effort and I’m just so happy I had the courage to take my sad poems to that Friday Noon Poets gathering at the Red Barron Restaurant in Carrboro and then to meet you all. ■

in **MEMORIAM:**
The journey of
JOHN EHLE

notes contributed
 by NCLR staff

“John RENDERED THE
 MOUNTAIN WORLD WITH ITS
people I KNEW SO WELL IN
 A WAY THAT MADE BOTH THE
land AND ITS INHABITANTS
 LARGER AND MORE *real*
 THAN *life.*”

Read about **TERRY ROBERTS** within the review of his latest novel in this issue. He has contributed frequently to *NCLR*, including essays on John Ehle in 2010 and 2012.

JOHN EHLE (1925–2018) earned a bachelor’s degree in radio, television, and motion pictures and a master’s in dramatic arts from UNC Chapel Hill. In 1967, he married the British actress Rosemary Harris, and they have a daughter, Jennifer Ehle, also an actress. His numerous honors include the North Carolina Award for Literature from the Governor in 1972, the John Tyler Caldwell Award for the Humanities from the North Carolina Humanities Council in 1995, induction into the North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame in 1997, and the R. Hunt Parker Memorial Award for significant contributions to North Carolina Literature from the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association in 2008.

BY TERRY ROBERTS

I first became aware of John Ehle through his novels, which I read voraciously and with wonder in my late teens and early twenties, and again when I was a young high school English teacher in the mountains of western North Carolina. When I first thought of contacting John, it was 1980 or thereabouts. At the time, I longed to become a writer myself, and John’s novels, especially the mountain novels, spoke to me both as a native of the Southern mountains and as a would-be writer. I was intensely moved by the depth and power of what he had accomplished working with a landscape that I thought of as my own. John rendered the mountain world with its people I knew so well in a way that made both the land and its inhabitants larger and more real than life. Although I was only twenty-five years old, I had lived enough to realize that he had given the full measure of human dignity to people whom most Americans would have dismissed as hillbillies or worse.

I then did what one did in that time before internet and cell phones: I wrote John a letter – carefully phrased and not too long – to tell him just how much his fiction meant to me. I folded in a few questions about his work, for which I truly wanted answers, but the questions were also designed to elicit a response. Maybe I would hear something in return, even if it was only a form letter of some kind.

OPPOSITE TOP **John Ehle, circa 1980**



COURTESY OF PRESS 53

In those days, John was widely known and celebrated, not just as a writer but also as an educator, social activist, and cultural gadfly. I didn't tell anyone that I had written to the great man because, deep down, I doubted I would hear anything in return.

How wrong I was! John wrote back in the next mail, a letter that was at once informal and funny. He answered my questions, asked to know more about me, and invited me to come visit sometime so that "we can have a look at you." That exchange of letters from more than thirty-five years ago began a lifelong friendship that is easily one of the important relationships in my life. I hope to tell you a little about that friendship, and in so doing, capture just how astonishing a man John Ehle was.

Within the year, I did go visit John and his wife so that they could "have a look at me." I first visited with them at their cabin in Penland, in what must have been the spring or summer of 1982. I interviewed John for *The Arts Journal*, a now-defunct newsprint magazine that was popular in Asheville at the time, about his new novel, *The Winter People*.¹ When I pulled up in the yard at Penland, a most fetching woman came out to greet me, waved and held out her hand. "Hi, I'm Rosie," she said in the most cheerful tone imaginable. It was, of course, Rosemary Harris, John's wife, and her smile, like her voice, gleamed.

While Rosie fried chicken (John had taught her how), John and I sat first in a side room where he wrote and, after lunch, on the porch, where we talked long about *The Winter People*, but also about the mountains and how they shaped the action of his novels, gave the characters something beyond themselves against which to strive. For the mountains – and some of the people who live here – are not merely beautiful, they are dangerous. Winter in the high peaks will take your stock, your children, and your life. It's no accident that the characters in John's novels are often forced to be the people of winter: fighters and survivors. A sometimes harsh environment is not all that the mountains provided John however.

Either in that conversation or one that came later, John described how Paul Green, the Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright who mentored John in Chapel Hill, once told him that he was fortunate to have the mountains as his natural setting. They form a kind of green bowl, he explained to John, a natural stage wherein the characters are isolated from the rest of the world, and our attention is focused entirely on the small, isolated community within those steep walls. Certainly, this is true, for John's imagination was an entirely dramatic one. For all his lyricism, he was a writer of the most intense and compelling scenes, in which love and hate flame out to devastating effects. Green, himself a flatlander from Harnett County, was jealous of the natural stage that was John's heritage.

Over the succeeding years, I visited John many times, either at the house in Winston-Salem or at the cabin in Penland, and we saw each other in meetings and at events. And as the years turned into

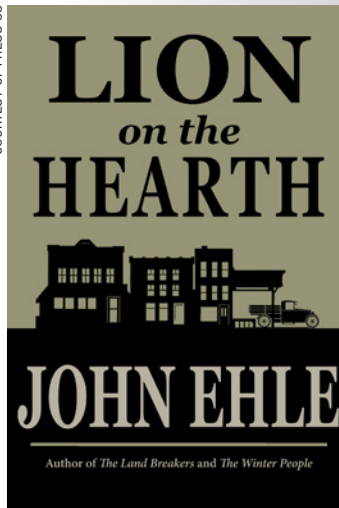


PHOTOGRAPHY BY LYNN ROBERTS

¹ John Ehle, *The Winter People* (Harper & Row, 1982).

LEFT Terry Roberts with John Ehle and Rosemary Harris, Winston-Salem, Oct. 2016

COURTESY OF PRESS 53



... HE IS WRITING ABOUT HIS
 FAMILY *history* AS WELL AS
 REGIONAL HISTORY, *but* IT'S A
 HISTORY *reshaped*
 AND *repurposed* THROUGH
 HIS *imagination* . . .

decades, our first acquaintance turned into something richer and deeper. Although I've never had a brother and so can't say for certain, it seems to me that over time, John became something very like an older brother to me. Even though he was born over thirty years before me, he never became a father figure because he was always relaxed, funny, and profane. He was never an expert or authoritarian. And as our friendship grew, he began to confide in me much as an older brother or favorite uncle. When I ask myself why he felt in a way like a brother – he had two brothers and two sisters himself – I think it's because we were so alike in background and instinct.

Both of us grew up in families that had long, deeply entwined mountain roots and had begun the process of leaving the high mountains and moving into town. In John's case, he recounts some of that narrative history in *Lion on the Hearth* and *Last One Home*, the latter of which has in part to do with his grandfather's insurance agency.² And the result for both of us is that we were at heart the product of the higher mountains and deeper coves, but with some broader social experience, and as we grew up, we both acquired a veneer of civilization over an original heart of maple and oak. Both of us were raised, in part, by our grandmothers: John by his maternal grandmother, Lilly Smith Starnes; and I by my paternal grandmother, Belva Anderson Roberts. In a 2009 conversation I had with John, he described this influence:

My grandmother lived at 750 Haywood Road in West Asheville. When I was a boy, she was my best friend. She had been raised out in the mountains and had moved to town. She dipped snuff and read the newspaper. And it was her children, my aunts and uncles, who grew up in the mountains. They were my introduction to mountain people and their ways. My uncle Mitch was a banjo player and repaired rifles on Lexington Avenue in Asheville. My grandmother nurtured my imagination and provided the link back to an earlier time.³

It was during that conversation in John's living room in Winston-Salem that I think we both came to realize how similar our early experience had been. My Grandma Roberts was my own best friend when I was a boy, and it was she – along with my father, plus his brother and sisters – who provided the link back to that earlier time in Madison County.

If anything, John's experience was more urban than mine simply because he grew up in West Asheville and was connected through his father's work to Asheville, as he describes in *Lion on the Hearth* and *Last One Home*. When he writes about the Wright and King families in *The Land Breakers* and the novels that followed, he is writing about his family history as well as regional history, but it's a history reshaped and repurposed through his imagination, based on the stories he

² John Ehle, *Lion on the Hearth* (Harper & Row, 1961); *Last One Home* (Harper & Row, 1984).

³ Quoted from Terry Roberts, "wonderfully simple, yet complex: The Mountain Novels of John Ehle," *North Carolina Literary Review* 19 (2010): 12–13; subsequently cited parenthetically.



COURTESY OF PRESS 53

heard as a boy. In the same way, when I found my own way back in time through the Robbins and Freeman families, it was through stories that I heard my father and grandmother tell. And in each case, we found regional events – the construction of construction of the railroad up the Appalachian escarpment in his novel *The Road* and the internment of over two thousand German nationals in my *A Short Time to Stay Here* – as containers for far-flung family history.⁴

Another experience that John and I shared in our separate childhoods was the profound influence of that old-time religion. John's mother was a fundamentalist Christian, who had little use for any book but the King James Bible, although, she did write poetry, most of which was devotional in nature. I have a copy of her one collection of verse on my bookshelf. My own mother, like my father, was a voracious reader, but she was also, like John's mother, a devout Christian, and she took us early and often to the First Baptist Church in Weaverville. As a result, both John and I were steeped in hellfire preaching from an early age and knew the Bible as only Baptist children come to know it.

In each of these ways, our boyhoods were surprisingly similar, so that when we met as men, we knew each other well from the start, despite the difference in our ages. We spoke the same language, both literally and figuratively, as language bespeaks experience. And as we both grew older, the difference in our ages grew less important because we were both interested in so many of the same things: books, places, people, and our family lives, past and present. Furthermore, we were both obsessed with education and opportunity as evidenced by John's role in founding the Governor's School (which I attended), the North Carolina School of the Arts (now the University of North Carolina School of the Arts), and the Committee for Education – juxtaposed against my own lifelong struggles to create rigor and access through the National Paideia Center. We had ever so many quiet but passionate conversations about how to open the doors of opportunity and training to talented young people who otherwise would wither on the vine.

Over the years, as I continued to visit with John both in Penland and in Winston-Salem, both those houses became a part of my own inner landscape. It would be a mistake, however, to loosely name either of John and Rosemary's residences here in North Carolina "houses." Their home in Winston-Salem is an impossibly large and rambling villa with rooms beyond rooms spread over three floors, all filled with wonders. For years, I dreamed of that house from time to time, of visiting there or even living there, until I began to realize that those dreams were a kind of touchstone, a returning home not to a place but to a core of being like a family. Often, I would think of that house – filled with John and Rosie's voices – or dream of that house during times of crisis in my own life, not because I had lived there, but because what John and I had in common was so closely intertwined with the man I meant to be – the man I hoped to be.



COURTESY OF KEVIN MORGAN WATSON



COURTESY OF KEVIN MORGAN WATSON

ABOVE Rosemary Harris with Kevin Watson, editor and owner of Press 53 of Winston-Salem at Books and Beans in Little Switzerland, NC, 2018 (See Press 53's new editions of Ehle's books throughout this layout and on the publisher's [website](#).)

⁴ John Ehle, *The Land Breakers* (Harper & Row, 1964); *The Road* (Harper & Row, 1967); Terry Roberts, *A Short Time to Stay Here* (Ingalls, 2012).

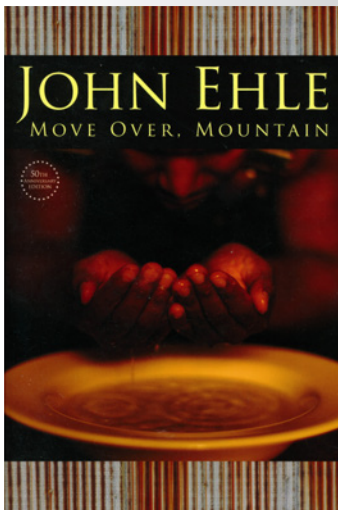
“FOR SOMEONE LIKE *John*,
IT’S NEVER JUST ABOUT YOUR
OWN *work* BUT ALSO THE
opportunities
YOU PROVIDE FOR *others*.”

Their cabin in Penland is not far from the Penland School of Crafts (appropriately) near Bakersville, built around an original log structure from the nineteenth century. John and I once went down into the dirt cellar of the cabin at Penland in search of wine that he himself had bottled years before while studying the winemaking process. We found several, dusty bottles that had turned to something like vinegar and laughed till we cried just at the smell, neither of us brave enough to taste it. The author of *The Cheeses and Wines of England and France, with Notes on Irish Whisky*, was a fine cook in the spontaneous, cast iron style of nothing fancy but everything mouthwatering.⁵ One of the best meals I ate in my life was a steak dinner that John prepared for several of us, the meat roasted on a charcoal grill, with potatoes, greens, and wine, of course.

In a way, these two homes – along with apartments in New York and London – represented at least some of the facets of John’s nature. He was equally at home on the rough backroads of Mitchell County, North Carolina, and the streets of Manhattan or London. During the last few years, he did grow less physically sure of himself and less comfortable in New York – where he and Rosie could be close to Jennifer, their daughter – and longed to be home in North Carolina. But even so, John could and would talk to almost anyone about most anything. He knew volumes about landscape, plants, animals, farming, building, food, alcohol, country life, city existence, war and peace, politics, and education. Witness the expertise that he poured into *The Cheeses and Wines of England and France, with Notes on Irish Whiskey* and *Trail of Tears: The Rise and Fall of the Cherokee Nation*.⁶ His novels are startling in the depth of their sensory detail on subjects far and wide, both near and removed in time. He was an offhand and unassuming polymath.

As I got to know John and read more deeply into all his novels – not just the mountain novels but also *Move Over, Mountain*; *Kingstree Island*, *The Changing of the Guard*, and *The Widow’s Trial* – I was also surprised to find more evidence of his passion for education.⁷ I had known by reputation about his role as a “one-man think-tank” in Governor Terry Sanford’s administration along with his design of and advocacy for the North Carolina Governor’s School. But new projects that he was involved in kept emerging: his role in founding the North Carolina School of the Arts and the North Carolina School of Science and Math. His role in driving the Awards Committee for Education provided summer enrichment activities for poor Black, Latino, and Native Appalachian teenagers from across North Carolina. What became apparent over time was that his adult life had been devoted to creating opportunities for talented young people stuck in the many cultural backwaters of the state to experience a wider, more encouraging and accepting world. He spent so much of his life opening doors for others.

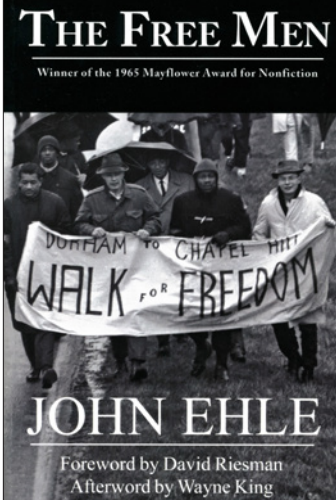
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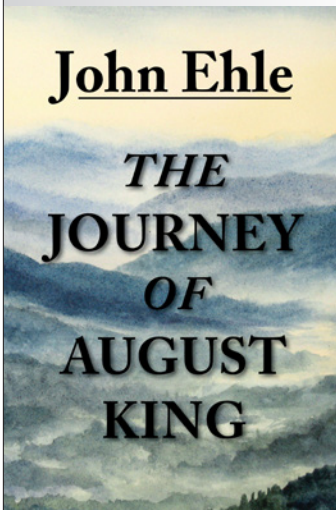
⁵ John Ehle and Linda Taylor, *The Cheeses and Wines of England and France, with Notes on Irish Whisky* (Harper & Row, 1972).

⁶ John Ehle, *Trail of Tears: The Rise and Fall of the Cherokee Nation* (Doubleday, 1988).

⁷ John Ehle, *Move Over, Mountain* (Morrow, 1957); *Kingstree Island* (Morrow, 1959); *The Changing Of The Guard* (Random House, 1974); *The Widow’s Trial* (Harper & Row, 1989).



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This theme in John's life – access and inspiration – must have come from his own experience growing up in West Asheville and slowly finding his own way by fits and starts, through his public schooling there, at Asheville-Biltmore College, and ultimately at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill after serving as a foot soldier in World War II, then slowly translating experience into art. Imagine the results if he had himself enjoyed the summer experience of the Governor's School or had he matriculated at the University of North Carolina School of the Arts. I never heard him say it, but I imagine that what he missed most in his own education, he worked to provide for the rest of us. And in a very real sense, that became a personal story for me in that I saw in John what it means to be an artist cursed and blessed with a robust social conscience. For someone like John, it's never just about your own work but also the opportunities you provide for others.

Those readers who only know John's fiction might be surprised to learn how this social and cultural consciousness was borne out in his nonfiction books *The Survivor: The Story of Eddy Hukov*, *Shepherd of the Streets: The Story of the Reverend James A. Gunsweller and His Crusade on the New York West Side*, and *The Free Men*.⁸ This last book, *The Free Men*, concerns the civil rights movement at UNC Chapel Hill during the late 1950s and early '60s. John's sympathetic treatment of activists from both races earned him lasting enmity from the more conservative power brokers in that community. Some believe that it's part of the reason that he eventually decamped from Chapel Hill and settled in Winston-Salem. Just as his own family – especially his mother – had objected to his early depiction of black characters in *Move Over, Mountain*, the old guard in Chapel Hill was not ready for a writer who challenged Jim Crow assumptions in the “southern part of heaven.”⁹

In ever so many ways, John was a true cultural gadfly, stinging the hide of a ponderous, post-war society, slouching slowly toward racial and social equality, although it is seldom remarked that social activism seeped into the novels as well. The ongoing tension between the farmers and planters (wealthy slave owners) in the isolated community of Harristown, North Carolina is a consistent theme in the mountain books, starting with *The Land Breakers*, and continuing through *The Journey of August King* and *Time of Drums*.¹⁰ John's sensitivity to racial injustice is most evident in the existential growth of August in *The Journey of August King* and in his depiction of black convict labor in *The Road*.

He was also aware of how women could be minimized and mistreated in American culture in general and in Southern mountain society in particular. His portrayal of Collie Wright as the potent protagonist of *The Winter People* goes straight to this point and anticipates his depiction of Hallie Wright in *Last One Home*. Hallie is the daughter

⁸ John Ehle, *The Survivor: The Story of Eddy Hukov* (Holt, 1958); *Shepherd of the Streets: The Story of the Reverend James A. Gunsweller and His Crusade on the New York West Side* (Sloane, 1960); John Ehle, *The Free Men* (Harper & Row, 1965).

⁹ A phrase coined by William Meade Prince for *The Southern Part of Heaven* (Rinehart, 1950), a book about growing up in Chapel Hill, NC.

¹⁰ John Ehle, *The Journey of August King* (Harper & Row, 1971); John Ehle, *Time of Drums* (Harper & Row, 1970).

“JOHN HAS ALWAYS
championed
 THOSE WHO LIVE ON THE
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 ATTENTION TO HOW THAT
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COURTESY OF PRESS 53



of Pinckney (Pink) Wright, the founder of a life insurance business in the novel, and of all Pink’s children, she is the most creative and most loyal. As John remarked in a 2009 interview, Pink Wright has no choice but to leave his company to Hallie rather than to one of his sons because she represents the future (Roberts 21). John has always championed those who live on the margins of our society, although it strikes me now, in retrospect, that we haven’t paid enough attention to how that sensitivity to injustice is woven into his fiction.

The myriad themes that John returned to in book after book are beauty, community, courage, family, place (especially the mountains), slavery, war, and (one that is too often forgotten) love. When I asked him late in life if there was a particular passage from all his fiction that he remembered most fondly, he recalled a specific paragraph from *Time of Drums*, and I knew immediately which scene he was referring to. It comes when Colonel Owen Wright has fallen in love with Sory Crawford, a local widow, but the time has come when he must return to the Confederate Army:

I never did say goodbye to her, not in words, but I remember being up in papa’s field that evening, just before dark set in, lonely as a single bird in a tree, astonished at my own deeds, happier than I had been in years. I was walking, walking, and across the valley I saw her walk up into her pasture. I stopped when high up on my hill, and she did, too, each moving leisurely, and when I turned she came to me, and when she knelt in the grass I knelt before her and took her in my arms tenderly and kissed the loneliness from her cheeks. All from so far away. I took her in my arms across the fields; in the shadow of the mountains and the war, I held her for a little while. (152)

One could write a long essay about this single paragraph – how life consists of love and loneliness, loss, and rediscovery – all scribed within the long shadow of the ridges above. But for now, let us agree that two things resonate: one, John’s lyricism, which no one else has ever been able to replicate; and two, how your heart is moved when he writes of love and longing.

John read an early but full draft of my second book, *That Bright Land*, before it went off to the agent and publisher,¹¹ just before his memory began to slip and he lost the ability to read anything so long as a novel. When I talked to him about it by phone some days later, the first thing he said was, “this one knocks the rag off the bush.” I was pleased at the tone of his voice but confused by the words. When I asked him what he meant, he said that it was an old mountain saying he’d learned from his grandmother as a boy. That it had to do with a game she’d known as a child when all they had to play with was a rag to hang on a bush and a rock or a stick to knock it off with. What had come down from her to him – generation upon generation – was that

¹¹ Terry Roberts, *That Bright Land* (Turner, 2016).



PHOTOGRAPH BY LYNN ROBERTS

anything truly fine “knocked the rag off the bush.” What I thought then, with tears in my eyes, and what I think now, is that no one will ever say anything more meaningful to me about my writing.

I had a sparkling dream one night not long after my own father died in the winter of 1982. I dreamed that I was working on a fence in the fields behind the house where I grew up, and up walked Dad with his mother, my Grandma Roberts. They stopped to talk for a bit, and it turns out that they were out for a stroll through the countryside – enjoying the season, admiring the fields, and seeing when the cherries might ripen on the tree. They were in no hurry and had not a care in the world. That dream is how I knew that Dad was enjoying himself free from pain and was not far away.

And so, I imagine now for John – who left us in March of 2018 – that he is with his grandmother, and they are reunited on a long walk in the mountains, admiring the countryside, telling the very best kind of stories as they go. If I am quiet, I can hear their voices. ■

“WHEN MY *father* DIED, . . .
I KNEW THERE WAS A *God*
BECAUSE THERE HAD TO BE
SOMEONE ON THE OTHER SIDE OF
THE *river* TO GATHER HIM UP.”
—Terry Roberts,
A Short Time to Stay Here (225)

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MEMORY AND THE FLOW OF TIME

a review by Terry Roberts

**Charles Frazier. *Varina: A Novel*.
New York: HarperCollins
Publishers, 2018.**

TERRY ROBERTS is the editor of the Gale Group's Literary Masterpieces volume on *Look Homeward, Angel* and a former editor of the *Thomas Wolfe Review*. His literary criticism includes *Self and Community in the Fiction of Elizabeth Spencer* (Louisiana State University Press, 1994). He has written for *NCLR* often, including on John Ehle and Elizabeth Spencer. Read his tribute to Ehle and a review of his latest novel in this issue.

CHARLES FRAZIER received critical acclaim for his debut novel, *Cold Mountain* (Atlantic Monthly Press, 1997), which earned him the 1997 National Book Award and Sir Walter Raleigh Award. He also received the Raleigh Award in 2012 for his third novel, *Nightwoods* (Random House, 2011; reviewed in *NCLR Online* 2013). *Varina* is the 2018 recipient of the Thomas Wolfe Memorial Literary Award, given by the Western North Carolina Historical Association. Read an essay on and a review of *Cold Mountain* in *NCLR* 1999, an essay by Frazier about the film adaptation of *Cold Mountain* in *NCLR* 2012, two interviews with him in *NCLR* 2013, and an essay on the opera *Cold Mountain* in *NCLR* 2017.

COURTESY OF THE NORTH CAROLINA HUMANITIES COUNCIL



Just over halfway through Charles Frazier's new novel, a middle-aged black man asks the title character, who is in her eightieth year, what she is most afraid to lose, and the following exchange ensues:

--Nothing of course, V says.
James recasts his question.
He asks, What do you want to maintain?
--Memory, even if it's sometimes false.
(192)

The exchange between James Blake and Varina Davis is easily lost within this large and complex narrative, but it is vitally important. In many ways, Charles Frazier's new novel – his fourth – is a 353-page meditation on time and memory. It is a fictional memoir based closely on the life of a real woman – Varina Howell Davis, the wife of President Jefferson Davis of the Confederate States of America.

Varina is like Frazier's first two novels, the National Book Award Winner *Cold Mountain* and *Thirteen Moons*, in that it follows with some fidelity the course of historical events. In particular, it is similar to *Thirteen Moons* in that it provides an extended study of one historical individual. In the case of *Thirteen Moons*, Frazier fictionalized the life of William Holland Thomas, the

poor, indentured white boy who becomes an honorary member of the Cherokee Nation and eventually the Chief who helps save the Eastern Band of the Cherokee from deportation to the West. In the case of *Varina*, Frazier spins his tale from the life of Varina Davis, an equally fascinating figure who, like Thomas, cuts across social and cultural boundaries.

If you had a delicious sense of irony, you could place a copy of Jeff Davis's memoirs on your bookshelf next to Frazier's new novel. The historical Varina Davis finished her husband's memoir after his death, and Frazier has now finished the cycle by writing her memoir, a narrative in which the fictional Varina constantly muses on the unreliability of memory – anyone's memory – as it strives to recreate the past. Frazier's version of Varina Davis's life is told through seven conversations that take place on seven Sundays in 1906 – between the aging Varina and James Blake, a black man who tracks her down after discovering that he himself was part of her past.

Although he barely remembers it, Blake as a child was Jimmy Limber, a boy that Varina had taken in

ABOVE Charles Frazier signing copies of *Varina* alongside NCLR Editor Margaret Bauer at the North Carolina Humanities Council John Tyler Caldwell Award for the Humanities ceremony and OPPOSITE RIGHT NCLR Fiction Editor Liza Wieland interviewing Charles Frazier for the ceremony program, Chapel Hill, 5 Oct. 2018

off the streets of Richmond during the Civil War and raised with her own children. In telling him the story, she is filling in the details of his childhood while simultaneously narrating various parts of her own autobiography. They are each making meaning out of their lives through the telling, especially when they challenge each other's assumptions about the past and what it might have meant.

In particular, Blake pushes back on Varina's notions about life before the war – how at various times, “we all took care of each other,” meaning both blacks and whites living on some few Southern plantations in a kind of antebellum innocence. Blake is clear that the slaves on those plantations only let the white masters – even so kind and sensitive a one as Varina – know what they wanted them to know, and so they create a fiction out of the horror of slavery. Varina is forced to reconsider her own life even as she is telling it, and as a result, guilt becomes a prevalent secondary theme in the novel. Varina is clear about her belief that the South deserved to lose the war and should have been punished for its crimes, something that enraged white Southerners about the his-

torical Varina Davis as well as Frazier's fictional “V.”

Even so, the idea of the unconscious nature of privilege – whether that privilege is based on skin color, class, or economic power – is explored at length in this novel, and James Blake acts as a constant reminder, both to Varina as a narrator and to us as readers, of the narrowness of our point of view. This interplay of perspective and memory is a powerful blend of ingredients, especially as the axle (Frazier's word) of the memoir is the long and involved story of Varina's flight with her children following the collapse of the Confederacy and the fall of Richmond. Her children include Jimmy Limber, so she is filling in gaps in his story as she recounts her own, and their escape, along with a few retainers and servants, is as full of dramatic incident as Inman's long march home in *Cold Mountain*.

For this reason, *Varina* may well be Frazier's most accomplished novel to date. Although it lacks the emotional impact of the closing chapters of *Cold Mountain*, it is full of character and drama, and the whole is overlaid with ambiguous meditations on time and memory.

It is a novel of ideas in the form of a fictional memoir. Furthermore, the structure of the book – a series of dialogues between an elderly woman of privilege and an inquisitive black man – gives those ideas a dramatic presence.

If there are legitimate criticisms to be leveled at *Varina*, they have to do with the design that Frazier has created. The one inescapable problem is pointed out by Varina herself: all memoirs end the same way, with the death of the subject, which is not necessarily a compelling event. But this is a small complaint given the weight and ambition of this book.

In the final analysis, *Varina* is an important novel in every respect. It explores fundamental questions about the human condition and does so through fascinating characters portrayed against a stunningly dramatic backdrop. Furthermore, it is characterized from the first page to the last by Frazier's customary lyricism and seemingly effortless historical detail. Given what he has accomplished here, it is time to stop referring to Charles Frazier as the award-winning author of *Cold Mountain* and begin lauding him as the creator of *Varina*. ■



“TO TAKE THE EDGE OFF”

a review by Sharon Colley

Terry Roberts. *The Holy Ghost Speakeasy and Revival*. New York and Nashville, TN: Turner Publishing Company, 2018.

SHARON COLLEY is currently a Professor of English at Middle Georgia State College in Macon, GA. She has a PhD from Louisiana State University, where she did research on social class and status in Lee Smith's works. She earned an MA in English from the University of Tennessee-Knoxville. Her BA degrees in English and Communications are from Mercer University in Macon, GA.

TERRY ROBERTS's first two novels received the Sir Walter Raleigh Award for Fiction, given by the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association and the Historical Book Club of North Carolina: *A Short Time to Stay Here* (Ingalls Publishing Group, Inc., 2012), the subject of an interview with Roberts in *NCLR* 2014, and *That Bright Land* (Turner Publishing Company, 2016), reviewed in *NCLR Online* 2017). His other honors include the 2017 James Still Award for Writing in the Appalachian South, the 2016 Thomas Wolfe Memorial Literary Award, and the 2012 Willie Morris Award for Southern Fiction. Roberts grew up near Weaverville, NC. His family has lived in Madison County, NC, since the Revolutionary War. He is the director of the National Paideia Center in Asheville, NC.

Terry Roberts's third novel, *The Holy Ghost Speakeasy and Revival*, is not an attempt to accurately depict Appalachian evangelicals; readers seeking such accounts should look elsewhere. Instead, the novel uses ribald humor and a trickster figure to explore how people cope with life's challenges, ultimately championing the cause of the common man.

Protagonist Jedidiah Robbins loses his beloved wife in a drowning accident. Fast forward approximately eighteen years, and he is a traveling evangelist, roaming the South with his own train and team, preaching his version of the gospel to grateful crowds. However, his moral authority could be considered compromised by the fact that he also sells moonshine. In fact, he has an advance team that goes ahead to sell the product, creating plenty of guilty souls for the revival – and for the collection plate, making money off the people a second time. Ironically, when his advance man is caught by small town officials, Jedidiah agrees to preach an anti-liquor sermon as punishment; the speech is so effective that it catapults him into mini-preacher stardom as a temperance leader. This new identity proves to be good for both the preaching business and the whiskey business, as he is often seen as above suspicion.

The novel bristles with broad and clever humor, as Jedidiah and his team repeatedly escape from local authorities and find ways to outsmart those opposed to moonshine, an attitude frequently tied to

a classist or authoritarian mindset. Trickster-like antics abound, such as selling Bibles out of one side of a train car and moonshine out the other, depending on the crowd. The tone is often more reminiscent of Southwestern humor or William Faulkner's comic moments than more searching texts such as Lee Smith's 1995 *Saving Grace*. That novel's protagonist, Grace Shepherd, struggles with faith, sex, and identity as the daughter of an imperfect traveling evangelist, but the spiritual world remains real for Grace, even as she wrestles with belief and morality.

Jedidiah's own beliefs are more difficult to ascertain. The numerous sermons presented have the flavor of evangelical revival preaching and, periodically, Jedidiah seems concerned about spiritual issues such as the salvation of his team members. He routinely hears voices, usually from his deceased wife, and has some unusual visions. Despite these moments, the ever-present moonshine, the attempts to trick congregations out of their funds, and the habit of offering “spiritual” guidance to attractive females suggests Jedidiah is a huckster.

To Jedidiah's way of thinking, however, he may be something else. His preaching provides him a way to cope with the “edge” (179), as he explains to the implausible character of Henry Louis Mencken. The “Sahara of the Bozart” author has read about Jedidiah's famous temperance sermon and found the preacher, initially hoping to expose him as a fraud.* In a private

* H.L. Mencken, “The Sahara of the Bozart,” *New York Evening Mail* 13 Nov. 1917: [web](#); rpt. in Mencken's *Prejudices: Second Series* (Jonathan Cape, 1921) 136–54.

meeting, Jedidiah suggests that both of them are “word-cursed”; they write and preach “to ease the pressure in the head, just to release the flood” of words (179). Furthermore, Jedidiah states that many of his activities – preaching, drinking, and enjoying women – serve primarily

“to take the edge off. To slow the mind down enough just to sleep. To ease the constant flow of words, words, words.”

“Like Hamlet?”

“Yes,” the Preacher smiles. “People like you and me. We have the Hamlet disease.” (179)

Jedidiah seeks coping mechanisms and shares them with his audiences, whom he believes may have similar needs. He is not a traditional evangelist, but he thinks he offers audiences something they may require.

Jedidiah is not without a conscience or values that will appeal to early twenty-first century readers. He includes an African American in his team and rejects overtures from the Ku Klux Klan. When a paramour starts traveling with the team, fleeing domestic violence, Jedidiah protects her and treats her with respect, eventually marrying her. He perceives hypocrisy in the application of Prohibition laws, as upper-class characters drink cocktails with impunity. Jedidiah ultimately becomes moved by the wealthy’s lack of concern for the struggling poor and turns into something of a spokesperson for the disenfranchised.



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

The broad scope of the novel at times seems to be trying to incorporate and perhaps play with Appalachian local color stereotypes. Emotional revival meetings? Check. Melungeon character? Check. Moonshiners? Check. Corrupt local law enforcement? Check. Mysterious dreams and visions? Check. The latter are primarily Jedidiah’s, adding to the alternative spirituality presented. Though the book does provide thoughtful three-dimensional portrayals of most characters, it also tends to embrace rather than undermine some of these regional stereotypes.

Jedidiah’s tailored messages do seem to resonate with his audiences, providing condemnation, comfort, and catharsis when the preacher deems they are needed; he is good with “words, words, words” (179). The whiskey provides escape and relief in a differ-

ent way. The methods characters choose to deal with life become less crucial than people’s need for coping mechanisms. The book is not primarily about religion as much as it is about how humans deal with after the legitimately tragic events of their lives. Because this is the focus, God seems mostly absent from much of the book – until it nears the end. While this review does not intend to provide spoilers, it is worth noting the inclusion blends smoothly in with the rest of the text, bringing a sense of closure rather than an unwelcome intrusion.

As a wild and often comic text that nonetheless plumbs the depths of everyday human despair and our need for help to cope, *The Holy Ghost Speakeasy and Revival* provides clever and complex depictions of its varied characters. Roberts’s provides them meaningful voices. ■

APPALACHIA ALIVE AND WELL

a review by Michael J. Beilfuss

Randall Wilhelm and Zackary Vernon, editors. *Summoning the Dead: Essays on Ron Rash*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2018.

MICHAEL J. BEILFUSS is Visiting Assistant Professor of English at Oklahoma State University. He earned a PhD from Texas A&M University. His essay “Rootedness and Mobility: Southern Sacrifice Zones in Ron Rash’s *Serena*” was published in the *Mississippi Quarterly* in 2015.

ZACKARY VERNON received his PhD in English from UNC Chapel Hill in 2014. Vernon is Assistant Professor of English at Appalachian State University. He was the first recipient of *NCLR*’s Alex Albright Creative Nonfiction Prize, and his essay was published in *NCLR* 2016. He has published other essays and several interviews in *NCLR*.

RANDALL WILHELM earned a BFA from Winthrop University, an MA from Clemson University, and PhD from the University of Tennessee. He is Assistant Professor at Anderson University in Anderson, SC. He is the editor of *The Ron Rash Reader* (University of South Carolina Press, 2014; reviewed in *NCLR Online* 2017). Read his essay “Expressive Interplay through Pictures and Words: The Art and Design in the *North Carolina Literary Review*” in *NCLR* 2017.

Readers of *NCLR* need no introduction to Ron Rash. As a beloved North Carolina poet, short story writer, and novelist, his name and works often appear in this journal. He first garnered serious attention sometime after the publication of his third collection of poetry, *Raising the Dead* (2002), and subsequently his first novel, *One Foot in Eden* (2002), which expands on the characters, events, and themes of *Raising the Dead*. However, it wasn’t until the publication of Rash’s fourth novel, *Serena* (2008), that he started to earn the popular and critical recognition he so richly deserves. In the past decade, the list of critical works has steadily grown, with articles appearing in journals such as *Southern Quarterly*, *Mississippi Quarterly*, and the *Journal of Southern Culture*, as well as in a few dissertations and essay collections. The publication of John Lang’s *Understanding Ron Rash* (2014; reviewed in *NCLR Online* 2017) marked the first book-length analysis of Rash’s output. Randall Wilhelm and Zackary Vernon’s *Summoning the Dead* is the first book-length study that assembles a variety of scholarly articles devoted solely to Rash’s work. It is a welcome addition to the burgeoning field of Rash studies, and it is an indispensable resource for present and future scholars of Ron Rash and Appalachian literature.

In *Summoning the Dead*, Wilhelm and Vernon pull together sixteen essays from an impressive list of scholars who approach Rash’s work from a variety of viewpoints, including environmental studies, feminism, visual art, post-colonialism, speculative realism, history, and food studies. Many of the critics will be familiar to those who study Rash, Southern literature, and/or Appalachian

literature: David Cross Turner, Thomas Ærvold Bjerre, Frédérique Spill, Mae Miller Claxton, Erica Abrams Locklear, and John Lang, among others. Of the seventeen authors, at least six teach or were students in North Carolina and eight are located in states that border North Carolina. In addition to this regional focus, the presence of Bjerre and Spill, who teach in Denmark and France, respectively, attest to the transnational appeals of Rash’s work.

The editors of the volume, Wilhelm and Vernon, who are both scholars in the fields of Southern and Appalachian literature, do a masterful job of collecting and editing a broad swath of voices and perspectives. In addition to co-authoring the introduction, they also each contribute important essays. They divide the book into three sections: “The Natural World,” “Intertextual Streams,” and “War, Memory, Violence,” and include essays that address Rash’s poetry, short stories, and novels. *Summoning the Dead* provides a wide breadth of analysis of Rash’s oeuvre to date. With some of the topics, the personal (yet professional) tone of many of the essays, and the use of atypical primary sources such as NPR call-in shows, it is a thoroughly contemporary collection that should provide a base for Rash scholarship for years to come.

In the vein of the best scholarly writing, the essays employ good, close reading of the form and style of Rash’s works while addressing larger issues, themes, and connections. For example, Vernon uses a wealth of textual evidence to build his interpretation of Rash’s *One Foot in Eden* as a critique of James Dickey’s *Deliverance*. He argues that Rash’s more nuanced “accurate and evenhanded” depiction of Southern Agrarianism helps

salvage that concept despite its problematic history. Class structures in the South, the demands of history, violence, intertextuality, and haunting imagery are some of the topics explored in Vernon's essay that recur throughout *Summoning the Dead*. Many of the essays discuss the same topics, attesting to the depth and complexity Rash imbues in his most striking works.

Whatever may be lost by the brevity of the essays – they average a tight thirteen pages each – is made up by the strength of the collection as a whole. The co-authored essay by Tripti Pillai and Daniel Cross Turner may serve as an example to attest to a number of the strengths in the collection. Like many of the selections, their essay provides a unique perspective on Rash by interpreting intertextual imbrications with a tight theoretical and critical focus. The essay also indicates some of the many possible and fascinating directions the scholarship on Rash can take.

While one may prefer some of the essays to probe their questions a little deeper, taken as a whole, the book provides excellent coverage of Rash's work and its critical possibilities. For example, when Pillai's and Turner's essay is paired with Barbara Bennett's essay, "Beyond Gender: Subversion and the Creation of Chaos in *Serena* and *Macbeth*," which directly precedes it, and which addresses the roles of gender and



PHOTOGRAPH BY MARGARET BAUER

nature in *Serena* and *Macbeth*, the two together present the reader with a stereoscopic view of the critical possibilities engendered by Rash's writings. A number of other paired, complementary essays also operate in dialogue with each other and help suggest further conversations ready to unfold. Adam J. Pratt's essay on the "historical context behind Rash's *The World Made Straight*" (168) provides rich background material and helps set up Lang's investigation of the Shelton Laurel massacre across Rash's works. Within the essays of Mae Miller Claxton and Martha Greene Eads, one finds a nexus of Ron Rash, Eudora Welty, social class, Flannery O'Connor, and Christianity.

One of the many charms of the book relates to the care and tone with which the critics approach Rash's writing. The occasional use of somewhat unorthodox primary sources (Facebook posts, emails, and call-in NPR shows) contribute to the overall, personal tone. Several of the essays mention personal connections or correspondences with Rash. Indeed, on the Acknowledgements page the editors thank Rash "for his support of this project and his willingness to work" with them. Wilhelm's essay begins by recounting an ongoing conversation he had with Rash "during the summer months of 2015" (83) and then delves into a fascinating discussion of "how vision and visual tropes synergize, complicate, and represent aesthetic and affective readings of characters, actions, and objects" (84).

Paired with rigorous scholarship and close reading, the references to conversations with Rash add important perspectives that will



PHOTOGRAPH BY MARGARET BAUER

be useful to future scholars. The reader gets a sense the essays are intended to illuminate and praise Rash's writing with their thoughtful analysis. The essays in *Summoning the Dead* excel at the best kind of close reading – when the critics begin and end with the text but do so with a perspective most relevant to their own interests, expertise, and knowledge. The personal connections to Rash (two of the critics even teach at the same school as Rash), coupled with the careful close reading, added to the analytical frameworks, help imbue the collection with a tone of intimate familiarity and penetrating insight.

One of the only drawbacks of *Summoning the Dead* is probably attributable to the constraints of space. Since there are so many essays included, each one tends to be somewhat brief. The essays are tightly written and edited, and manage to communicate a lot in their brevity, but at times I wished the authors had room to dig a little deeper into their topics. In one of the most theoretically complex essays in the collection, Pillai and Turner adapt "emergent taxonomies of object-oriented ontology to probe the undeadness of particular autopoietic and allopoietic objects that constitute the environments

of *Macbeth* and *Serena*” (150). While Pillai and Turner adroitly explain and apply their theoretical perspective, they might have unpacked and interrogated some of the theoretical underpinnings of their approach a little more. For example, I am thinking here of how Levi Bryant’s concept of “machinic ecologies” is described in an endnote and then used as a base of analysis, without pursuing some of the ways *Serena* and *Macbeth* may challenge and complicate Bryant’s concept. Of course, to provide a fruitful examination of these complications could perhaps sidetrack the main argument and would lengthen what is already one of the longest selections in the book. Taken on its own, like nearly all of the other essays, Pillai and Turner’s essay leaves the reader wanting a little more – in a good

way. But as a whole, the book provides a thoughtful and meaningful collection of essays with a broad range of topics in conversation with each other.

The personal connections and the tone of illumination and praise established by the collection suggests something about the generosity of Rash and what he attempts to accomplish in his writing. Lang explains that Rash’s fiction and poetry “underscore the need for heightened awareness of humanity’s capacity for evil and conscious cultivation of such virtues as empathy, compassion, and love for one’s neighbor” (188). His writing “acknowledges the intense challenge these precepts continue to pose – not as abstract ideas to be contemplated but as a way of life to be enacted” (189). It takes a special kind of

writer to recognize the inescapable presence of violence and evil in the world and turn that into a catalyst for virtues such as compassion and loving your neighbor.

The essays gathered in this collection elucidate Rash’s complex vision and understanding of the violence and beauty present in the Appalachian South and make that vision available beyond the prescribed borders of place and time. *Summoning the Dead* will surely be a touchstone text for any critical examinations of Rash’s works, and Appalachian and Southern studies, in the years ahead. Further, it serves as an example of how the literature of the mountain South can suggest complications to theoretical approaches as diverse as environmental, gender, postcolonial, visual, historical, and intertextual studies. ■

2018 HARDEE RIVES AWARD WINNER: EDDIE SWIMMER

presentation remarks by Lorraine Hale Robinson

The 2018 recipient of the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association’s Hardee Rives Award for Dramatic Arts is Eddie Swimmer, an accomplished dancer, director, storyteller, and public speaker. His heritage is both from the Eastern Band of the Cherokee in North Carolina and the Chippewa-Cree Nation. Swimmer’s important contributions to North Carolina dramatic arts are closely related to his period of service as director of the outdoor drama *Unto These Hills*.^{*} His culturally sensitive approach and the increased involvement of tribal members have contributed to the play’s strengthened success, which has been an important factor in promoting economic vitality in Western North Carolina.

For his contributions that have inspired, educated, and delighted, it is with great pleasure that the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association names Eddie Swimmer as the recipient of its 2018 Hardee Rives Award for Dramatic Arts. ■

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* Read Gina Caison’s interview with Eddie Swimmer talking about his work on *Unto These Hills* in *NCLR* 2010.

LORRAINE HALE ROBINSON served as Senior Associate Editor of *NCLR* until her retirement from ECU. She is a member of the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association Executive Committee.

ABOVE Eddie Swimmer accepting the Hardee Rives Award, Greenville, 26 Oct. 2018 (If he looks familiar, Robinson pointed out to the award banquet audience, it is because “his portrait appears in the US postage stamp Native American Dance Series.”)

LIKE WE WAS DREADING THE CHAOS

a review by Jim Coby

Taylor Brown. *Gods of Howl Mountain*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2018.

Donna Everheart. *The Road to Bittersweet*. New York: Kensington Publishing Group, 2018.

JIM COBY received his PhD in English with a focus on Southern literature from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette in 2016. He currently teaches composition and literature at the University of Alabama in Huntsville. He is a regular reviewer for *NCLR* and has also published an interview with Matthew Griffin in *NCLR* 2017. His scholarship has been published, or is forthcoming, in the *Ellen Glasgow Journal of Southern Women Writers*, *Teaching American Literature*, *Pennsylvania English*, *South Central Review*, and *The Explicator*.

TAYLOR BROWN is the recipient of a Montana Prize in Fiction. He currently resides in Wilmington, NC, and he is the editor-in-chief of *BikeBound.com*. He has been a finalist for numerous awards, including Press 53 Open Awards, Machigonne Fiction Contest, Wabash Prize in Fiction, Rick DeMarinis Short Story Contest, Dahany Fiction Prize, and the Doris Betts Fiction Prize. Along with his novels, mentioned in this review, he is the author of a short story collection, *In the Season of Blood and Gold* (Press 53, 2014).

Take a journey now into the wild, dark heart of Southern Appalachia in the 1950s, when whiskey-running provides a stable, if dangerous, income and secrets are buried as deep as the bodies hidden on Howl Mountain. **Taylor Brown's** new novel, ***Gods of Howl Mountain***, revolves around Rory Docherty, a whiskey-running, disabled Korean War veteran, as he navigates the treacherous world of snake-handling religious fanatics (and their beautiful daughters), one-eyed corrupt sheriffs, competing bootleggers, and a whole host of other threats. All the while, Rory is attempting to uncover the dark secrets of his family's history that have left his mother mute. The cast of characters expands, landscapes widen, and events become more volatile until the novel careens toward its inevitable, violent conclusion. And yes, those of you playing Southern Gothic Bingo at home are likely to have your cards filled in before the end of the third chapter. To Brown's credit, such familiar aspects never bog down the prose or overly burden the story. If anything, it becomes clear that incorporating these clichés is Brown's way of adding a type of self-awareness to the text. And anyway, when a book is this brooding, this compelling, and, frankly, this much fun, need we be so concerned with a few overly familiar set pieces?

The stuff of Southern stereotypes becomes the fodder for Brown's irreverent imagination and humor, particularly at the expense of "true Southerness." The banter between his characters – particularly Rory and his whiskey-running compatriot, Eli – is fast-paced and witty, colored with enough dialect, to maintain a familiar sense of Appalachia. There's also Rory's

grandmother, Granny, in the text, whose one-liners catch both characters and readers off-guard, and who makes a particularly crass joke that – well, let's just say that those familiar with Faulkner's *Sanctuary* will catch the reference. With Granny, Brown creates a wholly original American character. Equal parts caustically sardonic and selflessly altruistic, she is a study in the contradictions and conflagrations that each human embodies. Her entrepreneurial spirit for a certain green plant, her quick wit, worldly knowledge, and fierce loyalty all position her as one of the most creative and endearing characters that I've encountered in years.

For all its irreverent intent, *Gods of Howl Mountain* takes seriously the stuff of war. Like the most interesting of Hemingway's characters, Rory Docherty has been injured both corporeally and psychologically, and many of the most captivating passages in the text reverberate with the resonances of Rory's fractured and hesitant worldview. He describes Korea to Eli as "a place where you wanted all those mean-made sons of bitches on your own side, standing behind you. The meanest ones. The sickest. Over there, bad was good" (57). This wartime trauma does not reside solely in the past, however, as Rory continues to experience flashes of battle during his everyday experiences. For example, Brown describes the rattle of a snake's tail: "The sound amplified to something modern, machinelike, a new and terrible weapon, like the machine gun of some war yet to come" (180). In this gripping description, we see how even the most natural of sounds become equated in Rory's mind to the atavistic brutalities of his wartime experience.



A type of latent environmentalism also underscores many of the concerns throughout Brown's novel. Indeed, much of the conflict and animosity between characters finds its roots in the destruction of place and loss of stability that occurs concomitant with environmental degradation. As Sheriff Carlin explains to Rory, "It's never been the same since they flooded that valley in thirty-one. Whiskey's got to run down out the mountains now to feed the mills, and the money runs up" (169). Which is to say, when industrialization forces people from their livelihoods, they resort to dangerous and violent modes of survival that in turn tax the community surrounding them. The Carolina parrot and panther, too, become the stuff of legend in this text, and their absence signals the loss of not just a species to the area but also a way of life and living that industrialization and urbanization slowly erodes.

A native of the Georgia coast and author of two previous books set in the American South, *Fallen Land* (2017) and *The River of Kings* (2016), Taylor Brown's writings resonate with a sense of familiarity

and appreciation for the region. It comes as little surprise then that *Gods of Howl Mountain*, set in Brown's adopted state of North Carolina, too, showcases that same attention to detail of place and people that has become synonymous with his writings. Brown's work has, in the past, been favorably compared to the writings of Cormac McCarthy and Ron Rash.* Such comparisons are apt. Like Rash, Brown crafts tales both literary and thrilling, managing to keep his tale engaging and fast-paced throughout without sacrificing the craft and attention to detail that makes a story truly gripping. And like McCarthy, Brown revels in the darker corners of the human mind, finding those elements of the human psyche that emerge when a person is stretched to his very limits. That said, the cosmic absurdity of such limited experiences, too, becomes a major focus of both Brown's and McCarthy's work. In the end, anyone willing to overlook the occasional overused plot element in favor of a gripping rumination on family, place, and violence, would do well to pick up Brown's *Gods of Howl Mountain*.

While Brown's novel employs several tropes of Southern fiction as a means of subverting and critiquing such false axioms, **Donna Everheart's** newest work, ***The Road to Bittersweet*** also utilizes many well-tread ideas but is ultimately less successful in fostering new approaches to understanding these concepts. Everheart's bildungsroman follows the path of the precocious Wallis Ann Stamper, as she navigates the world of young adulthood on a journey toward self-understanding. Precipitated by a devastating flood of the Tuckasegee River in Western North Carolina, the text revolves around Wallis Ann and her family: her older sister, a preternaturally gifted but mute fiddler, Laci; their toddler younger brother, Seph; their irascible, if hopelessly optimistic father, William; and their grief-stricken mother, Ann. In better days, the family earned their living through their musical talents, but following the loss of their home, the Stamper clan adopts a peripatetic lifestyle with their patriarch pursuing various means of earning a living. Eventually, the Stampers make their way into South Carolina, where Wallis Ann encounters Clayton Jones, a high-diving performer for Cooper's Family Fun and Shows. The family joins the traveling unit as the musical entertainment before heartbreak and tragedy lead to the novel's conclusion.

Everhart's ruminations on grief and loss, especially through Wallis Ann's parents, are some of the more relatable and heart-wrenching passages in this novel. Fairly early in the novel, for example, a water supply

ABOVE A moonshine still, typical of those in the mountains (reverse side of post card hand-dated "10-14-16 at Hot Springs, N.C.")

* Rev. of *Fallen Land* by Taylor Brown, *Kirkus Review* 5 Nov. 2015: [web](#);
Brian Seemann, rev. of *In the Season of Blood and Gold* by Taylor Brown, *Necessary Fiction* 24 Nov. 2014: [web](#).

contaminated from the runoff of the recent flood poisons the youngest member of the Stamper family. The surviving family members cope with the loss in their own ways, from Wallace Ann's self-blame for accidentally facilitating Seph's consumption of the water by turning her attention from him for a few brief minutes, to the patriarch's necessary need for goal-oriented action. Everheart writes poetically of Wallis Ann's father digging Seph's grave: "As time went on, the digging turned into him stabbing violently at the earth over and over, working out his demons. The ferocious way he mutilated the soil was in direct contrast to Momma" (122). This passage highlights a key dichotomy in how the Stamper parents conduct themselves following the death of their child. While William seeks physical tasks, Ann retreats to a mental space that leaves her fraught and impotent. In the days following, Wallis Ann keeps "waiting on Momma to break" (123), but instead of breaking, Ann continues to inhabit a withdrawn, colorless space. In her adroit understanding of the various modes through which grief can manifest itself within individuals, Everheart crafts an affecting and realistic portrait of a family during a time of loss.

While the novel handles the concept of grief quite well, it falters in other emotional capacities. Though there are several convincingly phrased ruminations of love and family, these thoughts often feel heavy-handed due to odd placement within the text. For

example, also early in the novel, Wallis Ann huddles with her family in the bed of her father's truck as rapidly rising floodwaters threaten to dislodge the vehicle from its position and toss the family helplessly in the raging, muddy waters below. In this rather thrilling moment, Wallis Ann notices her mother's gaze fixed firmly on her father's eyes. Everheart writes, "I seen their love so clearly, it was like somebody had placed me in front of a dirty window and then wiped it sparkling clean. Love like theirs was what I wanted, the kind what held on and never let go. The lasting kind, equal in measure for each person" (20). As a general conceit, this passage works well enough. It highlights the observant nature and lasting optimism so integral to Wallis Ann's character. Still, this passage occurring during the midst of a furious flood, at a point in which the family's very lives were at stake, strikes this reviewer as completely unrealistic. While it is, of course, within the realm of possibility that a teenager would have such thoughts about the respect and desire she has

for a relationship like her parents, it seems that the character would have more pressing concerns at this moment than the equity of her parents' relationship.

One of the areas in which Everheart succeeds is in creating an unmistakable voice. Wallis Ann's speech and thoughts are peppered with enough colloquial expressions and rustic rhythms to demonstrate to readers Everheart's ability to fully render a believable character. On the whole, however, the novel feels rather uneven. Many characters remain flat, and the plotlines themselves do not engender much in the way of tension. Several of the novel's potentially engaging plotlines are wrapped up in predictable, if satisfying ways, within a chapter or two. The novel's major conflict, on the other hand, does not occur until the final fifty pages of the novel, and is resolved in an unconvincing and rushed manner that undermines much of the character development and humanizing of a trivialized lot that has occurred for the bulk of the text. ■



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DONNA EVERHART, *USA Today* bestselling author of *The Education of Dixie Dupree* (Kensington Publishing Group, 2016), is originally from Raleigh, NC. *The Road to Bittersweet* is a Publisher's Lunch Buzz Book for Fall/Winter 2017–2018 and a 2018 Southern Independent Booksellers Alliance (SIBA) Trio Pick. The author is a member of the North Carolina Writers' Network and Women's Fiction Writers Association. She currently resides in Dunn, NC.

ABOVE **The Tuckasegee River in Cullowhee during the flood of 1940**

AT HOME IN THE VALLEY OF THE BUZZARDS

a review by Jimmy Dean Smith

David Joy. *The Line That Held Us*.
New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2018.

JIMMY DEAN SMITH is a Professor and former Chair of English at Union College in Barbourville, KY. He has recently published journal articles and book chapters on Ron Rash and Flannery O'Connor, among others, and edits the *Kentucky Philological Review*. Read his essay on Ron Rash in *NCLR* 2011.

DAVID JOY was born in Charlotte, NC, and is the author of the novels *Where All Light Tends to Go* (Putnam, 2015; reviewed in *NCLR Online* 2016), and *The Weight of This World* (G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2017), as well as the memoir *Growing Gills: A Fly Fisherman's Journey* (Bright Mountain Books, 2011), which was a finalist for the Reed Environmental Writing Award.

In this brutal, beautiful, and necessary novel, David Joy stares down his literary forebears – writers like Cormac McCarthy, Flannery O'Connor, and Joy's former teacher, Ron Rash – who use lyricism and violence, not to set the other trait in relief, but instead as complements, ragged portions of a fallen, redeemable world. *The Line That Held Us* begins in the woods where two men are breaking the law, one poaching deer and the other poaching ginseng. Neither of these men ought to be on forbidden land, but both seem fated to be there. The man with the rifle, Darl Moody, mistakes Sissy Brewer – dressed in gray camo, hunched over a ginseng patch – for a pig and shoots. Thus begins the engrossing, often repulsive (how the bodily fluids flow!) story of Dwayne Brewer's hyperviolent quest to enact revenge, not only on his brother's killer, but also on Darl's best friend and reluctant accomplice, Calvin Hooper, and Calvin's girlfriend, Angie. (Although her role in *The Line That Held Us* takes a turn for the predictable when Dwayne kidnaps her, Angie is in fact the most ferociously resourceful of the novel's "good" characters, ready to eliminate her captor with a Molotov cocktail when the opportunity arises.)

One of the novel's memorable characters is troubled by buzzards – naturally enough, since he keeps a dead body nearby. These scavengers also serve to remind us that a Euro-American mistranslation of one of the novel's settings, Cullowhee, was "valley of the buzzards," a bird well-suited to survival no matter how disgusting it is. Later in the novel, one character reflects on what has brought three people together in a tense and likely fatal confrontation: "What a strange, strange world, how a man ends up where he does. . . . Sometimes it's his own doing, but most the time, most the time, it's like we're led along like starved dogs" (244). This person has lately begun thinking of himself as a prophet "sent to teach . . . something" (242) about giving up hope, about the wisdom of living like starved dogs and just going where grim circumstance leads. Earlier, another of those three had reflected that "it [is] impossible to forget even for a moment how quickly the hammer could come down" (148). Now, with a rifle's muzzle mere feet from this man's head, the tough-guy metaphor has become excruciatingly literal: he "closed his eyes [and] waited for the hammer to fall" (247). In the second chapter of the novel, Joy

PHOTOGRAPH BY ASHLEY T. EVANS



RIGHT David Joy speaking with his friend Roger Bigham in Jackson County, NC, 2017

had seemingly made a too on-the-nose allusion to another homicidal prophet, Flannery O'Connor's *Misfit*: "that kid might've been all right if it had been a gun to his head every minute of his life" (14). In the final moments of this weirdly hopeful novel, however, the gun metaphors undercut the novel's apparent fatalism, and at least one person survives that final encounter not only alive but enlightened, not the victim of fate but the recipient of revelation.

Although Joy's novels are populated with people who could live in many parts of rural America, his place is a thinly fictionalized version of the author's own home in Jackson County, NC. There are parts of Google Map's Jackson County here – Cullowhee, Sylva, Dillsboro, a crossroads store in Tuckaseegee, Christmas tree farms – where Joy makes fictional things occur on the margin of fact and story. In his fiction, Joy is building a world, populating his coves and river towns with made-up folks (a sketchy lawyer, churchgoers who share a pedophile's surname), keeping other characters in reserve, perhaps for novels to come: boozy college kids messing with danger, rich retirees lording it over the locals, MS13. With the verisimilitude of place, Joy can work on the people who live in the modern mountain South, where the one place likely to hold all kinds of people at once is Walmart.

The Line That Held Us is David Joy's third novel. Its publication closely follows those of the good but tentative *Where All Light Tends to Go* and the mature, excellent *The Weight of This World*. The latter, which found Joy successfully



PHOTOGRAPH BY ASHLEY T. EVANS

learning to write through the viewpoints of multiple protagonists, occasioned several remarkably truculent paragraphs in *Open Letters Monthly*. In it a reviewer objected strenuously to the last two words of the book's title. The world, he suggests, is a good place to write about, but this world – the world Joy loves – is not. In that now-defunct online journal, Steve Donaghue rejects critical consensus to denounce "manic hayseed noir," advising Joy to "leave the meth labs and peeling trailers, come down out of the hollers, and try writing about *people* for a change" (italics his) – as if those living up hollers in single-wides are not, in fact, human beings worth reading and caring about.¹

Although this kind of review – intemperate, bigoted – does not demand or even deserve a response, David Joy wrote one with "Digging in the Trash," an even-keeled statement of purpose that can be read in *The Bitter Southerner*. In Joy's online story, he states that "this is a place sopping wet with raw emotion, a

landscape drenched with humanity. It is all I know and it is beautiful."² He mentions Donaghue's review and gets to his point: "I'm tired of an America where all the folks I've ever loved are dismissed as trash . . . reduced to something subhuman simply because of where they live." What Donaghue just about says, writes Joy, is that "*what* lives in those trailers, *what* finds itself in a world consumed by hopelessness, addiction, and violence, those aren't people at all" (italics mine). Most of the people in this latest novel are *not* trash – Darl and Calvin are working class, and Angie is going to school to be a nurse. These are decent people. But Dwayne Brewer, from the first pages he appears on, is trash and knows it. That's the gun pointed right up his road in Jackson County, where dogs and rats and buzzards look to be better suited to life than his kind of people (or people). *The Line That Held Us*, with its wild swings from grotesque violence to nature's beauty to a religious rapture that might even be real, ends propitiously, with a cocked and sighted gun. ■

ABOVE Jackson County, NC, 2017 (These and other photographs by Ashley T. Evans appeared within Joy's "Digging in the Trash" essay, cited in this review.)

¹ Steve Donaghue. Review of *The Weight of This World* by David Joy, *Open Letters Monthly* 15 Mar. 2017: [web](#).

² David Joy. "Digging in the Trash," *Bitter Southerner* 2 May 2017: [web](#).

HOPE IN THE ROUGH

a review by Anna E. McFadyen

Heather Bell Adams. *Maranatha Road: A Novel*. Morgantown: Vandalia Press, 2017.

ANNA E. MCFADYEN completed her MA in English Literature at NC State University in December 2018. She received her BA in English from Meredith College, where she served as co-chief editor of *The Colton Review*. A native of Raleigh, NC, she is currently researching the history of Scottish immigrants in North Carolina at the time of the American Revolution. Her graduate scholarship includes work on English Romantic literature and contemporary Southern fiction.

HEATHER BELL ADAMS won the 2016 James Still Fiction Prize, the 2017 Ron Rash Fiction Award, and the 2017 Carrie McCray Memorial Literary Award. Her short fiction has appeared in *The Thomas Wolfe Review*, *Clapboard House*, *Pembroke Magazine*, *Broad River Review*, and *Pisgah Review*, among other publications. Excerpts of *Maranatha Road* were finalists in the Reynolds Price Fiction Prize, Southern Literary Contest, and the North Carolina State University Fiction Prize. A graduate of Duke University and Duke University School of Law, Adams lives in Raleigh, NC, where her legal practice focuses on financial services litigation.

OPPOSITE RIGHT Heather Bell Adams with UNC-TV's *North Carolina Bookwatch* host D.G. Martin, 11 Mar. 2018

In her debut novel, Heather Bell Adams creates a landscape of redemption in modern Appalachia. This native of Hendersonville, NC, leaves fingerprints of authentic mountain culture throughout *Maranatha Road*, including such regional hallmarks as gemstone-mining, apple orchards, summer camps, church communities, and dizzying gorges spanned by high bridges. In the fictional town of Garnet, named for its modest, blood-red gems whose veins run underground, she introduces Sadie Caswell, wife of farmer Clive Caswell and mother of Mark. The family lives in a picturesque farmhouse on Maranatha Road, where the dark mountains open to the light. However, Sadie's denial of her son's psychological problems cautions the reader that their world will not remain bright, despite the family's optimistic plans for Mark's wedding. In the novel's opening, we also meet Tinley Greene – a recently-orphaned, friendless sixteen-year-old. Her youthful vulnerability, reflected in her name, appeals to Mark's protective sympathies, while her beauty appeals to his desires. What she takes for true love, however, Mark sees as a terrible mistake, and he cannot bear his guilt.

Adams carries the reader swiftly through chapters of alternating narration by these two women whose lives clash over Mark Caswell. Tragedy makes them enemies, but it inextricably links them, too. It will be a long road for either woman to find hope – or forgiveness for one another – but surviving hardship does teach them how to forgive themselves, in time. Rather than learning from each other's love for Mark, which would satisfy a more predictable plotline, Tinley and Sadie must

make their bitter peace separately before meeting again.

The trouble is, Mark Caswell has not lived the life his mother believes. All she knows is that her son has finally found happiness and stability with his fiancé, Maddie. After Mark is gone, Sadie is instead confronted by the disturbing fact of Tinley, a hysterical stranger who claims to carry Mark's child. Although Sadie angrily blames this girl for ruining her son's life, she cannot help feeling haunted by her own maternal failings, which may have worsened her son's mental deterioration. This quieter but more consuming misery is what Sadie Caswell must come to terms with by the novel's end. Tinley, too, feels haunted by her parents' ghosts and the ghost of the young man who once rescued her from danger and loneliness. She resents Sadie for rejecting their unborn child and belittling her own pain. Sadie, meanwhile, grapples with the hardest consequence: learning who her son really was. As she puts it, "There are some things you can't face even if you come at them sideways" (191).

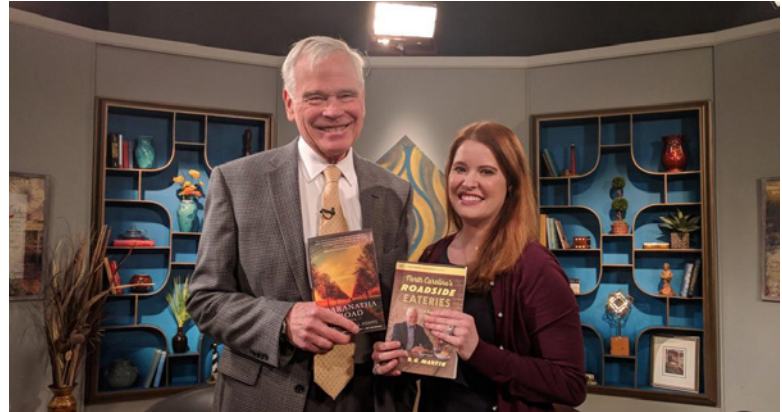
Even without the author's endnote that "*Maranatha*" "roughly means *the Lord, or hope, is coming*" (263), the reader senses that these characters will reach some destination of peace. At the novel's closing, Sadie describes a polished garnet, saying, "You can see how dark it is. . . . You'd think there was no color in it, not until the light hits it right" (262). These broken people keep searching for one beam of hope to bring color into their world.

Adams's various narrators create an introspective suspense that lasts throughout the novel, and the details of their daily grief

are telling. Having lost her own mother as a teenager, the author writes from a place of experience, as memories hover over Tinley like bittersweet spirits – the cool touch of a mother’s hand on her face, the aroma of her hot biscuits, the way her father flew a kite, and the smell of his old pickup, which the girl still drives like a comforting embrace.

Adams’s prose is conversational and natural, catching the rhythms and phrasings of Southern voices without attempting an overt mountain dialect. The storytellers of *Maranatha Road* confess fear, nerves, and heartache, but we cannot envision their own physical forms until another narrator takes over. In this way, the author comes at details sideways, to use Sadie’s phrase. The narrators’ insights reveal qualities that other characters cannot see in themselves, like the voluptuous beauty of an insecure girl, the inflexibility of a mother in her tight grey bun, or a story wife’s tenderness that only a husband can see. In one of Clive Caswell’s rare but vital chapters, he says of his wife, “What others might call a stiffness in her, I see as backbone. . . . I’d known for a long time that a core of goodness runs through her, same as the veins of garnet around here” (172–73). He is the first person to give the reader hope that kindness exists under her angry exterior. Sadie recognizes her own failings as a spouse in contrast to Clive’s forgiving patience.

Sadie Caswell is no saint, but she is relatable, and her emotional disconnect in the face of grief mirrors her husband’s silent struggle, described through body language in his wife’s narrative and through gestures that affirm his understanding of her pain.



PHOTOGRAPH BY KATY LOEBRICH;
COURTESY OF UNC-TV PUBLIC MEDIA NORTH CAROLINA

Tinley’s brief, naïve romance with Mark is less convincing and less interesting to me than the picture of a mature marriage endured, suffered, and appreciated over time. Their seemingly passive separation proves to be petrified love in the wake of loss. Novels often deal with the grief of parents over a child, but Adams’s portrait shows how such hardship can divide older parents as much as it divides young ones, like the couple in Wylie Cash’s *A Land More Kind Than Home* (2012). Hope for reconciliation in *Maranatha Road* extends to every kind of relationship, encompassing human failings in marriage, parenthood, sisterhood, friendship, and community. Even though the reader feels there will be a better resolution, Adams manages to keep the plot from feeling too predictable, delaying this expectation with little twists, and introducing minor characters whose good intentions sometimes backfire.

Typical in Southern literature, the land around Garnet and its inhabitants have a significant connection, but it is not the land itself that determines characters’ fates; it’s what people make of themselves within that environment. In Sadie’s words, “In some places around here, the road

curls around the land like fingers closing in a tight fist. But where we lived on Maranatha Road, the fingers ease into an open hand . . . the twisted mountain roads stretching into gentler curves, letting the light in” (21). Terrain like a “fist” presents a subtler mountain violence than the criminal or homicidal violence in other Appalachian novels, like those of Ron Rash or Wiley Cash. What occurs in Adams’s plot is primarily a violence against affections or against the self. Mountain fatalism is present, but it takes a turn of grace as those affections heal. While the plot contains important (occasionally too-convenient) coincidences, Tinley interprets them as positive signs of fate that encourage her to endure. Her mother has instructed her to look for signs everywhere in life, and other characters find guidance similarly. Because Mark saves Tinley from harm in the first moment they meet, even he believes that fate has placed a responsibility on him to ensure the girl’s future well-being. However, it is Tinley’s outlook and work ethic that ultimately determine her course.

Garnet and Maranatha Road become a reluctant lodestar to Sadie and Tinley. They both leave town when painful reminders

become too much to handle, but their return allows them to make peace with themselves and to rise from grief as stronger women. Instead of escaping Appalachia permanently, as many young people do in response to challenges, Tinley realizes that leaving a place isn't what fixes a person's life. Disappointment happens everywhere she goes. It's an inner war, and sometimes coming home to face what haunts an individual is the best cure. Tinley declares, "the ghosts will disappear. I'll make them" (237), and she takes shelter in a house painted "the kind of haint blue my mother used to say kept bad spirits away. I've seen it on porch ceilings before but never on a whole house – not until now. . . . I live in this house protected on all sides" (252).

Yet what of Tinley's baby? There is talk of abortion, adoption, or neither – each frightening in their own way to the young mother. How can a girl who can barely care for herself take care of another life? Can she part with her only living family? And can Sadie reunite this remnant of Mark to herself and her husband before it's too late? Will that child, like Pearl of *The Scarlet Letter*, become a pure symbol, free of the bitter mistakes that created her? Tinley once looked to Emily Dickinson's bird of hope to comfort her fears. As she thinks of her future, that winged emblem seems to fuse with the memory of Tinley's father's kite, and the uncertain young woman learns "what to hold onto, what to let fly" (258). Hope keeps singing no matter how bleak the environment, and Tinley's courage just may persist. ■

WILEY CASH'S TIMELY HISTORICAL FICTION AWARDED

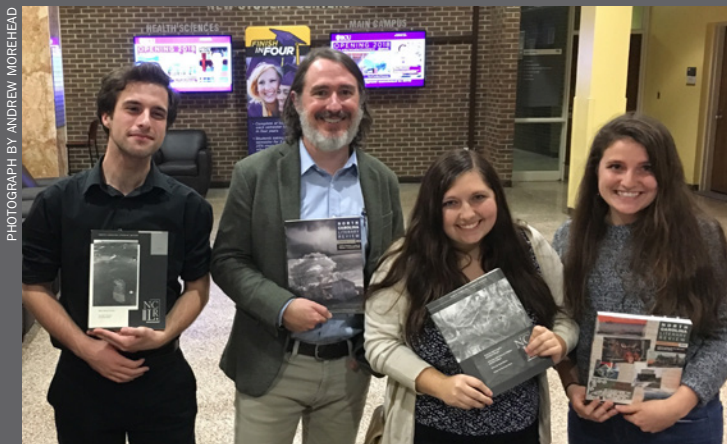
presentation remarks by Gayle Fripp

*North Carolina Literary and Historical Association,
Greenville, NC, 26 October 2018*

Fifty-five years ago, the Historical Book Club of North Carolina established the Sir Walter Raleigh Award to recognize the North Carolina author judged to have written the best work of fiction for that year. Past winners include Reynolds Price, Doris Betts, John Ehle, Lee Smith and Charles Frazier, so this year's winner, Wiley Cash, joins a prestigious group.

Cash grew up in Gastonia, NC, the locale for his winning novel, *The Last Ballard*, and yet, until 2003, when he was in graduate school in Louisiana, he had never heard of the textile mill strike that occurred there. The Lory Mill strike of 1929, which drives the novel and its characters, is one of the most notorious in the labor history of the US. Cash's story centers around the life and murder of twenty-eight-year-old Ella May Wiggins, a single mother who was paid nine dollars a week for working seventy-two hours. She used this meager income to support her four children; five others had died from pellagra and whooping cough. Wiggins joined the union because it promised better wages, which meant a better life. In Cash's novel, seven other characters also tell their stories and react to this volatile situation. Cash uses these interesting people and beautiful writing to lead us to an outcome known from the start.

The novel's themes include gender and racial inequality, love and marriage, courage in the face of oppression, and corporate greed, present in 1929 and still present in 2018. In an interview, Cash notes that "history is not a fixed thing [because] politics and public sentiment can dictate what is retained and what is lost." He is proud to be called a Southern writer from North Carolina: "My hope is that I always perceive the larger world through the lens of the place I know best," he says. This novel and his previous ones, *A Land More Kind than Home* (2012) and *The Dark Road to Mercy* (2014) do show us the larger world through his special lens. ■



PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDREW MOREHEAD

ABOVE Wiley Cash with NCLR interns Jordan Crawford, Melissa Glen, and Susie Hedley after his East Carolina University reading, Greenville, NC, 6 Nov. 2018 (*The Last Ballard* was ECU's 2018–19 Pirate Read.)

(MIS)REPRESENTATION OF THE MOUNTAIN SOUTH

a review by Leah Hampton

Julia Franks. *Over the Plain Houses: A Novel*. Spartanburg, SC: Hub City Press, 2016.

Philip Lewis. *The Barrowfields*. New York: Hogarth, 2017.

LEAH HAMPTON is a native North Carolinian and a fellow at the Michener Center for Writers, where she edits *Bat City Review*. Previously, she taught English at multiple colleges in the Asheville area. Her reviews have appeared in *Appalachian Heritage* and *The Los Angeles Times*. Her awards include the 2012 Doris Betts Fiction Prize for "The Saint," which was then published in *NCLR* 2013, and the Keene Prize for Literature from the University of Texas for a story, "Boomer," which was published in *NCLR Online* 2018.

JULIA FRANKS has lived in the Appalachian Mountains most of her life. She currently lives in Atlanta, where she is the founder of Loose Canon, an organization with online software that allows kids to choose the books they want to read. She was named Georgia Author of the Year Award for Literary Fiction in 2017.

PHILIP LEWIS spent his childhood in the North Carolina mountains. He graduated from UNC Chapel Hill and Campbell University Norman Adrian School of Law. He now lives and practices law in Charlotte, NC.

North Carolina writers love our mountains, but few fully understand Appalachia's culture and literary legacy. All too often, the mountain South is misrepresented, usually inadvertently, by writers who don't embrace the responsibility that comes with setting a story here. Because of persistent, hurtful stereotypes about Appalachia, major publishers often forgive, and even reward, these writers, and as a result many readers consider their books to be accurate representations of the region.

Mountain people have long been the subjects of stories that use our home, rather than engage with it. One recent example is **Philip Lewis's** debut novel. ***The Barrowfields*** is the bildungsroman of young Henry Aster, son of an eccentric alcoholic by the same name. Young Henry is a lad of Old Buckram, NC, a mountain hamlet rife with local color. Lewis describes Old Buckram as a grim, backwards place, occupied by townfolk with "[f]aces expressionless and impassive, appearing to live in the complete absence of curiosity" (233). Young Henry, a musical whiz kid, grows up in a creepy mansion on the outskirts of town. Inside this spooky domicile reminiscent of Shirley Jackson's Hill House, the family tiptoes around their patriarch, elder Henry, whose drunkenness and taciturnity has a lasting effect on his son.

The author, who grew up in Ashe County, devotes lengthy descriptive passages to the mountains and their unsavory inhabitants. Lewis has acknowledged in

interviews that his hometown is nowhere near as dark or regressive as the fictional Old Buckram. Thus, one might assume Lewis's portrait of Appalachia to be a faithful one, free of offensive hillbilly typecasting. Alas, the author displays considerable disdain for the place and its people.

On its surface, the book examines dysfunctional family relationships and writing as an escape from same. *The Barrowfields* follows two generations of Henrys in quasi-gothic style. Young Henry details his father's life story, then recounts his own coming of age as a young lawyer. Both men reject mountain life and chase lofty literary and intellectual goals which will, they hope, free them from their Appalachian prison.

The deeper story, however, is Lewis's sublimation and delegitimization of everyone but his narrator (who, it must be said, bears a striking resemblance to the author). The Asters, and nearly everyone in Old Buckram, are portrayed as a rabble of hicks. Baffled by the elder Henry's intellect, they reject "the whole idea of his exceptional literacy" (15) and question not only his literary ambitions but learning itself. The Asters' emblematic ignorance defies, of course, the family's obvious folkloric traditions, not to mention the many settlement schools and educational movements common to the region at the time. It also defies Phillip Lewis's own upbringing in a highly educated mountain family. The Asters remain implausibly anti-book even after their son's bookishness results in his rise to fortune. Further, their criticisms are voiced in

a “casual” fauxcountry dialect that the author openly mocks; at one point the Aster matriarch marvels that unlike herself, elder Henry “spoke in complete sentences with advanced grammar” (14–15). For the record, Appalachian dialects are studied enthusiastically by sociolinguists, and our grammars equal or exceed the complexity of mainstream tongues.

Lewis’s representation of Western North Carolina, then, is essentially backhanded hagiography. Anyone familiar with contemporary Appalachian literature will quickly tire of the book’s misty mountain platitudes and toothless grannies, as well as its unappealing narrator, whom Lewis treats as wholly reliable and sympathetic. The state’s most complex ecosystem, though well described, is reduced to a tattered backdrop here. Appalachia exists merely to facilitate young Henry’s brooding. He grapples with his mountain man identity, simultaneously wearing it like both a badge and a hair shirt. This tension inside young Henry, between his rurality and his desire to distance himself from his father’s unsavory origins, smacks of colonial attitudes we mountain folk rejected generations ago.

For Lewis, both Henrys are tragically flawed not because of their addictions and unchecked privilege, but because of their inability to escape, or indeed survive, Appalachia. In *The Barrowfields*, assimilation and outmigration are not exploitative, but rightful pursuits. All us western Tarheels are a feeble-minded, tusslin’ mess waiting to be corrected by the righteous Aster boys.

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Moreover, Lewis is not just anti-Appalachian; his missteps extend to half of humanity. Young Henry’s mother and sister, both potentially interesting characters, demonstrate only minimal interiority. Lewis also peppers the book with offensive depictions of minor female characters. Most are ugly shrews or ignoramuses, and the smart ones are fat-shamed or simply ignored.

Eventually young Henry leaves Old Buckram to study law and meets Story, a bright woman whose primary asset, according to young Henry, is her prettiness. She and her friends, all accomplished, educated people, “caromed about like cheerleaders . . . in that cute way girls do” (169). The second half of the novel centers on the pair’s romance. Young Henry achieves a sliver of self-awareness about his prodigality and sexism by the end, for which Lewis rewards him with the “g’rl.”

To be fair, *The Barrowfields* is distributed by a major publishing house, so Lewis’s tone deafness

is not entirely his fault. A good Southern editor might have confronted the author and saved his agile prose from its own collapsing container. Unfortunately, his New York publishers did not recognize or question the book’s offensive, bourgeois clichés, no doubt because they believe them to be accurate depictions of this oft-maligned setting.

Only readers who share Lewis’s sentiments will be fooled by *The Barrowfields*. If you have any knowledge of or interest in the Southern Highlands, you are far more likely to enjoy a different kind of mountain story. Prefer Appalachians who don’t spurn their own kind, and writers who find inspiration and value in our vibrant culture. Believe, for one, **Julia Franks’s** debut novel, ***Over the Plain Houses***, which won the Southern Book Prize and Thomas Wolfe Memorial Literary Award for 2017. While Franks, who lives in north Georgia, is not native to Appalachia and occasionally

misses the mark herself in terms of her privileged perspective, she has deep connections in Western North Carolina, and her story is altogether a more sensitive and skillful treatment of many of the same themes as *The Barrowfields*. She also does a much better job situating her novel within the mountain literary tradition.

Over the Plain Houses, set in Haywood County during the late 1930s, follows the awakening and metamorphosis of Irenie Lambey, a preacher's wife. Inspired by the arrival of a self-assured female United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) agent, Irenie gradually decides to escape her oppressive marriage to Brodis, whose religion has turned him toward abuse and obsession. In Franks's Appalachia, the same tension in Lewis's novel – between rural tradition and outside influence – gets a decidedly feminist treatment. “[T]ime was rolling faster,” Franks writes, “twice, three times as fast as it ever had before. The trees had come down. . . . They used store-bought cloth and store-bought meat” (123–24). These changes, while environmentally destructive, offer opportunities that forward-thinking mountain people embrace.

In short, Irenie realizes she can reject the toxicity in her rural life without rejecting Appalachia itself. She studies the masculine straits confining her and contrasts them with the support provided by her mountain home. “The mountains were supposed to be full of bandits and ramblers,” she notes after her husband assaults her, “But as long as she'd been walking the woods, nary a one of them had reared up from the shadows, or called her a thing of his own” (98–99). Her own spouse has lately morphed into “a creature who'd appeared at the edge of day for the single purpose

of making her small” (98), whereas the land she lives on continually restores and protects her.

Irenie, a resourceful wife and mother, navigates a crisis of faith in the institutions that bind her to Brodis by digging deep into the mountains, and into our matriarchal rituals. Thanks to her upbringing in an accurately portrayed family where education is valued, she seizes the opportunity to send her son to a progressive school in Asheville. She also openly questions the boundaries that limit her own intellectual, religious, and reproductive rights. In her searching, Irenie explores her landscape, and her ecological hikes become psychological journeys, wherein she “felt alive, unfurled” (4). She gains strength and perspective from Mother Earth – so much strength, in fact, that Brodis becomes concerned that his wife is turning into a witch. Throughout history, striving for female agency has often been equated to witchcraft, and the author depicts Irenie's awakening with respectful nods to the folklore of radical consciousness raising.

The author took obvious pains to research her setting in detail, and her hard work certainly pays off. Every plant, weather pattern, and porch nail has been faithfully portrayed here; the reader feels completely pulled into this bygone world. Though preacher Brodis becomes increasingly more repulsive in the novel, Franks' narration of his environment is often breathtaking. Brodis knows the mountain ecosystem as well as his wife does, having worked for decades as a farmer and logger. Brodis has “learned the textures of the trees, the wide easy plates of pine bark, the stringy slip of cedar skin, the striped grip of

poplar and hemlock,” and he moves with fierce wisdom through forests and along ridgelines (59).



NORTH CAROLINA POSTCARD COLLECTION
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Franks handles the structural elements of this book masterfully. Her characters are well drawn, and the dialogue is so crisp and perfectly realized that even her villains are sympathetic. Her beautiful imagery and descriptions beg to be read aloud, every word. And the plot, which leads to a literally explosive conclusion, ramps up the tension expertly, without a single wasted scene or any reliance on overused tropes.

Over the Plain Houses is distributed by Hub City Press, which regularly introduces fresh, diverse voices in Southern literature. Like Algonquin, Carolina Wren, Lookout, and other wonderful publishers operating here in the Carolinas, Hub City of Spartanburg, SC, takes representation of the modern South seriously. Franks and her editors capture a markedly different, more inclusive story from the mountains, and readers are well served by their efforts. ■

UNEARTHED SECRETS IN THE SWAMPLAND

*a review by Betina
Entzminger*

**John Hart. *The Hush: A Novel*.
New York: St. Martin's Press,
2018.**

BETINA ENTZMINGER is an English Professor at Bloomsburg University in Pennsylvania. She is a native of South Carolina and earned her PhD at UNC Chapel Hill. She is the author of *The Belle Gone Bad: White Southern Women Writers and the Dark Seductress* (LSU Press, 2002) and *Contemporary Reconfigurations of American Literary Classics: The Origin and Evolution of Stories* (Routledge, 2012). Read her essay on Caroline Lee Hentz's *Marcus Warland* in *NCLR* 1999.

JOHN HART grew up in North Carolina and attended Davidson College, earning graduate degrees in both accounting and law. He is the author of four other thrillers (three reviewed in *NCLR* 2009) and is the only author to have won the Edgar Award for two consecutive novels. He is also a recipient of the North Carolina Award for Literature. His novels have been translated into thirty languages and can be found in over seventy countries.

John Hart's *The Hush* had this early-riser turning pages until midnight and envisioning a Hulu original series dramatizing the novel's actions. A sequel to Hart's earlier book, *The Last Child* (2009), this novel is set ten years later in the same fictional location, Raven County, NC, about two hours northeast of Charlotte, based on rural North Carolina, where Hart grew up. The novel also features past main characters, Johnny Merrimon and Jack Cross, now in their early twenties. Jack is fresh out of law school, and Johnny has become a hermit, living in a cabin he built on six thousand acres of land he inherited, including the abandoned former slave settlement, Hush Arbor, for which the novel is named, and the surrounding swampland.

Those who haven't read *The Last Child* will still enjoy *The Hush*, as the novel stands on its own, with the exception of some potentially frustrating references to the earlier book that document the town's memory of Johnny's past. For example, Hart repeatedly references a newspaper photo of Johnny taken near the end of the events in the first novel: "Feathers and rattles and copperhead skulls hung from leather thongs around his neck. The papers called him *the wild Indian, the warrior, the little chief*. Some said Johnny was unhinged, a danger. Others thought he was the bravest child ever to come through Raven County" (36). Those who haven't read *The Last Child* may wonder about Johnny's appearance in this photo, but no explanation is given in *The Hush*.

At twenty-three, Johnny is still an enigma to the town's inhabitants and is even more entranced by the land's magical pull than he had been ten years earlier. Understanding the land and its influence, which is addictive and empowering for Johnny but frightening and dangerous to intruders, is one of the novel's preoccupations. In fact, the land itself functions as a darkly mysterious, complex character whose secrets readers come to know as the novel unfolds. Hart gradually reveals to readers that some supernatural power envelopes the land, capable of shaping intruders' perception and even inflicting or healing bodily harm. In subsequently uncovering what that power is and how the characters came to be, the author explores important themes that give the novel weight and depth.

One such theme invokes tortured relationships, including references to the twin sister Johnny lost in *The Last Child*, to remind readers that people must endure such loss and that letting go is sometimes the healthiest path. Johnny, his mother, and Jack have painfully endured the loss of loved ones, but the novel reveals that cheating death also leads to suffering.

Additionally, *The Hush* emphasizes the connection between people and place, evoking an environmentalist tone. While Johnny's bond with the land he inherits becomes spookily and dangerously intimate late in the novel, earlier on he resembles a Native American spiritualist who is at one with his environment, respecting his

wooded home and being nurtured by it in return: “Sap rose in the trees, and he felt it, same with the birds and beetles, the crawling vines and the flowers that followed the sun” (102). One of the novel’s least likeable characters is William Boyd, a big game hunter who exploits the land for trophies. Johnny shoots up Boyd’s camp after discovering that Boyd has killed a massive mother bear and orphaned her two helpless cubs while trespassing on Johnny’s property. Boyd’s ultimate fate emphasizes the novel’s green sensibilities.

Perhaps the most significant theme is the relationship of the past to the present, particularly as it relates to the legacy of slavery in the United States. As Hart said in an interview, “The book is very much about time as a tapestry and the threads that stretch forwards and back. It’s impossible to escape the history of slavery in the South, especially today.”* Hart develops this theme by revealing the secrets of Hush Arbor, the former slaves who once inhabited it, and their former white owners who were Johnny’s ancestors. As Verdine, a descendant of the former slaves, tells Johnny, “Time is truly the thinnest of things” (253). Through the recurring dreams of the descendants of slaves and slaveholders, the novel suggests that no one can escape the damage done by slavery and the deeds of their predecessors:

Beneath an oak tree that was massive and gnarled, the oldest of the stones were small and unmarked. Johnny dreamed of them more often than he liked.

Hanged slaves under a hanging tree . . .
That was county history, and dark.



PHOTOGRAPH BY SUSAN SHINN TURNER; COURTESY OF THE SALISBURY POST

It was family history, too. (18; ellipses and emphasis in novel)

And through the literal unearthing of a body, Hart reminds readers that, although we may attempt to bury and forget the pain of the past, it lives on beneath the surface, causing continued misery.

The best aspects of this novel remind me of Toni Morrison or William Faulkner, particularly Faulkner’s iconic line, “The past is never dead. It’s not even past,” which Hart dramatizes somewhat more literally than Faulkner did. As in Morrison’s *Beloved*, the supernatural elements in *The Hush* seem mostly necessary and believable in the fictional universe Hart creates. The themes Hart explores have been examined to similar ends before, but the supernatural elements of the plot give them a new countenance here.

Despite the weighty themes and compelling plot, stylistically Hart is no Morrison or Faulkner, which may be good news to many

readers. The style more closely resembles that of his friend and fellow novelist, John Grisham, and this was one element that I found off-putting until I became fully immersed in the story. For example, the frequent one-line paragraphs inserted for dramatic effect – “This place. / His life” (2) – seem heavy handed and overused, appearing six times on pages two and three alone. In addition, Hart uses the narrator’s access to Johnny’s thoughts to reveal aspects of his character, but sometimes the lines seem more for the reader’s benefit than organic to the character himself: “He was forgetting; he could feel it. Forgetting how to relate, to be a part of . . . this [society]” (8). By page fifty, however, I was so absorbed in the novel that these stylistic tendencies ceased to bother me. I enjoyed the novel and I’d recommend it to other readers, but I doubt that I will ever teach it because stronger stylists have made these points before. ■

* Corbie Hill, “When It Came Time to Write a New Novel, John Hart Turned to Familiar Territory – His Native North Carolina,” *News & Observer* 19 Feb. 2018: [web](#).

ABOVE “Thrillers! An Evening with John Grisham and John Hart,” moderated by *North Carolina Bookwatch* host D.G. Martin in Duke Energy Center for the Performing Arts, Raleigh, NC, 23 Feb. 2018

LOVE AND DEATH IN DEEP SPACE

a review by Joseph Dewey

Steve Mitchell. *Cloud Diary: A Novel*. Winston-Salem: C & R Press, 2018.

JOSEPH DEWEY, Professor of Literature at Broward College, is the author of numerous studies of postmodern and fin de millennium American literature and culture, most notably *In a Dark Time: The Apocalyptic Temper in the American Novel of the Nuclear Age* (Purdue University Press, 1990), *Beyond Grief and Nothing: A Reading of Don DeLillo* (University of South Carolina Press, 2006), and *Understanding Michael Chabon* (University of South Carolina Press, 2014). He has published articles on a wide range of Southern writers, including Cormac McCarthy, Reynolds Price, Allan Gurganus, Barbara Kingsolver, David Bajo, and Karen Russell.

STEVE MITCHELL is an award-winning short story writer and poet living in Greensboro, where he is co-owner of Scuppernong Books. His stories and verse have appeared in *The Southeast Review*, *StorySouth*, *Red Fez*, as well as *NCLR*. His story "Platform," published in *NCLR* 2010, is part of his 2012 short story cycle *The Naming of Ghosts* (Press 53, 2012; reviewed in *NCLR Online* 2013). In addition, Mitchell has worked with mixed media projects involving both film and music, including an ambitious online project in which readers of *Cloud Diary* can suggest songs that capture and echo different moments in the narrative.

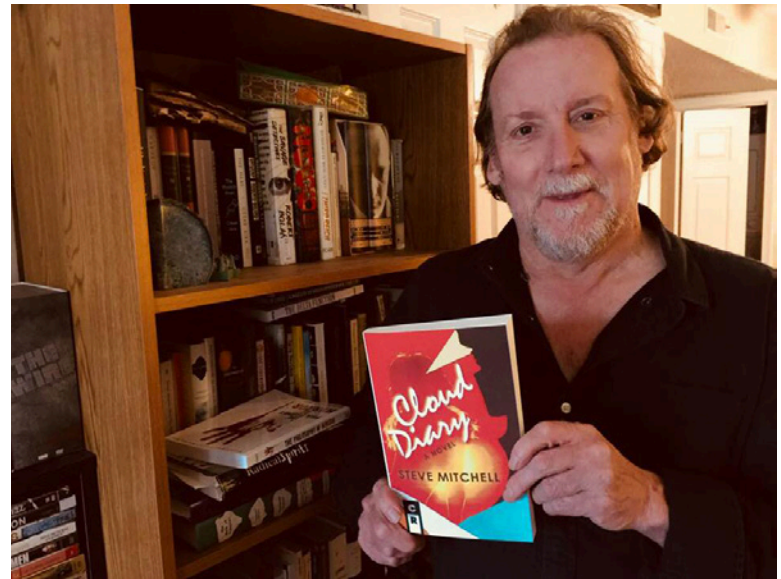
First-time novelist Steve Mitchell is clearly intrigued by deep space. Doug, Mitchell's narrator, is a twenty-something isolate, a would-be writer of unfinishable short stories who exists along the fringes of the thriving arts community around Winston-Salem. When he first meets the free-spirited Sophie, a promising painter who in turn will jumpstart his heart, he is working nights as a security guard in a largely empty warehouse. "I guard space" (5), he deadpans. This is not the deep space of kitschy science fiction but rather, the formidable, terrifying space that envelops each of us, the deep space that seems impenetrable until the unexpected chance arises to share that cloaking loneliness with another, if only for a time. That deep space has engaged the American imagination since the melancholic whale hunter who wants to be called Ishmael first peered over the chipped bow of the *Pequod* to take in the sheer breadth and reach of the nothingness into which we are all born. And, although the story that Doug recounts of his experiences, first with the seismic shattering of love and then, too quickly, with the hammer-stroke intrusion of death bears no obvious debt to *Moby-Dick*, this shimmering story of a friendship that both lifts and buries explores the dark implications of Melville's most paralyzing fear: if all the elaborate shadow-shows of Christianity are merely the fables we whisper to each other in the dark, stories about celestial zombies, slick magic tricks, and star-dusted cannibals, then we are only random matter colliding in unfathomable emptiness. But, Mitchell reminds us, how powerful are those collisions. In heroic counterpoint to Melville, Mitchell affirms that, within a most forbidding deep

space, each other is all we have. And, when that love proves fleeting and inevitably fails, we find sustenance in the sparest fragments of memory images, gestures, bits of conversation that we shape into a fine and private mythology, stories at once imperfect and imprecise that become our cloud diary.

At its great and generous heart, *Cloud Diary*, then, is a turn of the new millennium love story. Boy meets girl; boy and girl fall in love. What could be simpler? We share the transformative space Doug and Sophie come to shape, the emotional ecosystem created first by the inexplicable gravitation pull of their attraction and then by the wonderful, crazy logic of their yearning. We share Doug and Sophie's meet-cute over spaghetti squash in a Harris Teeter; their awkward first dates; their clumsy first kiss; their snappy repartee watching obscure foreign films over box wine, soda crackers, and strong coffee; their fierce lovemaking. Most important, perhaps, we share how their growing passion for each other fuels the passion for their art. Love inspires their creativity; art sustains their love. Mitchell takes a risk as he limits the narrative to exactly that shared space. We get no backstories of either lover, no recollections of their childhoods, their families, or their past lovers. Indeed, other characters appear only as secondary players; Mitchell offers no subplots to intrude into the complex space that Doug and Sophie share. The risk succeeds magnificently as Mitchell creates a love story at once engaging and unnervingly immediate. What stuns here is the unforced elegance of Mitchell's anatomy of love, his willingness to use language unironically to cap-

ture that mysterious kinetic. After all, as the great-grandchildren of Hemingway, we hold language suspect, impoverished, thin; what we talk about when we talk about love is, well, everything and anything but love. But here, in graceful prose that begs to be read aloud, in sentences both sinewy and terraced, we feel love's tonic energy. As Mitchell shows in line after stunning line, language may be secondhand, but it is like a hand-me-down gown that still lights up the room.

But, as with Melville, Mitchell cannot ignore the hard reality of our vulnerability. Sophie manages The Naked Scrawl, a cavernous bar (actually a converted two-car garage) with cheap beer and day-old cupcakes that provides area artists, poets, and musicians a reassuring space wherein to share their passions and their dreams. Unlike James Joyce's shabby Dublin hacks or Woody Allen's pretentious Manhattan narcissists, Mitchell's Carolina artists are tenderly, dedicated to their craft, to each other's welfare, and to the bold ideal that art itself is a culture's vital and necessary energy. Late one night, however, that space is shattered by three masked, armed robbers. Abruptly, Mitchell's elegant prose shatters into concise reportorial brevity. Doug must watch helplessly as one of the robbers shoves Sophie back to the manager's office to get the night's take. Doug never knows exactly what happens back in the office (nor do we), but he knows that he did nothing. Days later, he



PHOTOGRAPH BY DEONNA KELLI SAVEDY, COURTESY OF TRIAD CITY BEAT

sees the purple-green bruises all along Sophie's breasts and arms. After the robbery, Sophie coolly retreats from Doug, and when she accepts an artist residency in Colorado, the lovers drop into deep space for what will become more than eight years apart.

Then Doug, now an established writer, receives a phone call telling him that Sophie is in the closing stages of leukemia. Veteran readers initially wince at such a contrived and hokey narrative premise. A beautiful woman, an artist, so passionate and so vibrant, dying so young surely risks tacky sentimentality. But Mitchell is too clear-eyed for clichés. The weeks that Doug spends tending to a dying Sophie are rendered with unblinking realism and deep-felt compassion. Sophie, like most of us, does not want to die alone in deep

space; indeed, she initially asks a shocked Doug to help her arrange her suicide. And as she slips away (Mitchell creates a most heartbreaking and bittersweet last date), we share Doug's gathering epiphany that for his heart at least there won't be a next time, there won't be another One. After Sophie's memorial service, alone now with his cat and his story drafts, Doug closes his cloud diary with a single dazzling memory/image that we know must now console him: he and Sophie dancing in some forgotten parking lot under the stars, an image both animated and still, two figures both together and apart, falling carelessly, helplessly, but catching each other. Mitchell understands that incandescent moment, as much memory as invention, is the only happy ending for a love story set in deep space. ■

**“AND THROUGH
IT ALL WE ARE
ALONE”:
TWO MODERN
TALES OF TIMELESS
ISOLATION**

a review by Sara E. Melton

Dale Bailey. *In the Night Wood.*
Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt,
2018.

John Kessel. *Pride and Prometheus.*
London: Saga Press, 2018.

SARA E. MELTON is a lecturer at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, where she teaches literature, composition, and ESL classes. Melton earned her BA and MA at Radford University and her PhD in English from Tennessee with her dissertation “Duties Best Fitted: Servant Characters, Sensibility, and Domesticity in the Victorian Novel.” She lives in Oak Ridge, TN.

At the end of *The Graduate*, we see the image of the two main characters, the young lovers who have just fled the wedding, together at last, having defied convention and parental wishes, but instead of victoriously falling into each other’s arms, they sit on the bus, lost in their own thoughts, smiling uncomfortably, the human condition wrapped up in one decisive image: we are alone, even when surrounded by others, even in the presence of the beloved. The ideal of union with family, friends, and romantic partner is timeless, but our essential inability to achieve that union is expressed by Mathew Arnold in “To Marguerite: Continued”: “We mortal millions live alone.” In two recent novels, authors John Kessel of Raleigh, NC, and Dale Bailey of Hickory, NC, continue this lament, using the devices of stories within stories, science, and the supernatural, to highlight the very human desire to connect – “Only connect!” as E.M. Forster wrote – the hardest task of all.

Mary Bennett, hapless sister of Elizabeth and Kitty, and the melancholy protagonist of **John Kessel’s *Pride and Prometheus***, says, “I realize how small I am, and how great time is. These rocks, this river, will long survive us. We are here for a breath, and then we are gone. And through it all we are alone” (110). Her words echo forlornly over all the main characters of *Pride and Prometheus*. The halo of the happy families of the Darcys and the Bingleys has a certain dim appeal in this novel, but it seems as far away and unattainable as a fairy

tale. When Kitty declares that she desires the kind of life Elizabeth has with Darcy, Mary replies drily that “There aren’t eight men in England with ten thousand a year and an estate like Pemberley.” But when Kitty laments that “I want to have a man who knows and understands me, who sees who I am and loves me. I want to look into his eyes and find a kindred soul,” Mary sardonically replies that it may be “easier to get the man with ten thousand a year” (93–94). Such is the doggedly pragmatic outlook of our heroine.

Mary herself is a socially awkward woman in her thirties, overlooked by her family, ignored by the potential suitors who might, according to received wisdom, make her life “exalted” if they were to offer her marriage. She is sufficiently far removed from her society that she feels human interactions and emotions are sometimes quite alien to her. Mary at least has the consolation of her intellectual curiosity and her studies, but Kitty has no such consolation, so her own misery at receiving no eligible marriage offer is more keenly felt. Their parents are isolated from each other by weariness, and lack of sympathy or understanding. The family members left at Longbourne are secure, but melancholy and adrift.

When fate brings Mary into contact with Victor Frankenstein, and later with his creature, she meets people still more isolated and miserable than herself, and with no equanimity or patience to bear their misfortune. The Creature, intelligent and able but outcast from society and comfort, declares he is surely the “most



COURTESY OF BARBARA CLAYPOLE WHITE

miserable creature alive,” even as he observes the unremitting misery of the London poor – fervently believing that his own intellect makes him feel his suffering more keenly. Worse, his rage at his isolation is transcended only by his obsessive belief that a female companion is the only thing that could save him from a life of despair, and, as Mary humorously points out to the Creature in one of the most compelling scenes of the novel, the mere existence of an eligible female is no guarantee of a successful union:

She recoiled at his self-pity. “You put too much upon having a mate. . . . You think that having a female of your own kind will ensure that she will accept you?” Mary laughed. “Wait until you are rejected, for the most trivial of reasons, by one who ought to have been made for you.”

Dismay crossed the Creature’s face: “That shall not happen. . . . The female that Victor creates shall find no other mate but me.”

“Better you should worry if you are accepted: then you may . . . ask a new question: Which is worse, to be alone, or to be wretchedly mismatched?”

(174–75)

Later, her concern for the “bride” is not the bride’s potential for destruction, but the fact that she is one more female pawn in a man’s world, a young woman bartered off to a marriage she is created for and cannot refuse.

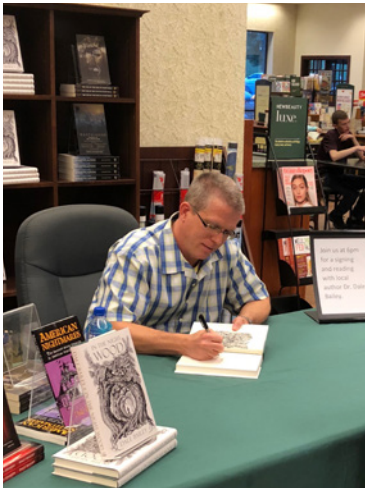
Victor Frankenstein is much the same as he appears in Shelley’s novel: ambitious, brilliant, morose, self-isolating, and sunk in self-pity and guilt. Both he and the Creature, named Adam in this work, are drawn to Mary Bennett, for her curious mind and her lack of squeamishness, and both have a chance at redemption – and a balm for their cosmic, obsessed loneliness – through her. Through her own suffering, she achieves a lasting self-knowledge and broader understanding for herself that she could never have achieved had she stayed with her parents at Longbourne, and she insists that both Victor Frankenstein and Adam consider their own culpability in the tragedies that have beset them; they must come to terms with their own actions instead of mindlessly blaming the other.

The author is mesmerizingly true to these familiar characters;

there is not a moment where the reader is jarred by the transition to a union of these unlikely novels. The development of Mary as a bluestocking and a character of tremendous strength and courage, exerting her last strength to save two men determined to destroy each other and themselves, is touching, and feels quite true. Mary, whose life has been blighted by a failed piano performance and a more general failure to fit in with her peers (particularly her charming sisters), rises well above all the constraints and concerns of her polite novel of manners society and emerges as a powerful character, fascinating and clever beyond anything we might have expected, even from the sister of Elizabeth Bennett. Her answer, and Kessel’s, to the problem of our essential isolation is complex, and avoids easy answers. Her sisters’ successful marriages ironically free her from the necessity of a financially expedient marriage of her own and allow her to pursue a more individual and even radical and classless connection to nature and to other human beings.

If isolation is an inescapable part of the human condition, so certainly are loss and betrayal, and the latter can often lead to the former, as it does with Victor Frankenstein and his creature. This is the paralysis at the heart of the plot of **Dale Bailey’s** compelling *In the Night Wood*, which begins with the suggestion of a picaresque plot: a young boy, Charles Hayden, who has been deprived of his

COURTESY OF DURANT HAIRE



ancestral birthright, has the most fleeting of glances and souvenirs (a peculiar Victorian children's book called *In the Night Wood*) of the wealthy family and property that his mother had renounced. While in graduate school, he meets a woman who has a family connection with the author of *In the Night Wood* and who, like him, has no close family. They are drawn together, and soon after their initial library meeting, they are married and, we are told, live "happily ever after." But from the beginning, they are described as woeful fairy tale orphans, abandoned by their parents, confused about their own story, following a bewildering trail of breadcrumbs. When they first arrive at Hollow House in Yorkshire – which they retreat to after the death of their daughter and an ugly scandal that results in Charles's dismissal from his job – they are described as "children in a tale, long lost

and returned at last to break the spell that had been cast over their ancestral home" (27).

Hollow House, Erin's unlikely inheritance from her eccentric family, is haunted ("of course," the author points out) by its deep, mysterious forest, and its two-walled isolation. "Hard to say whether the intent was to keep something in or something out" (44), comments the neighborhood physician Dr. Mould, and indeed both Erin and her eccentric ancestor are portrayed in terms of the Lady of Shalott, isolated by walls and towers, and perhaps by an obscure curse, with only their obsessive art, and the relief offered by prescription drugs and alcohol, as compensation. It is also haunted by the legend and mystery of its tormented previous owner, who huddled in the house for many years with little human companionship, and wrote his one work of disturbing fiction, a tale for children, which is nevertheless not quite appropriate for children. There is, of course, a mystery at the heart of the work and in Hollow House itself, and Charles Hayden sets out to find it, to occupy himself and possibly to burnish his scholarly credentials.

The mystery is quite exciting, involving literary research and code-breaking and scholarly collaboration, the balms for any English major's soul – and Charles is a proper English major. He and his collaborator, whose name, Silva, echoes the forbidding Eorl Wood that surrounds

the house, have a very attractive, and attracting, synergy: while living out a disturbing fairy tale, they consider whether they might in fact be living a fairy tale, and discuss the philosophical and metaphorical implications of fairy tales à la Bruno Bettelheim, making this a work of meta-metafiction. So if, like nearly all fairytale characters, they are part of a story they don't want to be in and, as Charles says, do not "want to read the story [they've] been written into" (111), well, there is no help for it but to try and untangle the threads of the story itself. Certainly, the novel becomes a clever story within a story within a story, as it gradually pulls together the threads of the original children's book, the author's tortured life, the secrets of Eorl Wood (which is, like Dr. Who's conveyance and like any important human relationship, "bigger on the inside than the outside"), and the tragic events surrounding Charles and Erin's estrangement.

But the more pressing mystery of *In the Night Wood* and of Hollow House is how to forgive, how to reach out, how to break out of relationship paralysis. Charles and Erin are as isolated from each other as coldly polite strangers, conducting conversations in "the oblique discourse of a marriage in distress" (63), lacking the courage and the will to get past their heartbreak and blame. Their misery, and their inability to address their misery by any communication or change

ABOVE Dale Bailey at a reading of *In the Night Wood* at Barnes and Noble, Hickory, NC, 9 Oct. 2018

DALE BAILEY is the author of seven books, including a collection of short stories, *The End of the End of Everything* (Doherty, 2014), and a novel, *The Subterranean Season* (Underland, 2015). His short fiction has won the International Horror Guild Award and has been nominated for the Nebula Award and the Bram Stoker Award. His story "Death and Suffrage" was adapted for Showtime's *Masters of Horror* television show; the episode was entitled "Homecoming."

of scenery, haunts the novel fully as much as the otherworldly influences. Soon after their arrival in Yorkshire, Charles has a conversation about *In the Night Wood* with a detective who is investigating a local child's disappearance. The detective says, "I remember now. You think she's going to find her way out. That's the way these things are supposed to go." Charles replies that "She has to figure out what she's lost before she can escape" – and Detective McGavick asks, "Who among us is lucky enough to do that?" (54). It is clear that the solution and the escape and the reconciliation,

if there is one, will hinge on the recognition of what has been and may still be lost, in both the past and the present. It's clear, too, that one man alone cannot come to this knowledge, just as Caedmon Hollow himself was not able: it will require assistance, and union, and forgiveness.

In the end, in both novels, it is the otherworldly influences that allow the possibility of reunion and forgiveness. And there is hope, in both novels, that something can be salvaged from the worst kinds of wreckage. Instinct and experience and poetry tell us

that it is a fragile chance. After all, in "To Marguerite: Continued," Arnold claims that our inability to truly connect is so absolute that, even when we most desire it, it is as though "A God, a God [our] severance ruled!" In this context, despite our stories and beliefs and poetry in common, despite our intelligence and sympathy, any moment of wholeness or unification becomes a victory in the face of the "Unplumb'd, salt, estranging sea." If we can unite for even a moment to slay the dragon, or solve the mystery, or heal a breach, then we have accomplished something of a miracle. ■

JIM GRIMSLEY RECEIVES 2018 HOBSON PRIZE



COURTESY OF CHOWAN UNIVERSITY

The 2018 recipient of the Mary Frances Hobson Prize for Distinguished Achievement in Arts and Letters is Jim Grimsley, an accomplished novelist and playwright. Grimsley is a native of rural Eastern North Carolina and studied writing at UNC Chapel Hill. For many years, he was playwright in residence in Chicago and Atlanta, and now teaches creative writing at Emory University. His first novel, *Winter Birds*, won the 1995 Sue Kaufman Prize for First Fiction and received a special citation from the Ernest Hemingway Foundation. His second novel, *Dream Boy*, won the American Library Association GLBT Award for Literature (the Stonewall Prize) and was a Lambda finalist. It was made into a film, which Grimsley talks about in an essay in *NCLR 2012*. Grimsley has received numerous other awards for his plays, novels, science fiction, and short stories. Read more about him and his work in an interview and article published in *NCLR 2009* and a short story by him in *NCLR 2016*.

The Mary Frances Hobson Prize is awarded annually and aims to recognize achievement in arts and letters, preferably by authors from the South or whose work relates to the South. Chowan University hosted Grimsley for an open dialogue with students, a lecture and the conferral of the Hobson Prize. ■

ABOVE Jim Grimsley, Chowan University, Murfreesboro, NC, 2 Apr. 2018

NCLR EDITOR RECEIVES 2018 JOHN TYLER CALDWELL AWARD, THE NORTH CAROLINA HUMANITIES COUNCIL'S HIGHEST HONOR

presentation remarks by Alex Albright, NCLR Founding Editor

Louisiana native Margaret Bauer came to live in North Carolina in 1996, when she was hired by ECU to teach Southern literature and to edit the *North Carolina Literary Review*, which I had founded in 1991 at the direction and with the wholehearted support of ECU Dean of Arts and Sciences Keats Sparrow.

While I was editor of *NCLR*, I found it virtually impossible to do anything else. Margaret, on the other hand, has, during a twenty-two-year stint as editor, written four books and edited two others; in 2012, she founded the online version of *NCLR*, completely different contact, same beautiful design and high editorial standards,

Prior to tonight, she has been awarded the North Carolina Award for Literature in 2017 by Governor Roy Cooper; the same year she was awarded the R. Hunt Parker Memorial Award for Significant contribution to North Carolina Literature from the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association, and the *NCLR* team received the ECU Centennial Award for Excellence in Ambition. She was named a Distinguished Professor at ECU in 2014, the same year she received ECU's Lifetime Achievement Award in Research, and she has held the Ralph Hardee Rives Chair of Southern Literature since 2004.

As a scholar, Margaret has demonstrated a remarkable breadth of interests, publishing books and articles on William Faulkner, Tim Gautreaux, Paul Green, Ernest Gaines, Ellen Gilchrist, Charles Frazier, Charles Chesnutt, Herman Melville, Zora Neale Hurston, Flannery O'Connor, Ellen Glasgow, Mark Twain, Kate Chopin, Alice Walker, Richard Wright, and Margaret Mitchell.

Perhaps recognizing her ownself that she's done enough academic writing, she's shifted gears dramatically in an already astonishingly productive and important career, returning to her undergraduate roots when she graduated with a concentration in creative writing from LSU. Now she's writing creative nonfiction essays and poetry. In two years, she's published four essays and a poem.

Suffice it to say that Margaret Bauer will not be sitting on her Caldwell Award. I understand she's working on a memoir, and also something about her very remarkable Louisiana politician father. I can't wait to see how this new phase of her life and energies work out.



COURTESY OF NORTH CAROLINA HUMANITIES COUNCIL

To present the Caldwell medal to her tonight is Amanda Tilley, who was in Margaret's very first graduate class at ECU, a class on Faulkner and other writers. She ended up writing her thesis on the Quentin Compson-like inner conflict about the Old South reflected in the actual letters of an Eastern North Carolina Confederate soldier, and a portion of which was published in *NCLR* 1999's special feature on the Civil War in North Carolina. ■■■

“what I do as NCLR Editor”
acceptance remarks by Margaret D. Bauer

Thank you, Amanda, Alex, Liza, Charles, and the North Carolina Humanities Council. What a pleasure Liza and I have had working with Paula Watkins and Melanie Moore on this evening's program. I also appreciate all of you who came tonight. I am certain you each represent a reason I am here: supportive

ABOVE Alex Albright, Amanda Tilley, Margaret Bauer, Charles Frazier, and Liza Wieland at the North Carolina Humanities Council's John Tyler Caldwell Award ceremony, Friday Center, Chapel Hill, 5 Oct. 2018 (For the event program, Wieland, *NCLR*'s Fiction Editor, interviewed Frazier.)

ALEX ALBRIGHT received the R. Hunt Parker Memorial Award from the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association for his many contributions to North Carolina's literary heritage. In 2018, he retired after teaching at ECU since 1981. Read more about him in *NCLR Online* [2018](#).



COURTESY OF NORTH CAROLINA HUMANITIES COUNCIL

“Every time you read a novel . . . you get to live another life, enjoy or suffer experiences that broaden your perspective.”
—Margaret Bauer

loved ones from various chapters of my life – I won’t risk listing and leaving someone out, so I’ll just call out Andrew, the most generous-hearted person I know (and I know a lot of generous-hearted people). Also writers, readers, artists, and colleagues who have participated in one way or another and who appreciate and support the mission of the *North Carolina Literary Review* – eventually becoming friends, even if I might just be meeting you in person for the first time tonight. At my seat in front of a computer screen, wherever that may be, I am often in the company of my many *NCLR* friends.

Alex, as I’ve said before, I owe you for how my career turned out. The gift to North Carolina that you gave with *NCLR* has been such a gift to my career. I am forever grateful. It has been such a blessing to my life to take what you gave to the state that I now call home and use it to promote writers like Charles Frazier and, as I think he will agree, just as important, writers just starting out, whom we promote along with literary stars like him who are always so generous in sharing their time and expertise. A self-confessed writer groupie, I treasure the opportunities I’ve had to



COURTESY OF NORTH CAROLINA HUMANITIES COUNCIL

meet and get to know many of the literary icons I so admire, but I also relish the times I’ve gotten to tell a new writer her story will be published and find out its her first publication. It has been a privilege to serve as an ambassador for North Carolina’s rich literary history, advocating for our writers, who set such a fine example of how productive communities can be when the people within support each other: I have witnessed repeatedly our literary stars encourage their audiences to read someone’s debut novel.

I asked Amanda Tilley to present the medal as a representative of both the Fabulous Starlight Women who keep me sane and, before that, one of my first students at ECU. She might recall the point I make to students on the first day of class when I explain to them why Humanities credits are included among university requirements. Women in my family live long lives: one grandmother until 93, the other 101. That is a long time to be stuck inside your own head, I tell students. But every time you read a novel, for example, you get to live another life, enjoy or suffer experiences that broaden your perspective. Literature, as studies have shown,



“It has been a privilege to serve as an ambassador for North Carolina’s rich literary history, advocating for our writers, who set such a fine example of how productive communities can be when the people within support each other.”
—Margaret D. Bauer

inspires empathy by allowing readers to see inside the consciousness of a stranger, showing us what it is like to be another, so that we recognize what we have in common and better understand our differences. Now, perhaps more than any other period of my lifetime, expanding the ability to empathize through compelling stories featuring various “others” is crucial, as is, of course, developing critical thinking skills, another of the reasons Humanities courses are so crucial.

My first Southern literature class this semester took place the morning after Silent Sam was taken down here in Chapel Hill. Through the literature of the 1890s South, a period when many such memorials went up, my students have gained a broader understanding of the history behind the issue of memorializing the Confederacy than they might have brought with them to college – more informed, perhaps, than they will hear around the holiday table next month. Knowledge can be discomfiting, I know, being from the Deep South myself, but is ignorance bliss, I ask them, or ultimately stultifying? They, and their friends in other Humanities courses are, I hope, learning to think beyond divisive dichotomies of red or blue, black or white.

Just this week, with funding from the North Carolina Arts Council, the Paul Green Foundation, and the ECU English Department, EbzB Productions’

play *Native*, written by Research Triangle High School drama teacher Ian Finley, was performed in Greenville – its Eastern North Carolina premiere. So here is an example of what I do as *NCLR* editor and will continue to do for as long as I am able: When you see that play advertised in your area, *go see it* – and bring a friend. If you don’t see it coming to your community, bring it to your community. This play about the collaboration between our own Paul Green, creator of *The Lost Colony*, and Richard Wright on adapting Wright’s *Native Son* for the stage in the early 1940s explores conversations we should be having, not shying away from, about the American ideals that are not equally accessible to everyone, about recognizing discrimination and white privilege. It is a provocative, timely play – “intense” and “moving” were the adjective my students used the class period after they saw it. Our audience ranged from ECU students to retirees, and we had an inspiring talk-back when it was over. *Make this happen on a stage near you*. I believe we all went home that night feeling more enlightened, more empathy after hearing Green and Wright try to “talk the darkness away,”* to borrow a phrase Green once used. Isn’t that what we all need these days? To communicate, to educate until we “talk the darkness away”?

Surrounded by so many good people, who support the Humanities, I feel lighter, hopeful – and so very honored to receive this award. Thank you. ■

ABOVE Margaret Bauer with playwright Ian Finley (center); David Zum Brunnen, who played Paul Green; J. Madrice Henderson, who played Richard Wright; and director Serena Ehardt, following the performance of *Native* at the Whirligig Theatre, Greenville, NC, 2 Oct. 2018

* Quoted from Green’s foreword to James Boyd, *Eighteen Poems*, 50th anniversary edition (Friends of Weymouth, 1944) xiii; with appreciation to James W. Clark, Jr., who called this line to my and others’ attention at a Paul Green Foundation meeting.

Big Fish:

THE MYTH and THE MAN

BY BARBARA BENNETT



COURTESY OF ALGONQUIN BOOKS OF CHAPEL HILL

BARBARA BENNETT received her PhD in American Literature from Arizona State University. She is currently an Associate Professor at North Carolina State University. Her books include *Comic Vision, Female Voices* (Louisiana State University Press, 1998), *Understanding Jill McCorkle* (University of South Carolina Press, 2000), *Soul of a Lion* (National Geographic Books, 2010), and *Smoke Signals from Samarcand: The 1931 Reform School Fire and its Aftermath* (University of South Carolina Press, 2018). Read her interview with Jill McCorkle and Lee Smith in *NCLR* 2016 and her essay on Jill McCorkle's *Ferris Beach* in *NCLR* 2006.

Although *Big Fish: A Novel of Mythic Proportions* was Daniel Wallace's first published novel, he admits that he had written about five previous novels that never got published. When he wrote *Big Fish*, he claims that the book "felt better but not necessarily more publishable."¹ He started with New York publishers because his agent felt it was a good novel that would be picked up, but fifteen publishers passed on it before Wallace thought of Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, a good publisher that was "just getting on the map." In fact, it was a perfect venue, having already published such Southern writers as Clyde Edgerton and Jill McCorkle. Algonquin Books published Wallace's debut novel in 1998. Wallace was excited, of course, and pleased with the early reviews, one of which mentioned the mixing of "the mundane and the mythical" and the theme of the "redemptive power of storytelling."² A few academic articles have been written about the novel, but the film has garnered much more attention in publication. Wallace admits, "It did well for the kind of book it was" and had "a lot of foreign sales before the movie" ever came out. The book sold modest numbers and went into paperback. Since then it has remained in print and been translated into twenty-four languages.

Wallace never thought of *Big Fish* as "movie fodder" because, he says, "there's no real storyline. It is nothing like a movie." But it was optioned – as many novels are that are never made into movies. The screenplay was written by John August, who is also responsible for the screenplays for *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *Corpse Bride*, among others. With August's inspired screenplay and the vision of producer Tim Burton, whose quirky mind produced such movies as *Edward Scissorhands* and *Beetlejuice*, Wallace's novel was bound to look magical and eccentric as a film. As Kim Hollis describes *Big Fish* the movie, it "is a quintessential Burton film in that it celebrates people who inhabit the fringe of society,"³ a characterization of John August's work as well.

¹ Daniel Wallace, *Big Fish: A Novel of Mythic Proportions* (Algonquin, 1998); quotations from the novel will be cited parenthetically. Personal interview, 29 June 2017; unattributed quotations throughout this essay are from this interview.

² Quotations are from *Publisher's Weekly* 9 Sept 1998: [web](#) and Bob Minzesheimer, "In the belly of *Big Fish*, a son finds the father he dreams of," *USA Today*, 14 Jan 1999: [web](#).

³ Kim Hollis, "Book vs. Movie: *Big Fish*," [boxofficeprophets.com](#), 21 Sept. 2004: [web](#).



PHOTOGRAPH BY NIMAN WOODS

“A man tells his stories so many times that he becomes the stories. They live on after him, and in that way he becomes immortal.

—John August,
Big Fish screenplay

Wallace remarked in an interview that when he learned about the book being made into a film, “I could not have been happier – or more surprised. I thought the narrative was off the Burton beaten path, and it was, but he saw the magic in it. For me, personally and professionally, it was a great and very lucky event, because my books are small, quiet and literary, and therefore don’t have a wide readership.”⁴ It was nominated for both Golden Globes and Oscars. Then, in 2013, it was made into a Broadway musical, the script written, again, by John August, with music and lyrics by Andrew Lippa. It ran for over a hundred shows with premieres in cities like New York, Sydney, Munich, and London in late 2017.

Wallace was born in Birmingham, Alabama. He attended Emory University and finished his degree at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Although most of his life has been in the South, he did work in Japan for a number of years for a trading company. Returning to Chapel Hill, he was employed as an illustrator, designing such things as refrigerator magnets. Eventually, though, his writing became his main focus and he took a job at UNC as a creative writing instructor. At first glance – other than the setting and the obvious accents in the film – *Big Fish* seems to be only tangentially Southern, but at heart, it embodies true Southern culture, for it is about the oral tradition of storytelling. Going back to the humorists of the Old Southwest – authors such as Augustus Longstreet, Thomas Bangs Thorpe, and George Washington Harris – the South has been known for its tellers of tall tales and the creation of legendary heroes like Davy Crockett. Between about 1830 and 1860, American readers (mostly men) craved the larger than life characters these authors created, stories that showed men facing the expanding frontier with courage and grit, committing manly, brave acts that were exaggerated with each telling until the line blurred between reality and fiction. Mark Twain arose out of this literary trend, a writer who knew the value of a good tall tale. He once said that a humorous story “may be spun out to great length, and may wander around as much as it pleases, and arrive nowhere in particular.” In his introduction to *The Sound and the Fury*, William Faulkner chimed in on the importance of storytelling in Southern literature and life when he said, “We need to talk, to tell, since oratory is our heritage.”

Finally, Allan Tate identified the “traditional Southern mode of discourse” to be “somebody at the other end silently listening.”⁵

In addition, the South has always loved its larger-than-life characters, both real and fictional. Just in the twentieth century, the South gave us Bear Bryant, Elvis Presley, Dolly Parton, and Huey P. Long, to name only a few such historical characters. Wallace’s Edward Bloom

⁴ Jason Erik Lundberg, “Interview: Daniel Wallace,” *strangehorizons.com*, 11 Oct. 2004: [web](#); subsequently cited parenthetically.

⁵ Mark Twain, *How to Tell a Story and Other Essays*, 1897 (American Publishing Company, 1901); *William Faulkner: Essays, Speeches and Public Lectures*, ed. James B. Meriwether, 2004 (Chatto & Windus, 1967) 292; Allen Tate, “A Southern Mode of the Imagination,” *Studies in American Culture*, edited by Joseph K. Kwiatt and Mary C. Turpie (University of Minnesota Press, 1960) 100–101. For more on the tall tale’s function and meaning in literature, see Carolyn S. Brown, *The Tall Tale in American Folklore and Literature* (U of Tennessee Press, 1987) 9–39.

in *Big Fish* joins a well-established line of fictional Southerners whose lives lend themselves to exaggeration and legend. In the Broadway musical, one of the key songs includes these lyrics that Edward sings to his son William:

Be the hero of your story if you can
 Be the champion in the fight
 Not just the man
 Don't depend on other people
 To put paper next to pen
 Be the hero of your story, boy, and then
 You can rise to be the hero once again.⁶

These words encourage the rise to greatness, the achievement beyond the ordinary, and the mythologizing of a man's life.

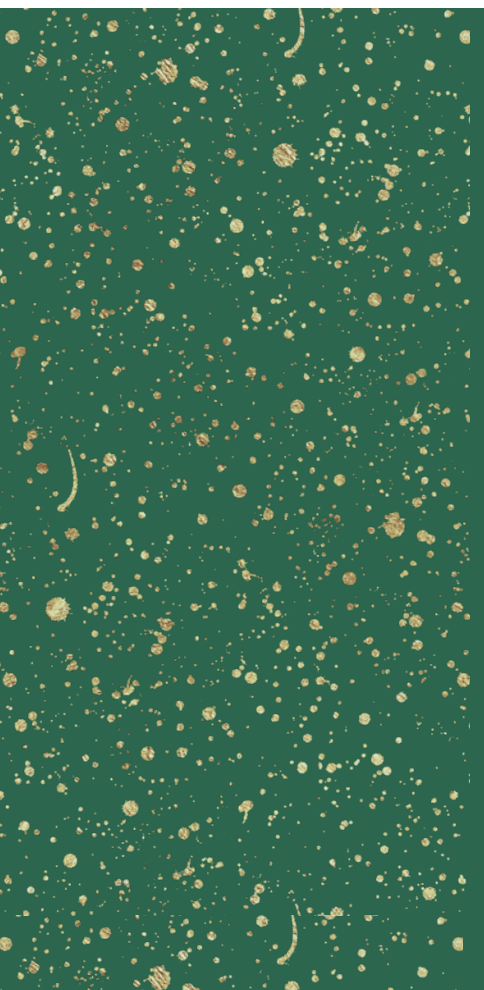
For this is really what the novel – and generally the film – is all about: a boy mythologizing his father, a father who has contributed to the myths by telling tall tales about his life when he is away from home. In the first few pages of the novel, William remembers imagining his elderly father suddenly as a young boy with his life ahead of him. The images of the old man and the young boy converge in his head, and his father “turned into a weird creature, wild, concurrently young and old, dying and newborn. My father became a myth” (2).

Myths generally have a purpose in a civilization, and that purpose is to help people make sense of the world around them, answering basic questions such as where did we come from, why does the sun rise each morning, and what happens to us after we die. For William, turning his father into a myth assists him in understanding this man who has been unknowable his whole life. Where does he go when he leaves us? What does he do when he's away? Is he a man worth admiring? The stories Edward tells when he gets home – which William internalizes – explain the answers to all these questions and more. The myths make the man real and help William come to terms with his father, something that Sigmund Freud said all young men must do. This works for both Edward and William. In one of the songs from the musical, “The God's Honest Truth,” the doctor admits, “Sometimes talkin' is how a man makes sense of the world.” This is, in fact, what the stories do for both Edward and William.

Joseph Campbell, in his landmark book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, claims that all heroes must go away from home to accomplish their heroic deeds; thus, Edward must leave his family in order to have his extraordinary adventures. Campbell explains, “A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive



⁶ Here and subsequently, lyrics from the musical adaptation of *Big Fish* are quoted from *The Musical Lyrics website*.



victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.”⁷ His stories make him the hero he purports to be.

Edward doesn’t have to go very far to get material for his stories. Many of them are bastardized versions of those of the Greeks and Romans – a difference in the novel and film, which depends more on stories about popular culture events, like a circus. The scene where Edward leaves his small town and ventures toward the city but has to prove his worthiness by getting through the mystical town “that had no name” and get past the notorious Dog, famous for biting off fingers, has echoes of a hero making his way in and out of the Underworld and facing Cerberus, the dog gatekeeper. Edward’s “three labors” (92) are reminiscent of Hercules’s tasks. First Edward works as a veterinarian assistant who must clean out the dogs’ kennels and cats’ cages – sounding a great deal like Hercules cleaning the Stables of Augeas. Second, Edward works as a girdle salesman and must fit the never-satisfied Mrs. Rainwater, reminiscent of Hercules having to obtain the Girdle of Hippolyta. Finally, Edward must face a wild dog terrorizing his neighborhood, as Hercules had to bring the watchdog Cerberus from the Underworld to the surface.

Additionally, there is a giant who must be tamed by Edward, a Cyclops figure (who also appears in the film). On another occasion, he is compared to Mercury because he is “so fast it was said he could arrive in a place before setting out to get there” (78). In the war, he is “of course, a sailor,” much like Odysseus (101). On numerous occasions in the narrative, William refers to his father as “a god,” “divine,” and “godlike” (95, 107, 121), and William admits that he believes his father is immortal: “My father gave me early indications that he would live forever” (128).

Along with mythic references, there are archetypes found throughout the novel: water is an important symbol of rebirth, blessings, and immortality. Water in the form of rain comes to the wasteland on the day Edward is born, and when he dies, he returns to the river as a sort of sacred fish. Beautiful women are associated with water, too, as the goddess figures who come to Edward during significant moments. The archetype of the journey is clearly evident, the all-knowing and all-seeing eye of the witch, duels between good and evil. The novel is packed with parallels to well-known myths and legends, and Edward is the hero of them all.

Like all heroes, Edward is on a quest, but it is not for gold, glory, or to kill a dragon. For Edward, the purpose of the quest is much more personal, for Edward has crafted these stories of heroism for his son. During one conversation Edward has with William on his deathbed, he says, “Remembering a man’s stories makes him immortal” (20). This is an important clue as to Edward’s real purpose in storytelling, the point of his



COURTESY OF DANIEL WALLACE

LEFT Matthew McGrory as Karl the Giant and Ewan McGregor as Edward in *Big Fish*

⁷ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces: The Power of Myth* (Pantheon Books, 1949) 27.





COURTESY OF DANIEL WALLACE

quest: he wants to be remembered. He knows he is dying, and like all people, he wonders if his life has had an impact or if he will be forgotten soon after he dies. Passing on the elaborate tales to his son – William will repeat these fabrications – will help him live on. A few lines later, Edward whispers to his son, “*I wanted to be a great man*” but admits that he’s not sure what the prerequisites are for being such a man (21). This, too, is part of Edward’s quest – not just to be remembered, but to be remembered as a great man. It is here that William has his finest moment as a son. He realizes what his father wants, and rather than withholding the compliment, he gives his father exactly what he needs as he is dying:

“I think,” I say after a while, waiting for the right words to come, “that if a man could be said to be loved by his son, then I think that man could be considered great.”

For this is the only power I have, to bestow upon my father the mantle of greatness, a thing he sought in the wider world, but one that, in a surprise turn of events, was here at home all along.

“Ah,” he says, “*those* parameters,” he says, stumbling over the word, all of a sudden seeming slightly woozy. “Never thought about it in those terms, exactly. Now that we are, though, thinking about it like that, I mean, in this case,” he says, “in this very specific case, *mine* – ”

“Yeah,” I say. “You are hereby and forever after my father, Edward Bloom, a Very Great Man. So help you Fred.” (22)

It is all Edward wants, all he has hoped to receive through his many stories and jokes. And he dies, as William explains, because “the world no longer held the magic that allowed him to live grandly within it” (166).

Wallace admits that fathers and sons intrigue him: “It appears I am drawn to stories about father/son relationships.” His own father, he says, “was in many ways like the father in *Big Fish* – charming, but using that charm to keep others at bay” (Lundberg). It is a topic that has been rare in American literature. In “Where are the Fathers in American Literature?: Re-visiting Fatherhood in U.S. Literary History,” Josep M. Armengol-Cabrera acknowledges that “[m]ost canonical authors appear to avoid dealing with the issue of fatherhood, which thus remains largely absent from American literature.” He goes on to describe the typical American hero, a description that sounds a great deal like

“I thought of him suddenly, and simply, as a boy, a child, a youth, with his whole life ahead of him, much as mine was ahead of me. . . . And these images – the now and then of my father – converged, and at that moment he turned into a weird creature, wild, concurrently young and old, dying and newborn. My father became a myth.”

–*Big Fish*



COURTESY OF DANIEL WALLACE

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“What is it you say now, what peace is there to be made in the last minutes of the last day that will mark the before and after of your life until then, the day that will change everything for both of you, the living and the dead?”

—*Big Fish*

ABOVE Daniel Wallace's cameo as a professor in *Big Fish*

Edward Bloom: “The American literary hero . . . is by definition a self-willed orphan, an individualistic character who breaks with all familial ties and begins a new life by himself, alone and unencumbered by the responsibilities of family life.”⁸ Edward’s life away from home allows him this kind of existence. He even takes a second “wife” in the character of Jenny Hill. By vacillating between the two families, he never had to be tied to one. But this has its cost: Armengol-Cabrera states that “most of the boyhood books in American literature show fathers failing their sons” (219), and perhaps that is what William, at heart, believes his father has done. Wallace’s willingness to look squarely in the face of this failure is one of the reasons his novel is so powerful. He shows Edward the father as a mythic figure, but one that is flawed. His son’s ultimate acceptance of his father’s shortcomings, yet his acknowledgement to his father that he believes he *is* great, is what lends authenticity to the relationship.

And William wants to get it right. In the novel, William narrates four death scenes spaced among the chapters that tell of Edward’s heroic deeds. As William relates each version, the story becomes more mystical and magical, and his father becomes less like an ordinary man dying in his bed and more like the classic protagonist who dies a heroic death. In “My Father’s Death: *Take 1*,” William admits that his father is a man he really doesn’t know, a man whose stories define him more than reality. But the ordinariness of his death is apparent to his son: “I smile at this guy who looks not like my father anymore but like a version of my father, one in a series, similar but different, and definitely flawed in many ways” (17). He has ordinary conversations in this “take” and it is here that Edward admits that he wanted to be a great man, and his son bestows that title on him.

In “My Father’s Death: *Take 2*,” William attempts to make his father admit or reject the idea of heaven and eternal life. His father resists, telling jokes instead. William is a bit frustrated that he can’t get a straight answer out of his father, but philosophically takes it in stride: “What is it you say now, what peace is there to be made in the last minutes of the last day that will mark the before and after of your life until then, the day that will change everything for both of you, the living and the dead?” (69). But what William does not realize is that his father is trying to relate his beliefs; he just does it in his own way. In *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, Freud identifies jokes as “sense in nonsense” and “bewilderment being succeeded by illumination.”⁹ Specifically, in this section, Edward tells a joke about a man, a carpenter, entering heaven who says he had a well-known son who had an “unusual birth and later a great transformation.” When Christ reaches out to this man and says, “‘Father, father!’ the man asks, ‘Pinocchio?’” (72). When William presses his father further about whether he believes in God and Heaven, Edward repeats the line “‘*Pinocchio?*’” (75). If William were listening carefully, the illumination Freud talked about would be clear: his father doubts, and he

⁸ Josep M. Armengol-Cabrera, “Where are the Fathers in American Literature?: Re-visiting Fatherhood in U.S. Literary History,” *Journal of Men’s Studies* 16.2 (2008) 211; subsequently cited parenthetically.

⁹ Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, trans. James Strachey (Norton, 1960) 8–9; subsequently cited parenthetically.

.....

"[M]y father hadn't been dying after all. He was just changing, transforming himself into something new and different to carry his life forward in."

—*Big Fish*

is answering his son's request in the only way he knows how, a joke, which Freud explains as "a diversion of the train of thought from one meaning to the other" (61).

By "My Father's Death: *Take 3*," William's narration has become more dramatic. The old Dr. Bennett, who has seen it all, "breaks down in a storm of tears, and for some time can't speak he's crying so much, shoulders heaving" (106). Edward has become less realistic and more godlike – in fact, the word "god" to describe Edward is used five times on one page (107). The doctor, William's mother, and William himself all seem disbelieving that a man of Edward's stature should be actually dying. When William enters his father's room, Edward is laughing at the absurdity of death. William and his mother are feeling frustrated that Edward is "dying and not dying *right*" (108). Heroes do not die in their beds; they die on their feet, sword in hand – or they do not die at all but are merely transformed into something else: William notes that his father is "not a man in the same way now. He's something else altogether" (109). He is getting closer to the man he will become in the final version of his death, and Edward hints that it will be magical: he tells William, "I know when I'm going to die. . . . I've seen it. I know when and how it's going to happen and it's not today, so don't worry" (114).

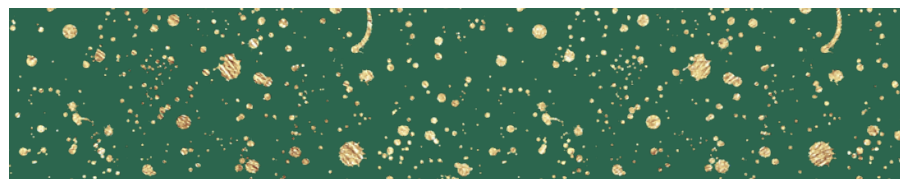
This remark plants a seed in William's mind, and when he next and finally revises the story of his father's death, he knows he must give his father the mythical sendoff he deserves, William's final gift to his father. Joseph Campbell describes the death of a hero this way: "The hero has died as a modern man; but as eternal man – perfected, unspecific, universal man – he has been reborn" (20). And so William's mythologizing of his father must include a death in which his father does not die but is transformed into something magical and worthy of his life of adventures and myths. William has mentioned several times that his father wanted to be a big fish in a big pond and he tells enough of his father's "fish stories" to create the inevitable end: his father must literally become *a big fish*. "My Father's Death: *Take 4*" and the final chapter, "Big Fish," describe this process. No longer is William frustrated by his father's jokes and stories. He recognizes them for what they are and responds by telling back one of his father's jokes to him as a sign of acceptance and understanding.

In the novel's final chapter, William creates his own tall tale, describing an escape from the hospital, a drive to the river, and the release of his father into another world. The water that his father has asked for and drunk in the first three takes is poured over Edward's head instead, as his skin begins to turn "scaly" (177). His father is not afraid; he is excited about the change that's coming to him and eager to get to the river. This fits exactly with what Campbell describes in the classic hero's death: "The last act in the biography of the hero is that of the death or departure. Here the whole sense of the life is epitomized. Needless to say, the hero would be no hero if death held



COURTESY OF DANIEL WALLACE

ABOVE Daniel Wallace, author of the novel *Big Fish* (right), and Tim Burton, director of the film adaptation



for him any terror; the first condition is reconciliation with the grave” (356). Standing in the river with his father wrapped in a blanket in his arms, William is a bit more reluctant and admits, “I knew what I was supposed to do then but I couldn’t do it” (179). But when his father encourages him and asks him for release, William has a revelation:

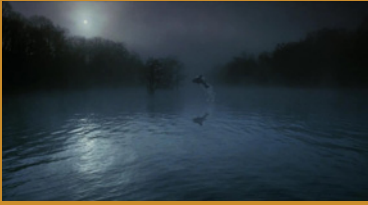
[A]ll of a sudden my arms were full of the most fantastic life, frenetic, impossible to hold on to even if I’d wanted to, and I wanted to. But then all I was holding was the blanket, because my father had jumped into the river. And that’s when I discovered that my father hadn’t been dying after all. He was just changing, transforming himself into something new and different to carry his life forward in.

All this time, my father was becoming a fish. (179–80)

And William watches him swim away, going “where the big fish go” (180).

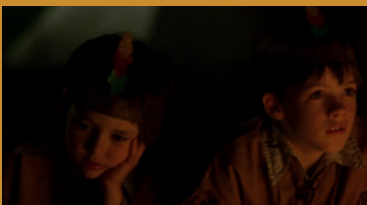
When the novel was turned into a film, Daniel Wallace admits he “had very little to offer in the way of changing or improving” the drafts of the screenplay he was sent (Lundberg). John August and Tim Burton took the basic idea of the novel – a boy mythologizing his father – and transformed it in many ways, some that alter its concept and some that were true to Wallace’s vision. Some of the changes are obvious in just looking at the characters and plot. The most significant change, as I see it, is in the character of Edward’s son, William. In the novel, William, from the first section, celebrates and mythologizes his father by retelling the myths and legends he has been told. He may not believe all the stories, but he has obviously bought into the concept of Edward’s life as a tall tale. As his father is dying, it is true, he pushes his father for some facts that will help him make sense of both his father’s life and his own, but when his father refuses to comply with his requests, the most frustrated William gets is leaving the sick room and slamming the door. He wants to know the facts, but it seems he has learned to live with the mystery found in the stories.

In the film, William’s antagonism toward his father and his tales is evident from the beginning. In one early scene, the young Edward, played by Ewan McGregor, is telling a literal fish story to a group of boys sitting around a campfire about the day his son was born. The boys’ faces show intense interest; they are rapt – all except William, who looks away into the woods with a look of both embarrassment and boredom. The next scene, set years in the future, depicts William’s wedding dinner. William, played by Billy Crudup, is seated at a table with his bride while his father tells the same fish story to the crowd. Now – no longer just embarrassed and bored – William is furious and gets up and abruptly leaves the room. His mother, played by Jessica Lange, tries to calm him by reminding him that the night is still about him, but William leaves in a huff. Later, William confronts his father when they are alone, and his older father, played by Albert



COLUMBIA PICTURES. ©2003

Watch William’s revelation about his father.



COLUMBIA PICTURES. ©2003

Watch a young William’s reaction to his father telling one of his stories around a campfire.



COLUMBIA PICTURES. ©2003

Watch older William’s reaction to his father telling one of his stories at William’s wedding reception and the conversation between them that ensues.

Finney, counters his criticism with “Everybody loves that story!” William replies bitterly, “I don’t love that story – not anymore, not after a thousand times. . . . For one night in your entire life, the universe did not revolve around Edward Bloom.” William’s voice-over then tells us, “After that night I didn’t speak to my father again for three years.”¹⁰

In Lundberg’s interview with Wallace, the author quotes from an email exchange with the playwright John August, who admits the difference in the book-William and the film-William:

I know a lot of people feel that the Will character in the book is mythologizing his father, building him up as something he never claimed to be. It’s true that the movie plays Will’s frustration with his father’s tales more strongly. But I think that it’s mostly coming from the change in narrator perspective. The book has a single narrator – Will – through which all tales are told, while the movie says the stories are the stories regardless of the teller.

I would argue, however, that there is more significance to the change than August seems to realize. In the novel, there is a sense that William believes his father’s stories – at least he *wants* to believe them. In the movie, William resists even the possibility that some of the stories might be true but just exaggerated. When Dr. Bennett tells William the true story of his birth – that his father was away on business, and he was born early and therefore Edward missed his birth – the doctor contrasts this version with Edward’s fanciful one and says, “I suppose if I had to choose between the true version and an elaborate one involving a fish and a wedding ring, I might choose the fancy version.”

William is not convinced, however, and claims he rather likes the factual account. He sets the goal of finding out just what is real and what is a lie, and his harshness with his father continues throughout his forced interrogations of Edward. He tells his father, “I want to know the true versions of things,” and compares his father’s character to an iceberg: “I have no idea who you are,” William tells Edward. “You tell lies” and “I felt a fool to have trusted you.”

Edward is somewhat confused by his son’s aggressiveness and asks, “Who do you want me to be?” He tells his son that he has been only himself from the beginning of his life, and that he can offer him nothing else. His father even goes so far as to compare his own story-telling to his son’s journalism career: “We’re storytellers, both of us. I speak mine out; you write yours down.” But William is resolute in his disbelief. He bemoans his situation in a voice-over: “We were like strangers who knew each other very well.”

“We were like strangers who knew each other very well.”—*Big Fish*



COLUMBIA PICTURES. ©2003

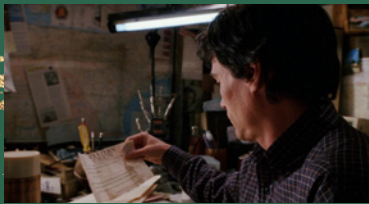
Watch Dr. Bennett tell William the true story of his birth.



COLUMBIA PICTURES. ©2003

Watch William and Edward argue about truth and trust.

¹⁰ *Big Fish*, adapt. of novel by Daniel Wallace, Dir. Tim Burton, Perf. Ewan McGregor, Albert Finney, Billy Crudup, and Jessica Lange (Columbia Pictures, 2003).



COLUMBIA PICTURES. ©2003

Watch the moment when William is going through his father's belongings and realizes that his assumptions might be wrong.

"My father talked about a lot of things that he never did and I'm sure he did a lot of things he never talked about. I'm just trying to reconcile the two."

—*Big Fish*



COLUMBIA PICTURES. ©2003

Watch William and Jenny's initial meeting and discussion about Edward.

In her article on the movie *Big Fish*, Kellyanne Ure comments on Edward's goal in telling his stories:

Part of the truth of what Edward is lies in the stories he tells, for they reveal his character and motivations in life, but William refuses to listen to his father and refuses to see the experience and truth his father offers him through his stories. William believes that what is real cannot be outlandish "mythologies" because what is real is not unusual. Edward tries to teach his son that *reality* is more than what can be seen or heard or touched, and this is part of the wisdom he offers his son.¹¹

Things begin to change for William, however, when William's mother asks him to go through some of his father's things in the garage, something that the novel's William never does. In the book, William does not need proof; he wants to believe that his father had the adventures he claims to have had. But the film William is so doubting that only physical evidence that some of his father's stories are at least partly true will soften his attitude toward his father. He finds a few things – photographs, certificates, awards – that prove partial truth. And then he finds the lease that his father owns on Jenny Hill's land and home. As a necessary step in understanding and accepting his father, William seeks out and finds Jenny Hill in a small town that his father apparently owns.

In the novel, Wallace calls the town Specter, "a town somewhere in Alabama or Mississippi or Georgia. Stuck there because his car has broken down" (144). Edward decided to buy the town, piece by piece, because the town "has that special somber quality, he says to himself, a quality not unlike living under water, that he can appreciate" (146). The final piece of land he buys is from a young woman named Jenny Hill, who lives in a swampy part of the landscape. Despite having a wife and son at home, Edward "falls in love with Specter first, then he falls in love with Jenny Hill" (155), setting up a household with her and visiting as often as he could. In line with heroes such as Odysseus, though, Edward sees Jenny "glowing there [but] he can't have her, and so he has to come back to [his family]. The wandering hero returns, he always comes back to us" (163).

It is significant that in the novel William takes this infidelity of his father in stride. Seeing his father as a hero – in comparison to wandering heroes such as Odysseus – he understands that many women would fall in love with him. He comprehends that such a hero would have all kinds of adventures, including dalliances with women, but would always come home to his Penelope and Laertes who wait patiently for their husband and father to return. Like the loyal dog who has waited for years for his master to return, William does not judge his father but just waits faithfully.

¹¹ Kellyanne Ure, "Walter Benjamin and *Big Fish* (2003) on Attaining Immortality Through Storytelling," *Velox: Critical Approaches to Contemporary Film* 2.1 (2008): 44.



COURTESY OF DANIEL WALLACE

In the film, William does not have such convictions. He already sees his father as a liar and an imposter. Finding out that his father cheated on his mother threatens to sever the final bond that ties him to his father. He drives to Jenny Hill's home and meets with her. He is prepared to hear the worst; he asks her straight out if his father had an affair with her. He tells her, "My father talked about a lot of things that he never did and I'm sure he did a lot of things he never talked about. I'm just trying to reconcile the two." The divergence here between the book and movie is crucial. In order for film-William to accept his father and give him the send-off he deserves, he must find out that his father is *better* and *more truthful* than he imagined. This is not true for the William in Wallace's novel, who has already bought into the larger-than-life character who is his father. So when, in the film, Jenny Hill admits that she wanted more of a relationship with Edward, but Edward refused, citing his love for his wife, William's respect for his father grows. He is able to accept the tall tales, knowing that, at heart, his father was a good man.

Finding out that Edward was true to his wife allows William to go back to his dying father and be more sympathetic, more accepting of the tales his father has told. It also allows him to participate in the mythologizing that has, up to now, been anathema to him. William is left alone with Edward during his final hours, and it is during this time that Edward asks William for the ultimate loyalty – creating his own myth to explain the death of his father. Edward urges him on with "The River. Tell me how it happens . . . how I'll go." At first William is resistant, admitting, "I don't know that story. You never told me that one." But encouraged by his dying father, William offers him the best gift he can, the final myth of Edward Bloom's life. He has learned about creative storytelling from a lifetime of listening to his father, so he begins the story and includes characters from his father's stories who appear along the route from the hospital to the river and standing on the river's edge, witnessing the hero's farewell.

In the story of Edward's transformation from man to fish in the film, there is another change that the filmmakers include. All along the way, people from his past are cheering them on, encouraging him toward the river, and applauding Edward's transformation. Edward says simply, "The story of my life," and William responds with "You become what you always were: a very big fish. And that's how it happens." William's love for his father is evident in this scene in the movie. He grants Edward what his father has always wanted: a hero's farewell, much like Joseph Campbell would have imagined it. But the need for physical evidence is, in the film, still a pervasive element. Whereas in the novel, William is satisfied with the final myth



COLUMBIA PICTURES, ©2003

Watch the hospital scene where William tells his father the story of how he dies.

of his father's life, the William in the film still has doubts, and so the filmmakers include another scene – the funeral.

Wallace's novel ends with Edward's transformation into a fish and escape into the river, but the filmmakers felt they must reconcile the man with the stories in order to satisfy William's need for truth, so at Edward's funeral, characters from his stories show up, regaling each other with memories of Edward's exploits. It becomes clear that some of the stories are true – though some, it appears, are exaggerated: the conjoined twins in one of his stories are actually identical twins, and the "giant" is not as tall as Edward claimed. But enough truth exists to make William believe in his father and finally accept him fully. Such a scene is not necessary in the novel: William has always believed in the magic of his father's stories.

As a final stamp of belief in his father, the filmmakers include one last scene: it is a few years later, and William's son is telling his friends one of his grandfather's tall tales, which obviously William has passed on to him. When the friends show incredulity, William's son turns to him for reassurance that the story is true, and William answers, "Pretty much!"

This brings up another difference between the novel and film: no mention is made in the novel of a pregnant wife in William's life, but in the film, this plot device plays a significant role. Tired and disgusted by his father's stories, William is no longer a viable audience for the retelling of the tales, so scene after scene is depicted of Edward telling the stories to William's wife, played by Marion Cotillard. She listens raptly and laughs at the right times. She encourages him to tell her more and is a willing audience for Edward, whereas in the novel, William plays this role himself.

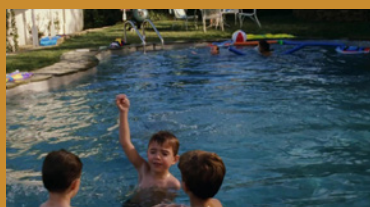
Perhaps in the Hollywood version, it was necessary to create a new listener for the tales. Perhaps William's wife plays a role that allows Edward to tell his own jokes and stories rather than having an over-abundance of voice-overs in the film. Perhaps, since they had decided that in the film William would be cynical towards his father, it was necessary to have a believer who sees the magic in the stories.

COURTESY OF DANIEL WALLACE



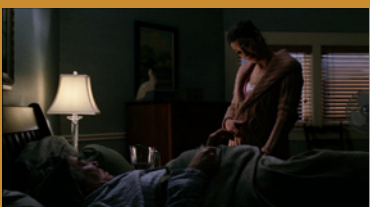
COLUMBIA PICTURES. ©2003

Watch the funeral scene in which William realizes that not everyone in his father's stories is fictitious.



COLUMBIA PICTURES. ©2003

Watch the final scene, in which William's son tells his friends one of his grandfather's stories.



COLUMBIA PICTURES. ©2003

Watch a scene between William's wife, Josephine, and Edward as she listens to one of his stories.

ABOVE Daniel Wallace with Ada and Arlene Tai, who played conjoined twins Ping and Jing in *Big Fish*

KAREN BALTIMORE designed this essay and the poetry in this issue. She has been designing for *NCLR* since 2013 when she was a student of *NCLR* Art Director Dana Lovelace at Meredith College in Raleigh, where she is now teaching. Find other samples of her work and contact information for your design needs on her [website](#).

"I've been nothin' but myself since the day I was born, and if you can't see that it's your failin', not mine."

—John August,
Big Fish screenplay

Perhaps, even, the Hollywoodization of Wallace's novel required there to be a "circle of life" in which William, the reborn believer in his father's myths, could prove his love and loyalty to his father by passing on the stories to the next generation. And significantly, in the novel, the hero's quest is Edward's: he is on a quest to be a great and memorable man. In the film, the quest is William's: to reconcile the man with the myth.

And certainly, in the quest in the movie and the musical (which follows the film much more closely than it follows the book), the point is to pass on his father's legacy to his son as well as the necessity of telling your own story in your own way. In a reprise of the song "Be the Hero," William sings to his son:

Be the hero of your story if you can.
Be the champion in the fight, not just the man
On a wing or on a prayer you get there only with your voice.
With a story in your heart you won't need any other choice.
You're a hero, fighting dragons, winning wars.
Be the hero
and the world will soon be yours!

Despite their differences, all three of the versions of the story – the novel, the movie, and the musical – have some important concepts in common: first, the difficulty in the father and son relationship in American culture and necessity of coming to terms with one's own father before it is too late. Second, all deal with the Southern – and in general, the American – importance of oral storytelling. Finally, the concept of the stereotypical American man is evident – dreaming big, as American men have – even before they were called Americans. F. Scott Fitzgerald's description of Europeans' first glimpse of the New World comes to mind here: that "fresh, green breast of the new world. . . . [that] had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams."¹² Edward dreamed big, like all those American Dreamers before and after him, and wanted, as they did, to be remembered for those dreams. ■

¹² F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (Scribner, 1925) 192.

TANGLED UP IN THE HEART OF DARKNESS

a review by Barbara Bennett

Elaine Neil Orr. *Swimming Between Worlds*. New York: Berkley, 2018.

BARBARA BENNETT received her PhD in American Literature from Arizona State University and is an Associate Professor of English at NC State University. She has written five books, including *Understanding Jill McCorkle* (University of South Carolina Press, 2000), *Comic Visions, Female Voices: Contemporary Women Novelists and Southern Humor* (Louisiana State University Press, 1998), and *Smoke Signals from Samarcand: Race, Class, and Eugenics in the Early Twentieth-Century South* (University of South Carolina Press, 2018). She is a regular reviewer for *NCLR*. She has also published an essay on Jill McCorkle's *Ferris Beach* in *NCLR* 2006 and an interview with Lee Smith and McCorkle in *NCLR* 2016. Read her essay on the film adaptation of Daniel Wallace's *Big Fish* in this issue.

Because Elaine Neil Orr grew up in Nigeria with intermittent stints in Winston-Salem, NC, she has a pitch-perfect understanding of her protagonist's conflicted feelings about living in and feeling at home in two different countries in her newest novel, *Swimming Between Worlds*. Tacker Hart, a budding architect, spends time in Nigeria in 1959 building a secondary school and learns to love the country and its people, causing concern for his employers, who believe he has "gone native" and is getting "tangled up in the culture" (20). They cruelly and suddenly whisk Tacker away from Africa and fly him home in a straitjacket.

Licking his wounds, Tacker finds himself back home in North Carolina with a new understanding of the race "problem" simmering in his hometown, gradually getting pulled into lunch counter sit-ins and assisting civil rights workers. Constantly, though, his mind is drawn back to Nigeria, where he felt alive for perhaps the first time. He can't explain to others how he is still drawn there: "It wasn't like the pull of a girl. It was like a god" (2). He often reflects on what Africa taught him: "The world was not just and neither God nor any teacher or coach or sponsor was going to save him" (7). Tacker feels isolated both

physically and psychologically, torn between worlds.

Set against this momentous era, the novel is also a love story, which begins when Tacker reconnects with Kate, a young woman he knew slightly in high school. He is not only drawn to her romantically, but also he starts to feel the need to share his newfound sense of social justice. Kate is a decent human being but definitely a product of her time and class. Her family, long known and admired in Winston-Salem, has not prepared her for dealing with such sticky subjects as equal rights. She seems to understand that women should not be undervalued, but it takes a lot of time and many experiences to start her thinking about African Americans as having rights, too.

When Tacker finds a potential job as an architect and is asked to design a bath house for a pool being built in Hanes Park, he is troubled but afraid to tell Kate or anyone else. The pool will be segregated, of course, and he struggles between ambition and ethics. He tries to turn in a ridiculous African design for the building, hoping it will get him out of the assignment, but ironically, his superiors love it and choose to build it. On the opening day, he participates in the ceremonies, but the tension

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is palpable, leading to a violent act that is at once startling and seemingly inevitable.

Kate resists Tacker's sense of racial injustice because of her own lack of experience with black people. At the beginning of the novel, she sees a black man walking down her alley carrying a bottle of milk, and she is undeniably frightened. She feels at risk for crime and rape and all the imbedded stereotypes that she has been exposed to over the years. Eventually her own awakening comes from Tacker as well as from her burgeoning career as a photographer as she distances herself through the lens and see her city differently. In addition, she interacts with Gaines, a black man whom Tacker rescues from a racist beating and then hires to work in his father's grocery store. She is still frightened of Gaines but forces herself to interact with him and his little sister, gradually learning not to be afraid of him. In the end, she embraces both Tacker and his civil rights work.

The novel is a vibrant depiction of a particular place and

time – both in Winston-Salem and Nigeria, where Orr's narrative returns over and over to fill in the details of Tacker's greatest triumph, which turns into a humiliating defeat – and Orr's prose is elegant and vivid. Tacker's experiences in Africa are brief but powerful. He does, as his employer accuses, embrace the culture in a way that would be seen as honorable today. He sleeps in the same shelter as his workers, considers them his friends, tries the local cuisine, and learns about their culture. But in 1959, this would be considered a metaphysical trip into the Heart of Darkness, and it marks his downfall. The glorious descriptions of Africa, though, leave the reader convinced that Tacker was doing the right things to honor the place and people he was helping.

Having spent some time in Winston-Salem in the early 2000s, I recognize the places Orr describes in accurate detail and felt I was walking through the streets again. But the reader doesn't have to know mid-century Winston-Salem personally because the visual

and social descriptions vibrate with authenticity. This novel has a clear sense of place and time, and Orr is masterful in bringing it to the reader fully and genuinely.

In some ways, the novel is painful to read, not just because it's a look backward at a Southern tradition of Jim Crow laws that no one should remember with fondness. There is pain also in seeing just how far we haven't come in nearly sixty years. Just this past July in Winston-Salem, a man challenged a black family at a community pool, doubting they were members and demanding they show identification. At least this time the man was removed from his position as pool chairman, and his employer fired him for racial insensitivity. But the point is that the incident happened at all: we still have racists among us who would believe a black family doesn't have a right to swim in a "white" neighborhood pool. The book reminds us of the past but also shines a light on the racial injustices that still survive, showing us just how far we have to go. ■



RIGHT Bolton Street Public Pool, Winston-Salem NC, 1966

AN UNWANTED EDUCATION, DETOXIFYINGLY SATISFYING

a review by Donna A. Gessell

Kat Meads. *Miss Jane: The Lost Years*. Livingston: Livingston Press/University of West Alabama Press, 2018.

DONNA A. GESSELL has a PhD from Case Western Reserve University and is a Professor of English at the University of North Georgia, Dahlonega campus. Her scholarship focuses on the works of Jane Austen, Flannery O'Connor, Gabriel García Márquez, and Judith Ortiz Cofer. She is a frequent reviewer for *NCLR*, including, most recently, a review of Meads's novel *In This Season of Rage and Melancholy Such Irrevocable Acts as These* (Mongrel Empire, 2016) in *NCLR Online* 2018.

KAT MEADS is author of sixteen books and chapbooks of poetry and prose. She has received numerous writing awards, including a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship. A native of Currituck County, NC, she holds an MFA from UNC Greensboro and a BA from UNC Chapel Hill. She currently lives in California, teaches in Oklahoma City University's low-residency MFA program, and is a member of the *NCLR* editorial board. Read an interview with Meads and her play *Husbands Found Dead* in *NCLR* 2009.

Kat Meads's latest novel, *Miss Jane: The Lost Years*, presents yet another dimension of being "a Cracker hick/chick." Like so many of Meads's other heroines drawn from her experiences in North Carolina, Jane proves vulnerable because of her socio-economic and cultural roots. An undergraduate at "a public university, South Atlantic region" (5), she is targeted by Prof P, ironically in his history of feminist studies class. Ninth in his string of sexual predations, she too is selected for her relative powerlessness.

Miss Jane's story is told forthrightly, but unconventionally by a chorus of female voices who doggedly keep the audience's focus on Jane, guarding against any sympathy for the perpetrator. Their role mediates the action, directing the reader's gaze firmly toward Prof P's manipulation.

The voices of the chorus save the narration from becoming overwhelmingly depressing. They are in turns witty, humorous, cajoling, scolding, and sanguine – always brutally honest in portraying the unfairness of the relationship:

You find our stance too polemical, too didactic? Our tone too loud and shrill? Our language too coarse and raunchy? Our manner of expression too bitchily blunt? You'd prefer we find a prettier, more lyrical means of outing the bastard? To you we say: tough titty. Get off the bus. This is *not* your ride. To those still perplexed by the "fuss" over another Cracker hick / chick accepting her hick / chick fate, we here clarify: it's the waste, knuckleheads. The waste of *another* hick / chick life. (9)

The story's detail is unerringly unnerving, perhaps leading the reader to wonder whether Meads is relying on firsthand information. In her note on the book, the author reveals her sources, while explaining her unconventional narrative form:

To say I've known a few Miss Janes is a lie; I've known dozens and "heard tell" of countless others. But how to tell this story? That took awhile to figure out. . . . Because heroine Jane's perspectives and perceptions are so blinkered, a routine first-person telling wouldn't do the trick. . . . So after some teeth gnashing and mental anguish, I came up with the idea of narration via a historically aware, pissed-off female chorus. That chorus serves as Miss Jane's unabashed champions. Never do they give Prof P the benefit of the doubt. Moreover, they make no apology for their female-biased reporting. In their view, the male-side story has had its day and say. Onward.*

The result is quintessentially disquieting: an in-depth exploration of sexual abuse, both its concrete aspects and its psychological ones. The chorus explains:

There will be siege. There will be torment. There will be *major* distress. Small, medium, and massive humiliation(s) will be visited on our Miss Jane, her self-preservation severely tested. Mind games of an increasingly devious sort will be played. Incidents of intimidations will escalate. Strong-arm displays of might and moxie will proliferate. Force (of various sort) will be exerted. Unfair advantage will (again) be taken. Guilt, the whipping stick, will (again) be brandished and applied. Ultimately at stake: Miss Jane's guarded / close-mouthed / disinclined to feelings-share disposition. (40)

* This quotation comes from the "From my author" note included in the publicity materials sent with the review copy of the book.

Thus, the chorus describes the classical stages of abuse – identifying the victim, ensuring her vulnerability, separating her from her friends and family, and humiliating her by undermining her identity and beliefs – all while exercising power over her, in this case initially through a course grade. Ironically, what keeps Prof P engaged for an additional two years is Jane’s “Cracker nature [that] he cannot immediately surmount, thereby presenting a novelty, a challenge, a change” (39). He abuses her even more insidiously: debasing her identity by attacking her personal habits, including diet and clothing; establishing her economic dependence; degrading her by limiting the type and number of her possessions – “shabby *must appear shabby* to demonstrate intellectual superiority/contempt for the conspicuously consumed” (41); demeaning her to others to keep her socially separated; and suggesting psychiatry for her supposed abnormalities, ignoring his own social deviation.

What makes Miss Jane so vulnerable, so “overly susceptible to calculated ridicule, the readiest of suckers for agendas of improvement pimped by con artists in the shape of higher education despots” (1) is her “Cracker hick/chick” culture: “No Cracker farm child would dream of demanding more than her share” (17). She becomes a victim and remains so:

Born of a fatalistic tribe enslaved by drought and hurricane scenarios, dependent on the vicissitudes of earth and sky, Crackers are ace brooders. Once started, a Cracker hick/chick will brood



COURTESY OF MARTHA BLANEY HODGES SPECIAL COLLECTIONS AND UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES. UNC'S UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES. JAL04 PHOTOGRAPHIC PRINTS COLLECTION

to beat the band, brooding her *raison d'être*, an atavistic predilection, a fall-back trope. So, no: we don't consider brooding, *per se*, progress. To brood is not to act; it is to brood. (28)

Miss Jane and those who love her are all bound by centuries of encoded cultural norms limiting intervention in anyone else's private life. The chorus explains their helplessness, “Crackers do not **discuss** dilemmas. The unsaid, they axiomatically assume, remains unsaid *for a reason*” (34). They are “prone to underreport/undervalue/dismiss the quantity and quality of their contributions, they won't credit themselves” (95).

However, Miss Jane's cultural beliefs at once hinder and help her in her struggle against Prof P's manipulation. Her background offers tools for her abuse but also surprising ones for her

resilience. Despite being repeatedly sabotaged, she succeeds in defining herself in her own culturally affirmed ways: actions that eventually help her flee.

With its passionately presented insights, *Miss Jane: The Lost Years* provides powerful reading for everyone. For those who have not been trapped, the tale offers explicit caveats to avoid asymmetrical power relationships. For those already entrapped, the book imparts hope through Jane's escape, an outcome made especially powerful by the chorus's refusal to provide specifics, instead proclaiming the power of the individual embracing her own selfhood. For those who have escaped, the book provides reassurance that even though they were once isolated, they are no longer alone, but at a cost: as with others, they have lost those years, forever. ■

“BACKSTORY DRIV[ING] PRESENT ACTION”

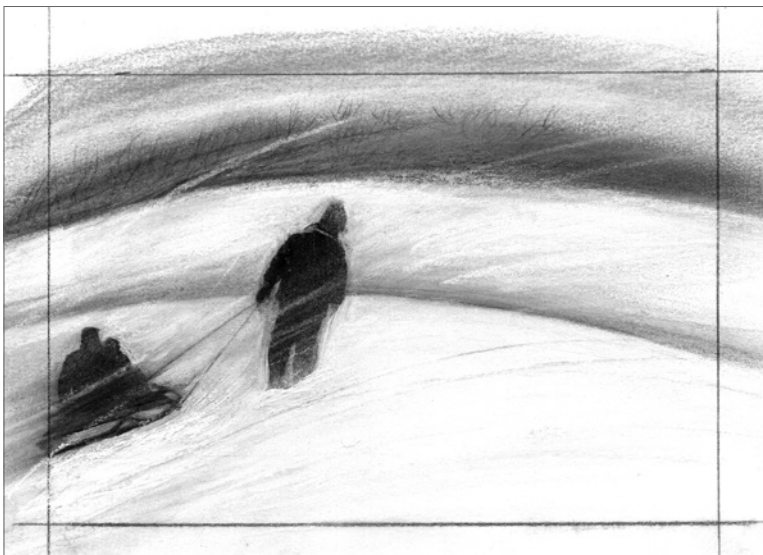
a review by Kristina L. Knotts

Philip Gerard. *Things We Do When No One Is Watching*. Kansas City, MO: BkMk Press, 2017.

KRISTINA L. KNOTTS has a PhD in English from the University of Tennessee. She works at Westfield State University in the Learning Disabilities Program and also teaches American literature part time. She is a regular reviewer for *NCLR*. See, too, her essay “back to beginnings”: Appalachian Women in Kathryn Stripling Byer’s *Wildwood Flower* and Isabel Zuber’s *Salt*, in *NCLR* 2007.

PHILIP GERARD is a Professor in the Department of Creative Writing at UNC Wilmington and is the author of four novels and seven books of nonfiction. He is a frequent contributor to *NCLR*, and several of his books have been reviewed, including, in *NCLR Online* 2014, his collection of essays *The Patron Saint of Dreams and Other Essays* (Hub City Press, 2012) and *Down the Wild Cape Fear: A River Journey through the Heart of North Carolina* (University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

COURTESY OF THE ARTIST



Things We Do When No One is Watching is Philip Gerard’s first collection of short stories, though he is no stranger to fiction. He is the author of *Hatteras Light and The Dark of the Island*. He has also written extensively about creative nonfiction. In his essay “The Fact Behind the Facts,” Gerard describes being a young reporter and reporting on a story with a seemingly heroic ending only to later discover that nefarious events led to the dramatic outcome. This experience taught him to explore the events leading to the conclusion that “[b]ackstory drives present action.”¹ This idea certainly serves as an impetus to the stories in *Things We Do When No One is Watching*, in which the protagonists are driven by their own backstory, trying to uncover how that translates into their current lives.

The collection begins with “Night Camp,” a story about shifting one’s usual way of thinking, signaling to the reader to expect the unexpected. The narrator recalls a camp he worked at as

a young man that conducted its activities solely at night. The campers, who all seem to share some sort of disability, whether physical or psychological, slept during the day, and participated in the usual camp activities at night, even active ones like softball or ones the campers invent like “Junebug.” (In this setting, as it happens, there is no barrier for the children’s imagination.) The narrator accepts the unusual terms of this camp, sensing that each camper hides some sort of mystery.

“Night Camp” explores the otherness those with disabilities may feel in the outside world, but tells a story about the comfort the children discover at Night Camp. The story’s gentle tone comes through as the narrator tells of the silence of the night games the children played as well as the “beautifully contained” setting of the camp and the “wild and rugged” woods where they stayed (9). The sense of wonder grows in the narrator as the weeks pass, and toward the end of the summer

¹ Philip Gerard, “The Facts Behind the Facts or How You Can Get It All Right and Still Get It All Wrong,” *Brevity Craft*, n.d.: web.

ABOVE Illustration by Joan Mansfield published with Gerard’s “Flexible Flyer” in *NCLR* 2005 (Mansfield’s work has been featured often in *NCLR*, including the cover art for the twentieth issue in 2011.)

HONORING THE VOICES OF JILL MCCORKLE, 2018 INDUCTEE INTO THE NORTH CAROLINA LITERARY HALL OF FAME

presentation remarks by Shannon Ravenel

It is my great honor to introduce this truly remarkable North Carolina writer. How wonderful it is to be here today with Jill's husband Tom, her kids Claudia and Rob, the Algonquin alums, including Mimi Fountain who promoted so many of Jill's books, and her many other friends and admirers.

If anyone were ever to doubt Jill McCorkle's North Carolina roots, all they'd need to do would be to listen to her say my name. I first heard her say it back in the early 1980s when Algonquin Books was deliberating what to do with the fact that this twenty-five-year-old Lumberton native had not one first novel, but two – *The Cheer Leader* and *July 7th*. Here's what Algonquin's founder and President, Louis Rubin, said in his June, 13, 1984 letter to book reviewers: "In September, this new, small publishing house will be doing something

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PHOTOGRAPH BY TOM RANKIN

ABOVE Jill McCorkle at the induction ceremony, Weymouth Center of Arts & Humanities, Southern Pines, NC, 7 Oct. 2018

the narrator observes, "What was gone was invisible. What was lost had disappeared into the night" (15). As he leaves the camp, he discovers that even the counselors he worked with had their own traumas that deepen their commitment to the campers. This opening story alerts the reader to the empathy inspired by the characters in this collection.

In this same vein of caretaking and caregiving, many of Gerard's stories are about an older narrator or character looking back at an event, trying to make sense of a trauma or an incident that happened in childhood that was unsettling to a young person. Many of his characters are cast in the role of caregiver or guardian of a younger, more vulnerable sibling or

neighbor. "Flexible Flyer" portrays older siblings who put aside their own desire for Christmas gifts so their younger brother, stricken with polio, can receive a sled for Christmas. "Flexible Flyer" shares a theme prevalent in Gerard's collection, that of the need for a community to protect the vulnerable among them, to put individual desire aside for others' sake.²

Other works here show characters who struggle with their own fears and limitations. In "Circus Train," a middle-aged man who sees himself as settled and successful has his self-image shaken when he returns to his childhood home to care for his father. Having nursed an image of himself as reliable and undervalued in his family, he finds that his paradigm

has shifted. "Miracle Boy" follows a skeptical but curious reporter who visits a young boy in a coma whose bedside has become the site of reported miracles. The reporter records those who visit the boy in hopes of healing, examining his own barely acknowledged need for redemption and hope in his own life.

Gerard's often world-weary protagonists in *Things We Do When No One is Watching* sometimes speak with bewilderment about the past, trying to uncover the significance of their own actions or the origin of their own limitations. The journey his characters take us on, into pasts marked by disease, sacrifice and suffering, is a journey that requires empathy and compassion. ■

² Philip Gerard's "Flexible Flyer" was originally published in *NCLR* 2005.

very much out of the ordinary. We are going to bring out two novels by a hitherto-unpublished young writer, Jill McCorkle. . . . The striking difference in form and technique of these two novels is evidence of her talent and range. She is a born story teller and will be a force on the literary scene for years to come." No words from Louis have ever proven truer.

Since then, Jill has published eight more books of fiction, for a total of ten. Her eleventh, *Hieroglyphics*, a novel, will be published by Algonquin Books, like all the rest, in 2020. Five of Jill's books have been named *New York Times* Notable Books of the Year. *Tending to Virginia* was reviewed on the *Times Book Review's* front page. Here's a tiny excerpt from the review: "It is the talking – the perfect dialogue, the vivid recollections, the memories and emotions that make this novel so rewarding."¹

But Jill hasn't been just writing and publishing fiction and winning prizes. She's also been teaching at UNC Chapel Hill, Tufts, and Brandeis (where she was the Fannie Hurst visiting writer), Harvard (where she was Briggs &

Copeland Lecturer in Fiction for five years and also chaired Creative Writing). She currently teaches at North Carolina State University. She's also a core faculty member of the Bennington

"She is a born story teller and will be a force on the literary scene for years to come."—Louis Rubin

College Writing Seminars and a frequent instructor in the Sewanee Writers Program.

And there's another place she teaches, one that's not listed on her CV. Three years ago, she inaugurated a writing group at Wesley Pines Retirement Community in Lumberton where her mother, Melba, is a resident. The group meets monthly. Jill says of it, "Quite a few members are actively writing, others tell stories, and some simply come to listen. . . . It's a big highlight of my month every month."

As the *Chicago Tribune* noted in 1996, "Jill McCorkle is a writer with a powerful conviction that story connects and heals and betters us."² Other reviewers have called her work: "Fully carbonated," "a fierce intelligence," "Breezy," "Crackling with humor," "a live wire who loves the people of her small town." The critics are describing her writing and her characters. But as we all know, they are also describing Jill McCorkle herself.

Congratulations, Jill! This is an honor that is so well deserved! ■ ■ ■

acceptance remarks by Jill McCorkle

. . . I stand here today as a sixty-year-old inductee of this illustrious group, something I could never have imagined myself doing when I was eight years old;³ and yet, that eight-year-old part of me – that voice continues to be the source of most of my writing life. You hear my voice – this external voice – and know that I am a product of my native southeastern North Carolina landscape – a voice that rendered me somewhat memorable, for better or worse, during my twenty years living in New England and a voice that once prompted a friend of Tom's to say, "Tom's wife is as country as cornbread." This from a dairy farmer in Mississippi with an accent I would have said was much deeper and more country than my own.

But in thinking of my voice as a writer, I am thinking of that other voice. That one living within us all, narrating and defining and summing up our lives.

When Claudia and Rob were growing up and I told them stories of my own childhood, some ending with great enlightenment or discovery or a lesson learned, they would ask, how old were you, and I inevitably said, "I must have been about eight." We laughed at how often I said it and yet there was truth, as if somehow as an eight-year-old, my narrative voice really kicked into gear. What was it about eight other than the challenges of multiplication and cursive? Perhaps it was a wonderful third-grade teacher, Ruth Prevatte, who encouraged writing and drawing and using your imagination, something later stoked and encouraged by my high school English teacher, Ruth Read, who is here today. Whatever it was, when I sit down to write, I feel that is the part of me that leads the way into other lives and places.

The writer William Maxwell believed that writing grows out of deprivation and I might broaden that to include storytelling as well. Good storytelling is there for entertainment yes, but it is also there as salvation for many deprived of voice – be it for reasons of politics, prejudice, alienation, illiteracy or simply being too young to be heard. That deprivation stokes a need and desire to be heard and recorded and remembered. I love the voices of children because

¹ Alice McDermott, "Back Home to Carolina," rev. of *Tending to Virginia* by Jill McCorkle, *New York Times Book Review* 11 Oct. 1987: 26.

² Sandra Scofield, "Free Spirits: Jill McCorkle's Tale of Life, Love, and Eccentricity in a Small Town," rev. of *Carolina Moon* by Jill McCorkle, *Chicago Tribune* 29 Sept. 1996: 2.

³ For the reading portion of her remarks, this inductee chose an excerpt from her 2013 novel, *Life After Life* (Algonquin, 2013), beginning when one of the narrators, Sadie, comments that "People get old, but . . . always they are about eight" (37). Watch the reading on the North Carolina Writers' Network's [Youtube](#).

there is no filter on their honesty and sense of truth. They are just getting started and running full speed ahead and blinded by the light of all the possibilities and dreams up ahead. They haven't yet learned all those complicated compromises and barter and conditionals of the fat, greedy, and needy middle of life tangles and entrapments. Now, no doubt all those tangles and entrapments are worth hearing about and much of literature centers on the messy conflicts of life, but I also like finding a clear-eyed voice of truth. Children have that even when told they should be seen and not heard (actually that tends to raise the inner voice to an even higher volume). Even when calling out fifty years later, they are powerful. Tennessee Williams said that "the object of art is to make eternal the desperately fleeting moment." Obviously, many such moments are guarded by our younger selves – the keepers of the faith. But, then who better to assemble them but the voices at the other end of life, because time and knowledge and wisdom have bought them the freedom to once again throw away

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—Jill McCorkle

a lot of time with my grandmother and the various people populating her world, in the place, Robeson County, where my parents grew up and my sister, Jan, and I grew up. My childhood was filled with the memories of others that by way of listening became my memories as well. I sit down to write and no matter where I am living, I am there in Lumberton, NC, in the backyard of a house I haven't been in in twenty-five years. I know every inch of that yard and can trace my way all over the neighborhood, who lives where. I know the light and the weather and the trees outside

the filters and claim what is rightfully theirs and return to that pure clear voice of childhood. I think the beauty of each passing year is the way we continue to recognize and understand things we've always been aware of.

I was fortunate to grow up spending



PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDREW MOREHEAD

my bedroom window. I know my bedroom furniture and the quilt my grandmother made with squares she identified as this or that, my aunt's dress, my grandfather's suit. Pinhole knots that look like things: a deer, an elf. I know there is a diary, locked and in that never suspected place under the mattress. I go there often. I see things I had forgotten. I see things differently by way of experience.

I do believe we are all eight years old in the heart and that the people and places who entered our lives and fed that inner voice remain there. I imagined many things as an eight-year-old: ballerina, Olympic diver, veterinarian or zoo owner, woman with hair all the way to her feet like Rapunzel. I got lost in such reverie, but I never imagined standing here at Weymouth in the company of people I so deeply admire with people I love in the audience. However, if I could have looked down a path to the future, I certainly would have. And I will for certain always have it as a point to look back on with great pride and gratitude for all that growing up in this state has brought to me – from my family and teachers to UNC Chapel Hill where I met Lee Smith and Louis Rubin – a man who absolutely changed the course of my life and introduced me to Shannon Ravenel, who I now thank for over thirty years of an amazing relationship. I stand here because of her influence as well as that of Louis and the many others who have fed my life. I am very grateful to all and so appreciative of this honor today. ■

SHANNON RAVENEL is a founding editor of Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill and now directs her Algonquin imprint, Shannon Ravenel Books. She was a long-time editor of *New Stories from the South* and before that of *Best American Short Stories* for Houghton Mifflin. Watch Ravenel's presentation of McCorkle on the North Carolina Writers' Network's [Youtube](#).

ABOVE **Jill McCorkle** at the induction ceremony, Weymouth Center of Arts & Humanities, Southern Pines, NC, 7 Oct. 2018 (Watch her acceptance remarks on the North Carolina Writers' Network's [Youtube](#).)

2018 Doris Betts
Fiction Prize Winner

L U C K Y

BY
MIRIAM
HERIN

It was not usual for Chhem Sokha to address Buddha in so forthright a manner, but on this day, she told him, *I need saamnangol*, my good luck. She repeated her need, so Buddha would understand how urgent this was. To direct his attention, she laid a banana and a saucer of beer before his picture. *I need it only for this morning*, she added, should Buddha think her greedy. Not that she was a stranger to saamnangol. She was born in the Goat Year, in 1931, under the dragon sign, a fortunate birth. “My beautiful lucky girl,” her father would say when she was a child in Cambodia. But today she might need the extra prayers.

Sokha bowed before the shrine. On the wall behind her, Jesus, printed in bright colors on a velvety cloth, stretched his arms toward the Buddha.

The back wall of the living room belonged to Jesus. The front wall was Buddha’s. In America, one needed both. She finished her prayers and went to her bedroom, slipping into the black polyester slacks and white blouse spread neatly on the bed. She smoothed her gray hair with a comb. Reaching to the back of the closet, she felt for her purse, hidden in a box of old shoes, and counted out six one-dollar bills.

The back wall of the living room belonged to Jesus. The front wall was Buddha’s. In America, one needed both.

MIRIAM HERIN’s second novel, *A Stone for Bread* (Livingston Press, 2015; reviewed in *NCLR Online* 2017), was selected as one of *Kirkus Reviews’* Books of the Year for 2016. The author’s first novel, *Absolution*, won the 2007 Novello Press Literary Award, was a finalist for *Foreword Magazine’s* 2007 Novel of the Year, and received Independent Publisher’s 2008 Gold Award for Best Fiction, Southeast Region. A Greensboro resident, Herin is a native of Miami, FL, and has lived in the Washington, DC, area and New York City, as well as in South Carolina where she earned a PhD in English Literature. She has taught composition and literature at Appalachian State University and Greensboro College, among other places. She spent over six years in inner city Charlotte organizing and directing a program for Southeast Asian teenagers, whose families were refugees from the Vietnam War, the genesis for the story “Lucky.” This is for them.

Final judge Stephanie Powell Watts selected Herin’s story, saying “With inventive, deftly rendered scenes ‘Lucky’ tells the story of the protagonist, Sokha’s, epic journey to buy rice and a bottle of cola from a neighborhood store. Sokha is haunted by tragedy, and her memories of the Red Khmer in Cambodia many decades past rise unbidden and unwelcome as she navigates the streets of her American town.” Watts describes “Lucky” as “an intimate, tender story about the loss of community, our mutual fear of our neighbors, and the boundaries of our faith” and says she “will be thinking about this beautiful story for a long time.”

Enough for a bag of rice. Perhaps a bottle of cola. The store was two blocks away, down Cumberland Avenue and to the left. The store wasn't Asian, but Mr. Franks, a white man, carried a few Asian foods, now that as many Lao, Cambodians, and Montagnards lived on Cumberland Avenue as black people. Mr. Franks stocked one shelf with jasmine rice, Asian sauces, and noodles.

Chhem Sokha rarely went to Mr. Franks' store, and she had almost never walked there alone. Even when Sok drove her, the place made her stomach quiver. Men loitered outside, drinking beer, most of them black. Sometimes they spoke words to her in English she did not understand. She worried they were laughing at her or making threats. But this morning, Sok called from the factory and said they asked him to work another half shift and possibly stay longer. He had already worked all night. She knew when he got home he would want to sleep, but tomorrow was the Festival of Prayers for the Dead at the Temple. She needed to prepare food for the monks.

Chhem Sokha folded the bills and slid them in a pocket sewn under the waistband of her slacks, then padded barefoot to the kitchen to find her cloth market bag. The house was small, but new. She was proud of her house. A church called Habitat for Humanity had built it for them, though Sok helped with the construction whenever he was off work. Sometimes Sok went to church on Sundays. Church was what Cambodians called Christian meetings.

Sokha did not go to church. She had tried it once and found it frightening. That church was in an old movie theater with broken seats. She did not like the man they called Pastor Le. Even though he was Cambodian and spoke in the Khmer language, his words were angry. He reminded her of Angka,



Musings of an Origin, 2017 (acrylic, oil, silk, fabric paint, linen, antique gold-leaf obi thread, black salt, smoke on canvas, 72x60) by Lien Truong

PHOTOGRAPH BY PETER PAUL GEOFRION

She wondered why Jesus and Buddha could not just get together and talk about ways to reward Khmer people in the next life for what they had endured in this one.

the Red Khmer, during the evil time in Cambodia. Pastor Le warned that Buddha was a devil. He described a dungeon called hell where Buddhists would suffer horrible torments. Had not Buddhists suffered enough? She wondered why Jesus and Buddha could not just get together and talk about ways to reward Khmer people in the next life for what they had endured in this one.

What had also bothered her about church was the music. They sang American songs, noisy like

WITH ART BY
LIEN TRUONG

LIEN TRUONG is an Assistant Professor of Art at UNC Chapel Hill. Born in Saigon, Vietnam, she received her BA from Humboldt State University and her MFA from Mills College. Recent awards include fellowships from the Institute for the Arts and Humanities in 2017 and from the North Carolina Arts Council in 2016. Her work has been exhibited in several venues including the National Portrait Gallery, Washington, DC; the Centres of Contemporary Art, Moscow and Yekaterinburg; the Oakland Museum, CA; the Pennsylvania Academy of Art; Galerie Quynh, Ho Chi Minh City; Nhasan Collective, Hanoi;

and Southern Exposure, San Francisco. Art residencies include the Oakland Museum and the Marble House Project. Her work has received reviews and mention in publications including *New American Paintings*, *ART IT Japan*; *Art Asia Pacific*, and the *San Francisco Chronicle*. Her art appears in collections such as the Weatherspoon Art Museum of Greensboro, NC; the North Carolina Museum of Art in Raleigh; the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art; the Post Vidal in Vietnam; and the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology in Vietnam. See more of her work on her

the songs on the radio, accompanied by twanging guitars and booming drums. She preferred the quiet of the Temple, the serene eyes of the Golden Buddha watching her from a round Khmer face. Buddha was the source of her saamnangol. Luck. She had not returned to church, but some Khmer people came by her house and talked to her about Jesus. Their Jesus seemed kinder than Pastor Le's. Their Jesus had also suffered because of cruel people. At least, Sok did not go to Pastor Le's church.

One day when Sok drove her to the Asian store, she made him stop the car at a street corner where a man was selling black wall cloths with pictures printed on them. Most were Americans like Martin Luther King and Elvis Presley and President Kennedy, Sok had explained. She had Sok buy one of Jesus, which she hung on the wall across from the Buddhist shrine. She did not think Buddha would be offended.

Sokha went to the front door. She seldom left the house alone. The streets of America frightened her. All streets frightened her. But the street she most vividly remembered was in Phnom Penh, twenty years before, the young soldiers parading cheerfully along it into the city. She had been much younger then, forty-four, pregnant with her seventh child. She thought how she had stood on the balcony of her father's house watching the army move past, the laughing boys with red checked scarves draping their necks, rifles slung over their shoulders. This was not like any army she had ever seen. Some wore ragged black pajama-like pants and sandals made from rubber tires. People stood on the sidewalks and cheered. Many handed the boys flowers. Sokha waved, relieved the war was over. Now, with a new government, their lives would improve.

Three days later, the soldiers came again to her street. Army trucks drove by the house, blaring commands through loudspeakers. Their voices boomed among the houses. Later that day, for what seemed no reason at all, she too was on the street, walking beside the soldiers, along with her parents, her husband, Keang, and their children, all six of them, the oldest son, Norn, with his wife and two children, hurrying away from their house and the city of Phnom

PHOTOGRAPH BY LIEN TRUONG



Sacramental Silk, 2016 (acrylic, enamel, silk, fabric paint, antique gold-leaf obi thread, smoke on paper, 30x22) by Lien Truong

Penh. Keang carried Satya on his back, while she held the baby Sok. The older children and her parents took turns pushing a cart piled with sacks of belongings – kitchen utensils, rice, canned goods, tea, cured meat, clothing, a radio. Their gold jewelry was hidden in an old teapot, their money tied into scarves, which they pinned under their clothing. Soldiers waving guns hustled them along the street, but this time the soldiers did not laugh. One soldier shot a small brown dog that raced barking from a house, trying to follow its family. The soldier skewered the dog on his bayonet, raising it like a flag.

Hundreds soon joined Chhem Sokha's family. They poured from their houses, a human river, merging into the slowly flowing ocean of people. Some were old friends and neighbors, most strangers. A few drove cars or pedaled bicycles. Others like Sokha's family pushed carts piled with whatever they had grabbed from their homes. Those who did

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not keep up were taken away by the soldiers. The growing numbers of people soon threatened to coagulate into a hopeless, immovable mass. She had to hold Sok high to keep him from being crushed by a cart or automobile. Sometimes they moved no farther than a mile or two in one day. No one seemed to know where they were going.

Sokha stepped from the doorway of the small house into sunshine. Light reflecting off of cars on the street blinded her. She put her hand up as a shield and slipped her feet into a pair of sandals waiting for her on the outside steps. There was no sidewalk or curb along Cumberland Avenue, and although Sok had planted grass in the narrow area in front of their house, only a few uncut patches stuck up like weeds. Grassy lawns like she saw in other parts of the city did not survive along Cumberland Avenue. Here there were only dirt yards merging into the cracked pavement of the street. People parked cars in their yards and piled trash at the edge of the asphalt, forcing her to walk in the street to avoid debris and cars and pools of dirty water in the holes where the pavement was broken.

She clutched the cloth market bag against her breasts and whispered a quick prayer to Buddha. Along the street, neighbors sat in open windows or on the concrete stoops. She nodded to her friend Sem Noy standing in the doorway of her house. Sem Noy was one of the few older women like herself. Although they had not known each other in Cambodia, they spent long evenings remembering the refugee camps and the first frightening years in America. Noy spoke some English and was studying to become an American citizen. Sokha did not want to study English. She would leave that to Sok. This morning she had called Noy on the telephone and asked her to go with her to the store. But Noy was caring for her three grandchildren, and one was sick.

Chhem Sokha moved cautiously along the street, arriving easily at the middle of the block. This was the least frightening part of the walk. So far, among the dingy frame houses and duplexes interspersed with newer Habitat houses like her own, she saw only Asian faces. Some of those she passed were young – teenagers who no longer went to the American school. They smoked and talked to each other in English, and she did not understand their words. She worried about them when she saw them. Did they not have more important things to do than hang around the porches and in the yards of their houses?

She knew these boys, knew them by their Asian names, even if many now went by American names like Mike and Tommy and Shaq. Most were Cambodian, Khmer, her people in exile, though they dressed in

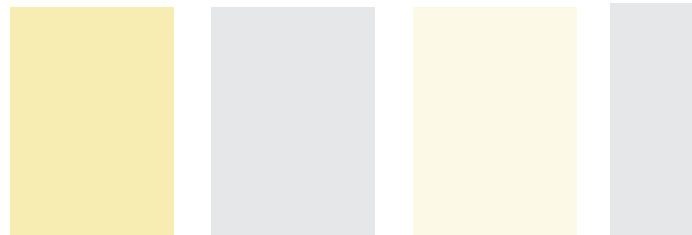
odd American clothes – baggy jeans and T-shirts with the sleeves cut away. She found the tattooed snakes and dragons bruising their arms distasteful. The Red Khmer had been boys, many as young as thirteen and fourteen. But their hearts and faces were made of stone, their eyes cold as river water. Sometimes she thought she saw the same hard stares in the faces of these boys on Cumberland Avenue. But she would not believe they were Red Khmer. They did not shoot people in the head or threaten anyone with guns. Sok sometimes talked about guns. He described shootings on nearby streets and warned her to keep her distance from these boys. “Drugs,” he told her, “make boys crazy.” She tried to do what he said, turning away as she passed.

Sokha slowed as she neared the boundary that separated Asians from blacks. There was no visible boundary. No one had painted a line on the street. But everyone knew where the boundary lay. On one side Asians, the other side black. On one side the odors of hot oil and fish sauce waft through the open windows. On the other, smells of bacon and greens. In the yards of Asians, minivans, station wagons, and second-hand Japanese sedans. In the black sector, old American cars, battered Buicks and Fords.

Sokha shuddered as she moved toward the divide. This end of the street did not feel safe. She almost never walked here alone. No matter that Sok told her black people, particularly mothers and children, were just as frightened by them. “They think all Asians are in gangs,” he told her, laughing. “They don’t want their children on our end of the street. They think the gangs will torture and kill them.”

Since Sok had begun going to church on the Sundays he wasn’t working, his anger had softened. He no longer gambled away half his paycheck, though sometimes he still came home hours after his shift, smelling of beer.

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Sokha paused, waiting. Clouds momentarily obscured the sun. She looked carefully to either side, glancing quickly over her shoulder. Something moved in the shadows along the alley of a boarded up house. Was that a gun? *Guns!* The long barrels of rifles spitting flashes of red, the color of the scarves worn by the boy soldiers. Who was there? Tires screamed in her ears. A shiny blue car swerved around the corner, music booming like gunshots, the sound rocking her off balance. Her foot slipped into a puddle of water. A chill of water rose above her shoe to her ankle. She cried out, jerking her foot away. What was in the water? She bent down, ran her hand over her instep, feeling to be certain no fat leech was puffing itself on her blood. Where was she? Who was watching? Were the guards there? She must not let them see her fear. While one hand tugged at the leech, her other dug in the murky water, burying the tiny roots of rice plants in the mud. She detached the leech from her skin and flung it as far as she could, away from the women wading in a long line across the rice field. She felt her foot again to be certain nothing else had clung there, one of the tiny thread-like leeches that could bore under the flesh and gorge deep into the body's organs.

She raised up as the blue car sped past. Cursed in silence the chhoeu sattek that had gripped her. Memory Sickness. What they had called it in the evil time. The ghosts in the night, images of home and their lost lives that flew into their minds unbidden, like slashes of lightning in the dark. People died from chhoeu sattek. Only now in America, the image that seared her heart was not from the lost life of Phnom Penh but of Angka. She stood in the bright sunlight of Cumberland Avenue, shaken by memories of standing in water, transplanting green shoots of rice. Standing hours, with nothing to keep

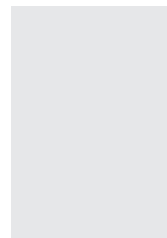
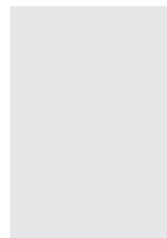
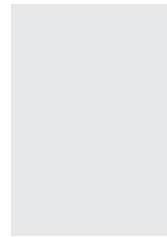
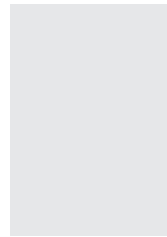
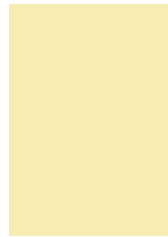
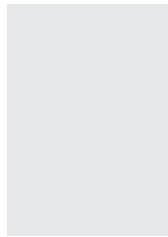
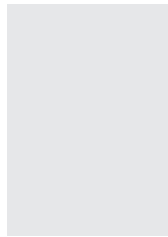
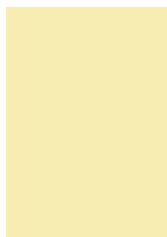
Something moved in the shadows along the alley of a boarded up house. Was that a gun? *Guns!* The long barrels of rifles spitting flashes of red, the color of the scarves worn by the boy soldiers.

her standing but will and the muzzles of rifles at their backs. Sometimes her mother worked beside her, an old woman, weak from hunger and malaria. Sokha never knew on any day where her children might be. The oldest sometimes worked near the dam moving dirt or were marched to a nearby village. The younger ones were sent elsewhere, for what was called training.

The day four-year-old Satya fainted in the hot sun, she was not with him. Her daughter, Nai, told them later that a guard lifted the limp child from the ground, slung him over his shoulder like a sack of grain and walked away.

Chhem Sokha had waited vainly through the night for the guard to bring Satya to the hut. She did not cry, her eyes empty of tears. Perhaps, she thought, in the time of Angka, tears were rationed like rice. When you depleted your quota, there were no more to be had. She had used too many when her father died. After three weeks of walking away from their home in Phnom Penh and already sick, he squatted in a ditch beside the road and refused to move. The soldiers hustled her family forward. But not far enough to keep her from hearing the gunshots. She did not look back, afraid she might see him, held aloft by a Red Khmer soldier on the

Memory Sickness. What they had called it in the evil time. The ghosts in the night, images of home and their lost lives that flew into their minds unbidden, like slashes of lightning in the dark.



end of his bayonet. That night, she cried herself to sleep and for many nights afterwards.

Sokha wiped the cloth market bag across her foot to dry it and continued along the block. Ahead, a group of black men loitered in the street. They were talking in high voices, gesturing with their hands. One waved a whiskey bottle. She stopped. How should she move past them? She could not go through the dirt yard because cars were parked there in front of a two-story gray duplex. She would have to walk close to the duplex stoop, where an old man sat in a rusty metal chair. If she crossed to the other side, she risked offending the black men. She thought about the Fortune cards at the Temple a few weeks ago. She had held the first card above her head then lowered her bowing hands in front of the golden Buddha. When she looked at it, the card read, "Travel will be dangerous." But Buddha allowed three chances, so she had pulled second card. This one said, "You will lose money in three days." Holding her breath and praying, she selected her final card, which was the right one. "Good luck follows you." Just as her father had believed. She left the Temple happy.

Remembering the fortune card now gave her courage. She walked directly toward the black men. As she neared them, she bowed in the Khmer way, hands folded before her, speaking some of the few English words she knew. "Yes, I go. Thank you."

Laughing, one man stepped back, his response loud and in unintelligible English. He imitated her

bow, though he was big and clumsy and staggered sideways. He held a brown bottle between both hands and bobbed it at her. The others moved back. She did not know what they were saying, so she smiled and kept nodding at the man bowing in front of her. He smelled like whiskey. But he let her pass. She was lucky. Buddha was with her. Relieved, she turned the corner onto Center Street. Mr. Franks' store was half way down the block, set back from the street on an asphalt lot. She reached it quickly. Three black men stood in the yard, drinking beer.

Sokha started for the door then stopped, gasping. Something was there. She looked past the men toward the store. A pickax and two shovels leaned against the outside wall. What could she do? Should she turn and run? Get home as quickly as she could? Come back later? She feared to move. Other men standing near the street were not drinking beer. They wore what seemed like uniforms, identical brown shirts with words embroidered on the pockets and on the back. She did not know what the words said.

In her mind, she saw Youn Ban come around the corner, his bare feet kicking up dust. She watched him from the doorway. When he paused a few yards from the hut, she could hardly breathe. He started speaking before he turned in her direction but did not raise his eyes. *Angka needs your husband, Comrade Sokha. For only a few hours. A special duty that will make Angka proud. You will see.* She tried to cry out



PHOTOGRAPH BY LIEN TRUONG

Sleeping of a Ghost, 2015 (oil on arches oil paper, 22x60 diptych) by Lien Truong

a warning, but Keang came beside her, placing his hand lightly on her arm. She felt the tremble in his fingers and tried to grasp his hand, grasp it tight, but he slid it away. Saying nothing to Youn Ban, he left her side and stepped from the hut. She watched them go, Keang so very thin, hair gray, yet walking erect, the way she remembered him in Phnom Penh, as he walked each morning from their house to the transit company where he worked. He did not look back. Chhem Sokha leaned from the doorway. At the end of the path, Keang and Youn Ban were met by two more men. One carried a pickaxe. Another rested a shovel on his shoulder. Sokha screamed and tried to go after them, but Norn grabbed her and pulled her to the hut floor, pinning her arms with his hands, smothering her mouth with his chest to squelch her cries.

That night she used up her ration of tears. She sat on the floor of the hut, sobbing into the rags of Keang's clothing bunched like a pillow in her hands to muffle the sobs so the Angka with flashlights would not hear. She tortured herself with images of Keang from their lost life, chhoeu sattek searing her heart and making her faint from dizziness. The festival of their wedding and the wedding night as he caressed her gently like a father with a child, patiently, when she refused to be a woman, lying face down on the rice mat sobbing and calling her mother's name. Only later, after many months, did she accept as truth her mother's Khmer wisdom, that although she did not choose her husband, she would come to love him.

When morning came and Keang did not return, Sokha stopped crying. From that day, Buddha erased Keang's image from her mind. Only once had he come to her and that was in a dream. When she woke from the dream, she could not recall his face nor how his hair fell on his forehead or the softness of his eyes. Chhem Sokha did not cry when Norn died of fever. Or when her mother gave her daily ration of rice to Sok, causing large ulcers to fester on her body. The day her mother died, Sokha cut a lock of her mother's hair and sewed it into the hem of one of her black shirts. She sat beside the body for hours, her face to the wall.

Sokha waited in front of the American store. What should she do? This was not Cambodia. Angka did not control this place. But she could not go forward. She started to turn away when two white men, also wearing the brown uniform shirts, came from the store with cartons of soda. They spoke to the others and the brown shirt men picked up the tools and walked to trucks parked down the block. This time Sokha said her prayer of thank you to Jesus. These were white men. Americans. They belonged to Jesus.

That night she used up her ration of tears.

Sokha waited until the men with the shovels and pick axes were out of sight before entering the store. She hurried to the back corner where Mr. Franks kept the Asian foods and found a ten-pound bag of rice. With her back turned to the others in the store, she reached under the waistband of her slacks to retrieve the dollar bills. She carried the rice to the counter and stood behind a white man buying beer. Mr. Franks rang the register without looking up. She paid for the rice and slid it into the market bag, putting her change in the pocket.

Outside, she squinted in the sunlight. The men drinking beer were still there. She darted around them and into the street. At the end of the block, other black men were quarreling. She did not understand what they were saying, but understood their hands and faces. One man swung his arm at another. A third man leaped between them and

PHOTOGRAPH BY PETER PAUL GEOFFRION



A Brief Mention of Sanctuary in America, 2017 (oil, linen, silk, fabric paint, colored pencil, antique 24k gold silk obi thread, black salt, smoke on arches oil paper, 72x51) by Lien Truong

then they were on the ground, rolling and shouting. She tried to hurry past. People came out of houses. There were more shouts. The street was filling with people. An old truck came down the street, passing her slowly, trying to get through.

Sokha moved into a yard as water thrown up from the truck splashed her legs. Dirty water ran down her slacks. She heard a sound, familiar, yet from a distant place in her mind. *Pop-pop*. She dropped to her knees, the bag of rice thumping beside her. She curled herself against a parked car, the hot hubcap burning her arm, the rice clutched to her chest. She felt the quiver of life against her, the breathing in as she breathed but could see nothing in the black night. The child stirred, forcing her to tighten her embrace, stifling the cry before it came. A hand touched her shoulder. The guide was beside her in the darkness, trying to give her something, putting something in her hand. She felt for it, felt the rag of cloth. She found the child's mouth and forced the rag in.

The forest was black, quiet except for the swish of feet through the brush, a crack of twigs. The small body jerked against her, like hiccups. The swish of feet came closer. The hiccups ceased. When the footsteps died away and the guide signaled all was clear, she held the limp child in her arms, carrying her over the mountain through the night and into the next morning, until the others forced her to leave her behind. Sok, a child himself, took the young one from her and covered her frail body with leaves and a fallen tree branch.

Sokha hovered against the hot tire, the smell of rubber burning her nose. This time, there was no silence of the forest. This time, there was noise. Shouts, people running, a siren. She waited for someone, a guide to tell her all was clear. A hand touched her shoulder. She gave a choking cry, shoved the bag of rice to the ground, pushing it as far from her as she could as if it might burn her.

"Ma'am, are you all right?"

She stared up at a young black police officer, eyes narrowed in a question. She straightened and brushed mud from her slacks, scrubbing hard at the

dirt stains from the tire on her blouse. She did not understand what he was asking, but his hand on her arm was soft.

"OK. No problem." She nodded, bobbing her head up and down and repeating the words several times to make him understand.

He reached a hand to help her from the ground.

"Everything's under control, ma'am. But you might want to get on home."

"OK. No problem," she said again.

She started down the block. Someone shouted and she heard footsteps. She walked faster. The footsteps followed. They were coming quickly. Someone was running. Shouting. Now she began to run, the other footsteps thudding behind her. She ran faster, down the mountain, from the cover of the woods, avoiding the soldiers who raised their rifles, fired in their direction. She kept on running, running, tugging Sok behind her, Sok who was screaming now, screaming for her to stop. Branches ripped her legs. Stones cut through her makeshift sandals. Her chest burned. But she would not stop running. She ran until the Thai soldier stepped in front of her, blocking her path with his rifle, causing her to charge into him. Causing him to curse her, swing the butt of his gun against her shoulder, knocking her to the ground. She no longer cared. She was across the border. She was safe.

Chhem Sokha stopped. A black teenager stood in her path. She covered her eyes.

"Ma'am," he said, "ma'am." Words like the policeman. Chhem Sokha peeked through her fingers.

"You dropped this, ma'am," he said, holding out her market bag with the rice.

She nodded, took the rice, remembered to whisper *thank you* as the boy turned away.

Then she was on the steps, slipping off her shoes, unlocking the door in a single twist. Inside, she turned the lock after her and leaned against the door, panting. She let the market bag slide to the floor. She saw Jesus reaching out his arms to her from the far wall, but she did not look at Buddha. She would thank him later in her prayers. For now, she had nothing to say to either of them. ■

She saw Jesus reaching out his arms to her from the far wall, but she did not look at Buddha. She would thank him later in her prayers. For now, she had nothing to say to either of them.

Welcome to *NCLR* and Expressions of Appreciation

by Margaret D. Bauer, Editor

We welcome new writers with new subjects to our pages in this section of each issue. The number of new (to us at least) writers of a range of experience should encourage the writers among our readers to submit their poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction to our competitions this year: the Doris Betts Fiction Prize competition (submissions for which are due February 15), the [James Applewhite Poetry Prize competition](#), and the [Alex Albright Creative Nonfiction Prize competition](#). Writers, please check the guidelines of the latter for a possible earlier submission period, moving it from summer to winter.

After closing Flashbacks with the 2018 Doris Betts Fiction Prize winner, we open this section with the story selected for second place. Academics like myself will appreciate its candid exploration of an issue we have either suffered personally or commiserated with colleagues over: partner hiring – or rather, the scarcity of opportunities in academia for both members of a couple to find comparable jobs in the same department. Non-academics may be surprised to learn that two people with the same educational background often work in the same department with very different salaries, teaching opportunities, and workloads, due to colleges and universities choosing to fund more cheaper adjunct positions over adding higher salaried tenure lines. David Hopes’s story brought back memories of saying goodbye to friends, not to mention my department losing excellent teachers and scholars, every year my first several years in academia because of this issue.

Six of the Applewhite Poetry Prize finalists new to *NCLR* are published in this section, and we welcome all to our pages. I appreciate finalist Jeanne Julian for coming to Greenville to read her poem as one of the “openers” for final judge Amber Flora Thomas’s

book launch reading. As I write this introduction, we are planning other reading of our competitions’ finalists across the state, thanks to funding from a North Carolina Arts Council grant.

Preparing the poems for publication, I noticed in the biographical note for finalist Craig Thompson Friend that he is working on a biography of North Carolina’s Lunsford Lane, a quite fortuitous finding, as we’d received a submission on Lane, and I thank Professor Friend for his advice on it. Look for the essay in the print issue, either in 2019 or 2020. The latter issue, I’ll take this space to announce, will feature “expatriate North Carolina writers.” Find more information about this issue on the [Next Issue](#) page of our website.

Also during the time we’ve been finalizing this issue, I’ve heard word that one of the finalists here, Wayne Johns, has published a new collection of poetry, which we will be sending out for review in next year’s issue. The two reviews in this section, both of two books, bring the total books reviewed in this issue to 39 (up from 29 in 2018). A conversation with one of our regular reviewers, Catherine Carter, has inspired me to share *NCLR*’s reviews more regularly on our social media pages. Publishing the reviews in these open access issues allows us to reach a broad audience, and we want to take full advantage of that for our writers. Once this issue is released, we will be ready to begin the process of assigning books for review consideration for next year’s issue, so please send us yours at your earliest convenience. Find book review guidelines on our website. Also, if you are interested in writing a review, please contact us to let us know. Perhaps some of the forty writers and editors whose books are reviewed here would like to give back in this way. We would certainly appreciate it.



NORTH CAROLINA

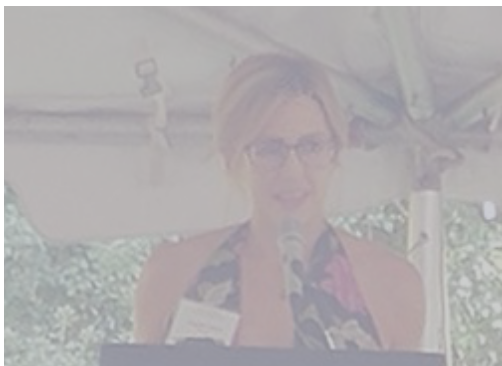
Miscellany

As it turned out, two finalists selected for publication in our competitions happen to be mother and son. Sally Thomas had two poems make it to the final round of the James Applewhite Poetry Prize competition, including one published here and another, selected by final judge Amber Flora Thomas for second place, to appear in the print issue. Also this year, coincidentally, the essay in this section by Sally's son Joel Thomas was selected by final judge Randall Kenan for honorable mention in the Alex Albright Creative Nonfiction Prize competition. It is his first publication.

Two other writers new to *NCLR* are Penelope and Jennifer Niven, another mother and child pair of writers. Read Jennifer's touching remarks given on the occasion of her mother's posthumous induction into the North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame. *NCLR* would welcome an interview with Jennifer Niven some time, or an essay about the works of Penelope Niven, a contender, perhaps for the new John Ehle Prize I mentioned in the Flashbacks introduction.

Once again, I remind you as you enjoy this open-access online issue to please subscribe to *NCLR*. Doing so allows you to submit to the Betts competition (sponsored by the North Carolina Writers' Network) at the member rate and to submit to *NCLR*'s poetry and creative nonfiction competitions, which do not have a submission fee but do require subscriptions. We look forward to reading your work. ■

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a short story by David Hopes
art by *Kimberly Wheaton*
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a poem by Jeanne Julian
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- 38** ■ Flashbacks: Echoes of Past Issues
poetry, prose, and book reviews

2018 Doris Betts Fiction Prize, 2nd Place

*Billy
landed
his job the
first year
on the
market.
He hadn't
thought he
was such
a star,
but there
it was.*

The Graduate Seminar in Early Modern Pastoral turned out to be more enriching than the catalog had implied. For one thing, Billy had met Kristen, who took the seat beside his because, as she said, it didn't look like she'd be catching the reek of cigarettes off him for an hour and a half twice a week. In this she was correct. He had not had a cigarette in his mouth once in his life. Another quality was that the situation allowed – nay, encouraged – the fabrication and bestowal of pastoral nicknames, like those in the texts they studied. This practice was both learned and vaguely naughty. He became Corin. She became Dorinda. They were not sure at first whether they should reveal to their professor that they'd named him Phoenix, but when he found out, he recognized the reference and was all smiles. They got As.

Billy landed his job the first year on the market. He hadn't thought he was such a star, but there it was. His specialties and the needs of the English department achieved such an uncanny congruence that he had been offered the job *sub rosa*, even before the Modern Language Association convention adjourned. At the interview, he made clear that he was part of a package, a team, and that his new wife was as accomplished a scholar and teacher as himself, as well as possessing a variety of skills that should recommend her to the department all on her own. They met her, liked her, and agreed that as soon as something opened up she could be edged in without the whole official search apparatus. There were a number of way of accomplishing that.

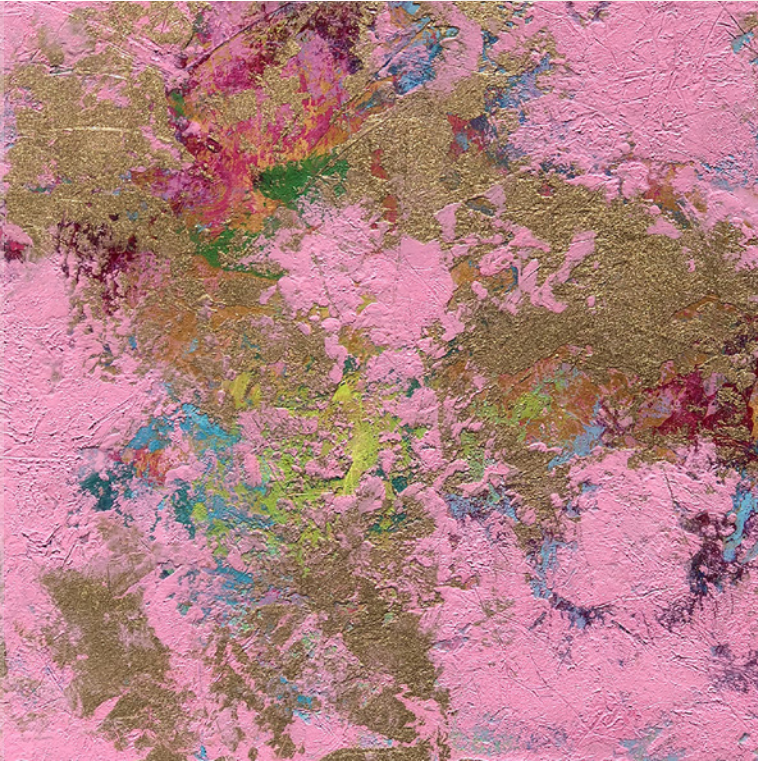
One involved in the process might note that she had written on Spenser and he on pastoral elements in Shakespeare and the Metaphysicians. On the level of concentration and credentials they were practically the same person. Even so, he had been quite

CORIN AND DORINDA

BY
DAVID
HOPES

DAVID HOPES is a Professor in the Department of English at UNC Asheville. His novel, *The Falls of the Wyoona*, won the 2018 Quill Prize from Red Hen Press. His plays *Uranium 235* and *Night Music* were recently performed at Asheville's Magnetic Theatre, and his latest book of poems, *Peniel*, was published by Saint Julian Press in 2017.

Final judge Stephanie Powell Watts called "Corin and Dorinda" "an emotionally intelligent story about what we are owed and what duty we have to the people in our lives in happy times and especially when we don't get what we desperately need."



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

The Geography of Emotion by Kimberly Wheaton
(oil and cold wax on cradled wood panel, 12x12)

NOBODY
DISGRACED
THEMSELVES
AND SCURRIED
AWAY UNDER
THE COVER
OF NIGHT.

**WITH ART BY
KIMBERLY WHEATON**

A long-time resident of Durham, NC, **KIMBERLY WHEATON** is a co-founder of [Pleiades Arts, Inc.](#), a nonprofit, community-based arts organization, where you can see her artwork in person. See her work, too, on her [website](#). She has a bachelor's in English Language and Literature from William & Mary and a master's in Environmental Science from the University of Michigan.

clear about his preference for having his wife beside him, his partner and the department's. He'd even suggested that they split the appointment, but somewhere up the ladder of administration this was nixed.

After the tottering relic whom Corin had replaced, nobody seemed ready to retire. Nobody got a better offer and left at the end of the semester. Nobody disgraced themselves and scurried away under the cover of night.

Dorinda had a couple of nibbles, and one out-of-town interview, but her own first year on the market came to nothing. They had made a contingency plan of visits and travel budgeting in case she got a job on the other side of the continent, but in the end they were not needed. His sigh of relief did not please her the way he may have thought it would.

Her professional frustration increased after a period of working with a Temp organization, and though his actions were blameless and she did not, in fact, blame him, her state of mind was bound to affect his.

Jeff, the department chair, eventually carved out a position for her as an adjunct teaching freshman composition. "It's the best we can do right now," he said. Corin understood. Dorinda did not.

Dorinda wept off and on for days. He had a job, a real job, and she, whose GPA had been slightly higher than his, did not. Furthermore, his job had taken them to a remote and semi-rural location, around which was not a wealth of other educational institutions where she might have settled herself acceptably. The few institutions nearby were full-up, or in no particular need of a Spenser person. She sent feelers out in all directions, but everything was either too far away or not on the hunt.

"I did the best I could" became his refrain, to which her response was inevitably, "I know, I know, I'm not blaming you," followed by a flood of unforgiving tears.

"Should I have turned it down? I still can." She hated when he said this, for he knew the answer had to be "no," and it edged her ever so slightly off the high ground.

Preparing his first syllabus that summer, he called now and then to her from their little study, "Drayton? Should I include Michael Drayton? 'Lit-any in Time of Plague,' for sure. Should I make a point of introducing them to the madrigal?" He thought he was including her, but she thought of the standard freshman comp syllabus that had been emailed to her and from which the first year

instructor was not expected to deviate, and her face set in a mask of simmering disappointment. The worst of it was that Billy – Corin – was doing everything right, and every well-meant gesture seemed somehow to touch a nerve. No, worse than that was that he didn't see her disappointment unless she mentioned it, and to mention it – at least as often as she wanted to – was tedious, even to herself.

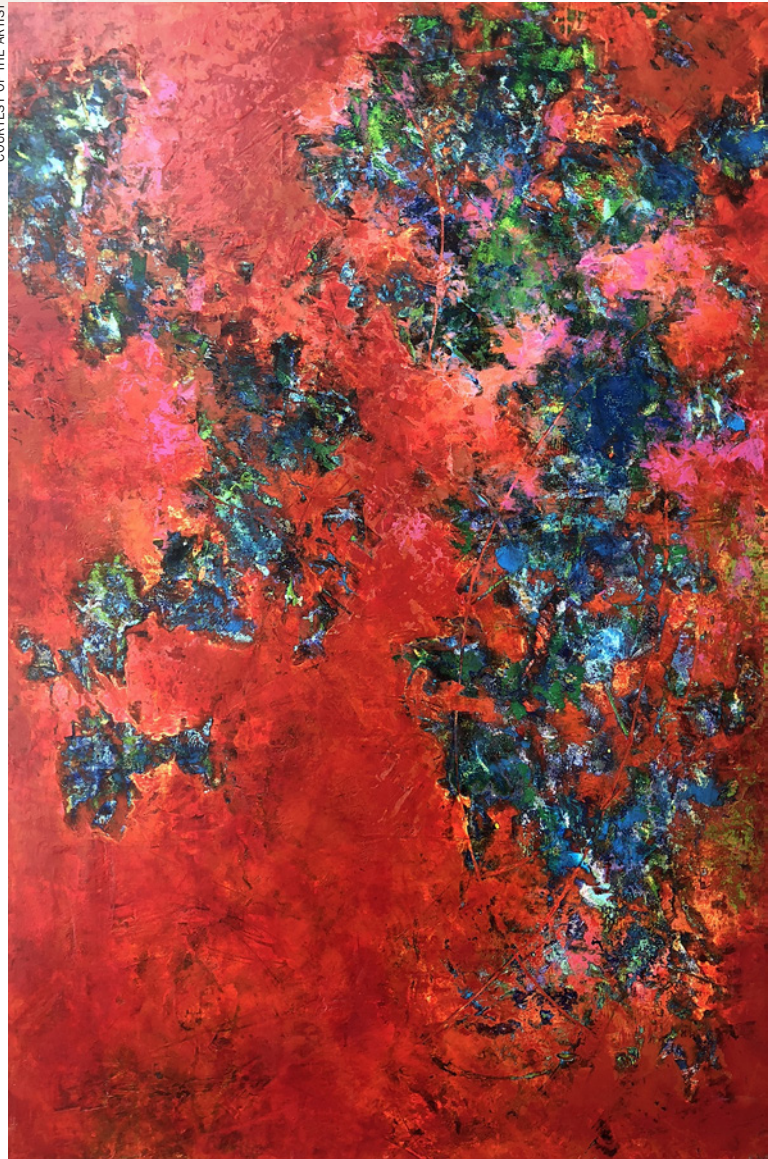
Somehow students discover selected fragments of a new professor's past, and it was not long into the semester before they were calling him "Dr. Corin." He liked it. He answered to it. He smiled. Nobody called his disappointed wife Dorinda. People didn't spontaneously make the connection between them, despite their common last name. In the department they called her Kristen. You could hear "Kristen" and "Corin" in the same sentence. It was difficult to know whether to disapprove more of the coldness they showed her or the informality they showed him, but something was wrong. She went to a career counselor who told her to be patient. One year in her life had gone awry. One. Be patient. It was not what she wished to hear.

During the beginning-of-semester composition faculty meetings she sized up her colleagues. If she was as smart as she knew she was, she should be able to rule that roost before too long. Better to rule in hell . . .

All the adjuncts and lecturers were women. Almost all cobbled together some kind of living by adjuncting at as many institutions as they could fit into their schedule. Some of the regular professors joined the meetings because they were teaching comp that semester, but even in a room where all were dedicated to one goal, one detected a line between tenure track and non-tenure track, be-

ONE YEAR
IN HER LIFE
HAD GONE AWRY.
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COURTESY OF THE ARTIST



Push and Pull by Kimberly Wheaton (oil and cold wax on cradled wood panel, 36x24)

tween lit people and comp people. This division was denied by everyone in the department and yet palpable, traditional, indelible. It had a taste like sharp steel in Kristen's mouth. She at once abhorred the hierarchy and felt she was on the wrong side of it.

She would begin a sentence with "I should really be teaching Milton" and retreat in confusion, realizing almost too late her preferences were a distinction that particular culture did not approve.

A lesson she had learned while still in grad school was that like hires like. It is true in Academia, and she supposed it must be true elsewhere. It's the most difficult thing in the world to improve a

mediocre department – unless some outside power takes a hand – because mediocre people, given their heads, will hire mediocre people. They recognize each other, their predictable ways, their modest goals, their understated demands. Why would anyone hire someone who was going to make them uncomfortable? This is also why excellent department and institutions stay excellent for a long time.

It didn't seem to her that the comp program was actually mediocre, but it did have a problem with self-image. No amount of insisting that the Literature program and the Freshman Writing program were equal partners had actually made that the case. The hierarchy was the stronger for everybody's officially denying its existence. New hires were expected to teach comp until they had made their way in the department. Later, they might have a schedule full of literature and creative writing and feel themselves fully arrived. All the denial in the world had not quite kept a comp class from seeming a punishment, a demeaning. You could teach comp with a master's degree, after all.

Elaine was the head of Freshman Comp, and Kristen/Dorinda soon perceived that much of its culture flowed from her. Elaine was agonized by the thought that what she was doing might be second rate, or perceived to be second rate, and therefore had affected the departmental culture so that a good deal of energy went into pretending things were otherwise than they were. So Kristen perceived, unable to tell perfectly what was her bitterness speaking and what was the truth. Department meetings included a part where Elaine felt underappreciated and solicited support from the department, which she always got. *Yes of course comp and lit are equals in this department*, someone would say with mechanical precision. On stage it would have been unconvincing, but in a department meeting it was enough.

Elaine had begun calling herself a rhetorician, and her favored adjuncts rhetoricians, advancing the theory that "rhetorician" was a professional category that others in the department could neither fully appreciate nor usefully judge. If the layman could not check Dr. Corin on his pronouncements concerning a difficult passage of Donne, neither should they be able to check the rhetorician on her markings on a student essay. Elaine rejected

the argument that one thing was more specialized than the other. Other faculty knew her tenacity was greater than theirs and let the matter drop.

On the faculty were several important writers, and when one remarked, "Well, am I not a rhetorician?" her response was, "No. You may be a great writer, but you are no rhetorician." Like Christian dogma, there were only two ways of taking this: either as an absurdity or as a mystical truth only the elect could comprehend. Such was the power of Elaine's personality that the second triumphed, generally, at least in the moment.

Her insistence of the specialness of her calling gave Elaine a certain control over hiring. Only she – or another rhetorician named by her – could be sure what the program needed. Quite mediocre people were retained because Elaine liked them, or because they could be presented as rhetoricians, whatever that may have been at that moment. Kristen, being forced on her from above, was immediately on Elaine's blacklist.

Kristen might have fared better if, in a moment of candor, perhaps seeking in Elaine a possible friend and confidant, she had not admitted her bitterness at not being in the literature program with her husband.

"But, you're teaching comp! You're teaching *rhetoric!*" Elaine had chirped.

"Oh, anybody can do that," Kristen had fired back. It was several weeks before she understood fully what she had done to earn Elaine's coldness. She'd thought she was merely speaking a truth that everyone understood. But what she had said was the single greatest heresy possible on the comp side of the corridor.

When she told her husband about this, he sucked in his cheeks and said "Ooooo," implying a misplayed hand on her part.

It didn't seem to her that the comp program was actually mediocre, but it did have a problem with self-image.

“I wish we could find a way to get me on the real faculty.”

“I know. Me too. But, be patient –”

“*You* don’t have to be patient.”

He reached his hand out and ran it gently down her cheek. “Dorinda,” he said. This always calmed her. She resented that it calmed her, but that time she decided to accept it. Her acceptance would not last forever.

Elaine’s antipathy made her job harder than it might have been, but, whatever her influence, Elaine could not unilaterally hire and fire, so Kristen was safe, even if unhappy. She watched her husband prosper.

The kids loved him – how could they not? He was handsome and sweet-natured. She watched the faces of their colleagues light up when he passed near them in the hall. Though she had no way of testing this, she doubted that faces lit up like that at her passing. Sometimes she resolved to be cheery and happy and make the best of things. Sometimes she resolved that cheeriness and happiness in the face of unfairness was a kind of hypocrisy.

Two years went by, and it was time for Corin’s re-appointment. Jeff had made clear the re-appointment was a formality, and that the next step would be to apply for tenure. It was going faster than usual. Corin was a better fit with the department than usual. Dorinda had not entered into the conversation. Once he was tenured there would be no prying them away from this little town and this complacent little institution. Her life was draining away around her, dealt the death blow by good things coming to another.

One day, Kristen overheard a conversation between two girls in her 101 class.

“I expected to have Dr. Mercer. What happened to him?”

“Fired.”

“What do you mean ‘fired’?”

“Well, moved on. He got one too many bad comments on his student evals.”

Here student #2 leaned in confidentially and whispered, “made too many students uncomfortable . . . you know his . . .” Dorinda looked up in time to see the student imitate a face of comic lechery.

She would have let this exchange pass as she had so many similar overheard and unverified conversations, but this one sank into her heart. Like a demon, it burrowed in and would not be dislodged. Her husband’s in-the-bag reappointment loomed on the horizon, and it looked like that would mean

an eternity of third-rate resentful students and subservience to the miserable Elaine. If she could just restart the process – a mere do-over, a return to the place of fairness where they stood on the day they both received their PhDs, hers ever-so-slightly more praised than his. She took a deep breath, almost unable to believe the thoughts that were entering her mind.

Kristen had just enough faith in the gods to assume mischief that was not meant to work would not. And so she sidled into the student computer lab, found a computer from which the previous user had not signed out. She waited until she looked very casual, and no one she knew was in the room. Then she typed a letter of complaint. About her husband. She installed careful errors, making sure the tone was not traceable to a Doctor of Literature. He had not done anything actionable, nothing the writer was willing to reveal, but it was the mood of his classroom, the overall tone of discomfort, to which many other students of the writer’s acquaintance would attest. . . . Kristen found herself inhabiting the fiction, addressing with relish what she thought at the outset would be a horrible, if necessary, task. She kept going back and fine-tuning the accusations, getting as close to the line of improbability as she could without crossing over.

With her finger poised to email the letter to the chairman, a cold chill settled over her. The email could not be traced to her, maybe, but it could be traced to somebody, the vehemence of whose denial could wreck the whole project. She took a deep breath and hit “Print.” She listened as the pages printed. One, two . . . She didn’t hurry to pick them out of the tray. None of the students in the room should see anything remarkable. She found an envelope, printed Jeff’s name and campus address in a hand as unlike her own as possible.

KRISTEN HAD JUST
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She dropped the envelope in the campus mailbox and headed for the hall. She pictured herself walking. “Is that nonchalant?” she wondered. “Is that what people mean when they say ‘nonchalant’?” She hoped not. Nonchalant would not have been exactly right.

Almost as soon as the deed was done and she was out in the cool hallway, she had a strange perception. It was as if she stood before herself, two persons, one version of her regarding the other from uncomfortable proximity. One of them was Kristen. One of them was Dorinda. Kristen had done a hard but necessary deed, and now Dorinda was judging her for it. Nobody but the two of them was in the hallway, so she said aloud, “I will not be judged.”

She didn’t look to see if Dorinda had gone away. She made her way to the car. As she half expected, Dorinda waited in the car for her. “I will not be judged” had worked pretty well the first time but lost some of its punch the second. Besides, Dorinda was herself, and the scrutiny of the self would not be called judgment, but rather conscience. Kristen looked into the rearview mirror and said, “New and better lives arise from disappointment. I am miserable here. I am on the verge of making Billy miserable. Maybe that’s happening already. He is the sort who can be happy anywhere. Nothing came from outside to help, so I am doing it myself. It is the right thing.”

Dorinda received the speech silently, as she had before, but her gray eyes in the mirror seemed ready to tear up. Kristen looked quickly down at the dashboard and started the car.

The house was empty. Kristen puzzled for a moment, then remembered that Billy was out of town, at a professional conference. The department provided money for people on tenure track to present at conferences, but not adjuncts, which was a shame, Kristen thought, for her reflections on *Commedia dell’arte* and the dramaturgy of Susanna Centlivre would have been a perfect fit. She repressed the impulse to stew about this, for the blow against the system she had just delivered was the even of many grievances. She opened the refrigerator door and pulled out lemons as the foundation for a cooling drink.

Their schedules were different, so it wasn’t as though she never had the house to herself, but now the solitude was more extreme. He was not only not home, but two hundred miles away, and, if she knew him, with his phone inaccessible under a pile of notes and programs.

In their room, the bed was made. He was the bed-maker. She would have been content to wrap up in the tatters of last night’s sleep, but while she was having her first coffee, he would be tucking in corners and fluffing pillows. It seemed an odd pursuit for a man not otherwise very fastidious, until she realized he was doing it for her. As with all kindnesses, the fact that it was unnecessary, maybe even a little irritating, was never mentioned.

As she regarded the neat bed, an unexpected image came to mind. She stood back watching herself enter the seminar room that first day of Early Modern Pastoral, when everything was beginning and every deed might have happy consequence through decades yet to come. She had graduated from a not particularly good Midwestern college, and she was a



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Chasm by Kimberly Wheaton (oil and cold wax on cradled wood panel, 36x24)

*She was a woman and therefore
had everything to prove
and finite time to prove it in.*

woman and therefore had everything to prove and finite time to prove it in. She'd scanned the room. She was an early arriver – always would be – so of the few people there before her, one struck her forcibly. His hair was gingery and, if not quite messy, cavalier. His shirt was unnecessarily vivid. He was the second-cutest boy in the room. For her self-image as it then was, that was about right. She sat beside him and made some comments about cigarettes, and when he smiled she decided he was the cutest boy after all. He was not yet Corin. She was not yet Dorinda.

She put the lemons back in the fridge and closed the door.

She put her hand on the hood of the car to steady herself. It was still warm from the drive home. She had no idea how and when campus mail was gathered and delivered, but the necessity of the situation overcame all other considerations. She drove fast. It was Friday afternoon and there were no evening classes, so she had her pick of parking places, and chose a coveted one next to the door. Probably the letter would still be lying in the box. She would

get it out. Could the box be lifted up and shaken like a piggy bank? She would pry it open with a screwdriver if she had to. She would go to the post office, or wherever the mail went, and sort through whatever had to be sorted through. She opened the glove box to fetch the screwdriver, just in case.

Once at the academic hall, she hurled herself against the door, jerking the handle. It didn't open. Though it had pulled open the thousand times she'd used it before, she pushed on it, as if by some magical process the operation of the doors changed after hours. Immovable. It was definitely locked. Regular faculty had keys to the outside doors, but adjuncts did not. She was turning toward the campus police office to get an officer to open it for her when she saw an officer walking, as if summoned, straight toward her. She flipped the screwdriver into the landscaping. A distraught woman wanting into a locked building with a screwdriver in her hand sent the wrong message. She hoped the officer had not seen. She almost smiled as she remembered the prayer Corin and she had devised long ago to solicit divine aid for their comprehensive exams: "O Pan and all the woodland gods, be with me now at the hour of my need."

"Ma'am?"

"I wonder if you could let me in? I seem to have left – uhm – some important papers, student papers, and of course I'm only an adjunct so I don't have a key –"

"Happy to, ma'am. I just need to see your faculty ID."

The heavy realization that her purse – with her ID – was home on the kitchen table sank into her viscera. "Officer, I seem to have left it. Could you? I mean, it's *very* important. My students are expecting –"

The officer shook his head ruefully. "I just can't do it. There have been too many incidents after hours, mostly students, but – you know." A gleam came to his eyes and he added, "You look like you could be an undergraduate anyhow, so I just can't risk it."

He smiled a big smile, intending a compliment to ease the sting of refusal. She decided to pretend to take it that way. She smiled and looked at the pavement. Moss grew in the little cracks, emerald and turquoise. It was unexpectedly beautiful.

"I could follow you," he said. "I could go up to your office with you, and that way nobody would be in there unescorted, and nobody would get into trouble."

The momentary leap of hopefulness flickered out. She had almost, for a second, believed her own



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Prodigal by Kimberly Wheaton
(oil and cold wax on cradled wood panel, 24x24)

lie. She could not think of what to say to get him to the student computer room to help her commit a federal crime. She had no reason to expect her charm to get her that far.

“No – no,” she fumbled, “I’m not sure now. – I’m not sure where I – ”

She didn’t look back at the officer. She shut the car door. Maybe she could call someone, a friend, a confederate to whom the outline of the crime could be confessed. But she realized she had made no friends in the department. She tried to imagine what she would say to Elaine, how she would keep the edge of contempt out of her voice long enough to ask for a favor. She put the car in Drive. She prayed, “O Pan and all the woodland gods, be with me now at the hour of my need.”

Once she got home, in desperation she did call Elaine. No answer. She left no message.

Corin’s plane was delayed and he didn’t appear until late Sunday evening. Dorinda watched him tumble out of the cab trying to gather his things and pay the fare and get through the front door all at the same time. It was clear he was exhausted. Two nights she had lain atop the bed with a coat over her so the bed would be unrumpled and just as he left it when he arrived. She hoped he would notice.

She waited until he put his things down and gave him a kiss on the cheek. He smelled of airplane and the almost departed ghost of aftershave.

“How was it?”

“Oh, you know how those things go. I saw Cissy and Michael. Cissy got a tenure-track at Hampden-Sydney.”

“Good for her! Your paper?”

“Well-received, I guess. Nobody laughed out loud.”

Corin went to bed hours before his usual time, tired, and maybe a little sick from the excitement and fast food. She lay down beside him after a while, stiffly, denying herself the comfort of his body.

His first Monday class was at two in the afternoon, hers at 8:30 in the morning, so it was not unusual for her to be out the door and gone while he was still brewing coffee. Today she was earlier than that. The world as she knew it depended on her getting to the office before Jeff did. She pulled into the lot early enough to obtain prime parking again. Up-right in the pachysandra she noticed a glitter that

she recognized as the screwdriver she’d discarded on Friday night. Not even breaking stride, she stooped and picked it up. Afraid that there would be a tie-up at the elevator – someone lingering on another floor, or a wheel chair – she lunged up the stairs. If she could just not be stopped by a student. If she just could avoid saying hello to anybody.

She’d barely caught her breath and turned into the main hall when the way was blocked by Elaine. It crossed her mind to breeze past and pretend she didn’t see, but Elaine was a big woman, and Elaine stopped her headlong progress with a hand to the middle of her chest.

“You called me last night.”

“I called you?”

“Yes. Your number was on my phone. Sorry I couldn’t answer just then. May I help you now?”

The look on Elaine’s face was – Kristen tried to figure it out exactly – hopeful and joyful at once, as if she had longed for nothing more than to be called, perhaps, consulted, by one who did so little to disguise her sense of superiority. Kristen took a big breath. She had done a horrible thing, which had to be atoned for. She put her hand on Elaine’s shoulder and said, “I was having trouble with a student paper – what to say, how to say it kindly and yet firmly. The one person I knew I could count on for this sort of thing was you.”

“Oh, well, of course – ”

“If you don’t mind I’ll bring it in during your office hours and you can talk me through it.”

Elaine’s smile warmed the back of Kristen’s head as she strode toward the office with renewed urgency. The usual small morning knot had gathered, poring through mail, standing over the trash can into which most of the mail vanished immediately, chit-chatting about the weekend and the week to come. Jeff stood a little to one side, actually examining something he had taken from his box, reading slowly, with the pages held close to his face, with his mouth turned down and his eyes narrow enough to send fine wrinkles to his hairline. Dorinda could hear her own deep intake of breath. Jeff was reading her letter. Her libel. Her fabrication.

He must have heard her gasp, or sensed the rays of despair issuing from her into the air. He raised his eyes and looked directly at her. He knew. She must have given it away somehow. Had some

SHE HAD
ALMOST, FOR
A SECOND,
BELIEVED
HER OWN LIE.

avenging spirit made her sign her name? Was there something in the printer that had?

"You look distraught," she managed to say. The panic in her voice could be read as sympathy for Jeff and whatever awful thing had just entered his life.

He must have read it that way, for he said, "Nothing, really. It's pretty awful, though. Somebody's making accusations against one of us." Here he held the letter up. Light from the window transluded through the pages, and she recognized her paragraphs, her indentations, the very shape of her words. The accusation gleamed midair for an endless moment, before he let it drop, with as much noise as paper can make on metal, into the slowly filling trash can – one, two, and gone.

She could not stop the second gasp flying from her throat.

Jeff looked at her again, a little quizzically this time. Had she given away that she knew what was in the note? What would she say if he – ?

He said, "We take real problems seriously, of course. But this has the air of – I don't know – a young woman facing a C after a long career of high school As. It could be anything. A dare. A crush confused about what to do with itself. And, it's anonymous. People with real complaints are generally willing to stand behind them. If I pursued every bit of shade cast by every disgruntled teenager –" Here he shrugged, as if that sentence had too many endings to choose among, or none at all. He moved toward his office, stopping when his body was as close as it could be to hers without actually touching. "Pull it out of the trash and look if you want. You'll be amused at who the accused is. You'll never believe it. And when you're Chair, you'll have to deal with this sort of thing all the time."

He moved on.

He had said, "When you're Chair," as if it were something he actually expected. She had no need to pull the letter out of the trash. Instead she made her way to her office, shedding horror and fear to the left and right as she walked. When she reached her desk, she was floating. Her hand lay on her chest, as though she needed its weight to help her breathe.

"Pan and all the woodland gods," she said, "be mightily praised, and praised again." She had been saved from the worse thing she had ever done. The screwdriver lay in her hand, pressing deep marks in her skin because she had been squeezing it so tight.

At the moment when a student was stumbling through an illumination of Sidney's *Astrophil and*

Stella 31, Corin felt in his coat pocket, even while draped over the back of his chair, the buzz of his phone receiving a text message. "With how sad steps, O Moon, thou climb'st the skies! / How silently, and with how wan a face!" the student read. The student was a drama major whom one might see on stage

from time to time. He was not as bad as the others. One noted that. He read the ancient words with sympathy and understanding. "What, may it be that even in heav'nly place / That busy archer his sharp arrows tries!"

That was actually the secret. Corin wanted to shout to the boy, "Just read the poem!" Just read as Philip Sidney would have, with a catch in the throat, with wit at war with misery. Just say it. Just say it right and sit down, the analysis being implied in the understanding.

Sure, if that long-with-love-acquainted eyes
Can judge of love, thou feel'st a lover's case,
I read it in thy looks; thy languished grace
To me, that feel the like, thy state describes.
Then even of fellowship, O Moon, tell me,
Is constant love deemed there but want of wit?
Are beauties there as proud as here they be?
Do they above love to be loved, and yet
Those lovers scorn whom that love doth possess?
Do they call virtue there ungratefulness?

Whatever the class was feeling, Corin was near to tears when the last words were spoken. The student droned on for a while with the details he had learned on the Internet, but not quite long enough to ruin the impression of the flawless reading. Corin said, "Yes, yes," as the boy sat down, smiling, knowing he'd pleased at least one.

While the class exited, Corin looked at his phone. A message from his wife. "Don't stop on the way home. Come straight home. Hurry."

That was not like her. She never texted during class hours unless it was urgent, or something was needed from the store on his way home. Tone is hard to get from a text message, but Corin's ear detected playfulness. Was she in a mood? Was she in *the mood*. In any case, he obeyed. He drove straight home, repeating the phrase "long-with-love-acquainted eyes" until his ravishment was complete, and he was ready for whatever she prepared. It had been a long time since she was happy.

SOMEBODY'S MAKING ACCUSATIONS AGAINST ONE OF US.

He pulled into the driveway. She had parked so he could not help blocking her. They would deal with that later. The backdoor was locked. The backdoor was never locked. He walked around to the front. It was open, and from the doorknob hung a coronal of mint and sage with starry yellow flowers – he recognized them but didn't know their name – woven in. He smiled and put the coronal on. He walked into the house. The air was heavy with sage and mint, and vases of flowers stood on every surface that could support one.

“Dorinda?” he called a couple of times. She was not answering. He dropped his coat and books on the floor. Tables and desks and other likely surfaces were buried in flowers and dishes of chocolates. He ate a chocolate. He didn't like chocolates that much, but this one had a cherry in the center, and some kind of warm liqueur oozing into his mouth when he crushed the cherry. The door into the garden – the bit of grass and one tree, which they called a garden – stood open. He crossed into the doorway and stopped. Paper lanterns hung upon the branches of the tree. She'd dragged the coffee table out onto the grass and covered it with purple, and on the purple sweated bottles of Prosecco. A couple of white blobs leaned against the tree, which Corin finally recognized as sheep cut hastily out of poster board. Dorinda herself sat upon a stool in the shade. Across her knees lay the lute he had bought her back in their graduate school days, which she had learned to play – for his sake, she said – better than indifferently. Her hair was combed down and shot out half-golden outriders in the breeze. Her dress was crinkly white linen, plain and old fashioned, though like him, now, she was crowned and draped in garlands of flowers. It had been a long time since she'd picked up the lute, and the tune she was plucking out at a hesitant Largo was difficult to recognize.

She giggled and waved her hand in the air each time she made a mistake, as though the hand waving and the giggle erased the mistake and set it all back to Start. Before any mistakes were made. When the lambs' down ruffled with zephyrs. When every goose was a swan. When it was pure. When Corin and Dorinda first sat upon the sward and confessed their love.

Corin suddenly recognized the tune. He eased down on the grass beside her and began to sing, high up, in the key the lute provided, “When to her lute Corinna sings – ” It was not his key; it was hers. He strained to meet her voice as it floated down toward his lazy baritone, and each time, with each effort, it grew higher, more silvery, until her voice mingled in his was as nearly one voice as it had ever been. ■

COURTESY OF THE ARTIST



Beginning Again by Kimberly Wheaton
(oil and cold wax on cradled wood panel, 48x36)

AS THOUGH THE
HAND WAVING
AND THE GIGGLE
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FINALIST, 2018 JAMES APPLEWHITE POETRY PRIZE**BY JEANNE JULIAN***Prelude to Lust*

At the county fair, leaving the blaze of afternoon
 for the dim aridity of the animal pavilion, woman
 and child are ambushed by odors of confinement:
 bedding straw, feed, stalls needing to be mucked out.
 Her granddaughter's hand, held in hers, seems to change:
 spring blossom becoming something viscid, overripe.
 She remembers that summer night, that boy,
 his short-sleeved white shirt, armpits damp with sweat,
 leading her from darkness into a darker barn:

They stroll side by side between pens, between
 circles of light cast down from metal-shaded bulbs
 dangling from the rafters. Sheep stir
 in a muddled state between waking and slumber.
 Among them, flannel-shirted 4-H youths
 sleep on cots in shadow, arms draped over eyes,
 bare feet poking from blankets, looking to her
 like drowned sailors washed up on a barren shore.

The boy stops, points coolly to a ram's hindquarters,
 enormous testicles – she knows that word –
 soft potent stones hanging in their leathery slings.
 The boy's arm slides around her waist.
 And now what?
 Without a word he steers her
 toward the exit, his hand along her hip.

He walks her through the neon luminosity
 of the midway's towering, grinding apparatus.
 Imagining the thrill of shared peril, she consents
 to the battered steel capsule of The Zipper.
 The carry smirks, locks the bar across their laps.
 During the jolting ascents, spins, downward plunges,
 repeated over and over, she knows
 there will be no celebratory kiss at landing

JEANNE JULIAN has published a chapbook, *Blossom and Loss* (Longleaf Press, 2015), and her poems have appeared in *Prairie Wolf Press Review*, *Poetry Quarterly*, *Lascaux Prize 2016 Anthology*, *pacific REVIEW*, *The RavensPerch*, and other journals, and won awards from *The Comstock Review*, *Naugatuck River Review*, The North Carolina Poetry Society, and the Asheville Writers' Workshop. She grew up in Ohio and pursued a career in higher education administration in Massachusetts before moving to New Bern, NC, where she is active with the Coastal Photo Club, Community Artists Gallery & Studios, Carteret Writers, Pamlico Writers Group, and the Nexus Poets' open mic series.

to mark their mutual survival of the dizzying ride,
 because her gut revolts. She's sick, re-tasting
 root beer she'd managed to sip, before,
 too nervous to eat in his so-craved company.
 Swallowing, she hopes he does not notice.
 They dismount, and she, drained and woozy,
 yearns for that previous partial embrace.
 But the evening ends. He takes her to Gate B,
 where she will meet Charlene, who'll drive her home.

Eventually, of course, she learned he had some other girl –
 a fiancée, maybe – back in his hometown.
 Someone, meaning to be kind, revealed that ugly truth.
 “That’s her problem,” she’d said haughtily.
 But of course her downfall was the unknown rival.
 He never visited or wrote.
 And of course she lived to feel
 most degrees of sexual heat,
 after that lewd, undelivered promise
 in the barn, the kiss of never-to-be.

As this hot afternoon drags toward evening,
 she feels oppressed by musty scents, the longing
 in the bleating of lambs.
 She lifts the little girl into her arms,
 as if to shield her former self from all that was to be.
 “Let’s go, sweetheart,” she says.
 “I’ll buy you cotton candy and a big blue balloon.”
 “No,” the child says, certain.
 “Pink. Pink is what I want.”



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Looking Back (acrylic, graphite, glazes, oil stick, and graffiti paint on linen, 48x36) by Krista Harris

A graduate of ECU, **KRISTA HARRIS** received her BFA in Painting in 1977. Since that time, she has gone on to a career as a professional painter whose paintings are represented by galleries across the country, exhibited in International Art Fairs in Chicago, New York, Miami, and Palm Beach, and hang in numerous private and corporate collections, including Duke Cancer Institute in Durham, NC; Ingenious Corp in London, England; Mesa University in Colorado; Ritz Carlton Hotel in Grand Cayman Island; and Northern Trust Bank in Chicago. See more of her work on her [website](#).

BLUE BLAZES

a review by Catherine Carter

Beth Copeland. *Blue Honey*.
Milton, DE: Broadkill River
Press, 2018.

Dede Wilson. *Under the Music
of Blue*. Athens, GA: FutureCycle
Press, 2017.

CATHERINE CARTER lives with her husband in Cullowhee, near Western Carolina University, where she teaches in the English Education and Professional Writing programs. She reviews for *NCLR* regularly, and her poems have appeared in several issues. She has been a frequent James Applewhite Poetry Prize finalist. In 2017, she received third place for “Billy Collins Pours Me a Beer” (published in *NCLR* 2018), and in 2018, she won the Applewhite prize. Read her winning poem “Womb-Room” in the 2019 print issue. Carter’s work has also appeared in *Best American Poetry 2009*, *Orion*, *Poetry*, *Asheville Poetry Review*, *Tar River Review*, and *Ploughshares*, among other literary magazines. She serves as assistant poetry editor for *Cider Press Review* and as the Jackson County regional representative for North Carolina Writers’ Network-West.

It would be difficult to find two books of poetry from a single year that benefit more from being read together than Dede Wilson’s *Under the Music of Blue* and Beth Copeland’s *Blue Honey*. Both mid-career books by white women, each delves into the anguish of family life through repeated images of blueness (twelve poems in Copeland’s book contain references to blue, as do four in Wilson’s). Both are elegiac, plumbing the “blues” evoked by their difficult subject matter – the loss of a child, the dissolution brought about by dementia, and the disappointments and failures of marriage. Both offer hope without certainty, and both finally stand upon the only support they have – the power of the telling, of the word. Otherwise, however, the two books sing very different blues.

Dede Wilson’s *Under the Music of Blue* centers around the loss of a daughter through a series of recurring motifs of stars (often the kind that children stick onto ceilings), dust, sleep, and morning/mourning in poems ranging from the formal to the very spare – spare to the point where the poems sometimes dip into the waters of the slightly surreal. *Under the Music of Blue* writes its own epigraph, beginning with an ekphrastic meditation on a bronze figure by Barlach, “The Ecstatic Man,” whom the speaker conflates with Matsuo Bash, the seventeenth-century Edo poet and master of the haiku. Wilson envisions him “whipped” by winter sleet and slogging along in clothes weighted by rain, but suddenly shouting in excitement when “the flawless word / breaks in your breast like a cord” – only to be “drowned out” by “the wind’s skirl / and the flint of the road.” The collection follows this model,

offering push-pull of hope, endurance, and only occasional peace with the battering of the world as it is.

The first section of the book seeks “to wake” from the despair of loss, and, conversely, to find respite in elusive sleep, where “self is all you want / to lose.” The speaker of “Trying to Sleep in the Butterfly Room” has lost a daughter, possibly due to drowning. The second section widens its focus, encompassing both the son who survived and the speaker’s relationship with her own declining mother. This mother both waited for her daughter “to slip in the deep, to live” (in “City Pool”) and found it almost impossible to enjoy anything easily, living in “silences we found too true to bear” (“When Mama Smiled”). In “Gathering Fears,” the poet “fill[s her] pockets with nails / someone has tossed in the street / to ruin our tires, to wound our feet.” In “The Blue Silk Lounging Pajamas,” she invokes the memory of her mother’s pajamas, the ones that “grew dearer and dearer, being lost” as emblems of the things we fear and those we cherish more closely when we lose them.

This section introduces the motif of dust – dust which both obscures a photograph memory and allows the speaker to recall the scent of a lover’s pillow in “Dissonance of Dust on This Old Sunrise Photo: A Triptych.” This dust both clouds and shines in “Youth” as the speaker’s younger self spins a convertible around an empty field:

stirring a cloud
of dust so high
the sun shone through,
gilt-edged,
and you so young
this could go on
and on, the tilt
of the car, the way
you soared
into and over
the dust to find
that clear sky
you were made of.



PHOTOGRAPH BY ALICE OSBORN

The speaker also reflects in “Judgement” on the “faded rag-stitched quilt // of days I’ve lost” as she writes “the poem my life built.”

In the third section, the poet’s voice resonates most strongly as she turns her attention more and more to that voice – to her own ability to speak in response to the world’s hardships, fears, and losses, to her voice’s interplay with others and her desire for the skill embodied in “The Chinese Master’s Brush.” In the midst of “let[ting] her mother’s sorrows in” (in “Feckless Rueing”), she both remembers former abundance (in “I Speak to My Son of Old Excesses” and “Happy Hours”) and begins to expand upon the fraught beauties attendant even upon age, change, and deprivation. Like the kintsugi which Copeland evokes to describe her mother in *Blue Honey*, Wilson’s speaker seems something like a broken vase mended with gold – never unbroken, but no less beautiful for the breaking.

Some of the collection’s most striking poems appear in this section, in which the poet becomes willing to speak of what she has hitherto concealed even as “wounds moan / in the throat of the wind” (“Breaking Old Silences”). She wonders, perhaps wistfully in “To the Friend Whose House Was Destroyed By Lightning,” “how it feels to be released // from all we hold and keep / and what keeps us.” Imaginative empathy and experience allow her to understand the twisted postures of saguaro cacti and show them to us as old women. In “Unwrapping the Mummy,” she washes the stains of lives out of cloth as she unwraps a metaphorical mummy, recognizing that “we make so much of remain.” She experiences tinnitus, in rhymed couplets, as the “Secrets the kettle is begging to spill. / Apples singing as they’re peeled.” This poem, “Tintinnabulations, or How

to Live with Tinnitus,” could well be the model for the book itself, begging to spill its secrets, peeling (and peeling) itself painfully into song.

This section rises toward the book’s final two poems, “Leaving the Vineyard” and “Longing for the Pleiades.” In the former, drinking wine and meditating upon the fact that “A grape that hasn’t suffered / will never give something good,” the speaker remembers her lost child once more, willingly, this time, saying now, “I don’t mind. / Grapes are rolling over / the sympathy of my tongue. / I’m pouring the years into wine.”

Had the book ended here, readers who have also endured the deaths of children might find it too pat; but the final poem recalls a long-gone house, the ceiling “papered in stars,” which ignites a journey of memory through star imagery from the poet’s past. The ceiling stars merge into the images of radioactive isotopes onscreen during an unnamed test for disease: “I watched / the galaxies of my heart / gather on a screen, not knowing / what they’d tell.” If the test reveals anything, readers aren’t told; in the final stanza, the lamplight tells nothing, and the speaker concludes in “Longing for the Pleiades” on a question: “If the stars have all gone out, / how long will they take / to let us know?” The poet pours her years and sorrows into the wine of experience and words, but in the end she is reminded again of how little she knows, and how little anything can tell.

ABOVE Dede Wilson reading at the Weymouth Center for the North Carolina Poetry Society’s Winter Meeting, Southern Pines, 22 Jan. 2011

Louisiana native DEDE WILSON is a journalist who now resides in Charlotte, NC. Her previous collections include three from Main Street Rag – *Sea of Small Fears* (2001), *One Nightstand* (2004), and *Eliza: The New Orleans Years* (2010)– and *Near Waking* (Finishing Line Press, 2013). The poet’s awards include the Main Street Rag Chapbook Competition and the Blumenthal Readers’ and Writers’ competition, and her work has also been published in such venues as *Asheville Poetry Review*, *Carolina Quarterly*, *Tar River Poetry*, *Painted Bride Quarterly*, and *Southern Poetry Review*.

Blue Honey examines the dementia that reverses **Beth Copeland's** relationship with her parents until she becomes the parent and they the children. That wrenching journey toward the loss (and guilty relief) of the inevitable end allows the poet to interrogate and rewrite family history. These poems are largely written in free verse couplets, and their literal level is always clearly established. If Wilson's poems are brave enough to risk the potential confusion of the oblique, Copeland's are brave enough to risk the potential prosiness of explanation – and to transcend it through the surprises of intense enjambment, vivid imagery, and unexpected but inevitable shifts from one level of understanding to another.

As *Blue Honey* opens, the speaker remembers childhood and her father's assurance that a sudden sting is not the fault of the bee, but she also recognizes, as the poem "Good Intentions" turns, that it was not her own, either: "But I didn't mean / to kill it. I didn't / even see it until / it stung." This sting becomes the front bracket for the whole collection, which ends in an effort to remind her father of the beekeeper he had been and to reclaim his fraught legacy through telling it. But it is also the premonitory evocation of both the volume's grief and its promise, ending:

I will love
and be loved, sting and be
stung. No one

gets out
alive.

PHOTOGRAPH BY PHIL RECH



From the second poem, this tightly organized collection explores the struggle to know who we are in the absence of those who made and shaped us; most of the first section's poems are dedicated either to the mother's transformation or the father's. However, it also begins to illuminate the problematic nature of the parents' long union. The missionary father who moved his family across the world in "Escape Artist" becomes the demented but crafty old man periodically escaping from his care facility; his final escape will be into death, but we also learn that he is already "A master of the art of escape, he left her // to cross the ocean with four little girls while he / took a whirlwind trip around the globe, sending postcards."

The second section chronicles the parents' move toward death and the siblings' grief; it also further develops the contradictions and tensions of the parents' marriage,

foreshadowing the unfolding of the narrator's own troubled marriage in the third section. The parents' wedding rings are lost during the funerary rites; later, the speaker's husband will temporarily lose his. We learn in "What I Remember When He Dies" that the Christian father could also hold a child upside down by the ankles while slapping her, but the startling moment of abuse is eerily counterbalanced by the poem's turn. The speaker recognizes that physical battering is less painful than some of the things her parents actually said, and

that the brunt
of his palm on my butt

was a blessing because it meant
his sin was greater

than mine and I
had been forgiven.

Another powerful poem of the second section is "Pretty," in which, as a doctor notices that

BETH COPELAND was born in Japan to American missionaries. She is the author of the 1999 Bright Hill Press winner *Traveling Through Glass* (Bright Hill Press, 2000) and *Transcendental Telemarketer* (BlazeVOX, 2012; reviewed in NCLR Online 2014). *Blue Honey* won the 2017 Dogfish Head Poetry Prize. Copeland holds an MFA from Bowling Green State University, teaches creative writing at St. Andrews University, and lives in Gibson, NC.

ABOVE **Beth Copeland at the Dogfish Head Poetry Prize presentation party in Lewes, DE, 9 Dec. 2017**

the mother must have once been beautiful, the speaker remembers herself at age ten, asking her mother if she were “pretty.” Her answer, “You’ll never be a great beauty . . . *But you’re pleasing enough,*” caused the daughter to recognize herself as “plain” and to remember that even asking the question, in a missionary household, was considered vanity. However, the poet, now a mother to her own mother, rewrites the history.

Now I smooth
her wild hair, so

sparse you can see her scalp. Yes,
I tell the clipboard

clutching doctor, my eyes locked
on his. *My mother was [beautiful.] She still is.*

Copeland’s signature enjambments and line breaks are especially visible here. The break on “clipboard” highlights the conflation of the doctor who can’t see her mother’s existing beauty with his bureaucratic function; “clutching doctor, my eyes locked” fuses the gaze and the clutch, suggesting the desperation and defiance of the statement; and “*She still is*” locks the statement with the solid emphasis of two spondees. This act of re-vision, offering her mother what the mother could not provide for the poet, is a compelling moment of reckoning, forgiveness, and independence. Copeland chooses not to repeat her parents’ mistakes; the act of speaking, of acknowledgment, is simultaneous with the act of forgiveness.

It is an act that seems to serve her well in the book’s final section, in which the painful marriage of the parents recurs in the poet’s struggles with her own spouse – who pushes her away into one or more separations. Nor does the speaker soft-pedal her own contributions to the divide; in “*Sweet Basil*” she acknowledges a flirtation which she ultimately eschews in favor of returning to her husband, the man with whom she plays “Tombstone Bingo” (counting cemeteries while driving):

We stop

keeping score, not
wanting to know who’ll

be the first to draw the last
breath, knowing no one wins

this contest.

This statement rewords the initial poem’s statement that no one gets out alive to cast light on the “contests” of marriage. The narrator has learned that it is the brevity of mortal existence that makes forgiveness imperative.

The book ends, not where it began, but in a kind of spiral from it, with “Sandhills Gold.” In the year of her father’s death, the poet writes, beekeepers gathered some blue honey whose origin no one knows, honey her father never found. As the speaker attempts to remind her father about his beekeeping, the process leads her to consciously choose what she will remember: a kind speech of her father’s, which renders her

a queen without

a country or a hive, standing in slanted light
as bees droned

around my head, weaving a crown of wings
and buzzing with sweetness.

But the poem goes on to spread grief like crystallized honey on toast; the choice to remember sweetness undoes neither the grief, nor the unbearable loss which must be borne, nor the long, corrosive action of “sorrow, anger, and remorse.” All Copeland – and Wilson – can keep is the power to tell, the words that are the blood which become the mysterious blue honey; like another poet,* what they could not part with, they have kept:

I want my words to flow
like a vein

onto the blue-lined page as holy
honey flowed from his white

hives onto our bread, our tongues, our lives. ■

* The subsequent passage is from Robert Frost’s “I Could Give All to Time,” in Edward Connery Lathem, ed., *The Poetry of Robert Frost: The Collected Poems*, complete and unabridged (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969) 334–35.

FINALIST, 2018 JAMES APPLEWHITE POETRY PRIZE

BY FRANCES J. PEARCE

Jump

One Friday night, before things
wafted awry, my parents
watched the debate on our new

black & white TV set. My father said
if Kennedy's elected, we'll have war.
Two years later, my first-grade

class joined in air-raid drills.
And then one day, a squadron
flew overhead. Theirs or ours –

we did not know. Our school,
located not far from a swarm
of military bases, lay in the path of –

something. All the while, a classmate
sobbed as her mother lay
in a maternity ward waiting to give

birth. Cindy feared she'd never get
to meet her teensy brother or sister.
She prayed the hospital wouldn't

be blown to smithereens. We survived.
Our city was not bombed. Only
recently did I learn that a single

Soviet submariner stood firm
between us and all-out war.
But when I think back, what I like

to remember is my mother
standing outside, apron still on,
turning the rope attached to a pillar

of our front porch, while children
from our street, and the next one over,
lined up for a chance to jump.



COURTESY OF AND © WITH ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG FOUNDATION

Retroactive I, 1936 (oil and silkscreen ink on canvas, 84x60)
by Robert Rauschenberg

FRANCES J. PEARCE moved to North Carolina at eight years old and has lived in various places across the state, including South Mills, Chapel Hill, Cary, Raleigh, and Burlington. She now resides in Mount Pleasant, SC. Her publications include a chapbook, *Those Carolina Parakeets Once Far From Extinct* (Finishing Line Press, 2014), and poetry in such venues as *Kakalak*, *Fall Lines*, and *Archive: South Carolina Poetry since 2005*. "Jump" is her first poem in *NCLR*.

Texas native **ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG** (1925–2008) served in the Navy and then studied art at the Kansas City Art Institute, Academia Julian in Paris, and Black Mountain College in North Carolina. He is known for his 1950s Combines. His art is featured in many galleries around the world such as Pace Gallery in Hong Kong, Kanal-Centre Pompidou in Brussels, the Barcelona museum of contemporary art, and Weatherspoon Art Museum in North Carolina. Read more about him on the Robert Rauschenberg [website](#).

FINALIST, 2018 JAMES APPLEWHITE POETRY PRIZE**BY WAYNE JOHNS***Renovations*

I should have paid more attention, tried to get closer, as a child watching my father restore, rewire, repair, then scale a ladder and walk across the ceiling of the world. He was always going up, coming down, with tools, bucket, dangling cigarette, balanced in his calloused hands. I can't really say, since we never touched, that his hands were rough. Though given all he did for a living, they must've been. Not for a living so much as to provide: the roof, the food, the yard. He also fed and buried all the pets – birds, rabbits, dogs – in the back corner of the yard. Even the runt our mutt kept pushing from the box. I kept putting it back, tried to feed it with a dropper, then cried and watched from inside as he jabbed the ground, dug his heel into the rolled shoulder of the shovel and stomped. Over and over. I watched so I'd know where to dig, though I don't know what I thought I'd find. I never knew his silence was a kindness. Of course I've seen his hands, even held one, briefly, during Mother's prayers at supper. That isn't true. He'd hold his index finger out, as if pointing at me. And I would take it, without question, like an infant. Because holding hands is intimate? Effeminate? And only gluttons and ingrates dare to ask for something else, for more?



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Impossible Things (oil and cold wax on wood panel, 36x40) by Mark Bettis

WAYNE JOHNS received the Rane Arroyo prize for his chapbook, *The Exclusion Zone* (Seven Kitchens Press, 2018). His first full-length collection, *Antipsalms* (Unicorn Press, 2018), received the Editor's Choice prize from the publisher. His poems have appeared in *New England Review*, *Ploughshares*, *Image*, *Prairie Schooner*, and *Best New Poets*, among others. This poem is his first *NCLR* publication.

MARK BETTIS attended the Ringling College of Art and Design in Sarasota, FL, with a concentration in computer animation. He experiments with oil paint, cold wax, marble dust, and many other elements and offers classes and workshops for aspiring artists at his studio in the River Arts District (RAD) of Asheville, NC. See more of his work on his [website](#).

BEAUTY MAKES SENSE

a review by
Hannah Crane Sykes

Martin Arnold. *Earthquake Owner's Manual*. Greensboro, NC: Unicorn Press, 2014.

Alan Michael Parker. *The Ladder*. North Adams, MA: Tupelo Press, 2016.

HANNAH CRANE SYKES is a native of western North Carolina who currently lives and teaches in the Piedmont region. She holds degrees in English from Western Carolina University and UNC Greensboro and has become a regular reviewer for *NCLR*.

MARTIN ARNOLD is the assistant poetry editor of *storySouth* and an assistant professor of English at Gullford College in Greensboro, NC. His poems have been featured in many publications, including *Best New Poets 2012*, *Verse Daily*, *Crazyhorse*, and *Denver Quarterly*. *Earthquake Owner's Manual* won the 2013-2014 Unicorn Press First Book Contest.

ALAN MICHAEL PARKER is Houchens Professor of English at Davidson College in Davidson, NC. He has written four novels and eight poetry collections, and his poems have been featured in *The New Yorker* and *The Yale Review*, among other magazines. He has received many awards, including the North Carolina Poetry Society's 2017 Brockman-Campbell Award for *The Ladder*.

In keeping with great poetic tradition, two recent poetry publications invite readers to examine the place of wonder and truth in the everyday world. In Martin Arnold's *Earthquake Owner's Manual* and Alan Michael Parker's *The Ladder*, readers will find poetry that emphasizes the absolute beauty of the very ordinary stuff of life. Martin Arnold's collection presents a fresh voice with often playful expressions of poetry. The sections are thoughtfully crafted to revolve around the earthquake motif with titles that trace the full experience: "Falling Objects," "Aftershocks," and "Elastic Rebound Theory." Some poems critique today's talking heads, and others pay tribute to days gone by or to the natural world. Encountering a collection titled *The Ladder*, one may recall other poetic ladders, like those in Frost's "After Apple Picking" and Yeats's "The Circus Animals Desertion." While Parker's voice is his own, he is standing alongside great figures as he addresses the pure joy and the intense agony of life. It is, however, the hovering between the corporeal and the spiritual that readers might find most compelling in both books, which are full of lines that closely bind the explained and the ethereal, the everyday and the spiritual.

In some cases, the voices in these poems draw distinct correlations between what we can see to be important and what we eventually deem important after consideration. Many poems in Arnold's *Earthquake Owner's Manual* marry two opposing forces into poetic harmony; these oppositions are achieved by the speaker's articulate word choices. For example, "Bullied by Lilies" merges the plush world of "leather couches

aimed at a plasma TV" with the lush natural world of "the music of trumpet vines recorded in each drop of honey, / counting gold as it drips from the showerhead of a wasp's nest." The speaker captures the artificial beauty of the material world: an Infinity in the driveway, DVDs perfectly organized on built-in bookcases, and glass walls that filter in sunlight. The speaker then relieves the tension of the man-forced world with images of the natural world: "scarab beetles jewelizing the ferns" and the breeze whispering to cherry blossoms. The poem artfully conveys the struggle of a speaker caught in two kinds of beauty, who ultimately knows which one is superior. Similarly, "Enough" in Parker's *The Ladder* merges the material world with our innate desire for beauty as the speaker conveys first a fascination with a watch that doesn't keep time and then an eventual reckoning with Time itself. Like Arnold's speaker in "Bullied by Lilies," the speaker in "Enough" comes to terms with the tension of trying to live in this world, especially with artistic sensibilities: "I showed everyone all my ideas, / my thunderous, ticking heart." One recognizes that same nakedness of Yeats's artistic voice in Parker's "A Coat." Like Yeats in his later work, Parker's speaker ends anger, tracing the past, and sadness and lies down by a stream, his anxiety succumbing to the natural world.

Both collections also deal in the delightful as they play with form and voice. In *Earthquake Owner's Manual*, Arnold intersperses the collection with a handful of poems called "Cloud Collisions, Cloud Collisions." In these beautiful interruptions, the speaker presents child-mind meditations that bind



ILLUSTRATION BY FELICIA VAN BORK

many of the other poems together. The first of the “Cloud” poems consider questions like “why don’t we appreciate each moment?” and “what is happiness?” By the final “Cloud” poem, the reader is presented with the meditative lines: “To be pure again, / You must descend from the heavens / To crawl through soil and rock / Toward the river beneath us all.” The “Cloud” poems mimic the appearance of their namesake; they float on the page, disregarding traditional forms of indentation and line justification.

Much like Arnold’s “Cloud” poems, Parker’s “Three Possibilities” distills great matters down to simpler terms. Again, we see a body of water; this time it’s a river, which becomes the River of Time, the poem’s central setting. The images of seeds, cherries, and a young boy fishing weave through the poem to take us to the banks of the river, realizing a desire to be good, to be whole, to be made of love but ultimately

Neither to be lost between
possibilities,
nor to be swept along
in the River of Time,
where I am, what I have been.

The speaker’s delight is found not so much in form but in this searching, the chance to be. Again, both poets bring the reader to the natural world and emphasize the need for humanity’s connection to nature.

Perhaps the most beautiful poems in both collections – and the ones that very well may stick with a reader long after the first reading – are the poems that describe moments of ordinary life with ethereal language, lifting the words off the page. Parker’s “Reading Antony and Cleopatra at the Airport Again” is one such gift, describing a bored kiosk attendant reading a worn copy of Shakespeare’s play. The speaker allows his imagination to take flight, creating a love story for the teenage girl who is selling trinkets at the airport. The girl and the speaker artfully transcend the space of the airport: “how theatrical the curve of the earth, / the arms of the beloved, the lighted sky / minus the moon. The moon would, / of course, finish the scene, signify.” We see the power of literature, of art, and of the imagination in the lines of this poem. Arnold’s “Appetite for Destruction” describes two friends skipping school in a Caprice to smoke pot and listen to the Guns N’ Roses album. Like Parker’s “Airport” poem, Arnold’s speaker is transformed, and we know the absolute thrill of this rite of teen life because of lines like “Whatever Bunsen burner alchemical miracle we miss / I’d gladly exchange today / for those guitars vibrating through me.”

Both poets further explore levels of human intimacy in their play with language: Arnold in the midst of the mundane and Parker in the midst of the ache it is to love someone. Arnold’s poem “The Ignoble Sublime” celebrates the kind of intimacy in which one feels comfortable enough to release a “gastronomic expression.” The speaker acknowledges that we spend much of our lives pretending that we’re not human and that we are perfect; how beautiful to find someone around whom we can be human and our most natural. This prose poem continues: “Today you take a moment to appreciate releasing the spirit trapped inside the body’s coiling labyrinth like a soul rising up after the body expires, like a prayer catapulted over the colossal walls of heaven.” By contrast, Parker’s “A Poem for Sally” expresses a father’s desire to “swallow whole / his youngest daughter” to protect her from herself and from the world; he’ll swallow some moonlight and water to give her peace and light and maybe a horse to ride on the river’s shore. The ache of this poem’s lines speaks clearly to anyone whose heart breaks to see the brokenness of a loved one; indeed, the speaker could almost be any parent who fears for their child in this world.

Certainly anyone who encounters these collections will want to return to their lines again and again. These accessible poems speak across so much of the human experience that readers will acknowledge them, thinking “I know this, too,” as they consider their places in the material and spiritual worlds. ■

FINALIST, 2018 JAMES APPLEWHITE POETRY PRIZE**BY CRAIG THOMPSON FRIEND***Day at a Historic Park*

I sorrow
 walking a gently hilly countryside
 once traversed by Shakori and Eno,
 Sissipahaw and Occaneechi,
 Tutelo and Saponi.

A gently hilly countryside,
 taken by Others who,
 pretending the Indigenous disappeared,
 ignored those who continued to traverse
 the ancient homelands
 that had been fertilized
 with Tuscarora
 blood.



I sorrow,
 touring mansion and fields
 saturated with the sweat of the enslaved:
 blacksmith Dick and cobbler Davey;
 cooks Milly and Charlotte;
 Chaney and Sabina, nurse maids;
 Jim Gundy, aged about 30 years,
 about 5 feet 10 inches high, well made,
 who once belonged to Edward Tansit
 of Franklin County
 who owned his wife,
 ran away in February 1820;
 and Weston, dark mulatto,
 about 24 or 25 years of age,
 5 feet 4 or 5 inches high, stout, and well made,
 who ran away in April 1827
 and went constantly
 armed with
 a gun.



I sorrow,
sitting in a chapel built to bring hope
to those not allowed to have it,
echoing with centuries of marriage rites
that gave custody to husbands,
so that he had right to her
even against herself,
making Peggy forfeit when she wed,
indebting Nancy when husband died,
pretending that being covered
meant being secure.

>>>



I sorrow,
 peering in the windows of a kitchen,
 out-building for a popular inn
 where Polly laundered and Jacob stabled,
 propertyless and illiterate
 where their son Andrew was born;
 where wife and child went uncovered
 when husband died,
 trapped by laws,
 condemned to poverty,
 their only redemption:
 they were not
 enslaved.



I sorrow,
 standing before a law office,
 workplace for George and James,
 justices of superior courts,
 conspiring with fear and enslavement,
 patriarchy and inequality
 to sustain and strengthen the common law,
 to keep the peace,
 restricting the lives of
 natives and blacks and women and the poor,
 to reward those
 who already had
 enough.

I wander among shadows of sins
 that I cannot ignore
 for they are written in time and land.
 Revering land,
 validating narratives,
 celebrating lives,
 I sorrow.

CRAIG THOMPSON FRIEND is CHASS Distinguished Graduate Professor of History and Director Emeritus of Public History at NC State University. He was the 2017–2018 President of the Society for Historians of the Early American Republic. Raised in Dallas, NC, he has a BA from Wake Forest University, an MA from Clemson University, and a PhD from the University of Kentucky. His published historical works include *Kentucke's Frontiers* (Indiana University Press, 2010), winner of the 2011 Kentucky Governor's Award. He is currently working on a biography of Lunsford Lane of Raleigh. This poem is his first submission to *NCLR*.

Photographs taken by the poet in the Mordecai Historic Park in Raleigh, NC; in order of appearance, the Mordecai House, the St. Mark's Chapel, Andrew Johnson's Birthplace, the Badger-Iredell Law Office, and the Smokehouse

BY JOEL THOMAS

WHIMSYTON, NC

2018
 Alex Albright
 Creative Nonfiction Prize
 HONORABLE MENTION



... authenticity has become a growing market ...
 Whether this arises from a desire to find getaways on the cheap or a desire to experience the “real” local culture, nearby small towns are prime destinations.

Authenticity is in high demand in the modern South. With the rise of city centers dominated by chain stores and impersonal architecture, and surrounded by suburban sprawl, especially in areas like Charlotte and Atlanta, authenticity has become a growing market for the urban middle class. This has manifested itself in a number of ways: adventure races where you pay people exorbitant amounts of money to run through an artificial swamp, week-long “mission” trips to exotic locales, but especially in the search for authentic getaways close to home. Whether this arises from a desire to find getaways on the cheap or a desire to experience the “real” local culture, nearby small towns are prime destinations. For example, I recently saw an article from a Charlotte lifestyle [website](#)

titled “11 Reasons to Embrace Whimsy and Drive 45 Minutes to the Totally Adorable Town of Lincolnton, NC.” This sort of article isn’t atypical, there are a million of them, essentially identical, about a million different small towns floating around the internet, but this one caught my eye because Lincolnton, a rural North Carolina town on the edge of the Appalachian foothills, is where I spent my later childhood and teenage years, and which I still, in some sense, call home.

The eleven whimsical reasons were familiar – the coffee shop, the bookstore run by my friend Richard, even the huge pottery jugs with faces on them, a local tradition, lining Main Street – but, at the same time, the descriptions seemed completely alien to me. They all had a sense of

Having grown up in Cambridge, England, Memphis, TN, and Lincolnton, NC, JOEL THOMAS currently lives, writes, and studies at the Virginia Military Institute in Lexington, VA. Selecting this essay for honorable mention in the Alex Albright Creative Nonfiction Prize competition, final judge Randall Kenan called it “distinguished” and remarked upon it “having something refreshing to say and a refreshing way of telling it.”

Contemporary photographs featured within this layout were taken by Sally Thomas, the author’s mother and, coincidentally, second-place recipient in the 2018 James Applewhite Poetry Prize competition. Read her other finalist poem in this issue and her second place poem in the 2019 print issue.

The postcards featured here are from the [North Carolina Postcards](#) collection at UNC Chapel Hill.



I can't tell you how many times people have remarked that Lincolnton is "just like Mayberry" to me, even people who have lived there their whole lives.

they were adorable, they were whimsical, they were everything a Charlotte soccer mom had ever dreamed of in a cute small town, but they weren't real. Not even the town in the article was real. It was no longer a place, but an aesthetic, a prop to be used in someone else's fantasy.

This reduction shouldn't really be surprising. The desire to seek simpler, cleaner living in the country and small towns, and, more importantly, the wholehearted belief that this sort of life actually exists there, isn't new. You can find it in old shows like *Andy Griffith*, where nothing ever happens in Mayberry that can't be solved by neighborliness and good old-fashioned country wisdom. You see it today in the Hallmark Channel movies playing on TVs in waiting rooms year round: the hero or heroine ends up in a quaint small town, rediscovers what they've forgotten in college or the Marines or New York, meets a good ol' boy or girl, learns some home-spun truths from an elderly relative, and discovers the true meaning of home, family, and romance, supported and accepted by the quirky yet lovable population of the rustic little locale where the movie takes place.

The small town has a sort of Edenic quality to it in our collective imagination. Small-town America is depicted as the last pure place, innocent in the midst of urban corruption. People seem eager to believe it, as well. I can't tell you how many times people have remarked

unreality to them. They had become flattened somehow, deprived of everything that actually made them unique. They were quaint,

that Lincolnton is "just like Mayberry" to me, even people who have lived there their whole lives. There seems to be a desire for small towns to conform to an ideal of the quaint, both from those who live in them, as well as those who are just visiting. The ideal is also a lucrative marketing point: Lincolnton is now advertising itself as "Near the Mountains, Near the City, Near Perfect," as well as heavily emphasizing the "historic" nature of the town. The ideal is borne out in realty listings that string together countless precious adjectives and phrases to describe the area: "picturesque," "small-town charm," "warmth of the people." These descriptors appeal to both locals and prospective buyers alike: who wouldn't

want to live in a fairytale land of friendly farmers and rich cultural heritage?

We want this idealized reality because we want to be more like the small towns on TV. We want to believe that all of our problems are easily solvable by friendliness and country wisdom. We want to think that we're living in a privileged rural ideal where everything is blessed and everything is full, if not of purpose, then of a sort of contentment with our lot and a faith that we will go on living the way we have always lived, no matter what. Newcomers and visitors want to believe that they've left the mayhem of Charlotte or Chicago or the entire state of New Jersey and entered a place of calm and plenty, almost like a retirement village but with guns, land, and the occasional Confederate general's grave. What people are really seeking when they invest themselves in the ideal of the quaint,

The desire to seek simpler, cleaner living in the country and small towns, and, more importantly, the wholehearted belief that this sort of life actually exists there, isn't new.



however, is an escape from reality, and, because of this, it's unsustainable.

Lincolnton isn't "near perfect." Not everything is picturesque. Not all the people are warm. This imperfection isn't a downside, it's just the truth about the place – or really, any place. This reality should be obvious to anyone, but it seems to be something we're desperately trying to forget. We want to forget things like the opiate crisis raging around us; the weakening of the traditional social bonds like religion that, for better or worse, have historically lent a certain structure to life; and the new wave of hostility that has inflamed the underlying racial and political tensions we've tried our best to suppress or ignore. We want to forget the everyday afflictions of disappointment, anxiety, and malaise. We try to forget because it's easier. It's easier to retreat to Mayberry than to admit that we have a deep anxiety about our existence.

We chalk our problems up to insanity, bad parenting, or a million and one factors that absolve us of having to acknowledge that our demons are very much ours, inherent in the nature of the place, not just the property of a small subset of people. We want to create a cocoon that separates good, respectable people from the haggard meth heads and middle-aged drug dealers who populate the "Who's in Jail?" section of the local paper. We want to exile them and assure ourselves that we're different from them on a fundamental level, that our children could never grow up to be them. It's easy to draw a line between good, enlightened townspeople, credits to their community and

invested in its success, and the great unwashed: rednecks, white trash, crazies, and weirdos. At best, this can manifest itself in an ego-serving sort of pity, sentimental conversations on "what must be done" about rural poverty, accompanied by a lot of sympathetic head shaking. At worst, it can lead to a deep disdain of how backwards or shiftless or stupid these people are, a hatred made even more bitter by proximity, and, all too often, the latter is papered over by the former.

Paradoxically, because the ideal of the quaint serves as a protective device against the less pleasant parts of life in a small town, it flattens the good parts

of the town. The town square in Lincolnton is very nice, but, if all value is assigned according to it being just "very nice" instead of it being the unique physical center of a distinct place, so are the town squares of a thousand and one other towns across the South. Many are even nicer. To portray Richard the bookstore owner as a sort of quirky movie character obscures the fact that he's actually a person with a distinct personality and set of experiences, not someone sent over from the casting department. A real place and real people can't be reduced to roles in a fantasy, and any attempts to make

them fit will always leave something

who wouldn't want to live
in a fairytale land
of friendly farmers and
rich cultural heritages?



crucial about them out. The very complexity that gives them their value will be glossed over in favor of a view of them that fits a certain brand and makes the place more palatable for consumption. The end result of this is that the town becomes what the people want it to be – one product among thousands, the town equivalent of one brand of bread among many on a grocery store shelf. The attempt to realize the ideal of the quaint, then,



lacks respect for a place as a place: in its fervor to make a place desirable, it makes it indistinct. There are towns several orders of magnitude more picturesque, more friendly, and more comfortable than Lincolnton, but there's only one Lincolnton, and any attempt to make it a better place to live must hinge on that understanding. Otherwise, it's doomed to failure.

The common factor in both of these reactions is that it places people who do not fit the ideal of the quaint outside the bounds of people who have a rightful claim to the place, making them, effectively, placeless. They're either threats, objects of pity, ignored, or misrepresented, not full participants in the collective life of the community. This placelessness is a phenomenon that has happened in every situation where humans have had to live together, and will probably continue to happen until we go extinct. But making someone placeless is all the more potent when it's combined with the ambition inherent in the quaint project, when those who aren't on board with the project or who seem, by their very existence, to contradict the message those committed to the project want to send to the world, to prospective property buyers, and to themselves are excluded. The result is that really the only sort of local color tolerated is a bloodless, brochure-ready sort, inoffensive and unrepresentative of reality.

A real place and real people can't be reduced to roles in a fantasy, and any attempts to the make them fit will always leave something crucial about them out.



The end result of this idealizing is that some towns start to feel like a sort of Potemkin village or a town-sized boutique. Stores are open for business, old folks walk hand in hand down the street, the sidewalks are well-maintained, but you're unable to imagine actually dwelling there. Everything is so picturesque that it can be dislocating. There's an amnesia around these places, the Blowing Rock, North Carolinas of the South, that seems to suggest that the town exists for no one but those who have come to enjoy the restaurants, take in the historic architecture, and fall into a soft hedonism. Even the war memorials and graveyards seem to be marketed in ways than deny the reality of grief, sadness, or loss. You can go see the tombs of Civil War generals on a carriage tour, marvel at their importance in history, and then be whisked on before

you notice the rest of the graveyard or think of war as war and death as death rather than a prelude to fame. You can go on thinking about how lovely it is to live where the people are warm, the scenery is beautiful, pain and loss are distant memories, and, above all, at no point are you forced to confront the complexities of reality. ■



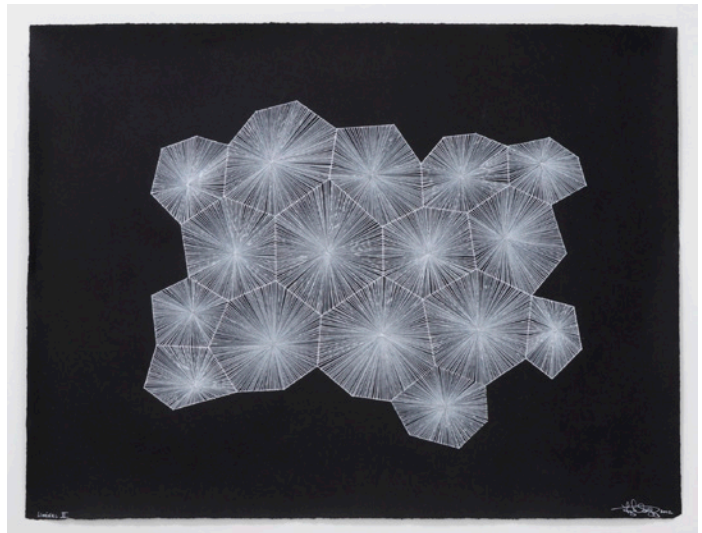
FINALIST, 2018 JAMES APPLEWHITE POETRY PRIZE**BY SALLY THOMAS***Magus at Twilight*

If we retraced our steps, what would we find?
 Street names changed, nothing we'd recognize.
 Strange faces, or none, at staring windows.
 Not that we knew anyone. Every man
 Pushing past in the crowd was a stranger
 Like us. Only we didn't sign our name.

On the other hand, we might find the town
 Restored to itself: doddering, asleep
 Beneath ordinary winter starlight.
 Nothing happening, no call for an inn
 Except as a lamplit place where old men
 Drink another silent round together.

Recall, all dark outbuildings look the same.
 We'd never know which it was, or whether
 The one we wanted hadn't been torn down.
 Imagine us three going door to door,
 Telling some incredulous householder,
Cows. A donkey, maybe. Also some sheep –
 As if he'd smack his head and say, *Oh, THAT.*

Put the dream away. Of what we saw there,
 Nothing's left, surely. Pass me the last wine
 And the heel of that bread. It's cold tonight.
 Look, a light's come shivering down the lane.
 Only an oil lamp: joiner's boy home late.
 His small flame sputters in the rising wind.



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Liminal III (ink on paper, 20x26) by Leigh Suggs

SALLY THOMAS received second place in the 2018 James Applewhite Poetry Prize competition, and that poem will be published in the 2019 print issue. She is the author of two poetry chapbooks, *Fallen Water* (2015) and *Richeldis of Walsingham* (2016), both from Finishing Line Press. Her poetry and fiction have appeared most recently in *Dappled Things*, *Presence*, *Relief: A Journal of Art and Faith*, *Ruminate*, *Wild Goose Poetry Review*, and *Windhover*. Other recent honors include the 2017 Editors' Choice Award in Fiction from *Relief* and Honorable Mention in *Ruminate's* Janet McCabe Poetry Prize competition. A native of Memphis, TN, she lived in Salt Lake City, UT, and in Cambridge, England, before settling ten years ago with her family in Lincolnton, NC.

LEIGH SUGGS was born in Boone, NC, and currently resides in Richmond, VA. She received her BFA from UNC Chapel Hill and her MFA in Craft and Material Studies from Virginia Commonwealth University. Her recent exhibits include shows at Penland Gallery in Penland, NC, and at Artspace in Raleigh, NC. Her work is a part of corporate collections, including the Federal Reserve Bank, Capital One, and Markel Corporation. She has been awarded several grants and honors, among them the North Carolina Fellowship Award, a city of Richmond CultureWorks Grant, and a residency at the Quirk Hotel & Gallery in Richmond, VA.

MORE THAN WORDS FOR PENELOPE NIVEN (1939–2014), 2018 INDUCTEE INTO THE NORTH CAROLINA LITERARY HALL OF FAME

adapted from presentation remarks by Jennifer Niven

“My life has been profoundly shaped and enriched because of North Carolina. I found here ‘life and food’ for the mind, the spirit, and the heart – past, present, and future.”—Penelope Niven

PHOTOGRAPH BY CHARLES FIORE



My mother was, as her daddy observed, the most complete person I have ever known. She once said, “I want my epitaph to testify that I have been a loving mother, wife, daughter, sister, aunt, and friend; and I have taught, written, and lived with joy.” My mother was and did all of those things.

She was what she and I like to call a citizen of the world, but geographically she lived most of her life in North Carolina. She grew up in a town outside of Charlotte, which was tiny but enormous in characters and stories. It was there she first started writing.

In her memoir, *Swimming Lessons*, she recalled:

Writing was my oldest dream, spun out of a love of words before I could even read them or shape them with a pencil – the words I heard my elders speak and sing, the words they read to me. I remember how words looked before I could decipher their geometry – black shapes laid out in their tidy mystery on the pages of storybooks . . . or the long columns of the daily newspaper. . . . When I was five, I stood between my parents in the Methodist church one Sunday morning, holding my own hymnal and pretending I could read the words of a song I knew by heart. Like the grownups around me, I glanced down at the words and up again. Suddenly, somewhere along about the third verse, I knew with absolute certainty that someday soon, I would be able to read. Then, I told myself, I would become a writer.*

When I was a little girl and discovering a similar love for the written word, my mom incorporated writing time into my childhood routine. She would sit at her big desk and I would sit at my small desk, and together we would write. But it’s a dream she didn’t realize professionally until she was forty. That was when she started volunteering at Connemara in Flat Rock, working with and organizing the Carl Sandburg papers. It was Sandburg’s

literary agent, Lucy Kroll, who proposed that my mother write his biography.

“Oh I couldn’t possibly,” my mom said. “I don’t know how. I’ve never written a biography.”

“Darling,” Lucy told her. “Every biographer has had to write a first biography.”

When I was in fifth grade I was asked to describe what my parents did for a living, and I told them: my father works at the college and my mother is obsessed with this dead guy. She went on to write, among other things, highly acclaimed biographies of two more dead guys and one live actor. She also taught creative writing at Salem College, and mentored numerous young writers around the world.

But the thing for which she is most remembered is the true, all-encompassing essence of herself.

As my cousin Bob says, “She had the gift of making everyone feel as if they were her favorite person. Even if you knew you weren’t.” She was my best friend, my inspiration. She taught me to never limit myself or my imagination. To never tell myself no. She taught me that I could be or do anything I put my mind to and to always make the world a lovelier place than I found it. She was my hero. She was my best. She was magic.

She always said to me, “I love you more than words,” which I took to mean two things: that she loved me more than words can say and also more than the words themselves. This meant everything because I knew what words meant to her. They were her first love and her lifeblood.

There is no way for me to express just how much this honor would have meant to her or how honored I am to accept on her behalf. So on behalf of my mother and myself, I thank you more than words. ■

* Penelope Niven, *Swimming Lessons: Life Lessons from the Pool, from Diving in to Treading Water* (Harcourt, 2004) 18–19.

ABOVE Jennifer Niven at the North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame induction ceremony at the Weymouth Center, Southern Pines, 7 Oct. 2018 (Read more about 2018 inductee Penelope Niven on the Hall of Fame website, and watch her daughter deliver these remarks on the North Carolina Writers’ Network’s [Youtube](#).)

JENNIFER NIVEN writes nonfiction and fiction, both historical and contemporary, mainstream and Young Adult. Her last two books, *Holding Up the Universe* (2016) and *All the Bright Places* (2015), both published by Knopf, are international bestsellers.

FINALIST, 2018 JAMES APPLEWHITE POETRY PRIZE

BY KIMBERLY J. SIMMS

Trespassing After the Hysterectomy

Lily-of-the-Valley

your pearly bells tremble
 a child's mouth brimming
 with laughter.

Daffodils

headless green arms gesture
 split-hearts subterranean
 leaves blackened.

Mole,

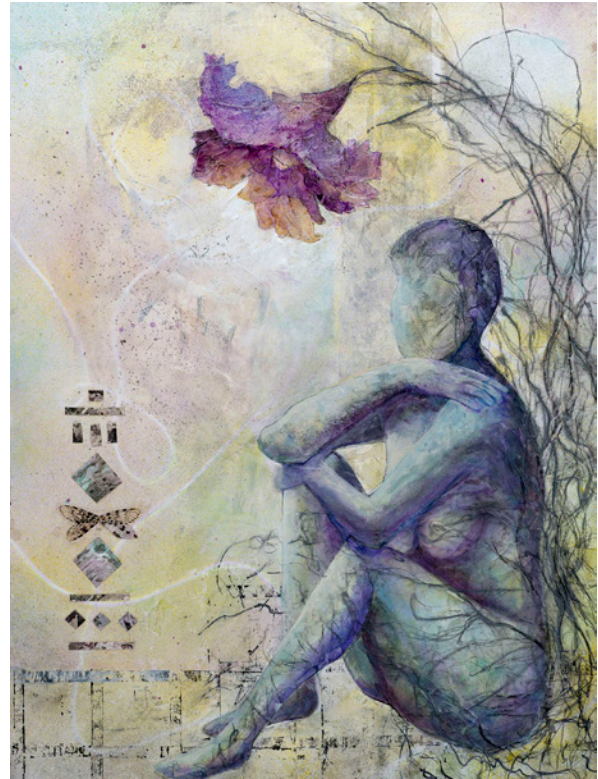
how sweet is your tongue
 after your feast of bitter
 tulip daughters?

Dark earth,

how do you embrace the emptiness
 of your bloomless womb
 your crumbling tubers?

Gloved hands,

I long to plant again
 even while pogonia tendrils more exotic
 unfurl sharp leaves, whorled blossoms
 beneath the last living hemlock.



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Garden of Soul (acrylic ink and collage; 13x19) by Nancy Smith

KIMBERLY J. SIMMS lives on the border of North Carolina and South Carolina between Henderson County and Greenville County in the Blue Ridge Mountains. She has been published in over thirty literary journals, including *the Asheville Poetry Review* and the *Broad River Review*. Her chapbook *Lindy Lee: Songs on Mill Hill* (Finishing Line Press, 2017) chronicles the lives of textile workers in the Piedmont region. She was the 2016 Carl Sandburg National Historic Site Writer-In Residence in Flat Rock, NC. She earned her BA from Furman University and her MA from Clemson University.

Born in Tryon, NC, **NANCY SMITH** made her home in Chapel Hill, NC, twenty-five years ago after completing a psychotherapist degree from UNC Chapel Hill. She dabbled in drawing and painting her entire life but began a serious pursuit of study under the tutelage of mixed media artist Luna Lee Ray ten years ago. Since then, she has shown her work in many group and solo shows in North Carolina. She is currently collaborating with women writers all over the world to give voice to women's concerns and experiences in a 2019 gallery event called *Women Speak*. Find another sample of her art in the Flashbacks section of this issue and see more on her [website](#).

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