

*The Journal of the Alabama Writers' Forum*

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# FIRST DRAFT

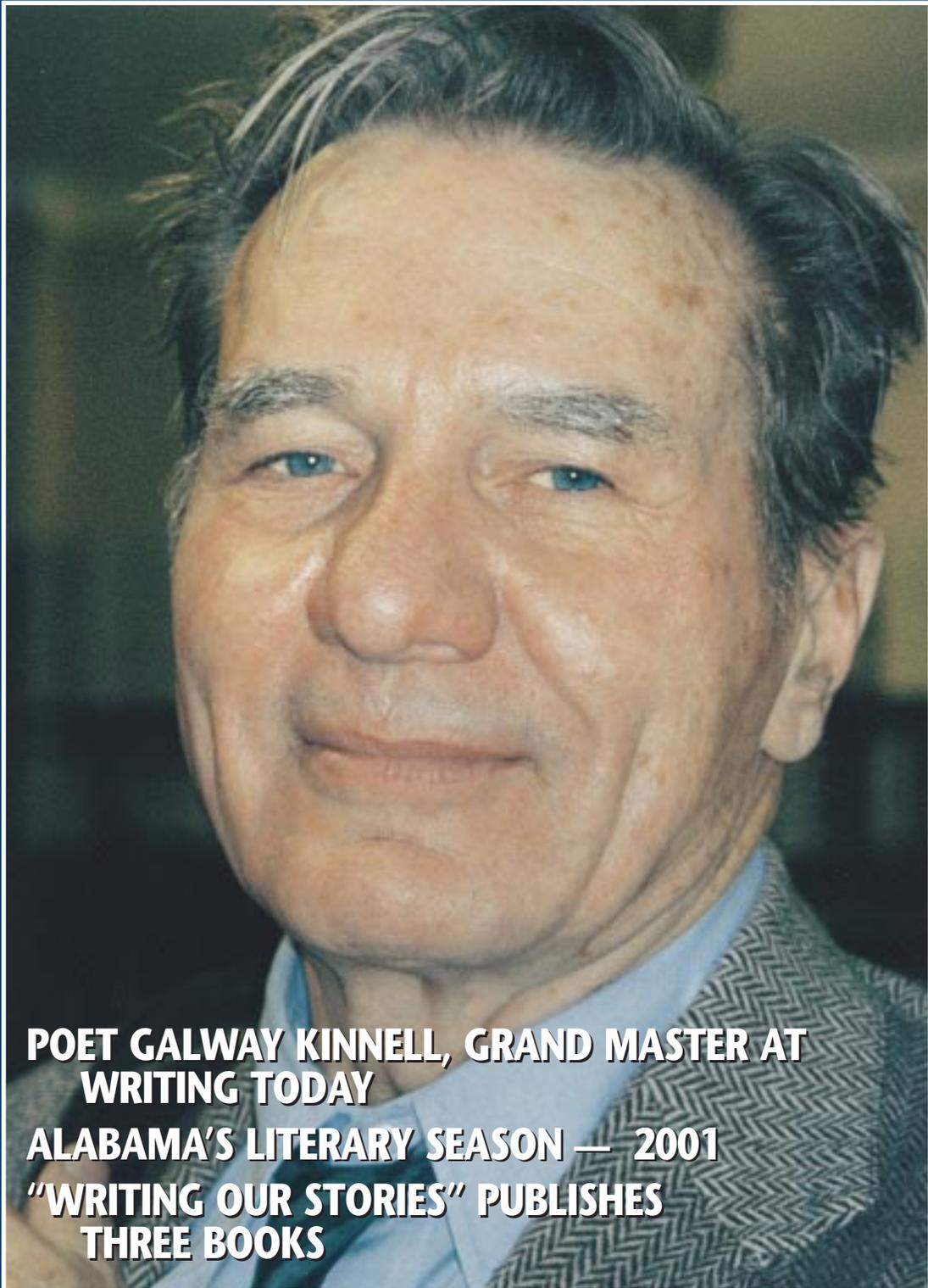


Photo © Miriam Berkley 2001

**POET GALWAY KINNEL, GRAND MASTER AT  
WRITING TODAY  
ALABAMA'S LITERARY SEASON — 2001  
"WRITING OUR STORIES" PUBLISHES  
THREE BOOKS**

# from the EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

## WHERE ARE HEROES FOUND?

It was the day before one of our big fall events—the debut of *Open the Door III*, an anthology from “Writing Our Stories.” I remembered a friend of Alabama children who has also been a champion of our program. I grabbed the phone and called her. “The boys are reading their poetry and stories tomorrow,” I said. “I know it would mean a lot to you to see them.”

The next morning, Miss Louise Pittman was one of the first people to arrive at Mt. Meigs for the book signing. She encouraged the boys by being in the audience, and by staying afterwards for autographs and lots of smiles. Later, at another occasion where our paths crossed, I heard her telling people about the power of creative writing she had personally witnessed in these juvenile offenders’ lives. A new hero to us, but certainly not a new hero to Alabama’s needy children, Miss Pittman worked for the Department of Human Resources for fifty years, retiring as head of Family and Children’s Services.

In this issue, we share with you a wealth of literary conferences, events, and awards to writers, we reminisce about Alabama’s Poets Laureate, and we meet newly published writers from the Alabama Department of Youth Services. Heroes make all of these programs and events possible.

We can’t possibly list names, but if you are one of the conference organizers, grant researchers, letter stuffers, drivers, publicists, graphic artists, or unpaid webmasters, please know that you are appreciated and that you are a hero to our literary community. Sometimes when the conference has been a raging success, it is the visiting writer who gets the credit (and the star treatment and then leaves town), but you are the one tending the flame year-round, and we know it. In Alabama’s literary community, heroes can be found everywhere from Monroeville to Bay Minette, from Jacksonville to Jasper.

Please take a minute when you attend an Alabama literary conference or event this spring to let these people know you appreciate their work. They would like a little valentine, I’m sure. And if *you* are the hero, well, you know it, so be proud. I am. 



*AWF Executive Director Jeanie Thompson and Louise Pittman, retired Director of Family and Children’s Services, Alabama Department of Human Resources.*

Jay Sailors

*Jeanie Thompson, Executive Director  
The Alabama Writers’ Forum*

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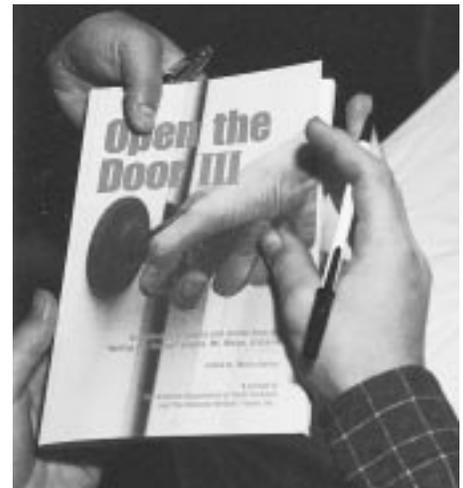
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Mika Fowler

Connie May Fowler's work featured at "Southern Voices" conference in Hoover (page 2).



Joy Sailors

Young writers find voices in "Writing Our Stories" (page 8).



Chandra Dye

UAH has tapped writer Kelly Cherry as Visiting Eminent Scholar in the Humanities for Winter/Spring 2001 (page 24).

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*Poet Galway Kinnell, Grand Master for 2001 Writing Today at Birmingham Southern College (see page 3)*

*Cover photograph: Miriam Berkley (New York, NY), photographer of international authors, including Doris Lessing, Germaine Greer, Isaac Bashevis Singer, and others. To contact Berkley, e-mail mberkphoto@aol.com.*

# HERE. . .

## Literary Gatherings for Everyone

*January begins an intense literary season in Alabama. From now through June, there are numerous readings, conferences, and courses that offer workshops and appearances by poets, fiction writers, memoirists, agents, editors, and others in the field who escape categorization. Information on some of the offerings around the state are listed here, with dates and contacts. See the following story for additional gatherings, out of state but nearby, that are of interest.*

### ON THE BRINK FEBRUARY 3, 2000 JACKSONVILLE

Designed to be “provocative and entertaining,” Jacksonville State’s “On the Brink” conference always delivers what it promises. This year it will feature, among others, poet Honoree Fannone Jeffers, whose *Gospel of Barbecue* won the 2000 Stan and Tom Wick Prize; Lynne Hinton, author of the novel *Friendship Cake*; and Robert Inman, whose collection of essays, *Coming Home: Life, Love, and All Things Southern*, was published last fall. Also featured are Clyde Bolton, author most recently of *Nancy Swimmer: A Story of the Cherokee Nation*; Ben Erickson, author of *A Parting Gift*; Wayne Greenhaw, who debuted his novel *Beyond the Night* in late 1999; Melinda Haynes, whose *Mother of Pearl* was widely praised last year; and Barbara Robinette Moss, author of the moving memoir *Change Me Into Zeus’ Daughter*. The conference begins at 9 a.m. and concludes at 4 p.m., with book signings to follow by the writers. Registration is \$35 for adults, \$15 for students. For more information, contact Gena Christopher at Jacksonville State, 256-782-5411.



Melinda Haynes, *Mother of Pearl* author, will be at the Jacksonville State College conference.



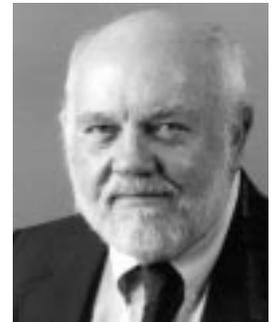
Lynne Hinton author of *Friendship Cake* will read at “On the Brink.”



Robert Inman, whose new book is *Coming Home: Life, Love, and All Things Southern*, will be part of the “On the Brink” author line-up.



Ben Erickson will talk about *A Parting Gift*, recently published by Warner Books, at “On the Brink.”



Clyde Bolton, formerly a well-know sportswriter for the Birmingham News, will be at “On the Brink” to discuss his new book, *Nancy Swimmer: A Story of the Cherokee Nation*.

Susan H. Page

Leigh J. Brown

## SOUTHERN VOICES: MEMORIES, MEMOIRS, AND MORE

FEBRUARY 23-25

HOOVER

"Southern Voices," now in its ninth year, is a three-day exploration of the characteristics



Lida Moser

Bailey White, writer and NPR commentator, will headline the "Southern Voices" conference.

of southern culture as reflected in contemporary arts. The conference, this year entitled "Memories, Memoirs and More," will open with "An Evening with Bailey White," the noted writer

and National Public Radio commentator. On Saturday, February 24th, Connie May Fowler, whose most recent book is *Remembering Blue*, will read,

along with Robert Morgan, author of *Gap Creek*; cartoonist Doug Marlette; poet Andrew Hudgins; and Martin Clark, author of *The Many Aspects of Mobile Home Living*. Michael Chitwood, author of *Hitting Below the Bible Belt*;

poet Jim Murphy, author of *The Memphis Sun*; and Megan Sexton, who wrote *Claiming the Spirit Within*, are also on the program.

"Southern Voices" will host the premiere performance of *Remembering Blue*, songs inspired by Connie May Fowler's novel. Composers/lyricists Karren Pell, Tommy

Goldsmith, and Tom House will appear with Fowler for a discussion of the project. Pencil drawings and watercolors by artist Bill Hill will be on exhibit during the conference.

Cost for the entire conference is \$65.

Individual event tickets are also available. For more information, call 205-444-7820; for tickets, call 205-444-7888.



Deede Hatch

Gap Creek author Robert Morgan will read from his work during the February 23-25 "Southern Voices" conference.

## WRITING TODAY MARCH 16-17 BIRMINGHAM

"Writing Today," one of the longest-running and most respected literary conferences in the region, will be held on March 16 and 17. This year's grand master is poet Galway Kinnell. A former MacArthur Fellow and recipient of both the Pulitzer and the National Book Award, his work includes the poetry collections *A New Selected Poems*; *Mortal Acts, Mortal Words*; *There Are Things I Tell to No One*; and *The Avenue Bearing the Initial of Christ Into the New World*. A collection of essays on poetry, *Walking Down the Stairs*, and a novel, *Black Light*, are part of a body of work that also includes translations of works by Rilke, Yves Bonnefoy, and others. Kinnell is Erich Marie Remarque Professor of Creative Writing at New York University.

Also on this year's "Writing Today" faculty is Barry Hannah, whose first novel, *Geronimo Rex*, won the Faulkner Prize, and whose collection of short stories, *Airships*, is a contemporary classic. Hannah's most recent novel is *Never Die*. Acclaimed children's author Faye Gibbons will also speak. Her award-winning books for children include

*Some Glad Morning*, 1983 Georgia Juvenile Book of the Year; *King Shoes and Clown Pockets*, a USA Today Best Pick; and *Mountain Wedding*, recipient of the Society of School Librarians Book Award. Gibbons' most recent books are *Mamma and Me and the Model-T* and *Emma Jo's Song*, published in late 2000 by Boyds Mill Press. Poet Jim Murphy, whose *The Memphis Sun* won the 1999 Stan and Tom Wick Poetry Prize, and novelist and new journalist Paul Hemphill, author most recently of *The Ballad of Little River*, will also read.

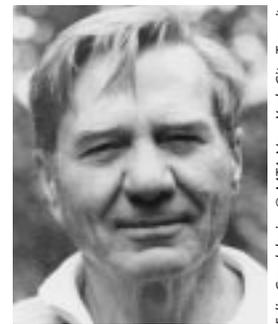
On the program are *Poets and Writers* editor Amy Holman and Editor-in-Chief of Hill Street Press, Judy Long. Holman's talk, "How to Be a Detective and Find Success in Publishing," will cover the basics of writing for

magazines, copyright, and how to properly pitch your books to agents or editors. Hill Street's Long oversees the editorial operation of the company, including manuscript evaluation, acquisitions, and preparing manuscripts for publishing. Other featured writers and speakers include Alabama Poet Laureate



Helen Norris, Karen McElmurray, John T. Edge, Bruce Schneider, Terence Monmaney, and editor Elizabeth Woodman.

The cost is \$110 for both days, \$60 for a single day's events, including morning coffee, luncheons, and



Felix Candalaria, © MTA New York City Transit.

Galway Kinnell is Grand Master of the "Writing Today" conference at Birmingham Southern March 16-17.

receptions. Either day's luncheon and speaker is only \$25. The conference is on the campus of Birmingham-Southern College. For information, call 205-226-4921, e-mail [dcwilson@bsc.edu](mailto:dcwilson@bsc.edu), fax 205-226-3072, or write "Writing Today" at BSC Box 549003, Birmingham, Al 35254.

## GULF COAST CONFERENCE OF CREATIVE WRITING TEACHERS APRIL 19-21 MOBILE

The University of South Alabama will host the Gulf Coast Conference of Creative Writing Teachers on April 19-21. The annual conference showcases the work of college writing teachers, and this year will feature keynote addresses by Robert Phillips, Distinguished Professor at the University of Houston, and Rainer Schulte, Professor at the University of Texas at Dallas and founder of the American Literary Translator Association. Phillips will read from his new collection of poetry, *Spinach Days* (Johns Hopkins), and Schulte will speak on translation. Writers/teachers who are interested in reading are invited. For registration information, contact Jim White, Director of Creative Writing, English Department, University of South Alabama, Mobile, Al 35588 or [jwhite@americanartists.org](mailto:jwhite@americanartists.org).

## ALABAMA BOUND APRIL 28 BIRMINGHAM

Dozens of Alabama authors will be present at the downtown location of the Birmingham Public Library from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m. for the third annual "Alabama Bound" bookfair. This one-day free event features more than 45 Alabama authors and publishers. Readers and writers can meet and talk in an informal and comfortable setting.

Among the writers attending will be Rick Bragg, author of *All Over But the Shoutin'*

Rick Bragg, author of *All Over But the Shoutin' and Somebody Told Me*, will be a participant in "Alabama Bound" at the Birmingham Public Library on April 28.



Photo © Marion Etlinger



Kathryn Tucker Windham will talk about the new book she co-authored with Chip Cooper, *Common Threads*, at "Alabama Bound".



Sharon Hill

At last year's "Alabama Bound," children's author Alan Johnson signed a copy of his new book, *Pikker McClikker*.

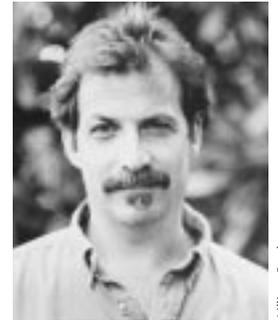
and *Somebody Told Me; Abab's Wife* author Sena Jeter Naslund; and Robert Inman with his new book, *Coming Home*. Other authors include Kathryn Tucker Windham, Selma writer, story-teller, and photographer, talking about *Common Threads: Photographic*

*Stories from the South*, which she co-authored with Chip Cooper; children's authors Charles and Debra Ghigna; Birmingham novelist and poet Anne George; and *Mother of Pearl* author Melinda Haynes. The first floor of the library is transformed into a mini-bookstore, and authors are happy to sign their books. For more information, contact Sharon Hill at 205-226-3606.

## ALABAMA WRITERS SYMPOSIUM MAY 3-5 MONROEVILLE

The fourth annual Alabama Writers Symposium will be held at Alabama Southern Community College in Monroeville. This year's theme is "Alabama— Heroes and Legends." The conference will open with a banquet featuring Winston Groom as speaker

Daniel Wallace, author of *Big Fish*, published by Algonquin Books, will be in Monroeville May 3-5.



Lillian Bayley

Howard Bahr, also a participant in the fourth annual Alabama Writers Symposium in Monroeville, has most recently written *The Year of Jubilo*.



Winston Groom will be the keynote speaker at the Alabama Writers Symposium's opening banquet.



Tom Corcoran

on Thursday night. Guest authors include Sena Jeter Naslund; Patricia Foster, author of the acclaimed recent memoir, *All the Lost Girls*; poet Honoree Fannone Jeffers; Daniel Wallace, author of *Ray in Reverse*; historians Wayne Flynt and Leah Rawls Atkins; Howard Bahr, whose new book is *The Year of Jubilo*; and scholars Don Noble and Larry Allums. Writer Carolyn Haines will lead a panel discussion on the life and achievements of the late Eugene Walter. The Honorable John Lewis, author of *Walking With the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement*, will talk about the literary legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Recipients of the Harper Lee Award for

Lifetime Achievement and the Eugene Current-Garcia Award for Scholarship will be honored at the conference. For registration and more information, contact Alabama Southern at <http://www.ascc.edu/symp1.htm>, or call 334-575-5356.

## SUMMER INSTITUTE OF CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY JUNE 3, 10-11 MOBILE

The 2001 Summer Institute of Christian Spirituality will convene on

the campus of Spring Hill College in Mobile on June 3rd. A poetry retreat and workshop will be offered June 10-11. Courses "Merton, Hildegard, Teresa and Therese," and "Poetry for Spiritual Growth" will be taught by visiting faculty, including Victor Kramer, Sr., Peggy McDonald, IHM Dr. Lawrence Cunningham, Dr. Peggy Rosenthal, and David Impastato. For more information, contact the Office of Graduate Studies, 334-380-3094, or visit the website at [www.shc.edu/academics/graduate](http://www.shc.edu/academics/graduate).

## ON-GOING READING SERIES

### THE UAB VISITING WRITER SERIES

UNIVERSITY OF  
ALABAMA,  
BIRMINGHAM

The UAB Visiting Writer Series 2000-2001, an annual offering of the Program in Creative Writing, will host visiting writers Tony Crunk, Natasha Trethewey, Tom Franklin, and Julie Checkoway in winter and spring 2001. Crunk, new on the UAB creative writing faculty, will give a reading on January 17, followed on February 14th by Tom Franklin, author of acclaimed short story/novella collection *Poachers*. Natasha Trethewey, whose first book of poetry, *Domestic Work*, was published by Graywolf in 2000, will read on April 18th. Julie Checkoway, author of *Little Sister: Searching for the Shadow of Chinese Women* and *Creating Fiction*, will read on May 2. Checkoway directs the writing program at the University of Georgia, and her work has appeared in the *North American Review*, *Iowa Review*, and *Threepenny Review*, among other journals. The UAB



Poet Natasha Trethewey will be part of the UAB Visiting Writer Series in the winter and spring of 2001.



Writer Tom Franklin, whose *Poachers* has stirred great interest in the writing and reading community, will also be featured in the UAB Visiting Writer Series.

Visiting Writers Series is co-sponsored by the UAB Department of English, the Honors Programs, the BACHE Visiting Writers Series, the Alabama State Council on the Arts, and the Friends of the Writing Program. All readings are free and open to the public. They are held in the Honors House on the campus of UAB and begin at 7 p.m. For more information, call the UAB Creative Writing Program at 205-934-4250.

### BANKHEAD VISITING WRITER SERIES UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA

Supported by an endowment from the Bankhead Foundation, the University of Alabama's Program in Creative Writing, the Department of English, and the Department of Arts and Sciences, the Bankhead Visiting Writer Series will feature:

- **Janet Kauffman** and **Emily Martin** on January 25. Kauffman is the author of three books of short stories, including *Places in the World a Woman Could Walk*; three novels; and three collections of poems, including *The Weather Book*, which was an AWP Award Series Selection. The recipient of a Michigan Arts Award, two Pushcart Prizes, the Rosenthal Award of the American Academy-Institute of Arts and Letters, and a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship, she has published in *The New Yorker*, *Vanity Fair*, *Paris Review*, *Tri-Quarterly*, *New American Writing*, and many other journals. Emily Martin, proprietor of the Naughty Dog Press, has been making artist's books since 1978. She also produces paintings and sculpture with a combination of narrative and visual approaches. Her books have been exhibited in the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Tate Gallery in London, and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago.
- **Michael Cunningham**, February 21-22. Cunningham received both the 1999 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and PEN/Faulkner Award

for his novel, *The Hours*. His work has appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Redbook*, *Esquire*, *The Paris Review*, *The New Yorker*, *Vogue*, and *Metropolitan Home*. He was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1993, a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship in 1988, and a Michener Fellowship from the University of Iowa in 1982.

- **David Gewanter**, March 8. Gewanter is the author of *In the Belly* (University of Chicago Press, 1997), a book of poems that won the John C. Zacharis award from *Ploughshares* magazine. He is also co-editor, with Frank Bidart, of *Collected Poems of Robert Lowell* (Farrar Straus & Giroux, forthcoming). A graduate of Michigan and Berkeley, Gewanter was director of the writing program at the Harvard University Extension School prior to assuming his present position as assistant professor of English at Georgetown. Bankhead Visiting Writers Series is co-sponsoring his reading in conjunction with the Religious Studies Department.
- **Jane Hirshfield**, March 15. Hirshfield is the author of four collections of poetry—*The Lives of the Heart*, *The October Palace*, *Of Gravity & Angels*, and *Alaya*—as well as a book of essays on poetry, *Nine Gates*. She also edited and co-translated two poetry anthologies: *The Ink Dark Moon: Love Poems by Komanchi and Shikibu*, *Women of the Ancient Court of Japan* and *Women in Praise of the Sacred: 43 Centuries of Spiritual Poetry by Women*. Hirshfield's honors include the Poetry Center Book Award, fellowships from the Guggenheim and Rockefeller Foundations, Columbia University's Translation Center Award, the Commonwealth Club of California Poetry Medal, and the Bay Area Book Reviewers Award. Her work has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, *The New Republic*, *The Nation*, *The American Poetry Review*, and many other publications.

Patricia Foster, author most recently of *All the Lost Girls: Confessions of a Southern Daughter*, will be featured with Sue Silverman on April 12 as part of the University of Alabama's Bankhead Visiting Writers Series.



Photo © Jon Van Allen.

- **Sue Silverman** and **Patricia Foster**, April 12. Silverman is the author of *Because I Remember Terror*, *Father*, *I Remember You*, the 1995 winner of the Associated Writing Programs award for creative nonfiction. She also edited *Pen/insula: Essays and Memoirs from Michigan*. Silverman's work has appeared in the *Chicago Tribune*, *WordWrights*, *Dominion Review*, *Charleston*

*Magazine*, *Nabant Bay*, *The Old Red Kimono*, and *The Albany Review*. Silverman has judged the Snowbound Writers Series and the Associated Writing Programs INTRO Series Contest. Patricia Foster's most recent work, *All the Lost Girls: Confessions of a Southern Daughter*, published by the University of Alabama Press in the fall of 2000, explores the relationships between southern mothers and daughters. Foster is also co-editor of *The Healing Circle: Authors Writing of Recovery* (1998) and editor of *Sister to Sister: Women Write About the Unbreakable Bond* (1995) and *Minding the Body: Women Writers on Body and Soul* (1994). *Minding the Body* was chosen by the Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center as a stage production and by the National Writer's Voice Project as part of a national series, *The Body in Question*. Foster has received the Florida Arts Council Award and the PEN/Jerard Fund Award.

## BACHE VISITING WRITERS SERIES BIRMINGHAM

The Birmingham Area Consortium for Higher Education (BACHE) will continue its 2000-2001 visiting writer series. Tom Franklin will give a reading on Tuesday, February 13, at 7 p.m. in the Dwight Beeson Hall auditorium of Samford University. Natasha Trethewey will read on Tuesday, April 17th, at 7 p.m. in the Comer Auditorium of the University of Montevallo. BACHE is a collaboration among the five-year colleges and universities in the Birmingham area, formed to enhance the educational experiences of their students. For more information, call UAB faculty members Robert Collins (205-934-4250) or Margaret Armbruster (205-934-5634).

## LITTLETON-FRANKLIN LECTURES AUBURN UNIVERSITY

The Auburn University Littleton-Franklin Lectures in Science and Humanities will host E. O. Wilson at 4 p.m. on March 5 at the Auburn University Hotel and Conference Center. A prodigious author whose works appeal to both scientists and non-scientists, Wilson's early explorations of the natural world in his native Alabama led to groundbreaking research in sociobiology, ecology, and preservation of the species. His books include *Ants*, *On Human Nature*, and *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge*. For more information about this or other Littleton-Franklin lectures, call 334-844-4043 or visit the website at <http://www.auburn.edu/franklin>.



# THERE . . .

## *Beyond the Border*

*Although Alabama has plenty to offer in the way of literary conferences this spring, there also are irresistible opportunities for readings and workshops in nearby states. Here's a small sample.*

**Springmingle '01**, the annual spring conference of "Southern Breeze," a regional branch of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI), will be held February 23-25, 2001, in Jackson, Mississippi. Speakers include Richard Peck, author of *A Long Way from Chicago*, a Newberry Honor Book and National Book Award finalist; Nina Laden, writer/illustrator of *The Night I Followed the Dog* and *When Pigasso Met Mootisse*; and Patricia Lee Gauch, vice-president and editorial director of Philomel Books and author of more than 35 books for children, including *This Time, Tempe Wick?*, *Thunder at Gettysburg*, and the Christina Katerina books. All three speakers will lead hands-on sessions with registered participants. The conference will be limited to 60 and registration will close at noon on February 21, 2001. For details and registration forms, send a business-size self-addressed stamped envelope to "Southern Breeze," Post Office 26282, Birmingham, AL 35260 or see the Southern Breeze web page: <http://members.home.net/southernbreeze/>.

**Art and Soul** is an annual arts and humanities program at Baylor University that explores the intersection of religion and the arts through scholarly inquiry, creative insight, public programs, and personal interaction. On February 22-25, 2001, Baylor will offer a public cultural event and national writing conference that will be held concurrently with an international scholarly conference on religion and culture. This gathering of writers, scholars, and readers creates a multi-faceted cultural event designed to educate, entertain, and inspire. This year's

speakers include Anne Lamott, Lee Smith, Jane Hirshfield, singer-song-writer Bruce Hornsby, and many others. Art & Soul conference registration includes entry to all public presentations, concurrent sessions on writing and literature, readings and panel discussions, luncheon and refreshments, and films and other presentations. A limited number of manuscript consultations will also be available for creative writers for an additional \$40 fee; please inquire before registering. *Full Registration*: \$60 in advance (before February 1, 2001), \$75 afterward (\$100 or \$115 with consultation). Student registration rates are available. For more information check the website at [http://www.baylor.edu/~Rel\\_Lit/](http://www.baylor.edu/~Rel_Lit/) or write Religious Faith and Literary Art, Baylor University, P.O. Box 97404, Waco, TX 76798-7404.

**The Nashville Screenwriters Conference** will be held on May 18-20, 2001, at the Hermitage Hotel in Nashville, Tennessee. Panels and speakers will address such topics as the writing process—getting started, getting organized, and writing with a partner or alone; screenplay adaptation; getting an agent; and breaking into the movies and television. Registration until March 1st is \$175 for members, \$160 for students, and \$200 for others. Call the NSC at 888-680-4491 or check the website at [www.nashscreen.com/about.html](http://www.nashscreen.com/about.html).

For information on additional conferences and workshops check the Shaw Guides at <http://writing.shawguides.com> and the Southern Scribe site, <http://www.southernscribe.com>. 

# Young Writers Find Voices in “Writing Our Stories”

To the scores of many fine new books offered by publishers across this country every fall, the Alabama Writers’ Forum has added its own tradition of new releases. Young voices from the “Writing Our Stories Program: the Violence Prevention Initiative for Incarcerated Alabama Youth” are debuted in anthologies published as the culmination of this thriving juvenile justice and literary arts partnership. In October, autograph parties celebrated the three new anthologies on each campus where the program takes place. Our photo essay tells the story, and teaching writer Danny Gamble shares his thoughts about the program at the Vacca Campus on page 12.

“Writing Our Stories” takes place through a cooperative arrangement between the Alabama Writers’ Forum and the Alabama Department of Youth Services (DYS). Funding for the project, which includes nine months of instruction, as well as in-service training and anthology editing, is provided by DHS, the Alabama State Council on the Arts (ASCA), and, for the first time this year, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). ASCA and NEA funds provide for writers to visit all three campuses as part of the “Alabama Voices” writers-in-communities program, jointly sponsored by the Auburn University Center for the Arts and Humanities and the Alabama Writers’ Forum.

All photos by Jay Sailors.



*The Honorable Rodger M. Smitherman exhorted the young writers and other young men present to value themselves and their lives.*



*“Signing a book with one’s writing published in it has to be one of the highlights of a young writer’s life,” commented Marlin Barton, assistant director of “Writing Our Stories,” who attended the Vacca event. Barton teaches in the Mt. Meigs program.*



*Teaching writer Danny Gamble talks with Eric Stokes, who returned to campus accompanied by his parents to read from Voices from the Concrete Box at McNeel School.*

*Autograph seekers lined up in the McNeel School library following the readings from Voices from the Concrete Box.*



The **Adele Goodwin McNeel School**, on the Vacca Campus of DHS in Birmingham, Alabama, held its first autograph party for “Writing Our Stories” on October 24th to celebrate the publication of *Voices from the Concrete Box*, edited by teaching writer Danny Gamble. The Honorable Rodger M. Smitherman, Alabama State Senator (D, District 18), addressed the writers, their parents and guests, then spent time chatting informally and gathering autographs.



Judge Sandra Storm (shown here at the autograph table in the Chalkville Chapel) encouraged the young writers to pursue their dreams and praised the power of poetry in our lives.

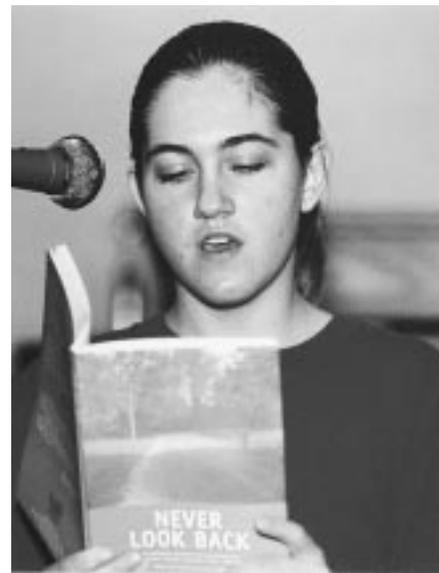
Students from **Sequoyah School** on the Chalkville campus published *Never Look Back*, a collection of poems, prose, and photographs. Teaching writer Priscilla Hancock Cooper edited the volume. The guest speaker at the October 19th event was Circuit Judge Sandra Storm (Birmingham).



Nakeisha King surprised teaching writer Priscilla Hancock Cooper (standing, right) with a poem in tribute to her work teaching creative writing to the girls at Chalkville.



Xanthea Green (left) and Nakeisha King sign copies of *Never Look Back*, in which their work is included, for guests after the Chalkville reading.



Rachel Johnson reads from *Never Look Back* to an audience of students, staff, and guests at the Sequoyah School.



General Alexander congratulates John Ashe, one of the writers published in *Open the Door III*.

The **Lurleen B. Wallace School's** "Writing Our Stories" program celebrated its third year of creative writing with the publication of *Open The Door III*, edited by teaching writer Marlin Barton, on October 10th. Adjutant General Willie Alexander of the Alabama Army National Guard arrived on the Mt. Meigs campus in his Black Hawk helicopter to address the boys as part of the book celebration.



Robert Fox and Danial Miller sign copies of *Open the Door III* for guests.



Robert Fox reads his poem "The Fox Trot" during the Mt. Meigs book celebration.



Isabelo Lopez, a bilingual poet, is especially proud of his work published in the anthology.



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Voices from “Writing Our Stories”

## HOW DOES IT FEEL TO BE A TEACHER?

BY DANNY GAMBLE

One of my former Vacca students recently wrote to me. In his letter he asked, “How does it feel to be a teacher?” I found his question interesting. I’d actually never considered it.

As in any profession, some days teaching feels better than other days. Since I first entered the classroom as a graduate teaching assistant, I have held a myriad of teaching positions on a number of post-secondary campuses. On many college campuses, policy replaces pedagogy. We who labor in education today must weigh our words carefully. We must deliver our material conscious of the easily offended. In the classroom, I often feel like the inmates run the asylum. This atmosphere makes being a teacher feel less than satisfying.

McNeel School on the Department of Youth Service’s Vacca Campus proves an exception. When I first joined the “Writing Our Stories” program a year ago I didn’t think I would feel comfortable at all teaching at a secure facility. I felt I would have little to offer these students. I felt they would have little to offer me. I was apprehensive.

On my first visit to McNeel, in December 1999, I met a group of students equally suspicious, somewhat apathetic, but clearly eager. I understood their suspicion and apathy, but I found their eagerness edifying. After all, these students did not attend an academically challenging magnet school. They attended McNeel at the order of the court. Their spirit made me feel needed.

After Christmas break, I began the new year as eager as the students. I had allayed most suspicion, and the apathy slowly dwindled. The students I met with in early January had defined their purpose in the class: they wished to become writers. I felt appreciated.

But all was not easy. I struggled with one student over the necessity of concrete imagery. On the first day of class he thrust a dog-eared manuscript my way and explained that he needed only praise to publish his verse as written. I read his work and informed him that he had a bright future writing greeting cards. He took great offense, but he eventually rose to my offhanded challenge. During a conference I taught him the word “cornucopia,” and showed him that if he cataloged his menu, rather than simply rhyming “good” with “food,” he would make his poem live. He accepted this advice and later wrote another poem from which I took the title for our anthology, *Voices from the Concrete Box*. Being a teacher can be deeply rewarding.

Another student had trouble with his spelling. His South Alabama dialect prohibited him from sounding his words. His limited vocabulary frustrated him. I eventually began placing a dictionary on his desk each day when he entered the classroom. Initially he pushed the book aside

and carried on with his struggle. One day I insisted that he consult the dictionary for the correct spelling and usage of a certain homonym. Upon opening the dictionary, he discovered its illustrations. From that point on, he seldom began a new assignment without first perusing the dictionary for a new vocabulary, based on whatever drawing caught his attention.

A latecomer to the class told me that he had no story to tell, that he couldn’t type, and that he had much rather draw than write. I asked him to participate anyway. During the course of an exercise describing the emotions of two people depicted in a lithograph, he was introspective. Most of the students wrote funny or extreme character descriptions. This particular student began to explore his father’s death and his relationship with his stepmother. I encouraged him to finish his story, and I took it home and typed it for him. I extorted payment, though. I told him that when he supplied me with a cover illustration then I would show him his typed story. The day we exchanged illustration for manuscript, I felt rewarded being a teacher.

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**SOME SAY A TEACHER IS ONLY AS  
ENTHUSIASTIC AS HIS CLASS . . .  
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GOOD ABOUT BEING A TEACHER.  
I KNOW THAT THE STUDENTS  
FORMERLY AND PRESENTLY ENROLLED  
IN THE “WRITING OUR STORIES”  
PROGRAM FEEL ECSTATIC  
BEING WRITERS.**

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When our class dismissed for the summer, I began to edit our anthology. I swear by the adage, “those who can’t teach do.” At home I did, but I missed the feedback from my students, whether insolent or servile. Editing the manuscript, I missed being a teacher.

On October 24, my first creative writing class reassembled at McNeel School to present *Voices from the Concrete Box* to the reading public. Of the twenty students I had taught the previous year, five returned for the book release and reading. These students worked diligently to take their

place among the literati. Two took time out of their new lives to return to a place that they couldn't possibly remember fondly. Their parents and even a grandmother returned with them. Three students, still residents of Vacca, proved to their current classmates that hope exists behind the razor wire and magnetic locks. Behind the lectern I surveyed these young writers, their parents, guest speaker Senator Rodger Smitherman, the representatives of the Writers' Forum, of the faculty, of the press. I was proud of being a teacher.

In this, my second year teaching in the "Writing Our Stories" program, my new students begin the school year with an advantage over my first class. They have seen, heard, and read the end result of their peers' diligence. Each is eager to top what he knows preceded him.

How does it feel being a teacher? Some days feel better than others. Some days I welcome the challenge of the classroom. On others, I have difficulty walking through the classroom door. Some say a teacher is only

as enthusiastic as his class. If this apology proves true, then I had better feel pretty good about being a teacher. I know that the students formerly and presently enrolled in the "Writing Our Stories" program feel ecstatic being writers.



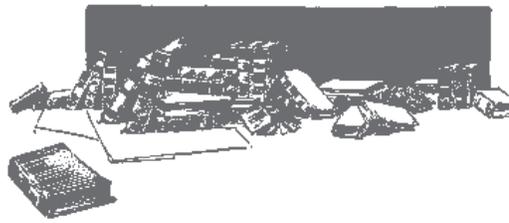
*Danny Gamble is a teaching writer with the "Writing Our Stories Program: The Violence Prevention Initiative for Incarcerated Alabama Youth" and an instructor in English at the University of Alabama-Birmingham. He has an MFA in creative writing from the University of Alabama, and his poems have appeared in Aura, Dang!, Alternative Harmonies, and Persimmon Dry, a chapbook of regional poets. He has written for Birmingham, Birmingham Art Line, The Society for Fine Arts Review, and Alabama Game and Fish. He is also the author of Exit: Brautigam, a one-man play on the life and work of poet/novelist Richard Brautigam.*

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# R E V I E W S

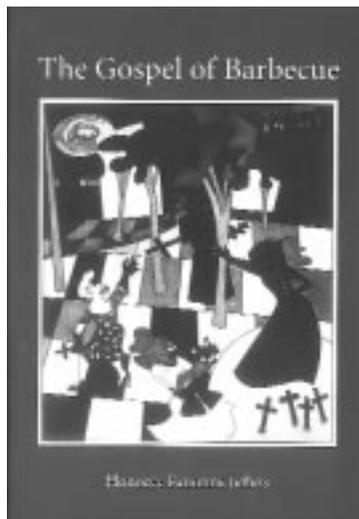
***The Gospel of Barbecue***  
**Honoree Fanonne Jeffers**  
**Kent State University**  
**Press, 2000**  
**76 pp. Paper, \$12**

The poems of *The Gospel of Barbecue* leave no doubt: if we are ever blessed with another edition of *Alabama Poets*, Honoree Fanonne Jeffers will be one of its major new voices. The blues-inflected prayers—whether memorial, testimonial, or mythological—of *The Gospel of Barbecue* bring the news, good or bad, so clearly you feel the erosion of William Carlos Williams's statement that you cannot get the news from poetry.

From the volume's opener, "Tuscaloosa: Riversong," in which she revisits the battle of Maubilla, giving voice to Tuscaloosa and to DeSoto and to her own pilgrimage to the Black Warrior River, Jeffers renews our histories, turns them into prayer that rhymes with need. In this poem's brilliant revision, Tuscaloosa becomes the god of Alabama, who commands: "dark arms cup the blade / blue spit in the scripture's eye / do not walk across my water / do this in remembrance of me." Jeffers explains, "This is not Jordan, but I have / prayed at this shore anyway." She understands that history sticks like religion, and it must be exercised where exorcism is impossible, and so she writes a poetry suited to our collective tongue, a hard and haunting music we will all want to hear again.

Many of the poems remember African-American history that gives these blues their violet depth. In "Ellen Craft," Jeffers negotiates the cunning of the former slave who escaped to the north by posing as a white man, keeping an eye on the consequences of this cunning: Craft's husband, whom Craft escorts as her "slave," worries that she will "stay to celebrate / our trickery when all our lives I shall / stare at him with the eyes of a white man." Again, in "The Gospel of Barbecue," "To Keep from Shouting Something," and "Big Mamma Thornton," Jeffers revisits her forerunners, demonstrating her commitment to remember, to preserve, and to sanctify.

Always, Jeffers is charting the difficult lines of race and culture, whether in Ellen Craft's masquerade, her uncle's prohibition—"Don't ever trust / white folk to cook / your meat until / it's done to the bone"—color-prejudice in her own family, in "Only the Yellow," or the development of her own vocabulary of complexion, in "The



Light Brigade." Such cartography is enriched by the family elegies, remembrances of her parents' courtship, till each of Jeffers' poems vocalizes both individual and collective experience—whether in the resonant confession of "Bless All the Givers of Pain," in which personal experience seems to forbid forgiveness, or "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," in which African-Americans seems to speak as one, to explain "we were picking cotton / or tobacco or peaches and glorifying / tragedy with our voices. / We were weeping bitter, large tears."

*The Gospel of Barbecue* contains a number of fine poems about jazz, often crossed with West African mythology or American social inquiry. In "The Lady Esu-Elegbara Finally Speaks Out" and "On Listening to the Two-Headed Lady Blow Her Horn," Jeffers locates in jazz the spiritual power of "the divine Yoruba trickster" who "interprets the wishes of humans to gods." These poems, and others concerned with music, detail the music of the sacred office and so suggest Jeffers's own poetic ethic.

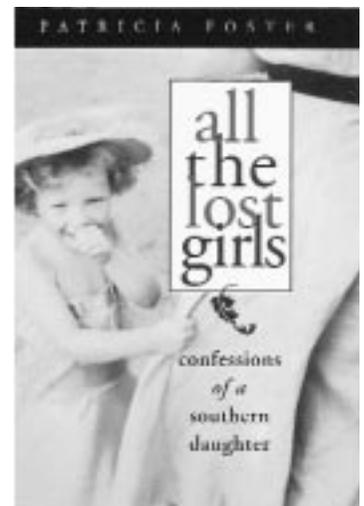
Still other poems demonstrate Jeffers's fine linguistic fire, "An Old Lady Told Me," for example, which weaves two voices together with a skill suggestive of Toni Morrison's own narrative acumen. But whatever the mode, the root of these poems is gospel, is prayer, as concluding poems, such as "Ezekiel Saw de Wheel" and the volume's last, "Prayer for Flat Rock," amply demonstrate.

Jeffers' is a music of memory that answers Tuscaloosa's command, "do this in remembrance of me." It locates the tones of the difficult and of the sacred in our own soil and challenges us to eat it like barbecue, challenges us to remember what sticks like smoke in our hair. With such songs in our ears and on our eyes, I do not see how any of us could keep from opening this book again and again, even if only to keep from dying for lack of what is found there.

*Jake York is a poet who teaches American literature and creative writing at the University of Colorado-Denver.*

***All the Lost Girls: Confessions of a Southern Daughter***  
**Patricia Foster**  
**The University of Alabama**  
**Press: Deep South Books, 2000**  
**308 pp. Cloth, \$24.95.**

This memoir by Patricia Foster, an Alabama native and professor of English at the



University of Iowa, is a cautionary tale about the price paid by children for their parents' ambitions. Through a combination of iron-willed determination, intelligence, and luck, Foster's parents (who remain nameless) rose from backgrounds of soul-crushing, mind-numbing poverty to be the first in their families to receive college educations. Her father became a medical doctor and her mother a science teacher. Yet the parents' sense of achievement remained insecure, and they demanded and expected great accomplishments from their three children as validation of themselves.

Foster's mother's situation was especially problematic, and it is her intense, ambiguous influence that proves decisive in this memoir. As a doctor's wife in a small South Alabama town in the 1950s and 1960s, the mother was miserably unhappy. Her career was subservient to her husband's, and her status dependent upon him. Without enthusiasm she filled the social roles her husband demanded of her, with the result that she constantly reminded her children—the two daughters especially—that they were the justification for her sacrifice.

On the one hand, the mother supported her daughters' desires for self-expression against the father's rigid conventionality. However, Foster found her mother's insistence that every achievement be exploited to one's personal advantage impossible and unbearable.

Foster absorbed the lessons of her mother's repression and denial of anger, while ignorant of its deepest causes. Her failure to achieve impossible standards of perfection and her inability to reconcile her parents' values of worldly position and material success with her deepest aspirations and longings led to depression, a failed marriage, and a nervous breakdown while in her twenties.

Yet the memoir is ultimately hopeful, "a portrait of the artist as a young woman," as Foster explores the growth of the artistic vocation which was to prove her salvation. As a child, Foster first came into contact with artistic values through a remarkable piano teacher whose free spirit, unconcern with appearances, and love of solitude and contemplation stood in stark contrast to the standards of achievement set by her parents. It is worth noting that Foster was an artist before she had truly developed an art, and that literature was her choice only after forays into music, painting, and sculpture.

An accomplished storyteller, Foster describes dramatic scenes whose painful authenticity rings true, as in this passage in which an argument between her father and herself suddenly reaches a new level with her mother's involvement: "For a brief moment I stare at both of them, ignored, irrelevant, the current of tension lifted above me, caught in the narrow grasp of their gaze. Then I run into the bathroom and slam the door, the old sense of shame rising like a

tidal wave, washing over me, hiding the undertow of rage that lives just beneath the surface of my skin."

Foster describes other eruptions of anger and shame from her past, vivid illustrations of the humiliations endured by women and blacks in the 1950s and 60s South. Contrastingly, the memoir also contains memorable lyrical passages, such as this description of her love of solitude: "In the woods, I smooth out, my mind loose, lightened, a delight I know no way to express in the company of others, their voices stretching me into invisible thinness. I stand very quiet—something solemn and incredulous bursts inside my heart." (p.116)

*All the Lost Girls* is a poignant, compelling search into the mysteries of the self and family life.

*Anne Whitehouse's feature on the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, originally published in the Los Angeles Times, was reprinted in Reading Our Lives: Southern Autobiography Anthology. Her first novel, Fall Love, will be published in 2001.*

***Southern Souvenirs:  
Selected Stories and  
Essays of Sara Haardt***

Sara Haardt, edited by

Ann Henley

University of Alabama  
Press, 1999

352 pp. Paper, \$19.95

Sara Haardt—award-winning writer and Montgomery native—died of tuberculosis in 1935 at the age of 37. Though she left behind a body of fiction and nonfiction that was widely admired in her lifetime, her work fell into obscurity almost immediately after her death. If she is remembered at all, it is for her 1930 marriage to H.L. Mencken, the famed "Sage of Baltimore." This may soon change. A new collection of Haardt's writing gives today's readers access to the life and work of this fascinating woman.

*Southern Souvenirs: Selected Stories and Essays of Sara Haardt*, edited by Ann Henley, brings together both previously published and unpublished material, including Haardt's critically acclaimed stories, "Little White Girl" and "Miss Rebecca." In these stories and others, Haardt shows herself to be especially gifted at portraying the lives of white girls and women in the New South struggling against the "southern lady" role. She tackles issues of



race relations, class struggles, and sexism with a detailed realism and bitter humor that seem to foreshadow the work of later writers such as Flannery O'Connor and Carson McCullers.

Haardt's personal struggle with tuberculosis figures prominently in her nonfiction. In "Dear Life," one of her finest essays, Haardt writes of a brush with death that forced her to come to terms with a contradiction faced by so many other southern writers: her simultaneous revulsion and longing for her home region. Haardt links her own illness and impending death to the cloying sweetness of the South. She concludes that "a full tropical death, at the moment of greater promise, was the peculiar heritage of the South, and of all Southerners." Sadly, she was right about herself. She died just as her career was beginning to reach full bloom.

Henley provides a brief sketch of Haardt's life and an excellent introduction to her career. Much of Haardt's best work is included in this collection. Readers interested in southern women's writing will find the book amply rewarding. There is still more material by her worthy of note, though most is currently out of print or still unpublished. But if *Southern Souvenirs* sparks the interest it should, a full Sara Haardt revival may be on the horizon.

*Cynthia Brantley Johnson is currently writing a biography of Sara Haardt Mencken. She is the author of more than twenty educational books for young people, and teaches literature and writing courses at the University of Texas at Austin.*

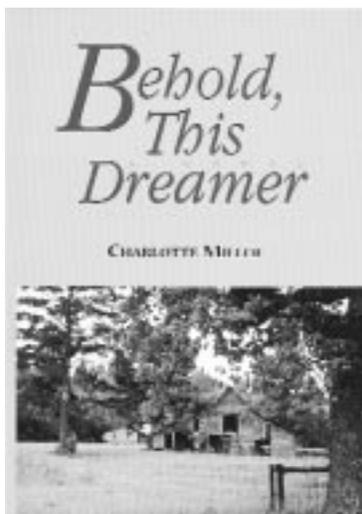
***Behold, This Dreamer:*  
A Novel**

**Charlotte Miller**

**New South Books, 2000**

**512 pp. Cloth, \$27.95**

Although much recent fiction set in the South has focused on racial issues, class distinctions among whites have also produced their share of injustice. No matter how hard-working he was, no small farmer could hold out for long against a wealthy planter who owned the cotton mill, the gin, and the bank. If he refused to accept the planter's dictates, he was likely to lose his land and perhaps even his life. When he sees Walter Eason destroy his father, Janson Sanders resolves some day to make things right. Unfortunately, perhaps because of his Cherokee good looks and his



proud bearing, Janson attracts upper-class girls, thereby setting himself up to be slaughtered by their fathers and brothers.

It is his dalliance with Walter Eason's flapper granddaughter that makes it necessary for Janson to flee his Alabama home even more precipitously than he had intended. In Georgia, Janson works hard and saves his money, supplementing what he earns legally with a bit of bootlegging. However, again an upper-class young woman enters his life, and this time the encounter is not a casual one. Janson and his employer's daughter, Elise Whitley, soon realize that despite their many differences, they are deeply in love. When their liaison is discovered, they fear that they will have to part forever, but then they find help from an unexpected source. The book ends with Janson on his way to realizing his dreams.

*Behold, This Dreamer* is a faithful representation of the twenties as seen from the vantage point of a class too often ignored in contemporary fiction. In Janson Sanders, with his fierce independence, his sense of self, and his love of the land, the author has created a hero worthy to represent the embattled farmers who have done so much to build this nation.

*Rosemary Canfield Reisman is a former professor and chair of the English Department at Troy State University. She is now visiting professor at Charleston Southern University.*

***One Day in the Life of a Born-Again Loser***

**Helen Norris**

**University of Alabama Press, 2000**

**224 pp. Hardback, \$24.95**

Alabama poet laureate Helen Norris is a master at creating characters who are a little off-center without being grotesque and at skillfully using language to weave tales that are at once realistic and dreamlike.

The characters in her latest collection, *One Day in the Life of a Born-Again Loser*, are all in some way losing at the game of life. In "Bower Bird," a young woman, in a desperate attempt to find companionship as she and her mother age and decline, pretends to be someone she is not. She leads a Vietnam veteran, himself a victim of life, into her room, which is filled with mirrors and colorful curios she has



collected, scraps that fill her empty life. As the man is having tea with her on a prayer rug in the bedroom, he looks at “the clutter below and the clutter above” and is reminded of “the jungle floor with its life that was separate from birds and trees.” He also remembers a bower-bird’s nest he had once been shown, “how it was decked to lure a mate with its bits of glass, glittering stones, flowers, shells, a colorful thread.”

“The Second Shepherd” is one of three stories in the collection that take place at Christmas. In this story, a young couple, who dread having to face another Christmas since the death of their only child, “borrow” a small boy from an orphanage for Christmas day. The adults in this story, many of whom are childlike or even childish in some ways, contrast sharply with Buster, the five-year-old orphan who is stuck in the beard he wore in the Christmas pageant, making him appear to be a small adult. And it is Buster who leads the lost and heartbroken couple back to the orphanage where they encounter another child, a little girl named Sally, still dressed as the Virgin Mary from the pageant, who helps them experience an epiphany that will, perhaps, help them come to terms with their own loss.

The stories range in tone from poignant to comic, but each is finely wrought. Norris’s characters and storylines are astonishing and her exquisite use of language equals that of Truman Capote at his best. Norris’s stories are always a treat and this collection is no exception.

*Marian Carcache is a writer and teacher who lives in Auburn.*

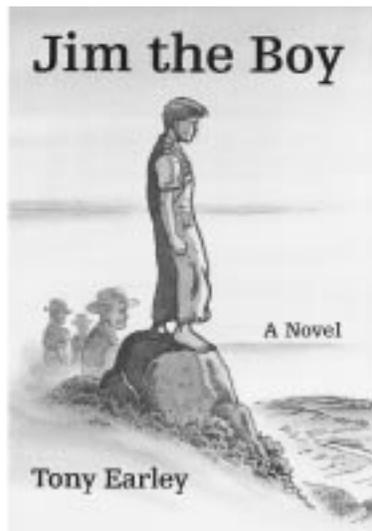
### ***Jim the Boy***

**Tony Earley**  
**Little Brown & Company,**  
**2000**

**227 pp. Cloth, \$23.95**

Tony Earley, one of *Granta*’s best young American writers and author of *Here We Are in Paradise*, writes a story that looks, feels, and smells like something written during the Great Depression-era South.

Fighting southern stereotypical characters who have beehive hairdos, live in trailers, and subsist on RC’s and Moon Pies, Earley reminds the literary world that there is a beauty in southern rural living that does not revolve around trauma—a beauty found in the



simple elegance of the land and an idea of home that seems long forgotten. From the beginning, home, family, and land lay the foundation for the story. As young Jim Glass leaves for school, he “turned and looked up the hill toward the school” and “wished for a moment that he did not have to take another step, that he could stay right where he was and never have to leave again.”

*Jim the Boy* is a year in the life of Jim Glass—from age ten to eleven—a time acknowledged as pivotal in a child’s development of self. Earley, through daily life experiences, captures wonderfully the innocence and language of young Jim. On the day of his birthday his mother asks, “Oh Jimmy,” she said. “How in the world did you get to be ten years old?”

And Jim replies, “I don’t know, Mama,” which was the truth. He was as amazed by the fact as she was. He had been alive for ten years; his father, who had also been named Jim Glass, had been dead for ten years and a week. It was a lot to think about before breakfast.”

But think and observe is what Jim Glass does throughout the novel. And the reader appreciates the young boy who sees the world and tries to figure his place in it.

Of course the danger of writing a story like this is falling into the deep pit of sentimentality. What is profound about this novel is how close Earley flirts with the sentimentality regarding our much-admired and iconized agricultural South without falling directly into that trap. It is Earley’s skill as a writer and his determination that keep the story firmly rooted in the realistic.

Even in this idyllic and bucolic novel, there are examples of the inequality inherent in southern culture. At the corners of the story are clear influences of classism and racism. Because these issues do not take the writing center stage, Earley not only strengthens the story of Jim, but also draws more attention to the inequalities themselves.

It’s nice to read something elegantly simple—something so caught up in the everyday—that we can forget, at least for a short while, that nothing else in our mass-market culture of “literature” brings us this sense of calm.

*Kyes Stevens is a poet and historian from Waverly, Alabama, who lives and teaches in New York but is still a Southerner.*

### ***Coming Home: Life, Love, and All Things Southern***

**Robert Inman**  
**Down Home Press, 2000**  
**264 pp. Cloth, \$23.95**

Fans of Robert Inman’s novels—*Home Fires Burning*, *Old Dogs and Children*, and *Dairy Queen Days*—who have not

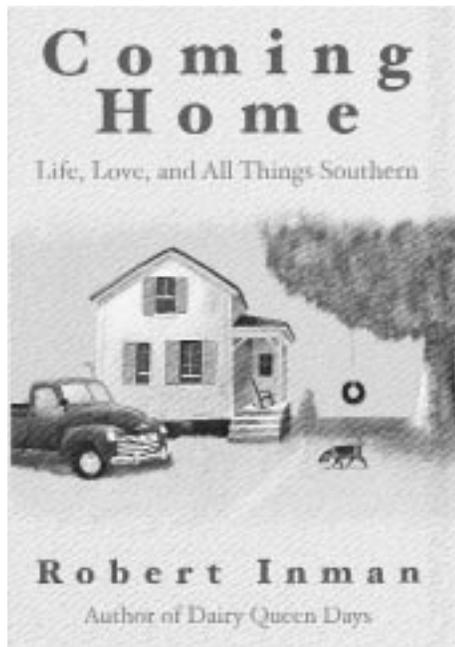
discovered his essays are in for a treat in *Coming Home: Life, Love, and All Things Southern*. In this collection of nearly 80 essays organized into five thematic sections, Inman returns to the traditional genres of his careers in the television and print media—the “television essay” and the feature story. His first books were similar collections, including *A Note in Closing* and *My Friend Delbert Earle*.

Although “essay” is the correct technical word for the works in this anthology, they might be more descriptively called “musings,” or “ponderings,” about life. Inman’s eclectic subjects range from family and friends to the natural world he observes through his window or ponders on the porch of his mountain home: physics, writing, fears and pleasures of fatherhood, the media (newspapers, television, movies, radio), holidays, war, astronomy, bird life, smoking, technology, childhood, cutting grass, schooldays, sports, first love and lasting love—and that is only a sample of the variety of topics, with memories of “home” in the South providing thematic unity.

Inman’s enthusiasm for life is contagious. His reminiscing prompts readers to do some musings of their own: remembering cherished childhood canine companions, recollecting a hummingbird battle over a feeder, recalling a debt to a demanding high school teacher (his “end of school advice: hug a teacher”), reliving a holiday gathering with family and friends.

Give yourself a special present: gather family and friends in front of the fire, and read even one of Inman’s musings to them. Then let the reminiscences begin.

*Nancy G. Anderson, distinguished teaching fellow and associate professor of English at Auburn University Montgomery, teaches undergraduate and graduate writing and Southern literature courses.*



### ***Widening the Road***

**Fred Bonnie**  
**Livingston Press, 2000**  
**192 pp. Paper, \$11**

I first met Fred Bonnie when I was a teenager running cross-country with his daughter, Samantha. Twenty years later, he re-emerged in my life at the Birmingham Southern Writing Today Conference. There, with great details, he energetically and enthusiastically chronicled a particular race I barely remembered. Listening to him then and later reading “The Race for Last Place” in his last collection of short stories, *Widening the Road*, I marveled at how well he captured the grueling nuances of adolescence and competition.

The stories in this collection feature a diverse range of characters, experiences, and settings. With a keen eye, Bonnie portrays the average Joe—whether it’s a disillusioned shipping clerk, harassed quarry worker, alcoholic war veteran, or restless teenagers working at the Winning Wheel Drive-In. Describing Link in “Gone With the Wind—Be Back Soon,” he writes: “His greasy gray hair hung to his shoulders, and wisps stuck out at sharp angles above his ears. In his thick-lensed glasses and his still-black mustache, he indeed looked a bit like Abraham Lincoln—a cross between Lincoln and a big-eyed tropical fish staring from an aquarium. Although everyone at Hacienda agreed Link was basically a garden-variety drunk, they also agreed that there was something that made people want to help him.” Like the anti-hero in Alan Sillitoe’s *Saturday Night, Sunday Morning*, Bonnie’s characters are often struggling, selfish, angry and even pathetic at times, but always sympathetic.

In “Squatter’s Rights,” Lloyd’s refusal to let his son-in-law sell the Chevy, which has been sitting in Lloyd’s yard for seven years, becomes a battle of wills and an exploration of the indignities of old age. In the story “In Search of Number Seven,” a middle-aged businessman’s quest for a particular airport bar becomes a pursuit of lost dreams and a rude awakening. Whether Bonnie explores a man facing the reality of his wife’s affair or a boy facing mortality, he paints a far from antiseptic view of life.

Like Flannery O’Connor, Bonnie examines often absurd, extreme behavior, as in the title story, “Widening the Road,” which captures the fiercely independent and gritty flavor of an older South giving way to the inevitable “progress” and development of the New South. Like Eudora Welty, he evokes a sense of time and place that is a fading southern experience. His sharp observations make the reader pause: “Blanche was thin and pallid and white-haired. She feigned heavy-eyed disinterest, although her mind ran like a crabmeat picker as it sorted her thoughts.” A steely practicality permeates Bonnie’s language and images.

The beauty of reading a good book is you can always re-read it as a different stage in life and gain a new perspective. The beauty of being a writer is you can always revise and revise some more, which is precisely what Bonnie successfully accomplishes in his last collection of short stories. Revisiting and recasting fifteen stories from his first two collections, he eliminates any "carelessness" or "sloppy work" that resulted from "a youthful rush to publish." He defines this edition, not as a "re-release," but as a reprint of works "re-seen through the eyes of twenty additional years of reading, writing and studying the craft." In this powerful and insightful collection, Bonnie's funky edge and offbeat sensibility continue to live.

*Lanier Scott is a freelance writer living in Birmingham. After eleven years of teaching high school English, she is currently raising her two-year-old son and working on getting her first novel published.*

### ***The Cornelius Arms***

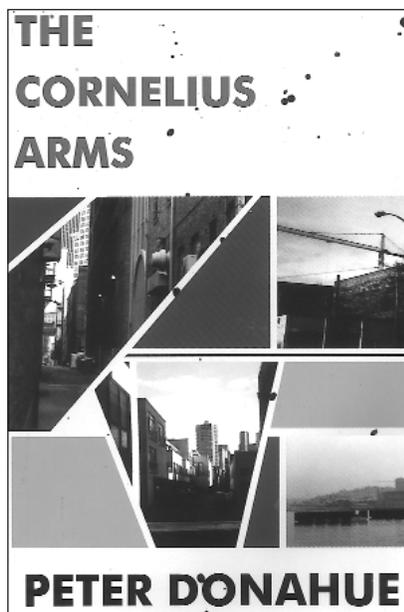
**Peter Donahue**  
**Missing Spoke**  
**Publisher, 2000**  
**256 pp. Paper, \$14**

When inner-city progress clashes with the little guys living in an old apartment house, the outcome is inevitable. What isn't known, however, is the effect on each life when the wrecking ball slams against the dilapidated building. What happens to those least able to defend themselves?

Where do they go?

Birmingham author Peter Donahue explores the theme of housing for the poor for his collection of short stories, *The Cornelius Arms*. Donahue spent a decade living in low-cost apartment houses in Seattle before recently joining the Birmingham-Southern College faculty as assistant professor of English.

In his story collection, he makes it clear that the weakest among us—children, sick, elderly, homeless—have neither the power nor the strength of a collective voice necessary to bring about change. The Cornelius Arms residents are given notices to move out for renovations. When the apartments are ready again, former



residents can move back in, though their apartment will be smaller and the rent will be higher. They may not have the same spectacular view of trees, the mountains, and the Sound. Many of the present tenants are living hand-to-mouth or on fixed incomes. What can they do? Mona steps forward as the resident activist. She believes some repairs and a coat of cosmetic paint would keep the old building alive and keep the doors open a while longer. She hands out flyers and tries to organize a tenant revolt even as the renovation crew is banging on the doors.

This book reads like a good novel. The metaphor of The Cornelius Arms sheltering good and bad, old and young is a powerful one with a deeply religious theme. Gene, a promising graduate student, makes a desperate effort to save the world's butterflies by capturing and hatching them in his apartment. Gene's story is a sensual delight that sets the tone of the book—to let nature take its course. Other stories reveal deep secrets behind closed doors. Among the more interesting tenants are many of society's marginal people. The youthful drug addicts who live from one fix to the next, young Neo-Nazis spewing their hate messages, an aging gay whose heart is broken as he tries to pick up the pieces of his life, and a daughter nearly smothered by her manipulative mother. Such interesting people we would never see otherwise.

*Marianne Moates is a free-lance writer living in Sylacauga. She is the author of Truman Capote's Southern Years (UA Press), and she writes a weekly book column for The Daily Home.*

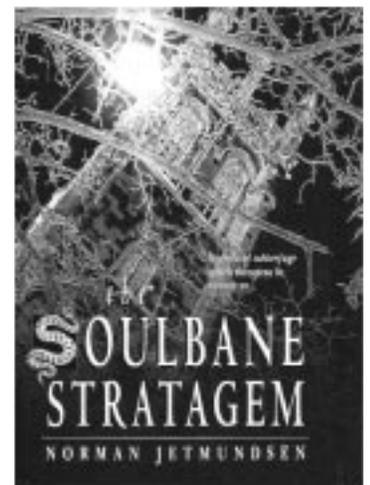
### ***The Soulbane Strategem***

**Norman Jetmundsen**  
**John Hunt Publishing Ltd.,**  
**2000**

**240 pp. Paper, \$12.95**

*The Soulbane Strategem* is a unique work of fiction by Norman Jetmundsen, an attorney who lives in Birmingham. While it might best be called a novel, it is also in parts a religious allegory, a call to arms in the spirit of C. S. Lewis, science fiction, a travel guide, a sociological study, and last, and best, a love story.

The main characters include two Oxford students, one an American, an Anglican priest, an Oxford "scout," a homeless man, and Soulbane (along with other henchmen of his "Royal



Hindness"). It seems his "Royal Hindness" was drubbed rather badly by Lewis and doesn't want to endure another "setback." The Oxford crew is up to the task.

The book follows the adventures of this strangely concocted army of God led by the hero, the American Cade Bryson. The chase primarily occurs in England, with side trips to Malta and the southern U.S.A. The settings are exalted but the main characters, with the exception of Cade, are from modest to poor circumstances. Each has a major flaw or burden.

The mystery is compelling. The suspense is well-paced throughout. The romantic part is a tad pristine but pleasant. The violence is appropriately interspersed. The religious conflict is true to the spirit of C. S. Lewis. The conflict with his "Royal Hindness" and his clever associates is one that is at the heart of the modern dilemma. The journey of the weary, conflicted pilgrims progresses appealingly through the labyrinth of evil forces. It mounts with crescendo towards the quite satisfactory ending.

The author tells the story slowly, with intricacy and verve. Character formation is less than full, of necessity, given the several themes, but adequate. Every word of this engrossing, pleasant throughout, and uniquely well-told tale needs to be read.

*David W. Hodo, M.D., is a writer, reviewer, and psychiatrist practicing in Selma.*

### ***Quilt Inspirations from Africa***

**Kaye England & Mary Elizabeth Johnson**  
**The Quilt Digest Press,**  
**2000**

**177 pp. Paper, \$27.95**

This gorgeous book is the collaborative achievement of recognized experts in the art and evolution of quilt-making. Kaye England of Indianapolis is a fabric designer, quilting instructor, and frequent contrib-



utor to specialty magazines; many of the outstanding examples of quilt art featured here are her creations. Mary Elizabeth Johnson, an editor and writer who lives in Montgomery, developed the crafts books program at Oxmoor House. A quiltmaker and consultant to quilt collectors, Johnson has published several books. In this one, her research and luminous prose combine with numerous full-color photographs to take the reader deep into the fascinating world of African history and culture.

Part I, "One Tremendous Adventure," explores the diverse creative heritage of a continent that has endured "centuries of isolation, followed by one of colonization." Topics include religious and social influences on African design, the influence of the "spirit world" and the proclivity for charms (such as the attaching of amulets to a quilt), universal motifs, and symbolism, all of which have contributed to an elaborate, yet definitive textile tradition. Interestingly, "the history of textile tradition in Africa is rich with impressive examples of advanced technology that did not damage the environment, used renewable resources, and provided lovely results. Many of these intriguing methods are still being used."

Part II, "A Caravan of Quilts," continues the exploration of Africa's traditions within the context of a practical manual for quiltmakers. The clear directions in this how-to section may inspire some who've never threaded a needle to take up quilting. One of Kaye England's creations is described as "a clever play on America's traditional log cabin design." The quilt is assembled in squares that suggest "a cluster of thatch-roofed houses arranged in a closed compound." The essay begins: "The very word *Congo* evokes Africa, bringing to mind a dark, bottomless river that alternately glides, pools, and plunges through a dense jungle teeming with exotic wildlife."

The quilt "Rainforest Stars" is as enchanting as its name. Beneath the picture is a Congolese proverb: "When the bee comes to your house, let her have beer; you might want to visit the bee's house someday." Put this book on a coffee table, and its glorious cover will attract the eye of anyone who enters your house. Open it, and you might find you want to visit its pages not just someday, but right then—and again, and again.

*Julia Oliver is a Montgomery writer and a founding board member of the Alabama Writers' Forum.*

WE, AS SOUTHERN READERS, MOST PARTICULARLY ALABAMA READERS, CAN NEVER RESIST A TELLING OF SOME ASPECT OUR STATE'S PAST.

*Five new and specialized books cast new light on different phases of the history of the state.*

***Jefferson Davis:  
Unconquerable Heart***

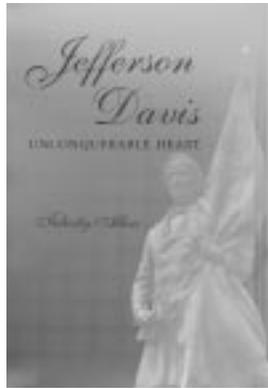
Felicity Allen

Shades of Blue and Gray Series

University of Missouri Press, 2000

808 pp. Cloth, \$34.95

Felicity Allen's biography of Jefferson Davis presents this one and only president of the Confederacy in the full context of his life and times. The book is rich with detail from the Civil War, but it also pulls back the curtain on Davis's life before and after those times.



Allen reminds readers of Davis's accomplishments in Washington, D.C., before secession—serving on the Congressional committee that established the Smithsonian Institution, for example, and actually drawing up the resolution, presented in July 1846, to defend Daniel Webster against charges of malfeasance in the Harrison-Tyler administration. There are glimpses, too, of the military career Davis savored, including a bit of humor from his Black Hawk War service in the 1830s. He made a group of miners furious enough to murder him when he defended Indian property rights, then gained their friendship by treating them all to a round at a frontier drinking booth.

Allen's writing brings to life the wrenching decision to secede and all the consequences, great and small, created by that decision. She characterizes Northern bitterness with a description of how Jefferson Davis's name was chiseled away from an aqueduct he helped design in Washington and not restored there until 1908. Using Davis's own correspondence and that of his second wife, Varina, Allen shares the family sorrows, including the deaths of all four Davis sons during their parents' lifetimes—sorrows that mingled with the larger sorrows of the South as a whole.

This biography is most poignant when it chronicles Davis's life after the South's defeat. There is, first, the humiliation of two years' imprisonment, much of it spent in leg irons behind the bars of a dank converted gun casement in a granite wharf wall at Fortress Monroe. Then the frustrating search for gainful employment, and,

finally, the determined written and spoken attempts to clarify and justify the thinking of the South.

**Unconquerable Heart** offers an intimate look at the relationship between Jefferson and Varina Davis—their devotion to their children, their unshakable beliefs and values, and their occasional disappointments in each other. Supported by detailed notes and an extensive primary-source bibliography, Felicity Allen's biography presents a vulnerable gentleman and his family making their way with determination through extremely difficult times.

*Ruth Beaumont Cook's North Across the River: A Civil War Trail of Tears was published by Crane Hill in October 2000.*

***Old Mobile Archaeology***

Gregory A. Waselkov

Center for Archaeological Studies,

University of South Alabama, 1999

62 pp. Paper, \$12

This lavishly illustrated and beautifully designed booklet is the first of a planned popular series of archaeology booklets to be produced by the Center for Archaeological Studies at the University of South Alabama. The booklet highlights the results of recent archaeological research at the original French town of Mobile and the colonial village of Port Dauphin.

Frequently, the findings of professional archaeologists are cloaked in professional jargon and buried in hard-to-find site reports. Likewise, much new historical writing is geared toward professional audiences and is heavy on detail but short on synthesis. Also, popular histories of the state frequently summarize Alabama's rich Native American and colonial past into paltry vignettes with outmoded themes, intended merely to serve as prelude to the main course of Civil War and 20th-century troubles. Consequently, general readers, especially those who would like to know more about the state's early history, have few places to turn for a solid and up-to-date account.

This booklet—compiled and designed by a world-class scholar—provides a refreshing and welcome relief from the usual offerings by providing new and exciting images and information about old

Mobile, early Alabama history, her native peoples, and the way in which archaeology, history, and anthropology combine to illuminate the past.

Designed with the general audience in mind, the booklet nicely summarizes the French period in Alabama, provides details on the Native American presence in the region and the role of the colony in the larger colonial world. Economic life, architecture, and details of daily life are conjured from the archaeological and historic record to paint a full and lively picture of the colony. There are more than seventy color and black-and-white photographs showing artifacts, excavation sites, historic maps, line drawings, and paintings. This is a “must have” for every Alabama library, as well as for the library of every Alabamian interested in history—from school children to the serious scholar. The booklet may be ordered through the Center for Archaeological Studies website: [www.southalabama.edu/archaeology/oldmobile](http://www.southalabama.edu/archaeology/oldmobile), or by contacting the Center at HUMB 34, University of South Alabama, Mobile, AL 36688-0022.

*Kathryn Holland Braund's most recent project is an edited edition of A Concise Natural History of East and West Florida, which is the narrative of the 18th-century cartographer and naturalist Bernard Romans.*

### **Montgomery in the Good War: Portrait of a Southern City, 1939-1946**

**Wesley Phillips Newton**  
**University of Alabama Press, 2000**  
**321 pp. Cloth, \$34.95**

Utilizing an abundance of sources—interviews, correspondence, photographs, and archived newspapers—Dr. Wesley Newton, who is professor emeritus of history at Auburn University, presents a richly textured image of Alabama’s capital city as it was in the period just before, during, and immediately following World War II. The description is often lyrical: “the capitol gleamed in the sunlight like a Roman civic building. . . . Although the Confederacy, like Rome, had not triumphed militarily, state and capital had retained a martial spirit.” But there’s also a shadow side: “The police force, as in other southern cities, was expected first and foremost to enforce racial segregation, resorting on occasion to virtually unchecked brutality against hapless blacks. . . . A few poor persons were fortunate to have an influential white patron to protect them.” A recurrent theme of this book shows how the foundations for a challenge to segregation in Montgomery were laid during World War II and its aftermath.

In 1939, despite the lingering depression, the city could boast 16,000 cars for a population of 78,000. The lenient, genial mayor “refused to enforce prohibition laws, winked at gambling. . . . [and] mounted no crusades against prostitution.” A new Coca-Cola plant had opened downtown behind historic St. John’s Episcopal Church.



Also that year, a local contingent of the United Daughters of the Confederacy marched up Dexter Avenue to the State House to protest (to no avail) the placement of a new bronze statue of Jefferson Davis, because it looked like a statue of Abraham Lincoln in Illinois done by the same sculptor. Movie stars Clark Gable and his wife Carole Lombard spent a night in Montgomery’s Whitley Hotel, on their way to Atlanta for the premiere of *Gone With the Wind*. Renowned Alabama artist Kelly Fitzpatrick taught classes at the Museum of Fine Arts. Elderly “Uncle” Bill Traylor, who had been born a slave and would receive national recognition as a folk artist after his death, sat on a crate beside a Monroe Street fruit stand to sketch.

Flight training for cadets was launched at Maxwell Field in September 1940. Allen Cronenberg writes in the book’s introduction: “Montgomery’s major contribution to the war effort—apart from sending its own men and women into the military services or its contributions to the volunteerism on the home front—was, of course, Maxwell Field. Because so many flyers trained there, it was often said that ‘the road to Tokyo ran through Montgomery.’”

In 1940, Congress enacted the first military conscription in peacetime to draft young men for military duty. For Montgomery and the rest of America, the war began with the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, and ended with the cataclysmic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945.

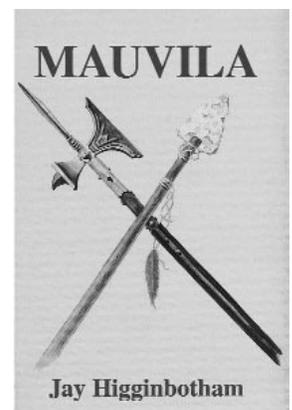
Drafted into the army in 1943 at age eighteen, Wesley Newton was wounded and taken prisoner during the Battle of the Bulge. However, very little of his own wartime experience is memoirized in the text. The author refers to himself in the third person, and by name, as he does the other Montgomerians—black, white, male, female, civilians, members of the armed forces—whose vividly poignant remembrances are included in this compelling narrative.

*Julia Oliver's new novel, Music of Falling Water, is forthcoming in June 2001 from John F. Blair, publisher. Her profile of Helen Norris appeared in a recent issue of Alabama Arts.*

### **Mauvila**

**Jay Higginbotham**  
**A.B. Bahr & Co., 2000**  
**(P.O. Box 8888, Mobile, AL 36689.**  
**1-800-304-0077)**  
**307 pp., cloth, \$25.00**

Mauvila (also spelled Mabila, Mavilla, Mauvilla) is the name of the palisaded Indian town in south central Alabama where on October 18, 1540, Hernando de Soto’s soldiers engaged Indians (probably Choctaw) in a fight that annihilated the Indians and greatly weakened the Spanish army. There are at least four contemporary accounts of the Soto expedition, and they have been available in English translations for some time, the most recent in the scholarly two-volume *The De Soto Chronicles* published by the University of



Alabama Press in 1993. De Soto's tragic and failed journey through the southeast and Alabama has fascinated people for centuries, but Andrew Lytle was the first to present a fictionalized account. His novel, *At the Moon's Inn*, published in 1941 and reprinted as part of the Library of Alabama Classics in 1990, is a classic narrative account, beautifully written, with imagination, and based on a sound understanding of the Hernando de Soto chronicles. Virginia Pounds Brown has written two highly acclaimed children's novels of the de Soto expedition: *The Gold Disc of Coosa* (1975) and *Cochula's Journey* (1996).

In 1990 Jay Higginbotham published his novel, *Mauvila*, in a limited edition. Although this novel with same title, and released in 2000 as new, has a different publisher and typeface, a slightly different layout, some spelling changes (Coosa is now Cosa and Taskalusia is now Tascalusa), a few words changed (*Indian* becomes *guard*), and some short paragraphs combined, it is the same novel.

*Mauvila* is creative and surreal fiction in which the action moves from present to past and back again, in which the voice constantly changes from various Spaniards to different Indians and even to animals, and the same incident is covered again and again, each time from the viewpoint of different people. Without titled paragraphs it would be impossible to follow. In one scene Soto's "coffin is bobbing" in the river, and he rises up, "leering" at the survivors of his expedition (p.19). The ghost then "slits his skin" from his larynx down to his groin, wiggles out of it, and throws it on one of his soldiers. According to the chronicles, Hernando de Soto's body was wrapped in a burial cloth, weighted with sand, and sunk in the Mississippi River. Although mixed-breed children and disease are recognized results of the Spanish entrada, this novel emphasizes sex with language unfit for children, and some adults may be offended.

Those familiar with the Soto narratives and with sixteenth-century Spanish and Alabama Indian cultures may find the novel lacking as historical fiction. Some press releases have suggested that this is history, but it is highly creative fiction. The confrontation between European and Indian cultures is one theme that threads through this macabre and violent account, where the irony of the Christians being the men most oblivious to the sanctity of life is not lost. The Spaniards view the battle as a conflict between Christians supported by their patron saint, Santiago, against "godless infidels" and "heathen devils." The story ends with the Spaniards who lived to tell this tale convinced their survival is God's miracle.

*Leah Rawls Atkins is a historian and author who lives in Birmingham. She is co-author of Alabama: History of a Deep South State.*

## ***Tannehill and the Growth of the Alabama Iron Industry,***

**Including the Civil War in West Alabama**

**Jim Bennett**

**Alabama Historic Ironworks Commission, 1999**

**469 pp., cloth, \$49.95**

The steel mills are still closing, the iron still burns in the eyes of Alabama's men and women, and the story of iron is still the story of

Alabama, which is why Secretary of State Jim Bennett's *Tannehill* resonates as it does. Bennett's is not simply the story of the Tannehill Ironworks, but also of the industry Tannehill began and of the state the industry drove to development.

This means that while Bennett provides us the particulars of almost all of Alabama's early blast furnaces and explains the practicalities of ironmaking, he is also telling the story of the Alabamians who made them happen. He tells the stories of Abner McGehee and Daniel Hillman, the men who forged the iron in Roupes Valley and tied it to the state's railroad projects, and of Moses Stroup, the ironmaster whose Round Mountain Furnace and Cherokee County revolutionized furnace-building in Alabama, who himself built Roupes Valley No.1 at Tannehill.

But since telling the story of iron means telling the story of coal, Bennett turns as well to the achievements of William Gould, coal mining pioneer and the first to make coke from Alabama coal. And since telling the story of coal means knowing something of geology, Bennett functions as geologist as well as biographer and historian, providing maps of the coal and ore fields that made Alabama iron.

*Tannehill* is compendious, containing hundreds of photographs, most of them rare, as well as maps, diagrams, oral histories of the Tannehill site, a detailed treatment of the archaeological work that uncovered its complexities, and a narrative of its restoration that suggests the difficult work of keeping the state's iron industry in shape.

Bennett's book appears as those difficulties become particularly apparent, exemplified by the recent closing of the Gulf States Steel Plant in Gadsden. It reminds us of the central role iron and steel have played in the history of our state and, in doing so, shows these closures as tragedies as much historical as economic.

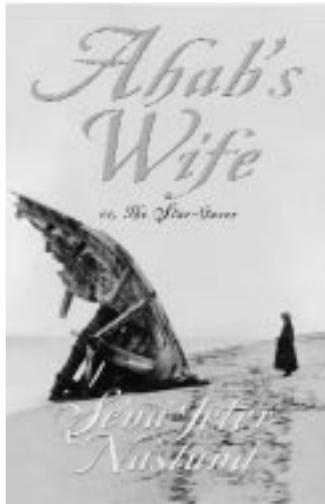
We need Bennett's book. It has been nearly three decades since the seminal work of Alabama industrial scholarship—Ethel Armes's *The Story of Coal and Iron in Alabama* (1910)—was last reprinted. Now that book, with its dozens of historic photographs, is out of the reach of most Alabamians. Bennett's *Tannehill* contains a generous selection of these photographs and so prolongs the life of Armes's work. Bennett's careful description also covers the ground broken by Joseph Woodward in his *Alabama Blast Furnaces*, a book last in print in 1940. And while surely indebted to the encyclopedic work of W. David Lewis's *Sloss Furnaces and the Rise of the Birmingham District* (1994), Bennett's is written in a more accessible language, supported but rarely outweighed by important detail.

*Tannehill and the Growth of the Alabama Iron Industry* is an important book, one every Alabamian should own and read and show their friends, because its story is the story of where we come from—the iron, hiding red in the Alabama clay. Its story is the story of the shaping of the clay, that iron, this state, its people, their heritage.

*Poet Jake York teaches on the English faculty at the University of Colorado-Denver.*

# ALABAMA LITERARY NEWS

**Sena Jeter Naslund** has been nominated for the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award for *Abah's Wife, Or, The Star-Gazer*. IMPAC, established in 1995 by the Dublin Corporation, the municipal government of Dublin City, and the productivity improvement company IMPAC, is the largest and most international prize of its kind. Nominations are made by selected libraries around the world, and previous winners include Nicola Barker for *Wide Open*, Andrew Miller for *Ingenious Pain*, and David Malouf for *Remembering Babylon*. The winner will be announced later this year. Among those nominated with Naslund are Isabel Allende, Andre Dubus, Anita Desai, Gunter Grass, Ha Jin, Sue Miller, Vikram Seth, and Salman Rushdie.



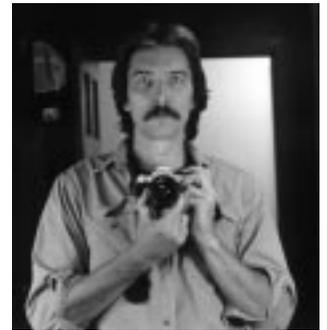
Award-winning poet **Jim Murphy** joined the University of Montevallo faculty last fall. Author of *The Memphis Sun*, published by Kent State University Press and winner of the 1999 Stan and Tom Wick Poetry Prize, Murphy is a native of Illinois. He studied with Sherod Santos and Sw. Anand Prahlad at the University of Missouri before earning a doctorate from the University of Cincinnati, where he studied with Andrew Hudgins, Don Bogen, and Tom LeClair. His poems have appeared in *Puerto del Sol*, *Painted Bride Quarterly*, the *Brooklyn Review*, and the *Alabama Literary Review*.



Poet Jim Murphy.

Poet and children's writer **Tony Crunk** joined the faculty of the University of Alabama-Birmingham Program in Creative Writing in fall 2000. Crunk's first collection of poetry, *Living in the Resurrection*, was the 1994 selection in the Yale Series of Younger Poets. His work has appeared in *Paris Review*, *Georgia Review*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, and *Poetry Northwest*. The author of

two books for children, *Big Mama* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1999) and *Grandpa's Overalls* (Orchard Books, 2000), he has taught at the University of Virginia, James Madison University, Murray State (Kentucky) University, and the University of Montana. While in Montana he worked with Hellgate Writers, Inc., and The Writers' Voice/Billings, Montana, Center.



Poet and children's author Tony Crunk.

**James White**, author of four books, including *Birdsong*, and faculty member at the University of South Alabama, has been named director of the Christopher Isherwood Foundation in Santa Monica, California. A new foundation, it will give grants to artists, writers, and scholars. White is also president of Software Teachers, which has released a series of programs for teaching writing, including *Writing for Film*, *Fiction Writing*, *Business Writing*, and *Basic Composition*. For more information check [www.SoftwareTeacher.net](http://www.SoftwareTeacher.net).

Poet, novelist, and short story writer **Kelly Cherry**, will serve as the Visiting Eminent Scholar in the Humanities at the University of Alabama-Huntsville Humanities Center between January and May 2001. She will be giving readings in Huntsville and other locations around the state over that time. For her reading schedule and more information, call the UAH Humanities Center at 256-824-6583. Cherry's many published works include *The Society of Friends*, a work of fiction published in 1999 by the University of Missouri Press; *Writing the World*, a collection of essays and criticism; and *History, Passion, Freedom, Death, and Hope: Prose about Poetry* (Story Line Press, 1999).



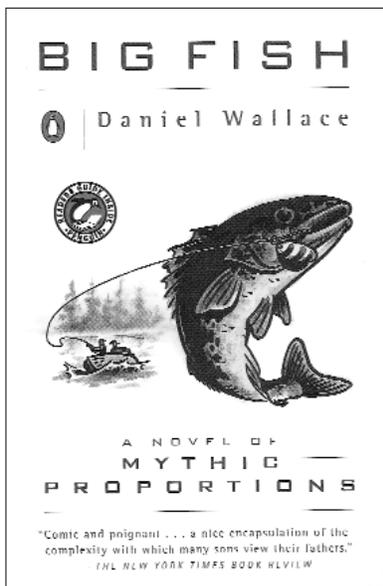
Kelly Cherry, poet and fiction writer.

The University of Alabama announced the appointment of **Wendy Rawlings** to the permanent creative writing faculty. Rawlings' first collection of short stories, *Come Back Irish*, won the 2000 Sandstone Prize for Short Fiction and will be published by Ohio State University Press in 2001. She has won fiction awards from *Atlantic Monthly*, *New Letters*, *Western Humanities Review*, and *Prism International*, and has published nonfiction in the *Bellingham Review*. She has received fellowships from Yaddo, the MacDowell Colony, the Bread Loaf Writer's Conference, and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts. She is a recent graduate of the Ph.D. program in Creative Writing at the University of Utah.

Guest faculty for the 2000-2001 UA Creative Writing Program will be **Joel Brouwer**. Brouwer's first book of poetry, *Exactly What Happened*, published by Purdue University Press in 1999, recently won the Larry Levis Reading Prize from Virginia Commonwealth University. His poetry has appeared in a number of literary magazines, including *Green Mountains Review*, *Paris Review*, *Ploughshares*, and *Southwest Review*. He is also a regular contributor of poetry criticism to *Boston Review*, *Harvard Review*, and *The Progressive*.

**Maurice Manning**, recent graduate of University of Alabama Program in Creative Writing, was awarded the 2000 Yale Series of Younger Poet's Prize for his book, *Lawrence Booth's Book of Visions*. The judge was W. S. Merwin. **Bruce Smith**, Associate Professor of English and faculty member in the Program in Creative Writing, is spending this year in Boston on a Guggenheim Fellowship. His most recent book, *The Other Lover*, was one of five nominees for the National Book Award in Poetry this year.

Steven Spielberg has signed on to direct the movie adaptation of Birmingham native **Daniel Wallace's** first book, *Big Fish*. A joint project of Columbia Pictures and Dreamworks, the movie will be produced by Bruce Cohen and Dan Jinks, co-producers of *American Beauty*. The screenplay was written by John August, author of the screenplay for *Go*. The movie has yet to be cast and locations are still being studied, but filming is scheduled to begin this summer.



The Alabama Writers' Forum has updated its website: <http://www.writersforum.org>.



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## *From the Field*

# Alabama's Poets Laureate, a Different View

BY SUE SCALF

The word “laureate” means “one who is crowned with laurel,” and its origins lie in the ancient practice of placing a crown of laurel upon the heads of victors, familiar to most of us through images of Roman emperors wearing their symbolic crowns. However, in our time and place, our poets are crowned only figuratively with laurel, and only recently have we in this country started naming a national poet laureate (which has been a practice in Great Britain for several hundred years). Unfortunately, you can ask almost any American on the street who our current poet laureate is—in Alabama or the nation—and the result will be a blank look. We are reminded, as if we needed to be, that poetry is still an elite art and that we must tread with humility in a world that much prefers the flashy and short-lived fame of rap stars and fashion models.

It has been my good fortune to know all of Alabama's poets laureate except for Samuel Minturn Peck, who was before my time. Some I have known well; several I have counted as friends, among them Helen Blackshear, whose recent edited book *These I Would Keep*, is a collection featuring the work of all of Alabama's poets laureate. Perhaps it was this reading that made me decide to share my own experience of and connection with these who have been crowned with the laurel.

In 1972, I gathered together forty or fifty poems I had written (my total output) into a little booklet. I had decided my relatives and friends would enjoy them, but before I had them printed I wanted someone “who knew something” to see them. The only person I knew of in Montgomery in any way connected with poetry was Bert Henderson, poet laureate of Alabama. He worked just a few blocks from my office, so I went down, now nearly thirty years ago, to cross the marble floors of the Whitley Hotel lobby. I knew that Sidney Lanier, the most famous Southern poet of all, had also

been a desk clerk, and it was with trepidation that I went to the counter and saw behind the burnished antique brass the man whose face I knew from photographs. I felt very awkward, but Mr. Henderson was charming. He took my sheaf of poems and told me he would be glad to read them. In a few days I returned to the Whitley, and along with my poems Mr. Henderson handed me a beautifully written commendation, one that I would use with his permission as a forward. “Forward” I had been. But I was glad I had been.

Later, as I began to learn my craft, to study poetry, to join all the local societies and organizations, I felt my knowledge and my understanding of poetry expand as I continued to write while I pursued an education. At one of the Alabama State Poetry Society meetings, Mary Ward, who was then poet laureate emerita, gave me a compliment I shall never forget (and which modesty prohibits my repeating here). The next poet laureate, William Young Elliot, awarded me a gemstone necklace in one of his contests. I do not remember the particular poem that received the award, but I have the necklace still.

Later, poet laureate Carl Morton and his wife, Isabel, became two of my closest friends. We were drawn together by our love for the poet Marjorie Lees Linn, who was terminally ill with cancer. Richard Beyer, Carolyn Cates, Riley Kelly (all poets), and I frequently met at Carl and Isabel's with the main purpose of cheering Marjorie, who was my dearest friend. (Marjorie was one of the finest poets as well as one of the finest people I have ever known.) Here is a vignette of us at Carl's house: Riley Kelly is playing the piano; Carl and I sit beside each other on the sofa, reading poetry aloud; Marjorie and Carolyn sit whispering on the floor, although once in a while Marjorie sings aloud to whatever song Riley is playing; suddenly Richard Beyer comes sailing into the room with

a flower between his teeth, pirouettes around us in a few graceful and exaggerated ballet steps; we burst into laughter, eventually wiping tears of hilarity from our eyes.

Morton Prouty, Jr., another poet laureate, was a person I came to cherish as I learned more about him. His manner was formal, old-fashioned, and somewhat in the style of Puritan cleric. In fact, I could visualize him wearing the colors and the collar of a Cotton Mather. He had a manner of standing very stiffly, almost as if his spine were starched. He wrote of the great sweeping themes, man's place in the cosmos, and even of the way a kitten lay beside the road, its fur lifted by the wind of traffic. His stiff backbone was actually a hero's mettle. We saw him suffer silently, wearing an eye-patch that hid the malignancy that eventually took his life.

Poet laureate Ralph Hammond is a person of many accomplishments and a hero, winning five battle stars in World War II while serving as a war correspondent. After the war he served as press secretary and later chief of staff for Big Jim Folsom. I knew him as one who never shirked the duties of organizations. With ease he served as president of the National Federation of State Poetry Societies; in addition he served many years as parliamentarian of the Alabama State Poetry Society. He has always helped other poets. I think he was and remains perhaps the least assuming and the most generous of all the poets laureate.

Last, I must mention the two Helens. Helen Blackshear and I worked together teaching creative writing at The Montgomery Academy for two years (I wound up staying eleven years). There

are people in life we should emulate, and Helen Blackshear is one of these. She is always cheerful, never shows fear and as far as I can tell has rarely known it, is ready to adventure—a kind of Ulysses ready to take sail, as in Tennyson's poem of the same name. Helen Norris, our current poet laureate, is witty, astute, current on almost every topic concerning health, herbs, and alternative medicine; she is cosmopolitan, a raconteur, but she is most of all a master of lyric poetry. Her melodious lines can hold an audience spellbound, until with a sigh, they breathe out in one collective "Oh. . ." like a mantra. She wears her crown of laurel with grace.

I have been privileged to know these poets laureate. I feel they have touched my own work, my character, and I can say proudly, the laurel suited them, and a leaf or two has drifted toward me.



*Sue Scalf was named Alabama's Poet of the Year in 1992. She has received more than 100 awards for her poetry, including recent awards from the National Federation of Poetry Societies and four Hackney Awards. She has published four books of poetry and has had work included in a half-dozen anthologies. Her poems have appeared in America, Carolina Quarterly, and Southern Review. Her most recent books are Ceremony of Names and South by Candlelight.*

## THE BACK PAGE

# The Intelligent Heart

BY PATRICIA FOSTER

**T**here are many things I could tell you about my life. I could, for example, tell you that my family hacked our way out of poverty and nailed ourselves to the middle class, the spikes digging deep into the marrow of our skulls. Our problems are huge. Insurmountable. Almost feudal in their proportions. I could tell you that it takes three generations for a family to right itself in a new class, to relax and enjoy the privileges and expectations, to belly up to the table. I could tell you that my father prefers to eat in the kitchen, that my mother still saves string, that my uncles wear dirty overalls. But I would be telling you this only to get it out of the way because the personal is not an issue here. What's at issue, in fact, is that the personal essay is dead, the "I" evicted from the fashionable venues of nonfiction.

Or so I've been told. "The world is just sick of people writing about their lives," a colleague explained bluntly to me behind the closed door of my office. Alone, I worried about this, wondering if it was time to be experimental, sexy, to jump on the bandwagon of the new new thing, those essays that intimidate and confuse, essays that threaten the rest of us to see them with uncritical awe. "It's better if it's a little more obscure," a student says, "if it has gaps, you know."

Well, maybe, I say to myself. But these are merely the buzzwords of academia; they often have little to do with the success of an essay, the clarity of thinking, the ability of a writer to engage the intelligent heart.

But what is the intelligent heart and who gives a fig about that anymore?

Sometimes I think I sit alone in my room, in a solemn universe of me and like-minded friends to whom I can point and say frankly, "We care. We believe in the intelligent heart!" We believe that stories matter, that whether autobiographical or fictional, the story must act as a catalyst for thinking and feeling, that it is the congruence of both which elevates literature to the status of art. The intelligent heart is the heart that seeks revelation in dreams, then turns dreams into insight, and insight into wisdom. The intelligent heart is the balance beam, the quivering tightrope we walk when we dip perilously into our psyches and gather up the stray bits and pieces we patch together to call art. Perhaps, more often, the intelligent heart is a masquerade, a carnival, a devilish trickster we wrestle with constantly, fighting shadows and phantoms in our attempt to find its true shape. Not that its true shape will give us any peace. Its true shape merely defines for us the oppositions we can work with, the strands of ambivalence we hold up to soft morning light. When functioning properly, the intelligent heart knocks at our door, awakens us from dreams, shudders from the drafty places in

our apartments and demands a quick audience. Write this, it says. And this. And this. And this. Faithfully we write it down, trying to quiet the alarm that it will be embarrassing, stupid, irrelevant, or that most insulting of faults: already done. We listen because it is urgent, because it sneaked up behind us and blithely tongued our ear. We listen because we know that stories come from the mystery of knowable places, the slime coating the muscle of an oyster, the brine of a shrimp, the tough thready strands of a tangerine. We know that everything we receive—even this, this summons—must be untangled and distilled, worked like the unraveling of rope, piece by piece, thread by thread, then put back together with the embrace of two broken thumbs. The intelligent heart is no mere bud of ornamentation. The intelligent heart is the source, the goods, the first principle from which everything else is made.

But this is not to say that the intelligent heart is all. Should anyone demand this, I would rise up in protest and draw my sword. "All" is something that can't be defended, dictated, enlisted, tabulated, or decreed. In every piece of good writing there is something suspect, a shadow lurking in the corner, a stray hair fluttering across the page, a drift of wind, a low-banked fog that obscures the promise of understanding. In every piece of good writing there is trouble, the quirks of personality and temperament, the dizzying graduations of self-love. No, the intelligent heart, in the end, is something elusive and longed for, the thing that can't quite be attained. The real problem for most of us is that the intelligent heart often remains buried for years, letting us grind out bare, quixotic but emotionless forms, forms that please our cerebral betters, that thrill grant committees, that please bored academics. These are forms that grow hairy with stylish weight, but that live, we secretly know, because of lack. And there is safety in lack. Safety in style. There is even, I admit, a kind of awe.

But when all the huff and puff of fashion slips away, the safe, stylish essay, cooked in the safe, stylish brain, is nothing but a husk, a fancy dress, a decorative facade covering an unknowable story, a secret life.

"Nobody wants any more of those personal stories," my colleague says. "Who cares about the I? Who cares about the woman in the storm? The family drowning? The mother clawing her way out of filth and dreary disease? Who cares?" she asks.

But I don't bow my head. "I do," I say. I refuse to be dead. 

*Patricia Foster's new book is All the Lost Girls: Confessions of a Southern Daughter, published in fall 2000 by the University of Alabama Press.*



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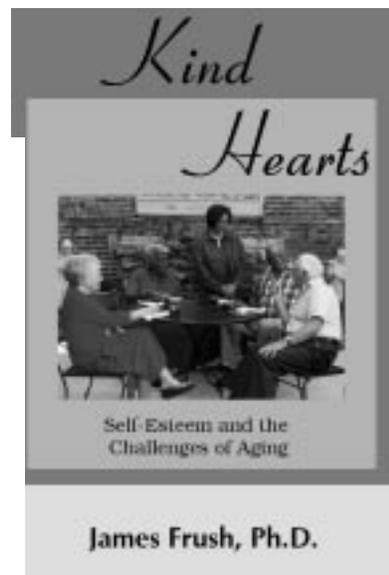
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