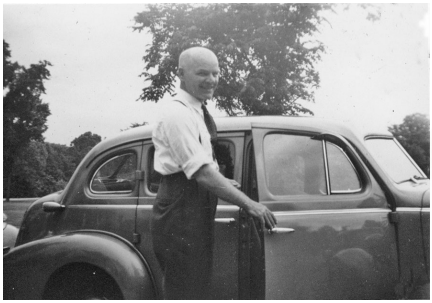

CLOSE-UP:

DIALOGUE AND VOICE

Glimmer Train Close-ups are single-topic, e-doc publications specifically for writers, from the editors of *Glimmer Train Stories* and *Writers Ask*.

DIALOGUE

BRET ANTHONY JOHNSTON, *interviewed by Margo Williams:*

Occasionally a line of dialogue, either something I've dreamed up or overheard, will spark a story. Really, though, dialogue is just another way of saying I start with a character doing something. What kind of man would say that, at this time? **Because dialogue is the only time the reader hears directly from the characters without the buffer of the narrator, the spoken word becomes a great barometer for what's happening inside a heart and mind.** What does a character want by saying something in this specific way? What is she trying to gain or conceal? ■

ERNEST J. GAINES,
interviewed by Jennifer Levasseur and Kevin Rabalais:

Dialogue is something you said you're proud of in your work. Does this go back to the sounds of words?

In dialogue, I'm dealing with the sounds I've heard.

Submission Calendar

One of the reasons I suppose I often write from first person or multiple points of view is because I want to hear the voices of different characters. Omniscient narration becomes a problem because, for me, the omniscient is my own voice narrating the story and then bringing in characters for dialogue.

I think my ear is pretty good. As a small child, I listened to radio a lot. During that time—this was back in the late forties—there were always great dramas on radio. I liked listening to them because I had to follow the story through dialogue. I like reading plays, and I like listening to the ways people speak. ■

MAILE MELOY, *interviewed by Joshua Bodwell:*

In Curtis Sittenfeld's review of Both Ways Is the Only Way I Want It *in the* New York Times Book Review, *she praises your restraint and says, "She is impressively concise, disciplined in length and scope." Can you talk about your process of working with this restraint? Do you write long first drafts in order to tighten in successive drafts? Or are your first drafts spare?*

They're spare. I often start with not that much more than dialogue. Then I have to go back and put in details about what things look like and where everyone is and what they're wearing. What happens between people is the most interesting thing to me. I have to make sure that readers can see the scene, and feel it, but I don't really care what the trees look like. I can make myself care if the trees are really important. ■

JAY McINERNEY, *interviewed by Victoria Blake:*

I'm good at observing certain social milieu, a certain kind of dialogue. I think I'm good at recreating the way that people actually speak in the worlds that I observe. I have a certain facility with the language that I think of as something of a gift. Whatever its magnitude and whatever its relevance, I have an idiosyncratic take on the language. I don't know if this is a strength, but at least it is a characteristic. ■

MELANIE RAE THON, *interviewed by Jennifer Levasseur and Kevin Rabalais:*

The deaf narrator of Sweet Hearts *says (or signs), "If you want to under-*

stand, you'll have to watch. You'll have to learn my language." She relates her family's story in a disjointed language that relies heavily on images rather than a linear narrative structure. How did you create this language to fit your story about a misguided and destructive brother and sister?

The brilliant Russian psychologist L. S. Vygotsky believed that dialogue launches language, but that **we come to know ourselves and our world through "inner speech," a private language almost without words, a ceaseless stream of images and associations that approach pure meaning.** Through this inner speech, a child discovers and creates her own identity and vision of the world. Marie, my narrator, loses her hearing at the age of nine, so she knows the spoken and written word, but, in time, she loses her desire to use her voice, and she comes to depend on sign because it is closer to her inner speech: flexible and cinematic, passionate and quick. She can literally say two things at one time: with the left hand she describes her nephew Flint as brutal, while with the right she exposes his tenderness and vulnerability. In sign, there is no need to reconcile contradictions, no need to construct artificial hierarchy or order. Marie can reveal detail, then panorama, moving swiftly between perspectives. Signed languages depend on intimate engagement, on the "listener's" attention to the flight of the hands, the expression of the face, the gesture of the body. There is no such thing as "overhearing" a sign or catching it in passing. If you avert your gaze, you've lost it.

I loved the possibilities of sign, the challenge of trying to render a new and complicated language within the limits of my own language. It is impossible to translate sign into written English, but I have tried to capture the intensity of Marie's sensations and memories. Images erupt. Because she's been deprived of her hearing, every other sense is heightened. ■

LEE SMITH, *interviewed by Susan McInnis:*

I want to ask about translating sound to the page. Dialect is so much more than speech patterns. How do you attune the writer's ear?

Photo: Brian Regan

I don't know exactly. You have to be able to hear speech. This is hard to convey to my students, because either you have an ear for dialogue and dialect or you don't. But even if you don't have a fine ear, you can train yourself. That's one thing my students tell me is so good

about starting to write, whether you ever write for publication or not. **Once you start writing, you start listening really carefully, looking at everything around you really carefully, and the world opens up in wonderful ways because you're paying so much more attention to everything you're exposed to.** And you hear lines as good lines. You hear somebody say something and you write it down. You know you're going use it. It's what Flannery O'Connor called a "habit of being," a way of learning to listen. Some people are born with it, other people can learn it, and still other people go through life with tin ears.

Once you do it enough, you feel comfortable writing in somebody else's voice, or writing in the voice of someone from another time. You can just let go while you're doing it. ■

MYLA GOLDBERG, *interviewed by Sarah Anne Johnson:*

In the conversations among soldiers [in Wickett's Remedy*], the soldiers remain nameless. These disembodied voices could be anyone, or no one. How did you decide to step outside of the point of view of the novel, and what did you want to show about the war and its impact on life in South Boston and vice versa?*

From the beginning of the book there are sections of unattributed dialogue, and then toward the end it's only the soldiers. I was very interested in capturing not just a person or even a couple of people, but a city and lots and lots of different people. **When you have unattributed dialogue it allows different people to enter into a story and then leave again, and you don't get tied up in their names because their names aren't important.** Barthelme uses unattributed dialogue and also Manuel Puig, who wrote *Kiss of the Spider Woman*. I've been heavily influenced by writers who work in that mode, and it just made sense to use it in this particular story because it was all about living in the city. One of the major experiences of living in a city is overhearing people, and I wanted that experience in the book. ■

WILLIAM LUVAAS:

Early on, my dialogue was stilted and artificial. Then I read somewhere that you should study the rhythms and diction of spoken utterance, even write down overheard conversations in public places word for word. So I did. You must learn to trust your ear: if dialogue sounds off, it *is* off. It's those

who can't hear this who are in trouble. We should listen to our characters talking as we write them. They often speak in sentence fragments, incomplete thoughts, and repeated phrases. Ideally, each will have her or his own personal idiom. But, of course, written dialogue only mimics spoken speech; it is actually speech delivered in drastic shorthand. Work hard on your dialogue in editing. Think of it as the poetry of fiction; each word must be exactly the right choice for the character. ■

BENJAMIN PERCY, *interviewed by Andrew McFadyen-Ketchum:*

Tell us about your "geometry of dialogue."

I published an article in *Poets & Writers* about this. Triangulation, I call it. It's dangerous, I think, to set characters down at a kitchen table—or at a bar, or at a park bench—and have them chat. It destroys momentum. So I advise writers to find a way to triangulate meaningful dialogue. To create some action, some short-order goal, that accompanies the characters' voices. Maybe they're painting a porch. Or driving through a construction site. Or gutting an elk. **The way they slop a paintbrush or stomp the gas or wield a blade says as much as any snippet of dialogue. And it creates an engine that moves the conversation forward.** ■

MELANIE BISHOP:

Dialogue should do two things: It should sound like people talking, minus the pauses and *umm*s and stumbling, and it should move your story forward. A couple of carefully chosen lines between two characters are much more effective than a long conversation back and forth. Try to include the couple of lines in any conversation that are most crucial, most key. The rest is often better paraphrased. Let dialogue be like subtle arrows shot through your story. Characters come alive on the page through what they say and what they do. Dialogue and action, therefore, are your vehicles for showing readers who they are dealing with in a particular story.

The best advice for preparing to write good dialogue is just to listen to the ways people talk and to the lines that come from their mouths. Write down memorable lines loved ones or not-so-loved ones have spoken to you. You know, those lines that we can't forget, that are etched verbatim into our minds. Use these lines in an appropriate story.

As interesting as the ways people understand each other are the ways we often misunderstand. Being able to write an exchange between two people where this lack of understanding is revealed is a sign of a skilled writer. Are the two people in the conversation listening to each other or not? Are they wanting to hear or not? Are they coming to the conversation with opposing personal agendas, and if so, what are they, and how do they drive the conversation? Aim for truth, which is what I would say in response to most any question about writing. ■

DAVID LONG, *interviewed by Linda B. Swanson-Davies:*

You don't want to put in a lot of stuff that people already know. If every conversation has a beginning, middle, and end, you don't want to include those parts that are just perfunctory stuff. It may be important for people, when they're first meeting, to greet each other, and if there's something significant about the way they greet each other, then you might use that. Otherwise, you'd want to just jump in. So I think the key to the thing is having most of the conversation be middle, not much getaway, and not much lead-in.

And there are rules in dialogue. You can't tell the reader things the people wouldn't say out loud. This is something I used to tell my writing students. You'd have these conversations where John comes back, and Mary says, "Oh, I've been visiting Rose down on the third floor. You know, our neighbor Rose, who grew up in Boston." In other words, people don't say that stuff, and so you can't use a patch of dialogue to feed information to the reader. I mean, that's your job as a narrator. Beyond that, I just try to listen real hard. I try to hear the words being spoken and to get the rhythm of the sentence and try to use how it's laid out on the page to capture the pauses—so you can break it up. You can indicate a pause by putting the *said* in the middle of the sentence. You can leave words out, you know: "Run get me that roll of VisQueen." You just want to say what somebody would say.

I'm really impressed with the way you do that. It seems to me that dialogue is one of the places where people can easily go wrong.

For me, along with writing place description, it's the most fun there is.

You know, the other nice thing about writing dialogue is, if you've given yourself a quota for the day, it takes a lot less words to fill up the page. If you look at days that you wrote three pages, there's a good chance some

of it is dialogue. The days that are, like, one-and-a-half pages, are pretty dense-pages days. I'm being about two-thirds serious now. ■

CHARLES BAXTER, *interviewed by Robert Birnbaum:*

Dialogue can be used to open out a page. Pacing is really critical for the flow of the story. You always get a choice in how you handle a piece of material. You can either give it a full scene, you can summarize it, or you can account for a long patch in somebody's life in just a sentence, if you want: "And things went pretty smoothly for the next three years." You've covered three years in one sentence. In the next sentence you move to when things are not moving smoothly again. Sometimes, for pacing purposes, you'll decide that a scene needs some air let into it, so, where you've had a long passage of exposition or a long passage of summary, you'll try to zero in on a moment and give two or three little exchanges of dialogue—little half-scenes, you might call them—and then you can go back to what you were doing. It just breaks it up. It's like when people have been sitting too long and they need to stretch a little bit or they need to see something that's here and now. Scene is always inherently more interesting than exposition. It's more vivid and more immediate, so you want to get into scene as often as you can.

I wrote an essay about dialogue called "The Elephant in the Living Room." Some of the most interesting dialogue is that in which the characters are either not listening, or listening selectively, or are hearing things that haven't actually been said. It's not as if great dialogue represents the care with which people listen and respond to each other. It's much more often the case that good dialogue in plays and novels calls your attention to the way people are not listening. Or are listening in light of their own needs at the time. ■

AMY BLOOM, *interviewed by Sarah Anne Johnson:*

I've heard you say that you're interested as much in what people don't say as in what they say. You even have part of a story, "Faultlines," in which the dialogue contains what the character didn't say, or should've said. What interests you about this dynamic? Why is it important to show?

It's because I'm interested in people. I don't know anything more interesting than the difference between what people say and what they feel. There's

a whole universe there below the surface.I'm always interested in the way that feelings underneath leak out and shape behavior. People try very hard to have them not show up or change anything or affect anything. But our defenses leak.That's how we know they're there. I love that. ■

THISBE NISSEN, *interviewed by Linda B. Swanson-Davies:*

You're very sure-footed in your delivery of dialogue. What is your approach?

This summer I'm doing a little talk at the Iowa Summer Writing Festival, and then another talk at Bread Loaf later on in the summer, and somewhere along the way,I've taken on dialogue as my thing to talk about. I can't quite figure out what I'm going to say yet, but I am fascinated by it. Why dialogue works or doesn't work. I don't know how aware I am of what I'm doing when I'm doing it. I really am hearing people talk and writing down what they say. I don't think I edit out as much crap as some people do. There are a lot of real dialogue tics in my stories. People don't speak in full sentences. They pause, repeat phrases; you know, there are so many tics to real dialogue.

Often when dialogue doesn't work, it's because people are using dialogue as a vehicle to get something across,instead of putting people in a room together and watching what happens. What comes out of their mouths? Often the things that come out of our mouths are not what we want to say, or what we're thinking. Or what would propel the action to a logical conclusion. We're all a mess. The things that come out of our mouths are gobbledygook. Occasionally someone is able to say what they're thinking, or they accurately represent their emotion in what they're saying. I really just go about hearing what people are saying and finding a way to get that into dialogue. Cutting out enough of the *um*s and repetitions, but keeping enough of them in that it's real. But maybe it's the things that go along with the dialogue, the gestures that belie the dialogue, the things that someone is thinking that are so different from the dialogue, or how they're actually getting out what it is that they're thinking. That somehow feels very natural to me. I wonder if it's a theater thing a little bit, too. I started out writing one-act plays in high school. I was part of a theater troupe that did that sort of thing, and when you're doing theater all you have is dialogue. You don't

have the luxury of exposition. You have action and dialogue. I wonder if that's rooted in there somewhere, too.

Do you ever face the problem of how to get some bit of info out there that you feel compelled to use dialogue for?

My instinct is to say—and I'm not sure if this a blanket truth—but my instinct is to say that if there's something I'm really trying to get out there, usually what I'm writing is crap and I have to toss it anyway. It's too leading. I'm using my characters instead of letting them do what they're going to do and get to the place that they get to.Maybe I have an idea of where I'mtrying to get them to go, or something I want them to grapple with, but I follow them and see what they do, and they take me down different roads because they don't say what they're supposed to say. If you're trying too hard to guide them—I want you guys here—and they want to go over there…

You cripple them.

Yes, and what they're saying isn't real because you're *making* them say it. There's too much manipulation going on. I've never actually taken a workshop class with Ethan Canin, but I have a lot of friends who have. He talks about deeply imagining your world, being inside it, and transcribing it rather than being the puppet master. Because if you're the puppet master, your characters are puppets.

If you can be a fly on the wall, who happens to have a laptop, you know you've got it made, because you can just scribble down what those people are saying. ■

RICHARD BAUSCH, *interviewed by Jennifer Levasseur and Kevin Rabalais:*

The many characters in In the Night Season *are given equal weight within each segment of dialogue, but who is speaking is never questioned. Each character has a life of his own, and that life is presented through his voice.*

That has to be done extremely carefully. You don't want to repeat too much who's talking, so you try to make it clear to the reader by the way it's laid out on the page. When you are writing narrative—what people are doing, what the weather is like—you can dream that up without thinking about it a lot. It's not the same with dialogue.You really have to go over it and over

it and make sure nothing is wasted, that every single line is doing more than one thing. The trouble people get into with dialogue is they allow the line to do one thing only, whether it is to sound realistic alone, or to carry forward exposition alone, or to give character alone. None of these by itself is enough. It's got to do all three of those things at the same time or else you have to find some other way to get it done. Dialogue has to sound like people talking without being like people talking. If it is like people talking, it's incredibly dull. You really have to think about it, step back and look at it, and go over every single syllable. ■

VOICE

ERNEST J. GAINES, *interviewed by Jennifer Levasseur and Kevin Rabalais:*

Have there been some characters' voices that were easier to find than others?

I feel I got inside Jim in *Of Love and Dust* easily because I was thirty-three years old when I started writing that book, and I created him to be the same age. He uses the language I grew up around, living in Louisiana. Also, it wasn't too difficult to find Jefferson's voice, which is seen in his diary in *A Lesson Before Dying*, because I wrote the diary after I had been writing the novel for five years, so I felt I knew his character. Sometimes I have to rewrite and rewrite to get the exact phrases I want. I stick with south Louisiana and not places with accents I don't know anything about. ■

MAILE MELOY, *interviewed by Joshua Bodwell:*

Where do your own short stories typically begin? A scene or situation? A narrator's voice?

They almost always begin with a scene or a situation, often very small, always involving at least two people. But the stories don't go unless I have the voice. It's like getting into a car with a tricky clutch, and you can either get it in gear or you can't. I think the voice has a lot to do with whether I can get the story in gear and make it go. ■

CHARLES JOHNSON, *interviewed by Jennifer Levasseur and Kevin Rabalais:*

You've talked about your six "apprentice novels." Did you think of them in those terms when you wrote them?

Every time you do something, you try to do your best. I wrote those books over a rather quick time—two years. I never intended to become a writer. All of my orientation from childhood to college was as a cartoonist. But then, one idea for a novel occurred to me, and I had to write it because it wouldn't leave me alone.

Setting out to write a novel was something I was familiar with because I had friends who were writers. One very good friend, Charles A. Gilpin, to whom I dedicated *Faith and the Good Thing*, wrote six books by the age of twenty-six, then died of a rare form of cancer. I wrote my first novel, and it was rough. I realized that I needed to know more. I started another one immediately to see if I could improve things like character and plot. Then I wrote a third novel to see if I could improve structure. By the time I got to the seventh, I had read every writing handbook I could find. I understood a lot, but there were certain things I realized that I still didn't know.

By good fortune, I happened to be at Southern Illinois University, where John Gardner [*Grendel*] taught English. According to editors who had looked at my work, I needed to learn two things: voice and rhythm. Those were two things that John was quite good at. He was a narrative ventriloquist. John paid an extraordinary amount of attention to rhythm, meter, and cadence. And he was also familiar with philosophical fiction, which was the thing I focused on for those six books that I couldn't nail. ■

HA JIN, *interviewed by Jennifer Levasseur and Kevin Rabalais:*

What are some discoveries you made as an evolving writer?

I think that if I really understand my material and speak from within the story, often the story will have its own demand for style. I think that's clear. For instance, look at *In the Pond* and *Waiting*. If you take out one sentence from each novel, they sound different. *In the Pond* is a comedy, and *Waiting* is a tragedy. **The subject matter, the story itself, determines the style. Style is supposed to serve the story, not vice-versa. Sometimes as writers, we make mistakes and try to devise a style and make it fit the story.** ■

BARRY UNSWORTH, *interviewed by Kevin Rabalais:*

Do you research the language of each period about which you write? How much room is there for a modern consciousness in historical fiction?

We speak with the voice of our time. We have the sensibility and the modes of our day. We can't translate our own sensibilities into the past. All that's really required, I think, is that you should have a sense of the past, which I have discovered in myself over the years. This is one of the reasons that I write, for want of a better term, *historical fiction*. If one really used the speech forms and grammar and vocabulary of the period, it would be incomprehensible to a modern reader. It would be a type of expression beyond the normal capacity to read. Certain compromises always have to be made. You have to try to find ways in which the past can be constructed. The problem is not really to dwell on the past as such, but only to convince the reader, and convince oneself, that you are hitting the right note, that you are getting an authentic feeling of the period.

Then, through that, you must try to reflect the themes into the present. Without bringing conviction from the past, you won't be able to very easily bring conviction into the present, and you won't be able to do what I like to do, which brings analogies between the past and present. This interests me more than anything else when I write. It's a kind of sleight of hand, or confidence trick, or the usual fictional manipulation. You have to just do enough to convince the reader that you're talking about a particular period and that you know that period. This relationship is very interesting and very complicated. ■

MAILE MELOY, *interviewed by Joshua Bodwell:*

You have a great gift for writing both from the male point of view (as in your masterful "Aqua Boulevard") and about men (as in the story that opens your new collection, "Travis, B."). There is a wonderful line in "Tome," the first story in Half in Love, *where the narrator, a competent female attorney, says, "I thought, That's what it's like to be a man. If I were a man I could explain the law and people would listen and say, 'Okay.' It would be so restful." Is there a little bit of the author in that declaration? Is that why two of* Half in Love*'s six first-person stories are told in a man's voice, as well as the only first-person story in your new collection? Can you share your thoughts about both female authors writing as men, and male authors writing from a female perspective?*

I didn't realize there were so many male protagonists until I put all the stories together. I think part of the reason I like a male perspective is that it gets me out of myself. I wrote "Aqua Boulevard" at a time when I was working on "Tome" and other stories about women in the West, and I felt like I had that voice down pretty well, but I was so *tired* of it. So I started a monologue, not knowing where it was going, in the voice of a seventy-year-old Frenchman (mimicking a seventy-year-old Frenchman I know and love), just to get out of the rhythm of my own voice. And it was hugely freeing. So then I had to add other characters and make something happen. ■

VALERIE MARTIN, *interviewed by Janet Benton:*

*I once heard you say something like, "**If people are questioning the details in your story, if they're saying something doesn't seem plausible, the real issue is that the voice isn't doing its job, because if the voice is strong enough, people will believe anything.**" I mean, look at the first line of Kafka's "Metamorphosis."*

Right. "I don't *believe* he turned into a cockroach." [*Laughs.*]

So is that what takes a while when you're working on a book in the beginning, finding the voice?

It does. Once I find the voice, then I feel quite free and happy. I mean in that hundred pages of this New England book, *Property*, I had a lot of trouble getting started. I often start too early in the action of the novel, and I wind up writing, say, forty pages before I get to the beginning, throw those away, and go on. At first I can't hear the voice, it's not coming in very

clearly, it's uneven, or I don't know who this person is.

And what's the feeling when you get the voice?

You just have this sense of ease. I mean, it's a hard thing to describe. It's not mystical, but then it is kind of mystical. It's like meeting somebody. Presumably all these are voices that I somehow know. A lot of them are combinations of voices, I think. Some characters speak in the manner of people I know. Paul's diction in *The Great Divorce*, the way he speaks is very much a combination of some Kingsley Amis characters and John. So it's a voice that I'm familiar with, certain turnings of phrase, certain ways of putting things. I guess Mary Reilly's voice was the strangest to come by, because it really is so completely different from anybody I know. ■

JAY McINERNEY, *interviewed by Victoria Blake:*

The narrator in Story of My Life *has such a strong personality, such a strong presence. Is your narrative voice as accessible to men as it is to women? How did you feel about writing as a woman?*

I remember *Story of My Life.* I kept rewriting that first chapter over and over again, because I knew that it was crucial that I really internalize this and get it right, or else it would sound phony.

It seems to me that you got it right. It's a very consistent novel.

It's funny. The only people who've even questioned that possibility are the, like, middle-aged male critics. Nobody else seems to. That book is only now starting to get the respect it completely lacked when it came out. You can't believe the critical drubbing at the time, only because of the subject matter! Particularly among male critics, talking about whether a guy could be writing a chick's voice…whether this is politically correct. Then they hummed about whether the voice was accurate, which of course they couldn't judge.

There certainly is a school which says that men ought to leave women alone and white people ought not to try and write black people, and so on. I think that's terrible. It's a surrender of the terrain of imaginative fiction. **If fiction is anything other than autobiography or journalism, then of necessity it involves imaginative projections into experience beyond the author's.**

Was it difficult to assume a female voice?

In the end, no. As I say, I worked. I worked over and over again on the first pages, wondering if I could get it right. And then I believed in it. Of course, it was based on real women out there. Hundreds and hundreds of hours listening to women like that talking. Women that I had dated, women that were my friends. A few in particular. The book played on one of my strengths, which is the ability to render a certain voice in an authentic way.

How long did it take to write it?

Honestly, about eight weeks. I wrote most of it at Yaddo.

Did you have the voice down before you went to Yaddo?

I had the short story.

Did you edit it much?

It was the least rewritten of any of my books. ■

SUSAN RICHARDS SHREVE, *interviewed by Katherine Perry Harris:*

The importance of observation for the writer—isn't it everything, in a way? This is something I have said to students. A story may be told a million times, but only you can tell it. A writer brings what he or she sees to a reader, and in that translation is empathy and originality and the humanity implicit in recognition. ■

CHANG-RAE LEE, *interviewed by Sarah Anne Johnson:*

Don't listen to anyone else. It's great to get opinions and advice, but you need to follow the particular private passion or obsession that you have for a story, giving no quarter to anything else. In the end, that's where writers come up with something unique. That's why novels still mean something even in this age—they're distinctive performances, utterly singular and surprising. Follow your passion. Feed your obsessions and in the end that will work best. ■

DAVID LONG, *interviewed by Linda B. Swanson-Davies*

You've said that the mind of the story has an attitude, or a personality. Do you have a particular attitude that you find yourself writing?

I think it's different in every story. Every story has an intelligence behind it. I'm on shaky ground here, theoretically, because I'm not sure I've worked this idea all the way out, but I know when I read any writer I've read a lot of, there's something that transcends the individual work.

But every individual work has its own voice, as opposed to the writer's. If the story's in the first person, then the voice of the story is the voice of the person telling it to you, and sometimes these are clearly invented voices. Other first-person voices you can almost assume sound like the writer, but even so, there's something that makes each individual work different. In some larger way there is an intelligence that transcends it, that is uniquely that writer's.

I don't know if I'm capable of talking about my own work that way. It's a lot easier for somebody to look from the outside. I can see that the voices of a number of the stories are related somehow. I notice that there are words I reuse and that there are sentence rhythms I find myself falling back on, and habits of composition. ■

LYNNE SHARON SCHWARTZ, *interviewed by Nancy Middleton:*

At one point in Ruined by Reading *you say that what you love to read isn't necessarily what you end up writing. That the subject chooses you—and even the style.*

It's true that the subject of the story chooses you. But it's the style even more. I wrote about this in connection with Natalia Ginzburg, who wanted to write very lush prose, yet writes extremely spare prose. Bruno Schulz, a Polish writer who died in World War II, is a very fantastical and wonderful writer. His work is rooted in the banal, as my writing is, but he lifts his subject up out of the banal until it becomes very surreal—an act of levitation. And I think, why can't I do that?

But you sit down to write and what comes out comes out. I don't mean you don't have any control—there's a lot of revision. I'm an obsessive rewriter. I love the rewriting process. Still, the result is not totally under the writer's control. ■

TOI DERRICOTTE, *interviewed by Susan McInnis:*

I was thinking about what attracts an artist to—not even to the material—but to that certain kind of energy that stays consistent. Over and above the content of the work, or even the themes of the work, there's a kind of a passion that artists have that is recognizably the mind inside the poem, or an energy inside a poem, inside the work of art. I think that's really what we like or dislike about artists. ■

AMY BLOOM, *interviewed by Sarah Anne Johnson:*

How did you develop your own way of writing a short story?

Ignorance is a wonderful thing. I read a lot of short stories. I didn't know any other writers. I didn't talk to any other writers. I didn't read any books on how to write a story. I guess the stories were taking shape inside of me, and I do read quite a bit. The voice was there. I don't understand it any better now than I did ten years ago. I'm grateful, but I have no idea. ■

SIGRID NUNEZ:

You have a relationship to the world and to people and there is so much that you don't let people see. Of course, that's true of everyone. There's something about writing passionately or intensely that enables you to expose yourself, in a way, and show your mind at work and your imagination at play and what kind of sensibility you truly have. This doesn't have to be in an autobiographical work; this can be in any kind of writing.

I don't think that much of all that comes out in your daily life, so I think that you're showing *so* much of who you are and how you feel about things, and your view of the world, through your writing. Absolutely. ■

BAUSCH, Richard. Novels include *Hello to the Cannibals*; *Good Evening Mr. & Mrs. America, and All the Ships at Sea*; *Rebel Powers*; *Violence*; and *The Last Good Time*. Story collection: *The Selected Stories of Richard Bausch*. richardbausch.com

BAXTER, Charles. Novels: *The Soul Thief*, *Saul and Patsy*, *Shadow Play*, *The Feast of Love*, *First Light*. Story collections: *Gryphon*, *A Relative Stranger*, *Through the Safety Net*, *Believers, Harmony of the World*. Books on writing: *Burning Down the House: Essays on Fiction*, *The Art of Subtext: Beyond Plot*. charlesbaxter.com

BENTON, Janet. Interviewer. Works as a writer and editor, has an MFA in fiction writing from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Teacher of creative writing, editing, grammar, and composition at several universities, and works with authors on work in progress.

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BLOOM, Amy. Story collections: *Where the God of Love Hangs Out*, *Come to Me*, *A Blind Man Can See How Much I Love You*. Novels: *Away*, *Love Invents Us*. Nonfiction: *Normal*. amybloom.com

BODWELL, Joshua. Interviewer. Work in *Threepenny Review*, *Ambit*, *Poets & Writers*, *Art New England*, *Fiction Writers Review*.

DERRICOTTE, Toi. Poetry: *Tender*, *Captivity*, *Natural Birth*, *The Empress of the Death House*. Memoir: *The Black Notebooks*. University of Pittsburgh.

GAINES, Ernest. Books of fiction include *A Lesson Before Dying*, *Catherine Carmier*, *Bloodline*, *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, In My *Father's House*, and *A Gathering of Old Men*. Essays: *Mozart and Leadbelly*.

GOLDBERG, Myla. Novels: *The False Friend*, *Wickett's Remedy*, *Bee Season*. Essays: *Time's Magpie*. Stories in *Harper's*, *McSweeney's*, *failbetter*. mylagoldberg.com

HARRIS, Katherine Perry. Interviewer. Work in *So to Speak*, *Writer's Chronicle*, *The Writer Magazine*.

JIN, Ha. Novels: *War Trash*, *Waiting*, *The Crazed*, *In the Pond*. Story collections: *Under the Red Flag*, *Ocean of Words*, *The Bridegroom*. Three books of poetry. Boston University.

JOHNSON, Charles. Novels: *Faith and the Good Thing*, *Dreamer*, *Middle Passage*, *Oxherding Tale*. Story collections: *Dr. King's Refrigerator*, *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*. Nonfiction books include *Turning the Wheel*, *Being and Race*. University of Washington.

JOHNSON, Sarah Anne. Interviewer. Editor of *Conversations with American Women Writers* and *The Art of the Author Interview*. sarahannejohnson.com

JOHNSTON, Bret Anthony. Story collection: *Corpus Christi*. Editor of *Naming the World and Other Exercises for the Creative Writer*. Harvard University. bretanthonyjohnston.com

LEE, Chang-rae. Novels: *The Surrendered*, *Native Speaker*, *A Gesture Life*, *Aloft*. Princeton University.

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LONG, David. Novels: *The Inhabited World*, *The Falling Boy*, *The Daughters of Simon Lamoreaux*. Story collection: *Blue Spruce*. Nonfiction: *Dangerous Sentences*.

LUVAAS, William. Novels: *The Seductions of Natalie Bach*, *Going Under*. Story collection: *A Working Man's Apocrypha*. williamluvaas.com

MARTIN, Valerie. Novels: *Trespass*, *Property*, *Italian Fever*, *Mary Reilly*, *The Great Divorce*, *A Recent Martyr*, *Set in Motion*, *Alexandra*. Story collections: *The Consolation of Nature*, *Love*. Biography: *Salvation*.

McFADYEN-KETCHUM, Andrew. Interviewer. Work in *Missouri Review*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Sou'wester*. Editor of PoemoftheWeek.org.

McINERNEY, Jay. Novels: *The Good Life*; *Model Behavior*; *The Last of the Savages*; *Brightness Falls*; *Story of My Life*; *Ransom*; *Bright Lights, Big City*. Story collection: *How It Ended*. Two books on wine. jaymcinerney.com

McINNIS, Susan. Interviewer. Center for Distance Education, Fairbanks, Alaska.

MELOY, Maile. Novels: *A Family Daughter*, *Liars and Saints*, *The Apothecary*. Story collections: *Both Ways Is the Only Way I Want It*, *Half in Love*. mailemeloy.com

MIDDLETON, Nancy. Interviewer. Work in *South Carolina Review*, *Glimmer Train*, *Belles Lettres*, and others.

NISSEN, Thisbe. Novels: *Osprey Island*, *The Good People of New York*. Short stories: *Out of the Girls' Room and into the Night*. Co-author of *The Ex-Boyfriend Cookbook*.

NUNEZ, Sigrid. Novels: *The Last of Her Kind*, *A Feather on the Breath of God*, *For Rouenna*, *Naked Sleeper*, *Mitz*.

PERCY, Benjamin. Novels: *Red Moon*, *The Wilding*. Story collections: *Refresh, Refresh*; *The Language of Elk*. benjaminpercy.com

RABALAIS, Kevin. Interviewer. Editor, with Jennifer Levasseur, of *Novel Voices: 17 Award-Winning Novelists on How to Write, Edit, and Get Published*.

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SHREVE, Susan Richards. Novels include *A Student of Living Things*, *Plum & Jaggers*, *The Train Home*, *Daughters of the New World*. Memoir: *Warm Springs*. Co-editor of *Skin Deep*, *Tales Out of School*, *Dream Me Home Safely*. Numerous children's books. George Mason University. susanshreve.com

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THON, Melanie Rae. Novels: *The Voice of the River*, *Sweet Hearts*, *Meteors in August*, *Iona Moon*. Story collection: *In This Light: New and Selected Stories*. University of Utah.

UNSWORTH, Barry. Novels included *The Quality of Mercy*, *Sacred Hunger*, *Land of Marvels*, *The Ruby in Her Navel*, *Morality Play.*

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