Close-up:

WRiters and their Reading

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

TOBIAS WOLFF, *interviewed by Travis Holland:*

Your work has been very influential. Who were your early influences as a writer? Have some of those early influences stayed with you—the touchstones, writers you can still go back to now and read?

Influence changes its character over time. To begin with, there are those books you encounter when you're young that make you a reader. **None of us become writers without first becoming readers.** For me it was the Hardy Boys, that sort of thing. Jack London. And, most of all, a now obscure writer named Albert Payson Terhune, who wrote books only about collie dogs.

There are maybe three phases of influence. The one I mentioned already. And then there's the influence of meeting a style that becomes a way of looking at things, and that you emulate. With a lot of my contemporaries it was Kerouac. E.E. Cummings was very influential. For me it was Hemingway. Not such a bad thing. You have to start somewhere, as an imitator—it's how we learn everything. And he's not a bad guy to imitate because, first of all, you find out in short

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order that you can't really do what he does. The plainness is totally deceptive, and is the result of lapidary work, and a way of looking at things that is completely beyond you when you begin. But it teaches you something, trying to do it. And then as I grew older it was Katherine Anne Porter and Katherine Mansfield. Chekhov. And, of course, Mansfield learned a lot from Chekhov. I love Porter's work, still. There is a purity, an emotional texture to her work that nevertheless is not sentimental, and that does not exclude feeling. Sometimes, in some writers, you would almost think it wasn't respectable to feel—there is such a level of detachment and coolness in the gaze of the writer that the effect can be a little chilly. I admired Chekhov's objectivity, which was nevertheless infused with emotion. So that's influential, in terms of when we begin to emulate.

And then, finally, as you come into your own, whatever that is, and begin to discover your own gifts—you start to hear the sound of your own voice a little better—you are swayed by a kind of influence that sets the standard by which you want your own work to be read. **So when I would read a great story of Ray Carver's, like "Errand" or "Cathedral," my thought would be, "I want to write this well." Not write like him, because I knew I couldn't. That was his world, his voice, all that. But I want to write a story this good.** I want to write a story that affects others the way this story just affected me.

That is an enduring kind of influence. And that is a generous kind of influence, because it extends in every direction. I have it when I read poetry, I have it when I see a good play, when I hear music. I want to be able to make someone else feel what I just felt. That's the kind of influence, finally, that stays with you. Because I'm not going to be Faulkner—I can read Faulkner now, and I'm totally immune to imitation. I love him, but I'm totally immune to any stylistic influence from him. I wouldn't dream of it. I can read Cormac McCarthy, who's obviously learned a lot from Faulkner. And as much as I love his work, I wouldn't dream of trying to write like him. But I think, "That's just great. I really want to do something this good." And so he's influential to me in that way. **After a while you are who you are. You don't try. It just happens to you.** ■

LYNNE TILLMAN, *interviewed by Brian Gresko:*

Who were some of the authors that inspired you to start writing?

I was eight when I decided to be a writer. I remember my father reading to

me at night, things like Shakespeare's plays. I think his love of English literature communicated itself to me. I remember learning to read and learning to write and putting things together. It was incredibly exciting. Also, I'm much younger than my sisters, and they had quite a number of books around that I remember looking at. But there were no specific writers very early on.

Later, what I read and how it influenced me became a much more conscious thing. *Haunted Houses*, my first novel, is influenced by Jane Bowles's novel *Two Serious Ladies*. It's not that the writing style is like Bowles's, but her way of writing about women was unique. In tone and style, it is just so anarchic. **She showed me that you can have toughness, seriousness, and hilarity all at the same time.** Women's lives were usually written in a much more controlled, socially proper way. But the way in which she writes people in relation to each other, in terms of conversation and dialogue, is so unusual. It's just an amazing novel.

The fact that she wrote as and when she did—the novel was published in 1943—made me feel more optimistic about trying to do what I was going to do in *Haunted Houses*. ■

DAVID GATES, *interviewed by Brian Gresko:*

I'd like to be as concise and disciplined as Amy Hempel, say, or as intense and brilliant and analytical as Samuel Beckett, or as wildly imaginative as Dickens. But these writers, and others I admire, are never in my head when I'm actually writing. Their influence takes place far under the surface for me. I know that part of my idea of what writing is comes from Beckett; part from Ann Beattie, to whom I was married; from Donald Barthelme, though I write nothing like him; from Raymond Carver; from Amy Hempel; and from John Cheever. That's the approximate order of my discovering them.

Jane Austen came to me somewhat later, and I was probably past the age of being strongly influenced. But I was aware, in reading her, of how well she shows her characters' motivations and agendas, and how they come into conflict with the agendas of other characters. It's something to which every writer of realistic fiction should pay attention, and certain scenes of hers stick in my head as touchstones: the two encounters between Elinor Dashwood and Lucy Steele in *Sense and Sensibility*, the Sotherton episode in *Mansfield Park.* But I can't say that I sit and study them. I love and appreci-

ate them, and I hope to be able to do something comparable. But when I'm sitting at my own work, other writers' work really doesn't enter my mind—probably because, when things are going right, I think of my characters and their situation as real, not literary. It's really just me and them. ■

JAY McINERNEY, *interviewed by Victoria Blake:*

Is there an education for becoming a writer?

I think just reading, reading the best that's ever been written. Making up your own canon as well. I can't speak for other writers, but **I know that one of the ways I learned to write, that I discovered a voice of my own, was by basically trying on Mom and Dad's clothes, you know, imitating all the writers that I liked.**

I have a manuscript of a novel from that period. I was perhaps twenty-four years old then, and it's really funny. I never finished it, but chapter one is basically Don DeLillo, chapter two is Ann Beattie, and chapter three is Raymond Carver. It was just exercising appropriation of voice and importation. Not that I was aware of that at the time, but I think that a writer needs to do this. You need to try on everything. Try on different voices. By that you learn ways of telling stories, and, eventually, if you are fortunate, you grow into your own way of telling a story.

You studied with Carver at Syracuse. You mention him a lot. Why Raymond Carver? Why have you sought him out?

Carver was a very important influence on my generation. It must have been a little bit like people after the Edwardian era reading *In Our Time*. There's a wonderful declarative sentence that says it's like pebbles at the bottom of a stream. The experience of picking up *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?* is a little bit like that. After the excesses of the seventies, which was baroque and extreme with the post-modernist orthodoxy of people like John Barth and John Hawkes writing fiction about fiction writers writing fiction to other fiction writers—the writing world then was swallowing its own tail. To suddenly come across Carver! It was a little bit like picking pebbles at the bottom of a stream. He legitimized realism and suddenly made it seem possible to write in a realistic mode.

In a way that Hemingway didn't?

Oh, no. In a way that Hemingway did…but when Hemingway wrote *In*

Our Time, realism was not under siege. **What Hemingway did was more to…well, more to unclutter the language, to strip it down to its essentials in such a way that it seemed to reveal the world in an entirely new way.** He stripped away the verbiage and the filigree that had been encrusted on the language. Carver did that too. It was like wiping off a window that was misted over, and suddenly you could see…everything. I think Carver was heavily influenced by Hemingway, although he always liked to dodge that question.

Equally important, he taught us how to write about the world. He told us that realism wasn't dead. You know, he didn't write an essay about it. He just started writing these incredible stories. They were realistic. There was no doubt in his mind. And it was tremendous. It was a revelation back in 1976 or '77, whenever he published that first book of his.

It took a while. I mean, it was years for it to really filter out into the graduate schools and the literary consciousness. His first book I think sold three thousand copies, but there were a few people, like me and my friends, who passed it around to ten people and ten people and ten people, so that by the time I went to grad school in '81, everybody, all the writing students in the country, were imitating Carver, or to a lesser extent, Ann Beattie and Mary Robinson, somebody who is not much talked about now. It was then called minimalism, or realism. ■

JONATHAN LETHEM,
interviewed by Brian Gresko:


Photo: Ben Goldstein

Do you have models in mind when you begin a project? By models, I mean works that influence your writing.

I've always been a consciously influenced writer. I usually have some models in mind for anything I'm writing, whether it's other novels, or some films, or sometimes even a comic book. In terms of prose style, I am almost always open to writing some degree of homage, or trying to adopt or import a part of another writer's style into what I'm doing. Usually it's more than one author, and/or it's in combination with some radically different influence on the narrative strategy, or on the kind of motifs, characters, or situations that I'm writing about. I never think that this is going to simply seem like writer X, because I'm always colliding that influence with a number of other elements.

I've come to believe that there is something innate in my method, my sentences, and my approach to narrative and characters that's inalterable, and that transforms these influences even when I'm not conscious of it. So I don't ever think in terms of embarrassment or hesitation or reservations about being influenced or working with models. I pretty much assume that's how it works for me.

I understand that a lot of other people are much more deflective or diffident or uncertain or unconscious about these processes, but I believe strongly that they're what's going on in making narratives for anyone. That is to say, I don't see being open to influence as some kind of radical or postmodern or experimental or unorthodox proposition; I see it as a way of talking about what simply is the case, and always has been for writers of all kinds.

These levels of inhibition about talking about influence may represent a kind of contemporary condition. Certainly the frameworks for identifying influence or for being anxious about it or resisting it are very recent ones. I don't think that these questions bedeviled people one way or another until relatively recently. So anytime people express surprise about my dis-inhibitions, I suspect that they're responding to the discourse, not the practice.

Anyway, it has always been my pleasure to assert my influences, partly because it connects my reading life to my writing life, and they seem so fundamentally connected.

I think *originality* is a word of praise for things that have been expressed in a marvelous way and that make points of origin for any particular element beside the point. When you read Saul Bellow or listen to Bob Dylan sing, you can have someone point to various cribbings and it won't matter, because something has been arrived at that subsumes and incorporates and transcends these matters. In that way, sourcing and originality are two sides of the same coin; they're a nested partnership.

If my description proposes some sort of dutiful, grinding, crossword-puzzle work—"let me take some Raymond Chandler here and graft it to some Philip K. Dick over here"—that's horrendous. You, the author, want to experience something that feels surprising and uncanny and native. You want to take all your sourcing and turn it into an experience that for you, first and foremost, and then of course for the reader, feels strong or urgent in a way that mimics some kind of natural, automatic process. ■

STEVE ALMOND, *interviewed by Aaron Gilbreath:*

This generation I'm seeing is screen-addicted. Technology has changed so much, and the world has become so chaotic; at the same time the avenues for escape, for basically tuning out of the real world and into some set of screen narratives have multiplied. There are all these ways of not being in the present moment, not being with somebody in a room, not being conscious of your surroundings and the fact that you are a human being on the earth with other human beings. But it's also true that as people feel more lonely and isolated from each other, they look to these screens as a way of feeling less alone, comforted. I think it's a false fix, but it's very compelling, and it also makes it more and more difficult for people to do the lonely, dogged work of reading.

Reading is not easy. It engages your full imagination and your concentration, and as people are raised from the time they're little kids, every two seconds there's a new image on TV, I think it is changing the way their brains function. If you took the average human being now and transported them back a hundred years, they would *all* be clinically ADD. They would all be bored out of their skulls if they just had to sit in the parlor and listen to their uncle tell stories, or play jacks, or whatever they did before all this crap came around. I mean, look, a hundred fifty years ago, people didn't fight over the TV remote; they fought over the latest installment of Dickens. And it's not as if our brains have fundamentally changed in a hundred fifty years. We're still capable of that greater concentration and that greater sense of empathy, and having our imaginations fully engaged and activated by literary art. So it is *possible*. ■

ANN PATCHETT, *interviewed by Jennifer Levasseur and Kevin Rabalais:*

What were some of the first books you read, authors who helped you realize you wanted to write?

Humboldt's Gift by Saul Bellow. I read it six times when I was in junior high. ■

MELANIE BISHOP:

What is one common writing problem you see in the early work of students, and how do you suggest avoiding it?

The most common problem I see as a teacher of fiction is the attempts at stories that aren't yet stories. It's a very hard thing to teach students, but they tend to recognize a complete story when one does show up in workshop. They have an easier time recognizing one than they do writing one. The only way to avoid this is just to have students keep reading and reading published short fiction, the best models you can find. My students usually read eight published stories per week, four before each class. They've usually read twenty-four or so before they try writing one.

What has helped, I've found, is right after students have written their first short story—or tried to—I have them list their three favorite published stories from what we've read so far. Then I ask them to articulate in writing what specifically they admire about each one. Then I have them fill in the blank on this sentence: What this writer has done in this story that I would like to do in my fiction is _____. Again, this requires that they really think about what the established writer has put forth and what the ingredients are of a successful short story. Then I take it one step further and have them write down the main differences they see between the story they have just written and each of the ones they most admire. For some reason, they can handle this type of comparison of their work to published work, if they are the ones making the comparison and finding the differences. They are usually pretty accurate critics of their own work after articulating what makes a story work, and they typically find the published stories more layered, more textured, more complicated, more weighty. I remind them after this that it's helpful to aspire to write something as good as the authors they most admire. **Holding those treasured stories up as models, reading and rereading them, helps students get closer to writing a full successful short story of their own. It just takes practice and it takes lots of exposure to stories that do work.** ■

JOSHUA HENKIN:

There is a romanticized image of the writer portrayed in the popular press. I'm referring, in its starkest form, to Hemingway, drunk, running with the bulls in Pamplona. Thanks to this, we have young women and especially young men who think the way to become a writer is to "experience the world." So they set out for Paris, or Tokyo, or Prague, they go trekking in Nepal, all of which can be, in the right hands, perfectly good material for a writer. But it's not so easy as that, and if an aspiring writer were to ask me whether he should go backpacking for a year or lock himself in his basement and read the great works of literature, I would urge the latter upon him. Flan-

nery O'Connor, who attended an MFA program long before it was fashionable to do so, said that anyone who has lived until the age of ten has enough material to write about for a lifetime. ■

VALERIE MARTIN, *interviewed by Jennifer Levasseur and Kevin Rabalais:*

Which writers do you feel you've learned most from in terms of craft?

One of the big books for me was Camus' *The Stranger*, which made me want to have a simple style and made me see what is possible with a first-person voice. Flaubert provided subject matter that has never left. The question of how a romantic education ill-equips us to live in the world and the conflict between romanticism and realism still is a subject matter for all of literature. Again and again, that is what I write about: the conflict between what we wish the world to be and what it really is, how much we long not to face reality. We still receive a romantic education. **We haven't gotten to the point where we raise a child and our greatest hope for that child is that he will be able to see reality. In fact, in some ways our greatest hope is that the child will be able to escape reality.** ■

MICHAEL CUNNINGHAM, *interviewed by Sarah Anne Johnson:*

The poetry of Walt Whitman also threads the three stories together, and the title Specimen Days *is taken from Whitman's autobiography. What drew you to his work specifically?*

In *Specimen Days* I was writing about a dark and difficult America, beginning with the slums of post–Civil War New York and ending in a future of political instability, pollution, and persecution. Whitman is not only, in my opinion, at least, the greatest American poet—he wrote his epic poem over a period of forty years, beginning before the Civil War, when America seemed like it might be turning out to be the most generous, abundant, democratic nation the world had ever seen, and ending after the war, in the midst of industrialization, which required a huge overworked and underpaid work force. Although I worried it would seem like I'd cashed in on Woolf and was now trying to squeeze a few bucks out of Whitman, he seemed so germane to the novel's themes that I couldn't leave him out.

Were you ever concerned about being too influenced by Whitman's voice? How did you protect yourself against this?

Whitman's voice appears in bursts, usually involuntary, from characters who are, you could say, infected by his poetry. There was no danger, or any possibility, of my writing in Whitman's style. ■

ANTONYA NELSON, *interviewed by Andrew Scott:*

What I like best about teaching is introducing students to texts that they might not have read. When I teach a workshop, whether it's graduate or undergraduate, as long as I understand that by the end of the class they have read some great stuff and appreciate it more, I feel like my job is done. That's a fairly modest ambition, and it's completely worth my time to cultivate readers and make them aware of other great books out there. Whether or not they write better themselves is much less my mission. I hope they do, but really becoming a better reader is a huge part of the process to becoming a better writer. They might pick it up somehow. ■

ROBERT OLEN BUTLER, *interviewed by Linda B. Swanson-Davies:*

When I go to writers' conferences, I encourage people to really read a lot because people don't know what can be achieved in writing without having experienced it as a reader—but you would encourage people to stop reading.

Once they have ravenously read for years, I encourage them—for a certain length of time when they have not yet found their own voice, and not yet found their way into their own unconscious—to drastically cut back on their reading. This is because when they're in grad school, they've got to face trying to find their own voice and their own path to their own unconscious. The defense mechanisms that they have, that we all have, are very clever. There are all kinds of things that would make you avert your eyes: your hands go up in place over the keyboard and you notice you've got to clip your fingernails; you go to read a good book—and this is one of the most devious suggestions that your defensive self is going to offer you, because it gives you the illusion of continuing to prepare yourself, because it is absolutely true that you must read and read and read. But so many students, when they've got to focus on finding their way into their own dark, scary dream space, find that one of the best places to hide is in somebody else's vision of the world. ■

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

I know that you love Chekhov and many of the great Russian writers. How does reading other writers inspire your work? Are there any contemporary writers you admire?

I like Alice Munro and Tracy Kidder a lot, but to keep my mind clear I usually read the Russians. I teach constantly and so there are so many voices interfering with my own voice. It's better for me to keep the reference clear. That's why I have to return to some great works, otherwise it will be very hard to keep my mind focused. Reading students' work, it's hard to avoid being influenced by it. ■

JULIA ALVAREZ, *interviewed by Robert Birnbaum:*

For me the way to clean the windshield is through writing, which goes hand in hand with reading. Jay Parini said something really interesting when we were on a panel together. He said, "When my writing isn't going well, my reading isn't going well." That is certainly true for me. **I need to be reading things I am excited about, things that are maintaining a certain level of awareness in me, language that is setting a high standard for the clarity and luminosity words are capable of; otherwise, my own writing is not going well. My own living isn't going well.** They're all part of the same thing—reading and writing and living. Reading is one of the ways I stay conscious. You know how in a choir, the choir leader will play a note that the singers are going to begin with? Good writing—excellent writing—plays that note for me so I can pitch my own voice at that level, or try to.

The danger is to fall back on all the things that worked last time. The writing becomes inauthentic. Sometimes that's what people want or think they want. I can't tell you how many times on the book tour with *In the Name of Salomé* or after one of the poetry books I'd get a question from the audience, "When are you going to write another book like *In the Time of Butterflies*?" "When are you going to write the sequel to *García Girls*?" The point is that if I am really doing my job, really serving my readers, I have to keep pushing myself as a writer. ■

JAY McINERNEY, *interviewed by Victoria Blake:*

J.D. Salinger has a few substantial cameos in your books. Did you spend time imitating him?

Well, you know, Salinger is the…well, he's the Flying Dutchman of American letters! He's the yeti or something. He's also the progenitor of the novel of teenage angst, you know. Youthful disaffection with adult society and with the world the young were about to inherit. Salinger was the first person to really catch the rhythm of contemporary American slang, which hasn't changed that much since 1951. I mean, the rhythm of the idiom. Teenagers basically speak the same way. It's amazing how enduring that language is, that tonally perfect teenage slang.

I find Salinger interesting because he did the opposite of what I apparently did when the spotlight hit. He ran, whereas some people would say I waved. I think mine was the more representative reflex. I know very few people who run from the spotlight. ■

AMY BLOOM, *interviewed by Sarah Anne Johnson:*

Who are some of the writers that have influenced you?

That's a funny question for me. I know lots of people that I have loved reading, but when I see their work, I don't see much of my own work in them. It's a tough thing to say. There was a wonderful review in England that compared me to Flannery O'Connor, which was very flattering on the one hand, except I think that our work has nothing in common and our sensibilities have nothing in common. In fact, I never read anything by her until I was an adult. I could cite her as an influence, except for all the reasons that she's not.

There are lots of writers whose work I love and admire. It's a tough thing to answer. I love the short stories of Alice Munro. I love the short stories of Doris Lessing—the early stories are just brilliant. I love the early short stories of Alice Adams, which nobody reads anymore. They're terrific and funny and smart and wonderfully written. I really like Tobias Wolff, and V.S. Pritchett. And of course I like Saki, John Collier, and Roald Dahl, too. I like Tolstoy a lot, and I revere Jane Austen. The number of people whose work I like is enormous. ■

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

Are there particular works of literature or films, like Rashomon*, that helped shape the way you deal with various points of view in one story?*

I saw *Rashomon* many years ago, and I suppose that has had some effect on me, as well as Faulkner, Joyce and whoever else's work I've read. They say if you steal from one person, you are plagiarizing; if you steal from a hundred people, you are a genius. You don't pick entirely from Faulkner, entirely from *Rashomon*, or entirely from Hemingway. You learn from all of them, just as all writers have done. You learn from people you read.

Who and what else have you been influenced by?

I've been influenced by the great French filmmakers of the fifties, Truffaut, for example, particularly *The 400 Blows* and *Shoot the Piano Player.* When I was writing *A Lesson Before Dying*, I saw a film on television with Danny Glover, and it had tremendous effect on me. Danny Glover plays a social worker who visits prisons. There's one prisoner who will do anything to annoy him. I realized that this is what happens when you keep going back to a prison to visit one guy. He will always do something to irritate you. That's how I decided to have Jefferson not speak, or say something to aggravate Grant.

What I'm saying is that you learn from all these things. You learn from music, from watching great athletes at work—how disciplined they are, how they move. You learn by watching a shortstop at work, how he concentrates on one thing at a time. You learn from classical music, from the blues and jazz, from bluegrass. From all this, you learn how to sustain a great line without bringing in unnecessary words. I advise beginning writers to keep their antennae out so they can pick things up from all these sources, not only books, but everything life has to offer, but books especially, which are the main tool they have to work with. They should not close their ears or eyes to anything that surrounds them. ■

ANN PATCHETT, *interviewed by Jennifer Levasseur and Kevin Rabalais:*

What role does reading play when you're involved in writing a novel?

When I wrote *The Patron Saint of Liars*, I didn't let myself read fiction, especially not contemporary fiction. Since I've gotten older, other people's

fiction doesn't influence me as much, and if it does, it's in a good way. ■

MARGOT LIVESEY, *interviewed by Ellen Kanner:*

Can you read other works when you're writing or do you have to shut yourself off?

I'm one of those people who would die without a book. I am always reading. There are certain authors who are too great, so I would hesitate to read them in the midst of something. ■

CARRIE BROWN, *interviewed by Jennifer Levasseur and Kevin Rabalais:*

Are you able to read fiction while you write it?

I can't imagine a life without reading; actually, I can't imagine a day without reading, and there would be long stretches when I'd have to do without it if I couldn't do the two together. What I read doesn't seem to get mixed up with what I write, thank God. How would I fall asleep at night if I couldn't read? ■

ANN PATCHETT, *interviewed by Jennifer Levasseur and Kevin Rabalais:*

You've mentioned Thomas Mann's The Magic Mountain *as an influence. Are there other books that have served as models for your writing?*

The Magic Mountain influences me over and over again. That's the story I write. I read it first in high school, then again in college. There are many similarities among my novels. A bunch of people get stuck in a house for a limited period of time. It's about internment and what happens to people in a confined environment.

There are many books that I've loved that I wish had influenced me. I wish that I had been profoundly influenced by *Lolita*, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, and *The Optimist's Daughter*, but there is nothing of those books in my work. I think it's all about books that you connect with in some way. Something in you says, "Yes, there it is. There's a good model for me." ■

ELIZABETH McCRACKEN,
interviewed by Jennifer Levasseur and Kevin Rabalais:


Photo credit: Kelly & Kelly

What role does reading play while you write?

Reading is extremely important to my working process. There are people who won't read anything when they work, but I read a lot. But if I read Grace Paley [*Enormous Changes at the Last Minute*], for instance, I become infected with her and write really bad Grace Paley. I don't read Raymond Chandler or anybody who's really idiosyncratic while I work. There is one paragraph in *The Giant's House* that I wrote when I was reading Carole Maso [*Ghost Dance*]. Every time I read that paragraph, I think, "Oh, my God, that's the Carole Maso paragraph."

I rarely get depressed by reading great books, as some writers do. I read when I work because it makes me excited about all the possibilities. It's absolutely essential to read in order to write fiction. You have to know how people have succeeded in other books.

Who are writers you like to reread, who give you the energy you're talking about?

The two books that I reread a lot are *Lolita*, which is perhaps my favorite novel of all time, and *Sacred Country* by Rose Tremain, who is a wonderful writer. There is something about both of those books that I find deeply moving and inspiring. I have Jeremy Irons reading *Lolita* on tape, and I listen to it like music. There's one line late in the book that I keep rewinding to. One of the things that I love about the autobiographical nature of certain types of narrators is the direct address of the reader. I probably indulge way too much in that. I just adore it. My favorite line in *Lolita* is a parenthetical aside, "(hi, Rita—wherever you are, drunk or hangoverish, Rita, hi!)." My friend Max says that it's interesting how many of Nabokov's best lines are failed palindromes.

I also love reading Dickens when I write. It depends on what I'm writing. Last year while I was working, I read *Freedomland* by Richard Price, who is a writer I have absolutely nothing in common with. I love books that make me think about things that I don't automatically think about. One of the things that Price is great at and that I'm miserable at is paying attention to

how characters stand. The physicality of his characters is amazing, as is his plot—that sense of how you can keep people reading a five-hundred-page novel without being manipulative—which is not one of my strong points. Even the dictionary has a hard time distinguishing between the definition of moving and manipulative. Somehow, there is a line between the two things. But where is it, exactly? ■

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

Some writers say that there is one moment in which they realize they are writers. Was there a moment like this for you?

It was a process. Before I started teaching at Emory, I had published a book of poems, but I was halfhearted about writing. I didn't know what I was going to do. But I was working step by step. Once I was hired by Emory to teach poetry, I became serious because it became my profession, and my livelihood became dependent on it. I don't mean to say that it was a purely practical decision made in order to earn the bread. There was more to it than that. I wanted to observe the masters, the writers I care for and love. I write with the hope that if one of the masters were alive and read one of my stories, he would be pleased. On the other hand, there was a pure, practical reason that I decided to become a serious writer, and that is the instinct for survival. That's the biggest reason for me.

That seems like a great challenge, that something you write should please the masters of the craft.

I think that when you constantly read a lot of good literature, you become close to writers, even if they are dead. **It's important to read the classics and to have some books that you carry close to your heart. I want these books to be my companions when I work.**

This doesn't mean that if you learn from the masters that you can write like them. That's impossible. You always have to be yourself. You always have to write something different. Originality doesn't necessarily mean that the work is good. Novelty and originality are sometimes not distinguishable. But I don't mean you shouldn't be original. Mastery and personal development don't contradict one another. The first step is mastery; then you can think about how to make something new. ■

MARY YUKARI WATERS, *interviewed by Sherry Ellis:*

Judith Lewis, in her L.A. Weekly *review of* The Laws of Evening, *wrote, "Mary Yukari Waters's characters emerge from her stories like delicate watercolor portraits, detailed enough to be recognizable but never overdrawn. There is no excess in her narratives, no drama, no superfluous preposition or adjective." Your prose is richly descriptive and poetic. What writers and artists inspire you?*

There are so many writers I greatly admire, but I've never felt that any one person directly affected my writing. I think it's because I started writing so late. I didn't go through that typical process of a young aspiring writer, where you read a lot of writers, pattern your writing after the ones you admire, and finally, after a lot of derivative attempts, find your own voice. When I started writing, I was working as a C.P.A., so it left me barely enough free time to write, much less read all the writers I was supposed to. I just didn't have that luxury. I was actually a bookworm as a kid, but I didn't do much reading during and after college. The bulk of my "literate" reading came after I had found my own voice. I think this made a big difference in the way I approached other people's writing. Through good luck, or bad luck, I missed out on that stage where I depended on other writers to help me with my own style and technique. Having said that, the writers I admire are Virginia Woolf, Doris Lessing, Edith Wharton, and Gail Godwin, among many, many others. ■

MATTHEW SHARPE, *interviewed by Sherry Ellis:*

The narrator of The Sleeping Father *is wise, knowing, and ironic. For example you write, "In the lives of Chris and Cathy Schwartz, hospital and school exchanged roles. Hospital was now the place where they went to be educated and socialized by illness and the resistance to illness; school was the place where they visited their gravely ailing secondary education." How did you determine the personality and level of omniscience you wanted the narrator to have for this novel?*

I keep having these very literary answers to your questions and I'll continue in that vein. I figured out the tone of this novel by reading *Middlemarch* by George Eliot. I happened to be reading *Middlemarch* while I was starting *The Sleeping Father*, and for a story whose subject is consciousness, among other things, I wanted to be able to inhabit the consciousness of several of the characters, and I thought that George Eliot tone, which is

lightly mocking, always very tender, and sort of maternalistic toward her characters, would be well worth emulating for doing what I wanted to do. I'm glad you picked up on that. Until I know the tone of the voice, I can't really move forward with any of the other aspects of a novel. ■

MELISSA PRITCHARD, *interviewed by Leslie A. Wootten:*

Do you read when you are writing?

Definitely. When I'm working on a project as I am now, my reading choices usually inform my writing in some way. For example, I just finished a new translation of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina.* **Tolstoy is a master at opening up moments and taking time to leisurely follow a character's thoughts and actions. His contemplative style encouraged me to slow down and open up moments in my own novel.** ■

MICHAEL CUNNINGHAM, *interviewed by Sarah Anne Johnson:*

When I started trying to write, in the mid-seventies, the only prose that was taken seriously was the lean, clean work of writers like Ray Carver and Donald Barthelme. I made the mistake of trying to write the way they did, but I'm just not a lean or clean kind of guy. Where Carver's and Barthelme's sentences were taut and resonant as plucked wires, mine merely felt undernourished. It took me some time to understand that what I needed to do was not reform my natural inclinations, but give in to them. I was helped in this endeavor by the distinctly un-lean work of Woolf, as well as Jayne Anne Phillips and Harold Brodkey. ■

ANDRE DUBUS III, *interviewed by John McNally:*

Had you read your father's work when you were younger?

I think I first began reading my father's work when I was eighteen or nineteen, I'm not sure, really. I probably read one or two of his stories before then, but it was in my late teens, while visiting his mother in Lake Charles, Louisiana, when I read his first and only novel, *The Lieutenant*. She was shocked that I hadn't yet read it, and handed me her signed copy, which I sat down and read in one sitting. I loved it, of course. The language, the vivid images and sounds and smells, the arc of the whole thing—I remember sitting there on my grandmother's couch alone afterwards and thinking

my father, who I hadn't lived with since I was ten, was special in some way, special in a way I hadn't known about. But also, though I didn't know it at the time, I felt moved and inspired artistically. I wouldn't begin to act on that for a few more years, however.

Do you have a favorite story by your father?

I don't know if I can point to one of his many stories as my favorite. He is one of those rare writers whose body of work is masterful at just about every turn. But I will tell you the one that comes to mind without my thinking too much about it: "A Father's Story." For its philosophical sweep, its veracity of characterization, and that incredible talk with God at the end! Also the fact that I read it in manuscript, hung over on a Sunday morning in my college girlfriend's dorm room, only weeks after trying to write fiction for the first time myself. ■

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

There are different kinds of readings. Sometimes I read for nourishment, and this is when I read the best literary works. Sometimes I read to get information and to learn about a subject. I read the National Book Award nominees to see what these writers are doing. I follow writers who are writing about immigrant experience, for instance, Chang-rae Lee [*A Gesture Life*], Jhumpa Lahiri [*Interpreter of Maladies*], Gish Jen [*Who's Irish?*]. Besides those, I read great writers like Saul Bellow, Flannery O'Connor, and Grace Paley. Especially Bellow. His sentences are wonderful, as are Cheever's. ■

CARRIE BROWN, *interviewed by Jennifer Levasseur and Kevin Rabalais:*

Are there particular authors or books you read that help with your own writing?

Not in a directly tutorial sense, but there is no question that the writers I love—an ever-expanding list, but one which always begins with Chekhov, Alice Munro, William Trevor, Penelope Fitzgerald, Eudora Welty, Jane Austen—have served as inspiration. I worship at their shrine, as it were, and their stories—and my gratitude for their stories—always remind me, when the going gets tough, of why I write in the first place, of what it is I'm hoping somehow to apprehend and set forth for a reader. ■

ANDREA BARRETT, *interviewed by Sarah Anne Johnson:*

I know that you were a biology student. How did you go from science to writing fiction?

By a long, confused road. I initially went to graduate school in zoology, which didn't work out at all. Later on I studied medieval history for a couple of years in graduate school, but I didn't stick with that either. In and around those two things I had about thirteen jobs in ten years, none of them related to each other, and none but the last two related to writing. It took me a long time to figure out what I wanted to do. It really wasn't clear to me. I kept trying awful jobs and fumbling around. **I did finally just start writing, and I can't actually account for that, except that I've always been such a passionate reader. I loved reading and loved books and wanted to write, but I didn't understand how anyone became a writer.** I didn't know any writers, and I didn't know about graduate programs in writing. But one day I started writing a novel. I worked on that for about six years, and eventually had to throw it out, but in the process I learned something about writing and I began to meet other writers, and all that was helpful. It was a long road, though. ■

MARY GORDON, *interviewed by Charlotte Templin:*

What about Virginia Woolf?

She is very important to me. I started a doctoral dissertation on Virginia Woolf. I never finished it, but she was the person that turned me to prose writing. ■

MELISSA PRITCHARD, *interviewed by Leslie A. Wootten:*

The stories in *Spirit Seizures*, my first collection, were modeled after those written by authors I'd read and admired. I'd say, "Now, I'm going to attempt a Gogol, Tolstoy, Flaubert sort of story." Modeling my work on the stories of others was how I learned to write fiction. With my second collection, *Instinct for Bliss*, I left imitative writing behind for the most part. ■

JULIA ALVAREZ, *interviewed by Robert Birnbaum:*

We are talking about writers and poets who seem in a way to be increasingly marginalized from mainstream perceptions, as if they have nothing to do with real life. Is your life real to you?

What do you mean?

Do you feel like you may be cloistered in this artistic bubble—

Not at all. I guess because I live in a rural community where my neighbors aren't necessarily intellectuals. My next-door neighbor is a sheep farmer. Biggest compliment he ever paid me was when he said he'd seen my book in the library. My husband is an ophthalmologist and has a lot of the old timers for patients. Old French Canadian farmers who are barely surviving out there. He comes home every day with stories. My world isn't really even the academic world, which can also be its own kind of bubble. When we go to the Dominican Republic, we are in a totally rural community, up in the mountains, off the grid, no electricity, no phones. Most of my neighbors up there don't even know how to read or write. What does it mean that I've written a book? I like that. I like to be in those worlds where I'm not in a bubble.

But that said, I think a lot of life seems very unreal to me right now. Partly, it's because now, with all this technology, we are exposed to so many other worlds, especially when you are traveling between them, and one world is still inside you and you are moving to another world, or you are hit by something like the news of Katrina or Iraq or 9-11, or some other devastating reality and you are thinking, how do I make sense of this? A lot of it is that we are getting so much information all the time and trying to integrate it and make meaning of it—that it just ends up seeming unreal. Which is the reason that maybe—as you were saying—people go to nonfiction. I mean why read fiction? I'm reading *1491*, an excellent book by Charles Mann. Also, *Collapse* by Jared Diamond, excellent. Both nonfiction. I am getting information from both these books, that's good, but I also need to make sense of it.

How do I integrate what I've learned into my own life? How do I make meaning of the experience of living in this world? That's what I think fiction can help us do. It provides a way to emotionally integrate and make sense of this mysterious world through story and character. That's why I

appreciate fiction that lets more in. That's why I don't like fantasy fiction or specialized fiction. I don't want gated communities when I read novels. Why I love Coetzee's work. The worlds in his novels are almost as big and baffling as the one I live in. I love what Czeslaw Milosz said when he was asked if he was a political writer. He said he was not political in the usual way the term is applied; politics as in an ideology, a polemical stance. But he said that poetry that sinks below a certain level of awareness, that that is not good poetry, it is no longer useful to us. This awareness doesn't have to come out in obvious ways, and in fact the writing gets flat and useless if it comes out in obvious ways. But good writing has a level of awareness of its own time. So if you are living in Nazi Germany, say, and you are writing delightful, exquisitely beautiful little clueless poems and stories, well, how can those be of value to your readers trying to integrate the reality around them? Even García Márquez, when he writes about a wild, magical world, there is a level of awareness in his work of the reality out there. So **I agree with Milosz's observation that good poems, good stories must have a certain level of awareness to be of value to the people we are writing for in our own time and down the line to others in the future.** So you have Milton writing about *Paradise Lost*, but he is totally aware of seventeenth-century British politics—it's there. We go to fiction that has that level of awareness in part to help us integrate things.

"We" meaning serious readers? Everyone?

I think William Carlos Williams was right: "It is difficult to get the news from poems/yet men die miserably every day for lack of what is found there." That failure of awareness, of emotional connectedness, is all around us. ■

ANDREA BARRETT, *interviewed by Sarah Anne Johnson:*

What drew you to writing about the events of Grosse Isle and the Irish immigrants who suffered from fever?

That was one of those strange, wonderful serendipities. Two things converged: one is that I'm a great admirer of the Irish writer William Trevor. He has a beautiful story called "The News from Ireland," a long story, about forty pages, with multiple characters and multiple points of view, about the famine as the people on a Protestant estate in Ireland experienced it. It's a story I teach often. I was teaching at Warren Wilson and I had a student who wanted to write her critical essay on that story. As her supervisor, I

asked her to read some material about the Irish famine so that she'd have a better understanding of both how well, and how extremely economically, Trevor had managed to work the historical facts into that story. Then I had to read the same books, because I didn't know the facts either. This is what I mean about learning a lot when I'm teaching. I assigned her a couple of books, and then I read the same books, which were largely about the Irish famine in Ireland. One had a brief chapter about what happened at Grosse Isle, though, and it hit me like a hammer between the eyes. I knew I had to write about it. ■

ALLEN MORRIS JONES, *interviewed by David Abrams:*

Let's talk about some of your influences. Who are some of the authors—dead or living—who have really had an impact on you over the course of your career?

There are the obvious ones who I think show up in my style. Cormac McCarthy has been pointed out by reviewers. I think that's an easy target, though, because I choose not to use quotation marks in my writing and everyone automatically thinks Cormac McCarthy or Kent Haruf. I think McCarthy and I also share an influence from Faulkner. I'm an enormous fan of about half of Faulkner's work. I'm also a big fan of Hemingway. But I think anyone writing narrative stories these days ends up standing in the shadows of Faulkner or Hemingway. I'm a big fan of Michael Ondaatje and Annie Proulx. ■

MARY GORDON, *interviewed by Charlotte Templin:*

How do you start a work?

I have an intense relationship with writers whose voices can be what I call a "tuning fork." There's a funny period before I really get started in a work—you know how dogs run in circles until they can figure out the exact spot where they need to lie down? I'm kind of like that until I can find the writer whose tone of voice really gets me going, and for each little project—a part of a book or a whole book or a story—I need almost to hear the tone in my ear. I have a very dependent relationship on the writers, but it's not like I'm going to copy them, or like I can't do something different from them. It's like having an older sister or brother start you on the road, because the road is dark, and you don't know where you are going. I feel like I have a

very dependent—and mainly oral—relationship to the writers who have gone before.

Can you say something about your choice to focus on story? You said earlier that you are not a great fan of metafiction.

Story is one of the basic human impulses. Every child wants a story told to them; we all like to sit around the campfire and listen to stories. Non-narrative, really non-narrative fiction—a lot of post-modernist fiction that is so self-referential—is not of great interest to me. As human beings, we want to make contact, and the impulse to story is very great. Sometimes I feel dorky, like I'm not cool, which is painful. That's why it's very important to be rooted in other writers. You look at older writers and think, "What do I really want to do?" And doesn't that matter more than who's the queen of the prom, which is a strong impulse? I would like to be the queen of the prom, and I'm not going to be the queen of the prom if I write the way I want to write, but I think self-referential, metafictional writing is a less human and less rich way to write. I've had to make a decision. If I'm going to do it the way I do it, I'm going to be considered a little retro and a little uncool. ■

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

I don't like to talk about living writers for all the obvious reasons. I read the work of my contemporaries, learn from it, and admire a lot of it. I reread or read for the first time contemporary as well as classical literature for literature classes, which I teach almost every semester, and for pleasure. Nevertheless, I have noticed a change taking place in the landscape of the novel among younger writers. After a long period of finely crafted fiction centered on the self, some of the new work seems to be taking on large subjects from a less self-involved point of view, dealing with the century in the classic way of the nineteenth-century novel as a mirror of social change, inventive in structure and more expansive in language. ■

BEVERLY LOWRY, *interviewed by Stephanie Gordon:*

This was in the early to mid-sixties, and women as a literary force had not really happened yet. So when I say, for example, that Doris Lessing was a big influence, it wasn't so much her writing style as it was the fact that she sometimes wrote about women who had traditional women's concerns, in

the Martha Quest books, in particular. And she was certainly considered a serious writer. As far as I knew, if you didn't deal with men's issues then you were considered a fluttery, non-serious female writer. And Hortense Calisher was another influence, her sensory prose and great descriptive powers.

Virginia Woolf was another; so was Grace Paley. It was partly how they wrote, it was also the size of their vision, but it always started with the fact that they were women. And I had to find myself as a writer who was a woman. I also blazed through Faulkner, although I resisted him at first, because I didn't want to identify with Southerners. ■

ELIZABETH COX, *interviewed by Sarah Anne Johnson:*

Do you consider yourself a Southern writer?

Well, I'm Southern. My stories are set in the South. The rhythm of the language, the plant life, the speech—all these are Southern. I grew up reading the King James Version of the Bible, so I know I use phrases and rhythms from that biblical background. I know that many writers do not want to be called Southern writers, but I don't mind. It's the material I use, but the themes, I hope, are more than Southern.

I do believe that we learn how to live life through stories. I was raised in a boys' private school where my father was headmaster. Everyone in that community was a teacher—a huge family of teachers—talking about literature, not in a pretentious way, but in a way that made me love the stories of Shakespeare, or the tale of the Odyssey or the Iliad—letting me know these stories were real, and relevant.

I began very early to learn that literature was a way of learning how to live your life. I think of writing as a way to deepen my life, teaching me to observe everything, every moment, more closely. Reading does the same thing. I put them in the same box, reading and writing. ■

JIM GRIMSLEY, *interviewed by Jim Schumock:*

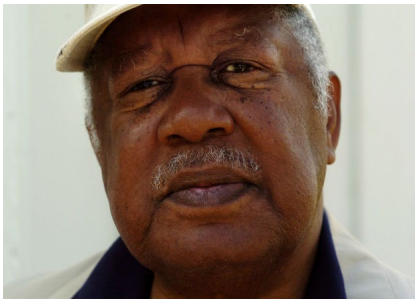
Which writers have most drawn you to become the kind of writer you are?

I'm one of those rare people who still likes Hemingway, and I think that's mostly just a fashion trend for him to have been badmouthed the way he

has been over the last decade or so, but I think he's an extraordinary stylist. I think I am interested in a wider range of style than he is. I do think, having read nearly everything that I could get my hands on of his, that that style does become predictable and repeatable in some of what he's written, and I don't want that to be true of me.

Other writers I adore: Flannery O'Connor is amazing, especially in terms of content. She can take a fairly simple situation and complicate it and complicate it and complicate it until you think you've read a story about the whole world all balled up in one place. I love Ford Madox Ford. *The Good Soldier* I think is one of the greatest books ever. It's a book I was reading at the time I was starting *Winter Birds*, and it gave me a sense of voice I wanted to repeat—that pristine voice full of danger, very civilized but full of danger all the way through. I could go on naming them—Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, George Eliot, the nineteenth-century people. ■

ERNEST GAINES, *interviewed by Michael Upchurch:*



The person whose work had the greatest impact on me in my earlier days was Turgenev. I used that book [*Fathers and Sons*] as my bible. I must have had so much of Turgenev in me! I mean, Turgenev does that himself, writes those little chapters. His books were always very small. And although I love the big, mid-nineteenth-century Russian classics, Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky, my favorite was the least known among the giants because of the structure of the smaller novel. And since then, since *Catherine Carmier*, I've stuck to that form. When I was at San Francisco State, I studied Faulkner and Hemingway, and all the others. And later when I went to Stanford, I wrote two short stories, one that was almost Hemingway and the other was Faulknerian. Malcolm Cowley was teaching at Stanford that year, and he told me, "One Faulkner's enough in this world." So from then on I thought, Let's leave those long, convoluted sentences alone and stick to what you can do best.

But I was and still am influenced by Faulkner—not necessarily the sentences—but his scenes, the characters involved. Mississippi borders Louisiana, of course, and you can see some of the same kinds of physical things: trees and roads and fields and the people. And they eat some of the same food.

Well, we have a distinct cuisine in the south of Louisiana, with a lot of Cajun and Creole influence, which you don't have in Mississippi. But when I read Faulkner's descriptions of his farmers and his small stores and the square and all these things, I can see those things in Louisiana as well. And, of course, it was Faulkner's concentration on his Yoknapatawpha County which gave me the idea to concentrate on my parish of Bayonne, and to concentrate everything in one area and develop the stories out of that area. I guess Faulkner could have gotten it from Joyce.

I think the understatement stuff, the short sentences, was Hemingway based. I learned a lot from him. But I studied American literature, you know, and I had a lot of influences. I studied Greek tragedy. I studied Shakespeare. I was reading all of that. And I think when I was writing *In My Father's House*, I had Greek tragedy in mind—of a strong man falling. So it's not only one writer or another, but a lot of writers, and then you find your own voice somewhere along the way. ■

ASKOLD MELNYCZUK, *interviewed by William Pierce:*

I think religion has a very different goal from literature, uses very different means, and yet the two overlap in many ways. Like religious writing, literature helps us to adjust to the predicament of knowing we are going to die, but not knowing in what chapter. ■

JAYNE ANNE PHILLIPS, *interviewed by Sarah Anne Johnson:*

What are some of the common problems you find in your students' work?

They just don't read. Even if they think they read, they really don't read much. They don't come to it with a background in reading. They haven't read a spectrum of writers, or they haven't read all the works of six or seven writers. They have less and less of a sense of history, and less and less interest in history. Kids who are twenty now grow up in a world in which emotional literacy is discouraged by the culture they live in. I don't hold them personally responsible. Somebody's got to come along and convince them that it's important to read. ■

KENT HARUF, *interviewed by Jim Nashold:*

First, you have to be a reader and to have read a good deal. You have to read with concentration and close attention to what's going on on the page, and to be open to the magic of what's happening, and be open to a kind of religious experience of literature that's essential. After that, the thing to do is to write and write and write. It can't be said too emphatically that the way to learn how to write is to write. Then you have to be open to being instructed. Either by your own efforts or by other people. Perhaps the most important thing is to be persistent. Most people who have some inclination to write quit before they get good enough at it to get published because it's too difficult. ■

SIRI HUSTVEDT, *interviewed by Jennifer Levasseur and Kevin Rabalais:*

I read *Crime and Punishment* when I was a teenager, and it was a cataclysmic book for me. I reread Dostoyevsky in college because I was studying Russian intellectual history and ideas are central to his novels. I began reading *Crime and Punishment* for the third time the day I arrived in New York. I didn't know a soul in the city. I sat in my tiny room on Riverside Drive and devoured the story of Raskolnikov. I finished the book in two days. That obsessive reading was probably an emotional response to my entrance into the urban world.

But Dostoyevsky was also an epileptic, and I feel very close to lives influenced by neurological events. Since I was twenty, I have suffered from severe migraines. Once, I had a migraine that began as a seizure, and I was actually thrown against a wall. I have had auras, hallucinations, and euphoria before attacks, all of which were, of course, far less dramatic than Dostoyevsky's grand-mal seizures. Nevertheless, I am convinced that these altered states have a strong influence on personality. Neurologists have associated epilepsy with religiosity—St. Theresa of Avila was probably an epileptic—and, interestingly enough, also with the urge to write. ■

JULIA ALVAREZ, *interviewed by Mike Chasar and Constance Pierce:*

When you started out writing, who did you look to before the voice of the Latina in literature was out there?

Where did I get the permission to write what I know? It was from Maxine

Hong Kingston. It wasn't even from a Latina writer. It was from reading a wonderful and, I think, classic book by an Asian-American author, *The Woman Warrior*. Something about her writing about her culture, and making sense of it, gave me permission to write about mine.

I see myself coming out of many traditions—and mostly I read these writers because they're my teachers. I read Tolstoy if I want to learn how to do a dinner party. I also read Gabriel García Márquez to learn how to get that panoramic sense of history in what I write. We're learning all the time from who we read, right? ■

RUSSELL BANKS, *interviewed by Rob Trucks:*

Rule of the Bone *certainly wasn't the first time that you worked from a specific literary reference. I'm thinking that* Trailerpark *is a response to Winesburg, Ohio, and that the short story from Trailerpark, "Black Man and White Woman in Dark Green Rowboat," came from Dreiser's* An American Tragedy.

Naturally those are important points of reference for me in the writing of the story and of that book, but there are others as well. *Trailerpark* is in some ways a response to my reading of *The Canterbury Tales*, too, and *Dubliners*. There are various levels of response in, I think, any work of literature. You don't write in a vacuum. You participate. That's one of the great, satisfying things about being a fiction writer or a poet, an artist of any kind. Nobody's dead. You participate in the tradition. You become one with these books, and these texts become part of your immediate daily life, and so you enter into that conversation and hope you become part of the chorus in the course of writing the book. It's inevitable. It's inescapable for me. I've been a compulsive reader since adolescence, so how could I not end up having a conversation of that sort? Having my work be a response to the works, that I've read?

Can we go to either a short story or a novel and talk about the particular process?

Actually, there's a double source for the short story you mentioned, "Black Man and White Woman in Dark Green Rowboat." Well, not source. It responds to Dreiser, certainly, in terms of the psychology of the characters, but it reverses and plays with it so that the victim is the man, in a sense. But also it's a response to a Hemingway story in how it's structured. So the

psychology, in a way, and the erotic component of it come out of Dreiser, but certainly the form of the story and the arrangement—one might even say the architecture of the story—come out of "Hills Like White Elephants." The physical positioning of the characters and the movement of the boat, when they turn and so forth, is very much learned from Hemingway. I mean, I learned how to do that from Hemingway, how to dramatize by moving the characters around physically in relation to each other and in relation to the landscape. Where they are in the lake and in the boat is all very carefully orchestrated or choreographed, and I didn't know how to do that until I read Hemingway's stories.

When you sit down in front of the keyboard, have you just finished reading the Hemingway story, or are you working from some distant memory?

Usually I'm working from memory—and what's retained. I read like a writer, and what stays with me is often what has resonance for me as a writer. It might be a false memory, too. It often is. If I go back and reread it, I say, Well, it wasn't like I remembered it at all.

But if it gets you the story…

Right. It's what I needed from it. So it isn't necessarily a close reading by any means. It's associational and sometimes it's intuited, and if it's strong enough or raises questions for what I really was responding to, I'll go back to the text. I did that with *Cloudsplitter*. As I was nearing the end of it, I was hearing certain tones, you know? I'd orchestrated these various pieces, and I was starting to hear tones that were reminding me of tones at the end of *Moby Dick*. And I wanted to get it right, and I remembered that there's a beautiful diminuendo ending to *Moby Dick*. That was how I remembered it. I didn't remember it as the great, cataclysmic ending. There is a cataclysm and then there is a diminuendo, and I was remembering that, and that's what I was reaching for. I was starting to hear the necessity for that. Coming down from Harper's Ferry I thought, There has to be a diminuendo. It can't just sort of be like, That's all, folks. There has to be a follow-through. I was orchestrating it almost musically in my mind, so I went back and read the last forty, fifty pages of *Moby Dick* to see how he did that.

Really, it was pacing I was looking at, and the rhetoric, to see how the rhetoric kind of cooled down, and how the narrative became more direct at the end, and how the whole voice was lowered. And I studied it consciously,but I was led there by what I deeply remembered, not having read *Moby Dick* in twenty-five years. So I think it operates that way, too. Sometimes you

will go directly back to the text and see how it's done, but you're led there because you have this memory of it. You're led there because what's unfolding on the page is leading you there. It's in response to what's unfolding on the page. ■

CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI, *interviewed by Sarah Anne Johnson:*

Photo: Krishna Giri

Maxine Hong Kingston really influenced me with *The Woman Warrior*. I'd been ready for that book when I read it, which was when I was doing my graduate studies at Berkeley. It opened up so many things for me, and it made me aware of the importance of her subject matter, and also gave me permission for my subject matter. I love the way that story plays such an important part in her book, and story plays a very important part in my books—telling stories, listening to stories, old stories out of our culture and how they affect us—all of those things. ■

DAN CHAON, *interviewed by Misha Angrist:*

The thing I've always loved about Carver's work is that he had this real appreciation for mystery in people's lives—that moment when something inexplicable happens. In "Fat," there's a very strange encounter between a waitress and a grotesquely fat man. The story ends: "My life is going to change. I feel it."

I think it's interesting that you bring up that last line of "Fat." O'Connor cites Gogol's classic "The Overcoat" as a kind of prototype of the short-story form, especially the ending, which is very similar to "Fat." In Gogol's story, we are told, "from that day forth, everything was as it were changed and appeared in a different light to him."

Yes—great story, and classic ending. We all know that Carver was an admirer of Chekhov; I don't know, maybe Chekhov learned a few tricks from Gogol. ■

MELISSA PRITCHARD, *interviewed by Leslie A. Wootten:*

When I'm working on a project as I am now, my reading choices usually inform my writing in some way. For example, I just finished a new translation of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*. Tolstoy is a master at opening up moments and taking time to leisurely follow a character's thoughts and actions. His contemplative style encouraged me to slow down and open up moments in my own novel. ■

FREDERICK REIKEN, *interviewed by Eric Wasserman:*

A criticism of writing programs is that students are quite impressionable and are in danger of imitating a certain type of story. Many students are drawn to imitating domestic writers such as Raymond Carver and Alice Munro. Isn't there a risk of promoting a specific kind of literature if instructors refuse to challenge students?

I recently saw folksinger/guitar-virtuoso Leo Kottke play in Northampton, Massachusetts. He told a little story about his mentor, John Fahey, and how at one point he said to Fahey something like, "You know, I have this fear that I'm going to sound a lot like you." Fahey's response was, "Well, everybody has to go through someone."

My sense is that this is true for all artists, and is particularly applicable to writing. That is, I think most, if not all, writers must go through a phase of assimilating and emulating their favorite writers if they're to have any chance of finding their own voice. Simply put, all writers need models of form and technique, and any writer worth his or her salt will go through various authors and come out the other side.

It's true that Raymond Carver and Alice Munro tend to be MFA-program staples everywhere, and this is because they're two of the most important North American writers of the late twentieth century. In the thirties, you had Hemingway, Steinbeck, Fitzgerald, and Faulkner. In the fifties and sixties, you had Cheever, Roth, Bellow, Salinger, O'Connor, Welty. Who do you have of that caliber to come out of the seventies and eighties? Carver and Munro. They've both, in certain ways, modernized the tenets of Anton Chekhov. And whereas Carver might be thought of as the heir to Hemingway, Munro might be thought of in some ways as an heir to Faulkner. No matter how you look at it, and whatever labels you try to put on them, their work has affected our modern literary tradition. To be a contemporary

American literary writer, you need to understand the understatement and scene-by-scene movement of a Carver story, just as you need to understand the elliptical expository methods of Munro. That's not to say one should try to write like Carver or Munro—in fact, Carver and Munro imitations have the same parody-like quality as an emulation of Hemingway or Faulkner, simply because their voices are so distinct.

From what I can see in the programs I've been part of, most MFA students are going to be exposed to a wide range of contemporary fiction, ranging from formalists like Jhumpa Lahiri to satirists like George Saunders, so it's not as if there's really a risk involved in focusing on these two masters of the form for a short while, particularly since their stories become a good and useful model for so many people. And whether or not Lahiri or Saunders gets assigned in your grad class, those books exist, and it's any writer or would-be writer's job to read and read and read.

As far as influences go in general, I've always held the belief that a writer can be influenced for the wrong reasons or the right ones. The wrong reasons are that, as you've suggested, they feel pressure to conform with the thing that is being celebrated at the present moment—and such impressionability typically comes with a lack of emotional maturity. Being influenced for what I'm calling the right reasons means being influenced by a writer whose work resonates with you because you share some aspect of that writer's sensibility. In finding a book that speaks to you, you've usually found a writer who in some way shares your own sensibility, and who has already taken ideas and impressions about form or content that are still inchoate for you, and transmuted them into something tangible and fully realized. In reading a work that influences you, you're essentially reading a work by someone who has mastered some aspect of what you hope to master. And so, by reading that work, you are embarking on the process of going through a mentor.

Like most writers, I went through a period of impressionability in which I was unconsciously emulating writers for precisely the wrong reasons. Just after I graduated from college, I took a night course at the New School and had a teacher who despised everything I wrote, and perhaps me personally. He was a big fan of Carver, and "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love" was one of his favorite stories. Toward the end of the semester, I finally wrote a story he liked. I included it with my MFA applications, and when I got to UC Irvine and sat down the first week with my advisor there, he pulled out the story and said, "Now here's an interesting little piece. I

think you should change the title to 'What We Talk About When We Talk About Hockey.'" This is the kind of risk I think you're talking about, but I would say that it was ultimately my responsibility to recognize what I was doing. Thankfully, I did.

That was the same fall I had what I think of as my one and only prophetic dream, which I'll be so bold as to mention, since I think it relates to this discussion. In the dream, I came to a bookstore window and found that the entire window was displaying copies of what was apparently my first book. But the book, instead of being pages bound by a cardboard cover with dust jacket, was, in each little wooden bookstand, a bunch of celery, complete with leaves and stalks. When I awoke, I likened the dream to a Magritte painting, said to myself something like, "Neat," and didn't think much of it. But that afternoon, the dream's meaning hit me full force. What I was writing was the equivalent of celery. I didn't care what it was so long as it would be published, and so it really was interchangeable with celery or radishes or whatever. I would say it took me almost two years after that realization to start writing fiction that I could honestly say was not the equivalent of celery. And I would say to any would-be writer of literary fiction that there are thousands of much easier ways to achieve notoriety and/or make money than by being a writer. So if you're going to do it, you have to give over to what is meaningful and authentic, for both your readership and for yourself. And that means letting go of your need to be like any other writer. The best writers' writing doesn't remind you of anyone else. ■

STEPHEN DIXON, *interviewed by Jim Schumock:*

It's said that writing is the ultimate seduction of reading. If so, who were the people who seduced you?

When I was sixteen, seventeen, eighteen years old, I read every single thing that Dostoyevsky wrote. I was absolutely obsessed by the man. Not by the style, because I wasn't really keen or aware of style as much as the content. This guy was writing about the deepest things imaginable. That really influenced me. Later on, it was Hemingway. I like the conciseness in his work and I like the subject matter. I became so obsessed with his work. That's when I was already starting to be a writer. I knew that I had to divorce myself completely and move to another hemisphere if I wanted to be a writer. I knew that a good writer, a serious literary writer, should not sound like anybody else. Unfortunately, I moved on to Joyce. Particularly *Ulysses*.

Not all of it. It's a flawed book. I admire the stream-of-consciousness style in Leopold Bloom. Again, this was my second literary divorce. I left Joyce; I had to, or else I would sound like Joyce. He's certainly a tantalizing writer to emulate. I did it because I had to write in my own voice. This was in my early twenties. I've consciously striven to have my own voice and to have my own style and to write my own fiction, my own things in my own style. Those three were perhaps the most influential. ■

CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI,
interviewed by Sarah Anne Johnson:

I tell some of my very talented students, "Stop everything. Don't read so much." Usually teachers are saying the opposite, but there comes a time when you have to shut down all of the input channels, and you have to go into yourself and write what's in there. ■

LYNN FREED, *interviewed by Sarah Anne Johnson:*

Photo: Nancy Crampton

I grew more literate—in my teens, really—I memorized huge chunks of Shakespeare. Much of this was required by school, which also required us to memorize chunks of the Bible. I found that I loved having the words by heart, accessible always. If anything got into my blood, it was the wonder of Shakespeare, the wonder of the Psalms. I would prop a book up while I was in the bath and recite a passage in there, over and over, until I had it word perfect. This seemed perfectly normal in a family like mine.

At about this time, I also fell in love with Jane Austen. I read through all the novels and, thereafter, reread them regularly every few years. What a wonderful training in irony, in timing, in pacing and shaping and characterization! Later still, when I was released from the bondage of academe and was free to read freely again, I found myself falling in love with one book—say, Duras's *The Lover*—and reading it over and over. I fell in love with Alice Munro likewise, with particular stories of hers. Doris Lessing, too—that wonderful intelligence, the brilliant descriptions of Africa, the tie to the land. I have to admit, though, that the Great Gods of Influence—Chekhov, Turgenev, etc.—do not live with me. I have read them; I have admired them; I have put them back on the shelf.

Are there other influences on your work?

I suppose so. But I never think in terms of "influence." If there is a book, or a section of a book, a poem, a line that stays with me, I colonize it, make it my own. Two shelves in my study are filled with such books. When I'm stuck, I reach over and read, to remind myself of what the whole enterprise is supposed to be about. ■

THOM JONES, *interviewed by Jim Schumock:*

When I was discharged from the Marine Corps, I had a head injury from a boxing match, and I didn't have the classic grand-mal syndrome, but rather a variant of temporal-lobe epilepsy with fugue states, which is extremely rare, so I was discharged as a schizophrenic. They didn't quite know what was the matter with me, and I can't blame them at all—they were good doctors—but when I got home, my own physician sent me to a Russian neurologist.

I presented myself with these very strange seizures, and he handed me a copy of *The Idiot*. He said, "Maybe this will help you figure it out a little bit." And, immediately, I embraced Dostoyevsky, read his whole body of work, and absolutely knew that I wanted to be a writer. I'm in Aurora, working in a factory that seemed to be my life, until this happened to me, and then I was obsessed with the meaning of life, the existence of God, the riddle of existence, the existential business. I read *Notes from Underground*, *The House of the Dead*, *The Brothers Karamazov*, *Crime and Punishment*, everything, virtually. I was a madman—tore into all books.

Did you really read a book a day for ten years at one point?

When I was working as a custodian, I would get stacks of library books. Olympia, Washington, has three very good libraries—the state library, a university library, and a Timberland system—so I always had twenty-five books by my bedside, and maybe I'd peruse three or four in a day. If I got something that was really slower reading, I would spend a week on it, but all in all, in eleven years I think, roughly speaking, I probably did read ten thousand books, and I know that was my real education. Because I wasn't working as a professional, I could think. I was doing mechanical work. I thought about what I would write. I would think about the books I had been reading—I had time to think. It's very hard for people who are knocking around in the world to have that kind of leisure. ■

SIRI HUSTVEDT, *interviewed by Jennifer Levasseur and Kevin Rabalais:*

When I am writing a novel, it is very hard to read other novels, especially good novels. The more powerful the imagination, the worse it is. I remember reading J. M. Coetzee's *Life & Times of Michael K* and thinking, "Why am I not doing this myself? This is so good." I had to put it away. Between novels, I can read fiction with a lot of pleasure, but mostly while I'm working, I read nonfiction. I like to read books for lay people about the brain and memory. I like to read history and biographies. I read a lot of psychoanalytic case studies. I've done a lot of reading about personality disorders from all points of view. ■

PAM DURBAN, *interviewed by Cheryl Reid:*

What about Chekhov's work can you point to as an influence?

His point of view. His objectivity. His big, loose stories. The possibilities of the story.

His use of time is very large and sometimes very minute.

Yes. His variety. Whenever I am tired of fiction, I turn to him to refresh my ideas of what I can do.

His point of view is objective—you may not get close into the characters' minds, but you get a sense—

Of who they are. And he's willing to let them see themselves as they see themselves. I've also learned a lot from him about structure. What's possible in a story. It doesn't have to be some tight progression of actions toward epiphany. It can be much looser than that and still get somewhere and be about something, and hold some kind of shape. ■

MATTHEW SHARPE, *interviewed by Sherry Ellis:*

I happened to be reading Middlemarch by George Eliot while I was starting *The Sleeping Father*. For a story whose subject is consciousness, among other things, I wanted to be able to inhabit the consciousness of several of the characters, and I thought that George Eliot tone, which is lightly mocking, always very tender, and sort of maternalistic toward her characters, would be well worth emulating. Until I know the tone of the voice, I can't really move forward with any of the other aspects of a novel. ■

PHILIP LEVINE, *interviewed by Jim Schumock:*

I suppose it's safe to say that among your poetic fathers are Walt Whitman and William Carlos Williams. How exactly do you think their work opened up the life of poetry for you?

Tolstoy was enormously important to me. You could never tell it by reading me, but there was something in him that suggested the largeness of this enterprise. What an enterprise it was to write. What an extraordinary thing that you could give your life to this writing. You could begin to change people. I felt his works were changing me. I felt that way about Chekhov, too. I was getting a different vision of what human nature was, what people were from writers like that. So they didn't influence me in any specific way that I can point to, but they invaded me in a profound sense and changed who I was. ■

THOMAS McGUANE, *interviewed by Jim Schumock:*

You've given rather broad credit to your literary fathers, among them Malcolm Lowry. Do you think there's any novel more read by novel writers and less by novel readers than Under the Volcano*?*

That's really an interesting way to put that. There's no doubt that it's essential reading for modern writers. It's one of the books you read and go back to your own work and say, "Now, what changes can we make in what we've been doing?" A serious writer could scarcely go through that book without contemplating changes in his own work. ■

TOBIAS WOLFF, *interviewed by Jim Schumock:*

If someone were taking a year off to learn to write short stories…

Just a year? Make it twenty.

What stories or collections would you recommend?

Dubliners. Chekhov's stories, as many as a person can read. Tolstoy's "Master and Man" and "The Death of Ivan Ilych." I would recommend a good selection of Maupassant stories. Winesburg, Ohio by Sherwood Anderson, and "In Our Time" and "Up in Michigan" by Hemingway. F. Scott Fitzgerald's stories: "The Rich Boy," "Diamond as Big as the Ritz," "Crazy Sunday," and "An Alcoholic Case." Katherine Anne Porter's stories, just about all of

them. Flannery O'Connor's stories—stories like "Parker's Back," "Revelation," "A Good Man is Hard to Find," "Good Country People"—classics of the genre. Raymond Carver's stories, and Richard Ford's *Rock Springs*. I would also recommend Dorothy Allison's great collection *Trash*. It's a much-ignored book, which she drew on very heavily for *Bastard Out of Carolina*. I think the book of stories is the better book, myself. Mary Gaitskill's *Bad Behavior*. Thom Jones's *The Pugilist at Rest* and *Cold Snap*. Denis Johnson's *Jesus' Son* and Lorrie Moore's *Like Life*, especially the title novella. I could go on and on. ■

MELISSA PRITCHARD, *interviewed by Leslie A. Wootten:*

The stories in *Spirit Seizures*—my first collection—were modeled after those written by authors I'd read and admired. I'd say, "Now, I'm going to attempt a Gogol, Tolstoy, Flaubert sort of story." Modeling my work on the stories of others was how I learned to write fiction. With my second collection, *Instinct for Bliss*, I left imitative writing behind for the most part. ■

ABRAMS, David. Interviewer. Published in *Esquire*, the *Readerville Journal*, the *Missouri Review*, *Greensboro Review*, *North Dakota Review*, *Fish Stories*.

ALMOND, Steve. Story collections: *My Life in Heavy Metal*, *The Evil B.B. Chow*, *God Bless America*. Novel: *Which Brings Me to You* (co-author). Nonfiction: *Rock and Roll Will Save Your Life*, *Candyfreak*. stevealmondjoy.com

ALVAREZ, Julia. Novels: *Return to Sender*, *Saving the World*, *In the Name of Salome*, *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, *¡YO!*, *In the Time of the Butterflies*. Nonfiction: *Once Upon a Quinceañera*, *Something to Declare*. Poetry: *The Woman I Kept to Myself*, *Homecoming*, *The Other Side*. Middlebury College, Vermont. juliaalvarez.com

ANGRIST, Misha. Interviewer. Published in *Tin House*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Elysian Fields Quarterly*, and elsewhere.

BANKS, Russell. Recent novels: *The Reserve*, *The Darling*, *Trailerpark*, *The Sweet Hereafter*, *Rule of the Bone*, *Cloudsplitter*. Story collections include *The Angel on the Roof*. Nonfiction: *Dreaming Up America*.

BARRETT, Andrea. Story collections: *Ship Fever*, *The Voyage of the Narwhal*, *Servants of the Map*. Novels: *The Air We Breathe*, *Lucid Stars*, *Middle Kingdom*, *The Forms of Water*, *Secret Harmonies*. andrea-barrett.com

BIRNBAUM, Robert. Interviewer. Editor-at-Large of the literary and cultural website IdentityTheory.com

BISHOP, Melanie. Published in *Georgetown Review*, *Greensboro Review*, *Florida Review*, *Puerto del Sol*. Prescott College.

BLAKE, Victoria. Interviewer. Underland Press.

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

BROWN, Carrie. Novels: *The Rope Walk*, *Rose's Garden*, *Confinement*, *The Hatbox Baby*, *Lamb in Love*. Story collection: *The House on Belle Isle*. Sweet Briar College. authorcarriebrown.com

BUTLER, Robert Olen. Twelve novels, most recently *The Hot Country*, *Hell*, *Fair Warning*. Story collections include *Severance*, *Intercourse*, *Had a Good Time*, *A Good Scent from a Strange Mountain*. Florida State University. robertolenbutler.com

CHAON, Dan. Novels: *Await Your Reply*, *You Remind Me of Me*. Story collections: *Among the Missing*, *Fitting Ends*. Oberlin College. danchaon.com

CHASAR, Mike. Interviewer. Poems in *Poetry*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Antioch Review*, *Black Warrior Review*.

COX, Elizabeth. Novels: *The Slow Moon*, *Night Talk*, *The Ragged Way People Fall Out of Love*, *Familiar Ground*. Story collection: *Bargains in the Real World*. Wofford College. elizabethcox.net

CUNNINGHAM, Michael. Novels: *By Nightfall*, *Specimen Days*, *The Hours*, *Flesh and Blood*, *A Home at the End of the World*. Nonfiction: *Land's End*. michaelcunninghamwriter.com

DIVAKARUNI, Chitra Banerjee. Novels: *Queen of Dreams*, *Mistress of Spices*, *Sister of My Heart*, *Vine of Desire*. Story collections: *Arranged Marriage*, *The Unknown Errors of Our Lives*. Published in *Atlantic Monthly*, *New Yorker*. Author of three books of poetry and a children's novel. chitradivakaruni.com

DIXON, Stephen. Dozens of story collections and novels, including *Meyer*,*The End of I*, *The Stories of Stephen Dixon*, *Old Friends*, *30: Pieces of a Novel*, *Phone Rings*, *Moon*. Johns Hopkins University.

DUBUS, Andre III. Story collections: *Dirty Love*, *The Cage Keeper*. Novels: *The Garden of Last Days*, *Bluesman*, *House of Sand and Fog*. Memoir: *Townie*. andredubus.com

DURBAN, Pam. Story collection: *All Set About with Fever Trees*. Novels: *So Far Back*, *The Laughing Place*. Stories in *Southern Review*, *Georgia Review*, *Crazyhorse*, *New Stories from the South: The Year's Best 1997*, *Best American Short Stories 1997*. University of North Carolina.

ELLIS, Sherry. Interviewer. Editor of the anthology *Write Now!* Interviews in *AGNI Online*, *Post Road*, *Writer's Chronicle*.

FREED, Lynn. Novels: *House of Women*, *Friends of the Family*, *The Mirror*, *The Bungalow*, *Home Ground*. Story collection: *The Curse of the Appropriate Man*. Nonfiction: *Reading, Writing, and Leaving Home*. University of California, Davis. LynnFreed.com

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*.

GATES, David. Story collection: *The Wonders of the Invisible World*. Novels: *Preston Falls*, *Jernigan*. Stories in *Esquire*, *Ploughshares*, *Grand Street*, *TriQuarterly*.

GILBREATH, Aaron. Interviewer. Work in *Paris Review*, *Tin House*, *Black Warrior Review*, *Hotel Amerika*. aarongilbreath.wordpress.com

GORDON, Mary. Novels: *Pearl*, *Spending*, *Final Payments*, *The Company of Women*, *Men and Angels*, *The Other Side*. Also a book of novellas, *The Rest of Life*; a story collection, *The Stories of Mary Gordon*; a book of essays, *Good Boys and Dead Girls*; and a biography, *Joan of Arc*. Memoirs: *The Shadow Man*, *Seeing Through Places*. Barnard College.

GORDON, Stephanie. Interviewer. Work in *Writer's Chronicle*, *Studies in American Indian Literature*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Studies in the Humanities*, *GSU Review*. Auburn University.

GRESKO, Brian. Interviewer. Work in *Huffington Post*, *The Millions*, *Atlantic*. briangresko.com

GRIMSLEY, Jim. Novels: *Forgiveness*, *Boulevard*, *Comfort and Joy*, *Winter Birds*, *Dream Boy*, *My Drowning*, *Kirith Kirin*. Plays: *Mr. Universe and Other Plays*. Emory University. Jim Grimsley home page

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

HARUF, Kent. Novels: *Eventide*, *Plainsong*, *Where You Once Belonged*, *The Tie That Binds*. Published in *Puerto del Sol*, *Grand Street*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Gettysburg Review*, *Best American Short Stories*.

HENKIN, Joshua. Novels: *The World Without You*, *Matrimony*, *Swimming Across the Hudson*. Stories in *Ploughshares*, *Southern Review*, *Yale Review*, *Triquarterly*. Brooklyn College. joshuahenkin.com

HOLLAND, Travis. Novel: *The Archivist's Story*. Stories in *Five Points*, *Ploughshares*, *The Quarterly*.

HUSTVEDT, Siri. Novels: *The Summer Without Men*, *The Sorrows of an American*, *What I Loved*, *The Blindfold*, *The Enchantment of Lily Dahl*. Essays: *A Plea for Eros*, *Mysteries of the Rectangle*, *Yonder*. Poetry collection: *Reading to You*. sirihustvidt.net

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

JONES, Allen Morris. Novel: *Last Year's River*. Co-editor of *Where We Live: The Best of Big Sky Journal*.

JONES, Thom. Story collections: *Sonny Liston Was a Friend of Mine*, *Cold Snap*, *The Pugilist at Rest*.

KANNER, Ellen. Interviewer. Novel: *The Last Refuge*. Nonfiction: *Love in the Time of Broccoli: One Joyful Vegetarian's Path to a Beautiful Life*. Nationally syndicated columnist with McClatchy newspapers; contributing editor, *Pages*. ellen kanner

LETHEM, Jonathan. Novels include *Dissident Gardens*, *Chronic City*, *Motherless Brooklyn*, *Fortress of Solitude*. Nonfiction: *Fear of Music*. Comic series: *Omega the Unknown*. Essays: *The Ecstasy of Influence*. Two story collections. jonathanlethem.com

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

LEVINE, Philip. Poetry collections include *News of the World*, *Breath*, *The Simple Truth*, *New Selected Poems*.

LIVESEY, Margot. Novels: *The House on Fortune Street*, *Homework*, *The Missing World*, *Criminals*, *Eva Moves the Furniture*, *Banishing Verona*. Story collection: *Learning by Heart*. Emerson College. margotlivesey.com

LOWRY, Beverly. Novels: *Harriet Tubman: Imagining a Life*, *The Track of Two Desires*, *Breaking Gentle*. Nonfiction: *Her Dream of Dreams*, *Crossed Over*. George Mason University.

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*.

McCRACKEN, Elizabeth. Novels: *The Giant's House*, *Niagara Falls All Over Again*. Story collection: *Here's Your Hat, What's Your Hurry*. Memoir: *An Exact Replica of a Figment of My Imagination*. elizabethmccracken.com

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

McNALLY, John. Novels: *America's Report Card*, *The Book of Ralph*. Story collection: *Troublemakers*. Editor of four fiction anthologies. Wake Forest University.

MELNYCZUK, Askold. Novels: *The House of Widows*, *What Is Told*, *Ambassador of the Dead*. Stories in *Gettysburg Review*, *Missouri Review*, *Antioch Review*, *Grand Street*. Founding Editor of *AGNI*. University of Massachusetts-Boston.

NASHOLD, Jim. Interviewer. Co-author of biography: *The Death of Dylan Thomas*.

NELSON, Antonya. Novels: *Bound*, *Talking in Bed*, *Nobody's Girl*, *Living to Tell*. Story collections: *Nothing Right*, *Some Fun*, *Female Trouble*, *The Expendables*, *In the Land of Men*, *Family Terrorists*. University of Houston.

PATCHETT, Ann. Novels: *State of Wonder*, *Run*, *Bel Canto*, *Taft*, *The Magician's Assistant*, *The Patron Saint of Liars*. Memoir: *Truth and Beauty: A Friendship*. annpatchett.com

PHILLIPS, Jayne Anne. Novels: *Quiet Dell*, *Lark & Termite*, *Shelter*, *MotherKind*, *Machine Dreams*. Story collections: *Fast Lanes*, *Black Tickets*. Work in *Granta*, *Harper's*, *DoubleTake*, *Norton Anthology of Contemporary Fiction*. Brandeis University. jayneannephillips.com

PIERCE, William. Interviewer. Senior Editor of *AGNI*. Stories in *American Literary Review*, *Cream City Review*.

PRITCHARD, Melissa. Novels: *Phoenix*, *Selene of the Spirits*, *Late Bloomer*. Story collections: *Disappearing Ingenue*, *The Instinct for Bliss*, *Spirit Seizures*. Arizona State University. melissapritchard.com

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WOLFF, Tobias. Story collections: *Our Story Begins: New and Selected Stories*, *In the Garden of the North American Martyrs*, *The Night in Question*, *Back in the World*. Novels: *Old School*, *Ugly Rumours*. Memoirs: *This Boy's Life*, *In Pharoah's Army*. Novella: *The Barracks Thief*.

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