In Which Robert Morgan Sings of Thomas Wolfe

I know that Thomas Wolfe is very much out of fashion now among academic critics. A few years ago Harold Bloom began a review of Wolfe’s letters with the sentence, “One cannot discuss the literary merits of Thomas Wolfe; he has none.” My friends from Yale never pass up an opportunity to express their disdain for my fellow Tar Heel.

Besides Wolfe, the other local writer often in the news when I was young was Carl Sandburg, who lived in the old Memminger house in nearby Flat Rock. Like Wolfe, Sandburg had a vast popular audience. Without knowing it at the time, I think I acquired from both local celebrities the sense that the best writing is poetic and for the larger audience of ordinary readers. Accessibility to the common reader has always been my goal and my challenge, in writing both poetry and prose. I feel fortunate to have had such models when I was so young.

I myself did not reread Thomas Wolfe for almost twenty years. I had gone on to discover the precise understatement of Hemingway, the fury of Faulkner, the tragic romances of Fitzgerald. But when I returned to Look Homeward, Angel in the early 1980s, I was pleased to discover that the novel still worked its spell on me. The cadences of the language, the richness of diction, the passion of the narration, the detail of boyhood and small town life early in the century, were just as vivid as they had been in my teens. But what was different in my re-reading was the emphasis. At the age of thirty-six the choral sections, the rhapsodic passages, seemed less interesting than the realism and satire. The satire was extraordinarily entertaining and on the mark. Wolfe is amazingly good at finding what is absurd about small town life, and in the speech of store clerks, local politicians, reporters, blowzy widows, he captures the spirit of an era. The work is alive and moving. But it seemed a very different book from what I had read in 1960. I had grown up to see new facets in the novel.

While re-reading Look Homeward, Angel it occurred to me Wolfe has suffered a fate among academic critics similar to their treatment of Poe. His great fame and popularity, his legend and notoriety, were held against him. Wolfe was so famous in his own lifetime there has been a backlash against him ever since. And like Poe, he is read by the young, and cherished by the young. Scholars are often embarrassed by their own early enthusiasms, feeling that what they cared for so much when young can’t be taken seriously later.

But since re-reading Look Homeward, Angel I have noticed his influence on so many other writers, including James Agee, Robert Penn Warren, Jack Kerouac, and Cormac McCarthy, to name a few. Of the novelists of the early Twentieth Century only Hemingway and Faulkner have had a greater impact on the following generations.

I am often asked why there are so many important writers from North Carolina. There may be more well known fiction writers and poets per capita from North Carolina than from any other state, unless it’s Mississippi. My short answer is: Thomas Wolfe. Once Wolfe achieved such great fame in the 1930s, other young North Carolinians got the idea that writing was an opportunity, a real possibility. The same is probably true of Faulkner and Mississippi. Once a region or a state has an extremely
famous writer other writers are likely to follow. But the recognition and encouragement North Carolina has given its writers is a factor also. When I was a student at NC State and then UNC-Chapel Hill in the 1960s, there was a feature almost every Sunday in the Raleigh News and Observer about one North Carolina writer or another: Frances Gray Patton, Guy Owen, Reynolds Price, Doris Betts, Romulus Linney. It was assumed at both UNC-Chapel Hill and UNC-Greensboro that among the students there would be important future writers.

Among Wolfe's shorter works is a novella called "The Web of Earth." This story is spoken entirely by a woman narrator talking to her son about their family, about gossip from home, about the late father. Wolfe wrote it after a visit from his mother in New York, and it is different from almost anything else he wrote, for it is without a third person narrator or editorial comment. Reading "The Web of Earth" in the early 1980s helped steer me toward writing in the voice of a woman character, toward letting the character tell her own story. That connection with a living voice is, for me, at the heart of fiction writing. We read novels, and we write them, to know and touch other lives, and to listen to other voices.

"That was the year the locusts came: it seems so long ago since the year the locusts came, and all the earth was eaten bare, it seems so long ago. But no (I thought) the thing kept puzzlin' me, you know--it can't be that, there hasn't been time enough for that, it was only the year before in January--Lord! Lord: I often think of all that I've been through, and wonder that I'm here to tell it. I reckon for a fact I had the power of Nature in me; why! No more trouble than the earth takes bearing corn, all the children, the eight who lived, and all the others that you never heard about . . ." (P. 148)

One of the special things I learned from "The Web of Earth" was that it is the unpredictableness of a narrator that makes the voice most alive. The speaker keeps surprising us, but the sentences seem inevitable once we hear them. I also saw the advantages of a woman narrator. Women are usually closer observers of detail, and they are more willing to talk about their feelings, their relationships, than men are. The novella was a revelation of intimacy, paradox of close characterization, and toughness.

It would be hard to overstate the importance of Thomas Wolfe to the younger generation of North Carolina writers. The soaring energy of the prose, the exuberance of his vision, are only part of his significance. Even more important is the sense of place, the bond with place, which his writing dramatizes and fosters. However satiric or ironic his Altamont is, and his mountain folks are, he wrote of life here in the first decades of the Twentieth Century with remarkable accuracy and understanding. However romantic his prose and his protagonist may seem, Wolfe has a willingness to portray the greed and absurdities of that world, the corruption of politics, the hypocrisy that tainted and limited our culture then, and now, as well as the intense family loyalties, brotherly affection, and mystery of the mountains themselves.

It is also hard to overstate the significance of seeing in a famous book people and places that you recognize. When I was a boy we went to Asheville about once a year to buy Christmas presents or school clothes. To me it was the great city on a hill. Asheville was the promise of the great world beyond the mountains. I had seen the Square, the Battery Park Hotel, the train station, and Beaucatcher Mountain. To see those places live again in Wolfe's prose was an inspiration and exhortation, whispering in my ear write, write, write.

Seventy years after Look Homeward, Angel's publication, I salute Wolfe's courage and honesty, his great artistry and largeness of vision. It is still painful to recall that he died so young, and that his best work might have been ahead of him. He belonged to a great generation of American writers. And I am proud to say he belongs to us.

[Excerpted, with permission, from Robert Morgan's remarks "O Lost, and Found," delivered to the Thomas Wolfe Society in Chapel Hill on May 6, 2000, and first printed in The Thomas Wolfe Review, Terry Roberts, Editor. Mr. Morgan--a native of Hendersonville in the North Carolina mountains, a graduate of UNC-Chapel Hill (B.A., 1965) and UNC-Greensboro (M.F.A., 1968) has published ten books of poetry and five of fiction, the most recent of which Gap Creek, A Novel, was chosen for the Oprah Book Club. He has taught at Cornell for nearly 30 years, but will come home again to teach in the mountains at Appalachian State University this fall.]
From the Director

CREATIVE WRITING AT CAROLINA, 1999-2000

The Creative Writing Program continues to enjoy unprecedented success with the support of both new and former donors and superior teaching by an award-winning staff. Do I love my job or what? Having taught in this program, off and on, since 1975, I can truthfully report that never have faculty morale and prospects for continuing success been higher. Highlights of the year included news from three alumnae—Lydia Millet, Jenny Offill, and Lily King—of triumphant novel publications. Lily King, who visited and gave a reading here, won the Barnes and Noble “Discovery” award for her provocative first novel, The Pleasing Hour. Lydia Millet, who appeared in a cheeky interview published in George magazine, garnered praise for her comic satirical novel, George Bush, Dark Prince of Love. Jenny Offill’s novel, Last Things, was lauded both by The New York Times and The New Yorker.

Our program received another $5,000 grant from the Truman Capote Trust, awarded to an outstanding young fiction writer. This year’s recipient, selected from six worthy contenders, was Courtney Jones, a rising senior who will study fiction next year with Doris Betts. The first Willie Lavonsa Moore Prize in Creative Non-Fiction—created by a substantial contribution from Mary Friday (’78) to honor the memory of a beloved classmate—was awarded to Elizabeth Lassiter. Second place went to Ashley Pace. Both women are graduating seniors, who completed their Senior Honors thesis projects this spring. The first Wanda Chappell Scholarship, funded by Random House as tribute to a beloved colleague who studied at UNC, was awarded to Jessie Tucker, a sophomore English major and creative writing minor. The first Angela B. Collins Scholarship, created by Dr. Charles Collins of Rockingham, has been awarded to a rising senior from Durham, Adam Whitehurst. These awards provide new opportunities for some of our most gifted students, and they have all come about within the last three years. It remains a chief goal of our program not only to serve as mentors to our students but to cultivate possibilities of support for them that might lead to exciting internships, tuition relief, merit awards and other sources of enrichment.

During the past year our students and faculty alike were entertained and enlightened by visits from poets Rodney Jones and Forrest Hamer, sponsored by the ongoing generosity of Ms. Blanche Brit Armfield, who not only created the Armfield reading series several years ago, but added to its funding this year so that we are now able to offer two major poetry readings annually. Plans are also underway to create a poetry prize in Blanche Brit Armfield’s honor. Ms. Armfield’s own first book of poems has recently been privately printed by her friends and admirers and a celebration was held to recognize her literary achievements in Camden, SC. Our week long Morgan Writer-in-Residency brought prize-winning novelist and alumnus, Russell Banks, to campus. Banks met with students, gave a public reading of his works in Memorial Hall, served on panels that discussed both his literary contributions and cinematic adaptations of two of his novels, and generally delighted everyone in his company. The Morgan Writer-in-Residency, established by Allen and Musette Morgan of Memphis in 1994, has, to date, brought the following distinguished writers to campus for an enjoyable and stimulating week: Shelby Foote, Beth Henley, Annie Dillard, Richard Ford, Robert Pinsky, Rita Dove, Richard Wilbur, and Russell Banks. In addition to these specially funded
visits, Second Sunday Readings (hosted by Michael McFee and sponsored by Creative Writing, The North Caroliniana Society, and the North Carolina Collection in Wilson Library) invited the following writers to give readings this year: Al Maginnes, Judy Goldman, Gibbons Ruark, Peter Turchi, Ron Rash, Candace Flynt, Cathy Smith Bowers, Sharyn McCrumb, Stuart Dischell, and June Spence. These readings begin at 2:30, the second Sunday of every month during the academic year, in Wilson Library.

We continue to expand our curriculum whenever funding and available talent allow. This past year we were able to offer two sections of Writing and Reading Children’s Literature. Ruth Moose taught the ever-popular section 39, and visiting lecturer Deborah DeRosa taught an introductory version of Ruth’s course. Laurence Avery offered a section of creative non-fiction, previously taught by both Bland Simpson and Alan Shapiro. Next year Professor Avery will teach a course in playwriting—a new offering. We’re excited about the prospects of being able to offer our students a broader selection of courses than in past years. Screenwriting, offered by the Communications Studies Department, attracts a number of our writing students every year. Down the road, thanks to an endowment made possible by television producer (“Star Trek”) Michael Piller (a former student of Doris Betts’s), there will be joint ventures between the Creative Writing Program and Communications Studies to enlarge the writing curriculum for students in both departments. We are always looking for ways to energize the writing sequence. Lucky for us we lured Sarah Dessen and Mike Chitwood back this year as adjuncts who taught both fiction and poetry sections. Jack Raper, who normally teaches modern literature in the English department, taught an intro to fiction course in our sequence. He loved the experience and told me it was “one of the highlights of his teaching career.” We continue to grow (last semester we taught around 265 students, just up from our normal 250 range). We are devoted solely to the teaching of undergraduates, with no plans to do otherwise. We enjoy being a small community within the larger whirl of the University—it’s one of our most gratifying distinctions.

Space doesn’t permit me to document all our faculty’s numerous accomplishments, but I will spotlight a few noteworthy items: SARAH DESSEN’S fourth novel, Dreamland, will be published by Viking in fall 2000. RUTH MOOSE recently completed her term as President of the 1800 member North Carolina Writer’s Network. She also won a “Poet Laurette” award from the NC Poetry Society, judged by Fred Chappell. MICHAEL CHITWOOD has poetry and prose forthcoming or in recent issues of TriQuarterly, Poetry, Threepenny Review, Ohio Review, The Sun, Iowa Review, and South Carolina Review. DAPHNE ATHAS received the Distinguished Service Award for Women from Chi Omega Fraternity on April 12, 2000. “Pillar of Time,” a section from her memoir-in-progress will appear in the September issue of American Letters and Commentary. LAURENCE AVERY had a poem in a recent Sandhills Review. An article on African-American drama is forthcoming in The Journal of American Drama and Theatre, and he’s bringing out an edition of Paul Green’s The Lost Colony with UNC Press—the first new edition in 40 years. JAMES SEAY’S poems were included in anthologies from University of Arkansas Press, LSU Press, and in two anthologies of North Carolina poets. Ernest Suarez’s interview with him was published in Southbound Interviews with Southern Poets (Univ.of Missouri Press, 1999). MICHAEL MCFEE won a Hettleman Prize for Artistic and Scholarly Achievement by Young Faculty, and was named Bowman and Gordon Gray
Distinguished Associate Professor of English for a five-year term. He had new poems in the *Georgia, Southern, Hudson,* and *Ontario Reviews* and published an essay on Fred Chappell in *Southern Literary Journal.*

ROBERT KIRKPATRICK received inaugural appointment to the new UNC Academy of Teaching Scholars, and led the summer 2000 Honors Seminar in London and Paris.

BLAND SIMPSON, NC Folklore Society Brown-Hudson Award winner for his writing and music regarding state and regional heritage, was the keynote speaker at UNC’s mid-year commencement. The Broadway hit *Fool Moon,* which he, as a Red Clay Rambler, helped to develop, won a special Tony Award.

DORIS BETTS has published articles and interviews in *Kalliope, Georgia Review, Southern Cultures, Brightleaf,* and *Carolina Quarterly.* For NPR she co-hosted a 13 week series on southeastern literature. In December she will receive a lifetime achievement award from the Christianity and Literature group, MLA in New York. ALAN SHAPIRO’s newest book of poems, *The Dead Alive and Busy,* was published this spring by University of Chicago Press.

JACK RAPER, the accomplished scholar who taught fiction writing for the program this spring told me: “It’s great to work with students who enjoy talking about fiction in ways it ought to be talked about.” MARIANNE GINGHER’S little tribute to the curious, inventive and observant child, *How to Have a Happy Childhood,* was published spring 2000.

LSU Press will publish a collection of personal narratives in spring, 2001. She was awarded a Chapman Family Fellowship by the Institute for the Arts and Humanities, fall 2000.

As part of our commitment to community outreach, this summer (2000) we’ll renew our sponsorship of the NC Writers’ Network writing workshops for high school students, *HOT INK,* held on our campus for two weeks in July. Also this summer, Sarah Dessen, Bland Simpson, and Michael Chitwood taught writing seminars for UNC’s General Alumni Association. A number of our faculty are on the Carolina Speakers Bureau. We give readings and performances at retirement centers, schools, literacy benefits, book stores, public libraries, community colleges; and regularly serve as emcees, moderators, panelists, and contest judges—on-campus and off.

Our student writing awards for 2000 were:

ROBERT B. HOUSE MEMORIAL AWARD IN POETRY: Max Spitzer

DORIS SMITH WILLIAMS PRIZE IN POETRY: Caryn Maureen O’Connell

LOUIS D. RUBIN, JR. PRIZE IN FICTION: Elizabeth Lassiter

MAX STEELE AWARD IN FICTION: Trina Ozer and Emma Brannan

GEORGE B. WYNNE AWARD FOR FICTION: Courtney Jones

WILLIE LAVONSA MOORE PRIZE IN CREATIVE NON-FICTION: Elizabeth Lassiter (1st place), Ashley Pace (2d)

Contributions to the Doris Betts Distinguished Professorship in Creative Writing are within range of our million dollar goal. We will begin a search this fall for a nationally prominent writer to replace our beloved colleague, Doris Betts, who will retire after the academic year 2000-2001. Of course we know that Doris Betts can never be “replaced.” She is the heart and spirit and pride of our Program and one of the strongest reasons it has prospered. In our search for the writer who will assume the Doris Betts Professorship, our priority will be to find a person who is compatible with the high standards and humanitarian vision that Doris has evidenced for more than three decades in her teaching.

The initial commitment to this endowed
chair by philanthropist Ben M. Jones, III (B.A., 1950) of $334,000 has inspired the generosity of many former Writing Program alumni and friends to contribute and pledge support, and we’re grateful for their help. In addition to establishing a chaired professorship in Creative Writing, we continue to invite contributors for a separate support fund, recently renamed in honor of the founder of our writing program, Jessie Rehder. The Jessie Rehder/Doris Betts Creative Writing Fund will help to invigorate the program by making enrichment opportunities (internships, visiting speakers, faculty leave stipends, student merit awards) available in the future. The continued vitality of the Creative Writing Program depends on our establishing a fund with such flexible purpose. Readers interested in supporting either the Doris Betts Professorship or the Jessie Rehder/Doris Betts Creative Writing Fund should send contributions to: Mary Flanagan, the Arts and Sciences Foundation, CB# 6115, Chapel Hill, NC 27599. Thanks to everyone who has already contributed.

We received two exciting gifts this year (2000). The first was a three-year commitment from James Kenan III to provide funding for the hiring of an “emerging” writer. This year, from a pool of terrific candidates, the hiring committee selected poet Christine Garren to be our first Kenan Artist-in-Residence. The appointment is for one year. Next year we plan to hire a fiction writer; and the position will continue to rotate among the genres.

The second gift was from a former Creative Writing Program student, R. Alex Rankin from Kentucky, who once studied poetry with Jim Seay. Mr. Rankin’s generous contribution will enable us to continue publication of our newsletter and will help further enrichment opportunities for faculty and students. In his letter to me, he expressed his desire to see gifted teachers “like Jim Seay” retained and rewarded. His gift was clear indication of his high regard for the mentoring we do here.

Other gifts to Creative Writing this year included contributions from our loyal patrons, Ben and Anne Bolch whose daughter, Suzanne, graduated from our ranks and has a hugely successful career as a writer/producer of (mostly) children’s and family television shows in Canada. We are grateful to Charles B. Collins and Random House as well, for funding scholarship opportunities for our students. Thanks, too, to Jessie Tucker, our volunteer student assistant for helping to update our bulletin board and providing other invaluable services—especially her good cheer. And special thanks to Bland Simpson, colleague extraordinaire, who will assume the many delightful duties of this post while I’m on leave this fall.

Marianne Gingher, Director
The Creative Writing Program

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CONGRATULATIONS from our faculty and alumni to Ms. Blanche Britt Armfield of Camden, SC, who, in April 2000, published her first collection of poems. Ms. Armfield, a closet poet for many decades, was urged by friends and admirers to bring her work to light. Ms. Armfield founded and continues to sponsor our annual Armfield Reading series which brings two notable poets to UNC-CH each year. A poetry prize, endowed by the Armfield fund, will be awarded annually, beginning in spring 2001.
NEW FACES THIS FALL

The Creative Writing Program is pleased to welcome Christine Garren and Lawrence Naumoff who will join our faculty this fall.

Christine Garren, first recipient of the new Kenan Visiting Writer position, will teach poetry. She received both undergraduate and graduate degrees from UNC-Greensboro where she studied poetry with Fred Chappell, among others. Commenting on her work, Chappell has compared Garren’s talent to “a hybrid of John Donne, Rilke, and Elizabeth Bishop.” She is the author of Afterworld, a book of poems published by the University of Chicago Press and nominated for a 1993 Pulitzer Prize. Afterworld was a finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Award. Among the Monarchs, her second collection, will be published Fall 2000. Her awards include an NEA fellowship and she has taught writing and literature at Guilford College and UNC-Greensboro.

Lawrence Naumoff, who will teach fiction in the fall, is no stranger to UNC-Chapel Hill or the writing program. He was among the first students who, in the mid-Sixties, studied creative writing with the founders of the program, Jessie Rehder and Max Steele. He remembers when there were “five students in Honors, team-taught by three faculty.” While a student he won the Thomas Wolfe Memorial Prize and an NEA award. He is the author of five novels: Night of the Weeping Women, Rootie Kazootie, Taller Women, Silk Hope, NC, and A Plan for Women and the recipient of a Whiting Award.

* * *

HOT INK’s Tony Peacock on “Writing—not for the test”

[Excerpted from former CWP student, National Hollerin’ Contest winner, and HOT INK teacher Peacock’s comments in The Chapel Hill News, July 21st, 2000]

The state-mandated [elementary school writing] test measures a particular kind of writing skill and thought process, which I can appreciate and admire, but there are other types of writing that are important. The test requires each student to take a provided topic of “prompt” and write a narrative following certain rules and guidelines. Students must stay within the framework of the topic provided. Their writing must demonstrate proper sequencing. There must be a clear beginning, middle and end to the narrative. The narrative must be completed within a 50-minute time period.

Students need to develop and possess these tools if they are going to be able to communicate effectively and efficiently in today’s world. But where does that leave the artists and teachers who want to introduce and foster writing skills that cannot be measured by the state-mandated test?

What about giving children a chance to experiment with their stories by letting their minds explode with imaginative situations that get them out of the boxes the writing test demands that they adhere to? What about giving students an opportunity to start their stories in the middle, where the action begins?

I heard Lee Smith say once that she wrote her last line first and taped it up in her kitchen until she finished the piece. Yes! She was talking about the arduous process of writing fiction, which is a completely different world from the basic skills that the state-mandated test measures. And isn’t everyone who has read one of Lee Smith’s books glad that, even though she mastered the basic skills of writing, she also learned the craft of writing dramatic scenes with colorful characters and a sense of place that cannot be completed in 50 minutes?

How can we make students understand that the blessed, hard work of the creative writing process is important too? If all they ever hear is that they need a 2.5 on the state-mandated test to be considered proficient writers, I doubt that many will. HOT INK reminds me that our students want creative writing. They need creative writing. We should make room for it in our schools.
Second Sunday Readings, 2000-2001

Sunday, September 10, 2000:
Fiction: Daniel Wallace, Chapel Hill
(two novels with Algonquin, Ray in Reverse and Big Fish)
Poetry: Julie Fay, East Carolina University
(three books of poetry, most recently The Woman Behind You)

[No reading in October; fall break.]

Sunday, November 12, 2000:
Fiction: P. B. Parris, Asheville
(two novels, most recently His Arms Are Full of Broken Things)
Poetry: Stephen Knauth, Charlotte
(most recent book, The River I Know You By, Roanoke-Chowan winner)

[No reading in December; semester break.]

Sunday, January 14, 2001:
Fiction: Wendy Brenner, UNC-Wilmington
(short story collection, Large Animals in Everyday Life)
Poetry: Jim Clark, Barton College, Wilson
(two books, most recently Handiwork from St Andrews Press)

Sunday, February 11, 2001:
Fiction: Jenny Offill, UNC-CH grad, Brooklyn resident
(first novel Last Things last year, widely and favorably reviewed)
Non-fiction: Jan DeBilieu, Manteo
(three books about people & nature, most recently Wind, John Burroughs Award winner)

[No reading in March; spring break.]

Sunday, April 8, 2001:
Fiction: Michael Malone, Hillsborough
(seven popular novels, including Uncivil Seasons and Foolscap)
Poetry: Jane Mead, Wake Forest University
(two books, most recently House of Poured-Out Waters)

Note: This is the NINTH year of Second Sunday Readings, and—with one exception—we have never repeated a reader. The series is jointly sponsored by the Creative Writing Program, the North Caroliniana Society, and the University’s North Caroline Collection. We meet at 2:30 in the Pleasants Family Assembly Room of Wilson Library. Readings last about an hour and are free and open to the public. The Bulls Head Bookshop sells the authors’ books afterwards, and refreshments are served. A very good time is had by all.
THE NEW RANKIN FACULTY SUPPORT FUND

R. Alexander Rankin (BA '77) of Goshen, Kentucky, has pledged $100,000 to establish the R. Alexander Rankin Faculty Support Fund in Creative Writing. In a letter to Arts and Sciences Dean Risa Palm, Rankin noted that “the experience of Senior Honors in Poetry has been one of the high points of my life.” He went on to cite the teaching of Creative Writing professor James Seay as part of the inspiration behind his gift: “Jim Seay exemplifies the kind of teacher that has given UNC a unique academic environment.”

Rankin praised the Creative Writing Program in a letter to director Marianne Gingher as well, commenting that he “enjoyed an enriching experience in Senior Honors Poetry.”

Rankin has business interests in Goshen, Kentucky, including Upson Downs Farm where he and his wife Sarah raise Thoroughbred horses. Their son Taylor entered UNC-Chapel in the fall of 1999, and Rankin’s brother Tom, who earned his M.A. in Folklore at UNC-CH, is director of the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke.

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WORDS & MUSIC: A FEW NOTES FROM WIL SEABROOK

[Editor's note: We asked Mr. Seabrook, a former CWP student who has just released his first CD with Chicago Kid Records, to comment on this creative project and the process surrounding it.]

For many jobs, I assume, there are certain avenues one can take, certain guided paths that can be followed that will lead an individual to a place he or she is, to a certain degree, expecting. Whether you’re a future lawyer going to law school, a future MD slaving your way through gross anatomy, or perhaps a future teacher, enjoying four years of higher education absolutely free in exchange for time given back to the great state of North Carolina, you know that doing A, B and C will lead you to X, Y and Z.

As an aspiring musician, the most troubling part of the process is that there’s no roadmap, no prescribed chain of progress I can follow that will lead to nearly certain success. I have, in fact, in the five years I’ve been trying to “make it,” spent more time working thankless, minimum wage jobs than I have playing for thousands of cheering fans.

I got into this almost by accident. An album project I did in high school made its way to various LA producers, who liked my voice and heard some potential. I deferred college for two years while I waited for these producers to make my career happen for me. When that failed to happen I decided school was better than Little Caesar’s, and gave UNC my best shot for two years (including some very satisfying time spent in the Creative Writing Program). Luckily, I ended up with a new producer on the scene, John Ryan of Santana fame, who has helped me get my ducks in a row. My debut album just came out on Amazon.com, and we’re planning a tour through the southeast sometime this fall. But for now I sit, writing at my computer desk, where, for the last month, I have sat eight to ten hours a day. I send out
mass e-mailings, maintain my website (wilseabrook.com), and make so many phone calls my heart almost stops every time I get the phone bill. Who knew a rock star’s life could be so exciting?

In the age of the internet, people are bombarded with so much information that the hardest part is getting people to pay attention. I got into music because I knew I could never be a salesman. Of course, the greatest irony is that I have had to become a better salesman in order to promote my work than I ever would have working for a large corporation.

But here’s the thing: I believe in what I’m doing. I write songs because I have to, because there’s so much hurt and pain and downright cruelty in the world. It’s my job to stand up and in the loudest voice possible say, “Yo, people! Would you pay attention to this racism/seexism/all-around-lack-of-love that is going on here? Are you going to let this sh*t keeping happening?” I believe in what I’m saying so strongly that I can set my shy, anti-social ego aside entirely. It’s about the message, and I can sell that message to anyone, anytime. It’s a beautiful thing to believe in what you’re doing. There’s no roadmap for my process, and I may not make it on the scale I’m hoping for, but I will always have this time in my life to look back on, and I know I’ll do it with a smile.–WS

And the Winner Is . . .

TIFF MERRITT, who holds our ’99 Rubin Prize in Fiction, continues to perform her original music far and wide, frequently with her band The Carbines. Ms. Merritt also walked off with the tunesmith’s blue ribbon in Wilkesboro, NC, winning the songwriting competition at this year’s Merle Watson Festival. Congratulations, Tift, and please play it again!

* * *

DO TELL!

Again, your response to our query-postcard earlier this year was terrific. Please do tell us what you’re up to next, and please let us know where other alumni are and what they’re about. We at the Creative Writing Program take great pride in your accomplishments, and we love to spread the word. Wire: [mbging@email.unc.edu]
[bsimpson@email.unc.edu] or [coombs@email.unc.edu].

* * *

Creative Writing at Carolina

Still available, this 16-page booklet looks at the past and present of our extraordinary undergraduate tradition. For a copy, please send SASE (6x9) with 55 cents postage to:
BOOKLET/Creative Writing Program
Dept. of English, CB # 3520 UNC-Chapel Hill
Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3520

* * *

AT DINNER WITH DIANA VREELAND

Her glass of neat vodka sat on the white damask tablecloth. Beyond the smear of lipstick, a twist of lemon floated among the ice-cubes. We were sitting side by side, on a banquette.

“What are you writing about, Bruce?”

“Wales, Diana.”

The lower lip shot forward. Her painted cheeks swivelled through an angle of ninety degrees.

“Whales!” she said. “Blue whales! . . . Sperrrm whales! . . . THE WHITE WHALE!”

“No . . . no, Diana! Wales! Welsh Wales! The country to the west of England.”

“Oh! Wales. I do know Wales. Little grey houses . . . covered in roses . . . in the rain.”

[from What Am I Doing Here? by Bruce Chatwin]
Alums All Over

ROBERT ARRINGTON ('72) is an attorney with Moore Stout Waddell & Leoford. His publications include 4 quasi-fictional pieces in *The Tennessee Bar Journal*. He has been married to Deborah Harvey Arrington for 26 years.

REBECCA BAILEY ('80) published poetry this year in *Carolina Quarterly* and *Atlanta Review* and is at work on a poetry manuscript, *United Fields*. A freelance editor and English Tutor, she performed Appalachian-style clogging in Switzerland this past August.

TAYLOR BALL ('98) is reported to be applying to law schools after a two-year hiatus in the entertainment business in Los Angeles.

JUANA OLGA BARRIOS ('84) is currently enrolled in the Ph. D. program in Depth Psychology at the Pacifica Graduate Institute in Santa Barbara, CA and in private practice in Los Angeles as a private educator, lecturer, and workshop leader.

KIM GILLEY BECKER ('87) who has written and published fiction, recently received her Masters of Divinity from Virginia Theological Seminary. Ordination to the priesthood is anticipated next year. She currently serves as assistant rector at Christ Church Parish (Episcopal) in Kensington, MD. She says, “I continue to write and read avidly, though for now my writing is directed more towards sermons than fiction, as I put my words in service of the Word.”

TESSA BLAKE ('91) has had her debut feature film, “Five Wives, Three Secretaries and Me,” named one of the Outstanding Documentaries of 1999 by the Academy of Motion Pictures, Arts and Sciences, and will be honored in a screening series in Los Angeles in March. The film will begin airing on the Sundance Channel in January, 2001. She has two articles about Poland coming out in the fall in *Travel and Leisure* and *Outside*.

BRIAN BLANCHFIELD ('95) now lives in Brooklyn, NY and, last year, won an AWP Intro Award. Recent poems can be found in current issues of *Barrow Street, Bellingham Review, Fence, Green Mountain Review, LIT*, and one forthcoming in *Volt*.

DAINA BRAY ('98) was a UNC finalist for a Rhodes Scholarship in 1999. When last she communicated, she was working for the Federal Management Agency, doing environmental reviews and finding the work “fascinating.”

EDNA C. BROWN ('79) currently works as the Entertainment Editor of Christianity.com, a new Web network debuting online summer 2000. She is also a free-lance writer/producer for television.

CLAY CARMICHAEL ('79) who lives in Carrboro, NC, conducts workshops for disadvantaged students and bereaved children in collaboration with NC hospices. Her third picture book, *Lonesome Bear*, will be published spring 2001 and she’s writing and illustrating book number four. Her essay, “Weathering Hurricanes,” will be published in an autobiographical collection about NC women by Coastal Carolina Press. Her book, *Used-Up Bear* won a storytelling World Gold Medal and was named ABA Pick of the Lists, and soon her books will be in six languages.

PETER CASHWELL and KELLY DALTON ('85) write that “after marrying in 1986, we achieved an almost Cleaver-like domestic bliss (minus vacuuming-in-heels thing).” They have two sons, ages 8 and 6. Since 1995, Pete has taught English and speech at Woodberry Forest School in rural Virginia, where he also coaches the debate team, assists the drama program, and writes occasional essays for Virginia Public Radio. Kelly has worked both as a mom, editor, researcher, clerk, and copyeditor. In 1998 she won a first-place award in poetry and a third-place award for short fiction in the Germanna/Windmore contest.

WILLIAM deBUYS ('72) writes that he and wife Anne ('72) keep “chugging along.” Daughter Katie becomes a freshman at Northwestern this year. Son David will be a sophomore in high school. His third book, *Salt Dreams*, won the 1999 Western States Book Award for creative non-fiction. Book #4 is due out next spring.

HEATHER DOWNEY ('98) is living in Boston with husband Wade (a UNC poetry alum) and works for Houghton Mifflin Publishers as assistant to the entire manuscript editing department. She’s in charge of editing their new paperback line
and writes that she’s doing “some neat children’s stuff, too.” She ran into CHRIS BARGE (’98) who lives in Boston and works in the “calendar department” of the Boston Phoenix.

JONATHAN THOMAS FARMER (’96) is completing his third and final year in the MFA Program at the University of California, Irvine where he co-edits the journal Faultline. His interview with Louise Gluck will appear in September’s issue of The Writer’s Chronicle.

BEN FOUNTAIN (’78) who attended Duke law school and practiced law in Dallas, TX, for a number of years is now writing full-time.

JOY A. FOWLER (’73) is currently finishing a Ph.D. in Children’s Literature and Writing from The Union Institute in Cincinnati, OH. Her dissertation is an historical fiction novel for young adults set in Virginia in 1862. During the regular school year, she serves as Chair of the writing department at the School for Creative and Performing Arts in Cincinnati. Last fall she second collaboration with the Cincinnati POPS orchestra aired on PBS, “The First Thanksgiving,” narrated by Richard (John Boy) Thomas. She was also awarded Exemplary Teacher of the Year 1999 by the Urban Appalachian Council for her work with Appalachian school populations.

CHARLES GAMBLE (’95), after performing for several years in Shakespeare Theatre in Sante Fe, recently graduated from a 2 year program in mime at Lecoq International School of Drama in Paris.

SCOTT C. GAYLE (’74) got married in 1999 to Cassandra Thomason of High Point, NC. He moved his law practice to Tuggle, Suggins, & Meschan, P.A. in Greensboro.

MEL GILLES (’95) is the Director of the Children’s Justice Center for Moab, Utah, where she coordinates services for child victims of physical and sexual abuse. She recently purchased her first home with MATTHEW GROSS (’93), her husband of three years.

JOHN L. GODWIN (’75) obtained a Ph. D. in American history from the University of South Carolina in 1994 and has published a variety of short historical pieces and book reviews. This year his book Black Wilmington and the North Carolina Way: Portrait of a Community in the Era of Civil Rights Protest will be published by University Press of America.

KELLEY HARRIS (’99) spent the last year living in Chapel Hill and working on her novel (a continuation of her Honors thesis). In the fall of 2000, she’ll start Stanford Law School and is moving to California.

LAURA HARRIS (’98) lives in Salinas, CA, where she works part-time as a Human Resource Coordinator for a law firm and is a free-lance writer for a business called “The Write Word.” She is active with the John Steinbeck Center in Salinas.

JACK HERRICK (’70) leads The Red Clay Ramblers back to New York later this fall for an Off-Broadway run of Lone Star Love: The Merry Wives of Windsor, Texas, the musical he co-authored with John L. Haber (’70) and English Shakespeare Company Director Michael Bogdanov.

HADLEY HORNE (’00) is working for HarperCollins Publishers as an editorial assistant in the children’s literature department.

DARYL HOUSTON (’99) worked for a year as a newspaper copy editor, but has taken a new job as a web content editor for a growing Internet firm. He became engaged in November.

JOHN IKEDA (’99) documented in words and photographs the destructive flooding in eastern North Carolina last fall, then worked with UNC’s Environmental Resources Program in January and February, running a photography club for children flooded out of their homes in Rocky Mount, Tarboro, and Princeville. He is now in Japan working and studying for a year.

SARA ANDREWS JOHNSTON (’91, Ph. D. English) has published recent poems in Carolina Quarterly and teaches literature and freshman composition at North Carolina State University. For the past four years she’s attended the poetry writing conference at West Chester University in Pennsylvania.

JONATHAN JUSTICE (’95) married Amy Lynn Amazon, also a Chapel Hill grad, on July 31, 1999. They live just outside NYC. Amy
teaches high school English and Jonathan works in business
development for Sotheby's auction house in Manhattan.

DAN KOIS ('96) has finished his MFA coursework at George Mason Univ. and will receive his degree, upon completion of his thesis, in December. His wife Alia Smith has landed a job as clerk to a federal district court judge in Honolulu, and they are moving to Hawaii for a year. Dan will continue working for the Sagalyn Literary Agency. Before moving, Dan directs the play "Dirty Juanita," which will be running at the Flatiron Playhouse on 23rd St., NYC, opening August 31. The play is by Mac Rogers (UNC '97) and stars Mac and Sean Williams (also of UNC). For ticket info, email: dkois@gmu.edu.

KEVIN MICHAEL KRUSE ('94), after finishing his Ph.D. in History from Cornell will teach this year as an Assistant Professor of History at Princeton. His dissertation, "White Flight: Resistance to Desegregation of Neighborhoods, Schools, and Businesses in Atlanta, 1946-1966" is under consideration for publication by Columbia University Press. He won the Supreme Court Historical Society's Hughes-Gossett Award a few summers back and writes: "Got to have dinner with the Justices in the Court building itself. It was in the middle of impeachment proceedings, and Ken Starr was at the next table. Very surreal."


JENNIFER LAYTON ('91) is a writer for indie-music.com, writing CD and concert reviews and artist interviews. She also writes a weekly humor column called "J Street" (www.jstreet-humor.com) and is co-moderator of the Net Wits, an international group of humor writers. She's working on getting a compilation of their columns published.

KRISTIN LEIGH ('90) will begin Harvard Medical School this fall. For the past year she has been working as a research coordinator for the UCLA Mood Disorders Research Program and publishing scientific articles on depression and bipolar disorder.

JANE MEEKINS LUCAS ('89) is adjunct Assistant Professor of English at Salem College. July—October she will serve as the college's interim Assistant Dean of Continuing Studies.

NATHAN MCCLINTOCK ('96) writes that he has just finished two years of farming soybeans and teaching nutrition in a small village in Mali, West Africa. Now he faces "the daunting possibilities of life in a world of plumbing and mobile phones."

CHANDLER MCREE ('87) is now teaching in the Communications Department at Brevard Community College in Melbourne, FL. His Civil War short story, "Requiem," was recently published in Mail Call Journal.

STEPHEN MARCH ('73) is Associate Professor in the Department of Language, Literature, and Communication at Elizabeth City State. He and his wife, Mary ('81) have two boys, 11 and 7. In 1988, his story collection, A Good Grave Digger, was a finalist for the Willa Cather Award. His story "Disappearances," won second place in the Carolina Alumni Review's fiction contest last year. His work has been widely published and he recently completed a novel.

ALANE SALIERNO MASON ('86) is Senior Editor at Norton. This year she edited House of Sand and Fog by Andre Dubus III, a finalist for the National Book Award. She also edited first novels Yellow Jack by Josh Russell (a finalist for the Barnes and Noble Discover Award) and Second Hand by Michael Zadoorian.

MARK MEARES ('77) currently serves as Associate Director for Corporate and Foundation Relations at UNC-CH.

SHERYL DEE MEBANE ('98) has signed a contract with Pearl Street Publishers to publish a revised version of her Honors thesis. She's in graduate school at Berkeley, studying chemistry.

LUKE MEISNER ('99) spent a year in Bangladesh, working for an organization that sought to unionize garment workers. "I found my creative writing skills invaluable in documenting the struggles of workers in order to present the human side of an issue that was important to government, investors, and in diplomatic circles," he notes.
PHILIP MEMMER ('93) lives in Clinton, NY. In 1999—2000 his poems will have appeared in more than a dozen journals, including Poetry, Connecticut Review, Northeast Corridor, and Free Lunch. He edits the poetry journal Two Rivers Review and works in Marketing for Borders.

JON MIZE ('00) is busy writing letters for Congressman Mike McIntyre as a legislative correspondent in Washington, D.C. He will return to NC for law school in the not too distant future.

ALEC MORRISON ('98) is living in NYC and working for Sports Illustrated.

MARIA WEINRICH NARDONE ('94) is married and has a 10-month-old son. She works as a freelance journalist and spent time in Costa Rica and Austria this year.

CHRISTINA NIFONG ('92) writes feature stories for the Raleigh News and Observer out of their Durham bureau. She and her husband are renovating an older home in Durham.

DAVID PAYNE ('77) published his fourth novel Gravesend Light (Doubleday) in August. He wrote that his second child was due in July and that he and his family were moving “from rural Vermont—with rifle, babies, axe, plow and Conestoga” to downtown Hillsborough, NC, in September.

ANNA PEEPERS ('97), who worked in London after graduation, fell in love with an English actor and accompanied him on his “Les Mis” tour which cinched their union. They married in Dublin in May 1999 and are currently settled in London where he continues to act and she works backstage dressing dancing lionesses and hyenas for “The Lion King” in Covent Garden.

DAVID RIGGSBEE ('71) was a recent recipient of a summer NEH and was a Visiting Fellow at the American Academy in Rome. His latest book is Styles of Ruin: Joseph Brodsky and the Postmodernist Elegy (Greenwood Press, 1999). His translations of Brodsky will be published as Brodsky’s Collected Poems in English this fall by Farrar, Straus, and Giroux. Two chapbooks are forthcoming, both from Pudding House: Scenes on an Obelisk and David Riggsbee’s Greatest Hits: 1975—2000. Next year, University of Virginia Press will publish Southern Poetry in the Twentieth Century, which he will coedit. Married to the artist Jill Bullitt, he is Professor and Chair of the Department of Language and Literature at Mt. Olive College.

STEVE ROBERTS ('84) is working in the film industry in Wilmington, NC. A Space Inside, a full-length collection of poetry was published in 1999 by Saint Andrews College Press.

WARREN G. ROCHELLE ('77) sold his first novel, The Wild Boy, to Golden Gryphon Press, to be published September, 2001. Communities of the Heart: The Rhetoric of Myth In the Fiction of Ursula K. LeGuin, is forthcoming from Liverpool University Press. He is Assistant Professor of English, Mary Washington College, in Fredericksburg, VA.

DAVID ROWELL worked as an editor at Doubletake for a number of years. He has recently moved to the Washington, DC area with his family where he is an editor at the Washington Post Magazine. He and his wife are expecting baby #2.

RENEE SHANNON ('95) received an MA in Creative Writing from NCSU in 1999 where she now works as Associate Editor of the North Carolina State Alumni Magazine and writes fiction in her “spare time.”

MEG SHEEHAN ('98) is currently working at Warner Brothers as a production assistant.

CLAIRE SMITH ('98) has joined the Sagalyen Literary Agency in Bethesda, Maryland.

JANE HOBSON SNYDER ('95), formerly Articles Editor at Mirabella magazine writes that although she misses Chapel Hill (especially the guacamole at Margaret’s Cantina) she and husband Graham Snyder (UNC Med '99) are cheerfully settled in Manhasset, Long Island (better known as East Egg to avid Fitzgerald readers). Currently she’s Assistant Editor at Da Capo Press, an imprint of Perseus Books, and she works out of their NYC office.

AMY SPROULL ('95) is currently editor of consumer books for the American Cancer Society. She’s engaged to marry Justin Brittain ('95) and has plans to travel to Costa Rica.
MELANIE SUMNER-MARR ('86) writes that Algonquin Books will publish her new novel, *Good Hearted Woman* next spring. She lives in Taos, New Mexico, with husband David and daughter Zoe. An excerpt of the novel will appear in the anthology *New Stories from the South* 2000.

MARK SUTTON ('96) is a member of the SC Writers’ Workshop and has completed the draft of a novel. He’s in his second year of Ph. D. work in composition and rhetoric.

WILL TAYLOR ('97) recently received his MFA (with a concentration in painting) from the Pratt Institute. This past April art critic Donald Kuspit selected his collaborative paintings with Jack Warren for the Pratt 20th Annual Graduate Symposium. His individual art work is represented by Subculture Gallery in New York.

GINNY HEGE TOBIASSEN ('81) lives in West Jefferson, NC, is an editor for the scholarly publisher McFarland & Company, and writes: “Anyone who thinks this job does not involve creative writing should see me trying to render some Ph. D.’s deathless prose into Comprehensible English!” Last year she took her work “A Christmas Carol in Rhyme” on tour and hopes to extend the tour in 2000.

SHANNON TURLINGTON ('93), of Saxapahaw, NC, has recently completed her 12th nonfiction book, *How to Find Scholarships Online*, which will be published by McGraw-Hill, and Arco Publishers has released her *Unofficial Guide to Distance Learning*.

MARY CAMERON VAN GRAAFEILAND ('98) is a publicity coordinator at Warner-Brothers Films, New York City.

MATT VOLLMER, recently married to KELLY PENDER, has had his first story selected for publication by *New Letters*.

MELISSA WALDROP ('95) was married to Rob Tolbert in June, 1999. She lives in Graham, NC where she is works as a special education teacher, writes educational materials, and is enjoying her new country home.

JIM WANN ('70) co-authored the musical murder mystery *The People Versus Mona*, which ran well last April at the Pasadena Playhouse in California. His Broadway hit *PUMP BOYS & DINETTES* is in frequent production.

ANDREW WATERS ('92) published a story, “Sweater Weather,” in the *North Carolina Literary Review* (fall 2000). *On Jordan’s Stormy Banks*, a collection of slave narratives that he edited, was published this fall by John F. Blair. He is managing editor of *Dog and Kennel Magazine*.

ALLEN YORK ('98) is a banker with BB&T in Elizabeth City, N.C.

ANDREA YOUNG ('94) received the Faulkner Society’s ‘99 Marble Faun award for poetry and this spring was named runner-up for the “Emerging Writers” award at the Southern Women Writers Conference. Her chapbook *mine* was published in May by Lavender Ink and her poems have been published widely. She recently spent two months in Italy where she witnessed the volcanic eruptions of Stromboli.

STEPHENV ANDREW YOUNG ('88) writes that he “earns a small and slightly disgraceful salary writing advertising for print and television, winning praise and awards for clever lines about women’s underwear and mattress companies.” He continues to write fiction, and he and his family will live in Switzerland most of 2001.

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**NAP**

Little deep word, how we crave a dip in your healing waters!

Nap was once the ocean where we lived, surfacing occasionally. Now it’s just a shrunked pool, part of an oasis in the Desert of Light.

You won’t find it on any map: it requires a long unrouted detour through Lesser Amnesia, a hiatus in the mind’s greedy itinerary.

But cats know where it is, and dogs, and old men in the shade catching forty winks so delicious they will always wake salivating, born again.

[from *Colander*, by Michael McFee]
“When I was a student at NC State and then UNC-Chapel Hill in the 1960s, there was a feature almost every Sunday in the Raleigh News and Observer about one North Carolina writer or another: Frances Gray Patton, Guy Owen, Reynolds Price, Doris Betts, Romulus Linney. It was assumed at both UNC-Chapel Hill and UNC-Greensboro that among the students there would be important future writers.”

--ROBERT MORGAN