

EVENTS

Wednesday, April 16, 1986

11:30 a.m.

Reading
Andrew Lytle
Winter Theatre
Dana Fine Arts

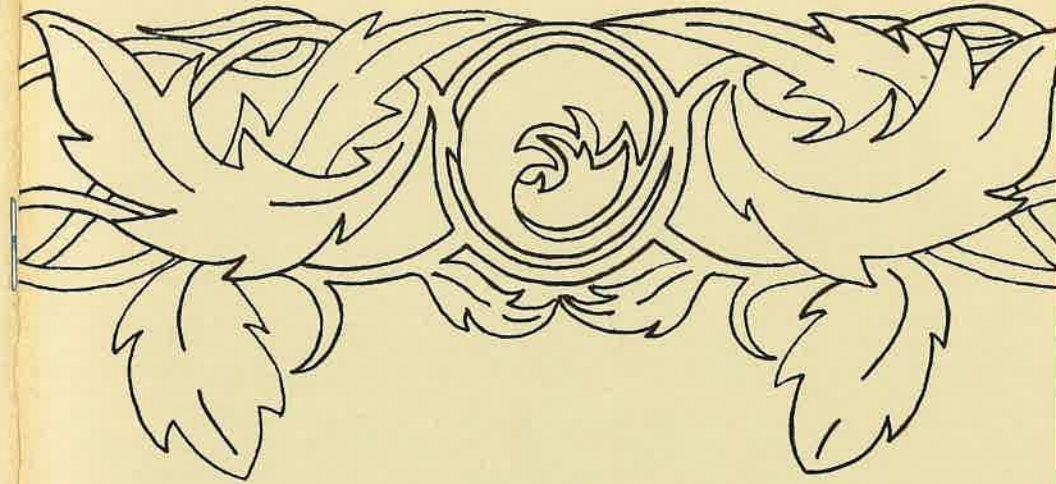
2:10 - 4:00 p.m.

Panel Discussion of Student Work
Denise Levertov, Meyme Curtis Tucker,
and Andrew Lytle
Winter Theatre
Dana Fine Arts

8:15

Reading, followed by Presentation of Prizes
Denise Levertov
Winter Theatre
Dana Fine Arts

We wish to thank President Ruth Schmidt and Eleanor Hutchens for their support of the Festival.



Writers' Festival

Agnes Scott College
1986

writers' festival
1986

Spring, 1986

Editor
Bo Ball

Readers
Bo Ball
Steve Guthrie

Cover
Margaret Luke

The editor reserves the right to make minor corrections.

Victoria Wood's story, "Tips" (*Aurora*, '86), is eligible for the fiction prize; to make room for another story, we chose not to reprint it so soon after its initial appearance.

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Send all correspondence to *Festival*, English Department, Box 979, Agnes Scott College, Decatur, Georgia 30030.

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At Clairmont Lodge

We've come to close the old hotel. I move outside,
away from iron beds, mattresses curled into shapes
they once held, impersonal now as the inked scrawls
in the gilt-edged register of names who came
for the cool and cure of mineral springs.

Where I lay my head is damp from the slow ooze
of chalybeate, magnesia, freestone, alum.
The air's tinged bitter as this arsenic spring.
I cup my hands and drink and do not die.
In trace amounts, arsenic's the cure for grief.

From the carriage house the voice of Johnny Ray
circles an old 78. Our mother waltzes to the tune,
hips remembering another man, whiskey-tongued,
who crooned *I'll Take You Home Again, Kathleen*.
He filled her dance card all those years, all gone.

This morning I found a cache of green beans
cloudy with spoilage, dinner menus for a week
of hot nights, June, 1924, three Blue Willow plates.
I'll keep the beans to remind me what it is we try to save.

Bill shoots bottle rockets across the pond,
careless of fingers, his face hot for explosion or speed,
for any movement that defies the ruin we rummage through.
He'll shoot till dawn, no one to complain of noise
this half-dark night, the curtained moon a glaucous eye.

Once we laid pennies on the tracks and waited for freights
from Birmingham to flatten Lincoln's face,
to make it run to the edge of the coin, and over,
the spark of metal on metal, the blister of it,
the low, flat hiss when hot copper hit the pond,
indifferent repository of all our mixing springs.

In this odd green light what we touch has no weight.
Our bodies begin their inward curl.
We'll wear each other down, back to water, our bones
leaching out their mineral worth on the grass.

— Dorothy Coffin Sussman

Haiku

days drag on like hymns
and I have to memorize
my name with you gone.

i'm too big to hide
my face in the folds of my
momma's dress out here. . .

i know two old black
women poets blind as moles
who taught me to see.

she sat in the dark
by her child's sickbed staring
at part of herself.

sun cries golden tears
upon the trees. wind mourns the
passing of summer

bring de sun back friend
cause de dark is too heavy
and i can't swing it.

coal oil lamp cast grand/
momma's shadow on the wall,
reading her bible.

fat laughter climbs sky,
little colored girls jumpin
rope in summer breeze.

images drop like
nickles in tin can. joy walks
on a razor edge.

giant fat chested
black wo/men sit calm in church,
stones hummin like bees.

— Gregory Powell

The Common Element

I. The Spastic

Each morning the earth creeps
 nearer to the sky,
 but even then
 I am unable to cross myself
 with proper grace;
 if you forget my name,
 I cannot blame you.
 The tactful retreat
 of your eyes
 no longer bothers me
 as I cannot afford the responsibility.
 Each step is its own reward;
 that I would place
 on the collection plate
 of your held tongue.
 Those screams you hear
 are not my agonies;
 that part of me sways only slightly.
 I wish I could shake
 the anger out of you,
 but we live in different worlds;
 my only sin is a short memory,
 your only savior.
 All else stands in perfect balance.

II. The Spectator

You are the polio polo champion of the street
 with your wooden clubs
 disguised as arms and legs.
 As you pole forward,
 you realize the value of luck.
 Dressed in jeans and plaid shirt,
 you would look just like one of us
 if someone held you down,
 but on you thrash
 with sinews tense
 as tight hinges,
 tottering on the edge
 of our world,
 reminding us of the death
 in our every step.
 My grave figure follows
 your broken shadow
 as you limp
 up the easier half
 of the road;
 I have no words of greeting
 as you press nearer.
 Reflected in my eyes
 is the image of hands
 wired together
 as if in prayer
 and smiles turned inside out
 that hands cannot cover.

— J. R. Green

Sylvia Redux

Reading *Ariel* again, Winter 1980

For weeks I had to wrestle with Sylvia.
And there she lay neither sister nor twin
But espoused, cheated, and desiccated Lesbos
Sealed in a mandorla and bleeding honey onto Dostoevsky.

There in the book our fatal, shared desire for mayonnaise,
Footnoted and trivial,
Attempted to prophesy.
However, that is purely coincidental.

When robbing the image of the bitch-goddess,
Flakes of gold come off in the hand.
The varnish, gold-leaf and tempera,
These layers are well laid and thick,
Uneven and as fragile as Napoleon pastry.

Sylvia had herself plated many times.
She liked the shine and perfection of a new finish.
Easily scratched and susceptible,
She liked the feel of the electric bath.

Analyses and essays lay stacked on my bed,
Each wrapped in its own cocoon.
The plastic criticisms are protected from water and death-worm.
Parasites can not get in but must work their way out.
I am sure she must lie at least near the sea:
"with agate marbles that were her eyes."

The sea salt purges and stings.
Personas seek different shells.
Through the novel one cries and rages.
But still, she sticks the lancet too deep.
The arcane heart bleeds for those saved by academia.
The poetess blessed by ivy eats the metered mess,
To send forth flames from kitchen, bed, and hive,
While wearing nothing but tiger-pants and Electra's smile.

For Sylvia thought something higher burned, matured in the oven.
Thus did metamorphosis come at oven's end
In garish neon blue.

The veneers swelled.
The gluing did not hold.
We see the poet cut the rope to lyricism and fall.
Behind us there lies a trail of golden flakes.
The gliding covers all.

— Reginald Abbot

Feline Leukemia, one year later

Though thin, thin,
flesh wasting daily,
she ate and drank greedily, messily
with soft bits of salmon, chicken on her face
refusing to wash, be washed,
only brushed,
over and over the fine fur against the bones
until she purred,
a hollow rasp in her thin throat
and I could not see —
her head thrust round and firm into my palm,
paws kneading carelessly on my skin —
any pain in her wasting, dying.

I disbelieved, those afternoons of her
stumbling happily in the yard,
lying weakly in the sun, waiting for spring —
that the night would come when I would submit
cradling her to me as she lay
— let death come
like a brief caress
covering her from flickering ears to the poor cropped tail
smoothing the black fur against the ribs
shadowed and individual
the catcurves of her legs and hips sharp and triangular
under the long fur parting
on the white crease of bones pressing against skin —

Death be a friend
to her lying still in the dark,
sides heaving,
crying out only in uncertain fear when her breath comes shallow,
and wanting only air, air, from the coaxing hand,
the loving hand,
that brought food, drink against the weeks of death hovering
and now only death can do what I cannot.

Take her.
I cannot give her up easily to the doctor's needle,
to clean, cool hands in an unknown room —
take her here, before morning, in the night
in her home.
If love cannot heal her
let it hold her when death comes.

— Jody Cass

Clayton Park

Sitting alone
 Overlooking the river from my perch on the rock plateau
 I see a couple man and woman sitting together
 on a rock in the middle of the river.
 They must have worked very hard to get where they are
 Staring into the hazy distance the river begins
 to curve and bend as convoluted as thoughts
 confused thoughts
 my thoughts.
 Drinking the last swallow of wine like old Eben Flood
 I wish for someone with whom I can scream curse cry.
 Below, on the right, lies a canine carcass
 alone
 Not even insects have found him worth company in his death.
 I am like Christ in his upright bed
 Each arm pulling the delicate body its direction
 The rib-skin punctured
 streaked stains of red dried to His body
 armpits tearing slowly
 and His longing for someone to share His pain.
 A savage paradigm of one who spent his life and death
 engulfed with loneliness.
 There are many who question their presence here
 I never have
 until this very moment.
 I lie down
 wondering if the chemicals will strangle me in sleep
 thinking not why have I lived
 but why have I not

— Michael Hanson

Richard

I awaken to lingering night,
 stretch calves
 still tight with sleep,
 then run,
 gulp in icy mist-drenched air,
 part fog, slice past
 clumped kudzu, looming
 in shrouds of gauze

The buck,
 tall and proud,
 appears, frozen
 by the unexpected
 quivering with life
 we skitter to
 twin stops

His crown,
 branches reaching
 heavenward
 prove his rank
 I tremble with respect
 humbled to be granted
 an audience

Together
 we begin to lope
 steal glimpses
 between the trees
 until, abrupt,
 he veers toward
 separate freedom

unexpected
 tears trace cool
 salt creeks of love
 down numb cheeks
 my dampened shirt
 too unlike his
 tawny cloak

I saw Richard
 last night
 Richard has a buck's
 head on a plaque
 its eyes replaced
 by opaque,
 sightless beads

Richard said he only shoots
 what he can eat
 I thought that was like saying
 he only rapes
 when hungry
 for female flesh

Richard's been domesticated
 by a woman pale and neatly packaged
 of plump flank
 predator's grip upon my arm
 he shoots a steel tongue
 between my lips

Hunters know the taste
 of wild game pulsing
 is all the darker, sweeter
 for the fight
 its conquered head
 a better trophy
 for the wall

— *Melinda Hawley*

Child's Play

Barefoot, Billy Henry defied Mama's warnings.
 "Don't you ever take your shoes off outside . . .
 No tellin' what you might step on
 And end up in the hospital too. There's
 Rocks and nails and glass and tetnus and polio
 And germs."

It was his idea to light the match.
 From a distance our eyes rivited on the scene.
 Siren screams cut the afternoon silence,
 A blazing pasture from one small flame.
 Fluttering delicate wings, the Gulf Fritillary
 Rises from the debris and
 Pauses in his flight, unharmed.
 Cyanide ready, I catch him
 For my collection.
 Mama will be proud — it's a rare specimen.
 Bill Henry stepped on broken glass —
 Mama warned him not to do it.

— *Linda Florence*

Midshipmen Depart By Twilight

Paint in blue,
 Picasso blue,
 the tint of night snow,
 and the little boy
 with his solitary horn.
 Wrapped in my turquoise quilt,
 the color of our eyes,
 I notice the sky fades
 before it darkens
 into cobalt, with
 the stars piercing back at me.
 From a storm,
 too distant to hear,
 sporadic lightning,
 harsh as neon,
 partially illuminates
 the space between I
 and the melancholy moon.
 Baby blue, I feel you are gone.

— *Charay Norwood*

The Fifth Force

The discovery of hypercharge could . . . have a major impact on the efforts of theoretical physicists to develop a grand unified theory that would explain the interaction of all known forces.

— *The Los Angeles Times*

When I was a boy, what I loved best was science. Alone in the experimental hours behind the closed door of my laboratory, the toolshed in the carport, I tested my brain's passion for unfolding the four split forces of the universe stamped into my father's textbooks: Gravitational, Electromagnetic, the Strong and Weak bonding of atomic structures. My dark world lit by a naked bulb, I poured and boiled, measured the names of magic, the specific gravities of the knowable earth, turned water to the color of wine, a mild poison, watched a spilled vial of iron filings whirl under the power in my magnetic hand. I ordered my rows of glass-stoppered bottles, tended my coiled tubing, the purified blue of the flame. What I loved best was the elegant shaping of power, the force of possibility.

I believed the store of facts could never be exhausted. I believed in an ordered procession of years. But tonight I love the physicists who love best what they cannot know. I stand at the window and join the great eye widening up toward the all-depth of space, I add my human sight to that vision riding back through the bucklings and curvings of time on a beam of primordial light, back to the whirl and boil of a gaseous soup, this universe squalling, a billionth of a second old, a single particle sparked into everything.

Tonight I love the physicist who rummaged among dated pages of a colleague's old research for evidence of the fifth, the weakest of the forces, a delicate balance of velocity and mass at distances no greater than six hundred feet. Tonight we live one leap closer to Einstein's unified dream, and I am traveling back on the light in the sphere of my skull, creating again my own image of a boy locked away in a toolshed, trying to deepen a question, each spark in his brain shooting down through five fingers, as bright as the first bright star.

— Theodore Worozbyt, Jr.

The Pure Relief of It

Fell went out and met Sullens in the Opp Department parking lot, where polished chrome and black asphalt spattered the sun till both men were riddled with it, and led him to a little dark entry hall that gave onto the Opp squad room. The hall was a shade cooler.

"Lamey, he's got the Buick, I spose, radio went out on me halfway to Montgomery, or I'd know. No radio," Sullens snorted, "just now —"

The bigger officer gave a little grunt of disgust, and Fell, eyes still dazzled from the brightness outside, heard rather than saw his neck move against his collar as he shook his head.

"—when we most could use it. Them parts cost \$59.73 which I'll probly have to pay for out of my own pocket, plus a two hour side trip in dead silence when I'm sposed to get my hiney over here and pick up important prisoners."

Fell walked quietly behind Sullens, listening to the leather of his holster squeak.

"Lamey, he can take the two freaks, big car like that. I'll take the normal two." Sullens had a way of announcing decisions as if they came from the chief.

"None of em's normal," said Fell, and slipped ahead of the other man to heave at the grey painted metal door into the squad room. "You got to get your shoulder into this thing or it'll never open."

Beyond the door, heat rolled over them, mute but steady. They chose the closer of two wooden tables and eased themselves into sturdy round-backed chairs, and their equipment gave off minute squeaks as their muscles settled. They sat face to face.

Fell thought it was his to speak first, it was his department. He had a voice soft and colorless as limp overwashed hotel curtains. "Now I seen it all," he said. "Now I can die." Then, "What happened in Andalusia?"

The Opp Department did not have a formal squad room, it was too small. But the long white room would in time get to be a squad room; it had battered vending machines and roll-out aluminum frame windows, clattering window AC and a bulletin board tattooed in orderly rows with notices of pain and sin, danger and lost dogs. It was a good patina, ageable.

A pack of two creme-filled chocolate cupcakes with plastic cover intact lay on the floor near the vending machine; both officers, glued into the sticky varnish of their chairs, ignored it. They were too hot to move. Sullens, the bigger, splayed his hands onto the table between them, a police table for sure. His fingertips explored the by-blows of ball points pressing thin government forms, carved lightning bolts, religious symbols

and insulting personal and sexual flotsam. Sullens probed the carvings with almost surgical care, as if winking for doodle bugs. He did not want to report to Fell.

"I need to range about getting them prisoners. It's an hour drive back."

Fell reached open a drawer in the table and brought out a report form pad. His expression was starchless as his voice. "Just tell me a little I can give the captain. Won't take long."

Sighing, Sullens arched his back away from his chair, and pulled a folded up government transmittal envelope from his back pocket. Setting his face like an annoyed preacher he unfolded it, and as if by ritual unwound the scarlet thread that held down the flap. He brought out a handful of scribbled notes on blue horse paper.

Fell hadn't expected to win like that. Judging on looks, Sullens had it up on him, he knew that much. Sullens was taller, and his crisp brown hair and large-pupilled eyes gave him a robiny alertness people liked. Civilians and uniforms both liked it. Then, too, a stringent daily alchemy with antiperspirants and gauze pads — which Lamey had once described to him in detail — kept Sullens from sweating under his arms, even now in August, though the back of his shirt clung to his shoulderblades in a wide wet patch the shape of Antarctica. It was reflected clearly in the polished surface of the vending machine behind him. All in all, on a personal level, Fell did not measure up. Drenched from armpit to elbow, hair splayed wetly like dead moths on a car radiator over his bumpy forehead, smaller, Fell looked over Sullens with uncovered admiration. However, he consoled himself by noticing that the other man's nose ended in a large sharply divided ball, shaped almost like testicles, a trait he had always despised.

"The Andalusia part come first," Fell's monotone softened the blow, "chronologically."

Sullens blinked once and began to talk rapidly, flicking his notes with his thumbs. "Craziest thing. Okay."

"These two walked into Marianna's Jewelers there on Courtland" — he traced a map on the table with his forefinger — "this morning, nine fifteen, about. Roger Taylor, the clerk with that little cast in his eye, rabbit —"

Fell nodded.

"He don't remember the time, exact. This couple come in. The man — well, you heard —" Sullens stopped, expecting something. Fell gave a smile with all the meaning husked off it.

"Tell it again."

Sullens tried to force a laugh into the heated air. "Handsome ain't the word. Lord, he was perfect. Bleach blond hair like Redford's, and Roger thinking it can't be real, but it was, Roger saw the roots of it growing out of his scalp. Blue-blue eyes, wide, features like one of these statues, bettr'n Redford, bettr'n any movie star Roger ever saw, and the body, the muscles, the walk, all the same. Tall guy, six three or four, long beautiful hands, beautiful like a man's, like. Nothing —" Sullens considered several words and rejected them all. He fanned the air in front of him with his notes, as if shooing something away.

like the other. They was at it an hour, jamming all these rings on and off. Lacy's knees was so weak she had to sneak a stool up behind her to keep from falling over."

Sullens watched sweat snake down the other man's forearm, and decided to wrap things up. He made his voice crisp. "And they picked something out, paid cash, left, same story?"

"Course. Half hour later Lacy figured something was gone. After she got through disinfecting the counter. Two more diamond solitaires."

Fell brought his washwater eyes up to the other man's, patient as a snapping turtle. Sullens spread out his arms, easing the dry shirt front from his body.

"Description like that," he said, "you was bound to get an arrest soon. Wish Lamey would haul his A in here."

He had suddenly found a gap in his head, a hole in his information, like a broken back molar. Mentally he tongued it. "You picked em up about three-four hours ago? That's what I figured."

"That would be about when you was heading out for Montgomery for them radio parts."

The gap began to shoot out serious pain. Heading to Montgomery in dead radio silence, that's where Sullens had been.

Fell examined a shirt button. "Three, four hours ago, we found em."

"So Lamey and me pick em up. All your holding cells is full. I'll take the beauty pair."

Something in Fell's general limpness warned him, but too late. Fell haw-hawed then, setting up a clattering echo in the machine-churned air, and he banged his palm down hard on the table. "Caught em already, let em go already."

In a stab of pain, Sullens clenched his eyelids; then the tooth was out, and he looked the other man full face, hiccupping a grunt of laughter. "Sh—"

Fell let his own laugh wind out of him as long as it would. "See, they was here at the Hotel Zenobia in Opp, registered, never made no effort to cover their tracks. Your pair must ov homed back to the hotel room right after their little do-lolly, done their stuff a little earlier'n mine, so all four, they hit the room together, close enough. Corner room, view of the streets. The way them four look, nobody in that block but cept some little bit baby, didn't know they was there. We landed on them about a half hour after they landed on the room, near enough. What you think we found?"

Fell had him, Sullens knew it. "What?"

"King sized olives. Pickled mushrooms. Eclairs. We busted in on the coziest little party you ever saw." Fell's voice assumed a reverant and liturgical tone; he was normally a hungry man. "Ham slices and these tiny cheese puffs and roast beef and them little smoked oysters and five or six different kinds of cheese and macadamia nuts and these king sized stuffed green olives. Fresh pineapple. Marinated asparagus. Wines and hard likkers and German beer and all to match. You could ov fed fifty, a hundred. They was partying and talking and laughing, and way down

the hall we could hear their voices. The beauty two, these high, thrilling sounds, and the uglies, well, it was noise curdled up, you kind of wanted to scrape it off your ears.

"We moved in— door warn't locked— pistols and badges out and so forth— and all we got out of it was an invite and these little fish paste crackers shoved at us."

Fell's voice, like the AC, had begun to alternate in tone. He calmed down and went on more thoughtfully.

"There they was, the ugliest man and woman you nor anybody else ever set eyes on, the very ugliest, and the prettiest pair, the loveliest, piled on top of one another. Collapsed on that iron frame hotel bed. Whooping and spilling chevas regal and ro-say and hugging one another, handling out king sized green olives to one and all and sundry." Green olives were one of Fell's favorites.

"Finally one of em, the she-beauty, got her breath and gasped out, 'Check the doorframes,' and couldn't say no more for giggling."

Sullens made his face blank as an empty trashcan. Fell had enough satisfaction.

"We called the stores and got the two owners on the phone. By then they was both on their own premises, and fit to be tied. What do you think? They was these two tiny identical black boxes," Fell went on happily, "taped to the outside doorframes of both the stores— legally still on the premises, see, about where the hand of anybody passing through would land. All of the missing stuff was right inside."

"Technically there wasn't any theft."

"Right. Best charge we could stir up was disturbing the peace, and by this time the owners had both figured out how easy it would be for these— clowns— to take back what they'd bought with cash, and ask for their money back. So, no charge."

Sullens fingered a lightning bolt in the tabletop. "Neither Roger nor Lacy never noticed a thing about them boxes?"

"Nor us neither."

Sullens pulled a sour face that burst hostility like a spit bubble. They knew each other of old. A pressure in the room eased off.

The smaller man spoke rapidly now, puzzled. "These was two pairs of twins, you got that right away, boy-girl, boy-girl. They was pulling a joke, and they just had to explain it to us. So we just stood around and fed our faces till they could catch their breath." Fell thought again about the olives.

"The beauty-girl and boy, now, they's the rich ones, born with all the money anybody can ever hope to spend, richer than filthy, where money don't mean nothing."

Sullens nodded. "Too beautiful for that to matter, too."

"And they'd gone out and found these others in a circus somewheres, some circus in Europe, a freak show, which is why they never spoke. They don't talk English good."

"So all four of them, they made up the joke and done it? Why?"

Fell eyed the chocolate cupcakes. The little wriggle of vanilla laid on

the dark frosting looked cool and precise, unmelted, as if the package had not been lying on the floor very long. He spoke kindly. "Oh, because. They never said, but I thought about it a lot before you drove in. Because of people, people and the way they do, the way they watch one another."

Fell got up and moved to the copier, and began feeding in Sullens' notes. He stood behind the other man now, and could see directly the Antarctica-shaped sweat stain on the other man's shirt. From this angle he could see Sullens' somehow defenseless-looking backbone outlined in the wet cotton.

"It's because we look at somebody and what we see is their hiney is shaped funny or (he thought of his wife) one breast is smaller than the other."

"But—"

"These four—well, most people see most people *some*, sometimes. When they squint. The person that *is*. These four—all their lives people been looking at em, couldn't look away, they's so dazzling, but seeing nothing, nothing. Like—staring at pitch black in a cave, or a spotlight glared in your face. Nothing."

"Hell!" exploded Sullens, furiously baffled.

"These four, they'd found somebody to see em. There they was in that hotel room laughing and passing the pah-tey and little oysters and falling all over one another."

Sullens got it. "They was the only ones who *could* see one another."

"You know what the joke was for, don't you?"

Sullens clenched his eyelids. "No, dammit."

The copier hummed on a high note and spit paper. Fell switched off the machine, adjusting minutely the hum of trifling electronic noise in the hot room. His ears picked up a new note, a low grind, out in the parking lot. He made up his mind and, like a dishevelled heron, swooped and scooped the package of cupcakes, which felt quite cool in his hand. He tore open the plastic, and extended one cupcake to Sullens, who accepted it without seeming to recognize it as food.

Sullens stood up, peeling himself carefully from the sticky varnish of his chair. Fell had saved one thing more, and they both knew it.

"It was in the Zenobia registry. He-beauty, she-ugly. She-beauty, he-ugly. They's married to one another." The small man gathered up his copies and tapped them rapidly on the tabletop to straighten them. "Probably just for the pure relief of it."

He headed for the grey painted metal door.

"Lamey's just pulled up in the parking lot. You better go out and tell him he's going to have to drive that Buick squad car back to Andalusia station through the biggest parade crowd come together since Christmas, empty."

— Chloe Nichols

Shadow People

They all knew Loi An was in the DMZ; that no-man's land which separated the participants in this dance of death they called their war. The sparkling brown ribbon of the Song Ben Hai would be behind them on this one. They would be alone.

He sat staring through the flap of the briefing tent at the crystal green mountains beyond. The green! How strange it was. There was no green like it anywhere else in the world. Sharp, crystalline, almost painful in its intensity, it was Vietnam's green and like the other things which were Vietnam's, it was its own, far apart from any world he had known before.

"You will be three clicks beyond the demarcation line at the Ben Hai River. That means North Vietnam and, gentlemen, you know what *that* means."

Oh, he knew. He wondered if the briefing officer really knew. Did this dumb second lieutenant droning on in this tent know the meaning of no resupply, no air support, no artillery and no acknowledgement? He knew and the men squatted around him on the floor knew.

"Shadow people, again," Van Lesser whispered to him.

Shadow people. That's what they called themselves. Never heard and never seen, they worked in the dark leaving only bodies behind to mark their passing. Their own troops rarely saw them. When they came into a base camp for a few days stand-down, their area was declared off-limits. They lived in dark bunkers during the daylight hours and came out only at night.

"Keeps your night vision from getting fucked up," he told a curious grunt one evening. In a nine-month period it was one of the few things he said to anyone who was not one of those squatted on the floor with him.

In the official rosters they were called SEALs. In the Order of Battle they were B-53 detachment of MACV-SOG. To the other troops they were crazy. The Vietnamese called them *Ange d'Morte*—angels of death; but to themselves they were the Shadow People.

"You will proceed up the banks of the small stream," the officer droned.

He tuned the officer out and looked around at the other men squatted on the floor. In the world they had been carpenters, bus drivers, mail-room clerks and parking lot jockeys. In the 'Nam they were killers. They should've been driving fast cars, drinking cheap wine and chasing loose women. Instead they trudged the jungle, drank brackish water and chased an elusive enemy. Chambers should've been surfing in La Jolla. Van Lesser should've been in accounting school. Downey should've been teaching creative writing. Swetz should've been doing stand-up comedy in Vegas. And him? Maybe he should have been reading poetry somewhere in Greenwich Village.

"The gun emplacement at Loi An must be eliminated," the officer bellowed, "and the agitators in the village must be neutralized."

Officers spoke in nice military euphemisms. They gave orders to "eliminate, terminate or neutralize." It was his mission. He would have

to destroy, kill or kidnap. The war had sifted down to just him and four others squatted on a dirt floor: Chambers, the mantracker; Van Lesser the demo man; Swetz, their nose; Downey, their eyes and him — their ears. He could hear the ruffle of a butterfly's wing at ten yards. He could hear a man breathing at 30 feet. He was important to them. They were just as important to him.

"Jesus Christ, another over-the-fence mission," Downey grumbled as they left the tent. Nothing new really, most of their missions were over the fence. The grumbling was just Downey's way of getting ready.

Inside their compound Swetz jumped up on a table and began singing, his canary-like head bobbing and his body moving to a Rhumba beat:

*Brassiere, I love the things you hold so dear
And when you press them in my ear
You shove my balls in second gear
Brassiere, brassiere.*

Well, it sounded like "Brazil." Swetz was getting ready too; the corny clowning was his way.

Van Lesser smiled at Swetz's antics and began to crack his knuckles as he walked in tighter and tighter circles — winding his mainspring he called it.

Watching the others he realized it was time for his own ritual. He slipped into his darkened bunker. Taking off the green cotton fatigues, he sat naked on the dirt floor and forced his vision into the darkest corner. Crossing his hands in his lap and straightening his back he began a slow, steady breathing. With each inward breath he inhaled a little more of the darkness, the jungle, the decay and the death around him. With each outward breath he forced a little more the humanity, the tenderness, the logic and the fear from himself. With each cycle he became less and less a man and more and more a part of the jungle around him. It always frightened him to know how much he could change during the ritual. The others were no longer names, no longer friends. They would function like a pack of wolves with him as their leader. In half an hour he too was ready.

Walking naked across the dirt compound he saw the others, standing in a small circle, a battery powered cassette player at their center. As he neared the circle they sat and started the tape player. The thumping savage beat of the Rolling Stones' "Sympathy for the Devil" rolled out across the compound. The regular Army guys in the camp — the clerks, gunners, grunts and radiomen — moved sheepishly away from the fence of the SEAL compound. Night was falling.

"Please allow me to introduce myself I'm a man of wealth and taste," Jagger sang as the five of them slipped into black pajamas. With all of their individual rituals performed the song was the way *it* — that entity which was somehow more than just the five of them — got ready.

"... killed the Czar and his ministers Anastasia screamed in vain," Jagger intoned as they smeared the jagged lines of camouflage paint on their faces.

Looking into the small mirror as he buried the shine of his cheekbone in a swath of dark green paint, he could hear the bongos, congas and

maracas pumping in savage harmony. He thought of other jungles, other drums, other paint. The blood pounded in his temples. He smiled outwardly, shuddered inwardly and howled with Jagger.

"I rode a tank with the general's rank when the blitzkrieg raged and the violence stank," Jagger crooned as the bolts of their Belgian rifles clicked in the dark.

They all began howling along with Jagger as they checked the edges of their Gerber knives and tested the snap of their garrotes.

"So when you meet me have some courtesy, have some sympathy and taste. Use all your well-learned qualities or I'll lay your soul to waste," they shouted together.

"Tell me baby, what's my name," he sang along with Jagger as they walked single file through the compound gate. And he was no longer sure he really knew.

"The gooks are in for some shit tonight," one radioman whispered to his companions as the five dark shapes disappeared into the jungle. Somebody would turn off the tape recorder. Somebody always did.

He could feel the dampness as the cool night distilled the day's humidity out of the air around him. He could see patches of moonlight through the jungle canopy and his eyes burned through the darkness ahead.

He checked the radio. He liked carrying the radio, even though he knew it made him a sure target for enemy snipers.

They didn't stick to the trails; they made their own. At times like these; slithering through the brush on a cool night, he would remember the boy playing war in the bushes of Independence Park.

It seemed as if each branch which brushed him awakened a memory. Ludwig with the broken, bloodied nose; and his tears, the tears of a five-year-old, over a hurt friend. Another brush, another memory. Mary Lou, in the small white casket — drowned in a tub by an insane babysitter. "Wake up, Mary Lou," he had whispered to her. He was eight. He had faith then. Another branch jolted loose the memory of Maddox — the dumb kid from Massillon, Ohio, who had stepped on a mine and went back to Ohio in a handkerchief before he even had a chance to see his first sunrise in Vietnam. He cried then. He thought he was going to cry now, but he had no tears. He had this switch. It kept him from hurting. He flicked it. The beast did not cry.

That's why he liked the radio. It was his way back to reality. It was a totem, a fetish, something to pull this snarling beastman back from the jungle. He hit the button on the radio handset and listened for the click. He was always afraid it wouldn't work.

He walked up the column, touching each of the other men on the shoulder and signing for them to sit. He listened to the jungle. Downey's head circled as his eyes strained to pierce the darkness around them. Swetz sniffed the air like a dog. Only when each of them nodded was the silence broken.

"Covey leader; Raven two. Radio check," he whispered into the handset.

"Raven two; Covey leader. Check," came the reply.

Every hour they would perform this simple check-in procedure. It

would let the officers back at the base camp know the team was still alive. If they did not check in the PIO officers would begin to formulate the official denials. They were not *supposed* to be where they were.

And he wasn't there. Not anymore. He had traveled down a 60,000 year-old staircase of racial memory and emerged into a primordial jungle. The soldier too young to shave was gone. He was a primitive man in black pajamas.

It was with the eyes of this primitive man that he saw the break in the jungle that signalled a trail. In the silent sign-language he positioned the other four strategically; the five of them forming the jaws of a living trap set to spring shut on their unsuspecting prey. That prey, three NVA couriers, had just rounded a bend in the trail 150 meters away.

"Be a bush," he thought to himself as the first NVA soldier passed. The third was his.

With the primitive force of a lion he leaped on the third man. Like his ape ancestors, he crushed the man's larynx. The muffled noises in the bush told him his companions had also brought down their prey.

Like a deft surgeon he manipulated the Gerber to remove the man's liver. Smiling at the reddish mass in his hands he lifted it and took a bite, spitting the raw meat on the ground. Van Lesser and Chambers were leaving the team's calling cards, nailing a black card with a grinning skull imprint to the forehead of each corpse. Downey grinned when he saw the liver with the bite out of it. They had heard the Buddhists considered the liver the seat of the soul.

"Sin Loi! No Buddha heaven for this fucker," Downey quipped, looking at him and smiling.

He smiled back and noting the moon over Downey's shoulder suppressed the urge to howl at it.

In thirty minutes they were at the edge of a clearing in the jungle. The village of Loi An, just 150 yards away, slept. He motioned Van Lesser to his right and Chambers to his left. Swetz with the radio and Downey with the grenade launcher squatted in place. Slithering on his belly, he entered the clearing. Swetz and Downey appeared as bushes behind him.

Drawing his legs up he pushed with the heels of his feet and slithered forward, moving across the damp grass like some perverse cross between a frog and a snake. Four-and-a-half feet, two-thirds of a body length, and he paused to listen. He could feel his heart pounding against his ribcage. The faint whoosh, bump, whoosh of the blood pulsing through his veins was the only sound he could hear. Drawing his legs up he pushed with the heels of his feet.

In the next two hours he repeated the motion a hundred times. The village gate was just two feet away. He pulled a long blade of grass from where it had been clenched between his teeth. Like a wizard with an emerald wand he waved the blade of grass in ever widening circles. About two-and-a-half feet off the ground, the blade bent slightly. He could faintly make out the trip wire in the darkness—booby trap. The wire was anchored to a fence post a few feet to his right. The free end, like a trail of bread crumbs, led to a small clump of bushes to his left. The

half-moon crescent of a claymore was nestled in the center of the clump. Carefully he removed the firing mechanism, turned the mine around and replaced the detonator. The hundreds of steel balls, splayed out by the mine when it went off, would rapidly thin the ranks of his pursuers should anything go wrong with the mission. He wiggled through the slats in the gate. Loi An still slept.

Well, he thought, at least the informant had been accurate in his description of the village. He could see the thatched shed and camo net covering the anti-aircraft gun just ahead. To the right was the hut of the cadre leader.

He watched as Van Lesser ducked behind the shed before going in to plant the charge. Chambers had taken up position behind the well to cover their retreat.

The door wasn't locked; they never were. It wasn't booby-trapped; they usually were. Inside he could hear the sleeping figures breathing; five of them by the sound of it. Suddenly one figure stirred. The extraction choppers wouldn't come in until the demo charge had gone off. He couldn't risk discovery this early. Placing his hand over the figure's mouth he slipped the 12 inch Gerber from its sheath. The figure began to struggle. He remembered the training session. Up, under the first rib; the blade goes in. Turn up and push, through the aorta and heart. The figure ceases struggling. A second figure sits up and he jerks the wire garrote around its neck. A cross with the hands, a sharp jerk, and this figure too collapses.

As he flipped open the loop of the garrote he heard the roar of an explosion. Van Lesser's charge on the gun. The pop, pop, pop of rifle fire came from the direction of the well and was drowned out by the thumping of chopper blades.

He pulled the pistol from his belt and levelled it at the now wakening figures in the hut. In the dark he was almost invisible. He spoke in a guttural voice.

"Didi, you hear? Didi, outside!"

The three remaining figures placed their hands on their heads and sheepishly filed out into the dirt clearing in front of the hut. As he stepped out he saw other groups of villagers huddled in front of their homes. The middle-aged man he had just pushed out the door glared at him and muttered two phrases over and over. They sounded like "Chao Lin" and "Mao Li." He motioned for the man to squat and saw his glare had changed to tears.

He turned to go back into the hut. If someone in the hooch was a cadre leader, as the MI types had claimed, then there should be some documents around.

Inside the hut he saw the horrible handiwork of his three minute visit. The two young girls lay on a pallet, almost embracing. A thin red line ran across the throat of one. An obscene red circle was spreading slowly across the white cloth of the other's flowing Ao Dai dress. They looked young, maybe fourteen, but it was hard to tell. Their deep brown almond eyes looked at him accusingly, forever open in death. He turned and

walked outside.

Chambers was questioning a villager in Vietnamese. As he heard the sing song of their voices he thought of the white Ao Dai with its spreading red spot. It spread across the sky. He thought of a small white coffin and a bloody nose. He thought of liver and blood on his hands. The radio! Why couldn't he click the radio. Van Lesser speaks to him, takes his arm, but he keeps walking. Walking toward the village gate, he drops his knife and pistol. The others stare at him, but none move. He walks into the cool shadows of the morning jungle and the blackness folds around him. Downey is the first to follow. He strains his eyes to pierce the darkness but all he sees are shadows.

— *Elton Manzione*

Pictures, All of Him

I know where he lives. Molly lives in the same town, and she showed me his house. We drove by one afternoon, and she slowed so I could look. It's big and old and white with a ratty sofa and beat-up easy chairs on the front porch. The porch is painted green. Rusted wrought-iron work surrounds it. There are two sets of brick stairs that lead up to it from the street. Moss covers the mortar. There is no front yard, just a hill with bushes and young trees tangled in growth. I pictured him sitting out there in the summer barefoot in ripped jeans and a faded tee-shirt, writing his songs with a chewed pencil on scraps of paper. The sky showers a cooling rain. He reaches out from under the porch roof and lets the drops fall into his palm. He wipes the water onto his leg, making a dark hand-print. He lights a cigarette and starts writing again. He smells the wet leaves and dirt. He writes a song about rain.

Every night I pray to God to give me a dream about him so I can live off it until I see him Saturday night. That's all I ask for. One of those kind when you wake up and hope you weren't dreaming. One of those kind that sits on your bare shoulder for days. You want to introduce it to everyone, but you can't because you'd have to take off your shirt for them to see it. Yet you can't disguise the lump it makes.

I remember a movie from psychology class. They took a cat and removed the part of its brain that kept it paralyzed when it was dreaming. (Only your eyes move when you dream.) They wanted to see what would happen when your brain did not keep you paralyzed. They showed the cat, going wild, acting out its dreams. But they did it in a cage so it couldn't hurt anyone. It couldn't kill the mouse it was chasing.

And I remember something I read. When the dreaming mind cannot deal with a problem, the waking mind is called in to resolve it. The resolution is stopping the dream.

To pass the time, I plan what I will wear when I see him next. I hate summer colors and summer clothes. I wish it was cold so I could wear my Indian scarf. It would look great with this sweater which I'll wear anyway. I won't sweat because I won't dance at the show. I'll just stand up front on the right side of the stage where I always do. The stagelights may burn into my face. But he'll be sure to see me. He looks at me a lot when he sings. One time he smiled at me. When I smiled back he wasn't looking anymore.

I took pictures of him two weeks ago. Just of him, no one else in the band. Two rolls. That's forty-eight pictures, all of him. I got one looking right at me, right into the camera. You might not be able to tell because of his long bangs that sometimes cover his eyes. His hair is in a bowl cut, and reminds me of someone from the Renaissance. When he sweats, he pushes it out of his face, over to the side. But in my picture it has fallen back down. But I know he was looking at me.

I saw him at a club last weekend and followed him outside. When I came out the door, he was looking right at me. It was like he expected

me. I walked up to him and asked him if he wanted to see the pictures I had taken of him the week before. I had already taken out all the blurry ones and the ones that were too dark. Molly told me that a serious photographer never shows anyone a bad picture, and never makes excuses for pictures. So I only had the good ones.

I handed him the whole packet. I wanted to watch him take the pictures out of the envelope. His hands are so white and thin. He had his jacket hanging on his shoulder. He was standing close to me, and he smelled of cloves. We looked at the pictures together.

I was afraid to look at his face, so I watched his hands. They went through the pictures like a deck of cards. I was so close to him I could almost feel the rough tweed of his coat. I wanted to feel it scratch my skin. Then he said in a quiet voice, "Ummm. . . I think you should know that I'm tripping really hard on mescaline right now." I looked up at his face. His eyes were flat and dark, his skin like smooth stone. I laughed. Then he laughed, and the stone broke into smooth ripples. I don't know why we laughed.

He said he liked the pictures, and gave them back to me. He said he had never seen so many black and white pictures of himself at one time. I gave him a cigarette and lit it for him. Since he was tripping, I knew I could look at him as much as I wanted. I watched him smoke. He held the cigarette in his left hand, down between his knuckles. He sucked in deep drags and exhaled out his nose and mouth at the same time. He had his other hand twisted in the front of his shirt. He does that all the time, especially when he's singing. He pulled on his shirt so much he had it wrapped around his middle. I saw the skin on his side. It looked white and soft. I wanted to reach out and run my fingers across his skin. He would take my hand.

I asked if he wanted the pictures. "For how much?" he wanted to know. "For free," I said.

"You'll give them to me?" His eyes looked shinier.

"Yeah. Here."

"Thanks."

So I gave him all my good pictures. But not the negatives.

That's the only time I ever talked to him. And I only did then because I was drunk. But when Molly and I go see him play Saturday night, maybe I'll talk to him some more. I hope he wasn't too messed up to remember talking to me. At least he has the pictures. I hope he didn't drop them on the floor of the club, or leave them in someone's car.

* * *

When he got home, he fell into bed with all his clothes on. He didn't even take his boots off. He woke up at 3 a.m., feeling an unnatural lump press on his hip-bone. He fumbled through his clothes with hands numbed by sleep, but fell back to dreaming before he found the spot.

One hour later he was jerked from sleep by terrible nightmares. He dreamed he had tumors all over his body. With closed eyes his hands roamed over his body to affirm its natural form. But they fell upon the lump on his hip-bone. His eyes flew open, and he half-ran, half-crawled

to the lamp on the other side of the room. He tore at his clothes to find the strange growth he knew he had developed overnight. But he found the packet of pictures instead. He laughed out loud. He looked at them again. He thought of me.

Or when he got home, he took a beer from the fridge and flopped in front of the t.v. to watch the late movie. As he pulled his coat off, the pictures fell out of his pocket. He smiled. He stretched out on the floor and spread all the pictures out in front of him. He picked out his favorite one, and remembered looking straight into the camera. He liked the way his hair covered his eyes. He took it into his room and stuck it in the frame of his mirror. (Every time he looks in the mirror, he thinks how he looked into my camera lens.)

Or he took them home and threw them in a big cardboard box where he keeps all the trash people give him. He forgot about them. He forgot about me.

Or the pictures had fallen out of his pocket at the club. They were swept up with the plastic cups and cigarette butts the next morning.

* * *

So I pray for a dream. I pray that when I dream of him, he dreams of me. I pray that it's not true that dreaming is the way your mind gets rid of extraneous information. The way your mind takes out its trash.

Before I go to sleep, I pretend that I am telepathic. I pretend I can communicate to him all the things I want him to know. I face the spot on my wall that marks a straight line to where I think he is. I concentrate as hard as I can until my head hurts and my eyes sting.

I work in a book store. He comes in, and I watch him browse through the shelves. He comes to the register and asks if we have a particular book. We don't, but I happen to have my copy with me, and I tell him he can borrow it if he wants. He takes it. When he leaves, I scold myself for lending my favorite book to a stranger. I think how he will read it, then forget to bring it back. It will collect dust on his shelf, or he will end up selling it to a junk store for ten cents. I am sure I will never see it again.

Two days later, he comes to return the book. He thanks me and leaves.

I go home that night and read the book again. Throughout, there are letters darkened with a black pen. I know I did not do this. I write the letters out, and find that they spell words, and the words make a poem. On the last page, there is an address written.

I go there, and knock on the door. He answers, and invites me in.

I am on a train, sitting in the lounge car. I play solitaire, and mix small cartons of orange juice with my vodka. Darkness flies by outside the window.

He is the only other person in the car. He plays solitaire, too. I see him look at my bottle. I offer him some, and he comes and sits with me.

We play Rummy 500; he wins three games in a row. The vodka warms us.

He asks if I want to smoke some pot. We pass through silent cars. When the train lurches, he grabs my arm to steady himself. We go to the

ladies' lounge and he leans against the door so no one can get in. We smoke, then go back to the lounge car and eat cupcakes and bar-b-que potato chips, wash them down with vodka.

We make up card games, and play all night.

I am driving down a straight flat highway. It is dawn, and the sun is coming up behind red and yellow autumn trees. I see someone, far down the road, sitting in the grass. He has a big knapsack that contains his possessions. He wears a denim jacket and a floppy black hat. I pull over, and he climbs in the car.

I stop at a truck stop, and he gets out and pumps the gas. We go into the diner and order coffee. He pulls a quarter out of his pocket and goes to the juke box. We eat egg sandwiches and listen to Nancy Sinatra sing "These Boots Are Made For Walking."

The highway goes on forever. We stop for lunch, then dinner. He punches tunes into every juke box.

When I am too tired to drive any further, he takes the wheel. He drives with one hand. The other holds mine against the warm vinyl.

I think what will happen the next time he sees me. He will be full of my telepathies. We will look at each other knowingly. We will never have to speak again.

I remember the words of his songs. He is a minstrel. He wears the jagged clothes of a jester, a shirt with bells and pointed boots. He recites poetry for the king, charms him with his tales. Father grows tired of him, but I convince Father to let him stay and entertain me. We drink mead from engraved silver goblets. I sit on cold stone steps and watch him dance across the floor.

I lie in my bed, naked under the blanket. He is there next to me, sitting on the floor, his knees bent against his chest. Bare skin shows through the hole in his jeans. We communicate, but do not talk. I look up at the ceiling, at the yellow light. I trace the paint cracks with my eyes. I see a spider, reddish-black. It separates and becomes two spiders, uncoupling. I pull the blanket up around me like a gown, gather the corners, push one over my shoulder. I leave the room, and go into the hallway. He is behind me, now wearing a blanket just like mine. His chest and arms are marble sculpture against the black fabric of the blanket. But we can't be in the hall. Someone might see us. We go back inside.

"Did anyone see you?" I ask.

He speaks, but in poetry.

"Sad Lady," he says.

"Who?" I ask.

"Sad Lady. Lady with sad blue eyes that drink in tears. Lady with sad lips that suck in words. Lady with sad hands that hold nothing."

He drops the blanket and stands naked before me. I chew on my fingers. He moves to my bed and pushes the blanket down around his waist. He looks like Jesus, swaddled in cloth. "We've talked about love," he says. "Now let's feel it."

Feel its texture, I think. We lie together, but do not touch.

When I wake up, I cry. I thank God for the dream. I pull the blanket

around me and walk into the hallway. Why did I wake?

I lie back down. I will sleep again, dream again. This will not be the end. Still, we lie frozen next to each other, not touching. I cannot move.

A cat springs into the room. It hisses, tears circles into the floor, pounces on some unseen prey, and runs across our stomachs. I do not flinch.

— Julie Kalendek

PARTICIPANTS

Denise Levertov, poet and teacher. Among her books are *With Eyes in the Back of Our Heads* (1960), *The Jacob's Ladder* (1961), *O Taste and See* (1964), *The Sorrow Dance* (1967), *Footprints* (1972), *The Poet in the World* (essays, 1973), *The Freeing of the Dust* (1975), *Candles in Babylon* (1982), and *Oblique Prayers* (1984). She has taught at CCNY, Vassar, California-Berkeley, Kirkland College, Tufts, and other schools. She initiated the Writers' and Artists' Protest against the War in Viet Nam in 1965.

Andrew Lytle, fiction writer, teacher, and critic. Among his books are *The Long Night* (1936), *A Name for Evil* (1947), *The Velvet Horn* (1957), *A Novel, a Novella and Four Stories* (1958), *The Hero with the Private Parts* (1966), and *A Wake for the Living* (1975). He was a contributor to *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (1930). He has taught American history, English and American literature, and creative writing at University of the South, University of Iowa, University of Florida, Harvard University, and other schools. He has also edited *Sewanee Review* and served at scores of writers' conferences.

Meyme Curtis Tucker, poet and teacher. Her poems have appeared in such journals as *Southern Poetry Review*, *Poets On: Negative Capability*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *Poem*, *Concerning Poetry*, and *The Chattahoochee Review*. She has taught at Adelphi University, Emory University, and Agnes Scott College.