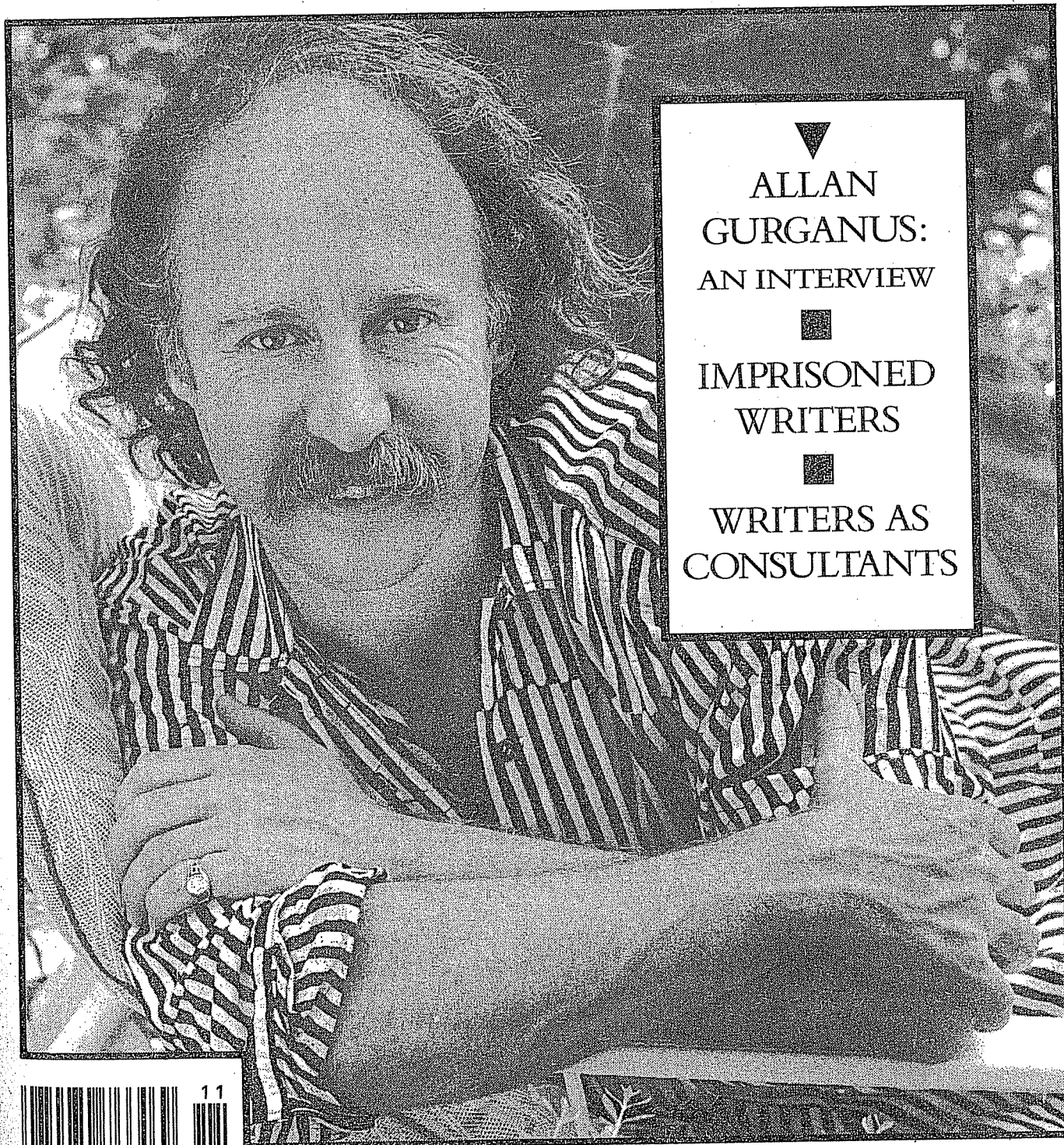
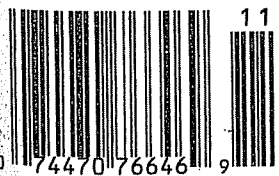


P O E T S &  
W R I T E R S



▼  
ALLAN  
GURGANUS:  
AN INTERVIEW  
■  
IMPRISONED  
WRITERS  
■  
WRITERS AS  
CONSULTANTS



VOLUME 18 ISSUE 6 NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 1990 \$3

POETS & WRITERS  
INC.

Founding Chairman  
Galen Williams

Executive Director  
Elliot Figman

POETS & WRITERS  
MAGAZINE

Editor

Daryln Brewer

Associate Editor  
Linda Corrente

Managing Editor  
Debby Mayer

Editorial Assistant  
Jim Andrews

Marketing & Circulation Director  
Christine Cassidy

Circulation Manager  
Anna Cerami

Assistant Circulation Manager  
Nori Negron

Circulation Assistant  
Bernard Dove

Advertising Manager  
Debby Mayer

Designer  
Linda Corrente

Poets & Writers Magazine (ISSN 0891-6136) is published six times a year by Poets & Writers, Inc., 72 Spring Street, New York, NY 10012. Telephone (212) 226-3586. Subscriptions: \$18/1 yr., \$32/2 yrs., \$46/3 yrs., \$3 single copy. Poets & Writers Magazine is available on microfilm from University Microfilms International, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106.

Poets & Writers, Inc. is a nonprofit, tax-exempt corporation organized for literary and educational purposes, publicly supported by the Literature Programs of the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York State Council on the Arts, foundations, corporations, publishers, and individuals.

Donations to Poets & Writers are charitable contributions under Section 170 of the Internal Revenue Code. A copy of the last annual report filed with the New York State Board of Social Welfare may be obtained on request by writing to Poets & Writers, Inc. Please call or write for further information.

C O N T E N T S

POETS & WRITERS MAGAZINE VOLUME 18 ISSUE 6 NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 1990 \$3

3 LETTERS

6 NEWS

- Commission Issues Report on NEA* ..... Elliot Figman
- Vantage Loses Vanity Class-Action Suit* ..... Arthur S. Rosenblatt
- B. Dalton Launches New Writers Program* ..... Arthur S. Rosenblatt
- CCLM Adds Presses and Becomes CLMP* ..... Jim Andrews

13 A GATHERING OF POETS AT KENT STATE

*One-hundred fifty poets from around the country commemorate the Kent State tragedy in a three-day reading marathon* ..... Stacey Chase

18 WANTED! SOMEONE TO MAKE ME A WRITER

*What do you do when someone asks you to read his or her manuscript?*  
..... Clay Reynolds

24 AN INTERVIEW WITH ALLAN GURGANUS

*The author of The Oldest Living Confederate Widow Tells All says, "If I have, at my death, created one other voice as alive for me and other people as Lucy, I will feel completely and utterly vindicated about my stay here."*  
..... Jeffrey Scheuer

42 IMPRISONED WRITERS

*A look at human rights organizations that monitor and protest the censorship, imprisonment, torture, or oppression of writers around the world* ..... Fred Pelka

44 WRITING IS A DANGEROUS OCCUPATION IN MUCH OF THE WORLD

*A report from the Program Director of PEN American Center's Freedom-to-Write Committee* ..... Gara LaMarche

50 A REALISTIC VIEW OF A READING TOUR

*On the road in New England* ..... Christopher Fahy

57 HOW TO TELL WHEN A MANUSCRIPT WILL BE REJECTED BEFORE READING THE FIRST WORD

*Meditations from the editor of Michigan Quarterly Review*  
..... Laurence Goldstein

58 GRANTS & AWARDS

66 DEADLINES

76 STATE GRANTS

81 CLASSIFIEDS

ON THE COVER: Allan Gurganus  
Photo © Marion Ettlinger

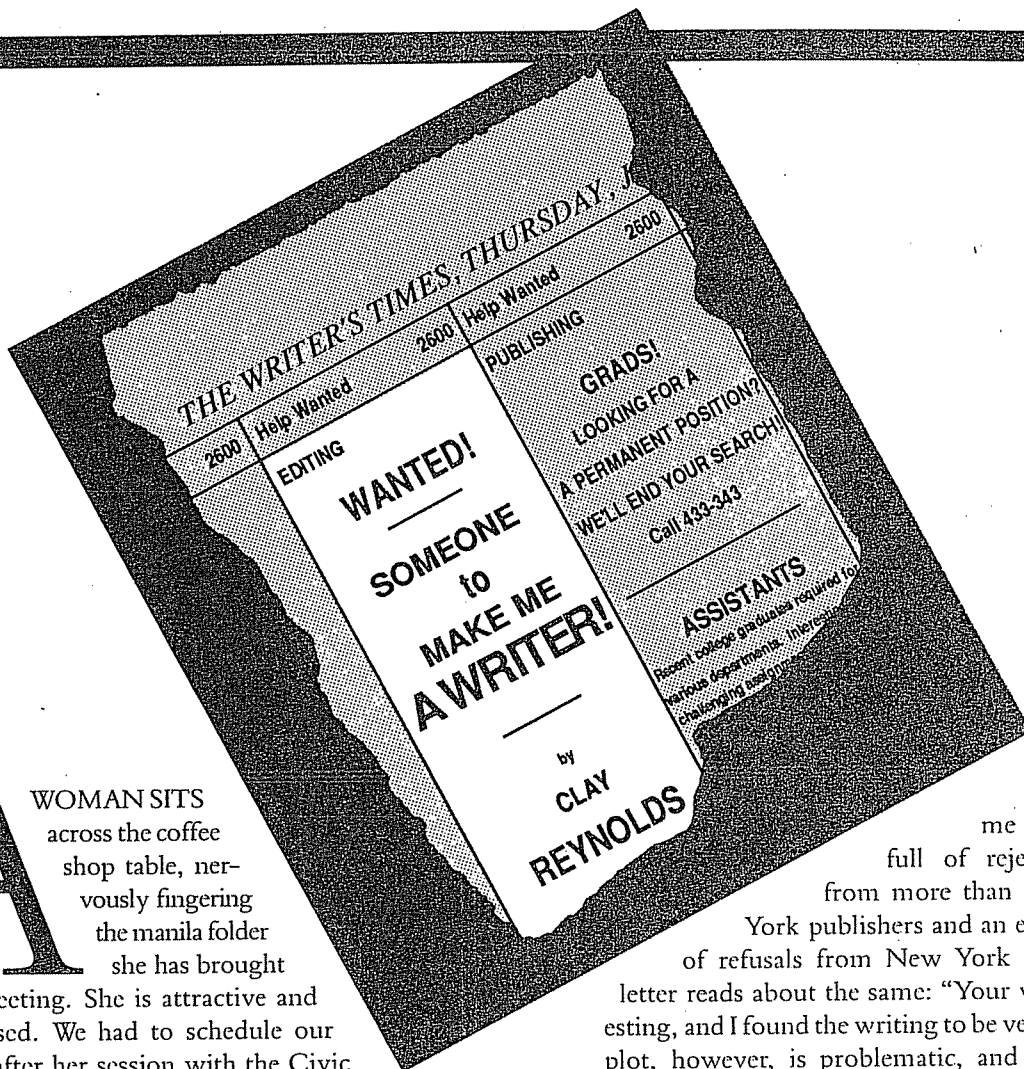
© 1990 Poets & Writers, Inc.

**A** WOMAN SITS across the coffee shop table, nervously fingering the manila folder she has brought to our meeting. She is attractive and well-dressed. We had to schedule our meeting after her session with the Civic Garden Society. For the past half hour she has been describing a novel that took her four years to write. Although she has a degree in creative writing from a major university and has attended a dozen writers' workshops, she wants me to look over her manuscript and tell her if it is ready to be submitted to a publisher.

"This is really my eighth novel," she says, casting her eyes around the room to avoid meeting mine; then her stare settles on my face with deadly earnest. "I've rewritten it eleven times, and I think this time I've got it right. I know it's good. I just know it is. But I need some help with it."

I light a smoke, sigh, and try to find a tactful way out of this. As Novelist-in-Residence at the local university, I have been in this situation before. Hardly a week goes by without someone calling me and inviting me to read a manuscript. "It's a classic," they say. "It's definitely publishable. I just need someone to look it over."

I can usually put them off with a variety of excuses, but this woman has been particularly persistent.



She shows me an envelope full of rejection letters from more than twenty New York publishers and an equal number of refusals from New York agents. Each letter reads about the same: "Your work is interesting, and I found the writing to be very good. The plot, however, is problematic, and I had major difficulties with several characters. It's just not right for us at this time." The woman is intelligent, well-read, and well-educated in business; somehow, though, she has failed to learn to read between the lines.

"I WOULDN'T REWRITE ANYTHING ELEVEN times," I begin with a smile, but I can see disappointment building in her eyes. "At least, I wouldn't unless I had a contract, a check in the bank." I go on to explain that I really can't help her. I'm not an editor, an agent, a publisher. I'm a writer with his own problems with editors, agents, and publishers. If I knew the secret of making them do something they didn't want to do, I would be spending this hot July afternoon in the South of France or on the cool rocky shores of Ireland, not in steamy North Texas; I would be dressed as well as she is; and I wouldn't be wondering who was going to pick up the check for this coffee shop meeting.

"I really can't do anything but correct your spelling, punctuation, syntax. Even if I rewrote the

whole thing for you, turned it into an entirely different book, you still wouldn't be any closer to publication than you are right now. I can't publish your novel for you."

She nods and hands the manuscript over. She says she wants me to "work through" it anyway. I realize my words have had no effect. When she looks at me, she sees nothing other than a published writer. My insecurities and failures in my own work are meaningless. The years I've spent sweating over a manuscript, reworking it, worrying about details, characters, plot lines don't show. I'm in print, in New York. That's all that matters to her. It's time for the heavy artillery to drive off this attack on my time and energy.

"I can't do it for free," I explain. I name my price, and I see her eyes widen. The price is deliberately inflated. I could take a pretty nice vacation on the proceeds; if she goes for what I think of as my "premium package," I could make a sizable down payment on a new pickup truck. But she shakes her head. Her husband, a physician, (who charges \$75 for a ten-minute office consultation), would never endorse such a ridiculous figure, she confesses. Our interview is coming to an end.

I hand her a list of agents and editors in New York copied from *Writer's Market*; I also recommend that catalogue of publishing opportunities and am not surprised to find that she's never heard of it; I suggest she subscribe to several magazines concerned with writing. I also tell her to quit rewriting and start regular submission to both agents and editors. I warn her against subsidy and vanity presses, name several writers' support groups in the area she might wish to join, and finally, I recommend that she start a new novel, something totally different.

She does pick up the check, so I am obliged, at least, to look at the manuscript. I count five major grammatical errors, two misspellings, four clichés, and a number of confused sentences on the first page. I now see what her biggest problem is, and I suggest she enroll in a basic-composition course at the university.

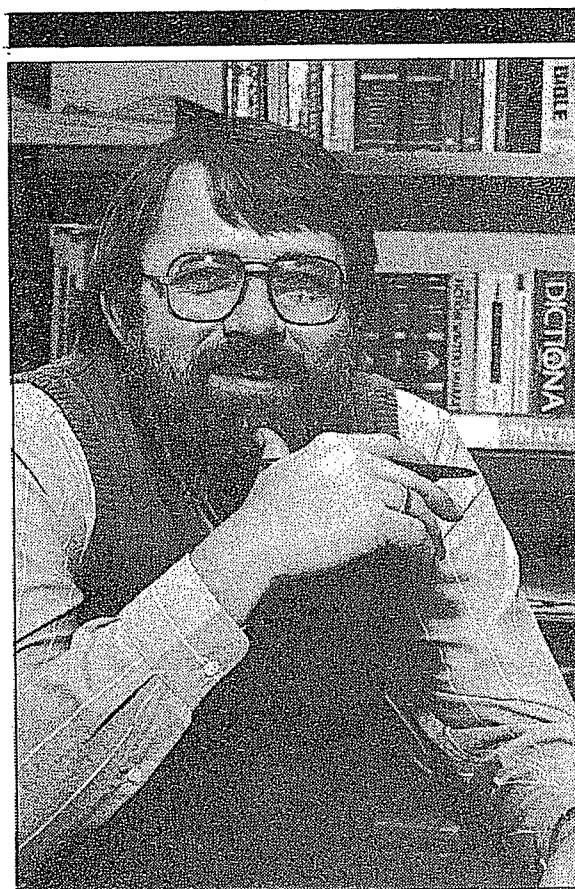
"I have a *degree* in creative writing," she snaps. "I've worked as a journalist and in advertising. I edit the country club's newsletter, and no one has noticed anything wrong with my English before."

Her anger gives me a chance to excuse myself, and as I walk away I take satisfaction only in my narrow escape from this job. I can't help but feel sorry for her, sympathize with her frustration; but I know if she had paid my price, I would have felt worse for myself. She wanted a life preserver for her fledgling career, and I threw her a brick. But I

saved myself from drowning in a poorly written, unimaginative, unoriginal piece of prose.

I curse the agents and editors who don't have the courage to suggest that she give it all up and concentrate on her bridge club or golf game; but then, I know she wouldn't be put off by such crude candor, even from New York. In a week's time, she will have located another published writer to approach with her manila folder; someone else's afternoon will be ruined; and, if the writer in question is serious and honest, she will suffer more frustration.

IF THIS WOMAN WERE UNIQUE, THE situation would be unremarkable, but it happens every day. Writers I know from coast to coast face it. They get that tightening of the colon when they pick up the phone or open a letter and hear or read the question: "Would you be willing to look over my work?" Many have unlisted phone numbers to shield themselves from the incessant inquiries that flood them when their books are reviewed in local or national publications. The situation is worse for published poets, who sometimes receive unwelcome sheafs of doggerel in their mailboxes with heartfelt pleas for help. Perhaps the authors of such verse and stories have shown their work to close



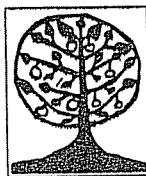
friends, family members, or maybe they've read it to their dogs, but now they want *an opinion* by someone who is "absolutely objective" and who will be "brutally honest." Sometimes they also want it corrected, even edited. Mostly, they want a shortcut to publication, and they hope that the writer-consultant will put it in the mail to an editor or publisher with a sincere endorsement.

Stories of John Kennedy Toole's mother bugging Walker Percy to the point where he felt he could only rid himself of the woman's nagging by reading *A Confederacy of Dunces* or of William Kennedy's road to publication with *Ironweed* abound in writers' magazines and are embellished in their retellings. But such techniques seldom work. In the four years since I've been a published novelist, I've offered the names of my agent and editor to maybe a dozen people whose work I read (always out of friendship and never for money), but to date, none have found publication. But as I sat on the dais of a writing group's conference last year and heard an editor blithely suggest to a crowd of several hundred that they "seek advice and help" from a "local established writer" before submitting their work, I blanched. I was the only "established writer" in the room who lived in that city. I was figuring

the cost of changing my phone number even before I was assaulted at the reception afterwards by no fewer than twenty would-be writers who were offering to allow me to read their romances, westerns, mysteries, children's books, and epic family sagas. Some even had their manuscripts with them and were fishing them out of briefcases and thrusting them into my arms with rapid-fire accounts of what their mothers, sons, daughters, and next-door-neighbors said was "wrong" or "right" with them.

BECAUSE OF THAT EXPERIENCE, AND because of experiences such as the one I had with the woman in the coffee shop, I decided to make up a list of rules for writers who want serious consultation and advice from established writers. In a way, the list is offered here in self-defense and in the hope of reaching some writers before they pick up the phone or mail their manuscripts to a published author and ask for help. What is suggested here is that writing is a business; and as the list indicates, the more businesslike the practice and expectations, the more satisfying and productive the results. If these six points are observed by both the writer and the consultant, then I honestly believe that both will be happier and better off for the experience.

## Start (or finish) your B.A. as a writer.



**Writing.** If it's your dream or your passion, our Adult Degree Program is for you. Design your B.A. and focus on writing—short stories, poetry, drama, essays, fiction—under the guidance of an experienced writing teacher. Earn 15 credits per semester through independent study and one 9-day residency each semester. Financial aid is available. Norwich University is accredited.

**Vermont College of Norwich University**

Box 644, Montpelier, Vermont 05602  
(802) 223-8701 (800) 336-6794

1. *Be prepared to pay for the service.* Nothing is more embarrassing than having to tell people that consultation costs money. People who would never think of asking a lawyer, doctor, or appliance repairman for free advice and estimates are often shocked when professional writers want fees to work over or even merely to read their manuscripts. Writers have their own writing to worry about, their own work to occupy their time. If they teach for a living as well, they have their own *tuition-paying* students' writing to read and evaluate. Even if they agree to take on the chore for free, the quality of their job, the thoroughness of their opinions will be compromised by the fact that they are "working you into their schedule," and they likely will hold it against you and your manuscript. Don't be shocked or angry if a consultant wants to charge more than you think the work is worth. In the first place, you are buying this individual's time, the most valuable commodity a writer has. In the second place, it's *your* creative endeavor: if you don't think it's worth paying for, what makes you think someone will want to publish it?

2. *Establish the fee right away.* Nothing is more awkward than to try to bring an already difficult conversation around to money. There is no going rate, and charges will vary from one individual to another, from one type of manuscript to another. In some cases, a fee may depend on whether the writer has the time, needs the money, or thinks the novice has it to spend. Professionals charge more than graduate students, doting uncles, or your babysitter; but you get what you pay for. Some rates are set by the job rather than the page, depending on length and complexity of the manuscript. If all you want is a reading and an opinion, the charge will be less than if you want a full edit, a critique, a partial or entire rewrite. It's best to pay at least half the agreed-upon fee up front; and make sure a delivery date is established. A simple letter of contract is sometimes a good idea.

3. *Know the rules of language.* Nothing is more frustrating than trying to read something that is badly written. Manuscripts submitted for consideration don't have to be perfect, but they should be neat and correct. If you seek help, be sure it's because you really want the manuscript edited and critiqued, not because you're too lazy or inept to use a dictionary and grammar handbook. It may be that a refresher course in composition is in order, particularly if you've been away from school for

## MASTER'S IN CREATIVE WRITING AT NOTRE DAME

*A new program built on a distinguished tradition, preparing young writers-to-be from Edwin O'Connor to Barry Lopez to Michael Collins, the recipient of the 1988 Young Writer of the Year Award in the Republic of Ireland.*

### FACULTY

- **Percival Everett** (fiction), author of *Suder*, *Walk Me to the Distance*, *Cutting Lisa*, *For Her Dark Skin*, *Zulus* and *The Weather and Women Treat Me Fair*.
- **Sonia Gernes** (poetry, fiction), author of *The Mutes of Sleepy Eye*, *Brief Lives*, *Women at Forty* and *The Way to St. Ives*.
- **John Matthias** (poetry), author of *Bucyrus*, *Turns*, *Crossing*, *Bathory & Lermontov*, *Northern Summer* and *Places/Poems*.
- **William O'Rourke** (fiction), author of *The Meekness of Isaac*, *Idle Hands* and *Criminal Tendencies*.

*For further information write or call:*  
Department of English, University of Notre Dame  
Notre Dame, Indiana 46556 (219) 239-6270

## CITY LIGHTS PUBLISHERS



### VITO LOVES GERALDINE by Janice Eidus

"Janice Eidus . . . possesses a fierce imagination . . . inventive and darkly amusing."

—*New York Times Book Review*

"This collection broadcasts one of the freshest and most idiosyncratic voices from the fiction frontier."

—*San Francisco Chronicle*

ISBN 0-87286-247-X \$7.95

At your bookstore. Or from City Lights Mail Order,  
261 Columbus Avenue, San Francisco 94133.

# Two Books Of Special Interest from TriQuarterly

## *Fiction of the Eighties: A Decade of Stories From TriQuarterly*

A landmark anthology commemorating the twenty-fifth anniversary of *TriQuarterly* magazine, this generous 594-page volume includes forty-seven of the best short stories to have appeared in *TriQuarterly* during the past decade. Among the writers represented are Grace Paley, William Goyen, Raymond Carver, John Sayles, Frederick Barthelme, Tobias Wolff, Richard Ford, T. Coraghessan Boyle, Amy Hempel, Robert Coover, Joyce Carol Oates, many new writers and a number of writers in translation. These stories range widely over the experience of modern life, and share a high level of artistry and an unmistakable atmosphere of the 1980's. For those who teach writing workshops, this is an incomparable primer of the contemporary possibilities of fiction. \$26.95, cloth; \$16.95, paper. (Plus \$1.75 shipping and handling.)

## *Earthly Justice* E. S. Goldman

This book represents several exciting firsts: the first winner of the William Goyen Prize for Fiction, and E. S. Goldman's first collection of short fiction. A retired businessman in his seventies, Goldman is a remarkable new figure on the literary scene. He brings to his stories a full life's experience, a polished mastery of language and an eye for sometimes-shocking moral dilemmas in everyday life. *Earthly Justice* is filled with surprise, delight, devastation and poignancy. Goldman's previous works include a volume of poetry, a novel, and stories in the *Atlantic*, *Story* and *Best American Short Stories*, 1988. 208 pages. \$17.95 cloth; \$9.95, paper. (Plus \$1.50 shipping and handling.)

To order, contact ILPA, P.O. Box 816,  
Oak Park, IL 60303 / 1-800-242-4572.

several years. Your friends, family, and fellow club members are not arbiters of usage and style.

4. *A consultant is a consultant, not a ghostwriter.* Nothing is harder for most writers than trying to write or rewrite someone else's creative work. If you think you've done the bulk of the labor by simply outlining a good story and that your consultant will "shape things up," just "get it on the page," you're kidding yourself. You're the author of the piece; it's your story. All a writer-consultant can be is an adviser, perhaps a line editor. Ghostwriting is something entirely different, and it costs considerably more than even the outlandish charges I make up to frighten off would-be authors. Your writer-consultant may suggest changes, additions, deletions, alterations of all sorts; but the original writing task is yours alone and should be completed before the manuscript goes to your consultant.

5. *If you don't want the opinion, don't ask for it.* Nothing is worse than reading and editing a manuscript only to have the novice become furious over suggested corrections or changes, and it's never pleasant to try to collect a fee from someone whose ego has been severely wounded and must now pay for the pleasure. If all you want is flattery, read to your cat. You are paying for an opinion, but it's only *one* opinion. It may be correct; it may be way off the mark. In terms of the fate of the manuscript, it is not likely to make much difference one way or another. The opinion of a second consultant or even a third might support or contradict the first, and none of them are final. Don't expect that an endorsement, even by a well-known writer, is going to sell the book to any editor; and by all means, don't refuse to pay. Even though you *asked* for the opinion and were *charged* for it, you still don't have to *take* it.

6. *Don't expect your writer-consultant to submit your work for you.* Nothing is more difficult to fend off than this request. Publishing is a competitive business. Few authors, however well-established they may be, are secure enough to introduce competition to their own agents or publishers. This doesn't mean, of course, that a caring writer-consultant won't help you submit your work, particularly if he/she thinks it's good. It's only to say that the suggestion to do so should come from the consultant, not you; and you shouldn't be disappointed if it doesn't come at all.

The point, of course, is that seeking a writer-consultant can't hurt, but it won't necessarily help

either. Only you can be the judge of what your manuscript needs in the way of final preparation, and ultimately it's *your* book, your work. If it's been rejected with or without comment, that is a better indication of its worth than anything anyone else can say. But rejection by one or even a dozen houses doesn't mean the book is worthless, not even if there's a consensus about problems in the manuscript. If you want to be a writer, you must stand on your own merits, be confident of your own abilities, and ride your own book to success. A professional writer is not an editor, publisher, or agent. The best advice is to rely on your own instincts and be diligent, persistent, and well-informed about the elements of your genre and form. If you can't take rejection and accept the blame for your failures, then perhaps you shouldn't be writing in the first place.

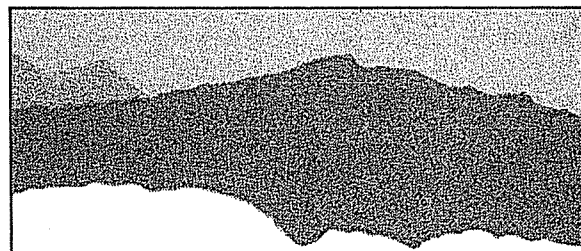
ONCE, MANY YEARS AGO, MY PARENTS and I were traveling cross-country when our car suddenly began to cough and jerk and finally quit entirely. My father and two passing motorists fussed and fumed under the hood for a while, but they couldn't identify any obvious problem: the car just wouldn't start. It was a Sunday, but we finally located a mechanic at his house, and he drove out, looked under the hood, and then borrowed a twenty-dollar bill from my father's diminishing cash supply and an emery board from my mother. He used the paper file to clean the connections and the bill to "gap the points," then told my father to "turn 'er over." He did so, and the engine fired up and hummed smoothly. The mechanic returned the emery board, but pocketed the twenty with a wink.

As we resumed our journey, my mother was furious and complained to my father about the "highway robbery" that had just taken place. "He didn't work on it for more than five minutes," she pouted. "Twenty dollars for five minutes' work." She knew that was our "motel money" for the night.

"I didn't pay him for what he *did*," my father said as he settled in for the now-longer trip home that night. "I paid him for what he *knew*." 🐉

---

*Clay Reynolds is Associate Professor of English and Novelist-in-Residence at the University of North Texas in Denton. He has published over a hundred articles, essays, and reviews, in the New York Times Book Review and Texas Monthly, among other publications. He is currently completing a third novel, Franklin's Crossing; his first two, The Vigil and Agatite, were published by St. Martin's Press in 1986. Two anthologies he is editing are due out from Southern Methodist University Press—Taking Stock: A Larry McMurtry Casebook (1990) and Careless Weeds (1991), a collection of novella-length works from Texas writers.*



## WARREN WILSON MFA FOR WRITERS

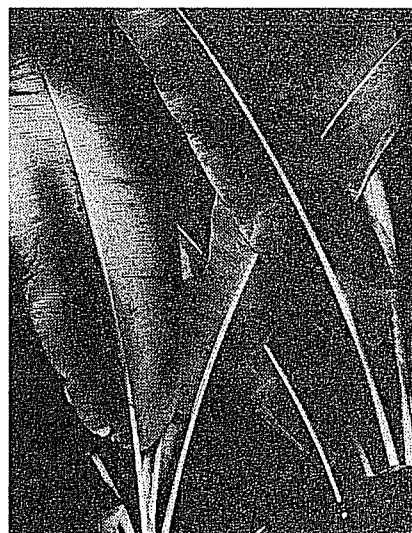
### Recent Faculty:

Joan Aleshire  
Charles Baxter  
Robert Boswell  
Stephen Dobyns  
Stuart Dybek  
Louise Glück  
Thomas Lux  
Heather McHugh  
Gregory Orr  
Francine Prose  
Mary Elsie Robertson  
Michael Ryan  
Joan Silber  
Ellen Bryant Voigt

Winter and summer semesters open with a 10-day residency of classes, workshops and lectures on the campus, located between Black Mountain and Asheville. The 6-month project is supervised through correspondence, with detailed manuscript criticism by faculty who are both accomplished writers and committed teachers.

For more information:  
John Skoyles, Director  
MFA Program for Writers  
Warren Wilson College  
701 Warren Wilson Road  
Swannanoa, NC 28778  
(704) 298-3325, Ext 238.

## Apalachee Quarterly



*Apalachee Quarterly* is not your usual little magazine.—LIBRARY JOURNAL

\$12 / year

P.O. Box 20106 / Tallahassee, FL / 32316  
Samples \$3.50