

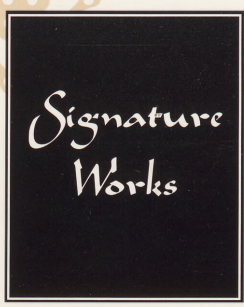
Frank Shurz

William L. Loyer



John F. L. L.

Tess



Patricia Rogers

John Lopate

Alan Clouse

Ed Stein

John Hill



Susan Prosperi

Olivia Hershey

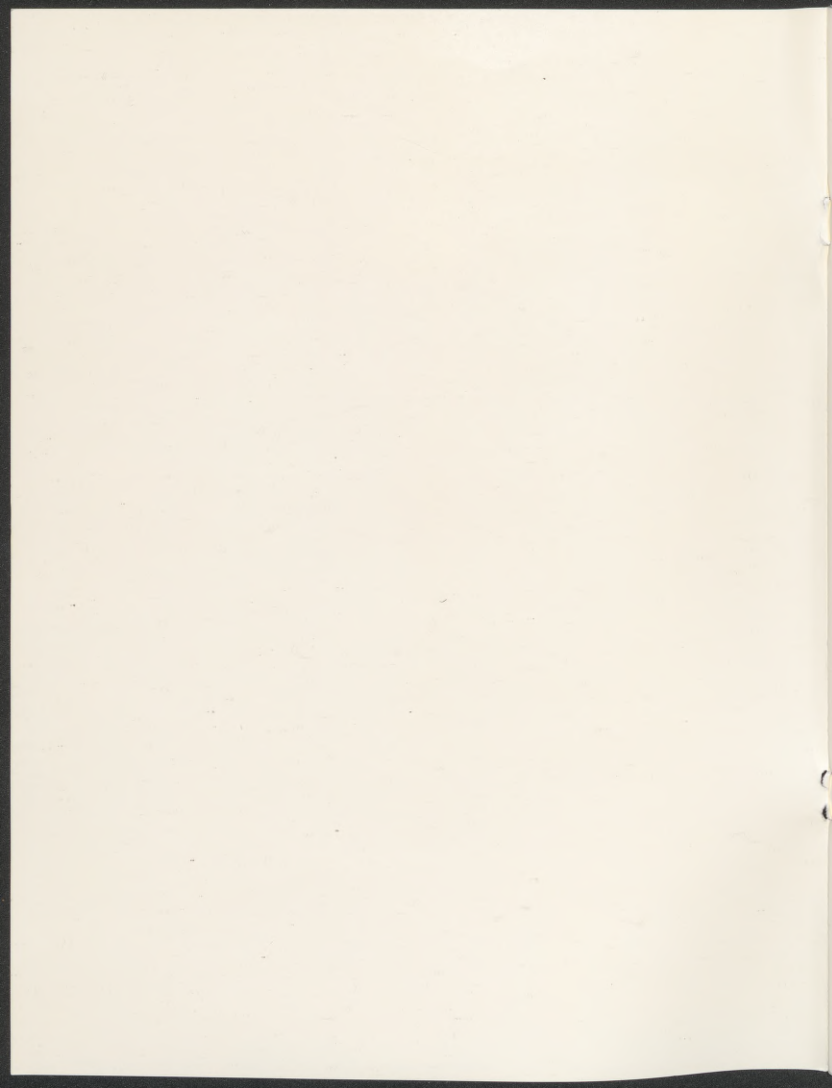
Wendy B. B.

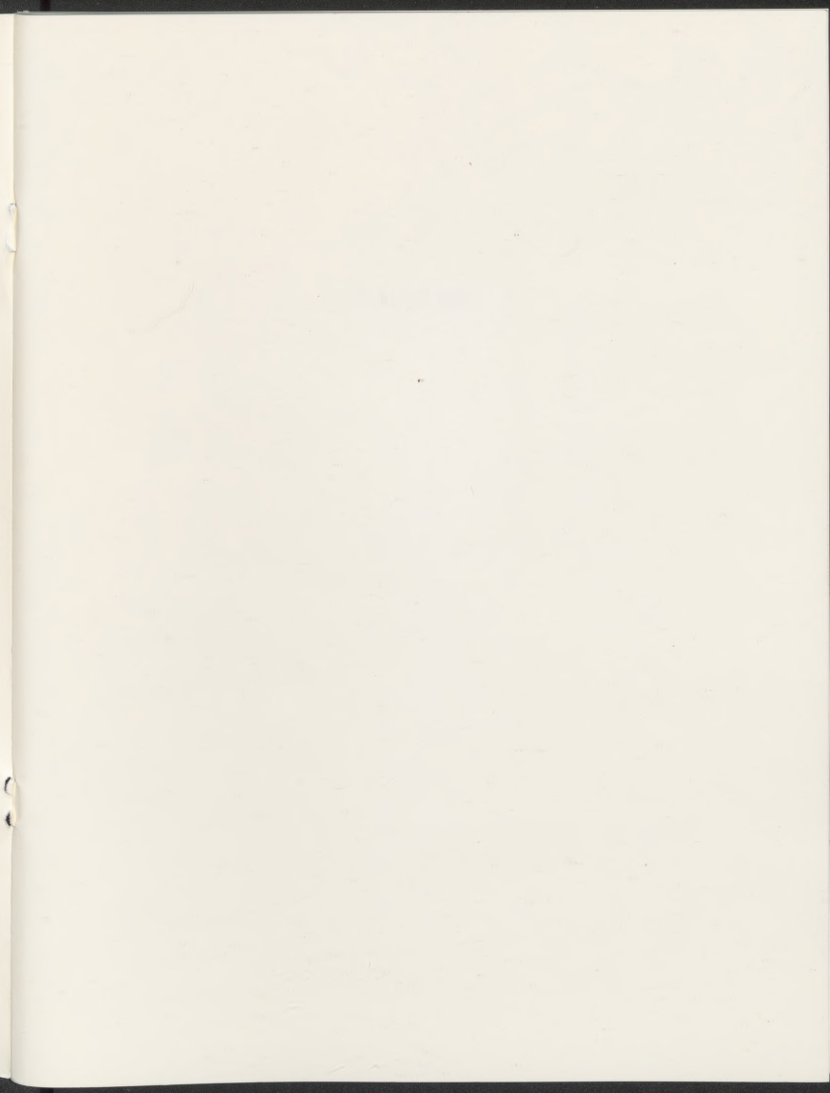
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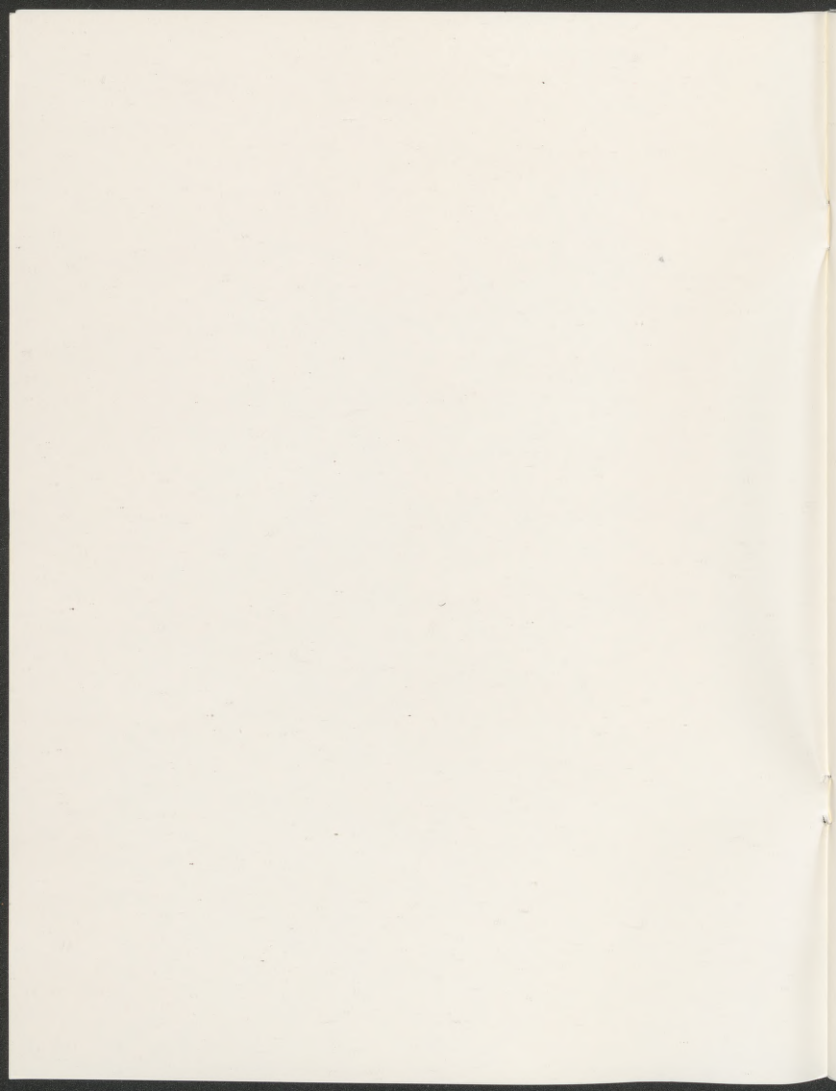
Edward Hirsch

John Oliver

Adam Zogzuli

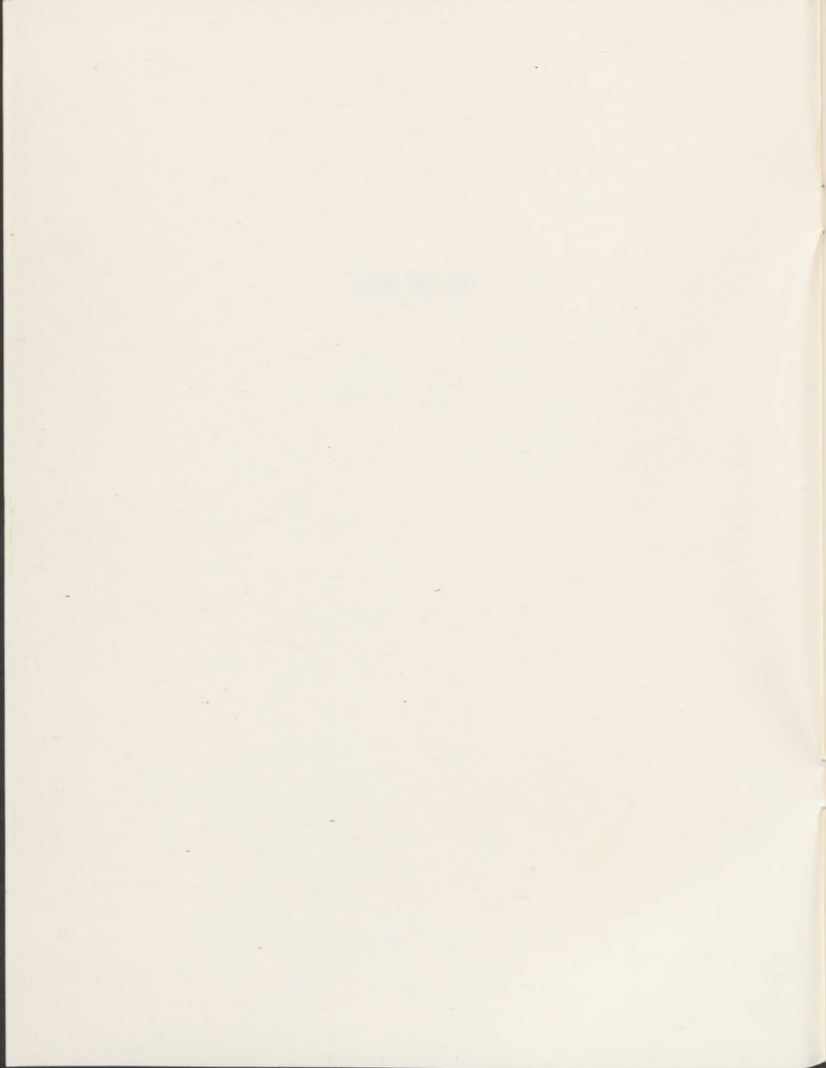








SIGNATURE WORKS



## SIGNATURE WORKS

University of Houston Creative Writing Program  
Faculty and Graduates  
Choose Their Own Most Significant Writing



An Exhibit cooperatively staged  
by the  
Creative Writing Program  
and the  
Special Collections Department,  
University of Houston Libraries



Houston, Texas  
April - July, 1994



## CELEBRATION WITH SIGNATURES

Robert Phillips

This exhibit is a celebration of the fifteenth anniversary of the founding of the University of Houston Creative Writing Program, one of the most notable in the world.

The graduate program in creative writing at the University of Houston was founded in 1979 by acclaimed poet Cynthia Macdonald, who invited fellow poet Stanley Plumly to come to Houston to help her develop the program, with administrative assistance from professor and critic Peter Stitt. After Plumly departed in 1985, Macdonald was joined in directing the program by poet Edward Hirsch, essayist Phillip Lopate, internationally-known fiction writer Donald Barthelme, and other members of the faculty. When Lopate left in 1989 and Donald Barthelme died that same year, Macdonald and Hirsch assumed co-directorship until I became director in mid-1991.

There are numerous reasons for the sustained high quality and reputation of the Creative Writing Program. One is the excellence of both the permanent and the visiting faculty. The permanent faculty currently is comprised of poets Richard Howard, Cynthia Macdonald, Edward Hirsch, Adam Zagajewski, and of fiction writers Rosellen Brown, Daniel Stern, Mary Robison, and James Robison. Howard now holds a distinguished professorship, and Stern has been appointed to the Cullen Chair vacated at Barthelme's death. In addition, playwright Edward Albee works with creative writing students in his role as a professor in the School of Theatre. A glance through this catalog reveals some of the previous permanent and visiting faculty members of national stature, including Howard Moss, Ntozake Shange, Beverly Lowry, William Goyen, Alan Cheuse, and Robert Cohen.

Another reason the program is so fine is the quality of the students. Each year we admit approximately ten new poetry and ten new fiction students from the one hundred fifty applications we receive from all over the United States, including Alaska, and from as far away as France, Italy, Turkey, Pakistan, India, Africa, and Russia. A number of our former students can be found in these pages, including William Olsen, Nancy Eimers, Gail Donohue Storey, and Paula Webb. We wish that space and funds allowed us to feature all our published graduates.

No attribution of program excellence would be complete without reference to Inprint, Inc. This nonprofit organization was founded in 1983 by a group of Houstonians, independent of the university, who were interested in making the UH program the best in the nation. Their fund-raising efforts have resulted in a great many student fellowships, as well as the underwriting of the Margaret Root Brown Houston Reading Series and other literary events. I do not know of any other creative writing program which enjoys such crucial support from the private sector.

There are two points of view about creative writing programs. The late poet Richard Hugo took the affirmative view: "Writing is hard and writers need help," he wrote in *The Triggering Town* (1979). "Pound was a creative-writing teacher for Eliot, Williams, Hemingway, and Yeats. Yeats, by Pound's admission, was Pound's creative-writing teacher in return. Nothing odd about that...as long as people write, there will be creative-writing teachers."

But Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Karl Shapiro takes quite the opposite stance. In a poem titled "Creative Writing" (1992), Shapiro railed, "English was in its autumn when this weed / Sprang up on every quad," and he fulminated against creative writing classes: "It spread from graduate school to kindergarten, / It moved to prisons, to aircraft carriers, / competing with movies, blackjack and craps..."

At the University of Houston we side with Hugo. We aren't foolish enough to think we can make a good writer out of a bad one. But we do believe we can save a good writer a lot of time and frustration by keeping him or her from wasting time with bad habits, wrong paths, and inappropriate models. "If we are doing our job," Hugo concluded, "creative writing teachers are performing a necessary

negative function." "Talent can't be taught," Donald Barthelme wrote, "but editing and craft can. We try to make repairs, enlargements, add a new fence, central heating, porches and verandas."

The exhibit *Signature Works* and this accompanying catalog celebrate that dedication to editing and craft and, above all, creativity. When we solicited statements of preference for a single work from our current faculty and some past faculty and graduates, we thought it an opportunity to learn how creative writers regard their output. We also wondered if very busy writers would be willing to take time away from present projects to consider and discuss earlier work.

The returns were even more illuminating than we had hoped. Only one individual failed to respond, while most were enthusiastic about the opportunity to select from their *oeuvre* a singular work which seemed significant in one way or another. "One way or another" is an understatement. You will find in these responses almost as many reasons for selection as there are pieces of writing. To list them is to realize the enormous number of choices that enter into any creative act, with, as Richard Howard wrote in his introduction to *Preferences: 51 American Poets Choose from Their Own Work & from the Past* (1974), "their enforced horizons of relevance, of relation, of relish: the physiognomy of preference, one might say."

Among the "reasons why" for selection as a signature work we encounter the following:

Because it was the only book that didn't disappoint its writer;  
Because it was the work after which everything became different for the writer;  
Because the piece actually was fun to write;  
Because of the thrill of first publication;  
Because it was the most challenging and humbling work undertaken;  
Because it was the most varied piece produced by the writer;  
Because it was the most affirmative;  
Because it carried the most emotional weight;  
Because it broke new formal ground;  
Because it took the most chances;  
Because it felt like the center of a writing life;  
Because the writer broke almost all of the rules set for himself or herself;  
Because it was the first book in which the writer found an individual voice;  
Because it changed the writer's life;  
Because it opened a new range;  
Because the soul of the work was the most organic;  
Because it gained new friends and readers for the writer;  
Because it was simply the best.

All of this, of course, is Monday morning quarterbacking. During the creative process, one does not deal with such considerations. As Donald Barthelme observed, "Do you think the Bible would have been written if people thought they were writing the Bible?" John Hollander put it another way: "The poems of mine that matter most to me are those I didn't fully understand when I wrote them." We are gratified that we can share our contributors' reflections on what they consider their signature works to date.

Our thanks to all the writers who contributed to this exhibition and catalog. Thanks to Patricia Bozeman, Head of Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries, whose idea it was to stage an exhibit celebrating the writing program, and who coordinated and produced the exhibition. Many thanks to Faith Venverloh, Associate Director of the Creative Writing Program, who made all the contacts, received all

materials, prepared the text about the authors, and cudgelled when cudgelling was needed. Thanks also to Special Collections staff: Randa Perkins, who supervised computer and print production; Deborah Lard, who input catalog text and prepared the many items for exhibit; and Barbara Nyles-Baron and Janarra Petty, who assisted in numerous ways with the exhibit and catalog. Special thanks to Allison Smythe, current Creative Writing Program student, who designed this catalog. Finally, we offer our especial appreciation to Inprint, Inc., and to the friends of the University of Houston Libraries for providing funds which made this publication possible.



D O N A L D B A R T H E L M E

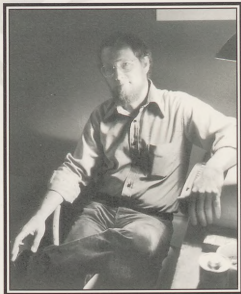


Photo: Jill Krenetz

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onald Barthelme began teaching in the Creative Writing Program in 1983 and was Cullen Distinguished Professor of English when he died in 1989. He was known both as a ground-breaking stylist and as a revered and influential teacher. The choice of his most significant work was made by his widow, Marion Barthelme, who lives in Houston and contributes in many ways to the Creative Writing Program.

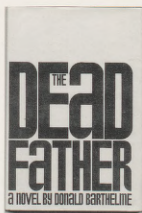




Most significant work: *The Dead Father*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1975.

I think Donald considered *The Dead Father* to be his most successful book. To begin with, I speculate this had to do with the mythological, fundamental nature of the subject.

— Marion Barthelme



*Donald Barthelme*

R O S E L L E N B R O W N



Photo: Mary Hoffman

A professor in the Creative Writing Program from 1982-85 and from 1989 to the present, Rosellen Brown teaches the writing of fiction and personal essays but is also the author of two books of poetry. Her four novels include the recent bestseller, *Before and After*, which has been optioned for movie production. She lives in Houston and is working on a collection of poems which will be published with a reprint of the original *Cora Fry* as a continuation of Cora Fry's life into the present.



Most significant work: *Cora Fry*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1977.

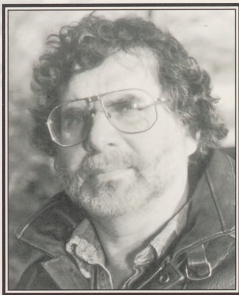
*Cora Fry* is my favorite of my eight books. That's because it's the only one that didn't disappoint me—didn't, that is, turn out to be less than I'd hoped when I began it, but, rather, more. Every writer, I think, expects something a little (or a lot) closer to some Platonic ideal than he or she is actually able to produce. In the case of *Cora*, which is a sort of novel in 84 poems spoken by a small-town New Hampshire woman, I started with modest expectations: I wrote the book to clear my head of the one before it, my first (real) novel, which had been noisy, difficult, full of contentious characters, and (when I saw it in print I thought this, though fortunately the critics didn't) wordy beyond bearing. *Cora* was lean from its very conception—written in syllabics, which are counted one by one, the way a child counts, on the fingers—and I saw it as open space, clean white pages interrupted by the occasional little black marks of its letters before I even imagined what those letters would say. Then, too, beyond the technical challenge of compressing a whole world into such tiny poems, I truly liked the woman who assembled herself slowly as the pages turned; I enjoyed her wit and modesty, and I thought her quiet discovery of what some might call feminism but which *Cora* would call just good sense and decency managed to make a realistic politics as it is lived by most women: more domestic, that is, than ideological. (My novel *Civil Wars*, set in Mississippi, approaches the same dichotomy very differently, but also insists upon the inseparability of home and world.)

*Cora Fry*, without the help of reviews or publicity, managed to sell very well and to make friends for its heroine in many unlikely places; I still meet people who bought copies to give to friends, or who have cherished their copies or asked if it's going to be reissued some time. (It had a brief but invisible re-emergence in the hands of a small press for a while, but it's gone again.) It's been made into a theatrical piece by two quite different adapters and has been performed by each in a number of theaters. Now I'm finishing a sequel: *Cora* nearly twenty years later. I want to hear from her how her life has gone, what's on her mind now, her children grown, her marriage no longer in the foreground, her parents aging, her part of the country in hard economic straits. And I'm encouraged that many of *Cora's* friends seem to be waiting eagerly to hear what she has to say.



Rosellen Brown

A L A N C H E U S E



Alan Cheuse was Visiting Associate Professor in the Creative Writing Program during the 1991-92 academic year and now teaches at George Mason University near Washington, D.C. He is currently producer and host of the National Public Radio short story magazine called "The Sound of Writing" and regularly reviews books for NPR's "All Things Considered."



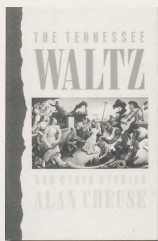
Most significant work: "Fishing for Coyotes" in *The Tennessee Waltz and Other Stories*. Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith Books, 1990.

I had left college teaching—a job in the Literature Division at Bennington College—in order to write full-time, being nearly forty years old and having decided that I was going to play "You Bet Your Life" and put every energy into the making of stories and novels. I moved with a small child and my wife at the time to the outskirts of Knoxville, Tennessee, where in the basement of a house in a subdivision called "Fair Oaks" (no oaks in sight, of course, until we planted a small pin oak in our front yard) I wrote a story called "Fishing for Coyotes." The story was set in Corpus Christi, Texas, and Padre Island nearby. After four drafts, I sent it to *The New Yorker* and one afternoon in May found a letter from them in our mailbox. I ran across the street to a neighbor's house and pounded on the door.

"Billie," I called out, "I sold a story to *The New Yorker*!"

My neighbor, a pharmaceutical salesman, poked his head out the door and said, "You did? Where is he?"

The story takes place at Christmas, and the magazine published it in their December 17, 1979, issue. In my heart, in my mind, if not in my life, everything was different for me after that.



Alan Cheuse

R O B E R T C O H E N

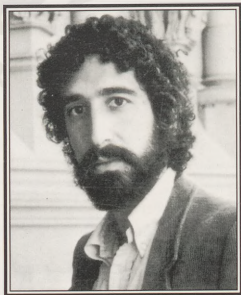


Photo: Jerry Bauer

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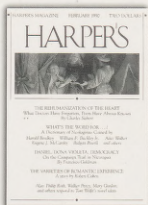
obert Cohen, novelist and short story writer, is now the Briggs-Copeland Lecturer in Creative Writing at Harvard University. As a Visiting Assistant Professor in the Creative Writing Program from 1989 until 1991, he was one of the first recipients of the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Writers' Awards.



Most significant work: "The Varieties of Romantic Experience" in *Harper's Magazine*, February, 1990.

I doubt if this is my "most significant" work—at least I hope it isn't—but I do associate it fondly with my two years at the University of Houston, because it was the first thing I wrote when I arrived there from New York. I remember the weather was horrific, which was not exactly news for August, and I was feeling, as I sat in my monkish apartment on West Main, even more irritable and isolated and unfocused than usual. What was I doing down here, anyway? The improbability of it—the randomness of it—had an odd effect on me when I turned on the typewriter: it loosened me up. I dashed off the first line, and then wrote a second to extend the first, and then a short while later I looked up, and the story was finished. It came in one sitting, which was unprecedented for me. So was the fact that I giggled to myself several times as I wrote it, which I knew to be a very bad sign. But I tried to ignore it.

The dirty little secret about writing is that sometimes it's actually kind of fun. This is a terrible thing to say, because it runs counter to ninety-five percent of the writer's experience, and because the rare moments of easy passage only make the dogged labor the next time seem that much more futile. But it bears remarking anyway. Whether any of this pleasure translates to the reader, well, that I suppose is another story.



John Barth



N A N C Y E I M E R S



After receiving her Ph.D. in Creative Writing from the University of Houston in May of 1988, Nancy Eimers taught at Northern Kentucky University for a year and is now Assistant Professor at Western Michigan University. Her poems have appeared in many literary journals and have been collected in her first book, published in 1991.

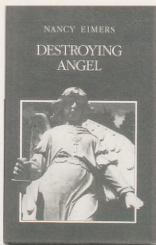




Most significant work: *Destroying Angel*. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1991.

Many of the poems in my book, *Destroying Angel*, came out of my six years in Houston. They serve for me now as a kind of retrospective, interior almanac, a wholly subjective recording of geological shifts and celestial data, star magnitudes, meteorological phenomena and gravitational forces that have their say in us, and had their say in me on Main Street in the Montrose neighborhood in the city Houston which I love, but only in the looking back. The freeways that islanded Montrose were a kind of atmospheric disturbance in my life: they exerted their unclean, enlivening influence, they exuded uneasiness as a constant rushing noise in the distance and as a stink my friend Ginger said was as if everyone in Houston were burning their morning toast.

Other small and random neighborings I remember are certain celestial slam-dunks and earthshaking free-throw bricks by the Houston Cougars, the lighted windows of friends' apartments on nearby streets, live oaks, a clumsy indoor flight of a tree roach, the rattling daily passage of nomadic can-men steering grocery carts, magnolia blossoms huge and white and threatening every private thought in the absolute abandon of opening. It pleases me to save what the poems are not themselves about, what Joseph Cornell called "sweepings," the bits of wood and glitter, rose petals and tiny plastic doll limbs that were thrown on the workshop floor, that never made it into the shadowbox but were loved by him, maybe for their sheer irrelevance.



Nancy Eimers

W I L L I A M G O Y E N

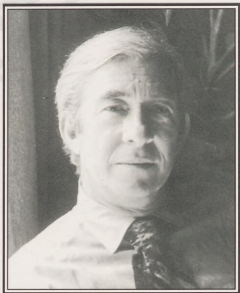


Photo: Michael Robert Cannata

William Goyen was one of the first visiting faculty in the Creative Writing Program, spending the spring semester of 1981 teaching fiction writing at the University of Houston. A native Texan who grew up in Houston, he died in 1983; the choice of his most significant work was made by Robert Phillips with the assistance of Mr. Goyen's widow, Doris Roberts.

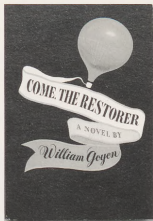


Most significant work: *Come, the Restorer*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1974.

In 1981, in a letter to bookseller Robin Moody of Daedalus Books in Washington, D.C., William Goyen ordered five copies of his *Collected Stories* from their current catalog, and then added as an afterthought,

"Also, there seem to be no copies anywhere of my favorite novel (among my own, that is), *Come, the Restorer* . . . Will you please let me know when you find some copies?"

—William Goyen to Moody, August 25, 1981



Using this letter as indication of Mr. Goyen's preference for that work, we have selected *Come, the Restorer* for this exhibit.

William Goyen

J E F F R E Y G R E E N E

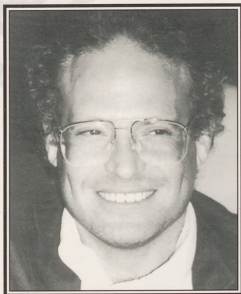


Photo: Stephen E. Malawista, M.D.

A 1986 graduate of the University of Houston Creative Writing Program with a Ph.D. in poetry, Jeffrey Greene now is Assistant Professor and Director of Freshman English at the University of New Haven. He publishes essays as well as poems and spends part of each year in Paris, France.



Most significant work: *To the Left of the Worshiper*.  
Cambridge, MA: alicejamesbooks, 1991.

June, 1991, my wife Mary had major surgery at the Clinique Bizet, and each afternoon while she was recovering, I brought her Coke, forbidden as being unhealthy (American). Then I read to her, often selecting things that I was interested in, knowing she would fade in and out of healing sleep. One book I chose was Neruda's *Memoirs*, and I was struck by his description of the day he held a copy of his first book:

*I have always maintained that the writer's task has nothing to do with mystery or magic, and that the poet's, at least, must be a personal effort for the benefit of all. The closest thing to poetry is a loaf of bread or a ceramic dish or a piece of wood lovingly carved, even if by clumsy hands. And yet I don't believe any craftsman except the poet, still shaken by the confusion of his dreams, ever experiences the ecstasy produced only once in his life, by the first object his hands have created.*

Neruda was in his late teens and broke from publishing costs, but soon people would be memorizing his poems. I envied the way Neruda cherished his first book—"its ink fresh and its paper still crisp." A poet deserves that thrill. My book *To the Left of the Worshiper* was in press, and I was still receiving materials from the designer in Boston. But instead of the thrill of publishing, I felt a tremendous freedom from the burdens of the first book, its consciousness of other poets, and the legacy of old poems. I had the opportunity to write the next book, not poem by poem, but with the whole work in mind. Publishing the book became a part of the art, a gift.

By mid-summer Mary could travel, and we rented a small building which was part of a renovated monastery in Serre di Rapolano. I'd write while Mary slept in the shade of a fig tree, the breeze from the fan leafing through her copy of *Our Man in Havana*. In retrospect, it was a summer of shared recovery.

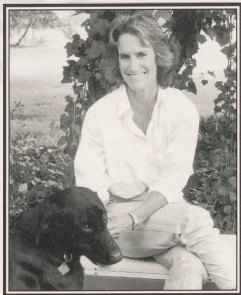
To the Left  
of the Worshiper



Poems by JEFFREY GREENE

Jeffrey Greene

O L I V E H E R S H E Y



Olive Hershey's first novel, *Track Dance*, was written as her thesis under the direction of Donald Barthelme when she earned her M.A. from the Creative Writing Program in 1987. She continues to live and write in Houston and is actively involved in supporting the Program and in teaching creative writing in the community.



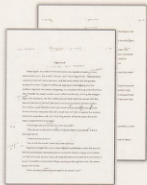
**Most significant work: *Big Bend: A Novel*. (Work in progress.)**

I began by thinking I would write about my first novel, *Truck Dance*, and its significance, but ended by deciding I'd bore people talking about a book four years after its publication. Hence I prefer to speak of my most humbling, which is to say my most challenging, project to date. It's a work in progress, an epic novel-trilogy-symphonic novel-topographic narrative-what-have-you, the working title of which is *Big Bend*. Currently weighing in at twelve hundred manuscript pages and roughly twelve pounds of packed paper, the opus is, at this writing, ungainly, unshapely, untrammelled, and still, to some extent, unknown. Unbelievable as this may sound, I have not yet discovered all that occurs in five story lines.

Since I haven't read an epic novel since *The Grapes of Wrath* and feel intimidated by volumes of formidable girth, I am beset by doubt and self-loathing. Moreover, the shade of Donald Barthelme roams my study at night to denounce my project as a piece of aesthetic terrorism. My agent, Liz Darhansoff, recently called the book "a monstrous thing to do to us." Of course, the actual landscape of West Texas is itself too vacant and vast to be contained in any novel however large, so that my greatest task is discovering a form for this book and a vocabulary for making the gorgeous emptiness of the place comprehensible to readers.

Though occasionally discouraged and still in transit after four years of work, I'm urged onward by the admiration and affection I feel for the Trans-Pecos region of Texas and for my characters, who are large enough of soul and psyche to survive in such a dry and lonesome space. Finally, as the years pass, I recognize the intense fragility and vulnerability of the hard-scrabble region I celebrate, and realize that it, too, shall come to "wear man's smudge and share man's smell." All the more reason to struggle to get it down.

Olivia Hershey





E D W A R D     H I R S C H



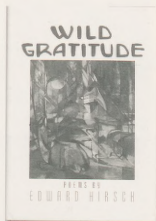
A University of Houston faculty member since 1985, Professor of English Edward Hirsch teaches poetry and literature for the Creative Writing Program; publishes poems, critical essays, reviews, articles, and interviews; and gives numerous readings nationwide. He lives in Houston with his wife and son and has just published his fourth book of poems, *Earthly Measures*.





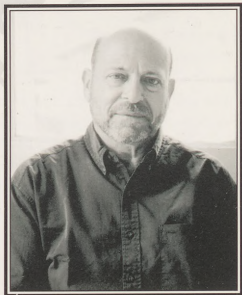
Most significant work: *Wild Gratitude*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986.

Robert Frost once said that if there are twenty-nine poems in a collection of poetry, then the book itself should be the thirtieth poem. I still have a feeling for the way the individual pieces of *Wild Gratitude* come together as a whole. The book commences with an epigraph from W. H. Auden, a talismanic prayer that sets out the pilgrim-narrator's central struggle—to transcend despair and show "an affirming flame." It begins with a playful, desperate call for help, and it concludes with the simple, astonishing, everyday news that "we are still here." It contains omens and elegies; it memorializes obscure figures (emaciated horses and village idiots) and great mad poets (Christopher Smart, John Clare). It takes up the subject of art and loneliness, it links the personal to the historical, it tries to come to terms with some of the worst moments of our barbarous century. It is loosely structured as a spiritual journey, a descent into hell, and a slow emerging. It takes a hard look at the worst and still finds reason to praise. It shows an affirming flame.



EDWARD HIRSCH

R I C H A R D H O W A R D



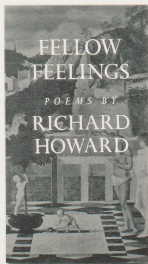
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ichard Howard is a Pulitzer Prize-winning poet who taught in the Creative Writing Program in 1985, 1986, and 1989 and has been Distinguished Professor since 1990. His eleventh book of poetry, *Like Most Revelations*, is being published in 1994. He is also well-known as a translator of over 150 works from the French and divides his time between Houston and New York, where he was recently named State Poet for 1993-95.



Most significant work: *Fellow Feelings*. New York: Atheneum, 1976.

It would be *Like Most Revelations*, a new book of poems to be published in March, 1994, that has my suffrage; do not most poets, though they may concede the worth, even the prepollence, of previous work, prefer the achievement they know to have come into being with the weight, or the buoyancy, of all they now are, and of all they have now abandoned? But you have asked for a preference among existing works, and that is readily, if factitiously, stated: of the nine books which exist as objects, I have a predilection for *Fellow Feelings*, published in 1976 after I had emerged from a mysterious illness ("Semi-Private," "Personal Values"), which casts a renewing light on procedures devised in earlier volumes; I think it is the collection most varied in compositional resource, with the largest proportion of poems I can acknowledge as dramatically applicable to readerly concerns, though I cannot always recognize those concerns of 17 years ago as mine and not some oddly conversant stranger's.



P O L L Y K O C H



A fter receiving her M.A. from the Creative Writing Program in 1989, Polly Koch remained in Houston, teaching fiction writing at the University of Houston and in community workshops. In addition, she occasionally edits museum catalogs and recently completed work on her second novel.



Most significant work: *Invisible Borders*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991.

Well, it was first. First novel, first-born, all the child and birth analogies weirdly apropos. How I wrote it—the initial construction of a theoretical “project” shaping the book, which is militantly nonchronological, the ballooning sense of barely containing the fictional reality as it emerged—would eventually become my *modus operandi* in writing other novels. The feeling of this first book, though, was different, with its abrupt and episodic moments of stasis, the occasional mired struggle with language, the rush through the last half toward completion (see?: like labor, or so I’ve been told). Then it was there, itself, and that was strange, too...

Though I was well into my thirties when I wrote it, the novel seems to me even now distinctly youthful, not in terms of naïveté or of so-called typical first-novelist gaffes, but in its dark, quasi-morbid exuberance, perhaps. The persistent (and self-protective) mystery of Elise. An innocence of a sort, which was useful during the period of time after it when I rejected what I had wrought, appalled by its thingness, its material weight. By its potential threat to me. No one talks about that part of childbearing, the fluid vulnerability to the first-born’s pain; it’s really an awful process, when you think about it. But from the novel’s ingratiating and youthful good will, I would eventually salvage some kind of love. The first time you do anything, I suppose, has by its nature an exaggerated extremity. I doubt that this will be my “best” book in the end, but it will always carry—in its own fiercely defensive and oddly sad sense—the most emotional weight.



*Polly Kors*

P H I L L I P L O P A T E

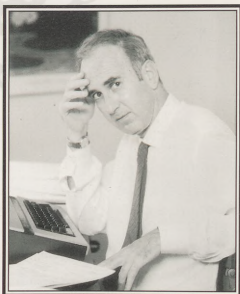


Photo: Georgia McInnis

N

ow Professor of English at Hofstra University in New York City, Phillip Lopate taught in the Creative Writing Program at the University of Houston from 1980 until 1989 and was Acting Director in 1981. He is the author of two essay collections, two novels, two poetry collections, a memoir, several screenplays, and numerous articles on architecture, urban form, and travel.

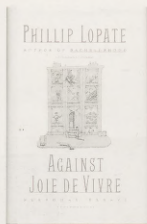


Most significant work: *Against Joie de Vivre: Personal Essays*.  
New York: Poseidon Press, 1989.

*Against Joie de Vivre* is most significant to me because it contains my best writing. I don't think there is any question that, of the three types of writing—novels, poetry, essays—I've done, my best, most natural form is the essay. And in *Against Joie de Vivre* I was able to plumb the depths of the essay form, to go to the bottom of it, to stretch it as far as it could go, at least in my hands. This was particularly true for what I think of as the five long, cornerstone pieces in the book: the title essay, "Samson and Delilah and the Kids," "Suicide of a School Teacher," "Anticipations of *La Nefte*," and "Uncle Vanya for Children." No doubt there were graceful and interesting things in the shorter pieces, like the one about Houston or "Waiting for the Book to Come Out," but they tend to be more conventional, one-theme explorations, whereas in "Against Joie de Vivre" and "Samson and Delilah" I was in new territory, facing the unknown.

"Samson and Delilah" is an everything-but-the-kitchen-sink piece. It contains autobiography, opera, movies, the Bible, sexual politics, all weirdly braided together. It was hard to write, and I didn't know until the last minute if it would all come together. "Against Joie de Vivre" was written in what for me was a very mandarin, formal and philosophical voice: it was a stretch. I wrote it under the direct influence of Montaigne's epigrammatic sentences and free associations. I think it's significant that my first book of essays, *Bachelorhood*, was written more under the influence of Hazlitt and Lamb, whereas in *Against Joie de Vivre* I went back, or forward, to Montaigne. Also, *Against* was written during my years at the University of Houston, when I taught a course in the History of the Essay and became much more self-conscious about the form. Since then, I've edited an anthology called *The Art of the Personal Essay*, which Doubleday-Anchor is bringing out in 1994. This volume grows directly out of my researches in *Against Joie de Vivre*, particularly the piece called "Whatever Happened to the Personal Essay."

It's a little galling that two of my earlier books, *Being with Children* and *Bachelorhood*, got more critical and popular attention than what is to me my best book. I don't think the world has caught up yet with what I accomplished in *Against Joie de Vivre*: compare it to other essay collections by my contemporaries and you'll see what I mean, how tame they are in comparison. Don't get me wrong, I think *Bachelorhood* is fine and entertaining, but it doesn't break new ground formally, and it doesn't take as many chances—it's more genial, more accessible. Of course, the title, *Against Joie de Vivre*, is a little off-putting. Face it: nobody can be against *joie de vivre*, not even me. It's a ludicrous notion that came to me during a boring dinner party in Houston, and I simply tried to take it as far as I could. I may never do better with the essay form than what's in that book. It just about says everything I know.



Phillip Lopate



B E V E R L Y L O W R Y

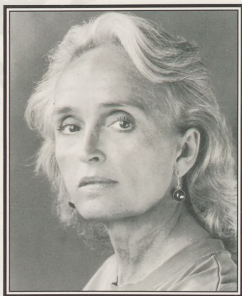


Photo: Marion Ettinger

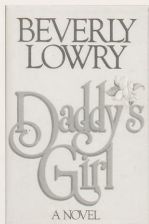
*B*everly Lowry was an Associate Professor in the Creative Writing Program from its inception in 1979 until 1984 and currently teaches creative writing at the University of Montana. Best-known for her novels set in the South, Ms. Lowry also writes short stories, essays, book reviews, and journalistic articles.





Most significant work: *Daddy's Girl*. New York: The Viking Press, 1979.

*Daddy's Girl*, it seems to me, is both exuberant and daring—two qualities I admire a great deal (in people and literature)—not to mention funny. I put a lot into this book; it feels like the center of my writing life. When I do readings from it, I look up and see chips of my life flying past, I rock with the music, enjoy the word play, end up feeling pretty much okay about what the book does and how it sings and what risks it takes. *Daddy's Girl* has an energy I lost for a while and only now have rediscovered.



Beverly Lowry

C Y N T H I A M A C D O N A L D



As the founder and first director of the Creative Writing Program, Cynthia Macdonald has had a profound influence on creative writing not only at the University of Houston but also in the entire Southwest. She continues as a faculty member and advisor to the Program, while regularly publishing volumes of poetry; writing reviews, stories, and personal essays; and maintaining a small practice as a psychotherapist.



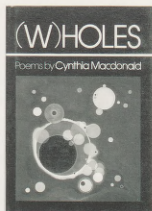
Most significant work: "Burying the Babies" in *(W)holes*.  
New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980.

"Burying the Babies," a 27-page poem in *(W)holes*—I literally buried it by not including it in *Living Wills: New and Selected Poems*. Yet the poem calls to me from underground as if it were Harvey Weinstein, the tuxedo factory owner left in a cinder block and dirt-covered pit near New York City's Westside Highway by his employee-kidnappers. Wallace Stevens called to Ramon Fernandez, Harvey Weinstein to Fermin Rodriguez, "Burying the Babies" to me, I guess, telling me it should not have been buried, should have been included. And I agree; I think it is either the most important poem I've written or the second-most. The other is the title poem (sequence) of "Alternate Means of Transport." I could only include one of the two [in *Living Wills*] because of length, and readers seem to find "Burying" so difficult that I chose "Alternate Means."

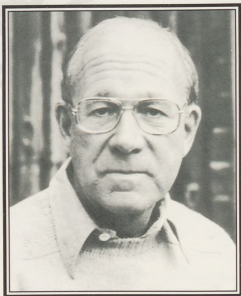
After poet Dave Smith reviewed *(W)holes* favorably but said he'd reread "Burying" several times and couldn't understand it, I thought, because Dave is an accomplished reader, maybe it couldn't be understood. Then Josef Jarjab, who was translating it for an underground Czech jazz magazine, asked me many questions about his translation choices, and his questions made me know it was understandable. What a relief!

What makes me so attached to the poem? First, I think the way its narrative structure formed itself, or was formed by me, is unique: it uses the multiple meanings of a single word as a narrative pivot, as if the word is a traffic circle or roundabout with many different roads—the multiple meanings—leading out from it. The roads cross other roads, which have emanated from other circles, forming dense overlappings of narrative like complicated freeway exchanges. Second, I like the way the quotes function as an intrinsic part of the narrative, two bridges carrying their traffic of meaning in both directions.

"Burying" will have to wait for a Collected Poems to re-emerge. This appearance, at the University of Houston Libraries, is like Harvey Weinstein's hand and forearm coming out of the pit through a small opening before the police had fully uncovered him and opened the steel door.



# H O W A R D M O S S



*H*oward Moss was Poet-in-Residence with the Creative Writing Program in the fall of 1979 and the spring of 1987. The author of twelve volumes of poetry and four of criticism, he was also the poetry editor of *The New Yorker* from 1948 until his death in 1987. The choice of most significant work was made by his close friend, Daniel D'Arezzo, who is currently preparing *Mr. Moss'* biography.



Most significant work: "Long Island Springs" in *New Selected Poems*. New York: Atheneum, 1985.

Howard Moss obsessively collected potential titles all his life, jotting them in notebooks that littered his desks and bedside tables, and was always generous (or meddlesome, depending on one's point of view) in suggesting titles for his friends' books. When Howard was preparing his final volume for publication, he considered titling it *Long Island Springs: Selected Poems, 1945-1985*. An alternative title was *The Miles Between: Selected Poems, 1945-1985*. His editor, Harry Ford, to whom the book is dedicated, prevailed on Howard to call it *New Selected Poems*, a choice that preserved him from setting one poem as a "signature work" above all others.

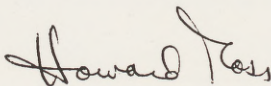
Still, if one were looking for a signature work, "Long Island Springs" would do: elegiac, direct, complex, urbane, and deeply felt. Howard bridled when reviewers routinely called his work "urbane," as if an Olympian chill blew through all his poetry. Wit and learning were second nature to him, but feeling always came first. The lapidary style of "Long Island Springs"—the near-rhymes, conversational tone, undulating rhythms—doesn't dazzle with the formal pyrotechnics he summoned in "Burning Love Letters," "At the Algonquin," or "Tourists." Instead, he uses his mastery of technique to perform the disappearing act that characterizes his later poems in *Rules of Sleep* (1984), in which the present is evanescent and the vanished always make their presence felt.

The urban pastoral Howard produced in "Long Island Springs" inevitably recalls Whitman, but primarily because of its topic. Howard's real affinities lay more with the founding mother of American poetry, Emily Dickinson, whom he regarded as the "mirror" counterpoising Whitman's "window." Howard knew the window turns mirror when the dark night of the soul descends. In *The Magic Lantern of Marcel Proust*, Howard wrote that *Remembrance of Things Past* is the story of how a boy becomes a great writer. In "Long Island Springs," he leaves a testament of how a boy develops the pathetic response to life's ironies.

— Daniel D'Arezzo

HOWARD  
MOSS

NEW  
SELECTED  
POEMS



W I L L I A M O L S E N



A 1988 graduate of the University of Houston with a Ph.D. in Creative Writing—Poetry, William Olsen now teaches at Western Michigan University along with his wife, Nancy Eimers. Selections of his poetry were chosen for inclusion in *New American Poets of the Nineties*.



*Most significant work: The Hand of God and a Few Bright Flowers.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988.

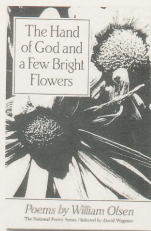
In one of his poems Derek Walcott says, "the worst crime is to make a career out of our conscience." My many lesser crimes include my having a career at all, and, to the extent that this first book and my education have been accomplices in this crime, I am extremely grateful.

I am, to use that preposition the unemployed favor, between books, the first and the second, so I'm not ready to sever all ties with this apprentice work. For one thing, the poems in it range over so great a period of time—the oldest I wrote in 1978, the newest, 1987—that for me to pretend to reject this book outright would be going incognito. Chickening out. Plus, I think I distrust the mania in contemporary poetry for make-overs in style. Either that mania seems consumerist in origin, or I can't subscribe to apocalyptic notions of personality.

Epiphanies are not the rule in my life. All I see in my poems are notations towards a slow and dim (and interruptible) awakening.

Yet I have for this material evidence of my work a fondness I can't possibly have for a newer work. It still holds up pretty well in my mind as a whole, and its publication came at a fine time, a time when I needed a job and I needed to think of my poetry as having come to some completion, some playing out of early obsessions. The truth may be that some of these obsessions are with me for life, that my life will probably play out before I understand these obsessions.

I've always come to poetry as a sanctuary for the spirit. In my case, some of the seemingly least personal poems are, with regard to spirit, the most autobiographical. Stevens' inward intelligence was the most passionate aspect of his life as it was lived, in the dour realm of financial success; for Williams, the life-lived, messy as it was, informed the most passionate aspect of his intelligence. Both were coming at the same thing, at giving shape to the love of what happened to be most proximate to them. Some of my early poems may have gotten closer to that intensity of attention I choose to call spirit than I can now allow myself to admit. Many more fall short of craft and heart in ways it was essential for me not to suspect at the time if I was to go on writing.



*William Olsen*



R O B E R T P H I L L I P S



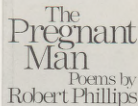
Photo: Geoffrey Kerrigan

Poet, short story writer, editor, and literary executor, Robert Phillips has been the Director of the Creative Writing Program since 1991 and also teaches undergraduate classes in creative writing. He gives numerous readings throughout the Southwest; maintains a rigorous schedule of administrative, teaching, and editing duties; and is preparing a new book of poetry called *Breakdown Lane*.



Most significant work: *The Pregnant Man*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1978.

To me, my "most significant" single work may be the poetry book, *The Pregnant Man*. It was published after a long period between collections (my first had been published by a small press twelve years before). It was not that I wasn't producing poems; it was simply that no publisher would take me on. When Doubleday accepted the book, I finally felt as if I were a poet. It was widely reviewed and won an award. Doubleday subsequently published my third collection as well.



*The Pregnant Man* is "most significant" for another reason. It marked the achievement of my individual style and voice. My first collection clearly owed debts to Hardy, E. A. Robinson, and John Crowe Ransom. But *The Pregnant Man* is all Phillips. It is the first of my books to infuse humor into the poetry, and the lines are lean and trim—elements I maintain in my poems to this day.

The book is also the most difficult of mine to find. Doubleday published an edition of six thousand. They sold three thousand—which I'm told is like *Gone With The Wind* for poetry. Then, through a clerical error, the remaining three thousand copies were pulped.

*Robert Phillips*

S T A N L E Y P L U M L Y

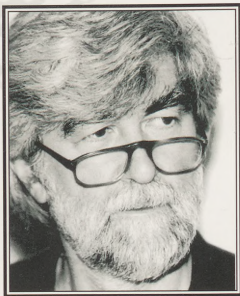


Photo: Jacques Rancour

*I*nvited in 1979 by Cynthia Macdonald to help develop the Creative Writing Program, poet Stanley Plumly served as co-director and then acting director in addition to his teaching duties. Upon his departure from Houston in 1985, he joined the University of Maryland, where he now is a member of the creative writing faculty in the Department of English.



Most significant work: "The Wyoming Poetry Circuit" in *Boy on the Step*. New York: The Ecco Press, 1989.

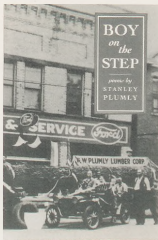
I thought about trying this poem for years afterward, and whenever I tried, it came out as a travelogue—a series, a sequence of places, people, and visitations. I kept mis-seeing the landscape and the experience as linear, as a movement across an open space and through time. It wasn't until I was able to see the shape of the experience as circular—in the round—and within time that I was able to see the shape of the poem, a poetry circuit.

The circuit started on a brisk October Sunday in 1979 in Billings, Montana, the closest airport in those parts. I was to be met by the person who would serve as driver, readings' introducer, and general good company, a young woman named Gretel Ehrlich who had come to Wyoming as a documentary filmmaker and who had fallen in love with the place and a sheep rancher and stayed. Working for the state's art council was a way to help make ends meet, since ranching was seasonal. On this night, though, poetry season and sheep-herding had coincided. Gretel arrived late, covered in sheep shit and trail dust, having just come down from the high country a couple of hundred miles away.

From there began the best poetry tour I've ever taken. Inevitably, in such an outside and outsized place, you become a kind of traveling sideshow, with variations in the act intended to keep you as well as your audience interested. There were no schools, save one, I think, so that the readings—over the course of a couple of weeks—more often occurred in the town's chief municipal building, a hunting lodge, as filled with stuffed animals and heads as with an audience. As for the audiences: no one seemed to be from Wyoming, but from all those other lost places in poems, whether the setting was Ohio, the South or Northwest. Gretel introduced, I read. From Sheridan to Cheyenne.

The wonder of the trip, of course, was the landscape, an alter-planetary landscape that you couldn't confront but, at best, implicate yourself into. That's why I begin my poem in distraction, in other emotionally appropriate places—Virginia woods, California pasture. I felt I could come to the real material in my poem from an angle only, and through implication. The details in the poem are literal; they had already been transformed. We were one dusky afternoon, for instance, stopped in our tracks by a herd of elk. They paused and took a hard look at us and cursed, no doubt. Gretel's truck sat there and waited and idled like another sort of animal, cowed.

Then there were lots of things that happened you could never get straight in a poem.



S U S A N P R O S P E R E

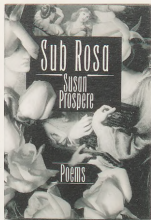


Susan Prospero has lived and worked in Houston since earning her M.A. in Creative Writing at the University of Houston in 1983. Also a graduate of Tulane Law School, she is currently employed at a Houston law firm. Her first collection of poems, *Sub Rosa*, was a finalist for the 1991-92 *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize in Poetry.



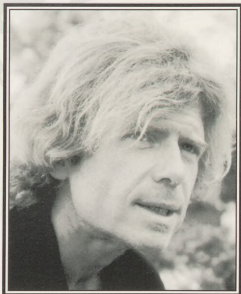
Most significant work: *Sub Rosa*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992.

Because I was/am a poet in the 1980's and 1990's in the United States of America, and because I'm fundamentally a pessimist, I'd have to say the fact that I have a book of poetry that most of my family and some of my friends have been willing to fork out \$18.95 plus tax for seems to me incredibly significant—not as an indication of accomplishment but as a stroke of luck, a bit of serendipity to keep me off balance, an existential joke, a wink, bingo. The poems are poems; far more talented poets and wondrous poems exist than do books. The fact that the poems were wrought at considerable psychical expense is commonplace. The book is the pleasure—something handy, saving hours of shuffling through typed and re-typed poems; something with (small) royalties and remainders, with beginning and closure; something to put away, to acquire the musty smell of old, shelved volumes, the yellowing pages; something with physical weight and measure, tactile, bound, a keepsake; something beautifully covered, abundant with overblown roses and eloquent blurbs, and on the back flap, sitting beside me, my dog Otis, a consolation—for as long as he lived—beyond all other.



Susan Prospere

J A M E S R O B I N S O N



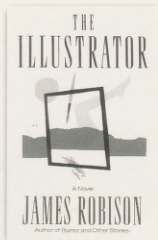
As a Visiting Associate Professor in the Creative Writing Program since 1988, James Robison teaches both undergraduate and graduate fiction workshops. He also has taught at various conferences and writing workshops around the country while producing short stories and a novel.





**Most significant work:** *The Illustrator*. New York: Summit Books, 1988.

In my novel, *The Illustrator*, I wanted to break all the rules I had set for myself as a writer. I wanted to unlearn all lessons, to write against the critics of the day, against my editors, and even, perversely, against my own sure instincts about what a novel should be. The book was intended as a transgression, in its form and content. Writing such a fiction is strenuous and liberating in equal measure. I can't judge the book's merits or flaws, but I know that the act and method of its composition were not simply important for me, they were imperative.



A large, bold, handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to be 'James Robison'.

M A R Y R O B I S O N

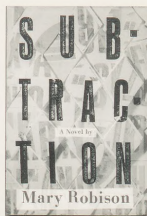


Mary Robison, novelist and short story writer, has been a member of the fiction faculty of the Creative Writing Program since 1987. She has also taught at Harvard, Oberlin, and Johns Hopkins and has written screenplays in addition to her other fiction publications.



Most significant work: *Subtraction*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991.

I worked on this book for ten years.



*Mary Robison*

P A T T I A N N   R O G E R S



Photo: Yvonne Maste

One of the Creative Writing Program's first graduates—with an M.A. awarded in 1981—Pattann Rogers has published six books and two chapbooks of poems, and her poetry appears in many anthologies and magazines. She now lives in Colorado and teaches poetry writing as a visiting professor at various universities.



Most significant work: "The Rites of Passage" in *The Expectations of Light*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981.

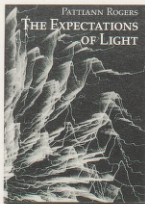
"The Rites of Passage" is a poem that I consider significant to my work as a whole. I won't say this poem is the most significant piece, but it is very significant.

It was in this poem that I first achieved a stance enabling me to incorporate into my work a subject and vocabulary I had been attempting to utilize poetically over several years. When it was written, I had been trying for a long time to express in my poems the imaginative vision and powerful emotions I felt were implicit in the knowledge revealed to us by science and to make use of the evocative vocabulary inherent to that knowledge.

"The Rites of Passage" was the first poem in which I found the voice I needed to explore and celebrate the human dimensions of science, addressing through it our concerns about the origins of life and death, consciousness and language.

This poem has added significance for me, because it was part of a group of poems that received the Theodore Roethke Prize from *Poetry Northwest* in 1981. This prize was one of the first my poems had received, and I saw it as a validation of the direction I was pursuing in my writing.

I remember "The Rites of Passage" as the crossing of a boundary, the beginning of new explorations, the point of departure for a new map.



Pattiann Rogers

J. A L L Y N R O S S E R



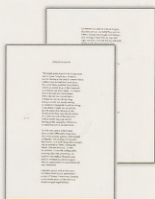
during the 1991-92 academic year, J. Allyn Rosser taught undergraduate writing courses at the University of Houston and since then has been Assistant Professor of English at the University of Michigan. Her first book of poems, *Bright Moves*, won the Samuel French Morse Poetry Prize in 1990.



**Most significant work:** "Delayed Response." (Unpublished poem.)

I have chosen "Delayed Response," a new and unpublished poem, to be included in the University of Houston Libraries' exhibition for several reasons. In the first place, the incident which gave rise to the poem took place during the year I taught as a Visiting Writer at the University of Houston. In the second place, the poem combines several themes that have colored my work since I first began to write seriously—and by seriously I mean as though my life depended on it. Finally, and most importantly, I have chosen it as the most recent poem I have completed to my near satisfaction. I believe and hope that at any given moment in my life I will consider my most recent poem to be my most "significant" work. This is in keeping with my conviction that there is no poem I have read with real interest and feeling that has not affected my writing in some way, however imperceptibly; nor have I written a single poem that has not guided me in some way toward all subsequent efforts. Each new poem, if this is true, builds on a cumulative significance, and (one hopes) comes prismatically closer to capturing the significance of one's whole life. Possibly hogwash, but I like to think it might be true.

It is a rare and serendipitous hour that allows us to spin poetry directly out of the raw stuff of our experience, and for this reason, "Delayed Response" was a pleasure to write. The squeamish among you will forgive me for adding a grotesque Houstonian anecdote. What is not in the poem is my vivid memory of stooping beside a window to pick up a piece of paper (rice-paper thin) from the floor; noticing it was peculiarly shaped, rather like a lizard; realizing it had once, in fact, been a lizard, and that I must unwittingly have shut a window on it. The insufficiently repressed horror of this memory returned months later while I was chasing an actual living lizard about the house, and the idea that "it was going to die" kept me chasing and cajoling the impossibly nimble and stubborn creature until it was safely outdoors. The truth is, an hour later the lizard was peering at me, clinging to the sliding door's screen—apparently trying to get back in. And there before me was that correspondence pile, that letter. Proof that we poets do not make metaphors; rather, they force themselves upon us.



J. Allen Ross



# N T O Z A K E S H A N G E



Well-known as a playwright as well as a fiction writer and a poet, Ntozake Shange taught for the UH Creative Writing Program in 1983-84 and the Department of Drama in 1984-85. She has received two Obies; collaborates often with other artists, especially dancers and musicians; and is a committed educator in the fields of literature, feminism, and writing and performance art.



Most significant work: "Open Up/This is the Police" in *The Love Space Demands (a continuing saga)*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991.

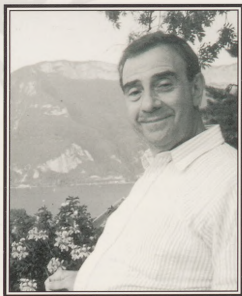
I found working through the poems in *Love Space* with diverse collections of brilliant and challenging musicians and choreographers to be the most exciting artistic experience in my life, since *For Colored Girls*. Working with Stanley Williams of San Francisco's Lorraine Hansberry Theatre and later, with Ricardo Khan of The Crossroads Theatre in New Brunswick provided my collective, The Lunar Unit, with great technical support and aesthetic options. Remarkable relationships and possibilities have been afforded me through my association with Jean-Paul Bourrelly (guitar); John Purcell (reeds), Billie Spaceman Patterson (composer-guitar), and with the indefatigable choreographer, Mickey Davidsa, and writer-director, Talvin Wilkes.

The adventure was sorting the multiple voices and attitudes in "Open Up" without forcing what Edward Said would call "contrapuntal tests" into a linear narrative form.



Ntozake Shange

D A N I E L S T E R N



aniel Stern joined the Creative Writing Program in the fall of 1992 as the Cullen Distinguished Professor of English and teaches both undergraduate and graduate writing workshops in fiction in addition to literature classes. His publications include nine novels, two collections of short stories, several plays and screenplays, and more than one hundred essays and reviews, and his passions include playing the cello in chamber music groups.



Most significant work: "The Interpretation of Dreams by Sigmund Freud: a story" in *Twice Told Tales: Stories*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989.

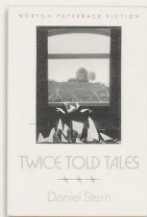
At a party a while ago, Joyce Carol Oates introduced me to an editor as a writer who had created a new form: the twice-told tale. I would not claim anything so ambitious. But inventing this particular way of telling stories did change my life as a writer.

I wrote an early Twice-Told Tale, "The Interpretation of Dreams by Sigmund Freud: a story" (the title is transformed from insanity to mere irony by the addition of the words 'a story'), shortly after completing a seven-year psychoanalysis. An understandable touch ofchutzpa, adding my name and commentary to the Master's masterwork. You rewrite me; I rewrite you. Punk!

Not so neat, however, are the ways of fiction. After so many years of self-examination as a patient, I was working, as a writer, to escape the narrow constrictions of the narrator or voice which can be easily confused with the author—as I see it, a major American artistic malady. Dickstein, the academic in the "Freud" story, is certainly not the author (this author never attended college). But in exploring the motifs of fathers and sons and certain personal encounters (with widows and others too 'personal' to be explicit about), I find that I had, indeed, graduated. Not only from the couch but to the comic mode, as a writer.

Actually, the Freud story was the second. The first was "The Liberal Imagination by Lionel Trilling: a story." This story has a protagonist even further removed from my personal character. What I found was: the further I got from the typical 'personal' voice, the more strongly I could deal with deeply personal material. It is the comedy of contrast that gives emotional subjects such as loss, age, and death the edge they need to avoid submerging the reader in false emotion.

Singing in concert with Hemingway, Karl Marx, Henry James, Wallace Stevens, Hawthorne and others has brought these stories a considerable amount of critical praise. But praise flows—or ebbs. What this book did for me was to open a new range with which to sing my songs.



Daniel Stern

G A I L D O N O H U E S T O R E Y



Photo: Rick Kientzger

Not only did Gail Donohue Storey graduate from the Creative Writing Program with an M.A. in 1982, but she also remained at UH to become Administrative Director of the Program from 1982-86 and to teach fiction workshops from 1984-86. She continues to live in Houston, where she is working on her second novel, a sequel to *The Lord's Motel*.

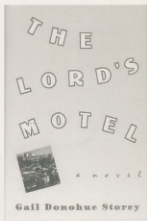


Most significant work: *The Lord's Motel*. New York: Persea Books, 1992.

My novel, *The Lord's Motel*, explores matters of eros and soul in our sexually and spiritually discomfited time. I'm interested in how we create the myth of the divided self and play it out in contemporary life. My characters try to resolve their confusion of soul through their relationships with their lovers and families and through their work, which has to do with pressing social problems.

*The Lord's Motel* deals with serious issues of sexual manipulation and domestic violence but tries to make the pain bearable through wit and knowing humor. I hope I've told a good story, not simply about getting away from Mr. Wrong and with Mr. Right, but about the inner transformation one must go through to be ready for an intimate relationship.

I find certain preoccupations in my writing, both linear and nonlinear, having to do with these conflicting mysteries of the erotic and the soul. I began my writing career as a poet; Richard Wilbur said that my collection of poems had to do with "the conflicting claims of order and feeling." Later, as a student of Donald Barthelme and Rosellen Brown at the University of Houston, I turned to writing short fictions as pure states of feeling, at once sublimated and erotically charged. In "Totally Nude Live Girls" and other stories, I tried to convey intense love and desire unmediated by conventional expectations. "Geometry Hotline" used a mathematical proof with diagrams to "prove" the existence of angels. *The Lord's Motel* is my most significant work to date because its humor is the most outrageous, its sex the most erotic, its soul the most organic.



Gail Donohue Storey

P A U L A W E B B



Photo: Paul Hester

Paula Webb has lived in Houston for over twenty years, earning a B.A. in art history and a B.F.A. in painting from Rice University and an M.A. in creative writing from the University of Houston in 1988. She worked on her novel, *Domestic Life*, under the direction of Donald Barthelme during her graduate studies and enjoyed its successful publication in 1992 and the sale of the rights for a movie production in 1994.





Most significant work: *Domestic Life: A Novel in Parts*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992.

If you guessed that my first book, *Domestic Life: A Novel in Parts*, was my most significant work to date, you would be nearly right.

I can still hear the voice of every teacher I ever had in that book. Good or bad, better or worse, *Domestic Life* was our midnight collaboration, and I never again expect to work in such rowdy company.

I worked late at the keyboard, trying to get just one character to breathe on the page, while twenty, twenty-five years of them came to buzz like mosquitoes around my good ear. Night after night, I booted up after dinner dishes were done, and out of nowhere, here they came, uninvited, buzz, buzz, buzz, offering all kinds of advice and opinions, directions and judgments, every bit of it unsolicited and every one of them rigidly insistent about the way my work had to be. Their remarks were pointed and often pithy, occasionally amusing and almost always correct, and very often, vulgar.

Now I liked almost all of them and have always enjoyed a heated debate, but it got pretty noisy pretty quick, and when they began (as was inevitable, I suppose) to fight among themselves, I had to dismiss them from the room or risk never finishing the damn book. They left, one by one, or in groups, and it wasn't easy to let them go, but I let them go. I had to.

Finally, it was just me and the keyboard and this quiet, and I said right out to nothing and nobody, "I'm just going to have to do this like I do this. I can't do it like anybody else," and that's when I heard this roar behind me.

I looked around, and they had all sneaked back in and were sitting in the bleachers and waving banners and roaring. "It's about goddamned time," they said as one voice, and then they roared some more, and then they left again, slapping high fives all around.

I finished *Domestic Life* in relative quiet, on my own time, under my own rules. It is my book, my first, I hope not my last, I hope not the Most Significant Thing I ever write. Still, it owes much more than a nod to all of them, the them who understood what making a thing was all about, the them who thought I might be able to make some things of my own. Very often now, late at night, I find myself thinking of them, all of them, all of them together. I miss them. I miss their company and their opinions and their generousities, and sometimes I even miss their noise.



Paula Webb

J O Y W I L L I A M S



Photo: Jerry Bauer

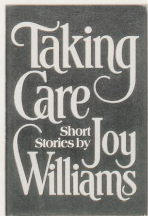
Although best known as the author of three novels and two collections of short stories, Joy Williams also writes nonfiction, including articles on Africa and the Everglades and a history and guidebook on the Florida Keys. She is based in Key West and came from there to teach undergraduate and graduate writing courses for the Creative Writing Program during the spring of 1982.



Most significant work: *Taking Care*. New York: Random House, 1982.

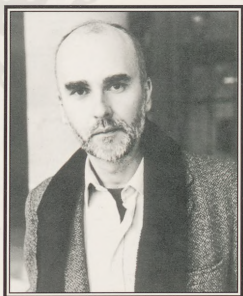
The University of Houston was my very first teaching experience. I was referred to as the visiting faculty person, I think. I also did a reading there for the very first time. I read the story, "Taking Care." My first collection of stories was published while I was at Houston as well. I was only there ten weeks, but it seemed a lifetime in more ways than one. The collection, *Taking Care*, was one of the most beautiful-looking books I've ever seen, but it was not widely reviewed, even on its looks. We had a sort of publication party for it in February, which is also my birthday month. All the students came and some of the actual faculty persons. I wanted a picture of a German shepherd on the cake, which I got, but the frostinged likeness was so repellent that we kept the box shut and only exposed it for instants of time.

Later I wrote a story about Houston, which had among its parts a sinister tanning parlor, the beach at Padre Island with its plastic from all over the world, and the roller rink way out, somewhere very far out there. I returned not long ago and saw The Orange Show and the beer can house and my own rental house near the University, hooded by live oaks and illuminated by its crime lights day and night, and oddly I remember my whole experience there quite fondly now.



A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Joy Williams'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

A D A M Z A G A J E W S K I



B

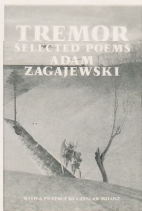
orn in Poland and a resident of Paris since 1982, Adam Zagajewski has taught graduate classes in poetry and literature for the Creative Writing Program every spring semester since 1988. He was an active dissident in Europe during the seventies, and many of his poems and essays deal with political issues. He won a Guggenheim fellowship in 1992 and is currently preparing for publication a book of essays titled *Two Cities*.



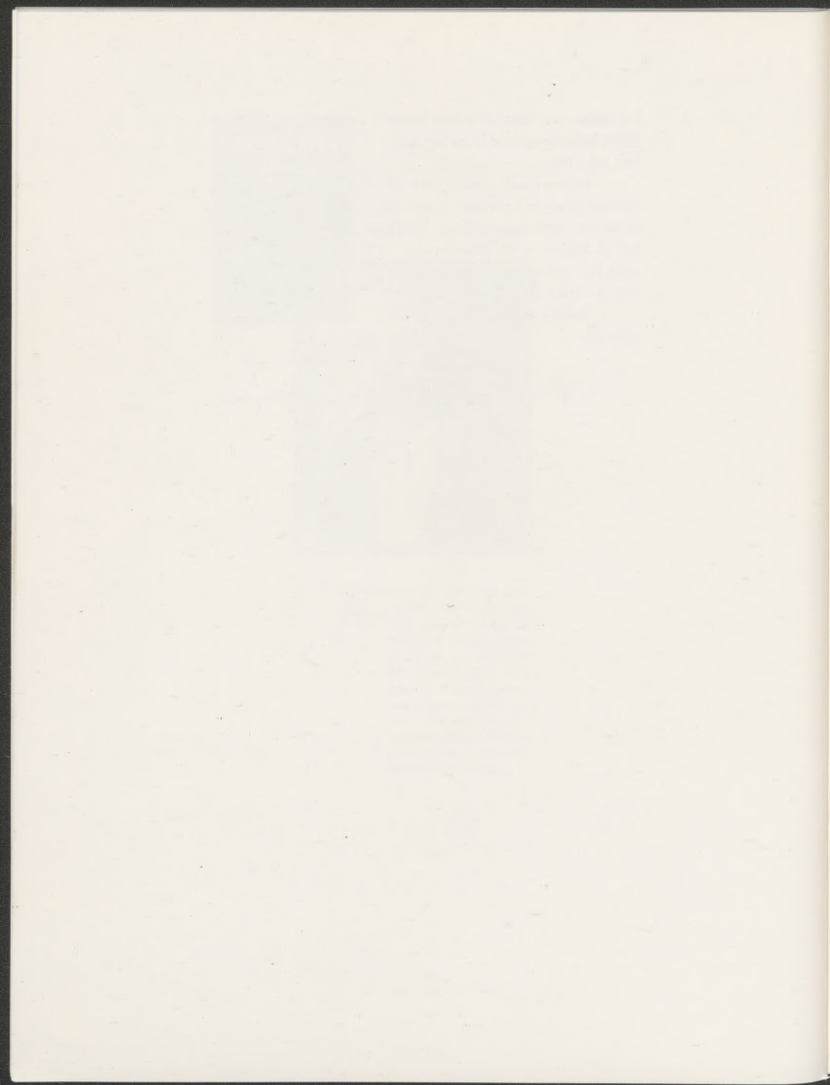
Most significant work: *Tremor, Selected Poems*. Translated from the Polish by Renata Gorczynski. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1985.

My literary presence in America has to do with translations, not with the original work as it appears from my typewriter. I choose *Tremor*, not because I think it is my best book. *Tremor* was my first selection of poems in English, and it was through this book that I got my first readers and friends in this country.

The reasons why I'm picking *Tremor* are largely sentimental.



Adam Zagajewski



## SELECTED PUBLICATIONS AND AWARDS

### Barthelme, Donald

Publications: *The King* (1990); *Forty Stories* (1987); *Paradise* (1986); *Sixty Stories* (1981); *The Dead Father* (1975); *City Life* (1970); *Snow White* (1967); *Come Back, Dr. Caligari* (1964).

Awards: Guggenheim Fellowship, National Institute of Arts and Letters Label Award, National Book Award, Rea Short Story Award, Texas Institute of Arts and Letters Award.

### Brown, Rosellen

Publications: *Before and After* (1992); *Civil Wars* (1984); *Tender Mercies* (1978); *Cora Fry* (1977); *Street Games* (1974); *Some Deaths in the Delta and other poems* (1970).

Awards: Ingram Merrill Foundation Grant, Award in Literature from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, Guggenheim Fellowship, NEA Creative Writing Fellowship, Bunting Institute Fellowship.

### Cheuse, Alan

Publications: *The Tennessee Waltz and Other Stories* (1990); *The Light Possessed* (1990); *The Grandmothers' Club* (1986); *The Bohemians* (1982); *Landace and Other Stories* (1980).

Awards: NEA Creative Writing Fellowship, USIA American Participant Grantee in Columbia, Uruguay, and Chile.

### Cohen, Robert

Publications: *The Organ Builder* (1988); stories in *Pushcart Prize XII*, *Editors Choice IV*, *Harper's*, *Paris Review*, *Tikkun*.

Awards: Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Writers' Award, Pushcart Prize, Jerusalem Foundation Fellowship, Yaddo Colony Fellowship, MacDowell Colony Fellowship.

### Eimers, Nancy

Publications: *Destroying Angel* (1991); poems in *Paris Review*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Crazyhorse*, *North American Review*, *Gulf Coast*, *Passages North*, *Antioch Review*, *Western Humanities Review*.

Awards: NEA Creative Writing Fellowship, MacDowell Colony Fellowship, Stella Ehrhardt Memorial Fellowship, Cullen Fellowship, *The Nation* Discovery Award, Academy of American Poets Prize.

### Goyen, William

Publications: *Arcadio* (1983); *Come, the Restorer* (1974); *The Fair Sister* (1963); *In a Farther Country* (1955); *The House of Breath* (1950).

Awards: (2) Pulitzer Prize nominations, (2) Guggenheim Fellowships, O. Henry Prize, Best American Short Story Award, Rice University Distinguished Alumni Award, MacMurray Award for Best First Novel.

### Greene, Jeffrey

Publications: *To the Left of the Warshiper* (1991); poems in *Antioch Review*, *Epoch*, *The New Yorker*, *Poetry*, *Seattle Review*, *Anthology of American Poetry & Yearbook of American Verse* (1984, 1985 and 1986).

Awards: *The Nation* Discovery Award, Connecticut Commission on the Arts Grant, Mary Roberts Rinehart Foundation Grant, Stella Ehrhardt Fellowship.

### Hershey, Olive

Publications: *Truck Dance* (1989); *Floating Face Up* (1984).

Awards: Edward Albee Foundation Fellowship, MacDowell Colony Fellowship.



**Hirsch, Edward**

Publications: *Earthly Measures* (1994); *The Night Parade* (1989); *Wild Gratitude* (1986); *For the Sleepwalkers* (1981).

Awards: Rome Prize of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, National Book Critics Circle Award, Guggenheim Fellowship, NEA Creative Writing Fellowship, Ingram Merrill Foundation Award, Peter I.B. Lavan Younger Poets Award.

**Howard, Richard**

Publications: *Like Most Revelations* (1994); *No Traveller* (1989); *Lining Up* (1983); *Misgivings* (1979); *Fellow Feelings* (1976); *Two-Part Inventions* (1974); *Untitled Subjects* (1969).

Awards: Pulitzer Prize, Ordre du Mérite du Gouvernement français, Award of Merit from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, Chancellors' Fellowship for Distinction in Poetry of the Academy of American Poets, Guggenheim Fellowship, National Book Award for Translation.

**Koch, Polly**

Publications: *Invisible Borders* (1991); stories in *Mississippi Review*, *Gulf Coast*, *Quarry West*, *PRISM International*.

Awards: Stegner Fellowship from Stanford University, Transatlantic Review Award, Cultural Arts Council of Houston Grant, Brazos Prize for Fiction.

**Lopate, Phillip**

Publications: *The Art of the Personal Essay* (1994); *Against Joie de Vivre* (1989); *The Rug Merchant* (1987); *Bachelorhood* (1981); *Confessions of Summer* (1979); *The Daily Round* (1976); *Being With Children* (1975).

Awards: (2) New York Foundation for the Arts Grants, (2) NEA Creative Writing Fellowships, Guggenheim Fellowship, Christopher Medallion, Texas Institute of Letters Award for Nonfiction.

**Lowry, Beverly**

Publications: *Those Two* (1994); *Breaking Gentle* (1988); *Daddy's Girl* (1981); *Emma Blue* (1978); *Come Back, Lolly Ray* (1977).

Awards: NEA Creative Writing Fellowship, Guggenheim Fellowship, Texas Institute of Letters Fiction and Short Story Awards, *Black Warrior Review* Short Story Prize.

**Macdonald, Cynthia**

Publications: *Living Wills: New and Selected Poems* (1991); *Alternate Means of Transport* (1985); *(W)holes* (1980); *Transplants* (1976); *Amputations* (1972).

Awards: Rockefeller Fellowship, (3) NEA Creative Writing Fellowships, O.B. Hardison Award from the Folger Shakespeare Library, National Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters Award, Guggenheim Fellowship.

**Moss, Howard**

Publications: *Minor Monuments: Selected Essays* (1986); *New Selected Poems* (1985); *A Swim off the Rocks* (1976); *Second Nature* (1968); *A Swimmer in the Air* (1957); *The Toy Fair* (1954).

Awards: National Book Award in Poetry, Ingram Merrill Foundation Grant, American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters Creative Writing Award, Lenore Marshall/The Nation Poetry Prize, Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets.

**Olsen, William**

Publications: *The Hand of God and a Few Bright Flowers* (1988); *Flight* (1980); poems in *New Voices*, *New American Poets of the Nineties*, *Paris Review*, *Indiana Review*, *Chicago Review*.

Awards: Bread Loaf Merrillmykian Fellowship, Texas Institute of Letters Poetry Award, *Poetry Northwest* Young Poets Prize, YHMA/The Nation Discovery Award, Jacob Javits Fellowship.

**Phillips, Robert**

Publications: *Breakdown Lane* (forthcoming 1994); *Public Landing Revisited* (1992); *Personal Accounts: New & Selected Poems, 1966-1986* (1986); *Running on Empty* (1981); *The Pregnant Man* (1978); *The Land of Lost Content* (1970).

Awards: Award in Literature from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, Arents Pioneer Medal, New York State Council on the Arts CAPS Grant, (2) MacDowell Colony Fellowships, (2) Corporation of Yaddo Fellowships, Pushcart Prize.

**Plumly, Stanley**

Publications: *Boy on the Step* (1989); *Summer Celestial* (1983); *Out-of-the-Body Travel* (1976); *In the Outer Dark* (1970).

Awards: Delmore Schwartz Memorial Award, Guggenheim Fellowship, Ingram Merrill Foundation Fellowship, National Book Critics Circle Award nomination, NEA Creative Writing Fellowship.

**Prospere, Susan**

Publications: *Sub Rosa* (1992); poems in *Antaeus*, *Field*, *The Nation*, *The New Yorker*, *Poetry*, *The Best American Poetry*, 1991.

Awards: Ingram Merrill Grant, 1991-92 *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize in Poetry finalist, *The Nation/Discovery* Award, PEN Southwest Houston Discovery Award.

**Robison, James**

Publications: *The Illustrator* (1988); *Rumor and Other Stories* (1985); stories in *Best American Short Stories*, *The New Yorker*, *Grand Street*, *Mississippi Review*.

Awards: Whiting Foundation Grant, the Richard and Hilda Rosenthal Foundation Award for Fiction from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters.

**Robison, Mary**

Publications: *Subtraction* (1991); *Believe Them* (1988); *An Amateur's Guide to the Night* (1983); *Oh!* (1983); *Days* (1979).

Awards: Guggenheim Fellowship, Yaddo Colony Fellowship, Authors Guild Award, PEN Award, Bread Loaf Fellowship.

**Rogers, Pattiann**

Publications: *Geocentric* (1993); *Splitting and Binding* (1989); *Legendary Performance* (1987); *The Tattooed Lady in the Garden* (1986); *The Expectations of Light* (1981).

Awards: Lannan Foundation Fellowship, (4) Pushcart Prizes, (2) NEA Creative Writing Fellowships, Guggenheim Fellowship, Texas Institute of Letters Poetry Award.

**Rosser, J. Allyn**

Publications: *Bright Moves* (1990); poems in *Poetry*, *The Georgia Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Paris Review*, *New England Review*, *Ontario Review*, *Passages North*.

Awards: Peter I.B. Lavan Award from the Academy of American Poets, Bread Loaf Fellowship, Samuel French Morse Prize, Yaddo Colony Fellowship.

**Shange, Ntozake**

Publications: *The Love Space Demands (a continuing saga)* (1991); *Belsey Brown* (1985); *From Okra to Greens* (1984); *Sassafras, Cypress & Indigo* (1982); *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide, When the Rainbow Is Enuf: A Choreopoem* (1977).

Awards: Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Writers' Award, (2) Obies, Guggenheim and Chubb Fellowships, Columbia University Medal of Excellence, NEA Fellowship for Playwriting.

**Stern, Daniel**

Publications: *Twice Upon a Time* (1992); *Twice Told Tales* (1989); *An Urban Affair* (1980); *The Rose Rabbi* (1971); *The Suicide Academy* (1968); *Who Shall Live, Who Shall Die* (1963).

Awards: Rosenthal Award of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, (2) O. Henry Prizes, International Prix du Souvenir.

**Storey, Gail Donahue**

Publications: *The Lord's Motel* (1992); *First Poems of Gail Donahue* (1974).

Awards: Yaddo Colony Fellowship, Houston Festival Prose Award, Virginia Center for the Creative Arts Fellowship, Houston Woman on the Move Award for 1993.

**Webb, Paula**

Publications: *Domestic Life: A Novel in Parts* (1992); stories in *Houston Metropolitan*, *Houston Press*, *Houston City Magazine*.

Awards: Cultural Arts Council of Houston Creative Artist Award, PEN Southwest Discovery Prize, Inprint Fellowship.

**Williams, Joy**

Publications: *Escapes* (1990); *Breaking & Entering* (1988); *Taking Care* (1982); *State of Grace* (1973).

Awards: Strauss Living Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, National Book Award nomination.

**Zagajewski, Adam**

Publications: *Canvas* (1991); *Solidarity, Solitude* (1990); *Tremor* (1985).

Awards: Guggenheim Fellowship, Berliner Künstlerprogramm Fellowship, MacDowell Colony Fellowship, Echoing Green Foundation Prize.

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