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Coraddi

The Magazine Of The Arts At UNCG

Spring
1992

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Both Courtesy of Weatherspoon Art Gallery



Monique Sills

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“...Art is always a fresh vision of the world... If it does not break, or develop, or renew in significant respects the traditional, customary, accepted, aesthetic and moral standards, if it merely repeats without creating, it is not art. If it does, it is incompatible with the ‘correct standards of life’ which must control mass media... Art, like love, can be experienced only as a personal, continuous, cumulative relationship. Else, art becomes entertainment — dull entertainment often — just as love is reduced to sex and prestige. Not that art should not be entertaining; but it is no more deliberately aimed at entertainment than love is. Art (and love) must be felt — they cannot be manufactured by someone to suit the taste of someone else...”

Randall Jarrell
National Book Awards Address, 1958



Marla Hale

Bootfriend

by Matt Malloy

I found a hand in my jellybean jar this morning. Of course it was a man's hand. My jellybean jar is a female, so it wouldn't have been a woman's hand, unless it was cut from the wrist of a lesbian, or a medical woman. But my jellybean jar is heterosexual and in good health, although after seeing it contain a severed hand it has become rather unattractive to me for the time being.

Unattractiveness by situation is one of those irrational yet unavoidably real tragedies of life. I've discussed this tragedy at length with my friend Boot. Boot says, "You can never know you love a woman until you see her in a state of total panic and she is beautiful."

Boot got dates with four different women before he found Marcia. She looked radiant screaming as he began making cuts in the side of his head with a pig's jawbone.

She sprayed him with mace and broke his arm at the elbow and called the police. When she found out that he had a record of this sort of thing, she forgave him. Anyone who would make cuts in the side of his head was willing to work devotedly to make a relationship last. She could see this. In two months Boot and Marcia would have been together for eight months. I think Marcia is very pretty.

Out past the plains there's the mountains, and if you go up the mountains fast enough, like a ramp, then you can break out of the earth's orbit and go until you find your asteroid Paradise. Nobody will wake you up with their screams there. Fine cheeses grow in orchards, tobacco is a cancelled TV series, love is scientifically disproven

and abandoned, and nobody will ever wake you up with their horrible, dying screams.

I make my own hat bands from used oil filters. People just leave old filters out when they get new ones. I thought maybe if I worked hard, I could sell enough of them to go to Africa and see the pythons, before they're hunted into extinction.

I gave my love a python,
Before her feelings faded,
Fated to be separated,
From all its python friends,
And family.

I've been thinking of saying a prayer today. It would be the second time I've ever prayed in my entire life. "God, please let those less fortunate than I die swiftly and painlessly, and then let them rest a few minutes before you send them back." A breeze rustles my hair. The air could be fattening if I tried to fry it up and eat it like a big birthday cake. "And when I die, Lord, please let me come back a hand unattached, so I can touch things without looking at them, without them looking at me. Let me be human and beautiful, but utterly anonymous except to myself."

The purple trash dumpster I'm sitting next to is trying to communicate with me, I'm sure of it. I think it wants desperately to be out of the hot, hot sunny sun sun. "Don't worry." I pat its side with the back of my hand. "The sun is falling faster and faster each minute of each day and eventually it will go like everything else into the ground." Then I think, this is not right.

The sun is the pig of the sky, a perfect pig that lives without living, and thus will never die. Perhaps it's already died without dying and used to dance around and flirt with the moon and have a favorite flavor of jellybean.

Boot definitely died with death. I'm not sure if that's fortunate or not. There's a person standing at my toesy toes in a tie and stuff. "Spare some change?"

"How long have you been here?"

"Ever since I was a woman. I used to be a woman. Why? Just because you've always been a man do you think everybody has to have always been a man? Who are you?"

"My name is Lieutenant Guiest." He shows me a very nice black leather frame with a little plastic window inside to see through. "We've found the mutilated bodies of five homeless people in the past four weeks. The last victim turned up five days ago in this neighborhood. I'm asking you if you've seen or heard anything."

"Anything?"

"Anything to do with a murder."

"No."

He puts a little piece of paper in my hand. "Can you read this?"

"I can read anything I choose, Lieutenant Guiest."

He looks at me and smiles a little. I try to mimic his look exactly. He seems to shudder. "Well get in touch with me if you see anything." He leaves without telling me anymore about himself.

Out past the mountains, there's the ocean, and in the ocean there's bubbles. If you're careful and quiet enough, you can crawl inside a bubble and roll across into rooms with walls of water in a mansion all to yourself, bigger and more beautiful than any place else in the world.

The inside of my chest is sweating. If I had known that it was going to be this hot today I would have put some deodorant on my lungs. Marcia's probably going to come by here and think I have some sort of problem.

Boot said I'm self-conscious. He's too debonair to know what it's like to be plain and boring. He has a beautiful wife and respect in the city. People say "Hi" to him when he is out and about,

ask to see his scars. He'd have made a good doctor, made you feel too good to realize you were in pain. He would have made a good Satan in that respect, too.

"Hey sexy!"

I never know what to think when she calls me that. "Hello, Marcia."

She's chewing something. "How's my baby doin'?"

"I want to weave my hair into a sail and pretend my head is a crow's nest. Berg, dead a head! Berg, dead ahead!" I laugh at my witty wit wit.

"Yeah, I know the feeling." She runs her fingers through my hair. "Have you seen Boot around?"

"Not since last night." There's a song in someone's screaming, everybody's favorite song, no matter what it is.

"I can't seem to sniff the little bastard out." She chews in thought for a moment. "You don't suppose he's with some other girl?"

"No, I suppose not."

Occasionally I have muffled thoughts of a certain comfort in holding someone's hand, even if it's no longer attached, even if it's in a jellybean jar: holding someone's hand that held someone's hand, a vicarious souvenir. Not that I would know for certain.

"What'd you do last night?" She stands close over me, straddling my outstretched legs. I can see up her nose.

"Nothing." I wonder if I snore in my sleep. Somebody could come along and realize I was sleeping and chop me into pieces without me lifting a finger.

She sighs and playfully thrusts my head between her knees. "What am I going to do if I never see him again?" A pungent residue that makes her leg hair stick to her skin is feminine and mysterious. I want to tell her, but she's already leaving. "If you see Boot, tell him he's dead when I get my hands on him." She digs her pointy purple heels into pavement with each spring-loaded step.

I've been trying to write an opera. Most operas these days are a little too run of the mill, taking place all in theaters and things. I want my opera to be performed by delivery, like balloons, only with bus-loads of musicians.

There's a smell of blood-basted jellybeans, ready to be roasted. There's a large man carrying important-looking sheets of shiny blue cardboard to a crusty amber van. Lovely how the world is afloat with bundles and granules of abstractly, purposefully inhabited mystery.

The opera is about a tree that sings its leaves to the ground, like a christy christ, christ, loving the oven as much as the wood. Sinners in hell are falling leaves, blown away by a man with a gas-powered blower in the Fall. Nothing is green forever, except green, and probably not even that.

An old, old pebble in the pavement must be either happy or insane, he has no other choices. The little thing is stuck in a single spot eternally, always facing the same edifices, nothing to do all day but look up people's noses, thrill at the sight of unfamiliar soles, get to know the regulars, miss the ones that leave. I bet the bits of concrete in the business district are insane.

I love the pebbles here. I like to think they like me too, a nice little symbiosis of sorts I bet the folks at the lab never thought of. Just as well.

They knocked Boot down with a stick as they drove by. He was playing with a leaf down at the end of the alley, didn't see them coming. Then they stopped and got out, loaded down with cutting tools. Slowly he began to stir. I hid my eyes. I don't like for people to see me cry, not even the purple trash dumpster.

Out past the stars, there's God. He doesn't know if he really exists, or if he's just a figment of somebody's imagination.

I saved his hand to give to Marcia. "



Lisa Olszewski

SULLIVAN HOTEL



"Billy's Dream"

Kevin Dillon



"Right Here"

Lea Chadwell

Straw-tick

by Holly Horton

Jay and I have been lying here for more than an hour now, and it's been so quiet. Neither of us can sleep, but we don't speak. We want to make love. I wonder if he is getting used to this, my silence, my withdrawal. He has been holding my hand in a limp sort of way and when he breathes I can hear a rattling within his body. I hope he is not getting sick, as I have been.

We lie on this small bed, a straw-tick that belonged to my grandmother. She made the dark-blue quilt and later sewed on yellow daisies, cheery decorations that are now brown and ragged. I can see our feet in the mirror on the other wall, a mirror that also belonged to my grandmother, as did the rest of the house. The house sits by a lake, green and inviting, and I wonder if my grandmother ever lay on this bed and looked out at the lake, waiting to make love.

#

I retrace my steps down the old creaking staircase, holding onto the slick pine railing and easing my way out onto the huge white porch. The late afternoon was breezy, and the wind seemed to buoy my body down the steps and across the small yard as I floated my way to the hospital. It was time; I was excited.

#

Jay clears his throat now, and whispers hoarsely, "What are you thinking about?" He stares at the ceiling, the ridges of plaster stuck up there like scattered bones. I don't answer him. He knows what I'm thinking. I've thought of nothing else for almost a month now. "You're not thinking of anything?" he asks, squeezing my hand and

glancing at me.

"Nope," I say. He continues to stare at the ceiling.

#

I had thought it would be hectic, speeding to the hospital, calling parents and friends and doctors. I had planned it to be a thrilling time, a rush, the end of an era in our life, and so I was slightly dismayed when things went so smoothly. It was so calm! The nurses were bored, the mood relaxing. It was routine. The baby took its time, languid in my firm belly. Jay held my hand and then stepped over beside the doctor. Then he bounced back to me, chattering and smiling. The doctor asked if he wanted to leave the room, annoyed at this show of emotion amid the calm, sterile hospital staff.

#

Jay touches my arm and I flinch. God, I think, it's been so long! So long since we said each other's names, and released ourselves from this silence.

"We'll take this as slow as you want to go," he says. He is stroking my arm and his voice is choked. He has been crying and I didn't even realize it. "As slow as you want to go."

"I don't think I can ever do it again," I say. He keeps stroking my arm and the skin there is getting chafed. He closes his eyes and sighs. "I don't see how I can," I say.

I feel as if I am skimming the floor of a lake, deep and cold. I open my eyes and the light is opaque, smooth and green. Absently I feel the feathery-soft silt with my toes, drifting to rest in the cool mud up to my chest. This is what I've

always imagined death to be. The hell of it is living eternally within this one color, this filmy algae-green. And feeling the swish of the milky, cold water against your body, but knowing that you don't have a body anymore.

Actually, the hell of it is that I know I have a body and it feels like the body of a whale. I imagine myself as a whale – a whale in the lake outside our window. I am bulbous and huge and slow. When I speak my voice is bubbly and thick, and I make garbled microsonic noises to Jay, another whale, who is blue and soft and floating away from me through the slick golden green. I squeak and bubble helplessly, and though I twist and roll, my immense whale weight pulls me slowly, heavily, to the bottom.

#

I felt the final contraction as if a giant suction cup had been ripped off my vagina. After that I couldn't feel much of anything. I couldn't hear anything, either, and I kept waiting for that sound. I closed my eyes and waited and waited. No one said a word and the silence was tight around me. Jay began to touch my face. He moaned and kissed my neck, and everyone was so silent. I pushed Jay away and waited for that sound.

#

After three years of marriage, it seems like you'd know somebody. It seems like you'd know yourself. I can't remember who I am, what I'm supposed to be like. I feel as hollow as this house, the timber ancient, the pale rooms bare. The floors have been stripped, the chimney cleaned. There is no dust except what floats in the sunlight, and there is no darkness but what is in the closet. It is all chaste, and plain.

What was I like three years ago? A month ago?

We want to make love. We want to go from this experience and purify ourselves, resurrect some emotion that doesn't sicken us. Jay wants a family. I want to mess up the bed, tear up the quilt and have sex in the feathers. I want to move.

I doubt that Jay has ever felt like a whale. I look out at the lake, wondering how much water I would displace if I eased my big whale body into it.

Jay stretches and the cords of the mattress creak. He has lost weight; it wasn't always so easy

for the both of us to fit into this bed. He turns on his side and faces me. Oh, god, I want to hold him so bad! I feel the tears sting my eyes and I try to blink them back and I hold my breath thinking that will calm me. But I've been so calm! So dead! A cry surges through me and I almost scream, so glad to let it go, and I sob and sob and sob, clinging to Jay's shirt and jolting with the force of my desire.

Our wails echo off the faded yellow plaster. My throat is thick and full. Jay is crying too, and he holds me so tight that I can feel his ribs and his stomach and his thighs. He presses into me and brushes kisses on my face and in my hair. We soon grow quiet, still quivering and tense and close. Jay runs his fingertips across my neck and breasts, down my stomach and gently over the inside of my thigh. I touch his chest and raise his shirt, and he pulls it over his head. He sits up and slowly undresses me, and the air feels cool on my skin. We press against each other, dissolving into each other's bodies, and the room begins to swell with waves of warm, soft water, rising over us and our bed and filling my grandmother's room with a resurging, light-flecked, throbbing golden green.

”

L.T. Hoisington

Forms in Clay









Alan Shapiro

An Interview Conducted by David McDonnell and William Gau

Alan Shapiro was born February 18, 1952, in Boston, Massachusetts. He received a Bachelor of Arts degree from Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts in 1974. The following year, Mr. Shapiro became a Stegner Fellow in Poetry at Stanford University. He has previously taught at Stanford University, Northwestern University, and the University of Chicago. He joined the English Faculty at UNCG in August of 1989 as a full tenured professor.

His published volumes of poetry include *Happy Hour*, *After the Digging*, *The Courtesy*, and most recently, *Covenant* (University of Chicago Press, 1991). His poetry, literary criticism and essays have appeared in *Critical Inquiry*, *Parnassus*, *Ploughshares*, *Tri-Quarterly* and *The New Republic*. Mr. Shapiro has been awarded fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Guggenheim Foundation. In 1987, he received the William Carlos Williams Award from the Poetry Society of America for *Happy Hour*. In 1991, he became one of thirteen recipients of the Lila Wallace—Reader's Digest Awards. This award includes a three year sabbatical for work on his new collection of poetry, as well as essays on poetry and poetics. As the award encourages interaction between writers and the community, Mr. Shapiro will participate in the North Carolina Humanities Council Speaker's Bureau, which has its headquarters at UNCG.

Coraddi: I wanted to begin with the development of your poetry. In your interview in *Triad Style*, it sounded so clean how there was basketball in your life, then suddenly, poetry just appeared. Did you not have any early experience at all?

Shapiro: Frankly, I really didn't have any. Neither of my parents were poetry readers, or readers at all. They were TV watchers and my brother was a singer and dancer; he was in show business, so he certainly didn't read. And my sister was so much older. By the time I was ten years old she was already in college so there really wasn't anybody reading in my family. When I hurt myself playing basketball I had also met a girl who was a very apt poetry reader, so it kind of came through her, and her family.

Coraddi: A muse?

Shapiro: Yeah, she was very amusing. It was meeting her and her family. She had records of Dylan Thomas reading and records of Yeats and Pound. Her mother was an artist, a painter, and even knew Charles Olson, who lived in Gloucester. So I even got to meet Charles Olson. So it was a combination of those two things — meeting her and getting to know her family — and their interest in the arts, which was contagious. That was my junior year in high school.

Coraddi: So that's when you began writing?

Shapiro: That's when I began writing, in my junior year in high school.

Coraddi: What was your writing like at that time?

Shapiro: Very emotive, very interested in me, my feelings; the unspoken assumption of the

poems was that I was the center of the universe. They were terrible poems, but I had very kind people around me who continued to encourage me and didn't tell me how terrible they were, but at the same time they did it indirectly. My girlfriend — who was a much better reader, much better writer than I was — would never say the poems weren't any good, she would say "you might try reading Lawrence Ferlinghetti." She introduced me to the Beat Poets, not that I have a lot of feeling for them now, but I did then. For the most part though, I was just writing out of my own experience, which wasn't that interesting.

Coraddi: Your first book, *After The Digging*, was a collection of emotionally detached historical narratives. Do you think that those poems were written in reaction to your first experiences as a writer?

Shapiro: Not really, I think that what's interesting about my early experiences which were similar to the first experiences of anybody at that age — is that what the poems showed is not that I had no familiarity with poetry, but that I inherited from my culture a whole lot of assumptions and preconceptions about what poetry is, even without ever having read any poetry. I thought that poetry should mean anything to anybody and that it was truer the more vague it was. The more vague it was, the more suggestive it was... without any experience in modernism at all, all of my assumptions were sort of vulgarized modernist assumptions. Poetry should mean as many things as possible. All connotation, no denotation. And it should be self-expression. It should be grounded in my own sensibility. It's interesting that my poems at that time were grounded in my sensibility, but not in my experience: 'cause they didn't have to do with *my* experiences, my social experience, my sense of being in a world that included other people. They were sort of solipsistic smears of language. In fact, a couple of years ago someone in my writing class turned in a poem that was totally obscure and unintelligible. Not unequivocal, but unintelligible. So I went around the room and asked everyone what the poem meant and everybody had a different reading and every reading was different from what the poet thought the poem was saying. So I said, "This is a bad poem because

you failed to state your intentions in language that makes them apprehensible to someone else's observation." She said "Well, isn't that what a good poem is? A good poem can mean anything to anybody," and I was looking at a version of myself twenty years ago. I said, "Where did you get that idea? What poems have you read from which you have derived this theory of poetry?" She fumbled about; she hadn't read anything. And that's a question that no one ever asked me at the time. I mean, wouldn't you regard theory as suspect when it's not based in any experience whatsoever? You're theorizing about an object you have no familiarity with. I mean, what if you were a brain surgeon and you had this theory that the way to remove a brain tumor is through the Achilles Tendon? You have no experience with surgery at all or with the history of surgery or knowledge of anatomy. You sort of just intuit it.

Coraddi: So what was it in your work that changed these romantic notions?

Shapiro: It was meeting J.V. Cunningham. Cunningham was the absolute opposite, the antinomian reversal of that way of thinking; in some ways you could argue that he went too far in the other direction. I don't think that's true in his best poems. I think it's probably true in a lot of his poems, as they are very arid. His is entirely a poetry of statement. For the most part, it doesn't have to do with inspiration or being possessed by a subject. It has to do with good craftsmanship whose standards are primarily social and traditional. The poet should always be in control. Poetry should always serve the poet, not the other way around. So he introduced me to another way of thinking and what that did was showed me that ultimately every theory about poetry is just a theory. It's not definitive, it's not absolute, and there are a lot of different ways you can think about it, which had not occurred to me when I was younger. I was colliding with someone with a completely different aesthetic. It made me conscious of the whole history that informed my own ostensibly unhistorical way of thinking. I didn't think I was part of a tradition, I didn't think I had anything to do with modernism. He was able to point out to me the fact that I was just sort of a reflex to that tradition. I was unconsciously inher-

iting it and replicating its worst features and so he made me much more self-conscious and critical. I never became a Cunningham epigone and I think that's one of the virtues of his pedagogical style: that it dissuaded anyone from ever becoming a follower. He didn't want followers, he wanted his students to be as aware and as self-critical and as historically informed as he was in the interest of being more individual in the way you treat conventional ideas and attitudes.

Coraddi: Do you believe that you were still holding onto some of your romantic beliefs because there were a lot of different voices in *After The Digging* ?

Shapiro: I still believe that. I have not let go of that. I think that this whole dichotomy between Classical and Romantic is a false dichotomy, that any writer worth his salt wants to be both. You want to have all the control and rationality classicism implies and you also want to have all the intensity and inclusiveness and generosity of spirit that's implied by Romanticism. I'd say that the answer to your question is yes and no. They're poems that I wrote after doing several years of scholarly research. The writing of those poems implies that poetry and scholarship are not mutually exclusive activities, that if you are going to write about an historical episode or figure you need to know as much as you possibly can about it. Half of the book has to do with the Irish Potato Famine in the late 19th Century. In order to write that, what I did was read the *London Times* from 1798 to 1850, fifty years of articles concerning what the British called the "Irish problem." I also read various histories about the Potato Famine.

Coraddi: Was there something traumatic going on in your life then?

Shapiro: Yeah, my first wife was Irish and I was living in Stanford at the time and her family was visiting us. And we had a tiny little house overrun with the Irish, so I started thinking about Irish genocide. Seriously though, the Irish Potato Famine was an artificial famine essentially created by the English. There was plenty of food in Ireland. Peasants could have been fed. So I got interested in what that experience would have been like for the British, not the Irish. I wanted to

understand how reasonably intelligent, decent human beings can do monstrous things. That was sort of the moral question the poems try to explore. Many of the poems are dramatic monologues spoken by various English officials who were in Ireland responsible for making decisions that had the power to affect the lives of the Irish Catholics. The other half of the book had to do with the witchcraft trials in Salem and is likewise interested in the same question: how decent people can find themselves in situations where they do horrible things.

Coraddi: *After the Digging* is mostly in blank verse. Why did you choose this form?

Shapiro: Well, it's a very flexible form. It's the most commonly used form in English drama. And so it seemed appropriate, particularly since the Puritans I was writing about were all born in England. I wanted to use a form that would enable me to articulate the contours of their speech as well as the contours and textures of their social life. I think that blank verse is a verse that enables you to move from low vernacular to elevated diction. It's capable of singing as well as talking. It's capable of ruminating and mediating as well as describing. I chose it because of its freedom and flexibility. I don't find any pleasure in restriction at all. The pleasure of verse is in the freedom it offers, the liberation. The sense of being able to do a lot of different things that I would not be able to do were it not for the pressure of the form.

Coraddi: As you went from *After the Digging* to *The Courtesy*, did you keep the conscious decision of form? How did the different forms develop?

Shapiro: Well, actually most of *The Courtesy* was written before *After the Digging*, but *After the Digging* came out before *The Courtesy*. So the publication dates of the two books are in some way just the opposite of their writing. So, in fact, *After the Digging* was for me a kind of loosening up, and a sort of necessary step toward developing a more flexible style. *The Courtesy* has a lot of poems that are in short lines and rhyming stanzas. Very formal. Also, in those poems the attempt is not to somehow render as fully as possible the texture of everyday life or ordinary experience so much as to distill from the

textures of everyday life some kind of generalized perception or statement. So I began to feel in fact that if there were pleasures in restriction, there was more restriction than there was pleasure in what I was writing. I had to develop a more flexible medium if I was going to continue to develop as a writer. So the writing of the poems in *After the Digging* was an attempt to break out: one, from my preoccupation with personal experience and two, out of these tightly structured little quatrains.

Coraddi: Did dealing with some of the personal experiences in *The Courtesy* scare you?

Shapiro: No. I guess what scared me was not dealing with them. Despite the apparent control and impassiveness of the surface of a lot of these poems, there's a lot of darkness and trouble in that book that I was compelled to deal with. You write the poems in the hope that you'll discover something about the experience in the act of writing the poem that will free you from the experience in some way, or at least provide a necessary precondition for freedom. All those poems are written in order to understand something about myself that I needed to understand. Understanding doesn't necessarily automatically translate into the power to change, but you certainly can't change your life unless you have an understanding of what needs changing. All those poems were written out of the sense of needing to understand certain things about myself, my own desires, my relationship with others.

Coraddi: I think that's interesting that you feel like you are trying to free yourself from experience because in your latest work, *Happy Hour* and even more so in *Covenant*, it seems like you are trying to become more a part of the experience; whereas in your earlier work there was more of a sense of detachment.

Shapiro: I think that's true; that's the distillation that I was talking about. I think in some ways there is a failure of nerve implicit in that detachment. The only way I can confront these experiences is to remove myself from them to a certain degree of generality or compression. I have to distill a whole complex of experiences into one set of representative images and use those images to suggest and invoke a certain degree or difficulty or complexity and try to hold it in

balance. But maybe the only way that I can gain that kind of control is through a certain level of aloofness from other people. I think there's a lot more narrative detail in the later poems. I wouldn't say that it's a desire to become part of experience. It's still the same act of trying to understand but the act now is a more inclusive act. The sense of control isn't gained through detachment now so much as through a more direct and inclusive engagement with circumstances. But I don't want to become one with my experiences.

Coraddi: Would you say that in your poetry now you are trying to develop more socially real situations?

Shapiro: Yeah. I'm interested in writing about a shareable world. I'm interested in writing about a world that other people are going to recognize as external to myself, a world I'm obviously deeply engaged with, in all kinds of private ways as well as public ways. I want to render as much as possible the world that I inhabit, and that includes the world of other people. I want to try to understand myself in relationship to that world as well as I possibly can. The poems are still as they were right from the beginning: attempts to learn something about the world, myself in the world, or the world in myself that I didn't know before — and to do so in a way that would be available to someone else's observation and intelligence.

Coraddi: With this more socially conscious development, do you feel like you're trying to become more of the "poet as public memory" that you mention in your essay "Horace and the Reformation of Creative Writing"?

Shapiro: Well, absolutely. All poets, whether they acknowledge it or not, are in some ways curators of the past. They are trying to preserve the past in the interest of understanding the present. The present is an effect of the past and the way we can understand where we are is to understand where we've come from.

Coraddi: Isn't there a certain egoism in saying that your own personal memory is in the greater interest of the public?

Shapiro: I wouldn't say that. I don't regard myself as the memory of the United States of America or of the Western World. I would follow William Carlos Williams in that "the only road to

the universe is through the local.” I’m concerned with my own particular personal history, which is a history that intersects in certain ways with other people — middle class Jews from the North East more immediately than lower class Baptists from the South East. But at the same time that history is still going to intersect with those other people in more remote or general ways. I can’t worry about that. All I can do is try to tell the truth about my own experience and hope that it will be of interest and value to other people. What I’m trying to do immediately is to generate what Seamus Heaney calls “images adequate to our predicament.” I’m in the most immediate sense trying to generate images adequate to my own predicament. Whether or not that’s going to be of value to anybody else is something I can’t control or worry about. All I know is that the only way I can reach a level of generality is through the particulars of my own experience. I can’t just jump head first into the universal, that would be for me an act of outrageous egotism.

Coraddi: How does your memory relate to the so-called Truth?

Shapiro: No one could figure that out. I don’t know how to answer that. I couldn’t offer you a definition of the Truth.

Coraddi: Do you think, though, that the Truth is something you strive towards in your poetry?

Shapiro: Oh, yeah. I’m uncomfortable with the word truth. Though, in this age of skepticism, what the theorists call the Hermeneutics of Suspicion, I still believe and think that all writers believe or hold an aboriginal belief in the ability of language to reflect and clarify the world beyond language in more or less truthful ways. I hold that aboriginal belief and I don’t think that any writer who doesn’t hold that belief could continue writing, even if it is a ‘necessary fiction’. Maybe trying to define truth is like trying to define reality. When you wake up in the morning, try to resist telling the first lie of the day; then you’ll know what is real. When I feel the temptation to lie, but don’t lie, I’ve discovered indirectly what’s true. I guess I’d say that what I try to do in poetry is not to lie. If I’m not positively pursuing the truth I’m negatively pursuing it by trying to avoid the deceptions that I’m prone to given my own psychologi-

cal make-up or the deceptions we’re all prone to because of the culture we inhabit and the formulas that the media in one way or another try to impose upon our own experiences.

Coraddi: In *Covenant*, you begin several of your poems with the presence of others, many times actual voices are present, and then you go on to something like a meditation. I was wondering if this movement was in an attempt to discover some kind of truth?

Shapiro: I brood over the voices in a way so that I’m not merely passively recording their voices but I’m recording their voices and engaging them in a kind of dialogue. What I say in reaction to them is not so much an attempt to clarify what they are going through in themselves because most of these people are dead. I’m trying to clarify for myself what they went through since in a way they are the elders of my family and represent not only my past but my future if I’m lucky. I’m trying to understand their lives in time as a way of trying to somehow render the felt textures of life in time which often involves the textures of loss, bodily disintegration, and the unpredictable which often takes unpleasant forms. But then there is also this movement of storytelling which is a way of rising above temporal flux. In some ways the ultimate truth in a poem like “Covenant” is that telling stories, even when the stories are sad and unhappy, is a life affirming act and a life-sustaining act. It can keep people going even when what they are talking about is how completely miserable their lives are. There is something in the social act of telling stories about the past that can preserve the present.

Coraddi: One thing that struck me in your poem “Turn” was your use of the word ‘speech’. Are you working towards a style more like actual speech?

Shapiro: All writing is a kind of formalized speech. I’m working on something...

Coraddi: more narrative, and more prosy... right?

Shapiro: Yes.

Coraddi: Are you trying to make more money?

Shapiro: [Laughs] Yeah, I’m dealing with various producers who are trying to buy the options

to my latest book of poems. “Turn” is about history and the way in which our voices, whether the written word or a speaking voice, is itself a creation of other voices. Your parents’ voices and the voices of all the friends you have ever known and the voices of your region, in “Turn”, are all products of history. The very words we use were invented by people who have been long dead. Much of what we say and think in the attempt to express our ‘true’ identity is itself composed by the voices of people who have not inhabited the Earth for thousands of years. That is really what the poem is about.

Coraddi: I know that this is post-modern, but do you believe that in order to write a good poem it must be about poetry?

Shapiro: No, I do not believe that at all. I think it is possible to write a good poem about poetry, but I think one of the things that keeps poetry alive and fresh and interesting is its confrontation with what is not poetic in the world out there. The poetry I am most interested in is Janus-faced. It looks out to the world beyond language or beyond poetic language and back into the world of art itself. It is constantly about its own history as well as the history that lies outside it.

Coraddi: Would you say that Janus-faced is metaphor?

Shapiro: Yeah, I think you could say that it is metaphor. Any poem that has to do with the representation of experience is always in some way about itself. But, it’s important that the recognition of that does not lead to the simplification that art is only always about itself. I think that what keeps poetry interesting is its impurities, the way in which it is constantly attempting to incorporate what is not itself into itself; in the same way that language is always enriched and made vital by new words and usages. What some conservative people call corruption is to me a revitalization. I think this is also true for literature, poetry in particular. What keeps it young and fresh and even Edenic is its confrontation with the world beyond itself and its refusal to settle for the purity of “art for art’s sake.” for a purely aesthetic preoccupation with its own making. Which is not to say that quality may be entirely forgotten in good poems, but if that is all that there is, it seems to me to be a

kind of art seeking refuge from the full complexities of life.

Coraddi: Is morality involved in this in any way?

Shapiro: The morality involved has to do with the way poetry enables us to revise our way of being in the world to include hitherto unencountered ranges of experience. That’s what I’d say is the primary virtue, to constantly step outside our assumptions to revise our way of being, to sort of look again at our lives so that we no longer see our way of life as *the* way of life but merely one way of living among an infinite number of ways of living. The virtue of that is that it enables us to include more of what our ways of living have excluded. That’s why poetry has to always be constantly looking at the world and at aspects of the world that up until the present had not been looked at before. The subject matter of poetry goes through periods of expansion and contraction. There are historical periods when the subject matter of poetry increases — as during the Renaissance — and then there are periods of retrenchment, when the subject matter of poetry decreases or contracts, as during the 18th century. In the 19th century it increases again with Wordsworth and Coleridge, Shelley and Keats. In the late 19th century it decreases again, in reaction to which we have the Modernist opening of the field; and in the Formalism of the 1950’s it decreases again. The experimental period of the 60’s and 70’s represents another opening of the field, and I suppose the historical periods that I’m interested in are those expansive ones, those that are opening up. I’m less interested in the periods of retrenchment, however necessary they may have been. Maybe it is because I myself am a product of a literary period in which there’s been an unprecedented increase in the subject matter of poetry.

Coraddi: This sounds like some kind of Yeatsian cyclical belief.

Shapiro: I know it does seem like that. I mean, I don’t think that it leads to anything that is theologically driven toward some sort of paradisaical state of absolute inclusiveness, it just seems to happen. A lot of people try to analyze literary history in Hegelian terms: you have a thesis, an

antithesis, and then synthesis and that each synthesis builds on the one before. That doesn't seem true at all to me. Literary changes seem more like Empedoclean flux rather than Hegelian Dialectic. You don't have thesis-antithesis-synthesis, you just have thesis-antithesis-thesis-antithesis...

Coraddi: Do you find your beliefs in poetry to be in conflict with your Jewish heritage?

Shapiro: No, I don't see them in conflict, but I don't think they're in lock step with it either. One of the interesting aspects of Judaism is its refusal of an other-worldliness. It's a very historical religion. There's no afterlife, or if there is the only form of afterlife for a Jew is in memory, your progeny. I'm not a practicing Jew, though I was when I was younger. It has had a strong influence. I still read the Bible, I read it all the time and I think the Old Testament especially has an extraordinary influence over my work. I do think there's an element of the sacred in my work, despite my interest in this social reality. I do think there's this sense in the poems of a sacred, albeit unknown, reality that stands over and against the social reality; a sacred reality from which we come and back into which we will go.

Coraddi: How do you balance your time with writing and your domestic life?

Shapiro: Both my wife and I wish we had a wife. In the old days, however morally bankrupt it may have been — a man married a woman and she took care of the kids and the home and the man was left alone to do his work. Now it's much more morally enlightened, but it's messy and exhausting. It's very hard to balance the claims of a family against the claims of teaching, so that during the school year I don't do any writing at all. I teach and I take care of my family and then I write during the summer. That's why this award couldn't have come at a better time. "



"Garden"

Pete Weisbecker

coffee

Overstrong coffee is very deep. I pour my milk into it and look over the edge of the mug and pour and pour. The milk goes down and down a very long way down and finally hits the flat bottom and swirls up. Very deep. I respect it.

coffee again

There's something exciting about knowing that down the soft carpeted gentle if not sturdy hallway, around the corner in the kitchen is a stout glass pot of milky coffee and a glowing red orange button telling me my white maker-friend is caring for it, keeping it warm until I can pour it into my mug first and then into my tum, which is itself a bit roundish and is sighingly eager for a taste of inspiration.

pear purr

A pear has a bumpiness and wet and clingy to its texture. When my knife like a wire slices a layer slowly, I hear it bump across the fruit and the wet sound of opening as the slice lifts from the remainder ... and the sound is the gentle rough bumpiness of a cat's purr, its mouth opening breathing purring in before a bite of food.

Push

These days at this point a certain motion has engaged me and is the motion towards my death, but, of course, all things of beauty and perfect moments along the way: PLODDING, but it's ever so fast. I don't know how my heavy legs and feet keep meeting the spinning treadmill, but, as in my dream from CHILDHOOD !! (my body knew for me even then that this was a rhythm and a life understood in a recurring sensation) of cards shuffling fast but one heavy long push GRAVITY, of water falling full and heavy from the tub faucet ... warm and hot and thousands of drops falling, but all together a heavy pushing flood... there was more. Now it is many notes pushed out in a solid heavy torrent of harmony blood. It is gravity and many small components within a solid flow downward understood. But I can stand below and look up into the flood and breathe Niagara Falls. When I was a child the dream scared me. I am no longer a child. I can feel myself a woman who can love a man as my mother loves my father. A solid life of years poured forth, but lived in single acts.

my he

When he speaks things I too think and have thought I dive into his eyes unblinking and drink (for all of me.)

Speak

I stand speechless. My mind pulsing a huge question mark and a desire for simplicity ... I'm trying to speak.

...that he wants me to talk. He wants to know what I think. It was very good for him to talk first ... he made a comfortable nest for me to lay my idea eggs in. I've been carrying them, trying to find a loving place. He is that neighborhood.

red

The red is back. No odes now. But a gentle gesture slipped under her door to hint at a proud and eager admiration trying to be humble and wanting to be known. 2 reds are free through their hair. I am stretched between a wondering smile and a crying corner of my heart which drags and hangs on

my dreams she has reminded me of, dreams wanting not to be forgotten yet. Between where it is ...
b e a u t i f u l ... I am poised now.

black julia

But sweeter are two lighter bodies whose souls are stars glowing in their yellow green eyes. They startle me with their impertinent silent questions. He is instantly loving. But she. She squeezes herself between me and her boyfriend my boyfriend. She accepts my friendship-coaxing strokes for a time and then puts her teeth in my skin.

Efficient friend

I feel tender and lazy. She has dignity. She is demanding. I wonder how she tolerates my self-indulgence, my BoingBoingBoing, as she goes WhirrWhirrWhirr?

That Saturday

Then practiced and 4:00 (a good number and time on a Saturday) met ____. “____” was there! Shorn but already 5 o’clocking anew. And so I met him but not until a big tight hug from ____ had wrapped itself around me nicely for a short while, but who was the other from passing car recognition. ____ got “____” to take us to “____’s” apartment. So colorful and intent, so clear even amidst temporary (permanently so) mess. By which I mean it’s always messy because it’s his workplace and he does involved things (jukeboxes and clocks from the early and middle of our waning century), but always turnover. Out goes a work of art, in comes a new junk trailing its peculiar mess recipe. So always stuff and industry very very present. Perfectly lit up colors — lime green, lemon yellow, cherry red — real candy colors, and neon lights.

God is so steady.

God is so steady.

eyeshadow

Makeup. Eye shadow. When a hand swings up at the end of an arm with fingers at its own end to wipe away the excess, a face tilts back then forward. “I’ve got the tin man’s hand,” she voices to the silver she sees and the mirror.

rake and unravel

My mind is an unraked yard on a gusty day. A single caretaker soul earnestly rakes and now rests and then rakes again. There is never a *DONE* but only simultaneous *doing* and *undoing*. Sometimes the unravelling follows the stitch so closely and other times a stitch may keep its anchorage from before to after our life.

The boys are poets.

Look at what we’ve got upstairs. Anger and bear-like shuffling. Loud music. (I bet the consoler has never had a girlfriend. Something in his tone of voice tells me.) But the bear is wounded. The smoking unresponsive bear found no one to pick up at the station this weekend because instead a ringing and her voice explained a new set of circumstances. And does he turn to abuse and does he turn to hatred? Instead poetry. Poetry and bafflement in a heavy-hearted way. A cub after all.

Fatima in Caserta

The crisp letters told her story
When I recalled Auden's lonely Icarus—
The luscious vessel and Breughel's
Delicate reds and brutal greens.
I read the parable in print: On Caserta's
Bright streets mid-morning across from the cafe
Where the Italian girls linger, slurp sherbet
And smoke cigarettes, talking
In loud voices like stable boys – the sun bends
And breaks their shadows into Gothic shapes
Vibrant in the sleepy morning,
Where the even carts have stalled to stare;
In the vivid mud the arches and naves vaunt reflections
Of Fatima's writhing. "Her legs jerk
Like an orange lobster" jeers a boy of fourteen.
He bends his neck to better view the birth
And blood. His sister remarks how her limbs
Look like snakes that swallow pigs whole—
"Boas and anacondas," their mother amends.

Remember Teresa in lonely Avila, living
What seems like a thousand centuries
And martyrdoms ago—
How funny I mused if some male angel
His muscles glistening descended,
Scattered a thousand fire-sparks,
Like colored flowers: ochers and mauves and
Vermillions all raining down on Fatima's
Pained and heaving thighs. What if
All the body of Seraphim descended and
Endowed only Fatima with great feathered wings?

John Gillikin



"My Stradivarius"

William Gau

The Daughter

My father sings his guitar
always, I remember music
me and my cousins singing foxes and geoses
and the midnight special
my father singing us together in the room
the room singing our house
the house singing our street
the street singing our town

My father taught me chords
and notes and
boil 'em cabbage down boys

and I need to keep singing
'till the pitch is right
and the tone 'till
I sing my father

Marta D. King

La Comedia, Davvero

dull, mirror. Huh? Me, one hand upraised—
“Did you put out Schiarita?” Voice, somewhere.
“She’s gonna pee on the rug again.” Amazing.

“Dear! Hello! Earth to Dante! Hey! Your hair
is doing funny things again. You’ll make
us late if you don’t hurry up!” A chair,

With trousers on it. Mirror, dull, opaque.
“They probably have the antipasto out
by now, and I’ve got cramps like you can’t ... Wake

Up!” Wife. Speak. “Nothing I can talk about.”
No words, not even thought, could hold the means—
“Are you all right? Perhaps we shouldn’t go out.”

“Hey Dad! Could I ask over the girl that cleans
for Maestro—” “Shush! Your father is not well!”
I have to write this down. “He leans

This way then that, and pale.” Each sound, each smell.
“He says he can’t talk.” “È vero? “Si!” “I
Can go—” “My master, Virgil, showed me Hell.”

“Should I go get the doctor?” “Tell me why
You’re like this, Dante.” “Is he hungry?” Gazed
through God. “You want a pie? A spinach pie?”

Matt Malloy



"Home"

Kevin Dillon

Robert Gerhart has been with UNCG's Art faculty since 1973. He teaches Drawing, Painting, Design, Color Theory, Etching, and Art History. He received his BFA from Pratt Institute in Brooklyn in 1965 and an MFA from Tyler School of Art at Temple University in Philadelphia. Prior to coming to UNCG, Mr. Gerhart taught at The School of the Dayton Art Institute in Dayton, Ohio.

God is so steady.
God is so steady.

