

## Provocative Perspective from a Distance

by Margaret D. Bauer, Editor

The *North Carolina Literary Review's* definition of a North Carolina writer includes writers who have lived here, even if they are writing from outside of our state, and for this issue's special feature section, we decided to focus on such writers, to remind our readers of the North Carolina connection of writers like Ben Fountain and Mary Robinette Kowal, both interviewed in this issue. I remember when I learned that Lionel Shriver, author of *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, is from North Carolina. I have been determined ever since to have her featured in *NCLR*. I mentioned that goal to Eric Walker upon seeing this favorite of her novels in his writing cabin, and was thrilled to hear his response: "I think I met her when we were kids." Their fathers were both preachers, and they ended up in the same place at some point. My answer to that was to create this special feature topic for *NCLR 2020*.

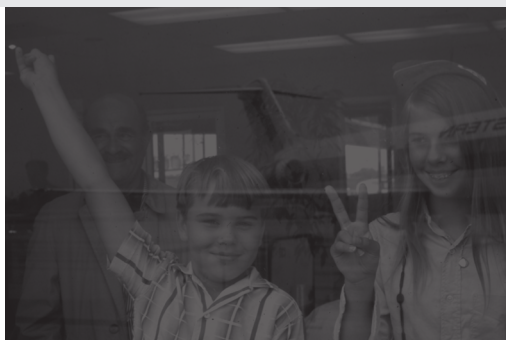
Some time after that, in spring 2019, Susie Hedley, one of the graduating interns, brought me a gift she had been working on since the spring 2018 North Carolina literature class in which we met. She had made contact with the assistant to the agent of Durham native, California television writer Gwendolyn Parker, whose novel *These Same Long Bones* we'd read, the class being small enough that we could find enough used copies. The novel is out of print, and I've been trying to connect with the writer for over a decade to get her consent to pursue a new edition. With Susie's help, I reached the author last summer and arranged an interview with Jenn Brandt, a Southern literary scholar living in California who knew the novel and, like me, enjoys it immensely and believes it belongs in print. As of this writing, we are getting closer to making that happen (stay tuned). I hope the interview with the author will inspire others to find a copy of the novel and read it. Or, share

my optimism, give me a little more time, and then look to purchase a new edition. I can tell you that the years I purchased used copies, sold them to my students for five dollars, promising to return their money at the end of the semester if they returned it, no one turned their copies back in to me. I believe you will want to keep your copy as well.

In addition to interviews, we had several essays submitted in response to the expatriate theme. Harriet Jacobs's North Carolina connection is well known, her pseudonymous autobiography among the most internationally famous works of nineteenth-century American literature. In his essay, Ryan Furlong ponders the appropriateness of calling a fugitive slave an expatriate writer. Jacobs did write from outside her native land, but was it "her" country? Sadly, as Ryan reminds us, the North to which Jacobs fled was not as welcoming as she'd hoped. His examination of the Philadelphia chapter of Jacobs's narrative reminds the reader of the disappointment of many who escaped enslavement only to find out that prejudice and oppression were (are) not confined to the South.

Charles Chesnutt, who lived his formative years in North Carolina, the home state of his parents, but then wrote his books from his Ohio home, has been a frequent *NCLR* subject. Lydia Ferguson's essay focuses on *The Colonel's Dream*, appropriately, as the title character of this novel is a returning expatriate, with plans to restart his life for himself and his motherless son in his native land, only to be disappointed by what follows. Paradoxically, he both embraces the vestiges of the Old South that he recalls fondly (and romantically) and is disappointed by the new form of slavery he discovers in the abuse of convict labor he finds there.

Glenis Redmond, another North Carolina expatriate writer since she credits her years living here with beginning her writing career, pays homage to



## NORTH CAROLINA EXPATRIATE WRITERS

enslaved ancestors like Harriet Jacobs in her third-place Applewhite Prize poem, published in this section. (Read an interview with the poet in *NCLR* 2019).

The rest of the issue features contemporary writers who have left North Carolina for their careers, like Eastern North Carolina native/LSU Professor Emeritus Moira Crone, interviewed by another Eastern North Carolina writer/Emory Professor Jim Grimsley. Elaine Neil Orr selected this interview for our John Ehle Prize, praising the “nuanced, probing, questions that betray a tender affection for and deep knowledge of the craft of fiction.” We thank Elaine for reading the qualifying content in this issue for us to make this selection, and we thank Terry Roberts for donating the prize money this year.

California native, now North Carolina poet Amber Flora Thomas interviews North Carolina poet Allison Adelle Hedge Coke, who now lives in California, but corresponded with Amber from Hawaii, where she served as the Dan and Maggie Inouye Distinguished Chair in Democratic Ideals for spring 2020. Jimmy Dean Smith shares his essay on Vanderbilt Professor Tony Earley’s work, inspired by the region on the edge of Appalachia the author grew up in. Maia Butler and DeLisa Hawkes, who interviewed LeHigh University Professor Stephanie Powell Watts for *NCLR* 2019, return in this issue with an essay about Watts’s novel, set in her native Piedmont North Carolina, “where [her] subjects are, where [her] home is,” as she told her interviewers last issue.

Like Watts, some of these writers set their work in North Carolina, achieving provocative perspective with distance. Others write about other places, real and imagined. But we claim all, proudly, as North Carolina writers and celebrate the breadth of their subject matter and talent. ■

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