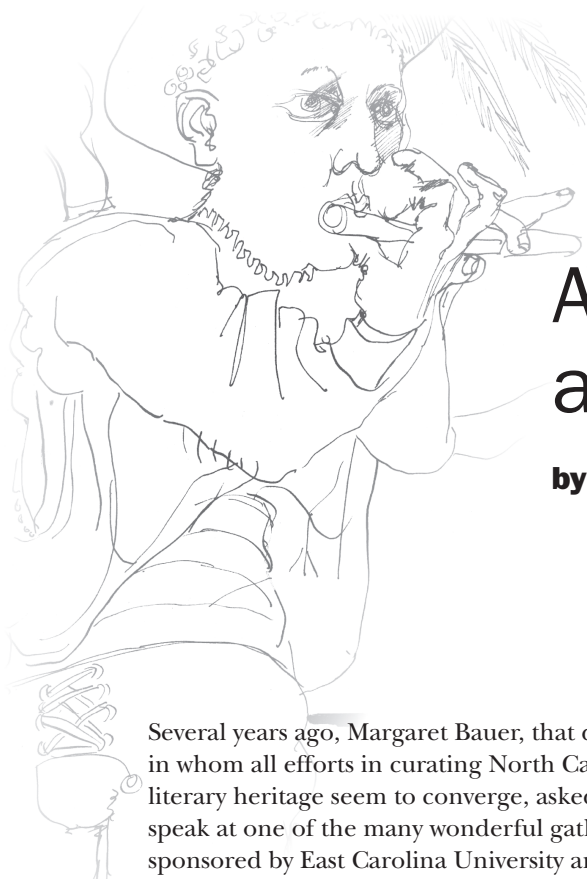


Read in your library here: <https://go.exlibris.link/N7hyJXSR>



Allan Gurganus and His Dildoes

by Gary Richards

Several years ago, Margaret Bauer, that dynamo in whom all efforts in curating North Carolina's literary heritage seem to converge, asked me to speak at one of the many wonderful gatherings sponsored by East Carolina University and the

North Carolina Literary Review and to introduce Allan Gurganus. At the time, I maintained that I'd never met him and, quite frankly, I wasn't sure I wanted to. The way I looked at it, he'd caused way too many problems in my life and had cost me, to the best of my calculations, \$1,504.08.

It started back in 1989 when, as a poverty-stricken undergraduate just starting to explore an interest in Southern literature, I had to shell out \$21.95 for his first novel, *Oldest Living Confederate Widow Tells All*, a monstrosity of a tome that was getting all this hoopla made about it and winning all sorts of

I'd never met [Allan Gurganus] and, quite frankly, I wasn't sure I wanted to. The way I looked at it, he'd caused way too many problems in my life and had cost me, to the best of my calculations, \$1,504.08.

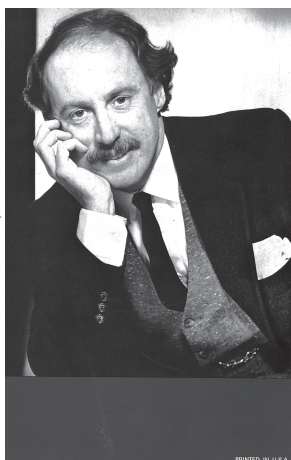
prizes.¹ I'll admit: he could rock a tattersall vest, and that author photo is probably the most famous image of Southern literary dapperness since Truman Capote pouted on the dustjacket of *Other Voices, Other Rooms* around the time that Mr. Gurganus was being conceived. And, yeah, there was a little bit of a man-crush as I played the Southern Authorial Hottie objectification game based on those author photos, even if the young T.R. Pearson ultimately edged out Mr. Gurganus.

What can I say? Beard always trumped mustache in *Honcho*-reading milieus. And it wasn't like the other competition was all that hot. I mean, come on: Harry Crews and Robert Penn Warren?

But it was the price of the novel that was the problem: \$21.95 . . . in the '80s? Do you know how much Ramen and beer could be bought on \$21.95 in 1989?

Then, several years later, I read Mr. Gurganus's short story "Minor Heroism," an aching poignant assessment of a son's relationship to a distant father.²

PHOTOGRAPH BY BECKET LOGAN; COURTESY OF ALLAN GURGANUS



notes contributed by the NCLR staff

ABOVE A dapper Allan Gurganus on the cover of *Oldest Living Confederate Widow Tells All*

¹ Allan Gurganus, *Oldest Living Confederate Widow Tells All* (New York: Knopf, 1989).

² "Minor Heroism," first published in *The New Yorker*, 18 Nov. 1974, opens Gurganus's collection *White People* (New York: Knopf, 1990).