

## HALLOWEEN'S HERALD OF DEMOCRACY:

Allan Gurganus  
and the Horror Show  
of American Politics

by Zackary Vernon

with photographs  
by Lynn Badia

Read about **ZACKARY VERNON** with his interview with Ron Rash and Terry Roberts in the special feature section of this issue.

Read an essay by **ALLAN GURGANUS** in *NCLR* 2007 and Gary Richards's essay about Gurganus's novel *Plays Well with Others* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1997; reviewed in *NCLR* 1999) in the 2008 humor issue, and hear Gurganus read his short story "Nativity, Caucasian" on *Mirth Carolina Laugh Tracks*, the CD component that accompanied the humor issue. His latest book, *Local Souls* (Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2013), was reviewed in *NCLR Online* 2014.

**LYNN BADIA** worked as a photographer, videographer, editor, and producer for PBS before entering the graduate program in English at UNC Chapel Hill. She received her PhD in 2014.

RIGHT Allan Gurganus and Zackary Vernon

**THE EERIE SENSATION OF BEING WATCHED IS EVER-PRESENT, AS THE EYES OF SUNDRY PEOPLE, ALL LONG DEAD, STARE OUT FROM THE WALLS.**

I knew things had taken a turn toward the strange when Allan Gurganus asked me to help him retrieve the baby coffin from his basement. This occurred in 2012, the day before Halloween, when I went over to his house to assist in setting up for the legendary Halloween show that he hosts each year. I was particularly nervous that day because Gurganus had just agreed to my request to write an article about the show's politically themed skits.

Gurganus's house is formidable, a large Gothic-inspired structure with a dramatic central dormer and a yawning front porch. Virtually every square foot of the house and porch is artfully cluttered with the artifacts of a life lived as a collector and aesthete, from Greco-Roman busts to Renaissance portraits to Southern folk art. The eerie sensation of being watched is ever-present, as the eyes of sundry people, all long dead, stare out from the walls. In such an environment, it takes no great stretch of the imagination to envision the ghosts of past residents wimply by in the dark hallways. In fact, Gurganus claims that he had to exorcise one such ghost not long after moving in.

When I arrived, I expected to be put to work preparing for the hundreds of guests who would attend the show the following day. Instead, Gurganus and I sat down in his library and, over drinks, discussed the article about his literary mentor John Cheever that he had just published in *The New York Review of Books*. After sharing a few details about his experiences with Cheever, and as I was struggling to formulate something smart to say about Cheever's contribution to

PHOTOGRAPH BY LYNN BADIA

