

“To write a novel is a delicious siege; one camps in front of a story as though it were a city and waits. To write a play is like crossing a river by leaping from rock to rock; there are always those pauses, those moments of empty space, between the rocks.”—Jim Grimsley

North Carolina native Jim Grimsley is currently perhaps best known as the prolific writer of award-winning fiction, the author of the novels *Winter Birds* (1994), *Dream Boy* (1995), *My Drowning* (1997), *Comfort and Joy* (1999), *Kirith Kirin* (2000), *Boulevard* (2002), *The Ordinary* (2004), *The Last Green Tree* (2006), and *Forgiveness* (2007), as well as the collection of short fiction *Jesus Is Sending You This Message* (2008). Grimsley has, however, devoted significant periods of his literary career to playwriting and continues to be intimately and variously involved with theatrical productions across the United States. Especially in the 1980s and early 1990s, he wrote and shepherded through production numerous plays, several of which were collected and published in *Mr. Universe and Other Plays* (1998). The success of these productions led to his serving as playwright in residence at both Seven Stages in Atlanta and About Face Theatre in Chicago. A longtime resident of Atlanta, Grimsley is currently Senior Resident Fellow in Creative Writing at Emory University, where he is also the Director of the Creative Writing Program.

MUSCLE MEN, TENNESSEE WILLIAMS, AND THE STATE OF SOUTHERN DRAMA:

BY GARY RICHARDS

An Interview with Jim Grimsley

In a series of emails exchanged late in 2008 and early in 2009, Grimsley responded candidly and provocatively to questions that asked him to reflect on his literary production, specifically as a playwright; on that of other Southern playwrights; and on the contemporary theater scene at local, regional, national, and international levels. Within the exchange, he charted, among a range of issues, the pleasures and pains of his work in this arena, the importance of his North Carolina childhood, and his concerns about Southern identity. The interview has been edited only minimally for clarity and brevity, and explanatory notes on other North Carolina dramatists have been added. ■ ■ ■

ABOVE Jim Grimsley on the set of the Kansas City Repertory Theatre's production of his play *The Borderland*, 4 Apr. 2009

GARY RICHARDS, the author of *Lovers and Beloveds: Sexual Otherness in Southern Fiction, 1936–1961* (Louisiana State University Press, 2005), is an assistant professor of English at the University of Mary Washington. See *NCLR* 17 (2008) for his article on Allan Gurganus's *Plays Well with Others*.

For more information about JIM GRIMSLEY, see his website at www.literati.net/Grimsley.