

LETTERS

A PLACE FOR YOUNG POETS

I nodded in sincere agreement with Melanie Sage's statement that "poetry holds a special place at Exeter" in the winter 2007 edition of the *Bulletin*. As did many others, I developed my poetic voice at Exeter, marking my senior year with both participation in the 20th anniversary celebration of the Lamont Poetry Series and an original hip-hop album with Jelani House '02. I am thankful to Exeter for granting me the opportunity to be a student of Ralph Sneed, an admirer of Dolores Kendrick and a new fan of Donald Hall. I hope I didn't miss it in this edition, but it would have been a pleasure to see how the poetic legacy continues among the students at Exeter today. Is there any way to see samples of work by current students?

Adrian J. "A-Jay" Hopkins '02
Bronx, NY

Editor's note: Look for coverage of this year's Lamont Younger Poets in our summer issue.

'PARADISE' FOUND

Congratulations to Donald Hall '47 (and to Maggie Dietz, who interviewed him in your winter issue) for not holding back on recounting his rough experience in English class at Exeter. The reminiscence inspires me to one of my own.

On a gray Saturday afternoon during the winter term of my upper-middle year, I picked out *This Side of Paradise* by F. Scott Fitzgerald at random from the shelf of the Davis Library.

Standing by the windows, I read the first two sentences. Then I sat down and read on. I read all that afternoon, took the book out that evening, and finished it over the weekend. After that, Saturday afternoons were not dismal any longer.

This Side of Paradise seemed to be about my own life, in language I would have used if I had written it. Having that kind of experience of reading a novel was definitely a first for me, and it brought the whole prospect of actually writing a book squarely into the realm of possibility.

I think my English teacher found my enthusiasm irritating, for across the top of my book report he wrote in red pencil: "*This Side of Paradise* is not a well-written book."

He and I were standing at opposite ends of the oval table, as though in a show-down at high noon. The other students had picked up their books and were filing out. The teacher was trying not to notice that I was now reading *The Great Gatsby* for my own edification. For my part, I was mentally spinning the chamber of my six-gun.

"It was a best seller in its day," I said, replying to his written comment without a segue. He'd know what we were talking about.

The teacher lifted his eyes to the ceiling, as though praying for patience.

"The fact that a book was a best seller in its day is no assurance of its lasting value," he said, "By the thirties, *This Side of Paradise* was completely outdated, and now no one considers it of any literary worth."

"But F. Scott Fitzgerald has a solid literary reputation." I returned.

"Not for *This Side of Paradise*. For *The Great Gatsby*, yes. For *Tender Is the Night*, maybe. But not *This Side of Paradise*."

Game, set and match. He was walking off the court. He was even rolling up the net, just to be sure.

Exactly 50 years later, I was in the fiction section of Barnes and Noble on Manhattan's upper west side, looking for *Giant* by Edna Ferber. There was no Ferber. The F section went from Faulkner to Fielding to—guess who?—F. Scott Fitzgerald. And the book that was in most plentiful supply was—you're ahead of me—*This Side of Paradise*. That was in 2004, in the following century.

It's hard to predict what books or authors will stay in the bookstores. Proof of that is a comment on the jacket of a copy of *Parades's End* by Ford Madox Ford I just bought. "There is no novelist of this century more likely to live than Ford Madox Ford," wrote Graham Greene, in a magnanimous augury that proved spectacularly untrue.

But though that early adverse experience at Exeter was not as severe as Donald Hall's, it hardened me in my resolve just as his did. Whatever my teacher or any other adult may have thought, *This Side of Paradise* changed my life. Now there was always something to do on weekends. There were books to read, techniques to study. I had found my calling. The autumn after that I entered George Bennett's special writing class, and was on my way to becoming a writer.

I'll grant that *The Great Gatsby* is a better book than *This Side of Paradise*. It should be, as it was a work of Fitzgerald's mature genius compared to his first novel. But *This Side* was the book that lit my fire. That seemingly random act of picking it down from the library shelf led me to *The Great Gatsby*.

Velikii Gatsby it was entitled in the Russian edition I gave to our guide as a parting present at a writer's conference I attended in St. Petersburg, in 2003.

"Oh, kak lyublyu Velikii Gatsby!" she squealed in delight. I don't think I could have given her anything more representative of America or anything she could have appreciated more. If I were to leave America and never come back, the ending of *The Great Gatsby*—Nick Carraway returning to his home in St. Paul, MN from his eastern boarding school at Thanksgiving—would symbolize to me what it is to have been American.

Elias Kulukundis '55
New York, NY

Elias Kulukundis '55 is the author of The Feasts of Memory and is presently working on a film version of his second memoir, My Taste of Illusion. He is also the founder of the George Bennett Fellowship, Exeter's writer-in-residence program.



Donald Hall '47

BOB LAPREE

name just a few of the amazing writing talents that Exeter groomed in those years.

As Myron R. Williams wrote in *The Story of Phillips Exeter* (1957), “It is still difficult to estimate the tremendous amount of influence which Frank W. Cushwa has had on the Exeter of today. From the moment he joined the faculty in 1908, he began arousing interests that had grown sluggish and set in motion new ones. Under him the English department really came of age, and he gave new life to the *Bulletin*, which he edited until 1933. The Davis Library, the *Monthly*, Academic lectures, funds for lectures and prizes, the Lantern Club, the Southern Club, the Musical Clubs, winter sports, new dormitories, the Art department, the Dramatic Association, Phillips Church, the Problem Committee, the Harkness Plan—these and other things received from him either the initial impulse or much of the momentum to make them go.”

Thank you for this opportunity to mention a few of these recollections.

Brooks Clark
Knoxville, TN

LIBRARIANS' LEGACY

As a recipient of the *Bulletin* for over 30 years, I've enjoyed reading of Exeter's continuing changes and improvements as well as historical coverage of its significant past. As a modest part of that history, I have a particular interest in the contribution of Exeter's female staff in the years before coeducation. Connie Brown has done an excellent job in her book on Academy wives and daughters, and your article “An Open Book,” in the winter 2006 issue, shed light on the contributions of some of the Academy's librarians. I'd like to add to that story.

I was privileged to be a librarian both before and after coeducation, just as the careers of two colleagues, Margaret P. Tate (aunt to Iris Gowen '72 and great-aunt to Bernard and Madeleine Parker) and Sara K. French, were coming to a close. I learned that these women had devoted not only their considerable on-the-job efforts, but also a great deal of personal time to many students over the years. They worked at a time in which the Academy could be an intimidating and often lonely place for some young men. There were those who could not afford to leave on holidays, and in an era before video games, PCs or cell phones (and a closed IOKA), they found company and relaxation at the library. Both of these librarians had students over for home-cooked meals, and occasionally took students to dinner at the Inn or provided them with welcome pocket change. Both also personally contributed funds to more than one student's continuing education and



Frank Cushwa

maintained long-term friendships with students they had originally befriended as preps. They were always a willing ear for a sad story and a maternal touch in a male society.

On a professional level, they were information sleuths par excellence. Without computers to aid them in their research, Mmes. Tate and French still never let a question go unanswered, even when that meant continuing their search in their free time, at their own expense. Both women were intellectually curious to such a degree that some students found it infectious. The rarer the information, the more they enjoyed searching for it—something, I might add, that was the case with all the library staff.

I hope there are *Bulletin* readers who still remember these fine women and who found their student days easier because of their assistance. Although I'm no longer in the library field, their excellent example followed me throughout my career.

Frances A. Nowak
Lowell, MA

Poetic Licenses, Cont.



The spirit of *non sibi* has always been part of me; my time at the Academy gave it a name and determined focus. It remains with me to this day, and seemed the perfect choice for a license plate when I lived in Oregon.

Unfortunately, Oregon uses a six-character license plate. Uninspired by possible abbreviations, I waited.

When I decided to relocate to Georgia, one of the first things I researched was the number of characters available for a custom plate.

The rest, as they say, is history.

Russ Washington '89
Marietta, GA