

## Biblio File

*Monstrous Beauty*, produced by Macmillan Audio, written by **Elizabeth Fama** and narrated by Katherine Kellgren, won this year's Newbery, Caldecott Odyssey Award for best audiobook produced for children and/or young adults. ... **Kathie Giorgio's** short story "Limbo's Gates" has been accepted for publication in the third volume of *Magnolia: A Journal of Women's Socially Engaged Literature*. ... In January, **Timuel Black** received the City of Chicago's first Champion of Freedom award. And the intersection of 50th and State streets in Chicago has been given the honorary name "Dr. Timuel Black Street." The street runs past DuSable High School, from which Black graduated. Also, on Feb. 12, Black reflected on the Dr. Martin Luther King's March on Washington in report produced by Medill Reports students at Northwestern University. ... Past SMA President **Theodore Berland** is looking forward to a healthier 2013, as he is recovering from several illnesses that "laid him low" throughout 2012. As for scrivening, he is at work on his memoirs. He recently contributed a collection of books by his late father (Sam Berland, a well-known inventor, performer and teacher of magic tricks) to the library of the Academy of Magical Arts in Hollywood. ... An audio book and phone app of **Laura Caldwell's** *Long Way Home: A Young Man Lost in the System and the Two Women Who Found Him* have been released. A portion of the proceeds will go toward Laura's Life After Innocence project. ... **Mervin Block** writes, "Good editors keep trying to kill clichés, but clichés outlive editors." ... Writing in the Feb. 3 Chicago Sun-Times, **Mark Eleveld** called **Patricia McNair's** *Temple of Air* (a 2012 SMA Adult Fiction finalist) "violently creative." ... **Deborah Blum** is writing a book about the history of poisonous food additives. ... **Robert**

Turn to Page 2

## Author grew up seeing stories as way to make sense of world

BY THOMAS FRISBIE

**Gillian Flynn** is author of three books, including *Gone Girl*, that are widely admired in part for their careful plotting.

But unlike characters, which come more easily to her, plotting is hard, she said.

"The way I organize myself is I write something down on a sticky note and I tape it to the wall [of my home office]," Flynn said at the February program of the Society of Midland Authors. "I would be trying to check who was where and when and what was going on and what the chronology was and who was lying about what. ... The office was just covered with fluttering notes everywhere."

Addressing a capacity crowd in a 365-seat auditorium at Chicago's Harold Washington Library, Flynn said she was lucky to come from a Kansas City family that valued storytelling.

"I grew up in a house that didn't see stories as anything frivolous," said Flynn, whose three books all are in the process of being made into films. "They saw stories as a way of making sense of our world. And a way of talking to each other. And that there was a real value in the telling of stories."

Her father was a film professor and her mother taught reading, she said.

"[My mother] was always putting a book in my hand and my dad was always secretly sneaking me off to vastly inappropriate movies for children," Flynn said. "So my mom would be like, here's *A Wrinkle in Time*, and it has various themes, it is so important to see them, and my dad would be like, here's 'Psycho,' let's watch it."

Of her books, "*Sharp Objects* was prob-

ably my darkest and most Gothic book," she said. That was partly because her day job for 10 years was as a writer for Entertainment Weekly, which was focused on pop culture. *Sharp Objects* has no references to pop culture.

When Gillian showed a draft of her second novel, *Dark Places*, to her husband, he said of her main character, "[I] can tell you don't like writing her."

Gillian agreed. She had wanted to try creating a character who was the opposite of the main *Sharp Objects* character,

Camille, who was an alcoholic and very haunted by her past. But she wound up making her new character, Libby, so likable "she might as well have taught aerobics."

"The next day I deleted everything," Flynn said. "I deleted all of Libby. ... I got another not-nice person, but everything made sense from then on. That was another important lesson for

me, that sometimes you just have to get out of your own way as a writer."

By the time she started *Gone Girl*, she wanted to go into a new direction with her characters.

"I had written two characters that were very isolated and very lonely and had trouble making any sort of human connection, and so I felt like I had really explored the geography of isolation and loneliness and I wanted to go in the opposite direction and look at what it means when you choose to join your life to someone permanently," she said. "I was very interested in writing a thriller [showing] no one knows what goes on in other people's marriages ... and, to take it even a step further, do you know really who you are?"



Gillian Flynn

## Biblio File

Continued from Page 1

**Loerzel, Jay Bonansinga** and **Richard Lindberg** are among the authors contributing to the *Des Plaines River Anthology*, an echo of the *Spoon River Anthology* that is being put together by **Augie Aleksy** about the occupants of the cemeteries in Forest Park, Ill. ... **Dan Dinello** published a Feb. 1 letter to the editor in the New York Times titled “A Robot at My Side, to Help and Advise?” ... What was **Michael Ebner** doing on Super Bowl Sunday? Lecturing about baseball, of course. His topic, “Baseball: The Great Jewish American Pastime” examined how baseball, Jews and American history converge. ... So you think you’ve been busy? Here’s what’s new with **June Sawyers**: Her latest book, *Bearing the People Away: The Portable Highland Clearances Companion*, will be published this year by Cape Breton University Press. She taught a course on Woody Guthrie, “Hobo’s Lullaby: Woody Guthrie and the American Protest Song,” at the Newberry Library in the fall and will teach a spring 2013 course on Synge,

Turn to Page 3

## Literary License

©2013, Society  
of Midland Authors  
P.O. Box 10419, Chicago IL 60610

Editor: Thomas Frisbie  
tomfrisbie@aol.com

[www.midlandauthors.com](http://www.midlandauthors.com)

Follow the Society on  
Twitter@midlandauthors

Society of Midland Authors members can now pay their membership dues, buy tickets to the annual dinner and make donations on our website with PayPal (there is a \$1 fee to help cover PayPal’s fee). To make a donation, visit our home page at [www.midlandauthors.com](http://www.midlandauthors.com) and click on the “Donate” button in the upper right corner.

# Lost literature of Nelson Algren

In the Feb. 3 issue of *Printers Row*, the literary journal of the Chicago Tribune, Society of Midland Authors member **Rick Kogan** commented on the recent discovery of a heretofore unpublished poem by Carl Sandburg. Kogan finished his article by asking, “But are there more Sandburg poems waiting to be unearthed? Is there a Nelson Algren short story gathering dust at Ohio State University, the repository of his papers?”

Kogan’s question about Algren and Ohio State University is reminiscent of the partial resurrection of Algren’s never-published book, *Entrapment*. This work might have been Algren’s Great American Novel. But the operative words are “might have been.” Algren started writing it after he completed *Man with the Golden Arm* (1949), continued working on it during the 1950s, but never finished it. Algren scholars have known about *Entrapment* for years, as the uncompleted manuscript has been archived, along with the rest of Algren’s papers, in the Special Collections library at Ohio State University. Algren biographer Bettina Drew devoted a chapter to it in her

1989 work, *Nelson Algren: A Life on the Wild Side*. But Seven Stories Press and editors Brooke Horvath and Dan Simon brought *Entrapment* to life, publishing two long sections of it in the 2009 book, *Entrapment and Other Writings*.

But is an unpublished Algren short story boxed up at Ohio State, waiting to see the light of day?

Horvath and Simon note unpublished manuscripts are in the Algren archives. Their existence is well-known, as Algren’s papers have been extensively cataloged. But with Algren, “unpublished” is a relative term. The man was the ultimate recycler, incorporating parts and passages from older books and stories into newer ones. For example, Horvath notes in his book, *Understanding Nelson Algren*, that Algren’s novel, *A Walk on the Wild Side*, “quickly moved into terrain all its own despite appropriating material not only from *Somebody in Boots* [Algren’s first book] but also from the stories “So Help Me,” “El Presidente de Mejico” and

“The Face on the Barroom Floor.”

Although all 23 linear feet of Nelson Algren’s Ohio State papers have been examined and documented, this does not mean literary historians have accounted for all of Algren’s short stories. With Algren, “unpublished” meant “no money coming in,” and because the author was an incessant gambler, he was perpetually broke. He often submitted stories and articles to magazines, because their editors made immediate payment. Horvath and Simon lament that “some of Algren’s finest stories and essays were published once, either in obscure or major magazines, then weren’t collected in book form, and so were lost.” Furthermore, Algren did not discriminate based on a magazine’s pedigree. Drew writes that “for a while, any low-class skin magazine could pick up an Algren story by paying a token sum to Doubleday [Algren’s publisher].”

The 1950s and ’60s saw a flood of men’s magazines with such forgettable titles as *Gent*, *Nugget* and *Swank*. It is very possible researchers have not uncovered all of Algren’s works that

appeared in these cheesy periodicals. Matthew J. Bruccoli has identified many “skin magazine stories” in his work, *Nelson Algren: A Descriptive Bibliography*. But this book was published in 1985, years before the Internet and eBay. Bruccoli’s work, though admirable, is not complete, despite two addenda published by The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America. (Consider, e.g., the short story, “Cawfee Man,” that appeared in the June 1962 issue of *Climax*.) It seems almost certain that there is a long-forgotten Algren short story in some equally long-forgotten issue of *Cavalier*, *Fling* or *Caper*, quietly mouldering away on the shelves of some tiny antique store.

Gentlemen, this means that it is perfectly OK to look through those old men’s magazines when you and your wife go to out-of-the-way auctions or country flea markets. Just tell her that you really are only reading the articles.

*Dick Bales is treasurer of the SMA.*

Literary  
Life  
Dick  
Bales



# Proud gun owner aims to tell both sides of the gun debate

Society of Midland Authors Board Member **Gerry Souter**, who will speak at the Society's March 12 program, is author of *American Shooter: A Personal History of Gun Culture in the United States* and calls himself "a liberal in the NRA."

In his book, he examines the history of firearms in the United States, from the settlers who carried matchlock muskets ashore at Jamestown to the citizens who purchase guns in record numbers today. He recounts how the country has lived with guns from the flintlock hung over the fireplace to the concealed-carry, laser-sighted Glock semiautomatic pistol tucked away in the hidden pocket of Mom's purse.

He weaves in tales of his own experiences with guns, including sport shooting as a young man, hunting and bonding with his father, and facing the smoking (wrong) end of a muzzle as an international photo-journalist.

**Literary License:** *Calls for new gun laws are back in the headlines. How does your book fit into the debate?*

**Gerry Souter:** My book traces the history of the bond with firearms that has existed since colonial times to the present. In rediscovering our relationship readers can better understand the bases for both pro and anti-gun sentiments as well as the close connection between military and civilian gun use issues.

**Literary License:** *What reaction have you had to your book from people on each side of the issue?*

**Gerry Souter:** Very positive on both sides – each recognizes the truth of their own argument and most realize the need for a new approach that satisfies both positions. I believe a disconnect is needed between military weapons and civilian sports firearms – especially marketing and background checks should be mandatory at the federal level for

March 12, 2013, program

Harold Washington Library  
400 S. State St.

6 p.m. - Program

Free

handgun purchases.

**Literary License:** *What makes you a "liberal" in the NRA?*

**Gerry Souter:** I favor sensible compromise that protects firearms ownership rights while reducing the need for military weapons and accessories in civilian hands. And young people exposed to shooting sports.

**Literary License:** *Why did you choose to weave your own experiences as a shooter into this book?*

**Gerry Souter:** I represent the typical experiences of an American shooter who has grown up with firearms and

appreciates how marksmanship skills help build character, respect and eye-hand coordination like many good solo sports. My personal contribution turns a lecture into a conversation.

**Literary License:** *You've written or co-authored about 50 books. Will there be another one about guns?*

**Gerry Souter:** I have one more book in outline form: a *History of American Shooting Sports*. It explores the tradition of shooting sports in the United States brought over from German shooting clubs in the early colonial period through accuracy sports that evolved from hunting and survival needs. Development of shooting sports evolved as traditional contests with local champions and large spectator crowds. The U.S. entered the already-mature European competitions in the 19th century. By then, military contract pressures were affecting the manufacturing and marketing of firearms and that pressure politicized the sport caused many of today's perception problems.

Literary  
Landscape  
Gerry  
Souter



## Biblio File

Continued from Page 2

"Man of Aran: The Plays and Prose of John Millington Synge." She recently finished writing two solo plays, "Life without Roses," a theatrical portrait of the Chicago literary figure Margaret Anderson and "Black Dogs and Melancholy," a solo portrait of Dr Samuel Johnson (an excerpt from the former play was presented as a staged reading in November 2012 at the Green House Theater on Lincoln Avenue, sponsored by Her Story Theater). She organized and presented "A Hard Rain: A Tribute to Bob Dylan's Live at the Gaslight 1962 Album" with singer and guitarist Gus Noble at Uncommon Ground Café in Lake View on Oct. 20 and is scheduled to perform "Scottish Ballads for a Long Winter's Night," an evening of Scottish ballads, folk songs and poetry at Center Portion in Logan Square with singer/guitarist Andrew Calhoun on Feb. 23. She will present three papers at two conferences in the coming months: "Jersey Cowboy: The Country Songs of Bruce Springsteen" at the annual International Country Music Conference in Nashville in May and "The Last of the Clans: The Art and Iconography of the Highland Clearances" and "Lay Down Your Weary Tune: Dylan, Scotland, and the Ballad Tradition" at St. Andrews University in Laurinburg, N.C., in April. She is writing her first e-single "Wages of Sin: Bruce Springsteen, Religion, and the Politics of Change" for the Now and Then Reader, the digital publishing house recently founded by Chicago book publisher **Ivan R. Dee**. To top it off, she is scheduled to receive the 2013 Flora MacDonald Award, which is given to a woman of Scottish descent or birth "who had made an outstanding contribution to the human community." ... Motor Racing Research Center historian Bill Green and **Michael Argetsinger** have written a pictorial history of the Watkins Glen racetrack, *Watkins Glen International* (Arcadia Publishing). A book launch will be held at Watkins Glen – at the International Motor Racing Research Center – on May 18. The Chicago launch is on May 23, hosted by the Chicago Loop Auto Sport

Turn to Page 4

## Biblio File

Continued from Page 3

Society. Michael will give an illustrated talk at both events. This is his his fifth published book. ... The Jan. 25 Chicago Tribune ran an excerpt of *Against Fairness* by **Stephen T. Asma**. ... **Tom Lichtenheld** and **Blue Balliett** were among the authors scheduled to be at a Children's Literature Breakfast Feb 16 at Anderson's Bookshop in Naperville, Ill. ... **Benjamin Percy** tweets to say Grand Central Publishing will re-release his first collection, *The Language of Elk*, as an e-book. ... As a tour guide in Chicago who points out architectural gems and movie history, Michael Corcoran sometimes cribbed from books by **Arnie Bernstein**, including *Hollywood on Lake Michigan: 100 Years of Chicago & the Movies*, which details how Chicago was an important early center of movie-making. The book also lists many of the early landmarks. Corcoran thought the book was a "lovely history." So he jumped at the chance to update it. *Hollywood on Lake Michigan, Second Edition* will be out in June from Chicago Review Press. ... In the Feb. 10 New York Times Book Review, Paul Kennedy told how former SMA member and award-winner **Daniel J. Boorstin** complained to him in 1980 about the Smithsonian Institution's decision to delete the final two words from the name of its Museum of History and Technology. "Boorstin had a point," Kennedy wrote. "Scholars of other fields do often tend to underestimate the influence of technology." ... **Audrey Niffenegger** and **Jane Hamilton** will hold a conversation at 2 p.m. March 2 at the Stuart Community Room in the Gorton Center, 400 W. Illinois Road, Lake Forest, Ill. \$10. ... On Feb. 11, the Chicago Tribune's Redeye edition interviewed **Jay Bonansinga** about about his "The Walking Dead" TV series and the third Walking Dead book, which is due out later this year. In the interview, Jay revealed the common



**Audrey Niffenegger**

Turn to Page 5

## New Books

### RETURN TO HOME

**Sandy Dickson's** new book, *Return to Home* (WestBowPress, December, 2012), tells the story of Mark Watson, a devoted Georgia husband and father who wonders where his real home is.

A real estate salesman, he takes on an exciting challenge that promises travel and more money. Along the way, he encounters people and Christian messages that make him regret his former agnostic convictions. He is given a huge secret he is never to reveal, lest something terrible happens to him and his beloved family, which leaves him feeling torn between two worlds.

### THE LONGEVITY SEEKERS

People have searched for the fountain of youth everywhere from Bimini to St. Augustine. But for a steadfast group of scientists, the secret to a long life lies elsewhere: in the lowly lab worm. By changing the function of just a few key genes, these scientists were able to lengthen worms' lifespans up to tenfold, while also controlling the onset of many of the physical problems that beset old age. As the global population ages, the potential impact of this discovery on society is vast – as is the potential for profit.

With *The Longevity Seekers: Science, Business and the Fountain of Youth* (May 1, University of Chicago Press), science writer **Ted Anton** takes readers inside this tale that began with worms and branched out to snare innovative minds from California to Crete, investments from big biotech, and endorsements from TV personalities like Oprah and Dr. Oz. Some of the research was remarkable, such as the discovery of an enzyme in humans that stops cells from aging. And some, like an oft-cited study touting the compound resveratrol, found in red wine—proved highly controversial, igniting a science war over truth, credit, and potential profit. As the pace of discovery accelerated, so too did powerful personal

rivalries and public fascination, driven by the hope that a longer, healthier life was right around the corner. Anton has spent years interviewing and working with the scientists at the frontier of longevity science, and this book offers a behind-the-scenes look at the state-of-the-art research and the impact it might have on global public health, society, and even our friends and family.

With spectacular science and an unforgettable cast of characters, *The Longevity Seekers* has all the elements of a great story and sheds light on discoveries that could fundamentally reshape human life.

### LOUIS AGASSIZ: CREATOR OF AMERICAN SCIENCE

The Feb. 2 New York Times Book Review called **Christophe Irmischer's** new book (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt) an "evocative new biography" and said, "Irmischer is a richly descriptive writer with an eye for detail, the complexities of character and the workings of institutional and familial power structures."

Booklist called it, "A masterful portrait illuminating the tangled human dynamics of science."

The book tells the story of a Swiss immigrant, Louis Agassiz, who 175 years ago became a founding father of American science. Agassiz, known at a young age for his work on mountain glaciers, was a pioneer in field research and an obsessive collector. He got the public to send him natural specimens for his museum of comparative zoology.

Kirkus Reviews wrote, "A thoroughly satisfying biography...Irmischer makes a convincing case that this egotistical, often wrongheaded figure deserves his reputation as a founder and first great popularizer of American science."

Publishers Weekly said, "In Irmischer's hands, Agassiz's life and passions are embedded in the major intellectual ideas of his time. ... The relationship between Agassiz and his second wife, Elizabeth Cary Agassiz, the first president of Radcliffe College, is also fascinating."

Turn to Page 5

## New Books

Continued from Page 4

### CHICAGO CABLE CARS

For almost a quarter of a century Chicago boasted the largest cable car system the world has ever seen, transporting more than one billion riders. In *Chicago Cable Cars* (The History Press, November, 2012), **Greg Borzo**



Greg Borzo

tells how, after 25 years, the boom went bust, and Chicago abandoned its cable car system.

The Chicago Tribune said, "Borzo's 192-page book contains dozens of historical photos as well as maps of cable-car

lines. 'He delves into the technology of the cable car and the Chicago politics and economics that helped spur both its realization and subsequent demise because of obsolescence and the benefits of the electric trolley, which was a more comfortable and profitable transportation mode.'

The launch party is 7 p.m. Feb. 28 at The Book Cellar, 4736-38 N. Lincoln, Chicago.

## Upcoming Events

### Upcoming Society of Midland Authors programs are:

*Friday, March 1 and Saturday, March 2: Creative Chicago Expo.* Chicago Cultural Center, 78 E. Washington Street, Chicago, Ill. The Society will hold a panel discussion on "How to Get Published" at 1:30 p.m. on Saturday, March 2.

*Tuesday, March 12, 6 p.m.:* **Gerry Souter**, author of *American Shooter*. At the Harold Washington Library.

*Tuesday, April 9 (6 p.m. social hour, 7 p.m. talk):* **Edward Hirsch**, poet, critic and president of the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation. **This program will be at the Cliff Dwellers Club.**

*Tuesday, May 14 (6 p.m. social hour, 7 p.m. dinner.* The annual Society of Midland Authors book awards dinner. (See early registration form below.)

*The Society of Midland Authors' 2012-2013 programs can be heard in their entirety at [www.chicagopublicradio.org/](http://www.chicagopublicradio.org/) amplified.*

## Biblio File

Continued from Page 4

thread in his work: "I guess all my books – including my work on TWD – are about disasters of one sort or another." ... The Oak Leaves (of Oak Park, Ill.) on Feb. 14 interviewed **Jim Bowman** about his new book, *Company Man: My Jesuit Life, 1950-1968* (See New Books, November/December 2012 Literary License). Jim, a Chicago Daily News religion reporter until the paper folded in 1978, said, "I applied to be the religion reporter. The interview was my first time in a city newsroom. I never hesitated. It became an introduction to [a different type of] professionalism. There was a particular craft to learn. Being a newspaper reporter, I had to be clear, focused and organized." ... A Seattle gallery exhibit through March 23 is organized around themes taken from *Vivian Maier: Out of the Shadows* by **Richard Cahan** and **Michael Williams**. ... **Jean Bethke Elshtain** was one of 74 signatories on "A Call for a New Conversation on Marriage." ... On Feb. 11, **Roger Ebert** posted a blog entry about his favorite bar, the Old Town Ale House. ... **Arnie Bernstein** tweets to say that final edits, acknowledgements and dedication are finished for his new book.

# Society of Midland Authors Annual Dinner Early Registration Form

The Society of Midland Authors 57th annual awards banquet will be held May 14 in the LaSalle Room at the Holiday Inn Chicago Mart Plaza, 350 N. Orleans, Chicago, honoring the best books by Midwest authors published in 2012. The reception with a cash bar will start at 6 p.m. Dinner will begin at 7 p.m.

The master of ceremonies will be Steve Bertrand, morning anchor of WGN-AM radio and host of the video podcast "Steve Bertrand on Books," which features his interviews with leading writers.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of dinners at \$75 each. \_\_\_\_\_

Number of vegetarian dinners at \$75 each. \_\_\_\_\_

Please clip above form and mail to: Dinner Reservation, Society of Midland Authors, P.O. Box 10419, Chicago IL 60610  
You may also download a similar form at our website, [www.midlandauthors.com](http://www.midlandauthors.com)

## New Members

**Samantha Hoffman's** debut novel, *What More Could You Wish For*, was published last year by St. Martin's Griffin.



**Samantha Hoffman**

She is now working on her second novel, *The Ones You Left Behind*.

Lindy J. Swanson of RT Book Review wrote, "Hoffman's first novel about falling in and out of love in midlife is an easy read. It's also a must-read for strongminded women who want to

follow their hearts. The story shows us that times of grief awaken a place within one's self for repairing broken heart-strings and making new beginnings."

Her stories have appeared in *Chicken Soup for the Dieter's Soul*, *The Corner Magazine* (London) and numerous other print and online publications. She writes a blog ([www.samanthahoffman.com](http://www.samanthahoffman.com)) about life in Chicago.

She also is a runner, reader, film buff, tech geek, blogging queen, personal assistant, chef, wine enthusiast, volunteer, animal lover, sister, friend and lover of life.

**Holly Rozner**, author of *Trade Secrets* (Money Smart, October, 2012), traded S&P options for five years and was a member of Chicago Mercantile Exchange for 22. A native Chicagoan, she was educated at a private girls' school near where President Barack Obama now resides. She earned a bachelor's degree in English and speech from Northwestern University and was later granted a CPA certificate by the University of Illinois.

*Trade Secrets* is a romance about two women whose lives intersect on a trading floor during the crash of 1987 and the subsequent FBI investigation into trading infractions at the Chicago exchanges.

Kirkus Indie said, "Rozner's debut novel peeks into the ... world of insider trading ... with multiple storylines and finely tuned characters, the elegantly fashioned novel amounts to more than its pieces would suggest. Rozner skillfully creates complex characters with strong female leads. Fans of *Fifty Shades of Grey* (2011) will approve. A smart, sexy debut."

# Poets find their creations are welcome at White House

*SMA Board Member Mark Eleveld helped to organize a poetry reading at the White House in May, 2009.*

**T**his president has been committed to showing American arts, our country, and the world at large." These are the words of Elizabeth Alexander, the 2009 Inaugural poet.

First lady Michelle Obama echoed that sentiment at the White House in 2009: "It is one thing for people to tell their stories in their own spaces, and quite another for those stories to be welcomed in this space [White House]. I have wanted to do this from Day One – the notion of standing in this room and hearing some poetry and spoken word."

There I stood at the gate to the White House. My invitation for the poetry show had come months earlier. Actor Zach Braff, political commentator George Stephanopoulos and his wife, and others walked up.

This was one of the first art events at the White House for the Obamas. The place crawled with students, actors, politicians and writers. The atmosphere was charged.

The holding room had a bar and a DJ. Wall-to-wall smiles. Spike Lee was hanging out. When Vice President Joe Biden and his wife, Jill, walked into the room the flashbulbs began. When the president walked in with the first lady and family, the flashes dramatically increased. Braff was standing on a chair, whistling as loud as he could. Slam poets including Mayda de Valle were standing on tables, James Earl Jones was entertaining my silly anecdotes, Esmeralda Spalding was smiling and looking beautiful. "We're here tonight not just to enjoy the works of these artists, but also to highlight the importance of the arts in our life and in our nation," said President Obama in his opening remarks that night. This tradition has continued.

In 2011 the White House held another poetry reading, including best-selling poet

Billy Collins. "One of my poet friends said you are going to make so many poets jealous going to the White House. I said, isn't that the whole point of writing? And then he reminded me that the whole point of writing is to mirror truth and beauty. Well, hats off to him, but he's not here." Collins' tongue-in-cheek is a subtle but a real truth.

When Elizabeth Alexander read at the Inaugural in 2009, "The moment was awesome, powerful. It was about the poem. I saw people getting ready to leave, but when they started hearing the poem, the words, they were eager to stay."

Poetry has now had a hand in five presidential Inaugurations. Robert Frost was the first Inaugural poet at President John

F. Kennedy's 1961 inauguration. Frost had planned to read his inaugural poem "Dedication" but because of the sun's glare and the wind, he recited "The Gift Out-right" from memory. 1997 Inaugural poet Miller Williams said,

"Robert Frost, who was a friend and mentor, said to me that if I were ever asked to be an Inaugural poet I should carefully hold on to the poem, because when he was beginning to read the poem he had written for John Kennedy's 1961 inauguration it blew out of his hands and he had to say another from memory. I held on tightly."

Thirty-plus years later President Clinton chose Maya Angelou in 1993 and Miller Williams in 1997. President Obama jump-started the tradition again by selecting Elizabeth Alexander in 2009 and Richard Blanco for his 2013 inauguration.

The 2013 Inaugural Poet Richard Blanco wrote and read his poem, "One Day." Pulitzer Prize winning poet Tracy K. Smith added, "The scope of Richard Blanco's poems, their beautiful fidelity to private experience, to place, and to community, and to a complex sense of self made him an ideal pick for the Inaugural poet."

*Literary Lore*  
**Mark Eleveld**

