



## RANDOLPH-MACON C O L L E G E

An assessment of "An Author in the Making: Jim Grimsley's Journey from Manuscripts to Press"

by Roman Trusnik

Jim Grimsley (1955--) is a latter-day member of the Southern Literary Renaissance that began so spectacularly in the United States with William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* 1929. Grimsley, a native of North Carolina, was aware he was writing in the tradition of Faulkner, but he tried to move away from the master in Mississippi and achieve his own voice. Like many other Southern writers, in his own life he knew the pains of poverty and alcoholism, and he did menial work while he was constantly writing. His career was different, however, for two reasons. He pursued these of the gay experience in his fiction and drama, which had only been treated tangentially in Southern literature, and his first novel, *Winter Birds*, was published first in German translation in 1992 before it appeared in the original English in 1994.

How this happened is fully studied in this work by Roma Trusnik, who had the good fortune of having available the rich collection of personal Grimsley papers on deposit at Duke University in the David M. Rubenstein Rare book and Manuscript Library. Trusnik had at hand a thorough and extensive collection of documents in the Duke Collection, which included personal journals and professional correspondence, notebooks and literary sources, and unpublished essays and sketches., as well as promotional material and drafts and galleys of both novels and plays. Of primary importance was the author's access to Jim Grimsley himself, who is still writing.

As Trusnik demonstrates, this is an extremely rich gathering for studying the lives and careers not only of Grimsley but his contemporaries as well. The methods he employs are drawn from a number of other disciplines which combine biography, literary and cultural history, textual scholarship, critical theory, and bibliography—all woven together in a highly readable and engaging narrative. One reads it with great pleasure.

Trusnik examines the archive in a roughly chronological way, combining letters, drafts, and professional papers in such a manner as to provide a thorough overview of Grimsley's life and career, the interchanges between him, his friends, and contemporaries, and the difficulties of the writing life.

Neither a traditional biography, nor a dry critical assessment, the method brings all things together in a lively and readable style. We learn more about Grimsley as a human being and publishing than we would from any traditional biographical or critical study.

The result is an unusual piece of scholarship and criticism. The text and ideas are carefully thought out and have been written with grace and clarity. It should serve as a model for similar studies.

I approve the work with great enthusiasm. Trusnik fully deserves the status of associate professor.

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