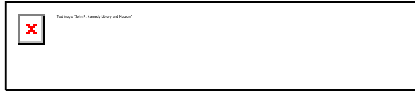

The Hemingway Foundation/PEN and the L.L. Winship/PEN New England Awards Ceremony

John F. Kennedy Library and Foundation
April 13, 2003

Introduction
Deborah Leff, Director, John F. Kennedy Library and Museum

Acknowledgment of Appreciation To Maria Riva
Deborah Leff

Presentation of the Hemingway Foundation/PEN Award to Gabriel Brownstein
Maureen Howard & Patrick Hemingway

Reading
Gabriel Brownstein from *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button, Apt. 3W*

Presentation of the L.L. Winship/PEN New England Award to Adam Haslett
David Mehegan & Joanna Winship Crawford

Reading
Adam Haslett from *You Are Not A Stranger Here*

Introduction of Keynote Speaker Robert Pinsky
Helene Atwan, Chair, PEN New England

Keynote Address
Robert Pinsky

DEBORAH LEFF: How nice to see all of you here. Good afternoon and welcome. I m Deborah Leff, Director of the John F. Kennedy Library and Museum, and along with John Shattuck, the CEO of the Kennedy Library Foundation, the Friends of the Hemingway Collection, PEN New England, the Hemingway Foundation and Society, *The Boston Globe* and the Ucross Foundation, it is my pleasure to welcome you to the twenty-eighth Annual Hemingway Foundation/PEN Award and the ninth annual L.L. Winship/PEN New England Award Ceremony.

It seemed to me like it might be appropriate to quote a writer at a time like this, and the writer I choose to quote is Ernest Hemingway. In a letter written in 1935 that appears in Carlos Baker s *Selected Letters*, Hemingway wrote: "Writing is something that you can never do as well as it can be done. It is a perpetual challenge and it is more difficult than anything else that I have ever done. So I do it, and it makes me happy when I do it well."

Today we honor those who do it exceptionally well, as we present the Hemingway Foundation/PEN Award, America s best known prize for a distinguished first book of fiction, and the L.L. Winship/PEN New England Award, honoring a book about New England or by a New England author.

As you know, the Kennedy Library has the privilege, because of the extraordinary gift of the Hemingway family, to house and make available the Ernest Hemingway collection, the world s most comprehensive archive of Ernest Hemingway s work. We have had a banner year: hundreds and hundreds of Hemingway research visits; a partnership with the Social Science Research Council that will make available, for the first time, copies of Hemingway s material in Cuba; work on the publication of all of Ernest Hemingway s letters; and most recently, a very special gift which we are honored to recognize here today, of the correspondence between Ernest Hemingway and actress Marlene Dietrich.

The letters are a gift from Marlene Dietrich s daughter, sitting beside me, Maria Riva, and she joins us today. Included in this gift are draft manuscripts of stories and poems. Caroline Kennedy, whose mother worked so closely with Mary Hemingway to bring the collection to the library, wanted very much to be here today but could not come. And so Mrs. Riva, she asked me to deliver you a note, and at the risk of admitting that I do read other people s mail-- after all, I read every one of those letters that Ernest Hemingway wrote to your mother [laughs]-- I want to read to you some of what Caroline has written.

"The letters from Ernest Hemingway to your mother, Marlene Dietrich, are exquisite, moving, and remarkable. Hemingway and Dietrich helped define a generation and become icons for the twentieth century. Your donation greatly enriches a treasured collection that meant so much to my mother and means a great deal to me. It will benefit scholars, writers and citizens worldwide for years to come."

It is my pleasure to present this letter to you, along with a book from Caroline, and I ask that everybody join me in acknowledging this extraordinary donation. [AUDIENCE APPLAUSE] I hope that everyone here has the opportunity to view the exhibit of these letters. I can t tell you what this means to the Hemingway Archive, and just how special this gift is.

Before turning to today s main event, let me offer a few more thank yous to those making today s ceremony possible. *The Boston Globe,* especially Aisha Saunders and Jim Venable; the Hemingway Foundation and Society, which funds the PEN Award, and especially its President, Linda Wagner-Martin; the Friends of the Hemingway Collection, which I encourage all of you to join-- it is dedicated to commemorating the life and work of Ernest Hemingway and supports the purchase and preservation of Hemingway materials for our archives; the Ucross Foundation and its President, Elizabeth Guheen; PEN New England, including Helene Atwan, the Chair, Perry Klaus, who chairs the Hemingway Foundation/PEN Awards Committee, Susan Quinn, who heads up the L.L. Winship/PEN New England Awards Committee, and Katherine Parnell, who did so much to make today s ceremony happen.

At the Kennedy Library Foundation, Sandra Sedacca and Ann Scanlon; at the John F. Kennedy Library Museum, James Wagner, who put together the Marlene Dietrich-Hemingway exhibit; our entire public programs and forums staff; Megan Desnoyers, who has worked so hard and loyally in the Hemingway Room for so long; and the remarkable James Roth, our Hemingway archivist, who pulls together for us everything Hemingway. And of course, the wonderful Hemingway family. It is so special to have Patrick, his wife Carol, and Angela Hemingway here with us today. They have all given so much and been tremendous visionary supporters of the collection in every possible way.

It now gives me great pleasure to open the 2003 presentation of awards. You ll hear first from Maureen Howard and Patrick Hemingway, who will announce the runners-up and will present citations to the finalists, and then they ll announce the winner of the Hemingway Foundation/PEN Award. Then David Mehegan and Joanna Winship-Crawford will announce and present citations to the winners and finalists of the L.L. Winship/PEN New England Award. Helene Atwan will then introduce our keynote speaker, former U.S. Poet-Laureate, Robert Pinsky. Maureen?

MAUREEN HOWARD: It s my pleasure to introduce Patrick Hemingway, who s here as the representative of the Hemingway family today. The Hemingway Foundation PEN Award: The late Mary Hemingway, a member of PEN, founded the award in 1976, both to honor the memory of Ernest Hemingway and to draw attention to first books of fiction. The award is funded by the Ernest Hemingway Foundation, which has been administered by the Hemingway Society since 1987. Linda Wagner-Martin is President of the Hemingway Foundation/Society. PEN New England manages the judging, as we know. And we re very happy to be here today at the John F. Kennedy Library and Museum, which is the repository of the Ernest Hemingway papers.

I would like first to salute my judges: Percival Everett and Jim Shepard, my fellow judges-- if they would stand up. [AUDIENCE APPLAUSE] We had a really good time working together. It worked. Some committees don t; ours did. I would also like to read about the runners-up to this award. And the runners-up are Jonathan Tel, for *Arafat s Elephant*-- Basic Books, and Julia Whitty for *A Tortoise for the Queen of Tonga*-- Houghton-Mifflin Company. They will be given the opportunity to go to the Ucross Foundation, which will award a residency fellowship given by the Hemingway Foundation. Ucross Foundation is a retreat for artists and writers located on a 22,000 acre ranch on the high plains of Ucross, Wyoming.

The finalists this year are Christie Hodgen, who is not with us-- she has just had a baby, and therefore is otherwise occupied -- wins for *A Jeweler s Eye for Flaw*-- University of Massachusetts Press. *A Jeweler s Eye for Flaw* is a brilliant collection of stories by a writer who is unafraid of exploring fresh possibilities for fiction. In a number of moving family stories, Christie Hodgen reveals frayed family connections which expose the emotional truth. She is also a fine practitioner of witty fables which reimagine history. Her gift for the challenging moment and a surprising phrase is prismatic, shedding light on the many facets of her characters seemingly ordinary lives. Hodgen's stories do not shy away from the complexity of our culture, yet they often transcend everyday reality to show us the flaw, as well as the perfect cut.

The other finalist is Dave Hudson, who is here today. Dave, will you stand? [AUDIENCE APPLAUSE] Dave Hudson for *Dear Mr. President*, Alfred H. Knopf. Dave Hudson's spectacular interview is good news for at least two reasons. First, because his collection, *Dear Mr. President*, opens a window on the Gulf War's particular mix of high tech surrealism, absurdity, and ruthlessness, and second, because it introduces a major new talent. Hudson's stories are notable for their audacity, ferocity, and emotional intricacy; they're willing to outrage. They're happy to force us to look upon unpleasantness, they disturb and console. They begin the impossible task of introducing us to the rapture and dread of combat, and they never, thankfully, lose sight of tenderness.

The winner of this year's Hemingway Foundation/Pen Award is Gabriel Brownstein, for *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button, Apt. 3W*, W.W. Norton & Company. Gabriel Brownstein's *Curious Case of Benjamin Button, Apt. 3W* is a voyeuristic delight: a magical, strange, kind and human peek into the windows of others. These inventive stories hang together with novelistic cohesion, but each one is a capsule of its own. Brownstein's characters are given with ruthless honesty, but always with affection and appreciation of the frail human condition. An essential character of the book is a place: a New York apartment building, offering its residents at once anonymity and a fishbowl existence. The beautiful language, the keen attention to detail, and the remarkable control all contribute to the success of this fine collection of stories. Gabriel?

[AUDIENCE APPLAUSE]

GABRIEL BROWNSTEIN: Thank you all. This is just so nice and so flattering. And thank you, Maureen and Mr. Hemingway, and thank you, Jim Shepard and Percival Everett. And Marsha Lerner, my wife, thank you very much for all the help. I think I'm supposed to read a story now, so I will read a very short story-- it's very short. [AUDIENCE LAUGHTER] It's called "Musé de Beaux Arts."

"Solly Schlachter lived on the top floor. We never spoke to him, partly because he was older, but mostly because of his dad. In those years before we saw our own fathers as nutty, we all understood Dr. Schlachter as cracked: a proctologist barred from public practice who wore a wire brush mustache and suffered a movie villain's limp. A the least provocation-- a nerf football bouncing across his path in the lobby-- Schlachter would

wave his cane and threaten to shove it up our general ass. 'For years, kid, I did it professionally.' Strange ravings, strange projects. The elevator opened and Schlachter lurched forward perilously. 'That's right,' he'd sneer. 'Make 'em think you're a corpse.'

"October 1975, rain came for 12 days and he rode up to the bearing two-by-fours. From his apartment, Schlachter had access to the roof, and next to the water tower he half-built an ark. At the first glint of sunlight we went out to play in the park and there glimpsed the tips of the curved, bare ribs of the ship rumor had it he'd measured in cubits.

"Another story worth recounting: '72 when Nixon was running for reelection, Schlachter wanted to fashion a wooden horse, fill it with McGovernites armed with jelly donuts, roll it over to 8 82nd Street, GOP HQ. He posted maps in the elevator and sign-up sheets, any Upper West Sider who wanted to play Achaeans at Troy. His money came from patents: ass investigating tools, scopes and wages; cameras attached to long, narrow tubes; a robotic device-- FDA approval pending-- that would scamper up the small intestine and return back, like a Mars probe, bearing precious samples.

"After Solly's death, the doctor spent some time in prison, in a prison hospital, then returned to the penthouse drunk, morose and alone. I was away at school when the Grumbachers caught the smell. Velasquez, the doorman, let the paramedics in and got a glimpse of the naked, bloaded corpse. 'A bottle of brandy on the night table, the Bible on his chest, his cock the size of a baseball bat.' 'Christ, Jesus,' I said, and remembered Solly's awful end. Velasquez, a large, philosophical Dominican whose two children now sing professional-- one with the Met, straightened his black glasses on his nose and ran a hand across his bald pate, 'Fuckin' mad man, throw a child off a roof. Son of a bitch didn't get half as bad as he deserved.'

"As a kid I couldn t fathom Solly's existence, that such a father could have a son. Dark red curls, hands jammed deep in his pockets, a furtive air of embarrassment and shame. We'd stare at each other in the elevator, that same fascinated quiet that came between me and passing Hasid boys. Understand, ours was a building full of kids: Zev Grubin on six, my compadré, the MacMichaelmans on eleven, Kevin the mad genius and his younger brother Ian. On the sidewalk we played Bob Greise, Fran Tarkington, tossed balls off the windshields of parked cars. Solly wended his way through the game slumped and strange and-- Kevin said-- disgusting. 'Solly the sissy,' we called him, or 'Sally'-- as if accidentally.

He once babysat for me, and for an evening I admired him. All night we worked on scientific hitting. Solly taught Rod Carew's batting stances -- wrists, elbows, squats -- and spoke beautifully on the quest to hit .400, Carew, seeking to regain one of the lost markers of human achievement. That Carew was a Jew, a convert, this was important, that he wore a *chai* around his neck and drew one across home plate with each at bat. Solly fetched an atlas and showed off Minnesota, the Twin Cities, the Land of Lakes, names straight out of Tolkein. But the next day when we were playing in the lobby -- Zev and the McMichaelmans and me -- I felt compelled to be vicious. 'Solly the sissy,' I screamed. 'Sally Cecilia.' We jumped up and down. 'Sally the Sissy Cecilia.'

"He kept his fingers in his pockets, flared from under the bill of his Twins cap. Little Ian MacMichaelman -- who would later play quarterback for Horace Mann High School -- threw a nerf football right at Solly's face -- maybe I encouraged him, maybe, the little brother, he wanted to prove he was one of the guys. And Solly didn't duck, didn't flinch, just let his nose be the ball's target. Then he got into the elevator, the door shut. It couldn't have been more than a few months later that Schlachter saddled him with wings and pushed him off the rooftop towards New Jersey.

"As I remember, Solly was a skinny kid -- light boned, long-nosed, a bird. He rose skyward, wings cupping air, then glided down over the treetops and playing fields of Riverside Park. It was mid-Hudson that the project went sour. Apollonian sun melted Icarus's wings; a hard wind wrecked Solly's. A miracle nonetheless: wafting boy swooping over the West Side Highway. Sewer duct slimed to the river north and south, seagulls played in the froth of the discharge. And Solly was one of them, airborne. A tugboat captain pressing a barge full of innocent trash -- ragged Levis, used-up Die-Hards, Oshkosh baby overalls, lead piping, cabbage leaves,

bullet casings, Alpo cans, phone books, notebooks, Danskin tights, dead gerbils, cracked Louisville sluggers -- he couldn't stop, not even for a boy falling out of the sky.

"As I remember it, we were playing football. I ran a button hook. Kevin MacMichaelman covered me out as far as the train grate and then I ducked in quick. Little Ian, at quarterback, lobbed the pass. It flew north to south, downtown, and Solly flew above it, crosswise, towards the water. He wasn't something you mistook for a plane or a bird. I stared skyward, dumbstruck. The ball sailed over my head to Kevin, who ran it in for a touchdown. My father says it's impossible, but I swear I can picture it all, the look on Solly's face, which passed not from ecstasy to terror, but from fear to exultation. He flapped his wings, and in one awful heave, they popped -- blew out from inwards like a cheap umbrella. He was too far out. I didn't hear him crash into the water.

"It hit the front page of *The Post*, a sub-headline: 'Doc's son in Greek myth plunge.' I found that recently in the Columbia Library, dated August, 1979. The larger event, of course, no one is able to forget. Still, I swear I remember particularls: the yellowing, sun-dried park grass, eggplant Parmesan for dinner, the stunned Grubins coming down for desert, parents conferring in the living room while Zev and I played with the electric football game I'd gotten for my birthday. But I talked to my dad recently and he said there was no way I could have seen Solly's fall.

"I must have confounded things, he said, patched my recollections like a crazy quilt of dream, anecdote, memory and fear. It was the summertime when Solly fell, he says, July. My mother, my sister and I were on the Cape. Dad was in the city working at Harlem Hospital. He turned down 89th Street to discover the ambulances and paramedics blocking the street, Solly's smashed body just yards from the sidewalk, insides out like a popped bag of trash, and the broken wings balanced on the roof of a nearby parked car.

"No shock that I've got distorted memories, said my father. It was terrifying, also a hard year for me: the cusp of adolescence. Maybe I had once seen a paraglider cross the park, he suggested. Maybe it distracted me from a football game. Did I remember Elizabeth Wilde on seven, who had drowned her baby and then leapt from her parents' bedroom window? I was in town for that. But there was no way he was confusing things. He remembered it all: Schlachter being led through the lobby in manacles, bawling. 'About suffering they were never wrong, the Old Masters,' that's Auden, of course, 'Musé de Beaux Arts,' Brueghel's painting of Icarus's fall. And me? About suffering? Never right, not once, not ever."

[AUDIENCE APPLAUSE]

Thank you. Thank you all.

DAVID MEHEGAN: Good afternoon. I'm David Mehegan from *The Boston Globe*. The L.L. Winship/PEN New England Book Award is sponsored jointly by *The Boston Globe* and PEN New England. It honors a book with a New England setting or theme, or a New England author. It is given in memory of Lawrence L. Winship, who was for many years a dynamic and influential editor of *The Boston Globe*, and the father of another dynamic and influential editor of *The Boston Globe*, Thomas Winship.

It is a great honor and pleasure for me to be associated with this award on behalf of *The Globe*. It recognizes the fortunate linkage between the Winship family, *The Boston Globe*, and the world of New England letters. There are not many book awards founded by newspapers, which is odd. And we are proud to be one of them. After all, we mere scribblers share with true authors the task and pleasure of understanding our complex world through writing and reading.

I would like to recognize my fellow judges in the Winship Award and ask them to stand, those who were able to make it today: Jennie Barber, Douglas Bauer, Suzanne Berne, George Packer and the leadership of Susan Quinn. Would you all stand? [AUDIENCE APPLAUSE] In a moment I will introduce you to Joanna Winship Crawford, the daughter of Lawrence L. Winship, who will present our award. Before I do that, I would

like to read the citations of our five splendid finalists and ask them to stand, as well.

The first finalist is Sven Birkerts for *My Sky Blue Trades: Growing up Counter in a Contrary Time*. Will you stand, Sven? [AUDIENCE APPLAUSE] Sven Birkerts' *My Sky Blue Trades* makes extraordinary literature out of an ordinary life. Struggling for identity as a child of immigrants, coming of age in the '60s, confronting failure as a writer before the first taste of success: we thought there was little left to be said about these things. But Sven's beautiful sentences and acute perceptions make it all fresh and new.

Our second finalist, who was not able to be here today-- I gather he must be in surgery-- is Atul Gawande, for a book entitled *Complications: A Surgeon's Notes on an Imperfect Science*, published by Metropolitan, Division of Henry Holt. This book was also a finalist for The National Book Award, as well. Atul Gawande's *Complications* is a vital addition to the growing literature describing the experience of doctors. In clear, beautifully constructed prose, he shares with us the terrifying uncertainty of a surgeon learning his art, one patient at a time. His willingness to let the reader into a world usually kept secret is an act of astonishing generosity, one that forever changes how we understand the practice of medicine: its successes, its failures, and the shape of its future.

Our next finalist is Robert Harms, for a book entitled *The Diligent*-- it's probably Diligent (French pronunciation)-- *A Voyage Through the Worlds of the Slave Trade*, from Basic Books. Is Robert Harms here? [AUDIENCE APPLAUSE] Yale University historian Roberts Harms' *The Diligent*: *A Voyage Through the Worlds of the Slave Trade* is a chilling and mesmerizing blend of scholarship and storytelling. By following a single 1714 voyage of the French slave ship *Diligent* from the South of France to West Africa, thence through the West Indies, Professor Harms recalls in almost unbearably minute detail, the monstrous wholesaling and retailing of human beings.

Lucy Honig, for *Open Season*, published by Scala House Press. Lucy is here, I think. [AUDIENCE APPLAUSE] In *Open Season*, Lucy Honig has written a lively, keen eyed, wonderfully wise collection of stories about the schemes, confusions, mistakes, sorrows and minor triumphs that complicate human life. She's never an apologist for the characters she follows in and out of difficulties, mostly of their own making, but always a sympathist. And while the events of these stories often seem quiet, they resonate in startling ways. Again and again, what we hope and fear for her characters is what we hope and fear for ourselves.

Don Share, for *Union*-- Zoo Press. And Don is here. [AUDIENCE APPLAUSE] Don Share's hauntingly lovely poems in *Union* draw us into a spiritual place where loneliness and empathy coexist: from a requiem for a father-in-law who died of despair and drink, to the poet's questioning of his own life as he stands before a church in Boston in the rain. He speaks in the voice of the Mississippi River, singing the Blues, carrying along with it the whole history of the defeated South. And he speaks with the realization that mourning and praising are inextricably linked in life and in words.

And now I would like to ask Joanna Winship Crawford if she would come up for the presentation of the certificate and award for our winner, who is Adam Haslett. Adam Haslett, for a collection of stories, a first collection, entitled *You Are Not Stranger Here*, published by Nan A. Tales, a division of Random House. This book was also a finalist for The National Book Award, and we found out last week, a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize. So we're glad somebody got it right.

In *You Are Not a Stranger Here*, Adam Haslett's imaginative range extends from animated black comedy to deliberative despair. But no matter their energy, these stories show the courage to occupy regions of highly textured human sadness. But as the title implies, it is a most hospitable sorrow, one Haslett makes deeply compelling, so that in story after story readers feel themselves being irresistibly invited in. Taken together, they produce, perhaps surprisingly, a complex lifting of our spirits, as always happens when we encounter a work of fearless art. The winner of the L.L. Winship PEN New England Book Award: Adam Haslett.

[AUDIENCE APPLAUSE]

ADAM HASLETT: Thank you. Thank you, David and to the Winship family and *The Boston Globe*, and to the Library, for having us all here. I'm just going to read briefly from a short story, just a few pages from the last story in the book, which is called "The Volunteer." And I think the only thing you need to know before I read is that the main character is named Elizabeth Maynard, and she is currently living in a kind of-- I call it the Plymouth-Brewster Structured Living Facility. It's somewhere between assisted living and a psychiatric hospital. And the other thing you need to know is that as this passage starts, she is waiting for a visit from a high school boy who's coming to visit her, who is the volunteer named Ted. And she's also just stopped taking her medication.

"Elizabeth wakes to colors more vivid: the Oriental carpet's swirls of burgundy and gold, dawn kindling the sky an immaculate blue. She puts on her bathrobe and moves to her spot by the window. Planes of the rising sun sparkle in the courtyard's frosted grass. It is the washed light of autumn that shone on the lawn of the hospital down on the Connecticut coast, the hospital where Elizabeth stayed a month the year before she and Will were married -- this memory arriving now with unaccustomed ease.

"He would come down from Cambridge on Sundays in his father's old Lincoln Town car. They'd take walks on the cliffs overlooking Long Island Sound. He was a bookish man, nervous. Like Elizabeth, he'd grown up in New England in a house of lapsed Episcopalians, raised like her on a liberal conscience, parents sighing resignedly over *The New York Times*, salvation -- if there were such a thing -- a promise of reform rather than redemption. Together, she and Will managed hours of politeness with no mention of Elizabeth's reasons for being in an institution-- her little *confusions*, as her parents called them -- the occasional trouble remembering where she was, the rarer sense she was being spoken to. Will was completing his doctorate in sociology at Harvard, and they spoke of that. They'd met in his discussion section the semester before she'd taken a leave from Radcliff, a school her parents still hoped back then she might return to.

"Toward the end of her stay, Will had an appointment alone with her psychiatrist. Elizabeth behaved badly, listening at the door. 'A mild imbalance,' the man said. She has never known if he was merely a sexist who thought her hysterical, or a kind man who understood what Will meant to her; perhaps even a man who let his kindness supervene his judgment. When Will asked him if they should still get married, the doctor asked if he loved his fiancé. Elizabeth never felt as safe as she did when she heard Will say yes without stopping to consider. 'Then you should marry her,' the doctor replied.

"After the wedding, they took her parents' summer home in the town next to Plymouth, an old salt box by the river where her grandparents had lived all their lives. Just for a year, it was said, while Will finished his degree. No rent for them to pay, and he only needed to be in Cambridge twice a week. She could remember her dislike of the idea of living, however briefly, in that house, away from the city, in a place she'd spent months of her childhood; the house one branch or another of her family had lived in or owned for more than three centuries. The weight of the past felt so heavy there, it was hard to imagine a future. Will set his desk up in the parlor next to the four-foot-high mahogany radio in whose bottom cabinets the old 78s of Beethoven and Mahler gathered their dust. Trying to read a book on the sofa in the afternoon, she had to work hard to forget the sight of her grandmother sitting in the chair opposite, napping through a summer rainstorm.

"Before they were married they had talked about having children. They both wanted them. A bit of a strain, don't you think? her mother said when she brought up the idea, their life together having just begun, no job for Will yet. But Will didn't see any reason to wait. They were happy when she got pregnant. More than the wedding vows, this meant permanence -- a future they could predict.

"'Beautiful morning,' Mrs. Johnson says, poking her head in the door. She has been the Director of Plymouth-Brewster all the years Elizabeth has been here. A gentle, red-headed woman who sits with Elizabeth and discusses the book she is reading. 'Don't forget, you've got a visitor this afternoon.' Elizabeth smiles and Mrs. Johnson passes on, and Elizabeth gazes again over the harbor. She sees people, tiny at this distance, heading out along the breakwater, leaning into the wind as they go. Yachts bob in the marina, their chrome

masts ticking back and forth like the arms of metronomes. Sun glistens on the water. The scene is alive with motion.

"Nearly four hundred years since our family arrived on this shore, Hester begins, her voice cleaner and more vibrant this morning. 'Here we go,' Elizabeth says, taking a sea in her chair, 'sing your little song.' It's better when she's able to effect nonchalance. Signs of care are like flesh exposed to her imaginary companions' arrows.

"And what a beautiful season suffering it has been. What principled wars. What tidy profit. And the machines, they are enough to take your breath away. And all the limbs and eyes and organs of the children bled and severed for progress. And the raped slaves and the heads of boy soldiers crushed like eggs. Why, the minister might even allow us a dance. Perhaps to celebrate you, Elizabeth, a flower grown from the seed of all this. What have you done to correct it? Do you suppose the divines would have liked your country club, Daddy coming down the back nine, dark hands fixing Mommy a cocktail? Jitterbug.

"'Lousy historian,' Elizabeth mutters, trying to maintain the dismissive upper hand. 'You're confusing all sorts of things.' It's been years since she's had to argue with the voice like this. She has the energy, for now. I'd forgotten, Hester says. You always believed books and their facts could save you. Haven't done so well by them, have you? Elizabeth laughs. 'If I'd only known what a harsh woman you were.' What, you would have refused my help? 'Is that what you gave me?'

"And then the memory is there, the morning her contractions began: second day of the blizzard, 1978, the roads covered in ice and buried, the police saying no one was to drive, the hospital telling them they weren't sure they could send an ambulance. She lay upstairs in her grandparents' old room in the front of the house. For hours, she did her breathing as best she could, laboring there on the high bed, clutching Will's hand. When the contractions got worse, her mother tended her, told her she had to be brave.

"Elizabeth begged for the doctor or drugs -- something to blunt the vicious pain in her abdomen. In the moments of reprieve she opened her eyes, and from the walls of the bedroom saw the dead generations staring down at her: the daguerreotypes of gaunt women and simian faced men, stiff as iron in Sunday black, posed as if to meet their maker. As children visiting their grandparents, Elizabeth and her brother scared each other telling stories of the people who'd died in these rooms. The pictures seemed alive now, the ancestors' rectitude offended by her abjection. She bit her pillow and sweated. Hours passed and still no doctor. She heard Will and her parents whispering in the other room, saying, how could they move her now that she was so far along and the roads so dangerous?

"At six the power went out, leaving the house in darkness. For a few minutes all that remained of the world was the seizing pain and the rush of the wind lashing the trees in the front yard. Her father lit candles, put batteries in the radio. It kept snowing. From downstairs she could hear the news saying hundreds of people were stranded in cars on the highway and then the voice of the announcer telling citizens to remain in their homes. Her mother gave her water and wiped down her face and chest. The pictures flickered in the shadows. Past one in the morning, in the fifteenth hours, long after she'd started to push, her mother left for a moment to find more towels. Elizabeth lay on the soaked mattress alone, Will in the kitchen boiling water on the gas stove, her father yelling on the phone to the hospital, snow pressing against the glass, the flesh between her legs ripping. She felt blood leaking onto her thighs. Something started hammering at her temples. Her heart kicked. She thought she would die.

"It was then she looked up in the candlelight, and for the first time saw Hester standing in the far corner of that ancient, crooked, low-ceilinged room. She stood silent in her black dress and hooded cape, a woman of thirty with a face of fifty, plain featured, eyes of mild gray. Naïve about nothing. A woman who had lain in this room on a winter night some centuries ago, Elizabeth understood, her husband at the trading post on the Connecticut River, her sister there to tend her three younger children instructed not to cry, crying in the other room twenty hours before she expired. A woman Elizabeth need give no explanation, her life reduced to a line in a letter written from one man to another. A line Elizabeth had always remembered from a summer past

when her grandfather read them papers their ancestors had left in the house: *Sad past words to report Hester has died giving me a boy*.

"Elizabeth stared at the dark figure in the corner and would have cried out were it not for her worry that Will and her parents would think her crazy. Slowly and without a word, Hester walked to the bed. She placed a cold hand on Elizabeth's brow. Elizabeth closed her eyes. She sensed Hester's hands between her legs, holding the baby's head. She gave a final push. When she opened her eyes and strained upright, she saw the blue child. The umbilical cord hard wrapped itself twice around his neck in her womb, pulling against his tiny throat, strangling him as he was born.

"Will was the first to enter. In the instant before reason or compassion or duty retrieved him from the doubt of her sanity he must always have harbored, he stared at her as if at a murderer. In a rush, she explained how it happened, because what choice did she have then? How a woman had come and delivered the child, how the cord must have been coiled like that for weeks. And her parents wept, and Will held his head in his hands. In the early morning a nurse arrived and cut the boy loose.

"'It's not help you gave me,' Elizabeth says aloud from he chair by the window. 'It's not help you gave.' She is thankful that for now there is no reply. Thankful, too, that the colors in her room beat once again with the pulse of life, the air and the blue ocean quickening to a new birth. Sedation's cloud is lifted. And Ted, Ted will be here soon." Thank you.

[AUDIENCE APPLAUSE]

HELENE ATWAN: Good afternoon. I'm Helene Atwan, Director of Beacon Press and Chair of PEN New England. On behalf of all of the members of PEN New England I'd like to congratulate our nominees and our winners, and to thank the judges who worked so hard, who were so generous with their time, and also to thank all of our partners in this wonderful event. It's been a great afternoon so far.

It's my happy role to introduce the keynote speaker. It's also a very difficult one, because I'm now the only thing that stands between you and Robert Pinsky. So I'm going to be very brief.

Robert Pinsky is widely considered one of America's best and most accomplished poets. His first book of poems was praised by Robert Lowell, and he seems to have gone uphill since then. All six of his books of poetry-- most recently *Jersey Rain* and a volume of new and collected poems, *The Figured Wheel*-- have been lavishly and deservedly praised and received many awards. He is also the author of four books of criticism and two important translations including his magnificent rendering of *Dante's Inferno*. And I'm only skimming the surface of his accomplishments, but I did promise to be brief.

I think perhaps most notably, Robert Pinsky was the 39th Poet Laureate of the United States, serving three terms in that role. And that work, along with his many initiatives to bring poetry closer to the fabric of American life may be what we treasure most about him. In the words of art critic Lloyd Schwartz, "In his poems, Robert Pinsky talks with democratic warmth and intimacy to the common things of this world. His extraordinary poems remind us that he has always embodied the very ideals he proposes for what a poet can do."

Please help me to welcome Robert Pinsky.

[AUDIENCE APPLAUSE]

ROBERT PINSKY: Many thanks, Helene. It's an honor and a pleasure to be talking to you all today on this occasion of honoring brilliant young writers and also in terms of great American writers of the past. I'm not going to speak to you formally today. Instead, I'm going to read some passages from American literature to

you and muse about them a little bit.

The subject of the passages and the subject of the musing has to do with two words: culture and innocence. Innocence and culture seem in a way to be opposites at first. Innocence suggests an infant, a child, having no experience. Culture, on the contrary, and oppositely, is going far back as possible to gather many things based on memory and the past. But it seems that repeatedly we use culture as a way to try to swim toward innocence or regain some of it, as in Yeats' phrase, "The ceremony of innocence is drowned." They both are biological terms, after all, aren't they?

Innocence means without noxiousness or poison. It's almost the same exact word with the same roots as inoculation. To be inoculated is to be protected from a poison. Culture-- which far more often than not takes poisonousness as its subject, and is almost an investigation of our poisons and toxins-- culture is also a biological term. We use it for the yeasts and germy things and stuff that I don't know the right names for that they grow in test tubes and Petrie dishes. So that conceivably, culture and innocence are not opposites, but are conducting some much more complicated and confusing dance.

I'll confess to you that the subject is in my mind partly because on this day of tremendous celebration we also are in mourning. We're celebrating the brilliant writers of the American present and of the past, and also in this morning's *NewYork Times* there's a story about the great museum of Baghdad-- and the scholar from the Mass. College of Art in the paper refers to it as the great, perhaps the greatest museum of Middle Eastern culture-- has been pillaged, to use an old-fashioned word, by people who, after all, were seeking things of value. And we must mourn and grieve not only with our sister and brother artists in what was ancient Mesopotamia, but also with our sister and brother artists from 3,000 years ago.

Lost.

One of the objects that was lost was described as a solid gold harp from 3600 years before Jesus Christ. A harp, the symbol of poetry. The harp is lost. And in our grief we have to pray that whoever took it for its value won't melt it down, as being the easiest and cheapest way to redeem the value. We can hope that the thieves-- and the paper does say some of them were very sophisticated-- we can hope that the thieves were not innocent of the larger value of that artifact, one among many. Another one I remember reading a description of is a pottery object that has a picture of birds and people feeding grain to the birds, and celebrating the feast of a goddess who precedes Ishtar. Lost. Looted. So it's an occasion of grief as well as celebration, and I'm just going to read you some of the things that are associated with that in my mind.

On the subject of writing and art, I asked a friend of mine who knows a lot about movies, "How comes movies nowadays seem better than ever"-- some will remember that-- "in the production values, cinematography, certainly special effects, and almost every aspect of film is more impressive than ever, except the scripts?" [AUDIENCE LAUGHTER] The scripts often seem inferior and kind of stupid, and lagging behind the skill of the director and of the actors and its scene designers and production designers. And my friend said, "Well, for decades, people who wrote screenplays started out wanting to be playwrights, poets and fiction writers. So they were drawing on thousands of years of culture, certainly hundreds of years of culture. And kids nowadays, they're innocent. They want-- when they're 12, 13 years old-- they want to be screenwriters. They go to screenwriting school, they discover other screenplays: so the depth of their culture is only the depth of movies, so they allude to other movies.

I thought immediately of the story that I bet is apocryphal or false-- the story is that when the actor, Robert Redford, was going to be in this movie *The Great Gatsby*, some impertinent reporter at a press conference that was announcing this project of Robert Redford's said to Robert Redford, "Have you read *The Great Gatsby?"* And Robert Redford is said to have said, "Well, not personally." [AUDIENCE LAUGHTER] Now I'll tell you why I think the story is false. Robert Redford's a smart man. And wouldn't it be nice if he did say that. But in fact, he was alluding-- he was already synching in character of the Great Gatsby and he's alluding to a famous passage in which Nick Caraway is talking to Gatsby and Gatsby says, "Oh, she didn't love Tom Buchanan." And Nick Caraway says, "You know, they were married. She must have loved him." And Gatsby

says, "Well, she may have loved him, but it was just personal." [AUDIENCE LAUGHTER] What if Redford was thinking about that passage, that it was just personal. And Caraway thinks to himself something like, "I'm starting to realize the magnitude of the project, the magnitude, the imagination project that that love represented. It was more than love between two people. And indeed it is, in the context of the whole novel, Gatsby trying to do nothing less than recover innocence, because he's been punished by his culture, he's going to use the culture and the terms of it and a beautiful young woman to get back to his innocence.

Many people have memorized the last sentences of *The Great Gatsby* the way we memorize poems. They are: "And as I sat there, brooding on the old, unknown world, I thought of Gatsby's wonder when he first picked out the green light at the end of Daisy's dock. He had come a long way to this blue lawn and his dream must have seemed too close that he could hardly fail to grasp it. He did not know that it was already behind him, somewhere back in that vast obscurity beyond this city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night. Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter. Tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther. And one fine morning-- so we beat on, boats against the current, boring back ceaselessly into the past. So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past."

Everybody worries about the military adventure in Iraq and what is going to happen next. And will we find a way to be innocent about it? Let's say it's corrupt and horrible and full of torture and pain and falsehood. But for now, is there something that could be redeemed? Could we somehow take a step forward? I think it as I read about the pillaging and the looting of the museum-- all the worry, the amount of meaning that was raped as a byproduct. I thought of a scene in *The Middle Passage* when the slaves scratch-- in the wood of the boat that many of them were going to die in-- they scratched their names in the language of the old culture. And it's the last time perhaps that name will ever be written or thought, these words scratched into the beams.

I'll read a couple of other passages to you. One is from Willa Cather's great novel, *My Antonia* . The European family that comes to the Plains, one point when they're helped by Jim Burton's grandparents, they give them mushrooms. And the Burtons had no idea what these stinky bits of dirt are; they throw out these wild mushrooms from the Black Forest. And when Mr. Schmerda finally commits suicide, it's these same uncomprehending people who preceded them in the course of the American immigration who have to preside over the funeral. And Jim Burton's grandfather prays at the grave, the solid grave-- he's a suicide-- he prayed that if any man there had been remiss toward the strange come to a far country, he prayed that God would forgive him and soften his heart. He recalled the promises to the widow and the fatherless and asked God to smooth the way before this widow and her children and to, quote, "incline the hearts of men to deal justly with her."

And he said, "We are leaving Mr. Schmerda at thy judgment seat which is also thy mercy seat." And somehow the crossroads avoids the grave. And the narrator, and in a way, protagonist of the novel says, "Mr. Schmerda never saw the roads going over his head, as grandfather had predicted. The road from the north curved a little to the east, just there, and the road from the west swung out a little to the south, so that the grave with its tall red grass that was never mowed was like a little island. And at twilight under a new moon with the clear evening star, the dusty roads used to look like soft gray rivers flowing past it. I never came upon the place without emotion, and in all that country it was the spot most dear to me. I loved the dim superstition, the propitiatory intent that it put the grave there, and still more, I loved the spirit that could not carry out the sentence. The error from the surveyed lines, the clemency of the soft earth roads along which the homecoming wagons rattled after sunset. Never a tired driver passed the wooden cross, I'm sure, without wishing well to the sleeper."

Is it sentimental to say "Never a tired driver passed the wooden cross, I'm sure, without wishing well to the sleeper"? Maybe it's more or less really true; some superstition in all of us, even if you don't know this story about the lost meaning, the mushrooms, the whole Czechoslovak culture that I don't even know the right name for. Certainly Jim Burton didn't. Were they Czechs? Were they Slovene? Were they what? Again, lost meaning, lost in the past. And then the lyrical effort: the harpist, Willa Cather with her golden harp, trying to

use her culture to reclaim a little bit, to redeem a little bit.

American lives, of course, all play this out, don't they? Gatsby's life is like the life of Jim Burton and Antonia. There's a past, there's immigration, there's a sense of complete innocence that we can make our life any way we like, start over again completely clean. And then there's always the past that comes-- this is the drama of the artist. Was Ernest Hemingway indifferent to this? On the contrary. Ernest Hemingway repeatedly made his protagonist a writer much like himself. And when I thought of this subject I thought of a little four paragraph summary of a life that raises the same issues in my mind, from *The Sun Also Rises.*

"Robert Cohen was a member, through his father, of one of the richest Jewish families in New York, and through his mother, of one of the oldest. At the military school where he prepped for Princeton and played a very good end on the football team, no one had made him race-conscious." Innocence. "No one had made him feel he was a Jew, and hence, any different from anybody else, until he went to Princeton. He was a nice boy, a friendly boy, and very shy, and it made him bitter. He took it out in boxing, and he came out of Princeton"-- excuse me, but when I was a little boy that was a kind of a curse word-- "came out of Princeton"-- I was near it, but from a different social class than then characterized the place. Like, you know, Paul Robeson lived in Princeton when he was a little boy. It came time to go to college, he went to Rutgers.

And Cohen -- "came out of Princeton with painful self-consciousness and a flattened nose" -- from the boxing -- "and was married by the first girl who was nice to him. He was married five years, had three children, lost most of the fifty thousand dollars his father left him, the balance of the estate having gone to his mother, hardened into a rather unattractive mold under domestic happiness with a rich wife; and just when he made up his mind to leave his wife, she left him and went off with a miniature painter.

[AUDIENCE LAUGHTER]

"...The divorce was arranged and Robert Cohen went out to the Coast. In California, he fell among literary people and, as he still had a little of the fifty thousand left, in a short time he was backing a review of the arts." He's getting to be somebody we know, isn't he? "The review commenced publication in Carmel, California and finished in Provincetown, Massachusetts. By that time, Cohen, who had been regarded purely as an angel, and whose name had appeared on the editorial page merely as a member of the advisory board, had become the sole editor. It was his money, and he discovered he liked the authority of editing. He was sorry when the magazine became too expensive and he had to give it up."

"By that time, though, he had other things to worry about. He had been taken in hand by a lady who hoped to rise with the magazine. She was very forceful, and Cohen never had a chance of not being taken in hand. Also, he was sure that he loved her. When this lady saw the magazine was not going to rise, she became a little disgusted with Cohen and decided that she might as well get what there was to get while there was something available, so she urged that they go to Europe where Cohen could write...."

"The lady who had him, her name was Frances, found toward the end of the second year that her looks were going, and her attitude toward Robert changed from one of careless possession and exploitation to the absolute determination that he should marry her. During this time, Robert's mother had settled an allowance on him: about three hundred dollars a month. During two years and a half I do not believe that Robert Cohen looked at another woman. He was fairly happy, except that, like many people living in Europe, he would rather have been in America, and he had discovered writing. He wrote a novel. And it was not really such a bad novel as the critics later called it, although it was a very poor novel. [AUDIENCE LAUGHTER] He read many books, played bridge, played tennis, and boxed at a local gymnasium." Surely this is not an unrecognizable life. And surely, its beginning in innocence, right through prep school, and the innocence ending with his initiation into Princeton University, that center of culture, a leading New Jersey institution-- surely that plays out a familiar drama. As I said, I am just musing to you. I don't have a grand conclusion to offer you. I just offer you this familiar theme through familiar quotations, and I suppose I just confide in you that it is much in my mind as I read *The New York Times*.

I'm going to close with a poem. The poem is by a New England poet. Newcomers to New England sometimes are mystified by walking in the woods not only in New Hampshire or Vermont, but even in Massachusetts, and seeing in the middle of the woods, walls-- rather a lot of them, rather close together: stone walls. And someone from the West, for example, might be mystified as to why there are walls in the woods. The woods are recent. I can't quote the exact statistics, but every year thousands of acres become woods again in New England that were once farmland. As the country moved west it was discovered that there were much better places to farm than Massachusetts and New Hampshire and Vermont. The walls are the byproducts of somebody's labor clearing the stones that every winter are coughed up from New England soil. In the process of freezing and melting, new rocks come up. And when you clear the rocks so that you can plow and plant you have to put them somewhere, so you pile them up into these little walls.

And when you're walking in the woods, sometimes deep into the woods, and see a wall, it's a testament to somebody's back-breaking labor, tremendous labor, cultivating-- if you'd allow me a little allusion to my themes-- cultivating that land. And in order to cultivate the land the wall was created. So the walls are really remnants-- to take a quotation from the poem itself-- "of a village culture." The walls are what are left of a lost culture. And I'm going to close by reading to you from Robert Frost's, I think, great poem "Directive," and that will be the end of this address. And I understand after that there's eat and drink. Is it downstairs? Downstairs there will be eat and drink after I have finished reading to you this poem.

"Directive

Back out of all this now, too much for us,
Back in a time made simple by the loss
Of detail, burned, dissolved and broken off
Like graveyard marble sculptured in the weather,
There is a house that is no more a house
Upon a farm that is no more a farm
And in a town that is no more a town.
The road there, if you'll let a guide direct you
Who only has at heart your getting lost,
May seem as if it should have been a quarry--
Great monolithic knees the former town
Long-since gave up pretense of keeping covered....
Nor need you mind this serial ordeal
Of being watched from forty cellar holes
As if by eye pairs out of forty firkins.
As for the woods' excitement over you
That sends light rustle rushes to their leaves,
Charge that to upstart inexperience.
Where were the woods not twenty years ago?
They think too much of having shaded out
A few old pecker-fretted apple trees.
Make yourself up a cheering song of how
Someone's road home from work this once was,
Who may be just ahead of you on foot
Or creaking with a buggy load of grain.
The height of the adventure is the height
Of country where two village cultures faded
Into each other. Bot of them are lost.
And if you're lost enough to find yourself
By now, pull in your ladder road behind you
And put up a sign CLOSED to all but me.
Then make yourself at home. The only field
Now left's no bigger than a harness gall.
First there's the children's house of make-believe,

Some shattered dishes underneath a pine,
The playthings in the playhouse of the children.
Weep for what little things could make them glad.
Then for the house that is no more a house,
But only a belilaced cellar hole,
Now closing slowly like a dent in dough.
This was no playhouse, but a house in earnest.
Your destination and your destiny's
A brook that was the water of the house,
Cold as a spring as yet so near its source,
Too lofty and original to rage.
(We know the valley streams that when aroused
Will leave their tatters hung on barb and thorn.)
I have kept hidden in the instep arch
Of an old cedar at the waterside
A broken drinking goblet like the Grail
Under a spell so the wrong ones can't find it,
So can't get saved, as Saint Mark says they mustn't.
(I stole the goblet from the children's playhouse.)
Here are your waters and your watering place.
Drink and be whole again beyond confusion."

[AUDIENCE APPLAUSE]

DEBORAH LEFF: I want to thank Mr. Pinsky. I cannot think of more exquisite or appropriate musings. As he said, we want you to all to join us for the reception. I know many of you are going to want to read the books that you heard read from today, so our bookstore does have them on sale. The authors are happy to autograph them. And so feel free to stop by there on the way down. Thank you all for coming to this wonderful ceremony.

[AUDIENCE APPLAUSE]

END OF CEREMONY