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## Book Reviews

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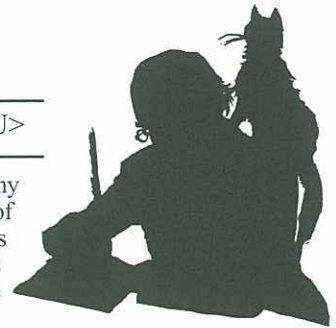
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# Book Reviews

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Lott, Bret. *The Hunt Club: A Novel*. New York: Villard c1998. 243p. ISBN 0-375-50014-6

Reviewed by **Mary Robinson Cross** (System Librarian, Columbia College, Columbia, SC) <marycross@colacol.edu>

Noone of us ever wants to lose any of our senses, especially our sense of sight. However, when one sense goes, others often become even more heightened. Leland Dillard, owner of Hungry Neck Hunt Club, was blinded by flying glass and collapsing eaves at a fire in his home. He depends on his nephew, Huger, to be his eyes. As Huger says, "It's me to drive you to the Piggly Wiggly, and me to write your bills for you, and me to rewash the dishes in the sink because you're—"

Huger was his uncle's eyes, but Leland's increased sense of smell was what brought them face to face with the body — face mostly gone and hands skinned off. Huger was a fifteen-year-old boy living with his mother in North Charleston, a community separated from the Charleston of the members of the Club, more by lineage and dollars than miles.

**Bret Lott** captures the essence of the South Carolina Lowcountry as though he has been intimate with this area all his life. A professor of English at the **College of Charleston** and **Vermont College**, Lott describes the Lowcountry of South Carolina like the back of his hand. "Live oak and pine, dogwood and palmetto and poison ivy and wild grapes and all else. Marsh grass down to the Ashepoo." All the natural elements found in this geographic region become the backdrop of a grisly murder.

For this, his first venture into murder and mystery, Lott has woven family, Huguenot names, the Medical University, SLED, the State Senate and much more to form a spellbinding story. He has driven down country roads like Cemetery Ridge and County Road 112 and over

the Mark Clark Expressway many times. He knows the interaction of the peoples and the places one finds in the Lowcountry. He describes them so vividly that if one were blind, one could see them clearly.

Charles Middleton Simons, M.D., the name on the sign found with the dead body, is, of course, one of those South of Broad doctors who come regularly to Hungry Neck in their Grand Cherokees, Range Rovers and Suburbans. To those readers not from South Carolina the name might not matter much, but to many who call South Carolina and south of Columbia home, there is a difference between a one "m" Simons and a two "m" Simmons!

Not just the Dupree, Ravenel and Simons "blue bloods" find their way into *The Hunt Club*. The rednecks are there too--Leland Dillard, Delbert Yandle, Tommy Thigpen, Pigboy, and Fatback. So are the blacks with aristocratic surnames — Miss Dinah Gaillard, who arrives at 4:00 AM every Saturday all deer season long with her deaf-and-dumb daughter, Dorcas, to cook up breakfast— grits, eggs, bacon, and biscuits. Miss Dinah's son, Benjamin, a hero of the Persian Gulf War, though deceased, is a presence throughout the novel as are the fables of the green-eyed ghosts of the Mothers and Fathers and the haints.

*The Hunt Club* is not just another murder mystery. It is the story of a teenage boy who comes face to face with the ugly side of life — a side many of us never experience except in stories like this one. Huger experiences life and death in ways he never dreamed possible. That Saturday after Thanksgiving brought so much into the open; not just the dead body, but the lies that had been told to him all his life. The deer that are killed in those Saturday morning hunts, the deer that are never missed by others of the herd, is that what Huger Dillard will become? 🌿

## Sam Gowan Interview from page 39

the English Department. In 1978 he earned an M.L.S. at Florida State University, returned to the University of Florida as a librarian, and has worked there ever since.

**BN:** *Most people we know today in libraries can hardly catch their breath keeping up with a single job. How did you manage a film career and a library career at once?*

**SG:** Don't ask the people I work with that question! Seriously, the movie projects have been infrequent over the past twenty years. And the role of the producer is relatively limited. You're dealing with budgets, with contracts, with deals, much of which you can do on weekends. When you are working on a film though, from Friday night right through, your weekends are straight movie work. Also, librarians can accumulate a good deal of vacation time and low-budget films are produced over short periods. "Ulee" shot for only seven weeks. It's something in the tradition of the independents. There's not enough money to live on, so everybody has a day job.

**BN:** *How often were you on the set for "Ulee's Gold"?*

**SG:** Just four or five times, overnight trips to deal with particular problems -- intervening

with the state film commission, for example, on a shooting location, or a problem we had with generators the crew needed.

**BN:** *We've seen the film referred to as a "hybrid/indy." What does that mean?*

**SG:** "Ulee" was made for Orion Pictures, not by Orion Pictures. That's very significant. Artistic control was in the hands of the director and producer, and Orion was not the producer. Victor and I had an ideal situation. We could make the film we wanted to, but we had a giant studio distributing it. It was a perfect world. For "Ruby," distribution went all wrong. It came to Gainesville and lasted two days. Orion did the work right. Their marketing department went back twenty years and read all of the reviews in the big papers for all of Victor's films. Then they targeted the reviewers still writing who'd been favorable, and directed publicity to them. They prepared audiences for the kind of film "Ulee" is, so we got the kind of word of mouth that you need. When "Ulee" opened, if people had come out of theaters grumbling, because they'd expected an action film, we'd have been dead right away.

**BN:** *When you met Victor Nunez in 1975, did you have any special interest in film?*

**SG:** No. Probably I knew less than you know now. I went to the movies. That's about it. I was reacting like a classic reference librarian. "Oh, you need an old house? I'll find you

one. You need to talk to **John D. MacDonald**? I'll call him up."

**BN:** *What do film people make of the fact that they're dealing with a librarian?*

**SG:** There's a lot of dissonance between the librarian stereotype and the film producer stereotype. People can't believe a librarian can be a film producer. Film producers are supposed to wear flowered shirts, sit around in hot tubs all the time. I use humor, laugh a lot, to help get over the stereotype barrier. People ask me, "What's a movie producer doing in a library?" I tell them that I like to eat.

**BN:** *What have you learned in films that's been useful back in the library?*

**SG:** Not to get uptight.

**BN:** *You grew up in New York, but through the films you're known as a Florida regionalist. How did that happen?*

**SG:** Well I've been coming to Florida since the 1940s, as a kid. The landscape in this part of the state has none of the sublimity of California, but the subtleties gradually affect you as you become adjusted to it. In one way Florida is like California -- the north and south are two different states. Also I became interested in the area's history. My wife and I got involved in historic preservation in Gainesville, to help preserve a certain special quality the region has. I met Victor and he had the same interests. I knew exactly what he was trying to do. 🌿

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