

**John Fry:** *You are a writer who has published books of both poetry and prose that, for the most part, clearly belong to the genre of poetry in the case of *The Fortieth Day*, for example, or prose with respect to *The Disappearance of Seth*. But *Bright Felon* has an uneasy and, perhaps better said, restless relationship with “genre” as that term has been traditionally used to differentiate between what poetry and prose are and are not. The back of *Bright Felon*’s dust-jacket calls it “lyric essays,” which makes sense to me, because though it is composed in sentences—sometimes syntactically complete, sometimes not—their choreography on the page, in each chapter, and between chapters makes me feel like I am reading a long poem. The way I would say, for instance, that the movement of the individual phrase/sentence/paragraph in Carole Maso’s *AVA* strikes me as having more in common, or at least as much in common, with a line of verse than a prose sentence. And the tension between the poetic line and the prose sentence is, for me, so palpable that I wonder whether or not you experienced it while writing *BF* and, if so, how you negotiated it.*

I think all of my prose books, *Bright Felon* included, have an “uneasy” or “restless” (as you say) relationship to “genre.” They reach toward poetry because breath and syntax and how they move an idea through the mind has never, to me, depended on the rules of language or grammar or line. Prose helps you flow through a thought and poetry interrupts with silence. But that might be the only distinction to me. So genre, like gender, seems primarily to be a reading practice. In the case of publishers, readers and institutions, genre is just a way of organizing or explaining a piece of writing that at its heart is anarchic. I asked that “lyric essays” be written on the back of the book *Bright Felon* not because I thought the pieces *were* actually that but because it helped to confound expectations about the book as “merely” a book of poems. In fact Barthes and his ideas about genre were very much on my mind in the writing. The subtitle I gave the book (“Autobiography and Cities”) is probably the clearest statement about its genre I could give. In fact that “subtitle” really is the genre tag; the *actual* subtitle is the Urdu writing that appears in orange around it.

I like that you said the book has a “choreography.” It does. I borrowed my structural ideas from dance, from sculpture, from architecture. It *is* a long poem. Of course it is. And it is all the other things too. And to say Carole Maso’s name in the same breath as *BF*. She’s my “BF.” Best friend. Boy friend. Bright felon. Maso’s *Aureole*, *Break Every Rule* and *Ava* were all critically important to me in beginning to leave the poetic line and write in prose, with the chance it gives you to finish a sentence, to manipulate what a “complete thought” might be. So there was a trajectory from *Quinn’s Passage* to another (as yet unpublished) prose manuscript I am finishing to *Bright Felon*. *Disappearance of Seth* is a little bit different because though I use the same strategies of non-linearity and interruption the primary impulse was still narrative—to tell the story of the war and the city—whereas in *Bright Felon* it definitely wasn’t.

Some prose writings appeared in *The Far Mosque* (in particular a long piece I wrote as an essay but couldn’t publish as such—called “Train Ride”) and *The Fortieth Day* and in my new poems as well.

Genre is sometimes a useful construction in thinking about or organizing one's thinking about a piece of art work but it really is only that—a construction. Ultimately, at the end of any project, whether it be fiction, poetry, essay, memoir, or something in between, my concern is with the consonants—the rapture and sounds and structures of language—and vowels—the breath or energy that moves through them. So when asked what kind of writer I am, I answer “poet,” as it seems to encompass this range.

**JF:** *I wanted to ask you about your relationship to geographical place in light of the fact that, save for the epilogue, you structure BF according to places where you have lived. Because it seems to me that those of us who grow up (especially as children) largely itinerant, frequently moving from city to city and community to community, often feel as adults either that any place can become home and that we can belong anywhere or, as is more often the case with me at least, that we belong nowhere and are strangers everywhere. By which I mean, that there is no one particular place—perhaps because too many places have been lived in?—where we know ourselves to be home. If this is similarly true for you, how has that vagrancy contributed to the sense of radical “lostness,” as you call it so achingly in *The Fortieth Day*, threaded throughout BF? And, has the chronicling of this lostness—or, as Fanny Howe might phrase it, such bewilderment—lessened it as a result of writing BF?*

This was the honest intent in writing *Bright Felon*—that I would be able to claim myself as an entity and my body as a place, that I would be able to claim my self and name myself. I went through the stage of realizing no place I ever was could be or would be home. And then I went through another door and now, really, *every* place I go to, even for a couple of days, or for a week, becomes quickly very familiar to me. I sketch out the surroundings—where is the coffee shop, where is the bookstore, where is the yoga studio—and because I am a creature of habit I become a “regular” fast. The locals suddenly know me and it's always a surprise to them that I am just passing through or staying for a little while. And then I dream of going back to these beautiful places: Laramie, Wyoming. Lewiston, Idaho. Idyllwilde, California. Walla Walla, Washington.

Also I realized in the writing of *Bright Felon* that place is deployed not spatially but temporally. Things (and cities) exist, as Einstein suspected, in time and space at once, and these two are intimately tied up with one another. Of course *Bright Felon* is a book of multiple disciplines, not just geography but city planning, physics, history, politics, dance, art, literary theory, music, astronomy, physical education, theology, geometry, architecture and in at least one place interior design.

It's not that I'm not bewildered anymore; I'm just less bewildered, I think, by bewilderment. I imagine this will change at some point.

**JF:** *In “Carlisle,” you write that “It's always the broken that holds the universe in place. // That's what I would say about poetry and prayer.” Particularly with respect to your revisiting of the Hagar and Ismail story at the end of that chapter, which is so freighted*

*with the mystery of faith and doubt, is that still what you would say—or all that you care to say—about poetry and prayer?*

Hagar and Ishmael, like Layla Al-Attar, the Iraqi artist killed by an American bomb in 1993, seem to come back and back and back in all my work. She's the mother of the exiled and he—he's still a cipher to me, the son who agreed to let his father take a knife to him. Not such a cipher, of course, but too close for comfort, I suppose. What do I say about poetry and prayer? I guess at the moment I distrust both—distrust their capacity to lull the speaker into the feeling that he (me) has been heard, will be answered. What we do in the face of silence, what we say in the face of it, is more important, more frightening, more real. *That's* actual "creation."

So if the broken holds the universe in place—in our case it actually *does*: it's *because* of the shattered asteroids and the gravitational pull they exert on the other planets that they all settled (mostly) into regular orbits and were able to develop atmospheres and we know where that led—then the doubt and trauma of poetry and prayer and their capability to be answered is what gives us our own abilities to continue on, to live in these mortal bodies, agreeing to die, reaching to feed ourselves every day and sleep every night so our minds and spirits can continue whatever the work is they are supposed to be doing. No one can tell.

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**JF:** *In "Marble Hill," on page 1, you ask "But is it really like Fanny writes, the body only a car the soul is driving," which I (perhaps wrongly) understood to refer to Fanny Howe. That question reminds me of a question she asks in The Lives of the Spirit, "Is the body made to fit the needs of the soul, or vice versa?" And I wondered about your view on the relationship between the body and the soul and, specifically, if you believe that there is a point where the body begins and the soul ends, or vice versa, and what (if any) role breath plays in this.*

"Fanny" is indeed Fanny Howe. She wrote this, I think, in her novel *Indivisible*, in which a woman travels from Boston to California, thinking the whole way. It was meant to blur with her earlier novels (hence the title), so you get confused while reading it a little bit, also because characters from all those earlier novels recur.

She appears again in the Beacon chapter of *Bright Felon* when we went to the Dia Museum together and looked at both the blankness of Agnes Martin and Robert Ryman (I think we both preferred Martin) and the emptiness of Richard Serra and Fred Sandback and Michael Heizer. She felt like we were two Dantes on an infernal journey. A lot is at stake for Fanny so when you are around her you feel like *everything*, whether it is the truth about the nature of the afterlife or where to get a good piece of pie or plate of spaghetti, is of the utmost critical importance. She is also the only grown adult I know who can speak baby-talk fluently. I mean she gets down on her hands and knees and speaks to her grandkids in baby-talk and they know what she is saying to them and they, in perfect seriousness of intent to communicate, speak back. It's shocking.

But about the body and the soul. I don't know what they are anymore. I am starting to suspect (is it because I am aging?) that soul lives a lot more in the body—is a lot more tangible—than I previously suspected when I only thought it was energy housed in the body or energy traveling through it (that would be breath). I guess classically you would say “breath” is God. The words for “breath” and “soul” are the same in Latin, Aramaic, Arabic—but I wonder if the body is just a radio pulling in the waves of the soul to its corpus or whether there is more to it.

Fanny also said, “If this life isn't enough/then an afterlife won't be enough” and I definitely believe that. I am starting to worry that all this thinking about the nature of the soul is just one more way to stop paying attention to the body. And there is so much to be learned about the soul from the body, the body that tires, needs sleep, the body that sickens, that dies and that body that explodes in ecstasy, that comes alive at weird moments in the night, that quivers with pleasure and delight.

**JF:** *In “Faith and Silence,” you write “I think there is a place in the ‘self’ where the flesh of the body’s temporal existence and the quotidian awareness of the mind and the placid awareness of the eternal (and usually very quiet) soul do not meet. I think that God is the place you cannot go.” This, for me, sings in harmony with the following lines from your poem “Math”: “Who is that in the space where your / self and your self do not meet.” And I see the tracing of this question writ large across BF. If the “who” in the poem is in fact “God”—that place you cannot go, can never quite grasp at but only fumble after, somewhere deep inside yourself, a place the early Christian Desert Fathers and Mothers called “the cave of the heart”—did the act of writing BF, sentence by sentence as if line by line, change—if in fact or at all—your view on not so much who “God” is/not but where God can be said to dwell? And if BF can be thought of as the saying of the “it” you would not yet tell at the end of “Faith and Silence,” is “God” still a place to which you cannot go?*

Yes, you make the right connection between those lines from “Math” and the lines from the essay which I think I was writing at the same time. (I should insert here that *Bright Felon* also has a shadow-text: my novel *The Disappearance of Seth* that I wrote just before *Bright Felon*; both books were published together so I was revising and reading proofs for each at the same time. There are many themes and images and areas of concern that travel between the two texts. There are also some characters that share affinities. For example, Salman from *The Disappearance of Seth* lives in Beacon and there are scenes set there. New York City and Paris also figure prominently in that book).

Well I don't know what “god” is. And I spell “Him” three different ways in *Bright Felon*. There is God, there is god and there is G-D. Each was intended in a different way, meaning they don't refer to the same thing or concept. I don't think I'll clarify more than that. So you check it out and tell me what you think. Whenever I write essays about faith or matters of faith I confuse the copy editors with my three different spellings for god but really there must be an infinite number of spellings, don't you think, for every word we use?

I'll say this much though: No, I'm not sure I any longer think "God is the place you cannot go." I think the body holds many layers and levels of the divine and I think—I really do now—that we're likely touching it, are suffused by it, are intrinsically part of it, at every instant of our lives.

**JF:** *You write that "I use the present to understand the past is not finished" in "Buffalo" which, like the way BF is a story told backwards in time, suggests an understanding of time markedly at odds with the linear way of storing the past, present, and future in climate-controlled units. Would you be willing to talk about how you understand, and relate to, time?*

I don't think we experience our lives linearly. Time works forward and backwards. We know we are building the future with our present actions. We also know that our memory of events in the past is not the past as it happens. So why is it such a leap to realize that time itself is not a continuum in a single direction nor a series of points that can be entered and exited from (dream of science fiction "time travel") but an absolutely constant multiplicity that exists in many directions simultaneously. The human body must live through linear time but the human mind—that weird thing that functions beyond understanding—of the brain but not in it—does not: the human mind exists at all points in time present and past and future at once. It's just another short leap to realize it is possible the mind can actually experience and know things the body hasn't reached to or gotten to yet. We might call it "instinct" in order to label it, or perhaps "gut feeling," or "déjà vu," or "funny feeling," or whatever, but doesn't it seem obvious what it really is? That we actually live outside the government of time?

*The Disappearance of Seth* is a much kinder and more organized exploration of this same thesis. The difference is that because *Bright Felon* is "poetry" or whatever, people accept the non-linearity without thinking too much about what is actually happening in the mind as the body flickers through all these awarenesses racing back to its source. If it was a novel it would be a grave situation indeed, one that would need to be studied, gotten to the bottom of.

**JF:** *In "Albany," you write that you are "[n]either Isaac nor Ismail" but the "third son, the wolf-tongued son." What does it mean to be "wolf-tongued?"*

Miguel Murphy, a poet, once said to me, "Only the vulgar tongue can praise god."

In a Euro-centric mythology (like Grimm or something like that) the wolf is the animal that threatens civilization, that lives in the forests outside the village and will devour you if you stray too far.

Ishmael is the older brother, the docile one who will go along with their father, and Isaac is the younger one, the one who panics, who backs away, who is shocked at what is being asked of him. So there must be another brother, the one in the middle, the scared one who wants to please his father but knows he cannot do what is being asked him. The one that

is pierced but rather than lie back and bleed or tear the knife out and run he just's stunned there, transfixed.

He has the tongue of a wolf so he knows god, he knows the straight lines of the village lanes and he knows the dark forest paths too. He's welcome nowhere, poor terrified mewling thing!

**John Schmidt:** *For a book which ostensibly traces the consequences of a revealed secret (i.e. coming out) back to its origin, Bright Felon seems to be as much about **not-telling** as it is about **telling**. These "lyric essays" (a wholly inadequate term in itself) are characterized by an ambiguity and openness which generates, rather than forecloses, meaning. When is it appropriate in this sense to "speak," and when to stay silent?*

You are right. The term "lyric essays" was really a grasping at straws (see above) but it seemed "better" somehow than "poems" or "poetry." The issue is really that they are not so much separate pieces as part of a joined text. Though a long time after their writing when I read them or when I read them now, I see they have very differing textures and tones. The "Corsica" section for example feels much more linguistically experimental than the "Washington" or "Albany" sections which seem more narrative or the "Cairo" section which reads much like an essay to me.

In terms of silence and ambiguity. I felt important to stay as honest as I could to the imperative of silence itself that had governed my life for so long. I do not use the word "gay" in this book, you will notice, though the entire thing is an act of coming out. I worried the whole time I was writing whether I was "spending" too much; what would there be left for me to say after it? I decided to take the risk.

**JS:** *As you emphatically suggest, "You really don't know yourself so well" (27). Even the name "Kazim" seems at times alien: "I mispronounce myself" (35). In what ways did you come to terms with--or perhaps actively define--identity and history in the writing of Bright Felon?*

The writing itself was creating an identity; I wrote it while confronting the very issue of how to discuss my sexuality with people who had loved me my whole life, who I thought I would "protect" somehow from this reality. It was as much a handbook to me about speaking as it was a guidebook backward through my history to try to understand a little bit about why I had been silent for so long, unable to speak for so long.

"You really don't know yourself so well" is something I overheard someone saying on the street. It wouldn't have been unusual if he was saying it to another person but he was saying it to himself. He was not walking and talking to himself but lying down on a bench outside Inwood Park. I had to pay attention to my life to write this book, which depends on interruption as a poetic strategy. And often times what was exactly in front of me interrupted the book—someone would say something on the train or I would look up and see someone cross the street through the coffee shop window. Sometimes the interruptions were remembrances from the past. No horse tack in the machines, for

example.

**JS:** *There is a real specificity to the portions of life you choose to animate in the book. At the same time, these moments are often set into sharp relief by cursory reference to a larger sociopolitical climate, lurking in the margins (the death of Layla al-Attar, for instance, or the "picture of war, Guernica, covered in black drape before Powell's speech, to make things possible," 54). Can you talk briefly about the relationship between individual and world in Bright Felon?*

It is a sculpture, in a sense, in terms of the material I chose to use. It could have been a completely different book. Though I edited and fashioned it meticulously what I didn't do was write ten times as much and then cut away. I really did write minimally even the first time through. Not too much was added as I edited and transformed the draft material through the final book. Joshua Marie Wilkinson read a close-to-finished version and gleefully did a Pound number, cutting and compressing very nearly every single line. I mostly adopted his suggestions but you know, not every last one. Of course I am insufferably making myself Eliot in the analogy.

Politics hid behind the whole narrative (like Guernica under that black sheet or the rally of the custodial workers I had to get through to meet Jason in the National Gallery) because politics—or the politics of religion anyhow—had so much to do with the imperative of silence I functioned under in the first place.

I also was influenced by Hans Hofmann's "push-pull" theory of perspective—that the pictorial surface can pulse with energy moving into both foreground and background. It happens in Barbara Guest's poems sometimes and I became interested in trying to develop this in writing. An individual versus the community or national; how these local and universal entities move through each other.

**Kat Factor:** *Gilian Conoley's quote that opens the book is such a striking compass: "A fragment" as well as "slant meeting" is the true north that prepare us for the plane of understanding in BF, the parenthetical ellipsis that follows suggests something is bound to be missing, and "I approached" is the appropriate phrase—for what writers can only attempt in language, while the lines "trachea/without sound" feels kin to the attempt to speak, a theme in this book. Not to mention her powerful words are the title of Bright Felon. Talk about how you discovered this quote and at what point did you know it was so perfect? Was it affirmation or an organizing principle when you encountered it? And, how do you see meaning constellating around those words—"bright felon"?*

I read her book *Lovers in the Used World* when it first came out in 2001. It's such a striking book full of powerful lines and images that have resonated with me for many years. I loved the idea of a signature as a "bright felon." A felon is a criminal who has committed a serious crime. I love the idea of him as "bright." My own life, my signature, myself—I am the son, the desperate one, the one who attended all the scripture study classes, who prayed and dreamed of becoming a creature of light—and all along, who knew, I was that thing I had been thinking about. "Bright" in addition to meaning "smart"

can mean “cheerful” and that’s the phrase I felt described me. Now I meet bright felons everywhere. When I read my favorite Lucille Clifton poem to audiences (“lucifer speaks in his own voice at last”) I always say, “This poem is about the original bright felon.”

Because the Conoley poem also includes the phrase “Choosing not choosing” which Sharon Cameron used as the title of her book about Emily Dickinson I became convinced that the phrase “bright felon” was actually from Dickinson. Conoley, when I contacted her, admitted the possibility but neither of us, after lots of searching, could locate the phrase anywhere within Dickinson, so I think Conoley must have channeled it on her own—though Dickinson too, I think, was a bright felon.

**KF:** *There has been talk about Bright Felon as an artifact that pioneers “Queering Autobiography.” Many writers and teachers have engaged with this book as a way of discussing new genres, alternative structures, and memory’s deviance. Please respond to this quote (of yours): “Perhaps the queer body—which has been marginalized, oppressed, excluded, killed—requires a different language, structure, or even genre to begin to tell itself.”*

If it’s a new genre it is because I began it as writing, sentences in poetry. I wanted to speak into silence. I had no other plan or theory behind it. Only by saying bits and pieces and thinking maybe those would accumulate into truthful speech. It was a way of speaking out both sides of my mouth I suppose, or speaking with the forked tongue of a fallen angel. The text is a body too. And a body that goes against social strictures and taboos is a special kind of body—usually in times past considered a sacred body—a virgin who stays virginal beyond a certain point, for example, or a body that transgresses the gender binary or which behaves sexually against the dominant structure required (principally) by the economic and political structures of a given society, for example to perpetuate private property laws via the mechanism of primo genitur or other system of inheritance.

So the queer body must actually be marginalized, oppressed, excluded or killed. For it to be allowed to flourish would ultimately call to question all the other myths of the given society, all the laws that tell bodies how they are supposed to behave. Rather than fruitfully engage in these questions as a civilized and enlightened society, to make the kinds of radical changes that might enable us as a species to continue to occupy this overworked ecosystem, streamline our population in the most loving way possible—by exploring different sexual realities and embracing these as part of the spectrum of human sexualities—we continue our slow, murderous and inevitable march toward endless war and starvation on a planetary scale. How sad. But I must say, I really am an optimist. I do see a green and queer-friendly future soon on the horizon.

But to go back to the first part of the question: the text is “queer” itself—it is not linear, it does not offer a simple reading. It complicates itself, the reader’s relationship to it, and the writer (me in this case) must also be a “reader” of his own experience, the reality he is sculpting and crafting from memory, history, science and his own wild body.



**KF:** *To encounter Bright Felon exposes multiple realms of literacy. An engrossing autobiography, the book casts richly about cross-genre issues. As a work of non-fiction written in verse, it makes the travelogue anew. As a work of poetry, it allows for mystery to turn to story, however strangely wrought. As an autobiography, it challenges all predecessors and transcends chronology, moving backwards in time and across space, utilizing the page and line break. How did it feel, craft-wise, to be making a text that “lives between poetry and prose, shifts time, place, tone and style from sentence to sentence”?*

It felt gorgeous and wonderful like finally I didn't have to explain myself to anyone any more and only had to write it. It follows the contours of my often frantic mind at the moment of writing. In rare occasions (as I've said) the actual moment of the writing erupts in the text. No horse tack in the machines. The man in the turquoise shirt who walked into Casa Mani Café in Carlisle, PA the morning I was writing a particularly painful chapter. I knew it was a “text,” i.e. in the Barthes sense, as I was writing it—not poetry, not prose, not “memoir,” not anything, a body the way my body is a body, something written meant to be read. Beyond that I didn't know and didn't need to know.

I am that bright felon and there was no version of the truth that was going to suffice, no form of writing that I could depend on. I could see no thing to be but my self.

But I felt a version of this writing *The Disappearance of Seth*, which as I've said was in ways a companion text to this book, though I started it a long time before and finished a long time after. *Bright Felon* was more or less written at what you call “white heat.” A first draft written in five months (November 2006 through April 2007) and then set aside for about a full year, worked on again, fine-tuning only, for about a week and a half. It's very very close to how it was originally written. I must have made about three hundred small tweaks and changes but the essential text, its contours, its order and components is the same as I wrote it in that bare Carlisle apartment on South Bedford Street, two blocks away from the colonial graveyard where stands a giant statue of Molly Pitcher.

With both of these books I had to brave the weird turnarounds of readers and reviewers. One said, upon reading *Bright Felon*, something like, “When I thought this was memoir I found it tiresome and meandering but now that I know it's poetry I like it.” And someone else, a writer of experimental literature that I admire very much, read *Seth* and said something like “Poets can't write good novels because they don't know about plot and character,” which seemed to me to give into the most conservative impulses about genre, impulses which only seem to serve a constriction of the possibilities of literature and the structures of thought it can help to assemble.

For a while I wanted to make sure readers knew *Bright Felon* wasn't supposed to be poetry because I thought that would open up a new relationship between them as readers and the text itself. Now I just feel like it matters less. Maxine Hong Kingston had to fight her publishers to call *The Woman Warrior* “fiction,” so it is not the only book that has

lived between categories. What would you say about Tan Lin's work or Karen Tei Yamashita's?

**KF:** *Permeations of sexuality, questing, and loneliness flex in the book, fruitful for what it means to be writing (and wandering) in the world. What were you conscious of, theme-wise, as the book progressed? Were you aware of the dominant themes? Were the threads and tissues immediately showing their muscularity? Did you know each location's river would carve and connect the book, offering inherent metaphors? Had you sensed each city was stimulant to poetic consciousness, as if each were a large living objective correlative for you/your emotions?*

I think the issue of sexuality—specifically one excluded from the main narrative of my life, from the spiritual tradition in which I had been raised—clearly had an impact on the decision to turn away from a normative approach to form. Wandering through strange cities became a metaphor for wandering through the strange city of my life. At one point, lost somewhere—in New York, I think—wounded and missing Jason, a friend of mine, I forget who it was, said bluntly to me: “I feel like your grief at not being able to be with Jason is a metaphor for something else. All you have to do is figure out what it is a metaphor for.” I was really upset with her at the time but I still think about her question. I don't know the answer to it.

In terms of weaving the book together: I knew some themes were emerging but promised myself not to craft them. I was on an exploratory mission to learn about myself; I didn't want my ego in the way. As I wrote sentence by sentence in individual chapters one rule was that I did not look back at anything I had written. I learned about this technique from Lyn Hejinian who used it in her book *A Border Comedy*. And then chapter by chapter I also did not look back though I did consciously bring up earlier images and events to fashion a kind of music. The book, you'll see, doesn't solely move backward through the cities I lived in—there is a present moment of writing the book and sometimes a move forward (“The book I myself write next trying to say something that is true—”).

I was aware that each city/chapter sometimes had a different texture or tone (“Cairo” for example feels essayistic, the New York chapters more discursive, “Albany” more lyrical and autobiographical) but this wasn't intentional or consciously constructed. I followed my urge and my experience.

**KF:** *How was the book made? Was it compiled from a series of travel scrawls? Did you work a chapter at a time, backwards chronologically? Or did you write are you remembered and were moved to do so? Or were you just weaving, darting, and yarning?*

I wrote the book chapter by chapter and sentence by sentence in the order it was published. I didn't reorder the chapters nor did I shuffle sentences too much, though I may have very occasionally in the reworking stage. At some point I mention a much earlier piece of writing called *The Historical Need* (“Or was that Hysterical Need?”) and

indeed I found that manuscript and used some of it as found text to construct the “Washington, DC” chapter. Some of the “Cairo” chapter comes from notebooks I kept in Cairo and the Epilogue chapter is transcribed word-for-word out of the journal I was keeping during a trip to Barcelona in March of 2007 right after I had visited my parents (“So having told them...”) during what I had thought was a break from working on *Bright Felon*. Later, after I had “finished” the book (it ended with the “Home” chapter) I found that day from journal and realized it was actually the closing chapter.

**KF:** *To what extent did your manuscripts before—your fiction, say, adjust the course of this creation? Were you more or less encumbered by admitting to talk about your life, (rather than project it, say, as in Quinn’s Passage), i.e. How were you prepared for this work?*

The real question for me was: now that I have written as close to a true autobiography as I could, what happens next—what is “the book I myself write next trying to say something that is true”?