

This issue is dedicated

to the memory of

Frederick Busch

(1941–2006)

“Can that be done,” he finally said. “It is only the question that a man of letters asks himself each time he enters his room, shuts the door with a welcome kind of despair, and sits himself down before the awful, terrorizing whiteness of the white page. Can . . . that . . . be . . . done.”

I placed a morsel of Irish soda bread, rich with currants yet the dough sternly unsweet, into my mouth beneath the veil. He drank at his coffee. I knew he would not stay away from the topic.

“Can—Bless you, shipmate. It is the question. And not only because it is so difficult. A man at his desk, poised above the awful blankness, must ask himself this: Do I seek a stay against oblivion on behalf of my little actors on the vast page? Or do I seek my own eternal life? In case of the latter, it’s philosophy a man must drive for. If the former, a generous and a merciful and a slighter end, why then you can write down in their scratchy particularity the traits of a person and keep them fresh for as long as the paper lasts. If in some library in some city in some nation of the world that book exists, then your character’s saved from oblivion—your remembered personage, I mean. Your own character, the outline and contents of your soul, that is neglected for the persiflage and rump-de-dumps, the lace collars and bone buttons, of romance. The choice is part of the danger. So’s the oblivion, of course.” He laughed, his mouth wide, his head tilted back, his little eyes staring at the smoke-browned ceiling of the coffeehouse, and no sound rising from his lips.

—excerpted from *The Night Inspector*

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Five Points



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ATLANTA

TENTH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

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