

THE MAKING OF *THOMAS E. KENNEDY: COPENHAGEN QUARTET**by Greg Herriges*

In the summer of 1995, Emerson College held its annual fiction writing seminar at its European campus, Kasteel Well, a thirteenth century castle nestled in the flatlands of Holland's village of Well, a scant six miles from the German border. The dean of the liberal arts division of the college at which I teach thought it was a good idea for me to attend the two-week program, and even helped fund my enrollment. I was, of course, grateful, not only because I would miss the first week of teaching four composition 101 classes, but also because I was attempting, however clumsily, to make the transition from writing commercial fiction to literary work. I flew from Chicago to Brussels with no sleep, and then drove a rented Fiat to the Netherlands, exhausted. I should get in here that I can't sleep on planes, and it would have been impossible anyway, as there was an open bar and some very merry revelers who grew more merry with every aeronautical mile we flew.

The castle and its grounds were breathtaking in a downtrodden sort of way—thirty-six wooded acres, two concentric moats populated by black swans, expansive lawns, and flowerbeds. The faculty was likewise impressive—authors James Carroll, Askold Melnyczuk, Alexa Marshall, though there was a bespectacled story writer by the name of Thomas E. Kennedy who did not strike me at first as so impressive. I'd never heard of him, first of all. He was in charge of a story section, while I was one of four novelists, so we had little contact with one another.

It was a nightly event, readings by both faculty and students in a parlor called Sophie's Room, christened for the daughter of a nineteenth century owner of the castle. Poor Sophie died when she was but nineteen years old. I recall that there was an unremarkable portrait of her in oils, all blues and browns, high on one of the walls of the room, and I felt sorry for her parents for having outlived her, for missing her so much that they named

a room after her. I thought of that every time I saw that portrait. The castle itself was a lonely place, though it became less so in the evenings as we were served wine or beer and the stories got under way.

One evening Kennedy took to the podium. A modest man, he began his reading and I barely took notice, except to reflect on his accent, which was one part New York and an equal share British, it seemed to me. But within a few minutes it became apparent that the voice was wrapped around staggeringly beautiful prose and a story of remarkable proportions. This fellow Kennedy, I realized with the grudging envy that writers naturally have for other, better writers, was a storyteller of the first order. The story itself, "The Great Master," has ever afterward been one of my all-time favorites. I don't think I shall forget that evening, because it initiated a long standing personal and professional relationship that I am fortunate to share, and which I am eager and willing to brag about at the drop of the proverbial hat, and especially when there are lots of literary types within earshot. Thomas E. Kennedy is not just one of the finest writers I have ever known, he is also a good, close friend.

I came to know Tom's work well, beginning with his deeply moving *Crossing Borders*, a novel which had elicited substantial praise from many serious publications, including the *New York Times Book Review*. I was equally familiar with and entranced by the stories in his next work, the collection *Unreal City*. It was in this volume that the stand-out psychological drama "A Berlin of The Mind" unfolds. I drove to Madison, Wisconsin, one day after classes to hear Tom read from it, and we renewed our acquaintanceship there at some literary organization that was affiliated with the University of Wisconsin.

But it was his *The Book of Angels* and *Drive Dive Dance and Fight* that, for me at least, marked Kennedy's ascendancy to the next level of literary artisanship. In the former we are introduced to Michael Lynch, an English professor who is forced to fight for his family, and the soul of his sister after she has died, by going up against a practitioner of black magic, one who takes seriously the precepts as outlined by Eliphas Levi: "To know, to dare, to will, to keep silence" (Cavendish 31). The result is fiction at its most chilling—what Askold Melnyczuk has called "a profound thriller" (jacket blurb—*The Book of Angels*). In *Drive*, Kennedy's most mature short work is presented in prose as tight and clean as a new drum skin. Here we find the wandering heartbroken residents of the world still hoping beyond a shadow of hope, still seeking to connect the orbs, somewhat like Whitman's noiseless patient spider so that they might make some semblance of sense out of the human journey, and maybe, if they're fortunate, find a little love along their way.

I enlisted Tom's help in the teaching of these two books to my lit students, and over a period of years we perfected the literary conference call. We'd set a date, a time, he in his home office in Copenhagen, my students and I ensconced in a cramped conference room on campus in Palatine, Illinois, ready and armed with carefully prepared questions about his stories and novels. The results were marvelous. There is an individual rhythm to any spoken exchange, especially to those over long distances, and we all soon became accustomed to the pace, the spaces of our remarks as they traveled over transatlantic lines and back. Kennedy is a natural when it comes to teaching, and so his responses were little masterpieces of improvisational lessons, oftentimes embellished with deep, personal reflection as an author, as a human being.

And so that's where the germ for making the video (the one that shares the billing with

this piece) began. I regularly host literary readings at my college, William Rainey Harper College. T.C. Boyle, Kurt Vonnegut, Jay McInerney, Mark Leyner, Robert Pinsky—we've had quite the lineup, including the Emerson College crowd, Carroll, and Melnyczuk, and it should come as no surprise, Kennedy. However it wasn't until my friend and colleague Kurt Hemmer—an expert on the beat generation—wrote and produced two documentaries on Janine Pommy Vega and Michael McClure, respectively, that I came to see the real possibility of creating a DVD with Kennedy as its subject.

I must admit from the outset that I had no idea what I was getting myself into. I have received much praise for the resultant artifact, the DVD production itself, most of which I can honestly confide to the reader I simply don't deserve, but will more than willingly accept. (A door opened one way or another is still a door opened.) But I might as well have tried to make a submarine in my basement, for all that I know about film or tape. Here is how I naively began. The Cultural Arts Committee at the college had booked Kennedy to read from his new novel in November of 2003. I wrote a proposal for the Instructional Technology department to video record Tom's performance. They granted my request, and I thought that was that. Tom would read, they would tape, good night everyone.

Tom would be visiting once again, and my wife and I greatly looked forward to that because we invariably have such a wonderful time together. Tom brings lovely gifts—exotic cigars, books, jazz CDs, and we always manage to discover new dining locations and elegant bars, sometimes not-so-elegant bars. Many a night we have whiled away the hours recounting stories for each other over chilled glasses of Stoly, a Miles Davis or Cannonball Adderley riff in the background, a blue sheen of cigar smoke in the air between us. Yes, this is what I counted on.

I didn't count on Tom Knoff.

Knoff is the production supervisor of Harper's Department of Instructional Technology, and while we have been colleagues for fourteen or more years, we had never worked on a project together. I recall our first meeting in his studio, a dimly lighted basement room strewn with electronic equipment in various states of repair (most of it looked broken), walls adorned with black and white pop-art posters; there's a big, five-foot tall one of Dylan in his "Like a Rolling Stone" days directly behind Knoff's desk. He remained disturbingly reticent as I profiled my plan for the Kennedy piece. We had exactly two days in which to shoot. I saw the first day as strictly the theater reading in front of a live audience, then I'd shoot Kennedy the following day at Hemingway's birth home. Hemingway's home was something of a shrine for Kennedy. We had visited it together the year before in deep autumn, found it to be a moody setting, perfect for the telling of some literary anecdotes.

"You need some vision," Knoff explained, "some unifying direction." I thought I had just given him one. He then ran through what he and Kurt Hemmer had done with Pommy Vega—a series of performance pieces, each standing alone. My take was a departure from this. I wanted a real documentary—other people, settings outside of the campus.

"We could bring in some experts, some critics," I suggested, "have them talk about Kennedy's work in between sections of the reading."

Knoff shook his head. He couldn't think of anything less exciting than that, and besides, we had no budget. The silence in that studio was burdensome. I had never felt so daunted. The whole video idea suddenly seemed to collapse, nothing more than a foolish

whim that I should have probably kept to myself. I knew how to *teach* literature; I just didn't know how to capture and present it visually.

Tom Kennedy rolled into town and gave a very poignant noontime reading of his second Quartet piece, *Bluett's Blue Hours*, a lovely exchange between the protagonist and his new love interest, Liselotte. Knoff recorded the entire presentation, moving around Kennedy fluidly, taping him from every conceivable angle in a mock-noir kind of approach, a silent partner in the dance of the reading performance. And this I didn't appreciate until later: he recorded two sound tracks concurrently—one from a wireless lavalier on Tom's sport coat, providing studio quality high and low tones, and the other from a boom microphone attached to the camera itself, which lends an eerie reverberation due to the theater's natural acoustical properties. You can hear the results in the final mix on the DVD, quite a stunning aural effect.

Knoff was unable to accompany us to Hemingway's house the following day, so after a five-minute lesson on how to operate a \$40,000 video camera, I took over the shooting. Tom and I arrived at Papa's old Oak Park Avenue residence early on a soggy, gray November day that would have been a good backdrop for a funeral. Wet brown and orange leaves clung to the pavement, to the yard itself, providing the only color in the shot. I struggled to get the camera anchored upon the tripod, struggled further to level the entire apparatus, like the comic novice I was. Lighting was a problem. The daylight was so chintzy, so dour, that I feared the portion taped on the front porch wouldn't be up to Knoff's standards. Kennedy was recounting the time Hemingway took a punch at a Mr. Eastman in Max Perkins's office for having written a negative review of *Death in the Afternoon*. I made him tell that anecdote three times because the swooshing sound of traffic kept feeding into the microphone.

We had slightly better luck with the next take in the backyard. This time Kennedy spoke of Hemingway's competitive philosophy when it came to creating literature, while I fiddled with the exposure. The light, while suffuse, was excessive without a porch overhang, creating vibrating lines in the eyepiece. I got hold of Knoff on my cell phone, and he guided me through yet another take, explaining how to use electronic filters. I was pushing buttons and winding lens gears that I knew nothing about. Eventually a woman who had something to do with the Hemingway Society arrived to open the house to the public, and she was nonplused to find us there in the midst of taping. She reprimanded us, not at all unlike two boys who had trespassed to get our baseball back, and so I dismantled the tripod, apologized, and we drove off into the dreary day, censured, and unsure of the work we had done.

That evening I shot Tom on stage in a nightclub, where he spoke about the act of writing itself, sitting upon a stool, Mort Sahl-style. There was a huge painting of the Creature from the Black Lagoon behind him, and he ended by cooing to it, "You know I've always loved you." We'd had a few martinis, and needless to say that sequence ended up on the cutting room floor, though I think we both regret it. It was one of our favorite moments. To this day he asks to have a copy of it.

Tom returned to Copenhagen to complete the third part of the Quartet, *Greene's Summer*, and to do more readings throughout Europe. We had scheduled one more shooting date for March 2004 at Harper College, which granted Knoff and me a sort of technical reprieve. Anything that didn't turn out could now be re-shot, and we could plan more



footage as ideas occurred to us.

I went ahead on my own, despite Knoff's objections, and solicited appearances by scholars and authors who might care to expatiate on Kennedy's career. I got around the budget issue by having the potential guests videotaped by the visual arts departments of their own universities. To get them started, I emailed each a set of six questions:

1. What do you think distinguishes Thomas E. Kennedy as a unique literary artist?
2. Which is your favorite of his short works, and why?
3. Have you an anecdote about Tom that you would care to share, one that perhaps serves to define him, or his personality?
4. Do you perceive certain repeated themes that Kennedy explores in his stories and novels, and, if so, what are they?
5. How would you characterize Kennedy's world view, his take on the human condition?
6. As a friend and colleague, what is it that you would like people to know about Kennedy, either as a writer or a man?

Soon I was in possession of two sets of tapes that quite pleased me, one featuring Walter Cummins, Editor Emeritus of Fairleigh Dickinson University's *The Literary Review*, and the other, Duff Brenna, author of *Too Cool* and *The Altar of the Body*. Walter's appeal on camera is his candid innocence and enthusiasm. There is a literal light in his eyes when he hits his stride, commenting on this notion or that about Kennedy's art. He was self-conscious at times on the rough cut and halted in mid-sentence in order to begin another take, my surrogate questioner giving him his cues.

Brenna, whose readings I had hosted in the past, I *knew* would turn in a very professional performance. His is a dark and moody presence onscreen, inherently dramatic, and perhaps he'll forgive me if I say *almost haunting*. He delivers his commentary as a college lesson to an imaginary student audience, and his admiration for Kennedy the author and man is pleasantly conspicuous. I had something here, something that would expand the nature of the documentary, shine some needed light on its subject.

Knoff staggered me with doubt when I presented these materials to him, along with hundreds of photos from Kennedy's private collection. He had a variant vision of this thing—just Kennedy alone, in the confines of the studio, totally within our control, as he had worked with McClure and Pommy Vega. He didn't like the sound quality of either tape, felt that the difference in production values could ruin the project, though he thought he could use some of the photos. I sat there in his basement quarters stunned as he delivered this pronouncement. And further—we still had no outline by which to contain Kennedy's readings, he insisted. Once again, I thought we had. He challenged me to talk about Kennedy, his latest novels.

Well, there was Kerrigan, I began. He discovers the essence of Copenhagen and its past through visits to its historic serving houses. I hit upon Bluett, Greene—referred to the collection as I had heard Tom do so, as the Copenhagen Quartet.

"That's it," Knoff stopped me.

"What is?"

"The Quartet. We'll have four sequences, a reading from each novel. In between we'll have him responding to questions."

Just like that he had framed the piece. I added the notion of cutting the questions

themselves out of the finished product, to present Kennedy telling his own story. I got the idea from *The Beatles Anthology*, in which the individual members become the narrators. A short video, it seemed to me, didn't have enough room for a subject and a host. A host would be clunky, just get in the way. I was gratified when Knoff took to this stylistic device.

So this was it. I emailed Tom about our progress, and I suppose my enthusiasm became contagious, and he fed that enthusiasm back to me redoubled. I went right to work on questions for his next on-camera appearance. Keep in mind that so far we only had a reading from one work, *Bluett's Blue Hours*, which meant that he would have to give three additional performances, one from a book that had barely been begun, *Breathwaite's Fall*. The March session needed to be a marathon.

It was Knoff's concept to have Kennedy read to an empty room. We already had miles of audience footage we could edit in if necessary, depending on how we felt during final cut. I booked a different theater on campus this time—one that could be lighted to order, and which had dead acoustics. It was a 350-seat room with ascending rows, somewhat like an indoor amphitheater. With the theater manager present, I conducted several dry-runs, experimented with light gels, decided on a light blue background. The questions were hammered out, and I sent them by email to Tom so that he could prepare. I didn't want to hit him cold. I did not tell him that I had a separate list with which to surprise him if what we got sounded pat or canned. Be prepared. I had been a scout once.

Knoff made VHS copies of all the master mini-dvds we had assembled—Tom's reading, and Duff's and Walter's commentaries, in case I found moments I thought we might be able to salvage. I studied them for weeks, coming home from my lectures, popping them in the machine at all hours of the day. I took notes and met with Knoff in his studio several times a week, poring over segments. He had converted the tape to his computer's hard drive and was able to enhance visuals, freeze-frame, stop on a dime. This is where it began to be exciting, began to take shape. Additionally we were able to compress and enhance the soundtracks of the guest tapes so that they matched our own, more or less, though we were still sparring over whether to use them at all.

"What venue are you aiming for?" Knoff asked me one day, after viewing the tapes.

Perhaps you can imagine my guarded bewilderment by now. Every time I set foot into that dreary little studio he pulled the carpet out from under me. I had begun to suspect that he was doing it on purpose, finding some perverse enjoyment in setting me on my ear.

"How's that?" I said, wondering what the trick was this time.

"You've got to decide who will want to see this." The choices were apparently film festivals and possibly public television, or else educational catalogues for the humanities. If we wanted TV exposure, then the guests were out. They wouldn't play. If, on the other hand, the intention was to teach, then the experts made sense. An educational audience would eat that up, as it were.

I decided on the educational route because I had found some promising moments with both Duff and Walter and I simply didn't want to do without them. And by this time Kennedy's publisher, who was based in Ireland, was thinking of including CD-ROM editions of the finished video inside the cover of the upcoming *Greene's Summer*. Suddenly our little undertaking was taking on dimensions neither Knoff nor I had imagined at the

outset. Kennedy himself urged me to look into getting permission to use Coltrane's "A Love Supreme" as background music, and I did. I got as far as finding the publisher, who advised me to write a letter to Alice Coltrane, John's widow. He believed she would grant us the rights *gratis* if we could assure her there was nothing obscene in the book. Obscenity was apparently a major concern of hers.

Now there was a stumper. What did Alice Coltrane consider obscene? Sex? To say there is no sex in Kennedy's work is to tell something of a whopper. During one of our conference calls with Tom, a student had asked him, "Why is there so much sex in your writing?"

Without missing a beat he'd replied, "Well, I have to get it somewhere."

Then there was the record company that would have to be dealt with. The music publisher gave me the name of an executive who might be able to help me, but by now all I could see were legal entanglements that might take longer to straighten out than making the video would. I hated to bring all my headaches to Knoff, but I did once more, and he assured me that he had canned samples of public domain music. Not to worry.

Tom's return visit in March was cause for celebration for a number of reasons. He had just turned sixty, and he promised me that the best years were yet ahead. I don't know if I quite believed him, but I certainly wanted to. Also, we dined lavishly, stayed up late exchanging news and tales, listening to rock and roll and jazz. But most importantly we took to our work that March Friday, and we worked it hard. The theater, bathed in robin's egg blue, had been prepared and awaited us. Knoff was already there when we arrived, taking light readings, arranging the chairs upon the stage to his liking. Tom was wearing a tweed sport jacket and a green Jerry Garcia tie my wife had bought him specifically for the occasion. The gods were smiling upon us.

Tom read pre-selected portions from *Kerrigan's Copenhagen*, *Greene's Summer*, and *Breathwaite's Fall*—this last piece manifested only in manuscript pages with handwritten notes and diagrams, crossed-out sentences, marginalia. It was my first exposure to the new work, and I found it beautiful in an unearthly way. Most of those readings were completed in one take, with very few stammers or flaws. This is when I discovered that a slightly blemished performance was inherently more interesting than a whistle-clean one. A mispronounced word, a hesitation, provided relief against an otherwise perfect landscape. You wanted contrast, needed it.

We did not break for lunch; instead, we hammered forward, filming Tom's responses to my questions. Knoff never used a tripod, choosing instead to carry the camera upon his shoulder almost like an extension of himself, as he slowly swiveled around Kennedy on a make-believe chassis, now on the stage, now below it in the seating area, constantly altering the viewer's vantage point. As is his custom, Tom turned each query into a private lesson on writing, and on writing's relation to existence. His vocation is not an end unto itself, but rather a means to understanding, to reaching out, to touching other lives. I was quietly astonished at his earnestness. This was not an act or a show for the camera; it was a series of solemn, ardent revelations of an artist's mind and soul. What struck me even more was our proximity to this unfolding, Knoff's and my own. Yes, we were collaborators in a sense, but to a greater degree we were witnesses to Kennedy's pure honesty, his enthusiasm, and the great dignity with which he treats his work and his life, the two intertwined, inseparable. It was humbling, but being the opportunist that I am, it was also

exhilarating to know that we had caught it on tape. This alone would sell our undertaking, and I knew it. I knew it even before we finished. My job would be easy from here on out. I had gotten the best out of Kennedy, had pushed, and prodded, and encouraged him, and he just kept giving back. I did honestly hope that he wouldn't hold it against me that I made him work so damned hard that afternoon. It *was* afternoon, for we had used up the day. Seven hours.

Tom journeyed back to Copenhagen that very evening after an all-too-brief visit. I recall leaving him at the departure ramp at O'Hare Airport in Chicago, the western sky still lighted, hinting at spring's ingress. I did not think that we could sustain the energy required to assemble the documentary past summer, and so I wanted it wrapped up soon. While Knoff embarked on a fresh round of editing sessions, I wrote liner notes for the DVD package and offered Kurt Hemmer a proposal. What if we contracted to mass-produce our combined literary documentaries and offered them to educational catalogues as a series, the Harper College Literary Documentary Collection?

Hemmer was amenable, but he urged me to plan a presentation for the college administrators. We'd need their permission. I didn't see a problem in such an endeavor, but Hemmer was more skeptical. Apparently copyright issues were red-hot on college campuses across America. But I wasn't looking for money; after all, one doesn't get rich making educational films.

Naïveté carries with it a certain optimistic momentum. Once again, I didn't know what kind of tangled road I was setting out upon.

Before my lectures one morning I received a call from Knoff in my office. He wanted to know if I could come downstairs and see something he had put together. Sitting at his desk, where he did all his editing by computer, I watched as a striking, seven-minute segment of our video rolled. A montage of electronically altered photographs of Danish bars and street scenes unfolded, accompanied by Kennedy's voice riding over smoky saxophone solos, the *Kerrigan* segment. When it was finished I just sat there. *How the hell had he done it?* I wondered. I had known he was skilled, but this was simply unprecedented. I watched it three more times, until it became etched upon my memory, something I could carry away with me in order to plan further pieces of the puzzle.

Knoff, a thorough professional, is inclined to contain his ebullience, but I knew he was pleased with the end product when he put it up on an Internet web site so that Kennedy could view it upon his home computer in Denmark. And view it he did. Within hours came his response. What Knoff had created, he wrote in an email, was impressive, but he had used photographs of the wrong serving houses—wrong in terms of the references in the reading it was supposed to illustrate. We could get away with it in the States, but any Dane would notice the error. Further, the Picasso renditions included were not the Picasso line drawings that existed in the St. Jacques, the setting of that particular chapter.

I was getting damned tired of falling on my face, although I was getting pretty good at it.

Kennedy himself came to the rescue by going more than just the extra mile. He went to the St. Jacques with a 35-millimeter camera and shot stills of the facade, the interior, and even the men's room walls, where the Picasso line drawings are displayed. He sent the package of prints by overnight express, and Knoff was able to superimpose the original soundtrack on a completely new and factually representative montage.



“But I don’t want to throw out the original sequence,” he confided to me. “We can use it at the end, a background upon which to run the credits.”

So our mistakes were helping to pave the direction of our little film. It occurred to me that this was the nature of the process—fluidity. You can only plan so much. After a while the piece asserts itself and becomes a player to be accommodated. I don’t think I appreciated at the time how much I was learning about video production, probably because of the buckets of anxiety that that kind of learning produces. I can look back on it now calmly, rather fondly, though I wish someone had given me some kind of warning.

By May, Roger Derham, Kenendy’s publisher, had decided to go ahead with the plan to include a CD-ROM version of our newly titled *Thomas E. Kennedy: Copenhagen Quartet* with the first 500 copies of the hardcover edition. This was quite a feather in our cap, because the DVD was not yet completed, and now we could launch our series of literary documentaries with a European success. Already I had been contacted by writers and educators from around the world, requesting copies of something that did not yet exist. I could confidently go to the college administration when the time presented itself.

Meanwhile, Knoff had edited the *Bluett’s Blue Hours* segment, and it was a masterful effort in its own right. He had somehow computer-enhanced Kennedy’s still photographs to resemble oil paintings—old shuttered apartments in Copenhagen—upon which he layered Kennedy’s voice and some acoustic blues guitar licks. Wonderful, I thought. But Knoff was worried about the great contrast in Kennedy’s personal appearance. In the *Bluett’s* segment recorded in November of 2003, he appears on screen with lamb-chop sideburns and long, almost shoulder-length hair. In the March 2004 takes, he is clean-shaven and the hair is neatly trimmed. Knoff’s initial solution was to use only the newer footage.

We were at loggerheads again, because I didn’t see a problem at all. I found the contrast in Kennedy’s appearance a bonus. It demonstrated the length of time our efforts spanned, and it bore witness to an artist open to change. He was more interesting this way, difficult to pin down. I must have become more expert at arguing, because I won this dispute readily.

A neat touch was the manner in which Knoff combined some black and white photographs of Walter Cummins and Kennedy together in Paris, along with Cummins’ personal reminiscence of having visited Hemingway’s apartment on the Left Bank. This served as a convenient segue to the footage of our visit to Hemingway’s birth home in Oak Park. Knoff worked as an artistic clearing agent for materials that Kennedy, Cummins, and I had supplied individually, joining them not only so that they made sense, but doing so with a real intuitive, aesthetic touch. It’s just another reason that I cannot take credit for the finished documentary. Knoff was the man behind the curtain working the controls. I was a spectator with a few ideas, struggling to articulate them in a medium I knew not at all.

When I first saw the DVD disc it was mid-June, down in Knoff’s creative dungeon. All mauve and gray, the label was an abstract collage of images, including the well-known shot of Tom in a sleeveless t-shirt holding a cigar. I didn’t know what to think of it, and apparently my face telegraphed that news, because just one day later, on 16 June 2004 (Bloomsday 100, as Tom had suggested to include in the credits), Knoff presented me with several copies of the completed product—case, disc, and my liner notes. It was an

entirely new approach, the collage replaced with a melancholy photo of Kennedy taken in Ireland, done up in sepia tones. I asked him what made him change his mind about the packaging. He shrugged. He didn't know, he said. I believed him then, and I do still, because it is so like Knoff to give you an idea one day and utterly change it the next if he thinks it's somehow better, for whatever reason, even those ideas he can't explain. And he was adamant about one point—this was *it*. No alternate edits, no second guesses.

This seemed to me a terrifying idea, but it is how Knoff declares a work finished. He had worked it so many ways for so long, he could continue no further. I took it home and watched it seven, eight times in one evening, perhaps nine more times the next day. I got to know it as well as any poem I cared about, or any novel I ever put on constant replay. There is one fraction of a moment I used to wish we could redo—when the title *Breathwaite's Fall*, white letters upon a black background, hits the screen. It seems to jump. It just hits so hard. But even this anomaly seems to me now to be right, an original characteristic of a most original enterprise. What pleases me most about *Thomas E. Kennedy: Copenhagen Quartet* is its honesty. Neither Knoff nor I sought to make an advertisement for Kennedy or his work. It truly is a study, and one that stands up, I think, because of Kennedy's great sense of purpose. Clean. No strings. It simply is what it is.

In October of 2004, the video was screened at over twenty colleges and universities worldwide. The response has been overwhelmingly positive. On 9 October Tom appeared in person at the first of these events held at Harper College, in Palatine, Illinois, a place that has become for him an academic home away from home. It was my great pleasure to introduce him, the video, and Tom Knoff to a standing-room-only crowd that included the college's president, vice presidents, deans and the press, as well as my very dedicated students. Kennedy then embarked on a whirlwind book tour of the United States to promote *Greene's Summer* and the documentary as well.

On a somewhat less encouraging note—after a meeting with the Harper College faculty senate president and an administrative vice president, it was decided that no literary series would be offered for mass distribution or sale. Hemmer had been right about the ferocity of the copyright debate. I'm truly sorry for it, because I believe so strongly in each of the works. The Pommy Vega documentary recently won first place at the Aurora Awards, and I expect the other two will also fare well in organized exhibitions. Ironically, while we cannot *sell* the DVD, we are allowed to send it free of charge to any educational institution whose representative requests a copy on official letterhead. Every week I receive stacks of such requests, and Knoff and I continue to turn them out cottage-industry style, one at a time. There is a certain dignity in such a small-scale operation, something like a small press. That's what I keep telling myself, anyway, as I stuff manilla padded envelopes with discs, bound for this library or that. The important thing is for people to discover Kennedy's works and, through them, the heart and talent of a remarkable man and a fine literary artist.

### Works Cited

- Cavendish, Richard. *The Black Arts*. New York: Perigree Books, 1983.  
Melnyczuk, Askold. Jacket quote. *The Book of Angels*. By Thomas E. Kennedy. La Grande, Oregon: Wordcraft, 1997.