

LOWELL B. KOMIE OF CHICAGO— WRITER AND LAWYER

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The legal profession in Chicago has been as thoroughly studied as any group of lawyers in the United States.¹ But in none of these studies do the lawyers of Chicago become real, their lives imaginatively and poetically rendered, as in the fiction of Lowell B. Komie.² Komie's work as a fiction and short story writer parallels what will soon be fifty years as a Chicago lawyer, fifty years with clients and their demands and idiosyncratic sorrows, fifty years commuting and walking the streets of Chicago, fifty years association with lawyers and forays into Chicago's courts. Komie has made a life for himself in the ways of the law, and so it is in his fiction where we find a world in which everyday struggles and foibles, whimsical acts and persistent longings are portrayed with such vividness that the small dramas of everyday professional life sear themselves in memory. Komie's fiction explores the everyday work life of lawyers who struggle and sometimes fail, but who never relinquish their imagination and dignity. This fiction warns, in many and subtle ways, about the potential destruction of human spirit and how we must struggle to stay alive.

For his thirty years of published work as a writer of fiction, and the imaginative reach of this fine collection of Chicago lawyer stories, I nominate Lowell B. Komie as the first Poet Laureate of Chicago

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¹ See e.g., Jerome E. Carlin, *LAWYERS ON THEIR OWN* (San Francisco: Austin & Winfield Publishers, 1994)(1962); Marion S Goldman, *A PORTRAIT OF THE BLACK ATTORNEY IN CHICAGO* (Chicago: American Bar Foundation, 1972); Wayne D. Brazil, *Views from the Front Lines: Observations by Chicago Lawyers About the System of Civil Discovery*, 1980 Am. B. Found. Res. J. 219 (1980); John P. Heinz & Edward O. Laumann, *CHICAGO LAWYERS: THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF THE BAR* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, rev. ed. 1994) (1982); John P. Heinz, et. al., *The Changing Character of Lawyers' Work in Chicago in 1975 and 1995*, 32 Law & Soc'y Rev. 751 (1998); John P. Heinz, Kathleen E. Hull, & Ava A. Harter, *Lawyers and Their Discontents: Findings from a Survey of the Chicago Bar*, 74 Ind. L. J. 735 (1999).

² Lowell Komie's legal fiction is now available in three collections of short stories, *The Judge's Chambers and Other Stories* (Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishers, 1987), *The Lawyer's Chambers and Other Stories* (Chicago: Swordfish/Chicago, 1994), and *The Night Swimmer-A Man in London and Other Stories* (Chicago: Swordfish/Chicago, 1999). Approximately half the stories featured in this *Legal Studies Forum* re-issue of Komie's stories were originally published in *Student Lawyer*, a publication of the American Bar Association. "The Divorce of Pedra Godic," "The Law Clerk's Parrot," "Intimate Pages: A Lawyer's Notebook," and "Cohen, Zelinski, and Halloran" appeared in *Student Lawyer* but were not included by Komie in his published collections of stories.

lawyers.³ Reading Komie's fiction, learning the lives of his fictional Chicago lawyers, we cannot help but see our own lives in a more focused, poetic way. It is time to recognize Komie and make a place for the poetry of his fiction in the legal scholarship devoted to Chicago and her lawyers.

The pleasures in reading Lowell Komie's short stories are many and varied. His stories are beautifully written, well-crafted, poignant and haunting. For readers familiar with the plot-driven, action-oriented fiction associated with today's legal thrillers,⁴ a dramatically different experience is at hand reading Komie's stories. With immersion in Komie's fictional world, we learn to slow down, and pay more attention to the sentiments, longings, and failures that shape lives. Komie's stories work like meditation fables—an injection of the familiar, a lawyer getting to his office, the pressure to pay bills, the oddness of a client, a small tugging at the heart in an effort to connect with another human being, a whimsical response to sorrow, a persistent wistfulness—fables in which small details of a life are observed and celebrated. All in this world is so familiar and yet somehow strange, strange in the way we sometimes look at ourselves and our own lives and can do nothing but wonder how it came to be. Whatever way my head may be spinning, reading Komie has a calming, sobering influence.

Reading Lowell Komie's fiction I sometimes feel the presence of the author across the table, tea in hand, telling his stories. One gets the sense—reading Komie stories—of turning the pages of a Chicago

³ In the absence of a full Pension, a glorious Red Sash, and a fine well-cast Medal, we have little to give Lowell Komie, but our publication, here, again, his stories which have taught us so much.

⁴ John Grisham's lawyer novels have become guaranteed best sellers (making Grisham an enormously wealthy man) and forged a new genre of pop culture reading—the legal thriller. (The genre is so well established now that some who write “within” the genre take great pains to suggest it is *not* a legal thriller they have actually written.) With the representation of lawyers now so pervasive in pop culture—books, films, tv dramas, everyday news accounts in major newspapers—we forget that law and lawyers have long been the subject of fiction, that legal fiction predates Grisham and the legal thriller. Legal themes have a well established place in modern fiction, and indeed, lawyers themselves were once literary men. With the number of lawyers now trying their hand at fiction, we can expect some few to transcend the legal thriller and lawyer/detective genre by the quality of their writing. Certainly, Scott Turow, another Chicago lawyer, in his most recent book, *Personal Injuries*, has written a compelling novel with well-developed characters, and with literary merit. See Scott Turow, *PERSONAL INJURIES* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1999). Of course, a writer need not be a lawyer to produce notable literary works that transcend the legal thriller genre. See e.g., Chris Bohjalian, *MIDWIVES* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998)(1997); *THE LAW OF SIMILARS* (New York: Harmony Books, 1999).

lawyer's fiction scrapbook, page after page, story upon story, a lifetime of gathering and watching, seeing and remembering. It's an album scrapbook featuring the richly simple lives of those who take up the law, bear the burdens of a lawyer's life, learn that the legal profession provides no ultimate sanctuary, and still find the means to go on. There is, in Komie's stories, an exposure of our longings and secrets. Komie, in the way he presents and marks the passage of his characters, shows himself to be a writer and lawyer of immense curiosity with an anthropologist's eye for ritual. We've all had moments, situations, and exposure to characters that seem a good fit for a story; Komie actually captures the ephemera of experience so easily lost and embodies it in his stories. It takes a practiced writer's eye and great patience to find the memorable in countless meetings and encounters with clients, the drafting of another will, the nuance of a woman lawyer's longings and growing sense that all is not well, or a tired lawyer's recognition that his life (and colleagues) has become odd. Komie seems to have found a magic by which the ordinary and the everyday can be transfigured into storied lives that have lasting meaning.

Obviously, the deep pleasure of Komie's stories lies in reading them. I can, however, with some danger of injustice to the stories, remember them here as simple thumb-nail sketches:

» Susan Eliofson's plunge into the Baltimore Aquarium to swim with the lawyer fish and her rude treatment by the Baltimore lawyers who interview her for a law firm position ("The Interview");

» a young man's remembrance about law school winter days, dancing in the Aragon Ball Room, a classmate's suicide, and the triumph of spring ("Spring");

» Cecelia Maria Sandoval, a law student in one of Chicago's downtown law schools, learning hard lessons about life and the oddness and brutality of law firm lawyers, but possessed with memories that she will need to draw on to survive ("The Ice Horse");

» a young lawyer is pushed out of a big firm and attempts a solo practice making mistakes that come close to costing him his professional life, but then pulling himself away from the brink of professional disaster ("Solo");

» a young Jewish woman is hired for a law firm because they need a woman and a Jew, and is caught up in a potentially destructive personal relationship with a firm partner ("Mentoring");⁵

⁵ Reading Komie's "Mentoring" I was reminded of the quixotic Puttermesser in Cynthia Ozick's *The Puttermesser Papers* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997).

» Martha Levine, struggling with and sometimes fleeing an overreaching senior partner, engaging in a symbolic ritual at the death of the partner so she can get on with her life (“Skipping Stones”);

» William Fuerst, a tired lawyer of twenty years practice, dragging himself to his office, dealing with angry clients, ensnared in the detailed time records he must keep to bill his clients, and experiencing a slight hissing of air from his ears—a time leak (“The Balloon of William Fuerst”);

» Julia Latham Kiefer, a securities litigation lawyer, who has made it into the law firm world, only to experience her own life and the lawyers around her as odd and neurotic (“The Cornucopia of Julia K.”);

» Carter Greenwald, a partner in an eighty-seven lawyer firm,⁶ has become irascible and irrelevant, but fights back with the fantasy that he might finally tell his law firm associates his true feelings, both about them and what he views as the deteriorating situation at the firm (“I Am Greenwald, My Father’s Son”);

» a lawyer helps a young Greek couple change their family name, becomes social acquaintances with them, and in a farewell party for them as they depart Chicago for Arizona, learns something of the husband’s Greek boyhood (“The Name, Kozonis”);

» Frederick Marcus is a lawyer who has an affinity for kites, flies them from his law office window, and finds a way to help clients overwhelmed by life as he too struggles to deal with everyday affairs (“The Kite Flyer”);

» Petra Godic, married to a painter, secures a divorce for a client who refuses to pay her bill and in her efforts to recover her fee struggles to maintain her composure and deal with a neurotic client (“The Divorce of Petra Godic”);

» Casimir Zymak is a lawyer who makes a place for himself in the crevices of a large city’s lower courts, an authentic and memorable character and something of a “romantic spirit” (Casimir Zymak);⁷

⁶ Komie, a solo practitioner by choice, and fond of the freedom it allows him, seldom places his fictional lawyers in large firms. “I Am Greenwald, My Father’s Son” is an exception. Julia Latham Kiefer, the protagonist in “The Cornucopia of Julia K.” is also part of the law firm world.

⁷ Casimir Zymak is, in my reading, something of a poet himself, a little man who finds a way to survive in a big world, but I must credit Komie with the notion that Casimir Zymak captures the “romantic spirit.” Email communication from Lowell B. Komie, January 23, 2001. Casimir Zymak makes an appearance in several Komie stories and semi-autobiographical writings. See Komie, *Casimir Zymak*, 25 Legal Stud. F. 109 (2001); *The Law Clerk’s Parrot*, 25 Legal Stud. F. 115 (2001); *Intimate Pages: A Lawyer’s Notebook*, 25 Legal Stud. F. 123 (2001).

» Albert Westheimer in “The Law Clerk’s Parrot” is a “clever man who underneath the practiced civility was very tough”; he expresses dissatisfaction with a young law clerk who misses work because of her sick parrot, and finally, purchases for the office a fake parrot with a microphone that repeats phrases spoken to it;

» Joel Greenfield as a young man had failed the bar exam, but is now on an Air France flight back to Chicago to dispose of embarrassing papers and save the reputation of a firm partner, meeting an arrogant law student on the flight (“Podhoretz Revisited”);

» Charles Riordan, sixty-eight and at the end of his career, comes close to losing the one estate case that has the potential to make it possible for him to retire with a semblance of financial security (“Investiture”);

» a young lawyer with AIDS goes to London to die (“Who Could Stay the Longest?”);

» the narrator in “Burak” talks, in a simple but elegant way, about his life as a Chicago lawyer;

» Alicia Beauchamp, a Federal District Judge, rules her courtroom with a firm hand and has a brief romance (“The Honorable Alicia Beauchamp”);

» Arthur Williams, Jr., a judge who labors in the labyrinth of Chicago’s lower courts and the politically corrupt ways of that city’s judiciary, faces the ultimate challenge to his dignity and integrity (“Ash”);

» and finally, in “Justine,” lawyers represent a client who has constructed a fantastical Hall of Justice.

Throughout this *Legal Studies Forum* collection of twenty-four Komie stories, Komie has so artfully woven his everyday lawyer’s life and the feel of Chicago into his literary vignettes that the reader is left unsure where Komie-the-lawyer ends and the world of imaginative fiction begins.⁸ But wherever the reality/fiction line is to be drawn, a

⁸ In a recent interview with Komie, I was resolved not to ask him the most obvious of questions—how much of your life as a Chicago lawyer have you made a part of your fiction? Curious as we readers of legal fiction may tend to be about the personal lives of authors, it seems an impossible (if not an unfair) question for a writer. Writers seem forever troubled by this worrisome question and I endeavored—tempted as I was—not to ask it. Komie did, however, remark during the course of the interview: “If you want to know more about my life as a single practitioner, I might refer you to the story “Burak” in *The Lawyer’s Chambers*.” See, *Lowell B. Komie: An Interview*, 25 *Legal Stud. F.* 223, 225 (2001); *Burak*, 25 *Legal Stud. F.* 165 (2001). The way I, a reader of his fiction, might try to answer this question for Komie (a presumptuous effort indeed) would go something

Komie story is always breathtaking in clarity, a touch of the solid in an ephemeral world, a glimpse of imagination and art in a world that seems always bent on destructing beauty as fast as it can be found or created. We know surprisingly little about any one of Komie's fictional characters, yet, there is a sense that we know everything that need be known.

Komie's stories are solid and functional, but always beautifully crafted, and hauntingly poignant in their sparse simplicity. These stories are so sparse, lean, angular, solid and built-to-last, I read them with the distinct sense I have walked into an Arts and Craft style house filled with Gustav Stickley furniture. If a writer can, without insult—and I intend none here—be associated with a style of furniture (and design), then Komie belongs to the Arts and Craft style. With a Stickley table, or chair, we have functional essence in form. And once that essence—furniture and story—is grasped, emotionally and cognitively, there is no turning back.⁹

It is the great solidness of Komie's characters, a sturdiness found in resistance to those forces in the world that would diminish them, that makes Komie's characters and their continued existence, each a minor triumph. We are, in these stories, so entwined in the ordinariness and small celebrations of everyday life that it is easy to lose sight of the extraordinary ways Komie's lawyers find to hold on, and do successful battle with the world. These stories, at once simple and complex, wrench the reader out of complacency, up-end fantasies rooted in high-minded notions that we might someday be secure and beyond struggle. There are moments in the stories in which the lawyer seems so firmly entrapped, weary and tired, that only bleakness and exhaustion are possible. Yet, in the juxtaposition of the ordinary and the whimsical, the small and the poetic, failure and personal courage, the characters suggest a hopefulness they have lived even when unable or unwilling to give language to that hope.

like this: I have put nothing into the stories I do not know first hand. I have tried to make it possible for readers to see the world of law practice as a writer sees it. I've made no effort to set myself as a writer apart from who I am as I go about my work. But be forewarned, these stories are no more the real Lowell Komie than the stories can be dismissed as fiction; fictions have a real bearing on how we live. If I have created a quandary for the reader in making so much of my life into fiction while holding to the reality that my fiction is just that—fiction—then it is simply a problem for the reader to resolve. On this question, what is real and what is fiction, you must read Kafka's parable, "Before the Law." When you read it, we will talk again.

⁹ For another literary man's devotion to Arts and Crafts style furniture, see "How Things Fit Together," in Kevin Oderman, *HOW THINGS FIT TOGETHER: FIFTEEN ESSAYS* 1-15 (Hanover, New Hampshire: Middlebury College Press, 2000).

Jayne Anne Phillips, a writer with roots in West Virginia, reflecting on the short fiction of Raymond Carver, characterizes Carver's work in ways that seems custom-made to fit Komie's stories.¹⁰ "Carver, in prose plain and still as clear water, addresses large questions and has the wisdom not to answer them." Komie seems to work this same literary vein—how are we to go on, what kind of life is possible when the great glories of success and contentment have not been visited upon us? With greatness passing us by, having found no paradise on earth, or in the practice of law, Komie, like Phillips says of Carver, "vocalize[s] a hard respect for losses inevitable and quiet as the fall of ash from a burning cigarette." Komie helps us find ways to appreciate and transcend the "stark and unadorned" world of Carver's stories, while in the fiction of both Komie and Carver the reader moves through a "landscape as a witness to private rite spoken simply."

Komie's writing now extends well beyond the genre of legal fiction,¹¹ but I think he can and should (and does) take pride in the knowledge that his short stories constitute an elegant set of fables for lawyers, and for those who aspire to be lawyers—as did Susan Eliofson in the "The Interview" and Cecelia Maria Sandoval in "The Ice Horse," and Ms. Bascomb in "The Cornucopia of Julia K." And while we may appropriate Komie as one of our own—as a lawyer who knows our secrets and the longings of our hearts—there is every reason for readers who care nothing for John Grisham and legal fiction, and still less about lawyers, to read these lawyer stories. Ultimately, any good story transcends its genre, and Komie's stories do exactly that—they transcend legal fiction, and the Chicago setting in which they are so firmly rooted. With careful attention to detail, subtle portrayal of wistfulness and memory, and a poignant account of everyday struggle and the personal rituals by which we shield ourselves from an uncaring world, Komie works in the fashion of a visualist, a sketch artist, a memoirist with an affection for still-life painting. These, then, are the stories of an artist, a master of well-

¹⁰ Jayne Anne Phillips, "The Secret Places of the Heart," <<http://www.jayneannephillips.com/escarver.htm>> (visited January 24, 2001).

¹¹ Indeed, his first novel, *The Last Jewish Shortstop in America* (Chicago: Swordfish/Chicago, 1997), and a novel to be published this year, *Conversations with a Golden Ballerina* (also by Swordfish/Chicago) do not involve lawyers. Commenting on this turn in his writing, Komie says: "I thought I would step away from lawyers in my fiction for awhile. There are too many novels about lawyers and written by lawyers. It's like John Mortimer stepping away from Rumpole and Louis Auchincloss stepping away from Wall Street. I enjoy doing comedic novels, it refreshes the spirit." Email communication to James R. Elkins, January 23, 2001.

crafted fiction with great imaginative reach, a reach that places the stories well beyond the world of lawyers.

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Lowell B. Komie's legal fiction came to my attention when I chanced upon a collection of his stories—*The Judge's Chambers*—published by the American Bar Association.¹² My first question—what is the American Bar Association doing publishing fiction? Curious, I rather hurriedly read the stories in *The Judge's Chambers*, selected two of them—"The Interview"¹³ and "The Cornucopia of Julia K."¹⁴—for use in

¹² Lowell B. Komie, *THE JUDGE'S CHAMBERS* (Chicago: American Bar Association, 1983) (republished as *The Judge's Chambers and Other Stories* (Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishers, 1987) with four additional stories not included in the American Bar Association edition).

¹³ In "The Interview," we find Susan Eliofson, a law student at the University of Wisconsin, undergoing that painful struggle familiar to so many—finding that first job. "She was tired of the interviews. She already had twenty at law school and two flybacks, and so far no one had made her a summer job offer." The story finds Susan in Baltimore for an interview with Reavis & Ferris, a 125 lawyer firm, which she hopes will offer her a position. But all is not well. A telephone call from Indianapolis to Paul, her boyfriend in Madison, the night before her interview, isn't answered and we begin to see that that relationship is not so secure.

In Baltimore, with little to do except wait for her interview the next day, Susan meets an SEC lawyer named Steven who joins her for dinner, buys them a bottle of champagne, and takes her to see the Baltimore Aquarium. During the course of the evening he tells her, you don't "belong in the corporate army." Steven's assessment seems well-founded. At the aquarium Steven has introduced Susan to the "lawyer fish," and while Susan is skeptical that such a fish exists, upon seeing "Lawyer Americanus" in its tank she says it "looked prehistoric with a black body and fat gray mottled underbelly. It blinked at Susan and languidly moved one huge fin." And then, in one of those unexpected and odd moments so notable in Komie's stories, Susan asks Steven: "What will you give me if I dive into its tank?" Steven promises a \$100. Susan takes off her skirt and blouse and has a quick swim with the lawyer fish and ends the evening by allowing Steven to kiss her goodnight.

The next day at the Baltimore law firm she is treated rather badly by lawyers who don't have enough common-sense to realize they are acting boorish and rude, that their inquiries are insipid, if not downright stupid. The lawyers are so distracted by their various deals and concerns of the moment they pay little attention to Susan, even as they try to interview her. If these lawyers represent the law firm, then Steven may have gotten it right—there may just be something in Susan Eliofson's wild energy that prompted her swim with the lawyer fish, her assumption of the name Anna Karenina when she introduces herself to Steven, and her imaginative revenge on one of the Reavis & Ferris lawyers who so callously conducted the interviews that makes her unfit for the "corporate army." We do not know, from the story, whether Susan will persist in her efforts to join the "corporate army" or whether we have seen something in her character

my “Lawyers and Literature” course¹⁵ and went about my business. The Komie stories became a staple on my course reading list and I grew fond of teaching them. Years later, searching out web resources for a “Lawyers and Literature” course web site, I decided to find out more about Lowell Komie and his writing.¹⁶ I found and learned little. The sparse information on Komie, this author of so many evocative lawyer stories, and the fact that he seemed to have so thoroughly escaped scholarly attention, baffled me. I continued to teach “The Interview” and “The Cornucopia of Julia K.” always curious about the writer of these poignant tales. Then, one day, it arrived—a package and a letter—Komie had surfaced. I had procrastinated in my efforts to track Komie down, to allay my suspicion that he might not be a real Chicago lawyer at all. But here, in hand, was a letter from Komie expressing interest in the fact that I was teaching his stories and offering a present, another collection of his stories. As much as I admired “The Interview” and “The Cornucopia of Julia K.” I had simply assumed that this was a one book author. Embarrassed that my research had been so shallow, I was nevertheless delighted to have, and from Komie himself—*The Lawyer’s Chambers and Other Stories*,¹⁷ a collection I did not even know existed. Over the days that followed, I read the eleven lawyer stories in *The Lawyer’s Chambers*—and six stories from “the writer’s chambers” that do not involve lawyer protagonists—and decided that Komie had not only produced some notable teaching tales, but that he was a formidable writer and that his portrayal of Chicago lawyers was of far more interest to me and my students than the lawyers we find in most

that will finally divert her from the law firm world she aspires. But even if she gets a law firm position, we suspect that Susan will find a way to deal with that world in imaginative ways.

¹⁴ For readers interested in what happens to a woman like Susan Eliofson (“The Interview”) when she finds her way into a law firm “corporate army,” see Lowell B. Komie, *The Cornucopia of Julia K.*, 25 Legal Stud. F. 71 (2001). Komie saw just enough of law partnerships early in his legal career to convince him that life was elsewhere. He became a solo practitioner and it is this perspective that frames and shapes his fiction. See Lowell B. Komie: *An Interview*, 25 Legal Stud. F. 223 (2001).

¹⁵ The course web site for “Lawyers and Literature” can be found at: <<http://www.wvu.edu/~lawfac/jelkins/lawyerslit/intro.htm>>

¹⁶ Yes, there was a bio listing on the author in *The Judge’s Chambers* from which I learned that Mr. Komie was a Chicago lawyer who had received his undergraduate degree from the University of Michigan and his J.D. from Northwestern University in 1954. The only other information provided was that he lived in Deerfield, Illinois, was married and had three children.

¹⁷ Lowell B. Komie, *THE LAWYER’S CHAMBERS AND OTHER STORIES* (Chicago: Swordfish/Chicago, 1994).

contemporary legal fiction. Indeed, I could not think of a single writer of legal fiction who had created a collection of short stories that would equal Komie's work.¹⁸ While I had latched onto a couple of Komie's early stories for my teaching, I gradually began to see Komie's work from a larger perspective. After an exchange of letters, Lowell sent still another collection of short stories—*The Night Swimmer-A Man in London and Other Stories*¹⁹—and as I finished reading them, it was with growing sadness that I realized I had finally read all of Komie's published short stories.²⁰

With three published collections of short stories, Komie has given us a great wealth of strikingly original literary legal fiction. There is far more legal fiction written and published today than any one sane person would ever try to read.²¹ For legal fiction at its best, there is no better place to read than these stories of a real master, Lowell B. Komie, the Poet Laureate of Chicago lawyers.

¹⁸ One might, for example, compare the writing of Lowell Komie to the far more widely known Louis Auchincloss. See e.g., Louis Auchincloss, *THE GREAT WORLD AND TIMOTHY COLT* (New York: McGraw-Hill Paperback, 1987)(1956), *POWERS OF ATTORNEY* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963); "The Senior Partner's Ghosts," "Foster Evans on Lewis Bovee," "Lloyd Degener on Eric Temple," and "Cliffie Beach on Himself," in *TALES OF MANHATTAN* 125-220 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967); *THE PARTNERS* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974); *DIARY OF A YUPPIE* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1986); "Hermes, God of the Self-Made Man," in *FALSE GODS* 37-97 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992).

¹⁹ Lowell B. Komie, *THE NIGHT SWIMMER-A MAN IN LONDON AND OTHER STORIES* (Chicago: Swordfish/Chicago, 1999).

²⁰ My only consolation was that there was still a novel to be read. Lowell mentioned *The Last Jewish Shortstop in America* (Chicago: Swordfish/Chicago, 1997) in one of his letters but I was reluctant to read it. Forewarned that it was not part of his lawyer-focused fiction, and suspecting it might actually be about baseball (of which I have read nothing, a sport I take up only at World Series time even though I played the game avidly as a young man), I hesitated. There was also concern that a writer accomplished at short fiction might not be able to manage the longer novel. My hesitations and concerns about the novel were misguided. I found *The Last Jewish Shortstop in America* imaginative and compelling, humorous and sad, sharp and poignant. I learned rather quickly that Komie's skills as a short story craftsman translate well into novel form and his non-lawyer stories deserve attention beyond the small world of academics and lawyers who might read his legal fiction.

Komie's new novel, *Conversations With a Golden Ballerina*, will be published by Swordfish/Chicago in 2001.

²¹ Komie indicated in a recent interview that he reads virtually none of it! See, *Interview*, supra note 8.