

John Bricuth/John T. Irwin



**John Bricuth (Pen name for John T. Irwin)
Author, Poet, Editor, Critic
Decker Professor of Humanities
and Professor of Writing and English at Johns Hopkins University**

Topic: "When an Author is Also an Editor"
Thursday, November 17, 2005
7-8 PM

Barnes & Noble, 8871 Ladue Road, Ladue 63124

For a map, driving directions, and more, visit the [Meetings](#) page
This meeting is FREE to members and non-members

Note: John Bricuth has kindly agreed to autograph books at this event.

JOHN BRICUTH is the pen name of John T. Irwin, former editor of the *Georgia Review* and author of numerous works of literary criticism and poetry, including the book-length narrative poem, *Just Let Me Say This About That*. It was the first volume in the Sewanee Writers' Series from the Overlook Press.

Bricuth is the Decker Professor in the Humanities at Johns Hopkins University and former chair of the Writing Seminars. His books include *American Hieroglyphics*, *The Mystery to a Solution*, and *Doubling and Incest/Repetition and Revenge*.

Years in the making, Bricuth's newest release, *As Long As It's Big*, is a stunning and unique poetic achievement. By turns rollicking, funny, and deeply moving, this dramatic poem tells a tragic story—the collapse of a marriage after the suicide of a child—within the topsy-turvy venue of divorce court ruled by an alternately cynical and sentimental judge. The poet cleanly balances sensitive portrayals of painful lives with hilarity, chaos, and occasionally ribald caricatures. Hugely entertaining and immensely readable, Bricuth's verse narrative will absorb anyone seeking to unravel the truths of modern family life.



Publisher: The Johns Hopkins University Press (October 15, 2005)
ISBN: 0801882451

JOHN T. IRWIN -- BIOGRAPHY

JOHN T. IRWIN writes under the pen name **John Bricuth**. He was born in Houston, Texas, on April 24, 1940, received his B.A. from the University of St. Thomas in Houston in 1962, served as an officer in the United States Navy stationed at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, from 1963-1966, and worked at the NASA Manned Spacecraft Center in Houston as the supervisor of the Public Affairs Library in 1966-1967.

Irwin received his M.A. and Ph.D. in English from Rice University in 1970 and began teaching as an assistant professor in English at Johns Hopkins University in 1970 where he continued until 1974. He left to become the editor *The Georgia Review*. His first book of literary criticism, *Doubling and Incest/Repetition and Revenge: A Speculative Reading of Faulkner*, was published by the Johns Hopkins University Press in 1975 and soon followed by his first book of poems, *The Heisenberg Variations*, in 1976, which he wrote under the pen name, John Bricuth. In 1977 Irwin left *The Georgia Review* to return to Johns Hopkins University as professor and chairman of The Writing Seminars department. He subsequently accepted a joint appointment in the English department and received an endowed chair, the Decker Professorship in the Humanities, in 1984.

In 1980 he published his second book of literary criticism and scholarship, *American Hieroglyphics: The Symbol of the Egyptian Hieroglyphics in the American Renaissance*, with Yale University Press, and in 1994, published his third book of criticism, *The Mystery to a Solution: Poe, Borges, and the Analytical Detective Story*, with the Johns Hopkins University Press. The latter book won the Christian Gauss Prize from Phi Beta Kappa for the best scholarly book in the humanities published in 1994 and also won the Aldo Scaglione Prize in comparative literature from the Modern Language Association.

In 1996 Irwin stepped down as chairman of the Writing Seminars after nineteen years, but still continues as a full-time professor in that department and in English. In 1998 he published his long narrative poem, *Just Let Me Say This About That*, under his pen name, John Bricuth, with the Overlook Press as the first volume in the Sewanee Writers' series. His new book-length poem, *As Long As It's Big*, is a narrative about marriage set in a

divorce court—released October 2005 by Johns Hopkins University Press. His latest critical book, *“Unless the Threat of Death is Behind Them”*: *Hard Boiled Fiction and Film Noir*, is currently with an agent.

For twenty-five years Irwin has edited the Johns Hopkins University Press Short Fiction and Poetry series, which has published over seventy volumes of short stories and poems, and he recently compiled and edited *Words Brushed by Music: Twenty-five Years of the Johns Hopkins Poetry Series* (Johns Hopkins University Press 2004) and *So the Story Goes: Twenty-five Years of the Johns Hopkins Short Fiction Series* (Johns Hopkins University Press 2005).

John Irwin has received Danforth and Guggenheim Fellowships and was elected to membership in the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2005.

Excerpt from “*As Long As It’s Big*”

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...Indeed, so strongly does this judge

I’m mostly quoting feel about divorce;
It’s repercussions, roots, parallel
Expressions of despair in modern dance.

That when these cases come before his court
Most times he slows them to a crawl, which is
To say, inserts an extra step, makes

The litigants appear with their attorneys
In his chambers, then forbids the lawyers
Their accustomed roles, instead of adversaries

Has them act, *amici curiae*,
As advocates of marriage, seeking ways
This one specific union they’d

Been paid to break might yet be saved by simply
Sitting down together ‘round a table,
Spending time—much as it might take

(This judge’ll clear his schedule any week
For eyewash of this sort)—just to trace
A battling couple’s troubles to their source,

Recovering, if they can, some sense of what
They'd each first found appealing in the other,
Thought best, loved most, then lost in time's

Relentless acid bath, and how, see that's
The question, how the very things they'd most
Admired became with years the irritants

That rubbed them raw as cobs till just the sound
Of one another's voices set their teeth
On edge, had them fingering hard crockery

Anent some insupportable
Retort. But what, sir, takes your breath away's
The way the judge demands the lawyers play

A part in this sad therapeutic farce,
Requires they be constructive, give the gutted
Couple free advice about the trials

Ensuing from divorce: suits for custody,
Child support, moving out
Of state, stuff like that, and then to top

It off, he makes these same attorneys, men
Much married (consequently, used to lots
Of yapping), testify like gospel shouters

In a pew about how youth is short
And passion strong and people change with years,
How quitters never win, how life is strong,

A marriage longer still, grim death the longest
One of all, crazy stuff like that,
But from the heart, sharing their emotions,

Showing they know how to listen with
A look as this same judge asks Mrs. Muffy
Merkin, "And when your husband called you that,

"How did that make you feel? Just tell us what
You felt." All this the judge exacts from cruel
Attorneys, makes them do, or else sit through,

And keep their faces ruled...

Praise for *As Long As It's Big*:

*"In As Long As It's Big, John Bricuth stakes out his claim to territory that no other American poet has trod. Here is an ironic spoof on the process of divorce law, a moving chronicle of a family falling apart, a war story, an outrageous comedy, a fireworks display of language and metaphor whose verve never falters, and what may be the most insightful comment on the game of mating and unmating since **Anna Karenina**."*

--X. J. Kennedy

"On the one hand, the shenanigans of a trio of scabrous, demonic lawyers; on the other, the anger and grief of the divorce court. Rubbing the one against the other, Bricuth strikes sparks of poetry as tragico-comical as life itself."

--J.M. Coetzee

"In this brilliant layered (and lawyered) Aesopic set of dialogues pertaining to a divorce hearing, ...the grotesque worldliness and civilized barbarity of the representatives of law and order are brought face to face with deep human suffering and a simple nobility that moves the reader to admiration, as well as to pity. An astonishing work."

--Anthony Hecht

"A masterpiece of American comic idiom, ...the humorous voice and the serious talk to each other in a way that vastly expands the vision of this strange and transporting poem."

--Andrew Hudgins

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