

MICHAEL SALCMAN, M.D., F.A.C.S.

Michael Salcman was born in Pilsen, Czechoslovakia in 1946, the son of Holocaust survivors, and came to the United States in 1949. He attended the Combined Program in Liberal Arts and Medical Education at Boston University, receiving the B.A. and M.D. in 1969, graduating first in his class. He trained in neurophysiology at the National Institutes of Health and in neurological surgery at Columbia University. Dr. Salcman was chairman of neurosurgery at the University of Maryland from 1984 through 1991. In addition to experimental treatments for brain tumors he is particularly interested in the visual system of the brain and the general problem of the brain and creativity. His early medical career was profiled by Pulitzer-Prize winner Jon Franklin and Alan Doelp in their book, *Not Quite A Miracle* (Doubleday, 1983). Dr. Salcman was named a Distinguished Alumnus of Columbia University's Neurological Institute in 1985 and of Boston University's School of Medicine in 2001. That same year he served as President of the Congress of Neurological Surgeons. He is the author of almost 200 medical and scientific papers and the author or editor of six textbooks, most recently the two-volume 2nd edition of *Kempe's Operative Neurosurgery* (Springer-Verlag, 2004). His books have been translated into Spanish, German, Portuguese and Chinese. His course "How The Brain Works" appeared on The Knowledge Network of the *New York Times*. He is presently Special Lecturer in the Osher Institute at Towson University.

In the art world, Dr. Salcman has been President of the Contemporary Museum in Baltimore and President of the Friends of Modern Art at the Baltimore Museum of Art. His art reviews and essays on the arts and sciences and the visual arts and the brain have appeared in *Urbanite*, *Neurosurgery*, *Creative Non-Fiction*, *World Neurosurgery*, *J.A.M.A.* and *The Little Patuxent Review*, as well as on various web sites such as artbrain.org. Since 2001 Dr. Salcman has taught annual courses on the History of Modern and Contemporary Art from 1800 to the Present at The Contemporary Museum, the Osher Institute of Towson University, the Art Seminars Group and the Odyssey Program at Johns Hopkins. He has given seminars on the brain's visual system and art at the Cooper Union in New York, the Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore and on art and science at the Walters Art Museum.

In addition to his other publications, Salcman has been writing poetry for more than forty years; his early poems were published in the 1970s. Many of his poems are about artworks and artists. Recent work appears in such major literary journals as *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Barrow Street*, *Harvard Review*, *The Hopkins Review*, *The Hudson Review*, *New Letters*, *New York Quarterly*, *Notre Dame Review*, *Ontario Review*, *Poet Lore*, and *Raritan*. Salcman's anthology of classic and contemporary poems on doctors, patients, illness and recovery, *Poetry in Medicine* (Persea Books, 2015), was published to wide notice. He is the author of four chapbooks and three collections, *The Clock Made of Confetti* (Orchises Press, 2007), nominated for the Poets Prize and a Finalist for the Towson University Prize in Literature, *The Enemy of Good Is Better* (Orchises, 2011), and *A Prague Spring, Before & After* (Evening Street Press, 2016), winner of the 2015 Sinclair Poetry Prize. The book is accompanied by an original suite of Prague photographs by Lynn Silverman, professor at the Maryland Institute College of Art.

His poems have been heard on NPR's *All Things Considered*, on WYPR's *The Signal* and in Lee Boot's *Euphoria*, a 90-minute award-winning documentary on the brain and creativity; they have received six nominations for a Pushcart Prize. Salcman has given readings at the Library of Congress and the National Academy of Sciences in Washington, the Pratt Library in Baltimore, the Academy of Medicine in Atlanta, the Writers Center in Bethesda, and at Columbia University, the Century Association, the Cornelia Street Café and the Bowery Poetry Club in New York. In 2012, prominent Baltimore composer Lorraine Whittlesey set a suite of his poems to music.

He and his wife have a small but scholarly collection of contemporary art from 1960 to the present in all media and a cat named Claude. Their two children and three remarkable grandchildren are presently out of the house.



RECENT INTERVIEWS & ESSAYS ON POEMS BY SALCMAN

AN INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL SALCMAN by CHRISTOPHER GEORGE, Loch Raven Review, 2008

<http://www.lochravenreview.net/2008Winter/george.html>

CLINCHING THE POEM, “The Cult of Beauty” in Baltimore Review; poem first published in River Styx, Issue No.88, 2012 (forthcoming in *Shades & Graces*)

<http://baltimorereview.org/index.php/blog/post/clinching-the-poem-michael-salcmans-the-cult-of-beauty-in-river-styx-88>

WYPR INTERVIEW ABOUT POETRY IN MEDICINE (Persea Books, 2015)
(audio)

<http://wypr.org/post/poetry-medicine-when-night-unravels-and-remembering-joe-challmes>

9/11 AGAIN..., AN ESSAY ON ‘SEPTEMBER SONNET’ by MARGARET SOLTAN, Professor of English, George Washington University, in *University Diaries*, September 11, 2016; poem first published in *Number One*, vol.31, 2003, reprinted in *Poetry of September 11: Library of Congress*, <https://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/911poetry/> (from *The Clock Made of Confetti*, Orchises Press, Washington, D.C. 2007)

<http://www.margaretsoltan.com/?p=53072>

COMMENTARY ON “Ten Reflections on Ramon Gomez de la Serna” (1888-1963),
Notre Dame Review, 2017:

This is the second of four suites of poems on one-sentence statements, clever sayings, bon mots, aperçus and surrealist greguerías, a form invented by Ramón Gómez, that represent a new type of project for my writing. The first in the series is based on statements by the French composer Erik Satie, the third on the painter Francis Picabia, and the fourth on Pablo Picasso. Interestingly, such witticisms appear to be a specialty of artists born in the late nineteenth century and active in the first quarter of the twentieth. The combination of humor and metaphor characteristic of these incredible short-shorts have acted as a spur to my own creativity and helped pulled me out of a period in which my own work seemed dull and repetitive. The one-sentence originals act as the titles to each of the “reflections” and provide inspiration for the one or two stanza poems that serve as commentaries on the words of these spiritual ancestors. My small poems are connected to these little gems in a more or less indirect and free-floating manner, as if Ramón Gómez, Erik Satie, Picabia and Picasso, and I were playing a round of Exquisite Corpse, that favorite game of the Surrealists. Several poets of my generation, including Tom Lux, my friend and mentor, began by writing Surrealist poems in the 1970s with a variable amount of success. Like my contemporaries I soon drifted away from the style and only recently have discovered an authentic way to join in the game, one that produces what I hope is an attractive mixture of darkness and humor.—Michael Salcman

A COMMENTARY ON MY BODY OF WORK

Most lyric poems such as mine have an autobiographical element and I use a variety of techniques, formal verse, nonce forms and free verse, obsessively focusing on the same subjects over and over. I firmly believe that the use of music, internal rhyme and metaphor, are critical to the success of poetry and its differentiation from prose. As a child I fell in love with the work of Blake, Donne and Poe, who remain touchstones for me, as do my favorite modernists, Yeats, Stevens and Bishop. In 1970 I bought my first two volumes of contemporary verse, *Crow* by Ted Hughes and *The Book of Nightmares* by Galway Kinnell, and knew that I was committed to the writing of poetry. I am very interested in the interconnectedness of art and science and a view of the brain as a metaphor making-machine. Many of my poems make use of information from my two other lives, one as a physician and neuroscientist, and the other as a lecturer, writer and collector of contemporary art. On occasion I have written individual poems that combine all three areas, medicine, art and poetry, to explore the two eternal subjects of greatest interest to most writers and poets, *eros* and *thanatos*. I usually divide my books into sections devoted to the major issues that have adversely impacted my family and myself, the geographic translation of our lives from Europe to America, my experience as a child of the Holocaust and my survival from polio, as well as other works that celebrate the philosophic pleasures of visual art, music, sailing and erotic love. This variety of experience is most obvious in my first two collections, *The Clock Made of Confetti* (2007), nominated for The Poet's Prize, and *The Enemy of Good is Better* (2011). I then devoted six years to producing *Poetry in Medicine* (2015), my anthology of classic and contemporary poems on doctors, patients, illness, and healing. This book has found a growing audience in new courses on Narrative Medicine in medical schools, a recent interest of mine, in which short stories and paintings, and now poems, are used to increase the empathy and observational sensitivity of young doctors in training. At the same time, I managed to accumulate a large number of published poems about my homeland, the history of Prague and the Czech Republic, the history of the Jews and my family in Czechoslovakia and the impact of the Holocaust. These poems are collected in *A Prague Spring, Before & After* (2016), winner of the 2015 Sinclair Poetry Prize. Most recently I have completed *Shades & Graces*, a collection of poems on my usual subjects and a long poem devoted to the death of my father. In my seventh decade I am increasingly drawn to a surrealist inflected sense of humor to counteract the steadily increasing number of somewhat somber elegies.—Michael Salcman

GENERAL SOURCES OF MY POETRY FOR NDR

(as prepared for Clarinda Harriss; additions in brackets)

http://ndreview.nd.edu/assets/35910/general_sources_of_my_poetry_for_ndr.pdf

[Most of my poems are based on first hand experience and are deeply influenced by my life as a neurosurgeon and brain scientist, as an art lover and critic, as a citizen of New York and Baltimore, as a sailor on the Chesapeake Bay, as a hopeless Romantic and husband, father and grandfather. My attitudes and cultural heritage are deeply European; I write many ekphrastic poems and poems about the Holocaust in its wider meanings.] I am happy to answer your other question; one that has never been posed to me. I loved Poe and Blake and Donne from childhood and started to routinely write poems in high school (1963) [for the usual reason, a means of getting dates; it didn't work]. I was doing an interview this past year [for The Baltimore Sun] and pulled down two books that were extraordinarily important to me and, for the first time, discovered that they came out in the same year! I can therefore actually date when a more nuanced view of "contemporary" work came to me: 1971 and when I first thought I might be a poet. The main stimulus was "Crow" by Ted Hughes (Ilene and I were also collecting prints by Leonard Baskin who did the cover illustration) and Galway Kinnell's "Book of Nightmares". [As a science major and medical student] The only two writers I met in the 1970s (before meeting you in Baltimore!) were Menke Katz (who was publishing my poems in Bitterroot in Brooklyn) and Christy Brown (famous from the novel and movie, "My Left Foot") who I didn't know wrote any verse until I met him and had the honor of reading his work to him at a gathering of his friends and supporters (his cerebral palsy wouldn't allow him to read aloud). From Menke's magnificent "Burning Village" I learned that I could draw on my heritage and be a Jewish poet in small part; from Christy I learned that my own physical limitations were no impediment in comparison to his. [Both Christy Brown and Menke Katz are the subjects of poems in my new book, The Enemy of Good Is Better]. During the decade that I fell silent (1977-1987) [because of a mean-spirited and unfeeling rejection letter from Menke's publisher], I read voraciously and my gods arranged themselves: Yeats and Stevens at the head, Bishop, Frost, Williams, Berryman and Hughes. Then Nemerov, Richard Wilbur and TS Eliot when I can ignore the politics [and anti-Semitism]. Poets I've come to love include Larkin, Merrill, Lowell, Plath, Amichai, Tony Hecht, James Wright, Weldon Kees, Heaney, William Matthews & Stanley Moss. Also Pavese, Pessoa, Roethke, Jane Kenyon, Tony Hoagland, Mark Doty, Robert Hass, Ed Hirsch & Stephen Dunn. From my own generation (!) I will speak only of the best of my teachers and friends [from ten summers spent at the Sarah Lawrence Writers Seminars], Tom Lux, Billy Collins, Dick Allen, Dennis Nurske. But I am really crazy for almost any kind of good poetry, Carl Dennis, Simic, Bly, Gluck, Thom Gunn, Don Hall, Ashbery at times, Heather McHugh, Justice, Pinsky, Szyborska and all the Wrights (see my acrostic poem at the end of Confetti attempting to kill them all off!). I loathe Pound for many of the same reasons that I can't and won't listen to Wagner: interminable, impenetrable posturing and anti-Semitic to boot. [My teachers at Sarah Lawrence included Tom Lux, Stephen Dobyns, Heather McHugh, Stuart Dischell, Dennis Nurske and Deborah Digges. Tom Lux and Dick Allen have been intimately involved in editing my manuscripts for publication.]

Here are some poems that mean everything to me: "The Second Coming" by Yeats or anything else, "Snowman" by Stevens or anything else, "Masterful" by Bill Matthews, "One Art" by Bishop or anything else, "Examination at the Womb-Door" from "Crow" or anything else, "The Wellfleet Whale" by Kunitz, "Refrigerator, 1957" by Lux, "For My Daughter" by Kees, "The Night House" or "Chopping Onions.....Three Blind Mice" by Collins, "The Diameter of the Bomb" by Amichai, "Otherwise" by Jane Kenyon. etc. etc. I am always glad to read poems by my idols and can imitate Collins and Lux really well!

FOUR POEMS:

CUTTING APPLES

My Father always carried a penknife
to pare his green apples, raising their skins
in perfect spirals. He never drew blood
slicing his bananas for breakfast,
their dark-seeded cores like little faces
dropping into the milk, one more item
in a life of a thousand chores,
one more notch in a life advancing
by millimeters or inches, not seconds or days.
I watched him turn himself as carefully away
from violence as a lathe on a table leg,
cutting each curve and flourish
from the flat face of a block
clamped in his hand. His hand and its thumb
never shied from the blade; he knew
that what you do with any tool gives it its value,
like a life—not too eager or afraid.

from *THE ENEMY OF GOOD IS BETTER*, Orchises Press, Washington DC, 2011
first published in *Alaska Quarterly Review*, vol. 27 (1-2), 2010,
reprinted *Poetry Daily*, June 21, 2010 as the Father's Day Poem

THE DOG SPEAKS

—*Interior With Dog by Matisse, 1934*

I'm only half-asleep so I know you're standing there
wondering if I'm asleep. Nope.
It's not easy to rest under this table—
for one thing, there's a strong downward slope
and gravity's got me half tipped out of my basket
like an apple by Cezanne.
Talk about a flat world!
For another, I can't get away from these colors,
the red floor tiles, orange table leg
and pink wall burning on my lids like the sun.
Then again I'm never alone; the kids think a gray dog is cute
and I'm the only dog in the room. I was bribed
(that's my excuse) with a bone
and a bowl of fresh water. Really,
I wish you wouldn't stare—it's extra hard to be an icon
when you're not an odalisque and have no hair.
Here's the inside dope, he wore a vest when he painted *them*
but saved his housecoat for *me*. I liked sitting for him,
he was never rude and spared me his violin.
I think I look very dignified, not naked, just nude.

from THE ENEMY OF GOOD IS BETTER, Orchises Press, Washington DC, 2011
commissioned by The Baltimore Museum of Art
first published in: The Hopkins Review: Vol.3 No.2 (New Series), Spring 2010

from "1944"

6. (the Truck)

From where they were hiding, my Father said
you could see the truck ride out in the morning,
men and shovels packed in its bed, the guards

having a smoke, the men shouldering their rakes and tools
as if volunteering to work.

A small town; people out walking could see them go.

In the afternoon, from where you were hiding
you could hear the shots, then nothing
until the truck returned, its belly rumbling back

for another meal, the guards having a smoke,
the tools laid down neatly in a stack
where the men once stood.

Even from hiding, you could see people on the street
give the driver a wave, his tarp filthy with dirt.

from A PRAGUE SPRING, BEFORE & AFTER, Evening Street Press, Sacramento,
2016, winner of the 2015 Sinclair Poetry Prize
first published in Poet Lore: vol.104 no.1/2, Spring 2009
republished in Evening Street Review, Issue no.4 2010

FIRST LOVE

—for M.M. (1931-2013)

My older cousin Magda who knew Mengele
who made me home-fried potatoes
just like my mother's and my mother's mother.

My first cousin Magda who had a dark helmet of hair
and a great bosom the shape of Europe
filled with the milk of Europe and lactic acid.

My cousin Magda who tasted of tears, always
with the soul of a Hungarian gypsy grieving
for a twisted son she never bore.

And cousin Magda who married Tibor who cut
garments for chairs and couches in the Fifties
upholstering America with his simple hopes.

And especially because my cousin Magda loved
my father more than anyone else the esteemed uncle
who'd rescued her brother from the cauldron.

That cousin Magda was the queen of woe
and her easy anger saved her for a while.
I never caught up with any of her worries but one—

I removed a tumor from her brain and she died
twenty years later and was twenty years older than I am.
So we never wed; and this was Magda's only luck.

from A PRAGUE SPRING, BEFORE & AFTER, Evening Street Press, Sacramento,
2016, winner of the 2015 Sinclair Poetry Prize
first published as My Cousin Magda in Fledgling Rag, no.16, 2015

LINKS TO PERSONAL WEBPAGE & OTHER SITES WITH MY
POETRY/BIO/BIBLIOGRAPHY:

***www.salcman.com (Necessary Speech)

***https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_Salcman

https://www.pw.org/content/michael_salcman

***www.versedaily.org/2011/aboutmichaelsalcman.shtml

***Poetry Reading at Georgia Tech, April 20, 2006 (Video, published May 19, 2010):

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ENA6Q_Dc48

Poetry Reading & Interview by Sheila Kast on WYPR Maryland Morning, December 10, 2010 (Podcast)

***Poetry Reading for Poetry in Medicine, Pratt Library, Baltimore, May 2, 2015 (Podcast)

www.prattlibrary.org/booksmedia/podcasts/index.aspx?id=2482

Print & Audio:

***<http://www.rattle.com/the-night-before-by-michael-salcman/>

<http://www.cortlandreview.com/issue/24/salcman.html>

***<http://www.cortlandreview.com/features/08/spring/salcman.html>

<http://caveat-lector.org/2201/website/audio/msalcman.html>

***Two Poems from Fjords Review (audio only)

<http://www.fjordsreview.com/video/audiophile.html#close>

Poetry Reading and Interview on Jane Crown Show, 2009

<http://www.blogtalkradio.com/the-jane-crown-show/2009/03/29/michael-salcman>

Print:

***Two 9-11 Poems by Michael Salcman from Library of Congress,
Poetry of September 11

<https://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/911poetry/>

***Three Poems by Michael Salcman from Ontario Review

<http://repository.usfca.edu/ontarioreview/vol67/iss1/18/>

***Two Poems from Harvard Review

<http://www.harvardreview.org/?q=authors/michael-salcman>

***Two Poems from the Hudson Review

<http://hudsonreview.com/2013/10/mendacity-the-drone/#.WVvLlmfv9A>

***Seven Poems by Michael Salcman in Mediterranean Poetry (2011)

<https://www.odyssey.pm/?p=2121>

***Four Poems by Michael Salcman, Mudlark Poster No.110, (2013)

<https://www.unf.edu/mudlark/posters/salcman.html>

***Three Poems by Michael Salcman from IthacaLit
<http://ithacalit.com/michael-salcman.html#.WVvJmWfyv9A>

***Three Poems by Michael Salcman in Poetry.US
<http://www.poetry.us.com/michaelsalcman.html>

Five Poems by Michael Salcman in Exquisite Corpse
www.corpse.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=658

http://www.arabesques-editions.com/journal/american_literature/4325906.html

***http://www.diodepoetry.com/v2n2/content/salcman_m.html
Caesar's Last Breath Nominated for Best of the Web Award; on Best Poems:
http://www.best-poems.net/michael_salcman/caesar039s_last_breath.html

***Baltimore Was Always Blue on Best Poems
http://www.best-poems.net/michael_salcman/baltimore_was_always_blue.html

The Ice House on NPR
<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4503421>

Two Poems on Innisfree Poetry Journal
http://authormark.com/artman2/publish/Innisfree_13_28MICHAEL_SALCMAN.shtml

Four Poems by Michael Salcman in Loch Raven Review
<http://www.lochravenreview.net/2009Spring/salcman.html>

***Three Poems by Michael Salcman in Weber Studies
<http://weberstudies.weber.edu/archive/archive%20D%20Vol.%2021.2-25.2/Vol.%2022.1/Michael%20Salcman%20Poe.htm>

www.reduxlitjournal.com/2013/08/95-three-weisses-by-michael-salcman.html

<https://theopiatemagazine.com/tag/michael-salcman-poems/>

***Uncle Rudi on Euphony (University of Chicago)
<https://euphonyjournal.org/2017/06/16/poetry-uncle-rudi-by-michael-salcman/>

http://one.jacarpres.com/#Michael_Salcman

www.newyorkdreaming.net/emigration-form/

***Two Poems by Michael Salcman
<http://www.lostcoastreview.com/poetry/2015/10/16/poetry-by-gayane-hovsepyan-james-a-sanchez-todd-mercier-jonat.html>

<http://journal.publications.chestnet.org/article.aspx?articleid=1262685>

***<http://www.valpo.edu/vpr/salcmanmetonomy.html>

***Three Poems by Michael Salcman from Enskymnt Anthology
<http://www.enskymnt.org/poetsntoz.html#Salcman>

***Vissi D'Arte on DMQ Review
<http://www.dmqreview.com/11Fall/index2.html>

MANY OF THESE ARE AVAILABLE THROUGH WWW.SALCMAN.COM

On April 28, 2006, Aaron Henkin interviewed Dr. Salcman on air about the science of poetry and the poetry of science on WYPR's The Signal; the interview is [archived](#) on the radio station's web site and the poems can be heard at www.salcman.com.

The day after the official publication date of *The Clock Made of Confetti*, January 28th, 2007, Dr. Salcman's three careers as neurosurgeon, art historian and poet, were the subject of a major feature article and interview by Mary McCauley, "Incisive Mind", on p.1 of the Sunday Art & Entertainment section of the Baltimore Sun. The article is [archived](#) on the web site of the newspaper.

Susan McCallum-Smith, the literary editor of *Urbanite Magazine*, did an on-air review of *The Clock Made of Confetti* and read from several of the poems on WYPR's Maryland Morning on March 16th, 2007. The review was archived on the show's web site and is also available [here](#).

On April 8, 2007, the Sunday Ideas section of the Baltimore Sun carried an article, "The Idea Machine", in which Mary McCauley interviewed Dr. Salcman in regard to his theories about the brain and creativity (the brain as a metaphor making machine.) The article is [archived](#) on the web site of the newspaper.

Interviews with Dr. Salcman can be found in the 2008 issue of [Grub Street](#) (Towson University) and on-line in the Winter 2008 issue (vol.IV no.4) of [The Loch Raven Review](#).

On June 21, 2010, Salcman and his poem "Cutting Apples" from *Alaska Quarterly Review* are featured on *Poetry Daily*.

In 2011, Salcman and his poem "Contra Chekhov" from *New Letters* are featured on *Verse Daily*.

Michael Salcman Interviews Elizabeth Spires at Goucher College (Video in Baltimore Review, 2013) <https://vimeo.com/72842230>

For the first time, Dr. Salcman returns to the Neurological Institute at Columbia University, where he trained in neurosurgery, to give a poetry reading about *Poetry in Medicine* in November, 2015. See the January 30, 2016 on-line article and review in *Intima*, a journal of narrative medicine.

On the fifteenth anniversary of 9-11, Margaret Soltan, professor of English at George Washington University, chooses "Autumn Sonnet" to analyze on her Blog, [University Diaries](#)

A Prague Spring, Before & After receives an outstanding review by Charles Rammelkamp on November 1, 2016 in v.12 no.4 of the on-line magazine [Ragazine](#).

A Prague Spring, Before & After receives a penetrating and sensitive review by Christopher George in the *Loch Raven Review*, [volume 12 no.2, 2016](#)