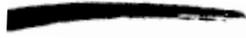
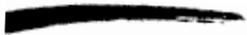


NOTRE DAME REVIEW



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NUMBER 40

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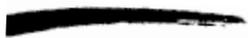
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GESTURE WITH HANDS TIED

Marcelo Hernandez Castillo

If dying required practice—
a gift in the shape of a bruise
that isn't a bruise—

I could give up
the condition
for being alone.

But it is silent,
until it isn't.

The red dog
scissoring through
the bell.

Why do I undress
in the sun and stand
until I can
stand no longer?

To open the borders
of my hunger
and call it a parade.

All the lamps
that wait inside me
saying, *come*

*the gift is the practice,
the sound is the door.*

PORTRAIT AND CONDITION

Marcelo Hernandez Castillo

If I could hide the white accordion, if I could hide my mother's eyes
beneath the keys—the song when it used to feel good—
the one buried in the field.

Remember the bowls—hierro tras los perros desnudos.
The time she could see my father's hands and not.

What can we say about music
that is neither cruel nor abandoned?

The rain and my hands
emptying all the bowls
as if it was music,
as if I could pick them up and dance.

But there is no reason to pick up the wet keys,
no reason at all to keep saying *trigger*
as if that alone would break us.

The plants in bloom, the shins softest in the middle,
her eyes hanging off every petal
and she so far away,
unable to blink,

but forced to witness it all.

* * *

Before the wasp, a hammer. Before the hammer, a knot.

The knot and its unreachable zero
bowing at the end of the symphony—
hardly a symphony,

first the wasp then the violins hushed in their cases.

When the knot is untied, she will no longer feel
the shape of the dark with her hands.

Or the corridor of blood
stuck in its hum—
lullaby in the policeman's radio.

When the dark resembles a child, she will see through the child,
she will tie him to her head
and expand the light around her. She will dream

she swings the hammer at anything that moves,
like the cold particular to street lamps,
or the cenzóntle given over to shadow, or just after.

She will laugh and the child will laugh with her.

* * *

She called the cops to report the mouth before it tipped over.
But it was too late.
If she looked inside

there would already be lights through the window,
and the TV with its jokes and the baby crying on the floor uncontrollably.

She didn't look, she collected the reward and
bought a gun.
She loaded the gun and fixed the mouth

but it wasn't the same, so
she broke it again
and returned the gun
but the store wouldn't take it
because they tested it out back and said it was still capable of measure.

She bought another gun and
the clerk smiled
as if it were roses,
 which it was,
and she said it was *special*, it was *real special*.

She went home to the mouth and
filled it with roses,
 but it wasn't the same.

The clocks stopped working and
the cops returned with their dogs
 but they wouldn't believe her.

They said *please* but she could no longer point.

* * *

Hardly the purple blossom. Hardly
the gun
 or its sigh pulled from the wall.
And lipgloss followed by grief followed by laughter.
 Hardly an iris disguised as a thief on his knees—he's
 hardly a thief.
Hardly a knife, and more light than a child can handle.
 The flowerless stem hardly a neck, hardly
 beautiful.

WHEN THE WAR ENDED

James D. Redwood

Annieke Mollot swung her Mobylette in and out of the traffic clogged along the Rue Monge. Up ahead, on the Rue Censier, the high mullioned stained-glass windows of the Eglise St Medard were lit up by the late afternoon sun. In one of the windows St. Genevieve minded her flock. Annieke thought of the fateful day in 1727 when the deranged parishioners, anything but sheep, succumbed to mass hysteria at the tomb of the troublesome Jansenist priest, Francois de Paris, and howled all night and leaped about like frogs, swept away by their grief. Some of them swallowed burning coals. Sister Rose sipped the air with a spoon, and someone else swallowed a complete leather-bound Bible. All of them oblivious to their ludicrous behavior.

The South Vietnamese were succumbing to mass hysteria now as well, Annieke had heard, but there was nothing laughable about it. Countless thousands of them had died since the first of the year.

She had planned to leave the Faculte des Sciences earlier in the afternoon, to avoid the rush hour, but Julien had detained her over coffee at the Restaurant Minerve, down from the university, longer than usual. The massive bulk of the Tour Zamansky loomed behind him, across the street, like one of the malevolent stone giants who used to descend from the Truong Son Mountains and wreak havoc in the coastal plains in the old days. Annieke's grandmother, who recited the legend to the child from memory, would have considered Julien's position in the shadow of the tower a bad omen. Annieke should have asked him to move, but what a fool she would have been to succumb to such nonsense!

Instead, she had listened to him quietly, but with her heart beating slightly faster than usual, and waited for him to tell her he planned to take her home to meet his parents at last. Julien de Rochambard came from a long line of aristocrats who traced their ancestry back to the original owners of Chenonceaux.

"Malheureusement, Cherie, they're leaving for Genève tomorrow," he said finally, his voice low. *"I don't know when they will be back."*

Annieke looked at him in silence, then rose to her feet, put a five-franc coin down on the green marble tabletop, and walked away.

"Wait!" Julien called after her. *"Tu comprends pas!"*

Annieke continued walking in the direction of Cardinal Lemoine, where she'd parked her Mobylette. A magazine vendor sold copies of Paris *Match* outside his kiosk at the head of the stairs leading down into the Met-

ro station. Princess Grace was on the cover again. The odor of damp coal came up from the train tunnel as though from the depths of a mine. What was there to understand? Would he have offered excuses to a *jolie* American actress?

The traffic angled left off the Rue Monge onto the Avenue des Gobelins, and in another minute Annieke drove past the squat front wall of the textile factory after which the street was named. Soon she was at the round point of the Place d'Italie, where she had to stop before edging her way in among the cars, cycles, and camions heading south along the Boulevard de l'Hopital from the Gare d'Austerlitz and the Seine. Only after she passed the Place and turned left onto the Avenue de Choisy did she breathe a sigh of relief. As she rode by the pagoda-roofed Olympiades shopping center and the Tang Freres market, she pressed down on the gear shift, impatient to get home, and spun the throttle into high. But just then Maître Coullard stepped out from behind his delivery truck, and Annieke had to swerve to avoid him. Loose flour fell from his apron, and the basket of *pain de mie* in his hands slid precariously before he managed to right it. The scent of fresh warm bread wafted into the street.

"Hey, watch it!" He shook his fist at her. "Crazy *metisse!*"

"*Fiche-moi!*" Annieke yelled back. She knew the old man, who was half-deaf, could not hear her above the roar of the motorbike. Two minutes later she came to a halt in front of 517bis, Rue des Hospices. A simple three-story wooden apartment building surrounded by high-rises, with a red tile roof in Saigonnais style and the brown clay chimney pipe of the Parisians, in the heart of the Quartier Asiatique, the number in white letters on a blue enamel wall plaque tacked to the right of the door. She got off the bike and dropped the kickstand, flushing as she remembered her response to Maître Coullard. *Stuff it!* Something a person named Annieke Mollot might well say. She took her book bag from the rack behind her, locked the bike to the iron railing in front of the building, and strode through the open doorway. But not Tran Thi Anh Nhiec.

Annieke hated her Vietnamese name. Grandmother Tran had dubbed her "little scold" because she was sickly and would not stop crying for the first three days after she was born, driving the family gathered in Nha Trang for the blessed event half mad. Grandmother predicted a heavy fate for the girl, who she said would be persecuted by the evil spirit of the Four Palaces until she was old enough to carry around a tray of smoking joss sticks on her head and chanted a series of propitiatory prayers for three days in a row, one to match each day she'd spent crying her head off. When Annieke and her parents moved to France in 1967, two years after Grandmother's death,

the ten-year old ignored her mother's repeated injunctions to fulfill the old lady's wishes, scorning the superstition as beneath her. Anh Nhiec had remained obdurate up to the moment of her mother's death the year before, although her refusal still gnawed at her conscience from time to time. But by then she'd caught the eye of the heir of the Rochambards, and what was she to do? What would Julien have thought?

Her father's wheelchair rumbled across the kitchen floor above her, and two voices drifted down the stairs, along with the smell of cigarette smoke. Eliane, Faustin Mollot's nurse and housekeeper, had left for the day, so who was this other person? Annieke climbed halfway up the stairs and paused on the landing. Tounette, the albino cat from the third floor, bristled as it went by her on its way down to the street. The two men were speaking English, her father gutturally, uncertainly, the visitor fluently. Then it dawned on her. The American had arrived.

Annieke climbed the rest of the stairs. The door to the apartment was also open, and she slipped into the kitchen but stayed in the background next to the refrigerator, which hummed beside her. Opposite the stove, and beneath the white metal wall cabinets which Eliane kept as spotless as though she ran an infirmary, her father and the American sat at the square enamel-coated breakfast table, on which was spread a faded damask tablecloth with a series of tricolored fleurs-de-lis etched into the fabric. A half-empty whiskey bottle and two tumblers, a pitcher of water, a copper ashtray, a pack of Gauloises, and an opened tin of Gaufrettes-Eventails were scattered about the table. The American had his back to her. Almost a full minute passed before her father noticed her.

"Ah, *enfant*, Monsieur," Faustin Mollot said. "*Voici ma fille*. Annieke, say hello to Monsieur Collins."

"Bertram Collins," the man said, turning. He fixed his eyes on her with obvious appreciation. "Nice to meet you. And you can call me Bert."

He held out his hand, but Annieke remained where she was. The man appeared to be about twenty-three, Julien's age, but he was dressed in tattered jeans and a wrinkled plaid shirt and had long, greasy blond hair that reminded her of a dish of rice noodles cooked in too much oil. He smelled of cheap airline soap, the kind she remembered playing with in the bathroom of the Air France DC-8 which had brought her from Saigon to Paris eight years earlier. The American was a friend of one of her father's former comrades-in-arms, a pharmacist who'd stayed on in Viet Nam. Dalloz had told Collins to look his old friend up when he arrived in Paris, according to the letter Mollot had received from the *pharmacien* the week before.

"Monsieur Collins just got off the last flight out of Saigon," Faustin

Mollot said. Annieke detected a note of exultation beneath the chaff of pretended sympathy in his voice.

“The last civilian one, that is,” the American explained. “They want all non-combatants out before the Air Force and the Marines go back in to take care of the problem once and for all.”

Annieke didn’t ask him what he meant by “the problem.” She didn’t say anything at all. Instead, she put her book bag over her shoulder and stepped away from the refrigerator at last.

“Annieke!” her father said sharply, as she brushed by them.

She halted and turned. “Hello.” Her voice was flat, the single word spoken without warmth. What did this American matter to her? She was still upset by the way Julien had behaved that afternoon.

Bert Collins smiled at her, but he looked uncomfortable, and before he could speak again she was in the hallway. Its walls were decorated with a series of tortoise shell pictures of rural scenes near her mother’s native village. Hills, streams, thatched huts, pink sunset clouds, bamboo forests, inundated paddy fields the color of scallions, separated by a long stone dike. Annieke was sure the American was watching her as she proceeded to her bedroom.

“Daloz didn’t tell me your daughter was such a hot little number,” she heard behind her. Annieke bristled like Tounette, but she kept on walking. Faustin Mollot muttered a confused reply to the man as she opened the door to her room and closed it after her. What a boor he was! But did Julien still think she was a “hot little number?”

Her room was small, uncomplicated, containing only a daybed with a quilt, a dresser, a pinewood chair, and a table with a mirror. A photograph of her mother as a young girl, in an *ao dai*, holding a sprig of *mai* blossoms at Tet, stood on top of the dresser. Annieke removed a pile of dirty clothes from the chair and pulled it over to the table. She sat down in front of the mirror and thought of the picture of Princess Grace on the cover of *Paris Match*. Julien must have been debating for months the effect she would have on his parents. She leaned forward, clamped her forefingers against her eyebrows, her thumbs against her cheekbones, and then, pressing hard, she forced her eyes open as far as she could, stretching them until she winced from the pain and the tears sprang up. But, to her dismay, when she took her hands away, her eyes slipped back into their normal almond shape. Annieke thought of old Coullard’s angry insult. How dare he call her a crazy half-breed! But she could not look in the mirror again.



Two days later, they took the Metro to Porte d'Auteuil and walked the three blocks to Roland Garros, to watch the preliminary trials for the French Open. Julien kept his arm around her the whole time. Annieke was delirious with happiness, and it was as though their little disagreement at the Café Minerve had never taken place. It was a gorgeous late-April morning, and a soft breeze came off the Lac Superieur, redolent of honeysuckle and red hawthorn. Annieke held him close and breathed in the sweet air of the Allee des Acacias. As if of one mind, they set their feet down cautiously, to avoid trampling the myrtle leaves, the snapdragon and cherry blossoms, victims of the preceding night's torrential downpour. Julien smiled at her as they approached the stadium. He was cheerier than usual. His father's membership in the Legion of Honor had just come through the day before.

"It's long overdue, *Cherie*," he said, as they strolled along Gordon Bennett Street. "He fought hard to keep Gabon and Djibouti in the empire while he was Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs, you know. But that was difficult after the Vietnamese and Algerian disasters."

Annieke flinched at the word "disasters," but Julien didn't seem to notice. He peered up at the huge posters of Bjorn Borg and Chris Evert on either side of the Porte des Mousquetaires. Last year's winners. A group of teenage girls clustered beneath the handsome Swedish superstar, giggling and nudging one another. Three of them were in mini-skirts, the rest in jeans. One was dressed in a tie-dyed psychedelic tee shirt and purple high heels.

"*Mon ange*," she murmured, blowing Bjorn Borg a kiss. Her purple lipstick matched her shoes. "*Mon ange suedois*."

Annieke tugged at Julien's sleeve.

"What if I told you that Borg was my angel also, *Cheri*? Would you be jealous?"

"Of course not." His tone was dismissive, as though the thought of a common tennis player, a foreigner at that, supplanting a Rochambard was too absurd to mention. "*Viens*," he said, taking her hand. "The line's building up outside the Tennisium." He led her through the gate.

"Don't you like him, though?" Annieke persisted. "He has dreamy eyes just like yours."

But Julien showed no appreciation of the compliment. The discount seats for Benny-Berthet Day had just become available, even though the charity event was still two months away, and another girl, standing with a friend directly in front of them, whispered to her companion that Borg was planning to show up for the special day in person. Her voice was pitched high with excitement. Julien frowned and cut in line ahead of them. He

marched past several other people and steered Annieke to the head of the line, as though a Rochambard should also never be kept waiting. They were met by glares as they came up to the box office, but Julien ignored the disapproving looks. Annieke waited nervously by his side, troubled by his rudeness but hesitant to say anything. Julien took his wallet from the inside pocket of his jacket and opened it. His remark about France's lost colonies began to bother her again as well.

Julien threw in an extra three hundred francs for the National League against Cancer along with the price of their tickets. The man in the box office bowed his head.

"*Merci, Monsieur,*" he said, as he handed Julien the tickets and a receipt for his donation. Julien bowed back, as though the man had just presented *him* with the Legion of Honor.

Annieke brightened at his generosity. "You're a good man, *Cheri.*" She pinched his arm. "Even if your nose is not as cute as Bjorn Borg's."

She crinkled her own at him, and he pried his mouth open in a slight smile. "Let's go get a macaroon soda before the match starts," he said.

The Suzanne-Lenglen Court rose above them like the prow of a cruise ship. He guided her to the Haagen-Dazs stand beneath the south wing. But in spite of the delicious soda, the milk and honeyed scent of the ice cream, the loveliness of the day, and Julien's magnanimity, Annieke's spirits drooped once more. It was in one of the larger courts, she remembered, either this one or Philippe-Chatrier, that thousands of French Jews had been interned during World War II before being sent east, never to return. They were packed in so tightly they could hardly move. They lived beneath the stairwells and were forced to survive on scraps and endure the stench of the overflowing latrines and their own unwashed bodies. They hadn't panicked, but then, unlike the South Vietnamese who were now in the grips of the final Communist onslaught, *they* hadn't known that their fate was sealed...

"Just think of it, Annieke! The Legion d'Honneur at last."

Julien's face relaxed in another smile, and Annieke returned it the best she could. But the effort was a feeble one, for suddenly she knew that this latest official achievement made it less likely than ever that he would bring her home with him to meet his family. Julien's straw gurgled as he drank up the rest of his soda, and his carefree obliviousness almost overwhelmed her. The day had hardly begun, but already it was over for her.

The group of girls they'd seen outside the stadium sauntered by them, the one in purple still murmuring about "her Swedish angel." Julien flicked his hand in their direction and drew in a satisfied breath of air.

"*Eh bien,* let them have their Borgs, if they must!" He grabbed her wrist

and pulled her to her feet. They headed toward the Allee Marcel Bernard. “My father’s medal is a good sign, *Cherie*. And now let’s go witness our country’s return to glory on the tennis courts.”

The cave dwellers, the Jews were called. Exiles in their own country. Annieke extracted her hand from Julien’s and lagged behind. She turned her head and looked back at the hull of Suzanne-Lenglen while Julien strode purposefully ahead. The Legion d’Honneur wasn’t for everyone, she reflected sadly. None of *them* had ever received it. Not even posthumously.



“Nhiec, where are you going?”

Tran Thi Trac was sweeping the bathroom floor with a short-handled rush broom. To do so, she had to bend far over, almost double, and long years of similar wearisome toil had crooked her back. She gathered the dirt into an aluminum dust pan and dumped it into a large white plastic pail that had a crack running down its side. Then she spat her quid of betel into the pail. The pungent smell of areca and lime filled the little bathroom.

Annieke made a face and turned from the mother she already thought of as old, although now, in March of 1974, Trac was only forty-three. The girl studied herself in the mirror above the sink and began to add the finishing touches to her makeup: black Guerlain eyeliner and a fiery red Lancôme lipstick, which she’d picked up from the Boite Mouvenard in the Galeries Lafayette that morning. Julien had given her the money for them.

“Tell me, Anh Nhiec,” Trac insisted.

The girl rubbed her lips together to spread the lipstick and looked back at her mother reluctantly. Her heart sank at the sight of the long thin trail of blood-red spittle which ran from Trac’s mouth to the bottom of her wrinkled chin. The old woman seemed unaware of it.

“Mother, please wipe your mouth.” Annieke waited while she did so, with the sleeve of her yellowed blouse. “Why do you use that filthy stuff, anyway?” the girl went on, her voice rising. “It’s for peasants. And why are you dusting the floor? That’s Eliane’s job. It’s degrading.”

The lines around Trac’s eyes hardened, and Annieke turned away again. She felt a throbbing in her stomach at the old woman’s unspoken words of reproach: How dare you talk to your mother so?

“I don’t want you seeing that man, do you hear?” Trac said. “Look how you’re dressed!”

The girl wheeled to her, ready with an angry reply, but just then her mother spotted a dust ball she’d missed, and squatting down, plucked it

from the baseboard and deposited it in the pail. Annieke colored up with embarrassment.

“Do you always have to squat like that? It’s so . . . common.”

“Common?” Tran Thi Trac eased herself painfully down onto the floor tiles and looked up, her eyes filled with sorrow.

“Ungrateful child! To think that you would call your mother common.”

Disgusting, Annieke had almost said. The farmers in the fields, both male and female, squatted like that to relieve themselves. The girl blushed a second time, but then, to comfort herself, she peered in the mirror and thought of the elegant dinner Julien had planned for her that evening. It was only their third date, but she was to meet some of his St. Cyr friends and she was filled with eager anticipation. One of the friends was a Rothschild!

“And look at your face, girl!” Tran Thi Trac exclaimed. “No Vietnamese would think twice about a *fille de rien* like you.”

I already know what they think, Mother. Annieke’s hand shook on the eyeliner, and she had to wipe a smudge off her left cheek and start over. All throughout her childhood, until they moved to France, the Vietnamese kids would make fun of her, and she would run away to Po Nagar, the Cham temple on Mount Cu Lao overlooking the Nha Trang harbor, and hide herself in shame among the eight-sided columns of the mandapa. The Indian merchants who’d built the place between the eighth and thirteenth centuries had been slaughtered by the Vietnamese or driven off. Annieke would pray to the female incarnation of Shiva seated on her yoni to wreak vengeance on her persecutors, who tormented her for what they deridingly called her light skin the color of a mourning robe, her big nose, her eyes as large as a tarsier’s . . .

“I don’t care what they think,” she snapped, closing her cosmetic kit and dumping it in her purse. The purse, like her red miniskirt, was a present from Julien. Both of them were made of the finest leather and came from the Maroquinerie Bougeval, near the Opera. They made her look *tres chic*, he’d said. Like a model, not like a *fille de rien*.

“And I will not stop seeing him, either. He’d be devastated.”

But her voice wavered as she appraised herself in the mirror, with a critical eye for any faults. She picked up a two-ounce bottle of *Reves de Nuit* and brought it up to her neck. She gently pressed the trigger, once on the left side, once on the right, and then, lifting her long black hair, once more on the nape. The scent of the expensive perfume, another lavish gift from Julien, gave her confidence.

“Why should I stop seeing him? *Il m’aime, Maman.*”

“Love?” her mother scoffed. “What does a girl like you know of love? Mark my words, you’ll regret it one day if you don’t listen to me. With that short skirt of yours, what do you think that French boy sees in you, anyway? And you call that love!”

Annieke was about to burst out with an indignant answer when her mother’s scornful laugh brought her up short. The old woman’s teeth were stained dark brown, from the foul-smelling *Can Tho* cigarettes which her sister sent her every eight weeks. Tran Thi Trac thought her teeth were pretty, like the black-lacquered teeth the country girls had in the old days to attract lovers. But her daughter was ashamed of her. What would happen if the Rothschilds knew she had such a mother? Annieke blushed again, for herself this time, and stole from the bathroom.



Three nights later, she awoke from a dream at about 4:00 a.m., to the sound of voices arguing in the kitchen. Although she’d gone to bed around ten p.m., she’d tossed and turned for several hours, in utter despair. That afternoon, she’d spotted Julien, smiling and talking with another girl, a blonde, at the *Café Familia* after class. They were sitting very close and didn’t seem to notice her, and then he placed his hand over the girl’s and gazed affectionately into her eyes. Annieke turned away in misery. All during the ride back home she’d fought hard to keep down her anguish. Who *was* she? She finally drifted off to sleep around one.

“Don’t talk to *me* about *la gloire*, Monsieur,” Faustin Mollot shouted. As Annieke sat up in bed, she heard his wheelchair roll across the kitchen floor. Her room was hot and close, but she was afraid to open the door.

In the dream, her mother, who had died from lung cancer seven months earlier, was alive again. Annieke was dressed for her wedding, in a traditional red Royal Court *ao dai* embroidered with gold phoenixes and a round *khan dong* headdress. She waited, trembling, beside the ancestral altar, along with Tran Thi Trac, for the arrival of the groom and his family. The altar was decorated with photographs of Annieke’s forebears and a black lacquer tablet with the names of her progenitors down to the fourth generation. The fragrance of fresh flowers and fruit, of incense, was all around....

“Little do you know what *we* had to go through to clean up the mess you left us,” the American shouted back at her father. “You think that was glorious, do you?”

Firecrackers announced the arrival of the rest of the wedding party outside their humble Nha Trang home. First the matchmaker, then the groom’s

father, the Legion of Honor pinned prominently to his chest, followed by the other male members of his family....

"You had to go through nothing," the old man replied. "And what did you accomplish? *Rien*. Listen to this!"

Annieke heard the rattle of a newspaper, even through the door. "Larteguy writes from Saigon that the final evacuation has begun. He says you Yanks are running with your tails between your legs. What do you think of that, *hein?*"

"It's a lie!" the American cried. "There's still time. You'll see. The Seventh Fleet is right off the coast, carrying several thousand Marines, and the bombers are ready to strike. This war's not lost—far from it!"

Lastly, Julien, tall and handsome in the customary blue tunic and white silk pantaloons, and all his female relatives. The honored guests carried two presents each: fabric, fruit, cakes, woodblock prints, poems and maxims in brush stroke calligraphic scrolls, even jewels, in lacquerware boxes covered in lucky red cloth. Everyone was radiant and happy. Even her mother, her teeth as white as alabaster, her back no longer bent, was all smiles....

Annieke rose from the bed and stumbled in the darkness to the door. She opened it, and strangely, it seemed to her that she now heard four voices yelling rather than two. Don't you know what time it is, Father? She was glad Tounette's owner was as deaf as Maître Coullard.

She stepped into the hall and plodded to the kitchen. Her father was jabbing an empty tall-necked wine bottle at Bertram Collins as though it was a sword. The American was seated opposite him at the breakfast table, just like the first time. They were too wrapped up in their argument to give her anything but a brief nod.

Faustin Mollot suddenly struck his breast with his free hand and levered his torso higher in the wheelchair.

"So you thought you could outdo us, eh? *Ecoute.*"

He pointed to an aquamarine transistor radio, which had to be the American's, standing upright in the middle of the table between them. An announcer was recapping the state of affairs in Saigon as of a number of hours earlier. Scenes of panic outside the American Embassy, crowds scrambling to get over the walls, Marine guards shoving people back at the point of a bayonet, a Vietnamese boy perched on the barbed wire fence, his hands cut and bleeding, cursing the allies who were abandoning them. Helicopters swooped in from the South China Sea and picked up people from the Embassy roof, then took off again. The airport had been rocketed, fires burned out of control in Cho Lon, the Chinese section of the city, bodies lay abandoned in the streets.

Faustin Mollot gave the American a defiant look.

“At least *we* left the country with dignity,” he said.

“Yes, but we’re not leaving,” Collins countered. “We’re going back. Wait and see. We won’t abandon them the way you French did. There’s no dignity in cowardice. Only in courage. *Our* courage.”

The veins bulged in Faustin Mollot’s neck, and his face turned crimson. Annieke moved toward him, afraid he might have a stroke, but he angrily waved her away. A smile appeared at the edges of his mouth.

“It’s too late, Monsieur. Your fine talk of American courage comes too late.”

He reached forward and turned up the volume. In tense tones the French correspondent went on to describe the current situation. An unearthly calm had fallen over Saigon now that the last American helicopter had lifted off. People wandered in an aimless daze, awaiting the arrival of the first North Vietnamese tanks. South Vietnamese soldiers shed their uniforms like unwanted skins and tried to blend in with the populace. Looters were rifling the deserted American billets and taking away everything in sight—electronics, household goods, appliances, furniture, souvenirs, cars, jeeps, trucks, orange Chrysler limousines. In front of the big stone statue of the charging ARVN militiamen across from the National Assembly, a Saigon policeman, loyal to the end, had committed suicide.

Faustin Mollot patted the top of the radio as though it were an obedient child. “Well, Monsieur?” His eyes shone victoriously. “I don’t believe it.”

The reporter cut to the newsroom back in Paris, where a Deputy Attaché from the American Embassy was saying almost the same thing to the all-night Radio France anchor. “This can’t be happening!”

The anchor and the diplomat started wrangling, and Annieke knew why she’d heard four voices rather than two. Her father and the American paused to listen to the quarrel on the radio, and then Bert Collins suddenly wheeled to her. In spite of his irritation, his eyes lit up with pleasure.

“Why don’t you let me get you a drink, little honey?”

He reached for an unopened wine bottle, and while he fiddled with the cap and searched for a clean glass, Annieke slipped behind him. The American attaché’s voice became mocking and bitter, and she halted and turned. The diplomat mentioned D-Day, the Jewish persecution, the spinelessness of the Vichy government, how if it hadn’t been for America—

“We warned you,” Faustin Mollot said, talking above the attaché and shaking a scolding finger at Collins. “But did you listen to us?”

In his excitement he leaned so far forward in his wheelchair that

Annieke was afraid he would fall. She stepped toward him again, but he righted himself and went on with his lecture.

“*Non!* And if you Americans had given us the air support we needed at Dien Bien Phu, where I lost my legs, you know, we would have killed every last Viet! *N'est-ce pas, Annieke?*”

He gave her a proud look, but Annieke shrank back from him. She glared at Bertram Collins. Why did you come here? This is all your fault!

“You don't know what you're talking about, old man,” the American said. “Don't blame us if you didn't kill enough of them. You had our napalm, after all. You could have wiped them out...like this!”

He lurched drunkenly forward, and with a broad sweep of his arm hurled everything off the table. The wine glasses shattered on the tiles. The ashtray landed with a clang and scattered cigarette butts all over the place. The cap came off the plastic wine bottle as it fell, and *vin de table* the color of betel juice sprayed the floor and the refrigerator. The liquid began to pool around the transistor radio, which was still working, however, and appeared to be undamaged. Annieke stooped and picked it up. She wiped it off with a dish towel. The anchor and the diplomat sounded as though they might come to blows soon, while in the background the Saigon correspondent tried vainly to intervene. Annieke turned the radio off and picked up her father's Dupont cigarette lighter, which she also wiped dry. She rose to her feet. Faustin Mollot looked as though he had no idea what had just happened.

“Am I not right, Annieke?” he said. “You agree with me, don't you, *ma fille?*”

She stared at him, speechless with disappointment, and he shrugged and turned back to the American. Annieke strode to the front door and took down a black knee-length polyester coat from a peg on the back of it. She put the coat on, slipped the radio and the lighter into one of the pockets, and opened the door. She went quickly down the stairs, afraid that one or both of them might call her back or try to stop her. She stepped onto the sidewalk without bothering to close the door behind her. The last thing she heard as she took off on her Mobyette into the night was the sound of the two angry voices raised in renewed conflict.



Annieke entered the Bois de Vincennes by way of the Avenue de Paris and the Avenue du Tremblay, after passing the Chateau and the Fort Neuf. In the early morning hours of October 15, 1917, the beautiful Mata Hari

was executed by a firing squad outside the keep of the castle. Born in the Netherlands and transplanted to Indonesia after her wedding at Annieke's age, Mata Hari fled to Paris to escape her wretched marriage and reinvented herself as an exotic Indian temple dancer. The French worshipped her, until she was arrested for spying for the Germans. Annieke gave a fleeting glance at the berm before which the poor woman had been shot. What chance had she had at her trial? she wondered. No more than any other defenseless person without a country....

There was a bite to the air as she sped along on her Mobylette and veered right onto the Route de Nogent and then took another right at the Lac des Minimes. She shivered but told herself it was only because of the cold. Mata Hari had defied them to the last, refusing to wear a blindfold and holding her head high even as the bullets hit her. Surely *she* could be as brave as the famous spy, couldn't she?

The junipers and poplars lining the broad entrance to the Jardin Colonial swayed violently in the wind as she approached it. The moon ducked behind a cloud, and it took her some time to find the temple itself, which she'd heard about from her mother only a month before she died. On the verge of the grave, Tran Thi Trac felt it was high time for Anh Nhiec to honor her ancestors, and she could start at the Temple du Souvenir Indochinois. But Annieke had waited until now.

She parked the motorbike by the twin pylons guarding the temple, which were decorated with red Chinese characters welcoming the visitor. She bounded up the stone staircase but then came to a halt. The broad façade suddenly frightened her. The undulating ceramic dragon on the roof, the symbol of the Emperor, seemed to guess why she was there and flashed its long sharp teeth at her in anger. The red tiles glittering in the moon which emerged from behind the cloud appeared to be dipped in blood. Annieke's step faltered as she approached the varnished sliding panels which screened the temple off from the outside world, and she almost turned and fled. Tran Thi Trac would be horrified at what she was about to do. Mother, please forgive me.

In 1919, the Emperor Khai Dinh himself had dedicated the temple, and Trac had often boasted that on the military tablet in the inner sanctum, prominently displayed along with the names of the other Vietnamese who had died for France in the two World Wars, was that of her brother Doan, one of the last defenders of the Bannier district of Orleans killed during the futile attempt to keep back the Nazis in June, 1940. How proud her mother was of him! But now how ashamed Annieke was....

She put her hand in her coat pocket and found the Dupont lighter. Her

fingers tightened around it and would have crushed it had it not been made of metal. For whom had they all died? For a country whose only regret was that the World Wars, and those that quickly followed, had not killed enough of them? Annieke thought of the two drunks arguing in the kitchen in the Rue des Hospices. Was she the only one who understood? She strode forward with renewed determination.

She slid aside one of the panels and stepped into the anterior gallery, where the second of eight ranks of tall columns kept watch like soldiers on guard duty. Although the light was dim, she could see what she needed to. The moon shone across the pond at the back of the temple, through a couple of mobile panels like the one she'd just pushed aside but which had been left open. In front of her, raised on a broad platform in the middle of the sanctuary, was an ironwood replica of the imperial throne, with the military altar to its left, on which was inscribed her uncle's name, and the workers' altar to its right. The altars were decorated with remembrances to the dead: candelabra, vases containing incense sticks, incense burners, trays of alcohol, rice bowls, fruit, tablets with the names of the ancestors, like those Annieke recalled from her dream. In bronze, mother-of-pearl, red and black lacquered go or sao wood. Offerings to those who had helped perpetuate the French Empire. Beside the altar to the military dead was a sculpted crane standing atop a tortoise, while on the other side, next to the civilian altar, a stork stood on a turtle's back. The traditional symbols of longevity. What a mockery they were! Tran Van Doan was only eighteen when he died.

Yet she did not seek his name. Instead, she stepped past the throne and took the lighter from her pocket. Directly before her, enclosed in a glass case facing a third, half-moon shaped altar opposite the back gallery, was Khai Dinh's rescript, officially dedicating the Temple to the French Republic. Annieke walked around to the front of the case. She took a scented cleaning cloth off a rack beside it, to protect her hand when she smashed the glass with her fist, and stared at the writing inside. Her face went livid as she read about the gratitude of the Son of Heaven for the noble sacrifice of so many of his subjects in the First World War, his solemn assertion that the Indo-chinese people would always be ready to die for France in any other worthy conflict.... She wrapped the cleaning cloth around her fist and leaned forward, but then she heard a noise behind her. She turned, startled. Her heart skipped a beat as she gazed into the darkness. A man appeared from behind one of the rear panels, but the moon was at his back.

"Julien!" she cried, thrilling with hope.

Bertram Collins staggered into the light. Annieke sprang back from him and let out a gasp.

“What are *you* doing here?”

His eyes were glazed, and he wobbled as he stepped toward her. He started to lose his balance and gripped the top of the half-moon altar to brace himself. A heavy brass candlestick toppled to the floor. Annieke’s jaw tightened. What right do you have to tamper with these sacred things? After a moment he straightened up and gave her a thin smile.

“I’m looking for you, of course. I took a taxi.” He spoke so rapidly the words tumbled out and collided with one another, and she found it difficult to follow him.

“How did you know where to find me?” she said, after a few moments. She strived to keep her voice calm.

“It was a hunch.” The wind rushed in from the pond in back of the temple, bringing with it the stench of his alcohol and sweat. Annieke grimaced and stepped behind the glass case so that it was now between them.

“A hunch?”

“I got worried when you took off like that, and I asked your father where you’d gone. He wasn’t sure, but he told me there was one place you definitely *wouldn’t* be. My hunch turned out to be right.”

He moved in on her, but he rocked precariously, and Annieke took advantage of his unsteadiness to retreat behind the throne. His smile faded, and he looked annoyed at her attempts to avoid him.

“What are you doing here?” she repeated. In her rising panic she was scarcely aware of what she was saying.

“I told you. I was looking for you.”

“Why?”

He nodded at the lighter in her hand.

“Your father wanted me to get that back for him.”

He lunged forward as though to grab it, and she darted back from the throne. He flashed his teeth at her like the angry dragon on the roof.

“Come now, don’t be difficult. Your father doesn’t like the idea that you might be a thief, and neither do I. I saw too many of them in Saigon.”

Annieke glowered at him. How dare he accuse her of being a thief!

“Here!” she cried. “Take the thing and go!”

She threw the lighter at him, and it struck him in the chest and fell to the floor. As he bent down to retrieve it, her hand flew to her mouth. How would she avenge her people now?

Collins got up and started forward again.

“And I want my radio back.”

Annieke had forgotten it. She dug her hand in her pocket and brought it out. When he saw it, the American’s eyes glinted. His voice turned menac-

ing.

“I bet you were hoping I’d overlook that, too, weren’t you? You sneaky little bitch. Give it to me.”

He advanced on her, and Annieke stumbled backward and fell off the platform onto the floor. She landed hard, but she barely felt the pain.

“Help!” she yelled, but there was no one there to hear her. The American loomed above her, blocking out the light, and Annieke shut her eyes, terrified, and waited to join her ancestors. She raised her arm to defend herself, and felt a wrenching of her fingers as he tried to take the radio away. She heard a crackling noise and opened her eyes.

In struggling with her, he’d turned the radio on, and suddenly he backed off, leaving it in her hand. Annieke increased the volume, and he continued to retreat. The menace was gone from him now. On his face was a look of shocked disbelief. An Agence France-Presse reporter was solemnly describing the fall of Saigon, but in his voice, as in her father’s, the girl detected a note of triumph, as though somehow the humiliating departure of the Americans had restored their nation to glory. While the man went on, his voice surging with Gallic pride, Annieke gave a perplexed look at the case containing the edict she had wanted so badly to destroy, and then she rose to her feet. The American wheeled from her, his shoulders slumped in defeat, and disappeared the way he had come, through the back by the reflecting pool. Annieke waited for a minute or two, her heart beating fast, but he was gone for good.

She turned the radio off and surveyed the silent temple around her, which was beginning to brighten with the approach of sunrise. Later that day, she would come back, with fresh fruit for her uncle’s altar. But before that, she would tell Julien that she did not care for him anymore, flinging his dismissal in his face even if he was clinging to the other girl. She had no further need of him, or of anyone else now. Her country had returned to glory, and to her, at last.

PARAGUAYAN

Jacobo Fijman

Your scent of wet grass
drags itself across the red sand
like a green shade.

The bronze absurdity
of your agile body rusted
in the hands of the sun.

We laughed with pleasure.

I bit your skin softer than wind.

Your eyes
poured the black seeds
of your sight.

All the tropics
became juice in your mouth.

The songs of the rainforest
were held in your form.

—translated from the Spanish by Marcelo Hernandez Castillo

SUNSETS

Jacobo Fijman

The sunset's muddy violets.
Relics. Devotions.
Cushioned faces.
Discolored
longings.
The sea takes shelter in my shadows;
and closes its cold and evening mouth!

The bell of my eyes
scatters my intimacy.
The mercy of my knees enralls in the sunset's sigh
(violet pigeons).
My hands can feel the color of a Catholic mass!

—translated from the Spanish by Marcelo Hernandez Castillo

REQUIEM*Jacobo Fijman*

The smell of yellow.
Silence smoothed
like the rigid drapes
in the black flower of my room.

The blue and white smile.
Desperate cries from the train
that fold unexpected horizons
of cold rain.

Autumn—
desolate bar stool;
snuffbox of blonde days,
languid and barefoot
and the dark evenings of a Rosary.

A stirring of chairs wakes me;
a flavor of infancy; and the smell of yellow.

—translated from the Spanish by Marcelo Hernandez Castillo

PORTRAIT OF MY SISTER SITTING ON A HEADSTONE

Nayelly Barrios

At the graveyard,
colored streamers hang from branches.

Behind them she saw her father's face,
time-bent & speck-riddled.

Strands of it there
 then gone.

And she believed it was him
until she remembered

he was dead.

If he is mausoleum, I can be temple.

And she proceeded to build

a temple
out of golden huizache flowers,

worked all day

spit-pasting golden flowers into walls,
taking streamers from a tree to make a roof,
weaving streamers through coils of her hair,
tying streamers to her wrists.

Come night-fall,

she lit that temple
with fireflies and prayer.

But, come sunrise,

she was no longer temple.

The new day dismembered the limbs

of her mantra.

Because just like longing

golden flowers wither & waste.

By his headstone

she was

mesquite branch

longing for breeze. She asked

*How can I reposition God's hairline
to rest right*

above my own?

FADING PORTRAIT OF MY MOTHER AND ME
IN A BLUEBERRY FIELD

Nayelly Barrios

The sky is an old man restless on his back
aching and cursing. Your fingerprints,
empty rivers against blueberry skin.

We've been picking since before the sun,
but I untied my blueberry bucket from my seven-year-old waist
much too early. I can never fill more than two buckets,

fifty cents you let me have to use in the candy machines
at the laundromat. Your head wades in the pool
of your wide-brimmed hat

the sun's prayer is getting old I hear you say.

From under the shade of a blueberry shrub
I watch your shadow tethered to the sun. Me,
always from under the shade of a blueberry shrub,

while the sun carves rivers between your breasts.

You ask me to sing you a song,
I say *I only sing for the dead*

I am mostly dead.

The sun's glance freckles my face through a tree,
and when I begin to hum,
you are already walking toward me.

You lay your limbs out to dry,
pat them carefully on the cool rocks next to me.

You ask
have you ever spent yourself thin in adoration of the sun?

No

I can't say that I have.

ARENA*after my mother**Javier Zamora*

Ay mamita, ¿don't you know Alianza Republicana Nacionalista's acronym spells sand? Don Vaquero's blue pick-up truck drives by every hour. Those speakerphones tell us this is the tide that will wash everything. Ay mamita, this is the party of Roberto D'Aubuisson who splits watermelons with machetes to show "everyone is red inside." People say D'Aubuisson is a close friend of un tal Tío Reagan and that his wife has a culo like Miss Universo.

Arena's cheerleaders wear red-white-and-blue dresses, they're the girls older guys whistle at. At least, these are days boys get free plastic soccer balls and we get free plastic pom-poms. There's Don Vaquero's pick-up again. Last week he delivered the white voting booths. Behind those black curtains, my father dyed his thumb purple. Ay mamita, I shouldn't have told him I thought his print looked like the beach, the one with all those washed-up bullet casings.

TE TOCA*Javier Zamora*

see *nervios* (also: *ptsd*) *shock*

the first shot ties a knot tightens till i hear the last shells drop *don't sur-
render shadow to walls* i tell myself in dreams where faces fill my skull
and the sea churns this is my belly that morning bullets were at my feet
the sea cope please cope there were two bodies the brick wall cement
floor four bodies the brick the wall three bodies no bricks cold ce-
ment no it was dirt warm blood dirt floor i saw three bodies and sea
water poured from my mouth

BREATHE*Amina Gautier*

She died earlier that day. Not a real death. With other faculty members and graduate students gathered in Vancouver for the Modern Language Association convention, she laid her body down in the convention center, closed her eyes—and died. At first she wasn't sure which position was best for the assumption of death. Should she lie faced down, or repose on her back? Initially, she'd pressed her face to the floor, where the carpet abraded her cheek and scraped it near raw; she assumed that position to be the most realistic—too often had she seen black bodies cuffed and floored, cheek to ground. No, she realized, this was not the position of death, but of arrest. So she turned face up and lay rigid as a corpse.

It felt good to die, though she did not convince herself that her actions equaled those of the youth protesters out in Ferguson, who had taken the lead and returned to protest day in and out, and who used their bodies to obstruct traffic, collapse economies and disrupt normalcy. Nor did she liken herself to the great civil rights activists long gone and revered. She did not have to douse her eyes with milk to soothe the sting of tear gas. Nor did she have to walk through a row of hatred as racists yelled slurs and hurled bottles and eggs her way. She did not have to sit peaceably while waitresses ignored her and refused to serve her at a lunch counter. She shielded herself from no hoses, ran from no dogs, and dodged no gunfire. She died in relative safety. Dead off in Canada, a country with no experience of slavery. Dead at a conference rife with academics in a building full of registered attendants. Safe, unlike so many others. Still, when other conference attendees were filling this hour with late lunches, she was doing her part; she was at least doing something useful. She told herself that her dying counted.

As she lay dying, she wasn't sure with what to occupy her thoughts, didn't know if dying in was like a public moment of silence where you were meant to concentrate and think solely on one thing. But thinking of all of the black men and women whom the police had wrongfully killed in just the past few months would ruin her silence, and corrupt her death. She would surely cry if left alone with her thoughts of the slain. So instead, she mentally recited bits of Hamlet's soliloquy. *To die, to sleep, perchance to dream.* She lifted her hand to her cheek and felt the scraped skin where the carpet left its rub.

When pins and needles riddled her feet, the bodies around her rose from the ground. She followed suit, relieved to be alive once more.



Call it curiosity. She has finished her conference activities for the day—chairing her own panel, skipping lunch to squeeze in a die-in before attending the panels of her friends, making a foray through the exhibit room to peruse the new releases from her favorite academic presses—when now, intending to leave the convention center and return to her own hotel room, she sees a small crowd of conference attendees all heading toward one room and decides to tag along to see where everyone is going. She is exhausted from it all, especially the dying, but too curious not to follow.

The panel chair is offering introductions when she enters and takes a seat in the last row on the far right in the room that is quickly filling. There are thirty-five people in the audience, a good crowd for a convention like this. She'd counted only twelve at her own early morning panel. She flips through the thick pages of her conference schedule and discovers that she is at a panel on Palestine and its literature. Of the three speakers, only one name matches those listed in the program. The panel chair apologizes for the two panelists who were unable to attend. One sent only his regrets. The other has sent along his paper, to be read aloud by a designated speaker. She frowns in her back row seat at these last minute changes. How unprofessional to cancel at such a late date. Had they not completed their papers on time? If so, that was not a good enough reason to cancel. It was rare for anyone to arrive at the convention with a perfectly polished paper. Many participants drafted their papers on the flight over and she'd seen too many attendees in the hotel business centers hastily banging out talking points on the hotel computers and printers for her to believe this could keep someone from making it to the convention. Perhaps there had been a funding issue. Perhaps these absent panelists had their papers accepted but had their conference funding denied. Every year, the money for conferences seemed to dwindle across the colleges of arts and sciences. She had friends who'd had their per diems cut and some who had to pay for their own meals because their universities would now only reimburse for travel, registration and hotel stay. Luckily, she has a new post at a well-funded university that will pay for her to attend two to three conferences per year where she can eat as much as she likes.

The first panelist's paper is on a set of translated diaries kept by a village police officer in the 1950's that he apologetically describes as boring records of visits the officer paid to his various neighbors. "That notwithstanding, these diaries are nonetheless important because of their internal dialogues and the ways in which the diaries of Palestinian villagers disrupt a western

tradition of narrative that is invested in a linear and chronological method of storytelling,” the panelist says.

The crowd grows during the delivery of the first paper, swelling as people filter in from other panels that have let out late or are on the other side of the convention center. Eventually, the seats are nearly all filled and several late-comers have to stand against the back wall by the entrance. It is the largest audience she has ever witnessed at an academic conference for a single panel that is not a keynote speech. How many people are here out of genuine interest and how many are accidental wanderers like her? She is the only black professor in the room. Her own area of interest is far removed from anything dealing with the Arab world or Middle Eastern culture. She is a scholar of eighteenth and nineteenth century African American literature and she studies the literature produced by slaves like Wheatley, Equiano, Douglass and Jacobs, by free African American authors like Brown, Webb, Wilson, and Delaney, and later by post-reconstruction authors like Harper, Hopkins, Chesnutt, and Dunbar. She barely dips into the early part of the twentieth century, going no further than the Harlem Renaissance, and contemporary literature she altogether eschews. What then is there to interest her in papers on the life narratives—the memoirs, biographies, diaries and autobiographies of Palestinian writers? What, if anything, does this have to do with her?

The next paper, the one sent in by the absent panelist, is introduced. “This panel was conceived, proposed and compiled several months before Israel’s bombardment of Palestine this past July, but the sanctioned violence has made our panel relevant in a new way,” the substitute speaker says. The speaker’s voice is a whisper, her lips are too far away from the microphone, but no one lifts a hand to an ear to signal her to raise her volume. It is like two voices, two mouths, two tongues speaking at once in a murmur. The absent panelist’s tongue, lying now in the speaker’s mouth is the echo of an echo.

The room is still filling. There are now more than fifty people in the audience. The year before, at the previous convention in Chicago, a panel about an academic boycott of Israel drew extraordinary attention, with journalists seeking entry in hopes of covering the proceedings. Perhaps people have come today merely to see if sparks will fly. Perhaps she should leave now, before anything gets out of hand. She has done her political duty for the day. Dying earlier has freed her from guilt. She rises to exit and inches her way behind the free-standing table at the back of the room set aside for attendees with disabilities or limited mobility, carefully navigating a wheelchair, a dog, and a cane.

Coming to the end of the paper, the substitute panelist reads the absent presenter's request for a boycott and his discussion of the recent escalation of violence in the Gaza strip. As the absent panelist's paper is read, a clipboard containing a petition for an academic boycott of Israeli institutions makes its way across the table of the three panelists, to the front left row and quickly comes down the entire left aisle before winging back up to the front right and snaking its way down to the end of the right row. "In our land we are unwanted strangers," the panelist reads. Perhaps it is because the words coming out of the panelist's mouth are the words of someone miles away that the sentence echoes in the crowded room, comes to her where she is edging along the back wall of the full room in an attempt to exit unobtrusively, roots her to the spot, and dispels the façade. Around her the bodies of black boys and men fall like shell casings. As easily as she sees the back of a woman in a Navajo print blazer in the last row on the right, so too does she see a boy in a hood gunned down without cause; another boy detained for walking in the street, not only murdered but criminalized and defamed after death; a man placed in a chokehold, each breath bringing him closer to his last. It has been a red summer of bombs and bombardments, chokeholds, and no indictments, of die-ins and cover-ups, of violence unexcused, unjustified, and rampant. She knows nothing of the Gaza strip, but she knows the trauma of being treated like an unwanted stranger in one's own country, knows too the struggle to survive in a land that has been tilled with the unpaid labor of one's ancestors and watered with the blood of one's own people.

The woman in the Navajo blanket rises from her corner seat in the last row and brings over the clipboard to her where she stands propped against the back wall. Though the room is now filled with more than sixty attendees, there are only three names on the petition. To her left, there are only two more people waiting to receive the clipboard—not enough signatures to make the petition count. Her cheek burns as if she has been slapped. She'd thought dying was all she'd have to do.

She scoots down the wall, balances the clipboard on her knees and signs her name in the waiting space. Below her signature, she forges the names of the summer's black dead. Other names come to her—too many names for one to have to know—and she writes them in as well. Lining the petition with the names of other unwanted strangers, she struggles for air, finding that she, too, cannot breathe.

EXIT NY

León Salvatierra

I will not die in New York
Any place is good enough to begin the journey
Except New York
I will forget the tact of death
Its drum its guitar
I will leave my coat hanging on the fire escape
Shut my ears and buy me some shades
I will mock death for 24 hours

Now I should leave
But everything binds me to these ropes
Its hard skyscrapers make me delirious
The elevators are in reality a cage
I will light a candle, ask in turn for my soul
That an angel dreaming of this swarm would fall
and lend me his wings I should hail a taxi
Bind it to a light post and utter three words
so it doesn't leave Now is the moment
that death keeps guard Wigs offer
ample tonalities I should paint my face
From up high I will mock death

I grew tired of the rigid balance of my body
of upward movement, of moving
downwards, of painting walls and washing windows
It's only the movement of my hands
that smears emptiness on the things that touch me
Human caresses are more costly than a soul
In this city in which we are all free
I have been granted permission to lock up my words
Today I will mock death and will spin luck
And will raise my arms to hail a taxi

What I repeated above are certain words
I said them only once taxi wings suicide 24 hours
I should leave angel cage fire escape
Wigs movements flight I should leave now

—translated from the Spanish by Javier O. Huerta

**LEON SALVATIERRA WAS BORN THE DAY THEY
KILLED SOMOZA**

León Salvatierra

I was born the day they killed Somoza
At ten thirty in the morning
like gunsmoke the news spread
through the streets of my barrio
I had been born with great gusto
So they named me Augusto
There were celebrations and toasts in my name

I was born the day they killed Somoza
My parents had already lost
five children. I had lost
five brothers. But I came into the light healthy
Eyes: neither one inflamed
Arms: neither one fractured
Two legs free of blemishes and sores. My small
Fingers, one by one were complete
My fingernails intact. My skin, wrinkly red
—but time knows that I was trapped
in my mother's womb—. I was born without crying
It's true. The umbilical cord was strangling me
But nothing was damaged. My fists and feet
moved like fruit and tropical branches.
My parents cried for me. They say one could tell
in their gaze. Well I was happy news.

I was born the day they killed Somoza.

—translated from the Spanish by Javier O. Huerta

ROSA ESPINOZA—ABRAM, TEXAS*Lauren Espinoza*

1.

I learned how to pick cuetes
 after 12 years of twice annual
 pilgrimages outside city limits:
 4th of July & New Years.

At Buelito & Buelita's house
 we could pop the Tanks, Chickens,
 Blooming Flowers, Jumping Jacks;
 throw sawdust full of Pop-Pops
 into the caliche street
 where it was darker with stars
 lit by orange blossoms.

After the New Year's incident
 where I looked too closely
 at the fire end
 of a bottle rocket,
 Buelita knew to watch closer.

2.

The first time I saw a man cry
 we weren't allowed video games
 or loud noises, my cousins & I.
 We could only play checkers
 or Monopoly without laughter,

we sat outside on the wooden picnic table
 a Tio had built as a final project in Ag class.
 No one remembered

which Tio, their projects
 interchangeable in memory.

No names carved
in the wood, her casket.

3.

I never learned the rosary, but knew the feel
of a mechón when it caught the fuse
of a Fountain. Knew to keep my head down,
run away quickly, and not look too closely.
*Santa María, Madre de Dios, ruega por nosotros,
pecadores, ahora y en la hora de nuestra muerte. Amén.*

AMANCIO JESÚS*Lauren Espinoza*

Young men at fraternity parties
 don't just fall off tables
 shattering both eye sockets,
 fracturing the skull,
 bone shards like country
 outlines on a globe.

Falling onto a concrete slab
 while dancing on a table
 is a farce, a caricature of
 men: jovial, sweaty, shirtless
 with glitter. A beer in hand kept
 him imperfectly balanced until he pushed
 or someone pushed for a man to take
 a 9-foot drag queen death drop.

A Sheriff declared the investigation
 regarding this incident closed,
 seeing with his two eyes
 what the young man cannot. His face
 too swollen with blood to lift eyelids,
 while brothers campaign outside
 classrooms preaching the gospel of falling.

As if a fall from grace
 is the expected outcome
 of a gay man dancing atop a table.
 There is a joke there, a joke about
 brothers afraid of being in a restroom
 accused of "sneaking a peak."
 Or a quip about a gay man's free
 chance at a face lift, and a Sheriff
 like Pontius Pilate—too quick
 to wash his hands as a young man
 sips water through a straw, a reed—

sponge of vinegar. Camels passing
in the backdrop.

FIFTY

Mark Brazaitis

Marla de León returned home from her disappointing, even outright embarrassing, excursion to the Sherman Ice Arena and strode into her closet, located off the master bathroom, which is to say her bathroom since she was, six months after her divorce, the house's only occupant. Standing in front of her coat rack, she made to remove her overcoat but noticed how profoundly heavy it was. She struggled as if in a straightjacket but seemed about to succeed in casting off her burden when a voice admonished, "Be careful, please." The voice sounded like her mother's. This was disturbing because her mother was dead.

Before she could answer, Marla tumbled to the floor, free of her coat. After she stood up, she turned to face the offending article. Instead of a coat, however, she saw a naked woman. She suppressed a scream only because, although the woman wasn't her mother, she was familiar. Presently, Marla understood why. The woman was herself: a fifty-year-old divorced mother of two and a grandmother—a grandmother!—a designation she'd hadn't fully accepted despite having occupied the role for eight months—of one. Marla might have thought she was looking into a mirror. But the woman's movements did not corresponded with hers. Whereas Marla opened her mouth in disbelief, the woman closed hers in suspicion. "Who the hell are you?" the woman demanded.

"Funny," Marla shot back, "I was about to ask you the same question."

"I live here," the woman said.

"I live here," Marla said.

The woman laughed. "Is that so? Where have you been sleeping—in the garage?"

"In my bed," she said. "This bed." She pointed out the door, to the bedroom.

"Uh-huh." The woman regarded her suspiciously. "Did you run away from home?" she asked. "Or from boarding school? You couldn't be in college yet, could you?"

I'm as old as you are, Marla thought but checked herself. This didn't feel true. She pivoted to the full-length mirror, where she was shocked to see how youthful she looked. I can't be older than twenty, she thought. She cocked her head to the left, to the right. She batted her eyelashes. She raised her chin. She lowered her chin. She grinned and grinned.

"Wait a minute," said the woman, her outrage apparently overpowering

her modesty (she made no effort to cover up). “I know what’s going on here. You’re trying to ditch me.”

Marla was about to answer the woman’s accusation with a denial, but the old lady was right. A lie, however, seemed the best response—a lie followed by decisive action. “I’m not going to ditch you,” Marla said. Moving faster than she had in thirty years, she shot out of the closet and the attached bathroom before slamming shut the door. Now what? she thought. But the chair in front of the desk in the near corner provided the answer. She grabbed it and propped it under the door handle. From within the bathroom came a frustrated groan as her old self, whom she thought of as Fifty, struggled to pull open the door. There was banging. There was kicking. There was cursing.

“You can’t do this to me,” Fifty shouted. “You can’t do this to us.”

A sassiness Marla hadn’t felt in years surfaced: “I just did.”

The chair, which Marla had inherited from her grandmother, might have looked fragile. But whatever wood it was made of—mahogany, redwood, beech—was as durable as steel.

“We need to talk,” said Fifty.

“Later,” Marla said.

“You’re going to leave me in a bathroom?”

“I’ll bring you food in a couple of hours.”

“I don’t even have anything to read.”

“There are clothes in the closet,” Marla said. “Read the labels.” She paused. “And pick out an outfit. It’ll fit.”

Feeling as if a weight had been lifted from her, which of course it had, Marla skipped out of the bedroom. To be sure her nemesis remained contained, Marla also propped a chair against the bedroom door.

She looked at her watch. She had left the public figure-skating session at the Sherman Ice Arena twenty minutes after it started. There was time to return.

Marla had grown up in Sherman, had been a member of the Sherman Figure Skating Club, had performed in all of its annual shows, including *Alice in Wonderland*, *Cinderella*, and, when a physics professor at Ohio Eastern University with moderate skating talent but a large wallet had financed the production, a mash-up of H.G. Wells’ *The Time Machine* and *The War of the Worlds*. But after minutes on the ice, she’d felt brittle and twice as old as she was. She absorbed the stares of the other skaters—teenagers on awkward first dates, young children in safety helmets and their bored parents, twins in pink skating dresses doing side-by-side, identical spirals as if in a TV ad for Doublemint gum—all of them doubtless wondering why a fifty-year-old

woman was spending her Friday night performing torturous half loops and enervated scratch spins at center ice. She imagined their mockery pouring on her like ice water. So she'd fled, disgraced.

She looked at her watch again. There was more than an hour of ice time left. Her return, at once half an hour later and thirty years earlier, would be nothing less than triumphant.



The couples therapist Marla and Dave had seen in Baltimore, where they'd lived for twenty-eight years prior to moving back to Sherman the previous January, believed Dave was experiencing a mid-life crisis. He and Marla were heading with alarming speed toward their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary and fiftieth birthdays. If Dave's mid-life anxieties could be channeled into relatively tame extravagances, such as sports cars or powerboats, the marriage could be saved, the therapist said. If as remedy he sought the company of women, he risked exploding it.

Dave's job as a cardiologist at Johns Hopkins offered him ample opportunity for extramarital adventure. Early in their marriage, he'd had an affair with an emergency-room nurse, a transgression he tearfully confessed to Marla and which she forgave. There may have been other betrayals to which he hadn't confessed. But he seemed sincere about fighting off his midlife demons, which is why their return to their hometown had been so promising. He had been offered a job as chief of cardiology at Ohio Eastern University Hospital. They would resurrect their relationship in the place it had been born.

When, three months into their return, Dave reconnected with his high-school girlfriend, she wasn't worried. The woman, Greta, was dying of esophageal cancer, and Dave's pilgrimages to her bedside seemed to Marla nostalgic rather than romantic. What she hadn't foreseen was the presence of Greta's twenty-seven-year-old daughter at her mother's bedside. A month after Greta's death, Dave asked Marla for a divorce so he could marry the woman Marla soon referred to as Greta Fucking Junior.



At the Sherman Ice Arena, Marla held center ice like a master magician holds the stage. The teenagers and parents who previously had cast disdainful and pitying gazes her way now stared at her with amazement. Marla's performance was all the more stunning because she was using rental

skates. What she could have done with a pair of Kristi Yamaguchi-endorsed, titanium-bladed Riedell figure skates!

As the night grew later, the crowd changed. Families departed, college students arrived. A disco ball descended from the scoreboard above center ice, spraying blue, red, and green light around the rink. What would fifty-year-old Marla think of such a display? Twenty-year-old Marla didn't know. But twenty-year-old Marla loved it. She spun, she jumped, she did a shoot-the-duck from one end of the rink to the other, drawing a warning from one of the skate guards to "Be careful. Skating blades are like knives."

Back at center ice, she caught the eye of a young man in an Ohio Eastern sweatshirt whose hair was a swirl of blond and brown and whose chin had the straight edge of a guillotine. He wasn't the most elegant skater, but he was fearless, whirling around her like a storm.



When Marla returned to her house, it was nearly three in the morning. She discovered Fifty on the closet floor, sleeping, her snores as loud as fog horns. Is this what I sound like? Marla wondered, appalled. She opted against waking the woman, but Fifty, dressed in pajamas, cracked open her eyes. "You smell like beer," she said. "And cigarettes."

"I went out after ice skating," Marla said.

"With whom?"

"Friends."

"All of our friends go to bed before ten."

"All of *your* friends go to bed before ten. These are new friends."

"Do tell."

So Marla did, sanitizing the part in which she and Kevin, the blond-brown from the rink, found themselves sharing a bottle of vodka and each other's lips in a basement somewhere in Partytown, Sherman's student-dominated neighborhood.

"Sounds fun," Fifty concluded.

"It was."

"I'm hungry."

"Oh," Marla said and realized that she, too, was hungry. "I'll make us something."

With apologies, Marla locked up Fifty again and found her way to the kitchen. She hadn't become a serious cook until her children were born, and, because this hadn't yet happened, she discovered she knew only the bare fundamentals. Indeed, she remembered only the outlines of her life

after age twenty. She returned to Fifty carrying two bowls of out-of-a-box mac and cheese.

After her first bite, Fifty shivered. “You’ve overcooked the noodles,” she said, “and this cheese mix tastes like gun powder.”

“Bang, bang,” Marla said, although after she ate a forkful, she understood the criticism. But she was hungry enough to eat it all. Fifty didn’t feel the same compulsion.

“Why don’t you let me cook next time?” Fifty said.

Marla sensed a ruse. If she allowed Fifty out of her prison, who knew what she might do. Her biggest worry was being reunited, in a single body, with the old woman.

“Next time, I’ll order in,” Marla said. She grabbed Fifty’s bowl and stepped out of the closet.

“Could you at least loan me a pillow?” Fifty asked.

“You can have the whole bedroom,” Marla said. When she invited Kevin to the house, she wouldn’t want him anywhere near Fifty. Marla would make use of the guest bedroom in the basement. After she left the master bedroom, she propped the chair under the door handle. “Sweet dreams,” she said to the closed door.

“I could make us breakfast tomorrow,” Fifty said. “Eggs, bacon, pancakes.”

“I’ll think about it,” Marla said.



“A gun?” Fifty asked incredulously. It was lunchtime a week later.

“How else am I going to be sure you stay put?” Marla shot back.

“Where’d you even get it?”

“Kevin.”

“What does he need with a gun? He’s a college student.”

“He’s on the rifle team.”

“And the rifle team has started using Saturday Night Specials?”

“He’s worried about crime in his neighborhood,” Marla said.

“He lives in Partytown,” Fifty said. “The only crime he’s likely to see is a drunk college kid pissing on his lawn.”

“He doesn’t have a lawn,” Marla admitted. “Okay, maybe he has a gun fetish. I don’t know.”

“Does he have tattoos?”

“Who are you?” Marla shot back, exasperated. “My mother?”

“Worse. I’m you plus thirty years.”

“He’s sexy. In bed, he’s even sexier.”

“I hope you’re using proper protection.”

“Like you did when you were my age?”

This silenced the older woman. After a moment, she said, “So you’re going to set me free?”

“In order to make lunch. If I have to eat one more slice of pizza, I’m going to barf.”

“So I’ll be cooking with a gun to my head.”

“I’ll only use it if you try anything suspicious.”

“Like what? Experimenting with oregano?”

They stepped into the kitchen. Three bags of groceries were piled on the counter. “I didn’t really know what to get,” Marla said, “except for chocolate.”

“My favorite,” Fifty said. “*Our* favorite, I suppose.”

“I got a little of everything. Chicken, vegetables, fruit, bread, and a bottle of mouthwash.”

“I could use some floss,” Fifty said.

“I never floss.”

“Which is why I need to.”

“Oh. Well, I’ve run out of cash.”

“It happens when a person doesn’t have a job.”

“You’ll have to tell me the pin number of your ATM card.”

“You don’t remember?”

“No,” Marla admitted.

Fifty smiled. “I’m not telling you.”

Marla wagged the gun at the older woman. “I never thought I’d threaten myself with a gun,” she said. “But here I go.” In as stern a voice as she could muster, she said, “Give me the goddamn PIN.”

“Or...?”

“Or I’ll shoot you.”

“Which would be a kind of suicide, wouldn’t it?”

“I don’t know what it would be.”

“And you still wouldn’t have the PIN.”

“You’re willing to die over a PIN?”

“I’m not sure I’m even alive.” Fifty paused. “Or maybe I’m half alive.”

“What do you mean?” Marla asked. It was a serious question. Ever since she’d freed herself from her fifty-year-old body, she’d had the feeling that something was missing.

“Some of the old impulses—relating to eating, drinking, and being merry—have diminished, replaced by a somewhat disconcerting absence of

longing,” Fifty said. “I feel older than fifty; I feel more like eighty. It’s as if I gained the years you lost.”

“Sorry,” Marla said, although she wasn’t.

“I feel like a Buddhist. Or a ghost.” She tapped her finger against her lips. “I can’t say I’m unhappy about it. It’s just...well...new.”

Marla smiled. “So we’re both loving life.”

“You’re loving life,” Fifty said. “I’m beginning to relish the absence of desire.” She looked past Marla, a peaceful look on her face, before gazing at her again. “I think the two of us should work together.”

“Explain.”

“We each have certain skill sets. I know how to cook, hold down a job, run a house. You know how to skate like an angel, attract the attentions of virile young men, and sleep until noon. But in order to function fully, I need to move about without a gun trained at my head.”

“I don’t trust you.”

“Why?” Fifty asked.

“Because the whole reason I am who I am is because I didn’t want to be who you are.”

“Which means what?”

“Which means when I drop my guard, you’ll jump me and we’ll be one person again.”

“Perhaps I didn’t make this clear: I like who I am. To no longer want to land a double axel? To no longer crave a man who I imagine would offer stimulating conversation and a medley of orgasms but proves borderline psychotic or, worse, boring? One word: freedom. Freedom from want! What a joy!”

“I still don’t believe you.”

“Why?”

“Because I can’t imagine ever wanting to give up figure skating or fucking.”

“I didn’t say I wanted to give up either. I said the desire to do both no longer consumes me.”

Marla sighed.

“Still don’t believe me?” Fifty asked.

“I’m hungry,” Marla said.

“Let me fix us a meal. We’ll talk afterwards.”

Fifty’s meal was splendid, and Marla responded to it the way she did sometimes long ago to splendid, filling meals: She fell asleep at the table.

When she awoke, Fifty was gone. Of course she was. Marla wondered if the old woman had put Dramamine in her meal. Or perhaps the witch

had simply cast a spell. She stomped around the house in a fury. But after a minute of loud petulance, Marla realized the situation could have been worse—far worse. Fifty could have pounced on her, unifying them again.

A few minutes later, Fifty returned. She had gone to the ATM. She slid \$20 across the kitchen counter to Marla. Marla's happiness at seeing the old woman return was tempered by her graying counterpart's stinginess. "Is this it?" Marla wanted to say. But she checked herself. If she needed money later, she would slip it out of Fifty's wallet.

"The afternoon is all yours," Fifty said.

"Great!" Marla said. There was a freestyle session at the skating rink. Afterwards, she was supposed to meet Kevin, although he'd been vague about the time and location. It didn't matter. She was young; she could be casual.

"Kevin Peterson is the boy you're dating, correct?" Fifty asked her.

Marla looked at the old woman suspiciously before nodding. "Do you know him?"

"I know of him. He's the younger brother of the woman who is now our—my—ex-husband's wife."

"Is this a problem?"

"For me? No."

"What about for me?"

"I would hate to prejudice your feelings toward him."

"What do you mean? Do you know something?"

"It's nothing," Fifty said. "As you said, I'm not your mother."

"Come on. Tell me."

"I won't tell you." Fifty looked at her with what, shockingly, was sympathy. "But if I had a few words of advice, they would be: Guard your heart."



Fifty was right. Kevin broke her heart—and quickly. Three weeks after her conversation with the old woman, Marla discovered Kevin's secret: He was in a long-term relationship with a junior at St. Mary's College in Cleveland. She was, Marla deduced, the virgin he aspired to marry. He'd taken her to the Valentine's Ball at Ohio Eastern. For several days preceding the ball, Marla had pestered him to take her. Finally, frustrated with her lobbying, he had admitted the truth. She called him a two-timing asshole. He accepted her criticism with a shrug. "My door's always open to you," he added.

"Well, my door is locked and bolted," Marla replied.

When Marla returned home, she sobbed at the kitchen table as Fifty of-

ferred consolation in the form of strawberry-banana crepes with a chocolate garnish.

Toward the end of the night, Fifty gazed at her with pity and said, “I should be envious of you. Your youth. Your beauty. But I wouldn’t trade places with you right now even if on top of your beauty and youth, I inherited an Italian villa.”

Marla’s eyes remained tear-filled. “You wouldn’t?” she asked pitifully.

“But only because the one time I went to Italy I became so constipated on pasta I had to drink a 32-ounce bottle of prune juice to remedy the situation.”

Marla tried to smile. When she failed, Fifty smiled for her. “I’d like to say it gets better,” Fifty said.

“Why don’t you?”

“Because it wouldn’t be true.”

Marla eyed her. “Are you just saying that?”

“What do you mean?”

“Saying that it won’t get better because you’re jealous and you want me back?”

Fifty smiled again. “Do I look like I’m jealous and want you back?”

Marla considered the old woman’s face. It wore all of her fifty years and more. Even so, its serenity made it attractive and appealing—beautiful even.

“Even if romance fails,” Fifty said, “you always have figure skating.”

“Yes, I do,” Marla said, although with less conviction than she’d wanted.



Two days later, Fifty returned from a trip to Cleveland with a pair of Kristi Yamaguchi-endorsed Riedell figure skates with titanium blades.

“How did you know my size?” Marla asked, but immediately she knew, and both women laughed.

They were superb skates, and the next time Marla was on the ice, during a freestyle session, she moved and spun and jumped like an aspiring Olympian. Only one of the nine other figure skaters on the ice complimented her. The rest gave her envious glances and worked harder on their axels and lutztes. She shouldn’t have expected anything else. She knew this world; if friendship existed between figure skaters, it was inevitably between figure skaters of widely different abilities. Nevertheless, she felt an overpowering loneliness. It wasn’t unfamiliar, and yet it hit with the force of revelation. She skated to the end of the rink and stared up at the scoreboard’s large digital clock, clicking off the seconds. She wondered when Fifty had stopped

skating seriously. Might this, she wondered, have been the moment she quit?

But what would I do without skating? she wondered.

She answered: College. Or a job.

But neither seemed desirable. Or, rather, they seemed to require from her a commitment she wasn't prepared—or prepared yet—to make. She wondered what Fifty had done when she was twenty. Marla should know—it was her history, after all. No, it was her future and it was a mystery.

For several weeks, she returned to freestyle sessions at the Sherman Ice Arena, something Fifty encouraged her to do, but the pizzazz was gone. She spent public skating sessions within the circle of orange cones at center ice, spinning like a ballerina on a speeded-up music box and hoping to impress whoever drifted, stumbled, staggered, and sometimes even skated by. After her disaster with Kevin, however, men of her age at the rink seemed unappealing and immature. Sometimes as she skated, Marla scanned the bleachers behind the Plexiglas to see if there was a divorced father who, glancing up from his laptop or newspaper, might catch her eye. She decided she might even settle for a married man, someone who could at least show her a good time. If she sounded desperate, it was because she had shed thirty years specifically to be thrilled and she found the gap between what she'd desired and what she'd discovered confounding and frustrating.

Compounding her feelings of loneliness and desperation was the contrast between her life and Fifty's. Fifty, who made a living as a freelance technical writer and editor, attended public lectures at Ohio Eastern University several nights a week. The topics ranged from global warming to "The Art of Cilantro." She'd also enrolled in a Chinese language class.

Marla tried to express enthusiasm for Fifty's life—the old woman had been good to her, after all—but it was a struggle. She found herself examining Fifty with envy, noting how she seemed less old every day, seemed to be enjoying a renaissance not only of spirit but of body. By contrast, whenever Marla looked in the mirror, she saw a puffiness that suggested more than her recent uninhibited devouring of Fifty's meals and her post-midnight raids on what the two women had dubbed "the chocolate cupboard." It spoke of weariness and disappointment and an ungraceful move from youth to maturity.

She knew there were better remedies to her blue mood than drinking, than drugs, than boys. But these were the most accessible. One night it was Henry with a six-pack and marijuana. Another night it was James with bourbon and painkillers. A third night it was Eddie with vodka and cocaine. The basement bedroom resonated with her lonely debauchery. Fifty didn't

complain about the unseemliness of her behavior, but over meals she did eye Marla with unmistakable compassion. Marla might have felt patronized if she didn't believe Fifty's concern was sincere.

Intuitively, Marla recognized a danger in appearing unhinged and at loose ends, although she thought the consequences would be no direr than a stern lecture from her older self. Over dinner one night, she tried to be upbeat in Fifty's presence. But she'd never been much of an actress, and by the time Fifty served chocolate pie with chocolate ice cream, her expression had fallen. I wanted this life, she thought, although her reasons—to skate brilliantly, to dazzle boys with her beauty—seemed less the fantasies of a middle-aged woman than of a twelve-year-old girl.

One night, she brought home Mike, a 19-year-old she met at the rink. He was so drunk on Sherman Slammer, the local moonshine, that he collapsed in the foyer of the house before he could remove his shoes. To compound the disaster, he peed his pants, his urine soaking through Fifty's Guatemalan rug and onto the white carpet. As he lay unconscious, Marla picked up a letter opener off a nearby bookshelf and fantasized about driving it into his neck. Instead, she imitated slashing it across her wrist. There must be a better way, she thought.

Although the answer presented itself quickly, she at first resisted. It seemed to her the equivalent of heading off on a safari only to reach an impassable section of trail and, with fantasies of seeing tigers and lions crushed, turning back, defeated. But she could see no alternative.

The next afternoon, Fifty invited her into the master bedroom in order to show her the dress she planned to wear on her evening date.

"What date?" Marla asked.

"He's a professor of art history," Fifty said, posing in front of her floor-to-ceiling mirror. "I've attended three of his lectures. After each, he asked me on dates. Third time was the charm."

Fifty glowed like a firefly, her aura so strong it projected light in all directions. It wasn't fair, Marla decided, that in freeing herself from Fifty, she'd made the old woman happy. It was supposed to work the opposite way.

Now? Marla wondered of her plan.

Now, she decided, but Fifty said, "Hold on a minute. I bought new earrings. I left them in the living room."

She stepped out of the bedroom and shut the door. Presently, Marla heard a familiar sound.

"Are you putting a chair against the door?" Marla asked. She turned the handle but the door didn't budge. "Let me out!"

"It won't be permanent," Fifty said. "But I know what you're thinking."

“How do you know?”

“Because I’ve been you!”

Although Marla continued her protest, she suspected Fifty had left the house. Marla immediately thought of the window. If a fifty-year-old woman might hesitate to jump from the second floor, a twenty-year old, with less brittle bones, wouldn’t think twice about it—unless there was something below the window to deter her. Which there was. Fifty, old but wise, had decorated the landing spot with shovels, knives, pitchforks, and other assorted tools, weapons, and utensils. Marla might have cursed if her anger hadn’t been superseded by admiration. *I will be this smart one day*, she thought.

She considered other ways to escape. She contemplated chipping a tunnel in the drywall, but Fifty had removed from the bedroom any items that might serve to break down the walls, including several old figure-skating trophies. The best Marla had was a hairbrush. She fantasized about removing the toilet and escaping via sewer pipes. Or, barring this, flushing a message, protected in a ziplock bag (of which she had a single one), down the toilet and hoping someone might discover it and free her.

Days passed, and although Marla couldn’t complain about the meals Fifty served her, nor about much of anything else—Fifty fed her copies of *People* and *US Weekly* and even installed an exercise bicycle in the bedroom—she’d had enough of her unsettled youth. She wanted serenity, stability, freedom from the intense and wild demands of her heart and libido and the downward pull of depression. She wanted to be Fifty.

Weeks into Marla’s captivity, Fifty, despite mild protestations to the contrary, didn’t seem any closer to releasing her. It was essential, therefore, for Marla to act on a plan she’d recently conceived, although if she failed, she might never have another opportunity.

To pass the time, Marla indulged in frequent baths, a practice Fifty criticized, albeit mildly, because of the water bill. In addition to using the baths as boredom breakers and relaxation inducers, Marla employed them as a practice ground for the execution of her plan. A dozen times during a bath, she slipped under the water and held her breath for as long as she could. Initially, she could manage only twenty-five seconds. But after a couple of weeks, she was pushing two minutes. After a month, she was a submarine.

Fifty was a woman of routine, and this worked to Marla’s advantage. She knew to draw her bath five minutes before six p.m., immediately before Fifty marched into the room with her dinner. In order to ascertain that Marla was nowhere near her when she stepped into the room, Fifty insisted that Marla sing to her from afar. Today, Marla, who’d stripped in preparation for her bath, sang from the edge of the tub. The song was “Reunited,”

which Marla realized only after she started was a hint of her intentions. Thankfully, Fifty didn't seem to notice.

The bathroom door was open, so the two women could see each other. Fifty placed Marla's dinner at the foot of the bed. "Enjoy," she said, which is what she always said.

"I'll eat after my bath," Marla said, and she slipped into the tub—literally slipped. "Oh!" she exclaimed as her feet slid out from under her. She was under water, on her back, gazing up like a zombie. She started counting in her head, as she did when she practiced.

Fifty didn't charge into the bathroom, as Marla had hoped. Marla wondered if the old woman had left the bedroom already, oblivious to the staged tragedy unfolding in the bathtub. She considered surfacing and implementing her plan another day. But she waited, and she was rewarded seconds later when Fifty appeared above her, a watery blur of gray hair and concern. Fifty said nothing, and although Marla couldn't make out the woman's features, she guessed she was scrutinizing her, worried about a trick.

Perhaps ten seconds ticked past, and Marla felt the first throbs of desire to breathe. In lockstep with her blossoming panic was a feeling of incredulity: Was Fifty really going to let her drown? If this was the case, she had underestimated the woman's—and her own future—compassion. Or perhaps Fifty knew exactly how many seconds a brain could be deprived of oxygen before permanent damage set in. How long could this be? Marla wondered. Two minutes? Ten minutes? Half an hour?

She couldn't last much longer.

Marla heard Fifty's words, garbled as if over a bad connection: "This isn't a trap, is it? Please swear to me it isn't a trap."

But if Marla swore it wasn't a trap, she would in fact be admitting it was a trap. She continued to gaze, zombie-like, up into the woman's looming face, the desire to breath becoming progressively overwhelming. She thought briefly of springing from the bath, as a woman had done in a horror movie she'd seen, but she suspected Fifty would be prepared for such an assault and would evade it. No, she had to stick with the plan: She needed the old woman to come to her.

Two minutes must have passed, and Marla wondered if it was possible she could, in fact, die, black out and die, as her suspicious older self looked down. If she died, would Fifty die? Or would she remain as she was now, stripped of the young portion of her, absent its life-affirming but life-confusing energy? Perhaps Fifty was debating this very concern. Deciding she could give herself only ten seconds more, Marla began an urgent countdown in her head. *Ten, nine, eight...* Fifty continued to gaze down at her from

godly heights...*Seven, six, five...* "I've seen *Fatal Attraction*," Fifty mumbled. "Please don't let this be a sequel." ...*Four, three, two...* Marla wondered if it would have been better to return to a different age. Thirty-one, thirty-two, thirty-three—they were the real golden era, weren't they? And her tenth year had been delightful, she believed, although her depleted brain would admit no memories of this time... *One*.

Suddenly, Fifty's face was suspended inches from hers, as if through a watery window. Marla felt the old woman's hands reach under her arms and draw her up. At the same time, Marla reached for Fifty, looping her arms around her waist. Marla had gravity and strength on her side, but Fifty had craftiness. She tickled Marla's armpits. The sensation was so shocking she nearly lost hold of the old woman. But she held on, and Fifty crashed into her. Their embrace was half a dance, half a wrestling match. Eventually, it was a coupling more intimate than sex.

The water rose around them before rolling into a wave and spitting them out of the tub as if onto a shore. By now it was hard to determine who was who, as they had mostly merged into one body, but somebody said, "I want," and somebody else, or the same person, repeated, "I want," and there was laughter undercut by tears, or the inverse. Even before she crawled to the closet, to the mirror, she knew who she was, although she wondered about the value of such wisdom when she couldn't recall, though she now wanted to, desperately, what chocolate had tasted like the very first time.

PAINT ME

Elizabeth Acevedo

with wide brushes
coil my hair
pepper some salt
loose
over both shoulders.

Let there be creases
in the skin
folds that hide
these secrets
full of shadows
let me be
Frida Kahlo-ed
braided into myself,
no still life
North American apple.

Lounging here
in a bookworm's room
show the words
that have mountained
at my bare feet

that have stood
me up.

I was not born
for stillness
let them see
this woman of acrylic
throbbing canvas.

Show them this mango
heart
ripening.

MEET PILGRIM*Rebecca Foust*

on-the-wane, kids grown and gone.
Who, voice-trained from birth in desire,
wakes one morning wanting—nothing—
in the way of things. Wanting some not-thing
not quite not-seen. Her dreams
—Macy's-parade-balloon-sized dreams—
now lie, a tangle of downed silk and line.
Waist-deep in bright ruin, she labors to sing,
wondering if wanting is after all, all
there is. Somewhere far away old ice recedes;
somewhere a new war combusts. Here, rain is rare
and Pilgrim sings her scales to the dust.
House of no children, guest room of no guest;
no god or guide, a broken song. Her quest.

WHY PILGRIM?*Rebecca Foust*

Yes, *Pilgrim*'s a buzz-kill: dour, dry, dull;
 what's cool now is hurling the word,
 an insult, at white racists.
 Yes, colonists were colonialists
 and for Native Americans, *Pilgrim*
 means genocide. But weren't some of them
 —Anne Bradstreet was one—also idealists,
 striving and brave? Look how the word
 constellates a whole world: *girl, glim, imp,*
grip, grim, rip, lip, not to mention
 the wondrous *pi*. Also, yes, *pig*.
Pilgrim holds—good and bad—what I am,
 featured here in its radicle form:
 seeker, someone who leaves her home.

THE PRIME MOVER

Rebecca Foust

In Pilgrim's childhood home, the prime mover
was not having enough to pay the bills.
Her father smelled like failure because
he could not pay the bills. At family meals
her mother said they lost the house he'd framed
and she'd laid the floors in, because they could not
pay the bills. After the divorce, Dad died
in IRS hock; Mom's heir was Goodwill.
In the *Sears Wish Book*, Pilgrim longed less
for the Things than the glossy intact lives holding
the Things. Weekends, she worked a rag over
a rich family's silver, vowing like Scarlet never
to eat dirt again. So clear then, the rules:
better yourself. Work hard. Save. Pay the bills.

MAYBERRY 94957*Rebecca Foust*

Everything was plu-perfect, gosh-darn-it,
till Pilgrim's kid got tagged autistic
and the PTA moms froze her out
with their Tupperware optimistic
"best for him, too's," not to raise hope
re: invites to parties, and Jeez-O-Pete but
when their kids played crack-the-whip
with him the one cracked, into the wall.
it got tough to stay nice and polite
when she heard "a little blood that's all,
boys being boys." Yes, Pilgrim was pissed,
her boy razzed every day, maybe twice:
"got Prozac?" And about what brick does,
on contact, to a child's perfect face.

THE NEWS DU JOUR

Rebecca Foust

Someone's still knocking. It's Ira, a man
outré'd by outrage. "What's your deal?" he grates,
pushing past. "Just take a look at this line."
He's right; they *all* want in. Pilgrim waits,
re-reading a page before flipping him off,
then returns to the party. It's still there.
She wants someone to talk to. Enough
of the holier-than-thou crap, now where
was that Beat Poet said to be a guest?
A bit short in the toothsome department,
but he'd published six books. Duly impressed,
she scans the room. There he is, refulgent
among fans, deploring the news du jour:
genetics, *Real Housewives*, the market, and war.

(THE NEW) EUGENICS*Rebecca Foust*

They were talking about the new God gene,
 saying Spirulina + Divine pills
 could not be far behind—take one with meals
 to channel Augustine, and to know how
 to vote—. Others had, if less tolerance,
 more hope: “at least we don’t rant on late-night TV
 for a God who tends only straight, white, sheep,
 and damns the raped strays.” All agreed global chants
 had not worked, nor mushrooms; tantric sex
 was fun. But this gene, in the right hands,
 (how hard can it be to sequence two strands?)
 could make Manson Ghandi! Stage a Beatles reprise!
 Pilgrim felt grim: *just make sure you spell Lennon
 with an “o” and two “n’s”—no more purges, please.*

JE EST UN AUTRE

—after Rimbaud

Rebecca Foust

At that night's party, it happens. You meet
 someone you like, very much. True, your new
 friend's tastes are a tad parvenu,
 and she wears too much bling (Take off
 the last piece you put on, Mom always said,
 to look well-bred.) Still, you talk books,
 politics, not just little Cromwell's score
 on the PSAT. What a relief not to be
 all alone, how lovely to agree
 on so many things! But when you raise a hand
 to your hair, they catch the light:
 your own rings. Yes, it's a mirror, and—shit—
 you talking into it. A zero sum game,
 and there you are, inside the gilt frame.

BANE LAID ON BEHALF OF THE LATEST LATE WIFE

Rebecca Foust

Let three times in ten years be the charm,
this third suicide no aging trophy-wife,
more an it-could-be-you-or-me kind of wife
who got lost in sorrow and shame,
her niece hit-and-run-from on the same day
the divorce decree came in the mail.
A poem might say night draped its violet shawl
across the grass where she lay—but—she lay naked,
sprawled. Gin, and a fistful of pills to maim
—was it the little-p or big-P?—pain.
All we know is it's happened again. And again
in our postcard town. Let three times be the charm
that lifts the bane. Or lays it on the men:
may you be left. Poison yourselves. Jump. Drown.

HOW I DODGED THE DRAFT AND LEARNED TO LICK THE CHINESE REDS

Peter Michelson

“Gentlemen,” Captain Grimke announced periodically, “if any of you have trouble with your draft board inform me immediately.”

Captain Grimke, as I’ll call him, was the commanding officer for my Air Force ROTC unit. In those days you had to enroll in ROTC if you were at a land grant school. Those days were the Korean War. Trouble with your draft board meant that it wanted you to serve your country. I elected Air Force because it was the only one of the service reserves that didn’t oblige you to carry a rifle when you marched. “This is your rifle,” the Army cadets sang out in imitation of a boot camp ditty, “That is your gun. / This is for business, / That is for fun.” Also Sanka was in the Air Force unit. Sanka was two or three years older than I and one of the three other guys from my neighborhood to go to college. He was going for a commission in the regular Air Force, which he later got. He became a lifer. He was a long, lanky southpaw and a pretty good first baseman, but his very deliberate country boy manner made him seem a little slow upstairs. That’s why we called him Sanka, “90% of the active ingredients have been removed from the bean.”

As long as you kept your grades above the 70th percentile of your class the draft board left you alone. Maybe it was the 50th percentile but anyway wasn’t all that difficult, especially since the grades of the women weren’t figured in the calculation. If you fell below that level you could take your “greetings” to Captain Grimke. Occasionally he could finesse you out of Selective Service clutches and keep you in school. If your case was hopeless he could get you enlisted in the Air Force. That kept you a long way from a free fire zone and got him a recruitment bonus. We were all in the draft dodge, including the Captain.

In those days college was a passport to whatever you could imagine, which for most of us wasn’t much more than a summer job. And even in the union hall you got preference if you were a student. I was in the Hod Carriers and Construction Laborers Local thanks to Kenny’s father. The union gambit was that you couldn’t get in the union if you didn’t have a job, and you couldn’t get a job without being in the union. Kenny’s father was a brick mason, and he gave me a job so I could get in the union. At the end of the spring term I’d go in to the union hall and put my name on the job list. There might be 35 or 40 guys ahead of me who had been waiting maybe a couple of days to get work. But in about fifteen minutes the agent would

send me out on a job. And nobody got pissed off. I was a college student, and everyone accepted that as the way of the world.

Adolph was an exception. The union agent asked me if I could drive a truck. Sure, I said. I had once driven a truck about a mile and never got out of low gear. He sent me over to Baugh Construction Company. Adolph was a foreman.

Bob Baugh, called “BaaBaa” by his crew, was the big boss, a youngish guy who liked to hire college kids. He turned me over to Adolph. Adolph was about sixty, or maybe ninety, weathered and wiry and categorically intolerant of incompetence. Not even BaaBaa argued with Adolph. Adolph took one look at me and knew I was incompetent. He waited until BaaBaa was gone. Adolph might be a foreman, but he subscribed to the worker’s code, and he didn’t put you on the spot in front of the paymaster.

“*Boy, you sure you can handle a truck.*” It wasn’t a question. His natural attitude was a glower, and his dark eyes were set under heavy brows like an eagle.

I was sure, I lied, but somewhat less glibly than I had to BaaBaa.

“We’re talking about a brand new truck, Boy. We’re going to the dealer to fetch it. They just put the bed on. You can’t handle a truck through heavy traffic, Boy, you tell me *right now.*”

I said I could. Adolph grunted.

On the way to the dealer Adolph said, “You’re lucky this truck’s new, Boy...got synchronized gears.”

“Synchronized gears!” I said, the way you might say *What’ll they think of next.*

“Synchronized gears,” Adolph repeated grimly. “You’re lucky, Boy.”

It was a red Ford, and its wide, flat bed had a hydraulic lift so that it could double as a dump truck. It was a utility truck for the company. I was to be its driver and a utility worker, going from one job site to another as need required. BaaBaa figured a college boy was less likely than the standard construction worker to stop at a bar enroute and get snookered. The Ford had a manual in the glove compartment.

“I think I’ll look this over a minute,” I said to Adolph, scanning the index for synchronized gears.

“You do that, Boy,” Adolph said, “less you want me to drive it.”

I shook my head.

“Truck’s insured, Boy, but I don’t figure to collect on the first day.” His eyes probed my pituitary lobes. “Understand me, Boy?”

I got the truck back to the office all right. By the time I arrived I was handling it pretty well. Synchronized gears, as I discovered in the manual,

meant that it shifted like a car, no need to double clutch between gears. The next morning Adolph sent me to pick up a load of lumber.

I was feeling pretty cocky when I pulled into the yard. The important thing was to *look* like you knew what you were doing. I watched a truck ahead of me get loaded. It seemed pretty basic. The forklift put the lumber on the bed, you cinched it down with the chain clamps and went on your way.

But several esoteric points escaped my observation. One was that the lumber sat on a pallet four inches high and required a 4x4 to stabilize its back end. The second was that if you were loading two pallets side by side, as I was, you had to make sure not only that both were centered on the bed but also that there was no space between them inviting the load to shift. The third was that any load riding higher than the cab, and mine was about three feet higher, made the truck ride top-heavy. The fourth was that a load longer than the bed, and mine had a six foot overhang, induced a whip effect both up/down and sidewise. The fifth was that the law required an overhang of more than two feet to have a red flag attached.

On the street I discovered that the truck under heavy freight was a rather different animal. The combination of the slightly off center load and the up/down whip effect produced a dissonant bounce that made for tricky navigation. Traffic and hills obliged me to do a good deal of shifting down. The synchronized clutch no doubt helped, but my neophyte expertise nonetheless generated a lurch at each shift. This had an unhealthy effect on the stability of the mass. Still, I was doing okay until I had to make a left turn off a downhill slope, which introduced a tangential factor into the equation.

It could have been worse, much worse. I believe I addressed the constants—mass, velocity and centripetal force—quite reasonably: I slowed down for the turn. On the other hand, I failed to calculate the variables. In fact it never occurred to me that there were variables to calculate until I was halfway through the turn. At which point they all came into play at once. I discovered that however slowly I may have been going I was going too fast.

The whip effect, theretofore only a vertical destabilizer, now added a sidewise momentum. This was aggravated by the load's off center imbalance on the bed and facilitated by its top-heavy throw weight and the space between the two pallets of lumber. In short, the load shifted in accord with the laws of nature. At that moment I had what Mr. Joyce calls an epiphany and what certain Buddhists call *satori* about those laws. It was somewhat academic, however. The truck was out of my control.

Instinctively I spun the steering wheel against the turn, as one would do skidding on ice. This possibly averted total disaster but also caused the load

to shift back against its momentum and sent the truck over the sidewalk curb in sullen slow motion toward a high wooden fence. I spun the wheel the other way and jammed my foot on the brake. The former move was well advised but the latter should have been modulated. The load shifted abruptly back against itself, tilting the truck up onto its right side wheels. The truck broadsided the fence, which was luckily of industrial strength, came to a stop, momentarily straining against the fence, and then dropped back onto all fours.

I sat in the cab, both hands on the wheel. I was surprisingly calm, almost anesthetized. I got out and surveyed the situation. The fence was unharmed except for signs of the scrape. The truck's right fender was creased and the side view mirror cracked, no other damage. The lumber was still chained to the bed but, in the whip lashes, had fanned out like a peacock's tail. I adjusted the chain clamps as well as I could, got back into the cab, waved to the small gathering of kibitzers, drove off the sidewalk over the curb and down the street, the tail of lumber fanning out a lane and a half wide behind me.

Six blocks later a cop stopped me. He gave me a ticket for obstructing traffic with my tail and for not displaying a red flag.

By the time I pulled onto the construction site I was a veteran truck driver. I was also sweating profusely. The carpenters were highly amused at the fan tailed lumber.

"Son of a bitch if they didn't send us a big, red turkey," someone shouted.

Adolph stood there with his hands on his hips, his face impassive in its customary glower, his fierce eyes taking it all in. He walked around the truck, paused at the cracked mirror and stopped in front of the creased fender. He looked at the fender, rubbed his grizzled chin, and looked at me. He obviously surmised everything that had happened, including the ticket. He looked back at the fender. His voice was as calm and flat and hard as a sheet of steel.

"Boy...Don't you ever...ever...*ever*...do that again," was all he said. I never did.

Adolph was pretty much on my case that whole summer. I used to grumble about it to Sam Watanabe. Sam was one of the carpenters.

"Yeah, Adolph gets on your back," Sam said, "but he never gets on your back about anything you don't expect him to. There's a lot you don't know, and he expects you to learn it. But you be straight with Adolph, he'll be straight with you."

Being "straight" was important to Sam. He was a Nisei veteran of World

War II.

“A lot of these guys,” Sam said, waving his hammer to include the workers on the site, “are nice as pie to my face, but behind my back...it’s the Jap this and the Jap that. Christ, I’ve got more respect for the ones that are racists up front. I’ve had guys come up to me and ask, Hey Sam, what about Jap women, they really got their cunts on sideways?”

Sam knew a lot about labor history and also the history of the second world war inside out. Since Dave Beck had been thrown into MacNeil Island for tax evasion, and he was from Seattle, his case got a good deal of discussion among the work force. Sam was sympathetic.

“Sure, Beck skimmed some cream off the top. You expect that. Look, that’s SOP for businessmen, and everybody knows it. But the fact is Dave Beck was a good union man. He was a good organizer. He got good wages, and he got good benefits. He probably was a crook, but, Christ, they’re *all* crooks. He was good for the union movement. And that’s why they were after him. The only thing I’ve got against my union is they want to tell me what size hammer to use.” Sam’s hammer had a longer handle and heavier head than union regulations permitted. “I don’t want to drive any more nails than anyone else. But when I drive that baby in I want it to stay *in*...” Sam grinned and winked, “And my wife agrees with me.”

In general Sam was humorous and cynical. But about the Japanese relocation camps he was mainly bitter. He had been seventeen at the time.

“They gave us two hours,” he said, “They came around and told us to pack up what we could carry, and they loaded us on a bus two hours later. The first thing my grandfather packed was his copy of Shakespeare’s works. My grandfather read every word Shakespeare ever wrote, several times. He wrote little comments in the margins in Japanese. I’ve still got that book. He died in that pen they put us in. They shipped us to Idaho and put us in a bunch of quonset huts with a steel fence around them. Outside the fence they had armed guards. That’s where my grandfather died, with his book of Shakespeare’s works.

“Then they had the god damned nerve to come around and ask us to volunteer to defend their country. Sure, we volunteered. But it was to show the sons of bitches and to get out of that prison, not to defend the country. They sent us to Italy. They sent Germans and Italians to fight in Europe, but they weren’t going to send Japanese to fight in the Pacific. Shit. Well, we fought. And we fought hard. We wanted to show the bastards. And we did. They gave us a lot of medals, more medals than any other division in the war. I got campaign ribbons and a Purple Heart and a medal, for *valor* they called it.

“So I came back with my ribbons and my Purple Heart and my valor, and people spit on me in the streets of Seattle, while I was *wearing my Army jacket*. Yeah, they spit on me. And my family was still in that pen in Idaho. I went to our house, we had a little house. Man, they had *cleaned it out*. Not a stick of furniture left, nothing. And my dad’s car, a ‘34 Chevy, my dad’s car was gone, just gone. And we were *lucky*. We still had the house. A lot of people didn’t. Some were burned out so there was just a shell left. Some were just appropriated...by hillbillies and negroes that came up to work in the shipyards during the war. Somebody just moved them in, collected the rent, and that was that. They were stolen, simple as that.

“And try to find a job? Shit. Japs need not apply. There were signs like that in some windows. That’s when I threw my medals out. Just threw them out. First we get put in prison for no reason, then I go off to fight in Italy, and I come back and get spit on, my family’s robbed, and nobody will give me a job. Fuck it.

“Don’t do it. Don’t let the Army get you. It’s not worth it. Its not worth shit. None of it’s worth shit. They talk about democracy...well, bullshit. Don’t do it. Stay in school and use your head. You want to be a teacher? Well, it’s not a bad idea. Maybe you can teach them something about what actually goes on in this country.”



“Lennybutt” got drafted before he got out of high school. That was because after six years and three high schools Len still had no immediate prospects of graduating. Len was an excruciatingly deliberate sort, which his teachers construed as slow wittedness. But the real problem was that, like *Bartleby*, there were a lot of things Len preferred not to do. Not even the Army changed that. He wasn’t insubordinate, exactly, he simply preferred not to. Some things he did quite cheerfully, like policing the area or hand-to-hand combat drills. Other things, like going to the firing range for marksmanship instruction, he declined. At first they tried to deal with him in the usual ways.

“’Cruit,” the drill sergeant barked, “give me 25,” meaning pushups. The rub was that the code obliged the sergeant to also do the punishment, apparently to indicate that a recruit’s ordeal was cake for a real soldier.

Len dropped to the ground and pumped out 25 before the sergeant had done ten. While the sergeant sweated out the rest Len jumped back to attention smartly. “Sir!” he said, with the barest trace of irony.

They rather quickly caught on to the fact that Len was a fanatical body

builder and athlete. He *liked* pushups. He *liked* doing five miles double time with full pack. And boot camp wasn't like school. The sergeant couldn't send truants to the principal, it didn't look good. The brig was similarly self-defeating. The upshot was that the sergeant stopped giving Len orders, but Len spent a lot of time on KP while the other guys were having a beer. But then Len didn't drink beer.

The firing range, however, was a sticking point. A recruit couldn't leave basic training without passing marksmanship. The sergeant shifted to an interrogative approach.

Was Len, he asked, a conscientious objector?

No, Len said, he was not.

Did Len have moral scruples otherwise about weapons?

No, he did not.

Then why, asked the baffled sergeant, wouldn't he handle an M1?

No particular reason, Len shrugged pleasantly, he just didn't care to do it.

But on the day of the final marksmanship examination Len went, without offering any explanation, to the firing range. From 100 yards he put seven of ten rounds in or close to the bullseye. The sergeant thought the scorer made a mistake. Len did it again, eight for ten this time. At 200 yards he hit eight for ten, at 300 seven, at 500 six.

Had Len had previous weapons training, the sergeant asked.

He had not.

"I don't get it," the sergeant said, meaning a whole lot more than marksmanship.

"Hand-eye coordination," Len smiled.

They sent Len to Korea as a pole-lineman in the Signal Corps. Since he was in a forward zone they issued him an M1.

"I won't be needing this to string wire," Len said and walked off. The supply sergeant shrugged and checked the rifle back in.

Len still preferred not to do a lot of things, none of them quite comprehensible to his commanding officer. And he volunteered for equally unpredictable tasks, some of them risky. Mostly what he preferred to do was what intrigued him from an athletic point of view. That's what got him a medical discharge six months early.

He was near the front lines, an area that a couple of months later would become the Demilitarized Zone. A communications line across a deep ravine needed repair. It required going out over the ravine in a small seat pending from a cable to which the line was attached, something like a primitive chair lift for skiers, except that it was propelled by hand. It also

meant you would be a conspicuous target. There hadn't been much action, but occasionally the North Koreans got bored or feisty and ran off a few rounds to justify their combat pay. Len volunteered.

By the time he worked himself to the middle of the cable to make the line splice, the North Koreans were apparently bored or feisty. Len wasn't particularly scared, but he did get a bit impatient dangling amid whizzing automatic rifle fire while his colleagues tested whether his splice worked. Before they could confirm that it did, his chair got hit. The impact spun his seat like an erratic pendulum, which untracked the roller from the cable. His seat hung there immobilized.

"Fuck this," he said aloud. He gripped the cable with one hand and hoisted himself, resetting the roller with the other. He was rather pleased with his one handed chinup. That he was a target hanging two hundred feet over a gorge didn't exactly frighten him but did encourage more haste than was customary. As he was propelling himself back a slug hit the roller. His weight held it in place, but a shard of lead ripped into his right eye.

"Shit," he said and kept going.

Later, one of his buddies said he deserved more than a Purple Heart.

"I don't think they give you a medal," Len said, "for saving your own life."

He lost some vision in his eye. For that he got discharged six months early and a \$150 a month partial disability pension, enough to keep him in all the Bob Hoffman patented high protein "Tiger's Milk" he could drink.

"You can get the G.I. Bill and go to college," I said when he got back home.

"Maybe I could," he smiled through his milky eye, "if I can ever get out of high school."



One-up Willie got out of high school in regulation time. He was probably the cleverest kid in the neighborhood. He was particularly adroit at talking his way into fights and then turning them over to me, which he always did with the smile for which he was famous. I was wholly inept at talking my way out and only about an even bet to fight my way out successfully, by which point Willie would have become a spectator. His folks ran a tavern on Aurora where we played the pinball machines and kept track of the baseball scores and the horse track results. He rode a gray pony around the neighborhood, which was outside the city and not yet suburbanized. He rode bareback because the tavern business wasn't quite profitable enough

to subsidize both feed and a saddle. Years later my mother sent me a news clipping about his younger brother, who had become addicted to betting the horses. He'd apparently lost several jobs, some mortgages, and maybe a couple of wives and a kid, not to mention about a hundred thousand dollars that wasn't his. My mother, who could have a raucous sense of humor, contended he made medical history as the first case of that predilection to be actually diagnosed as an addiction.

Willie planned our adolescent activities. We did a lot of "sneaking in" to the Longacres horse track, the hot rod races, Playland amusement park and the big downtown movie theaters. Willie's technique was flawless. Some of the rest of us occasionally got caught. He also organized a fairly profitable petty shoplifting ring, under which aegis I developed my own modest talents. Willie had a way of manipulating you into doing what he wanted, which was usually a bit shady. That was part of his peculiar competitive nature. In playground sports he would sometimes throw a game for no other reason than a perverse sort of amusement. He got some kind of kick out of achieving the opposite effect from what the rest of us were working for. Our anger never bothered him. He just flashed his famous smile. And he was a good enough ball player that it never really affected his credibility on the playground. You never knew but what he just might play it straight.

Maybe his most lasting contribution was that he taught several of us, in a kind of seminar, how to masturbate. He was always a little more advanced.

Willie joined the Navy just before the draft board got to him. Afterwards he went to college for about a year, but he was really too sharp for college. What he was was a born salesman. In fact he bought a used car lot with the small fortune he accumulated in three years as a clerk-typist in charge of leaves at Subic Bay. It was easy enough to finesse himself a pass every few months, and he could give, and did, detailed accounts of every whorehouse in the orient. Manila, Honolulu, Bangkok, Jakarta, Hong Kong, Melbourne...he went everywhere. Tokyo was as close as he got to Korea.

From Subic Bay he ran a kind of travel agency for sailors. He arranged passes and naval air transport to just about anywhere in the Pacific. His business had certain standards. For example he accepted no officers as clients, only enlisted men. This never caused a problem, he said, because no officers knew enough about what was going on in the Navy to blow the cover of his operation. He could also arrange for duty transfers, which he did sparingly but for high fees. Willie was even-handed with his services, which gave priority to need. He adjudicated need in his own inimitable way. For instance a guy who had burned out on Manila whorehouses and wanted

a blond in Melbourne had priority over a guy who just wanted to get laid in Hong Kong. Moreover, he had set fees, which were not subject to bribery inflation. His standards paid off. It would have taken just one disgruntled client to blow the whistle and send Willie to the brig or maybe even a court martial. Instead, when he came home he could speak several pidgins and had \$17,000 in the bank, a considerable sum in those days.

In a way that even-handedness ran counter to Willie's competitive instincts, which were better suited to the free market dynamics of the used car business. And I don't mean that he was a shyster, though he probably could have made a handsome living as a broker or confidence man. The year before I made the move to Our Lady I looked him up while I was visiting my mother. He couldn't believe I was still a student and took it on himself to explain to me where the real action was.

"I do all right," he said, "but I'm not really all that interested in the money. It's more how the deal goes and how it turns out. Like last week this kid comes in. He's eighteen, a well dressed, polite kid. He's shopping around. Got \$400 burning a hole in his pocket for his first car. You check that out right off, how much they got to spend. Look, we do loans, got a set-up with the bank. I get a commission on each loan. But I don't get anybody in over their head. Bad business. But pretty much anybody comes on my lot I sell them a car. That's the buzz, swinging the deal. I got the whole range, from like-new Caddies down to a '38 Hudson. I even got a '47 Studebaker. Remember the front-back Studdy? Good shape, too. Want to buy a nice collector's item? Make you a good price." Willie flashed me his famous smile.

"Never could do business with you....Anyway this kid comes in. He's been shopping the avenue. But I see he's on foot, you dig it? And I've *been* this kid, right? And I know how bad you want that first car. You can do a *lot* of hoofing around to find a tolerable \$400 heap. So I can see that before the sun sets this kid's going to buy a car. I'm making sure it's *my* car he buys. I mean this kid's a sure sale. The only question is, is he *my* sale. And that's the *only* question. I mean, what are we talking here? What am I going to *make* on a \$400 car, maybe a hundred bucks tops.

"You see what I mean. You know what still appeals to an eighteen year old kid? Not a Hudson, right. A '41 Ford or Chevy is what appeals. Chopped and channeled with a metallic fleck paint job, right? Beautiful. Well, I don't have a '41, but I got a '40, see, a Chevy coupe. Same design basically. I've got it marked at \$550, right, but I show it to the kid.

"It doesn't look too bad. I don't know what's under the hood. For a five hundred and fifty dollar car I don't have my mechanic break it down. He

gives it a minor tune, we wash it, polish it up and put it on the lot. It's looks that sell cars 90% of the time.

"Right off, I see the kid light up. I got two or three at his price I can show him. But I know he's been looking around, and I know if something had turned on his lights he wouldn't be here. So I only show him the Chevy. I see he's got the itch. The question is, has he got enough scratch.

"I tell him he should take it around the block. I know that'll hook him. Because I've had my man put on a used pack we had around. And when that baby rumbles it'll sound like the Mormon Tabernacle Choir singing the Star Spangled Banner to the kid. Sure enough, he comes back, and I see we're going to talk turkey.

"Can I come down, the kid wants to know. I look at the car. I kick the front tire, Good tires, I say. I take out a pad and do some figures. I already know these figures, but I do them for the kid. \$500, I say, lower than that I'm losing money. Which is true. I mean, whatever I'm not making I'm losing, right?

"This is a gamble. But it makes the deal interesting. And I see the kid's well dressed, and he's got the itch. It only takes a hundred dollars more to go first class, I tell him. Of course, I say, I've got a Hudson for \$400 he can look at. But I know what he wants, and I figure by the looks of him he's got at least another \$100 stashed away. Turns out I'm right. He calls his mother, tells her he's found a great deal. She's there in ten minutes with the cash. I make a point of talking with her. Butter her up a little. Good public relations. Everybody buys cars.

"The next morning I come to work, the kid and his old man are waiting. The old man's mad as hell. The night before the kid hadn't driven the Chevy 20 miles and it threw a god damn rod. Can you believe it? Threw a god damn rod 15 miles down the road. 17.8 miles to be exact.

"I busted a gut laughing. The old man's still smoking out the ears. Come on into the office, I said. I sat down and wrote the kid a check for \$500. The old man cools off some, but I'm still laughing, and he can't figure it out. I say, Look, I got a nice, clean '38 Hudson you might be interested in. That gets to him, and he laughs. It's all in a day's work. Win a few, lose a few."



Big Loll is in produce now, but he was in the Marines then. He spent the last year of his enlistment in Korea. He joined the Marines for the obvious reasons. He'd always had delusions of grandeur. When he was fifteen

he hitch-hiked to Palm Springs to try out with the White Sox or Cubs or whoever did spring training there. He had his bat over his shoulder, his fielder's mitt hung on the handle and his cleats dangling from the meat end. I think he'd just seen "Damn Yankees" and thought he was "Shoeless Joe from Hannibal, Mo."

He somehow managed to get a tryout, or so he said. It couldn't have lasted more than five minutes. He was barely competent. In our county league a fly ball had once literally hit him on the head. He was waving his hands, looking up and calling I got it, I got it, and the ball just dropped on his forehead. If he'd have opened his mouth a little wider he'd have caught it. He did have a pretty good arm. But we all knew that he'd never faced a pitcher with anything more than a round house curve you could clock on an hour glass. He said they told him he needed a little more seasoning, and they'd keep an eye on him for the future.

"Keep an *eye* on you," Oneup Willie smiled. "How they going to do that? The White Sox sending a scout to the north end county league?"

After that Big Loll quit playing baseball and took up track and field. He turned out to be modestly competent as a javelin and discus thrower. The thing was he *looked* like an athlete. He had a superb physique, particularly his upper body. One of his favorite tricks was to go into a clothes store and try on a shirt two sizes too small. Then he'd flex his latissimus and bunch his biceps and shoulders until the shirt split up the back while the stupefied clerk watched.

"Ah guess Ah'm just a little too musculah," he'd say in the mincing affectation of Rhett Butler he frequently used.

I saw him do this, and Lenny said he saw it too, complete with the same little speech. It was Big Loll's way of trying to build a legend. Actually he succeeded, though it wasn't quite the legend he had in mind. Another favorite routine was to abruptly fling out his arms as if he were suddenly seized with the need to stretch, and the unexpected impact would send you reeling.

"Ah'm sorry, Ah guess Ah just don't know mah own stra-ength."

He loved it when we called him Big Loll and never seemed to catch on that it was intended as an ironic put-down of his ego. He seemed to think it had an epithetic ring like *gentle giant*.

Public exhibits of his athletic mediocrity notwithstanding, his transparent vanity never faltered. He was never more than a reserve player on the high school football team. He was catastrophically inept at basketball. And even in track and field he was only adequate at best. He was strong, but he just didn't have the touch. Even after the Palm Springs fiasco he was forever

talking about playing for the Chicago Bears or qualifying for the Olympics.

So when he told us he was going to join the Marines we thought it was just another story. Then one day he was gone, and the next time we saw him three months later his hair was clipped short, and he was strutting around in his shit-brindle green uniform. He'd also picked up some argot.

"Yo, Son, I got me some bow coo squid." This apparently meant that he'd been to several whorehouses or possibly to one whorehouse several times. He also said that he'd done so impressively in boot camp that they wanted to send him to Officer Candidate School.

I don't know what we expected when he came home from Korea three years later, as a corporal. His ship, like most of them, came in to Seattle. There were the usual bands, can-can girls and the harbor fire boat water spectacles.

After the ships docked sometimes the receptions were a little more equivocal, at least for the out-of-town boys. One night I'd answered a knock on the door, and there was a guy on the steps in nothing but his skivvies, undershirt, socks, and a dog-tag. He'd just come in from Korea, he said. He was walking along a downtown street and a girl called from a car, Welcome home soldier, you want to go to a party. He said sure and got in the car. She offered him a drink and the next thing he knew he was on a dark road in our end of town, and two guys were taking his wallet and clothes, including shoes, where they said soldiers sometimes stashed cash. They were pleasant enough, but armed and thoroughly professional. We called the cops. They came and got him and said it was a common occurrence when troop ships came in. You never saw a word about it in the papers. You just saw pictures of the fire boats and can-can girls.

But Big Loll was a hometown boy, and his mother threw a party for his homecoming. He looked the same, but he wasn't. He changed out of his uniform the minute he walked in the door. We assumed he'd been in combat, but he wouldn't talk about it. At first I thought this was just a coy wrinkle Loll had added to his repertoire. But he had brought two buddies home with him, and none of them would talk about Korea except in the most general terms, like the weather. In the summer it was equatorial, and in the winter it was arctic. It was wholly out of character for Loll to miss an opportunity to embroider heroics. In high school if he got into a game for two plays he made them sound like the pivotal plays of the game.

"When Ah hit him with mah shouldah Ah saw a little *chicken* in his ahs. Ah knew we had the game in the bag aftah that...."

War stories should have been Big Loll's element. But his element had changed. He was soft spoken and recessive, as if his ego had not so much

been deflated as disappeared. He didn't seem sad exactly, but without his ego he'd lost his zip. I'd expected him to say something hopelessly melodramatic, like "War is hell." He'd always loved to dramatize himself. But all he said was that he was sometimes bored, sometimes frightened and sometimes angry, describing these states as if he were talking about some third person he didn't know too well. Obviously there had been trauma, buddies wounded and killed, but insofar as he talked about it at all it was as if he couldn't assimilate what had happened and would just as soon forget it.

Despite what had frequently been the obnoxiousness of his ego, there was something sad about its loss. He wasn't Big Loll anymore. He was just a guy named Lawrence. And I had never known that guy. The guy I grew up with would have invented prowess and heroic scenarios, maybe even affected the wisdom of the man who'd looked into the jaws of death the same way he'd affected a southern accent. But this guy didn't. He didn't affect not talking about himself or the war. He just didn't do it. He didn't even speak the same. The first personal pronoun, which had been indispensable to his vocabulary, now hardly existed. And when he used it he pronounced it the usual way, *I* rather than *Ah*. His boot camp argot had also disappeared. He was just a guy named Lawrence who talked like a guy named Lawrence. A few months later he married Mabe, short for Mabel, his high school girlfriend who had remained rather melodramatically faithful to him. Meanwhile, he went to work for a Safeway in the produce department. The last I heard he was a manager.



Big Loll's quietus symbolized something I dimly perceived but didn't articulate. By the time he and Len and Willie came home from holding the communists at the 38th parallel, I was living in a different world than they came home to. I was finishing college, and they were getting on to the next phase of their lives. Their military experience hadn't seemed to signify much to them. Maybe that was because Korea had been such a frustration, a war that stopped precisely where it began and seemed to serve only the most nebulous of purposes. More than half a century after Len took a pointless hit in the last desultory stages of combat, it still wasn't *over*.

General MacArthur's fate seemed to sum it up. He had come home in a blaze of defiant glory. Three months later, as he himself had unwittingly prophesied, he had become a faded memory in the minds of the millions of people who had cheered him on. What was that all about? Len, Loll, and Willie didn't know, and they didn't waste time puzzling on it. They had not

been heroicized. They had not been historicized. They had not been politicized. They had simply been obliged to fill the time between high school and the rest of their lives by serving, as it was called, their country.

I didn't see much of them after that. I didn't make it to Loll's wedding, and heard that Willie got married at the county courthouse, not bothering with a reception. Marriage was one of the many things that Len continued to prefer not to do.

We never said anything, it was just understood that we inhabited different worlds. That had in fact been understood from the moment I decided to go to college. Loll had written me a short letter about it from a base in Texas.

So you're going to be a college boy. Congratulations. I always knew you had it in you. It's the best thing that could happen to you. It's a whole lot better than going into this man's army. It's pretty hot and boring here. Though like I told you we get some squid now and then if you know what I mean. But I guess you wouldn't know about that, my ass!

But I mean what I said about college. That's just great. Mabe told me about your scholarship. You deserve it. I'm proud of you. I'll bet your mom is too. I always knew you'd make something of yourself some day. And don't worry about the jocks. They all pull their pants on one leg at a time just like you. Show 'em what a Tiger's (our high school mascot) made of.

Somehow, because I was going to college I *deserved* to "make something of myself." It seemed a little peculiar to me then, and it seems *very* peculiar to me now. The total lack of envy or sense of injustice. If I deserved to go to college, the implication was that Loll and Len and Willie and the others deserved to go to Korea and get shot at. I knew it was nuts, but I had no lexicon for that recognition. Still, I knew it, just as I knew it was out of line the way things worked at the union hall.

When Len had got his draft notice I cried, partly because I knew people got killed in wars, but also because I knew I wasn't going to get one. Not that that knowledge kept me from exploiting the system. Had I volunteered for the draft or enlisted I would have been thought a fool. It was as if everyone subscribed to my mother's premise.

"Well," she said, "you can go to college or you can let them use you for cannon fodder."

It was many years later that I realized her sentiment was as old as re-

corded history. The plague only became a concern to Marcus Aurelius, for instance, when it had consumed the supply of draftable young Romans. The standard epithet of Roman mothers then was that if it came to a choice between the pestilence and the army, they'd just as soon their sons be soldiers. That may not have been the birth of patriotism, but it was quite possibly the most pertinent expression of its metaphysics.



Captain Grimke apparently agreed. So I followed the received wisdom and served my country in college. One hour a week we marched around in our uniforms, and one hour a week we were lectured by Captain Grimke.

In fair weather we marched outside on a large parade ground. We were supposed to be learning close order drill, which if you were not too particular is what we did. Our drill instructors were the serious cadets, like Sanka, bucking for commissions. During inspections they felt obliged to assert their authority in a vocabulary acquired from Grimke's assistant, Sergeant Frank, as I'll call him.

"Mister, this is not the Fuller Brush Company, shave that stubble (peach fuzz was more likely).

"Mister, on your own time you may look like Billy Eckstein (a singer whose trademark was a flaring rolled collar and a wide, loose knot in his cravat), but in this man's army you'll wear a regulation shirt with a regulation knot.

"Mister, if that's a shine on those boots (for some reason shoes were called boots), my aunt Jessie is Genghis Khan."

When it rained we marched inside the armory on a sort of overgrown dance floor. This was somewhat more amusing, since it required twenty different future second lieutenants to keep their respective squads from marching into walls or one another. The armory scene usually resembled a Keystone Cops movie. On one occasion, faced with a quick decision between colliding with another squad or the wall, our officer candidate chose the wall. As we were snickering and getting ourselves back in order, Sergeant Frank strolled up and addressed our chagrined leader.

"Cadet Pelligrini, there's a subtle difference between a beachhead landing and close order drill. I hope you will master it before you disable your entire squad."

Captain Grimke lectured us on a variety of topics, including aeronautics. We stayed just alert enough to be able to answer the multiple choice questions. For example: "An *aileron* is A) a manifestation of air sickness; B) a

hinged wing section of an aircraft for directional purposes; C) an unidentified alien aircraft.”

He also was an advocate of air power as the guarantor of world peace. He took up that motif more vigorously after Ike was elected and Dulles (the liberal grammatology was “Dull, Duller, Dulles”) put SAC on Red Alert, reminding the Red Menace that Republicans subscribed to “massive retaliation.” No more Korea-style “containment.” Captain Grimke translated this into the air wave of the future, apparently aiming to inspire our enthusiasm for the Air Force. But since we were all draft dodgers and he himself was a draft dodger’s agent, he didn’t have much success.

Nor was he helped by his lectures on the chain of command. He was quite aware that we were a skeptical audience, conscientiously evading the very hierarchy he described, occasionally with his help. So he tried to lend the subject credibility by punctuating it with moral apothegms. Since these lectures themselves detailed a rigid authoritarianism, his morals softened them by reconstructing the logic of democracy. His favorite theme was individualism, a much worried topic in the ‘50s. Having outlined ascending levels of punishment for disobedience to a superior (execution was relatively rare, he smiled, but not without precedent), he paused thoughtfully, his manner shifting from military disciplinarian to professorial sagacity. There were those, he acknowledged, that found military discipline inimical to individuality. But that view, he said, looking out over the 300 young men seated alphabetically in identical blue uniforms, was superficial. Individuality was inside, he said, thumping his chest to indicate a heart bigger than all outdoors. A rich boy might cloak himself in the finest cashmere, a poor boy in the coarsest denim, he said, his style waxing biblical as he approached crescendo, but did that signify their true worth? No, true worth was inside, another thump to the chest, and only there could one test the mettle of individuality. In uniform, in the service of one’s country, rich and poor alike were indistinguishable, and in uniform, freed from social caste, true individual merit revealed itself indisputably. He delivered that conclusion diminuendo, his voice earnest and intimate, as if the inexorable sweep of his logic spoke for itself.

Captain Grimke’s moral altitude was not shared by his assistant, Sergeant Frank. In his capacity as drill sergeant he did not incline to philosophical discourse. But on rare occasions, in Captain Grimke’s absence, he also lectured. Sergeant Frank, who fancied himself a military strategist, spoke with that straight from the shoulder manner of a hard headed man whose knowledge came from experience in the field. He implied that, while the Pentagon generals were well intentioned, many tactical matters were

beyond them. The defense of Taiwan, he announced one day, was a case in point. Red China was another much worried topic of the fifties, especially its ontology. The question was whether it existed, since the United States had never officially recognized its government. Sergeant Frank, who had served in the Pacific, obviously took the hard-nosed view. He explained that, since occupation is an aggressor's object, the final line of defense is to repel invasion. And what is it, he asked, that stands between Taiwan and an invasion by Red China? The cadets waited expectantly. What *did* stand between Taiwan and an invasion by Red China? Was it the vanguard artillery on the islands of Quemoy and Matsu? No, those outposts could be easily bypassed. Was it the heavy fortification and mobilization of Taiwan itself? No, for the Red Chinese overwhelmingly outnumbered the Taiwan forces and could afford even massive casualties in taking their objective. The only thing that stood between Taiwan and a Red Chinese invasion, Sergeant Frank paused meaningfully for his neophyte audience, was the China Sea!

A murmur of recognition rippled through his audience. Of course, the China Sea! And how then, asked Sergeant Frank, leaning confidently into his *summa logistica*, was the enemy to be met? Not in the air, for he had no air force. "Two if by sea," he said, smiling. The cadets chuckled. And here was the heart of the matter, for the enemy's naval strength lay in its very weakness. Sergeant Frank let that sink in, his sly smirk implying that he alone among tacticians had thought through this zen-like conundrum. The Red Chinese navy, he announced, consisted entirely of junks and sampans and thousands of them.

He stilled the cadets' laughter with a raised hand, earnestly analyzing the logistical problem this raised. Not only did the vast number of these vessels preclude effective aerial or naval bombardment, but their bamboo construction meant that only a direct waterline hit could stop them. And even then, it appeared from the sergeant's description, the severed halves would, like angleworms, reconstitute themselves and, paddled furiously by millions of maniacal Maoists, continue until they swarmed the shores of Formosa. There was one way and one way only to combat this buoyant, hydra-headed armada. The students awaited revelation. Sergeant Frank's solution was stunningly simple.

Solemnly reminding his audience that gasoline, being lighter than water, would float on it, his plan was to wait cunningly until the Red Chinese navy had launched itself. Then Taiwanese planes would fly back and forth over the China Sea, coating it with gasoline. And then, the sergeant concluded solemnly, producing a visual aid from his pocket, all you needed to do was light a match.

LINES AT BREAK OF DAY*(Remembering Isaac Rosenberg, autumn 2014)**Angela Leighton*

So quiet, now, in the early slanted sun,
 the day so young we might not have happened yet,
 the garden clear of us, history unbegin.

We might be conceived afresh, new-chanced for life,
 not guilty, used, in hindsight none the wiser,
 in foresight only blinder for all our news.

Turning, I catch a gleam, the lightest thread
 thrown to the winds, slack, yet holding fast,
 a shine-conductor wiring a poppy to a post.

Then everywhere, that spidery filigree rigging,
 so many ligaments of hair, hair's-breadth, short lengths
 to take the open measure of what's not there.

From flower to fence, from walnut tree to wall,
 these web filaments uphold a world in fall,
 erect a scaffolding in autumn air.

Just a trick of the eye perhaps, a shot of magic—
 but look, and you track a fibre-optic line
 of light, sideways, to catch the sun in passing.

Then nothing, or something again, a fluke travelling
 even as you turn, then lost to view—a sensor
 sensing your presence, a lightly glancing answer.

Lines, like others—so fragile, bound, once learned
 by the book, by ear, in the fibres of a remembered sound—
 lines, like tiny consistencies, crossing the gap

between this and that—lines that carry, connect,
 and seem like nothing, a wish perhaps, and yet
 a tether, a hold on things, a kind of sense.

They cannot stay a poppy, staunch a hurt,
parry a gunshot, stop a threat or tank,
or cure, or expiate. They only hold,

like strung telegraphs of light, slides of shimmer—
reminders of life again, at break of day,
a chance, a start—given, fragile, and unmeant.

REMEMBERING CHOPIN AT VALDEMOSSA*Angela Leighton*

So many dry stone walls might halt a landfall,
 cadenzas of weather in winter, alluvial rains

that wreck the terracing, leach the reclaimed levels
 of olives, oranges, vines—their livings' ledgers.

Cold. I remember the cold, and clouds come down
 too quick, muting the sheep-bells when flocks move on—

transhumant wanderers calling from worlds away.
 The valley's deep auditorium carries the sound.

Here, the museum's too quiet, enclosing its own.
 What touching compulsion draws me back to that room,

back to his piano, *Pleyel* (to play the fool)
 while air, an audience, clairaudient, almost an ear,

bends close—cat's-whisker to the silent notes?
 Someone's left a red rose flicking the keyboard.

(Photos, portraits, letters, manuscript papers,
 voices of children elsewhere, in empty cloisters

where the monks' old pharmacy displays its simples, arts;
 outside, a log-pile stacks and honeycombs the dark.)

I'm thinking: Opus 28. These ivory keys
 are touchy as fingers, easy as opening doors,

a palmistry for feeling how a memorised wish
 might still transmit, hand-to-hand, his time to this.

But the thread's been lost. Rattled, the slack strings cough.
 The shocked resonance trails tunelessly off.

Outside, first raindrops; a thick mist hushes the air.
Far off, otherworldly, those sheep-bells call and answer.

POMEGRANATE*Angela Leighton*

First, the scent of fennel in the air,
 inflammable stalks of a dried-out summer,
 Etna's spills, god's gift of fire,
 and the cicadas chafing, their clock in our ears,
 time at a standstill—

then, Pirandello's saracen olives
 tortured out of the stony ground,
 stumped by drought and turned in time
 to crippled twists, gaping hides,
 an agony unwound—

and the hills infernally veined with sulphur,
 fruit scented with the taste of hell,
 that chthonic stench of a sapped underworld
 and, in my piss, surprising, as if
 Persephone's self—

passed in the stink of tinder and brimstone,
 our old mineral complicity with earth,
 filter of Hades, bitter mirth.
 This acrid element that will not leave
 seeps and stains—

through vents and craters, faults and fumaroles.
 Persephone's shuttle trails its taint
 along the bloodstream, tricking the tongue,
 bittersweet, two-ways. Stone's a taste,
 the tale not done—

but keeps a swing-door, way out, wait in,
 wished-for, shafting like a miners' lift-cage,
 rooting darkly from a field of flowers.
 And I, in some dead siding halted,
 remember that girl.

TWO MONOLOGUES

Māris Čaklais

1.

In black distances are such markets
where horses are tethered to lightning;
but none has a price fixed to it,
only each by shadow, by shadow.

Give me one lightning horse,
so that still today I can catch my breath!
But beneath the overturned bowl of sky
no one will give an honest trade.

In black distances—there they know,
that we aren't made of grey lead,
that we also do not have a fixed price,
only each by shadow, by shadow.

2.

Black grapes, hot skies...
dagger pierced, blue silk edge.
No longer grapes, only shadows
fall into my basket now and fall.

Birds in the skies, what did you flee from?
I don't ask anything of you.
Because, when the panther freezes mid-leap,
I'll still manage to glimpse it.

All is correct, mountains, little brothers,
a scream can be well hidden in a hunchback.
Rivers fly off, you have to stay,
learning to wear silence on your back.

Black grapes, hot skies...
Someone heavy-footed wades over you...
The veil falls from weary eyes,
shadow bread once eaten, how it creeps.

—translated from the Latvian by Inara Cedrins

FREEDOM WENT OUT TO THE BOULEVARD

Māris Čaklais

Freedom went out to the boulevard
called itself by name
shot up along with the flags
flowed into the stems of flowers
unrolled down to the roots

On Freedom Boulevard sits a woman
among the sawed-down amputees
these blackened pillars of Riga
between Lenin and between Freedom
herself like a monument

But maybe that's not a woman
Freedom sits in its own
boulevard called by its name
beneath autumn leaves, curses
and sunflower seeds?

—translated from the Latvian by Inara Cedrins

During Soviet occupation the main street in Riga was named Lenin Boulevard and had a statue of Lenin at its head; since independence it is named Freedom Boulevard and the Freedom Monument replaces Lenin.

MURDERS*Māris Čaklais*

They not only have automats
 they not only have days off
 after an operation
 they have girlfriends too
 who eat cinnamon rolls
 while slurping coffee
 in the Press building café
 still more
 they even have childhood photos
 in pioneer celebration lineups
 or in kindergarten
 with toy weapons in their hands
 that one with a ribbon in her hair
 is my sister
 it turns out they not only have a genesis
 they also have
 father and mother
 in their turn
 the greater number
 of them are not murderers
 the greater number of them can't imagine
 how cinnamon rolls taste
 after a person's murder

—translated from the Latvian by Inara Cedrins

THE LOVER RETURNS TO THE SCENE OF THE CRIME*Māris Čaklais*

Sargasso long since raffled off,
 all the restlessness, all the reason—
 on an unexpected morning
 the lover returns to the scene of the crime.

Up in the pine tree a woodpecker still taps,
 below the abyss murmurs.
 And like the promise of another life
 the music school, lit up, resounds.

Love—it's not only a single pitcher.
 Its music is without measure.
 All the while you live, it teems.
 And you return to the scene of the crime.

It freezes easily, and turns to sludge.
 But perhaps that laughter is from the stars?
 Teeth—an apple—breaking the skin?
 But maybe that's just the wind?

It's possible that it all happened blindly—
 I drank this life full throttle.
 Clinked and—was close.
 Emptied and—hadn't made it.

Sudden thunder in the middle of December.
 That's a greeting from a lone wader.
 Blouse flattened against a hot chest.
 Unending, the music, music.

—translated from the Latvian by Inara Cedrins

SCYTHE IN THE APPLE TREE*Māris Čaklais*

And dogs barked,
 and smoke rose,
 and flowers of fire,
 and children screamed,
 and a foreign tongue
 yelled at them all,
 and the scythe remained
 in the apple tree.

And now the stork
 does not want to nest here,
 and swallows
 fly away.
 Like red beads
 currants scatter, but
 the scythe still holds
 to the apple tree.

And into living flesh
 the blade grows deeper,
 rusty with sap
 but rust forms calluses.
 So life
 together with death
 for time to come
 has grown together.

—translated from the Latvian by Inara Cedrins

ARS POETICA

Māris Čaklais

In the far-off centuries of childhood,
when there were no refrigerators,
pails were cranked up from the well
and they were dripping wet.

And a can cooled in the pail,
and milk rested there the entire hot day.
But the greatest pleasure for a child
was a frog—next to the milk.

In the morning a poem awakes me,
in the night I cover myself with stanzas;
at the humming afternoon teatime
a poem stings like a wasp.

How varied the paths of poetry,
how wonderful they all are!
There are poems like wells,
there are poems like pails.

I like a poem to be sunny,
I like a poem to be shadow.
But my favorites—live and green—
are the poems like tadpoles.

—translated from the Latvian by Inara Cedrins

NOT ONE HORSE LEFT TO STEAL

David Matlin

He remembered the afternoon he stumbled into this world. War was done. He'd fought in Europe. Seen the abandoned death trains full of rotting bodies. Climbed the ravines of Italy bayonet-by-bayonet. Wasn't brave by his own estimates. "Liked to breathe was all," he said of it afterwards, more to himself, "liked to see others do it as well as I wanted to." Left his two bronze stars with his grandmothers in Oklahoma when he came back. He let them sing over him. The violence he'd sunk into was so pure no purification ceremony could help him. He knew it. They knew it.

As he watched over the sleeping body he thought of a boyhood friend at the Indian School where he and others were sent to be cured of being Indians. But he spoke Kiowa when he could and learned some Cherokee too from Jack Bushyhead, another boy, like himself, who said late at night "This is Oklahoma" "This is Pennsylvania" "This is Nebraska" as they pointed directly out the barred windows. "But wait. We can out-wait you," they said to the names and the pronunciations of the names. No defiance as they honed themselves for the inevitable, no matter how agonizing its perch in the distance.

Bushyhead's War took him to a railroad trestle outside Munich in 1945. Dachau, it was called. Bushyhead became an officer. A First Lieutenant in the 157th Infantry Regiment. Tom thought it was hard enough to stab and shoot people. Then have to look at what he did, that came without warning. And after thirty he stopped counting. He knew it wasn't a hundred. But the somewhere in between sort of billowed like a fuckin' smoke signal. And still, after the decades, looked to pulverize the leftovers when he'd least suspect it. He didn't want to give orders. Hear orders. Obey the voice of any man. Pick it clean if he had to, then go home. Try to see if he could stand himself. If not, then just goddamnit try to see if he could make it to daybreak. A little air in his nose. Just a little. And maybe enough. No need to go further.

He and the Lieutenant met after the war. A bar in Germany. Both of them still in the army. Late 1946 it was tasting like varying stages of rotting corpses. He tried to eat. Get it down. That lingered for years. Beer was OK. So he and Bushyhead drank themselves sober one night over the Cherokee's story about ordering the executions; over three hundred men. Part of an SS garrison housed at Dachau. Murdered 'em with machine gun fire, MIs, pistols. Let some prisoners loose to rip people apart while they were still alive.

"Maybe they'll keep it shut down till long after I'm dead too, Tom," the

boyhood friend said. "Saw them People, Tom," he said.

He was telling no lie, Tom knew. They walked the canals of the ruined city till midday. Smoking, walking mostly in silence. Occasionally one said something to the other about Oklahoma. The color of a spring sky out on the plains luring the eye in to the distances, dragging the thickly insufficient mind with it. And fried okra. It was easier for them to talk about food.

"Which of us'll choke to death first?" Bushyhead asked as they said goodbye to each other. Tom remembered Bushyhead tried to loosely smirk over the question as he focused on a scissor-tailed fly catcher, its forked tail streaming behind, wings flexed over its back, chasing an insect. The sight of the bird hovering and swaying in its beautiful flight nearly made Tom Green burst into tears over this last recollection of watching Bushyhead move slowly away on that morning after the War.

An Indian ordering the executions of those unarmed SS troops? The fact of it hovered over the Kiowa and didn't go away. Was it the Ghost Dance sneaking up with its tricks, circling the world to come with the scents of hallucinations and desertion spreading out unintendedly from the trances?

The question made Tom Green feel gutted. Was Bushyhead's retribution for the Indians and Jews; the Jewish Farmer who he loved, and this family constructing towers in the midst of its million black cans of Southern California roses to look for Arabs and more war as FBI agents hovered, afraid the atomic flashes over the San Gabriels were transformed by these Jews into secret codes. Was it for the Trail of Tears, the Washita, Round Valley, the Gold Rush leaving in its wake genocide and slavery?

"And what the hell does that one stinking end of the war incident say about Indians and Holocausts and who gets to inhabit which mass graves?" Tom Green asked himself while Wesley lay sleeping at the edge of a fast rushing Flint Hills creek.

When his grandmothers knew they could do nothing for him, neither to help him want to be alive or help him want to be dead, he began to walk. "Not one horse left to steal. And anyway, ride off to which fancy sunset," he asked himself. He walked to Texas. "Who the hell walks to Texas?" he said to the general sprout of new spring flowers loud enough to nearly wake Wesley. He picked cotton there. Picked fights in bars. Till barely he could say which was which. "One paid you one way. The other. Why it paid too and left change in yer pocket. Dig deep fool. Get below the roots and strike blood. Keep the change, reverend. And don't slip." He smiled down at his left forearm where some stranger tried to drill with a broke bottle. "Prospectin'," Tom mumbled. "Hit some pay dirt too."

He harvested crops from the Rio Grande to the Sacramento hauling around twelve foot three-legged ladders for some years picking fruit. "Eighty pounds at least of that wood. Didn't seem too bad at five in the morning but climb and haul it fourteen hours a day makes you feel like you got trapped in a fan belt. Pulverized for ninety cents an hour, wages being what they were looking like an ant eaten lizard. Put that in yer pocket too," the Kiowa whispered to a passing butterfly.

There were others climbing those ladders. And mostly, they were Indians too. Achumawi down from the Pit River Plateau following the crops and seasons. Tom remembered he liked the men and women. They had a mouthful of stories and enough humor for at least a century of disappointments. More than that and a girl better start baking some cricket cakes. "Don't ask," one of Tom's friends said with a quick easy wink. "Time you get through with them crickets they'll fill your balls with straw." They set a hard pace too, for work. Trees were filled with fruit and wasps. Some days to keep from being overstung and sent to fever you had to jump from your ladder and run. "Achumawi women like fast runners," they told the Kiowa. "Why if you outrun a nest of wasps no tellin how good you'll be. One Arapaho, come down before the War, got a wasp up his pants. Thing climbed all the way and planted a sting on the head of his dick. Him. He was fast enough and they had a couple of year's story about a prick end went big as a baseball. Fed 'im deer hoof soups and hoped against that hour when the swelling went down."

He liked one woman and thought about staying. Helen was her name. Helen Nears Water and she was smart. Told Tom one of her grandmothers was so beautiful she was chosen to stay the night with important corpses before they were cremated. After that no lovers appeared for years. "Men were too scared," Helen Nears Water said in her sexy tense Achumawi woman's voice as she touched Tom with the head of a woodpecker on the sorest wasp-stung sections of his hands and arms. He didn't know if it was the woodpecker or the way she breathed in his ear but just about everything felt pretty good after that and he seemed, until the day he told her he was set to leave, about as immune from wasps as he was ever gonna be.

Once, Helen Nears Water appeared in a down south field one night while the Kiowa was watering roses. He thought it was an apparition but the thing spoke human words and sounded like Helen Nears Water. "My mother said your soul left you for the mountains years ago. She told me you got the funniest color for a dead man and someone ought to find you. Thought you needed some luck and a good bowl of fresh caterpillars." Tom told her he'd be happy to eat the bowl. And about them caterpillars. If he

ate one, why he might end up running for the President of the U-Nited States. "Sounds like you got the Indian disease, for sure," Helen Nears Water said to her Kiowa friend.

Tom asked her to stay but the Achumawi whispered, "Not until I become a woman who can see for at least five hundred miles."

"How long'll that take?"

"Until you figure out where your elbow fits best."

Helen Nears Water left five whale whiskers and five cacoons in a small basket woven of wild iris.

"Mother made it for you. Don't lose any of it," she told him. And with that she imitated the way he sharpened a hoe or stared at a plate full of food and laughed. Before she left she looked straight at him like a Girl who takes her lovers seriously and sang:

And for Fish to Breathe?
Which Colors?
Which Wrecks of Earth?

He still questioned if it was an apparition and thought of a time just before he came among Helen Nears Water's relatives. His lame grandmother was said to be a great granddaughter of a slave sold at the Dalles, the old Indian trading site that was, as far as anyone knew, really without origin. A woodpecker scalp from the mysterious Konomihu could end up in the medicine pouch of a Choctaw dancer, its journey from the Columbia, to the northern plains, on into the dispersals of the continent's traceless interiors hovered in a background at least 10,000 years old. String those bird scalps so that each of them whispers and robs the White man of his billion virginites. Such a slave too was as desired as a cool still opal the desert Piute let sometimes appear among the wonders, as Tom's grandmother remembered it. A woman of those tribes was able to outwork at least three men and on occasion performed a gliding dance that made the bees themselves feel to be poorest cousins, such was the dancer's flight and ecstasy. It was one of the reasons for the tribe's small population. That and the way a Pit River slave was said to be able to wash the violences out of men and their dreams.

He was also introduced to the language of the Dalles. The old Chinook Jargon spoken by nearly all the travelers, voyagers, trappers and settlers from Mona Loa to Shasta to Mount Ranier and the farthest wilds of the new cities and peoples who were said to plant that language in the roots of Vancouver, Seattle, and Portland. Scottish and Norwegian settlers who gave up their native languages for the everyday beauty of new words that caught

them and held them to the world as they felt it and built it. It seemed to Tom to follow the volcanoes and included among its speakers Hawaiians, missionaries, lumberjacks, Russians, and field hands like himself who could and did direct water into dreams with not much more than their own hands and a shovel.

The first of those words he heard were combinations; a fellow fruit picker looking at his filled sacks saying "Tyee here is still a cheechako." He didn't know at that point if it was hostile, the many workers breathing out some untold rule about weight limits, work limits; some mistake get his body floating in a neighboring reservoir. You never know how things can turn when you're doing something simple as picking plums and getting paid by the hundred pound. It took a couple of weeks until Helen Nears Water called him "Muckamuck" a word he knew could be heard on the bluffs of the Santa Ana or the sidewalks of Coney Island he walked after coming home from a war.

There wasn't enough time to learn a whole language but he didn't want to be "memaloose"; the best word for death he ever heard. If there was a "talapus" howling in a yonder canyon why Old Man Coyote's at work gathering his mud pies. And if he went "lemolo" he and anyone else was susceptible, dangerous craziness and rebellion lurking near and hunting human existence. "Cayuse" he knew. And stealing a horse was always more satisfying, make a fool of the owner by being "malakwa"; more mosquito than human when necessary, suck the unwary to their bones. "Illahe" a fine name for Earth and the "tupso" that grows on it and makes it green. And the coastal "lamonti". The pronunciation was familiar to him and his own People containing the tracks of French Voyagers who came into the seventeenth century plains and then wandered further and further leaving these sounds as marks of their own tides. "Hooch" too, as in what everybody knows, and you got two bits Mr. Tillikum, cause if you ain't then all friendship is off.

Tom Green let the residue of those words wander over the backs of his teeth. Wesley slept as he watched thickening clouds snarl on the northern horizon about fifty miles away. He saw the initial whisp-like streams begin to coagulate and bulge. They seemed to pull both earth and sky into their blind concussive heavings, and some of what lies beyond in both those directions. The down and up blossoming into wands of possible tornadoes or other incubations set adrift by either the deepest sleep of the living; the deepest breath of the dead who merely inhale as a final way to avoid becoming the land's guardian dwarfs.

Helen Nears Water did invite him to her world; the Pit River Plateau with all of its life. "Never know, Tom, how you'll like the volcanoes. Might

choose you to dignify the company of the Dead on their way to the mountains. But first we'll have to pierce your nose." She said this while combing and smoothing her hair, applying red ochre to her left cheek, a mark that made Tom Green wonder about the women of her Tribe. If their intelligence was sexy as Helen Nears Water's then what did lay at the heart of the beautiful Furnace up there in the Blue of Sky?

Was it the way she and her relatives marked the flight of mallards on the sunset horizon or the privacy of their kindness which seemed to the Kiowa the most quietly moral of the human experiences he'd known. No one could own anything among them and Tom thought it allowed them room to be deeply brave about this thing. That it also gave them humor and wide curiosity; he sometimes wanted to ask his grandmothers if it came before the violence, the grinding force giving each world one leg to stand on and turn to what sort of fat?

The Kiowa remembered Helen Nears Water telling him to "Grass In." When he asked what that meant she handed him a blue jay feather and said, "Means to be a Person, have some footing so's not to blow away." And with that she blew the hair from his eyes and asked if he'd like some breakfast of acorn cake. He liked the memory of her breath and the sweet taste of that acorn cake as he watched Wesley breathing, hoping the Susto wouldn't take up residence in the Farmer's son. It was the Mexican name he learned in the rose fields. Workers from remote Oaxaca or Puente down the road suddenly taken with symptoms, hardly noticeable and then dying. He knew it as Soul Loss. Beginning with indigestion, hard breathing, going skinny, ending with no interest in desiring human existence. So he watched Wesley's chest rise and fall as he heard Helen Nears Water say how the Soul, according to her People, leaves the body a week before Death, a little longer sometimes, get a good headstart that way. Say if you can hear your Soul in dream before it goes too far you can cut a hole in yourself and if it wanders back in time, why the Old Thief might go somewhere for a while. He enjoyed the gentle tones of the story, and knew Wesley, thin as he was, was poisoned. And to Helen Nears Water the Poisoner was old as Coyote, began traveling on the First Night, and was good at bribery and disguise. No Beginner at the Beginning. Pay a captor the right treasure and be on the way with a bag of illnesses and discouragements. For the right price pour tincture of poison oak into a favorite pick-me-up tea; sprinkle powder from the red sacs of black widows into a sleeper's nostrils.

And the most potent; incantations extracted from the sacs of words to be mumbled and malevolently repeated. She told him of another Poisoner, the one who dressed in owl feathers, ran over the countryside hooting. This

one was very dangerous. Those in the vicinity of the rampage brought very close to sickness and death. The “Wallipo” it was called, gone to dismemberment, and others, including People from different Tribes, had to stalk, carefully kill this one who becomes so barren and grim.

Tom wondered if it was one of those forerunner dreams, something seen in medicine trances thousands of years in the past and given this name. He didn't want to believe it was the rampage of his own civilization those ancestors saw and gave over to the inheritance of the Visions and Dreamers.

And if Rain chases after Mouse listening for his beautiful flute how will She ever remember to do what She does best? Tom felt their stories told of fatal and vulnerable human life in so gentle and often funny a way it gave him reassurance before that most goblin-like thing to happen to him; being born a human being. And as far as the wandering Goblin Worlds Helen Nears Waters relatives told him lay at the near and far stories there was “Cho-djo-djo” the name he heard at that moment of Wesley's breathing sleep. The Giant carrying his loads of children, men, pregnant women, dumping them in his twilight fires and shouting over the landscape:

I've found my meat.
I've found my meat.

Ridiculous and cruel and real with an eye for beautiful women who he rapes by touching their feet. He and his brother ghouls howling in the night covering their faces with spit.

Who were these People to carry their far wandering stories right under the nose of the civilization that wished nothing more for them than to be dead. Stories dressing the murder and wrath in comic disgust and black confusion, did it with a smile and wink going so deep the mockery can drink no more blood?

A song sung over him by Helen Nears Water's old aunt preparing tea. This he heard too:

Who used to live here
When the Land was called
Water Lilly People Place
As your lips glide
North to South
Beginning or End

In the Sayings

The Livings

The Ones from

Yaw Yeh Yeh Yaw

Yeh Yaw

It was four of that spring afternoon. Light nudging the northern thunderheaded wall was paleish lime green mixed with hazes of pink, washing grays and fierce lightning glazes that stung ground and air lessening the hold of bees over their wild flower labors. Air came to nose in slight folds, folded by distant turbulence and left to wander down and be received in the sea of plains. Wesley slept two, three hours, was due for more as Tom worried about a tornado, worry as it must coming in names and forms of winds; Santa Anas, Chinooks, Cold Eaters eating wind and snow, sweeping up locomotives like some owl with its eye on another wilderness, and the dark rampaging funnels with their 50,000 feet halos of enfuried cloud stuff, and the immediate burden he carried, a simple passage Helen Nears Water's aunt sang, about getting words, then getting all mixed up because of words, and each confusion landing those not completely formed word carriers farther from their original fires until, finally, no warmth was to be had, and at that moment the new Word Beings turned into People.

Out of that cold? Tom wondered as his second momentary burden rose up: a Blackfoot boy he'd known at Indian School. Did some mean desert road work as a prisoner in the Anza Borrego Badlands and those wastes around the Salton Sea, got some roads laid down for farmers. Seven, eight years of it. Said the desert dried up whoever he'd been, was out there in the Imperial Valley picking cotton and lettuce. Told Tom about the Calapatria Bulldozer Race, 1944-45. The 509 Composit Group in their B29s doing mock atom bomb runs over the Salton Sea.

"Full sized mock-ups," Jonas Pumpkin told the Kiowa, "for atomic combat. Fill'em with concrete, high explosives, everything in the Fridge but the uranium. One time one of them B29s come in smooth as a pelican and dropped a load too soon. Missed the town of Calapatria by an elephant's toenail. Goddamned thing dug a hole over ten foot deep. Never did explode. Government rushed a fleet of bulldozers out to erase it. I'll bet who's ever on Mars is still gambling on them fuckin' machines. Best bulldozer race since the Indians got horses."

Thing brought in, wrapped up as a grandmother's corn husking tale, as

Tom considered the peculiar prowling dream fringes. Steer too close to that business and there'll be no cover from stray ghost hostilities coming for a prankish taste of human meat.

Where water comes down
to make flowers

He heard once more the aunt's song and felt the wing of a warbling vireo brush his shrapnel-torn shoulder (no more chronic infection after that) and not wanting to know too much asked later about the song-bird: so drab he was told, full of jumbles, gossip, in and out of this world:

Water coming down
They say

Drowns certain consonants
"F" erased for instance
probably upstream

"A Long Time Ago"
If the Condors didn't get it.

Song among Helen Nears Water's People attracting ghosts and dreamers, guardians and swarms of invisible admirers come to hear a mortal singer make it up for pleasure and spontaneous invention. Helen Nears Water said her aunt didn't want to become a singer; wanted actually to avoid it: too dangerous. Survive the first episode - sleepless wanderings over lava beds in snow and heat for months, the mad running from one hill to another, then the preparation for trance and frenzies to help the sick. "Sing or the Other Things" her aunt told the young Helen who was herself "called" since early girlhood.

‡ ‡ ‡

Tom knew war. Came home. Didn't know how to get rid of it. A crisis big as birth. What could he do? Go back to Oklahoma. Stay with his grandmothers. Eat alone. See no one for months. Fast himself into dreams and visits from ancestors?

‡ ‡ ‡

At the end of it he didn't know who came. A whirlpool of voices and noises so painful. He thought he might as well stop breathing. Easier for everyone alive or not. When it ended his grandmothers washed him with eagle feathers, sang over his body and mind, mixed teas from various plains wild flowers which he drank slowly, afraid he'd forgotten how to swallow. The killing made him a bad visitor to daily life. If he couldn't figure out how to get back in he'd get hungry and the hungrier he'd get the deeper he'd be struck by drought, not necessarily carrying him away, but sucking him through. It'd get to be like a sand dune filling his footsteps. Tom Green knew his grandmothers weren't trying to be sneaky with their words. The trouble doesn't spend itself and always grows shrewder. So the man who slays needs some unguessing, be horrible and harmless while learning all over again if he can.



Dragonflies were slowing up. Fresh spring knats seemed weighted by late afternoon shadows. There were jack-in-the-pulpits near his feet ready with a sermon, tongues hung over their open throats and no tellin what trances to be stirred up by a Flint Hills breeze. Some white wind flowers swaying near Wesley's shoulders, lone sprouters one stalk at a time, and for the love of the flower's name, Tom thought of handfuls for girls like Helen Nears Water. There were early ground plums too, shiny and purple, sweet as peas, and Tom got on his hands and knees, picked a few mouthfuls for Wesley. He stayed away from Nuttall's death camus, a mean lily from roots to highest clusters of cream colored six petaled flowers smelly with warnings and just right for poisoned darts and arrows; get a good recipe and all hearts will stop over that brew. Wild hyacinth with their populated top clusters holding the light blues for easiest sadnesses of a spring afternoon, and a Comanche favorite. He looked around for early sprouts of rattlesnake masters, the tall clusters holding medicines of sexual longings and exhaustion, "Why have some of this tea Mr. or Madame, it's been smoking in the corner a long time."

He noticed Wesley was stirring.

The tamales were by now properly sun-warmed and glazed semi-sweet by corn husks, moisture heating the masa and stringed beef. Tom liked the Nahuatl name, well-traveled as it was, long before Columbus, finding every corner of an ancient America come war, peace, the hunger of gods, sorrow

of cities, the tamale was joined. Tom watched as Wesley's mother prepared and wrapped each portion. She folded the corn husks with such care, Tom felt it formal and homely as wrapping the newly born, fingers and hands diligent and supple, sure of the weave passed down from her grandmothers and gorged on by every male generation under the watchful whiskers of the Oppossum, that old hand-me-down ugliest bringer of beauty. The jamaica gathered equally from the fruit trees surrounding their home, the brew left in sun to go smooth. He knew this was far as Wesley's mother intended or wanted to go. She watched the FBI come and arrest her son. Looked out her kitchen window holding an old butcher knife her uncles used for grizzly bears in an earlier century so tight her husband thought she'd broken her fingers. The Kiowa and Wesley's father were afraid she'd burst right through that window and be shot dead. But she held the knife instead. Watched them hand-cuff her son and drive away. For two weeks after she whispered about America under breath and the family she married into. Why could they hide the uncles from the FBI and not her son? Wesley's father slept in his truck. A son swept off, taken to another world like his own ancestors in Russia; like his wife's ancestors in California taken to slavery, prisons, the edge of cliffs and thrown over by the miners and militias. Where was it to end?

So she made tamales and asked to be taken to Mexico "to find land."
And as for himself, Tom Green?

He wasn't necessarily and completely grateful to have been born but he was grateful as hell the scratchings over it didn't have to peel the bone too. Why, as he looked at the spring sky, did the clouds grow their most heavy and uneasy crops? And given somewhat more money he'd pay a tornado not to go to tail as it does, suck everything in the neighborhood like some loose witch. "How much you want, honey, not to touch down, stay put where you live?" he asked those things swirling and massing in the not too far away orchards of air. But no solitary wizards out there, ladies or gentlemen ever supposed the right words as She, The World Eater, licked for some sweet, rare parsley she never finds. "Gimme your address. I mean the permanent one where I can mail that herb. Keep you from stirrin the way you do. Those the right words or ain't they as you drop your hail in the night?"

The Farmer showed him a note Wesley wrote.

"Dear Mother,

I've been trying to write these letters every week. Each time one goes out, the world they go to recedes. I don't really know how far that is but it's the thing that scares me most. Something small

as this and simple. I don't have the words I ought to have for this fear. It's been three years. I don't want you to worry but I don't want that world I left to disappear any more than it has or myself to become the kind of ghost that ghosts become here.

Your Son, Wesley”

He'd written every week, but after this nothing. And she knew. Tom watching her sorrow began to wonder about some of the old women Helen Nears Water said worked the fields like everyone else; whether they could pull bones from the eyes of fresh corpses, start that way to bring the newly dead into breathing once more. She gave him a basket with feathers woven directly into it, as deep a wonder to him as the shadows left by condors.

“It's a prophecy,” she said. “Someone might need it one day.”

So he left it on the front seat of the Farmer's favorite pick-up.

“This come from you, Tom?” Wesley's father asked.

“Thought it might get lost if I carried it any further.”

Helen Nears Water never told him what dream the basket held. But it didn't seem to do any good. No letters arrived from Wesley and Tom guessed the Farmer's son decided he had to let the outside world disappear. That or die.



Tom thought of it as the Up Country not yet spent of snow leaving that below to dampnesses of ground and winter drift neither shedded by tree or lake, mind nor dream. Not a funeral to be sure, but some sort of unexpected tax on the cemetery, the dead in their homesickly weather making ghost fires accompanied by the sounds of woodpeckers where no trees abide, and breath, as the living attest, of solitary cold flames. From those death fires no smell of burning, not enough smoke for the head of a thimble, and no place for covetous destruction to find enough comfort, given over, as it is in this nether world, to poor eyesight, the lameness of tongue and penis, having to carry those parts too, into a poor-assed rotten-footed infinity.

And as for men and their horse-gnawed days. Better to get the chills in a Nevada whore house where the girls know how to fill the baths with slipperiest waters. It was in this manner the Kiowa thought about keeping People and Peach Trees alive in what corners of a garden? This Peach Tree. That Person with their less than sugary buds?

Around the village were placed baskets of acorn water

for souls to drink (thirst in the Other World reeking of staring owls and the preenings of foxes who think they are covered with moths).

It is this secret finery of the Living which slowly scours the Dead.

The smell of Heaven fanned into tonguelessness where the once tasting stubs lie like to stubs of mountains.

The plateau lands shared by the Living and the Dead each without their knowing are where the majority of the thefts take place.

Mostly they are women, who, searching for sweetest acorns, lose the arrangements of perception and become poisonous.

Arrowheads are the leftovers of these thefts.

Some fly through dangerous dreams.

Helen Nears Water told Tom Green women emerged out of the raping and murder carrying flowers in their hands clear to the 1920s.

They became "Dream Dancers."

Her mother's cousin was one. Around 1896-97 she was stolen by a "Bush Boy" up somewhere in the mountains.

Saw him sunning himself on a large boulder, a child, perhaps not larger than an eight-year-old who turned into a lion.

The smell of tamales warming in the sun reminded Tom Green. Clear, delicious hunger might help both Wesley and himself. He could, if he concentrated, hear Helen Nears Water's dignified, shy voice, and the way she spoke English, as if it were a ripple in herself, the syllables held not tightly, but with some restraint, her hesitance and reluctance to say anything in this language having the sheen of a low tide, where she seemed to walk, shoulder far searching for words as if they were suddenly exposed shells she could examine, then pronounce them, not knowing how the thing ought to be or should be heard. And it was immediately charming to him especially when she tried to tell him of the spirit of anyone's Life, as her relatives knew it; different from a soul and a ghost. It assisted in the vital activities of thinking and how thinking appears to itself and finds a way deep into a day.

"It lives," she told him, "behind your ear." And she touched the flesh under his right ear, pushed and rubbed lightly there.

“I can feel it,” she said. “It’s like a raindrop that’s found a burrow. Its Life is your Life. Everyone’s a twin.”

And Tom Green in his wanderings after the War thought this might be the only knowledge worth holding, a kind of wild crumb, so hastily overlooked.



Could he tell Wesley about these things? Of men who bound their hair with nets made of milkweed and where they placed fresh flowers everyday of a distant flower season, this and nothing else to be worn?

Exactly how far does a prison’s shadow reach, he wondered, as the Farmer’s son’s body shuddered in sleep. And of the forms of Death the Farmer’s civilization sought for its purposes, was this thing called “prison” the most rainless and cunning?

“Tom,” he heard Wesle’s child’s voice ask as he noticed the torn web of an orb weaver, and feeling spooked by what crawls and flies around, listened as the voice pronounced, “Who was Colonel Warner?”

“I’m not sure, son,” The Kiowa remembered his answer, still gathering himself over the pain the long ago question unmasked. He knew the boy often listened to his mother reading to the Farmer, and at least some part of what they shared was about the “Settlement” as the they referred to it which she’d studied while a student at Berkeley before the Depression set in. Her “People,” both Indians and Mexicans, were enslaved or indentured. If the word “murder” arose over certain incidents, she’d pause, her face fixed in rage that spared no inhabitants of that house, and crushed whatever lay in hand, often whole packs of her cigarettes, letters she worked over for polio drives, sweaters half knitted and ripped helplessly. Wesley hearing the insulate violence of his mother wondered as a child if it was sorrow, and what sorrow did to adults. Tom knew Warner’s description. The young Colonel, accompanying the Ewing Young party after beaver and other peltry came through the Sacramento Valley 1832/1833. In his earlier recording the young diarist noted a place well populated, its numerous inhabitants collecting seeds and curing salmon (which stained their villages “red”), from a various and extremely plentiful territory rich in game, fish, birds, and grasses, harvesting according to local needs, rivers and swamps, meadows and mountains. Warner was astounded by not only a numerous population, but an expertise in procuring unusual abundances unlike any he saw over “the continent” as he appraised it. Snaring game, hunting with fine bows, fishing by “diver’s methods” with uncanny nets, gaining far more than a

subsistence.

In the following summer of 1833, from the headwaters of the great River to the introductory flats of the San Joaquin, the trappers, to their horror, saw no more than “six or eight living Indians” over those vast square miles. What they saw instead were skulls everywhere; dead bodies under trees, lying on lake and creek edges, the whole of the huge water course and its adjacent lands turned into a charnel plain presided over, in his words, by “the death angel” with the cries of the dying, the violence of the fever as it swept over, nearly killing the writer/recorder himself as he attempted, carefully as he could in the writing, to say it was a hideous “valley of death...”



After washes of any hard memories Tom Green wondered if the pouch of a medicine curer helped; dried spider, dragonflies, red arrowheads capable of long flights to other planets and stars. But, then, how to use any of it, keep it from becoming poisonous to a future, using remnant phrases from an Old Language “spoken by ones who hunted elephants, camels, them other things,” as Helen Nears Water said of chants which set the inhabitants of those pouches spreading over dreams and prophecies.

He recalled being told, at heart of it, the ancient Makers didn't care whether worlds were to be made or not. And funniest thing, the immobility of those Makers, sitting, going rigid, caused the gentle laughter of worlds to be set in their own motions without safety and hope, the twins turning instantly rotten as those Old Makers knew, drowning worlds in the small and large wreckages lurking in their shadows.

The oldest wish was for health, and the First People, so innocent they didn't know how to eat, to swallow, and had to be shown.

He noticed again the orb weaver's web filled with wind carried floss, the light of sun there thinning; thin and dry and spinning on itself. And the fragment of a song Helen Nears Water's grandmother sang over him, touching his elbows and forehead with crane feathers:

Sky of this Earth
 Make me know Nothing
 Make me know Nothing

Colonel Warner described a malaria epidemic. Wesley's mother and the Farmer thought it was set apart by the rarest sympathy and admiration for that Valley World already knowing as it did exactly what irreversible disap-

pearance was, not as rumor, but as the smells and fugitive escapees coming from the "Missions". He watched the Farmer's wife over the years stand before other wives in their Valley of the Santa Ana. Many neighboring families and ranchers hated the Jew, begrudged the Jew for his skills and success. The one they saw, if they cared to look, at a late night window studying hydrology, fertilizer applications and chemistry, botanical genetics, models for how to re-think the usages of water.

"Why, what the fuck was that bastard doin? Plannin sumthin and by God sendin it in secret codes to Russia," they whispered while their wives watched Wesley's mother drive her convertible, speculated about the color of her skin, whether she was "...full Mexican, part nigger er'what. Sum mixture of Indian thrown in an' her ridin thru town an' all like she wuz sum strapped up whore."

Yet when she accompanied her husband to talk of soil conservation and the mis-usages of fertilizers at town meetings those same wives were prone to meaner angers than their husbands, complaining as they did among themselves, while playing thousand dollar a hand at home poker after a good season's haul: "Who gave her the right. Talk the way she does. Give an education to a spic like her and look what happens."

Tom Green helped them to hang up signs for these issues. Go out with a hammer and digging stick, shovel; plant a proper stake, nail up a good notice, telling what ought to have been, in his mind, a decent thing, since he'd seen personally, the rich plains soils turn to kill clouds, bad irrigation techniques poisoning the rest with leeching salts, a nightmare ugly as war. The billions tons of life giving dirt whipped to scourging sand-blast he thought only certain Hebrews like his friend, the Farmer, still had proper words for. A People like that, as he came to realize, coming upon such wanderings, and heave their words into more.

They were, when they weren't overcome with their trouble, funny and quick, able to create surprising ease for everyone around them. She filled baskets with containers of Spanish rice, frijoles, chicken with mole sauces, spicy burritos, tamarindo for the thirsty. They both sang and danced. The Farmer often told stories and jokes in mixtures of English, Yiddish, Russian, and Spanish, coming, as Tom Green thought, to these languages as if they belonged to and were a part of the Home he carried waving his pruning knife as he talked, as if cutting the parts of things to be told in the air of it, the Kiowa watching and smiling over this man and woman, who he knew were struck and charmed with dreams.

The Waterer never saw his friend once use these tongues to, as his neighbors thought, belittle them. It was just that he couldn't help his joy

in moving from one home to another as he thought and talked throughout the day. And if he met a fellow rancher near a hard won sundown on the border of a field in their pick-ups he inevitably had whiskey and shot glasses in a glove compartment for the occasion. His wife honored the birthdays of neighbors' and workers' children. If there was sickness she often prepared food for stricken families, found doctors, and during fiestas made bouquets and wreaths of her husband's roses. But no matter. He was still the "Little Jew" with his "Jew Plans" and she "the Mexican" with her fine old Californios manners "better kept in a ditch" and "What she think she was goin into schools for with ideas to help those dirty kids learn how to read?"

And so it hovered as a second sky.

PINTURA : PALABRA

Orlando Ricardo Menes

INTRODUCING A PORTFOLIO OF POEMS

What follows is a substantial group of poems by eight contributors who were inspired by “Our America: The Latino Presence in American Art,” an exhibit unveiled in Washington, D.C., in late 2013 at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, and currently touring several U.S. cities through 2017.

This second PINTURA : PALABRA portfolio (the first just recently published in *Poet Lore*) consists of poems by seven Florida poets who took part in the second PINTURA : PALABRA workshop, which was held last year in Miami during the month of May at the Frost Art Museum on the campus of Florida International University.

This workshop was facilitated by poet Emma Trelles (who was a participant in the D.C. workshop). Emma also happens to be a past winner of the Andrés Montoya Poetry Prize, and her manuscript *Tropicalia* was published by the University of Notre Dame Press in 2011. By the way, the judge for that year’s contest was Silvia Curbelo, who took part in the Miami workshop and whose two poems you will be enjoying.

Besides Silvia, the other seven poets whose vibrant works you will be experiencing are Adrian Castro, Mía Leonin, Roy Guzmán, Alexandra Lytton Regalado, Caridad Moro, Rita Maria Martínez, and Elisa Albo. I have chosen poems that exhibit a range of poetics and aesthetic preoccupations. Indeed, there is much diversity in these poets, some being established in their careers and others emerging, including individuals from different generations and whose cultural or national roots reflect the panoply of Latino ethnicity in that state, in this case Caribbean and Central American. You can certainly learn more about them from their bios in the back of this issue.

I am thankful to Francisco Aragón of our Institute for Latino Studies for conceiving, initiating, and directing “PINTURA : PALABRA, a project in ekphrasis.” This multi-year initiative has the aim of promoting Latino writing inspired by the visual and plastic arts. These workshops, held on-site wherever the “Our America” exhibit travels to, is the principal means for carrying out this vision, in collaboration with the Smithsonian American Art Museum, as well as the exhibit’s many hosting venues and partnering literary journals.

Finally, both Francisco and I are grateful to the Weissberg Foundation for providing partial funding for PINTURA : PALABRA.

EL PATIO DE MI CASA

Silvia Curbelo

On the last night we go as far as the edge
of the field. Then back. All around us
shadows of trees, the unattended rose garden.
The house hums with what we mean to say.

Time is a figure at the edge of a snapshot.
A sapling, a spigot, a darkness, a face.
We make walls from what the night
gives back, the stone of what we name

and name again. The black sky
is not a symbol. The child's bed is not a raft.
There is no narrative but this
thick gathering of clouds, this leaky roof,

as if the threat of rain could be anyone's story.
When I open my eyes the patio is empty,
rooted in sleep, equal parts mirror
and dream.

Artwork: *El Patio de Mi Casa*
Artist: Maria Brito
Year: 1990
Medium: acrylic paint, wood, wax,
latex, gelatin silver prints and found
objects

JOYRIDE IN BLUE*Silvia Curbelo*

What is lost, what is broken,
 the sweet slide of two worlds
 colliding into night. Call it
 a journey, a geography,
 tangle of wires and TV light,
 the insomnia glow of boredom
 that has you reaching for the car keys
 one hundred miles from morning, bone-
 tired white flag of 6 a.m.,
 as you slip behind the wheel
 with the radio wide open.
 And the street like a face in every mirror,
 pulling you out from that starting place
 where home and motion intertwine,
 steam on the shaving mirror, gold script
 on the blue towel, *His*. Not his.
 But this is not the stone you carry, clatter
 and hum of being alive, full-ride nightscape
 splashed across your windshield like the back hand
 of forgiveness, a kind of loose rain in the weeds
 and empty lots of L.A., past the sinewy
 figures of love, ghost deals gone sour
 and a song in every shot glass.
 Let's call it the blues, barkeeps
 and cabbies cashing in their fares
 to head home before the day breaks open
 with its backslide of regret.
 But not yet, not this moment,
 windows rolled down to whatever
 wind flies in, slow grind of salt
 and blue neon, past lit up
 tenement windows, museums
 of rust and moving on. And desire
 like an afterthought, all flash

and blur, the last-ditch starlight
of ten thousand cigarettes going in the dark.

Artwork: *Night Magic (Blue Jester)*

Artist: Carlos Almaraz

Year: 1988

Medium: oil on canvas

AFTER CARMEN HERRERA'S BLANCO Y VERDE*Mia Leonin**No he pintado ni por gloria, ni por dinero...*

I.

You have no Marys to illuminate you,
 No thunder clap of applause. Your northern node
 glimmers in Capricorn. Your ascendance is steady and tectonic.

Visual haiku, your lines open into spaces,
 green swords lunge into white.

Before you, I only noticed the cattle egret
 pecking away at the heifer's flank.
 I didn't see the pasture as foreground.

When did you decide you were an artist?

You don't decide to be an artist, art gets inside of you.

II.

In my doorway I found you.

I wanted to name you Alma,
 but your wings are only for show.

I summoned Paloma, but she can't speak
 without a knife between her teeth.

Blanco, you are a mouth opened in song.
 You are a wing, flickering between cloud and cumulous.

A morning face pressed into the shade of a book,
 you tremble at every take off.

Planeta sin planetario

Campana sin campo

Toro sin espasmo de carne

Don't you feel Cuban?

I feel Cuban, but I can't function in Cuba. I would never have been an artist if I'd stayed.

White, you are the plate spinning atop a stick.
In the next room, my mother stands up
and walks away from her last breath.

In truth, her chest caved in and she emitted one final wheeze.
But, blanco, you already know that.
You were there all along, masking color.

What are the good things about being the age you are?

*Not too many, my dear, not too many! There are too many physical difficulties.
I do not advise it.*

White, you are wax candles melting into cake.
You are sea caps rising as two oars slip into the ocean.

You are 11:11, the time of day when hours and minutes
growl from their cell.

You are a city where a gravel pit shack can be called
"Casa La Paloma" if someone owns a paint brush.

III.

Earth is a door I cannot face.
Green, we ask what we have always asked of you:

To flutter then unflutter the heart.
To bind its unknowing to diastolic wisdom.

You are the leaf listening beyond the caterpillar's chewing,
the scale of a dragon whose breath smells of burnt sugar.

You are the frozen iguanas falling from trees,
their hypothermic green oxidizing to mud.

What was Paris like in the 1940s?

It was right after the war and a lot of things were lacking. There was no coffee, there was no this, there was no that. One day we went to the opera and in the intermission a woman stepped out dressed in a ravishing couture gown. Everybody applauded wildly.

In old English "grene" comes from the words "grass" and "to grow."
Carmen Herrera, like the word *green*, you were a noun and a verb,
long before you were an adjective.

Green exists between yellow and blue on the spectrum of light.
Verde, like language, you exist because two colors mix:

Encantadadaísmo

Origasmo

Shamanimalista

In Thai, Vietnamese, and old Chinese,
the word for green and blue can be the same:

Shade and shadow

Sombra y sombrilla

You were born in 1915, and discovered at age 89 after painting full-time for more than 60 years. Why do you think it took so long for your

work to be recognized?

You have to be in the right place at the right time, which I always managed not to be. Years ago somebody called Rose Fried had a very avant garde gallery in New York. She told me, Carmen, you can paint circles around the men artists that I have but I'm not going to give you a show because you're a woman.

Blanco y Verde, joined contingencies:

Majestic mountain and landfill

Sea level rise and gondola

Bit coin and Ben Franklin

Billion-dollar fast food franchise

and tomato picker's metastasized tumor

What is abstract art?

Abstract is what you see. Lines and spaces.

I'm not sure if you are being coy or condescending.

Ya soy muy vieja para ser coy. Condescending, yes, I may be that. Now ask me about color and you will get a less literal response.

Green, confluence of light and dark:

You are my Appalachian trail
of tears.

My Valentine's Day
of the Dead.

What do you do when you're not painting?

I'm working on this dilapidated room, this shoe box of mementos. I'm getting rid of this big sack with all the other old sacks crammed inside, sacks you think will one day have a purpose. In other words, I'm working on dying. You are too young, lady.

I'm not so young.

True.

Artwork: *Blanco y Verde*
Artist: Carmen Herrera
Year: 1960
Medium: acrylic on canvas

BORDERLAND PICA: BLENDER

After Margarita Cabrera's sculpture

Roy G. Guzmán

A pair of proud brown boots refused to ford The Rio Grande. The man who wore them tried to hoist them off the ground, resolving to a might he hadn't accessed since his youth. But the boots wouldn't budge, squalid and festering on soil that roasts itself for pleasure.

The man had already lost two toes on his trip. At night, when the wolves howled shadows, despair drove the man to serenade the footwear. During the day, when his body was more waterfall than repository, he'd pluck twigs off brushwood and gamble them for the boots, bidding star crumbs he'd spot all throughout the landscape of his deathbed.

As days stretched into invisible mosquito nets of comets, the cacti grew firmer. The boots clung indulgently to the ground, like infants refusing to find their old cradle in the new. The man, unable to carry on, amputated his legs.

The heat and sand eventually rooted out the bones from his thighs. The pelvis became an artless mask. His ribcage, an artifact for a desperate museum. Always ravenous, the boots' laces wound like vipers around the leather requiems. The sun, an indifferent witness, longed for a true out-of-body experience.

Had you asked the boots what caused the man's death, they'd have simply said kings don't ever pray for their servants.

Artwork: *Brown Blender*
Artist: Margarita Cabrera
Year: 2011

Medium: vinyl, copper wire, and thread

TRES ROSTROS DEL FUEGO: AFTER LUIS JIMÉNEZ'S
MAN ON FIRE (1969)

Roy G. Guzmán

I. Cuauhtémoc as Ziggy Stardust/Thin White Duke

I'm a meatpacking eagle descending from a planet of tunas.
I'm the electric eel protruding from a hawk's mouth
when the hawk hasn't fed,
the squeal of terror bifurcating valleys. War
is the pose you choose to be photographed in, gullies
jammed between the leather cushions at the studio. I'm the free-
tailed bat bursting from the bloodstream,
what walks on fire, Mom and Pops knowin'
we're the true inheritors of mudslides, of quicksand,
del limo. We sacrifice each other to make new stars,
eat a man and we fly higher, stretch from a cliff
and nostalgia es lo parido y lo desaparecido. I croon at the stake
when the skies are attenuated by the thunder of harquebuses...
Mis huaraches son Hello Kitty glow-in-the-darks,
but don't lose your fingers canning tomatoes, honey—
not before juicing the holy sky we've witched above ourselves.
In five years I will die,
so tell me, Unrefined Brown Sugars of the World—gathered
by manos molidas—has Hell already burned through my scalp,
or is the rope still tight around my neck?

Quetzals gloat in their magisterial robes. Marsupials wed
in bloodbaths. New Wave glasses decode the hunters'
hauling of their ships to our chambers. My shoulders burn
a burgundy, orange-yellow plume
that spreads to the rim of a cycle. I twist,
a double helix strand of lightning bugs. I am synthetic blood
when real blood runs out,
the spiritual goat of evolution, the last of the outer-space raza.
Fortune cookies predict the
forsaking of our brothers. Stick lavender feathers in
your red polyester jacket pockets while you plan your escape,
don't let your chanclas squeak by the river.

You'd think every dream comes with coupons
 you can use at the store to trace your doubts in the fake waterways
 of the enemy. Sunken archipelagos. The
 lotion on a warrior's elbows,
 the impossible harbors of a massacred gente.
 Who needs extra brochures of the conquistadors' New World
 when you can get lost inside your broken body parts,
 inside your unredressed disfigurements? I am the green
 specter above a ridge, a bird of prey
 with feathered lungs, the fog that hoards all stars,
 what rolls under the ships when the captains ain't got you lookin'.
 I place flowers in the oppressors' eye sockets
 when we claim victory, the guests throwing
 the biggest, unrecorded rave in the darkest temples of
 a gouged backdrop of honeyed rosquillas.

Men of Miclantecuhli, with the eyes of
 Hidalgo y Costilla, descendants of Benito Juárez:
 I will autograph your travel guides
 with ash we buy at the dollar store. Star-shaped piñatas
 were filled with broken toys to demonstrate our bodies
 exploding. Blow kisses to the absent skin of your sisters.
 The alligators are drawing near from los pantanos
 to devour the wrong party scene, they received the wrong invitation,
 they're drunk with allegories. Be a dear, Sweet
 Orphan of Death. Scatter glitter on the blood that gushes
 out of our temples. Make it shine
 like a bastard sun mopping the floor of a house without mirrors.
 Gather the women's skirts unspooling
 on staircases like curséd four-eyed opossums returning
 to the jacaranda trees that shake their busy rattles to the roaring fire.
 I'm the finest lover you've never tried resuscitating
 while hanging from branches to aim at the adversary. ¡Tira
 la flecha, hermano! ¡Tira la flecha, hermana! Soy
 el Tiraflecha que nunca se persigna antes de salir de su casa.

We're done with penicillin ammunition.
 We're deaf to the guests photographing our semioticians
 in the VIP room. The music of our bodies gets louder as we famish.
 The conquest scene is a conjunction of hyenas

laughing till our bones turn to tamales. The world will end
 in a single take, with hearts of brass manufactured by machines
 across the ocean, our teeth *mordiendo y mordiendo dinero*.
 People of my dog-eared kingdom, Machete Boogie-Men:
 we've run out of billboard funds
 to depict the massacre of our archetypes. And I speak Spanish.
 When it's time to dress up like warriors around tea parties,
 the encores will be played by British stunt doubles.
 Mail your bonbon boxes and Cinco de Mayo cards to Dorothy,
 she's searching for the yellow brick road to El Dorado
 and her *rastrillo* has shattered. In the next rendition of myself,
 I won't play the role of a human
 sacrificer. But if you bury your soul deep within my ashes,
 babe, you can prophesize every war *en las cartas*.
 I want to spit out the skulls of my ancestors
 like a blue snake hurls a deer from ruins. Make 'em
 dance! dance! dance! dance! dance!
 to the radio of our wounded rivers.
 Tonight Death is feeling extra hot, mixing
 martinis with one bony hand, playing a false tune
 no one cares to hear with his other. Every woman's skin burns
 as he plays the same sad chord that induces geographical amnesia,
 our skeletons capering against the rootstock.

II. Hernán Cortés as a Bro

america let me get at you bro.

america let me play with your silk hair. can you hold my burger for a sec.

heres a selfie of me with pink shorts planning an attack this morning.

heres a selfie of me with a beer executing my attack and looking badass.
 wanna see how big my boat is.

here i almost lost the game. coach charles says winning is what counts.

ill be honest this one pic was hard to take. there was so much glare i had to
 crop out from the background. you have these shadows

that dont exactly work with the water. you have to find the right color tone otherwise you get washed out.

are you the mapmaker of my dreams. thats my favorite pickup line. do you have good memory.

my favorite exercise is making my enemy run like hes drunk.

heres a cool island on fire. all these people on facebook like what i took

away with me. i got like 21 likes on this one. that whole albums got like 200 likes if you add them together.

35 likes has been by minimum in the past. im trying to reach 1000 today. im just searching for the right territory

to help me bring out my talent. a territory to save from the slaughter.

cuba tells me i need patience. honduras says im difficult with clients.

i am the treasurer of my frat and bros like portugal england and france know they can count on me for anything.

are you on tumblr. tumblr is alright. bunch of rape victims there. you an only child i bet. me and my boys

have this instagram account where we upload pics of us working out. we take care of our bodies you know.

have you ever tried scrolling down so fast on your phone you start mixing obituaries with people. i like that. at first i get dizzy

but then it feels like im watching a movie with actors that just say stuff no one else should hear.

bro i dont know what youve heard about me but im telling you

im not half as bad as they say. bunch of #haterz. my dads a lawyer. hes never wanted us to work like slaves.

sure #smallpox trended for centuries. but thats because some people dont know how to read

their 140 character survival manuals. everybody says you have to work hard if you want control.

i can give you a whole keg of disease bae. ill help you evolve.

theres a yahoo article i read this morning that says evolution is good for you.

bro like yesterday for instance i got a new pair of boots and that gave me something to look forward to.

when you follow the right economic model your fine. listen to your master and youll get ahead. thats what my dad always says.

where do you work out. once i told myself i would never become a has been. you know one of those moments where your staring at a lake

and you get an epiphany. its all gravy after that. turn down for what. are you getting a text.

let me show you my new twitter avi. you think id look taller inside this armor

if i pop my collar. man its hard keeping up with appearances. they cant hold a bro down bro. bros before branches if you get the joke.

before i met you i pictured you as this girl who needs a man to walk her to her dorm.

my bros used to say you were so exotic looking no one could have you. your always playing hard to get

and #isht. bro i see that now.

so anyway let me finish my story. before i met you i used to see myself walking you home

like im not being creepy or anything im just there you feel me. i always

know where you are. other territories dont deserve

that kind of attention but you do. i like chick flicks.

you make me want to snap your cordilleras with my iphone or with my hands. look at the moon outside. i know it sounds cliché

but the moon is so cool sometimes in the sky. bright like floodlights. even the moon cant hide you.

sorry im pouring my feelings on you like that. like this is me we cool.

have another shot. forget marina. shes like yesterdays news. we prefer calling it soccer

not football here. four loco is the shit. you see your rivals blood when your trippin.

i bet you wanna see me plan my next move. see i got the feels now. how can you resist me.

Artwork: *Man on Fire*

Artist: Luis Jiménez

Year: 1969

Medium: fiberglass and acrylic urethane with painted fiberboard base

THE BODY AT THE END OF INEFFABLE*Adrian Castro*

The wind tattered the tabernacle of palm fronds
 The market was swept by the broom of death
 and the crown bounced down
 an empty road like forgotten weeds
 and the landlord handed his last slipper
 and lost the name of the mother of death

After the altar was sheltered
 After the altar was set
 and they said I was the altar
 I knew it would follow me
 in spite of my helpless memory
 & that I'd always search for something rhythmic
 something holy & red
 My palms cupped like hearts ready
 to strike at love
 Fingers like claws ready to write on the Earth
 Open the Earth to something holy:
 a name not spelled backwards
 not derivative of a nightmare
 but simple that spells search
 seed
 summer
 spring
 fall
 an altar they said was the mother of death

Artwork: *Farm Workers' Altar*
 Artist: Emmanuel Martinez
 Year: 1967
 Medium: acrylic on wood

FATHER ABOVE, MOTHER BELOW, THE HANGING TREE

after "At daylight the miserable man was carried to an oak..."
K. Gonzalez-Day

Adrian Castro

A boy who slept among skinny
bony branches—his eyes sour like bile—
nobody would forget
the day he was found hanging by his feet
the bloody cloth of disrespect dripping
his last breath fanning the mossy trunk
By all accounts a memorable day

A crisp morning in Northern California
The moss dripping its diamonds upon the Earth
The town that never recovered from the scorched gold mines
now entrusted to memory
The early settlers blame them now
these last ones who arrived barely clothed
with hats from border towns covering their naked dreams

The town's tyrants huddle like hyenas
cackle their despotic victory
One tyrant tall & useless
searches the soil perhaps to explain his bitterness

The boy's father climbed another oak
because his misery could fit nowhere else
He watches that one
who is searching the soil
who is scraping his coward stained hands
that one he sees helpless in his bitterness
others huddle to frolic in the savage spectacle
rather than watch the helpless spectacle

The father's arms are outstretched as if asking the biggest question
as if to embrace his boy

His son's arms stiff & stretched forward as if the boy thought
alas
the Earth was going to catch him

Artwork: "At daylight the
miserable man was carried
to an oak..."
from the series *Searching
for California Hang Trees*
Artist: Ken Gonzalez-Day
Year: 2007
Medium: ink-jet print

AURA Y CANDELILLA

Rita Maria Martinez

1.

Not the luster of an astral body.
Not an emanation of light

from the serene Buddha.
Not the mandorla, nimbus,

or halo in illuminated manuscripts.
Nor the aureole surrounding Our Lady of Guadalupe.

In fiction it's a glowing
red lamp on the front porch hinting

someone will die before daybreak,
perhaps knifed over poker.

It's pulsating spots. Slashes. Fire
that consumes my father's eyesight—

candelilla, he calls it, the sudden flash
of flames signaling the onset

of personal apocalypse, a migraine
that will ensnare and drive him into darkness.

2.

The brain becomes riddled with lesions.
I picture them as mines, sometimes moon craters

hording grief at their center,
refuse and ash of synapses.

Unlike my father I don't experience
an aura. I'm befriended by the sucker

punch, by the nonchalance of ambush.
Sometimes I succumb to discomfort,

surrender how I imagine Luis Jiménez
did when carving *Man on Fire*,

glazing the man's contours and skull
in an unrepentant blaze.

Did the artist have a vision, a flash
of the enslaved man? Did the image of bondage

smite him like my father's *candelillas*?
Jiménez died when a sculpture toppled

and severed an artery in his leg.
There was no warning.

Just an explosion of color.

Artwork: *Man on Fire*

Artist: Luis Jiménez

Year: 1969

Medium: fiberglass and acrylic urethane with painted fiberboard base

RIP THE STITCHES

Alexandra Lytton Regalado

After Maria Cabrera's sculptures

1. *Black and Grey Toaster*

Where are the fingerprints abuela pressed into the masa, the singed edges of the tortilla hot off the comal, black as the hearth-darkened walls of the adobe rancho you left behind?
Red strings like wires, nerve endings exposed,
the black toaster's vinyl body exhaled into a slump;
the slotted mouth ever ready
for the Eucharist of sliced white bread.

2. *Brown Blender*

Father's sagging shoulders, skin brown from the fields,
the brim of his straw hat, frayed. Strings uncut, untied,
end of the day Mother's hair slipping out of her bun,
root tendrils of the banyan returning to dirt,
the still-growing hair and nails of a corpse. One push
to chop, crush, and blend; the calavera smile of the buttons.

3. *White Coffee Maker*

La olla de café roiling with frijoles, la olla de café to collect rain,
la olla de café filled with bath water, afternoon café de olla
spiced with canela. White counter space, clear filtered water,
glittering flecks of coffee sieved through the hourglass drip of days.

Artwork: *Black and Grey Toaster, Brown Blender, White Coffee Maker*

Artist: Margarita Cabrera

Year: 2011

Medium: Vinyl, copper wire, and thread

EL CHANDELIER

—After Pepón Osorio

Alexandra Lytton Regalado

We're chained to *El*
 chandelier
ella, aquella—

extra syllable, typical woman's overstuffed suitcase,
 the rib pulled from *Él* and *Aquel*

hasta la coronilla de rubias
 and the singular trigueña
 birthing strings of pearls
 from our splayed legs

teardrop crystals, baggies of water suspended
 above roadside fruit to scare off flies—
 no deterrent to bears, moose, and deer,
 the woodland creatures of our new North

blue dominos give way
 to the cement swans, protectors of our lawns,
 the coterie of archangels, saints
 and chingalavista demons of the second tier

la Carabela de Colón sails across the ceiling,
 the chandelier's first lights, glinting
 off glocks the color of coquí
 and quetzal, lapis lazuli

Even the neuter objects prefer the male "O":
esto, eso, aquello, ello—knotted brows, thrust
 lips push the air out—not the "A" of *ella*
 that pulls back, the first note of pain

pirámide of moreno kewpies
 y los hijos de Hernán—no denying
 he was magnificent:
 corn-silk hair, eyes of jade, his pale face—

mothers sway like palms
 over their golden cradles, malinchistas,
 ¿mi bebé? mire pues, es lindo, blanquito,
 y parece que, en cierta luz,
 sus ojos se ven azules
 their newborn greys
 dreaming music box ballerinas

And regarding *el tema* on how *El* is to end in “O,”
La is to end in “A”
 there is this: *el dilema,*
el drama—some have broken the rules

el problema is that these crossed over—
 el día, el aroma, el agua, el poema, el idioma—
 el chandelier’s edge of lake, mineral smell of still water,
 the poem, a pebble in the quiet reeds

halo of Astroturf torches in fringed skirts
 trailing the underworld
 of fat doves and soccer balls kicked
 into the neighbor’s yard

and because the “A” stood at the front
 with a glint in her eye:
 el águila, el ala
 also sailed across the border—
 even *el alma*

half man, half horse
 with sticks of lightning
 he killed the deer, monkeys, birds
 our children stared with eyes
 round and dark as the eyes of deer

But, O, O, O, *la mano*
 is a raised hand—
 eagle-eyed, her words sweep
 like a wing across the white page:

when there is more than one

La

we reclaim

las aguas, las alas, las almas.

Artwork: *El Chandelier*

Artist: Pepón Osorio

Year: 1998

Medium: Functional metal and glass chandelier with mixed media

UNPACKING THE SUITCASE

AFTER WEST SIDE STORY UPSIDE DOWN,
BACKWARDS, SIDEWAYS AND OUT OF FO-
CUS (LA MALETA DE FUTRIACO MARTINEZ)
BY ADÁL, 2002

Caridad Moro

I. Snippets of *West Side Story*, 1961

This is how you learn you are not an American girl.

Once a year, you watch *West Side Story*
on the screen of your parents' 1974 Zenith
and catch a glimpse of yourself on television.
You are the first born gringa in the family,
your English is perfect, but you don't look or live
like your friends. You don't go to slumber parties
or play-dates, you don't join the Brownie Troupe
or take ballet, but once a year you get to live
in Technicolor and root for the Sharks
because they speak Spanish, too.

You are taught there is safety in numbers, you move
in packs, cloistered by siblings in an apartment
building just like Maria's, cousins and tías
on every floor, duennas in batas de casa
adept at concealing battalions of Playtex Cross Your Heart
bras, black lace slips that slide off the shoulder,
the delicate mauve of a fading bruise.

During the mambo your mother dances around
your living room, tells you to watch her, shows you
how to control the Hula hoop of your skirt
so that the crinolines she has pinned to your PJs
orbit around your hips without the flash
and blur of your ruffled panties, makes you
promise not to tell your father.

Like Anita, your mother knows her way around
 a bolt of cloth, but you don't tell your friends
 she sews all the clothes you wear. After work,
 she comes home to your dresses, red cushioned
 pushpin corsage at her wrist, alchemy of thread
 and Simplicity Patterns spun into gold standard
 replicas fit for the girl you want to be, but aren't.

II. Sound Bites of *En Mi Viejo San Juan* as sung by Brenda Feliciano

My father makes me learn to play
En Mi Viejo San Juan on the guitar,
 makes me learn the words so I can master
 Brenda Feliciano's pronunciation of loss—
 the third language we speak at home.

(Adios, adios, adios)

It doesn't matter that we're not Puerto Rican
 that he's never seen San Juan,
 that my callouses have morphed back into blisters
 trying to shred my guitar like Eddie Van Halen,
 all that matters is how he weeps at Brenda's farewell.

(Adios, adios, adios)

Her keen careens into a wail
 I replicate but cannot conjure or understand.
 I am thirteen and have never lost anything
 but his approval. I am thirteen, and do not fear
 dying away from home. What did I know?

(Adios, adios, adios)

III. Pedacitos de Pedro Pietri, Founder of the Nuyoricán Poetry Café

He was never late
 He didn't have a car
 He worked
 He walked to work
 He was always on time
 He was on time the day the wheel spinner took his finger
 He was on time on the morning the foreman was late
 He was on time on the morning the foreman forgot to check his machine
 He heard his finger jam the machine before he saw it severed
 He saw his finger spinning in the wheel before he felt the pain of its loss
 He joked that the wheel spinner ate his finger before he ate his breakfast
 He joked that he should have called in sick
 He joked because he had no sick days
 He apologized for breaking the machine
 He apologized for his blood, how it tie-dyed the wheel
 He apologized after he fainted
 He apologized for the mess his mangled hand left on the floor
 He apologized to Hector who was sent to clean up the mess
 He was twenty-one
 The wheel spinner was older than he was
 The foreman said it was an accident
 The foreman said The Company was not at fault
 The Company offered him 1500 dollars
 He thought 1500 dollars was a fortune
 The foreman told him 1500 dollars was more than the going rate for a single finger
 He thought 1500 dollars was more than he deserved
 He did not say the foreman was usually late
 He did not say the foreman was usually hung over
 He did not say the foreman had to rig the machine every morning
 He said it was an accident
 He said the foreman was not at fault
 He said The Company was not at fault
 He signed the No-Fault Agreement
 He signed it with his left hand
 He signed the check
 He signed it with his left hand
 He walked home with fifteen 100 dollar bills in his pocket
 He bought a solid gold I.D. bracelet to remind him of his name

He went back to work as soon as they let him
He was never late

Artwork: *West Side Story Upside Down, Backwards, Sideways
and Out of Focus (La Maleta de Furiaco Martínez)*

Artist: ADÁL

Year: 2002

Medium: suitcase, flat-screen LCD monitor, and digital video

CALIFORNIA HANG TREE

Elisa Albo

After “At daylight the miserable man was carried to an oak ...”
from the series *Searching for California Hang Trees* by Ken Gonzales-Day

Only the trunk looks alive, a colossal torso enrobed
in mossy skin, green fur thick on fleshy rolls, a body
sensual in its curves, ample hips and rounded backside,
wide ankles and massive thighs that support it, narrow
back, the spine, heartwood at its center. Ancient oak
in a stand of oaks, in a blighted forest in California,
she’s a snag, standing in death, silent witness, her bark
a suit of armor against insects, disease, storms and fire,
but not against ropes fashioned into nooses gingerly tossed
over limbs, not against men, their ignorance, their hate.
If hair be wires, if tree branches human limbs, then arms
and legs sprout from this tree, craggy twigs, bent limbs
multiplied, octopi flailing, frozen in time—a photograph
someone took, someone else chose to hang on a museum
wall, so we could see it, write it, recall the limbs of hundreds
of innocents dangling above the ground beneath this
massive tree, their Mexican blood not soaking the earth,
the grass now green beneath still, ghostly feet.

Artwork: “At daylight the miser-
able man was carried to an oak ...”
from the series *Searching for Cali-
fornia Hang Trees*
Artist: Ken Gonzalez-Day
Year: 2007
Medium: ink-jet print

INTERMEZZO*Stephen Massimilla*

Dark morning could have come
 with small white newts, avian purring
 and children tumbling in the hills—
 or so it's still easy to think,
 though someone has been poisoning
 the mourning doves, and it rains
 six days out of every ten.
 Your entomologist neighbors feed
 on weedy red leaves from their sill—
excellent, they say—
 while the Canada geese have vanished
 along with the sweetest little fleet-nosed gophers
 of the dirt plots in the park.
 Nap hour comes sooner, takes longer.
 The season's at the halfway mark.
 Like a broken ring of water,
 the center escapes.
 You trip through puddles, the sun makes
 its increasingly fewer rays change color—
 at times to race, at others to gather
 in lassitude, or even to explode.
 The heart's weather is also a matter of incertitude.
 The wind could coagulate like a mother's blood
 and express in an instant every shade
 of hurt that occurred to it, subjecting you
 to its vicarious wish. At every switch
 of the lunar calendar—all this
 and nobody notices.

YALE CLUB
FIFTY VANDERBILT AVENUE
NEW YORK, N. Y. 10017

December 21, '72

Dear O'Rourke:

I replied soon as I received your epistle. I only licked a page here and there. Of course, I believe it's cruel and ludicrous to imprison men for burning draft cards. But what dismays me is that you have now become a paper-bullet writer. There's more politics in literature than letters in the economics and policies of the State.

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It is kind of you to cite me at the conclusion of the volume, but do you realize your opening line you are closely paraphrasing me. And though I had no part in the making of this book, I believe, without bombast, that I have had a good deal to do with the making of William O' Rourke's mind. Atheist that I am, I add, For God's sake return to belles lettres, and bear in mind that a journalistic prose has nothing to with a man who wishes to be a litterateur.

do-

My affections, as always,
128 East 91st Street
Apartment 2 B
New York, N.Y, 10028
Tel: 289-4339

Paul O'Connell

EDWARD DAHLBERG: LETTERS TO A YOUNG WOULD-BE WRITER

Edward Dahlberg

With annotations by William O'Rourke

The letters found below are those I still have from the writer Edward Dahlberg (1900–1977), who was my teacher for two courses one semester at the University of Missouri at Kansas City. I had what is usually called a checkered history as an undergraduate. I went for one year to Rockhurst College (now University) in Kansas City, Missouri, did badly, and, after spending the summer working for the Santa Fe Opera, barely managed to transfer to the state university branch in my hometown, then a so-called streetcar university, insofar as it educated local students, not being the residential campus it is now. After a listless academic year there, with the exception of the classes I took with Dahlberg in the spring semester of 1965, I went to Cape Cod to work as part of the annual migration college kids take to become cheap seasonal labor. Though, unlike most of the hundreds who did so, I stayed on the Cape, in Hyannis, after the summer, rented a room “fit only for suicide” as a friend put it back then, and eventually secured a job at a craft shop that remained open for the fall and changed apartments to a cozier one above the store. The owners had decamped to Boston for work during Christmas time, making enamels on copper in a downtown department store window.

*I was attempting to write my version of the great American novel, a long piece of juvenilia titled *The Armless Warrior*. The Vietnam War, needless to say, was raging at the time. In order to delay being drafted I returned to Kansas City in January of 1966 and re-enrolled at UMKC.*

*Dahlberg had already written a great American novel/memoir, called *Because I Was Flesh*, which appeared in 1964 and is one of the most prominent of neglected and unread masterpieces by an American writer. There are a number of reasons for that, some revealed in his letters to me, others the product of the literary culture and marketplace. Dahlberg had returned to UMKC for the fall semester that I had forgone. When I returned in January, I learned that Dahlberg had decamped before the semester's end. It evidently took me a few months to summon the strength to write him. Dahlberg was 65 and I was 20 when the correspondence began (he was born in July 1900 and I in December of 1945.) I do not have copies of my letters to Dahlberg. They are among his papers kept at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas, Austin, so what I wrote to him remains speculative to me. I'm sure they were*

inflamed and appropriately jejune. The letters that I have from Dahlberg are all similar in their physicality, mailed in small-sized Air Mail pre-stamped envelopes (8 cents!), chevroned around the edges with red and blue slashes, the letters themselves often typed on cheap yellow paper half the size of standard ms. paper. In between Dahlberg's letters that follow in chronological order I will comment, I hope where helpful, supplying context and explanation, if not excuses. It was on the phone, not in these letters, where Dahlberg once thundered into my ear, "O'Rourke, all excuses are perjuries!"

May 9, '66

Mr. William O'Rourke,
5431 Wyandotte
Kansas City, Missouri.

Dear O'Rourke:

I have your very good letter and thank you for what you say about me. Our situation at the university was almost similar. You had no human being there except myself and I no gifted student but you. I became so discouraged that I told Dr. Ryan, my only friend on the faculty, that I could not stomach the mediocrity of the teachers and the people who never came to learn anything and were quite successful.

These are doleful days, and I should feel quite crestfallen were you to be drafted. I read in the papers (if you can believe anything that is in them) that students now can either go into the peace corps or join the poverty program. Maybe this would be a solution, not the most felicitous one, for you. Unfortunately, it does not matter what college you attend the studies are a humbug; you might in the east meet more intelligent young women and men, but the professors, with the rarest exceptions, are dunciads everywhere.

Should you want me to write to Dr. Ryan in your behalf for any sort of kindness, be sure that I will do so at once. My influence in New York colleges is unmentionable.

I have three books coming out this fall, *Edward Dahlberg Reader*, a volume of my letters, and if I can repair some very bad sentences I wrote a few years ago, and put that logic into the words that is never in life, there should be another volume of mine appearing in Autumn, *The Leafless American*.

Believe me, in one way or another, those have feeling and do their utmost not to be stupid (for no man is wise except by accident) we are all torn piecemeal every day, and of every each hour.

I am very glad that you wrote to me, for I had hoped you would return,

and that maybe I could be useful to you.

Everybody wants to write, but very few wish to read, and so you know I never minded the fact that you chose to study good books instead of the usual, hackneyed scrawl one gets from students and most of our so-called celebrated writers.

Write me when you feel like doing so. Be sure that I always appreciated your character. Had I five O'Rourkes in Kansas City I would have remained there, but then I am demanding miracles of a surd universe.

I repeat, thank you very much for your letter; that is far better than the fusty and tepid best regards that one gets in an epistle nowadays. I lived on the Cape for 6 years, and just about lost my senses during the long, obituary winters when the small snowy hamlets were peopleless.

Edward Dahlberg

64 Rivington Street,
New York, 2, N.Y.

UMKC, back in the mid-Sixties was a much more parochial institution than it is now. Of course, all of America was more parochial in 1965. Dahlberg didn't gather too many friends, or acquire them easily. Academics are famously sensitive about their accomplishments, however puny, and often are prickly in the presence of large, imposing figures who come from either coast to the hinterlands. I hyperbolically ended a reminiscence of Dahlberg a year after he died with the remark, "At the end of his long life he had fewer than six people he would have called 'friend.'" When Jonathan Lethem in 2003 wrote about Dahlberg in Harper's he titled the piece, and the eventual book (2005) it appeared in, "The Disappointment Artist." Lethem quoted from my earliest pieces on Dahlberg in his article, but it was clear Lethem had no notion of anything else I had written.

I had returned in the summer of 1966 to the Santa Fe Opera, where I toiled as a scenic technician. Because of my friendship there with Susan Scott who worked at the opera as a "volunteer", I came to know her parents, the heiress Eleanor Metcalf Scott and the poet Winfield Townley Scott, who out of the blue Charles Baxter called earlier this year (Feb. 19, 2015) toward the end of a book review of H.P. Lovecraft in the New York Review of Books, a "grievously neglected American poet." Good for him. Scott (who had written early in his career on Lovecraft) was the second real writer I had come to know after Dahlberg and I don't find it entirely out of place at this point that my earliest encounters with authors involved the seriously neglected. What my letter from the opera (the

technicians lived at the ranch annexed to the theater) complained of specifically, I do not know, though I had a lot of complaints.

July 30, '66

Mr. William O'Rourke
P.O. Box 2408,
Santa Fe, New Mexico.

My dear O'Rourke:

I have your doleful letter, but what remedy is there for life at your age or mine? You know what feelings I have about our execrable education. But then there is bread, and how to get it, and into I have known many writers who fell into depravity of one sort or another, to fetch lucre.

There is a Hollywood scribbler whom I see on rare occasions who imagines he can debauch his own spirit and that of the populace and at the same time compose an honest book glutted with the truths of a soothsayer. While I was starving, he earned much money, but now that his hopes are wan, and he is hungry, but for fame!

The other day I wrote to a man at the University of Texas who is editing a small volume of miscellaneous essays and a tale, to excise some of my remarks about pathics. Then along came galleys of letters of mine to appear in the *Edward Dahlberg Reader* (which the editor had selected) and there are droll and harsh words about homosexuals, and so I now think I made a mistake, and must write him again to let it be, and take the consequences, for this brood of unnatural half-men, governs reviews and one's book is likely to be interred should one be as offensive as I have been. There will also be a volume of my epistles to be published in November by Braziller, and I have not the scantiest idea which ones are to be printed.

What else can you do but read the wise authors, and somehow you will come out of your tedious perplexities. There were long seasons of drought when no matter what I did I had no luck with women. I earnestly hope you will find one, but not a venomous bitch, and don't get married too early, for it takes a long time to understand anything at all about one's self, and by the time you have the least comprehension of your nature, you are likely to discover that you have wed a woman who is absolutely alien to you. But all advice is worthless, but I give it, anyway, for I have no other choice; for should I be mute I would blame myself if you blunder, and of course offering you counsel may be wrong too.

This is a barbarous, sullen town (no pun), and I feel that soon as I com-

mence to write I go into exile. But I think every man of feeling is banished.

Don't imagine that it is easy for me to compose a book, or that I am any less of a worm than you. It is always hard, and you do not know whether you are putting down elegant platitudes, wandering, or if you should not cast the whole idea away. Even so, what is a man to do with his life? I cannot be a drone, and have no thought of being a drudge either. The two dilemmas are: the woman who inflames the heart and the flesh, and the talent to do something with those heavy, endless hours.

Auden is another pseudo-male, and so you are quite right in rejecting him.

Write me whenever you wish to do that. I would suggest other books for you to read, but I imagine you have by no means consumed the list I gave you; however, if there are ancient sages you desire to be familiar with please let me know.

Wish my rejoinder were more useful to you; the truth is I have been in the dumps, since for months I have been taking elaborate notes and scrabbling what lines I know not for a literary autobiography.

Be sure of my friendliest regards, and that I always like to hear from you. I shall be here until about the middle of September.

Edward Dahlberg

820 Arguello Road,
Santa Barbara, California 93105

*Well, I can only surmise I mentioned that I was drawing the attention of a number of men at the opera, but none of the women. Some elegant paradox I was attempting, no doubt. In any case, Dahlberg's attitudes regarding gays in the 1960s mirrored the mainstream's (only in his prejudices was Dahlberg ordinary), though complicated, I'm sure, by those gay men who most admired him and were his patrons. And, however Dahlberg spoke, wrote, about women in his letters, and in person, what was clear to me was that he thought about them quite a bit. I've always considered the most common sort of misogyny displayed by men was their thinking about women not at all. And lest anyone thinks I rejected an overture from W. H. Auden, the reference, I'm sure, was to Auden's libretto, or some part of it, to Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress*, which Santa Fe was mounting that summer. When I encountered Auden a few years later at Columbia University (he was visiting a poetry workshop there) I refrained from telling him I had worked on *The Rake's Progress*, and had studied his libretto closely. I did, though, sit silently fascinated by the length of ash he maintained on the cigarette*

he was smoking, while a student, I think it was Hugh Seidman, recited a poem.

November 29, '66

Mr. William O'Rourke,
5431 Wyandotte,
Kansas, City, Missouri.

My dear O'Rourke:

I am always pleased to get your letters, and cannot help but notice some of the sharp and deeply-felt phrases. Would that I could in some way heal your despondency, but that is impossible. Each one carries his sack of suffering, and even could another help him, he would not know how to do it.

A pity too that your friend has been drafted. I prize my few friends, and who claims he has more than that is a liar and a braggart.

The Reader and a volume of my Letters will be published the latter part of January; and three of my books will be issued as paperbacks.

There is another volume of mine, *The Leafless*, which a San Francisco publisher will bring out in the close future.

Meantime, I am at work on a literary autobiography, and at this writing am dealing with those young enthusiasts of the Muses, Ernest Walsh, Kay Boyle, Robert McAlmon and Emanuel Carnevali, forgotten this day, but then that is the way it is. A parcel of this is supposed to appear in the *New York Times* in their Sunday Book Supplement.

Have been invited to go out as a Distinguished Professor (their wording) to a California university, but am fearful of accepting this. One has either to contend with academic bottleheads or untalented students. And the experience at Kansas City was a remorseless ordeal, and quite unreplenishing. I am not really a schoolmaster, for writing is my life, and my life otherwise is zero, except when friends come. I am very delighted to hear that you admire Dr. William M. Ryan; he is the only scholar out there and my dear friend.

I know this is a surd reply to your epistle; and what makes it so is that I would like to be useful to you, but at least now don't know what to do. Words should be curative, but it is hard to tell what they may be.

Maybe, if you can manage it, you ought to get out of Kansas City unless that means relinquishing affectionate companions. I may be doing some teaching at an eastern college, nearby, but don't know yet. Then there is that devil, lucre, which always haunts us. But tell me what you would like to do,

and let me see whether I can help. Be sure I want to do that if possible.

I don't hesitate to tell you about a brother, but there is little to divulge, would that it were not so, but then our real kin are those who share our conceptions and feelings. Anybody who thinks is an orphan in the earth.

A renowned Italian author came here with two other people and we did a tape-recording together and this will be heard on the principal Rome radio. The Italian translation of *Because I Was Flesh* has had a real reception among serious readers and the intelligentsia in Italy. This I did not know until I was informed.

Write when you feel inclined to do so.

Be sure of my warmest thoughts for you. I always had a strong feeling that you had a different sort of nature, not at all average; I consider the mediocre man insane.

Edward Dahlberg

64 Rivington Street,
New York 2, N.Y.

*Dahlberg had returned to New York City from Santa Barbara and I had returned from Santa Fe to UMKC. It was, officially, my junior year of college. Looking back it is clear I see-sawed from remarkable summers to below ordinary college semesters. Dr. Ryan taught Chaucer and other medieval subjects. I had retained from Santa Fe a 1946 Studebaker pick-up truck, with a metal load bed, painted turquoise in the New Mexican manner, equipped with Atomic Energy Commission tires (they were so stenciled on the sidewalls.) I had a cowboy hat and cowboy boots, but, soon realized that this was no draw on anyone wandering the campus, since all my fellow Midwesterners at UMKC were fleeing such rural and roughshod backgrounds, hoping to be educated and economically advanced. Had I been a student at an east coast university it may have been different. I would have been the other, not the all-too familiar. This is doubtless why Dahlberg keeps referring to my missives as "doleful", as I went on about my somewhat self-imposed cloistered existence. Given the time lapses between letters their doleful qualities might not seem quite so redundant as they do now read collectively. All these "doleful" years I recounted in my 1981 novel, *Idle Hands*, which I demi-dedicated to Dahlberg. During the later 1960s Dahlberg was having something of a renaissance, at least in the publishing world, since *Because I Was Flesh* had been widely praised, if not read.*

February 10, '67

Mr. William O'Rourke,
5431 Wyandotte,
Kansas City, Missouri 64112

My dear O'Rourke:

I believe you know how sympathetic I am with your perplexities. Nor can I tell you how pleased I am that Dr. Ryan is your friend. This pedantic noddle, I am referring to French, of course, who calls me pompous, would not associate with students as Dr. Ryan or I do, and even that sounds, as I write it, like a bombastic remark. This hack was motivated by ferine jealousy and malice. I would not trouble about it except that he was assailing not my book but my character. Not that I go about babbling about my paltry virtues. Be sure, I have been assailed all my life, for one cause or another; that I ever desired to be respectable, a pecuniary adjective, is a foul lie. Since my youth I fled from the petit-bourgeoisie in the academies or in the business world.

I know nothing about the draft board. But I am to be a professor at Columbia University in the Fall and am supposed to teach writing, if one can do that, or be a benison to one human being in the earth.

I believe I told you I had the most rueful experiences with women at your age, and am not suggesting that all the darlings now are falling at my feet. There are scholarships at Columbia, and I could endeavor to secure one for you. But as you say, there is conscription, and then I don't know what you would be relinquishing should you leave Kansas City. I don't think much, except, of course, your family, and that is extremely important. And should you have friends there, and even one female who fetches your imagination, that, too, is a vital consideration.

As Dr. Ryan is a learned medievalist, and language so important to the living waters in the soul, I should not like to see you lose the advantage of hearing his lectures and learning from him,

Everything is a dilemma, and a Burden of Tyre.

You might, if you have a mind to do so, write to Thorpe Menn, the book-editor of the *K.C. Star*, provided you do not afterwards become the victim of his boundless spite. Never fear the strong, but be on guard against the weanling and the feeble mind.

You have, as ever, my very warm thoughts, and if you at any time think I can be useful to you, well, that is what man is born to do.

Edward Dahlberg

64 Rivington Street,
New York 2, N.Y.

I was living at my family home while attending UMKC and that condition obviously affected my mood and demeanor. I read a lot, but wasn't attentive to my studies and was, more or less, affronted by having to sit in, say, a Shakespeare class. I wandered in one day and discovered that there was to be a mid-term exam on three plays I had yet to read. I did summon enoughchutzpah to ask the professor if I could take the exam the next class. I wasn't sure I would ever finish the degree. Dahlberg, meanwhile, published one of the volumes he had mentioned and it was lambasted in the Kansas City Star and I dispatched my own attack of the review to the Star, which, no surprise, ignored it. The "French" Dahlberg mentioned in the letter would be Warren French, who may have done the referenced Star review. He taught 18th century literature at UMKC, which I took, having, at least, exhausted all the literature courses the English department offered. Attacking one of my own professors wouldn't have been out of character for me back then.

April 2, '67

William O'Rourke,
5431 Wyandotte
Kansas City, Missouri.

Dear O'Rourke:

Please forgive me for being so dilatory in replying to your letter. It was kind of you to send a letter to the *Star*, but by now I think enough people know how squalid and malicious was his review.

I rejoice in hearing that you have found female companionship, and hope she is the darling you require. Women nowadays are not very good. It was Homer who called the serving-maids of Penelope bitches, and everything is about the same, but just worse since the days of Attica.

Students are supposed to be coming from England and Europe as well as the United States to attend these alleged courses in writing. I understand the director is endeavoring to secure scholarships for those who cannot afford the tuition. It might be good for you, and maybe I could get this for you. I don't know. There is another and real quandary. Should his girl be what you deeply need, I would be most hesitant to suggest that you come to New York, for here you might be lonely, and though I could introduce you to people, who can take the place of a woman? Let us see what will occur?

How much shall I relish the task? I came to New York when I was twenty-three, and I was a solitary, a halved male for a year, and it was a bleak experience. So I don't want to give you counsel that might be hellebore for you.

This is a garbaged, septic city, where you can meet people with whom you can talk, but the women I see are savages in skirts half a meter in length, and though they look like amorous morsels you are likely to starve to death on such a sparse meal. I wish I could be clear about this. But I am endeavoring to do the best I can. I still don't know how desperate is your desire to be a writer, a good one. We have a plethora of scribblers and require no more. Then I would not like you to pay the cruel price I had to become an author, and then to be reviled by a pismire like French. Should he have a particle of the masculine in him I would be startled. Quite oddly, what raised his bile was my divulgation of Melville's homosexuality. Had he been willing to accept my challenge, then I should have cut him to pieces. For he has neither wit nor learning. Nobody in American letters ever heard of French, and almost every pedant scrabbles a few drossy books which are forgotten within a few weeks after they have come off the university presses.

I expect to go to Long Island to the shore the fag-end of May, and to continue writing, and, of course, reading.

I'm not always so tardy in answering your epistles, and please don't think I was indifferent. I myself was in the dumps despite the national encomia I have received for my books. *The Leafless American* went back to the printer who was drunk when he was setting up type, and so at the end of the book there are one or two lines missing.

You have, as always my warm thoughts; write whenever you have a mind to do so, and I promise to respond straightway.

Professor Edward Dahlberg

64 Rivington Street,
New York 2, N.Y.

Who was the "darling I require" mentioned in his letter? I have no recollection of any relationship in Kansas City at the time. I was getting out a bit more, in my fashion, and had a few friends and I was aware I could make women laugh, my best trait. The reference must have been to Susan Scott, whom I may have mentioned to him. She was writing me and we had been a suspect item for a short period toward the end of the previous summer in Santa Fe. But, in December, I received a Dear John letter and recklessly took off over Christmas break in the Studebaker pickup for Santa Fe in order to attempt to reclaim her.

The pickup threw a rod near Wichita, Kansas, and, after selling a truck I did not own, I continued on to Santa Fe by train. Susan refused to see me, but her mother made me a cup of hot tea, after Susan left me standing, abandoned, on East Alameda as she drove away with her new beau. I was standing forlornly on the dirt road by the meager river with a dunce cap of snow on my head. In the summer of 1967, instead of returning to Santa Fe (the opera had asked me back), I traveled to the Cape to work for my friends, the shop owners, the Karekas, who were doing well. The Santa Fe Opera burnt to the ground that summer. But the season went on and they rebuilt. At the end of the summer I left the Cape and visited Dahlberg at his apartment on Rivington Street. New York City in the Sixties hadn't gone through any real estate revolution yet and much of it, including the Village, appeared unchanged, remaining as it had been for a number of decades. Rivington Street, though not in the Village, certainly retained the atmosphere of the shtetl in the late '60s and Dahlberg's narrow apartment could have housed fresh immigrants. I recall black accordion metal gates guarding the two long front windows that abutted a fire escape. I suppose one of them must have been open, since this would have been the window where Fanny Howe claimed in Poetry magazine a few years ago (July 2008) to have jumped through, escaping Dahlberg's pants-down advances back then. For my visit, Dahlberg sat rooted at his desk, which was prominent in the apartment's front room and I in a chair across from of him. If we had a meal I don't remember it, but there might have been cheese, crackers, fruit. This was the first time I had seen him apart from a classroom in Missouri. Dahlberg spoke as he wrote, whereas I, at the time, strove for mere coherence, lacking eloquence. Though it was my early inchoate talent for aphorism that I showed which doubtless interested him in the first place.

January 26, '68

Mr. William O'Rourke,
5431 Wyandotte
Kansas City, Missouri 64112

Dear O'Rourke:

I have filled out the forms and am mailing them this day. I shall not be at Columbia, but am going with my wife to Ireland, and we expect to remain in Europe for a year.

You can get a student's loan; that I have learned from those in my group. What you will learn in the department of writing is zero. The teachers are dunderheads, with no passion or erudition. Actually, though Kansas

City is a corpse town, you will not find a Dr. Ryan in this profane institution. I wanted you to study medieval English with Dr. Ryan, and learn a good deal about the origins of language just about at its end today. But I know you must have feminine companionship, and I don't understand why it is so difficult to find a savory and delectable female in the mid-west. I certainly am not telling you that they are there, and that the onus is upon your head. I should be most unkind and not truthful were I to speak so to you.

Please forgive me for not replying to your last letter; I had some accursed sickness, and was so phlegmatic thereafter that I did no work, could not read, and was entirely worthless.

I knew your direful plight when you were here, and even then I could not help you, and that made me quite ill. We are not born for ourselves alone, says Cicero.

It is a fierce tomb to be alone, and I have known it and been in that sepulcher too often in my life not to appreciate deeply your own sorrow. The tragedy is that we can do little or usually nothing for others. I believe you know that if I knew someone here who would be a companion for you I would convey her to you.

It is futile to console you, and even dishonest. And I won't do it.

I send you my affections for what they are worth, not much, and wish I could at this time be advantageous to you.

I have had numerous mishaps myself, but won't bore you with them.

My book, *The Carnal Myth* will be out in May, and in the meantime I am laboring over the literary autobiography, sidereal drudgery, and I can't be sure that I know what I am doing.

Professor Edward Dahlberg

64 Rivington Street,
New York, N.Y.2.

I had returned to UMKC for my last year and applied to the fledgling graduate creative writing program just begun at Columbia. Dahlberg wrote me a letter of recommendation and I applied to one other school's program, the University of Iowa, its storied writers workshop. In both cases I had applied as a poet, of all things. I was admitted to both, but wanting to flee the Midwest I turned down Iowa and accepted Columbia. I was elated by the acceptances. At the same time I had entered a volume of poetry in the Yale Series of Younger Poets contest and it was eventually rejected, but even the rejection seemed like something. Dudley Fitts was the judge that year, his last (really his last—Fitts

*died the same year). Dahlberg, however, had only lasted a year at Columbia and, after I arrived there, I heard stories about the cause of his departure, though the one I believed is that he had failed Piers Paul Read, Herbert Read's son, and that got him fired. Years later I heard other stories. Read published in 1974 *Alive*, a book about disaster-inspired cannibalism. *Cannibalism everywhere*.*

March 21, '68

Mr. William O'Rourke,
5431 Wyandotte,
Kansas City, Missouri 64112.

Dear O'Rourke:

Please forgive me for not replying to your last epistle. Since I had the virus, of some kind or other, I have been lumpish, and have found it very hard to work, though I have. But after that I am undone, and this as a paltry apology, but please accept it.

I was glad to speak for you; but then what will you derive at Columbia University? There are four she-professors who know nothing and cannot talk about it eloquently. So you would not find their humid lectures of any value. Would you find feminine companionship here? You know I would have introduced you to one did I know her. It is woeful that I can give you no counsel that is beneficial, and this is hurtful to me. It always has been this way, as far as I can recollect. I knew these long spasms of stupor and solitude, and that is the way of the one and not the many, though I believe the disease of the multitude is solitude.

We leave on May 28th and it is very kind of you to suggest that you see me before leaving. Two young women are in my group, one married, and the other is looking for lucre and a man of social position, so that is very fine to tell you.

Meantime, I have been taking elaborate notes making ready to attack American education and our tepid females, and love in North America, pretty sodden and moldy.

Now I have to correct page-proofs, and they came so late that the publisher will not allow me to mend a sentence here and there or even take care of the errors of printers. The other volume, *Edward Dahlberg American Ishmael of Letters* should be issued shortly, within a few weeks.

This contains sundry essays written about my work.

To repeat, it is good that you have Dr. Ryan as a friend. He doubtless has told you what Kansas City is as if you required more empirical evidence than you already have.

I wish I could be your teacher, for I notice that you strain for your language, a metaphor or a trope, and though that is inevitable at the start, and many authors who should know better still do it, you might go on doing it.

Try if you can to be a natural prose stylist, and that is hard, very. Study Swift's *Journal to Stella*. Write sentences that fetch you, and also jot down idiomatic phrases.

I guess one should ask another to pardon him when he is unable to be useful to him.

You have my affections which would be had you a young nymph in your arms.

Professor Edward Dahlberg

64 Rivington Street,
New York, N.Y. 2.

I doubtless had written thanking him for opening Columbia's doors to me. I am sure his recommendation made the difference. During my time at Columbia I learned, one, that I was the student who had the lowest undergraduate grade-point average ever admitted to any of Columbia University's graduate schools, and, two, that Dahlberg's recommendation consisted of one sentence, saying that I was the only intelligent person he had met in the Midwest. It did feel odd that he left the City just as I arrived, but his absence, doubtless, let me settle into Columbia unencumbered.

October 30, '70

My dear O'Rourke:

Thank you very much for your epistle gorged with a rare probity in a putid, raging, and nihilistic age. How rueful it is to hear that you are alone. It is even related that one of the great sorrows of Our Blessed Mary was solitude.

Well, you will have to make your own mistakes although I had fervently hoped you would commit mine! But do, though nobody takes advice, try to compose your novel in a noble English. One can be a Bottom Dog in fiction, or in life and language it well.

Do you have the *TriQuarterly*; it will also be published as a book. Any number of persons have spoken of your tribute to me, and in a most complimentary vein. But my dear O'Rourke, when did I ever ask a student of mine to peruse my books. Never! That is a trifling matter, and though every

author is vain, I did not indulge in that sort of egolatry.

Do you wish me to send you a copy of *The Confessions*, now ready, that is, the trade edition, but to be published February 1st. You are right you can't be a reviewer whilst hoping also to be a man of letters. Of course, you can say what you must about books in the Nation, though also your load of Babylon since most of your books offered to you by the editor, are draff.

Am glad you wrote to me; it was no pleasure to rebuke you, but it is said in the Book of Proverbs that if you reproach fat Jeshurun he will kick you, but if you reprehend a wise man he will thank you. Forgive me anyhow for being so severe with you. I always wanted you to have only a trull or a tart if that is what was available, but I felt that your other simple was work. Love.

Edward Dahlberg

In handwriting in the letter's margins: If you're ever hungry, or out of pocket, you know that though my querdon [?] from books have been small, I'll never turn away from you. If you're ever in trouble call me collect—724-1108. I'll do my best to find a publisher for you if you wish me to do that.

57 West 75th Street
Apartment 5 H
New York, New York 10023

Dahlberg had returned to New York City in late 1969. I became an aide-de-camp of sorts, helping out however I could. Some of this was amusing, some not. I've written about these times before, so I won't recount them here (see my Signs of the Literary Times [1993]). While at Columbia I began to publish prose; one of the first things to appear was the reminiscence of Dahlberg that appeared in the fall, 1970, issue of TriQuarterly. (I wrote the piece in 1967, having been told by Dahlberg around the time of my visit to his Rivington Street apartment that some sort of volume was being put together and I might submit a recollection.) I also began to do short reviews for The Nation in 1970, having met the poetry editor, Allen Planz, at a party and we furthered our drinking at a bar on lower Broadway (the St. Adrian Company in the Broadway Central Hotel, which collapsed, the entire building that is, in 1973). Planz then introduced me to the literary editor, Beverly Gross. She liked what I did, always a necessity, having an editor who likes what you do. I saw Dahlberg intermittently through the spring and, finished at Columbia, and, after working during the summer for the N.Y. Shakespeare Festival, took myself off to Provincetown at

Stanley Kunitz's suggestion. Kunitz taught at Columbia and even though I had switched immediately from poetry to prose at Columbia, he had me to his townhouse for a memorable night with Robert Lowell and Elizabeth Bishop. Kunitz was involved in the creation of the Fine Arts Work Center and in 1970 he persuaded two fresh Columbia MFAs, myself and Louise Glück, to quit the City and spend the long, vacant off-season in Provincetown. For whatever reason, I have no letters from Dahlberg to me at my initial New York City addresses—I lived on West 76th Street and on East 8th Street, between B and C, when I was a student at Columbia.

November 5, '70

William O'Rourke,
355 Commercial Street,
Provincetown, Mass.

My dear O'Rourke:

I replied to your very good letter the other day, and this feature article just arrived, and I hope that it will give you some pleasure.

So if I am laconic, I've been toiling over notes for the book on *The New World* for hours and my back is sore and fatigued.

You have my love, and although I've been your taskmaster, I never reproached you with vipry thoughts, Never; be sure of that, although in the main nobody has one certitude.

Anyway, I want to get this off to you; cleave to, my fine boy (this is not patronizing but affectionate), and you'll one of these days, if you'll now heed my exhortation, read, read, read, and then write, and write and write. Chase any lissome trull that you fancy, that you fancy, drink a bottle of small beer, if it eases your entrails, but as I have oftentimes told you, By Zeus earn the right to be a lecher.

With love,
Edward Dahlberg

[On back of envelope:]

Edward Dahlberg
57 West 75th Street
Apartment 5H
New York, New York 10023

Unfortunately, the FAWC only provided the smallest of stipends in its infancy (\$100 a month) and, having no other source of income, I worked for a fish-

packing enterprise (Atlantic Coast Fisheries) in Provincetown for three months and then, more comfortably, as a night guard for the Chrysler Glass Museum. At the museum I wrote a short story, my first to be respectably published, set in the fish factory, called "The Maggot Principle"; first and last, insofar as I abandoned the short story as a form (or it abandoned me) and I turned henceforth only to book-length fiction.

November 18, '70

William O'Rourke Esq.,
355 Commercial Street,
Provincetown, Mass.

My dear O'Rourke:

This won't be a reply to your own enchanting epistle, for which I thank you very much. But I must get this to you with the same haste. As the Angels demanded of Lot, that he flee Sodom at once.

I want to see about 40 to fifty pages of your novel about Kansas City, and if it's good (no patronizing remark; for one is always a prentice; beware of the writer who calls himself a Master), I think I can get it published for you.

So please forgive this laconic note, and along with this, I am mailing to you a copy of *The Confessions of E.D.*

So forgive this drossy note; what is important at the moment is haste, or as the Angels said to Lot: Haste thee out of Sodom.

[And in handwriting below signature:]

I earnestly hope you will be able to laurel Sorrentino's book; simpleton that I am I told him O'Rourke is reviewing it! Alas, I shouldn't have said it; for if you impugn it I'll be to blame! But one must not tell lies! Should I so counsel you what a sharper your teacher must be! I wrote a moiety of that scurrile book of mine, *From Flushing to Calvary*, on Commercial St., Provincetown in 1931:

Love,
Edward Dahlberg

I was still doing the short reviews for The Nation and was sent Gilbert Sorrentino's novel Steelwork (1970) to review, along with a few others. It never ran, or the one I wrote never ran. It must have been critical in some way and Sorrentino (who died in 2006) was a favorite of the literary editor, and, I pre-

sume, he (it was no longer Beverly Gross) just killed the review and ordered up another. The fact that Dahlberg had written some of his early proletarian second novel on the same street in P-town I was writing from must have startled me, though since Provincetown was a place many writers had passed through over the decades (as well as the entire east coast, all of New England) and it shouldn't have been surprising, even to a youngster like myself.

December 13, '70

William O'Rourke
355 Commercial Street,
Provincetown, Massachusetts.

My dear O'Rourke:

I did not reply straightway for two causes: one I have had a plethora of work, really, no nonsense or bombast about this, and the most sovereign reason is that I do not wish to hurt you.

What I importuned you to do you did not do: eschew figures of speech; only in one or two instances were you lucky. Then I begged you to write about your own experiences, a poor Irish Catholic in Kansas City; if later on you portrayed your life, and that of your father, mother and sisters, I cannot in all fairness to you, tell you, since I did not get beyond fifty pages. What is the point of humdrum conversations you offer the reader which he can hear in the streets every day, and that which he wishes above all to shun. I had emphasized this to you, namely, that colloquies should be ideal rather than real, and that not one line should be written that does not nourish the soul, enhance the wisdom of the auditor. This too you failed to do. Now, I am still of the mind, and without equivocation, that you have talent, a friend of mine, not much older than you, said the best piece of writing in the *TriQuarterly* is your portrait of me as a professor at Kansas City. And he's no simpleton. Should I be your flatterer, or dissembler, and really harm you. That I cannot do. But I can say soon as you do what I ask of you, and that is to divulge the secrets of your own identity, and experience in Kansas City, I shall peddle your heart. But not yet; when will you be ready? when you are. Now, I have no dicta to proffer you but do, please, as I ask, do not make my squalid mistakes. And you will then display the regal talent I believe you have. Is this guess-work. doubtless. But what else is there?

Now, you lauded the work of Sorrentino, and in some large measure, the fault and onus are mine. You wanted to please me, but I told you not to tell lies, and alas maybe you didn't. One cannot ascribe your weak judgment

to me; it is always your defect. It is a very bad and salacious book, not erotically, or genuinely masculine. No, I am not asserting that Sorrentino is not a ripe male, but that he is somehow or other though a man in the depths of his forties, or so I suppose, had adopted the cult of youth, and one nowadays is young if he employs four letter words, or composes a latrine novel. What am I to say to Sorrentino, the truth? What will it bring me, maybe a foe who is at present a friend of my work. Have I any other choice? So I become the hard, the truculent man, and not the flaccid, pragmatical one.

Once more I exhort you, do what I suggest; this is not egotatry, but a great desire on my part to see you write a book, and not acquire a quick reputation, and be a churl among upstarts, or mushrooms in our merchant agora.

Do not for one moment imagine I like writing to you in this vein. Do you not think it would be a cornucopia of pleasure for me to relate that you have genius, and that nobody except a food would or could gainsay it.

I know how difficult it is to be obscure, impoverished, and to get a letter of admonition instead of a laurel of parsnip from me. But be patient; it is very stony counsel. Meantime, if I can get some money for you, I shall do it, but I am not certain of this. I must ask some one.

You have my love, and please believe me, it pains my pulses to write you so, and to tell you to sit down and write what you know, the Kansas City blood in your veins, and not scrawl all sorts of talk that is useless to you, me, and anybody else.

Should I, far older than you, and yet with the same quandaries, be your pickthank friend, you would abhor me, later.

Edward Dahlberg
57 West 75th Street,
Apartment 5 H
New York, New York 10023

Will return your MS.

Evidently I sent Dahlberg the pages he requested. And I must have sent what I wrote on Sorrentino, though Dahlberg evidently thought it was praise enough, unlike the Nation. The novel I was working on was my first, published eventually in 1974, entitled The Meekness of Isaac. I had written a long unpublished novel my first year at Columbia called The Armless Warrior. I am not clear on what I sent Dahlberg, since I was looting the earlier novel here and there, though The Meekness of Isaac was, in its final version, written mostly fresh. I did send the same pages doubtless to an editor in New York who had contacted me and he repeated more or less the same thing Dahlberg said, though of course,

more simply. Even then I had no desire to emulate Dahlberg's prose; I only wanted to write as well as I could, which I thought then was well enough.

December 22, '70

William O'Rourke
355 Commercial Street,
Provincetown, Massachusetts,

My dear O'Rourke,

I have just filled out the form you sent to me, and be sure I have offered the warmest words about you. Make no mistake about it. It is the least that I can do.

It was a deep pain to return your MS., for I had hoped, and quite fervently, that you would write about your early boyhood as a poor Irish Catholic in Kansas City. Build your experiences as a mason might; don't wander here and there, or set down lines that reader can relinquish. A book must be essential to a person's identity; any other sort is deceit. I am glad you did not laud that scurrile book; I feared your own perceptions might be marred by my own desire that he receive laurels, but not false withered ones.

I know a man who says there is some foundation that gives money to talented young men who have not yet published a book, and soon as he is out of hospital I shall speak for you. Please know that I'll do all within my paltry powers to help you. Alas, I have small influence in this fell and caitiff world, but I have a few friends, and I'll do all I can.

Know that you have my love, and my profound concern.

Poor Dr. Ryan has just lost his Mother, a very dear Woman, and he is in the dumps; it is a wound that can never be healed.

Be sure to write of your Mother and Father as they are, and also of your sisters and brothers, and the harsh penury that both of us have known.

Please know, above all, that I am not the Moses of the Muses bringing down the ten commandments the canons of prose style; break my tablets if you must, but abide by our great English.

As you see this letter was written on the 22nd of this month; many ills, and also the depravity of melancholia prevented me from finishing this epistle.

If I've hurt you I beg your pardon; we must ask forgiveness of those whom we have not harmed, lest they suppose we do not love them.

Edward Dahlberg
57 West 75th Street,

Apartment 5H
New York, New York 10023

Again, I'm not sure what forms I sent him. For a Guggenheim? Hardly, since at the time I had published almost nothing. Most likely, it was a general recommendation for a file I was opening at Columbia, a service the school provided to its graduates, future job seekers, of letters of reference. Dahlberg didn't unlock any monies from his patron, or, at least the one he seemed to have in mind (Coburn Britton?), though he did extract some funds for me a few years later from the Authors Guild (the Authors League Fund) around 1974. I think it was \$2,500. He then did it again, but I refused the additional money and both he and the Fund took some offense at that. Over the years I have donated money to the same Authors League Fund that had funded me back then.

May 13, '71

William O'Rourke,
355 Commercial Street
Provincetown, Massachusetts 02657

My dear O'Rourke:

At last I have word from you; you must needs know that it was a load of pain for me to annul your manuscript. But you must, and nothing else, write about your experiences as a young, impecunious Irish Catholic in Kansas City. But in a traditional English, no jargon, and no counterfeit spermal lines. I had to write just as plainly to Sorrentino, and after he had inscribed his book to me with genuflexional words. What else could I do? If I lie to you I'm your foe, should I be truthful you're silent as the sphinx. What should be my conduct? I cannot be other than I am, and take the blows of one who is morose. Again and again I implored you to do what I am now asking of you. What the Grub Street hacks tell you at Columbia is dross, and they have duped you. You were a glory there, and some day you may be, but not at this writing. You must be a novice, now and always, as I am. Each book is a battle, and nobody knows whether it will be won or lost, no matter how many books of worth he has published. Nothing helps; you blunder, stumble, or as Gloucester says, "I stumbled when I saw."

Now, don't be perverse; take my counsel though you pay no Mammon for it; despite the fact it is good advice, for people commonly heed a varlet, a criticaster, and though you are an oracle at the moment, and know that what he's doing is wrong, he will return you a peevishness, a long night of

stillness.

I am now writing a novella for Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, and with a plethora of luck should complete it within six months, but I have been mumbling this for a lustrum, beginning it at Soller de Majorca, then in Dublin, again in Santa Barbara, in Kansas City, New York, and Barcelona. You see then I do not write easily, but fumble just as you do. Age does not make you wiser nor does youth. If the Muses are kind, then you'll compose a book to be lauded.

Please don't expect falsehoods from me. I try not to decoy myself, and why you?

When the book is right it will pleasure my soul to tell you so and on the heels of Mercury.

Of course, your plight troubles me, but I must perforce gamble my heart, here and there, peddling it for francs as Stendhal said, and I have never reached that reposeful El Dorado. But I must write one book, then another, or else Rumor advises me, I shall soon be forgot, although never remembered.

Why did you not review *The Confessions*? I never saw what was said about me in the *Nation*, and only have read about six or seven articles about me, some were panegyrics, others worm-eaten and scullion attacks, with no comprehension of the book. To be quite candid, the *Confessions* has been widely noticed from coast to coast but never divulged. Here you could have done me a signal service. Why no, do not ask me. How do I know anything about another person, even my student whom I have friended best I can. And still wish to do so. So this is no pile of spleens, just wonder.

You have, as ever, my warm affections, and when You do what you are, for what deeds, good or bad, are the consequence of your character, I think you'll get off an autobiographical novel that will be worth the time and expense of the soul, and then I shall do all that I can to find a publisher for you.

Edward Dahlberg
General Delivery
Post Office, Sarasota, Florida.

I'm not sure why I didn't review his Confessions. My book review connections were not many and The Nation, I think, did have someone else in mind for the book. I did review a book for the New York Times Book Review in 1971, arranged by Richard Elman, one of my former teachers at Columbia. It was the only review I ever did for the Times, being, as it was, as my friend Craig Nova would have put it, a "vicious attack." I had stopped working at

the Glass Museum and got a job for the summer as a dune buggy driver, taking tourists for rides over the high parabolic dunes outside, or astride, Provincetown. And, during that summer, I met the woman who led me to Harrisburg, Diane Schulder, one of the lawyers for the defense.

YALE CLUB
FIFTY VANDERBILT AVENUE
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10017

[early October 1972, via postmark]

William O'Rourke,
4 Milligan Place,
New York City 10011.

My dear O'Rourke:

I am exceedingly sorry that I failed to reply to your last two epistles. Fearful of this criminal city, I went to Florida, which I could not stomach. I had withal two bouts of Hong Kong influenza, and a hemorrhage.

Now, I am very delighted that you have published your book. Frankly, I know nothing about the two unfrocked priests and the nuns save what I have read in the press, which is to say, I know nothing.

Your book just arrived, and I haven't had a chance to look at a line to see whether you have eschewed our boorish jargon, or if you, my fond hope, have consulted the masters of the English language. I realize this is not a work of literature, but let me inform you that there is more politics in belles lettres than there is literature in political writings. Balzac was alluded to as a statesman.

Of course, you can use a sentence, or more, from *The Confessions* as an epigraph to your novel, and I am heartened to learn that you are relying upon your own experience (Whose else can you borrow?). When we fail to comprehend a work of a seer the cause is that our feelings and life do not equal his. I have said somewhere is that I all I have to do is to open my mouth to sow dragon's teeth. So if you have not sufficient character to acquire foes you're sure to be a nobody as an author.

You can call me almost any day at about one o'clock of the afternoon.

Why not do me a signal kindness and review *The Sorrows of Priapus* which has just been reissued a brace [of] days ago. The publisher is Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. Ask for Mrs. Lindley. Tel: 572-5000.

Spite of my silence you've always had my friendship and love.

Edward Dahlberg

128 East 91st Street
Apartment 2B
New York, N.Y. 10028
Tel: 289-4339

The book was The Harrisburg 7 and the New Catholic Left. The trial was over the beginning of April of 1972 and the book was published in October 1972. The haste, oddly, was not a hindrance, at least from my point of view. It was written entirely on the Cape, three months in Provincetown and three months in Barnstable, at my friends', the Kareka's, new home on a bluff overlooking the salt marshes of Sandwich. I wrote it with intense, single-minded concentration, and it showed.

YALE CLUB
FIFTY VANDERBILT AVENUE
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10017

December 21, '72

William O'Rourke,
Thomas Y. Crowell Company
666 Fifth Avenue,
New York, New York 10019

Dear O'Rourke:

I replied soon as I received your epistle. I only licked a page here and there. Of course, I believe it's cruel and ludicrous to imprison men for burning draft cards. But what dismays me is that you have now become a paper-bullet writer. There's more politics in literature than letters in the economics and politics of the State.

It is kind of you to cite me at the conclusion of the volume, but do you realize in your opening line you are closely paraphrasing me. And though I had no part in the making of this book, I believe, without bombast, that I have had a good deal to do with the making of William O'Rourke's mind. Atheist that I am, I add, For God's sake return to belles lettres, and bear in

mind that a journalistic prose has nothing to do with a man who wishes to be a litterateur.

My affections, as always
Edward Dahlberg

128 East 91st Street
Apartment 2 B
New York, N.Y. 10028

The opening line Dahlberg refers to is: In the logic of our time, it is better to have a bad experience that turns out well, than to have just a plain good one. I'm not sure why he sent the letter to my publisher. I may have been traveling. A biography of Dahlberg was being prepared at the time and he set its author, Charles DeFanti, to scour my book, looking for examples of my plagiarizing of his words. As I have written elsewhere, on reflection years later, that line, my own, owes a bit more to Camus than Dahlberg, but it's probably a toss up. DeFanti's forced reading of my book did lead to our friendship that continues to this day.

April 11, '74

William O'Rourke, Esq.
306 Front Street,
Key West, Florida 33040

My dear O'Rourke,

I never looked for such a benison as an epistle from you. St. Augustine said he would never have become a Christian had he not believed in miracles. A brave man and also a gullible one.

I tremble when I ponder your return. The age is void of truth. The quandary is: how can I be useful to you. I've spoken to Nick of another contract for you which you can gulp down in a brace of hours.

You always can utter your woes to me. I'm not that sort of poltroon.

I hope you've been the kindest weather for your companion. Everybody, except liars are alone nowadays, so you're quiet. Ruskin asserted that inaction was the ruin of a nation. But what's that to do with Hecuba or you. The meanwhile, you have my deepest affections.

Edward Dahlberg

[On back of envelope:]

128 East 91st Street,
New York, New York 10028

This was the last letter I received, or have, from Dahlberg, and it is entirely hand written. Though sent to my friends', the Kareka's, shop in Key West, it was forwarded to me when I returned to my apartment at Milligan Place. By then my first novel must have been in production and I had gone to Key West for a visit, and not alone. I took Joan Silber, my girlfriend at the time. (You'll have to ask Joan if I was "the kindest weather" for her.) I always thought it strange that I had arranged for a publisher for Dahlberg, rather than he arranging one for me. I introduced him to my Harrisburg 7 editor at T.Y. Crowell, Nick Ellison, who I had met when he was an editor at William Morrow, while I was a student at Columbia. I, along with Craig Nova and Irini Spanidou, worked there as part-time (at least Craig and I, Irini being full-time) copy editors, more or less rewriting Temple Fielding's Guide to Europe during that period. He is the "Nick" that Dahlberg refers to in the letter. Nick published Dahlberg's The Olive of Minerva (1976), which I reviewed in the Soho Weekly News, and I got Nick to bring out, at the same time, an omnibus volume of Dahlberg's three early novels. I was often at Dahlberg's 91st street apartment during the early 70s (1972-74) and then he returned abruptly to Ireland around the end of 1974, then rushed back to NYC and stayed at the Hotel Chelsea for a while (circa 1975) and I helped him find a small apartment on the upper East Side which he abandoned suddenly and then went, finally, to Santa Barbara, California. I'm not sure why there aren't—or I don't have—any California letters from him, or any written reaction to the publication of my first novel. I did record my last conversation—on the telephone—with him in a eulogy I wrote that appeared in the San Francisco Review of Books a year after he died, his last words to me before he emphatically slammed down the phone ("No university has ever paid me \$12,000!"). I had just told him I had been hired by Rutgers University in Newark for my first real academic job. So, we must have spoken on the phone in 1975/6. His many chastisements in the letters were always a delight to me, whereas in person or on the phone, the same sort of lambastements were more painful, revealing to me the stark difference between the literate and oral forms. Perhaps we were estranged. And it was on a PATH train to Newark in 1977 that I learned he died, during my second year teaching at Rutgers. I was reading the New York Times commuting to school and happened upon his obituary. The train car was filled with dusty bright sunlight. I looked up and away from the paper that I had let fall onto my lap. The great man who had buoyed my youth and stoked my nascent ambitions and who had paid me all that unwarranted loving attention like no other, gone.

[FROM THE BOOK *RED NOISE*]
SEVERAL DEDICATIONS OF THE YEAR

Tatiana Danilyants

to Samuel Barber

What remains?
 What doesn't smolder?
 What's left in the fire?
 What's hidden that won't be found?
 Where's the liquid that might, finally,
 satisfy hunger
 and desperate thirst, Father?
 Where's the laughter to cure the damaged soul?
 Where's the heat steaming away despair?
 Where's the bandage of love?
 And where's the IV line of mercy?
 Where's all that?
 Where?

Gloom. Rain. Fog.
 A lone figure moves off.
 I watch it go and see:
 unfolding
 its wings are unfolding.

to Claude Lévêque

Everything tempers
 makes
 human steel
 stronger
 blades double-edged
 memory like a flag.

Everything tempers
 makes
 real steel
 stronger
 more true
 closer
 to its core.

to Alexander Slavinskiy

For some there's not enough heat
for some bread
for some money
for some a kick in the ass
(to get the juices flowing)
for some not enough embraces
for some snow
for some drops of water

and for some there's not enough
Touch of the Hand
for some
And a Warm Heart
for some
Wings of Desire
and for some
The Long (listen: impossible) *Goodbye*

and for all, all of us
there's not enough
of universal speaking out,
of love—reckless, tough, piercing
like the flashbulb of a Canon 7D—
of great life itself,
full of falling and derring-do,
full of falling and impulsivity,
full of falling and flight.

Afterword

Meanwhile:
full-force
here, there
everywhere
all-out
smilingly
within reach
touching
you

and me
blooms
a green bud...
a white flower...
red blood...

Life is everywhere, you know...

—translated from the Russian by Katherine E. Young

SIMPLY TO REMIND YOU

Tatiana Daniliyants

Untitled 1

all these things worry me
death the leaving of loved ones
the loss of friends
in short
how things can't be reconciled
I wake up at night
thinking about the thin web
of relationships
its treacherous thinness
transparency
the way it—sways
.....
one can
call this an allergy
to life
although I think it's
an allergy
to
death

and what about
changing the angle of view
the center of gravity
?

it might
help

Untitled 2

how to straddle time?
so that
a thought appears

to freeze in London
in the rain's mirror
catch sight of itself

to be caught on the border:
the softness
of summer's end
in London
the boneless space
of rain

Untitled 3

fall 2007 (it has its own—distinctive features)
caught in London

you put out your hand
and, see:
rain

Untitled 4

nothing more:
simply to remind you

—translated from the Russian by Katherine E. Young

**[FROM THE BOOK *FOUR HEARTS / SERD TSA CHETYRĚKH: SERBIA*]
SLEEPLESS CONVERSATION (INCANTATION)**

Tatiana Daniliyants

Talk to me / Like lovers do

—*Annie Lennox*

Talk to me
in the language of birds
in the language of sleep
in the language of forgetfulness
in the language of a forgotten tongue
in the language of a parchment from Carthage.
Talk to me
in the language of a cricket
in the indistinct darkness.
Be bread/wine/water for me
lentils/gunpowder/fire.
Be for me
the skin of the earth
the skin/blood/bone
of conversion
be the flesh of trans-
formation.
Talk to me.
Talk to me.
Be my
source of light.

—translated from the Russian by Katherine E. Young

XXX*Tatiana Danilyants***We just write our own experiences.****Grant me the patience of a marksman!*

Your house. Your mirror
 (reflecting two? One?).
 Your rain. Your balcony.
 White flutters in the dark sky.
 Smells. Rustles. Yelps.
 The quiet of the rain.
 ...help me remember that handwriting:
 I know it.
 Who was that? Who wrote that?
 ...was it about Ithaca?

Or:
 Like this,
 I clench my heart,
 which
 is a restless heart.
 And say:
 Listen!
 But...
 ...the words drown.
 ...the words drown.
 ...the words drown.

—translated from the Russian by Katherine E. Young

VR*Matthew Roberson*

The truth of the matter was that if Boles and his team didn't produce a passable version of their code in time for testing he would be unemployed just in time for summer.

If this were to happen, he would get to agonize over his unemployment and suddenly uncertain future prospects entirely in the company of not just his wife, also at the moment between gigs, but his kids, who would be out of school and around the house all day everyday with, he imagined, not just their sullen teenage declarations of independence from all the idiocy his generation represented but frequent, meaningful looks to each other about their parents' embarrassing inability to stay employed. It would be barrels of fun.

Only it was unclear how anyone expected his team to crank out all the necessary code on their end and eliminate all the bloat that came with it in anything under a year. It simply didn't matter that there were investors to appease in the short run, and trade shows to tease so soon after that, and a launch date—a LAUNCH DATE—ahead of the Christmas rush. There was the irrefutable truth, he kept saying to anyone who would give him at least half an ear, that no way could the kludges his guys had been generating recently could possibly be redeveloped and bug checked and put in place in time. He wasn't Scotty, he told Zeke, who had been with him all the way on this project, and even for years before, on this and that other project. I can't just grimace and say, Aye, Captain, and *make it so*.

Yeah, Zeke said, as if he'd heard this before more than once, from more than one Star Trek geek. Yes. But you know Scotty would tell them he couldn't manage in under two years, so they'd give him one, instead, and be grateful for his ability to work miracles. Zeke looked up from the complex of three monitors grouped around the top of his desk like a 3d of mirrors in a dressing room. Which you haven't done. Which is kind of the problem. And, he added, you're mixing up your captains.

I know, Boles said, agreeing, apparently with all that Zeke said but still, none the better for it.

It's not that Boles was unused to switching jobs. It was almost the norm that someone in his line of work hopped companies every couple of years. It was the nature of working in an industry where the next big thing emerged every time someone sneezed, and a dozen or a dozen dozen companies emerged in response, like prairie dogs popping up to sniff the wind. Even

if only one or two of those startups were hanging on a year later, and all the employees of all the other startups were out of work in search of their next new jobs—well, there'd be new startups. There always were.

That one kid with all the neck hair down in Integration couldn't be more than thirty, Boles thought, yet he had already bounced between a half-dozen companies. And he wasn't really out of the ordinary.

But a half-dozen, Boles thought. Maybe that was a lot. Maybe neck hair was a bad omen. God, what if he was that?

Boles didn't allow himself to wonder long, because worrying over that seemed like maybe just more bad mojo, and Boles really, truly didn't want this particular company to go belly up—and not for only his own sake.

This place really did have an amazing vision for the future and, more astonishingly, a chance of making it happen. And the money Boles stood to make if this thing were to take off. He'd accepted every offer of a buy in, stock options. People who had been in his shoes when Apple had started to turn its wheels now owned summer houses in the hills of Nevada or New Mexico that cost as much as the average person makes in a lifetime.

But all this only if Boles's team could come through, apparently.

They should call thing we're making a *Vision for the Future*, Boles said. You get it?

Very clever, Zeke said. I'd bet Marketing is ahead of you on that one already, though. He looked up to study Boles. Just tell them you need more people, he said, then went back to his task.

More people might do it, Boles thought. Maybe.

Or Boles could be on unemployment again, casting about for some new opportunity while being home, suddenly, all the time. Not that Boles didn't enjoy being home. He was the lucky man, he usually felt, who enjoyed time around his family—even if the kids had lately become a little too wise for anyone's good. And there was always something at home Boles found interesting, be it the piles of magazines that seemed to build up in slippery mounds around the house or dinking with shears in the yard or watching TV. Housework? No big deal. It's just what had to get done. He actually liked the routine.

So, why his worry, he wondered, only briefly, before putting his finger square on the fact that in the last couple years, especially since Cass had been right-sized out of her last job, things on the home front had gotten a little unpredictable, and Boles didn't know how he'd handle it around the clock.

Basic requirements all got met. The kids made it to school. They did their homework, or at least as much as any kid did. After school activities,

seasonal sports, etc., were all attended. Almost always. But, beyond that, things had gotten a little weird. They had unpredictable dinners at equally weird hours. Last week at what should have been bedtime they'd had what Cass dubbed the celebration of the can, scooping cold food options straight out of a huddle of dented containers of corn and beans dropped smack dab in the middle of the table. Diced tomatoes for the vitamin C. Cass said she was clearing out all the excess in the cupboards, and the kids didn't bat an eye. Or Cass and Elizabeth had taken to wearing their pajamas almost all the time around the house. If there were no pressing need to be somewhere, immediately into the PJs, flannel the current cold weather favorites. They called it their leisure wear and had done it long enough now that they'd stopped startling the UPS man into checking his watch on late afternoon deliveries, as if he'd blundered into some nighttime he hadn't seen coming.

William went around in enormous headphones, lifting off an earpiece only when some pantomime from Boles or Cass or Elizabeth made it clear he needed to enter the world of actual human interaction. Then, back to the swaddling comfort of his pillowed source of some-or-other stream of something. Music? Boles asked one time. What are you listening to in there? A podcast? YouTube? Yeah, William had answered. At times, actually, Boles was sure William wasn't listening to anything at all, the headphone plug just nestled snugly into the solitude of his pants pocket. And the fencing, if that's what it could be called, the dancing, lunging, wall-damaging swirl William did with a blunt-tipped foil he'd bought on eBay. Hours of it a day, and no interest in actual lessons or a league, both of which Boles had happily offered to pay for, if that's what William were into. No, Dad, was all he got about that request, and an impatient stare, though not an unkind one, and a judgmental look from Elizabeth, who Boles would have thought would be more concerned about sibling weirdness than parental pushiness, and a request from Cass that he just lay off—as if Boles were the one who didn't get how the world ought to work.

And their pacing. All three of them. It was all off. It took any one of them hours to do anything around the house. A shower? That, it seemed, had to involve a half hour warm-up period, during which after-shower clothes were pulled from the drier and then assembled, and water was allowed to run, to warm up the bathroom—and the showers, themselves. How could anyone suffer such endless pounding of water hot enough to generate piles of steam that billowed out of the bathroom until, finally, appropriate cleanliness was achieved? Ask someone to clean that very same bathroom? Again, the warm-up period, in which arguments against it being one's turn were mustered. Then, eventually, inevitably, the clearing out of

items that would be in the cleaner's way, the toothbrush holder, the rugs on the floor, the scale, and then the inspection of all of these items, as if they needed to be not just moved but considered, measured against their ongoing utility, or, maybe, their very place in the world? Boles didn't know, and he didn't get to see any actual cleaning, which usually took place behind a closed bathroom door, endlessly, as if every inch of the place, down to the very grout between the tiles, were being scrubbed with a toothbrush. Really, he suspected, all the magazines in the magazine basket were being read, or some game on a phone was being played, for nearly ever, and then surfaces were quickly wiped with some greasy cloth, the toilet swished once or twice with the sad, half-bald brush living in an equally wrecked white plastic holder hiding behind the towel rack. All-in-all, a two-hour process, typically.

Did it matter, ultimately, how long the process took, if the job got done? Boles knew it didn't, but time was his sore spot these days, because it was running out at work, and he and his team were doing anything but dawdling and squandering it away. They worked ten, twelve hours a day, six, sometimes even seven days a week, and, still, they would never meet the expectations of the other teams waiting on their results, so they themselves could meet the expectations of the project managers waiting for results they could take to the anxious owners of the company, who waited on tenterhooks every minute of every day for the goddamn competition to roll out their successful product first.

It was a ridiculous fear, really. There were only a few events a year when companies rolled out their amazing new gizmos. The E3 Videogame Show, The Consumer Electronics Show, South by Southwest. Those all happened on dates planned well in advance, and none was right around the corner.

Boles did have to acknowledge, though, that the larger picture was a little more complicated. If a company were really on the verge of something, then somehow everybody in the industry knew, just knew, and with that kind of buzz came successful fund-raising through kickstarters, big name investors, maybe even a buyout from some business with pockets so deep that the sudden flood of resources provided would mean inevitable success, somehow—because that's how the world turns.

And to be on top in this industry, which promised the real Holy Grail hankered for by not just purveyors of entertainment but education providers and doctors and coaches and who knows whom else. Its promise of really being there, really feeling behind the wheel in a racing game or really having a trigger tucked into your twitching finger in a first person shooter or really being able to sit simultaneously in your underwear in your bedroom and in

a classroom in a virtual university or with full presence operate your medical expertise on a patient half a continent away. To run a football downfield past half-ton linebackers intent on crushing you to the turf, whether just for the thrill of it or to learn how better to do your job—and all free of risk of actual physical injury. To fly through the spiral arms of the Milky Way, whispered along by ambient music or Neil DeGrasse Tyson's sweet nothings, whatever your preference. God, the possibilities. And then all the porn, of course, and all the money tied up in that, though porn would probably no longer be called that in the world of VR. People would have interactive erotic experiences. Immersive tactile sensual stimulation. Erogenous envelopment. Whatever. They would plug their brains and bodies into visual and haptic stimulus systems so powerful and convincing that some might never come up for air, overcome entirely by virtual arousal, having endless screws that through stereoscopic 3D and 360 degree visuals and AMOLED screens and appendage gloves and external cameras and infrared LEDs to track motion would be so direct in their stimuli that they'd be more real than real.

Just imagine.

Only Boles knew that this vision of an entirely immersive holodeck come to life was itself, at the moment at least, well—entirely virtual.

For one, even their most hardened—and hopeful—testers eventually pulled off the goggles with a bit of queasy panic to admit there was a still a little lag between their actions and the world their eyes saw. It was a tiny lag and getting tinier, but still. Some less-seasoned testers would break into a cold sweat because of it. Boles had seen it himself, the little drops popping out all around the goggles along people's hairlines, jawlines, the sign of a nervous system starting to twitch. There was the one kid they didn't ask to test again; he'd started to turn an actual shade of green before he struggled desperately out of the headset to then vomit on what had to be a pretty new carpet and, probably, some on the shoes of people trying to talk him down. The industry term was latency, but it was simply seasickness, Boles knew. What happened when what the body felt didn't match what the eyes saw, and the nervous system reacted accordingly.

On a more hopeful front, they'd almost conquered the screen door effect, so that the pixelated pictures unfolding in front of users didn't actually look pixelated, broken into a million tiny grids—but it all depended on what pictures you were talking about. Some still looked a little boxy, shady, wrong—maybe a room that looked too perfectly plumb or a person with features whose dimensions were all a millimeter off. And that was the heart of the biggest matter, Boles knew, though somehow everyone else seemed to brush off. The success of their headsets all depended on the pictures you

were talking about, the pictures that made up the worlds the users inhabited. Yes, they were all beautiful, lifelike, convincing, but, to Boles, they were all still undeniably manufactured, tailored to satisfy the experience of immersion. Amazing, but artificial. Like space age renderings of some set piece, some less kitschy version of Disney's Small World, which you wound your way past, enjoying, even admiring but always knew was an elaborate, theatrical put-on, dependent always on your staying seated in the boat.

Then there were the feedback systems to track the user's motions, and the algorithms being written to anticipate even milliseconds ahead of those cameras, and the simple mechanics of managing the thousand electronic readings a second involved in all of it. The thought of it all made Boles incredibly uncomfortable. Talk about a cold sweat.

Just another all-too real consequence of man's pursuit of the imaginary, Boles thought as he contemplated another awkward trip out of his corner cubicle. Boles had a great cubicle, oxymoronically. His job had authority enough that his padded, folding walls had been allowed to capture twice the normal amount of cubicle space, and they were situated in a quieter corner of their office's cavernous work area. But that spot was, unfortunately almost the full length of the building from the sliding doors that opened onto the hall that held the swinging doors that opened onto the bathrooms, and to find half a minute's blessed relief from his strangely small and powerfully overactive bladder almost always agitated by too much coffee, Boles had to run a gauntlet of the dozen or so young men, always young men in this line of work, in the direct line between him and release.

And, yes, it was embarrassing that he seemed to trot that path every half hour or so, as if almost incontinent, or worse, unable to immerse himself deeply enough in the work that physical demands might recede from existence, but it was more than that—it was on these trips having to witness so many in his charge exactly so immersed, and at such cost. All those young bodies with such potential for health hunched over desks and keyboards, mice or pencils clawed into their hands, heads turtling up and down in a tragic bobble as they alternated between screen and desk, screen and desk. Next to them all those empty or half-empty or opened and forgotten bags of the off-brand chips the vending machine guy had started sticking them with, because he knew they'd eat anything crunchy and containing calories, and the nasty boxes of donuts that could be as easily from today as from last week, and the coffee in cups that sported sedimentary deposits of grime inside and out. The clothes that got changed only every few days. The pervasion of BO that every last one of them seemed to tacitly agree that they'd ignore. The appalling lack of oral hygiene. It just wasn't right, Boles knew,

being a father, and a human being, that these young men treat themselves so—but was Boles going to hound them like the overbearing adults they'd probably resented their entire lives up till this first taste of freedom doing exactly what they did best, to hell with everything else? Abso-fricking-lutely not. They didn't want his help, and they'd take it wrong, and get on the wrong side of these boys and who knew what evil pranks might start slipping his way, his Facebook or Twitter account hacked to profess his new love for necrophilia. Worse, the ultimate worst, they might stop pursuing the realization of the company's product with just that vigor that led to all their ill health. That would not do.

And Boles hated his trek down that line of young men because it disquieted him on a metaphysical level. It wasn't just that they were weirdos. Boles, himself, had been and probably was still a variation on whatever these kids would be called nowadays—dorks, geeks, nerds? Probably there was some other newer meanness. It didn't really rattle him that the boy they'd hired most recently, for example, wore sunglasses all day, indoors, whether at his computer or in conversation with another employee at the soda machine, or meeting with the team for status updates, or in Boles's office for a performance review. There was nothing wrong with the kid's eyes. Boles had asked around as subtly as he could until one of the other young men responded in a neutral voice, Oh, you want to know about Dan's glasses.

Well, yes, I guess, Boles had said.

He just likes them, was the answer, end of story, just that he liked them, and that was enough, apparently, though Boles still wondered why he liked them—and wasn't it hard to see in the fluorescent dim of the office, and didn't he realize it was just weird?

Didn't any of them realize that they were weird? That the Pokemon cards, or maybe it was Yu Gi Oh cards that some of them played or battled or whatever were designed for ten year olds? Or that accumulating thousands of karma points on an Internet bulletin board didn't actually mean anything? That the latest evolution of some comic book character was not criminal or tragic or disgusting, as they too often declared. Spider-Man is not real, he wanted to scream. So, who cares?

But he knew better. These things meant something to his employees, the same way football or baseball teams mattered to other, many other people who spent how many hours arguing over the merits of some athlete they presumed to know by the familiarity of only a last name or how many months building fantasy leagues on which real money was wagered and won and lost or how many years collecting player cards or some other memorabilia? Maybe some of these things were deemed cooler than the others, but

were any really better or more real? Not by a longshot.

And these boys were all so sweet, too, painfully literal and naive, to the point that Boles had learned not to joke about something so fraught to them as the opposite sex, lest they get panicked, putting on the over-focused looks they hid behind, a look he'd first come to know when making some stupid joke about a woman's climax being the real holy grail, before having to backtrackingly and awkwardly explain to a suddenly attentive room that such a thing was not really so elusive or intimidating.

Well, they weren't all sweet, of course, but enough of them. Sweet, overall, with the tolerant, empathetic disposition of outsiders or underdogs.

Probably these young men were more enlightened than he, Boles thought.

But they also weren't in charge. Boles was, and he had to keep one foot on the ground, and one eye on what mattered to other people, the people who would buy product, who wanted to live out their fantasies about sports or war, and the people up top of him on the food chain, the ones who brought in capital and organized stock buy-ins and understood terms like leveraging, the people who signed his paycheck and turned all the daily physical and mental sweating over digital realities into cold hard cash that Boles could put to good use at the local Whole Foods to buy the only yogurt his daughter would eat and the endless boxes of cereal for his son, and all the organic coffee his wife could drink.

Though what a laugh. Cold hard cash. Boles was pretty sure that no one anywhere even stamped a signature on his paycheck anymore. Or held more than the occasional piece of cash in hand. Last time Boles had hit an ATM was before a recent weekend trip upstate and only because one of three enduring lessons his father had insisted Boles learn was that you needed cash if you were going to travel. Boles hadn't used a cent of it, had even paid tolls with his bankcard rather than wait for a booth with a real live teller. The almighty bankcard, whipped out as one end in a transaction that flowed through circuits leading to the ones and zeroes adding up to whatever sum it was Boles's bosses were triggering into his bank account on a bi-monthly basis. Boles knew it wasn't enough. The bosses were generous with their healthcare contributions, though, and that mattered. Boles had kids to care for.

Elizabeth, in particular, seemed to need some sort of doctor's service every other week, for the stomach aches that had become her bane since she'd enrolled in junior high, or for her soft teeth, which needed almost constant filling or capping or straightening, and for which Boles blamed himself. His side of the family was the source of that particular genetic weakness. He

didn't know, though, where to lay blame for her sensitive stomach or other ailments, the allergies, and the infected sinuses, the eczema. More important, he didn't know what needed to be done. No one did. The doctors offered up shots and antibiotics and ointments, as well as their hope that Elizabeth would grow out of most of her ailments. Boles had started taking that particular hopefulness as especially discouraging, because it indicated, of course, how much about the brute apparatuses of their patient's bodies the doctors simply didn't understand.

Boles had brought her to this latest visit, deadlines at work be damned. Even if it was in a doctor's waiting room, he wanted to spend some time with his little girl, who he'd watched emerge bloody into this world and grabbed up even before her mom could and rocked and rocked, ignoring all the suggestions from the delivery room staff that he not hold her too long. He'd hummed out words he'd never imagined before the fact, singing that he knew her, he knew her, he knew her—all to the small consternation of the nearest nurse, who maybe hadn't heard that particular greeting before and probably wondered if Boles was a little nuts. Though, surely, she'd seen stranger things in their neck of the country. They all had.

Boles hadn't known himself just what he meant, only that here was a spirit sewn to his on some level other than the ordinary.

Whatever that might mean, Boles thought as he sat by Elizabeth in the office and tried to make conversation.

I'm happy you're finally getting on better with your math teacher, Boles said, and Elizabeth said, Nnnnnn.

You'll be glad you went with the advanced class, Boles said, and Elizabeth said, Nnnnn.

Because band is fun, but you're getting to the age, Boles started, before Elizabeth warned him off with an Mmmmm.

Okay, Boles said. It's just nice to see some high notes, after everything—and that was all he planned to say, but this, apparently, was what it took to draw his daughter's eyes from her phone.

What do you mean, she asked.

Well, Boles said, You know. Because Boles had more than one memory of Elizabeth banging through the house for entire weekends, unwilling to explain what was upsetting her but entirely free with her declarations that Lindsey or Emma or Laura was simply THE WORST, and that some people were just mean, and that she couldn't wait till she didn't need to be with any or all of them in next year's classes.

Just some of the drama, Boles said timidly, and his loving child, who'd once upon a time clutched at his pant leg if he threatened to leave her side,

now stared at him as if he were an offense, an odor, a blemish she'd never noticed but now couldn't bear.

Drama? Elizabeth asked, before attending back to her iPhone with a series of furious swipes. Drama, she said to Boles, turning the phone to him, is defined as an exciting, emotional, or unexpected series of events or set of circumstances, an incident, scene, spectacle, or crisis. I don't remember having any of that, she said, before giving him a last stare, an examination, really, in which he came up wanting, apparently.

Sweetie, Boles said, I didn't mean anything. I apologize. Let's just forget I said anything, he said, but she already had, with a flourish, and Boles, as well—though, of course, she hadn't forgotten a thing.

And he hadn't meant anything, Boles hadn't. He certainly didn't know any particulars. The one time he'd inquired after those, about halfway through last school year, Cass had informed him that, in latest news, the girls in Elizabeth's grade had started the rumor that one among them had a tail, some vestigial nub connecting her to some primal and perfectly grody past that was exactly opposite the polished and perfumed and perfectly air-brushed image after which the all aspired—a tail that this blighted soul was rumored to take great pains to hide, coiling it into the crack of her rear end at moments like gym class when all that stood between her and exposure was a thin pair of cotton panties. They're not saying that about Elizabeth, are they, Boles had asked, and Cass had simply frowned at him, as if he was missing the point

I'm sure they've all had their turn being the girl with a tail, was all Cass had been willing to add, and Boles had been happy to let it go.

But it had haunted him, this nasty little gossip, less because it was nasty, or gossip, both of which he unfortunately expected from almost everyone, and especially teenage girls, given what he'd heard about them from adult women who'd survived that time, and from all the movies which made this meanness a central premise, but because it was so patently absurd. A tail? Who has a tail? Maybe some rare soul somewhere in an odd decade was born with a spinal protrusion of some kind that an incredibly imaginative type might say resembled a tail instead of a bump or lump, but even so— isn't that the sort of thing medical science could get hold of and file down out of existence, probably for the comfort of the soul who had to sit on it? A tail. The girls chose it as their scarlet symbol not because it was so gross but because it was so improbable, the ultimate aberration.

And Boles imagined that some of them wanted to believe in it, because it was so fantastic.

It wasn't unlike anyone who just wanted to believe, and entirely in sync

with the consumers of the virtual reality Boles's company wanted to capture, Boles thought, his attention turning again, always again to work. The pimply teenage boys they were laboring to serve didn't want a real re-creation of reality, which Boles laughed to think would involve them strapping on a \$1000 space-age headset so they could virtually shop or wash dishes or sit in a doctor's office with a furious child. No. They wanted to sit comfortably at home and simultaneously swim with dolphins, trek through forests as beautiful as those in the James Cameron flick. To fight in the arenas of Rome. They wanted virtually real fantasy, Boles thought, and realized he wasn't telling himself anything new, just rubbing the sore spot of the real reality of what it was he did day in and day out for long, long stretches of hours and days and weeks.

If ever there was a soul suited to this work, it was Boles. He had grown up at the intersection of influences primary to virtual reality, down the street from IBM, which, when Boles was a teen in the 80s, had been the biggest player in the computer business, employing a healthy chunk of all the professionals in the field, and all those in Boles's town, producing machinery that made massive mainframes and the first bulky, boxlike, beige personal PCs that all the parents started hauling home so their kids could be on the edge of a new world—which they could maybe make the most of by learning programming or, more likely, use to play the games that everyone owned on a flat floppy disks the size of 45 records housed in square plastic, the text adventure game, *Zork*, which Boles and his buddies puzzled through together, or pinball, which Boles's older brother would play for hours, stoned out of his head, giggling through breaks home from college.

On the other edge of Boles's childhood world sat Singer Link, which every visitor to town imagined made sewing machines but was really in the business of building flight simulators for anyone and everyone interested, the private airline companies, and flight training schools, but mostly the military.

Something turned for Boles the day he and the kids in his tech programming class at school were grudgingly granted a tour of the Link facilities—the sections and simulators not classified secure. As he sat in the even-then already outdated flight simulator to which they were allowed access, with its clunky and worn controls and lurching motion on hydraulics that had seen better-oiled times, so absorbed in the idea that he was really flying that his hands sweated and his heart beat in his ears and David, the kid taking a turn with Boles, said mockingly that Boles sure loved handling his joystick—as he sat there, Boles knew he wanted more, and not just playing with but making more like this.

He gave some actual thought, too, to just what he was doing, when he was in college and learning to program but also signing up for the philosophy classes going all the way back to Plato's ideas of what's really real in the first place, which, in its idealism, sounded to Boles like nothing if not the ultimate virtual reality. He hadn't needed to take courses on religion to know, also, that through history religions had as much interest as anyone in exploring, even designing, virtual realities. His own postmodern age, he was told by a surprisingly earnest young professor in a dress-shirt and cuff links, vivid tie and suit vest, jeans and sneakers, recognized that all reality is virtual, shaped by the spin of language. To Boles, who spent most of his education fine-tuning the language of code that compiled could make worlds appear on the screen, this made more than perfect sense, and, in contrast to his classmates' concern about the fluidity of all this, he was enthralled, imagining the worlds he might make.

Boles's roommate had told him in impolite terms he was a little confused, that there was more than some small difference between virtual and actual.

I don't actually know how to fly a spaceship, laughed Tom, who spent the better part of his days and too many nights in the inky black of digital space blasting alien cruisers and creatures in some quest whose contours had never been clear to Boles. I'm not actually killing space monsters. I'm pretty sure, said Tom, there aren't actually any of those roaming the galaxy.

Yeah, said Boles. But you've devoted the better part of your brain to knowing that they like to attack from behind interstellar clusters. And that they like to disembowel their opponents.

They do seem to be your mortal enemies, said Stephen, their other roommate, from in front of the TV.

We've heard you scream at that game so loud it sounded like you were gonna have a stroke, said Boles.

You said the controller's giving you carpal tunnel, said Stephen. Sounds like battle scars.

Didn't you practically fail half your classes last year, said Boles, because you'd rather play than study?

That sounds pretty actual to me, said Stephen.

Fuck the both of you, said Tom.

In the days following 9/11, Boles, and all the world, were made all-too-aware of the actual consequences of virtual worlds when it was discovered that the pilots of the planes incinerating the World Trade Towers had trained almost exclusively on simulators.

And hell, Boles said to Cass one morning, everything I do every day is

built on the dream that this product will make us rich beyond belief.

Everything you do, Cass said.

Beyond belief, Boles thought, but not beyond imagining. Tens of millions for him alone, at least. Maybe hundreds, depending on stock sales. He wondered, not for the first time, what one does with hundreds of millions of dollars? Rich people on TV seemed to eat a lot of scallops and duck and pureed vegetables and to own not just homes but summer homes and ranch property and on that property hundred thousand dollar treehouses made by the guy on that show on that channel. They vacationed in Belize. Had really nice shoes.

It wasn't lost on Boles that this is only what he'd been encouraged to imagine, and that his sense of what was to be rich was entirely, in a word, virtual. Of course, any and all of it, imagined and not, depended on his team getting the good product out first.

That night in bed, Cass said she didn't give a crap. A half a crap. She didn't understand why anyone really needed any more than what they needed to get by.

She was more interested in Boles being home on the occasional weekend to help her redo the backyard, where she was replacing the brown, water-starved grass with a maze of flowering plants and shrubs native to the west coast, as well as salvaged birdbaths and impromptu sculptures of arranged stones. Wouldn't it have been nice, too, if Boles had been mentally as well as physically present at the barbecue in that backyard, after she'd made the effort to invite over people she'd met at the neighborhood association? She knew he had a lot on his mind, but still.

And shouldn't it have been Boles who took William to the mall when he wanted to find bow ties for his next fashion statement? Ties are a father son thing, she said.

Well, said Boles, who still hadn't recovered from coming downstairs one morning to find William decked out in t-shirt and bow tie, polka-dotted, no less, and a big smile. In the moment, Boles had only had the wherewithal to ask what was the occasion. William had said it was Tuesday. Ok, Boles had said. Now he said, Normally. I guess.

There's no shortage of interesting inexpensive stuff in the world, Cass said. Take up knitting. Try cooking. People the world over, she said, enjoy walking their dogs in the park.

If you want a cheap vacation, go camping, she said, then rolled to face Boles. We should take the kids now that it's getting warm. Get some fresh air.

If they'll go, Boles said. Maybe. But he didn't want to, and not just

because he had no time for anything but work.

Boles hated camping. The endless gathering of equipment and packing the car. Driving hours with a bike rack swaying in the rear-view mirror. Unpacking. Setting up tents that never made any more sense in their construction even after years of puzzling through their poles and hooks and snaps. The dirt. Mosquitoes. Smoke. Boles always came back from a camping trip smelling like an ash heap. Sleeping on rocks. Never getting anything exactly warm to eat. Or enough. Then scrubbing dishes under a goddamn spigot. Washing up in drafty, damp, spider-infested communal bathrooms. All in the name of fun. It's never quite as awesome as you say it's going to be, Boles said.

You're just a drag, Cass said, turning again and curling backwards into him, already half-asleep, with the other half somehow only a few breaths away. You focus on the wrong things.

Yeah, Boles said, because she was right, of course. Boles knew damn well that Cass's warm weight beside him, and the soft sounds the kids made in their rooms sleeping or texting or whatever it was they did behind their doors, these things mattered. They made all the expectations and assignments and grand goals of work seem like arrows that would forever reach only halfway to their goals and then half that distance again and then half that into an infinity of never arriving.

But Boles also knew he'd get up tomorrow morning and drive to the office and promise to make deadlines and get the job done, before anyone else, so that the product could get to market and everyone's grand dreams, especially those of their cherished customers-in-waiting, could come true.

ELIZABETHAN POET*Lars-Håkan Svensson*

He had been writing for so long and so copiously that no one was surprised that new books kept appearing even after he had suddenly died in the middle of an anacolouthon. He wrote with an ease that created a hunger for more, dazzling his audience with one idea more ingenious than the preceding one as though there was no limit to imagination. On a title page the publisher printed a sensational picture of him at work, showing him indefatigably writing on in his shroud: his gaze was clairvoyant, his posture stiff but his hand kept producing line after line without being seized with cramp. He became an institution, a marvel that people began to take for granted. Yet after a few years some readers began to feel that here and there his plots lacked nerve and the characters who had followed hard on each other's heels with never-ending individuality would now become blurred at certain critical moments, beginning to resemble one another and being unable to express themselves with their customary whiplash precision. But what could you expect from someone who no longer breathed, who had access only to yesterday's news. Then, when his singular career seemed to be very near its end, he (or rather his emaciated hand) pulled himself together, and he wrote from memory a prodigious collection of love poems, an Iliad of passions which so far had only existed as an idea in his mind but in which he now, with an incomparable fusion of intellect and passion, expressed what he had always felt but had not been able to get down on paper: that the best is yet to come.

GOTHIC SHORT STORY WRITER*Lars-Håkan Svensson*

For decades she enthralled and frightened her fashionable but exclusive audience with scenes and lines that seemed to be fetched from the underworld—from the court of the unmentionable god—but which were really (though only she knew it) carefully watered-down versions of what she had heard and seen in her childhood. She was welcomed on red carpets and at cocktail parties under heavy cut-glass chandeliers, and timidly smiled her pale smile in the quickly elapsing eternity of the flashlights. Then, one day other voices began to speak inside her—about the same intolerable horrors that she had learnt to live with in her early years and had written about—but this time the voices spoke on another, more general and more abstract level which paradoxically made evil and grief more tangible, something that she might be able to change. She had always longed for this level but in some mysterious fashion it had always been forbidden for her. It was like a revelation. She toned down her language and began to use code words—such as "ether", "nightlight", "bath-tub", and "catch"—words that suggested the same horrors to her but in a way that seemed more mundane and *manageable*. But no one understood her. Finally she embarked on a work which she felt might be her best and last. She wrote as if transported to a higher existence—like a runner who one day, inexplicably, runs with a lighter, even more resilient step and suddenly emerges from the pine wood and finds herself on a gentle slope, glimpsing the sea, the light, liberated at last. She had said all she had to say and was finally free. But not even this did they understand.

MAIGO

D. E. Steward

Flying west from Faust's Metropolis

From ten thousand meters above Gravenhage looking northwest over the North Sea

Two other airbuses on their climb from Amsterdam in the same direction trail sooty-ragged carbon, occluding perhaps a fifth of the skyfield

Then England, Scotland, Ireland below

From twelve thousand meters the North Atlantic like a blue and white color-field painting the whole way to Newfoundland

Clyfford Still shapes, mostly blue

Delft blue and Quimper at times even a semi-occluded hyacinth or cirrus-filtered sapphire

And over Newfoundland's skerry-riddled littoral, the precambian shield's gray granite tinged in hazy shadow blue

Old Norse *sker*

Viking keels came to ground down there from Bergen, Sognefjord and Trondheimsfjorden over a thousand years ago

From the broken coastal sheltered Northway

Norway

The great curved Norse snout of Europe two thousand miles long

Sognefjord alone tracks a hundred sheltered miles into the interior

Settlements inland at the narrow ledges and small plains at the heads of fjords on river deposit alluvials off the high Oppland-Buskerud-Telemark plateaus

The raiding, shallow-draft longships went out from the shelter of the
Northway

Managing fifteen knots at times

Their overlap-straked hulls sizzled in the spindrift of cod-rich waters

Northway broad-beamed knorrs and karves launched for trade and trans-
port heaved and creaked with line-taut sail-flap

Slammed hard in wallow-yaw running seas

Slaves, wool, timber, wheat, farm animals, freemen, victuals, furs, pelts,
horn, walrus ivory, weapons, trading goods

They crossed the North Atlantic regularly with livestock and stores

Goat clatter sheep bleat horse-whinny heifer-heave hoof-slide live cargo shift

Hogtied for stability, maybe letting animals stand in the straw now and then
in calm seas

Reaching for the skerried Canadian coast

Vineland

Newland

Greenland

New World

“Faire this morning the wind being west we smelled the pines” – in the log
of William Penn’s *Submission*, November 1688, seven hundred years later

A millennium of Europeans offshore smelling New World pines

Stockholm’s Arlanda (ARN) now in the solstice-tending morning mid-May
2009 sun

In Uppland

Bound for Umeå Flygplats (UME) an hour's flight up the Gulf of Bothnia
at sixty-four degrees North

In Västerbotten

Out in the Pacific sixty-four North gets you all the way out the Bering
Straits to the empty Chukchi and Seward Peninsulas

Here the North is calm and settled Swedish sensibilities

Stockholm airport's standard international glassed steel accoutrements but
little hustle

The same placid Swedish unconcern that allowed Olof Palme's assassin in
Norrmalm downtown to anonymously trot away up the Tunnelgatan steps
into history

Stood one time well to the side of the memorial plaque in the Sveavägen
sidewalk and watched passing Swedes stop and gape and cry

Palme graduated from Kenyon in the late nineteen-forties, hitchhiked
around the US, visited Walter Reuther before going home

His socialism apparently came from the American example rather than from
America's angst of inequality

Decades on other issues, other players, other ponderables at stake

Come to ground within awareness of Umeå's timber-port log-raft past

Where the snow is gone except from Västerbotten's high slopes and ridges
but has left the boreal-patchy lawn of the Umeå Rådhusparken gray-brown
and beaten down

The frost just gone the city laid in blooming tulip beds in the Råd House Park

On its slope down to the river the benches and much of the dead lawn are
taken by young people mostly sheltering in the cold sun from a strong *Kung
Bure* breeze

Thoroughly twenty-first-century shaved heads or a lot of hair, a lot of smoking, generally unisex *tout noir*, guffaw theatricality

Holding to that weakly sunny park space as though it was elixir

Basking as best they can after their subarctic winter

Well into the dusk blatantly reluctant to leave the Centrum for outlying apartment rooms

In one of the first evenings of their brief summer

This little university city with perspectives of the east and of the farther north

On the gulf's Kvarken Narrows across from Vasa, Russian from 1809, Umeå was burned out half a dozen times in Sweden's complicated Baltic wars with the Tsar

Now with the consumer trimmings and a normal twenty-first-century Euro mix of locals, South Asians and a few forlorn Africans

With a boreal emptiness within the shopping arcades

As though discount video games, thongs, cell phone *étuis* and shoes, shoes, shoes were not enough to bring Umeå up to Milano and Berlin

On Gammlia, the hill that was a redoubt of retreat when eighteenth-century Russians would arrive to fire out the port, and where the taiga began before the modern roads, the Västerbottensmuseum

A boy friend from Eugene and a long-term visit there back behind

Not in the least regretful that she came home

First hints of post-twenties on her brow and in her wry self-disparagement

She is marvelous to talk with

We talk Obama, Swedes who dress *tout noir*, Hamsun, Norway, Palme, Si-

belius, Västerbotten, places she must see like South America, time, circumstance just a bit

Twenty minutes, half an hour

When we shake hands we are thinking of circumstance

And she mentions it

Everything a woman should be, meant in the way that women say that about a man

But so much is circumstance

Tomorrow the road west to Mo i Rana

Inland the towns are villages, the villages are hamlets, the hamlets crossroads

Cabin fever kicks in for most people at around sixty degrees latitude, but people in the Swedish taiga do not seem spooked from their winter just past

Boreal modern, some with a charming high-cheeked Sami squint around the eyes

The woman at Gammlia had that hint of Sami

Here sense of Sami is an underlying ambience

It could be upcountry Manitoba or central BC with its sense of Cree in the background

Daily equilibrium in the taiga depends on the vehicle driven, the season, and the state of those you're with

Intimidated by the miles ahead, at Östersund break off heading northwest to take the lower road through the fells above tree line at over a thousand meters, the Old-fjällen

A Norwegian *mil* is ten kilometers

Mo i Rana, almost on the Arctic Circle, next time

Cranes (*Grus grus*) strut loftily across the bogs and reindeer in spring velvet bump slowly off the road

Gossanders, goldeneyes, ring-necked ducks, teals, a covey of willow grouse

Down the Sanddøla River's deep gorge to the Namsen where in the sixties saw a local farmer land what must have been a ten-kilo silver Atlantic salmon with a sea-trout rod

Make Steinkjer on Nord Trøndelag fjord before dusk, pleasant little port open to the North Atlantic a long five hundred kilometers from Umeå back on the Swedish gulf

Norway's national day, *Nasjonaldagen*, in the morning with town and village parades, lines of citizens walking on the way to Trondheim

Some wearing black wool elaborately embroidered, scarves, shawls and hand-made silver or gold jewelry, male *bunads* are knee britches, short jackets, broad-brimmed hats

Often Norwegian teenagers, more girls than boys, are given their regional *bunads* that they keep and wear ceremonially throughout their lives

All of Trondheim is a *Nasjonaldagen* parade, citizens walking, every club, bicycle to gourmet to canine to rock-climbing, police contingent, fire fighters contingent, Somalian contingent, Greek contingent, Indian contingent, Turkish contingent

Trondheim's thirteenth-century cathedral was built mostly by English masons and craftsmen who crossed the North Sea for the job, as they did a generation on to build Bergen's cathedral to the south

Nearly a thousand years ago they came to Trondheim and Bergen under the aegis of Canute the Great, Canute the self-proclaimed "King of all the English, and of Denmark, of the Norwegians, and part of the Swedes"

His ancestors: Harthacnut of Denmark, Gorm the Old, Harald I of Denmark, Harald Klak, Thyra, Sweyn Forkbeard, Gyrid Olafsdottir

The women forgotten, except for very few like Gyrid

Left to the void with the churls, oarsmen, slaves, swordsmen, axmen, spear-
men, the riggers and carpenters, herders, smiths, cooks and clerics

They sailed from The Wash, the Mouth of the Humber and Harwich via
the Orkneys and the Shetlands

Carrying the craftsmen with their stone chisels, mallets, compasses, plumb
lines, long-pan water levels

Christianizing Vikings on their way to Trondheim

Not yet Anglo, not yet not Norse

Speaking Anglo-Norse

Anglo-Danish pidgin

The Danelaw Midlands speaking Norse until the Normans in 1066

Writing mostly in Latin

The language of the militant faith that propelled them to lift Trondheim's
and Bergen's great gray cathedrals to the sky

The accomplishing longship and knorr crews launched repeatedly for centu-
ries

Technology transfer and diffusion of culture by sea shuttle

And all their genes remain on the Norwegian fjords, to mix with twenty-
first century Somali, Greek, South Asian, West African and Turkish ones,
walking in Trondheim's *Nasjonaldagen* parade

THREE STORIES

Jarda Cervenka

THE VISIT TO LA CASA FITZCARRALDO

The pupils of the eyes of Alicia Clara, ebony black and surrounded by irises of heartwood mahogany hue gave one a look from the darkness. But the darkness was often abolished by her sunny smile, so well liked in the fish market. Alicia was a popular fishmonger in Bellavista-Nanay. To locals she sold fish, both fresh (some catfish were still alive) and fried. She sold her body, part-time, to tourists in the nearby quasi-hotel “La Casa Fitzcarraldo.” She was judged beautiful for an Yagua Indian, with hair like straight shiny wires, complexion of warm brownness, slim as she was graceful. She was always clean, maybe a fish scale or two on her blouse; she wore only blouses, never the clingy t-shirts, the ubiquitous uniform of women of the village. Only she knew why. Morning and evening she was pleasant to her customers, never would they suspect her thought to be murky like the Amazon, since she was not in the habit to display her feelings, or share her mood. Indijenas are like that.

She knew more about the Amazonian fish than many ichthyologists, which made her happy—and sought after. She could tell how many hours a creature had been out of the water, except the bodo, which could stay alive laying in the bottom of the boat for a day. (But that one, bodo, she recommended only for soup, it was too ugly, too.) She had the best connections with local fishers who came from high up river, some were caboclos of mixed blood, old-timers, who brought her the best catch, like peacock bass—tucumare. She usually saved those for the local celebrity Don Huerequeque, who played the important role of a cook, under his real name, in the famous film *Fitzcarraldo* by Werner Herzog. He built a bodega in Nanay, where Alicia got a discount on Ucayalina, the beer she loved. She loved the beer because it was named after the Ucayali River, which joins Marañon to form the Amazon hundreds of miles upstream and from where her Yagua people come.

For common customers she still had quality fish to offer, like yaraqui and curimote so good for a deep fry, but also for seviche, the original Peruvian specialty. Flat pacu are perfect for sautéing, as even Julia Child could appreciate, *sole meunière* being her most favorite meal. Sometimes there was available the large killer torpedo surubi—that one could feed a family, because the kids would be scared away from the table by its tyrannosaurus

teeth. Fetso vegan tambuqui was almost always a sure sale, wonderfully succulent prepared any way. The world's largest river fish, pirarucu, she would never get—that was only for the hotels in nearby Iquitos. Of piranhas she would sell only rare black piranha; too many bones in the red-bellied ones.

Regarding the deals with her body, she had her rules, which, by the way, would not be acceptable in the downtown Iquitos. She was no puta from Plaza des Armas, for which she was proud, to some degree, and still did not deprive her of customers. It was all about her dream.

Alicia Clara had a sort of a cousin in the concierge of La Casa Fitzcarraldo. He, too, was a caboclo, half-breed from Ucayali delta, up the big river. And Alicia trusted Segundo, since his task was to select the right customers for her from the guests of the hotel who asked to meet a pretty lady for the night. He would take 20 percent of the flat fee for the service, so he tried/ Segundo was able only to preselect the customer as being disgusting slob or non-disgusting slob, no weirdoes allowed, though. His criteria were crude, so Alicia had to use a comb with finer teeth. It must be reminded again that she was not some puta from Plaza des Armas.

So before her final decision she would sit with the man downstairs at the bar and get treated to caipirinha. There she would observe with one eye Pepe, the barman mixing cachasa rum with crushed sugar and lime pulp, or, sometimes, use white rum for caipirissima, or vodka for caipiroshka. With the other eye she studied if her victim ordered politely, using words like gracias, gracie, danke viehlmal or thank you. She observed if he drinks fast, his palms sweat, pushes his cheeks out with his tongue, looks sideways, and worse, if he would bargain for the price. There were other aspects of his physiognomy and physiology that she studied by her fish-eagle eyes, but after all she would not reject a nervous overweight adventurer with a kind smile. Pay the fee of 150 pesetas or 100 dollars in advance, compadre! It's for Alicia's big dream! A dream house.

"He is a nice gringo. And loaded he seems to be, too. I checked his boots," Segundo assured Alicia.

"I trust you, cousin, I had a rough day, and I need some peace."

"You don't come for peace here, you come for pesetas, some for you, some for me. Don't forget, carissima." Segundo offered her a cigarette knowing she does not smoke. "He is waiting in the bar."

It was a nervous but pleasant encounter from the first moment. There were both hesitant with about the same intensity. He thought 'beautiful,' she thought 'handsome.' They introduced each other formally. His name was Hans and he was German. He was long, carried himself well, shook hands nicely, no sweat. He must have been about mid-thirties, his black hair

attested to a non-Arian ancestor in his ascending pedigree, but his eyes were Teutonic forget-me-not blue, which fascinated Alicia, since in Nanay nothing was blue, even the noon sky was tinted milky, and jacarandas grew only in pre-Cordillera. She looked at his eyes, not into his eyes, and forgot what she wanted to say. He had a small lower jaw, clean shaven, not the usual few days' stubble to enhance the manliness of a "dangerous adventurer", who would present with new Abercrombie & Fitch jungle pants, khaki shirt with an abundance of pockets, and maybe, a scarf around the neck.

They sipped their first caipirinhas, which helped them to smile, while the second ones pleasantly affected their balance. Since Hans did not seem to hurry, Alicia took care of the decisions and led Hans upstairs to his room. There he sat on the easy-char and Alicia sank on the bed.

"You are very nice, Alicia, do you understand my Spanish?" was the only simplistic sentence Hans managed after a long uneasy silence. His Spanish was excellent, though.

"Come to the bed, Mr. Hans." She kicked off her shoes.

"Well, Alicia. I want to talk to you, you know, about what are you doing, your family, about Nanay..."

"You paid Segundo downstairs, Hans, now you wanna talk, just to talk?" She shook her head and raised her eyebrows. "Did you pay just to talk? Well, you paid for my dream, you know."

Hans hunched his shoulders then he explained his situation. In Peru's Amazonia, he was traveling with a group of his compatriots. It had been two weeks now and nobody would talk to him. He was mute for two weeks; he was alone with them around him. They knew he was gay. They laughed at him, they were against gays, and they even might have hated homosexuals.

"So I paid your Segundo to arrange for me to meet you. He said you are very nice, I paid him so I could talk. To you. It's true. I wanted to be like a normal person, normal traveler."

"Did those malditos y malignos think you have eight legs and horns? Why did you stay with the stupidos?" She frowned in displeasure. "But anyway, tell me, why did you become a mariposa, gay, then? Much trouble?"

It was time for a break, so Hans pulled a flat silver hip flask out of his rucksack and offered it to his companion. "Pretty," she said but refused a sip. She was puzzled by the situation, she was used to a different sequence of events and deeds in La Casa Fitzcarraldo, she did not need to get more alcoholic confusion. As it has been usual at this evening hour it started to rain, first in susurrant whispers then in loud tropical decibels, which reminded Hans that he is not in Munich's Englisch Garten but in the Amazon, an exotic beauty in front of him, cachasa in his bottle—he took a good swig.

He knew if he could embed in his memory this moment, the sounds, the hallucinogenic scent of tropical rot, the humid heat, it would be the great diamond in the crown of his travel memories.

Alicia repeated the question: why had he become mariposa, she had never met one. Hans explained that he was born like that, just like she was born Yagua, or somebody a negro, or somebody super smart—"you see," he said, "I have two brothers and they were not born like you say—mariposa. They have families, love women and all that. Mariposa—I sort of like that name—butterfly, it is pretty."

"Well, we can have other names, like cocorro, marica, and danao. Oh, I forgot, kids say culi-flogo!" She chuckled, tense moments over.

"Amazing," Hans threw his hand in the air in an amusement, "So many terms—it is just as many as Eskimos have names for snow!"

Alicia Clara did not understand "Eskimos" and "snow", so she asked for his flat silver flask and did the deed. Neither of them seemed to mind the silence that followed.

Alicia stood up and stepped back. She pulled her blouse off and stood half naked, arms hanging along her hips, with a questioning grin. In the subdued light of the room her breasts were of mutton fat jade, suggesting cartilaginous firmness. Venus of Milo—except of the remarkable asymmetry. Her left one was noticeably smaller, Hans observed with astonishment and clinical interest. But in a second, on the projection screen of his hippocampus, he saw Amazons, the mysterious fierce female warriors of Amazonian mythology, who cut off their left breast to make it easier to aim arrows from their bows at male adversaries.

Alicia took a hand of Hans and put it on the larger of her mameas. She observed no activity in his jungle pants; his face displayed a reptilian gaze of indifference. She let his hand go, it fell off limply. Hans felt this moment was like crossing of the "event horizon" of the black hole—lamentablemente amigo—only trouble could follow. His mouth a thin slash, his eyes moist, his tongue locked—till Alicia said a few words in a language he did not understand, so he forced a chuckle.

"You are very beautiful, very nice, cara Alicia Clara. And I thank you."

They were two intelligent people and so by the power of their intellect they recovered and resolved the impending crisis by wide smiles. It was not very difficult, their mutual newfound sympathy made it even comical. A happy thought occurred to the now restored Hans: *Maine echte Amazona! Die Abenteuer des guten Soldaten Hans! Adventure of the good soldier Hans.*

"I have an idea," he said. "There is a small eatery, Rositas, just across

from Fitzcarraldo. And Dona Rosita makes wonderfule sevice, muy rico, I swear. Let me take you there. I'd like you to tell me there about your dream house, everything..."

Without hesitation Alicia put on her blouse and they were on the way. Downstairs, at the concierge, her cousin Segundo leaned over the counter and in a loud whisper, with an unpleasant amused grin said something in Yagua acid twang while pointing at Hans. On the street, Alicia asked Hans to wait a little and returned to talk to Segundo. "You shit-for-brains, you shithead, shitkicker, and scumbag—from now on you can forget about your twenty percent, you can shove it high up your black ass." This was the lingo of a fishmonger, which doesn't leave any doubt about the power and meaning of the judgment.

Perfectly calm she joined Hans on the street where the rain just stopped and the breeze coming from Bellavista-Nanay was cool, scented by vapors of beer and fish, and the indescribable perfume emanating from the Big River. Soon they ordered Ucayalina brew and sevice for two from Dona Rosita. This common meal was made into a rare delicacy by freshness of the tam-buqui caught this morning, "cooked" in juice from home grown limes, with slices of white onion, garnished with cilantro from the back garden—and it came with Rosita's specialty: finger of yucca (cassava, manioc) boiled and then deep-fried in palm oil. As good food does for everyone everywhere, it induced a mellow feeling of mild happiness, the sensation heightened by the second and third Ucayalina.

Alicia Clara described her dream; a dream-house to be built on a lot near a small beach where Rio Nauta flows into Amazon, still in the territory of Nanay. The pylons were already sunk in. The walls will be of softer but pretty yellow capirona, the windows will be facing East and the river, so the morning sun will make merry. She described stairs and outdoor kitchen with a separate barbeque pit of clay and stones, and on, and on, in detail, her hands in the air, her eyes wide open, as if she was describing a lover, a newborn, a friend...her dream. Hans listened with full attention.

"But the floor would be very special, Hans, it will be made of real *sonte-hard renako*, smooth, scented of sweet tobacco when dried and it will extend to a beautiful, big veranda, over the water. And I will have a skiff tied in the water just underneath," Alicia beamed with pleasure. "And when you come next time, in a year, swear you will come, Hans! You'll stay with us. I will have a parrot, a man, and monkey by then. And you will stay with us four, and I'll get you a large hammock from Iquitos, not that little shit *Indios* in the jungle make. And all of us will swing in hammocks on veranda in the evening, with *caipirissima*. The *renako* floor will be beautiful purple

after the rain, will glisten like a dog's balls and you won't know if you should look up at the big orange sinking into the river, or down, at the most lovely floor in the world. In Alicia's own house." They drank to this *fata morgana*, to the proposal of happiness. Two friends and six *Ucayalinas*.

Then after the last gulp of brew Hans performed his infamous imitation of a howler monkey to the amused amazement of his new friend and Dona Rosita, who was just closing the shop. Then he pulled out of the back pocket of his corny jungle pants the silver hip flask and gave it to Alicia. "Presento from Germany, *guerida*." She held it like a precious object of antiquity, radiated microwaves of pleasure, and thanked him kindly.

Alicia touched his face in the gesture of sympathy for the fools, took his hand and put it on her breast, the smaller one. She started to laugh at her confusion, she laughed till sparkling tears ran down her mahogany cheeks—and Hans joined her, madly.

FOR THE LOVE OF TRILOBITE

"...trilobites, indeed, could be considered the most important fossilized marine arthropods, essential for biostratigraphy, evolutionary biology and even plate tectonics. They first appeared 540 million years ago and existed for 291 million years—till their final demise, extinction in the late Carboniferous and Permian 251 years ago. But we'll come to that later."

Marie took a deep breath as if she wanted to shed some nervousity. Dr. Marie Podbabska was newly appointed as assistant professor in the Department of Paleontology in the School of Geology, Charles University in Prague. She was presenting her first seminar and it was on the topic of her scientific love—trilobites. Her main problem in designing the lecture was to eliminate the less important facts from the forty-five minute presentation. After describing the anatomy of a trilobite, pointing to uniqueness of eyes with 360-degree vision, the extreme variation in size from two millimeters to seventy-five centimeters, she paused before stressing: "...the incredible diversity in morphology! This makes life very difficult for a poor paleontologist. Taxonomy and phylogeny show us, amazingly, eleven trilobite orders, five thousand genera and, so far, twenty thousand species!"

At this point Dr. Robert Cerny, from the Department of Mineral Resources, thought he would leave, but, then, he liked Marie, and it would be pretty rude. After all, he thought, it was nice to look at her, sweating it out—and with some grace. He knew grace comes from knowledge of the topic; she was known for being good, in the School. And Robert, being a

self-described lowlife and victim of retarded puberty, he would stay just to watch her ample behind, which he and his similarly affected friends called *africanized*.

“Hrud mocne povijata, hle, leptotvarna zena! (Built so well, quite a beautiful specimen!),” Rob whispered to himself.

Slender, she was, but her curves were well delineated, her chest of handsome quantity. Her orange blossom, honey-colored hair was pulled into a luxurious horsetail, her face was Scandinavian—oblong with small nose and two succulent lips—teeth were American, perfect. Her eyebrows, in an anti-Mongolian slant, gave her a slightly worried mien, which instantly disappeared with even a suggestion of smile.

Men adore female anatomy, but it is through her face and brain they fall in love; both of which are situated above shoulders. And Dr Robert Cerny liked her face much—it was one reason he came to the lecture.

“The hard, dangerous work in limestone quarries has been done by quarriers.” She was at the conclusion of the lecture. “They lived in villages along Berounka river and west around Prague. And these poor quarry men learned that the little creatures they saw in the stones, parts of the stones, were of interest to Dr. Antonin Fric in the National Museum. And he might pay a few kreuzers for unbroken specimens. So the more curious and/or intelligent men learned that the little ‘crayfish’ Dr. Fric called trilobites were the most valuable of all the fossils. In time, the quarry men developed their own nomenclature for trilobites, to enable them to communicate, which I believe is unique in paleontology. Unique in the world.”

Dr Podbabska looked at the watch and frowned. “Not much time left,” she said, “but if you’ll bear with me I’ll read you few quotes by Dr. Fric, as he wrote in 1863. I think it would add some dimension to dry stratigraphy or morphology. He writes: ‘Quarry men knew some trilobites under Latin names, but usually used names they themselves created.... During my trips around Prague I was meeting in limestone quarries people of unusual character. After being asked if they put aside some fossils, they answered uniformly they have none.’ Then Dr. Fric described the haggling about how much, how many kreuzers or goldens would exchange hands in the case some fossil will be, by chance, discovered somewhere. He ends describing the end of a meeting with a rock-breaker: “...humbly, Highborn Sir, I make no proposal and leave it on your kindly opinion. I would be happy, Sir, as you are a noble man.” The quarry man parted with a low bows and repeated attempts to kiss my hand,’ Dr Fric remembered.”

Marie looked at her watch. “Now...allow me to deviate further from the science...and show you a few slides of trilobites and tell you the names

quarry men invented for them. It will require you to stretch your imagination a bit. These are from Silurian ‘Barrandenian’: *Paradoxides bohemicus*—was “Spike”, *Bohemoharpes bubuvicensi*—“Horseshoe”, you can see why, *Proetus bohemicus*—“Monkey head”, that one is good, *Koneprusia brutoni* was “Fly with spike”, and I have forty names more.” She paused. “Sometimes I wonder,” she continued, “if these semi-literate quarry men knew more paleontology than my esteemed colleagues in the Department of Mineral Resources, for instance.” The speaker looked into the eyes of Robert Cerny for the first time during the presentation and grinned. “Well, my time is up, so thank you for your attention.”

Marie stayed around hoping for somebody to approach her with a question or opinion, but everybody rushed out, with the exception of a young woman with an auburn afro who wondered about the evolutionary connections to recent *limulus polyphemus*, horseshoe crab. And then there was Dr Robert Cerny.

“That was good, Marie, pretty good,” he said and tried to shake her hand, awkwardly. She was still high, flushed a little.

“Wasn’t I too nervous, you think?”

“Maybe the first minute, but then you were a real pro, I swear.”

“Yeah, yeah, you say.”

“But you know, the end about the quarry men and how they named trilobites, and about Fric, that was something I’ll remember. And the pictures. Very cool!”

“Oh, I am glad you say it, that that part was not out of place.”

“On the contrary, Marie, you brought not only a piece of folklore, which I bet nobody in the bloody School knows about, but a little poetry into paleontology. I love that. How about coffee downstairs?”

So Turkish coffee it was, Marie calmed down and stopped combing her hair with her fingers. They watched each other’s face, they smiled a lot, talked about professors in the School, agreed on the excellence of “Saurus” Augusta and “Handsome” Pertoldi, mediocrity of Spindlarski and laughed at the cult of the “Big sheik”, Herr Professor Kottner. Rob touched her hand and was surprised by his rising feelings of, say, sympathy. He decided to risk it.

“How about a dinner—to celebrate your talk? I don’t want to be pushy, but I really would like to take you to Cantina in Mala Strana, they have some great Mexican food.”

There was a long pause before Dr. Marie Podbabska, with an ironic grin, suggested she would have to go home and change. It meant she said yes and it was a very happy moment for Dr. Robert Cerny.



At Cantina, over flaming fajitas and Moros y Christianos, their mating slow-dance began hesitantly, but the tempo increased with the help of a few mugs of twelve-proof pilsner brew from Pilzen, the real stuff, accompanied by wide smiles, a couple laughs and touches.

“You know, my apartment is just a few hundred feet from here, Karmelitska Street 16, kitty-corner in front of the church of that Prague Baby Jesus. What do you say, Marie, dear?”

“What could—or should I say?” she asked, and finished the tanker of brew, now without foam.

“I have a bottle of Barillito, there.”

When Marie asked what Barillito was, Rob knew it would happen. Excitement filled his chest as if he won a lottery. Men are like that.

“You’ll like it, it’s the best aged rum from Puerto Rico, forbidden to use in mixed drinks. They serve it there as you would serve an old cognac, only to best friend.”

“Am I your best friend, Rob? Or do you see me now just as a ‘popular girl’?”

He took her unprotesting hand: “You are the bestest, most popular person in my book, I cross my bloody heart, and you look...bombastic....and I like you enormously, Marie. I do.”

So they walked those few hundred feet, and Marie told Rob that his strategy was primitive and totally transparent when she sees now the proximity of Cantina to Karmelitska 16. He laughed and said nothing. Lies wouldn’t do. At the apartment they had the Barillito night cap straight, then she threw her bra into the air, it landed on the chandelier hanging from the ceiling. Later Rob learned it was her immutable habit.

They made love of mediocre quality because Rob could not help himself from thinking how happy he was, he was flooded with feelings. Then they laid in peace, holding hands like kids, Rob thinking he would give a million bucks for a cigarette, Marie thinking she should have brought a toothbrush. She told him she had lived like a goddamned celibate nun for a hundred years, recently. She looked at her Timex; but still, she mused it was just only six and a half hours after he told her she did good on the trilobites speech. That fast!

They continued their affair, fell in love with the speed of lightning and developed a true friendship in time, too. After one year they both had a thought about permanency—which, of course, would be the end of an interesting story. However one day...



“...I got the dough, Robert, I got the grant!” Marie danced a pirouette, then had to calm herself down, there were people around. “And it is in Corsica! Remember? Looking for the *Proetus* trilobite, the last of the class before they became extinct. Remember?”

“Unbelievably great!” Rob congratulated and followed with a French kiss. They celebrated with the local bubbly *Rychle spunty* (Speedy corks), talked about Corsica, about travel money, and rejoiced that both have similar schedules at work, lecturing in the spring semester so they can go together.

“I asked several people in our department what comes to their mind when they hear the word ‘Corsica’. One said the stupid habit of vendetta, and another said the most mountainous island next to Sardinia and birth-place of Napoleon. What comes to you, Rob?”

“Oh, right away I think of the French Foreign Legion. They are stationed there, in Corsica; they cannot be on French soil proper by law. I read an autobiography of a legionnaire just recently.”

“I think I heard of the Legion. Tell me.”

“Well, in short, these warriors of *Legion estrangere* are legend. About half of them are not French, many escaped the law, or families, and in the Legion they could get new identities, names, the past was forgotten, but they must swear total obedience and sign a contract for five years. They have been described as cutthroats, saundry fugitives from justice, but I think it is too harsh to call them scum of the earth. You know, they become highly disciplined professional soldiers, all qualified as Commandos.”

“Sounds like tough guys.”

“I guess they are. They are given a honorary place in the parades on Champs-Elysees during national celebrations.”

“Do you think we’ll see them in Corsica? I’d like to meet some, I wonder how they look.”

“I am absolutely certain they would love to meet you, my girl,” Rob chuckled, “you can bet on it.”



In the Fall, when the weather in Prague is sad, Doctors Podbabska and Cerny took a train to Livorno and from there a ferry to Ajaccio, the capital of Corsica. The ferry’s navigation was not a happy affair. To save money they stayed on the lower deck and when a storm hit them at about the level

of Napoli, everyone got sick. Marie threw-up down into the Mediterranean, and people on the upper deck vomited at the heads of the proletariat on the lower deck. It was disgusting; there were no showers available.

In Ajaccio, where they checked into a youth hostel for twenty hard euros, they double-showered and stopped smelling like rotten eggs smashed in vinegar.

“Smell me, Dr. C!”

“A sunny field of wildflowers, Dr. P.” He sniffed her like a bloodhound. All was good again.

In the morning, Marie and Rob hitchhiked south and made it all the way to Bonifacio. This is the plan the geologists agreed upon: to save money to spend on the best seafood diners they could find—but then they would sleep outside under the sky, free. And this plan was followed by the most memorable day of their Corsican adventure.

That day they packed a couple sandwiches, a geological hammer, Brunton compass, and half a bottle of native wine (Vin de Corse Coteaux du Cap Corse), and were on the way, almost singing. When they came across a deserted limestone quarry a few miles Northeast of Bonifacio, Marie quickly determined it was upper Carboniferous, and there were fossils everywhere in the rubble (mostly brachiopods, some bivalves, corals, and occasional nautilid). On the rocky wall there was a forest of ivory-like crinoids, some in perfect shape, which excited Marie.

“Look, couldn’t you imagine them swaying in the tidal stream hundreds of millions years ago, their tentacles luring in some unfortunate arthropod. This is so cool.” Marie stumbled in delight. The hunt for the big prize started. Rob found it. He was sure it was a trilobite. He contained his excitement, picked up the rock, and since the life of true love must be nourished by small deceptions, he placed it in Marie’s path so she would be the one to find it. She picked it up shortly, remained quiet, sat on a boulder, held back the tears.

“What is it?”

“Rob, this is an almost perfect specimen, even the pygium isn’t missing.”

“Whoa, show!”

“This is it, this is *Proetida*. The last of my beloved class of Trilobita, before they disappeared, Robert. The last Mohican in their evolution!”

“So happy for you, that’s why we came here.”

“Just look at those beautiful composite eyes, almost alive.”

They opened the bottle of wine and she sprinkled some vine ordinaire on the pale limestone ground: “Blessed be late carboniferous!”

Robert took the fossil from her hand, laid it on the rucksack then stood her up and lifted her into the air in the silence of the quarry, no birds, crickets, wind, the echo of their voices just imagined. The collectors of fossils sat with a feeling of peace in them, his hand on her behind, chomping on the sandwiches, not talking, full of good thoughts they were; collectors of memories.

Back in town Marie decided *La Boite a Sardines* (Diners soupers) looked good for a celebration. It was half full of fast talking and deep smoking Corsicans, no tourist in sight. The h'ordeuvres were exotic, just as they hoped: umami tasting sea cucumber, holothuria, little pile of metallic tinged roe of sea urchin, fistful of deep-fried two-inch fish to be eaten whole (made the tongue feel hairy, a little), some cockle clams. It was a pleasurable adventure.

"What now after we ate the whole tidal pool?" Marie wondered, while Rob studied the menu; the main course would be raw tuna tartar, rosy, translucent, godly.

"Even a toothless jaw could chop this like butter," said Rob.

"It sprays juice at my palate. What can I say?"

The native red wine was black like anthracite, rough, but dissolved the mucus well.

It was difficult to understand the dessert menu—but they ordered from their whistling waiter one Chock Africaine—*desert chocolat a L'ancienne dit Africain*—for ten euro, to share. They whispered "paradise" in one voice. Marie paid the gratuity with abandon, the wine did it. And they were out under the stars, schlepping with uncertain gait to somewhere into the hills. Passing the garbage dump Rob hollered, "Discovery!" There laid a thin twin mattress, looking clean in the darkness.

"We will sleep as if we were in the Four Seasons tonight!" They carried the thing away. The path they followed led into a ravine and up a hill. On one side of this very narrow canyon there was a wall of shale rock, the opposite side was a steep covered by thorny bushes. The ravine was not wider than ten feet. After Rob cleaned a few stones away, the mattress fit well, the bedroom looked fantastic, Marie exclaimed.

She threw her bra in the air, it landed on a tree-heath bush (*Erica arboorea*), famous for its root, briar—bruyere, from which the bowls of quality pipes are made, Rob hurried to explain, he used to smoke pipes.

Then, out of the wind, covered only by silent stars they fell asleep on their conjugal resting place touching each other by their butts for a feeling of safety and bliss.



It was still twilight when the first birds' calls announced the day, and then human voices woke Rob and Marie. The intruders found the geologists laying on their backs, arms along their bodies, as children would draw a human figure. An Escadron of Commandos of the French Foreign Legion descended upon them, backpacks heavy, weapons at ready, their faces drawn by fatigue after the all night forced march. They were far from their Camp Raffalli. Their faces caked by dust widened into broad smiles, while stepping over the corner of the mattress, delighted by their view. And each one, one by one, they pronounced few words of advise as to the positions in sexual intercourse, some of them contributing only one or two words of obscenity, but judging by their expression of delight the words were meant to entertain, with good intentions.

Learned polyglots and philologists would delight at the litany of utterances in languages and lingos from roots Germanic, Ugro-Finish, Romanic, there was Woloff from Senegal and Bantu tongue of Ibibio of Cameroon, and there were Slavic obscenities. The mattress dwellers understood only one, it was the speak of a Slovak—their language is just a primitive patois of Czech. The whole event lasted about five minutes.

When the last of warriors passed Rob and Marie emerged from the induced stupor. From the near opening to their ravine they heard a brisk command and Foreign Legionnaires started their march hymn, which gradually faded into the morning silence: "...we are rough and tough, no ordinary guys, our ancestors died for the Legion's glory, we will soon perish, it is the tradition..."

Dr. Marie Podbabska retrieved her brassier from the tree-heath and with her man, Dr. Robert Cerny, they sat up. Both looked for words with slightly open mouth.

"I fell in love," Marie sighed.

"I am in love, too, my girl."

"Oh, yeah...but, Cerny, I fell in love with Corsica!"

They hugged tight, to be sure.

THE END OF THE PARTY

The world is always beautiful in dusk and dawn, but even more in the subtropics of the Florida Keys, known as Cayos de la Florida to undocumented immigrants, alias illegal wetbacks.

It was a calm evening, the sea silver black, flat as a pond, cicadas sounded by Stravinski. Mosquitoes and no-see-ems were some other places, so it

was pleasant to party on the veranda of our winter refuge above the Gulf of Mexico. Alcoholic vapors covered the smell of seaweed rotting between the mangroves, and above the mangrove thicket a few bats performed their acrobatics. If one would accommodate their eyes for the darkness, one could spy a great white heron we called Charlie waiting motionless in the shallows, only his head moving from side to side to visualize, in three dimensions, a blue crab for dinner.

Five of us settled around the ipe wood table, all smiles and very small talk at first. Mona shrieked, "Give me another drink so I can talk," and Rush, her second half, raised both hands and said nothing. Paul and Mary said they had a great time in Italy, though they still felt jet lagged, and so I made them Viper Keys, a kind of rum daiguirí, to help them recover. A Viper Key consists of five parts, all derived from tropical plants so it suits this tropical environment and dissolves all worries and mucus, loosens the tongue, primes the vocal chords and activates fast-twitch facial muscles. Everyone talks at the same time with Viper Key in hand.

"So, how was Italy?" I asked in hope to hear about specifics.

"Marvelous, great," Mary exclaimed and talked about churches, streets and piazzas, and pizzas in the tourist's way.

"Anything interesting? Like did you talk to people?" I interrupted.

"Yeah, tell him," Paul woke up. "About the two Italys."

Mary explained that if you buy a Lancia made in Milano, it would be as good as Mercedes or better. If you buy one made near Napoli, Lancia-Sud, when you open the door, the handle will stay in your hand.

"Yap, this fellow we met in tratoria, he said that the North and South are two different countries. He was an architect, good English. So Paul asked him how it comes to be that Italians are so renowned for their design. Design of everything. The guy laughed, like we know nothing and he said this: that a kid in Italy walks to school through a beautiful renaissance garden, passes great baroque statues on the square and enters a school built in art nouveau style or architecture, and on the walls of the school hang reproductions of great masters. The kid grows up and becomes a designer, and when he or she designs, the seeds of art history, subconsciously, sprout and influence his work. Yes, 'seeds in brain,' he said. Ain't it cool? Do you know Paolo Pinifarina?"

"Who cares," Mona, Rush's wife, said. Then there was a silence. She looked mean, with narrow eyes and lower teeth showing. It felt as if an acid cloud fell on us; you can't breathe well under an acid cloud, it is poisonous, too. Rush showed no surprise, he looked at me and said nothing, as usual, when Mona was involved. She laughed briefly, not unlike the strange howl

of hyena, but quieter.

Rush is my oldest and best friend, we go back to high school. He has been always very smart, but not nerdy, quite popular with girls, mostly with those we used to call “sleazy sluts,” who were the most important for our development. Now he works in research for crystalline and amorphous solar panels, doing well. We understand each other in almost everything. We dislike all ideologies, religions, nationalists and stupidos, and we like birding a lot. We love all animals and kill nothing except ticks, when we fish it is catch and release. Strangely, in our simplified philosophies, we agree on the importance of being nice to people and of lying a lot so as to fit in and so to survive well. All the time, while we try to find the truth in our views, we try to make them as simple as we could manage, of bullshit devoid. He has been a very precious person to me, never too far from my thoughts and musings. Always.

I was so sorry when he married a gal he did not really know. However, I was perfectly aware that negative, deleterious remark about a friend’s wife could doom a friendship in an instant and permanently, even if well intended and in sympathy.

After Mona’s remark I got up and went to the kitchen for a plate of baked water chestnuts wrapped in bacon; I had heard the stove calling me. Rush followed me to get his pipe.

“Nice instrument of destruction, this. Is it an Italian pipe? I see the Lucite stem,” I said.

“Yes.”

“Savinelli? Such a nice briar,” I said and took it from his hand.

“No, it’s is Caminetto, I think it is the second best Italian. See the bird’s eye pattern on one side and straight grain on the other side?” Rush changed his expression from dour to the famous smile on his Slavic round face. “And here, see? The open ‘V’ stamped on the stem—it is the mustache of the founder of the company, Grandpa Cuchiago. Ha!” Rush radiated, and I rejoiced to see it, first time in that evening.

“Cool,” I said. “Let’s go back to join the party.”

“I don’t want to go.” His smile disappeared/

“Well, Rush, don’t be a baby, please.”

Then he bent his head and said: “I’ll kill her. I will.”

My heart constricted in a slight pain seeing my friend’s hand trembling. “How Rush? With a grenade launcher or uzi?” I tried to lighten him up. “Come on, don’t talk rot.”

“Not with a grenade. With a pistol, Beretta, Italian,” Rush whispered and I pushed him out to the veranda since there was no other way to go, no

fire escape, no theatre's trapdoor to the underworld. There, Mona was pouring herself another stiff whisky, she did not like Viper Key, "too much shit in it," she claimed.

I did not want to give up so I asked Rush about his trip to London and Paris. "Weren't you in London this spring?" I pushed it and Rush nodded and with obvious effort started to talk.

"Yes, it was a business trip, just a few days. And I took a short side trip to Paris, just to see the newly redone Picasso Museum in Marais. Yeah, it was interesting, but short."

Paul asked what was new, what has changed in the last years. "You used to fly there quite often, I remember."

"Yeah, London is still such an exciting place, so much action, you feel like you are in the heart of Europe, the old architecture, colonial mixing with futuristic skyscrapers. But, Paul, when you see everywhere women covered in hajib or niqab, I don't know. I even saw two in burcas on Trafalgar Square...I have to admit it gave me the creeps, deep creeps. So from this Londonistan I had to run to the British Museum of Natural History and hide there—my favorite hideaway, you know."

"I know, I love that place. You can hide there from humanity. It is quiet there, too," said Paul, half closing his eyes.

"But even there the Islamists did not leave me. And in the section of amphibians, you know, frogs, salamanders, newts, I just could think about *War with the Newts* by Karel Capek. And about the apocalyptic end of the worlds as we know it, as he, Capek, had described."

"Great read, truly—but, I think, maybe the end is too much science fiction," Paul wanted a concord.

"Yeah, Paul, except the beginning of the story, how the Europeans import newts for labor, underwater works, and such. That is almost in a detail a prophetic allegory of the recent history of the West; it is what is happening now. And Capek wrote this some bloody seventy-five years ago!"

As I expected Mona scatologically contributed: "All shit and bullshit! I could vomit blood, listening to that."

I admit, there and then, I yearned to see her emanating a stream of her diluted blood.

Since there was no laughter or smiles or obsequious conversation and Mary looked uncomfortable, I asked Rush about the City of Lights. And heard how marvelous Marais is and the new museum, how Picasso is all brains, brains, brains. And how in Montmartre and Trocadero float dark silhouettes, covered in hijab, eyes on the ground...in this city of lovers, of elegance. My friend lowered his voice.

“There, I wished I was in our cabin on Clam River, up North, on a sunny day, just birds and deer and wild turkeys, maybe a splash of a beaver, and mama bear with cubs coming to show off...no hominoid around.” Rush stopped, realizing he deviated.

“Well, Rush,” Mary said without hesitation, “it just shows you how Europeans are tolerant. Tolerant to religions and cultures, you see?” Mary is an assistant professor in the university, so I couldn’t help myself from asking her how were things in the Ivory Tower of Multicultural Sensitivity, if it was crumbling down, yet? This sarcastic remark did not improve the mood on the veranda, on this quiet beautiful evening.

“You know, Mary, I was just thinking...” and Rush could not finish since Mona announced: “Look at the the thinker, the genius! Knows everything!”

“Be nice, Mona,” I said. Not more; I couldn’t. At that moment, on the projection screen of my hippocampus, I saw a Bacuba ju-ju sacrificial mask made of afara wood, with a cruel, toothless wound for a mouth, black hollows for eyes, stained black by soot with human fat, rusty nails pounded into cheeks, each nail for an evil wish...I had to get up; I walked to the railing, looked down at the sea. I felt the desire to be somewhere else, like Rush felt a moment ago. I wanted to be in the rainforest in Amazonia, in the midst of silent botanical riot, to sit on a stump by a fire my Indian maintains. He would boil coffee, I would roll cigarettes from the black tobacco for both of us, we would hear parrots shrieking, a few monkeys panicking above on a renaco tree, with a bottle of the cheapest rum—cachasa—laying by the fire, at the ready, and on the bottle a jewel beetle (Buprestidae) just landed, reflecting the flames in radiant emerald and gold. And there I have no memory, no plans, coffee is getting ready, it is hot and humid and wildly fragrant, I had finished the cigarettes from local black tobacco for both of us, I lost all memory and make no plans, I felt surrounded by a great natural peace, not extraordinary happiness, but peace.

I woke up and look at the sky. If there was a meaning in the starry sky for me, it was lost now—except when the sky is as red as now, with a purple line by the calm sea. The Asmat cannibals in Papua-New Guinea know that at red sky in the evening, somewhere in the heart of darkness there is a headhunting raid taking place. I yearned the cannibals would change their savage plan and I whispered in a muted cry: anthropophagi horribiles, avanti, here, come here, there is a good head for you, out of which black cave without lips unfriendly sounds emanate!

I needed different sounds, so I went inside and put on the CD by Louis Armstrong, my greatest hero of old time tunes.

“...it is a wonderful world...frineds greet each other ‘how are you’...it is a wonderful world...oh yeah.” I thought Mary’s eyes got misty when the famous raspy voice with the beautiful melody enveloped us all.

Paul started to talk. I call him a relict of Scandinavia because of his lanky tallness, big teeth, and straw hair. He is a reliable friend who almost never loses his sense of humor or his balance on the tight rope of politics. This was important to me since, with Rush, we get into foreign politics; we see it as an experiment of social anthropology, teaching us much about homo sapiens, as a species. It must be said that with my friend Rush we consider ourselves positively liberal. Paul is with us most of the time, rooting for abortion on demand, marriage of gays and their right to adopt, social programs for underprivileged to reduce their intestinal fat, and *panem et circenses*, bread and games, to friends of the U.S. of A., and liberty and justice for all. We are the original feminists, too, seriously. And in foreign politics we favor total econo-blockade of Russia, and Iran, and moving Palestinian Arabs to the Sahara, for starters. Of course, all of us in sync, we suspect these dreams of ours to be dreams not unlike those induced by Berkley’s LSD, Mexican peyote or Amazonian ayahuasca.

Paul used to be the bovine inseminator in a big farm in California, where he met Mary, who took horseback riding lessons there. She finished medical school and married Paul when he promised to go back to school himself. She wanted to help “peoples”, not patients, so she went to work in public health programs at the university where Paul worked on his degree in genetics.

I asked Paul what was new in genetics; we now live in the era of genetics and molecular biology, they say.

“We are studying evolution of genome and of the brain at the moment, truly fascinating,” he said. “And how the human races developed, and how the brain increased in homo sapiens.”

I knew it will be combustible to go into the topic of races, and it might create even more hyperbaric situation when drinks are in hand. But I asked, nevertheless, how it comes to be that about eighty percent of blacks are under the mean standard in education in general population, in intelligence, as it is often called. Paul giggled nervously but answered.

“You know, all races are genetically identical when it comes to brain development prenatally and up to about age four years of age. But then the decline in blacks starts and—sorry about that—it continues to decline. It is well documented by studies of identical twins reared apart and interracial adoptions.” Paul stopped talking. I thought he felt embarrassed lecturing. He downed his drink and looked apologetically at his Mary, who did not

look much pleased. He continued, bravely. “It is all due to lifestyle influences, family influences, and so on. Sorry to say but it has all been documented well, even on the molecular level, the epigenetics is the branch of genetics explaining it all,” Paul said. “I don’t want to talk about this, are we having a nice party or what? I need another Viper Key of yours! Fast!”

“Well, you scientist, you Einstein! I tell you the reason. It all is a result of fucking racism! Youzer, youzer!” Mona exclaimed. Long silence followed.

I remember how Rush married this girl. He met her at the party at Carlton College, where she came as part of a package: few six-packs of Summit Ale, few ounces of ganja and no objection to topless dancing. They started dating, and we, all bums, envied him. She was quite pretty, with delicious thoracic creation, long attractive hair, and her face was lovely since she was never distant from a smile. She liked and remembered jokes, she liked animals, she held hands with Rush and was a graceful dancer, too. But after the marriage, not in many years later, she started her accelerated decline, losing first the smiles, then jokes, then dancing and holding hands with Rush. From a cute, lively, sperm-like tadpole she metamorphosed into a warts covered buffo buffo. None of us knew the reason for such a rapid decline. But I suspected Rush knew well, he must know.

Not long ago Rush surprised me, relating how they traveled with Mona to the West, through the canyons of Utah, Monument Valley, pueblos of New Mexico, and how it was not a happy trip. And how standing at the rim of the Grand Canyon he put his hand on her shoulder blade—but in a last second he did not push. I admit it shocked me then.

I went to the kitchen to breath again and I decided to make an attempt to salvage the party, I would tell how the last week I ruined the famous dish, pot au feu, just minutes before guests arrived for dinner, how with one move I made it a mush, and so on, and I would clown a bit, too.

I returned to the veranda full of good intentions but I found everybody standing, getting ready to leave. Rush looked at me, but his face did not talk so I did not understand. Since I am the laureate of degree of Master of Bullshit and Administration—MBA, I thanked my friends for the very nice party! And bid them goodbye, drive carefully, happy combustion!



I had plans to go birding to the Everglades with Rush. Last time we started in Flamingo and spotted/ticked thirty-two species, including an anhinga standing on the back of a ten-foot-long alligator, a male rufous-sided towhee, a make red whiskered bulbul and even the beautiful, purple

gallinule (*Porphyryla martinica*). These were our pagan idols of beauty, which we worshiped by binoculars. But I had to postpone the bird watching expedition since I had to travel to Atlanta and Chicago.

It had been about three weeks after the party when I returned, tired, home. I sat in peace at home, like in a warm cocoon, seeing no human faces and hearing no Babylon of business voices. I made myself a Nescafe and read Kurtzwell's book on singularity, nanobot replication, and quantum computing. After an hour my head started to spin. I closed the book to rest my brain's connection and opened the idiot box, where a severe looking woman in police uniform was just talking about some murders.

"...and the preliminary analysis suggests that the husband might have threatened her with a gun. She appears to have charged him, chopped at his neck with a meat cleaver, severing his carotid artery. He still shot her through the heart before he collapsed and rapidly bled to death. The murder weapon, Beretta three eighty semiautomatic pistol, Italian make, as well as the meat cleaver with buffalo horn handle of Japanese provenience were found next to the victims." She paused shaking her head. "Strangely," she continued, "the woman held the hand of her victim; she may have reached for him in the very last scintilla of her life."

The fatherly looking policeman standing next to the woman analyst then added: "I don't remember such a bizarre double murder, not one, in all those twenty years with the Golden Valley Police Department."

Golden Valley, the domicile of Mona and Rush.

I wanted to run to the telephone but my legs would not carry me. I tried to breath deeply. A pain in my heart kept me from moving, since I knew. I was certain.

In the following days, the feeling of loss did not diminish. The pain was not as severe as losing a loving dog but it tangled my innards into a Gordian knot, which would not be completely untangled for a long time. When I would go birding alone, the pain would come back when through tears I could not see the painted bunting well. It used to be Rush's favorite, the painted bunting. It would hurt, bad.

THREE POEMS*Gëzim Hajdari**Untitled One*

We hold tight to our names
ripped out like grass,

and we don't know where it comes from, this solitude.

Maybe we should have stayed
closer to the trees
or the overturned statues.

For years we've been walking
the barren fields
without childhood.

A slow snow
falls on our bodies.

Untitled Two

Nothing dawns
on time's face.

The Balkan night—
black leather.

The valley's abyss
holds the dust of my wishes,
the ashes of my seasons.

What am I looking for
on the hilltop
of this tormented country
of drunkards?

Outside, in the garden,
the wind knocks quinces
into the mud
like ugly dreams.

Untitled Three

No one knows if I'm still hanging on
in this burnt-up corner of earth
or if drunk in the depths of night I write
joyful and dark verses.

I dream of death every time
spring returns.
Groans get lost little by little
in the rain's nakedness.

My youth is burning up
in a hurry, without echo.
All around me smile
roses and knives.

Smoke and alcohol
is what my body will soon smell like.
Who knows what hidden hurt one day
will wear out my voice.

—translated from the Italian by Sarah Stickney

LIKE RIVERS GOING TO THE SEA*Lidia Kosk*

From Siberia, retracing the trails of the exiles,
 in the footsteps of their grandchildren
 treading in the *taiga*,
 through hunger and barbed wire,
 from the steppes of Kazakhstan
 where the earth saved the starving
 with frozen tubers, a poor
 manna substitute—
 walked the Polish soldier.

A miracle happened: the right to fight.

From huts on the river Bug
 in the meadows amidst marshes,
 sweet-water birds' paradise,
 along small and big streams,
 to their beat
 converging,
 growing
 free like the rising waters of rivers
 going to the sea—
 walked the Polish soldier.

With the refrain of history
 and the new song of his brothers,
 with the murmur of sand of deserts,
 as the azure and waters of oceans
 were not enough
 to quench his thirst,
 dreaming of the amber Baltic sea—
 walked the Polish soldier.

Kilometers upon
 kilometers, dust upon dust,
 the Polish soldier arrived
 at the great water—

the sea cuddled his weary feet,
covered soldier's boots
with white petals
of salt.

—translated from the Polish by Danuta E. Kosk-Kosicka

AT LARGE: THE POET'S STORY

John Matthias

The theme of this issue is “layers,” and I’ve been doing a little archeological dig of my own since my last column. Maybe because I have spent the last couple of years writing fiction for the first time in thirty years or more, I started looking around for some interesting (and sometimes forgotten) fiction written by poets. It did not take long before I began jotting down names and titles for a hypothetical anthology, although, frankly, I don’t know that I’ve got the patience to follow through on it. I’ve been through the game of permissions negotiations several times in the past, but in those days I was much younger. Still, I’ve pretty much thought the thing out and, for what it’s worth, here’s a draft introduction and a draft table of contents. Maybe someone else will want do the hard work involved getting something like this into print.

‡ ‡ ‡

The greatest poetry always told stories: Gilgamesh, Homer, Virgil, Dante, Chaucer, and Shakespeare. As for ourselves, contemporaries, we come well after storytellers discovered the flexibility of prose and after the flowering (and de-flowering) of the 19th century novel. Better, or perhaps worse, than that: We come after the great modern prose stylists: Flaubert, Joyce, Hemingway, Woolf, Bellow, Gass. A few poets, looking back at Scott and Byron, continued to write verse narrative well into the last century, but they were mostly not among those to whom we have looked for inspiration. There are craggy and eccentric exceptions, of course, among our modernist heroes and heroines—mainly Robert Frost, E.A. Robinson and the stubborn and sometimes foolish Robinson Jeffers. It is interesting and possibly significant that Jeffers’ work was kept alive for many years by readers who had little interest in his contemporaries, which means readers who paid no attention to Pound, Elliot, Williams, H.D., Stein, and Moore. I have met readers of Jeffers who, among modern poets, read only Jeffers. When asked to look at the *Cantos* or *Patterson* they are inclined to ask why the story keeps changing or fading or breaking down. What about a beginning, middle, and end? What about, instead of a train wreck, a walk in the woods with a bright dawn at the end and a deer turning its head at the edge of a lake? And isn’t the highest of narrative forms the epic? Stephen Vincent Benet’s *John Brown’s Body* sold an astonishing number of copies only five years after

publication of *The Waste Land* before becoming a coffee table book in the 1954 edition with illustrations by Fritz Kredel based on Matthew Brady's photographs, which was followed by a Broadway dramatization involving celebrity actors of the period. Two years after *John Brown*, Robinson's long narrative poem *Tristan* also eclipsed the sales figures for best-selling novels. This moment of literary history is seldom discussed. It is both amusing and resonant to see Benet's note to his epic dated 1928 from Neully-sur-Seine. There he sits among the Lost Generation avant-garde writing blank verse about Grant, Lee, Jefferson Davis, and Lincoln.

But even modern and postmodern poets have been drawn, for whatever reason, at least now and then, to plain narrative, though mostly in prose when even the freest kind of verse hasn't offered a mode in which story can find its way to the eye, ear, and imagination. (How many readers, truth to tell, prefer the prose sections of Williams' *Patterson* to the verse?) "Tell me a story," asks a child; "Do you remember when we once," asks an old acquaintance; "Before you were ever born," says a grandparent. I have begun this anthology with a short poem about story telling by Robert Penn Warren, one of our great mid-century novelists and poets. It poses just about all the questions there are about this business of making up stories. In, *Audubon*, a book-length poem of Warren's that comes very close to being an attempt at narrative (blocked from that, perhaps, by certain modernist conventions), the poet concludes:

Tell me a story.
 In this century, and moment, of mania,
 Tell me a story of great distances, and starlight.
 The name of the story will be Time,
 But you must not pronounce its name
 Tell me a story of deep delight.

One looks at Warren's forty or so books listed on the back jacket flap of his *Selected Poems*. Stories, poems, novels, and plays. Not to mention his pedagogical anthologies with Cleanthe Brooks: *Understanding Fiction* and *Understanding Poetry*. This was the 1950s when Brooks and Warren were radical "new critics." So was Yvor Winters a "new critic" of sorts, though his one-off short story, the masterpiece called "The Brink of Darkness," might possibly outlast all the essays in *In Defense of Reason*. In that one story, the author knows more than he does in all of his other prose. He had also tried brief stories in verse—"John Sutter," and "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight"—but when he had the one story ("and one story only") that brought him near to madness, he told it in prose. Perhaps one could also argue that there

is no poem deriving from William Carlos Williams' medical practice quite as strong as his story called "The Use of Force." And Professor R.P. Warren the New Critic is nowhere near the controls of the Faulknerian avalanche of Southern Gothic violence in *Brother to Dragons*.

But there have not been many successful narrative poems written since the end of the 19th century, the divide perhaps being marked by two last ambitious attempts by the old masters, Yeats and Hardy: *The Wanderings of Oisín* (1889) and *The Dynasts* (1904-08). One finds bits of story in the major long poems by Pound, Eliot, Williams, H.D., Olson, and Duncan. Briefly, the "New Formalists" tried to breathe some life into the verse narrative. A very few triumphs by isolated individuals passed through the poetry world with little notice: James McMichael's *Four Good Things*, which is autobiographical; Daniel Hoffman's *Brotherly Love*, about William Penn; and Charles Boer's *Varmint Q*, about William Clarke Quantrill. More widely recognized have been book-length poems by Rita Dove (*Thomas and Beulah, Sonata Mulattica*), Vikram Seth (*Golden Gate: a Novel in Verse*), and certain works of quasi-translation like Herbert Mason's *Gilgamesh*. It has often been history—and Pound here is a paradigm—that has motivated the best passages and, sometimes, complete poems charged with the energy of narrative. But in a modernist and postmodernist context, poets with a story to tell have been hard pressed to find models to sustain their work. Boer, for example, writes an invocation to John Greenleaf Whittier: "You were so sure / of yourself / you threw your presentation / copy of / Leaves of Grass into / the fire." Are we meant to say to ourselves, "Good for you Mr. Whittier"? But *Varmint Q* couldn't have been written without Whitman, whose passages of narrative are breathtaking. Still, most ambitious attempts at writing long narrative poems after World War I were stillborn. By the time I saw a copy of *John Brown's Body* on the shiny surface of a coffee table in my girl friend's house in the 1950s, even this remarkable anomaly had become, as Pound would have called it, an "unopened, unopening book," something remaindered from Jay Gatsby's West Egg library or its equivalent.

So most of the work collected in this anthology is written in prose—prose by poets. The question of why these poets turned to prose, and also whether or not some of the more experimental pieces here may be a kind of poetry, I will leave open. I have no theories to peddle here, only a group of interesting fictions never before grouped in quite this way. Because the contrast with modern and postmodern attempts to write verse narrative is interesting, I am beginning with just two examples of "stories in verse." Frost and Jeffers were certainly the most seriously read narrative poets of their time, so I begin with "Twelve Collars" (in part to avoid yet another

reprinting of “Home Burial”) and “Roan Stallion.” But how many entirely successful full-length, full-dress, narrative poems do we have in our recent past? Following Frost, Robinson and Jeffers, I can think of only one: John Berryman’s *Homage to Mistress Bradstreet*. Even the several poems mentioned above do not really compete with the Bradstreet poem. When one asks which narrative poems have been generally acknowledged as such, and which have also been around long enough that one might gamble on their ability to endure, one is still left with *Homage to Mistress Bradstreet*. Berryman wrote of his famous poem, “Narrative! Let’s have narrative, and at least one dominant personality, and no fragmentation! In short, let us have something spectacularly NOT *The Waste Land*. The “poems in verse” chosen for the first section here are also spectacularly not *The Waste Land*. But in some of the stories, there are obvious affinities with modernism. While I have no desire to prolong the old poetry wars by re-igniting battles between prose redskins and palefaces, or between the raw and the cooked, along the lines defined by midcentury anthologies of poetry, I think there are some felt affinities among certain groups of writers that might be honored here, even if they have a great deal more to do with “the individual talent” than “tradition.” But the reader must seek these out himself since the order of presentation, after part I, is by date of birth.

So now and then a poet turns to prose. I don’t find anything very mysterious about this. Long after I was engaged on this project, someone called my attention to Howard Moss’s anthology *Poet’s Story* (1973). Moss writes a long introduction which is, first, a poetics of the short story in general and, second, a poetics of the poet’s short story in particular. It’s all a little dizzying, and entirely too much. I know very few poets who haven’t, at some point, written a short story or two, or a book of them. Moss’s brief was in part to rescue rare stories by poets whose fiction had never been collected and was, therefore, in danger of being lost. That was honorable work. But I am not engaged in a salvage operation here. Most of the stories I’m printing are available in their author’s own books, although a good number of these are at this time out of print. What I hope may be useful is the dialogue going on among the fictions here anthologized.

With regard to style, some comparisons may be in order. It was fascinating when Robert Lowell’s “Near the Unbalanced Aquarium” was published in his *Collected Prose*, to see how close certain prose passages came to passages in the *Life Studies* poems—much closer, in fact, than most passages in the prose of “91 Revere Street,” which was a part of the book itself. Lowell said near the time of *Life Studies*’s publication, that he thought the prose of Flaubert and Chekhov might make a good model for a contemporary poet.

The prose passage in “Near the Unbalanced Aquarium” parallels the verse of “Sailing Home from Rapallo”:

I went to Genoa and brought Mother a black and gold baroque casket that would have been suitable for burying her hero Napoleon at Les Invalides... They misspelled Mother’s name on her coffin as Lovel. While alive, Mother had made a point of spelling out her name letter by letter for identification. I could almost hear her voice correcting the workmen: “I am Mrs. Robert Lowell of One Seventy Marlborough Street, Boston, L. O, W, E, double L.”

In the corresponding poem, Lowell writes:

Mother travelled first class in the hold;
Her Riscorgimento black and gold casket
Was like Napoleon’s at the Invalides...
In the grandiloquent lettering on Mother’s coffin,
Lowell had been misspelled Lovel...

In both versions, the style is level, plain, Chekhovian. But the endings are radically different. The simultaneously fond and annoyed imagining of what Mrs. Lowell might have said to the workmen is replaced in the poem by the arresting image that everyone remembers: “The corpse / was wrapped like panetone in Italian tinfoil.” Lowell’s “91 Revere Street” and “Near the Unbalanced Aquarium” are memoirs, but they read like fiction and possibly contain fictionalized elements. It would be difficult to guess which came first, the prose or the verse. The existence on one version does not, it seems to me, indicate dissatisfaction with the other, either in these particular passages or in parallel passages elsewhere in *Life Studies*. Having tried one thing, Lowell simply decides to try another. (He was also able to derive a poem from Elizabeth Bishop’s story, “The Country Mouse.”) The Chekhovian ironies and Flaubertian realism are immediately evident whether one is reading the prose or the verse. It has been tempting to include some of Lowell’s prose in this book, but I have decided to exclude work that is self-identified as memoir. There would be many other memoirs that would need to be considered if I were to include Lowell’s prose, some of them very fine.

The relationship between poem and prose gets much closer, and much more interesting, in a comparison of Donald Justice’s story “Little Elegy for Cello and Piano” and his corresponding poem, “The Sunset Maker.” The story is a little masterpiece, getting about half of Proust into five pages. The composer in both story and poem is Eugene Bastor. He has been married to the narrator’s sister, a cellist, and the “Little Elegy” was written for them to play together, the composer on the piano. A particular performance is

remembered, and the musical characteristics of the piece are described in technical terms. (Justice was a decent classical pianist himself.) At the end of both story and poem, the narrator makes clear that the composition, which he regards as Bastor's masterpiece, was last heard at a performance he attended long ago and has not been played since. But it remains in the memory of the narrator, especially a "little phrase," like the similar phrase by Vinteuil that haunts Marcel in Proust's search for lost time. The haunting phrase is actually given in both story and poem in musical notation. Only in the *Donald Justice Reader* do we discover that Justice himself composed the notes on the page when he was a student of Carl Ruggles in 1943. So the little elegy becomes, in part, a self-elegy (and it's an easy guess that Eugene Bastor is based on Ruggles). After the musical quote in the story, Justice writes.

A brief inhaling and exhaling, a somewhat drawn-out deep gasp or sigh. Sometimes this phrase comes to me just as I am falling asleep. It is not exactly that I hear it. It is just there, and I do not of course know what it means.... It is sentimental of me to think of Eugene as surviving through this fragment, which in any case I am probably the only person anywhere to remember. And yet it does seem as if all the hard early years of study and practice here and abroad, and the thousands of mornings of seclusion in his studio, the remarkable ear, the near-photographic memory and recall, had all come down to this, this one ghostly phrase. And soon there will be no one at all to remember how even these six notes sounded.

In the poem, these lines follow the six notes:

Inhale, exhale: a drawn-out gasp or sigh.
 Falling asleep, I hear it. It is just there.
 I don't say what it means. And I agree
 It's sentimental to suppose my friend
 Survives in just this fragment, this tone-row
 A hundred people halfway heard one Sunday
 And one of them no more than half remembers.
 The hard early years of study, those still,
 Sequestered mornings in the studio,
 The perfect ear, the technique, the great gift
 All have come down to this one ghostly phrase.
 And soon nobody will recall the sound
 Those six notes made once or that there were six.

Do we choose one version over the other, story over poem, poem over story? Did Donald Justice? He published them both in the same book, as he also

published a sequence of three poems about piano teachers and a corresponding memoir. It is a great pleasure for the reader to have these alternate and overlapping versions together in the same book. However, in the case of “Little Elegy” and “The Sunset Maker,” one might easily prefer the short story to the poem. The ending of the latter is better and different, and the epigraph to “The Sunset Maker,” like those in Lowell’s *The Mills of the Kavanaghs*, introduces a speaker—“a friend of the dead composer Eugene Bastor”—which complicates the poem in ways that the fiction does not require.

A third contrast between the verse of a poet and the style of his short fiction might be useful. In his introduction to the *Selected Short Stories of Weldon Kees*, Dana Gioia makes much of a comparison between Kees’ poem “To a Contemporary” with its extravagant, heavily Latinate style and complex syntax where “one phrase is piled on another in strange appositions” and where there are “strong enjambments in almost every line,” with a paragraph in which Kees style is “deliberately flat,” and where the tone is as “neutral and seemingly objective as a black-and-white photograph.” And yet Kees is also capable of writing prose based on a single resonant image that becomes as memorable as anything in Imagist poetry. How many readers—very few, I imagine—know the ending of the first story in Gioia’s selection of Kees’ short fiction, “The Ceremony.” A “petrified” Indian is discovered in the ground where a commercial building is to be sited. The workmen hesitate to violate a Native American burial. They are forced not only to continue digging, but to “break up” the petrified body.

The men raised their hammers and swung them down. At the first blow, the body cracked. Hollenbeck stood there, shading his eyes from the sun with his hand. One less petrified Indian. The next time the hammers descended there were four large pieces and other little ones, crumbling. “The vanishing American,” Hollenbeck said.

The relationships between poem and narrative in Lowell, Justice, and Kees probably define a sufficient range of stylistic choices to suggest how poets sometimes maneuver from one form to the other. Often surprisingly little revision is required to get a tale told in prose that may have been suggested by some lines in verse, or told in verse by something first suggested in prose. But now and then, as in Kees’ “The Ceremony,” there is a radical stylistic discontinuity. Thematically, the discontinuity in that story is absolute between the culture that buried the petrified Indian and the one that dug him up and broke him to pieces with hammers. It is the site—literally and figuratively—where stories by American poets might be seen in the light of a primal encounter with the past.

It is for that reason that I begin this anthology—following the two examples of verse narrative by Frost and Jeffers—with Kees’ story, violating very slightly the decision to organize the prose contents by the birth dates of the authors included. All but Delmore Schwartz were born in or after 1914. But Schwartz was born in the final weeks of 1913, and so it would be a great pity to omit his classic story “In Dreams Begin Responsibilities” only because he managed to arrive in the world a little too early to suit my scheme.

Following Schwartz’s story, comes his friend John Berryman’s “The Imaginary Jew.” This triad serves me well as a place to begin. Along the way, there are stories that are presumably regarded as poems by their authors—Pinsky’s “An Alphabet of my Dead,” which appeared in his volume of poetry called *Jersey Rain*, and Hass’s “Paschal Lamb,” which appeared in *Human Wishes* with a number of other “prose poems.” But neither Pinsky’s nor Hass’s prose in these books resembles very much the classic prose poem as exemplified by Baudelaire, Rimbaud, or Mallarmé. They are really stories. With something like the selections from Nathaniel Mackey’s *From A Broken Bottle Traces of Perfume Still Emanate*, something more complicated is happening. Two prose pieces that initially appeared in his serial poem *Song of the Andoumboulou* initiate, by way of dream and musical phrases, a 545 page jazz-based epistolary novel of a kind. An epistolary novel—reaching by way of its repeating “Dear Angel of Dust” all the way back to Richardson. The innovative work by story-tellers like Hejinian, Gander, and Howe also, in their oblique ways, reach back to immemorial story-telling traditions.



That’s as far as I got with my draft introduction. Since the table of contents would be contingent upon any number of non-literary considerations, I couldn’t be absolutely certain what I’d end up with. But here—in condensed form—is one look at what the fictions in such an anthology might be. And I’ll begin with the Penn Warren poem intended to work as a “foreword.”

There is a story that I must tell, but
The feeling in my chest is too tight, and innocence
Crawls through the tangles of fear, leaving,
Dry and translucent, only its old skin behind like
A garter snake’s annual discard in the ground juniper. If only

I could say just the first word with breath
As sweet as a babe’s and with no history—but, Christ,

If there is no history there is no story.
 And no Time, no word.
 For then there is nothing for a word to be about, a word

Being frozen Time only, and I have dived deep
 Where light faded from gold to dark blue, and darker below,
 And my chest was filled with a story like innocence,
 But I rose, rose up, and plunged into light-blaze brutal as blackness,
 And the sky whirled like fireworks. Perhaps I could then have begun it.

If only the first word would come and untwist my tongue!
 Then the story might grow like Truth, or a tree, and your face
 Would lean at me. If only the story could begin when all truly began,
 White surf and a story of sunlight, you running ahead and a smile
 Back-flung—but then, how go on? For what would it mean?

Perhaps I can't say the first word till I know what it all means.
 Perhaps I can't know till the doctor comes in and leans.

I: Narrative Verse: Robert Frost, “A Hundred Collars”; **Robinson Jeffers**, “Roan Stallion” **II: American Poets’ Stories** (*The TOC should eventually be organized by date of birth, with an exception as noted in the introduction. The list here is in no particular order at all, and is certainly open to change.*) **Weldon Kees**, “The Ceremony”; **Delmore Schwartz**, “In Dreams Begin Responsibilities”; **John Berryman**, “The Imaginary Jew”; **Donald Justice**, “Little Elegy for Cello and Piano”; **W.S. Merwin**, From “Foie Gras”; **Sylvia Plath**, “Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams”; **John Ashbery**, “The Recital”; **Robert Creeley**, “Mr. Blue”; **LeRoi Jones** (Amiri Baraka): “Going Down Slow”; **Lynn Hejinian**, from *My Life*; **Susan Howe**, from *The Midnight*: “Scare Quotes II”; **Forest Gander**: from *As a Friend*; **Robert Pinsky**, “An Alphabet of my Dead”; **Robert Hass**, “Paschal Lamb”; **Nathaniel Mackey**, From *A Broken Bottle Traces of Perfume Still Emanate*; **Randall Jarrell**, “Art Night,” from *Pictures from an Institution*; **Donald Hall**, “Argument and Persuasion”; **Rita Dove**, “The Spray Paint King”; **Michael Anania**, “Autoclysms”; **Albert Goldbarth**, “Two Brothers”

ELIOT BY THE POUND: TWO BIG BOOKS WORTH THE WEIGHT

Robert Crawford. *Young Eliot: From St Louis to 'The Waste Land.'* London: Jonathan Cape, 2015.

A. David Moody. *Ezra Pound, Poet: A Portrait of the Man and His Work. Volume II, The Epic Years 1921-1939.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.

J.D. Garrick

How pleasant to meet Master Eliot. And it's good, on finishing Robert Crawford's avuncular new biography, to find again a tattered copy of *The Sewanee Review* for Winter 1966, their T.S. Eliot memorial issue. In it, near the end of a half-page tribute, Ezra Pound asks: "Who is there now for me to share a joke with?" And next asks, "Am I to write 'about' the poet Thomas Stearns Eliot? or my friend 'the Possum?'" Putting the question like that, Pound didn't have to answer; the answer, and the heart of his brief encomium, was in the silence.

What we might call, sharing a joke, Eliot's possumystical tendencies burst from page one of Crawford's introduction to *Young Eliot*, a title to pause over for two reasons. First, a *young* Eliot would be an unfamiliar figure to many readers today; and in fact Crawford starts the book by sportively negating his own title, writing "T.S. Eliot was never young." He finishes it that way, too: After a fine verbal image of Eliot holding a fresh copy of *The Waste Land*, his official literary name on the title page, he says echoically, "It was as if he had never been young." *In my beginning is my end.* Crawford stops in 1922, long before his subject metamorphoses into the Eliot most people know, the Grey Eminence, the Pope of Russell Square, the magisterial Dr Johnson of his century. But his readers had already met a Prufrock growing old, and Gerontion, and Tiresias.

The second reason for the title's vibrancy is that Crawford, a Scot who teaches at the University of St Andrews and writes poems himself, is the first biographer not forced to "pass over the first twenty-one years," as he says, "in twenty-one pages." Or made to paraphrase, or to suppress entirely, instead of being able to quote from letters and other material in scattered and voluminous archives. In the seventies Lyndall Gordon wrote a lively biography called *Eliot's Early Years*, but Crawford's takes precedence now and will probably be definitive for our time.

Few, if any, stop-press revelations are found in *Young Eliot*;—rather continuity, accuracy, and sometimes over-generous detail not previously forthcoming. An almost-dramatic moment comes in the first sentence of Chapter 11, where Crawford writes of Eliot's first wife, "When Vivien first slept with Bertrand Russell is uncertain." Crawford had been circling round the issue, somewhat like Faulkner's narrator in *Absalom, Absalom!*, without specifying who was doing what to whom. Whatever the specifics, Vivien—Crawford's spelling—was calling Eliot "my dearest Wonkypenky" by a certain stage of their marriage; most men wouldn't like that, and on balance she and Russell as a pair don't distinguish themselves in the book. Vivien's death years later in a mental asylum casts a deep shadow over this oddly-configured triangle, but Crawford might have noted that Eliot got his revenge on Russell in the late nineteen-forties, beating Bertie to the Nobel Prize by two years.

Otherwise, the reader might be mildly surprised to learn that for a while in 1919—Crawford doesn't make it easy to tell precisely when things happened—Eliot wore a beard. Crawford quotes Richard Aldington as saying that Eliot in "derby hat and an Uncle Sam Beard, looked perfectly awful, like one of those comic-strip caricatures of Southern hicks." But Aldington was an ex-army officer and only in no man's land might beards grow in the army. Here again, Crawford follows his strategy of undercutting, not Eliot's doomed beard, but his ossified image as The Man in the Four-Piece Suit, to steal a phrase from his friend Virginia Woolf.

For purposes already hinted at, Crawford refers to Eliot as "Tom" throughout. (Will he keep doing this, resuming his biography post-*Waste Land*, where he'll begin with Eliot in his mid-thirties and move on from there?) Quoting Crawford, who had to ask himself the same question Pound asked in *The Sewanee Review*:

...I was always impressed by the way Valerie Eliot [second wife, later flame-tender] would speak of "Tom," using his first name.... It was a way of reminding people that T.S. Eliot was a human being, rather than a remote historical monument.

Even a post-postmodernist biographer might think for a moment before calling a young Henry James "Hank"—or "dear H.J." as Pound does in the Pisans. But, seeking Eliot's

...ineffable effable
 Effanineffable
 Deep and inscrutable singular Name,

Crawford lands on “Tom” and a pioneering I-thou intimacy with his subject. This works perfectly through much of the narrative, at least until Chapter 10—more than halfway—when Tom and Vivien are starting life together. That chapter opens, “No sooner were they married than Vivien was ill.” And there, if we credit what Crawford is saying, began Tom’s strenuous climb upward from innocence. But was a certain—unspecified—incapacity on Tom’s part largely to blame? *My dearest Wonkypenky* is suggestive. Over this question Crawford speculates about an imaginable soul-or-body brotherhood with enervate Origen, about what Crawford delicately calls Eliot’s “woundedness”: “His art is made out of damage and woundedness.” This then, along with “young,” becomes one of the crucial words in the book. A link with Hemingway here: youth; the wound; maturity.

It could be that someday three psychiatrists, one of whom can write like Christopher Ricks, will cast a cold eye on the Wonkypenky business. Meanwhile, the poems themselves give clues, and more than clues: Eliot often seems to be kidding in the early poems, but he’s not.

Back to Christopher Ricks: In his review of Peter Ackroyd’s earlier *T.S. Eliot, A Life*, Ricks—whose complete edition of Eliot’s poetry is due later this year—disagrees with Ackroyd on a perceived component of Eliot’s character. In this best-of-Ricks piece, while crediting Ackroyd with being “fair-minded, broad-minded and assiduous,” he says the author misleads the reader by placing too much importance on Eliot’s “native caution.” And in short, I was afraid? Then Ricks begins listing all the emphatically un-Prufrockian, or anti-Prufrockian, decisions Eliot made while young: cutting every kind of bond of family, career, and country; choosing to be a poet, one of the toughest professions in which to make a living; following after strange companions, e.g. Pound, and strange gods—and even, in well-advanced middle age, becoming a playwright. Add to this his marrying, in wartime, a young woman he scarcely knew. That sounds more like recklessness than caution.

Like Ackroyd, Crawford makes much of Eliot’s shyness: “Though he learned to manage it through formality and occasional bluster, his shyness never left him.” But shyness is as shyness does, and whatever face Eliot showed his contemporaries; whatever possum-like gamesmanship; whatever bashful mumblings he uttered to girls, he had enough fortitude or plain chutzpah to stick with and publish the revolutionary “Prufrock”—poetry’s counterpart to *Petrushka*—and *The Waste Land*, its *Sacre du printemps*. Then to carry on under the driving hail of abuse that followed: Harold Monro of Poetry Bookshop thought “Prufrock” insane, and Charles Powell—not the Anglo-Iberian historian—wrote in the then-*Manchester Guardian*:

...we can only say that if Mr. Eliot had been pleased to write in demotic English *The Waste Land* might not have been, as it just is to all but anthropologists and *literati*, so much waste paper.

Later, what could have been seen by biographers as caution matured into humility, “the only wisdom we can hope to acquire” according to *East Coker*. This may or may not have been where Pound ended up, in his silence; although clearly he didn’t start with caution. And humility wasn’t something Eliot learned from his philosophy professors at Harvard, either—of whom Crawford gives a keenly perceptive account. At any rate he left them far behind.

On a much larger scale, the Great War should permeate Crawford’s coverage of the years 1914-1918, but doesn’t really. Crawford hardly excels in evoking the displacements, terrors, and losses the war caused; and given that this was the war to end wars, the war to make the world safe for democracy—at the cost of 17 million dead—the conflict ought at least to enshadow every page. Contrast what Jean Echenoz does with war in his astonishing short novel *14: It is black night*, or rather pastoral luminosity giving way to it, against Crawford’s light of common day.

Even though Crawford says, awkwardly but justly, that the war was “obscenely unignorable,” he mostly keeps a measure of distance from it, despite its fouling every corner of British life, killing off much of a generation of the best men, and leading to unimaginable genocide in the next one. Paul Fussell’s *The Great War and Modern Memory*, one of the twentieth century’s basic books, gives details, as in the chilling observation that

One did not have to be a lunatic or a particularly despondent visionary to conceive quite seriously that the war would literally never end and would become the permanent condition of mankind.

Eternal war for eternal peace, or maybe just for its own sake.

One of the best passages in Crawford, however, is his account of Eliot’s Kafkaesque efforts to join, first one of the armed forces, then another and another;—all futile, because stymied by what later generations know as Catch-22. He quotes, too, a repellent paragraph from a letter written by Vivien’s brother Maurice, a young survivor of combat. Eliot, showing the darker side of the Possum and some courage, had sent the letter to an anti-war publication, naming no names. Anti-war material was not well liked then.

(Postscript here. Under the rubric of twentieth-century mass slaughter, Crawford—in his treatment of Eliot’s onomastic Sweeney obsession—misses

a Kubrickian point of irony that popped up at the end of World War II: It was a Major Sweeney who commanded Bockscar, the B-29 that dropped Fat Man on Nagasaki. The name's a coincidence, but when we find out that the clamps securing Fat Man inside the aircraft were made in a factory owned by Zeppo Marx, we begin to see what Faulkner meant by the prime maniacal risibility.)

Eliot said that growing up "beside the big river," the Finn-haunted Mississippi that runs by St Louis, gave him his poetic roots. "It is self-evident," he wrote in 1930, "that St Louis affected me more deeply than any other environment has ever done." Crawford, though he pays a brief homage to the river's power, directs the reader instead to the many summers Eliot spent on the coast of Massachusetts, living in a 5,619-square-foot "cottage" that the T.S. Eliot Foundation has just bought for \$1.3 million. Apparently people in Gloucester don't know about Eliot, according to a recent article by Joann Mackenzie in the *Gloucester Daily Times*; but as Crawford sees it, "From childhood onward, Gloucester shaped him as a poet." Something wrong here: Surely he ought to have written, "helped shape him as a poet"? That much is true; for a small instance, see the opening lines of "Marina," recording what Eliot saw from the summer house.

Then, too, after noting the veneration shown Eliot forebearers by the living members of the family, Crawford writes, oddly, "Being a little boy in Gloucester was not all ancestor worship." No, it wasn't, since in these waters Eliot's became a hand expert with sail and oar, as he came to love the alternate reality of the sea.

Crawford often draws connections between events (and non-events) in Eliot's early years and passages in his poems. Often these are helpful; sometimes the reader will say, "Yes, but..." as when the author suggests that a tornado through St Louis in May 1896 may have influenced Part V of *The Waste Land*. While "What the Thunder Said" gives nothing less than a vision of apocalypse—"falling towers" alone is direly prophetic—the U.S.A. is a nation where violent extremes of weather are as common as computer cracking, and many of us can recall driving through the Hurricane Hazels of our youth, the rain and wind lashing the streets, the lights gone out and the trees coming down. The Eliots' four-story brick house was untouched. And the notion that Vivien—on the strength of her father's owning real estate in Ireland—may have inspired the archetypal figure of "Mein Irisch Kind" in Part I, is unconvincing. More likely Emily Hale, Eliot's first love, who sang an endearing Irish song. Crawford, wisely, doesn't try to act the therapist in trying to explain why Eliot and Emily Hale never married—even though, on the evidence, they should have. Again anyone can find hints about

this in the poems; not enough data for conclusions now, but more will be brought to light when Emily's letters from Tom, some 1,131 of them, are made public on New Year's Day 2020. That may be the next leap forward in Eliot lore, should nothing else intervene; so much material is sequestered in archives.

Showing persuasively that the instances of anti-Semitism in his early work, as in "Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar," originated in familial and social prejudice, Crawford doesn't excuse Eliot's early attitudes; his devotion to "Tom" is never slavish. Whatever else can be said here, St Louis 1900 was St Louis 1900, not Paris 1925. And by the time Eliot wrote his best poetry in *Four Quartets*, the strain of ugly inhumanity was long gone from his work.

There remain the once-suppressed Columbo and Bolo verses Eliot wrote as a Harvard undergraduate. These—described by Crawford as "sexually explicit, overtly racist, outrageously carnivalesque [good word] and taboo-breaking"—served as "part of a male-bonding routine" for a club Eliot joined. Plainly they're not Crawford's genre, but he does quote from them; the locus classicus now for anyone wishing to read them is an appendix to *Inventions of the March Hare: Poems 1909-1917*, edited by Christopher Ricks. As Ricks says in his (scathing) review of Sartre's *Saint Genet*: "Time soon knocks the edges off 'shocking' literature." The verses are, in a word, uninspired, by current standards dull; mute inglorious Miltons everywhere could surpass them. But they were written by T.S. Eliot and serve to show, in Crawford's words, "There was a determinedly Aristophanic side of Tom that strove to rebel against the proprieties of an upbringing soused in genteel Unitarianism." Soused indeed.

So Tom rebelled, no shyness there. But it's droll to imagine what he, as publisher and director at Faber & Faber, would have thought of his firm's issuing *The Faber Book of Blue Verse* in 1990—containing his own slightly naughty limerick and two other, more indigo, effusions.

"You want to know the art of living, my friend?" asked Henri-Frédéric Amiel. "It is contained in one phrase: Make use of suffering." And this, after tea and cakes and ices, is what Crawford's Tom had to manage. A privileged and mostly trouble-free childhood receding rapidly in the mind's eye, Eliot set out to do what many have done before and after him: Step by step walk the thousand-mile road.

A. David Moody, Professor Emeritus of the University of York, had an arguably sterner task than Crawford's in dealing with the often-quixotic, ever-controversial Pound. And mostly Moody is stern. In this, the second of a planned three-volume biography, the author—no Ezzing here—sel-

dom loosens his tie, while acquitting himself honorably in praising Pound's merits and deploring the unsavory elements of his work. These last are well known. But when Moody does relax a little, it is to refreshing effect: Just as Crawford, trying to show Eliot's true nature, offers a vignette of the aged sage "settled down to playing with his nephew's remote-controlled toy Aston Martin James Bond car," Moody gives us Pound and his daughter Mary going to see the Disney version of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*—and staying to watch it again. Mary said, "I think he enjoyed the film even more than I did." Then there are Yeats and the cats: Moody quotes the Irish poet's story about his visiting Pound and going out to the garden at night with him, who then "would call the cats of Rapallo and feed them bones and pieces of meat." Yeats thought that Pound "really has no fondness for cats but feeds them out of some general pity for the outcast and oppressed"; but if that was so, why would Pound all the while "relate each one's history"? The Pisans are filled with cats, from the one "that with a well-timed leap could turn the lever-shaped door handle" to Ladro, the thieving night cat—"Prowling night-puss leave my hard squares alone";—to the mana-bearing "cat-faced eucalyptus nib" Pound used as a talisman, and the ubiquitous primal Lynx of canto 79. Granted Eliot's cats were more memorable, with their Holmesian associations, and more profitable too.

While maintaining his integrity, though, Moody might have taken Pound's advice in the *ABC of Reading*:

Gloom and solemnity are entirely out of place in even the most rigorous study of an art intended to make glad the heart of man.

That Pound often strayed from his own best precepts, or violated them, is beside the point. *Do I contradict myself...?* The precepts themselves are sound and shouldn't be neglected. And when a bad error turns up in Moody's text—the revered name of Gandhi misspelled both times it appears—his erudite scrutiny falters; Gandhi, after all, is the father of a nation of a billion and a quarter people, some of whom will be reading Moody's book with the keenest attention.

But a good biographer always makes sure the other shoe drops, and Moody is diligent about this. After he quotes Pound as saying, apparently in the summer of 1935, that "Stravinsky is the only living musician from whom I can learn my own job," the reader may ask, "What about Bartók?" And soon enough, a few pages later, Moody says of Bartók's fifth quartet that it meant much to Pound, "because he felt it to be, like his own *Cantos*, the record of a struggle and revolt against the entanglements of a civilization

in decay.” That attitude, as we know, fueled Pound’s most intense passages (along with the most wearisome) in the twenties and thirties. He was the poet who’d written of the trenches:

There died a myriad,
And of the best, among them,
For an old bitch gone in the teeth,
For a botched civilization....

The war again. As Moody observes in his preface:

Things were not so simple, politically and socially, in the 1930s; and Pound himself was not simple.... Altogether, Pound emerges in this account as a flawed idealist and a great poet caught up in the turmoil of his darkening time and struggling, often raging, against the current to be a force for enlightenment.

Sometimes Moody’s ability to compress—learned from Pound, the master at this?—borders on the remarkable, as when he summarizes in a paragraph the extremely complex Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939. Hugh Thomas, the fine historian of the war in Spain, might have found it challenging to do that.

A soon-disillusioned volunteer on the Spanish Loyalist side, George Orwell—in a typically sensible statement made after Pound won the Bollingen Foundation prize for the Pisans—went along with the award, but added, “I must admit that I personally have always regarded him as an entirely spurious writer.” Different politics, to be sure, but hard words. They remind us that Pound himself could be savagely dismissive as a critic, as seen in the first paragraph of a review he gave a biography by Edmund Gosse:

Gosse’s *Life of Swinburne* is merely the attempt of a silly and pompous old man to present a man of genius, an attempt necessarily foredoomed to failure and not worth the attention of even the most cursive reviewer.

This review, chosen by Eliot for inclusion in his *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, was written in 1918, when Edmund Gosse was very much alive; seven years later he was knighted, partly for having written his much-read autobiography *Father and Son*. Even supposing Gosse was an elderly ass, anyone who comes on as strong as Pound did so often has to expect a certain measure of hostility, and Pound was already a marked man when words like “fascist” and “traitor” began to be flung his way. But restraint would have made no muse for the *Cantos*, Pound being Pound.

In Moody’s book, the *Cantos* are examined with a care matching Craw-

ford's, as in the close reading of the enigmatic canto 48—the one imagining the progress of a cat crossing two miles of rooftops in southern France. Moody goes after this one—the fascination of what's difficult—because critics tend to pass by it, as he says; George Kearns, whom he sees as “one of the most perceptive of Pound's readers,” dismissing the canto as “an annoying interruption” and “a modern babel.” Here Moody displays the cardinal virtue of fortitude, along with his usual prudence and justice, and shows why canto 48 is not a blank space between 47 and 49.

Likewise with Moody's attention to canto 51, the better-known one with the fly-tying instructions. Pound once read this on a Caedmon recording. Moody offers sharply-conflicting interpretations of it—should we look favorably on the instructions or not?—giving a small boost to the thought that the life of the mind can be worth living. Maybe Moody will do the same in Volume III for the famous canto 81, the “pull down thy vanity” canto: Is Pound addressing failed institutions, or himself? Canto 52, however, contains what Moody calls “the most disgracefully flawed page of the *Cantos*,” centering on *neschek* or usury; and Moody, making it clear he's not writing hagiography, censures both the idea and the way Pound gives it voice. But that is rogue economics, and we must move on.

As in Crawford there's a love triangle in “The Epic Years,” much longer-lived and more complicated than the Tom-Vivien-Bertie tangle. Pound, no wonkypenky, had a biological daughter (Mary) by his mistress, the violinist Olga Rudge—which daughter he couldn't legally acknowledge because he was married to someone else. A year later—in 1926—Pound's wife Dorothy gave birth to a son, Omar, probably fathered by a man she'd met in Egypt. So Pound became a *cornuto*, accepting a son not his own but denied the fatherhood of his own daughter. Such was the extended family's contribution to the Roaring Twenties, although it was people not the principals who had to push the carriages. Later Pound, Dorothy, and Olga formed an uneasy ménage-à-trois, but in his last years Dorothy left for London and he lived with Olga alone. Omar and Mary turned out all right.

What you get married for if you don't want children? Eliot is always pithy. Pound's quest to “make it new,” to apply the Confucian *paideuma*, to extol Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta the temple-builder, to save America from its anti-Americans, to fight the world, to vanquish the Dantescan monster Geryon; to spread the gospel of John Adams: Pound was an overreacher in spades, but had it not been for overreachers, history would have become an even less enticing undergraduate major and there would have been no Christopher Marlowes: no tragic sense of life, only, as Tennessee Williams put it, Loss, Loss, Loss. And in fact the third volume of Moody's biography,

due in 2016, is to be called “The Tragic Years.” A word not to be treated lightly.

We can, if we like, read the *Cantos* for their music alone, their consonances and dissonances, their rhythms above all. *Canto*, as Moody reminds us, is a verb in Italian, “*Io canto*,” I sing, as well as a noun meaning “chant” or “song”—as in *bel canto*, beautiful song. Moody calls attention to the second canto, “as musical as words alone can be,” at one point likening the pulse to an Indian raga’s—high praise. Moody knows his rhythm, the sine qua non of a Pound critic; as Eliot wrote in “The Music of Poetry”: “I believe that the properties in which music concerns the poet most nearly, are the sense of rhythm and the sense of structure.” And Moody is a resolute guide through Pound’s opera *Le Testament* (1923), later commenting on his second opera *Cavalcanti* (1931-1933) as well. For anyone not a composer it’s essential to have the music playing along, and it can be heard on a single CD, *Ego Scriptor Cantilenae: The Music of Ezra Pound*, on the Other Minds label out of San Francisco with Robert Hughes conducting. Should the operas seem unduly exotic, the troubadour songs from Provence—as sung by the wonderful Martin Best Consort on Nimbus CD NI 5445—will give a point of reference. Otherwise the American composer Virgil Thomson has suggested a link with Satie.

As Eliot later found religion, Pound found Mussolini. Moody doesn’t try to play Freud with an unrequited love affair, but instead writes with his characteristic gravity:

The capitalist democracies...were in deep crisis, with their millions workless, their industries shut down, their markets stagnant, their farmers foreclosed upon by mortgagors.... Pound could see with blinding clarity what needed to be done, quite simply that capital, the nation’s wealth, should be made to serve the needs and interests of the whole nation.

The last part of this is what Pound thought Mussolini’s Fascism, with its “greater care for national welfare,” was achieving; and there were plenty back in the States, especially businessmen, who agreed. *Calling All Moths: Candle Dead Ahead*: As Europe started to self-destruct, with Mussolini’s invasion of Abyssinia and the ominous re-arming of Germany, Pound was saying that war against Hitler “would have meant war against a clean concept of money.” *You turn a blind eye to a good many things, Ezra*, Pound’s friend and fellow poet Basil Bunting had told him. But Pound’s feelings for the fallen Duce outlasted the war, as canto 74, the first of the Pisans, attests. Rightly or wrongly he would be called a mad poet, like Smart and Blake and the wounded-and-gassed World War I vet Ivor Gurney before him. By

the time he reached old age, after a lifetime of declaiming and exhorting, teaching and preaching, hitting the wall, Pound finally earned the right to remain silent. “Suffering exists in order to make people think,” he’d said to his daughter years ago; caged in Pisa, Pound suffered, and thought.

In the bars of Havana, Papa, they say the sharks are the critics. And like Hemingway’s old fisherman, Pound went out too far. His world-gospelizing was too grandiose and self-centered and he became a bore. The line of work he chose was dangerous; a much better man than Pound tried to save the world from its sins, and died as an enemy of the state, crucified between thieves. ¿*Otro loco más?* But alone in an all-too-concrete political arena, many times more vicious than Eliot’s literary London, Pound learned the meaning of a hard sentence in Conrad’s *Nostramo*:

There was something inherent in the necessities of successful action which carried with it the moral degradation of the idea.

Pound finished with a badly soiled reputation, but was born after all in a fertile land for notoriety: Billy the Kid, Bonnie and Clyde, the Manson Family. Other examples will spring to mind. Maybe they’ll make a movie or docudrama about Pound, too, as Brian Gilbert did with *Tom & Viv* in the nineties. Or maybe he’ll be seen as too highbrow, or plain untouchable. Nevertheless, pariah that he later came to be, he deserved all of the tribute Hamilton College, his alma mater, gave him;—and this is where Moody stops. Having no idea Pound would call Alexander Hamilton—for whom the college was named—“the Prime snot in ALL American history” (canto 62), and consign him with no small irony to the ninth and lowest circle of Dante’s Hell, the traitors (canto 69), Hamilton awarded him their honorary Doctor of Letters, concluding with these words:

You have ever been a generous champion of younger writers as well as of artists in other fields, and for this fine and rare human quality and for your own achievements in poetry and prose, we honor you.

The year was 1939, with another surge of the blood-dimmed tide just ahead. On the first of September Germany invaded Poland. And so on to all that, in Moody’s final volume; but already there’s a strong chance Moody’s will be the indispensable Pound biography, until someone does something horrorshow with DNA.

POETRY WARRIOR: ROBERT CREELEY IN HIS LETTERS

Creeley, Robert. *The Selected Letters of Robert Creeley*, ed. Rod Smith, Peter Baker, and Kaplan Harris. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014.

Robert Archambeau

“The book,” wrote Robert Creeley to Rod Smith, who was then hard at work on the volume in question, Creeley’s *Selected Letters*, “will certainly ‘tell a story.’” Now that the text of that book has emerged from Smith’s laptop and rests between hard covers, it’s a good time to ask just what story those letters tell. Certainly it isn’t a personal one. Creeley was a New Englander, through and through, and of the silent generation to boot. Yankee reticence blankets the letters too thickly for us to feel much of the texture of Creeley’s quotidian life, beyond whether he feels (to use his favored idiom) he’s “making it” through the times or not. Instead, the letters, taken together, tell an intensely literary story—and, as the plot develops, an institutional, academic one. Call this story “From the Outside In,” maybe. Or, better, treat it as one of the many *Rashomon*-like eyewitness accounts of that contentious epic that goes by the title *The Poetry Wars*.

If, like me, you entered the little world of American poetry in the 1990s, you found the Cold War that was ending in the realm of politics to be in full effect in poetry. What had begun as a brushfire conflict between rival journals and anthologies in the fifties and early sixties had settled into an institutionalized rivalry, with an Iron Curtain drawn between the mutually suspicious empires of Iowa City and Buffalo. The longstanding Iowa Writers Workshop found itself in a geo-poetic stalemate with a younger, more radical opponent, the Poetics Program at SUNY-Buffalo, which Creeley helped found in 1991, and which formalized Buffalo as the institutional home for poets who rankled at the idea that history had ended with Robert Lowell. For many young poets, it seemed one had to pick a side, and treat the rival camp with deep mistrust, if not contempt. For others, it all seemed a bit pointless, especially the rhetoric of resentment emanating from Buffalo, perhaps the best-endowed poetry program in the nation at the time. Reading Creeley’s *Selected Letters*, which begins with a wartime letter from Creeley to his family and ends with an email he sent two weeks before his death in 2005, we get a view from the trenches of the postwar poetry wars, from their beginnings to a time when they were fading into literary history. We get, too, a vivid picture of the outsider status, or non-status, of innovative poets like Creeley in their formative years (“we do not have any status as

writers in this country” he wrote in 1956).

The lack of status and external affirmation help explain why Creeley turned to William Carlos Williams self-affirming line from “The Desert Music,” “I am a poet. I am. I am” as a kind of touchstone. Indeed, one of the things that emerge from the letters is how yearningly Creeley turned to Williams as a mentor, and how generously Williams responded. Creeley repeatedly quotes Williams in his correspondence, often meditating over Williams’ assertion in the *Autobiography* that “the poet thinks with his poem, in that lies his thought.” This is a reiteration of the old Coleridgean idea of organic form, of the poem being not an illustration of an idea but something whose parts were so arranged that it would be (to paraphrase Cleanth Brooks) heresy to paraphrase it. For Creeley, though, the dictum represented no mere formal matter, but a way of making objective and precise his most troubling fears and desires:

It seemed that, first writing, I was constantly falling over my own feet trying to say what I wanted to. If, for example, I wanted to involve a sense of love, or pain, loss, whatever, I could not it seemed place it as clearly as I felt it. So I began, then, trying to articulate as carefully as possible areas of possible thought, call them—to the definition Williams gives in his *Autobiography*—The poet thinks with his poem, in that lies his thought, and that in itself is his profundity... It was a very germinal attitude for me... I am finally a shy man, or was, when younger, painfully so—and began, I suppose, to use the poem as an articulation of all the ‘unresolved’ things I felt and found no other means to ‘say.’ It was also an exorcising of sorts—the craft made exact... fears of hopes, or literal experiences, that otherwise floated in an entirely personal term of threat, etc. I felt if I made it possible, for myself as well as for others, to ‘go through’ these situations in a poem—where the formal unity provides a coherence and an objectivity of place—they might both better understand them and also find them at last related to a tolerable entity—no longer ghost, etc.

Perhaps it was because Creeley was so committed to his particular notion of what a poem should be—or perhaps it was because of the resentments of his marginal status—that we find him so frequently combative and intolerant in his letters. Theodore Roethke takes part in “every fucking filthiness of literary practice in the US today,” Louis Simpson’s work is “pathetically poor,” W.S. Merwin is “that fucking Merwin” and a “symbol of rot.” Robert Bly is “no poet,” while Helen Vendler embodies a “sad dumbness.” Kenneth Patchen (“fuck him”) is a “pathetic idiot,” and there are sneers for Louise Glück, Charles Wright, and a host of others. Kenneth Koch and Frank O’Hara get off easy with the label “lightweights,” although at one point the disdain for O’Hara looks to be much stronger. “I saw Frank O’Hara’s book

in a local shoppe,” we read, “and I think I could cut him.” The fact that this was written on a postcard to Don Allen in 1958 offers one opportunity to soften the threatened violence: Allen was working on his seminal anthology *The New American Poetry*, and it may be that Creeley was offering Allen editorial advice (a rather harsh judgment on O’Hara, certainly, but better than a knifing). It is also possible that the jazz-obsessed Creeley was using the slang specific to jazzmen, in which “cutting” meant “embarrassing by out playing.” I am informed by one of the editors that a great deal of agonized discussion went into the explanatory footnote addressing these matters.

Creeley was no pluralist when it came to poetry, and the letters show little patience for those who were. When Cid Corman’s editorial policies at *Origin* proved too broad for Creeley’s taste, Creeley denounced him as a “fuckup” who “floats all over the place.” When Kenneth Rexroth supported the poetry of Roethke, Creeley wrote him an impassioned letter, saying “I wd have you by the lapels anyhow; jesus god to say only I don’t understand. I want to, I don’t. Because I will never forget this...” He takes it even harder when William Carlos Williams speaks favorably of W.H. Auden—in fact, he can’t quite believe such a betrayal is possible: “I almost sense,” he writes Williams, “a gun at your back.” It is strange to read, in this context, that Creeley feared the poetry world would “withdraw into ‘teams,’” especially since he had already named his all-star lineup: “Robert Duncan; Charles Olson; Paul Blackburn; Irving Layton; Denise Levertov, and perhaps a few others, though I cannot at the moment think of them.” Whatever his misgivings about the taking of sides may have been, Creeley was clearly an active soldier in the poetry wars, and opposed to any talk of *détente*.

Like the young Yeats, the young Creeley writes passionately about poetics and personalities in his letters; and like the older Yeats, the older Creeley writes letters dominated by institutional concerns (with Yeats it is all publishing rights and theater sets; with Creeley it is tenure lines and Guggenheims). Given Creeley’s increasingly established position in American poetry, and his enviable academic perch, it is a bit strange to see his sense of himself as an aggrieved outsider continue under circumstances so unlike those of his youth. In Creeley’s own late-in-life formulation, this attitude became a “habit” that endured, even when he found himself a Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets and a special professor with “0 to minimal” duties, a situation so comfortable that he confessed to Susan Howe “they are paying such money I am ashamed to tell you.”

That the habit of alienation and *ressentiment* endured well beyond the situation that gave rise to it is amply demonstrated by a 1985 letter in which Creeley claims that poets from the tradition with which he identifies are

ignored and disdained by academe. Charles Olson and even William Carlos Williams are, he says, “action the academic won’t touch with a ten foot pole.” This had certainly been true in Creeley’s youth, a fact easily forgotten by those of us who were given “The Red Wheelbarrow” to read in junior high. But in the very year of Creeley’s complaint, we find academe abuzz with talk of William Carlos Williams. His work is analyzed in multiple articles in *The Journal of Modern Literature* and *The New England Review*, and in pieces in university-sponsored journals from *AGNI* to *Comparative Literature Studies*, from *Twentieth Century Literature* to the *Mississippi Review*. He’s the subject of discussion in the music studies journal *Tempo*, in *The Journal of Reading* and *Scandinavian Studies*, in *Pacific Coast Philology*, as well as in such far-flung venues as Spain’s *Grial*, Israel’s *Poetics Today*, and Mexico’s *Diálogos*. Even such traditionally conservative journals as *The Sewanee Review* and the *Kenyon Review* (one of Creeley’s *bêtes noir*) gave Williams positive treatment in 1985. The list goes on. The academics set their ten-foot poles aside for Olson, too: the University of California Press’s edition of Olson’s *Maximus Poems* received positive notice in *Modern Philology* and *World Literature Today* in 1985; the University of Illinois Press’s study *Charles Olson’s Maximus*, written by Don Byrd (professor at SUNY-Albany) was noted in that year’s *Yearbook of English Studies*, a very fine article on Olson appeared in *Criticism*, and the journal *American Studies International* called for a fuller treatment of Olson as a central figure in the history of American poetry. One could go on, mentioning articles in *Modern Language Studies* and the *New England Review*, or the fact that in 1985 George Butterick of the University of Connecticut had just published the sixth volume of his edition of *Charles Olson and Robert Creeley: The Complete Correspondence*, but one hopes the point is established.

Resentful Creeley’s rhetoric may have been, and demonstrably unjustified by the time he complained about pole-wielding academics warding off Olson and Williams, but it wasn’t just a matter of a cranky disposition: Creeley’s formation in a time when poetic recognition for those who wrote as he did was minimal left its scars: early alienation cuts a deep rut. It is to be regretted that it entered the pedagogy, and remains to this day a habit of some grizzled veterans of the poetry wars.

While the story of the poetry wars simmers at the core of Creeley’s letters, it would be wrong to reduce his *Selected Letters* to a single narrative. Despite his reticence about his personal life, for example, there are moments when we do catch glimpses of the intimate Creeley. In small flashes we see plenty of material of the sort over which another kind of correspondent might have lingered: pain at the thought of the father Creeley lost as a small

child; divorce; the tragic death of a young daughter; one or two references to the “drunkenness and ugly violence” that plagued his life generally, and his marriages particularly. His wartime service in a medical capacity in India and Burma, where he looked on helplessly as countless young men died on blood-drenched stretchers “in every conceivable posture,” was intense, and perhaps formative, but gets less than a half page of treatment in more than 400 pages of letters. Creeley is reticent, too, when it comes to politics. When he does write about social conditions, he can be quite acute, as when he describes what amount to the feudal conditions of the Guatemalan plantation estate where he lived in the late fifties. And he does, on occasion, take a meaningful stand when pushed a little: one of the pleasures of reading the letters is seeing Robert Duncan talk Creeley out of going on a State Department sponsored junket to Pakistan, when participation would have implied approval of American foreign policy during the war in Vietnam. Generally, though, Creeley is a not atypical World War Two veteran in his skepticism, even cynicism, about grand political schemes: listening to the sounds of aircraft flying overhead on their way to bomb rebels in the Guatemalan hills, he despairs of any political solution to injustice, seeing no solution, “since each government in turn seems to invest itself with what it can take.” The individual can trust no political cause or party, only himself—and, as Creeley’s frequent statements of guilt and self-doubt attest, often enough he can’t even do that.

One encounters many fine little asides as we move through the letters—an account of the “wild business in Vancouver” in 1963, when Ginsberg, Olson, Duncan and Levertov converged on the city; a sharp little portrait of a not-yet-famous Jack Kerouac in San Francisco (“one of those slightly red-faced quiet men.... I like him very much”); observations on grading student papers (“it’s a little heartbreaking, and endless”); and a note to Charles Bernstein complaining that the title of Bernstein’s journal *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* was “a son of a bitch to type.” But there is a real story here, Creeley’s, and that of a cohort from his generation—the story of a network of the isolated few reaching out and supporting one another as poets when no one else would, in what Jerome Rothenberg (one of Creeley’s correspondents), described as “an effort somehow in common.” It is a story that begins at the fringes, and ends with the old outsiders presiding over a subdivision of the literary/academic complex in which so many of us happily reside.

A CONTEMPORARY MASTER

Geoffrey Hill, *Broken Hierarchies: Poems 1952-2012*, ed. Kenneth Haynes. Oxford University Press.

Kevin Hart

Geoffrey Hill's *Broken Hierarchies* will be with us for a long time, perhaps forever. The thick volume under review is unlikely to survive intact, no more so than any collected poems by a major poet, but poems from it will be read indefinitely. Certainly it will take a long time to make decent sense of the whole, largely because of a striking change in Hill's productivity. Once one could have imagined Hill's canon to be marked in essence with the publication of *Canaan* (1996). To be sure, his readers would have hoped for more of the crystalline poems, both long and short, that we had come to expect from him, and indeed for new adventures in style (something like the title poem would not have been wholly unexpected, for example); but we anticipated no more than two or three more slim books, maybe one roughly each decade. Now we find that *Canaan* ends on p. 235 of *Broken Hierarchies* while the collection draws to a close with the last of the *Daybooks* on p. 936. So we have hundreds of pages of unlooked-for poems, far more than any reader twenty years ago could have foreseen. Some of these unheralded pages have already garnered intense discussion, though a balance of light and heat has probably not yet been struck. *Speech! Speech!* (2000) and even the less wild *The Triumph of Love* (1998) have energetic admirers and detractors alike, and thereafter readers of the later, milder books, especially those from *Scenes from Comus* (2003) to *A Treatise of Civil Power* (2007), fall almost readily into groups of those who admire "late Hill" and those who regret the change—or, more correctly, changes—and miss the more severe, more harassing master of *King Log* (1968), *Tenebrae* (1978) and *The Mystery of the Charity of Charles Péguy* (1983).¹

One reason why *Broken Hierarchies* will be on our desks more often than on our shelves is because we have to assess the quality of the later writing, and to make sense of Hill's poetry as a whole, if indeed that can be done. (Some readers will find two bodies of work in *Broken Hierarchies* with *Canaan* looking backwards and forwards. The poet himself would have us see *Canaan*, *The Triumph of Love*, *Speech! Speech!* and *The Orchards of Syon*

1. "Late Hill" appears to be most admired in Britain. See John Lyon and Peter McDonald, *Geoffrey Hill: Essays on his Later Work* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). All eight essayists are British.

as one long project.²) The task of assessment requires not only sustained attention to the poetry from *The Triumph of Love* to *A Treatise of Civil Power*, poetry with which we have had a little while to tarry, but also, and more particularly, the six *Daybooks* (2007-12) which, along with *Ludo* (2011), end the volume and themselves make up 331 pages of poetry. Nor is this all: we shall need time to read and re-read the additions that comprise the full text of *Hymns to Our Lady of Chartres* (1982-2012) and *Pindarics* (2005-2012). We need also to hold together *Broken Hierarchies* with Hill's *Collected Critical Writings* (2009), along with uncollected material—his rendition of Ibsen's *Brand* (performed in 1978), in particular—and work in hand that is yet to be prepared for the press, principally his Oxford lectures as Professor of Poetry.

Time would need to be taken as well to identify and weigh the effects of textual changes that have been introduced to this collection. Kenneth Haynes's editorial hand is either light or he himself is retiring or the poet has invisibly directed editorial policy, for the textual apparatus is very spare indeed. We have a few pages of very brief acknowledgements and indices of titles and first lines, but no statement of editorial policy or notes of textual changes. Additions to *Clavics* and changes in the original poems in *Hymns to our Lady of Chartres* are covered only by the dates of the *Daybooks*. Readers have to discover revisions by themselves. The ending of "Coda," for example, has been changed from "I know that sounds / a damn-fool thing to say" and restored to the sharper original lines, "I know that sounds / a wicked thing to say" (600).³ Nor are we invited to see where Hill has reduced his use of accent marks and the raised vertical line to denote a caesura. (Most readers will be relieved to hear that this collection has fewer of the mannerisms of Hopkins than recent individual volumes have had.) *Broken Hierarchies* is clearly not intended to be a critical edition of the poet's works. Yet it would have been very useful in so large a book, one that is more for reference than for reading, to have been pointed to the more important textual changes.

One obstacle to determining the quality of the new poetry, at least for many readers, will be the wide agreement about Hill's uninviting difficulty.

2. Counterpoint Press's publicity statement for *The Orchards of Syon*, presumably reflecting Hill's views, is no longer on its website; however, it remains on amazon.com: <http://www.amazon.com/The-Orchards-Syon-Geoffrey-Hill/dp/1582431663> (accessed February 22, 2015). I find the claim unpersuasive.

3. The word "wicked," rather than "damn-fool," was originally at the very end of "Coda" in the 2005 Clutag Press edition of *A Treatise of Civil Power*. "Damn-fool" appears only in the 2007 Penguin edition of the book.

Some of the later poems are spikier in their allusiveness than even the dense earlier poems and, without the grandeur of the best earlier poems (*The Mystery of the Charity of Charles Péguy*, for example), some of the later poems can seem more than a little arid (for instance, *Speech! Speech!* 7 (292) and 17 (297)). The poet has long responded to complaints about the cryptic nature of his work by insisting on two contrary things at once: that strong modern poetry is always allusive and impacted (and that life itself is nothing but demanding); and that his poetry is, in Milton's expression, "simple, sensuous and passionate."⁴ He has even woven the criticism into his verse: "Up the Hill Difficulty" (318), "I'm / ordered to speak plainly" (368) and "I do not / Establish the recondite as Hill-school" (642). I suspect that, especially in the earlier poems, many readers react less to difficulty than to what they take to be a sense of aloofness in the voice. It's as though they overhear the speaker murmuring under his breath, with Giosuè Carducci, who was later to become important to Hill, "Odio l'usata poesia: concede /comoda al vulgo i flosci fianchi e senza /palpiti sotto i consueti amplessi /stendesi e dorme."⁵ Certainly *For the Unfallen* (1959) and *King Log* (1968) share little with the poetry of Philip Larkin, Ted Hughes or Seamus Heaney, which was variously lauded in Britain at times when Hill's verse was all too often greeted somewhat coolly. *King Log* won important prizes, yet it was only with the appearance of *Mercian Hymns* (1971) that Hill's writing was to be admired at all widely.

I do not hear aloofness in the voice of the early poems; it is a learned voice, to be sure, and one that does not patronize the reader by not expecting him or her to know very much at all and to have only untutored emotions. As it happens, Hill castigates aloofness in an early poem, "In Piam Memoriam" (34). What I hear in the early poems is a man beset by what the Church calls "scrupulosity," an obsession with one's own sins, which, in Hill's case, stems from the slightest tendency to aestheticize suffering, even in a work that stands as a witness to it. "September Song" (44) is a prime instance. Poems in which the poet, as purported judge, keeps finding

4. Don M. Wolfe, ed., *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, 8 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953-82), II: 1643-8, 402-3. Milton's point in this passage is to contrast poetry with logic; the former is "more simple, sensuous and passionate" than the latter. Milton does not say that poetry is "simple, sensuous and passionate."

5. Giosuè Carducci, "Preludio," *Odi Barbare*, edizione critica a cura di Gianni A. Papini (Milano: Fondazione Arnaldo e Alberto Mondadori, 1988). G. L. Bickersteth provides a translation: "I HATE the common muse: she lies / With languid limbs and yields her charms / Without one struggle, an easy prize / To any vulgar lover's arms," *Carducci: A Selection of his Poems with Verse Translations, Notes, and Three Introductory Essays* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1913), 195.

himself in the dock rather than on the bench no doubt can make a reader feel uncomfortable, for he or she also falls within the poet's withering gaze each time a poem is read and granted aesthetic or moral credit. As a poet suffering from scrupulosity, Hill can be difficult in the sense of not being easy to endure, but the allusive and lexical "difficulty" of his verse has been exaggerated. It comes from a capacious knowledge of the canon of English literature, along with forays into classical and modern European literature (with an awareness, sometimes a detailed one, of compacted contexts), on the one hand, and a moral rigorism, on the other. What I have called Hill's scrupulosity is a species of this latter genus; it is characterized by an ethical strictness that does not bow as a matter of course to ecclesial teachings but is animated by a tightly disciplined humanism.

So, almost at the start of the book, one finds a lyric entitled "God's Little Mountain" (8) and one pauses before the peculiar title. But it is strange only if one has not read Mary Webb's novel *Gone to Earth* (1917) and does not know of the site described there called God's Little Mountain and what happens on it. Admittedly, not everyone is familiar with minor British rural novels in the line of Thomas Hardy, and yet I wonder if the reference needs to be caught for the lyric to be understood. It is not so very hard to see that a "little mountain" is a hill, and that the title jokes about the one who signs it: a failed prophet, a failed visionary poet, or both. (Hill's poems have had humor from the beginning, although it becomes apparent only in *Mercian Hymns* and increasingly broad in *Speech! Speech!* By the time of *Al Tempo de Tremuoti* we hear "The glory of poetry is that it is solemn, / Racked with anarchic laughter" (935).) At the start of *Canaan* one finds the first of three lyrics entitled "To the High Court of Parliament (November 1994)" (171), a poem which would be perplexing only if one does not know Milton's *Areopagitica* (November, 1644), addressed "to the Parliament of England" (and, once again, there is a buried reference to a hill, the Areopagus in Athens). Yet if a reader of poetry has not read Milton's great tract he or she can hardly blame Hill for being difficult in alluding to one of the most significant pieces of English prose on the three hundred and fiftieth anniversary of its publication. Besides, readers of Hill should be well aware of his many allusions to the Puritan poet: the titles *Scenes from Comus* and *A Treatise of Civil Power* both allude to works by Milton.

Similarly, the paradoxes in the poems are not in themselves intractable once one begins to see things as Hill does. "Our God scatters corruption," we hear in "Annunciations" (40), meaning both "Our God dissipates corruption" (He is pure, just, and so on) and "Our God disseminates corruption" (religion is a means of justifying exploitation and violence). Sometimes

the paradox works by way of colloquial speech. In “The Humanist” we hear of hands that were once “Thick with Plato’s blood / (Tasteless! tasteless!)” (46), and the parenthetical exclamations, a gesture to be repeated widely decades later in *Speech! Speech!*, mean at once that it is lacking in good taste to speak of the great idealist’s blood and that this blood has no taste to the tongue whatsoever (because he denigrates the phenomenal world). When considering an ascetic’s wish to overcome desire, Hill has the imagined person reflect on successful self-purgation, “my desire dying / as I desire” (120), meaning both that sensual desire has been transcended by intense practice of contemplation and that a new sort of desire is generated by ascetic exercises. At times a paradox is simply stated and its enactment left to be imagined. “You are the crucified who crucifies,” we overhear Christ being told in “Lachrimæ Coactæ” (123), meaning that He places the prospective believer, presumably a secular humanist, in the excruciating position of having to make an act of faith: to do so might well expose one to criticisms of cultural nostalgia, psychological weakness, lack of rationality, and so forth, while not to do so might result in one’s damnation after death.

Hill’s poetry is quite different from verse by his contemporaries that might be regarded as “difficult” in ways that more surely resist becoming “simple” or “simpler” after study and attuning oneself to a habit of perception. For example, it is hard to know how to begin glossing any number of poems by André du Bouchet, as well as longer pieces by Paavo Haavikko, and challenging, too, to venture a commentary on extended works by John Ashbery (“A Wave” (1984) or *Flow Chart* (1998), say). By contrast, a knowledge of British history and literature, especially of the Tudor period and the First World War, along with a little time on the Internet, gives one pretty much all one needs to master many of Hill’s allusions. Not all, by any stretch: when Hill beautifully evokes “fat Caritas, those / Wiped jaws of stone” (48) it is possible to grasp the first part of the image (and impossible to avoid the edge of “fat cats”) but the second part remains elusive. I have read many studies of Hill but have not yet found a satisfactory interpretation of this line and a half. One has to know far less about Spanish, French and Italian literature and history, and have just a little Latin in hand, in order to read *The Mystery of the Charity of Charles Péguy*, *Tenebræ*, *Pindarics* and *Odi Barbare*. One might well have to give up hopes of finding those “fruitful ambiguities” the New Critics prized so much and content oneself instead with more troubling “thornful ambiguities” but close reading remains essential to reading Hill, even though Ashbery’s poems often make its more familiar versions seem somewhat ineffectual.

It would be more just, and perhaps in the end more rewarding, to

regard Hill's best poetry less as "difficult" than as "rich" or even, if one were willing to take a step or two in the direction of phenomenology, "saturated." For one finds a fullness of phenomenality in Hill's best lines. This is not because those lines are transparent, with all ambiguities and figures removed, so that they allow us to grasp phenomena without the heavy veil of natural language hiding them. Rather, it is because in their verbal and conceptual density those lines register various intuitions of phenomena and manifest them more fully than one finds elsewhere. Heidegger observed, "we see *through* language" and that "the word gives Being"; with Hill we might say, "at its best his language lets things appear."⁶ Consider a few short passages drawn from the full course of the collection:

Why do I have to relive, even now,
Your mouth, and your hand running over me
Deft as a lizard, like a sinew of water? (77)

*

The nailshop stood back of the cottage, by the fold.
It reeked stale mineral sweat. Sparks had furred its
low roof. In dawn-light the troughed water
floated a damson-bloom of dust (107)

*

Here the lost are blest, the scarred most sacred:

Odd village workshops grimed and peppercorned
In a dust of dead spiders, paper-crowned
Sunflowers with the bleached heads of rag dolls,
Brushes in aspic, clay pots, twisted nails (147)

*

Wintry swamp-thickets, brush-heaps of burnt light.
The sky cast-iron, livid with unshed snow. (378)

*

6. Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Phenomenological Research*, trans. Daniel O. Dahlstrom (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 22, and "The Nature of Language," *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 88.

first here after the storm these butterflies
 fixed on each jinking run,
 probing, priming, then leaping back,

a babble of silent tongues;
 and the flint church also choiring
 into dazzle (516)

*

How the sea-lightning with a flash at hazard
 Cleft the lanternd yard into pelting angles (838)

This catena could be extended to ten, twenty or thirty quotations without too much effort, and in each case one would find that Hill is a poet who increases phenomenality through the writing of poetry. More of the world is given to us, and more completely, than we are used to finding in any but the greatest of twentieth-century European and American poets: Celan, Char, Eliot, Lorca, Montale, Rilke, Stevens, and Yeats.

The sheer figural force of some of Hill's best lines can jolt passive syntheses, whether primary or secondary, that have been long sedimented in consciousness and bring them to our attention. "Funeral Music," for example, can be read as the overflowing of diverse intuitions of the Wars of the Roses (1455-85) with respect to competing horizons—historical, political, philosophical, spiritual—such as the Battle of Towton (and the suffering of those who fought for Lancastrian and Yorkist interests), the question whether intellect supervenes with respect to flesh and even individuality, and the problem of evil. Sometimes a phenomenon is brilliantly constituted, as in a decapitation resulting in a "meaty conduit of blood" (47), or as in atmospheric conditions: "Sun-blazed, over Romsley, a livid rain-scarp" (239). At other times, as already noted, the poem registers less a phenomenon than modalization about it. This happens above all with the very idea of reading and writing poetry. Both Hill and his readers are faced with a biopsy of a dire situation, that in enjoying literature we have perhaps been acting quite shamefully, flavoring our "decent mouths / With gobbets of the sweetest sacrifice" (40). It comes almost as a relief later, with *The Triumph of Love*, to be told that poetry, at least Hill's poetry, is "*a sad and angry consolation*" (285). If Hill's poetry is a salve for our scars, it is bound to burn as much as cool.

No one horizon or even a small number of them can encompass *Broken Hierarchies*. Yet one horizon that certainly should be recognized is that of political theology. Towards the end of his academic career, Hill took an interest in the theology of language, and there is no doubt that the doctrine

of original sin has informed his sense of human speech for decades.⁷ This theology is often inflected by way of “political theology,” though this surely does not bind Hill to Carl Schmitt’s political views. Political theology is announced even before one reads a single poem, since for anyone who knows Hill’s prose it is declared on the cover of the book. The words of the title “Broken Hierarchies” change their sense and function when detached from a fine lyric in *Without Title* and placed over all of Hill’s poetry. Like many another of Hill’s poems, this one beautifully evokes rain—“the roadway sprouts ten thousand flowerets” (516)—and we are told how the vertical lines of rain are lashed by wind. The falling rain is nothing but broken hierarchies that stretch from the heavens to the earth. Yet the poem also gives a sense of other orders of life, birds and the ocean over which they fly, that both land upon our world, which is to them an “alien shore.” When allowed to embrace all of Hill’s verse, however, the words “Broken Hierarchies” gather up other lines in the book, most notably “everywhere / Dismantled hierarchies” (719) and “Bless hierarchy, dismiss hegemony” (738), as well as reflection on “the seventeenth-century vision of harmony” (568).

We need to keep in mind, especially when reading a poet who is also a philologist (and a close reader of Richard Hooker’s *Of the Lawes of Ecclesiastical Politie* (1594)), that “hierarchy” stems from ἱεράρχης, leader of sacred rites, and we remember the two treatises of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite who most likely coined the word, *The Celestial Hierarchy* and *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. God may be “distant, difficult,” as Hill’s Ovid testifies (39), but religion consists of endlessly failed attempts to overcome that distance and understand that difficulty, and religion is enveloped in politics as well as in resistance to the State. “Innocence is no earthly weapon,” Hill’s Ovid goes on to say, and we hear both that innocence did not protect people from the brute violence of the Third Reich and that innocence is a divine weapon. We are told later, in *Tenebrae*, how Dietrich Bonhoeffer, imprisoned in Tegel, nonetheless “restores the broken themes of praise” through the letters and papers he wrote there (137). And we are also warned in the same lyric, “We hear too late or not too late.” It is less a call for conversion than for informed theo-political judgment so that we might not be covered by “wild reasons of the state.”

I should make it clear that the sort of political theology at stake in Hill’s work does not presume an act of faith. In a recent piece he jokes about the tentative nature of his religious faith, calling himself “a thief / of others’ belief” (609). The political theology in play is a structure that we all inherit

7. See Geoffrey Hill, “Inventions of Value,” *Collected Critical Writings*, ed. Kenneth Haynes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 404.

by way of passive syntheses, though few interrogate it as piercingly and relentlessly as Hill does. Imbrications of Church and State yield one political theology, often promoted and sustained by way of “culture,” yet the various gaps between them, not to mention their mutual distrusts, simulations and caricatures of one another in major and minor ways, lead to other political theologies. It would naïve in the extreme to think that only the Church is in the business of promoting transcendence, for there are many modes of social and political transcendence on offer. “Funeral Music” is as good an instance as any of the sort of political theology one finds in Hill at his best. The poem identifies and variously criticizes the Neo-Platonic spirituality of Suffolk, Worcester and Rivers: the “Pentecostal blow” that cuts off a head may be believed to be from a seraph rather than a public executioner yet we nonetheless see “Spattered block-straw with mortal residue” (47); and we may suppose a political reconciliation “By silent music,” yet we nonetheless are required to confront frozen ground “Stuck with strange-postured dead” (48).⁸ This is not a poem that separates religion and politics, faith and skepticism; it points to how the one is folded in the other, and the other in the one. Especially in his earlier poems, Hill diagnoses more often than he judges.

One could easily extend the analysis. In *Mercian Hymns* we may not find a version of the “Magnificat” (Luke 1: 46-55) as we do in the Mercian hymns cited in *Sweet’s Anglo-Saxon Reader*, nor though do we find a secular world that is settled in its lack of belief in God.⁹ Instead, we encounter a Mercia in which the absence of any concord between the Church and the Roman Empire broods endlessly and heavily. In *The Mystery of the Charity of Charles Péguy* we do not find *la mystique* lauded at the expense of *la politique* but the two held in a fierce tension, albeit with an unsettling sense that the former leads to the latter, as in *Notre jeunesse* (1910). The very title, *Canaan*, bespeaks imbricated religious and political concerns, and if they were to be missed before one opens the book one would meet them in the title poem. It begins, “They march at God’s / pleasure through Flanders / with machine pistols, / chorales, cannon / of obese bronze” (180). *Speech! Speech!* gives us in its one hundred and twenty sections the number of the days of Sodom; it is a contemporary prophecy—demotic and elevated at once—of destruction, or, if you prefer, an inversion of what Augustine calls the City of God,

8. I take it that “silent music” is a translation of St John of the Cross’s “La música callada,” “Cantico Espiritual,” *The Collected Works of St John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, intro. Kieran Kavanaugh (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1979), 714.
 9. See Henry Sweet, *Anglo-Saxon Reader in Prose and Verse*, rev. Dorothy Whitelock (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 184-96.

which for Hill is “towering / at watch and ward, prophetic, exposed / to obscurity, hidden in revelation” (296) and which he later calls the “Unapproachable City of God” (347).

It should be readily apparent that when Hill speaks of “broken hierarchies” he is not lamenting a collapse of the English class system or the loss of the Empire or anything of the sort. Nor is he merely following Shakespeare’s Ulysses when the latter speaks quite generally about rank, “Take but degree away, untune that string, / And hark what discord follows” (*Troilus and Cressida*, I, iii, 109-110). Hill’s concern, rather, is with the break down of a shared order of aesthetic, moral and social values that has come about through repeated abuses of an unregulated market and which informs Tories as fully as Whigs. The lowest common denominator has become exchange value, understood as the whole story about “value,” a belief that, in practice, has imposed its hegemony, from beneath as it were, over all forms of social and intellectual life today. To survive, let alone flourish, poetry of the sort that Hill commends needs a shared public order, a sense of civic justice, an awareness of the sacred, and an affirmation of the value of learning.

In Hill’s laconic words, spoken with a backward glance to Yeats’s “The Second Coming,” our social experience is quite otherwise these days: “Democracy is a Potemkin fiction / Anarchical Plutocracy / Proliferates its gyre” (813). The allusion to William Morris’s analysis of the cause of British social ills to be “anarchical plutocracy” is a biting one, yet it has truth enough for the bite to hurt those who seek wealth solely for private gain who might chance upon the lines.¹⁰ (Equally pointed is the epigraph to the collection, taken from Ezra Pound’s *Ta Hio* (1936): “If the rulers of states think only of amassing riches, they will be surrounded, surrounded ineluctably, by mean men, and the depraved. . .”) By contrast, Hill tells us, poetry, properly conceived, is “hierarchical, democratic, erudite.”¹¹ A true democracy presumes that everyone is able to gain access to knowledge and to appreciate shared values; and, for Hill, a false democracy means that everything produced in a society is “accessible” without effort. In the poet’s own words, “Hierarchy yet: Blake’s lordly plates to *Job* / And he was a sworn Leveller” (738).

At the top of one hierarchy that preoccupies Hill early and late is the nobility evidenced by human endurance of suffering, and here several poets are important to him. I refer first of all to “Four Poems Regarding the Endurance of Poets” (55-58), and note in passing just two things: for all the talk of Hill’s devotion to Britain and its canon of poetry, which are surely

10. See William Morris, “Art under Plutocracy,” *The Political Writings of William Morris*, ed. and intro. A. L. Morton (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1973), ch. 2.

11. Hill, “Civil Polity and the Confessing State,” *Warwick Review*, 2: 2 (2008), 19.

deeply felt, not one of the four poets is British; and it is the *poets* whose endurance is regarded, not the poems that they have written. Yet it is not only the endurance of poets that calls forth Hill's empathy and admiration. His Grandmother is remembered; her "childhood and prime womanhood were spent in the nailer's darg" and we are movingly told, "It is one thing to celebrate the 'quick forge', another to cradle a face hare-lipped by the searing wire" (107). Also in his pantheon is Bonhoeffer who, "in his skylit cell" (137), honorably resists the reduction of Christianity to the forms in which the Third Reich deemed to be acceptable. One also finds Alan Turing who cracked the "enigma code" in the Second World War and who was treated abominably by the British Government when his sexual orientation was discovered and "treated" by chemical means. Colonel Adekunle Fajuyi, first military governor of the Western Region of Nigeria, is another moral hero for Hill, and with good reason: he underwent a gruesome death in order to save a guest. "I don't doubt / his courage," Hill writes, "his slow dying—smell my fear!" (313). None of Hill's tributes is long. As he says elsewhere, after having spoken just thirteen short lines about a young victim of the Shoah, "This is plenty. This is more than enough" (44). To make aesthetic gain out of human suffering is indecent for Hill, early and late. In the words of his succinct ode on the sinking of the Titanic, "By all means let us appease the terse gods" (30).

To my mind, Hill's most enduring individual books are *King Log* (1968), *The Mystery of the Charity of Charles Péguy* (1983) and *Canaan* (1996). There are imposing sequences in *Tenebræ* (1978), especially "Lachrimæ," and several good things in *Without Title* (2006): "The Jumping Boy" (487) and the title poem of *Broken Hierarchies* both stand out. *A Treatise of Civil Power* (2007) has the powerful "On Reading *The Essayes or Counsels, Civill and Morall*" (595-96) and "Integer Vitæ" (579), among other memorable pieces. *Without Title* is stronger than *A Treatise of Civil Power* when it has the first version of the sequence "Pindarics" but not otherwise. Looking back, I find that *Mercian Hymns* (1971) has worn less well than I would have expected; yet it is still an original and powerful work. Generally, in the great outpouring of poetry from *Speech! Speech!* on, I find less to celebrate though much to ponder. The fury of the book just mentioned is impressive, yet the verse itself is lackluster: Hill is usually—not always!—at his best when writing formal verse. To be sure, there are beautiful moments in *The Orchards of Syon* (2002) and *Scenes from Comus* (2005)—for example, in the latter volume the lyric beginning "That weight of the world, weight of the word, is" (430)—though mostly I find the poetry less concretely realized than that in Hill's first books. Sometimes this lack of realization comes as

an effect of exposing oneself to powerful influences (Hopkins and Montale, above all), and sometimes I sense that, beginning with *The Orchards of Syon*, lines in different poems might well be interchangeable. All too often in the later poetry Hill enables us to see things but does not allow them to appear, and what he most often lets us see by way of *dicta*, however plangent or amusing, is his own fury or his own scruples.¹² That said, the expanded version of *Pindarics* (without the headings drawn from Cesare Pavese's *Il mestiere di vivere*) is more likely to be read and weighed over the years to come than *Speech! Speech!*, *The Orchards of Syon* or *Scenes from Comus*.

Of the *Daybooks*, it must be said that they are of mixed quality. I am not sure that opening himself to the influence of John Skelton has always been good for Hill. *Liber Illustrium Vigorum* and *Clavics* seem limited by it. The *Daybooks* with the most solid claims on our attention are *Odi Barbare* and *Al Tempo de' Tremuoti*. There are fine lyrics in the latter collection—"Ravenna, this was your doing: when you buried" (905), for instance—but the former book is the richer of the two. The title repeats the title of Giosuè Carducci's three books of "barbarian odes" published in Italy over the period 1877 to 1889. Their barbarity lies solely in their reaching back to a pagan past for inspiration. Hill does not stretch back quite so far, or at least not without help. He takes as a model Sir Philip Sidney's Sapphic lyric "If mine eyes can speak to do hearty errand" in *Arcadia*, although he may also have Ezra Pound's "Apparuit" in mind.¹³ That he thinks some of his readers might also be a little barbaric, or might enjoy a joke about the weaker brethren, he mistranslates the title, "*I / Hate barbarians*" (836). The sequence of fifty-two lyrics, each of six quatrains, begins with a flourish:

If the soul so glares at annihilation,
Name despair one deviant path of wisdom;
Music steel-rimmed spectacles make as objects
 Claiming a victim (835)

Perhaps a gloss is warranted. In old age the soul is likely to look directly and fiercely at death, and the despair that is consequent on one's inevitable demise has wisdom of its own. One can occupy oneself otherwise, however,

12. I take the distinction between seeing and appearing from Jean-Luc Marion. See his essay, "What we See and What Appears," in *Idol Anxiety*, ed. Josh Ellenbogen and Aaron Tugendhalf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 152-68.

13. Sir Philip Sidney, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*, ed., intro. and notes Maurice Evans (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977), 190. Also see "Apparuit," which like Hill's poems in *Odi Barbare* has six quatrains, Ezra Pound, *Poems and Translations*, ed. Richard Sieburth (New York: The Library of America, 2003), 321-32.

by art, which might even steel one for what inevitably will come. The poetry about to be written is music (as meter surely is), and Sapphics is a very difficult meter to master in English; it is like the steel-rimmed spectacles worn during the austerities of the Second World War when death was immanent to many. The meter makes poems, aesthetic objects, and the labor in attending to the meter and the form makes the poet a victim of his own art. Hill has broached the theme of poetic self-sacrifice earlier in “Pavana Dolorosa,” though with martyrs in mind (and with a touch of self-deprecating humor): “Self-wounding martyrdom, what joys you have, / true-torn among this fictive consonance, / music’s creation of the moveless dance” (123). Like St Robert Southwell, whose martyrdom could be regarded as a perfect work of art, Hill’s writing of sonnets is itself a species of voluntary martyrdom.¹⁴

A long essay would be required to do any sort of justice to the dense and often beautiful lyrics of *Odi Barbare*. I shall restrict myself to a few comments on XXVIII:

Broken that first kiss by the race to shelter,
Scratchy brisk rain irritable as tinder;
Hearing light thrum faintly the chords of laurel
Taller than we were.

Fear to have already the direst choosing,
Sixty years spent as by procrastination.
Answer one question, this is all I need, so
Speeding denial.

Ancient question haunting the Platonist: can
Spirit ransom body, and if so could I
Rise again in presence of your devoting
Sorrow to sorrow?

Quick, is love’s truth seriously immortal?
Would you might think so and not be this other
Finally known only through affirmation’s
Failing induction.

What though, wedded, we would have had annulment’s
Consummation early, and though in darkness
I can see that glimmerous rim of folly
Lave our condition,

14. On Southwell’s martyrdom as a work of art, see Pierre Janelle, *Robert Southwell: The Writer* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1935), 286, and Hill’s essay “The Absolute Reasonableness of Robert Southwell,” *Collected Critical Writings*, 29.

Had we not so stumbled on grace betimely,
 In that chanced day brief as the sun's arising
 Preternaturally without a shadow
 Cast in its presence. (862)

Young love remembered in age: the poem nicely captures both the love and the remembering, and both are presented in full intensity and each with its share of frustration. The kiss is broken, there is irritation in the air, and even now, in old age, after decades of reflection, one cannot know the proper value of the event. Hill sharply registers the occasion of sixty years before with its “Scratchy brisk rain” and the “chords of laurel”: the light is so overwhelming that one can almost hear it and the laurel playing music. Equally, though in an entirely different manner, he gives us the urgency of reflection in age (“Answer one question,” “Speeding denial,” “Quick”).

In fact, the speaker asks not one but three questions, “can / Spirit ransom body[?]” and “if so, could I / Rise again in presence of your devoting / Sorrow to sorrow?” and “is love’s truth seriously immortal?” The first question is philosophical, and within philosophy entirely conventional. It’s a *faux* question to ask a lost beloved, someone with whom he shared a love that was far from Platonic, and the pressing question comes second; for when love goes wrong it hurts like nothing else. The third question has due weight by dint of “seriously.” Love has its truth, and perhaps it is the highest truth we can know, even if the love was fleeting (and the relationship in effect annulled). But must we consider the everlastingness of that truth with all possible gravity? Is one to be judged eternally on a passing moment—a moment of grace, to be sure, but one on which (and in which) one stumbled—and one’s failure to be true to the relationship it opened up? Or perhaps we should acknowledge genuine doubt about these things: Can we really take the Platonic doctrine of immortality seriously, either in itself or in the version cherished by Christian Platonists? In old age, Hill looks back sixty years to a kiss near a laurel, and thinks of how the couple’s lives would have been different had their marriage been annulled earlier rather than later: the speculation is a “glimmerous rim of folly,” an unsteady light that nonetheless bathes him and his beloved all these years later, a faint light in contrast to their sense then of the day of their engagement being “without a shadow.”

Much more could be said about XXVIII and about many other lyrics in the sequence. To read *Odi Barbare* with the attention and regard it calls for will, as I say, take a very long time, and to get a sense of how much enduring poetry Hill truly bequeaths to us will take far longer. That there are

poems that will continue to prick, haunt and console for generations is not in question; and in the end we shall think only of them. *Broken Hierarchies* is the work of a major poet; it will be with us for decade after decade and even when time has reduced it, as it surely will, the volume will remain an unavoidable reference point when considering the canon of Hill's work and the canon of modern English poetry.

A GEOGRAPHY OF PAIN

Cathy Linh Che, *Split*, Alice James Books, 2014.

Kevin O'Connor

While a “poetry of witness” might apply to any testimony about traumatic events that fall along a spectrum between the private and the public, Cathy Lin Che’s debut collection *Split* accrues complexity and depth by collapsing those polarities and exploring how the legacy of a destructive international event (the Vietnam War) impacts a personal history damaged by interfamilial abuse. If some individual poems in the work of this young Vietnamese American writer might be viewed as aesthetically slight, or even as self-indulgent confessional displays when considered alone, the book as a whole demonstrates both psychological fearlessness and literary ambition in its insistent attempts to discover larger historical and narrative meaning in personal trauma and to rewrite the memory of pain in a healing and potentially redemptive artistic form.

The title of the collection *Split* announces a motif which can refer simultaneously to the resonance of the psychic wounds of the poet’s parents and grandparents suffered during the Vietnam War, to her own “split heart” as a result of her rape and abuse as a young girl within an extended immigrant family, and to the wounds suffered by any of the innocent and vulnerable—especially women—at the hands of men who transgress as a result of their own dehumanizing wounds. Young American Marines—“just boys,” who “with scissor-fingers/. . .snip the air”—mimic the cutting of her mother’s hair as a young woman in Vietnam—are characterized as both needy and threatening; likewise, her own father, once a reluctant Vietnamese soldier who haunts the volume as a survivor in protective denial, is unable to “arm” his daughter from the predations of males in his own extended family:

My father was a soldier.
He taught me nothing about men.

They are an empty barrel.
You’re not supposed to look into
A gun you dismantle

to try to see its parts.
 (“The Future Therapist Asks About Rape”)

This collection is organized in three part: the first section attempts to recover and re-enact the factual dynamic of the speaker's sexual trauma as a girl; here the poet's effort to truthfully self-objectify and describe events becomes the first phase of moral exploration into the sources of guilt and shame. If the book had merely continued in this vein, it would have fallen more into the category of aestheticized but primarily therapeutic complaint; however, Part Two expands the temporal and social field of inquiry into causation and complicates a view of the skein of familial influences and interdependencies. Likewise, the poet's formal strategies become more varied and complex even if, as in "Dress-up," her attempt to capture the way her father's psyche and body were damaged in war, her poem "never seems to fit him." Part Three bookends the volume by returning to the site of the speaker's original trauma where she resorts to Catholic and classical myth to help stitch and heal the wound: "What I seek/is redemption. An arrow/that joins a split heart."

The achievement of Che's book lies in its sense of limitation and appropriate scale. Though her raw materials are potentially lurid and sensational, her graphic confessional revelations are selectively discreet; her tone can be searingly intimate, but never hysterical; and she is careful to filter references to history, culture, or mythology through a grounded personal lens. Stylistically young, Che tries on a number of stanzaic patterns and line lengths, but if one influence is predominate, it would be that of William Carlos Williams. Her diction tends to be colloquially plain and spare; her music is energetic but quiet; and her line breaks rely less on enjambment and more on the emphasis and focalization of discrete images:

I cycled through dreams
as though washing
my hair.

Organized
The ruptures to form
a sequence.

Soldiers
on their bunks,
reading their books.

My father a machinist
with blood
on the wheels.

I burned time
on strips
of film.

Stacked reels
In boxes in a corner
of a darkened bedroom.

Che's formal control and aesthetic strategy in the volume become most apparent in the cumulative power of her motifs and image patterns. Her direct address poems to "Doc" succeed in aestheticizing the therapeutic similar to the way prayerful addresses of Donne or Hopkins at once externalize a real drama of faith and also find a suitable fictive addressee for the poetic act. Likewise, while the title image of "split" may initially refer to the speaker's sexual violations of body and heart as a child, it expands associatively to include the way American soldiers threateningly "clipped the strands" of her mother's hair; her father's psyche "shot through, shrapnel/still lodged in his scalp"; her grandmother's "childhood home razed by the rutted wheels/of an American tank"; and ultimately the notion that "in every psyche, tiny or dramatic perforations—"

Geography and space also act as binding motifs. Excavating the buried memories of abuse, the speaker tries to understand the dynamic of the crime by mapping out "an archipelago of needs," and re-imagining the original transgression: "I was a border, and he crossed it—." While exploring her own victimization, the speaker also glancingly depicts the moral complications of her own Leda-like surrender: "I was on the downward slope/of the sine waves of consent." As we read further into the volume, the house and the darkened room of the original violation become associated with the larger social terrain of violence and trauma in the family's history:

In Vietnam, the landscape
is aftermath—

tourist shops, sunbathers,
packs of motorbikers—

there were still
bomb craters

and in them, the grass
grown in.
("Doc—)

Che's poetry works in the tension between the desire to witness and explore the living wounds of past traumatic violence and the desire to domesticate and even reify the painful past in photograph or tourist museum or poem:

...I want to strip
the significance—

put it in a museum
behind the walls of glass—
a hand, a torso, knobs

of muscle.
("Object Permanent: Memory")

In "Daughter" the poet even imagines her surviving refugee parents spatially— her mother as "a house with a palm-thatched roof" and her cryptic, impenetrable father as "a private landscape" who, while unable to protect her, "showed her what it means to survive." While the aggressive drives of men may be depicted as one source of the long concatenations of further transgressions, men like her father become sympathetic in their machine-like dehumanization:

My father looked like a human
with holes punched in.
The place where he worked
smelled of gasoline
and oiled cement.

In "On McDougal Street," the speaker ogles a construction worker, and the poem is startling both for its unflinching revelation of her own conditioned desires and in the powerful economy of its juxtaposed images:

I want to remove that shirt, kiss
his dark arms, that wife-beater tan,

suck in the aroma of his hair, his sweat,
that smell of work, the smell

of my father and oil
on the machine shop floor.

My father could pulverize me
and my mother, but never did.

He carried a gun for eight years
and never told me about it.

Here the lovers hold hands, and there,
my father squeezed my mother's hand so tight

her fingers bled. *See what they do to you?*

“Letters to Doc” the penultimate poem of the volume, shows both the strengths and limitation of this kind of “witness” poetry. The statements of bare facts and stripped down images are not just an ‘antipoetic’ strategy: they establish the moral grounding and purpose of the poetic act.

Yes, a rupture.
There was blood
And membrane.

I wiped and wiped.

On the paper,
a brutal portrait of me.
There it dried.

a physical fact.

But to display oneself without insisting on “thicker” descriptive context and distancing stylization may result in the poet giving up agency over the significance of her own experience:

I have placed it
In the open
For all to see

I am asking that you
read me.

The poem’s strongest feature is that it quarrels with itself, recognizing the counter-force of a willful art in this essential tension: “I want to rewrite everything./In love, my back arched/like a cat’s. “

As I consider the way the speaker in the final two poems consciously identifies with Persephone and Daphne—mythic personifications of transformation and regeneration—I cannot help but feel that these allusions seem grafted on and not fully earned or assimilated: the announced desire

for redemptive rebirth and closure runs far ahead of its realization. Yet, even like Sylvia Plath reaching for the metaphors of Holocaust and mass annihilation to convey the enormity and intensity of her feelings of victimization, Linh registers her ambition impressively:

Persephone had it right.
If you must go, might as well
Take all of spring with you—

The unfurling leaves,
The dandelion seeds.
A strawberry patch

While in terms of formal mastery, *Split* may pale beside the early work of Sylvia Plath or Adrienne Rich, Cathy Linh Che writes out of genuine necessity, making inventive poems by the rhythms of her own pulse. This first volume stakes out enough raw material for a lifetime of imaginative poems, and this reader wants to believe that she will find new, more sophisticated forms to serve her growing ambitions as a poet.

COLLECTING JOHN SILKIN

Jon Silkin. *Complete Poems*, edited by Jon Glover and Kathryn Jenner. Manchester: Northern House and Carcanet Press, 2015.

Igor Webb

The poem most associated with Jon Silkin, the poem he read most often at his many public appearances, was “Death of a Son,” written at the very start of his career, when he was just twenty-two. “This was something else,” Silkin says of the death of his child Adam, “who died in a mental hospital aged one,”

this was
Hearing and speaking though he was a house drawn
Into silence, this was
Something religious in his silence,

Something shining in his quiet,
This was different this was altogether something else:
Though he never spoke, this
Was something to do with death.

Something, something...Silkin calls it “religious,” a word he never uses again. He didn’t like to be vulnerable to witless interpretation on account of a misguided directness. But as the hundreds of poems in this massive new *Complete Poems*, weighing in at 915 closely printed pages, show he *was* first and last a religious poet. Silkin’s own, chosen identification of himself as a “committed individual,” to pick up the horrible phrase with which he titled his anthology of work¹ from his remarkable magazine *Stand*, seems, surprisingly, less vital, and dated; like CND, the Fifties protest movement opposed to the Bomb, Silkin’s idea of commitment survives as a serious idea, in particular as an idea of great resonance in its time, but nonetheless as an idea *of* its time, locked away in history.

As it happens the very last entry in the *Complete Poems* is an unpublished prose poem written close to the end of Silkin’s life, “Emmanuel” (in Hebrew: “God is with us”), a dialogue in the tradition of Jewish biblical complaint between man and God. The baffled, enraged human speaker asks: “What language must I speak to you in?” and, “Is there nothing so

1. *Poetry of the Committed Individual: A Stand Anthology of Poetry*. Edited with an introduction by Jon Silkin (London: Penguin and Victor Gollancz, 1973).

sensible, but it is subtle?" These questions, in all their nuance and complexity, reverberate through the whole body of Silkin's work, are already implicit in "Death of a Son," and have lost none of their force. The religious quality of the writing, then, does not—I guess I should say, obviously—have to do with orthodoxy or observance but rather with the kinds of questions or human troubles that persistently hound and pain Silkin.

It matters in this respect that Jon Silkin was born into one of England's most prominent Jewish families (his father's brother and law partner was the Labour peer, Baron Silkin of Dulwich), and came of age during and immediately after the Second World War. As a young man just beginning to write, he was inescapably immersed in the intense coming-to-terms—philosophical, aesthetic, of course religious, and not least political—of the first post-World War II decade. Theodor Adorno's dictum that it would be barbaric to write poetry after Auschwitz left a kind of stain on the paper Silkin, and his circle of Jewish and non-Jewish literary peers, especially Geoffrey Hill, used to compose their work, and spotlighted his generation's deep distrust of every form of utterance. How can one speak and not be complicit?

I am not sure Silkin ever worked out a satisfying answer to this nasty question. His approach to an answer was neither traditional nor orthodox, and reflected his unusual route to the poet's corner. Although he was sent to school at the elite Dulwich College, Silkin in fact never completed the course of study, in particular in Latin, which was necessary to enter university. Instead he joined the Army, and then worked as a manual laborer, including stints as a gravedigger and bricklayer; sometimes he slept on the streets. (There was something of the vagrant about him all his life.) His local London paper announced the publication of his first book of poems (1950) with the headline: "Poetry Volume By Silkin's Nephew." This identification must have rankled, since Silkin so emphatically rejected the proper path his family had laid out for him. And even after his second book, *The Peaceable Kingdom* (1954), published by Chatto & Windus, launched him into literary society—his editor at Chatto was Cecil Day-Lewis—Silkin remained an outsider, eventually settling *Stand* about as far away from London as you could get and still remain in England, in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, at the time, in the early Sixties, a place more Victorian than late twentieth century, dark, damp, smoky, sooty, a working-class northern city with a language—Geordie—and a drink—Newcastle Brown—distinctly its own.

But from the cultural periphery Silkin deployed his genius as an editor and literary promoter. The list of writers for whom *Stand* was the main outlet, or the first place their work appeared in print, is pretty amazing, and includes Geoffrey Hill, Tony Harrison, Terry Eagleton (who for some years

was *Stand's* poetry reviewer), Ken Smith, Michael Hamburger, Roy Fisher, and an equally remarkable list of writers from across the globe, including Miroslav Holub, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Nathan Zach, Giuseppe Ungaretti, Zbigniew Herbert, and Nazim Hikmet. When each new number of *Stand* appeared, Silkin would lug copies up and down the country, flogging the magazine on the streets of the university towns, or in the city pubs. He was more or less single-handedly responsible for the revival of interest in the poetry of the First War, especially of Isaac Rosenberg and Siegfried Sassoon.

What Isaiah Berlin says of the great nineteenth-century Russian radical Vissarion Belinsky applies perfectly to Silkin: "Literature was for him not a *métier*, nor a profession, but the artistic expression of an all-embracing outlook, an ethical and metaphysical doctrine, a view of history and of man's place in the cosmos, a vision that embraced all facts and all values." For Silkin, more than for any of his contemporaries, each of whom wrote while also gainfully employed in a university or office, literature was life. He never spent too long in any one place, or in any one house, or with any one lover or wife or child; he belonged only to his art.

All the more staggering then to weigh the possibility that in the very act of creation he might be complicit with the destructive forces or values or habits of mind he wanted to stand against; and even more, that his own words might betray him. These were, it is true, as I have said, the anxieties of Silkin's entire generation worldwide, evident as much in the radically restrained work of, say, Tadeusz Rozewicz or Zbigniew Herbert as of Geoffrey Hill, and for which the antidote or liberating manifesto, in English, was Hill's brilliant "Redeeming the Time," a more or less explicit response to Adorno. Since everything human, says Hill, from relations between owner and worker to the paving of roads to forms of reminiscence is there in our words, the poet can be "the rock of the defence of human nature"—at once political and metaphysical—by virtue of his unique capacities for making something newly expressive out of the language of his time, can *redeem the time*, as he says Wordsworth does in "Intimations of Immortality." Hill focuses especially on how section 9 of the poem breaks out of the "force field" (Hill's term) of section 8:

Oh joy! That in our embers
Is something that doth live,
That nature yet remembers
What was so fugitive.

This moment, a vocal leap or ecstasy, a healing, redeeming exuberance, is what Silkin and Hill want to release as well; but joy is extremely rare in

Silkin's work. There is a great deal of struggle, but precious few instances of breakthrough.

In the beautiful "The Two Freedoms," two pet birds, perhaps yellow parakeets, escape from their cage.

The sunlight
Smoked on them, gold were their wings, gold feet; gold sounds

Fled from their throats quickened by
The winged sun that, for a moment, urged their flesh
To the transubstantial freedom
Ghosts are.

Uncaged the birds are stunning in the sun. So stunning they have a "transubstantial freedom": they have achieved the condition of...ghosts. Ghosts? It may be that Silkin intends a pun here on "Holy Ghost," but he rarely resorted to Christian symbolism, never mind in any positive way. Moreover, immediately in the next line, the birds "in the sun became the one gold/ With him in dignity." So the word "ghost" seems an instance of a tick in Silkin's work when an unbounded jubilation might be possible, an inability not to qualify, not to attend to the other condition: if there is life, there is death; if there is pleasure, there is pain. The birds, like the speaker of "The Two Freedoms," are caged. It must so be noted in his "careful words."

Silkin's method is dramatic, in the sense that the motive for so many of his poems is conflict (as in "The Two Freedoms") but more that the poems are performances, finally, or most importantly, about, and for, love. Silkin uses this word in its colloquial sense, as a form of address to a lover, but also as Dante uses it, to convey the broad range of associations of "love," from sexual relations to tenderness to compassion to something akin to "grace." Creation is observed and experienced in Silkin's writing as pointedly including a various and universal "preying upon" (his words); he is especially attentive to our wanton human ways with the most vulnerable beings ("Flypaper"). What he wants to set against cruelty, emptiness, and existential absurdity is love. Often the poems are addressed to someone identified only as "Love," or "you"; sometimes this unidentified person, "Love," abruptly appears in the middle or even at the close of a poem (as in the fifth stanza of "Lens-breakers," which, out of the blue, begins "My love..."). It is as if the poems are for but also with "love." The human dilemma, Silkin insists, requires precisely the achievement of "love"—and he insists too on the word "love," rejecting its alternatives and cognates, whether simpler, grander, or subtler. The drama is performed before—sometimes designed for, some-

times, as in a Brecht play, thrown angrily at—God. These poems want to be heard by “love” as a way of finding Love.

“I cut winter flowers for a stone jar,” Silkin writes in the opening of “Flowering in winter,” “hoping to hear from you.” There has been some quarrel or hurt, as often in the poems of love; a quarrel or hurt and an absence that wants to be filled by nature and words. But:

Where are your words? your face
 unpetulant as dew. You hope for the best,
 and bud as constantly as the moon. I put my hands
 up to your cheeks, the flower
 of our hurt, for fear to touch
 you elsewhere.

The hesitant enjambment is characteristic of Silkin, suggesting at once care and aggression, a subtlety of sex he is especially alert to. If, against the cruelty of life, the cruelty of man to man and man to woman (and vice versa), of humans to animals and indeed to the whole of nature, the cruelty of animals to other animals, and of God to His creation, if, against all this, what we have to deploy is love then, Silkin seems to say, it has to be love complete, in all its uncomfortable mingling of mystery and violence, tenderness and aggression, pleasure and pain, body and spirit.

But love, its dignity! The moon, her mature
 belly, is a Jew wandering the night sky;
 his gold is beaten to her silver. Her light's a forceps
 she gives birth to ships with, tridents that crawl
 over her livid heaving face
 of sea. Is it sorrow?
 The extreme of love. Go on. The tides whamming
 against the vessels they raise:
 it is love, it is.

There isn't the space here to discuss whole categories of poems that anyone coming upon Silkin's verse for the first time ought to check out, such as his “ecological” poems (the wonderful “Flower Poems,” as well as, for starters, “Nature With Man,” “A Kind of Nature,” and “Urban Grasses”) or his many poems about Jews, a subject at the core of Silkin's entire body of work (I like in particular “A Word About Freedom and Identity in Tel-Aviv,” “Juniper and Forgiveness,” “Two Poems Concerning Jews in England,” and “My Father's Mother.”). All of which points to a need for a different kind of collection of Silkin's poems than this voluminous one. The meticulous and

indefatigable editors of these *Complete Poems*, Jon Glover and Kathryn Jenner, have troubled not only to collect in this volume all of Silkin's published poems but also those he did not publish, helpfully placed immediately after the published poems for any particular stretch of years; they have listed where each of the published poems appeared; provided a full chronology of Silkin's life; offered a selected bibliography of Silkin's publications, including edited works, interviews, and criticism; as well as a listing of writing about Silkin, including obituaries and reviews of his books. And Jon Glover has written a long, thorough introduction intended to orient the reader both to the cultural moment in which Silkin did his work, and to the work itself.

All of this will be terrific for the scholars: but maybe not so much for new readers. For new readers something more manageable, focused, and elegant is urgently needed. So let me here launch the petition to the editors of Carcanet Press and Northern House to bring out a new, and one hopes suitably handsome, *Selected Poems of Jon Silkin*.

DARK ILLUMINATIONS

Tuvia Ruebner. *In the Illuminated Dark: Selected Poems*, translated and introduced by Rachel Tzvia Back. Hebrew Union College Press / University of Pittsburgh Press, 2014.

Henry Weinfield

Of the generation of Israeli poets that includes Abba Kovner (1918-87), Yehuda Amichai (1924-2000), T. Carmi (1925-94), and Dan Pagis (1930-86), only Tuvia Ruebner remains; and among these extraordinary writers, Ruebner is the least known, at least in the United States. With the publication of *In the Illuminated Dark*, ably translated and introduced by Rachel Tzvia Back, that will presumably change. Ruebner's story is a remarkable and an especially tragic one. Born in Slovakia in 1924, he alone of his family was able to leave for Palestine in 1941; his father, mother, and younger sister would be murdered in Auschwitz in 1942. Ruebner married his first wife, a fellow Slovakian émigré, in 1944. In 1949, a few months after their daughter was born, they were in a bus accident: she was killed and Ruebner was seriously injured. With his second wife, whom he married three years later, he had two sons. In 1981, the younger of these, having served as a reservist in the First Lebanon War, disappeared in South America and was never heard from again. As Back poignantly observes in her introduction, "The lost son and, above all, the lost little sister wander unceasingly through Ruebner's poems. Time does not distance their images or lighten the weight of their absence" (xix).

For Israeli poets, the figure of the little sister, because of its resonance with the Song of Songs, has become a trope for the Holocaust—and this, incidentally, tells us something important about how modern Hebrew poetry, written in a language that had only recently been reinvented and by poets whose first language was usually not Hebrew, immediately acquired the ballast of a continuous tradition. The little sister makes herself felt in Ruebner's poems already in the early 1950s, essentially as soon as he begins writing in Hebrew (where previously, during his first twelve years in Palestine, he wrote exclusively in German); Ruebner's little sister poems thus predate Abba Kovner's great poetic sequence, "My Little Sister," which was first published in 1968.¹ One of the extraordinary things about these poems of immense tenderness and subtlety is that just as the Shoah (Hebrew for

1. See Abba Kovner, *My Little Sister and Selected Poems*, trans. Shirley Kaufman (Oberlin, OH: Field Translation Series, 1986).

“catastrophe”) is behind every line but never actually mentioned, so the little sister is everywhere and nowhere at the same time. “[I]n the air that is dwindling between her lips,” Ruebner writes in an early untitled litany, she “lives the last minute’s / eternity” (9). And in the poem actually entitled “My Little Sister,” she is “smoke before me...burning in my eyes,” or “strewn among the flowers,” until finally, in the poem’s concluding section, she is transformed successively into a tree, a blackbird, and finally a cloud—“The cloud that covers my life” (14-15).

These early poems are so deeply inflected by an unmentionable past and by a sense of loss in quest for what it recognizes is an unattainable form (“I went to find for you a form, / tenderness with no body” [“My Sister,” 29]) that they are not actually political: they rise above the specificities of history and politics into an expressive ether of their own. Like the German Expressionists, in whose work he must have been deeply immersed as a young man, Ruebner seeks to make language express its own paradoxical inability to communicate—and it is for this reason, I believe, that as his work deepens, he turns more and more in the direction of *ekphrastic* poetry. The ekphrastic poems that Back renders are from Ruebner’s collection of 1982, *A Graven and a Molten Image*. Ruebner’s biblical title is not only ironic but rather difficult to parse. Is he accusing art—and hence his own art—of amounting to idol worship? Or, on the contrary, is he turning toward painting because in its closeness to *things* it avoids language and hence the ways in which language has been debased in our time? Here, in any event, is “The Color of Black Waters” (after Hans Hartung’s “Composition”):

The landscape is torn, as though stitched from tears,
In a voice-not-a-voice fall the broken waters.
My sister’s face among the hills flickered and disappeared.

The mornings, day after day, are like deep pits.
The eyes of childhood are stone. Don’t lift it.
The stone drips black tears. (127)

Here the little sister has become part of Hartung’s landscape. The poem is nicely translated, on the whole, but, in the first tercet, Back could just as well have put “flickered and disappeared” into the present tense so as to preserve an exact rhyme (Ruebner’s Hebrew employs rhyme in this case); and in the second, “Don’t lift it” is awkward, partly because of the near-rhyme with “pits” and partly because the pronoun would have to refer to *a* stone rather than to “stone.” The power and economy of the original is nevertheless conveyed.

In the remarkable “postcard” poems of the ‘nineties, Ruebner opens himself up to quotidian realities and becomes an important social and political voice, while forfeiting nothing of his subtlety. “A Postcard from Jerusalem” reads in its entirety:

Jerusalem took leave of Jerusalem and vanished.
There, up in the air, there’s no way that could be Jerusalem? (167)

The “Postcard from Tel Aviv” ends similarly:

Who ever imagined it would be this way?
Is Tel Aviv really Tel Aviv?
Who invented Tel Aviv anyway? (159)

The most powerful poem in the sequence, however, is the “Draft of an Impossible Postcard,” from which I quote the concluding lines:

No one talks about what
doesn’t need mentioning. What was was and there’s no need
remembering. The place looks after the local people
as much as it does. The birds have no cares:
they come and go at will. There are those among them
that sing. If you were here you would hear
their beautiful song. (171)

What doesn’t need mentioning, of course, is that the place the poet is visiting is one of the camps. This ironic gesture of not mentioning what doesn’t need mentioning (and sometimes of mentioning that it doesn’t need mentioning) is itself a central trope of Israeli literature, one that extends across genres. I am reminded in particular of Aharon Appelfeld’s brilliant novel, *The Immortal Bartfuss*, in which the fact that the book’s eponymous hero is a survivor is left to the reader to infer.

In the concluding sections of the volume, Ruebner’s engagement with history and with the immediate realities of Israeli politics becomes more and more eloquent. “It’s Been Years,” a poem written in a visionary stream, begins: “It’s been years / since the monsters started walking among us”; and ends: “how oh how to end this when / there is no end” (187). There are many magnificent poems included from the poet’s eighth and ninth decades, but I shall content myself with quoting just one, “Soldiers’ Memorial Day.” After evoking the fathers, mothers, and wives “[standing] among the stones / as though not knowing where to turn,” Ruebner writes:

Oh, beautiful country, pursuing
 us from one end of the world to the other
 in yellow and green fields in cloud shadows.
 Even with thorn and thistle, with nettle and briar, you seduce
 to enter you, to penetrate deep deep within you
 body into body to no end.

What a terrible love, year after year, this ceaseless memory
 always tearing open the wound until it blooms again and again
 in this maddening spring becoming already
 shorn summer, to the burnt expanses in the unbearable light
 and now this aroma in the air mixes with the smell
 rising from the ground and from the pallid stones.
 Oh, my son. (217)

“Seduce” is transitive and needs a direct object (in this case “us,” which we awkwardly insert), but in other respects the translation is effective. Note the conjunction of “terrible” and “tearing” in the last stanza, and how this is echoed in the phrase “unbearable light.” Here, as in so many of Ruebner’s poems, contemporary realities find their echo in the Bible: the poem’s last line, “Oh, my son,” Ruebner’s lament for his own lost son, reverberates not only against the apostrophe to the land that opens the second stanza but also against King David’s lament, “Oh, Absalom, my son, my son!” “What a terrible love!” And yet in Ruebner’s brilliantly ambivalent lines, in which history is continually reawakened by nature itself, one understands why it has “no end.”

CONTEMPLATIVE MAN

Brock Guthrie. Sibling Rivalry Press, 2014. 90pp. \$13.46.

In an age where the worst crime a white male poet can commit is to write poetry about being white and male, *Contemplative Man* bravely asks its audience to approach the book on its own terms—the language and content much like that of a Mark Halliday piece or a Raymond Carver poem. Guthrie folds the quotidian into origami cranes, the wisdom in each poem scribbled on the extremities of each wing, and the speaker, an extension of the poet himself, critiques hyper-masculinity by simultaneously embracing it. The result: a book of poems containing the most tender, magical “bro-ments,” enveloped in the hyperbolic uncertainty of a generation of men who wear their emotions on their rolled-up sleeves.

—Peter Tival

EDITORS SELECT

Ian Bostridge, *Schubert's Winter Journey: Anatomy of an Obsession*. Knopf, 2015. One of the best books about poetry published this year is a book also about music—Schubert's settings of Wilhelm Müller in his song cycle, *Winterreise*. The book is really *sui generis*. Bostridge, one of the major tenors at work these days, is also a fine scholar and writer (he has a Ph.D. in history). Both on a large scale—the way the poems and songs relate to the Napoleonic wars and the Hapsburg Empire—and the almost microscopic—various possible interpretations of a brief phrase of words or sounds—he makes this greatest of all song cycles an enormous adventure for the reader as well as the listener. Bostridge's own translations of Müller's poems, along with his commentaries, persuade us that the poems are more than they are often thought to be—i.e., simply minor stuff to be consumed by the music. Beautifully produced by Knopf, the book contains artworks from the period of *Winterreise's* composition and from modern and contemporary artists whose work illuminates the poems and songs. Schubert's work is forever of its moment but also deeply of our own, and Bostridge stresses how Beckettian it is at its heart. Released a little earlier, was Bostridge's semi-acted film version of *Winterreise*, directed by David Alden. Anyone reading the

book will want to order the DVD.

Roy Fisher, *An Easily Bewildered Child: Occasional Prose 1963-2013*.

Shearsman, 2014. British poet Roy Fisher's poetry has been very much admired by a small group of enthusiasts in the US, though more widely read in the UK. His work is forever associated with the city of Birmingham, which he has claimed as his own poetic territory—"Birmingham's What I Think With"—ever since the publication of *City* in 1961. This selection of miscellaneous pieces of prose, edited by *NDR* contributor Peter Robinson, is the perfect companion to Fisher's poetry. And the poetry itself is some of the best there is in English, US or UK, written during the past half-century.

Ciaran Carson, *From Elsewhere*.

Wake Forest, 2015. Ciaran Carson's last volume of versions from the French was *In the Light Of: After Illuminations by Arthur Rimbaud*. This time, Carson turns to the poetry of Jean Follain, matching each translation with a poem of his own, and so establishing a dialogue, which runs throughout the book. matching poem to poem was also the technique of Carson's *For All We Know*, where the model was musical and fugal. He has also established a full scale dialogue between his books *Until Before After* and *On the Night Watch*. Along with Paul Muldoon

and Michael Longley, he is now one of the best Irish poets still producing major work.

John Tranter, *Starlight: 150 Poems*.

BlazeVox, 2015. This selection of poems by the Australian poet John Tranter is his first by an American publisher. John Ashbery writes, "Welcome to Tranter's medicinal coruscating world. You'll like it. It'll do you good." Like Ciaran Carson in *After Illuminations*, Tranter enters into a dialogue with Rimbaud in his fine sequence called "Speaking French," and with Baudelaire in the sequence "Contra-Baudelaire." These two French sources of modernism achieve a kind of apotheosis by negation in Tranter's postmodern poetics.

Lera Auerbach, *Excess of Being*. Arch

Street Press, 2015, Lera Auerbach, the Russian-American composer, is well known for her music—symphonies, concertos, songs, string quartets, operas, and ballets. In Russia, she is also a widely read poet. And she is a painter. *Excess of Being* is a book of aphorisms written in English and illustrated by her own art works. Auerbach is a polymath who must never sleep. Many of these aphorisms may keep the reader awake at night as well.

Paul Pines, *Message from the Mem-*

oirist. Dos Madres, 2015. Paul Pines's new volume of poetry is also

illustrated—in this case by Mark Shaker. The poems and illustrations make up a lively dialogue throughout. Like Lera Auerbach, Pines is also something of a polymath, and his poems manifest a deep interest in fields ranging from cosmology to jazz, the movies, and baseball. He also draws on his experience as a psychotherapist. Like one of his heroes, the physicist Wolfgang Pauli, Pines' basic sense of well-being is derived from a memory that remembers itself.

John Wilkinson, *Schedule of Unrest: Selected Poems*. Salt, 2014. Former Notre Dame colleague and still *NDR* Advisory Editor, Wilkinson has given over the selection from his many books and pamphlets to Alex Pestell, who is thanked for “for grasping the nettles I shied from.” Any selection, by definition, leaves things out; and one reader or another might miss a favorite poem here and there. But the book is over 260 pages long and the work is difficult. It is the ideal volume for a new reader of Wilkinson to acquire. Tom McCarthy says that “Wilkinson's poems are kinetic, they are organic, they are chemical, political somatic. Through the sear of their disjointedness and speed, a miraculous coherence emerges, just as when in the heat-glare above a petrol-station forecourt, a hidden world—a real one—shimmers into view.” You must, I'm afraid, read the entire

book to understand how accurate a description that is.

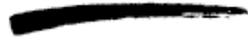
Michael Martone and Bryan Furuness, Editors, *Winesburg Indiana: A Fork River Anthology*, Indiana University Press, 2015. Though spookily reminiscent of the *Spoon River Anthology*, *Winesburg Indiana: A Fork River Anthology* may, or may not, speak with a forked tongue, or, at least, a tongue planted firmly in a cheek, but this compelling compendium also accomplishes the necessary task of surprising readers with an alternate Indiana, the literary one, that stands in polar opposition to the crowd of yammerers who fill the State legislature in Indianapolis. Here in this particular Hoosier RFRA—Righteous Fulminations Requiring Artistry—you will find thirty of Indiana's most articulate observers and writers, some well known, some not so much, all full of sass and humor as they take on a host of contemporary stereotypes, spinning them on their heads and leaving any reader dizzy with admiration. Includes sparkling contributions from *NDR*'s own Joyelle McSweeney and Valerie Sayers.

Michael Perkins, *The Pocket Perkins: Brief Writings*, Bushwhack Books, 2014. Another *NDR* contributor, Michael Perkins's new volume is sub-sub-titled: *Life as a Writer, Walker, Pagan, Poet, Philosopher, Flaneur, Provocateur, Libertarian, &*

Libertine. Malachy McCourt, who is a few of those things himself, says spiritedly, “The only reason to interrupt your reading of *The Pocket Perkins* to the last page would be sudden death. The man writes in spectacular colorful words hoisting the English language to places it’s never been. I did not mind dashing to the dictionary at intervals as I was learning new ways of telling the story from this master.” A small book, but with a large range.

Harry Mark Petrakis, *Song of My Life*, The University of South Carolina Press, 2014. Petrakis’s memoir, a portion of which we had the honor to publish in *NDR*, is a capstone work by a prolific and award-winning novelist and nonfiction writer, a thredony for a long life lived fully and deeply. As the short story writer Stuart Dybek tells us, “To be lost in a babble of voices is to be mute. Chicago writers—African American, Asian, Hispanic, Irish, Jewish, Polish—have set themselves to transforming a turbulent city’s port of entry babble into the mnemonic clarity of beauty in story and song. That is what Harry Mark Petrakis has done for the Greek community over a lifetime of empathetically powerful stories. That vision is the gift to readers that he continues to give us all in *Song of My Life*.” A remarkable and moving tale.

Mark Brazaitis, *Truth Poker*, Autumn House Press, 2015. Brazaitis, long-time contributor to *NDR* and winner of ND’s Sullivan Prize of 2012, offers us a new collection of stories, two of which *NDR* published. Obviously a writer we admire and we are not alone. Sharon Dilworth says of this volume, “Phantom girls appearing on dark, lonely highways, Guatemalan cops with hand painted playing cards brokered as bribes, a man who fixes people’s eyes without the benefit of a medical degree.... These innovative stories capture characters doing exactly the wrong thing at exactly the wrong moment. Exquisite!” So say us all.



CONTRIBUTORS

Elizabeth Acevedo holds a BA in performing arts from The George Washington University and received her MFA from the University of Maryland. She has been published or has work forthcoming in *The Acentos Review*, *Poet Lore*, *The Ostrich Review*, and *Callaloo*. She is a CantoMundo Fellow and a member of the 2013 Callaloo Creative Writing Workshop.

Elisa Albo's latest chapbook *Each Day More* is a collection of elegies. Her chapbook *Passage to America*, now available as an ebook, recounts her family immigrant story. She teaches at Broward College. **Robert Archambeau**'s

books include *Laureates and Heretics*, *Home and Variations*, *The Poet Resigns: Poetry in a Difficult Time*, among others. A new collection of his poems, *The Kafka Sutra*, is forthcoming from MadHat Press. He teaches at Lake Forest College. **Nayelly Barrios**'s work has appeared in *Beloit Poetry Journal*,

Puerto del Sol, and *DIAGRAM*. She has been featured as the LoWriter of the Week on Poet Juan Felipe Herrera's website and is a recent participant of the Squaw Valley Community of Writers. She is a founding editor of

Ostrich Review. **Mark Brazaitis** is the author of seven books, including *The Incurables: Stories*, winner of the 2012 Richard Sullivan Prize and the 2013 Devil's Kitchen Reading Award in Prose, and *Julia and Rodrigo*, winner of the 2012 Gival Press Novel Award. His latest book is *Truth Poker: Stories*, which won the 2014 Autumn House Press Fiction Competition. **Maris Caklais** (1940–2003) was a Latvian poet, writer, and journalist. **Marcelo Hernandez Castillo** is a Canto Mundo fellow, a Zell post-graduate fellow and the first undocumented student to graduate from the University of Michigan's MFA program. He's a Pushcart nominee and has received fellowships to attend the Squaw Valley Writer's Workshop, The Atlantic Center for the Arts and the Vermont Studio Center. His poems and essays can be found in *Indiana Review*, *Jubilat*, *New England Review*, *The Paris American*, and *Buzzfeed*, among others. Poet, writer, and artist **Adrian Castro**'s work combines Afro-Caribbean myths, history, and rhythms to explore Afro-Caribbean–American identity. He is the author of three collections of poetry: *Cantos to Blood & Honey* (1997), *Wise Fish: Tales in 6/8 Time* (2005), and *Handling Destiny* (2009). The recipient of a Cintas Fellowship and Eric Mathieu King award from the Academy of American Poets, Castro has taught at University of Miami, Miami Dade College, and Florida International University. **Inara Cedrins** is an artist, writer and translator who received her BA in writing from Columbia College in Chicago and her MA in arts administration at the School of the Art Institute in Chicago. Her anthology of contemporary Latvian poetry written

while Latvia was under Soviet occupation was published by the University of Iowa Press, and her new Baltic anthology, three books of poetry from Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, has been published by the University of New Orleans Press, with her prints as cover art. **Jarda Cervenka** has published four story collections, a novel, a book of poetry and collages, and a travel book for young readers. His several awards include the Richard Sullivan Prize. **Silvia Curbelo** is a Cuban-born, American poet and writer. She is the author of a full-length collection of poems, *The Secret History of Water*, and two chapbooks, *Ambush*, winner of the 2004 Main Street Rag chapbook contest, and *The Geography of Leaving*. She has received poetry fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Florida Division of Cultural Affairs, the Cintas Foundation and the Writer's Voice, and was awarded the Jessica Noble Maxwell Memorial Poetry Prize from American Poetry Review. Her poems have been published widely in literary magazines, and in such anthologies as *The Body Electric: America's Best Poetry from the American Poetry Review*, *Thirty Years of Anhinga Poets and Poems*, *Poets, Poetry*. She is managing editor for *Organica* magazine. Though born in Boston in 1900, **Edward Dahlberg** (1900-1977) spent a good deal of his youth in Kansas City, Missouri, where his mother was a "lady barber." His first novel, with an introduction by D.H. Lawrence, was *Bottom Dogs*; then came *From Flushing to Calvary*, followed by *Those Who Perish*, and, with a change of prose style, the book of criticism *Do These Bones Live*, essays collected in *Flea of Sodom*, and the autobiography *Because I was Flesh, Reasons of the Heart*. Dahlberg also published a collection of poems, *Cipango's Hinder Door*. Other volumes are *Epitaphs of Our Times: The Letters of Edward Dahlberg*, *The Carnal Myth*; a memoir, *The Confessions of Edward Dahlberg*, *The Sorrows of Priapus* and *The Olive of Minerva or The Comedy of a Cuckold*, a novel, and a compendium of the three early novels, published in 1976. He received a number of fellowships, including a Guggenheim and taught at a handful of universities. Permission to publish the letters he wrote to William O'Rourke was granted by Kevin O'Carroll, Edward Dahlberg's youngest son, and overseer of the estate. A trove of Dahlberg's papers are housed at the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin. **Tatiana Daniliyants** is a poet, film-maker, and artist. She is the author of three books of poetry in Russian: *Red Noise*, *White*, *Venetian*, and two bilingual books (in Russian-Polish and Russian-Italian). She has twice won the International Festival of Verse Libre (Russia), as well as the Nosside prize (Italy). In April 2014, she received the Catherine the Great medal for achievement in contemporary Russian literature (St. Petersburg Union of Writers). **Lauren Espinoza's** poetry has appeared in *Time You Let Me In*:

25 Poets Under 25, *New Border Voices: An Anthology*, *The Mas Tequila Review*, *The Acentos Review*, *As/Us*, *Souvenir*, and *Pilgrimage*. She has poems forthcoming in *Sinister Wisdom*. She is an inaugural member of the Letras Latinas Poets Initiative, the workshop assistant for *CantoMundo*, a teaching artist with *Badgerdog*, and a recent graduate of the MFA program in poetry at Arizona State University. **Jacobo Fijman** (1899-1970) was born into a Jewish family in Eastern Europe and immigrated to Argentina at the age of five in 1904. He wrote three books *Molino Rojo*, for which he is most known, *Hecho de Estampas*, and *Estrella de la Mañana*. He was interned for the majority of his adult life in a psychiatric ward until his death. He is widely recognized as one of the most important surrealist poets of Latin America. **Rebecca Foust** was the 2014 Dartmouth Poet in Residence and is the recipient of fellowships from the Frost Place and the MacDowell Colony. Her fifth book, *Paradise Drive*, won the 2015 Press 53 Award for Poetry. **J.D Garrick** taught undergraduate and graduate seminars in Eliot at the University of Notre Dame in the 1970s. **Amina Gautier** is the author of three short story collections: *At-Risk*, which won the Flanner O'Connor Award for Short Fiction; *Now We Will Be Happy*, which won the Prairie Schooner Book Prize; and *The Loss of All Lost Things*, which won the Elixir Press Award. **Roy G. Guzmán** is a Honduran-American poet whose work has appeared in *The Acentos Review*, *BorderSenses*, *Cartridge Lit*, *Compose*, *Drunken Boat*, *NonBinary Review*, *Red Savina Review*, and *The Best American Poetry Blog*. He has been nominated twice for Best of the Net and is a current MFA student in creative writing at the University of Minnesota. He dedicates this work to Los Mojados y Los Dreamers. Born in Lushnje, Albania in 1957, **Gëzim Hajdari** was persecuted by the communist regime and fled to Italy in 1992 where he has since resided. He is a prominent member of the "Scrittore Migranti" movement in Italy, a group of writers who intentionally eschew their first language, choosing instead to write in Italian. Hajdari has earned acclaim both in Italy and abroad for his poems. **Kevin Hart**'s most recent book of poems is *Wild Track: New and Selected Poems*. He is just completing a new book of poems to be called *Barefoot*. His most recent scholarly book is *Kingdoms of God*. He teaches religious studies at the University of Virginia. **Javier O. Huerta** is the author of *American Copia* and *Some Clarifications y otros poemas*. **Lidia Kosk** is the author of eleven books of poetry and short stories, including two bilingual volumes, *niedosyt/reshapings* and *Śłodka woda, słona woda/Sweet Water, Salt Water*. Her poems, published in the United States, Europe, and Japan, have been translated into several languages, and into choral compositions and multi-media video presentations. **Danuta E. Kosk-Kosicka** is a biochemist, poet,

translator, and co-editor of *Loch Raven Review*. She is the author of *Face Half-Illuminated* and *Oblige the Light*, winner of the fifth annual Harriss Poetry Prize, as well as the translator for two bilingual books by Lidia Kosk. As well as literary criticism, **Angela Leighton** has published three volumes of poetry, *A Cold Spell*, *Sea Level* and *The Messages*. She currently is finishing a mixed volume of poems, memoirs and translations called *Spillikins*. **Mia Leonin** is the author of two books of poetry, *Braid* and *Unraveling the Bed*, and the memoir, *Havana and Other Missing Fathers*. She has been awarded an Academy of American Poets Prize, two Florida Individual Artist Fellowships, and her poetry and creative nonfiction have been nominated for the Pushcart Prize. Leonin's poetry has been published in *New Letters*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Indiana Review*, *Witness*, *River Styx*, *Chelsea*, and others. She frequently writes about Spanish-language theater for the *Miami Herald*. She teaches creative writing at the University of Miami. **Rita Maria Martinez**'s work appears in the eighth edition of Stephen Minot's *Three Genres: The Writing of Fiction/Literary Nonfiction, Poetry and Drama* and in *Burnt Sugar*, *Caña Quemada: Contemporary Cuban Poetry in English and Spanish*. Martinez's chapbook, *Jane-in-the-Box*, takes a character from classic English literature, Jane Eyre, and revamps her with tattoos, fishnets, and modern feminism. Martinez has been a featured author at the Miami Book Fair International and at the Palabra Pura reading series at the Guild Literary Complex in Chicago. **Stephen Massimilla** is a poet, critic, professor, and painter. His co-authored book, *Cooking with the Muse*, is forthcoming. His latest collection, *The Plague Doctor in His Hull-Shaped Hat*, was selected in the Stephen F. Austin State University Press Prize contest. He received the Bordighera Poetry Prize for Forty Floors from Yesterday and the Grolier Prize for Later on Aiaia. Massimilla has recent poems in *AGNI*, *Barrow Street*, *Colorado Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *The Literary Review*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Tampa Review*, and *Verse Daily*; and his work has appeared hundreds of other publications. He holds an MFA in writing and a PhD in literature from Columbia University and teaches literary modernism, among other subjects, at Columbia University and the New School. **David Matlin** is a novelist, poet and essayist. His novel-in-progress is entitled *The Still Hunt*. He lives in San Diego. **John Matthias**'s collected poems are now available from Shearsman Books, as is his first novel *Different Kinds of Music*. **Orlando Ricardo Menes** formerly directed the Creative Writing Program at the University of Notre Dame where he has taught since 2000. *Heresies*, his latest poetry collection is forthcoming this year. His third poetry collection, *Fetish*, won the 2012 Prairie Schooner Book Prize in Poetry. He is also the author of *Furia* and

Rumba atop the Stones. His poems have appeared in several prominent anthologies, as well as literary magazines like *Ploughshares*, *Harvard Review*, *The Antioch Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Hudson Review*, *Shenandoah*, *Callaloo*, *Indiana Review*, *River Styx*, *Epoch*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, *New Letters*, *Crab Orchard Review*, and *Green Mountains Review*. In addition, Menes is editor of *Renaming Ecstasy: Latino Writings on the Sacred* and *The Open Light: Poets from Notre Dame, 1991-2008*. He is poetry editor for *NDR*.

Peter Michelson is the author of several books, including *Pacific Plainsong I-XIII* (poetry) and *Speaking the Unspeakable* (prose). "How I Dodged the Draft..." is part of his work in progress, *An Autobiography of Postmodernism*.

Caridad Moro is the award-winning author of *Visionware*. She is the recipient of a Florida Individual Artist Fellowship in poetry, and has been twice nominated for a Pushcart prize. Her current work is available or forthcoming in journals and anthologies such as *As/Us: Women of the World Journal*, *Lunch Ticket*, *Diverse Voices Quarterly*, *The Meadowland Review*, *The Stonecoast Review*, *The Hartskill Review*, *Storyscape Journal*, *Tigertail*, *A South Florida Poetry Annual*, *This Assignment Is So Gay: LGBTIQ Poets on the Art of Teaching* and others. She is professor of English at Miami Dade College.

Kevin O'Connor is an editor of *One on a Side: An Evening with Seamus Heaney and Robert Frost*. His poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Common*, *Fulcrum*, *The Recorder*, and *NDR*. He teaches at Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts.

William O'Rourke is the author of *The Harrisburg 7 and the New Catholic Left*, *Signs of the Literary Times: Essays, Reviews, Profiles*, and *On Having a Heart Attack: A Medical Memoir*, *Confessions of a Guilty Freelancer*, among others, as well as the novels *The Meekness of Isaac*, *Idle Hands*, *Criminal Tendencies*, and *Notts*. He is the editor of *On the Job: Fiction About Work by Contemporary American Writers* and co-editor of *Notre Dame Review: The First Ten Years*. With this issue (#40) he steps

down as the editor of the *Notre Dame Review*. And he would like to thank Kevin O'Carroll for permission to publish the letters Edward Dahlberg wrote to him. **James D. Redwood's** collection, *Love Beneath the Napalm*, was the first winner of the Notre Dame Review Book Prize. Other work has appeared in *The Chariton Review*. **Alexandra Lytton Regalado's** poetry has also appeared in *MiPOesias*, *Narrative*, *OCHO*, *Gulf Stream*, *Tigertail: A South Florida Poetry Annual* and others. She holds an MFA in poetry from Florida International University and an MFA in fiction from Pacific University. Co-founder of Kalina publishing, Alexandra is author, editor, and/or translator of several Central American-themed books, most recently the bilingual Salvadoran poetry anthology *Theatre Under My Skin*. **Matthew Roberson** is the author of three novels, *1998.6*, *Impotent*, and *List*.

His short fiction has appeared in *Fourteen Hills*, *Fiction International*, *Clackamas Literary Review*, *Western Humanities Review*, *McSweeney's Internet Tendency*, and others. He teaches at Central Michigan University. **León Salvatierra** is the author of *Al Norte*. He is currently a visiting lecturer of Spanish Language & Literature at UC Berkeley. **Janey Skeer** has been working in clay for 30 years. She received her MFA in ceramics from the University of Denver and exhibits locally, regionally, and nationally. Her work has been collected by many institutions, including the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. Her websites are: www.janeyskeer.com and www.JSkeer.com. **D.E. Steward** writes serial month-to-month months in the manner of "Maigo" and the seven other months published in earlier issues (*NDR* 22, 24, 26, 30, 32, 34, 38). The project, *Chroma*, is in its twenty-ninth year with 341 months written with well over two-thirds published in literary magazines. **Sarah Stickney** received her MFA from the University of New Hampshire. She received a Fulbright grant to study immigrant writing in Italy where she worked with the Albanian/Italian poet Gëzim Hajdari. Her co-translations of Elisa Biagini's selected poems, *The Guest in the Wood*, was chosen by the University of Rochester for its Best Translated Book Award for poetry in 2014. Her poems and translations have appeared both in the United States and abroad in publications such as *La Questione Romantica*, *Rhino*, *The Portland Review*, *Drunken Boat*, *Cold Mountain Review*, and others. She teaches at St. John's College. **Lars-Håkan Svensson** is a poet, translator and critic. **Peter Twal** is an Arab American, an electrical engineer, and an editor at *PARAGRAPHI-TI*. Recently graduated with an MFA from the University of Notre Dame, he is the recipient of the Samuel and Mary Anne Hazo Poetry Award, and his poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Kenyon Review Online*, *The Journal*, *DIAGRAM*, *Bat City Review*, *New Delta Review*, *Forklift*, *Ohio*, *New Orleans Review*, and elsewhere. **Igor Webb** is director of creative writing at Adelphi University. His story "Reza Says" was chosen as a "Distinguished Story" in *Best American Short Stories 2012*. **Henry Weinfield's** most recent books are *A Wandering Aramaean: Passover Poems and Translations* and *The Blank-Verse Tradition from Milton to Stevens: Free-thinking and the Crisis of Modernity*. Recent poems and translations from Ronsard have appeared in *The Chicago Review*, *The Hudson Review*, and *Literary Imagination*. He is professor of Liberal Studies and English at the University of Notre Dame. **Katherine E. Young** is the author of *Day of the Border Guards* and translator of *Two Poems* by Russian poet Inna Kabysh. Her translation of Kabysh won a third place in the 2011 Joseph Brodsky-Stephen Spender competition. Her translations of Xenia Emelyanova were

longlisted for the 2014 PEN/International New Voices Award, and her translations of Vladimir Kornilov appear in *The Penguin Book of Russian Poetry*. She co-directs the DC Area Literary Translators network (DC-ALT). **Javier Zamora** was born in El Salvador; he migrated to the U.S. when he was nine. He holds fellowships from CantoMundo, Colgate University, and the National Endowment for the Arts. His poems appear or are forthcoming in *Kenyon Review*, *Narrative*, *Ploughshares*, *Poetry*, and elsewhere.

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