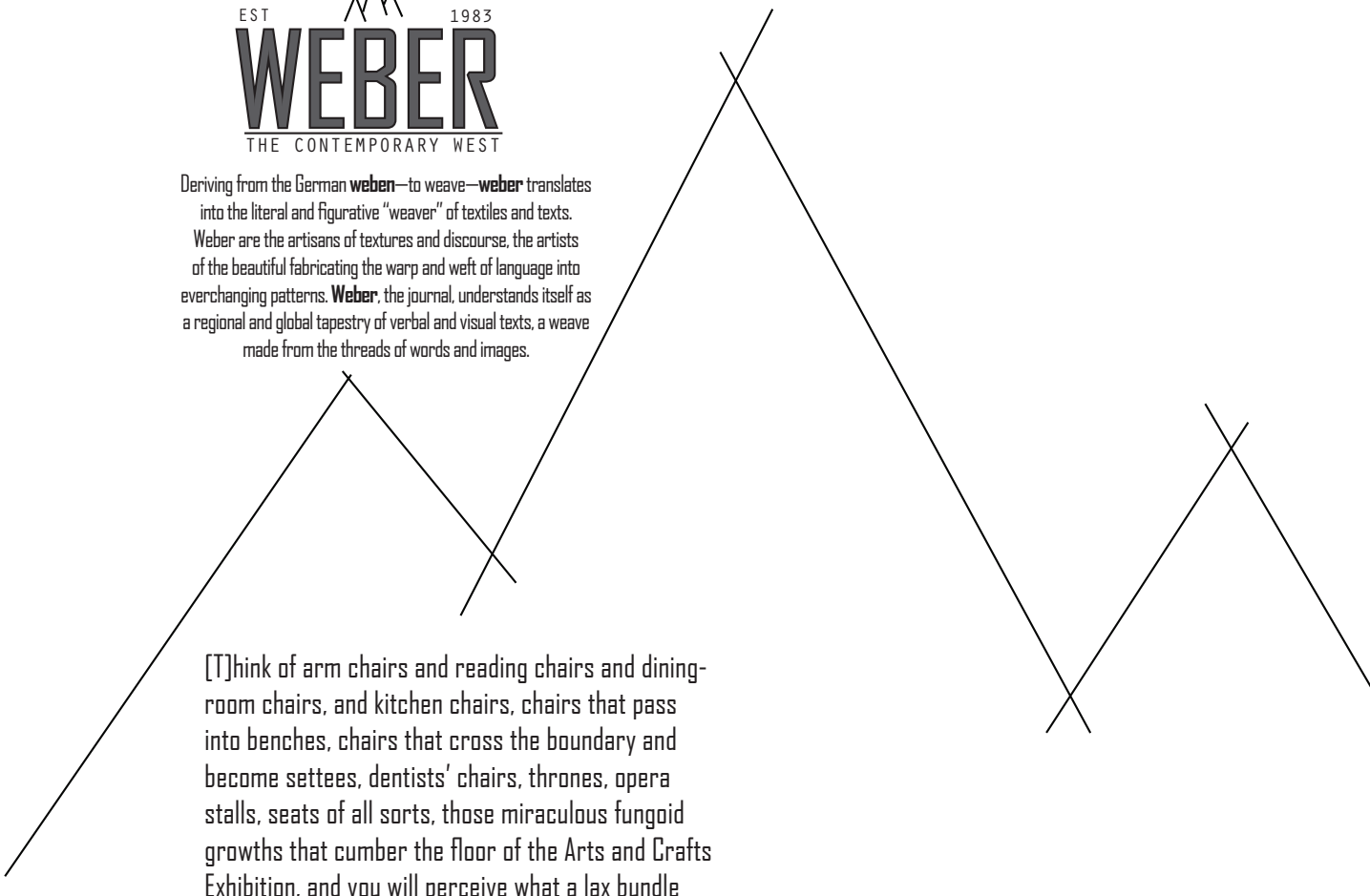

EST 1983
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THE CONTEMPORARY WEST

EST 1983

WEBER

THE CONTEMPORARY WEST

Deriving from the German **weben**—to weave—**weber** translates into the literal and figurative "weaver" of textiles and texts. Weber are the artisans of textures and discourse, the artists of the beautiful fabricating the warp and weft of language into everchanging patterns. **Weber**, the journal, understands itself as a regional and global tapestry of verbal and visual texts, a weave made from the threads of words and images.



[T]hink of arm chairs and reading chairs and dining-room chairs, and kitchen chairs, chairs that pass into benches, chairs that cross the boundary and become settees, dentists' chairs, thrones, opera stalls, seats of all sorts, those miraculous fungoid growths that cumber the floor of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition, and you will perceive what a lax bundle in fact is this simple straightforward term. In co-operation with an intelligent joiner, I would undertake to defeat any definition of chair or chairishness that you gave me.

— H. G. Wells, **A Modern Utopia** (1904)

INSPIRATION

from the editor's desk

Design is a fundamental human activity, relevant and useful to everyone. Anything humans create—be it product, communication or system—is a result of the process of making inspiration real. I believe in doing what works as circumstances change: quirky or unusual solutions are often good ones. Nature bends and so should we as appropriate. Nature is always right outside our door as a reference and touch point. We should use it far more than we do.

Nature's design is fully economical. Human design follows this model when it minimizes information and maximizes understanding.

— Maggie Macnab, **Design by Nature** (2011)



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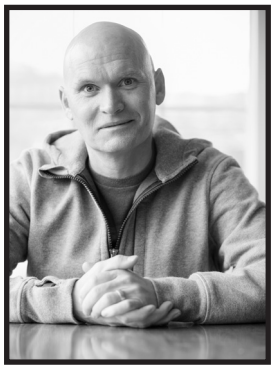
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Ryan Ridge

Reimagining It—

A Conversation with Anthony Doerr



Todd Meier

PRELUDE

Anthony Doerr has accomplished in his career what every writer dreams of accomplishing. This isn't simply about the prestigious awards he's received – of which there are too many to list here – or the praise for his work, which is nearly, truly universal. These are wonderful commendations that writers might quietly wish for, but what I'm speaking to is all that Doerr achieves within his diverse body of work. It is a rare writer who can shift among forms so deftly; he renders memoir, short fiction, and the novel with equal dynamism, intelligence, and empathy. So, too, can he illuminate such varied and compelling worlds: whether it's an essay about baking macaroons with his sons or a novel about two children's experiences during World War II – as is the case in the bestselling, internationally acclaimed All the Light We Cannot See *– Anthony Doerr's prose shines a light on the complexities of why we think and feel the way we do.*

However, what I find most remarkable in Doerr's work is his awareness of audience and the ability to connect with the unknown person who will inevitably spend time with his words, within his worlds. While his writing addresses the most complex, human topics, the audience feels invited to participate in that writing and to experience the narratives themselves. Not all talented writers are generous writers – and this generosity is a talent in itself. In that sense, Doerr accomplishes not only what every writer might hope to achieve, but, more importantly, what every reader hopes they encounter when they sit down with another human being's words.

Anthony Doerr is the author of the memoir Four Seasons in Rome, *the story collections* The Shell Collector *and* Memory Wall, *and the novels* About Grace *and* All the Light We Cannot See, *which was awarded the 2015 Pulitzer Prize for fiction and the 2015 Andrew Carnegie Medal for Excellence in Fiction. Doerr's short stories and essays have won four O. Henry Prizes and been anthologized in a number of collections, including* The Best American Short Stories, New American Stories, The Best American Essays, *and* The Scribner Anthology. *He has been the recipient of a number of awards, among them: the Barnes & Noble Discover Prize, the Rome Prize, the New York Public Library's Young Lions Award, a Guggenheim Fellowship, an NEA Fellowship, four Pushcart Prizes, the 2010 Story Prize, and* The Sunday Times *EFG Short Story Award. His work has been translated into over forty languages.*

I had the opportunity to speak with Doerr via phone on November 2, 2016. What follows is our conversation about empathy, the West, and what he's working on now.

CONVERSATION

I am wondering if you could speak to initial influences. Are there any writers who had an impact on your work early on, both as a kid but also when you started writing?

Sure. I don't know whether or not to count these standard items: you know, I loved C.S. Lewis and *The Chronicles of Narnia* when I was nine or ten. My mom read those books to my brothers and me. That guy built these incredibly complicated universes and he did it with just little black marks on a white page and that was intoxicating. I remember asking my mom, "How do they do this?" And she said, "Oh, it's just one guy, and he's dead." And it was this really interesting idea that your voice and these amazing things could be built and they could live on after you were dead. I don't know that I could have articulated that logic then, but that was the kind of magic that was affecting me early. And I was

the youngest, so I didn't have a ton of supervision—in a good way. We went to the library to get our books and I could take out whatever I wanted. The librarian and my mom didn't really get on me about what I read. I remember checking out ***The Sheltering Sky*** by Paul Bowles and I was probably only eleven or twelve.

Wow.

I know. It was like ***What's hashish, Mom?*** And that was probably an early influence. I still went for the ***Peanuts*** comics and I loved ***Calvin and Hobbes***. The writer for ***Calvin and Hobbes***, Bill Watterson, grew up in the town I grew up in. Actually, I had the great literary upbringing that you only get in the middle class. I'd bring home ten books, and mom wasn't censoring me. It was kind of amazing when you think of what's happening in Turkey or Syria or Russia right now, when you think about how many young people aren't always able to access anything that could really change their lives.

Then I did a Stephen King stint. I got into Jack Kerouac and ***On the Road***, stuff like that. But you move to imitation, even then. I was writing in notebooks, but I was really shy about it. It's not like I'd ever met a writer. I figured writers were dead or lived in Paris or something. I wasn't really willing to share lots of stuff, even with my mom. I was just writing stories. And I loved to be outside, so when I started to find writers who paid attention to that, that was big for me. Like Rachel Carson, Annie Dillard, you know, writers who could take their interest in the natural world and translate that into language—that was really cool. And then as I got older, I started reading authors like Rick Bass or Andrea Barrett. And I thought, ***Wow, well, I like the natural world and stories and it's okay to meld those two things. It's okay to like science and try to tell stories about that.*** That's something that Andrea Barrett does so well. Her work kind of gave me permission to try that.

Now, you mentioned Barrett, a writer who does a lot of research. You've spoken about the role of research in your work, and I'd like to ask you more about that if I could.

I had the great literary upbringing that you only get in the middle class. I'd bring home ten books, and mom wasn't censoring me. It was kind of amazing when you think of what's happening in Turkey or Syria or Russia right now, when you think about how many young people aren't able to access anything that could really change their lives.

Sure! And I'd love to know about your process. Do you use the library or the internet in your work? Or is it pure imagination that you experience?

It goes back and forth. It depends on the nature of the project. I did a book—kind of a hybrid novel, is what I called it. It was titled American Homes *and it was very research-heavy. It's about 110 pages of prose poems about houses in the vein of, I'd say, [Richard] Brautigan crossed with [Italo] Calvino. Something like that. Some wild stuff.*

Oh, that's cool.

And then the second part of the book morphs into lyric essays, and it falls apart into fragments and jokes. I did a lot of research with that book, but when I'm doing narrative fiction, I try not to research while I'm writing. Now, do you do your research for a book before, during, or after? When you were working on All the Light We Cannot See, *how much research went into the front end of that?*

Really, all of the above. Or maybe the exact opposite: I get stuck, maybe after three sentences, trying to hallucinate some apartment in 1938 and

I don't know exactly what objects are on, say, the kitchen counter. And my work is always focused on bringing verisimilitude, trying to use images to transport the readers. Kind of like C.S. Lewis: the idea that you use details to transport somebody out of their life and into another life. That idea appeals to me still, as an adult. In early drafts, I'm sitting there trying to imagine this scene and it's just gray. So, I end up relying on a bunch of crap from my own life to fill in those details. I think, obviously there must have been cupboards, because we have cupboards. Obviously they'll have four-dozen spoons, but then that brings up a whole other set of questions: When did people start using forks? What if people are eating with their hands in Turkey in the 1450s? So I think, *Crap, I don't know what they're eating. I don't know what their underwear is like.* And that's where research comes in. I start falling into these whirlpools of researching, and sometimes that's just procrastination, but you just have to be kind of willing to give yourself up to the serendipity of finding these things, because it's never straight. It's never these cool little subway tunnels right to the useful information you need. No, it branches off into seven different areas, and sometimes you might find something you'll keep, sometimes you find something you won't need for three weeks. And sometimes you find something and think, *Oh that's actually going to change stuff I've already written. I was inaccurate there. I've got to reimagine it.*

That's interesting. Is it ever a drastic change?

Oh, yeah. Like, today I was researching censors before the French Revolution and I had this idea that censors were going around and crossing things out. That, of course, is wildly inaccurate. Censors actually worked with the author, on behalf of the crown, to make their writing fit for print, and sometimes that meant removing objectionable content. But the author and the censor actually worked together on it. For the most part, censors performed a sort of benevolent service. And I thought, oh dear, that doesn't work at all with what I've got. So, sometimes you learn a lot more about history when you're halfway through a project and you've already written a lot of stuff. And sometimes you have to ditch lots of paragraphs you've already written.

Now with regard to All the Light We Cannot See*, you've written before about your sense of responsibility to make Werner both an empathic character and also a person who could do wrong. You have the complication, the nuance in there, and he's just really a humane character. Do you feel that responsibility for all your characters?*

Oh, yeah. I think so. I mean, I don't know if I did it, but yes, I think that's what literature can do. I'm not going to say my books do that, but in literature you can take something that's perceived and then try to complicate it—whatever

I start falling into these whirlpools of researching, and sometimes that's just procrastination, but you just have to be kind of willing to give yourself up to the serendipity of finding these things, because it's never straight. It's never these cool little subway tunnels right to the useful information you need. No, it branches off into seven different areas, and sometimes you might find something you'll keep, sometimes you find something you won't need in three weeks. And sometimes you find something and think, Oh that's actually going to change stuff I've already written. I was inaccurate there. I've got to reimagine it.

that is. If you think of, say, George Washington or Alexander Hamilton, and then this narrative is presented and you realize that the version you think you know is actually a lot more complicated. Right now, really both political parties are using very simplistic versions of their enemies to try to evoke emotion and to use fear. And the truth is that young people are being radicalized for super complicated reasons that we might be complicit in. And I love taking those big universal things and then looking at them through the lens of a single individual and how much better those big ideas are understood on a smaller scale. I think that's the tightrope that journalism tries to walk, where they're trying to cover larger themes in human and moral culture. But I think the best journalists—and certainly the best fiction writers—are trying to do that through the individual. They tunnel down to get the tiny little loops of humanity and that's how you get those larger things. That's a trap that I see students who are just starting to write falling into all the time. They want to write about love or heartache or what it feels like to be estranged or disaffected, but they're writing about love with a capital "L" instead of talking about one girl and what it's like for her to fall in love in 2016.

It can be macro and they need to zoom in.

I think so.

Speaking of students and teachers, I usually teach a couple of your stories: "The Caretaker" and "The Deep." I usually do those along with Barry Hannah's "Testimony of Pilot," narratives that span large swaths of time. These stories seem novelistic. How and when does it become clear to you whether you're working on a novel or a story?

Great question. In my younger years, that was a more fun question because capitalism wasn't part of it. And I was just trying to make stuff in the hours between teaching and going to gigs trying to make money. I was just focused on making something, and I wouldn't really know what it was or my chance of publication. But now I'm under pressure from these capitalist things. My publisher, my agent, they want to know what's coming next. And that's fair, because they have jobs and work for corporations and manage people of their own. So, often if I'm writing a story anymore, it's because I agreed to do something for someone. I already know that I need to have, for example, a little short story done by next September. I need five thousand words. But it doesn't always work that way. Sometimes it ends up being really long. I just wrote a story set in Maine. The painter Linden Frederick asked a bunch of writers to work together on this. And they asked originally for two thousand, five hundred words, and it took me all summer. I got eight thousand or nine thousand words and ended up cutting and cutting and cutting. So sometimes it's purely project-based.

As a person who was born in a different geography myself, but spent a lot of years out West, I'm curious about your own experience of being a transplant to the West. You're from Ohio, now living in Boise. How does the West as a place or a landscape or even as an identity make its way into your work?

Good question. Not in an obvious way. There's no cowboy storyteller or settlers battling over the past or anything like that in my work. I'm here because I fell in love with an Idaho girl in college, and she was making more money than me and I'm already so inclined to be outside and enjoy the outdoors that I was happy to come out here. And now, as I'm sure you can relate, you build relationships and experiences and friendships. And so it's more about just being home. Now that my work is finding a lot of readers, I get a lot of questions, especially from my readers in Europe: Why do you live in such a conservative place? Those are hard questions for me to answer, but I usually just say it might be a very conservative place, but my friends here are all very good people who love their families and love to do things outside. I'm not necessarily living on a street

with a half-dozen literary savants, where we're standing at the mailboxes chatting about Anne Carson's poetry every day. But I'm usually at work until four or five and then I like to go home and rake leaves and wrestle with the kids, be domestic. You know, I live in a really pretty place.

Do you have an ideal reader? For instance, Kurt Vonnegut always thought of his sister. Do you have anybody like that?

That's interesting. Well, what about you? You answer first.

Yeah, I've got a buddy of mine, Gene Kwak. He's usually a pretty good barometer. I always think at the end of it, Would Gene like this? *And it usually works, but then when he doesn't like it, it's kind of crushing.*

And does it work? Is he honest? Does he read things before they're published and you can still make changes?

I usually don't let him read something until it's out there, but sometimes I let him read work when I can still make changes. My wife's a writer, too, and I always have her read. That makes things easy. We're each other's first editors, definitely. So that's kind of nice, having her right there across the room.

My wife is my first editor, too. And she's really good on story things, you know: ***that's not plausible, this character wouldn't say that, I don't understand***. That's a big one for me. I don't want to unintentionally confuse my reader, so she helps a lot with that. But I don't know that I necessarily have a specific person. When I'm teaching, I often talk about "the woman on the bus or the woman in the cafe who is reading your work." You can't be looking over her shoulder and explaining it to her as she reads it. That kind of goes back to the dead author thing. Everything that text is has to exist solely in the text. I think, ***Will this make sense to a woman who will be born today and then read this piece when she's thirty?***

I think about generosity a lot. The world right now has enough content that you could watch television programs or download novels for five lifetimes. And I try to remember and be so grateful any time a reader is giving you hours of her life to read your work. It's incredibly generous. So I try to hold her attention. If she is willing, for whatever reason, to open to a page that you've written, I try to make it carefully enough that she'll stay. That doesn't mean I need to pander or that I need to make it suspenseful in some traditional understanding of suspense, but I at least want to reward her attention. Make it feel like those five minutes or five hours are meaningful.

Now, post-Pulitzer, do you feel any added pressure or is there a sense of freedom? Or: are you just totally unaffected by press and publicity?

I think about generosity a lot. The world right now has enough content that you could watch programs for five lifetimes. And I try to remember and be so grateful any time a reader is giving you hours of her life to read your work. It's incredibly generous. So I try to hold her attention. If she is willing, for whatever reason, to open to a page that you've written, I try to make it carefully enough that she'll stay. That doesn't mean I need to pander or that I need to make it suspenseful in some traditional understanding of suspense, but I at least want to reward her attention. Make it feel like those five minutes or five hours are meaningful.

I wish. I'm skeptical of any claims that any living person is unaffected by those things. Maybe every hour I could give you a different answer. If there aren't engagements, it's like, this is awesome. I'll write a 900-page novel set in the 1700s and somebody will probably publish it. But the commercial success of the last book was a little alarming. I hadn't really expected it or experienced it before and I worry that a lot of those folks who bought ***All the Light We Cannot See*** will be disappointed if they don't like my next book. It doesn't mean I'm not going to take a major risk and write a 1,000 page book, or write something incredibly diffuse, but I feel a little guilty about it sometimes. Thankfully, when you're focused on writing, those worries tend to fade away: you just know you can only make the text as intrinsically sound as you can make it. Then, maybe later while you're walking the dog, you think, ***What is this thing I'm making? Is there even a market for it?*** I mean, if you're writing a book of prose poems, you totally understand. It's like, you can't think too much about whether or not this'll be face-out on the shelf at Barnes and Noble. You know, that is a destructive way of thinking about your work.

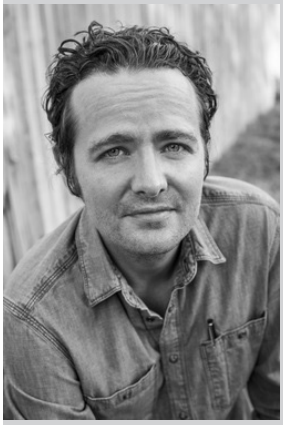
Certainly. Now, can you share anything about what you're working on now?

I try not to, just because my agent tends to get mad at me if I do. I'll just say that it's about books and about the history of books. I don't know. It's a mess right now.

Is this a novel or nonfiction?

A novel, I think. It's fiction and it's long.

Thank you, Tony.



Ryan Ridge holds a BA in English from the University of Louisville and an MFA in Fiction from the University of California, Irvine, where he was the recipient of the MacDonald Harris prize for fiction. He is the author of four books, including *American Homes* (University of Michigan Press, 2014), which was the Michigan Library Publishing Club's inaugural book club pick. His fiction and essays have appeared in *Santa Monica Review, Mississippi Review, Potomac Review, Los Angeles Review, Lumina, NERVE, DIAGRAM, Passages North,* and elsewhere. Ridge received the 2016 Italo Calvino Prize in Fabulist Fiction judged by Jonathan Lethem. An assistant professor at Weber State University, he edits the literary magazine *Juked* and lives in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Isabel Asensio

"The Human Fallout from Big Political Upheavals"—

A Conversation with Cristina García



PRELUDE

Cristina García is a prominent and prolific Cuban-American journalist and writer. She was two years old when her family immigrated to the United States and settled in New York, where she grew up speaking Spanish at home. She holds a BA in Political Science from Barnard College, and an MA in International Relations from the Johns Hopkins University Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies.

García launched her career in journalism in 1983 when she was hired by Time *as a researcher and reporter. She became the magazine's national correspondent in New York, San Francisco, Miami, and Los Angeles, and was appointed Miami Bureau Chief in 1987, covering Florida and the Caribbean. Even though fully dedicated to her literary career, these days García contributes articles to a number of magazines, including* The Washington Post Magazine, Latina Magazine, Islands Magazine, *and* Cigar Aficionado.

García started writing fiction full time in the early '90s. She published her first novel, Dreaming in Cuban, *in 1992. Set against the backdrop of the Cuban Revolution, the novel tells the story of three generations of women in the del Pino family and how they cope with exile and Cuba's political situation. The book received wide critical acclaim and was a finalist for the National Book Award. Since then, García has published the novels* The Agüero Sisters *(1997), for which she received the Janet Heidinger Kafka Prize;* Monkey Hunting *(2003);* A Handbook to Luck *(2007); and* The Lady Matador's Hotel *(2010). Her most recent – and timely – novel,* King of Cuba *(2013), is a dialogic narrative that sarcastically portrays an older Fidel Castro and an octogenarian exile who struggle to keep their futile obsessions alive.*

Here in Berlin *is the title of her seventh novel, forthcoming in fall 2017. García has also written books for young readers, theater, poetry, and non-fiction, and has edited two anthologies,* Cubanísimo!: The Vintage Book of Contemporary Cuban Literature *(2003) and* Bordering Fires: The Vintage Book of Contemporary Mexican and Chicano/a Literature *(2006).*

Fascinated by "the human fallout from big political upheavals," García addresses issues of identity construction, diaspora and migration, and nostalgia in her work. Regarded as a significant Cuban-American voice in American literature, she has been the recipient of prestigious awards, such as the Whiting Writers' Award in 1996, the Northern California Book Award, and the Frontizera Award, both in 2008.

Since 1993, García has taught undergraduate and graduate courses as a visiting professor and artist at numerous universities and colleges, including Mills College, University of Nevada-Las Vegas, University of Texas-Austin, University of Miami, Texas State University-San Marcos, St. Mary's College of California, and San Jose State University. In addition to developing year-round programming of literary conferences, readings, and workshops in the Bay Area, she is the founder and artistic director of Las Dos Brujas Writers' Workshop.

What things in life inspire you to write?

What inspires me to write? I think what I'm always interested in, in one form or another, is how people cope with dislocation and upheaval. Sometimes it's political, a level of identity. Anything where people are under stress, that's where a story is born. So I love hearing total strangers' stories. That happens to me all the time. I feel like over the years, first as a journalist and then even as a novelist, I have been that person to whom stories are told.

Are you inspired by stories of love also? To me, displacement and upheaval seem to be very stressful feelings. What about positive experiences?

Well, I think love can be kind of stressful, too. There's been research that shows that the early stages of falling in love are akin to states of insanity or manic episodes. So I think even good changes are stressful, like a new child. I'm just very curious. I would say what I specialize in is the human fallout from big political upheavals. That interests me constantly. And all the migrations and reinventions that happen with those kinds of upheavals.

In King of Cuba*, the two main characters, Goyo and El Comandante, are individuals who are sick, decayed. They're darkly hilarious in the sense that we laugh with them to avoid crying. They're pathetic characters because they hang on to their obsessions, futile as those obsessions may be. My question is: Is this how you see the current state of Cuba? Decaying? Sick? Obsessed? And where do you see the U.S.-Cuba relationships going now that the two countries may restore diplomatic relations?*

I think I said this elsewhere, but I do think that this big division of those who remained in Cuba and those who left is one that each side clings to desperately. And yet, I think there's a very false dichotomy between the two. I think they are really the same people. They're just disagreeing on something very fundamental, but their personalities, the way they deal with it, the intransigence with which they have dealt with these endless issues, is so similar, which is why there's been a stalemate for fifty-something years. So in *King of Cuba*, I was trying to show that, even though the one guy was a shopkeeper and the other guy ran the country, there wasn't much difference between the two. That they clung, to use your words, in a futile manner to points of view and stances and positions that have outlived their usefulness. And so I think, as a result, they have ended up in a way in the scrapheaps of history. They're still trying to construct some meaning and legacy out of the wreckage, and I don't see that much difference between the two.

So then, would you say they impersonate a bigger person, with Goyo representing those who had left Cuba?

Well, I want to make him very individual, but I think he is emblematic to some degree of his particular part of the exile, just that very first generation, the oldest ones, the ones who, to put it bluntly, are dying out now. That first generation who had education and status and opportunity that many Cubans did not have. It's a very particular kind of group that he represents. He doesn't represent all exiles, I don't think. There are many generations of Cuban immigrants and lots of socioeconomic differences among them. But that group, that group that he's a part of, or would love to be a part of, purports to speak for everyone.

Where do you see the U.S.-Cuba relations going, if they are going somewhere at all?

Well, that's the curious thing. I think there's a lot happening at the business level. I haven't been to Cuba in five years, so I'm not really up to date. But I have a friend who travels there constantly, and I have a friend who just spent a year there, and what I have heard is that not much has changed for the average Cuban. In fact, maybe it's gotten a little worse. Because, say, people who were raising produce in the countryside—that produce was funneled in particular ways so that people had access to whatever it was, whether it's a tomato or whatever. That's going to the hotels now. It's going to the burgeoning tourism industry, while your average Cuban is having to pay five times the amount for that same tomato. He or she is not seeing any benefit in this, so this whole trickle-down thing is not working in Cuba, and I still think it's a relatively small number of Cubans who are benefitting from this change—the government, principally.

For the average Cuban, it's not really changing. A lot has to happen.

A lot has to happen. I think the people benefiting are some people in tourism, the ownership. It's still the oligarchy, the military class, the children of the military class. It's not your average Cuban who's benefiting.

So this diplomacy is superficial.

It seems to be, at this point. Tourism gains, big business, but for the average Cuban? ***Nada. Menos de nada.***

Your most recent work is the play The Brownstone Quintet. *Is this the same brownstone that we read about in* King of Cuba*? The one that Goyo owns?*

No, this is a different brownstone. The brownstone in ***The King of Cuba*** is in Manhattan near the United Nations. But this brownstone is in Brooklyn and it's where this particular family called the Cuervo lived in the '70s. They haven't inhabited this home for decades, but in the play they're back there mysteriously. I originally had it like they would all be dressing in white so it would give them somewhat of a ghostly appearance, but the stage reading was not like that. Everyone wore what they wanted. But essentially it was these five voices, hence the quintet, coming back to revisit an incident that had divided them long ago, something that had happened in the 70s to the youngest of the three children. So that's what that is about. It's a dark comedy. It starts out very funny.

How was writing theater as opposed to narrative?

Oh my god. I think it's the most fun I've ever had writing. With novels, which I love, too—and I've been doing them for over twenty-five years—you're in solitude. I feel almost like I'm a cave dweller for years at a time. Like a troglodyte, just working on my thing and kind of spinning words. It's a very solitary, deeply immersive experience and then I drag myself out every few years when a book comes out; I visit universities and come to Ogden, Utah. But writing theater happened very fast. I was part of this workshop. I thought, let me try something new. And so it came together in five weeks and the stage reading was week six or seven, and the immediacy of the feedback and having people enact your words was electrifying for me. And the challenge of distilling it



Michael Wutz

down into poetic utterances. Not that utterances were poetic, but the distillation, for me, getting it down to very essential language, for me, felt like writing poetry. For all of those reasons I found it very engrossing, and I want to do more of it.

That's fascinating. Speaking of poetry, in an interview for The Atlantic *you once said that poets are your heroes. Why so? What about novelists? Are they also heroes to you?*

Oh, yeah. Writers in general, but I think that poets are my biggest heroes. For me, they are my guides to new terrain. They are my guides, whether it's cultural, emotional, or geographic. I go to the poets first, because I feel that they distill and invoke the preoccupations of their culture more economically and beautifully than anyone else.

That's a very poetic way of saying it. So what writers have inspired you, or still inspire you?

I read very widely from lots of different traditions, but I always say Chekov because it's true. I don't know how many times I've read his short stories, his novels, his plays. If there was one author I couldn't do without, it would be Chekov. But I have many favorite writers, poets, memoirists.

You have taught at several higher-education institutions as a visiting professor or a scholar. What are the commonalities or differences between a writer of literature and a professor of literature? As you teach literature, how is that different, or what does it have in common with the writing of literature?

Well, when I teach, I mostly teach workshop-type classes, creative writing workshops, sometimes for mixed genre classes. So I'll have poets and fiction writers, memoirists, etc. Sometimes I write creative nonfiction. But essentially, I do not approach the teaching of literature as an academic. I generally don't use secondary sources or criticism.

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Some people would disagree with that approach.

Oh, of course. Everyone is up in arms. I'll tell you one story. I was teaching at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and they said, "Teach a literature course, whatever you want." So I did one undergrad on children's literature, and it was very fun. And then I taught a grad class, and I had all PhD candidates in that class. It was a class I designed about politics in literature, and they had to—however they wanted, but without using criticism—respond to the work. For the first couple weeks, everybody was lost. They were missing a kind of necessary part of their engagement with literature, but I was asking them to engage with the work directly, without any other mitigating voices, and to come up with a response, whatever that meant for them, including creative responses. Initially I got kind of academic papers, but eventually I got everything from radio shows to performance pieces. This one woman—not that I'm encouraging this—but she dropped out of the PhD program and is now a working artist exhibiting her work all across the U.S. and abroad. She ended up doing these interesting kinds of boxes in response to everything. And that was a mixed-genre class. We started with Nabokov's ***Speak, Memory***, with the Russian revolution. We looked at poetry from the Spanish Civil War. We looked at work that emerged

from WWII, the Iranian revolution, Cuba. There is no shortage of atrocities in the twentieth century from which literature springs. And in the end, they collaborated. Someone made a small film. All kinds of things were unleashed when they were given free rein to engage directly and respond directly. And I do think that it reinvigorated their first love when they were kids and holed up with a book and got lost in that world so directly without anyone else telling them what to think, that they captured a little bit of that early intoxication with language.

So, then, does it bother you when people in the profession study your work with the use of literary theory?

Not at all. I appreciate the interest. I appreciate the attention. Often, I learn from it. I learn more often than not from what I'm reading. And I'm grateful for the associations. I never feel like I'm the last word on any of this. A lot of what one writes, one writes associatively. And one writes from sometimes mysterious places. And things you don't fully understand, that you're always trying to bring closer to the surface, but it has deeper roots. And then people come with their associations and all kinds of chemistry can happen from that.

Along those lines, would you say that the role of universities, and in particular the work of college professors, has been essential in the growth of U.S. interest in Latin American writing and U.S.-Latino writing?

Oh, definitely. I feel very fortunate that, when I started writing and publishing, things were changing a bit. I felt like I caught a wave to some extent because, prior to that, really interesting works of literature produced from the so-called margins were relegated to the sociology shelves. Not the literature shelves, where they belonged. But certain things happened—it was a zeitgeist. Things happened and it reached a critical mass in terms of population interests and academic focus that enabled Latino literature to become a field. A legitimate field of study, which it should have been all along, but it had to grow into it just as many other fields have also had to evolve. So I think the combination of maturing feminism, widening the lens of inclusivity in literature, and the writers themselves—the insistence and importance of what they were saying—all contributed to these changes.

Do you think Latino/Latina writing is part of the mainstream now?

Oh, I think it's an essential part of anyone's literary education, especially of American literature. And I think it has a very interesting relationship with Spanish literature, also.

My colleagues and I find ourselves constantly defending and justifying the study of the humanities. Students ask us all the time, "Can I get a job with a BA in Spanish or in English? Or should I just do what my parents have been asking me to do this

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whole time and study Computer Science or Business?" How would you answer this question?

I get that question all the time because I get all the refugees in my classes. It's very hard to convince people sometimes. It's often the ones who are having the doubts that you can encourage in their doubts. Because the ones who go through and need to get a job because that's their aim, you're not going to be able to dissuade them much. Whereas those who feel that calling, who feel that undertow of this competing love versus practicality, I think those are the ones you could reach a little bit more. I'm hoping it would be a wider net. But I think it's essential for thinking, for compassion. When you're reading ***Madame Bovary***, and you're immersed in that story and the level of empathy and intimacy you have with another character, you don't have to identify with them. I've never liked that phrase. It's an incredible privilege to know another person that well and to have it be done through beautiful language. It's a deeper humanity, a deep knowledge of the human condition. I think it compels you to think and be more empathic. I think someone with an English degree can do anything. I think there are actually a number of tech companies now who are seeking liberal arts majors, because they are realizing that liberal arts majors have a broader perspective. That they can be trained to do any number of things, but you can't be trained to think empathically. And I emphasize that a lot with my own daughter, who was dealing with that high school careerism and I said, "This is the time for you to explore and expand your horizons." Why try to wrap everything up into just a job? I mean, it's part of reality, but why would you choke off your own possibilities so prematurely?

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Let us shift gears a little bit and talk about identity, diaspora, and immigration. Many of your characters have what's been called a hyphenated identity. I'm thinking of the two characters in Dreams of Significant Girls*, a German-Canadian girl and a Cuban-Jewish girl, and I am also thinking of the character in* I Wanna Be Your Shoebox*, a girl of Japanese-Cuban-New York descent. How has the assimilation of a hyphenated identity changed through the years for the individual and for those around them? Would you say it has become easier or harder?*

I think it depends where you are, where you're growing up. In San Francisco, it's pretty easy to have a hyphenated identity. Or in LA, where my daughter grew up. I might have mentioned before that she's part Japanese. On her dad's side there's Japanese, Russian, and Jewish, and on my side there's Guatemalan, Cuban, and Spanish. So she's very multi-multi-hyphenated. So it's been really interesting to me to watch her grow up and see how that would play out. When I grew up in New York, everyone would ask you, "What are you?," assuming you were Italian-American, Irish-American, one hyphen. But this whole notion of many identities . . . I just heard a new phrase over the summer because my daughter was in a book called ***Hapa***. Do you know what ***hapa*** means? ***Hapa*** means part-Asian. Somebody did a photography book on part Asians. She was in that book and her dad was in that book. But

over the summer I learned that my daughter isn't *hapa*. She's *quapa*, because she's a fourth Asian. So I think what is happening is that the real world is outpacing our language. And these fixed notions of identity are not so easily applicable to the reality of who people are today and how they're evolving. My own daughter sees herself in terms of her affinities. More than the way I thought, "Oh, Cuban American." Yeah, she's from L.A. She might say, "Yeah, my grandmother Aki is Japanese," but she might not say, "I'm part Japanese. My mother's a crazy Cuban," and all that. But she's first from Los Angeles, she's a clarinetist, she loves this. It's a more fluid sense of identity and belonging. She has multiple belongings, whereas when I was growing up, it was like, "Where do I go?" It was much more fixed than I see her and others like her grappling with. It's a generational thing, I think, and the world has changed a lot. All this immigration to the States and multi-racial marriages have created a bumper crop of multi-hyphenated, fascinating new people.

So would you say it's easier now? Or maybe that's not the right word.

I think in certain places it's easier. I don't know how it would be in a less diverse place. It might be even tougher. It might be tougher to be biracial in a place that's not diverse to begin with and then you have to explain it. I think it really depends on where you grow up and how you grow up.

You left Cuba when you were two years old, and nostalgia is a focus of your work. Do you feel nostalgia for a country you didn't grow up in? Would you say that there are different types of nostalgia in an immigrant?

Oh, yeah, I think so. I came when I was so little, so I obviously didn't have any direct nostalgia for Cuba. I had no memories of the place. And I've said this elsewhere, but when I did go back to Cuba for the first time, I was twenty-five. I met all of my mother's family who had stayed behind and then was sort of retroactively flooded with the nostalgia. Because I thought, "Oh my god. I missed out on all these people." They might have saved me from my mother, you know. [laughs] And they had been so tarred and feathered by my mother that I felt very late to the party, late to this whole possibility of belonging. So that was my nostalgia. My parents' nostalgia was for a land they grew up in and lost entirely. I think coming from Miami there are kinds of inherited nostalgia. I've seen teenagers who've never set foot in Cuba, but are pining for it. So they've inherited this. I think this is a particular phenomenon of Miami; it's this hothouse feel that is Miami and it's so close to Cuba. They share the same weather and flora and fauna. *Pedacitos de guayaba*. They're all in the same kind of humid bubble.

Do you think your nostalgia is an inherited one? Do you think it's more about not having nostalgia until you were twenty-five?

For me, my nostalgia is for the quarter-century I lost not knowing my grandmother. It's a very specific nostalgia. She was a very extraordinary person. She and my mother didn't get along at all, and I don't get along with my mother, but I got along really well with my grandmother. I felt like my entire childhood might have been different had she been in it, had I had the possibility of another female figure. Also because I didn't have it on my father's side either, because my mother hated her mother-in-law. So there was no contact there. So when my daughter was growing up, I made sure she had lots of contact with her Akiko, her Japanese grandmother. Even though she's my ex-mother in law, I went to see her in Thailand. That's where she lives now. I love her. She was all of our grandmothers, you know? So I think for me it has something very specific to do with culture, of course, but also a sense of belonging. I felt I belonged with my grandmother in a way.

Let's talk a bit about language. Were you raised speaking Spanish at home?

My mother spoke to us in Spanish and my father spoke to us in English.

Okay. So how did you respond to your mom? Usually in Spanish?

Usually in English.

Even though she talked to you in Spanish?

Yes.

You write in English. As you know, many families in the U.S. live in a state of diglossia *where English is the high language used in formal context and Spanish is considered the low language used in more casual conversation. Other families choose not to pass on the language as a result of prejudice they may have suffered while growing up. I wondered if you might talk about this particular aspect of immigration, of the diaspora.*

Oh, being bilingual is a huge advantage. I have to hand it to my mother for that. She was absolutely insistent on using Spanish in the house. I barely ever heard her speak English at home, and she was adamant that when we spoke to her we would use Spanish. Consequently, even though I never studied it formally, I could get by and I could travel and I also, I think, absorbed and internalized that because it was very important to me that my daughter learn another language.

Your father chose to speak in English. Was it because he didn't want you all to feel discriminated against?

No. Because he was perfectly fluent in English. He was sent to Canada to study when he was a boy. So even though he considers himself Cuban, he lived in Guatemala/Honduras until he was eight and at the age of eleven he was sent to Canada. So he actually had spent very little time in Cuba. And he became fluent in English and French while in Canada. He had accentless English, so I think for him it was the path of least resistance. My mother was taking care of the Spanish, so he kept speaking English. He was perfectly bilingual and it was just easier for him vis-à-vis us. He didn't want to get into that fight. If anything, I would say the hierarchy was the reverse. I think Spanish was held in higher esteem in my household and the keeping of the culture. I think that was in conjunction with the belief for a number of years that we were only temporary exiles and that we would go back. And then when the reality set in, we're not going back, the language, especially when we were in New York and not Miami, the language was the one thing my mother could cling to. And so I think it became her number one priority in terms of passing on being Cuban. I have seen a broad array of what you've talked about, among students and people I've known—people who don't want to speak to you in Spanish even though they have a heavy accent. They'll still speak to you in English. There is this sense of shame and they don't want people to make assumptions about them. I think in many places in this country, immigrants are denigrated and mistreated and they don't want that association, so they have assumed the old-fashioned mantle of assimilation, but to the detriment of their own culture and language skills. I saw that a lot in Texas. I had a little house in New Mexico for a while that I used to retreat to. And I was very welcomed in this little community in northern New Mexico. Because I was a García, I think. And everyone had the social niceties. ***Hola, ¿cómo estás?*** But if you started speaking in Spanish, you got this kind of deer in the headlights look, like, "Oh no. You're not from here, are you?" It was this crazy thing that it was almost integral to their daily lives, but it didn't really go beyond pleasantries.

So they just wanted to use a few Spanish sentences?

Yes, but they were cultural markers of belonging. You're a part of this or you're not. And when I continued speaking Spanish in those scenarios, I was marked as an outsider, which is so ironic, because I'm speaking to all these beautiful Spanish-named neighbors, and so I learned how to do the niceties, too, and then just go to English. Everywhere I went, depending on where I was, the rules changed. It just hits home on how fluid and alive and what an indicator of belonging or not belonging language is.

Bilingualism is quite an advantage. And it's sad that there is a significant number of families who don't realize what their kids are missing. So now I would like to talk a bit more about your previous career as a journalist. How has journalism shaped your career as a writer? In an interview for Contemporary Literature*, you mentioned that journalism and fiction are both forms of translation. So what do you think writers translate in journalism and fiction?*

I think every time we write it's an act of translation, whether it's imaginative or whether we're trying to remember and shape into narrative something that we saw or witnessed, or a story that someone has told us. We make choices all the time about what is included, what's excluded. And I think that is an act of translation, and in that translation we get a reflection of one's sensibility, what's important to you because I chose this and not that.

I think journalism continues to shape my fiction, interestingly enough, because I usually spend a period of time researching books before I start writing them and that always, for me, involves a certain amount of reporting and throwing myself into the subject matter. Sometimes doing interviews, sometimes just observing and walking unknown cities, like Berlin for the new book. Or when my daughter was little we went to Vietnam for five weeks to work on the *Monkey Hunting* book. Things like that, I think. I was at a great advantage to have spent those ten years learning how to collect and process voluminous amounts of information and pull out what was essential. And so, in a way, even though you have a lot more space in a novel than you do in a 1200-word article, the principle is the same. You're still collecting much more information than you'll ever use. And you have to use your analytical capacities of discernment and sort of shake it out down to almost a need-to-know sentence, basis by basis.

So would you like to talk about the forms of translation?

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What role will bilingual journalism play in the coming years, in your opinion?

You know, I don't really know, but maybe just to speak to literature and novels, I think there is an unapologetic, head-on, head-first dive into bilingualism on the page. Because that is where a lot of these stories live, how they're told, how they're enacted. And it's false to

do them other ways. We recently had a big discussion, when I taught at San Jose State last spring, of whether or not to italicize. Is someone using too many foreign words or not? But essentially the world and its multilingualism and multiculturalism has exploded in such a way that you can get on board or get left behind. You can fight on and say, "When America was great," which, excuse me, when we had separate water fountains? I don't think so. Get on board. Everyone benefits from this. Embrace it. The future is here, and you can be a part of it, too.

Our student newspaper publishes Spanish pages on Fridays for the Spanish readership here on campus. But you're absolutely right, this is the future. If you don't embrace it, you're going to be excluded. . . . Can you tell me a little bit about Las Brujas Writers Workshop, why that title and how the workshop came about?

Sure. I usually do one or two conferences a year. To give you an idea, this first workshop was a big conference in the New Mexico desert at Ghost Ranch. We probably had about eighty participants and I carefully chose the faculty. Primarily because they were fantastic teachers. We had Juan Felipe Herrera, who is now Poet Laureate; we had Denise Chavez, who is a wonderful novelist and theater performer; we had Chris Abani, a Nigerian novelist and poet. And then we had Kimiko Han, a poet of Japanese descent from New York. By choosing that faculty, we got an incredible diversity of students. It was maybe eighty percent writers of color and the rest were writers not of color. I think what was instructive and unusual for them was to be in the so-called minority, and that was a privilege to them. There have been other kinds of workshops that are specifically and only for people of color, only if you're Asian-American or whatever. Those are extremely valuable. I've taught in some of them; no complaints about that. I didn't want to exclude anybody. I just wanted to choose fantastic faculty of color and see what happened. I do these workshops because they are places where people can come and get their work done. They don't need to translate for everyone else, and I'm there facilitating it and reinforcing it and saying, "Yeah, we have to tell these stories, and tell them from places and perspectives where you have been told they have no worth." That is really where it was born, just from that desire for inclusivity. And I've done different kinds of workshops, like "finish your book" boot camps, and that type of thing. I've had a series called "Cultivating Chaos": it was a drop-in community class where you could come in for very little money. So I'd get ten to fifteen people coming in every Sunday for a month and do generative exercises. So it's just a way to be in the community outside of the academic one, and having it accessible to people who are doing other things to survive who are also trying to write poetry. Or write a novel on the side, or whatever.

Essentially the world and its multilingualism and multiculturalism has exploded in such a way that you can get on board or get left behind. You can fight on and say, "When America was great," which, excuse me, when we had separate water fountains? I don't think so. Get on board. Everyone benefits from this. Embrace it. The future is here, and you can be a part of it, too.

How do you think you've evolved creatively and, along these lines, what are you working on right now?

Well, I really just go where my curiosity takes me, and it keeps taking me further afield, which is a good thing. Somehow I always keep circling back to Cuba and Cubans, but I have a book coming out in October 2017. It's a novel, but it's unusually structured in that it's thirty-five voices of contemporary Berlin. It's a lot of German voices, Russian voices, ex-Stasi agents, a few Cubans. I've been publishing some excerpts, but altogether, I think it's kind of a chorale of contemporary Berlin and hearing from voices that you would not have expected to hear in this city.

Why Berlin?

Well, originally I had the idea to do this sort of triptych novel, or maybe a three-volume thing of looking at what we've been talking about before: kind of the human fallout of Cuba, kind of global adventurism. My first stop was going to be Berlin. You know, like, where are the stories of Cuba being closely associated with Eastern Europe and Russia all these years? That was going to be my first stop, and then I was going to go to Vietnam, and then I was going to go to South America, probably Chile, because of the whole agenda thing. When I got to Berlin, I didn't find much, but I found so much else. I rented an apartment there for three months: my living there, and reading that history, and talking to the people just hijacked the project, and now it's a book about Berlin.

That's fascinating. So these thirty-five voices, do they have more of the shape of a character with a longer storyline? Or is it like the voices that we hear in King of Cuba*?*

Well, the conceit, I guess you could say, is that these stories are being told to an unnamed visitor to the city. And the unnamed visitor also takes photographs. So there are photographs in the book. We see traces of her in the book. Sometimes the voices will directly address the visitor, but we never quite know who she is. You assume it's the author, but you don't know for sure. I guess that's the unifying thing. There are these clusters and thematics, but basically it's kind of a dissonant chorus.

How interesting! I can't wait to read it. Well, thank you so much for your time, Cristina. It's been a pleasure.



Isabel Asensio (Ph.D., Vanderbilt University) is an associate professor of Spanish at Weber State University, where she teaches basic through advanced Spanish courses. She has also taught a number of courses for the Honors Program, Women and Gender Studies Program, and Master of Arts in English Program at WSU. Her research interests include Hispanic women writers, cultures of Spain and Latin America, and Translation and Interpreting Studies. She has received ACTFL Oral Proficiency training, which has greatly impacted her choice of teaching strategies over the years. She is currently the president of the Utah Foreign Language Association, and has recently been elected vice-president of the west region for the 2016-2019 triennium by the National Collegiate Hispanic Honor Society.

Cristina García

KING OF CUBA

A Play

Staged Reading Version

The following excerpt is from the theatrical adaptation of the novel *King of Cuba*. In this portion, which corresponds to the first pages of the novel, the audience hears the two main characters: Goyo, a Cuban exile who lives in the United States; and El Comandante, the character who embodies the dictator Fidel Castro.

As with the novel, the theatrical adaptation begins with words of anger, resentment, and frustration. First, Goyo expresses his anger and resentment against El Comandante because of the state of Cuba; then, El Comandante voices the anger and frustration he feels with the Cuban people: on the anniversary of the Cuban Revolution, nobody seems to remember or, even worse, to care. This frustration permeates the entire novel where the main characters are unable to change anything despite their efforts.

KING OF CUBA: Cast

Havana

El COMANDANTE, Cuban dictator, turning 90	Marga Gomez
FERNANDO, his long-suffering brother, 80s	José Enrique Pardo
DELIA, his ex-beauty queen wife, 50s	Zuzy Martín Lynch
BABO GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ, writer/dictator's friend, 80s	José Enrique Pardo
VÁSQUEZ, Angel of Death, ageless, elegant	Chris Gueits
EMILIO, the dictator's son, 40s	Fernando Pujals

Miami

GOYO HERRERA, Cuban exile, recently widowed, 80s	Steve Ortiz
ALINA, his photojournalist daughter, 40s	Carolina de Robertis
GOYITO, his ex-junkie son, 40s	Fernando Pujals
LUISA, his recently deceased wife, a ghost, 70s	Carlota Caufield

* * *

CHORUS WOMAN #1,	Zuzy Martín Lynch
CHORUS WOMAN #2,	Carlota Caufield
CHORUS MAN #1,	Fernando Pujals
CHORUS MAN #2,	Achy Obejas

* * *

PERCUSSIONIST	Carlos Caro
STAGE DIRECTIONS read by	Claire Calderón
SOUND DESIGN	Claire Calderón
DIRECTOR	Gary Graves

Running time is approximately 90 minutes with an intermission.

(Percussion: FREE-STYLE WITH CONGA as audience enters and settles in.)

(LIGHTS UP on a Miami shooting range.)

GOYO
Here you go, you son of a bitch. I would surrender everything I have for the chance to kill you with my own hands. This is for stealing our country, the Pearl of the Antilles, and ruining it with your goddamn revolution!

(Percussion: SINGLE SLAP.)

This is for my brother, Fredi, who died fighting against you in the Bay of Pigs. And for my father—may he rest in peace—who died of a broken heart after he was forced to leave Cuba.

(Percussion: SINGLE SLAP.)

And this, cabrón, *this* is for the woman you stole from me. My first and true love, Teresita Ponti. You disgraced her, left her pregnant, then abandoned her. There are no words for your cowardice. Do you even know what happened to her? Do you? She hung herself from a chandelier in her parents' music room, where she'd played her Schubert sonatas with great delicacy.

(Percussion: SINGLE SLAP.)

Sí, for Teresita, and for your countless crimes against the Cuban people, for those of us still suffering in our unending exile, I will shoot you dead. Así, straight to the heart!

(Percussion: SINGLE SLAP then VÁSQUEZ RIFF.)

(Vásquez emerges.)

VÁSQUEZ
Buenas tardes, Señor Herrera. Bull's-eye.

GOYO
Who the hell are you?

VÁSQUEZ
Certainty is impossible.

GOYO
Que carajo?

VÁSQUEZ
Action is the dignity of greatness.

GOYO
Ah, the words of the great José Martí! Now *he* was a true Cuban hero.

VÁSQUEZ
You wish to be like him?

GOYO
I would give everything I have.

VÁSQUEZ
Like Martí, your moment will arrive.

GOYO
Riding high on a white horse, eh?

VÁSQUEZ
Each man must meet his destiny.

(Percussion: VÁSQUEZ RIFF. Vásquez vanishes.)

(LIGHTS UP on El Comandante's bedroom.)

EL COMANDANTE
Carajo, look at those lovebirds on the malecón, verging on public fornication, giving our island a bad name. Brothel of the Caribbean, my ass. It's the anniversary of the Revolution— and NADA! As if we didn't exist. But I still exist, hijos de putas.
That's right, you fat, lily-livered exiles. My precious enemies. You keep me alive. Your hate—ha!—is oxygen to my blood. You tried every dirty trick in the book: exploding cigars, arsenic milkshakes, foot powder to make my beard fall out. And I'm *still* here. Why? Because nobody has bigger cojones than I do…Ach, dry toast and oatmeal again. What I wouldn't give for a porterhouse steak and three fried eggs—y porqué no?—a double scotch. Fuck it if my insides turn to lead . . .

EL COMANDANTE [Continued]
I was four years old when I saw my father's cojones for the first time. Steaming like a locomotive after his hot bath. I knew right then that *they* were my inheritance, my destiny. That night, I asked my mother, 'Mami, will all of me grow?' And you know what she said?

MAMI'S VOICE
Ay, mi cielo, your pinguita will be the greatest in all the land, in all the Americas, perhaps in all the world!

EL COMANDANTE (as little boy)
Okay, Mami, the greatest. But will it also be the biggest?

MAMI'S VOICE
Don't you doubt that for a second!

EL COMANDANTE
That night, I strutted off to bed with big dreams, the biggest of all. I imagined my pinguita growing and growing until it floated high in the skies, a giant dirigible draped with parachute huevones and a proud snout that served as the control room for the whole impressive operation and which nobody—not even the Yankees with their warships and gun batteries—would dare shoot down.

MAMI'S VOICE
Good night, mijito. Sleep with the angels. Besitos.

EL COMANDANTE
And with that, I rolled over and fell deeply, happily asleep.

(HARD KNOCKING.)

EL COMANDANTE
What? Who's there?

(Fernando enters.)

EL COMANDANTE
Did I miss the parade?

FERNANDO
Joint chiefs of staff meeting—

EL COMANDANTE
More cut-rate tanks from North Korea? I'm sick of those assholes.

FERNANDO
We've got more important problems—

EL COMANDANTE
More important than this? Mira, one newspaper after another.

FERNANDO
I don't see anything.

EL COMANDANTE
Exactly. *Nothing is there*. It's the fucking anniversary of the Revolution and *not one word of it anywhere*. I want to talk directly to the people. Cut out all programming.

FERNANDO
Do you think that's wise? *Gaucho Love* is in reruns and—

EL COMANDANTE
Are you telling me that the Cuban people would rather watch some co-memierda telenovela from Argentina than listen to me?

FERNANDO
Bueno, as a matter of fact—

EL COMANDANTE
The people need to know that the Revolution must go on, with or without me!

FERNANDO
I don't like seeing you so agitated. You need to rest.

EL COMANDANTE
I'll be resting for a fucking eternity! Who'll take over once we're gone, Fernando? When we die, so will the Revolution!

FERNANDO
The Revolution will never die. The people will—

EL COMANDANTE
The people will sell us out for a bar of soap!

FERNANDO
You underestimate them—

EL COMANDANTE
Or a cellphone! Or a plate of dichoso pork chops! Descarados todos. We might convince everyone on the island that the sea is red but let's not deceive ourselves.

Lauren Camp

Consumption



Whitewater-Baldy forest fire in the Gila Wilderness and the annular solar eclipse, May 2012

1
In the desert, every dry person talks how
we need June to burn less. Eleven days of charring
from treetops, flames curl and cloak the unoccupied forest.

This may not be the place
to begin watching the sleeveless sky. We count loss
in acres of grays that linger in switchbacks.

Our ginger sun turns to red moonlight,
a rupture we've lain on the edge of.
Together, we tally what burned.

2
Why not start the next day? The eclipse
promised a sun doused in moon-
skin and enlarged the rumor of something insoluble.

We stood on silent rooftops in fold-up makeshift glasses
in a vulnerable light somehow gentled.
As each celestial body obscured and outshone,

we looked at the halo. Never again
in our lifetime would a night combust with light
this coronal, cast outward.

3
On Thursday on the west edge of town,
an art studio collapsed into easels, cinders and corners.
A man and his dog were drawn to hallway-like streets.

The weight of the fire brushed seven years of his paintings,
singed combustible colors. That groggy night, it climbed
between canvas, past stucco, and took what it wanted.

No one ever said *leave* until then. As Felix slid
into his Tundra, in rumpled t-shirt and sneakers, he tasted
the sweaty scent of junipers, each exact loss.

4
When he was eight, my husband dribbled
lighter fluid down the orange plastic of his racetrack,
and articulated the journey of Hot Wheels

through many plumes of red. Another car
released to chance, each segment of track spreading
to ruin. It pleased him, this work of destruction:

on Elmar Way, away from his mother, this spark,
this blaze, this glint and observation,
the way a child chooses to uncap flame.

5
One believes each scorched aspen, ponderosa, blue spruce
and fir, each unbundled rocky peak and sulphur vent,
the churning side of dams and rock valleys as they rust

and strip of color. Of course we mourn.
We're fixed on miles of ash and the mnemonic wind
clapping under skies that two days ago gave us a round gesture

and ripple of moon over sun, its center brushed ecstatic pink.
Every direction leaves us weak, every cascade
of fire, every margin it loosens.

Wrung in the Wind

Wind waggles the small oriole,
plume-bulged, through the intersection,
and he crosses off to the side:

ragged wing, swoop black—

he nicks the street near the orange jeep,
leans in half-numb, I think,
with all this strew
and whistle. Sky sails to a blue roof

on an old Suburban, and nervous dimensions
of dust in the rearview mirror. In front,
a traffic light bares to green

and our engine shudders through
the juncture as sun arcs
between the jagged air and mountains:

this feather draft, small passerine—

kinetic gold light
curving through and hurtling.

Autumn

A day that stayed in place, inaudible from dawn to the strike of evening.
Enough time to rest and plunge back across the pebbles
  to my pens and desk.
A squash we didn't plant has come in gold across the aspen roots.
Two hawks burst over, claiming a rotating sky.
The desert, normally dry, emits a faint scent, the damp wisp of cedar.
Water has gathered in holes we dug.
This is why the pangs of time are necessary.

To the east, mountains bracket the distance, releasing their images
silver on blue.
The whole day has nearly disappeared and night is a ruffle about to blossom.

Over the Cattle Guard Before the Pasture

The new year is already shouldered
with a silver needle, a poke to the third eye.
A twitch, a wince. Increase in whether, why and chill.

What was brush and campsite four months ago
has sorted to hoarfrost and whimper,
long ridges and mountains: what we can stand.

We hold mornings in the palms of our hands,
hear the gasp of heater settings.
I see tall words on windows, and tired robins

lapping rotten water below etchings of snow.
All places decide what we love.
Nothing can break us

from the true-hearted sun, the last hovering leaf.
In this small valley, such empty streets.
I can't layer more silence.

The Cows

Three times I saw the cows.

Perhaps it was summer's wasted heat
spat out across each day that brought them on.

At dusk, we sat on folding chairs, feeding pine limbs
and cambium layers to the fire as a line of bovines
passed by, behind our orange 2-man tent.

The great body of beasts lurched
the campground in silence, but one cow hung behind,
stitching between hunker and instinct,

his keening call disintegrating into dark.
Nothing to do but watch him, hemmed in
by a crowd of slender aspens behind the moon.

That night, I held love beside me
as the cow cried in his grief.
David pumped the fire, kept it from collapsing.
Later, our smells fastened in the tent
and it was this cow we heard in night's long middle,

this cow that made me shiver in my sleep.

•

The next day I thought of endings.

We'd loaded our car with tent and pads, our pots
and lantern. Items piled, rolled, tacked and tarped.

Highway 4 stretched toward the trailhead
at Las Conchas. Around us, the constant stagnant ash
of last summer's eyeless fire.

A short hike helped us resolve this tired landscape,
and carry back some green. We rambled for an hour
below a steep stone wall bewitched with color.

What was there to see but sinewed trees and rock?
We picnicked as snowmelt giggled and flux down
from the mountain. We weren't watching anything,

just slipping sounds into us to take home.
Retracing steps, through the wide heart of aster
and chamisa, we heard a headstrong flailing.

Eleven cows, three calves, all thick and deep as oil,
rushed from a path between the pines.
We stepped aside, watched the quivering mass

as they dipped enormous heads to the stream,
to gather in some liquid, then rose up again
as one body, looked back at us, guarding.

•

It was not then, as sun seamed to highway,
that I realized. It was before—

in the still red-throated morning, in the car loaded
with our shelter and hunger.

Before we passed the seven yellow cow-crossing signs,
I steered the car from accident.
Dodged something like a large rubber tire

or a full garbage bag, something in the blue of the road.
We passed it at 10 in the morning on a Thursday,
along the inside of a curve.

Looking back, I saw the cords of a cow
loosening in dust at the side of the road.
What dying, and what ghosts.



Lauren Camp is the author of three books of poetry, including *One Hundred Hungers*, which won the Dorset Prize. Her other books are *This Business of Wisdom* and *The Dailiness*. Lauren is the recipient of the Margaret Randall Poetry Prize, the RL International Poetry Award, the Anna Davidson Rosenberg Award and a Black Earth Institute Fellow. She works as a freelance teacher and radio host in northern New Mexico.

Darren C. Demaree

All the Birds are Leaving #64

There are animals
that keep treasure

in their bellies
& though some of us,

our old leaders,
looked as if they did,

too, we are judged
rarely for what we can

swallow. Thin-
throated, our counting

of time isn't keeping
time, it's naming it

before we even know
what it is. I remember

etc., is our best
closeness to thick

reality. The sinew
we will never see,

but we have infinite
names for that, too.



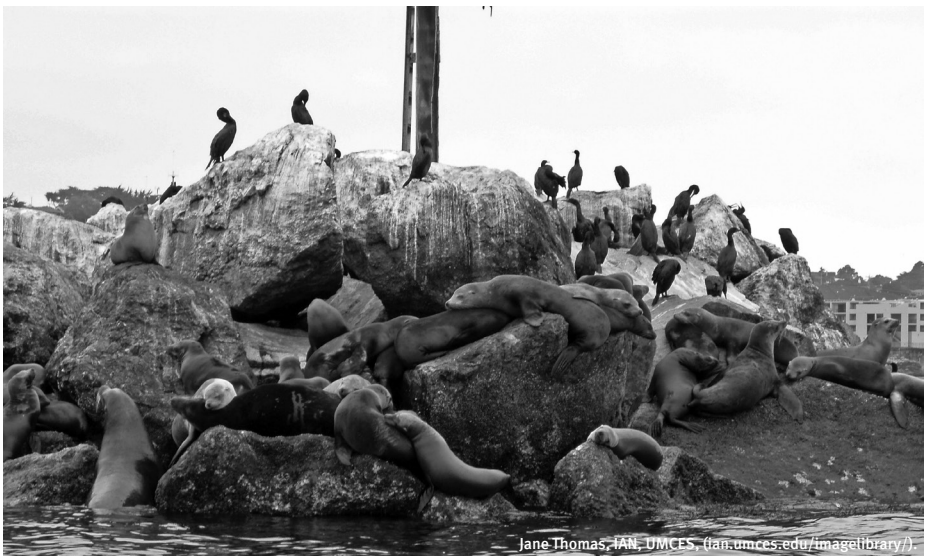
GDJ



Darren C. Demaree is the author of six poetry collections, most recently *Many Full Hands Applauding Inelegantly* (2016, 8th House Publishing). He is the managing editor of the *Best of the Net Anthology* and *Ovenbird Poetry*. He currently resides in Columbus, Ohio, with his wife and children.

James Grabill

Inscrutable Northerly Drift



California sea lions (*Zalophus californianus*) on the breakwater near the Coast Guard pier, Monterey, California

The night and day sky continues to wheel in slow motion of the genome shifting with Celsius north.

At intermixed latitudes, the Pacific sea lions dive in swims beyond littoral brines, suspended in heaves, salt in the mouth of waters, the burn of bees in the forgotten and recollected, the quantum only hour as unfinished as all species.

Voices out of the future come with the rain on back of drought, the inscrutable green where a chance exists, with dusts that fall in lobbies where forests have left their imprint.

Blood breathes out into blood, which breathes out into blood through miles in common, presence of species in common, where the extravagant overpeopling of hectares exists in common, Pacific island torches at the perimeter, the future drifting further north on its hungers.

Unexpected beauty we haven't named will take its time, however long the documentary footage resembles genetic complexity, where a feather can lift into thunderhead multiples and survive in jurisdictions of the unseen.

Where All Morning the Climate Increasingly Turns in Slow Motion Nearly Every Which Way

With every cell tied to what hopes in a molecule, this present era of remote consequences shows how every bite appears to be taking it out on the wilderness.

Whether wisdom bites at your boot heels or the planet keeps going behind red curtains in the embassy of opposites, the baroque wheeling of air and water around Earth, as oceanic and precise as it may be, has been archaic and yet modern as morning skin.

With hypnotized angers going about bamboozling political will of the masses, morning sinks its silver spoon into the next roar of winds and squealing apparatus of eighteenth century assumptions no one's dismantled.

So who knows the exact month, season, and hour divine intent kicks in, cleaning the place up after us? In our freedom, who among us hasn't been owned by more than her own desire, more than inflations of rains that feather off the more serious melts in our saucering galaxy?

Morning light continues to shatter into spreads of color in parallel with the ancestral mind, as tongues are unconditional animals mostly before words, when isn't it time to admit that little exists other than what's here?

Wouldn't you say a clear and present threat to the population has been the population? Hasn't all night through the day been where Northwest firs are risking their limbs?

But morning shouldn't be asking us much, even when all that exists plays the genetic keyboard before a fair share of bystanders and numerous public displays of impermanence.

Grand Opening

‘80s searchlights are still pouring up into the dark above town. Drowned out may be the ancient compass of stars, but who needs it? Sky-high beams swiveling, blazing, pass through the molecular remains of labor in the air.

The schooners have all reached land. Cities have already been peopled. Archconservatives are making the place free for the money. The store with no end is stocked with goods which are wonders of the world.

The ocean has kept going until reaching its destination. It has worked so hard to reach the shore, the apparatus set in motion may not be able to stop. But no fear. No one can help being drawn into the store with no end.

All the while, Civil Defense patriots with emergency-band radios they monitor from their kitchens keep mobile generators in a roar, pouring in gas, policing wires to the incandescent motorized washtubs the size of old cars. Steam in the summer evening swells around the great lenses at the smoking root of their beams.

The store with all anyone needs opens for the first time in the world. The nearby farmhouses are humbled. The governor of giant engines cuts the ribbon each time. Space-age doors slide open, and shut after you pass. Parking lots are packed with moving vans, as shuttle buses haul people in from long-term parking. Cargo jets keep landing in back, passenger jets from the East and West. Diesel trains blaring, roar in and disappear somewhere inside.

Junior and senior high schools merge everywhere you turn. Carmel chocolate for $10. Free coupons, 2 for 1, 1 for 2, you name it. Look like a model. Stand before mirrors, a wealthy ballplayer. Pray for the wealth of your nation, everyone of us. Never fear appearing to be an animal again.

The Idea of a Little Water

Water in a glass shouldn't be leaving behind a great deal of damage. Half gone in a few moments as the galaxy bends, small water like this won't be head-high in imperative transactions or brow-beating the semblance of wisdom out of its folds.

Bound to the week of work, but lacking skin, water's always being let go. Its surface is so light gravity can't hold it down. Suddenly water's feathering into its molecular wing, flying light into eyes.

The eye of the frog drips with anticipation in the half-lit evening moraine. Cooling falls, and more water's gone parachuting over the county line, in the circulation between private identities.

The first matter missed, when thirst would rather survive, water struggles at each corner to break loose from the current trouble it's seen. Working to surface in its cloud of satellites, ascending in elaborate tiny chandeliers that shatter out of history, water has seen everything a body can dish out and has already gone more places than still exist.

But then the nature of water is to join the wave, to concentrate as so much of itself it symbolizes nothing but bulk, with its tendency to think nothing about moving the salt sea further inland, plowing off with any ten-ton truck in the way.

In raging wind, water will be flying shrapnel or avalanching with all its weight into reactors, prying apart what anyone may have nailed down. It drops off Japanese docks on the Oregon Coast in front of the brain, before enough time exists for most to comprehend.



James Grabill's recent work is online at the *Caliban*, *Green Mountains Review*, *Kentucky Review*, *Elohi Gadugi*, *Buddhist Poetry Review*, *Harvard Review*, *Terrain*, *Mobius*, *Calliope*, *The Oxonian Review*, *The Toronto Quarterly*, *Mad Hatter's Review*, *Plumwood Mountain*, and others. His books include *Poem Rising Out of the Earth* (1994) and *An Indigo Scent after the Rain* (2003), both from Lynx House Press. Wordcraft of Oregon has published his new project of environmental prose poems, *Sea-Level Nerve: Book One*, 2014, and *Book Two*, 2015. A long-time Oregon resident, he teaches "systems thinking" and global issues relative to sustainability.

Joan Kincaid

Faites

I'll find a thousand shifts to get away
As good to die and go, as die and stay.
—King John, William Shakespeare

The trees are warming up for their goodbyes
They gesture in the wind all over town
fluttering bravely as they're about to end.

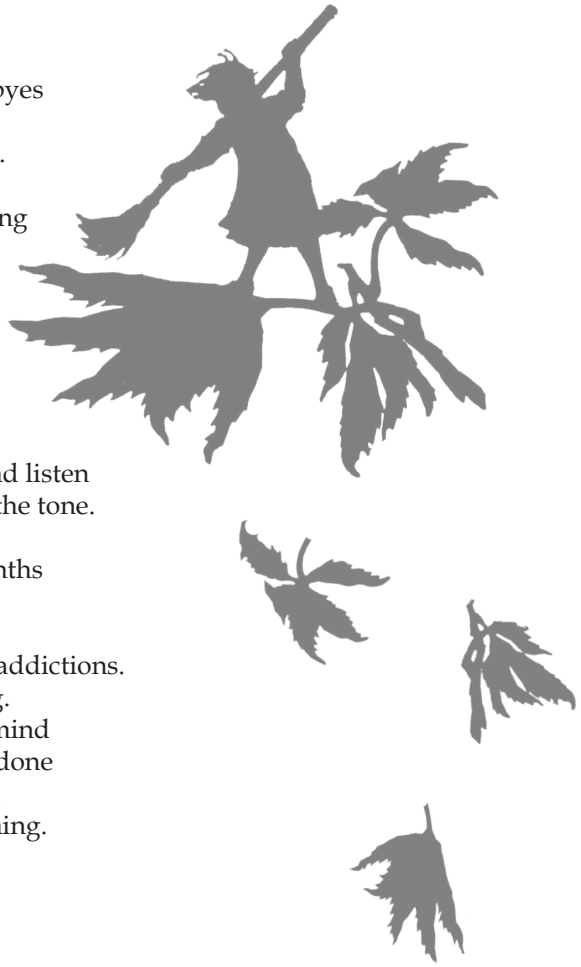
The fridge is full of nothing and everything
that requires work to work
lean against the white door wishing
for a waitress.

Who are you to rant twenty-four seven?
What event are you out to disprove?

We phone to learn details of her death and listen
to her hello please leave a message after the tone.

Today it's fifty degrees and will take months
to think it's mild in May.

It must be nice to be so addicted to your addictions.
Time to find time to accomplish anything.
In a moment there will be a test in your mind
you will re-do what has already been re-done
many times before and will be true again
faites accomplish that accomplished nothing.



Outlook III

Suddenly sleep seems the only solution
The howling dog waits to be let in
The lavender banner with Earth on it floats
We are on a late moonlight walk
Sometimes it's best not to look at anything
All these poems and words hiding in books
Even the best poets are trapped there
So are ordinary things
I for one prefer them to remain secret.

We decide to fast to cure something
When you're in the dark
There is no way in or out sometimes
No one seems to get it.
You make little repartee
Unaware of who you are
The soiled table cloth from last night's porch dinner
Has been run through the machine
Tonight it will be fresh and clean on the round table
Where the birch tree sways gently in candle light;
And the lone owl calls to something down the block.
Crickets and Katydids fade in the late summer night
Passers-by beyond the hedge observe us in shadows.



Joan lives with Rod, a rescue cat named Cordelia, and a fox terrier named Fancy. She writes and paints in Sea Cliff, Long Island. Her work is published internationally, and once upon a time she was an opera and concert performer. Her latest book, *Being Here: New and Selected Poems 1988-2012*, is now available.

Peter Ludwin

For the Instructor Who Told His Students They Could Never Write about the Moon



1) Homestead on the Texas Plains, 1840

Summer, and you've learned to dread
that ascending night light. Transfixed
by its swollen belly, you listen,
ears cocked like a rabbit. Your stock
is fenced, but what's a fence to *them*?
A twig to snap before the knife blade,
fire-heated, carves its cruel song.
You knew this when you pushed west
beyond the settlements, but like the bison
you had to migrate, impelled by a deep,
unseen river you never managed to name.
Now light floods the room. You toss
and turn on your cot. Even these rough
plank walls contain a hint of hoofbeats.
And when you search the window,
a lance, a shield, a face painted black.

2) Sand Hills, Western Nebraska, 1910

You don't recall a past life in Texas.
Don't know why the moon tugs you
like the tide. This evening, a predator
in ambush, you lie on a low rise
waiting for cranes. But you carry
no weapon. Just your aging eye.
What would your father have thought?
If somethin' moves, son, shoot the sumbitch!
Their cry like no other, the cranes
stir your sluggish blood. One more trip.
That's why you look up tonight.
A pair skims the silver disc,
their course a plume of smoke adrift.
Remnant from a grass fire.
If only you had the gift to make words
sing, you think, you would write a poem.



Peter Ludwin is the recipient of a Literary Fellowship from Artist Trust and a W.D. Snodgrass Fellowship. His most recent book, *Gone to Gold Mountain*, was nominated for both a Washington State Book Award and an American Book Award, the latter by the Before Columbus Foundation. His work has appeared in *Crab Orchard Review*, *Nimrod* and *Prairie Schooner*, among other journals.

Christopher Munde

Summit

Mt. Qomolangma



Occupied cityscape: As peaceable and as strained.
As a sign of respect, live visitors allow the dead
To maintain their vertical Public Square, so long
As it is called a museum, so long as it looks
Like an ossuary.
Meanwhile, beneath dim goggles,
The first twinges of hypoxia have begun to meddle
With a climber's barriers: Veils of snow crosshatch
And propose, until he is calling to every solid form,
Reaching out with a hand
That should not be free.

Servants

Are for stains are hung in the washroom
The ivory slab is for summoning
A little demon on cheesecloth leash
Look to our left on the wall the palm prints
Half painted over clawing through green
Today I declare this a green room and those
Are for talking politics are a vital reason
For a room now on disregard its last use
To our left again nearly done all those
Stains have been greened into lattice
Of olive leaves may spirits abide best we
Care for the help they are better than we
At scouring palm prints from corners
The help are for painting goose eggs
Are for feeding to it so it won't gnaw
The leash or the leather footstools
Do not look right just yet we are renovating
Here your eyes are for dotting the walls
Is an endless two-step and our earns
Are for ashes

Closed Casket Principle

Pandemonium fraught with the innocence
Of animals whose paws and tentacles and
Chicken brains remain oblivious

To the pleas of the condemned
The quiet and practical are thus
Enlivened and made grotesque

By their beaked and bladed exuberance
Repurposed to play with famous flesh

So censorial tools are fashioned
To scrub the victims' faces and to stripe
The eyes black like bandits' masks:

Decorum is a weapon of the just
For parsing certain dead from infamy

Behind the tiled scramble of each likeness
Imagination cuts a mouth for the first chirp

It matters not whether assailants' inkless teeth
Announce remorse or laughter from the page

For the dead rise at all bedsides without anger
But with clawed joy to touch unaltered faces

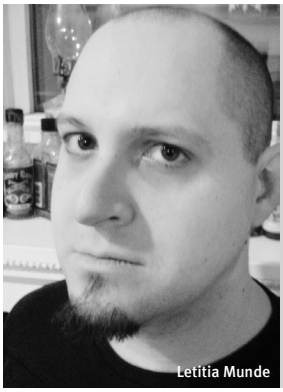
For each newborn animal is ferried in its box
Where coins coax eyes into nocturnal slits

Triangulation

The girl who works the intersection feels
Three paradises assail her every morning:
The chimes of the cathedral to her left
Tangle in the air with those of a secular church
Just right of her, while she pins, through a sort
Of sonic triangulation with its baritone adhan,
The location of the mosque somewhere behind.

What congeals above is far less harmony
Than a rat king of independent melodies, each
Knotted in the streets outside: Ice cream truck
Pileup, left wounded and gnashing at odds.
Whichever one siphons the most clients her way
Appears through that sunrise to howl the loudest,
And, for her, manufacture a strain of clarity:

She, a quiet axis. Girl who bears cacophony
Harbors several incongruous songs, strands
Of sense gleaned from the male celebrants
From whom she plucks bloody shrapnel,
Clips tails and lays them parallel on the bed.
The girl riddled with music learns a melody needs
To disengage from listener and singer to endure.



Letitia Munde

Christopher Munde's poetry has appeared, or is forthcoming, in *Blackbird*, *Bombay Gin*, *Massachusetts Review*, *Third Coast*, *West Branch Wired*, and elsewhere. He was awarded an Academy of American Poets Prize while completing his MFA at the University of Houston. Presently, he lives and teaches in western New York.

Richard O'Connell

Cabeza de Vaca

From the Proem to his *Relacion, 1542*


Cabeza de Vaca (ca. 1488-1560)

Amongst all Princes reigning on the earth,
I know of none held in such high esteem
As is your Sacred Catholic Majesty:*
For whose affection strangers strive and vie
With those impelled by faith and loyalty
To serve the crown imperial of Spain.

Although all want what riches may be gained
From action and ambition, yet we see
Great inequalities of fortune everywhere,
Not caused by any fault, nor anyone,
But falling out by accident alone:
Occurring by the providence of God
And solely by his will. Thus one man's deeds
May far exceed his expectations, while
Another's may fall fruitless, failing in
His aims so utterly, as if indeed
The man had never walked upon the earth:
Coming to such a futile, fatal end,
Forgotten in the instant of his fall
And vanishing like foam upon the sand.
What matters, then, lives in our memory
Or else we are but beasts that cannot leave
A record and a legacy to pass
Unto posterity or our own age.

Know, as for me, I undertook the march
With Governor Narvaez into Florida
Under the superscription of the throne,
Named second in command, Lord Treasurer
Of your royal Highness, to secure all rights;
Hoping my continued service to the crown
Would match the glory of my ancestors
Who saved our nation from the infidels.
Yet all I hoped to realize came to naught
As neither my counsel nor my constancy
Availed us aught within that wilderness;

For no Armada sent, before or since,
Ever found itself put in such desperate straits
As ours, abandoned, famished and forgot,
Cast on a hostile, inhospitable coast
Without supplies or arms or clothes to wear.

My last remaining task is to transmit
All that I saw and heard in the nine years
I made my way across a continent
With others, wandering miserable and lost
Until at last we came to Mexico;
Reporting not of rivers, mountains, plants
And animals alone, but of the tribes
We met, with whom we dealt and learned their tongues,
Their habits, ceremonies, wars and rites.
Also, so that your Majesty may learn
What happened to our expedition, how
Our governor and comrades disappeared,
Never to be seen or heard about again;
How we were captured, tortured and enslaved
By savages within the Cactus Land—
Scorched by the sun and freezing under stars;
And how so many died before our eyes
By famine, drowning, arrows and disease,
That of six hundred in our vessels sent
With Governor Narvaez into Florida,
But four of us came back, as I shall tell.

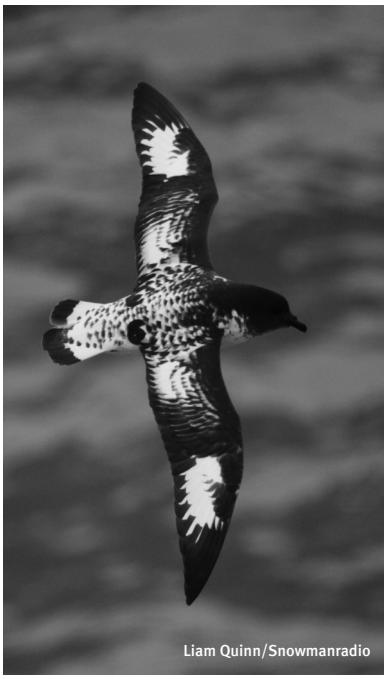
I speak as no New Spain conquistador
But as one greatly moved by what I saw
And suffered in my trek across harsh lands
Inhabited by peoples poor and piteous,
Deserving of our love, not cruelty
By Christians, as too often I have seen,
Which acts cry out for justice unto God.
Rather than to exaggerate those things
Described herein, I have diminished much
So as not to read like legend or romance
Full of prodigious marvels and events.
Yet I have held to strict veracity,
With no extenuation of the facts
That I have set down here in my own words
With great exactness and considerate care;
Knowing my story is no trivial thing
To those who go forth in your sovereign name
Bearing the light of faith into new lands.

In homage, then, I tender this account
Written with no pretense of art or style,
So that this narrative may stand as truth:
Sufficient in its starkness, unadorned,
Appropriate matter for your Majesty
From one returned back lately from the dead.

* Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor and King of Spain

Richard O'Connell lives in Deerfield Beach, Florida. Collections of his poetry include *RetroWorlds*, *Simulations*, *Voyages*, and *The Bright Tower*, all published by the University of Salzburg Press (now Poetry Salzburg). His poems have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *National Review*, *The Paris Review*, *Margie*, *Measure*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *Acumen*, *The Formalist*, etc.

Simon Perchik


Liam Quinn/Snowmanradio

All but the splash is thickening
half as marrow, half
feathers and long ago seas

share this pot with bones
dropped end over end
though they stay, are growing wings

the way mourners are overcome
by turbulence, lean into each other
—it's a dark kitchen, barely room

for the talons that will stretch
are already flying side by side
as smoke reaching around the silence

all afternoon carrying the dead
though finally every bone becomes too heavy
from nothing inside but shoreline.

*

You walk clinging to streams
from when the Earth was shattered
still gathers up the rocks broken off

for light where a sky should be
help the lost find their way home
and though her grave was left behind

you come here to start a fire by naming it
slowly after the tree that widened, became a sea
and every night washes over this stone

guiding it back as a singing—each leaf
already the warm breeze that reaches up
no longer smoke from arms and distances.

*

First on paper then the carpenters
following the saws—in the end
the house was divided with borders

where each wall was scented by a song
still playing when the hammers
were silenced the way you grip this knob

then leave a room that has no place to go
though you turn the radio around, sing along
till the static no longer comes from nails

stiffening, beginning to foam as each board
draws its wood tighter around your throat
—it's a small house, a kitchen

that's gaining weight, a sink
where iron drips just for the flash
when it touches the ground the way the dead

weigh less when the last thing they saw
was the darkness, drop by drop
opening the corners, the water, louder and louder.

*

You draw the map on her dress
shade in each afternoon
with a gentle stroking—here

the storm will be, the chalk
is already falling back
breaking apart over the fixed point

where the Earth was lowered
the way all graves are calmed
and though the dress is black

you hold it up as a gesture
guiding her with a night
that now weighs nothing

will circle over and over as the sleeve
no longer whitened by moonlight
taking so long to finish, become the path

helping you stay on your feet
once there's no chalk left
no sparks and the heaviness.

*

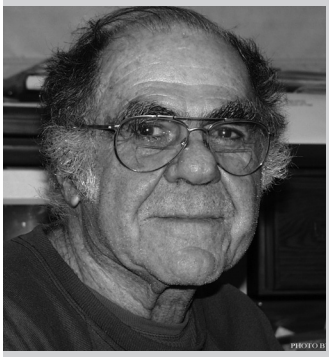
You wash this shirt at night
letting its buttons loosen
though the sleeves harden when wet

smell from salt then stone
—you become a lighthouse
—waves could save you now

come with a sea as that darkness
you need to embrace it, let the waters
take in that afternoon as if you

are still drowning, arm over arm
in the sand left over from an old love song
come back as lips to warm you

and though this is a small sink
it's always August, deeper and deeper
filled by an open wound.



Simon Perchik is an attorney whose poems have appeared in *Partisan Review*, *The Nation*, *Poetry*, *The New Yorker*, and elsewhere. His most recent collection is *Almost Rain*, published by River Otter Press (2013). For more information, including free e-books and his essay titled "Magic, Illusion and Other Realities," please visit his website at www.simonperchik.com.

Lindsay Ahl

The Sun Sets in the West



1

Blooming fields pass by purple flowers a blur

Wearing her white dress for Sundays, she
Brightens the backseat

Her father, driving, his children and moonshine
Wind beating the back of the 1931 Buick

A snake moving, and the road opens wide, her father swerves

Sunday-pale, they're floating out
Over the road, telephone pole rushing

When she comes to, she's hanging from her chin
On barbed wire, Sunday-bright

Across the fence, horses in the field far away
Warm sun on her back, wild grasses in the distance

A mocking bird imitating a cardinal, a train
Bound for Helena, the sound of the Buick rushing

The voice in her head: I've never been to Helena

2

Age nineteen, a long Sunday afternoon, 1936—
She's giving birth to her first son in Greybull, Wyoming

Out her window—peaked snow capped mountains
An occasional eagle

Her son grows up
Drinks blackberry moonshine
Fishes the river below their house

Walks for supplies in cold 30 below

3

His face in the silver mirror
Reminds him of Lightening, his ghost-horse—

And walking the streets that night, he hears
The voice of his enemy

He spins to the man who stole his horse
Props the man's leg, knee to ankle
From the street to the top of the curb
Slams all his weight down
(This for his horse)
First onto one leg
Splintering screams from the body below

A godly deliverance
Revenge

Another slam onto the other leg

The sheriff, one-half block away
Sitting on a horse, doesn't move
Men rove the sidewalks, their cigarettes small Sunday

Arcs in the evening air

4

Horses don't have a mystical side, horses
Are dumb animals, he went to college

To get away from those damn horses
But that doesn't mean anyone can steal from him

Even before it happens he feels the cool silver
Sheen of moonshine pouring

Down his throat, can feel his own head
Going through the plate glass horse-heavy window

Of Meiping Bar, knows already his woman will track
The scars of his childhood beatings with her tongue

Knows already she will enter and leave
Gallatin Gateway out of Bozeman a ghost

He'll face cold, remorseless

5

When he used to bring out the horses, he'd see a girl
In the yellow fields

His daughter, a silver vapor girl,
Staring at him even though she isn't yet born—

There are many ways to be robbed—the ghost
Of your child can rob your future, your field

Your woman
Can find you in Helena, drunk

Looking at the ghosts of your future

6

Once, fishing on the Bitterroot, he instead shot
Rattlesnakes that came out of nowhere

He can name every bush, weed, flower, animal track, cloud, weather
Pattern, *God damn it, a man's got to know at least these*

He married a beautiful woman named Helen
At their reception, his brothers tied up her brother in the yard

The way the moon played in her hair that night

7

To his daughter, he sang moonshine songs

Stale cigarette smoke, gun cleaner—the smells
Of his ghost in the house

Staring into his coffee in the morning
Moonshine high, telling himself, not again, not

Today

I won't drink today but
Moonshine evenings take over, night after night

8

Hair to her waist, wild
As a stolen horse's—

Helen's hair, vaporous as a loose snake
And just like Helen of Troy, kidnapped

By love, she left him right there
In Bozeman

Taking their quiet ghost daughter
With her, the daughter with moonshine hair

No one noticed

9

If you look completely
Into a man's eyes can you see

Anything they've seen?

If you look into the sun can you see
Your father's silver moonshine

Your grandmother's Sunday dress?

If a man's history is the history
Of the country

Was your mother's crucible the long ghost winters,
Mountains disappearing in snow?

10

I watch Wyoming horses in the field
As I hold my son at the fence

His small arm pointing
Past wild grasses, yellow blowing in the wind

And I see the past and future
In his moonshine eyes



Lindsay Ahl has work published or forthcoming in *The Georgia Review*, *Hotel Amerika*, *Barrow Street*, *BOMB Magazine*, and many other publications. She was a Fletcher Fellow at Bread Loaf for her novel, *Desire* (Coffee House Press, 2004).

Esteban Rodríguez

Exodus

And when decades of laying cement abbreviated his balance and step,
and his spine could no longer commit itself to symmetry, curving

to its side like the top of a question mark, my father continued brushing
aside his posture's battle with gravity, his joints' petition for retirement,

as the concept had yet to migrate into meaning in either his broken English
or Spanish, and because routine was the only thing that kept his name

on a payroll, he'd haul his morning shadow into our kitchen's Pine-Sol
scented darkness, rub the few hours of sleep still loyal to his eyelids,

and bend at the counter like someone buried deep in prayer, in the belief
that he'll receive a better outcome if he remains longer in his position.

On mornings when he'd shuffle loudly through the drawers, I'd eavesdrop
from the hallway, watch him put his faith in the stained altar of a coffee pot,

in the stale fragrance of generic coffee grounds, and on the wafer-thin filter
where he'd pour them in, as the first spurt popped like a muffled gun shot,

then pooled into a puddle as thick as the river he was reborn from. Drip
by drip, I'd listen to the ripples spread, fill with the urgency of an hourglass,

and as he'd adjust his jaw, straighten himself into the embodiment of a man
who didn't lose his patience, I couldn't help but place him back in the river

again, and picture him doggie paddling to the other side, while the men squatting
to his rear, hoping the moonlight is qualified to be their ferryman, test the water

until they find themselves wrapped inside its current, swimming towards
the lives they've already tilled on that fabled ground. And as my father

bellies through the last leg of his exodus, I imagine how quietly he'll fatigue
into a stout description of steel toes and jeans, into a husband defined more

by his hard hat, or by the way his tongue doesn't need to cool the tumbler
from its steam, because every time he'd bring it to his lips, I could see

the plaque and indifference caked around his teeth, as he'd sip what he could
before the sun, that ancient immigrant, dawned the plains and clocked

the day in, and I'd walk in after him to finish whatever was left, to taste
that caffeinated oasis I could never sweeten enough to drink.

Trash

As bright as midnight underpasses lit with homeless fires,
or flares of summer fireworks singeing their signatures across

the air, I watch my father strike a match, bend the arthritic
architecture of his body down, squat with a can of diesel

in his hand, and douse it on the growing mound of trash
he's slowly piled up, on the same spot where remnants

of last month's ash lay sprawled, and trails of coyote paws
have fossilized with the pools of piss they left behind.

The moon, like a chipped fingernail scratching the darkness,
quickly arcs across the sky, and as it casts a dim spotlight

on the edge of our backyard, every pair of nocturnal eyes
eavesdrop on my father's stance, on the way he tosses

splintered crates and planks, scraps of corrugated steel
peeled from our unused shed, and a catalogue of car parts

weathered beyond repair. Like a children's magician
pulling handkerchiefs from a hat, he exhumes a stash

of Hefty bags filled with cut brush and grass, saw-dust
and crumpled roof shingles, a punctured water hose,

torn window and screen door mesh, along with a drawerful
of my mother's old kitchenware, and aware that I'm always

near, that I too am an accomplice to this ritual, a small box
of limbless action figures too stiff and injured to play with

again, too symbolic not to accept the scene playing out
before me, and forget that before the timid flames began,

I thought he was building another house, framing a foundation
large enough for all the things this one couldn't fit,

and blueprinted with a patio, fence, a fertile lawn without
the bent and rusted hubcaps I sit on, or the stripped tires

he lays on the heap like funeral bouquets, stepping back
as the mountain of our imagined home burns again,

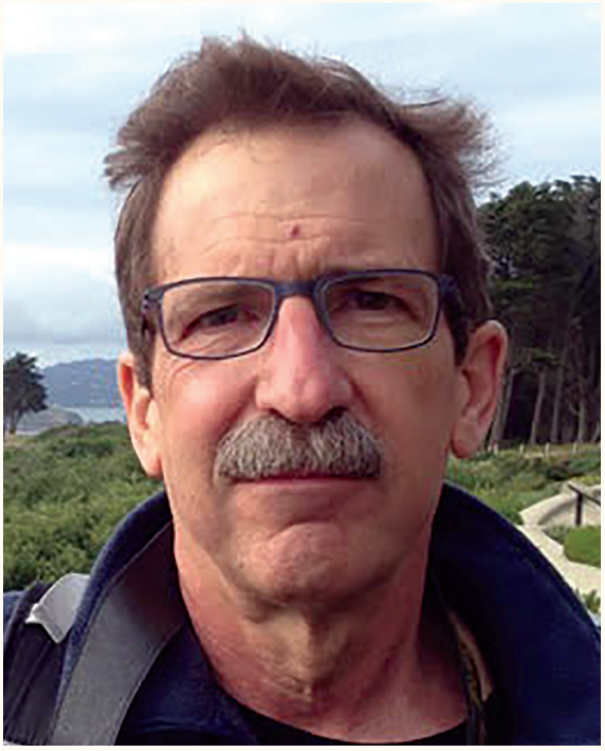
and again I walk closer, convinced that as the blaze fans
higher, we'll soon throw our tired bodies into the pyre.



Esteban Rodríguez holds an MFA from the University of Texas Pan-American and works as an elementary reading and writing tutor in the Rio Grande Valley, promoting both English and Spanish literacy. His poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *The American Literary Review*, *The Los Angeles Review*, *Nashville Review*, *Sugar House Review*, and *storySouth*. He lives in Weslaco, Texas.



Spiral, laminated cherry strips and clamp hardware grafted to a cherry branch, 75" x 104" x 72", 2016.



THE ARTIST

JIM JACOBS WAS BORN AND RAISED IN PHILADELPHIA. HE RECEIVED HIS MASTER OF FINE ARTS DEGREE IN PAINTING WITH A MINOR IN WOOD DESIGN FROM EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY IN 1982. JIM HAS EXHIBITED HIS WORK IN OGDEN, SALT LAKE CITY, NEW YORK, LOS ANGELES, CHICAGO, AND OTHER CITIES IN THE U.S.



Vigilance, under construction.



Vigilance, under construction.



Vigilance, detail.



Vigilance, under construction.



GRAFT SERIES

INTERSECTIONS FASCINATE ME. GRAFTING, IN THE TRADITIONAL SENSE, IS A PROCESS USED TO JOIN TWO DISTINCT PLANTS, OFTEN TREES, TO MAKE THEM MORE PRODUCTIVE. IN *GRAFT* NATURAL TREE LIMBS ARE GRAFTED TO MILLED LUMBER, WOODEN TOOLS, FURNITURE, AND HUMAN HAIR. THESE WORKS—GANGLY, ELEGANT, CONTRIVED, FRAGILE, AND AT TIMES SELF-DESTRUCTIVE—ARE REFLECTIONS ON OUR PECULIAR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE NATURAL WORLD.

Vigilance, cherry lumber grafted to cherry branches, 138" x 55" x 85", 2015.

IN ONE SENSE, AS EVOLUTION HAS SHOWN, HUMANS AND THEIR PRODUCTIONS ARE CLEARLY AS MUCH A PART OF THE NATURAL WORLD AS ANY OTHER LIFE FORM. OUR SKYSCRAPERS ARE AS MUCH A PART OF NATURE AS THE HONEYCOMB OF THE BEE AND, IN FACT, REPLICATE SOME ANALOGOUS STRUCTURAL PRINCIPLES. NOTED CONCEPTUAL ARTIST AND SYSTEMS THINKER HANS HAACKE FAMOUSLY SAID, "THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN 'NATURE' AND TECHNOLOGY IS ONLY THAT THE LATTER IS MAN MADE." YET, THERE ARE REASONS TO BELIEVE WE ARE SOMEHOW DIFFERENT FROM THE REST OF THE NATURAL WORLD. WE'VE INVOKED BOTH SCIENCE AND RELIGION TO EXPLAIN THE APPARENT DIVISION. WE POSITION OURSELVES ABOVE NATURE BY DECLARING THAT WE ARE ITS STEWARDS. WE POSITION OURSELVES BELOW BY ELEVATING THE REST OF NATURE TO A ROMANTIC IDEAL. WE LOOK FOR NATURAL CURES AND NATURAL FOODS. WE SEEK NATURAL LIGHT BEER AND NATURE VALLEY GRANOLA BARS. AND, EVEN IF WE ERASE THE IDEAS THAT PURPORTEDLY SEPARATE US FROM THE NATURAL WORLD, THE MOST POWERFUL FACTOR DISTINGUISHING US AS A SPECIES REMAINS: OUR DISPROPORTIONATE IMPACT ON THE ENVIRONMENT.



Cascade, maple lumber grafted to a mulberry branch, 88" x 144" x 108", 2015.



Flagellate, laminated maple strips grafted to an apple branch, 46” x 78” x 25”, 2016.





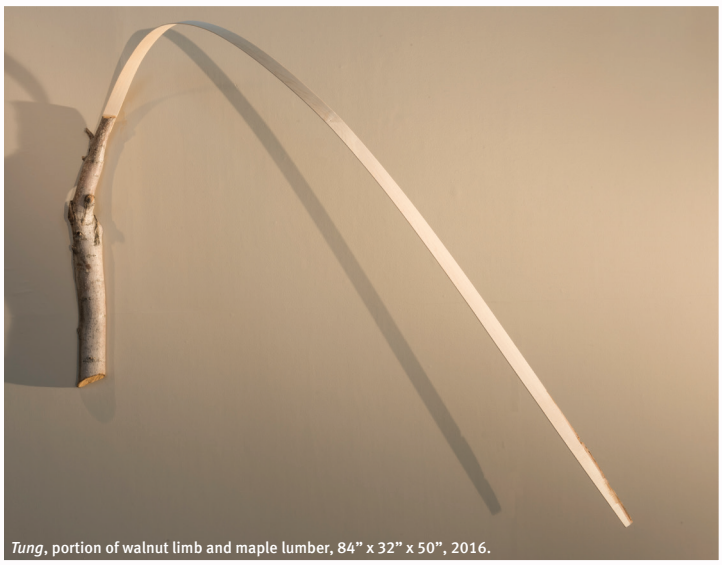
Outcross, maple strips grafted to a mulberry branch, 44” x 140” x 24”, 2013.



Ouroboros, laminated maple strips with clothespin spring grafted to an apple branch, 34" x 21" x 12", 2016.



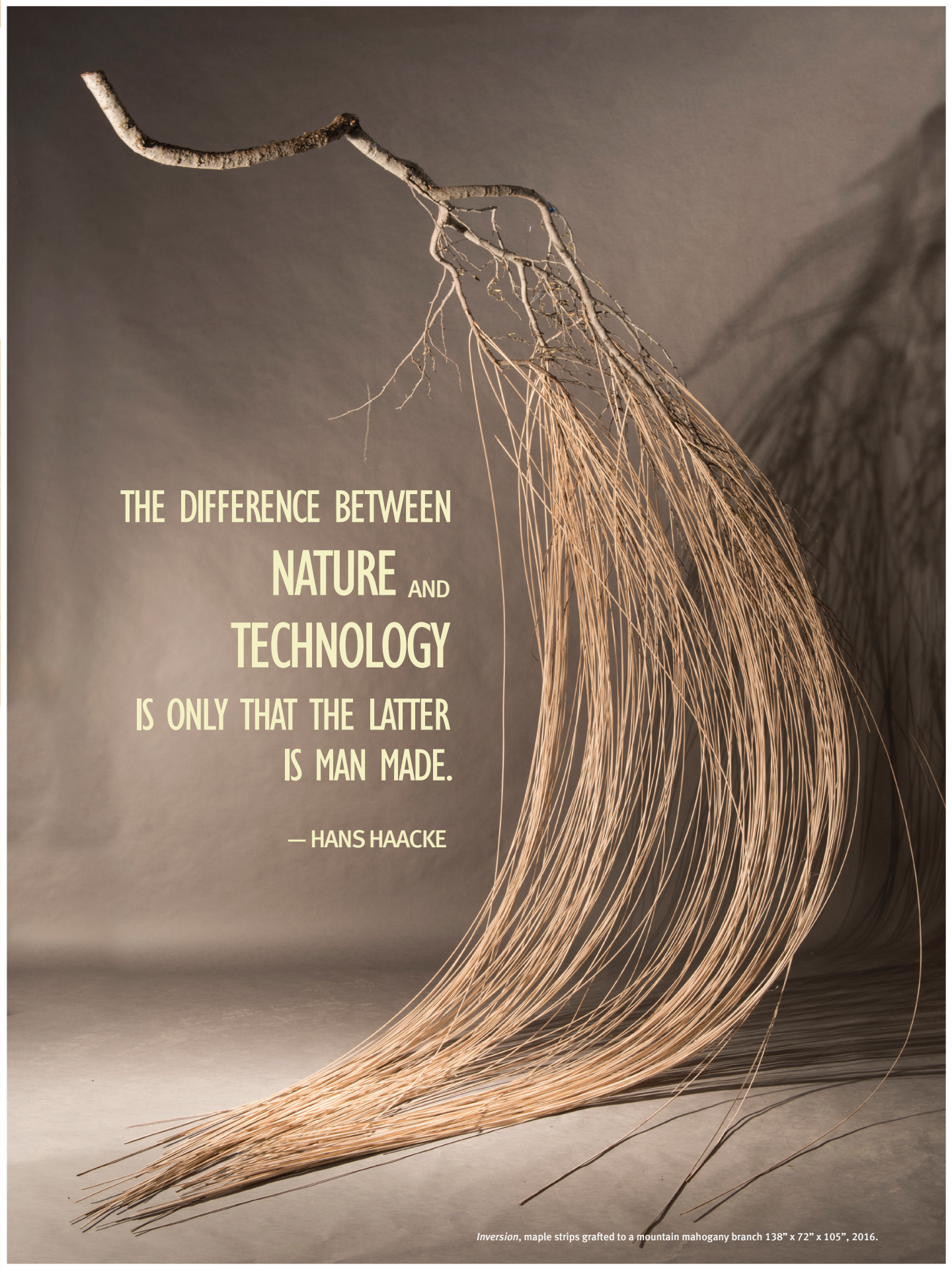
Tung, detail.



Tung, portion of walnut limb and maple lumber, 84" x 32" x 50", 2016.



Splice, maple and mulberry branch, 30" x 44" x 7", 2013.



Inversion, maple strips grafted to a mountain mahogany branch 138" x 72" x 105", 2016.

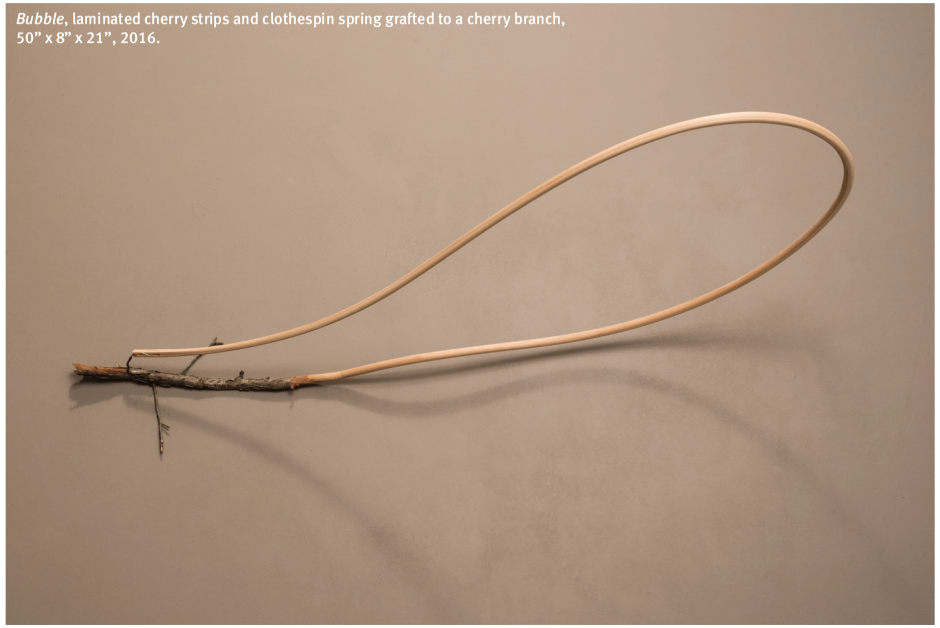
WE POSITION OURSELVES ABOVE NATURE BY DECLARING THAT WE ARE ITS STEWARDS.



Delude (Pursuit), laminated maple strips grafted to a hawthorn branch with hammer head, 52” x 2” x 20”, 2016.



Mika, willow branch with human hair graft and graphite, 60” x 9” x 3”, 2017.



Bubble, laminated cherry strips and clothespin spring grafted to a cherry branch, 50” x 8” x 21”, 2016.



Tap, laminated cherry lumber strips with sledge hammer head grafted to a cherry tree trunk, 63” x 3” x 33”, 2016.



Armed, laminated cherry strips and clothespin springs grafted to a cherry branch, 21” x 12” x 2”, 2016.



Art Lesson, maple, mulberry branch, blackboard paint, chalk, 45" x 53" x 15", 2012.



Regeneration, cherry lumber and cherry branch, 29" x 38" x 42", 2008.

THIS SERIES OF WORKS IS INFLUENCED BY THE MATAPALO TREES OF CENTRAL AND SOUTH AMERICA. AFTER BIRDS DEPOSIT THE SEEDS, THE MATAPALO, OR STRANGLER FIG, STARTS ITS LIFE AS AN EPIPHYTE HIGH IN AN ESTABLISHED TREE. OVER TIME, THE VINE'S ROOTS REACH THE FOREST FLOOR AND GRADUALLY WEAVE THEMSELVES AROUND THE TRUNK. EVENTUALLY THEY ENCIRCLE THE TREE SO THICKLY THAT THE HOST TREE DIES, LEAVING A TIGHTLY WOVEN MASS OF VINES THAT TAKE THE FORM OF THE TREE.

Z

SERIES

INTERLACE

Botany Lesson, maple, mulberry branch, blackboard paint, chalk, 48" x 96" x 9", 2010. (Detail)



Cocoon, maple, maple and mulberry branch, 18" x 108", 2004.

SERIES

EIDOLON

THE WORD EIDOLON HAS A RANGE OF MEANINGS INCLUDING MENTAL IMAGE, PHANTOM, IDEAL, AND IDOL. IN THIS SERIES I USE IT TO DESCRIBE THE IMPERFECT NATURE OF MEMORY AND ITS INTERSECTION WITH OUR DESIRE TO SEEK OUT MEANINGFUL PATTERNS.



Princessa, inkjet print and acrylic paint on panel, 27" x 39", 2014.



Reina Sofia, inkjet print and acrylic paint on panel, 27" x 39", 2015.



Bush, inkjet print and acrylic paint on panel, 27" x 39", 2015. (Detail)



Valladolid, inkjet print and acrylic paint on panel, 27" x 39", 2015.

Rachel Jamison Webster

White Hawk

To be a child again, well fed and ringed by light you can almost feel like a fur around you spun and spinning into wind. We danced, and I forgot the cold. My feet stamped ice and I turned into a rhythm. We were up in the thinner air of the spirits then, so close they seemed to be breathing us, sucking us up as the loves they'd forgotten. When I looked at my husband and sisters I could see little ribbons of sky breaking into their skin like flowers opening their soft fringed mouths—bright too bright—and a strange shimmer of gold rivering from my sister's fingers. We were not solid but loose as summer water, freezing back into body, and I could see through them to the light that had become us once. Our forms were shaking up, our limbs were splitting and I thought of the vine that breaks the bark. We were windbitten silver wood slipping out of its skin, worm-marked and swollen with water that hums the inner ringing of the river. And the light was stabbing down like ice on stone then into fire tonguing us back into one. Who we were we had been all along. Though we'd have to go on in our hunted bodies, which were getting slow and strange to us.

Running Standing Hairs

They were pursuing us, hunting us like buffalo on the ground so we trekked up into the badlands, those strange stones and cones close to heaven. They may have been made of ice or horn and when the sunrise hit the rocks they shot through with pink and yellow—like veined flesh, and the land rippling on as the ocean above us. Looking up you would think you were in the great glowing of color and form, you were living in a stone cloud ever opening, and all the time you were growing smaller. A bug among bugs in the dust. And below you, the river was just a white snaking skin of ice. It looked like milk, like the thin clear milk just after the baby comes. And we had to crack it with our hatchets to get out the water.

Catherine Whitefoot

Every time I see them I feel ashamed. Not only for what we do to them, which is worse than what we do to their buffalo, but for their dignity. The way they know themselves in their bodies. Mine I keep covered up, and when I take off my clothes to bathe, it is grotesque to me. Embarrassing. The sickly white skin and falling paunch of stomach. I don't want to be a woman with its shy apology weighing my limbs, hiding cold, furred and folded between my legs. Meak and weak and something dirty in me, too, a kind of crawling need unsatisfied.

That's why I sing so loud and clear in church. I want to be taken up, up, into something better. I want to bell the emptiness. I love the church for its white hollows. The light floods in and I feel the hush. It is like a husk. It is like I am, a husk—we all are—windblown, like we know not what we do.

Eugenie

Some souls you just know. Before she came she called to me. She strung me like the Crow strings lost things. Tufts of fur, little cones and beads. When she was born I recognized her eyes and in them I saw myself. I was her mother like that was what I came to be. We were so whole together I could forget she was beside me. We liked to sit close while eating. Try this, she'd say, pressing a bit of seasoned stewmeat into my mouth. She's your grandmother! my friends laughed, because she had that way. As if she already knew and had known that I was coming even though she came through me and after me. She should have been my grandmother, dying before me. She was my daughter. She should have died after me. I should not have had to hold her while she died.

Catherine Whitefoot

The skin between worlds is thin today, the wind boring holes through folds in the seen, waiting as it does for the bodies it was once, and lost.

The gate whines its irons and clacks dry wood on wood. It has been left open. Anyone can enter for the careless woman I've become, snow like skin fluttering up on the gusts, then sinking down again to the sage that always smells to me like cinnamon.

My feet are choking in their boots. My eyes no one sees are only holes for seeing this world, a world so porous it is less a world than a shimmering in and out, a kind of labored breathing. Gray crossing gray crossing gray in tones like low notes, in a sky rubbled blank and white.



Rachel Jamison Webster is author of the full-length collection of poetry, *September* (TriQuarterly Books, 2013), and the chapbook, *The Blue Grotto* (Dancing Girl Press, 2009). Her poems and essays appear in many journals and anthologies, including *Poetry*, *The Southern Review*, *The Paris Review*, and *Narrative*, and she has been awarded honors from the Poetry Foundation, the Noepe Center, and the Academy of American Poets. She teaches poetry and literature at Northwestern University and edits the online anthology of international poetry, *Universe*, www.universeofpoetry.org, which aims to publish poets from every nation in the world, regardless of territory. These poems are from a book-length manuscript written in the voices of those who participated in the Ghost Dance of the 1890s. Rachel would like to thank the Brush Creek Arts Foundation and the people of Pine Ridge for allowing her to spend time on sacred land, where this book was first drafted. You can read more about Rachel and find links to her work at www.racheljamisonwebster.com.

Emily K. Bright

How Much World There Is



Prairie-bluff
no path
and everywhere I step the knee-high grass bends down
how often can you say
it looks like no one's ever been this way before

bees dive into ground-holes
dragonflies uproot their
improbable flat purple bodies
farther on
the Mississippi
tree-lined
engulfing island after island

can't you picture
awed explorers overlooking
people there

saying *surely this land continues* *in abundance* *on forever*

twenty different kinds of trees along the river
birds inside them insects
grass
that hides a dozen creatures
me a great destructive force
testing with my hands and feet

how much world there is

Driving into Lightning, a Tornado Watch in Place

I know the tales of flying cars, the woman with her groceries placed gently on her head
five miles away. That's the stuff I think of, driving toward the storm-dark clouds, tornado

warnings interrupting radio. There are roadside ditches hardly low enough to shelter me.
I keep my seatbelt on. I count on rubber tires in case of lightning.

This I learned in grade school: if struck, jump straight from your car, just don't be
a conductor. Bet that's harder than it sounds. The Acts of God that I grew up around

were paltry. Nor'Easters cancelling school. I knew a kid whose house burned down
and he got all new stuff. I just keep driving toward the lightning.

There are people in the bomb-filled countries, driving, walking every day, going into shopping malls, going straight into the storm, thinking, "have to get there," not letting fear derail.

It's always someone else's danger, the car two miles back, the café down the block.
The rain becomes impossible to see through, no gaps between lightning/thunder.

For a moment I can see the good health and assumptions bubble-wrapped around me,
letting me make plans, redefining natural causes until even old age is poor reason to go.

The air is sharp with static. I am slim statistics, foot on the accelerator. I am little matter
in the storm's-eye view. I'm two lines in tomorrow's paper. Lightning/boom.

What is it, then, what is it that keeps me driving ever deeper in?

Geologic Hymn

My father taught me rock formations. Those red cliffs
once were dunes, he said, once were sand ground down
from mountains. From him, I learned to reconstruct.
Where I live has been both glacier and the sea.
Deep beyond our hearing, rocks sing their tectonic praise.

What Has Been Grassed-Over

Sometimes there are secrets left unscathed by glaciers.
The knowledge that we thought lost—not entirely.
Take the North Dakota boy who dug throughout his ranch
each afternoon, the cattle grazing elsewhere, lifted
shovelfuls of dirt in hopes each moment of that jolt
against not rock, not pipe, not old foundation.
You decide the outcome, folks: how long should he
keep digging? How many years, dusk coming on,
and someone calling him for supper?

1999. He strikes a rib. He strikes a brown, curved bone
connected to, connected to

The duckbilled hadrosaur
lies side-long, curled. Mummified, which is to say,
cartilage remains. Chemicals that once were organs. No time
now for commentary, here is where we drive across the prairie
bearing spoons and toothbrushes to dust the banded markings
left on mud by skin—yes, *skin!*—dust until our eyes have
banded. Haul that baby down the highway to be CT-scanned
in a machine reserved, I kid you not, for space shuttles.

Meanwhile on the family land, the cattle redirected,
dig site cordoned off, the boy has gone to grad school
for a PhD in dinosaurs. His parents have reclaimed
their lives: wash the dishes, grill the steaks. They still
pause to consider the spectacular, but less often now: it's their
familiar miracle, and the housework still gets done.



Emily K. Bright holds an MFA in poetry from the University of Minnesota. She is the author of the chapbook *Glances Back*. Her poems have appeared in such literary journals and anthologies as *Other Voices International*, *Collier's Online*, the *North American Review*, and *The Pedestal Magazine*, among others. She works as a freelance radio producer. Find her at www.emilykbright.com.

Müesser Yeniay

Stranger

It is raining
the stranger who comes to visit me

its delicate toes
falling on the earth

-like a present from the distance-

It is raining
somebody invisible
is knocking my window

let my heart stay here
like a loaded cloud hung on the sky

which has just learnt to rain



Forgetting Tastes Sweet

You can also forget like everybody
and put the face of a lover where you take
perhaps in a mosque courtyard

in that massacre called forgetting
chest dries, skin shrinks

you can also forget like everybody
or search a way to forget

it is easier to forget a lover
people forget their most beloved
and face of somebody unknown comes
into their mind

you can also forget
forgetting tastes sweet

Snow

I am walking with a half foot
on the mountains that never exist
my body is raining like stony storms
my body, the hardest thing within me

tired like depth of seas
and defeated waters
that made mirror from rocks

as the wind shakes trees
I would like to lose myself in that

snow seems to have taken an oath
to cover everything…

In Your Eyes There Are Palaces

In your eyes there are palaces
whose doors open to me
there are singing birds in your deepest forest
and cellars of green

if it is your sky that rejects
it can be walked there
on bare foot

in your eyes standing
age-old trees

inspiration is by you
your hands
that present fertility of a grain

what's far but we ourselves
love is closer



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Stephanie Dickinson

Wind Children—1919

Honeylet and I wash in the creek. The thickness of quaking aspen causes a green wind to blow against our skin. She tells me soon she will feel good in her flesh; a baby will be born belonging to her and she to it. No matter if the father is a prairie dog or warrior ghost. The Sisters think she has gone astray, shilly-shallying on her chores and letting a barn boy or one of those clumsy oafs who spread manure on the vegetable garden touch her with more than his glance. Someone has used Honeylet's body like a field. "Who is the father?" I ask my friend. "The older boy who milks the cow Flossie? Is he the father?" She bows her head. She doesn't know. They cornered her. The older boy and another boy. "Mae Anna, will the baby have a third eye in its forehead? Will a horn grow from its nose?"


Tim1965

*

"Father, may I talk to you?" I ask in my quietest voice. "Father Eden, may I have a moment?" I turn to him not only with my mouth but my eyes. He won't refuse me—Mae Anna, his favorite kitchen girl, the one whose shyness reminds him of an antelope. He'll notice the pale sun torching the black of my hair. How pretty she is, he'll think, although he'll catch himself, pretty, yet they smell different, these Lakota girls, like soil or straw the sheep find their sleep on, like snow melt in a rusty bucket.

He's standing in the doorway watching us, the three kitchen girls, prepare his and Father Chappy's noon meal. The morning he's spent adding long columns of numbers—up to his ears in Sisseton, South Dakota, Mission Residential Indian School receipts—the yellow bits of paper like shredded rapeweed. I believe he finds it soothing to watch his food being touched by young hands, his buttermilk skimmed from the

jug, each ladle flecked with grass fat. He likes how I understand the wood-burning cookstove, knowing when its heat must be kept even and when to fan its embers. I act as if I am happy learning the white ways of dough, its rising and falling, as I wait to slip an egg into my apron pocket. It might be bread sopped in bacon lard I take or raisins. For the hungry little ones who cry at night from the long rows of beds. My red hands are allowed to handle what will enter the priest's white body. My day in the kitchen is like a dream, but not the dream where I can levitate, where I can lift the ceiling and fly through it.

Father Eden's face flushes. Has he only imagined that I've spoken to him? I am cutting potatoes. The tuber's white eyes wink from its smooth purple skin. *See me. See me.* I would like to steal this whole potato and not just its peels. Honeylet runs cold well water over the boiled eggs. More than once he has instructed us about eggs. Let them cool in the palms of our hands, and then run water from the hand pump over them. Honeylet picks bits of brown shell from the egg white.

Some feign not to see her belly, how it grows like a giant tortoise between her pelvic bones, how it fills her schoolgirl dress and apron, how she staggers under its weight. The Sisters refuse to look at her when she enters the chapel where we take our dawn devotions; there is a change among them, an intake of breath, before their eyes slam shut in prayer. Sister Agatha has questioned her, refusing to take Honeylet's silence for an answer. *Who is the father? One of the older boys?* All the Sisters want to know what we students turn away from; knowledge is dangerous to obtain and hold inside. How pretty Honeylet is—her black plum eyes and lips, her narrow chin, her hair that falls to her knees when unbraided. I've heard Sister Agatha say that her features are white.

Awinta, the third kitchen girl, looks plain and scrawny as tumbleweed. But like a star-nosed mole she can snatch food and eat quicker than the eye can see. Two years ago her cousin's belly swelled and she was sent away no-one knows where. That was before Father Eden came. There are Lakota students who carry tales to the Sisters. I am sure that the flat-nosed Awinta is one of them, a listener.

"Father Eden, may I talk to you?" I repeat, setting aside the potato peeler. The kitchen stops. Only the vat of boiling water keeps talking, keeps bubbling along.

The listener girl goes still. Everything about her poises in readiness.

Does his face show surprise? His eyes are different than the ones the Sisters use for their watching. He laughs when he eats marmalade and oat cakes. His hands are the warm color of a carp taken from the fire wrapped in husks. Father Eden isn't used to a student addressing him directly. How old is this girl? Fourteen? Fifteen?

My chin goes up and my gaze meets his. He's a big man and his blond head and broad shoulders tower over his brother priests. I am four feet nine inches at the last marking. We kitchen girls clean the priests' rooms with vinegar rag and elbow grease. We learn things. We are the Lakota

children the Church has saved from the brutality of the Reservation, teaching us to read and write the white language, and giving us a trade. I am learning the cookstove. Its char and scorch.

In the rectory dining room, the pendulum clock strikes noon. My ears follow the brass bob's swing from side to side, tick-tock, tick-tock, and then the shiver of the chimes striking the hour. Lakota people tell time by the sun, the same way the *pispíza* and *chápa* divide the day, the prairie dog and the beaver. When the chimes sound I flinch twelve times.

"Of course, my child, you may speak," he says, finally. His white collar constricts his pink throat. The gold cross glints against his black cassock. What has this to do with his potato soup and hot bread? Like a hunter listening to the brush, he is cautious.

My child. He hides behind those words.

I am washing Honeylet's hair, so heavy it feels like rope. I work the braid apart, dividing and loosening it. Because her body is changing, Honeylet tires easily. I tell her to kneel beside me, so we can see ourselves in the river. My eyes, always darting, are like the quick moving water. The true water is inside us, I tell my friend, the clear streams of where we came from and will return to. If you can throw your face into the water and have it look back, your future can be foretold. Sunfish and minnows school around our wrist, rubbing against our fingers with their fins, nibbling.

*

His eyes move to the peeled egg, pristine and white, resting on the countertop in its innocence. "What is it, Mae Anna?" he asks. I feel heat spread in my cheeks. He has put my name in his mouth. I am more than a kitchen girl. "It is something you'd rather speak of in Confession? Something best left between you and God? Some private sin?" Mae Anna, one of the few students who speaks Lakota, and many times, has been punished for it.

My back is to the window and shafts of sun strike me. "It's not my sin, Father. Not Honeylet's either." My hands drop to my sides. I smell the soap he rubbed against himself this morning, the wash water's musky clove. The same soapy clove water I sponged myself with before throwing it out. In the three places Sister Agatha says a girl needs to wash to be clean. Face, underarms, and between the legs. The water he leaves in his drinking glass I finish. I am gathering bits of Father Eden's power. And I know what there is to be known about him. That he wanted to become a doctor; that his mother had no husband and could not afford to feed him. Brought up in a Catholic Orphanage, he entered the priesthood and before ordination he'd mastered seven languages. They called him The Translator. The majesty of Latin, each phrase a seven-flamed candelabra, he loves. I know what there is to know about him by the etchings left on his writing tablets. The contents of the letters he's penned leave a trace like tracking a trail of broken twigs. He, too, knows my language. Lakota. He thinks that is his secret.

"Father, soon Honeylet will give birth."

"A birth not sanctified by holy matrimony," he says, nervously.

Lakota belief says the child chooses his mother. The child is not only a gift from the spiritual realm but sacred. Honeylet peers warily out from under her bangs, her black eyes piercing like a muskrat's. Yes, he sees birds in her hair too; he again smells rain over rust, the good odor of earth.

"Who will help her deliver?" I ask, thrusting my chin out. "The Sisters?"

His eyes flash: a bolt of blueness off on the horizon. This is not a subject for a girl of tender age even if she is but a generation removed from savagery. "There is nothing to fear in the infirmary," he says. "The Sisters are good nurses."

*

Honeylet and I laugh about the mothers of priests and nuns. Who are they? It seems impossible they have human mothers. We guess the Sisters are the offspring of rocks; born craggy and old. In the shade of the black locust, we dangle our feet in the creek. We play with our leaf girls and sew them new dresses from leaves of the silver ash. Their war bonnets we trim with waxwing and dipper feathers. We watch the ants awakening in their tiny forests of grass. We giggle. No white person has ever seen us smile. The Sisters do not believe our faces know how.

Father Eden knows he's spoken a lie. The Sisters pretend to care for those in the infirmary. Tuberculosis is rampant and the lungers cough, two to a cot. Boys burn with fever and girls with measles. I know about the notes he makes. His writing tablet contains the etching of sentences he's already sealed into envelopes. The archdiocese expects his monthly reports. Mission School receipts to the penny. Father has asked his holiness for one doctor visit a week. The Church demands that such visits be cut back to twice a month.

"The infirmary is a bad place. Where do the girls and their babies go afterwards?" I ask. "The babies never return. And only sometimes the girl." Honeylet crosses her arms, her hands rest on her belly. Her lips tremble and she stares at the floor. "Do they go into Sister Agatha's wildflower garden?"

Father Eden's mouth opens yet nothing comes out. Again, he sees only the color of birds in my hair. A nuthatch. A grouse.

Rumors travel through the sleeping dormitories from girl to girl. In the dark the unspoken translates into fact. Theda Swallow says Lakota words were overheard—the blue violet and arrowroot whispering to the white clover and anemone. Marion White Swan listened to the clods of dirt in Sister Agatha's wildflower garden speaking amongst themselves. *We shelter no seed or bulb of bloom but stillbirths and infant bones. All jumbled together – the punished ones.* The muttered-about-garden is more feared

than the cemetery where students dead from coughing and measles are buried between the cottonwood trees. The wildflower garden is for rarer foxglove and elderberry: the wild oats of infant earlobes and toes, the stillborn Venus slippers, their eyelashes and knucklebones. The big boys who tend the vegetable gardens are not allowed to weed or plow it.

"Please, Father Eden, you are the only truth teller. Do you know where the babies go? There is talk that a Sister on instructions from above took a baby born to a Lakota girl and threw it into the furnace."

Father Eden's face reddens.

Silence. The listener girl Awinta has taken all my words in. They are of great value to her. Have I committed what the Sisters call mortal sin? I picture other sins. My mother lies face up in the cattail marsh, her head resting on a knot of half-dried reeds, last year's water, darker, scarred by the ice. The stalks bend to look at her thawing hair loosening from its braid. The sheriff's people left her here—skirt torn by animals, brown pollen dusting her forehead. When the sheriff and his men first came to take all the children to the School, my mother hid me. Her hands showed mine how to survive, to steam cattails and scrape the root into gruel, to trap squirrel meat. We ate that winter without much hunger, and then in the spring the men came again. I scrambled over the rocks that seem to roll under my feet, one foot bare in the snow, the other wearing cloth wrappings and string. After they carried me off, they surrounded her. She fought. Her death was quick. Now my mother is the color of the pounding stone. Her flesh a feast for the turkey buzzard and beetle.

"Mae Anna," he says, surprising me again with my name. Mae Anna Whose Dough Always Rises. "Where would you get such an idea? The babies are likely adopted into families who can care for them and the girls are sent home. There's no mystery. What? Who told you that story?" He chuckles, lets out a long breath as if relieved, pats my shoulder. His hand is still resting on my shoulder, when the head nun enters by the back door, bringing the mustiness with her of a dirty cupboard. Quickly, he withdraws his hand. Sister Agatha's steel spectacles glint.

"What are you girls doing idle?" Sister Agatha's lips press down like the sharp edges of a ruler.

Honeylet drops her head, feeling shame.

Again, tick-tock, the trickle of long minutes, the hissing of the kettle about to boil over.

Father Eden clears his throat. "Mae Anna, when you finish shelling the rest of those eggs, please set Father Chappy's and my table in the study. We will eat at 12:30." There is something that the old Sister intends to load onto his shoulders, something unclean and he does not want to know.

The old nun clutches in her hand one of the leaf dolls, withered now, and if she breathes on it will blow the tiny stitches apart. "They make them out of leaves," she snaps. "They are blasphemies. We are finding them everywhere in the dormitories." I smell her breath from here. Like a civet cat in the root cellar caught between the walls.

"The thousand tribes have a handful of shattered leaves, and we have the land," Father Eden says, as if to make light of it. "Not a bad bargain."

Sister Agatha's stern face absorbs the motionless kitchen. A slight nod at the listener, the tattletale. "All right, girls. I see you're snatching bread from the oven. Go wash your hands. Never touch the Father's food with fingers you touched your mouth with. God and the Saints are always watching."

We students grow most of the food eaten here. The boys talk as they weed to the squash curling yellow on its vines, to the white blossom, to sweet corn ears steadied by string to their stalks.

Father Eden backs up into the rectory dining room. The table bare and waiting to receive the gifts, the oak grains whorling under its polish. "How about joining us for lunch, Sister Agatha?" Does he breathe through his mouth as she passes by?

A smile crosses her jowl-cheeked face. The few whiskers bedded down in the wrinkles around her lip. "I shouldn't, Father Eden, we've got so many work shirkers in the infirmary. And there's these leaf images that we keep finding with the laziest." Her voice trails off, caught by the cleft in her chin. "But I will lunch with you."

*

Before our work day begins they give us two hours of school. They teach us white history. Sister Rosalie likes to draw on the blackboard. Little Big Horn Massacre. Under a photograph she writes General George Armstrong Custer. The Bluecoat General who the Sioux called Yellow Hair. In chalk she writes Sitting Bull. No photograph. Her glasses have wire rims and her blue eyes are fly wings on green pond water. Her fly eyes light on me. I take a deep breath. Yellow Hair's pale eyes are like Sister Rosalie's. Like places worn away. Ash. Like emptiness. His fingers are long as kindling used to start fires. I listen through the open window to the insects. The locust lift their little saws and they stop to pick berries and eat, then the saws start again. "What is the name of the battle where these two met? Anyone?" The new boys brought on the train bow their heads ashamed of their shorn hair. Yesterday, their braids were cut. The barber thumped a soup bowl on their heads and guided the scissors around its lip. They sit hunched like moles whose eyes you never see. "Lakota boys and girls," Sister Rosalie says, her eyes buzzing. "Little Big Horn saw events of pure savagery. What were they?" No one volunteers. The war ponies rise like clouds of dust on the ridge. Eagle feathers shiver from lances. I raise my hand. "Sitting Bull had the vision of Bluecoats falling at Little Big Horn like grasshoppers." I picture my mother's words. The warriors ready to die to protect their women and children. They paint themselves red with a blue circle around the face. "The Sioux lodges gathered to fight for their hunting lands," I say, my chin raised. "Uncpapas, Santee, my people the Oglala Lakota, Brule, Blackfeet, the Sans Arc's. The warriors fought bravely and few Bluecoats escaped." I watch Sister Rosalie put down her chalk and pick up the ruler. The classroom goes still. "Dismissed," Sister Rosalie says. The girls in their

blouses and skirts and the boys in their uniforms hurry out. "Uncpapas," she says, bringing the ruler down. Everyone gets up except Honeylet, who remains seated. "Santee." Thwack. "Oglala." Thwack. "Brule." Thwack.

The door closes against us. I hear their words, the infirmary, Sister Agatha's domain, yet Father Eden hopes the healthy children aren't sleeping next to the sick. Those with the coughing illness must be separated from the others. Otherwise, you could hardly hope for a decent outcome. I take up the paring knife and move the potato pan to where I can listen better.

"It's about the pregnant girl," he says.

I picture Sister Agatha's gray eyes like dry weeds seeking out his. "Who?"

"The kitchen girl, Honeylet. Surely her time is soon."

"No, no, no," she interjects. "It is a false pregnancy. Nothing at all." Sister Agatha goes on. "For attention, she only wants attention. Waddling about in her apron and blouse through the school courtyard. We tried to pry some truth out of her. Nothing, no father's name, because there is no pregnancy."

My forehead goes hot. False pregnancy. Honeylet refused to say who gave her the belly. Surely, the father is one of the older boys, the nuns agreed, talking it over their dessert—their fat slices of mincemeat pie, their forks kept poking in search of raisins. Once the Sisters unlocked the dormitory doors and whisked Honeylet into the next room. I heard the thwack of the strap.

"Soon she will be in labor," Father Eden insists.

Sister Agatha goes on. "You are new here and we've seen this many times before. The Lakota are prone to hysteria and many girls have given birth to wind babies. That is what we call the false pregnancy. "

"But her stomach?"

"The stomach fills with air. Hysteria. We will move her to the infirmary when she believes it is her time. There will be no fruit from her womb, trust me, Father Eden."

I taste her words. Lies, the bile burns in my gut and furs my tongue. "I've not heard of such things," he says. He mentions the Mission School has no doctor in residence. Sometimes there are many death certificates to sign. I imagine him directing his gaze to the bridge of Sister Agatha's nose, that way it appears he is looking at her eyes. "This afternoon I have the repair for the leaking roof in the classroom to attend to. The boys may not be able to replace the shingles. And when Honeylet believes it is time, I'd like to be advised. I am interested in witnessing how a wind baby is born."

"Of course, Father."

Sister Margarita has bustled into the kitchen with her barrel-shaped behind and shoos Awinta away from the door. I picture Father Eden nodding, touching the tips of his fingers together, Honeylet's name on his lips.

I go back to peeling potatoes. They talk too. More eggs need to be

boiled for Sister Agatha. Their little skirts of foam ride the water. Quick now, the trays are prepared and hoisted up for the rectory dining room. I think of my mother. The wise woman, the keeper of all the remedies, leading me into the winter and teaching me how to run and how to stand still, to be a starving fawn and yet keep away the hungry dogs. Spirit power.

I hear Honeylet softly cry out. She presses her hand to her belly, and then I see a puddle of water on the floor under her. A look of panic in her eyes, her elbows press against her side. Awinta raises her hand, about to point. I draw my finger across my throat and throw her my hardest glance.

"Meet me in the locust grove," I tell Honeylet. "Go."

I hurry the soup into the bowls, cut a plate of cold roast beef to be served with the eggs. I slice more, wrap the beef in a rag, and slide it into my apron pocket. For Honeylet's labor. A wooden spoon slides the tins from the far back of the oven rack toward me. The bread has baked to a golden brown giving off the white aroma. A beast of a cookstove and the kettles of wash water must be kept boiling, morning and night. I'll steal water for Honeylet. The priest won't be able to save us.

Father Eden, Father Chappy, and Sister Agatha are seated in the rectory dining room at an oak table with carved legs, which if you look closely at, like I have with a vinegar rag to wipe dust, you'll see the open mouth of a viper. The wood worker knew his way around a water moccasin that had been washed out of his river, wrapped itself around the table leg, his jaw unhinged. I think of the snake, licking the air with his forked tongue as I balance the soup bowls and beef platter into the sun-filled room. Father Eden raises his eyes. They follow me.

*

The rains have not fallen from the clouds this summer. The earth is angry at the white man for scraping away the prairie grass. First, Sister Rosalie takes me behind the knobless door and up the stairs where no one likes to go. Only a staring banister decorated with acorns and squirrels leads to the room with the cross, the two pieces of wood broken from the tree. Sister Aster holds my hands around the wrists; her fingers are soft with padding. She is the size of two nuns. I am here to be taught a history lesson about the pioneer wagons and their scouts heading West. Not about Hairy Moccasin or Half Yellow Face or Pretty Bride or Magpie Girl. Uninhabited lands, fierce weather, clouds of flies, swarms of grasshoppers, and searing sun, but worse the wild savages with war cries and tomahawks. Sister Rosalie strikes me with the willow switch which cuts like a knife before it burns.

*

We hide in the tiny musty chapel—the one no longer used. Only the bare walls and stained glass window looks on—the Virgin Mary cradling her newborn son—halos like sunflowers crown their heads. I bathe Honeylet's face. Between the rough-cut pews my friend lies on her back

with her knees up, and legs apart. You can hear the dinner bell being struck only it isn't time to summon the students for supper. Dong. Dong. They are searching for us. Honeylet is panting, pushing.

I ease a bunched cloth between her clenched teeth. Sun glints through the ruby-colored glass. The Great Spirit is trying to see inside. My friend whimpers, trying to catch her breath. Her blood doesn't frighten me. It smells sour-sweet of hot teeming weeds. The air has been used up. My heart is beating way too fast. Honeylet's crying stops. Again, her cries turn to whimpers.

"He's coming," she mouths.

My fingers touch a tiny head. The shivers radiate. I hold him up by his ankles and spank. A cry. One then another. The mouth opens and lets out a fierce cry. Hush, little ghost pipe, do you want them to find us? His eyelashes are glued together but the mouth wants to drink. Honeylet raises her arms, her son, how perfect he is, how beautiful. The sunflower halo surrounds them. I promise Honeylet and her son that I'll take care of them. Don't worry, we're going to run away

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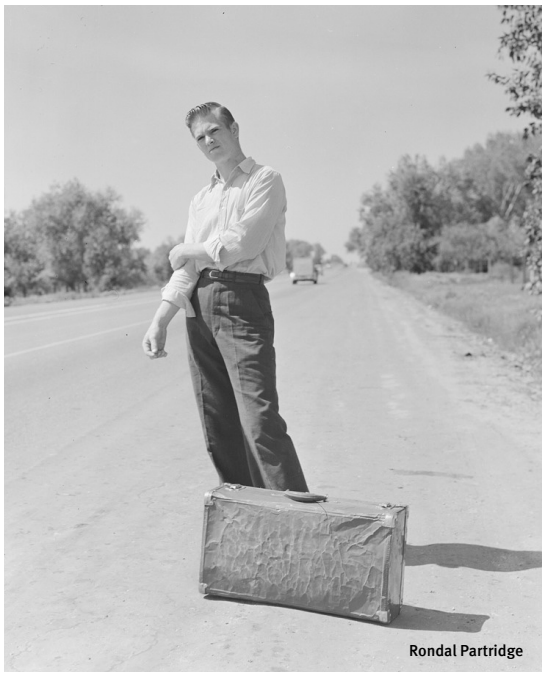
Father Eden studies in his hand one of the leaf dresses. He breathes on it and yet the little stitches hold. He knows that these children are the last of the proud, vanquished peoples, the thousands of tribes, the thousands of languages. The rivers and towns and territories are haunted by their voices. Mamaroneck, Massapeaqua, Wyoming, Iowa, Missouri. The first human voices this land knew, the land that can not, can never be owned. Dakota. Mississippi. Omaha. Winnebago. Biloxi. Yankton. Wichita. They found the two kitchen girls and it was just as Sister Agatha said, a wind baby. Honeylet has been sent home, and while Father Eden continues to ask Sister Agatha where her home is, since the girl had been at Sisseton since she's been a toddler, he's gotten no answer. Mae Anna, after being disciplined, has come back to the kitchen where she was sorely missed. He pressed for her swift return.



Stephanie Dickinson, an Iowa native, lives in New York City. Her novel *Half Girl* and novella *Lust Series* are published by Spuyten Duyvil, as is her novel *Love Highway*, based on the 2006 Jennifer Moore murder. Her other books include *Port Authority Orchids*, *Heat: An Interview with Jean Seberg*, *The Emily Fables* (ELJ Publications), and *Flashlight Girls Run* just out from New Meridian Arts Press. Her work has been reprinted in *Best American Nonrequired Reading*, *New Stories from the South*, and *2016 New Stories from the Midwest*. She is the editor of Rain Mountain Press.

Scott Jessop

My Travels with Superman


Rondal Partridge

It was August 1962 and I had just graduated from Air Force basic training in San Antonio. We were awarded a one-week leave before being shipped out to God only knows where, and my buddies and I decided to go into town: raise hell, get drunk, and with luck, get laid. After more Lone Star beers than I could handle, we stumbled into a pool hall a couple of blocks from the Alamo. I had been bragging about my skill with a cue, so a Colored guy from my barracks put me deep into a series with the local hustler before I could sober up enough to view the balls on the table. He pushed me into the game as revenge for some remark I had made regarding shining my shoes or some such thing and I, although I knew I was being set up, I thought I could handle a couple of Bexar County yokels. I scratched on a critical shot and lost my entire pay and means back to Lyndon, Kansas, and home.

My dad was the barber in this lonely town that could boast a hardware store, bank, IGA, and clothing store with Levi jeans and Sunday suits. Dad had fought in World War One and near the end of the war was saved by American flyboys strafing the ground with pistol shots from the cockpits of their planes. Forever grateful, Dad named me Mitchell after Billy Mitchell of the Army Air Corps. Mitchell Johnson, that's my name. He returned to town a quieter, more distant man than the one who left and learned hair cutting from his father, snipping scissors and sweeping floors for the next forty years in the shop next door to the Rexall Drug.

He married late—mom was a schoolteacher—and their first child, a boy, was stillborn in 1934. My sister came along a year and a half later, and I followed in December 1941 just as another war was starting. My dad started working as a farm hand during the summers to earn extra money. Half of his pay was to send my sister to college and the other half for me. I did my part by taking the Lyndon Tigers basketball team to the state championship and getting a basketball scholarship to KU to study English lit. I saw myself returning to Lyndon to teach high school and coach the team. It would have made my mother proud. She died that winter after slipping on the stairs of our front porch and hitting her head on the flint rocks she had so lovingly lined her flowerbeds with.

Half way through my second season as a Jayhawk, I injured my knee and coach cut me from the team. With my scholarship gone, I had to leave school, and I wound up working on the dock at the Fleming's warehouse in Topeka for slightly more than minimum wage. For more than a year, I loaded trucks during the day and hustled pool from Washburn kids at night; then the draft notice and the Air Force.

Apparently my knee wasn't injured enough to dismiss me from military service. In fact, it felt pretty good and I started thinking I'd do my stint and then return to KU. Meanwhile the Air Force would have me. If I couldn't please Mom, then I would Dad.

The Texas hustlers left me with five dollars in my pocket, my pass, and my duffle bag, so I hitched a ride with Frank Rockwell to Boise City, Oklahoma, a wide spot along a noisy truck route. From there, I figured I could hitch a ride across the expanse of Kansas and be home in a day or so. The first ride was with a tanker driver who spotted my uniform and entertained me with his stories of the Battle of the Bulge, and my second was an old farmer that had never heard of the Air Force but dropped me in Cimarron. I thanked him.

My thumb was out on US 50 two miles outside Dodge City with the blasting west Kansas heat and the steady blow of the hot, southern wind. Cars filled with wide-eyed families heading home from the cool mountains of Colorado for the hot plains and city jobs in Wichita and Hutchinson passed me in multi-colored flashes of Detroit paint. Sullen cows watched me stroll along the road, and farmers plowed the stubble of their harvested winter wheat and kicked up massive clouds of black dust. Then came Neal.

I had paused to study the tracks of the Santa Fe Trail as they descended a hill and dreamed of a cold Coke and something to eat, when I spotted a distorted pink dot on the horizon. It started to fly by as the others had when the brake lights lit up and the rubber smoked. The pink '58 Rambler Ambassador backed up along the road and the driver leaned over to the passenger side. "Where you headed?" he yelled through the open passenger window.

"Topeka is close enough," I yelled in return.

He waved me in and I tossed my duffle bag in the backseat as I slid into the front seat. My host was a good looking, fit guy in his mid-thirties dressed in jeans and a loose cotton shirt, light blond-ish, red but mostly blond hair, and a cigarette dangling from his mouth. He barely shot me a look before stomping on the Rambler's gas and straddling the car over the solid line in the center of the road. The front windshield was covered with carnage collected throughout western Kansas with a particularly large moth still vainly flapping its wings in the seventy mile-per-hour winds. Littering the floor of the car were milk bottles and wax paper containing bits of mayonnaise and mustard mixed with cigarette butts and spent matches.

"My name is Mitchell," I offered. "Neal."

"Where are you headed?"

Neal took a long drag off his cigarette and tossed it out the window. "Kansas City. I heard there might be a job on the railroad, but I don't know. It could be an illusion, you know? Maybe I just want the job, or maybe I just want to want the job, or maybe I just want to be driving. Have you ever had the need to just drive?" He gyrated and twisted as he talked, getting into a rhythm that only he seemed to hear in his head. "You get an itch, then a twitch. I don't know, man, I just like the world better when it's flying by at eighty miles an hour. No cops, no people, nothing in your head, awareness expanding. Einstein said the closer we get to the speed of light the slower time goes. Maybe I'm just trying to slow time—slow down the whole universe—ring the bell—hey, man I want to get off. Maybe. I don't know. I don't think I have a lot of time and I want to make it last. That's why I itch. Why I crave speed. That's why I love the railroad, man."

I only just kept up with his rant and ignored most of it. "Have you done that kind of work before?"

"I used to work for the Southern Pacific before I went to prison."

Prison. Shit, he was an ex-con, I thought. Probably stoned out of his mind. We were coming into Dodge at a fast clip. I wondered if I could just ask him to drop me off at the Dairy Queen. "Yea, I'm on parole in California," he was saying with a voice that was a mixture of the street and some western ranch. "If they knew I was in fucking Kansas I'd be back in the clink. Doin' time. Bustin' dimes. Eatin' limes.

"Learning to conform to social conventions and arbitrary rules that civilized folks call laws, but what is really just an expression of power over our minds and our imprisoned consciousness. Power and control. Law and order. Order some laws. Bite your claws."

"Aren't you afraid you'll be pulled over driving like this?"

Neal smiled and pulled another cigarette from his pack of Luckys. "It won't be the first time." He pushed in the car's lighter. "So what's your story, soldier?"

"Airman," I said, turning back to the feedlots and trains and blood covered beef cutters lumbering home after work as Dodge flew past the window in a blur.

"I'm heading home after basic." I told him my story as he pulled on consecutive cigs and drank milk from a bottle he had stashed under his seat.

"Your problem, man," he said with his chaotic, cowboy Colorado drawl, "is that you're in a death match competition with a dead baby. The son that never was and so is nothing but promise and dreams and potential that never comes and never has to because the imagined promise is a stronger image than the reality."

"And what's the reality," I asked.

"That your older brother was a failure at life, man. Living, man, it doesn't get much more basic than that and he fucked it up." He looked out over the prairie as the sun was setting. "Mystery. Your brother is like that dark line on the horizon—the coming night while you're like the setting sun in the West. All orange and red and passing into oblivion, you're a solid thing like this day. There's nothing they can do with you but call it a night, but the dead brother is like tomorrow. He's a mystery, a hope, all hope, the unseen tomorrow like coming death, mystery darkness wrapped around the world full of what-cans and what-will-be and what-could've-been. A setting sun can't compete with that. The only thing left in your life is to eat, fuck, and go to bed."

I listened to Neal talk non-stop for the next half hour before the long day and sleepless miles on the road and wide vinyl comfort of the Rambler's seat caught up to me and I fell asleep to the roar of the engine screaming across Kansas. I woke up briefly around one in the morning to see Neal pissing in his empty milk bottle while balancing the wheel with his knees and focusing his attention on the business between his legs. As I watched him in my hazy state of consciousness, I put it together that my driver was none other than the legendary Beat, Neal Cassady. Neal of Kerouac. Neal of Ginsberg. Neal of Burroughs. I had read *On the Road* my senior year in high school, and with my best friend, Greg, took off for Denver to find the hipsters described in Kerouac's book. We went looking for Neal. Instead, we found lunatic Larimer Street drunks that robbed us of our money and we had to have our parents wire bus fare to get us home. And here I was with the Adonis of Denver, Dean Moriarty himself, at the wheel of a pink Rambler, on the road. Drifting back into my deep slumber, I listened while he drummed the steering wheel to the same secret tune playing in his head as we sped down US 50 at ninety miles per hour.

The morning sun broke through the window and as I opened my eyes, I could see the red, white, and blue pole of my dad's shop and could smell bacon and eggs wafting from the nearby café. My dad would be there having coffee with the sheriff and Kyle McCleary from the hardware store before opening his shop. They would be talking about Republican politics and cursing Kennedy and bobbing their chins at the price of wheat and corn, knowing how that would affect the whole town. But as the sleep dripped from my eyes I saw a tumbleweed blow across the highway and a cowboy covered in dust walking into the café, which was not the diner in Lyndon.

An ancient Ford truck sauntered up next to me with Neal at the wheel. "Come on, kid," he yelled.

I grabbed my duffle from the back of the Rambler and asked where we were going and why couldn't we take the Rambler. "Cause I boosted that car in Colorado. I can't be seen driving it there."

I hopped into the truck as Neal lurched it back onto the highway and down the road. It soon occurred to me that the sun was behind us, indicating a westerly direction. "Where are we going," I asked again.

"I crave an exceptional hamburger. Ever had a really good burger?" "Well, yea…"

"I'm not talking about some grease cookie from your local drive-in or a dried-out hunk of charcoal from the back bar-be-que. I mean a fat, juicy, dripping nirvana-like experience that changes your life and leaves you satisfied like a couple of chicks… whoa!"

"Neal," I said as we crossed into Colorado. "Where are we going?" "There's a little bar in the Bessemer district in Pueblo, Colorado, where they top these incredible burgers with grated cheese and slices of black roasted Pueblo Anaheim peppers." He smacked his lips and pounded the wheel as he whooped and hollered and took me farther and farther from my home. Neal pulled his last cigarette from the pack, crumpled the empty box, and tossed it out the window.

"Pueblo? Jesus, Neal, I've only got five days left on my pass and I wanted to see my dad, not take a gastronomic tour of the high plains."

"The prodigal son will return, but man, you gotta hit it. Hit it hard like Billy Mitchell in his marauder—ratta-tatta-tat—hit it hard, man."

Low on cash, we stopped for a day in Rocky Ford to pick cantaloupes for a nickel a basket with wide-eyed Mexicans and sweaty Coloreds. It was hot, heavy, back-breaking work and we earned little more than a dollar eighty for our day's labors, but got beans and tortillas from the farmer's wife so Neal viewed the day as a success.

Loaded with seven dollars and seventy-five cents and an empty tank of gas in our stolen truck, we rolled into Pueblo at ten that night and stopped in front of a pool hall. Neal split the money and then challenged me to a game of eight ball at a quarter a game. After ten games, he was down fifty cents and belligerent. I apologized and offered to give the money back but he told me to go fuck myself.

Then he started hopping around whipping the cue in the air and threatening me, so that I threw the money at him and left the hall to go for a walk. I strolled down to Damon Runyon Field and watched the local team lose to Amarillo in extra innings when the visitors got a solid hit deep in left field. Then I walked along the river, down past the working class bars with their smells of beer and cigarettes, past the doors with passed out drunks, and dark alleys where hip Colorado kids scored tea and high school girls lifted their skirts. I figured Neal had cooled off enough and I hiked back to the pool hall. Neal was at a table and hitting balls and talking non-stop about San Francisco. A big Italian from the steel mill was out twenty-two dollars and Neal

just kept talking and shooting until he cleared the table. The big wop caught me lurking at the door and realized he had been hustled. Neal and I made a run for the Ford and sped off in no particular direction, laughing like pranksters and panting like dogs.

The morning came in Pueblo and we watched the sun rise over Lake Minnequa as burly Italians, skinny Irish, dark Coloreds, and brown Mexicans kissed their pregnant wives good-bye and trudged to work at the mill. Neal and I skipped rocks on the water. "They make you uncomfortable, don't they?" Neal asked me with a nod to the ethnic crowds marching to the hot converters filled with glowing steel ready to be poured into molds.

"I guess, yea, coming from a small Midwestern town where being anything but white, Anglo-Saxon, and Methodist is considered a minority," I said, watching my stone skip across the lake.

"Civil rights. It's coming. I'm not saying it's right, but it'll be here in a few years and in the meantime while you're fighting the Communists—which by the way were invented by the Pentagon as an excuse for war—it will be the son of a Black man or brown man or red man standing beside you, as you fight the yellow man with his Mao book held out in front of him like a shield against your capitalist bullets."

He was right, of course, but I had a hard time releasing the deeply held suspicion I had in my heart. The Klan had been particularly strong in eastern Kansas during the twenties and my dad briefly had been a member until he refused to drive out a Black family that lived in a shack by Salt Creek. Despite his compassion, that prejudice was still there and had been passed down to me like a dirty family heirloom. But I had already lived with Blacks and Mexicans and Japanese and Indians while at Lackland getting my training, and my darker feelings were waning.

Neal and I walked to the corner of Division and Evans and found the bar with the incredible burgers. A pretty, young Mexican girl blessed with an ample bosom and round rear end took our order and brought us a couple of beers as lawyers, union bosses, and bankers that served the needs of the men in the mill came in for lunch. My companion noticed my interest in the waitress. "Ah, I see," he said with a loud voice and a slow twang, "they're good enough to fuck just not good enough to live next door to you."

"That's not true," I protested.

Neal waved his hand around the room. "You know all of this land south of the Arkansas River was old Mexico before the United States came in and took it, like Hunke rolling drunks in a New York subway. You understand that, don't you? As a white man in a brown man's world, you're the invader on their land. And Pueblo? Hell, it was nothing until Jim Beckwourth came in and made it into something, and in case you didn't know, and why would you having an Kans-ass education spoon fed to you by the white man conspiracy, Beckwourth was a Nee-gro."

I nodded stupidly and lifted the hot burger to my mouth. The grease shot from the thin brown skin and into my mouth, giving me a burst of beefy flavor. And then the Pueblo pepper, roasted and black, sweet and hot, mixed in my mouth with the beef and cheese to become a symphony of sensual flavors unlike anything I had even conceived of prior to this Baucus of beef revealing its sinful Zen-like experience to my brain. It was the best burger I had ever had and would ever have. I crave one now. Grated cheese ensures it will melt over the hot meat and peppers, lettuce and tomato calm the fire of the pepper, and the beef is hot and juicy and better than any plum-wine-fed Kobe you can find.

The meal left us stuffed and satisfied. Neal and the waitress disappeared for a few minutes of romping in the backroom while I talked to the local businessmen who offered to buy our lunch to show their gratitude for my service to our great nation. Neal leaned out the kitchen door, his shirt un-tucked and his hair disheveled, and waved me to the backroom.

He draped his arm around our busty waitress, and standing with her was a young girl of maybe nineteen, round face, blue eyes, dark-haired with the influences of Spain, Mexico, and Ireland written across her face. Her small up-turned nose was sprinkled with freckles, her breasts smallish but perky and fine, and her smile shy and wide with bright, white teeth that stirred my heart and inflamed my frustrated and long suppressed lust. "This is Louisa," said Neal. Then, magically, thankfully, she took my hand and led me to her room above the bar for an afternoon of sex in the dry, high air of Colorado.

We left Pueblo shortly after six o'clock and headed east across the high plains with the Ford pointed back to Kansas, fifteen fifty left in our pockets, and a basket of Rocky Ford cantaloupes to feed us on our journey. As the wind whipped through the window and the sun set behind us, I fell into a deep sleep with Neal Cassady, counter-culture hero, Beat, and my personal existentialist guide, at the wheel.

I woke the next morning with the smell of humidity in the air, yellow sun on my face and the hustle-bustle of small town America in my ears. I stared at the barber's pole outside my window, slowly realizing it hung on my father's shop in Lyndon. I could smell the breakfasts cooking in the café and could see the hardware, the IGA, and the banker opening the door to the bank as his employees waited patiently at the curb. Neal was gone. It wasn't possible to drive from La Junta, Colorado—the last town we passed through before I fell asleep—to Lyndon in a single night. And we were back in the pink Rambler, which meant we had to have switched cars in Syracuse, and I had absolutely no memory of that. I opened the car's door just as Neal was exiting the shop with my dad. He was shaking my father's hand with his left while his right passed through his freshly cut hair.

"There's my airman," said Dad as he gave me a hug, the first in years. "I missed you, Mitch."

"I missed you too, Dad."

Dad turned to Neal. "Thanks for giving my boy a ride."

"Thank you, sir, for the haircut," said Neal succinctly without the gyration and hands in the air I had been experiencing. Dad went back into the shop as I grabbed my bag from the backseat of the Rambler. Neal's hand slapped the back of my shoulder and his fingers squeezed the meaty muscle at the base of my neck.

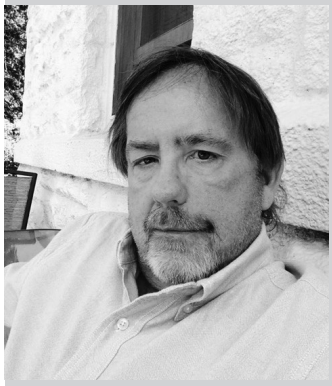
"Forget what I said about competing with a dead brother," he said looking forlorn. "Sometimes I don't know why the fuck anyone listens to me."

With that, he released me, opened the door, and lowered himself behind the Rambler's wheel and fired up the engine. He pulled a Lucky from a fresh pack and without even a glance back pulled away from the curb and left. I went into Dad's shop and we talked.

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The Air Force sent me to Germany for a year, then Michigan, and Alaska, Edwards in California, and Delaware. I never made it to Pueblo. After the service, I went back to college—Kansas State Teachers College in Emporia this time—and got a job at the *Emporia Gazette,* and I've been working as copy boy, press operator, and occasional writer for two years. I graduate this spring and have been offered a job in Iola teaching English at the high school. Yesterday, February 5, 1968, word came across the wire that authorities found Neal Cassady dead the day before in Mexico. My editor asked me to write a couple of inches to sum up his life.

I don't know if the man who picked me up that day was Neal Cassady. I don't know if I really picked fruit in the Arkansas Valley or made love to a girl named Louisa. But I think about those travels and I think about Neal.



Scott Jessop lives in the 135-year old, haunted Midland Railroad station in Manitou Springs, Colorado, with his daughter, Kathleen, and his cat, Jack Kerouac. He is a corporate video and TV commercial producer, author, poet, and spoken word performer. Recently, his work has appeared in *The Red Earth Review*, *Carbon Culture*, *Brickplight*, *New Verse News*, and *300 Days of Sun*. In 2013, Penduline Press nominated Scott for a Pushcart Prize for his short story "Mephisto."

Frank Scozarri

Lost to the Light



The reel spun futilely as the end of the film flapped repeatedly against the empty film gate. Below, a steady beam of light shone out onto the screen, featuring nothing more than dust particles flashing by, and through the keyhole from the theater seats in the grand old auditorium came the grumbling sounds of patrons.

"Roll the film, damn it!" one cried out.

"Come on for God's sake, start the movie!" yelled another.

But the old man did not awake. He lay still, breathing heavily, his head resting on his arm which lay on the table. In his mind was a vision of Greta Garbo in full *Mata Hari* headdress, dancing seductively before a mesmerized crowd. His ears were full of the sultry sounds of middle-eastern music and he could see the smoke rising from the incense burners in the nightclub's elegant showroom. Dancing like a drunken elation in his head, Garbo approached the multi-armed deity, a statue of Shiva, and her hips began moving feverishly and the coin-laden scarf around her waist chattered with great intensity. The audience, consisting of bartenders, politicians, tourists, and military attachés, went silent with anticipation. Then she came right up against the statue, took her top off, and pressed her body into it. For a moment it was as though she was going to make love to it. Everyone was breathless. Then the room darkened and a cloaked woman dashed by, covering Garbo from view.

"She's not a spy," the old man mumbled. "She is not the great enemy of France like everyone thinks! She is not!"

A loud bang awoke him. And when he lifted his head he saw the projection booth door slammed open against the front wall. Through it came René, the theater manager, rushing past him like a madman.

"You imbecile!" he yelled.

René bolted for the second projector and clicked the '*switch over*' button. Instantly the film began to roll and angled beams of light shone once again through the keyhole, bringing back to life the oscillating images of characters and the sound of their dialogue.

"Bravo!" somebody yelled from theater seats.

René came back to the first machine, turned it off, and pressed his palm against the lamp canister, but it was so hot he had to withdraw his hand quickly.

"Where is your brain?" he cried. He pushed at the old man's chest; his eyes were burning. "What is it with you?"

In truth, the old man knew, he had taken too many naps, too often at the wrong times, and with greater frequency in the past weeks. It was a problem he could not cure.

"If you cannot do the job," René cried, "I will find someone who can."

The old man only looked up at René with sorry, puppy-dog eyes.

René looked around. The projection booth was in a typical state of disarray. There were film canisters lying on the floor, some with their lids off, candy wrappers scattered about, and a half-eaten sandwich dried and crusty from the day before, lying on the table. The trashcan near the door was full and overflowing.

"You can't leave this place like this," he said. "You can't leave these cans lying around." He gathered them up, put their lids back on, and stacked them in a neat pile against the wall. "You have to clean this place up! It's part of your job! It's your last chance. If you want to sleep, go home and sleep!"

The old man wisely remained silent.

After a few more minutes of huffing, René stood silently with his hands on his hips. He glanced up at the big wall clock. "It is the last showing. Can you handle it?"

"Yes."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"Don't forget to cap the film canisters!"

"I know."

"And the lamps! Remember to shut off the lamps!"

He was referring to the time the old man had forgotten to shut off a projection lamp and burnt out an expensive bulb.

"Yes."

"And lock up properly."

"Of course."

René took another glance around the projection booth. "Only three more months!" he said, shaking his head.

When he turned to exit, the old man mumbled something, inaudible.

"What?" René asked.

"Nothing."

René hesitated at the door, but then left, closing it securely behind him.

Spencer Tracy would have never stood for that, the old man thought. *Not for a second. He wouldn't have.*

When the film finished, the audience slowly cleared the auditorium and departed out the front lobby doors. The old man watched them through the key hole until the last patron was gone. Then he canned the two film reels and set the canisters on top of the neat pile René had stacked against the wall. He tidied up the projection booth, swept it clean with a broom, hiding the small pile of trash in a corner, and he made sure the lamps were off. Then he exited, locking the projection booth door twice around with the key before descending the narrow staircase to the foyer. He swept up the popcorn and garbage scattered throughout the theater auditorium, dumped a garbage pail into the dumpster out back, and fixed the large theater curtain so no screen was showing. Finally he returned to the lobby, opened a wall panel and pulled down the switch that doused the large marquee light out front.

A lonely walk down a lonely street brought the old man to his dreary, one-room apartment. There were no windows inside, only a bed, a little table, a sink, a small closet, and a separate closet for the toilet. It was a place to lay his head and close his eyes, and he could imagine himself in another world, a cinematic world of swashbuckling swordsmen and adventurous sea captains, but in truth, it offered little in the way of sustenance and comfort.

He lay down on his shaggy old mattress to the sound of squeaky springs and, unable to sleep, he stared up at the dark, opaque ceiling.

"You are the beauty," he said, speaking aloud to Garbo.

Not everyone could communicate with movie stars of the past. It was some kind of cosmic, telepathic thing that only he possessed, and he prided himself on this ability.

"I understand every word you speak," he said. "I understand every move of your dance. It is you, yes? It is you who will save the world from itself? And not for country, but for love itself. Am I correct in my thinking? Of course I am."

He pictured her clearly, as if she were standing there in the room beside him, her image as vivid and beautiful as she had ever been on the silver screen.

"If you want, I'll help you. I'll be your secret accomplice, your *attaché fidèle*. I know where to go, how to end it. I have seen how it ends, and we will end it differently. Together we will overcome the French military and German spies. Okay?"

He waited for her reply, but there was none. It didn't always work, he knew. But this night, he was really hoping for some two-way dialogue.

Then he thought of René's words and became depressed. *Only three more months!*

As horrific as it sounded, it was true. The era of film projection at the *Arlington* was coming to an end. When he first heard the news, he didn't believe it or accept it. It was not possible, he thought. How could an art form requiring such skill and finesse be replaced by a computerized robot? But the change was going to happen. He had even read about it in the papers. A new, digitized projector was to be delivered in the coming months and his skills of threading film and swapping reels was to become obsolete. As the silent era gave way to sound, the film era would go down to light—the light of new technology.

He looked over to his small table. There was the bottle of gin waiting for him. He could see it in the darkness. For over five years now it had been there. It had been that long since he'd been away from the stuff. And if he returned to the sharp-tasting liquid now, he knew he would return to it for good—until the end. It was the great morphine, he thought. It was the anesthesia for life's tragedies, the sweetest of all escapes. And it was not unusual. All the stars had one in one form or another. For Ray Milland it was whiskey on his long *Lost Weekend.* For Richard Burton it was vodka and soda water, which he liked as much in life as he did in his on-screen rants with Elizabeth Taylor in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* And as for Sinatra, well, of course, he preferred a well-mixed cocktail with the merest hint of dry vermouth, although heroin was his fix in *The Man with the Golden Arm.*

But it was gin that Spencer Tracy liked best. Gin was his favorite, his one and only, the drink he used to kill the real-life pain of the ordinary man.

The old man closed his eyes and tried to sleep. And though he finally drifted off, his sleep was restless. On through the night he awoke often, and when he did he looked over at the table and saw the bottle of gin still there waiting.

The morning was usual, nothing different, a poached egg at the corner café, some time to browse the newsstands, and a long walk along the river. He kept occupied until it was time for work. That was his routine, anything to keep him from his dreary apartment. When the afternoon came, he made his way to the old downtown district. A long sidewalk led him to the vertical, art deco marquee of the *Arlington Theater*. The overhead billboard displayed the films "Now Playing:" *Beat the Devil* and *The African Queen*.

"Ah, it will be Bogie night," the old man mumbled.

He unlocked the front door, went into the lobby, and looked around. Everything was as he had left it the night before. He climbed the narrow staircase to the projection booth, slipped the key into the door lock, and opened it.

As always, the projection booth greeted him like the arms of a beautiful woman. Stepping inside always gave him a warm feeling, like a welcoming home. He smiled broadly. That is, until he saw the note René had left on the clipboard along with the daily features. It read: "Don't fall asleep! And don't forget to turn off the lamps!"

The old man tore the note off the clipboard, crumbled it up, and tossed it in the corner.

"He knows nothing of film projection! He is the boss of no one!"

He searched though the pile of film canisters, and when he could not find the scheduled films, he glanced around the room and located them on top of the projection table. Evidently René had placed the films there to make it easier for the old man.

"So now he thinks I'm not capable of finding the proper film cans?"

There were only four reels, which was good, he thought, only requiring two changeovers per film. Not like the old days when you had to do three or four reel changeovers for one movie.

He opened the *Beat the Devil* canister, the one marked 'one of two,' and took out the reel. He flipped open the cover on the first projector, placed the reel on the sprocket, pulled out an arm's length of film, and held it to the light. Once he found where the numeric countdown begun, he threaded the film through the gate, running the machine just long enough for it to catch, then looped the end of it onto the empty reel and advanced the film to the opening credits. He repeated the process on the second projector, loading the second reel and advancing it to the switch-over cue.

"Life is an illusion," he mumbled. "It is best to live it as such. Sometimes you win, sometimes you lose."

He sat at the table and ate a sandwich. After forty minutes, he looked down through the keyhole and saw only one person seated in the theater auditorium. When he looked down a second time, the audience had grown by three. At a quarter to four, he pressed the mechanical button which opened the theater curtains. And when it was exactly four o'clock, he started the film, framing it first, sharpening the focus, and synchronizing the sound. When all was set and done, he sat at the table and listened to what, for him, was a most beautiful melody—the sound of film clicking through a gate at twenty-four frames a second. It was a six-thousand foot reel, which meant he'd have an hour before he would need to switch over to the second projector.

Through the keyhole came the sound of Humphrey Bogart's voice. Though he could not see the film from his seated position, he knew every scene, every film angle, and every word of dialogue, verbatim. He had seen the film a hundred times, maybe two hundred.

"What's our wide-eyed Irish leprechaun doing outside my door?" Bogart's voice asked.

"Just wanted to have a little talk," the voice of Peter Lorre replied.

"Okay, but make it fast," said the old man quickly, stealing the line before Bogart could speak it.

"Okay, but make it fast," Bogart then repeated on the big screen.

The old man chuckled.

After fifty minutes, he turned on the lamp on the second machine, giving it time to warm up. After another five minutes he began watching for the cue mark; a small circular flash in the upper right-hand corner of the screen, and when he saw it, he clicked on the motor of the second projector. And when it flashed a second time, he pressed the '*switch over*' button. Then he heard the splice go through the machine and the images from the second projector immediately took over, flicking out the black and white celluloid, without interruption, exactly where the first reel had finished off.

"Now that's the way to do it!" he said. "None of this three, two, one," referring to the numerical countdown seen onscreen if the cue mark was missed.

The old man chuckled, thinking back to a time when René had mistimed a changeover. He had been left to manage the projection booth for only a minute and still couldn't get it right! And there was that awful gap of white screen between the reels, and the painful groans of all the theater patrons.

The old man clicked off the motor on the first machine and began watching the film through the keyhole. On screen now were Jennifer Jones and Humphrey Bogart, standing on the Terrace of Infinity, high above the Amalfi Coast. The cinemascope image provided a panoramic view of sea and mountains that stretched from one side of the screen to the other. It seemed to be filmed from the height of an airplane, which gave a real appreciation for the beauty of this place. And the dialogue was quick and clever, bringing a smile to the old man's face.

"There are two good reasons for falling in love," Jennifer Jones said. "One is that the object of your affection is unlike anyone else, a rare spirit. The other is that he's like everyone else, only superior, the very best of a type."

"Well if you must know, I'm a very typical rare spirit," the old man said before Bogart echoed the same line onscreen.

"How long have you lived here?" asked Jennifer Jones.

"The longest I've lived anywhere," the old man recited, again beating Bogart to the punch.

"Didn't you ever have a mother and a father and a house?"

"No, I was an orphan," the old man said loudly. "Then a rich and beautiful woman adopted me."

The old man smiled as Bogart repeated the lines onscreen.

It was like Sunday mass, the old man thought, easier than reciting lines from the good book. And as the movie progressed, the

old man lost himself, as he often did, in the romantic action and intriguing storyline. The images on the screen danced in his head as vividly as if he were acting them out himself.

Now a trio of characters, Robert Morley, Peter Lorre, and Bogart, found themselves shipwrecked and washed ashore on a deserted beach. A hoard of horse-backed nomads stormed down a hillside firing shots at them. Everyone was frightened, except Bogart, and the old man, who stood fearless in the projection booth.

The old man raised his hands and said bravely, "Better get down everyone!" He made his voice sound tough and cynical.

Seconds later, Bogart raised his hands and repeated the line on the big screen.

"Africa," the old man then said aloud as if he were speaking directly to the nomad chieftain. "It's not a bad place to land. No customs forms to fill out."

When Bogart repeated the lines, the old man chuckled.

The film finished, and during the intermission the old man replaced the reels with the second feature, *The African Queen.* He waited the customary twenty minutes for everyone to return from the concessions and then rolled the film. Once he heard the projector running smoothly, he sat down at the projection table and listened to its melodic sound.

"You are a good machine," he said, patting it on its side. "You bring life to the ordinary. You create magic from nothing." Then he sighed. "But like me, you are old and replaceable!"

He stretched his arm out comfortably on the table and laid his head upon it, and in his mind he watched the movie, following along as if it were playing in his head. He knew every scene, every word; all the facial expressions. The smooth clicking sound of film rushing through the gate, coupled with his cerebral reenactment, brought him to the place he loved best, his nirvana.

But he did not watch Bogart and Hepburn. He was with them in the boat, going down the Ubangi River. And he recited Bogart's lines as if they were his own. And he watched Katherine Hepburn's transformation from one who despised an aging old drunk to one who loved. And now that she'd become smitten with this rugged old man, unkempt and capable as he, he accepted her expressions of adornment as if they were meant for him.

In his head, the reels spun forward at lightening speed. Before he knew it, Bogart stood with a noose tied around his neck, being interrogated by a nasty German sea captain, accused of being a spy for which death was the only penalty.

But it was not Bogart—it was the old man.

"Don't give in!" the old man mumbled. He felt the ship rocking beneath him as if he were really afloat. "Be brave, Rosie! Be strong! It is for love and country!"

As the large German vessel, the Louisa, drifted closer to the African Queen, the makeshift torpedoes pointing from the Queen's bow closed in on its hull.

"Take cover, Rosie!" the old man shouted, bracing himself for the explosion. "I'll be with you shortly!"

Though the celluloid images danced vividly in his head, they had barely finished the first reel on the projector beside him. On the screen, the first cue marked flashed by, then the second, then the end of the film looped through the gate, and suddenly, nothing but a white stream of light shone out from the projector. And the groaning and booing from the audience was almost instantaneous.

"Roll the damned film!"

"Hey! Wake up up there!" another screamed from the front of the house.

But the old man's head remained down on the table, resting on his out-stretched arm, his eyes closed and his expression intense. Even if he wanted to, he could not move. He had a noose around his neck, and the rope was pulling tightly.

"Be brave, Rosie!" he mumbled again.

Then the projection room door swung open with a bang, slamming against the forward wall, and in stormed René, as livid as he could possibly be.

"This's it!" he screamed. "You are through!"

The old man lifted his head as René rushed past him and lunged for the '*switch over*' button on the second projector. He pressed the button, and instantly the images returned to the screen below.

"Thank you!" someone yelled from the auditorium.

"About time!" another screamed out.

"You are finished!" René shouted to the old man. "Get your things and leave!"

"What?" the old man asked.

"You're fired!"

It took a moment for the old man to gather himself. He had barely stepped off the deck of the Louisa.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Get your things and leave! Now! I'll mail you your check."

"But I thought I had three more months?"

"Not any more. You are through, now!"

René grabbed the old man's collar, lifted him from the chair, and using his grip, escorted him to his bag, which was against the wall. The old man picked up the bag and then René pushed him to the door.

There was nothing the old man could do. He was too dazed and confused to resist, and when he was heaved through the door, pushed out like a rag doll, he nearly tumbled down the stairs. He dropped several steps before he could stop his momentum and

regain his balance. Then he straightened himself, turned back, and looked up at René, who stood with both hands on his hips.

"Get out!" René yelled, pointing toward the front door of the lobby.

The old man continued down the steps, made his way through the foyer, and pushed his way out the front doors.

"He is a man without honor," he mumbled to himself. "He is a man with no loyalty."

As he walked down the street in darkness to his apartment, he thought of Garbo, her persona as *Mata Hari*, strong and defiant against all odds and in the face of certain death. Her image danced in his head, feverishly, the coins of her hip-scarf chattering like wind chimes in a hurricane. Every movement of her body showed him her strength and will to overcome. *She is the bold and daring one*, he thought, the one never to give in to the misalignments and abuses of power.

Then, in his mind, he saw the bottle of gin awaiting him, there on his table in his dreary apartment, and the image of Garbo faded to black.



Frank Scozzari lives on the California central coast. He is an avid traveler and once climbed Mt. Kilimanjaro, the highest point in Africa. A multiple Pushcart Prize nominee, his award-winning short stories have been widely anthologized and featured in literary theater.

Ken Waldman

Mushrooms



It is midday Sunday. Rod is back in the greenhouse tending to the roses. I am out foraging for mushrooms with his wife, Valerie, and their llama, Rex. Valerie is a maddeningly pretty blonde with grayish green eyes and the most wonderful shoulders I've ever seen. How I admire those shoulders. She and Rod own a nursery on Whidbey Island, and for awhile yesterday morning I watched from a window as Valerie shoveled manure and wheelbarrowed it uphill to where they were planting garlic. It looked to be strenuous labor. After lunch I had grabbed a spare shovel and worked alongside her for most of the afternoon. It had been all I could do to keep up.

Today my muscles are a bit sore from yesterday's effort. The sun shines through the cedar and alder as we walk down a rutted path about to enter the woods. Since it is October, there are as many leaves off the trees as are on them. Valerie walks Rex by gently tugging the leash that is tied loosely around his neck.

"You know," Valerie tells me. "Rex is a handsome llama. All llamas are smart, but only some are handsome."

"Hey Rex," I say. The llama's ears perk and he nuzzles my face. Then we stare at each other right in the eye.

"He really likes you," Valerie tells me as Rex breaks off our staring contest and goes for a mouthful of apple off an apple tree.

I pat Rex on the head and say, "Good llama, smart llama, attallama."

Humoring llamas is easy here. Whidbey Island's been that kind of place. I arrived two nights ago as a complete stranger, looking Rod and Valerie up partly because we had this mutual friend in Minneapolis, but mainly because I needed a shower. As a cabinetmaker with a truck full of tools, I understand this couple who work seventy hour weeks to run their small business. And I know they understand me. From the beginning, I felt at ease, and even before showering I quickly told them the background of my visit: that I had left St. Paul to escape a long-term, dead-end relationship; that I had meandered south, then northwest, fishing and camping; that I planned to see more of the Northwest and then California once I left Whidbey; and, most of all, that I was confused about my life, and was using this trip to gauge possibilities. When I told them that I was considering moving to towns in New Mexico, Colorado, and Montana, I mentioned that from what I had seen of Whidbey Island, I was going to have to add it to the list.

Meanwhile, Rex, the llama, steps down into a shallow creek and prances for a minute, his hind legs making small splashes. Now he's off and pulling us along. The woods are wet underfoot as we trample leaves and dirt. We scan the ground for mushrooms but there are none. I breathe in the damp, sweet air.

This mushroom expedition was Valerie's idea. After I showered on Friday night, the three of us drank beer at the kitchen table and talked. When I mentioned how much I enjoyed spotting mushrooms everywhere I hiked, Valerie immediately suggested I stay through the weekend and go mushrooming with her on Sunday. Then she said I better be prepared, and hurried into the living room where she fetched several of her mushroom identification books. She put one on my lap, and the rest by my bed in the guest room. She told me that because work kept her so busy, she hadn't gone out foraging for months, but luckily for us this was the best time of the year to go. I told her I couldn't wait until Sunday.

While Valerie and I talked, Rod sat smiling at the table, moving only to get more beers or find another jazz CD. He was a big, handsome guy with a light brown beard. Muscular but supple, he reminded me of a friend, Tony Murphy, a contractor back in St. Paul.

On Friday night, Rod kept lighting joints and I kept smoking, something I rarely did. We talked about their work, but I kept forgetting what exactly we were talking about. I was higher than I had been in years. At one point Rod and Valerie excused themselves. I thought about getting up but was too stoned to move. A few minutes later they returned clad in robes, and carrying towels. They motioned me to follow them to the hot tub in the back yard. I felt brilliant for suddenly remembering that they had said something about a hot tub earlier in the evening.

Outside it was cold. When I looked around, Rod and Valerie were already in the tub. Quickly I shed my clothes and eased into an empty corner. We talked, the words floating from my lips. The water felt wonderful. A dog bark echoed. Valerie said something about stars so I looked

up and saw a nearly full moon. Then Rod pressed a button and the water turned into churning jets of energy. On the other side of the tub I heard Rod, then Valerie, moan softly. Again I looked to the moon. Then the jets stopped. We all looked at one another, then shyly looked away. Before I knew it, Rod and Valerie were getting out of the tub and slipping into their robes. I waved them inside while I stayed in the water. Scissoring my legs, I began playing with the jets, for an instant even wishing I had Karen, my ex-St. Paul love, with me. The water pulsated around and around. When I finally felt as if I'd had enough, I shut off the jets, climbed out of the tub, and covered it with boards. The air was cold and bracing. I shivered as I dried my hair. Then I scurried inside.

I slept deeply and dreamlessly. It was late the next morning before I opened my eyes, and even then I was too exhausted to move. I lay in the bed for an hour more, thumbing one of the mushroom books Valerie left for me, reading the introduction, then skipping to the chapter on poisonous mushrooms. I tried memorizing their Latin names, but didn't have the patience. For a while I looked out the window, occasionally seeing Valerie push the wheelbarrow uphill.

Finally at noon I got up, though felt thoroughly worn out. I groaned at my reflection in the mirror. Valerie and Rod laughed when they saw me at lunch dragging myself without a trace of energy. The hot tub syndrome, they called it, and said it happened to everybody. They said when they first got the tub installed it made them fall so far behind on their work, they had to empty it so they wouldn't be tempted until they caught up. I nodded that I understood. It wasn't until I helped Valerie shovel manure that afternoon that I felt like myself again.

Now we walk deeper in the woods, our eyes peeled for mushrooms. With Rex it is slow going. He doesn't maneuver well through the knee-high brush and heavy vines. Valerie tugs at him, then jerks his rope. He's sniffing at some shrubs, and then he eats. Valerie decides to let him continue. I look down to the side, and spy a miniature army of mushrooms, fragile-looking things with narrow stems and tiny round helmets. They're milky-colored. I point them out to Valerie. She tells me they're too common to bother with, but then decides to take one anyway.

I grab Rex by the leash. Valerie kneels, and equipped with a knife and tweezers she scrapes the dirt from the bulb of the mushroom and very carefully digs it out from the ground. Using the tweezers, she drops the mushroom into a plastic bag which she then ties up. In the meantime I see large, pulpy-looking mushrooms growing out of the tops of decaying logs. The mushrooms look like swollen ears. When I point them out to Valerie, she unsheathes her knife, expertly separates the fungus from the wood, and puts the sample in a new plastic bag. I ask her why she needs a new bag. She explains that if two kinds of mushrooms share the same airtight space they can take on each other's taste, smell, even poison.

I reflect on what she's said. It's something I haven't read yet in any of the mushroom books. I ask a few questions, and then I am quiet, my eyes

darting from tree root to tree root, sometimes down to my shoes. I am enjoying it out here. When we speak, it's about mushrooms, and the mushrooms are plentiful. Then Valerie gets excited. “Look,” she says. “Chanterelles.”

To the right I see a patch of mature yellowish mushrooms, their caps jauntily flared like sombreros. There are so many we pick two dozen, leaving five or six intact, Valerie telling me never to pick all the mushrooms from any group. I watch as Valerie rinses one of the chanterelles with saliva and then puts it in her mouth, chewing off a bit of one end. “Boy, this is delicious,” she says. “Wait 'til Rod sees these. Is he going to love us. We'll put a few in our dinner salad and then have chanterelle omelets for breakfast tomorrow. Boy oh boy.”

Valerie breaks off a piece of one of the chanterelles and offers it to me. I have never eaten a wild mushroom before and I think twice before putting it in my mouth. I notice though that Valerie hasn't keeled over so I eat it, working my way through it in tiny, mincing bites, just in case. It is like no other mushroom I've ever eaten, so lemony and pungent. I tell her how I'd like to sauté them in butter and pile them in a baked potato. “I knew you'd understand mushrooms,” she tells me.

Sometimes it's Rex leading us. Sometimes we lead Rex. The woods are full of mushrooms. Valerie collects several more samples. One she doesn't collect she laughingly calls a Space Needle. She points it out to me. It is by itself, tall and slender, vaguely futuristic-looking. “Wait 'til you see the Space Needle in Seattle,” she says. “Craziest thing you'll ever see. Almost looks a little like this mushroom. I'd pick this mushroom up,” she continues, “except you never ever disturb a lone mushroom. It's bad manners.”

The thick brush of trees filters the diminishing sunlight. It's getting cooler. We decide to head back to the house. The gluttonous but handsome Rex has been eating all day, and still he nips at anything remotely edible. At one point he sticks his nose in Valerie's backpack. “No you don't, Rexy,” she says, and cuffs the llama tenderly on the nose. “If you so much as touch a chanterelle we'll make *you* into an omelet tomorrow morning.

I watch as Rex backs off from the backpack and takes a renewed interest in the scenery. “Smart llama,” I say.

It is past four o'clock when we make it to the top of the driveway. We call out to Rod who is digging a ditch off to the side of the house. He gets excited when Valerie tells him about the chanterelles. He tells us he has another hour of work before he can quit for the day. The plan is to buy salmon and have a feast.

Valerie showers first. After I shower, Valerie is already set up at the kitchen table with a magnifying glass, her mushroom books, the tweezers, the scissors, some sheets of white paper, and the plastic bags of mushrooms. “I'm all ready if you are,” she says.

Identifying mushrooms is fun, but not as much fun as I hoped. We pick a mushroom, consult the books, and then run through a battery

of yes-or-no questions. Then we compare our mushroom to the picture in the book. As a final test, Valerie separates the stem from the cap and places the cap on top of the white paper. In time, the cap emits spores which show up on the paper in a distinctive color.

I am the assistant, watching over Valerie's shoulder. I help out where I can, sometimes with good, sometimes with absurd guesses. For some reason, I am preoccupied with the poisonous mushroom group. Every time Valerie keys a mushroom, I ask if it's poisonous. I can't help myself. At first she's amused, but then she gets annoyed. Finally she accuses me of not taking the identifications seriously. After the reproach I go off to the other side of the room, sit on the couch, and bury my head in one of the mushroom books to show her how serious I am. She doesn't notice.

By now, Rod is showered. When he comes to the kitchen table he takes a chanterelle, eats it in two bites, and washes it down with a beer. I accompany him into town to pick up the salmon at the grocery store.

We buy the salmon, grab beer, bring back a few other odds and ends. I tell him I love his wife's shoulders. He tells me that when they met she used to be a scrawny thing. I tell him I can't believe it. When we return, Valerie is still hunched over the table, keying mushrooms. “Hey,” she calls to us as soon as we step inside the front door. She's holding up a mushroom for us to see. “Look at this. I knew I'd never seen one of these before. It's quite rare and mildly poisonous.” She looks my way with a special look. “You hear that? Mildly poisonous. You happy now?”

I go over and examine the mushroom. “Happy,” I say.

Rod and I let Valerie finish with the mushrooms as we prepare dinner. First, I fix the chanterelle salad, and then use the blender to whip up a batch of avocado salad dressing. Then I wash the carrots and begin steaming them. After that, Rod has me chop two whole bulbs of garlic to use as a topping for both the steamed carrots and the potatoes Rod has baking in the oven. On the patio Rod grills the salmon over glowing coals. We all sip Mexican beer.

During the meal, Rod and Valerie both rave over my avocado dressing. I pay homage to garlic and tell them that from now on I will consider a baked potato naked without it. The silver salmon is moist and buttery; the steamed carrots are just the right touch. For dessert, Rod produces a joint from his shirt pocket, and, sipping on beers, we pass it around. For a few minutes we giggle. Then Rod rolls another and Valerie changes the music. I clear the dinner table and start on the dishes. When I turn around, Rod and Valerie are dressed for the hot tub. We head that way, passing the joint between us as we walk.

We take off our clothes and ease into the tub's warmth. The night is clear. The moon is full. The darkness is both wide-open and womb-like. I feel absurdly good and compare myself to the moon. I am that high, I think. I am that full.

Then Rod puts on those jets again. As I play in the corner with the hot, churning streams, I get a crazy idea. Leaving the tub, I go into the cold air, find the garden hose, and wet myself down with icy-cold water.

I shake involuntarily as I howl at the moon. Valerie and Rod soon join me. We point the hose at one another, shriek at the coldness, and howl and howl. Toward the far end of the driveway, I notice a silhouette running in circles in an awkward gallop. I begin doing the same.

Then Valerie and Rod pull me back into the hot tub. We hug and kiss one another as the hot water caresses us. We touch each other everywhere. Rod's cheeks are like mushrooms, I think. So are Valerie's lips. So are her breasts, especially the nipples. So am I. The water runs over us until the three of us, smiling, leave the tub and enter the house together. Valerie and Rod go to their room and motion for me to join them. I think about it, and as soon as I think, I know I shouldn't. I wave them goodnight before I continue to my room. Then I turn off the light and soon fall asleep.

Not much later I am awakened by a strangely vivid dream, nothing more than an image of a plastic bag with four mushrooms in it, the Latin words *amanitas phalloides* spelled underneath the bag. Immediately I flip on the light and look up the name in the index of one of Valerie's mushroom books. It's the death cap mushroom, the most poisonous mushroom of all.

I close the book, turn off the light, and ponder my dream. Somehow the spooky puzzle pleases me, and I keep picturing the dream image, trying to juggle significant facts. I can't stop thinking of the four places I'm considering moving to: Taos, Boulder, Missoula, and now Whidbey Island. As I continue thinking, I begin believing that one of these places is lethal to me, and the poison of one has made the others equally dangerous. It's a crazy interpretation, but I love it. Before falling back asleep I decide to leave Whidbey Island in the morning and resume traveling.

I wake early Monday morning feeling clear, momentous even. When I remember my dream, I grin. When I recall our antics in the hot tub, I laugh. I dress and go to the kitchen. Perfect timing. Valerie is sautéing the chanterelle mushrooms. Rod is cracking the eggs. They put me in charge of making the orange juice. The omelets turn out to be every bit as good as promised. We help ourselves to more coffee. Doing the dishes, I tell them about leaving.

"You know," Rod says. "Me and Valerie were just talking earlier. You could stay here for a month or two, no rent, help us around with this and that. We'll pay you a bit, feed you, hot tub you," he smiles, "and introduce you around town. In no time you'll be set." He sips on his coffee. "You want maybe to stick around and think about it?"

It's the first real offer I've had since leaving St. Paul. With tears in my eyes I thank them, but tell them there are a few more places I need to see, and if things don't work, I'll be sure to return.

It is before 8 A.M. and I am packed up. We all squeeze each other and kiss good-bye. I honk at Rex as I drive along the fenced pasture. The llama is nipping at a tree. When he hears my horn his ears perk for an instant, and then he's back to munching.

I leave Whidbey Island and get on I-5 heading south. My plans are vague. Though the day is overcast, I feel great, and think of driving to San Francisco in a single leap. Or maybe I'll detour into downtown Seattle and board a ferry for the Olympic Peninsula. I have heard Port Townsend is worth visiting. I have heard I ought to explore the rain forests near the coast.

Without realizing it, I am already past Everett and fast approaching Seattle. I keep passing hills, and speed closer. Suddenly the Seattle skyline opens, and it is like no other. Of course, there are the tall buildings, but to the right, apart from everything else, I see this curious, funny-looking tower with a long, thin, buttressed stem and a mushroom-like cap. It's obviously the Space Needle that Valerie mentioned in the woods.

Irresistibly I am drawn to this weird, metallic fungus, this mycological skyscraper. I am no stranger to the unusual, but this is the craziest thing I have ever seen. To study it up-close, I exit the interstate, park my truck, and walk toward it, entering a sterile downtown park. As I walk, I am staring up at its gills, the silvery underside of its cap. Above, the sky is a thickening gray.

For an hour or more I stand in front of it, awed by the insane technology, the ungodly shape. I try to guess about the architects who designed it, the workers who built it, the people who live in a city where such a monument exists. When someone walks right beside me, the spell is broken, but not for long. I begin walking back to my car. Though I know no one here in Seattle, I am ready to begin looking for an apartment. Just then a woman whizzes toward me on her bicycle. Even though she's wearing a helmet, I can see she's pretty. As she flies past me, I twist my neck to follow her path.

I am still watching as she briefly turns her head and flashes me a smile.



Ken Waldman is a writer with seven full-length poetry collections and a memoir, and a fiddler with nine CDs that combine Appalachian-style string-band music with original poetry. He has an MFA from the University of Alaska Fairbanks, and since 1995 has worked as a freelance writer, musician, and educator, often touring as “Alaska's Fiddling Poet.” His website is www.kenwaldman.com.

Janet Lydia Gilchrist

Dancing to New Mexico

One Land, Many Steps



We parked in the dirt off the road, removed the environmental bumper sticker, and walked through the river until we reached our destination. Our hostess had dug a pit six feet cubed in the sand and built a fire at the bottom. When there were plenty of hot coals, she put in the turkey and filled the pit back in. It was Thanksgiving 1989 and my first trip to the Gila National Forest of southwestern New Mexico.

I live in the blank spot on the map between El Paso, Texas, and Tucson, Arizona. The whole state of New Mexico is a bit of a blank in the consciousness of the rest of the country. It is often mistaken for a foreign country, and it is the state the weather forecaster typically stands in front of. In the four hours it takes to drive from Albuquerque to Silver City, one could drive through multiple eastern states. In the desert southwest, states gape and spread, all landscape and few people, in awe of the vast sky.

This is Apache territory. It was Mexico until the Treaty of Guadalupe in 1848. Now it is Grant County, New Mexico, USA. No interstate highway comes through here. One doesn't tend to get here by accident, or to leave without thinking at least twice.

This is Apache territory. It was Mexico until the Treaty of Guadalupe in 1848. Now it is Grant County, New Mexico, USA. No interstate highway comes through here. One doesn't tend to get here by accident, or to leave without thinking at least twice.

Music, dance, and food bring the Hispanic community together. On Saturdays, friends remember, their mothers, grandmothers, or aunts cleaned house and danced to the music on the radio. The children could place their feet on their mothers' when the steps were fast. Vicente Fernandez sang *rancheras*. Steve Crosno broadcast radio and television shows from El Paso, and Grant County tuned in. He played a bilingual mixture of music that came to be called "Chicano Soul." Every other week after payday, the living room was cleared of everything but the record player, or the family pulled out their musical instruments. *Posole* or *menudo* simmered, empanadas baked, and beer was enjoyed. The children went to bed, and the adults danced to *cumbias*, waltzes, *charangas,* and two-steps.

The music of the Kumbia Kings, or Al Hurricane and Tiny Morrie, played along with Michael Jackson, The Commodores and country artists. The kids learned to dance on Auntie's feet cleaning the house on Saturday, watching Dad's energetic *taconazo*, and with best friends dancing a *corrida*. They learned from watching Steve Crosno, American Bandstand, and Soul Train on television. At weddings they danced *la marcha*, the chicken dance, and the electric slide. You have to embrace complexity to identify the Hispanic dance traditions of Grant County.

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"Fourth generation Mexican-American," a coworker tells me when we talk about ethnicity. I am impressed, not by the lineage but by the immediate identification of it. This is something that she has learned to state with specificity. I have to count back: I was born in the United States, as were my mother, her mother, and her mother. My great, great grandparents came like many others from Sweden during the famine in the 1800s. I will have to look through family files to determine the generations since our ancestors came from Scotland and England. How do I describe my ethnicity? "White" is such a blank.

Many Hispanic families have been in southwestern New Mexico since before the United States arrived. The Apache, of course, and the Mexicans or Spaniards. Overnight a line was drawn that changed their country and separated families. I remember trying to answer my toddler's question while driving through one of the border patrol checkpoints in the area: "There is a line over there, and they check to see if we are on the right side of it."

Hispanic families here have diverse roots. Some trace ancestors to Spain, Brazil, Mexico, England, France, and other origins. There are Native American lines. They muse about what box to check and usually choose "Anglo" or "Hispanic" if that choice is given. "Mexican"? No, the cultures are different, but there are shared influences and history. Some say "Chicano" and some "American of Mexican descent." "American" is the bottom line.

Whether Mexican-American families have been here for one generation or six, they live in a unique culture with tradi-

Hispanic families here have diverse roots. Some trace ancestors to Spain, Brazil, Mexico, England, France, and other origins. There are Native American lines. They muse about what box to check, and usually choose "Anglo," or "Hispanic" if that choice is given. "Mexican"? No, the cultures are different, but there are shared influences and history. Some say "Chicano" and some, "American of Mexican descent." "American" is the bottom line.

tions as complex as their stories. A waltz is kind of a formal dance that becomes a *bolero* here, a more closely embraced dance with a more romantic style. A *huapango* is differentiated by the strumming of the guitar and is danced differently depending on what part of Mexico the dancers are from. At a *quinceañera*, the father changes the daughter's tennis shoe to a high heel and they have a dance celebrating her entrance to adulthood. Birthdays and anniversaries are occasions for dance. *Bautismos* are, too. Catholicism, *curanderismo*, and country mix together with *carne adovada*, green chile, and brisket plates.

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I came to New Mexico on a whim and a Greyhound bus. I was eighteen and stunned by my return to the United States after a sophomore year of college spent in Kenya and England. I fled west from New York City before even making my way to see my parents in Maryland. "Just come back," my father said when I called from somewhere in Pennsylvania en route to Albuquerque. "It's a big decision. If you still want to go after a few days, ok."

Fate is what actually happens. The character who came to fix the faucet in my Gold Street duplex studio apartment introduced me to the local environmental movement. I took the invitation and a ride to that Thanksgiving in the Gila wilderness. Interested in everything, I decided that I could never tire of studying plants. I studied botanical medicine in Albuquerque, practiced in a free clinic, and then taught there. I fell in love, had children at home, and lived off the grid in the Pinos Altos mountain range.

You do what is in front of you to do; you take the next best step. Rural New Mexico has shaped my adult life with wilderness and beauty and limited educational and career opportunities. I have worked in an herb store, studied and advocated for native plants, managed collaborative forest restoration projects, helped to found a charter school, taught yoga, and visited first-time parents in their homes every week during pregnancy until their babies' third birthdays.

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Until this generation, there were lots of places to dance in Grant County. The Catholic Youth Organization halls had dances. There were bands playing at nightclubs in every nearby town. There was rock and country-western and Spanish music. Church fiestas brought the community together for food, music and dance. The university had a popular place for youth to dance. There was a dj every Friday and Saturday night at a downtown pool hall. There is no place left for youth to go dance, and no regular dance venue at all.

When musicians used to get together to practice, neighbors would hear the music

and come to listen and dance. When one of these bands reunited for a festival recently, the neighbors called the police to stop the noise of their afternoon rehearsal. When a young man pulls his partner in to dance a *bolero* now, he is invading her personal space.

The phones used to be attached to the wall, and if you were expecting a call you had to stay at home until you received it. Now the phones are attached to the people, and it is hard to get away from them at all. Life is busy, and there's not so much live music. I enjoyed talking with friends and neighbors about their dance traditions. Everyone noted how much has changed since they learned to dance.

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Embrace complexity. I am not likely to be mistaken for a five thousand year old Indian man. How on earth did I end up teaching yoga in the blank spot on the map between El Paso and Tucson? I was a professional dancer in Maryland as a teenager. You can spot me smiling too big and swinging my red ponytail as a dance extra in John Waters' 1987 film *Hairspray*. Yoga is an eastern discipline of breath and body that has been primarily practiced by men. Now it is all over the world, practiced largely by women. We travel and breathe and move and learn from each other, and now look where we are.

La marcha is the first dance of a newly married couple. It is done in two lines, one of men and one of women, led by the parents, the wedding officiator, the *padrinos*, then the couple, the wedding party, and all the guests. The lines separate and reunite to form a tunnel of clasped hands under which the lines dance and emerge to add arches to the tunnel's length.

We have danced our way to New Mexico. My coworker has learned to clarify that she is a "fourth generation Mexican-American" in her own country where Hispanics are routinely questioned and suspected of being "aliens." I didn't suspect that I was leaving my family in Maryland for good when I took the Greyhound bus to Albuquerque twenty-five years ago. We come together. We move apart. We go through the tunnel and become a part of New Mexico.

You can feel the music work on your soul and on your body. That's what dance is about. It is the human body, anywhere on earth. Dance is a person who is moved. To be moved speaks of a depth of connection and feeling. Wherever we come from, we know dance and music. Dance is joy, self-expression, and human connection. The human brain is wired for connection. In rural New Mexico, food and music are ways to come together and celebrate life in "the land of enchantment."



Janet Lydia Gilchrist is intrigued by the relationship between wildness and culture. Her research on Hispanic dance traditions of Grant County, New Mexico, while a graduate student at Western New Mexico University, led to this article. Janet is an activist for health, education, the arts, and the environment, recognizing that the first three of these are crucial for the last.

Shaun T. Griffin

Dressing for Fire


Cameron Strandberg

In the summer when we lie down to sleep, all of the windows are open. There is stillness in the house. Sometimes you hear a whip-poor-will, an owl, or the crazed howl of a coyote. It is only when they stop that sleep comes. Occasionally, if a new bird strays from its migratory path, it wakes us, startles us from sleep. When we had a foreign exchange student from Buenos Aires he could not sleep for the first two weeks because of the silence. There were no sirens, horns, or trucks outside. We sleep soundly, deeply, most nights, but when my wife, Debby, pushes on my arm I know why: smoke has come into the room like an unwanted bird that has strayed from its path. I turn and look north from the bed—is the red shadow on the mountains facing Reno? I walk to the bathroom: is it coming from the west, from Tahoe, or is it further south in the Pine Nuts or Carson Valley? This smoke is a terrible smell. No one who lives here has escaped its reach. It is so dry in summer that fire becomes an element of dread: it can swallow a block of homes in minutes. This fall, two different wind-caused fires in south Reno consumed thirty homes each in a matter of hours. We lie back down and hope it is not close, but hope also it is not near the houses of friends because too many have lost everything.

I was driving home from the prison (where I teach a poetry workshop) when flames threatened Carson City. All of the hills on its west side had burned or were burning. The city was filled with smoke. I couldn't see the Capitol dome less than a mile from my car and I knew it would scar the most

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vulnerable: pets, children, and grandparents. That fire burned for days before they could put it out. Often it is caused by wind but sometimes it is the result of a stupid mistake—ash from a barbeque, a spark from a chainsaw, even a controlled burn by the forest service.

When I drove into town and up Paradise View, my friends were there. Larry and his wife were standing in the rubble—their home had vanished. He had done all the right things—concrete tile roof, cleared the sage and brush to the property edge, and still flame arced from pine tree to pine tree. A spark started the siding on fire and it was over. The hardest part was that homes fifty yards away were still standing. The flame hopscotched from one home to another but in no particular order. It was so hot the firemen could not get their trucks close enough to fight it. There was nothing any of us could say. Larry had saved their photos, computer, and dog, but the rest was gone—instantly. He had hiked Mt. Rainier with me, had flown to La Paz with me, and now this—some dervish of heat had torn his life in half.

How does this happen? How do you prepare?

There is no easy answer. Caprice blew down that canyon. Caprice opened a house to fire and left. Left Larry and his wife and their neighbors searching for what to do: rebuild, relocate, or leave. The insurance adjusters look good on TV; in person it's not quite so pretty.

We were lying on the beach at Camp Richardson on Tahoe's south shore. We were with our friends from Southern California, Ronni and Steve. Debby started working with Ronni when she was a counseling intern. The lake was calm—we were talking, enjoying the summer heat. I turned over to look up and thought it was a cloud but it kept getting darker, bigger, and there was no wind. It grew to the size of a football field in twenty minutes. I knew there was something wrong—it was not a thundercloud. It was fire. "We need to leave now," I said. One hour later they closed Highway 89, the primary north/south artery on the west shore of the lake. By the time we got to the hotel at Stateline—less than seven miles from where we were—one-inch flakes of ash were falling on my car. The sky was raining ash. To the west, where the fire was burning, it looked like an oil field had exploded—it was completely out of control. The hardest part about a forest fire is that it makes its own weather. It creates firestorms so it must be fought from the air and the ground, if it can be fought. The Angora Fire burned more than 250 homes. A smoldering campfire started it and one of those homes belonged to friends. Again, the house across the street was fine; theirs was leveled to the ground. He was a teacher and she worked with people with disabilities. They and their girls lived in an apartment for

a year. The home is rebuilt now, two years later, and they are just settling with the insurance company.

Fire does not ask why. Smoke floats in the room and touches everything.

I remember my first house in Nevada when I awoke to the towels smoldering over the heater. We crawled across the floor, opened all the windows and threw the towels in the snow. It wasn't until morning that I realized it could have been deadly. My friend did not awaken until I shook him. Waking in his VW van, it was comical then. We were in our twenties and the house looked like it had been abandoned in the middle of winter—windows and doors open to release the acrid smell. Of course, this only confirmed what the neighbors thought: not only is he a newcomer, he's from the city. I have lived with that smell through thirty winters. What I most fear is the loss of the poems, the writing and painting that cannot be replaced. Which leads me to surrender, once again. I try to be cautious—I never let the wood stove get too hot or leave it unattended. And yet, it provides: we heated our old house exclusively with wood and since moving across the street, I light the stove almost every winter morning. I installed this stove because a fire calms me. A friend's son sold me this stove—it is old now, the firebricks are breaking inside. Last year, the chimney sweep bent the flue plate so it is harder to balance in the open position. Cutting and stacking wood gives me more pleasure than I can say. The last thing I do before leaving is cut kindling for Debby. I smoke salmon over a wood fire year round, and in the summer, fashion a makeshift barbeque of bricks in the driveway. Leandro, our student from Buenos Aires, taught me to cook ribs slowly over hardwood coals. It took hours—if you could touch the grill the heat was just right. This meant lighting a fire when the cheat grass and the cornflowers had died, when the yard was brown. I hosed the ground for thirty feet and kept a bucket of water close by.

On the Fourth of July, Debby and I walk to the end of our block and set up chairs. For years it has been the one time when we see all of our neighbors. The wind is usually howling and the last moisture has disappeared from the Comstock. By the time the show starts we are under blankets, cold, nervous, excited. Each year we take bets: what locust tree will start on fire, what scraggly sage will burst into flame, what spark will ignite the grass? It is an anomaly of living in this high desert town. Even though fire is what consumes the landscape, they stage one of the best fireworks displays in northern Nevada. The entire volunteer fire department lies in wait: trucks, water buffaloes, jeeps, fire engines, command posts and more. All this to keep the town from burning down. To their credit they do. They have done so repeatedly. When real fire comes to the Comstock, they respond as professionally as any team of firefighters I know.

Twice since we have lived here fire has threatened Virginia City. From my front yard the tankers dropped the red borax retardant on the hills, maybe a mile from town. A single engine aircraft led the DC-3 tankers through the smoke and into the ravines too steep to climb and fight on foot. This aerial support is called in for fires such as these. When those planes come to this little town we all worry. Another time, at work, the fire came within a

half mile of our office. We started to load the most important files into the car and hoped that the tankers and the ground crew could hold the perimeter. Our building was one of three to withstand the 1870s fire. It is restored now and paid for, but we could never replace it. Fire destroys. I just wanted it to stop, to move away from the buildings on the south end of town. The wind was erratic and all it took was one small ember. Our roof was covered with cedar shake shingles that were over forty years old. They would have ignited in minutes. I watched until the dark came and the fire blew farther south. I went home, ate dinner and hoped the phone would not ring. Smoke was everywhere and it had come into the room with noise, sirens, and fear. Five years later, I took out a loan to put a metal roof on the building. It will slow the embers if they come.

Strangely, this draws a community together—no one is exempt. A fireman once took me from my home on a backboard after I rolled my truck on Geiger Grade. I pulled a snowplow driver from his cab when he rolled his truck. You depend on one another; you do what is necessary to save, to protect, to help. This is the best part of a small community—people pitch in, do what is necessary in a crisis. I imagine the same could be said of a city block—but here we have no choice. If my neighbor's home burns, the consequences are felt throughout the community. This has happened more than once—and it is never good. The woman who stands before you has a child, a suitcase, and a dress—the nylon dripping from the hanger. The teacher who lives in a trailer for four months while they gut his house is not any teacher—he sold us our house. The grandfather who hunts must wait out the season with his adult children while the contractor rushes his work to beat the snow. When the fire burns so close to your house you can see the flame, you immediately feel nauseous—it has shredded someone's life. You know them, talk to them in the post office. You know the men and women standing on the ladder trying to put it out. You know the people who live on either side of the flames. You know what this place has been: many artists lived in this home—painters, poets, novelists, and musicians. It was from the 1870s, almost historic in the Intermountain West and now it is an idea. A friend is battling the banks, the insurance company and more because he was the caretaker. It is never easy to reconstruct a life, to move on after such devastation. It is an act of will that is further complicated by caprice—why me and not them? Why this home and not that home? Why did it visit my room?

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And yet: I ask my friend with a backhoe to come to my yard. I want him to dig a pit to roast a pig. I have no idea how to do it but I want to

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and so I read and ask and practice: surely this can be learned. My friend asks how deep. I imagine six feet. In Jarbidge, in northeastern Nevada, they have dug a hole in the ground and lined it with steel for an annual barbeque. That mountain town of forty year-round residents, the site of the last stagecoach robbery in America, lights a bonfire of soft wood and then hard and it smolders to coals. They throw in rocks and when they are heated, they move the coals to the edge of the pit. They wrap the meat in burlap, put a piece of sheet metal over the rocks, another on top of the meat, and return the coals—what amounts to a Dutch oven beneath the ground. They cap it with a final plate of steel and let it cook for twenty-four hours. There is nothing with which to compare slow-cooked meat. The whole town gathers to celebrate the passage of Independence Day, a tradition that has been going on for decades despite the fact that Jarbidge almost burned down more than once. The most recent forest fire spread for miles and burned out of control in the Humboldt National Forest for over two weeks. The geography was overwhelming and the cost to fight it prohibitive. They let it burn out but kept watch on the town.

Twice we have done this roasting in our backyard. The first time was beginner's luck: I spent the day gathering sage to start the fire, juniper and mountain mahogany to sustain it, and then borrowed oak and almond from friends. I did not know how deep to make the coals and so guessed: at least six inches below and four above. I asked four friends to help, hoping that our two garden hoses and buckets of water would keep the sparks at a minimum. It was September, dry and dusty. Thankfully, there was no wind. Had there been wind we could not have done it. We lit a bonfire to start the coals. The flames were over ten feet, almost to the top of the roof. I knew they would subside but I did not want them to spread. We squirted every spark, every sudden jump of flame and slowly, the heat began to rise in waves. It took more than an hour to build enough coals to last through the night. I went in the house and brought the pig from the bathtub. It had been sitting on ice overnight. When I carried it up the stairs the day before, my mother-in-law asked if I had a body in the clear plastic bag. No, it's just a pig, I told her, but she had her doubts. My mother-in-law, Gladys, was game for just about anything, but this tested her religion: she thought her son-in-law had gone off the rails. I assured her it would be wonderful and she rolled her eyes as if I had no idea what wonderful was.

I loved that woman, think of her every day, and miss her like Debby does but probably not as much. When we were in Sacramento to visit her, Debby's sister, Winni, yelled into my room: "Mom's in cardiac arrest. Get in the car." I ran into the hospital barefoot, still not sure what had happened or why. She had had a heart attack but was supposed to recover. She would be home in a week and I could pilfer cookies from her jar. When I got to her bed she grabbed my face and kissed my lips hard. I held her and then walked to the waiting area. Her heart literally tore in half. I think she had too much pain, too much sorrow, trying to take care of her husband who by then had had a stroke and was not working. This was a woman who was in the underground at sixteen during World War

II, ferrying messages to and from the Allied pilots shot down in her Belgian village of Heers. This was a woman who lied to German soldiers so that the pilots could live. One of the fliers was her future husband, Bob. One of them flew multiple missions behind enemy lines. One of them kept the B-17 in the air, burning, until the last man parachuted out. One of them kept it flying on two occasions, on fire, to save his buddies. He was in the waiting room with us, hoping this was not the end.

When I used to trim junipers for Gladys, she stood outside in sweltering heat and held the ladder. By then they had grown above the roof. The chainsaw was over my head, my goggles were fogged with sweat. "Be careful, don't get hurt," and then her words faded when I set the blade into the wood. Tall scraggly junipers, they kept moving and dancing when I touched them with the chainsaw. They fell all over the driveway and I tried to push them from the roof. Bob came outside, lit a cigarette, and thanked me. I watched them for over three decades, braiding the fine language of marriage.

I knew Gladys was joking when she laughed at me from the couch. I knew she would love the pig. No one liked to eat more than she. Those years of living in darkness, on root vegetables and with a Jewish orphan in the house while the Germans stalked her village, those infinite years when the Allies were farther away than the moon, gave her patience and perspective. She was frugal—I teased her unmercifully about the coupons. At the store the cashiers would run when she came in. She was the only woman who left the grocery store with more money than she brought in. I didn't know about hunger when I met Gladys but she would teach me. Her diary of the pilots, elaborate drawings of their faces and flight jackets, read like a telegram from an underground museum. Gladys loved that pig. Winni cut it up in minutes. She was a physician. My good friend John threw the pieces on the Weber for a final searing and even the vegetarians went off the wagon for the afternoon. This is what fire brought us. This is how we gathered to share food. This is one thing I could give to Gladys.

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Do you stop living because the air is filled with fear? This is what I asked Fadhil al-Azzawi, the Iraqi poet when he came to Nevada. For three weeks we drove up and down the state as he read his poems in universities, libraries, and bookstores. At one point we were driving around the west shore of Lake Tahoe on the same road that had been closed to fire that summer's day. It was March and the road was snowy. We listened to the radio in the silence. It was at the height of the Iraq War. A pediatrician was being interviewed live from Baghdad. The journalist asked, "How can you go on delivering babies when the war will take them from your hands?" Fadhil laughed because he knew the answer. The doctor spoke immediately: "We have endured warfare for centuries. We must go on. There is nothing permanent. We cannot stop living until the war is over."

The journalist continued: "Do you have children?"

"Yes, four, and we may have another one."

An ember will smolder, but just as surely, dawn will come and something will appear—a blue flower in the periwinkle, a bird at the window. There will be a mark of renewal. We will make our way forward, just as the first miners in this clapboard town did. The fire and the wind will exact something from us, but we will wake after the smoke comes into the room.

"*Now*," she asked incredulously, "when Baghdad is so unstable?"

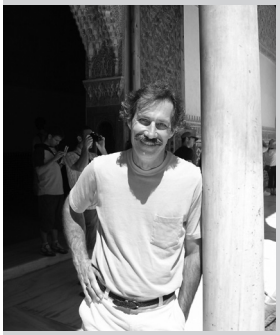
"Yes. Is it any worse for the Somalis, the Haitians, or the Lebanese refugees? They have not stopped living, they have not waited for the dictator to leave."

Fadhil leaned forward: "We are not fatalists but we keep on. We have for centuries. If we waited for peace we would have died out long before the British came." Fadhil was tortured for four years, a political prisoner before he fled his homeland. He has not seen one family member since. They communicate through messengers. His house in Kirkuk is a home for squatters. He has lived in Berlin since leaving Iraq in the mid 1970s. He and his wife are writers. His poems and novels poke fun at the idea of permanence, the notion that you could live just as you wanted. In the face of extremes, he laughs to keep perspective just like my late mother-in-law. It's not death they are afraid of; it's living without the chance to go on that they fear.

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Somewhere then, the smoke takes its place. We will live each day until the next Fourth of July. We will gather our chairs, walk to the end of the street and see our neighbors again. We will tell lies about the fireworks and secretly hope that a locust catches on fire. In the cold, unnerving wind, we will walk back to our homes. An ember will smolder, but just as surely, dawn will come and something will appear—a blue flower in the periwinkle, a bird at the window. There will be a mark of renewal. We will make our way forward, just as the first miners in this clapboard town did. The fire and the wind will exact something from us, but we will wake after the smoke comes into the room.

My wife turns in bed. I look into the night sky. This is how we dress for fire.



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Ashley Morrow Hermsmeier

Encounters with Nature—Making the Reader Care About Your Epiphanies



Mount Whitney from the Alabama Hills.

A few years ago I climbed Mount Whitney. It was the hardest, most painful, most ill-advised thing I've ever done, but I did it because I knew it would mean *something*—it had to. A great adventure in nature would help me figure out Me, this world, or the next. But three years and multiple personal essays later, I've had no such figuring. What I *do* figure is that I have yet to master the skills required to take in an experience with the natural world and use it to bring forth bits of wisdom—what others make look so easy.

In his essay, "The Judgment of the Birds," Loren Eiseley notes that "the man seeking visions and insight must go apart from his fellows and live for a time in the wilderness" and that "true wildernesses" can be found any place "where a man can be alone. It can happen in a hotel room, or on the high roofs at dawn." This is what I'm looking for—a vision at dawn, of sorts. I should start by waking up earlier.

For centuries humans have turned to nature for answers, for help, for inspiration, and although no two experiences are exactly the same, similarities can be gleaned from the canon and from more contemporary works. In the work of modern nature writers, I have found a similar pattern in the way they treat nature, and the narrator's response to the immersion in the natural world: First, there is a

time of observation and description, followed by a connection beyond the present narrative, and the moment is capped with a revelation.

Let's begin with Henry David Thoreau—the often-described "father" of modern American nature writing. He is part of a tradition of writers who immersed themselves in nature in search of answers, of new questions, of the Self. We can pick virtually any chapter from *Walden* and find this formula in play, but let's look at "Where I Lived, and What I Lived For," in which he shows us Walden Pond and the surrounding countryside. Many of the sentences in this chapter begin with or include the phrase, "I looked" and "I saw," which paves the way for physical descriptions of the land and sky. Thoreau observes and describes the pond at sunrise: "I saw it throwing off its nightly clothing of mist… its soft ripples or its smooth reflecting surface" (70), and he does the same with the surrounding hillsides: "I could catch a glimpse of some of the peaks of the still bluer and more distant mountain ranges in the north-west, those true-blue coins from heaven's own mint" (71). He is completely immersed in this place. As he is getting to know it, so is the reader.

Thoreau then moves from this time of observation and description to a period of making connections. The scenery playing out before him carries his imagination to other places, people, texts, and events. There is the allusion to "the Greeks" as "worshiper[s] of Aurora" and an engraving on King Tching-thang's bathtub that read, "Renew thyself every morning…," and then there is the allusion to "Homer's requiem" that had "something cosmical about it" (72). With each reference, there is also a connection to the rising of the sun—something he has experienced in a new way since living in the woods. His revelation begins here: he realizes that a new day can bring an awakening of the soul—if Man is willing to look.

It is after this connection of the natural world to the world of humans that he realizes inspiration comes with the "celestial music" of dawn. He writes,

> Every morning was a cheerful invitation to make my life of equal simplicity… with Nature herself…. All memorable events, I should say, transpire in morning time and in a morning atmosphere…. We must learn to reawaken and keep ourselves awake. (72-73)

This idea of coming awake and remaining awake is a revelation that has come to others who pay attention to the sun. It is an awakening of the senses, of the soul, of one's entire being, and the common denominator is that of nature's inspiration. Also notice that Thoreau uses "we" in the moment of revelation to include the reader. This is not an epiphany just for himself, but for all who might try to find a way to "reawaken" and stay that way.

Like Thoreau, Rachel Carson observes nature and then relates it to humanity. In her essay, "The Marginal World," she explores a sea cave at a rare and extreme low tide. She follows the "formula" by first looking, using the phrase "when I looked" repeatedly to move into description of the sea cave. Her description shows us that the cave was "carpeted with green sponge. Gray patches of

sea squirts glistened… colonies of soft coral were a pale apricot color… a little elfin starfish hung down." We are in the world of this "magical zone of the low water" for a few paragraphs before she connects beyond this scene to a time when she saw a ghost crab, alone, in the gleam of her flashlight. She recalls,

> [t]he blackness of the night possessed water, air, and beach… the darkness of an older world, before Man… no sound but the all-enveloping, primeval sounds of wind blowing over water… no other visible life—just one small crab near the sea.

She makes a connection to more than just herself by seeing the world as timeless, and she forms an alliance between ancient and modern humanity with the natural world's sights and sounds. The revelation suggests itself:

> The little crab alone with the sea became a symbol that stood for life itself—for the delicate, destructible, yet incredibly vital force that somehow holds its place amid the harsh realities of the inorganic world.

Like Thoreau's, Carson's revelation is for all of us. We are invited to contemplate with her the ways in which our life hangs precariously between the calm of the sands and the chaos of the sea. We can all be destroyed, easily. This revelatory moment comes about because Carson was willing to look, to describe, and to connect.

The revelatory moment can also be approached as an intensely personal event just for the writer (or narrator), yet still remain an event that includes the reader. Recently I

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had the privilege of listening to Barry Lopez, author of *Artic Dreams*, speak about writing. He said that (and I paraphrase) writing is about taking what has happened to us and turning it into a pattern that can help everyone understand their own life. This is what happens in revelatory moments, and we can see it in more contemporary works from Annie Dillard, Pam Houston, and Cheryl Strayed.

Annie Dillard is unique in that she often keeps a distance from her actual *self* so that the reader can still feel included in the revelatory moment. She is more personal and perhaps dramatic than Thoreau, yet she still manages to keep a thin wall up between herself and the reader—a technique that keeps her from sounding too sentimental. Or, as some might say, doing too much navel gazing. In her essay "Total Eclipse," Dillard retells the day she and her husband traveled to eastern Washington to watch a solar eclipse. In the opening paragraph she writes, "It was like slipping into fever, or falling down that hole in sleep from which you wake yourself whimpering" (9). The use of "you" so early in the essay creates that bit of distance from herself and invites the reader to

be part of her journey, even though she quickly moves to first person in the next paragraph. When they arrive at the site of the eclipse, she moves into observation: "we could see," "[w]e tightened our scarves and looked around." Each observation comes with a description of the surrounding hillsides, valleys, rivers, and orchards below. She describes "a band of cirrostratus clouds," "hundreds of low, golden slopes," a "thin, shining river," and "frozen irrigation ditches," until we arrive at the eclipse:

> The sky's blue was deepening, but there was no darkness. The sun was a wide crescent, like a segment of tangerine…. The towns and orchards in the valley to the south were dissolving into the blue light. Only the thin river held a trickle of sun.... The sun was going, and the world was wrong.

Dillard revolves around the moment of disappearance for the remainder of the essay and extends beyond it when she thinks of "[t]he Crab Nebula…[which] looks, through binoculars, like a smoke ring. It is a star in the process of exploding" (21). Dillard does more than allude, as Thoreau does, to the bigger picture. She goes into great detail about how the Crab Nebula is expanding at seventy million miles a day and yet, "[p]hotographs… taken fifteen years ago seem identical to photographs of it taken yesterday. Some lichens are similar." She moves from the vastness of space to the mundaneness of lichens on earth that, like the Crab Nebula, have no perceivable growth.

From these connections she moves back to the eclipse: "The small ring of light was like these things—like a ridiculous lichen up in the sky, like a perfectly still explosion." It is only after thirteen pages of observing, describing, and making connections between the world of the sky, the universe, and this trip to this crazy hilltop that her revelatory moment begins to happen. She writes, "We teach our children one thing only, as we were taught: to wake up." The eclipse plunges Dillard into a sleep-like state, which she likens to death, and it isn't until she and her husband are at breakfast that she is pulled back into wakefulness with the simplicity of a college boy's comment that the eclipse looked like "a Life Saver up in the sky." The revelation is complete when she realizes that

> [t]he mind—the culture—has two little tools, grammar and lexicon…. With these we bluster about the continents and do all the world's work. With these we try to save our very lives.

By using the pronoun "we," she includes the reader in her revelatory moment—we are even asked to do what she is doing: put our experiences into words as well. We, too, might be able "to save our very lives." Without the eclipse, without writing about the eclipse, Dillard might never have come to this revelation about the importance of "waking up"—a notion so similar to what Thoreau found with the coming dawn. This is a revelation intended for us, but what about the revelations that don't seem to include the reader? Revelations that are so personal, so vulnerable, it almost feels like an invasion to read them?

Pam Houston tends to have personal revelations (for the narrator—and arguably for herself) in her work, yet she invites the reader to join her.

In her short story "A Blizzard Under Blue Sky," it seems as though she starts with the revelation when she writes, "One of the things I love the most about the natural world is the way it gives you what's good for you even if you don't know it at the time" (334). She uses second person, as does Dillard, to include the reader as she moves into a story about fighting clinical depression through snow camping with her two dogs. Houston's observe-and-describe portions of the story are more active than those of Dillard, Carson, or Thoreau; she keeps us in the action as she shifts with fluidity from first person to second person. She writes,

> I snapped my boots into my skis and we were off. There are not many good things you can say about temperatures that dip past twenty below zero, except this: They turn the landscape into a crystal palace and they turn your vision into Superman's. (135)

She could just as easily have written this passage in first person, but by using "you," she is inclusive despite the fact that this is an adventure purely for the narrator's benefit, for *her* healing, not ours.

Like Carson and Dillard, Houston observes using phrases like "I noticed" and "as far as we could see" in order to describe the landscape. This landscape includes "something that looked like it could be a lake… or maybe just a womb-shaped meadow"; there are "crystal-coated trees" and "diamond-studded sunshine." From her description, Houston moves into brief connections—similar to Thoreau in their brevity—beyond the narrative. After considering the snow and the coldness of the day, Houston writes, "I have a friend in Moab who swears that Utah is the center of the fourth dimension…," and "I thought of Moby Dick, you know… where white is really the absence of all color, and whiteness equals truth." These connections make the scope of the story more grand, in some way, than it actually is—which is a brief twenty-four hour period spent below freezing temperatures. Without these connections to elements beyond the moment, the revelatory moment might not come.

After fourteen hours of cold misery in a snow cave with her dogs, the sun finally comes up and gives the narrator hope of warmth. She has the revelation:

> For the first time in many months I was happy to see a day beginning. The morning sunshine was like a present from the gods. What really happened, of course, is that I remembered about joy.

This is a moment just for her, yet there is a catharsis that happens for the reader as well—we can feel the joy with the narrator after a long miserable night, a night that serves as a metaphor for the life of someone who

We can feel the joy with the narrator after a long miserable night, a night that serves as a metaphor for the life of someone who suffers clinical depression. But what she gives the reader through this personal revelation is the hope of hope.

suffers clinical depression. But what she gives the reader through this personal revelation is the hope of hope. Similar to what Thoreau realized with the coming of each dawn, and what Dillard realized with the re-emergence of the sun from behind the moon, we need to *wake up* and try to stay awake. As Houston says in the closing line of the story, "I was struck by the simple perfection of the snowflakes, and startled by the hopefulness of sun on frozen trees." Each revelatory moment seen so far gives the reader hope that we can be better with each new day.

In her memoir *Wild*, Cheryl Strayed recounts her months spent hiking the Pacific Crest Trail and revamps the tradition of nature-based illumination that began with Thoreau over one hundred and fifty years ago. Where Thoreau and Dillard, even Carson, spend the majority of their stories or essays observing the details of nature, Strayed—in the vein of Houston—spends the majority of time on personal narrative. However, similar to the others, Strayed's revelations come when she takes the time to observe and describe the natural world and make connections beyond the moment.

One of Strayed's first revelations comes early in the book and follows the previously established pattern of observation, description, connection and revelation. However, there is one slight difference: Strayed centers the narrative solely around herself. The other writers make connections to the larger world or universe or humanity, while Strayed links her past to her present and vice versa. For example, in chapter four, Strayed is only three miles into her trek on the PCT, hundreds of miles to go stretch before her, and she is already thinking about giving up. She writes, "I didn't know what the hell I was doing…. I was alone in the wilderness with a beast of a load to carry" (58). From here she takes a moment to rest and moves into observation of the world around, filling the page with phrases we have seen in others, like "I saw," "I looked," and "I could see," followed by description: "the sage was less verdant," "the blue sky," and "the mountains… sloping gently down into a wide desert valley." She then moves to the connection, revolving solely around her past and her mother. She notices the aforementioned patch of sage, which brings back the memory of her mother teaching her how to rub it between her palms and inhale the scent for a "burst of energy." When she does this on the trail, she writes:

> I didn't so much smell the sharp, earthy scent of the desert sage as I did the potent memory of my mother… remembering why it was that I'd thought I could hike this trail. (59)

The revelation that follows is deeply personal, and the reader is moved, but not invited to join the catharsis: "the death of my mother was the thing that made me believe the most

Strayed's vulnerability prevents us from feeling alienated. There is no "we" or "you" present in her narrative, as in Houston or Dillard, but her honesty and candor invite us just the same. If we don't feel with *her, we at least feel* for *her and we can imagine ourselves in a similar place.*

deeply in my safety: nothing bad could happen to me… [t]he worst thing already had." We might not be included in this revelatory moment, but Strayed's vulnerability prevents us from feeling alienated. There is no "we" or "you" present in her narrative, as in Houston's or Dillard's, but her honesty and candor invite us just the same. If we don't feel *with* her, we at least feel *for* her and we can imagine ourselves in a similar place.

In one of Strayed's last revelatory moments in *Wild*, she is watching the sun go down. She begins with observation and description of wild fires some distance off before moving to the setting sun:

> I could see the evidence of those fires: a hazy scrim of smoke blanketing the westward view… I'd seen a lot of breathtaking sunsets… on the PCT, but this one was more spectacular than any… the light made indistinct, melting into a thousand shades of yellow, pink, orange. (233)

From sunset into darkness, the sky holds Strayed mesmerized and she connects once again to her past. This time the connection extends to her father—his abandonment of her and her family—and this memory leads to her most emotional revelation:

> As I gazed out over the darkening land… it occurred to me that I didn't have to be amazed by [my dad] anymore. There were so many other amazing things in this world. They opened up inside of me like a river… I laughed with the joy of it, and the next moment I was crying my first tears on the PCT…. I was crying because I was full. (233-234)

Again, this revelation is not for us, it revolves around Strayed only. However, we have spent 234 pages with her at this point—we've seen her in her weakest and strongest moments, and it is through this sympathetic affiliation that we are invited. Strayed doesn't try to include us in her revelations like Thoreau, Carson, Dillard, or Houston do, yet she continues the tradition of walking into the wilderness in search of answers, in search of Self, and she shows us what nature did for her. And if nature can do this for her, then perhaps it can do this for us should we ever need it to.

Strayed is one more voice in the wilderness, a voice in the choir of voices that has been singing a similar tune for over one hundred years. It's a reckoning with nature. Sure, Strayed's focus falls more on herself than on nature, but that seems to follow the natural progression laid out by those before her: We've seen how with each passing generation writers tend to insert more of themselves into the narrative. If everyone who ever

We've seen how with each passing generation writers tend to insert more of themselves into the narrative. If everyone who ever wrote a story set in the woods kept doing the same thing over and over again, then there would be nothing new to offer. Growth and expansion are part of everything – part of nature itself.

wrote a story set in the woods kept doing the same thing over and over again, then there would be nothing new to offer. Growth and expansion are part of everything—part of nature itself. That is what Strayed does—she has continued down a path set long ago—when Thoreau considered the woods, when Carson considered the crab, when Dillard considered the sun, and when Houston considered the dawn.

I have yet to find my revelatory moment at the summit of Mount Whitney, and maybe that's the problem: I'm treating it like it's *my* revelation. I haven't considered You. I haven't considered a key factor that accomplished writers seem intuitively to know is essential—the invitation. So, I will continue to walk into the woods in hopes of "waking up" as so many before me have learned to do. And maybe one day, after I've looked into enough tide pools, gazed longingly over enough vistas, or conquered enough summits, I'll finally learn how to join the conversation that began so many years ago.

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Richard LeBlond

The Goshute Weaver



The Great Salt Lake Desert in western Utah may be the most desolate part of the vast and arid Great Basin. It is 4,000 square miles of salt, almost as big as Connecticut. Desolation shapes the desert's human history. The Goshutes were the people who inhabited the desert's edges before the arrival of the Euro-Americans, and they are still there today. The Goshutes are related to the Northern Paiutes, Bannocks, and Western Shoshones—all adapted to the Great Basin and known collectively as the Numic speakers (Simms 2008).

Historically, the Goshutes may be the most disparaged group of Native Americans. Nineteenth century accounts are colored by pity or disgust. Mark Twain had encountered them on his way to Nevada in 1861: "We came across the wretchedest type of mankind I have ever seen," he wrote of the Goshutes in *Roughing It.* His extensive comments are scathing.

Since my retirement in 2007 I have spent a month each summer exploring mostly unglamorized regions of the West. I have become particularly fond of the area along the Nevada/Utah border that includes the Schell Creek, Snake, and Deep Creek mountain ranges. This is the Goshute homeland, and after Twain's rude introduction, I decided to take a closer look.

According to the Utah State Division of Indian Affairs (2014), the "Goshute culture has long been recognized as the

least complex of any to be found in the Great Basin region." During the 19th century, the Goshutes were derisively called "Diggers" because of the importance of roots in their diet, and no doubt because of the rhyming of that name with a derisive term for African Americans.

I learned that Twain had encountered something extraordinary, but he could see it only through the bias of his time. This "least complex" culture faced a constant threat of famine in a land of austere beauty. For over a thousand years the Goshutes had succeeded at the edge of survival in one of the temperate zone's most impoverished habitats. A hundred square miles might feed no more than a single family. The Goshutes and the other Numic speakers had adapted to an environment unlike any other on the continent. To master it, they had to find a new way to live.

I visited the Goshute reservation during the summer of 2008, wanting to photograph the towering Deep Creek Range. I also hoped to buy some form of basketry, because the weaving technique of the Great Basin's Numic speakers is unique, unrelated to any other. Steven R. Simms, in *Ancient Peoples of the Great Basin & Colorado Plateau*, argues that the distinctiveness of the Numic weaving technique is "so strong that it is almost as if the Numic have no historical roots at all. It is out of this impossibility that we realize that the Numic Spread is not a debate over whose ancestors are who, but an example of culture created anew." The Great Basin apparently required an original technology.

The Goshute Reservation lies off the western edge of the Great Salt Lake Desert, about sixty miles south of the nearest town, Wendover, on the Utah/Nevada border. The reservation is located in the Deep Creek Valley at the foot of the Deep Creek Range, whose highest peak, Ibapah, reaches 12,087 feet. Deep Creek Valley is where the Goshute families historically gathered after the foraging season ended. So today's residents are still in their ancestral winter home, though the reservation itself is a small fraction of the land needed for a foraging economy.

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Almost all of the valley's residents live in two villages. Ibapah, located on the northern edge of the reservation, contains a mix of native and European descendants, and is where tribal headquarters is located. Three miles south is the village of Goshute where most of the reservation's 100 or so residents live. Some anthropologists believe there were once as many as 20,000 Goshutes, but today there are hardly more than 500, and most live off the reservation. (There is another, much smaller Goshute reservation to the east in Skull Valley with about 30 residents.)

In July of 2008, I stopped at tribal headquarters in Ibapah, a low government building with the architectural splendor of a strip mall. Inside, the walls were veneered and fragile-looking. An arrow might go clean through them. It was like other humble office complexes I have seen, except all the employees were Goshutes. I approached a woman sitting at a desk near the open door of her office.

"I'd like to get permission to enter the reservation and take some photos of the mountains and valley."

"Come with me," she said, stepping out of her office and guiding me down a dark brown hallway that bore notices of social services and posters of coming events. We entered the office of the tribal administrator, Ed Naranjo, who was deep into a paper task and did not immediately look up. But as soon as she introduced me, he was genial and facilitative. After I made my request, he asked for a description of my truck, called the reservation police, and told them what I wanted to do.

"Check back in on your way out," Ed said, "so I can let the tribal police know you've left."

I headed south into the reservation to the small village of Goshute. Most of the homes were mobile, which seem to catch their inhabitants in an everlasting moment of transience. As I drove down the narrow road, I saw an older man walking out to his roadside mail box. So I stopped, stepped out of the truck, and introduced myself. His name was Alfred Dushane, and he looked to be somewhere between sixty and eighty years old, as if the sun and wind had given up aging him. His upper jaw was down to its last front tooth. His calmness put me at ease.

Just as we began to talk, a pickup drove up with a big Natural Resource Conservation Service decal on the door. The driver stopped next to us, his window rolled down. He smiled, and we introduced ourselves. His name was Milton Hooper. He, too, was a Goshute.

I told them I had permission to head down the valley and take photos. "But I also want to find a weaver. I hope to buy something, maybe a basket."

Alfred replied, "There are a few people on the reservation who make beaded straps, mostly for key chains and necklaces. But I think Bernice Steele is the only one still weaving baskets. She lives in Wendover."

"I think she's still tanning deer hide too," Milton said. "Ask Ed on your way out. He'll know how to get a hold of her."

Milton then offered to lead me, and I followed his pickup down the valley. Shortly, he turned southeast onto a dirt road heading up the lower flank, the steppe, of the Deep Creek Range. When we came to a fork in the rutted road, he stopped, and we got out of our trucks.

"This road will take you up to a creek," he said. "It gets steep, but I think you'll be all right. It's very pretty up there." Pointing towards a low ridge to the south of us, he said: "I'm headed over there. A couple of men are making a small watering hole for wildlife at a spring, and I'm going to give them a hand if they need it."

I asked him what animals were still living in the mountains.

"Elk, deer, antelope, lions, coyotes. And a few who had left are coming back. There've been recent sightings of bear and black wolf, and turkey were re-introduced in '02."

"Does anyone still use the native plants?"

"There are some people who know about the plants, but hardly anyone's using them anymore. I remember seeing

gunny sacks full of pine nuts when I was a boy, and I used to pick chokecherries and other fruit."

"I've been reading as much as I can find out about Goshute history," I said. "There were some pretty awful things said in the 19th–"

"–Twain!" Milton angrily interjected, but it was softened by a slight smirk. His response was not just that of someone enduring the reawakening of an old wound (sorry about that), but also had the perspective of a historian.

I would have loved to hear his account of the past, but he was in a hurry. We shook hands and headed to our tasks. The mountains and valley were in caring hands, but like almost everywhere, the old uses are dead or dying. Even if the land's resources were still wanted, the drastically smaller foraging area has severely reduced what can be gathered. Instead of the Goshute depending on the land, the land now depends on the Goshute.

On my way out of the reservation, I stopped at the tribal office to get the contact information for the weaver, Bernice Steele. Ed was happy to assist. He opened the phone book and searched for her number.

"That's funny," he said, "I can't find it. She called me just last week, mad as hell."

"She has your number," I said.

"Yes, she has my number," he grinned.

Just then his secretary, with good listening skills, walked in from an adjacent office with Bernice's number.

I showed Ed my copy of Simms' book, *Ancient Peoples of the Great Basin & Colorado Plateau*, published only two months before my visit. He was instantly engrossed.

"You're leaving this with me?" he asked with a wink.

"No way," I answered with a smile, but not with a wink. I later sent him a copy in gratitude.

In Wendover, I called Bernice Steele from my room at the Red Garter Hotel and Casino, but no one answered. I kept calling for the rest of the day and evening, and next morning, but still no answer. Since there are only so many blackjack games and slot machines one can play while waiting for a Goshute weaver, I headed down the road towards the next adventure. But that night, from the remote mountain town of Jarbidge, I finally caught up with Bernice on the phone, and we set up a meeting for the next day. I gladly returned to Wendover, as I had left a pair of pants in my room at the Red Garter, in addition to having lost a shirt at the blackjack table.

Bernice lived in a mobile home with her granddaughter and two great-grandchildren. She stored her weaving in an adjacent shed, and worked outdoors in the shade of two cottonwood trees. It was 100 degrees on the day of my visit,

The mountains and valley were in caring hands, but like almost everywhere, the old uses are dead or dying. Even if the land's resources were still wanted, the drastically smaller foraging area has severely reduced what can be gathered. Instead of the Goshute depending on the land, the land now depends on the Goshute.



with no air-conditioning in the house. Bernice said her great-grandmother, born in the 1840s, had taught her how to weave. I guessed that Bernice was about eighty years old. But when I later pondered the date she had given for her great-grandmother's birth, I realized Bernice was probably closer to ninety. Even at that age she would have been about seventy years younger than her great-grandmother. Bernice learned weaving from a woman who quite possibly had been born before any of her family had seen a Euro-American.

Except for a Reno gallery, the only commercial outlets for her work are Wendover locals and the Goshutes themselves. Several of her pieces are on exhibit at university and private museums in Utah and Nevada. In addition to her basketry, she made beaded purses and wallets, and her granddaughter had talked her into making beaded holders for cellphones. She also made decorated gloves and moccasins from deer skin, and cradleboard "backpacks" for toting babies.

I wanted to buy one of her conical burden baskets designed to carry the cones of the pinyon pine back to camp. There, the cones underwent a complex process to free and prepare the delicious and highly nutritious nuts. During late-summer and autumn, families harvested pinyon cones before the nuts had ripened, as ripened nuts would have been contested by other creatures. The bearer carried the burden of cones on his or her back, the basket held in place by a cord strap that wrapped around the bearer's forehead. The open tops of the baskets Bernice had woven were about one-and-a-half feet in diameter, and nearly two feet deep. The bottom was only a couple of inches wide.

The basket's conical shape is an elegant example of applied physics, as it brings the majority of the weight to the shoulders and upper back. Anyone who has worn a heavy backpack knows how much easier it is to bear the burden when the pack rides high.

Bernice also made winnowing trays—willow woven into nearly flat triangles with rounded angles, and slightly depressed towards the center like a gently cupped palm. The long axis was about a foot and a half. The winnowing trays were used to separate chaff from seeds, and legs and wings from roasted insects.

I was surprised by how artless the weavings were. In both the burden baskets and the winnowing trays, the willow ribs were of slightly different diameters. Some of the ribs were more strongly bent than adjacent ribs, creating an unevenness in the plane of the winnowing tray. The cross-stitching done with thin willow strips formed lines that were only roughly parallel. Ends of strips poked through the ribs here and there.

Then I realized what I was looking at. This was not art. These were tools, the novel technology of the Goshutes and other Numic speakers. She had not crafted objects to be seated on pedestals or display case shelves, even though she knew that is where they were headed. No doubt she could have "improved" them, as she had done with the gloves and moccasins. But the baskets and trays were as they had been taught by her great-grandmother. They might have lasted years, even generations, in the service of a Goshute cook. The unevenness of the winnowing tray's plane no doubt was intentional, contributing to its function of freeing pine nuts from their shells, and knocking legs and wings off roasted grasshoppers, locusts, and cicadas.

The weavings were not representations of the past, but the past itself, kept alive.

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Walter Metz

The Little "So-Called Men" Go to the Movies[1]

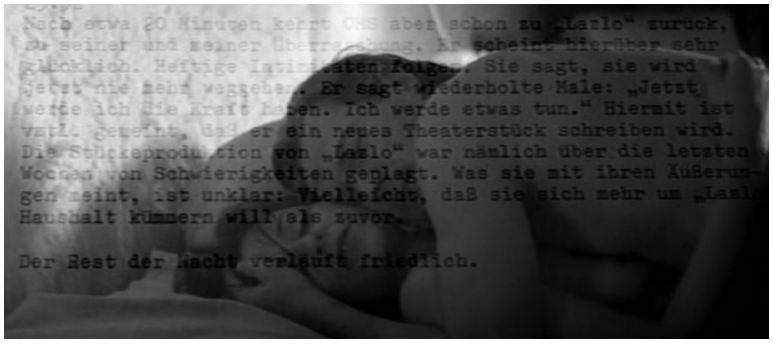
I. "A War of Typewriters"

In *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (1986, tr. 1999), a history of media and technology, German cultural studies scholar Friedrich Kittler laments how modernity overwhelmed humanity with its machines. He sees this process as having begun in the 19th century. Step by step, electronic devices commandeered all of the human sensory functions: "A telegraph as an artificial mouth, a telephone as an artificial ear—the stage was set for the phonograph" (28). The gramophone allowed a machine to capture the human voice, while the cinema subsequently replicated sight.

However, it is with the typewriter, the seemingly most innocuous of 19th century inventions, that Kittler crescendos his epic study. Drawing upon such diverse sources as Thomas Pynchon's novel *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) and Paul Virilio's *War and Cinema* (1989), Kittler traces the close development of media technology and warfare. In the United States, Remington became the dominant manufacturer of typewriters—1881's Remington II model was the best selling machine in America—allowing the company to diversify beyond its original firearms concerns. For Kittler, there is little difference: in his eyes, the typewriter is "a discursive machine gun" (191).

The writing on the wall predicting the demise of humanity was typewritten, argues Kittler. Type represents the penultimate replacement of the human by the machine. Whereas handwriting is individual, and expresses the diverse souls of people, type is the same no matter the differences between the hands that strike the keys.

The final step in the decimation of what Kittler terms "so-called Man" took place at the beginning of World War II, and is intriguingly represented in Norwegian Morten Tyldum's film, *The Imitation Game* (2014), which finds mathematician Alan Turing (Bendict Cumberbatch) building the computer that broke the German military encryption of troop locations. The story begins with Enigma, the "secret typewriter of Wilmersdorf" (253), a German encoding machine



A typewritten surveillance report ironically superimposed over the lovers in *The Lives of Others* (Germany, Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, 2006).

[1] In tribute to one of the great critics of cinema and culture, Siegfried Kracauer.

that was thought unbreakable. By building essentially the world's most important computer, Turing's team was able to decipher the Nazi code and allow the Allies to win the Second World War.

While clearly a better outcome than a victory by Hitler, Kittler pauses to consider this triumph as more than a bit Pyrrhic. For it really wasn't a victory of one set of humans over another, but an abrogation of the human role, given over to the machines. Kittler positions World War II as a "war of typewriters" (256). Turing's Universal Machine was simply a more powerful typewriter than the vaunted Enigma, itself a machine into which humans merely typed messages to have them automatically encrypted and deciphered. Through a series of rotors, the Enigma machine converted messages into a seemingly random string of letters that could be transformed back into meaningful language only when an identical Enigma machine was fed the proper settings. Humans could change the settings every day, but only to allow one Enigma machine to once again speak to others of its ilk.

"The Second World War devolved from humans and soldiers to machine subjects," Kittler argues (259). The filmmakers behind *The Imitation Game* set about capturing the work of genius it was for Turing to build a machine to break the German Enigma. The film humanizes Turing, making us care emotionally about him by demonstrating how cruelly he was treated as a gay man in post-war Britain, at a time of rampant homophobia. Arrested for indecency, his primary role in defeating Nazism completely censored from the public record, Turing committed suicide less than a decade after the end of the war, despite his central role in completely transforming the future into an unfathomable computerized network.

It is precisely this Romantic notion of individual genius endorsed by *The Imitation Game* that Kittler works so hard to dismantle in *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*. Whether gay men are allowed to love whomever they want, or whether brilliant female mathematicians get the professional respect they deserve, the emotional content of *The Imitation Game* is beside the point for Kittler's analysis, in which technology has doomed all humanity, progressive, oppressive, or otherwise.

The movie treats the Enigma story, not as the last nail in the coffin for our future, but instead as a string of brilliant individual deductions tied to humanity's greatest ability, thinking. The film's Turing makes one great act of empathetic humanity, squirreling Joan Clarke (Keira Knightley) into Bletchley Park because she is a genius at doing puzzles. However, the sexist military structure refuses to allow Joan to

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The first shot in a graphic match which links Alan Turing's improvement on the Polish "bombe" de-encryption machine with Nazi tank treads in *The Imitation Game* (Morten Tyldum, 2014).



The second shot of the graphic match: the Nazi tank treads in *The Imitation Game*.

work on Turning's project. Instead, he gets her hired in the secretarial pool, where women type out intercepted Nazi radio transmissions. Kittler predicts as much: he is fascinated by how the typewriter as a machine subsumes the female labor that the very word hides: a typewriter is both a female secretary who uses the machine, and the name of the machine itself.

The Imitation Game's Turing throws a pebble at Joan's window late at night, not to engage in sexual shenanigans, but instead to have her help him work on his decryption algorithms. Indeed, it is Joan who sparks Turning's solution to Enigma. She reports that not all German radio operators are the same. She can distinguish one of them by the cadence of his typing. Contra Kittler, human individuality has been preserved amidst the technological onslaught: one radio operator *can* be individuated from another. People like Joan, who does what the imprisoned Turing tutors us to do repeatedly—"Are you paying attention?"—*are* able to use their mental faculties to overcome the reductionism of the machine. Joan's insight cascades into Turing's, who subsequently realizes that their machine does not have to start from scratch every morning after Enigma's settings have been changed, because almost every German transmission ends with an idiotically repetitive refrain: "Heil Hitler." And thus, in one of the great ironies in human history, Nazi mechanization fell to British individuation.

Despite the Romanticism of *The Imitation Game*, Kittler lurks behind every image. At one point, a graphic match links the whirring rotors of Turing's machine to the treads of a Nazi tank squashing a British army helmet into the mud. Mechanization clearly threatens humanity at all times, but the cinema points beyond Kittler's technologically determinist pessimism. This essay proposes to find a middle ground between Germanic Romanticism and cultural morbidity. A grotesque historical mirroring of *The Imitation Game, The Lives of Others* (2006), Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's German film about the aftermath of the Soviet victory in East Germany, envisions Kittler's influence in communications technologies: typewriters, audio, and video recorders. Set in Berlin in the 1980s, in the same location and at the same time as Kittler wrote *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter, The Lives of Others*

extends *The Imitation Game*'s study of the technological deterioration of "so-called Man" into the post-war period and beyond.

II. "The Engineers of the Soul"

Kittler uses the technological communications revolutions of the late nineteenth century—the invention and diffusion of the phonograph, the cinema and the typewriter—to explain the current plight of humans. Kittler argues that the coincidence between communication and militarism has destroyed our humanity; he repeatedly forwards the phrase "so-called Man" to describe the nuclear threatened state of humanity at the end of the 20th century ("Preface," xxxix). Kittler scholars Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz summarize the argument of the book:

> Writing, a technology of symbolic encoding, was subverted by new technologies of storing physical effects in the shape of light and sound waves. Two of Edison's developments—the phonograph and the kinetoscope—broke the monopoly of writing, started a non-literary (but equally serial) data processing, established an industry of human engineering, and placed literature in the ecological niche which (and not by chance) Remington's contemporaneous typewriter had conquered. (xxv)

The typewriter, an individualized variant of the Gutenberg printing press, was promulgated in the United States by the Remington gun concern, while a young soldier in the American Civil War, Thomas Edison, invented the gramophone in order to reduce human error in telegraphy, with his company's invention of the film camera to follow.

Kittler wrote his remarkable book in the early 1980s, in a Berlin torn asunder by the Cold War. Indeed, the Cold War use of military communications technology permeates the book. In reference to the West German use of U.S. Army radio equipment, Kittler argues:

> The entertainment industry is, in any conceivable sense of the word, an abuse of army equipment. When Karlheinz Stockhausen was mixing his first electronic composition, *Kontakte*, in the Cologne studio of the Westdeutscher Rundfunk between February 1958 and Fall 1959, the pulse generator, indicating amplifier, band-pass filter, as well as the sine and square wave oscillators were made up of discarded U.S. Army equipment: an abuse that produced a distinctive sound. (97)

In 2006, fellow Berliner Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck produced a film, *The Lives of Others*, about the Stasi surveillance of artists in early 1980s Berlin, another Cold War story of the conflation of militarism and communications technologies. The 2007 Academy Award winner for Best Foreign Language Film, *The Lives of Others* is an intertextual adaptation of *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, an exciting instance in which a film and a theoretical critical studies text resonate around the same material objects to understand one particular moment in cultural history.

Both Kittler's text and von Donnersmarck's film make sense of the

early 1980s in Berlin by framing the political repression of the Cold War via the analysis of media communications. That much could perhaps be chalked up to the cultural zeitgeist; after all, the Wall—a symbolic and literal barrier to communication—was the defining feature of Berlin in the second half of the twentieth century. The impetus for this reading, however, is that the specifics of the two texts, not just these vague generalities, line up remarkably closely, as closely as any purported Hollywood adaptation of a canonical literary text. The plot of *The Lives of Others* hovers around the three material objects central to Kittler's study. The film concerns Gerd Wiesler (Ulrich Muhe), a Stasi agent who uses video surveillance ("film") and voice recording technology ("gramophone") to spy on the population of East Germany. At the beginning of the film, Wiesler is assigned to the case of Georg Dreyman (Sebastian Koch), a Marxist playwright loyal to the East German government. However, Dreyman's friends, mostly other artists, are a suspicious lot, and thus the subject of much harassment by the Stasi.

As a result of the rape of his girlfriend, Christa-Maria Sieland (Martina Gedeck) by a high-ranking East German government official, Dreyman comes to fully appreciate the corruption of the regime; he consequently decides to write a scathing indictment of the government. His friends give him an unregistered typewriter, which he uses to compose the missive. Because Wiesler's insight into Dreyman's apartment is limited to the line of sight of the surveillance cameras (outside of Dreyman's building) and the audio-only regime of the surveillance bugs, Wiesler does not know where Dreyman has hidden the typewriter under the floorboards. Thus, it is the specific nexus of incomplete communication posed by gramophone, film, and typewriter with which *The Lives of Others* is concerned. The tracing of the theoretical boundaries of this nexus reveals that Kittler's and von Donnersmarck's understanding of the dehumanizing effects of the Cold War on Berliners is compellingly coincident.

And yet, von Donnersmarck is headed in the same direction as was *The Imitation Game*. He ends his film with humanist redemption, when the former Stasi agent opens Dreyman's book to discover that it is dedicated to him. Wiesler tells the cashier at the Karl Marx bookstore, an ironically named shop if there ever was one, in response to the clerk's inquiry about giftwrapping: "No, it's for me." The double-entendre is heartwrenching, and offers a glimpse of hope that the future might be better than the past. Here, "so-called Man" sheds his "so-called-ness" and demonstrates that Kittler may just be underestimating our species. As a critic devoted to pedagogy, I must agree that von Donnersmarck's hopeful approach to learning from the abuses of the past is more in keeping with my experiences than is Kittler's pessimistic nihilism. This, of course, is not the same thing as saying that Kittler's model for communication theory is useless for understanding *The Lives of Others*. To the contrary, his understanding of how militarism dominates communication is crucial for plumbing the depths of von Donnersmarck's remarkable theoretical project etched into celluloid.

The beginning of *The Lives of Others* resonates with Kittler's study of the gramophone. Kittler argues that

the gramophone transforms human civilization because it uses mechanical and electrical means for the first time to preserve the uniqueness of the human voice. As Kittler frames it, "Media render Man, 'that sublime culprit in the most serenely spiritual sense' of his philosophy, superfluous" (78). Indeed, one early marketing strategy for Edison's phonograph in the United States was to highlight its use for preserving the dying words of family members. Thus, the gramophone takes previously ephemeral human utterances and turns them into an archive of stable and re-usable knowledge.

The Lives of Others begins with typewritten title cards that will come to be associated with the East German spy technology: Wiesler and his minions type everything they hear during their audio surveillance onto sheets of paper. The typed words set the film's historical location: "1984, East Berlin. Glasnost is nowhere in sight. The population of the GDR is kept under strict control by the Stasi, the East German Secret Police." Another title card exposes the absurd extent of this mad typewritten epistemology: "Its force of 100,000 employees and 200,000 informers safeguards the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. Its declared goal: 'To know everything.'"

The image fades to black, and we next hear the sound of footsteps. The first shot of the film proper is of two men's backs, one an East German guard and the other a suspect being held in the Stasi prison. Thus, even before the end of the film's very first shot, *The Lives of Others* has displayed the entirety of Kittler's critique of the dehumanization of "so-called Man." The film, through a mix of typography and sound and image recording, has demonstrated the abstract brutality of the Stasi regime: men whose faces we do not even need to see are engaged in destroying humanity, and this in a country where that task was nearly completed for slightly different reasons a mere forty years previously.

The Lives of Others continues this Kittlerian critique throughout its conventional, narrative cinematic explorations of the lives of these others, historical remnants of a world left behind by the tearing down of the Berlin Wall in November 1989. The first narrative sequence of the film—its "gramophone" section, if you will—is obsessed with the nature of sound recording. It is November 1984, and this particular prison is the "Temporary Detention Center," the qualification of the concreteness of detention with the absurd notion of temporariness being one of the film's many Kittlerian ironies.

The first close-up of the film is of a reel-to-reel tape recorder in Wiesler's desk drawer. Wiesler turns on the device and closes the drawer as the guard brings the prisoner into his office. The prisoner insists to Wiesler: "I've done nothing. I know nothing." Wiesler's job is to break down this man's freedom by overwriting this blank epistemological performance. By the end of the interrogation, Wiesler will have produced Kittler's "so-called Man" before our eyes, documenting both textually and phonographically his guilt, both in action and knowledge. Wiesler begins with the double-speak of Totalitarianism: "If you think our humanistic system capable of [mistake], that alone would justify your arrest."

Wielser interrogates Prisoner #227 by asking him to repeat his story.

The prisoner replies simply, "It's in my statement." However, writing is not enough for Wiesler. He is interested in the details of the performance, which both gramophone (his tape recorder) and film (von Donnersmarck's camera) will capture. "Once again please," Wiesler insists. Wiesler is interested in evidence that the prisoner's story is memorized. Thus, exactly as Kittler analyzes, humanity cannot escape from mechanized dehumanization: repeated interrogation is what the Stasi demands of its suspects; the suspects in turn memorize their story in order to not get caught. If they fail to perform the story identically, the Stasi have evidence of their guilt. If they do succeed in memorizing perfectly, Wiesler knows they are guilty because no human being can be that perfect. Only "so-called Man"—a failed, dehumanized automaton—can possibly have lived into the late twentieth century when trapped amidst such contradictions. Alan Turing certainly did not, destroyed within a decade of the end of the war by a different witch-hunt on the opposite side of the Wall separating the "free" world from the enslaved one, which for Kittler are one and the same.

The prisoner's memorized story is about his old friend Max Kirchner. They listened to music together on the day in question. "He has a telephone, you can call him to confirm this." At this exact moment, when music and aural reproduction ("gramophone") are mentioned, the film shifts narrative registers dramatically. A cut to a different, vertical reel-to-reel tape deck reveals Wiesler, not in his office, but in a classroom. He is playing the audiotape *recording* of the interrogation for his students at the Stasi Hochschule in Potsdam. The film's trick, beginning in the past, and then shock cutting to the present, establishes a pedagogy of audio reproduction. Wiesler is teaching his students not only interrogation techniques, but more importantly, how to listen. In Alan Turing's terms, Wiesler is asking them, "Are you paying attention?" Wiesler explains: "The enemies of our state are arrogant." He rewinds the tape so that they can hear the evidence, an audio record that is full of data, and unchangeable.

Von Donnersmarck's film, however, believes in visual images as well, and uses them to fight against Wiesler's logic of the gramophone. This is indeed the allegorical key to *The Lives of Others*. While Kittler believes the nexus, gramophone/film/typewriter has murdered off humanity, von Donnersmarck's film, as does *The Imitation Game*, believes "so-called Man" is redeemable: the wars against humanity can be overcome by human decency. Wiesler will become the hero of the film. He plays the role of evil pedagogue now, but his schooling is to come. For now, *The Lives of Others* goes its own visual way, beginning the process of severing its discourse from Wiesler's.

The film returns to its images of the interrogation, cross-cutting the visual recreation of the past event as supplement to Wiesler's audio experience for the students in the classroom. The prisoner falls asleep in his chair in the interrogation room; von Donnersmarck's editors cut from the visual witness to that event to a rightward panning camera down the row of Stasi students. The film is now intervening against the gramophone. Yet Wiesler is still in charge. Just before the camera arrives at one par-

ticular student at the end of the row, to the right of the image, that student complains: "Why keep him awake so long? It's inhuman." Wiesler makes a notation in his grade book about this troublemaker on his seating chart, planning perhaps a future interrogation of this student's Kittlerian subversiveness. However, a different radical, one who believes in the human (Man over so-called Man), will have the last laugh (how far is the liberalism of German Expressionism from the contemporary German cinema anyway?), as von Donnersmarck's film discourse wins out over Wiesler's gramophone record.

Wiesler explains that the best way to catch a guilty prisoner is non-stop interrogation. An innocent man will rage, a guilty one will cry. He turns the tape recorder back on. The prisoner repeats verbatim: "He has a telephone, you can call him to confirm this," he sobs. Wiesler stops the tape and calls his students' attention to these words: "A liar has prepared sentences which he falls back on while under pressure." Sure enough, the prisoner cracks: he names the person who helped his friend escape to the West: Werner Glaeske. The students chatter. Wiesler tells them to be quiet. On the tape is the sound of him taking the fabric off of the prisoner's chair. Wiesler asks them to listen to that sound. "Your subjects are the enemy of socialism," he concludes, with the implication that their stink is a threat to the State.

Wielser's boss, Anton Grubitz, comes to applaud his lecture. The students follow suit, reluctantly. Grubitz's arrival catalyzes the plot of the film: he invites him to the theatre where Grubitz will assign Wiesler the task of investigating the playwright Dreyman. Almost seven minutes into the film, after this opening tour de force of the gramophone, von Donnersmarck produces the title card, *Das Leben der Anderen*. The rhetorical terms are set: Wiesler's audio recordings of suspicious East Germans will compete against von Donnersmarck's filmic reconstruction of history to testify to how humanity again won over the monstrous beasts of Totalitarianism, just as Turing's machine defeated Enigma forty years earlier.

The Lives of Others and Kittler's text converge at the militarism of the typewriter. Like Enigma and the "bombe" before it, this typewriter—the "discursive machine gun"—is used by both sides. The Stasi use the instrument to convert complex human actions into scientific catalogs of events while Georg Dreyman uses the machine to highlight the tangible failures of the East German system: when suicide rates go too high, the government simply stops keeping track of the numbers. Similarly, the failure of the Stasi typewriter does in fact lead to real machine guns, firing after escapees across the Wall. It is remarkable that *The Lives of Others* need not turn to any such clichés; as Kittler explains it, the typewriter is already a visible weapon of the Cold War.

Like Enigma and the bombe, the plot of *The Lives of Others* concerns two typewriters: Wiesler's, through which the spy inscribes the details of Dreyman's personal life; and Dreyman's, with which he composes the essay discrediting the East German government. Beyond the typewritten text of the opening title cards, the first narrative appearance of a typewriter in the film is Wiesler's as he sets up his technological surveillance shop in the attic of Dreyman's building. Wearing headphones



The graphologist has identified the specific markings made by every typewriter known to exist in East Germany in *The Lives of Others.*

to listen to the audio emerging from the bugs in Dreyman's apartment, he types down everything he hears, an automaton, a so-called Man.

However, a different audio fights back against this human debasement. Dreyman's mentor, the ruined blacklisted playwright Jerska, gives Dreyman sheet music, "Sonata for a Good Man," to play on his piano. During Dreyman's birthday party, Wiesler keeps typing throughout the evening. After all the guests have left, we watch Wiesler type the words, "They presumably have intercourse," exposing the pathetic nature of his status as no more than a peeping tom, intruding upon the private life of Dreyman and his girlfriend, the actress, Christa-Maria Sieland. At this moment, Wiesler's subordinate arrives to relieve him of duty for the overnight shift. The replacement is far more crass than Wiesler, "These artists, always at it"; Wiesler at least performs his unctuous job with wordless, albeit diabolical, dignity.

Dreyman's story, however, centers not on Wiesler's surveillance typewriter, but another one altogether. One of the angry dissident artists, Gregor Hessenstein, brings Dreyman a typewriter hidden underneath a cake. He could only get a red ink ribbon for this model. "Nobody may know that this typewriter exists," the rebel insists. Sure enough, after the publication of Dreyman's essay in *Der Spigel*, Grubitz gets chewed out by his superiors. He assures his boss that they have a copy of the original essay from their spy at the magazine. Using the typeface, they will trace the essay back to its author. In the most Kittlerian scene in the film, a graphologist reports on the typewriters used by all of the authors in the GDR.

In a low-angle medium shot, representing Grubitz' seated point-of-view at his desk, the graphologist delivers his scientific report. Using a metal pointer, he displays blow-ups of the red typed examples from Dreyman's essay. The graphologist knows every typewriter in East Germany, but cannot match these letters to any known dissident. Grubitz asks the expert about the typewriters used by particular troublemakers. The graphologist responds with precision: "Paul Hauser uses a Valentino typewriter, made by Olivetti. That model has a more horizontal…." However, as the expert begins to point to his chart and explain the details of the graphical analysis, Grubitz interrupts him. The report concludes with Grubitz asking how big is the typewriter that produced Dreyman's essay. The graphologist again responds with precision: "It's one of the smallest available, 19.5 cm x 9 cm x 19.5 cm." When Grubitz observes, "it's as easy to smuggle as a book," he dismisses the graphologist.

Kittler argues that one of the typewriter's major cultural effects was the loss of the personal information contained in handwriting, more evidence of our debased status as "so-called Man":

> Cinema and the phonograph, Edison's two great achievements that ushered in the present, are complemented by the typewriter…. Since 1868, writing has no longer been the ink or pencil trace of a body whose optical and acoustic signals were irretrievably lost, only to reappear (in readers' minds) in the surrogate sensuality of handwriting. (13)

The Lives of Others resists such Kittlerian determinism. Even though the Stasi have discovered that typewriting is indeed more individualizing than Kittler claims, Dreyman's hidden typewriter still confounds their desire to "know everything." Without perfect video surveillance within Dreyman's apartment, they cannot possibly know about the existence of his red-ribbon typewriter, never mind where they might find it.

The centerpiece sequence of *The Lives of Others* also features filmic images of human bodies fighting back against the linguistic reduction of humanity to the typewritten page. Almost exactly halfway through the film, the first typewriter scene described previously is inverted. Wiesler's assistant again relieves him for the night shift. By this point in the film, the agent is now in the midst of full-blown doubt about the purpose of his life. Not knowing what to do with himself, he stumbles into a bar, where Christa-Maria struggles with her own guilt at not telling Dreyman about the abuse she is suffering at the hands of the rapacious Minister Bruno Hempf. After their brief conversation, Wiesler returns to the surveillance room. His helper has fallen asleep at his post. However, earlier, he typed a report about Christa-Maria and Dreyman having sex.

Wiesler rips the report out of the typewriter and reads it. The film cuts to a close-up of the typewritten document. In voice-over, we hear Wiesler read the contents of the report. Superimposed over the typewritten text is the film's most passionate, romantic sequence: Christa-Maria rushes in to embrace Dreyman, and the passionate lovers have sex, wordlessly in silhouette. The assistant's voice-over delivers the report on the soundtrack, filled with absurd inaccuracies. The film's images thus undo the feebleness of the typewritten report. His description of the intense lovemaking is: "Vigorous acts of intimacy follow." His misreading of the reason for Christa-Maria's return—she is really choosing Dreyman over the Minister—provides the film's most humorous moment: "What she means by her statement is unclear. Perhaps she intends to take better care of his household." Both *The Imitation Game* and *The Lives of Others* transcend mere Romanticism to instead represent a complex humanity in the wake of seeming technological determinism. The Turing film replaces sex with cryptology, while von Donnersmarck uses sexual intimacy as a marker of humanity's resistance to reduction to mere typed reports.

The sex sequence in *The Lives of Others*, testament to the power of visual images over type, foregrounds the film's political project. For whatever their other flaws, Dreyman and Christa-Maria, at this one moment, are able to establish human contact with one another. The lush romantic sequence serves as a marked contrast with Wiesler's sex with a prostitute. After mechanically servicing him, the prostitute gets up to go to her next appointment. When Wiesler begins to beg for a few more minutes of human

contact, she tells him curtly to book a longer slot next time.

The sequence where Dreyman and Christa-Maria make love is resonant with a similar analysis in *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*. Kittler analyzes a 1919 essay by Rainer Maria Rilke entitled "Primal Sound": "[The piece] leaves no doubt whatsoever about which contemporary developments were most important to literature in 1900. Instead of lapsing into the usual melancholic associations of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*… at the sight of a human skull in candlelight, the writer sees phonographic grooves" (43). The primal scene where the Stasi agent misunderstands the lovemaking because his aural surveillance gives him only part of the story is given to the film's audience visually, as we ironically see the images of the lovemaking on top of the inaccurate and ultimately meaningless typewritten report.

Kittler analyzes: "Word processing these days is the business of couples who write, instead of sleep, with one another. And if on occasion they do both, they certainly don't experience romantic love" (214). As Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz describe it a bit more clearly in their "Translator's Introduction":

> [Kittler] further develops the contradictory and complicated relays between gender and media technology, including a 'register' of this century's 'literary desk couples'—couples who, according to Kittler, have exchanged lovemaking for text processing. (xxviii)

The triangular love relationship in *The Lives of Others* engagingly develops this metaphor. As playwright and actress, Dreyman and Christa-Maria are literally supposed to be the "literary desk couple" destroyed by militaristic modernity. Indeed, they are by film's end, as Christa-Maria is run over by a car and killed while running away from Grubitz and his Stasi agents.

However, ultimately, *The Lives of Others* is Wiesler's film, a narrative that documents his redemption. Wiesler hides what he knows about Dreyman, allowing the playwright to emerge from the investigation unscathed. Wiesler, however, is not so lucky. For his failure, Grubitz demotes Wiesler to a basement office where he merely opens letters, not composes them out on assignment. Later, after the fall of communism, he becomes a mailman, still only delivering letters. In the film's very last scene, he passes a bookshop with Dreyman's photo on a poster in the window. The new book, a novel, is called *Sonata for a Good Man*. Wiesler enters the Karl Marx bookstore to purchase a copy of the novel. As if to a lover, the book is dedicated to "HGW XX/7," Wiesler's code name as a Stasi agent. The cashier asks Wiesler if he wants the book gift-wrapped. "No, it's for me," he says tellingly.

The film ends in freeze-frame on Wiesler's face. While Kittler's analysis stresses that militarized communications technologies have reduced lovers to "so-called Man," *The Lives of Others* demonstrates that, despite the brutalities of Cold War culture, it is possible for humans to rediscover their humanity. Wiesler and Dreyman survive the Cold War; Dreyman's discovery that his Stasi tormentor, his Inspector Javert, was the very one who saved him from torture, becomes the stuff of his post-Cold War literary creation, replacing Christa-Maria as his muse with "the good man" who found his

soul by refusing to continue his robotic service to a Totalitarian regime.

At the narrative level, of the three material communications objects that Kittler studies, film—the moving image—is the least present in *The Lives of Others*. There is merely one sequence in which Grubitz leads a raid on Dreyman's apartment in order to attempt to discover the whereabouts of the typewriter. On his way into the apartment building, Grubitz waves at Wiesler, who sees him via the video surveillance camera. However, *The Lives of Others* is itself a film, and thus participates, at the metadiegetic level, in the Kittlerian examination of the culture of so-called Man. At the center of Kittler's argument lies his attachment to Derridean deconstruction, a belief that modern technology has re-shuffled the history of Western civilization in ways that belie the false ordering and rationalism of Western philosophy. Kittler argues: "Whereas (according to Derrida) it is characteristic of so-called Man and his consciousness to hear himself speak and see himself write, media dissolve such feedback loops" (22-23).

Kittler is part of a group of scholars who believe that technologically determined social ways of being force profound transformations on cultural practices. Similarly, James Carey argues that the telegraph inaugurates a new era in communication because it separates, for the first time in history, communication from transportation. Unlike the pony express or the railroad, the telegraph allows people to communicate without moving themselves or their representatives. Nothing more extreme than tapping a finger to send electrons scurrying down a wire is involved in trans-continental telegraphy. Kittler's similar insight about the transformation of culture at the hands of the phonograph is of particular interest for adaptation studies. Indeed, Kittler implies that the phonograph's short-circuiting of print-based media invents the twentieth century, and radically transforms the world of classical philosophy: Plato in *Phaedrus* argues with Socrates over whether giving a speech or writing it down is the more effective form of communication; film of course is superior to both, both better at engaging an audience and better at recording the world with precision.

While Kittler's analysis stresses that militarized communications technologies have reduced lovers to "so-called Man," The Lives of Others *demonstrates that, despite the brutalities of Cold War culture, it is possible for humans to rediscover their humanity.*

The phonograph, the typewriter, and the cinema produce a new possibility that we in adaptation studies make it our business to interrogate. The literary basis, indeed the Platonic basis, of traditional adaptation studies would do well to absorb Kittler's technological dimension. His theory of the phonograph is an adaptational one: recorded sound allows for the transmittal of communicative information without the conversion to literary symbols. Similarly, a film communicates narrative and emotional information, often without the need to resort to its literary, symbolic "source." This process does not point to deficiency as implied by traditional

fidelity studies, but instead becomes the normal state of twentieth century modernity.

Early on in the book, Kittler argues that "oral history today confronts the historians' writing monopoly" (6). Given the prior force of Jacques Derrida's argumentation on this point, in works ranging from "No Apocalypse, Not Now" to *The Post Card*, and the technological proofs that Kittler piles on top of them, the wisdom of seeing modernity as destabilizing a teleological history of communications technologies is not in question. A Platonic belief in a progressive civilization proceeding from oral primitiveness to written dominance has rightfully become undone. *The Lives of Others* instead challenges Kittler's pessimism about the consequences of these observations. Not the fact of the cinema's militarist technological status, but the subversive artistic uses of audio-visual technology demonstrates how "so-called Man" is in fact far more human than Kittler allows.

Kittler's precise analysis of the transformation in culture produced by the communication apparatuses of the late 19th century allows us to understand how cinema interrogates the citizens of the 21st century. Von Donnersmarck's artwork, in its obsession with audio and video surveillance, and in its central plot concern over a hidden typewriter, is a radical adaptation of Kittler's book. Both Kittler and von Donnersmarck are subjects of a Berlin of the late 20th century. Both thinkers document the horrors of militarism run amok. And yet, the last page of Kittler's book obsesses over the aftermath photographs of Hiroshima in 1945, while von Donnersmarck's film celebrates the collapse of the East German dictatorship and the survival of the film's artistic hero, and his former Stasi spy turned savior. *The Lives of Others* takes the same data as Kittler, but ends its narrative progression with a completely different interpretation of that data. The "so-called" men in *The Lives of Others* find their humanity and triumph over the repressive East German government, and indeed live into the 21st century. This cannot be inconsequential to those of us, myself and Kittler alike, who deeply care about the future of humanity.

Early in the course of *The Lives of Others*, Dreyman attends an afterparty at which Minister Hempf meets Christa-Maria. In order to cut in on his dancing with her, Hempf praises Dreyman by quoting, "Writers are the engineers of the soul." Dreyman's radical friend, Paul Hauser, confronts the Minister with the observation that this quote is from Stalin. The Minister responds with mock joking, stating that he likes to provoke. As his hand is placed firmly on Christa-Maria's backside, Paul and Dreyman do not take kindly to this. The corrupt conflation between East German political power and engineering is the material pessimistically analyzed in Kittler's *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*. The testament to the enduring viability of "no-longer-so-called" Man is crucially, eloquently expressed by *The Lives of Others*: the nefarious scientific dehumanizing of our souls at Hiroshima and Auschwitz can be reverse engineered and transformed for the betterment of humanity by great artists such as von Donnersmarck.

III. Conclusion: "Just a Body Doing a Job"

My readings of both *The Imitation Game* and *The Lives of Others* have relied upon a method of seeing



The kind young English teacher plays a reel-to-reel tape recording of Simon and Garfunkel's "The Dangling Conversation" in *High School* (Frederick Wiseman, 1968).

the material technological objects of Kittler's analysis within the film's images themselves. There is something too literal about this methodology that misses the full impact of Kittler's argument about what film culture might mean to contemporary humanity. I would like to conclude with a far less literal, and more speculative, example of the Kittlerian, an analysis of *High School* (1968), Frederick Wiseman's documentary exposé of Northeast High School in Philadelphia as a factory meant to produce soldiers for the war in Vietnam. One of the truly great editors in the history of cinema, Wiseman made films that work like Turing machines. The filmmaker shot dozens of hours of footage over the course of three weeks, resulting in a brief eighty-minute film. Wiseman squeezes meaning out of every cut, ratcheting through possibilities of where to put each shot like the Universal Machine's rotors.

In the first half of *High School*, we see close-ups of teachers, well meaning but encouraging rote automatism, not all that far from Wiesler's lecture at the Stasi training school in *The Lives of Others*. A kindly Spanish teacher does not seem to appreciate the irony that she forces the students to repeat the word "*existentialista*" while teaching the students about Jean-Paul Sartre, an advocate not of military order but of human freedom. The first section of the film ends with another kindly English teacher playing a reel-to-reel tape recording of Simon and Garfunkel's song "The Dangling Conversation." Wiseman's camera dwells on the reels of the tape recorder, plunging the film into a Kittlerian reverie about why the mechanical recording of the song is so much better than when the teacher, in her own voice, read the words out loud minutes before.

Then, an intermission! Why would an eighty-minute film need an intermission? Wiseman has withheld the entire political project of his film for the final forty minutes. The second half begins with the school's soccer coach reminiscing about his star player, who he has just learned had his foot blown off in Vietnam. After much abuse of many more students, the film ends with images of a demonic woman, one of the administrators reading a letter to revel in the fact that a student, about to fly a secret mission in Southeast Asia, does not think he will return alive. Because he has no next of kin, he bequeaths his life insurance benefits to the high school. Wiseman cuts to black to end the film, having had us dwell for minutes on this frightening face in a low-angle close-up.

Wiseman's films are Turing machines, cold and analytical, and yet seem to have learned the lessons of Kittler. The airman's handwritten letter to the high school is both an articulation of Romantic individualism and also testament to the machine-like precision

through which the high school factory has successfully destroyed his humanity in order to churn out soldiers. *High School* is a film that sees the world Turing bequeathed to us as analyzed by Kittler, deeply threatening to the future of humanity. But, like *The Lives of Others* and *The Imitation Game*, *High School* also believes in the power of individuals, using the master's tools, mechanically reproducible images that are the cinema, to dismantle the machine's house.

High School is the Turing film that *The Imitation Game* is too literal to allow itself to become. Benedict Cumberbatch gets us to care deeply about Turing's secret homosexuality amidst his grandiose project of inventing the future of high-speed computation. Yet, unlike *The Lives of Others*, *The Imitation Game* seems to believe it is telling a straightforward historical tale of the past. Kittler suggests the devastating implications of the mechanization of humanity lie not in our past, but in our future. The war of typewriters did not end with the Turing machine's victory over Enigma. That was merely the first volley, to be continued behind the Iron Curtain, and in Vietnam, and who knows how much further into our future.

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READING THE WEST

read-ing [from ME reden, to explain, hence to read] – vt. 1 to get the meaning of; 2 to understand the nature, significance, or thinking of; 3 to interpret or understand; 4 to apply oneself to; study.

THE GRANDDADDY OF ENDANGERED SPECIES

On World Wildlife Day, March 3, 2017, EnviroNews *USA released a documentary entitled* Lions and Tigers and…Sage-Grouse? Oh My!—The Granddaddy Endangered Species Battle of Them All, *on the perils of great sage-grouse habitat. The narrator (Emerson Urry) explained:*

Scientifically known as *Centrocercus*, the greater sage-grouse spans 11 states and is referred to by experts as a "lynchpin species" in the sagebrush sea ecosystem—an ecosystem that once encompassed some half-a-million square miles—though today, its size has been whittled away by humans to less than half that.

An estimated 16 million of these unmistakable birds roamed the brush less than a century ago—but in 2015, as few as 208,000 may remain in the wild. Bleak statistics like these have resulted in an all-out, all-hands-on-deck, sage-grouse crisis—throughout the West…

Source: http://www.environews.tv/030317-lions-tigers-sage-grouse-oh-granddaddy-endangered-species-battle/

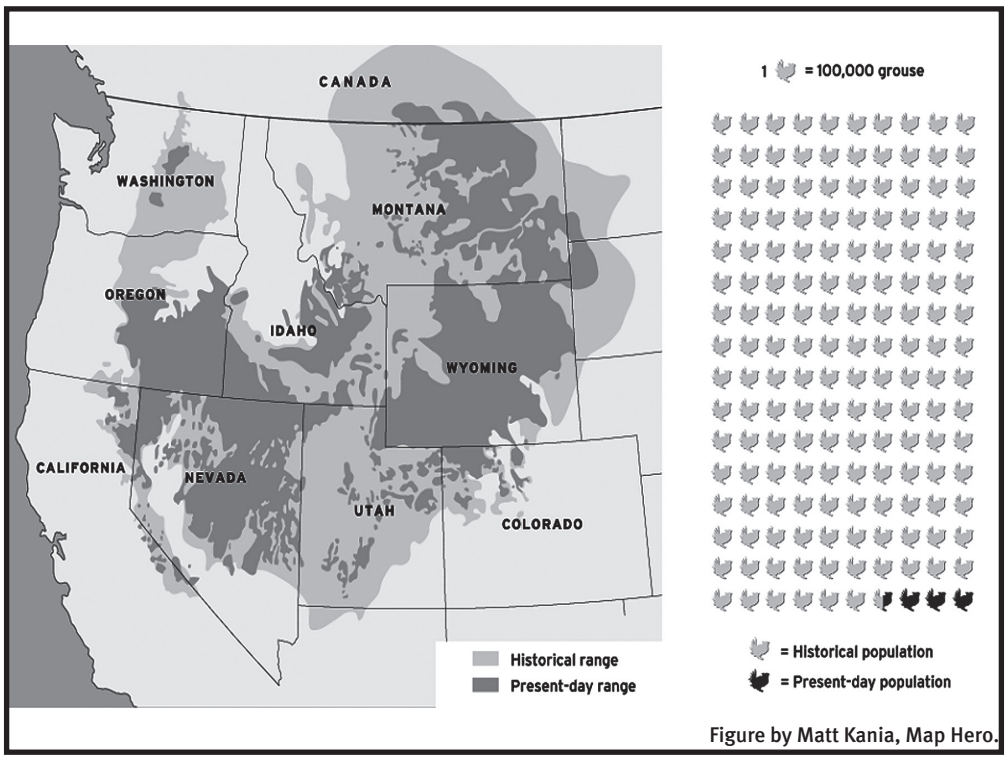


Figure by Matt Kania, Map Hero.

The Greater Sage-Grouse's range has shrunk by about half, and its population has declined by as much as 95%, from pre-settlement estimates as high as 16 million to between 200,000 and 500,000 birds today. (Midpoint of current population estimates depicted above).

Source: http://sagebrushsea.allaboutbirds.org/livingbirdmag/#livingbirdmagpt2

DENIED PROTECTION

Lions and Tigers and…Sage-Grouse? *was made in response to the denial of Endangered Species Act protection by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on September 22, 2015, following a 15-year political battle and one of the costliest investigations into a land management effort. As then Secretary of Interior Sally Jewell explained:*

… this is the largest, most complex land conservation effort ever in the history of the United States of America—perhaps the world. So, there's too many partners and individuals to recognize here because of the scope, scale and complexity of the state, the federal, and the private actions, because they are unequalled in the history of wildlife conservation in the U.S.

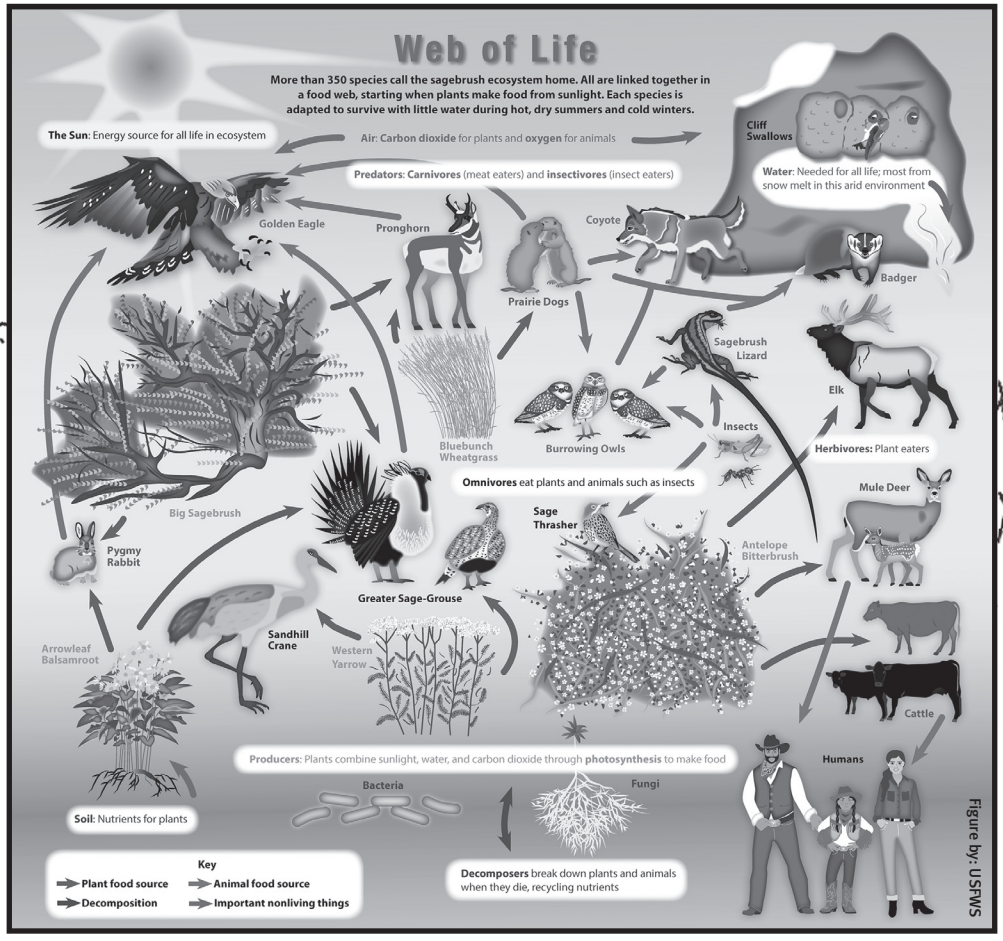
Because of an unprecedented effort by dozens of partners across 11 western states, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has determined that the greater sage-grouse does not require protection under the Endangered Species Act.

Source: https://www.doi.gov/video/greater-sage-grouse-does-not-require-endangered-species-act-protection

SAGEBRUSH ECOSYSTEM CURRICULUM

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service has created the Sagebrush Ecosystem Curriculum project:

… a formal educational program to help teachers to get students to think critically about the sagebrush ecosystem and ways to protect it and the diverse species that live there.



LIVESTOCK AND SAGE-GROUSE

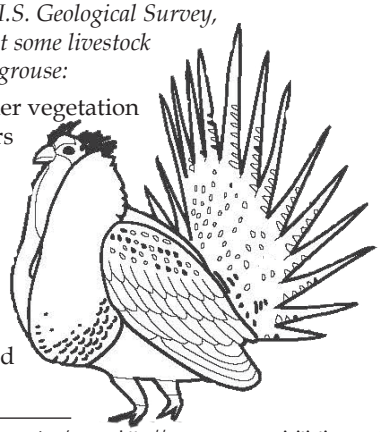
In March 2017, CBS reported on a study issued by scientists from the U.S. Geological Survey, Colorado State University, and Utah State University, which suggested that some livestock grazing, particularly later in the growing season, could actually benefit the grouse:

Late-season grazing leaves in place for longer the grasses and other vegetation that sage-grouse nest in, increasing their breeding success, researchers concluded. It also can stimulate the growth of vegetation that sage-grouse eat…

Grazing on land occupied by greater sage-grouse is frequently cited by biologists as one of the causes of the bird's decline, along with disease, oil and gas drilling and other factors.

The latest findings don't reject that claim outright, saying higher levels of grazing early in the growing season have been closely related to grouse population declines.

Source: http://www.cbsnews.com/news/livestock-grazing-can-benefit-struggling-bird-species/



http://www.sagegrouseinitiative.com/sagebrush-community/the-bird/

A POSITIVE PLAN FOR UTAH

In March 2016, Utah officials filed a lawsuit seeking to invalidate federal land-use plan revisions aimed at conserving imperiled greater sage-grouse, claiming that it "illegally trampled on the state's own conservation plan that Gov. Gary Herbert approved in 2013." The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources reported that Utah had made the health of the greater sage-grouse a priority. In Spring 2017, the service announced that reservations were being taken for viewing the lek (mating grounds) in Emma Park near Price.

Utah wildlife managers have created a scientifically based plan built on decades of research. Utah's sage-grouse are responding positively under the plan. The year to year population numbers for sage-grouse typically cycle up and down over time. Utah's population has been cycling up over the last three years. In fact, the 10-year rolling average number of males counted shows an increasing population trend since the mid-1990s.

One reason Utah's plan is proving successful is the support and collaboration from government agencies, private landowners and businesses, biologists and cross-discipline working groups facilitated by Utah State University Extension's Community-Based Conservation Program.

Sources: http://www.sltrib.com/home/3500515-155/utah-sues-to-overturn-sage-grouse; https://wildlife.utah.gov/learn-more/greater-sage-grouse.html

EDITORIAL MATTER

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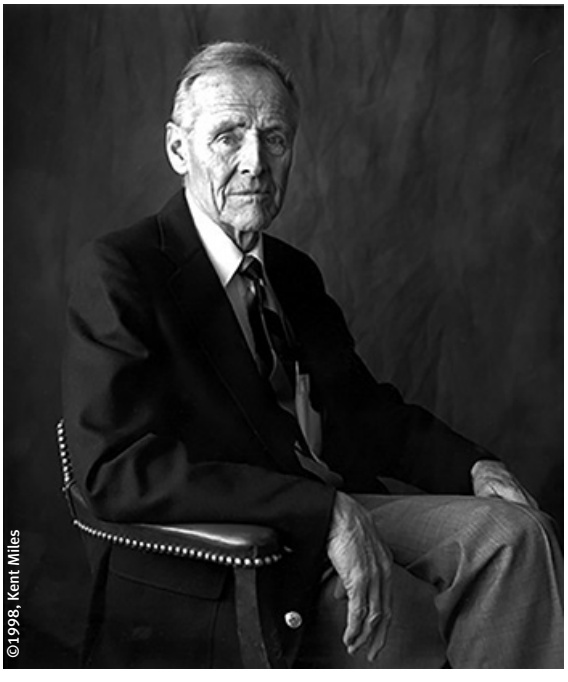
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