EST 1983

WEBER

THE CONTEMPORARY WEST



Fall 2019 | Volume 36 | Number 1

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.

When asked if I am pessimistic or optimistic about the future, my answer is always the same: If you look at the science about what is happening on earth and aren't pessimistic, you don't understand the data. But if you meet the people who are working to restore this earth and the lives of the poor, and you aren't optimistic, you haven't got a pulse. What I see everywhere in the world are ordinary people willing to confront despair, power, and incalculable odds in order to restore some semblance of grace, justice, and beauty to this world.

The poet Adrienne Rich wrote, "So much has been destroyed I have cast my lot with those who, age after age, perversely, with no extraordinary power, reconstitute the world." There could be no better description. Humanity is coalescing. It is reconstituting the world, and the action is taking place in schoolrooms, farms, jungles, villages, campuses, companies, refuge camps, deserts, fisheries, and slums.

—Paul Hawken, 2009
Sustainability Summit Featured Speaker
Weber State University 2019

The ugliest thing in America is greed, the lust for power and domination, the lunatic ideology of perpetual Growth—with a capital G. "Progress" in our nation has for too long been confused with "Growth"; I see the two as different, almost incompatible, since progress means, or should mean, change for the better—toward social justice, a livable and open world, equal opportunity and affirmative action for all forms of life. And I mean all forms, not merely the human. The grizzly, the wolf, the rattlesnake, the condor, the coyote, the crocodile, whatever, each and every species has as much right to be here as we do.

—Edward Abbey,
Postcards from Ed: Dispatches and Salvos from an American Iconoclast

Front Cover: Molly Morin, *Flying Machines: Whorl 1,* code-generated plotter drawing in pigment ink on cotton rag, 2018.



VOLUME 36 | NUMBER 1 | FALL 2019

EDITORIAL BOARD

EDITOR

Michael Wutz

ASSOCIATE EDITORS

Kathryn L. MacKay
Russell Burrows
Brad Roghaar

MANAGING EDITOR

Kelsy Thompson

EDITORIAL BOARD

Phyllis Barber, author
Jericho Brown, Emory University
Katharine Coles, University of Utah
Diana Joseph, Minnesota State University
Nancy Kline, author & translator
Delia Konzett, University of New Hampshire
Kathryn Lindquist, Weber State University
Fred Marchant, Suffolk University
Madonne Miner, Weber State University
Felicia Mitchell, Emory & Henry College
Julie Nichols, Utah Valley University
Tara Powell, University of South Carolina
Bill Ransom, Evergreen State College
Walter L. Reed, Emory University
Scott P. Sanders, University of New Mexico
Kerstin Schmidt, Universität Eichstätt-Ingolstadt
Daniel R. Schwarz, Cornell University
Andreas Ströhl, Goethe-Institut Washington, D.C.
James Thomas, author
Robert Hodgson Van Wagoner, author
Melora Wolff, Skidmore College

EDITORIAL PLANNING BOARD

Bradley W. Carroll
Brenda M. Kowalewski
Angelika Pagel
John R. Sillito
Michael B. Vaughan

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Shelley L. Felt
Aden Ross
G. Don Gale
Mikel Vause
Meri DeCaria
Barry Gomberg
Elaine Englehardt
John E. Lowe

LAYOUT CONSULTANTS

Mark Biddle
Jacob Hansen

EDITORS EMERITI

Brad L. Roghaar
Sherwin W. Howard
Neila Seshachari
LaVon Carroll
Nikki Hansen

EDITORIAL MATTER CONTINUED IN BACK

VOLUME 36 | NUMBER 1

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FALL 2019

ART

75 Molly Morin, *Information Density, Flying Machines*

CONVERSATION

6 Aubrey Jones, *Text, Textile and Touch: The Languages of Women – A Conversation with Ken Bugul*
14 Mark LeTourneau & Mark Denniston, *Justice, Race, the Law and the Case for Linguistic Credibility – A Conversation with John Rickford*
24 John Armstrong, *Mars, Venus, and the Astrobiology of the Anthropocene – A Conversation with David H. Grinspoon*
34 Suhasini Vincent, *"Poetry is the Sound of the Human Animal" – A Conversation with Suniti Namjoshi*
42 Adrienne Andrews, *Adjusting the Lens: Narrative as a Tool for Social Activism – A Conversation with Richard Ray Perez*
50 Sherilyn Fuhriman Olsen, William Pollett, Courtney Craggett & Abraham Smith, *Singing the Unsung, or, Recording the Voices of Silence – A Conversation with Tyehimba Jess*
62 Michael Wutz, *Escaping Vietnam and Finding Refuge in the United States – A Conversation with Paul Dinh*

POETRY

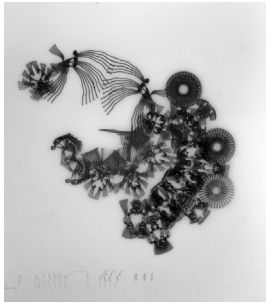
87 Matthew Daly, *Buddy's Drinking Hand* and other poems
90 George Moore, *Iceland* and other poems
93 Bibhu Padhi, *Stories* and other poems
96 Bill Snyder, *Redundancy* and other poems
98 Matt Schumacher, *Ballad of a Basque Sheepherder: Shaniko, Oregon* and other poems
101 Erica Waters, *Marrow* and other poems

ESSAY

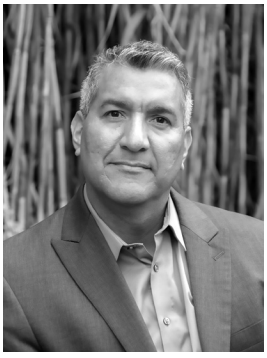
105 Brett Busang, *I Am a Potato-Eater Still – A Harvest-time Vignette*
111 Joan Coles, *Poison River*

FICTION

117 Ben Leib, *I Got Nails Tattooed on My Ankles Because I've Never Left the Road Behind*
125 Franci Washburn, *Copperheads*
135 Glenn Stowell, *The First Axiom*
143 Kirie C. Pederson, *Rules of the Wild*
149 Richard Dokey, *The Veteran*



Molly Morrin.....75



Richard Ray Perez.....42



Tyehimba Jess.....50

TEXT, TEXTILE AND TOUCH — THE LANGUAGES OF WOMEN

AUBREY JONES

A Conversation with

KEN BUGUL



In her native language of Wolof, Ken Bugul's pen name means "one who is unwanted." Born Mariètou Mbaye in 1947 in a tiny rural town in Senegal, Ken Bugul was the last child born to her mostly absent mother and blind, aged father. Though she was a member of a large Muslim family – comprised of her siblings, her mother, her father, and his co-wife – she grew up isolated and unenriched by the bonds of familial affection. As a young child, she stole away to the local French school where, though not enrolled, she learned to read and write in French by watching through the window. She ultimately earned herself a scholarship to study in Brussels, Belgium, where she not only pursued her formal education, but also gained the life experience that would form the basis of her autobiographical novel Le Baobob Fou.

Translated into English in 1991 as The Abandoned Baobob: The Autobiography of a Senegalese Woman, *the 1982 novel launched her writing career and garnered international attention. It tells the story of how Ken Bugul's European friends and contacts essentially regarded her as an exotic object to be passed around, and how her yearning for human connection caused her to overlook her exploitation. It also recounts her return to Senegal, where she reclaimed her position in her native culture when she became the 28th wife of a village marabout. After the death of her husband and her return to urban life, she worked for the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), remarried, and gave birth to a daughter.*

Since the publication of her fictionalized autobiography, Ken Bugul has published nine other novels, curated art exhibits, and served as guest artist at numerous institutions, most recently as Writer in Residence at the Literaturhaus Zürich, Switzerland, from July to December 2017. She regularly lectures at universities in Europe and the United States on such topics as African migration, women's conditions, and life writing, as she did at Weber State University in March 2018.

I'm a language teacher, so I can't help but ask a rather facile question to start: how many languages do you speak, and when did you start learning each one?

I speak the language from my country, Senegal, which is Wolof; French I started learning in school. And English I also learned as a foreign language at school. But French is an official language of Senegal; education is in French.

So when you were a little girl sitting in a tree (as you mentioned in your talk), and you jumped down and ran to the school to listen in, that was the first time you ever heard French?

Yes.

So Wolof is your mother tongue, and French you learned very early; then English . . . .

Yes, English I learned at the high school level. The first year in high school, you make your choice, whether you want to learn English, Spanish, German, in those days Russian, Arabic, Portuguese . . . So for me, I chose English. Then in second and third year, you choose another foreign language, and I chose Spanish.

And in these schools, do they teach other Senegalese languages?

Only at the university level, at that time. A long time ago! But now, they are starting to introduce not only Wolof in schools, but other African languages as well. You can not only study Wolof, but Peul as well, because that is also a language of Senegal. I chose English and Spanish, but now we can choose to learn our local languages. These are currently at the level of a pilot program.

Your novels are written in French. Is that a strategic choice?

I chose French because I can write in French. I don't feel as comfortable in English, but people in Senegal – or at least those who have been to school – can read French. If you choose to publish in Wolof, it is because you can read Wolof. Me, I do not read Wolof. It has a special phonetic alphabet that I have never learned, because it was not my time. That is for the new generation to do, they are learning to read it.

I chose French because I can write in French. I don't feel as comfortable in English, but people in Senegal—or at least those who have been to school—can read French. If you choose to publish in Wolof, it is because you can read Wolof. Me, I do not read Wolof. It has a special phonetic alphabet that I have never learned, because it was not my time. That is for the new generation to do, they are learning to read it. Sometimes I open something, and if it is written in French, Spanish, or English, I can read it in five minutes, but if it is in Wolof, I have to be very careful. I know Wolof a little, so I imagine that this sign means this sound or that sound, a sound that does not exist in the French alphabet, but it isn't easy.

I always wondered what it would be like to speak a language for which I do not have a codified system with which to associate it. I would have learned to read and write English at age five or so, and before this I do not have much memory, so I don't remember what it is like to speak a language without that system of signs attached.

Yes, it is a different experience. I often think now that I would like to learn how to read and

write Wolof. One day I will learn, so that I can have this relationship with my mother tongue.

Speaking of another type of language, something that I noted in your work is the language shared among women. This can be spoken language, of course, or gesture, body language, or even silence. In your autobiographical work Le Baobob Fou*, for example, there is a moment where, after a harrowing experience followed by a period of convalescence, Ken Bugul takes a walk in the forest with her friend Leonora. The two women spend the day together without speaking, and she finds this to be a pivotally healing moment. Perhaps this "other" mode of communication owes something to the fact that, as the narrator realizes at a certain point in the novel, women all share the same destiny?*

Yes, I think that is along the lines of what I meant. There are certain things that women can share with one another in terms of a shared experience, that they can only share among themselves. They are mothers, daughters, sisters; they can share some bodily experiences; these are things that they can understand and know together.

I must confess that during my postdoctoral studies, I had a crisis where books ceased to grab me in the same way they had before. I was no longer finding myself enchanted by stories. This is why I am all the more grateful for the experience of reading your novel Riwan*. There is this moment near the beginning where the narrator opens the gate in the marabout's compound: she is greeted by all the women living there, and she touches all their hands, studies all their faces. This is a type of non-verbal communication shared among women. And this moment is so beautiful, it utterly enchanted me. I had to keep reading.*

Ah, yes, that's right. This kind of communication without words is very common in Senegal, and you see it now also in the Caribbean, in the Antilles, because it was brought there as well . . . to Haiti, to Guadeloupe, to Martinique. Women will communicate in all these ways, in the touching of hands, a look of the eye, a clearing of the voice . . . .

Christian (Ms. Bugul's assistant): When I teach this part to my students, I explain that you have to understand that this is a moment where the character is in relation to Ken Bugul from Le Baobab Fou*. She is someone who has rejected all this, the culture with all these women in a harem, and then she has come back, and it rehabilitates her.*

Exactly. And when I returned, all these things came back to me. The henna on the hands, the smell of the henna that reminded me of my mother, my sisters, the smell of the fabric that reminded me of my grandmother and my mother—all these things that I

And you know, there is also the communication with signs, with henna and with clothing, in Senegalese culture. I have been doing a project on this, where I study the meaning of henna, for example: there are ways of doing henna that will indicate if a woman is unmarried, married, engaged, or widowed, so that when you meet a man you do not know, you can avoid ambiguity; they will know right away what the situation is. And there are ways a woman can wear her headscarf that will indicate to her husband if she is on her period, these kinds of things.

experienced again after having rejected them, and been rejected by everyone, they came back from the back of my mind.

And you know, there is also the communication with signs, with henna and with clothing, in Senegalese culture. I have been doing a project on this, where I study the meaning of henna, for example: there are ways of doing henna that will indicate if a woman is unmarried, married, engaged, or widowed, so that when you meet a man you do not know, you can avoid ambiguity. They will know right away what the situation is. And there are ways a woman can wear her headscarf that will indicate to her husband if she is on her period, these kinds of things.

So there is also non-verbal communication between not only women, but also between women and men.

That's exactly right.

This project on clothing and adornment, is that some new writing you have been doing?

No, this was an exhibition in France. Clothing and fabric, the ways we dress, has always had great meaning for me, perhaps partly because my mother was a tie dye worker; she did batik. I have always associated the fabric, the way it smells and feels, the way it looks, with the women in my family. All of this is so incredibly sensorial for me, and very close to me. Because my mother worked with fabric and designed all the traditional articles of clothing, the ***pagnes***, the head scarves—it was everywhere when I was growing up. So we were always sleeping on the cloth, lying on it, smelling it. My relation with cloth is very physical.

Your books have taught me a lot about West African clothing. I have to confess that in all my reading of West African stories, I often came across the word pagne *for example, and I never quite understood what it was, because when you look it up in a bilingual dictionary, the translation you will find is "loincloth." This never seemed to fit, though, in the stories I've read before and especially not in your novels. The descriptions you give of these articles of clothing are indeed very sensorial, and they carry with them a weight and a symbolism that I couldn't place in a first reading. Your style is such that while the description is clear and captivating, it is not excessively ornate, with the result that I find myself transported, but also craving more. So that while I read your books, I felt compelled to go look up images of this clothing. Which reminds me of another scene featuring silent communication: in* Riwan*, the marabout's young wife, Rama, is putting on an outfit while her aunt is watching, and Rama says to her, "I know what you're thinking, that I shouldn't wear this outfit, but I don't know why I shouldn't." It is essentially a moment of telepathy between aunt and niece. But I wanted to really picture the outfit that was central to the scene, so I found images of a* taille basse . . . .

Ah yes, a ***taille basse***. This is a traditional Senegalese dress, long and fitted in the waist. You know, at a conference, a researcher pointed out a link between text and fabric in Ken Bugul's work. I was so amazed that she found this little notion in my writing. This is why I feel intimidated in the company of professors, because they are so clever, to find these things in my work.

No no, it is we who are intimidated in your midst! You create this work of art, you weave together a story, and perhaps we find things in it that you didn't even know were there. But you are the origin and the muse of our work; you're the reason we're here and we get to do the work that we love. And isn't it incredible – this association among text, textile, and storytelling when it is a motif that is so central to you?

Well, I think I have to associate fabric with my mother, it is my comfort. You know, I have a favorite *pagne*, just like a child with a beloved object; I can't be separated from it. I have not spent a single night without this piece of cloth in 70 years, well, until this trip! I got to the hotel in Utah, opened my suitcase, and it was not there. I panicked and called my daughter. How can I sleep without my *pagne*? It has gone all over the world with me, and here I am in Salt Lake City without it. I was so distraught! She felt so terrible for me. She told me to get a towel from the bathroom to sleep with, anything to take its place. But nothing can, that is how attached I am. It comforts me, I think, because of this association I have with my mother.

If I remember correctly, one of your novels deals more specifically with your relationship with your mother?

Yes, the book is ***De l'autre coté du regard*** (2004) (***As Seen From the Other Side*** [2008]).

And you wrote this after your mother passed?

Yes, I did.

How beautiful then that you have this way of remembering her, this connection with fabric, with weaving together a text through which you can put her back together, at least for yourself and through your own eyes and words.

Yes, I think that is quite right. Through my eyes this time.

In another interview, you mention that your assimilation began as a little girl in French school, where you saw devalorized images of African persons, and valorized images of the French. You naturally gravitated toward the valorized image of the proper little French girl. This observation underscores the importance of young people, in particular, having access to valorized images out in the world with which they can identify. How is the situation in your home region? Has it improved much since your childhood?

As school children, when we did not conform to these standards placed on us, we were humiliated in front of all of our friends. If we misbehaved or were not model children during recess, they would put a donkey head mask on us. And there you were, in front of the school and all your friends, laughing at you, and you feel so, so degraded. Sometimes when I talk with my daughter about these things, and I am ready to cry, she feels so terrible for me.

Oh yes, it is completely different now; it has all changed. Back then there were textbooks, African ones with depictions of Mother, Father, Sister, Brother, and they were drawn in this very dark, ugly ink, with exaggerated features, grotesque. And they were shown behaving so stupidly. There was even a Mariètou [Ken Bugul's first name] who would be on her way from the market with the fish and the meat, and she would be fighting with another child. And the dog would come and eat the fish and the meat that she had set down to behave so stupidly, to fight. It was terrible. And then the French textbooks had the proper little girl, with the pretty hair and the nice dress; and of course, I wanted to be like her. When you are a child, these things really influence you. Can you imagine? As an adult, you are better equipped to resist this type of nonsense, but a child?

As school children, when we did not conform to these standards placed on us, we were humiliated in front of all of our friends. If we misbehaved or were not model children during recess, they would put a donkey head mask on us. And there you were, in front of the school and all your friends, laughing at you, and you feel so, so degraded. Sometimes when I talk with my daughter about these things, and I am ready to cry, she feels so terrible for me.

I can't imagine learning about what you went through from the perspective of your daughter, because even as someone who is not your daughter, I sometimes read your words and am moved to tears. For example, there is this moment in Le Baobab Fou *when you first arrive in Belgium, and you are walking through the streets when you stop to study your reflection in a shop window . . . it is so arresting, it cut right through me.*

Yes. That mirror, I can't forget it. And with all those people behind me, all white; and then you have this black face in the mirror, surrounded by all that white. After coming out of that shop, the experience with the shopkeeper . . . .

We often hear a debate between those who believe that what is more essential to identity is race, versus those who believe that it is class. This moment in your novel is illuminating in that regard, because you had gone into a shop after having been given money to buy new clothes and supplies in your new European environment. You say in the novel that at this point you are happy to find yourself indistinguishable from those around you, because you are "a consumer, like any other." But then you find yourself in a wig shop, where the shopkeeper says, "Oh no, we have nothing for you." Even though you have money, it cannot make you look like everyone else. In Belgium, difference is written right onto your body.

Think of why I wanted to buy a wig. There I was in the streets, in crowds of white faces, and no one paid any attention to me. I thought that maybe if I could look like them, they would notice me; it was absurd, but I wasn't thinking correctly. I thought: if I have a wig, I will have hair like theirs. This was my very first day waking up in the Western World, and people just seemed to move past me so quickly. So I had the desire to look like everyone else. I wanted to pay with my money, like everyone else. But the shop owner refused me.

Yes, and think of why I wanted to buy a wig. There I was in the streets, in crowds of white faces, and no one paid any attention to me. I thought that maybe if I could look like them, they would notice me; it was absurd, but I wasn't thinking correctly. I thought: if I have a wig, I will have hair like theirs. This was my very first day waking up in the Western World, and people just seemed to move past me so quickly. So I had the desire to look like everyone else. I wanted to pay with my money, like everyone else. But the shop owner refused me.

Class is important, and yet there are these other limitations that are written onto our very bodies.

Certainly class is important, but yes, I agree.

Switching gears for a moment, I understand that the only novel of yours that is translated into English is Le Baobab Fou.

Yes, the only one. It is a pity!

So you would like more of them to be translated?

Yes, all of them!

Have you worked closely with the translators of your books?

No, even when Marjolijn de Jager translated ***The Abandoned Baobab***, I never met her; she never asked me any questions. And the others who translated it into Italian or Polish, they didn't ask me any questions. But the Italian and Polish translations were very good; some were not so good, like two of the Spanish translations of my novels, ***Le Baobab Fou*** and ***Riwan***. So now there is an official organization in Spain, part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Casa África, that is doing a second translation of ***Le Baobab Fou***.

I can only imagine that to translate even one work, it is important to read the others by that author as well, and to ask the author questions.

Yes, it is important, because if you can get in touch, you ask them about certain meanings. We were talking about how in Africa we use foreign languages, even the colonial languages; sometimes we even create language, so our way of expressing things is influenced by all these things. It may be written in French, or in a colonial language, but based on our own culture, and things can be misunderstood. So sometimes I think it is good to ask the author or someone from the cultural environment, "What do you mean by this?" This would be a good exercise even for students who are learning to translate.

Right, a translator needs to immerse themselves to some extent, and this is why I think it's also important for a translator to read the author's other works, to get a good feel for their style, their culture, etc. An author's oeuvre constitutes a world in itself; it isn't just a collection of French words.

But I can see that you—you go through the text and understand beyond the French you see here on the page.

And yet I could spend a lot more time unpacking things in your work. I was thinking of your style, and it occurred to me that it has a feel of écriture féminine*, in that it is not exactly linear or sequential; sometimes your writing is following one story arc and then there is a flashback without warning; the perspective may jump from one character's to another's, this sort of thing. But I was reading someone else's analysis of this narrative styling, and they saw in it elements of* oralité.

It's not strictly having to do with ***oralité***. You can be influenced by ***oralité*** without using this flashback style. For me, it is because of my life before, and my life today; the connection between them is so strong. When I am talking today, I have to go back. For example, when I bring my ***pagne*** to each new city, it is there with me and it takes me back. It is the ***pagne*** of my childhood, with my mother, when we were sleeping on her work, all that fabric, smelling the indigoes. So you see why, when I got to Utah and I did not have my ***pagne*** to sleep with, that was a problem for me.

Did you use the towel from the hotel bathroom, by the way?

No no, it is not the same! You see, this ***pagne***, it is made of cotton . . . that sweet cotton.

Back to that sensorial connection.

Yes, and it is not only the sensitivity of the body. You see, when I was child, I was often alone. I was separatd from my mother, the last child in the family; I did not play much, I did not laugh much. I did not have the feeling of a family much. I missed everything.

So I was somebody who lived in my head, in my heart; for me, every little thing had importance. I could pass so much time just looking at a pea, or a butterfly, following the butterfly until it was out of sight…because I was alone. Maybe if I had a normal childhood, playing with other children, if I had my mother, my father, maybe I would not be paying attention to all these little details. Everything that touched me had importance, because I wanted to create a world around me, and I used my senses, my eyes, my ears, my nose. I was alone, and I was looking for psychological shelters, and that's why I am very sensitive to the nature of things.

Touch is a sense that not many authors latch on to, and yet I find that your work is very textural.

Tactile, yes. And even with sight. When I look at this blue, I enter into the blue. When I taste something, I go beyond the taste. And all this originates in my childhood, when I was all alone and all my senses were open, watching everything around me. Someone else can be a great writer without having gone through that. But I think each individual has his or her own story.

Proust is famous of course for honing in on taste . . . .

Voilà, the famous ***madeleine***.

Right, and for me it has always been smell. Sometimes I will smell something, and the world around me will completely transform to bring back to life some past moment. And for you, it seems to be all the senses. It is as though you are a walking nerve.

Yes, I am sensitive to everything.

Clearly it makes for a very good writerly quality. Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me today. It was such pleasure.

Merci.



Aubrey D. Jones (Ph.D., University at Buffalo-SUNY) is Assistant Professor of French at Weber State University, where she teaches introductory through advanced French language and culture classes, as well as literature, translation, and film. She also serves as the Internship Coordinator and World Film Series organizer for the Department of Foreign Languages at Weber and teaches for the Dual Language Immersion Bridge Program through the University of Utah's Second Language Teaching and Research Center (L2TReC). Her research interests include feminine subjectivity and the body, as well as representations of dis/ability in French and North American francophone literature. She has published and presented on these topics in Canada and the US, and is currently investigating the intersection of dis/ability, superpowers, and the supernatural in French Canadian fiction.

JUSTICE, RACE, THE LAW and THE CASE FOR LINGUISTIC CREDIBILITY

MARK LETOURNEAU
and MARK DENNISTON



A Conversation with JOHN RICKFORD

On April 6th, 2018, Dr. John Rickford, J.E. Wallace Sterling Professor of Linguistics and the Humanities at Stanford University, visited Weber State University at the invitation of Dr. Scott Sprenger, Dean of the College of Arts and Humanities. In the morning, Dr. Rickford delivered a lecture; in the evening, he introduced a film. Both the lecture and the film concerned African-American Vernacular English (AAVE), to which he has devoted decades of teaching and research.

(For more on Dr. Rickford's distinguished career, please see: http://www.johnrickford.com.)

John titled his lecture "Justice for Jeantel and Trayvon: Fighting Dialect Prejudice in the Courtroom and Beyond." The lecture analyzed a portion of the transcript of the 2015 trial in which George Zimmerman was acquitted in the shooting of Trayvon Martin, an African-American youth—specifically, the testimony of Rachel Jeantel, a friend of Trayvon's. Despite Jeantel's being the "ear witness," her testimony was dismissed as "not credible" by the jurors partly because it was delivered in AAVE. Not only did they have difficulty understanding the dialect, but, as a non-standard variety, it biased them against her testimony, leading them to discount her credibility as a witness.

John served as an advisory editor for the film entitled Talking Black in America, *which presents "the history and symbolic role of language in the lives of African Americans and highlights its tremendous impact on the speech and culture of the United States." Made under the auspices of the Language and Life Project in North Carolina, the film intersperses commentary by Dr. Rickford and other linguists with vignettes of AAVE as used in various settings.*

Between the lecture and the film, we were privileged to interview John. Because we teach in the Departments of English (Mark LeTourneau) and Criminal Justice (Mark Denniston), the interview ranged over concerns of both disciplines. Near the end, John commented that such collaboration would be rare at a research institution like Stanford. We thank Dr. Michael Wutz, the editor of Weber, *and Dean Sprenger for making this truly interdisciplinary conversation possible.*

LeTourneau: For the benefit of those who are reading this interview in Weber *and haven't either heard the lecture or seen the film, we'd like to start by asking how the two are related. Mark and I noticed that the lecture is more specific in its title than the film. Is that because the film comes out of your previous research in AAVE?*

I'm an advisory editor and associate producer of the film. The film is really Walt Wolfram's project at North Carolina State University. He did produce a number of earlier videos about different dialects, such as the Smoky Mountain dialect. Walt and his excellent filmmakers, Neal Hutcheson and Danica Cullinan, have films on a variety of subjects, including Lumbee English, and the language of an old African American woman, Muzel Bryant. They have done work on all kinds of regional dialects. Eventually he wanted to do something on AAVE because it's the most studied variety in the United States, and they asked us to be advisory editors to suggest what kind of things to put in the film. That was our role, and then we got a National Science Foundation grant to make some other films related to it. But that project is basically Walt Wolfram's. I want to give credit to him for that.

When Scott (Sprenger) came out to Stanford, he saw the film. Walt was there at the time; he's been going from university to university showing it, and he and I helped lead the discussion afterwards. Scott was originally inviting me to come and show and discuss the film, and I told him that my 2016 ***Language*** article ["Language and Linguistics on Trial: Hearing Rachel Jeantel (and other Vernacular Speakers) in the Courtroom and Beyond," coauthored with Sharese King] on Rachel Jeantel's testimony at the George Zimmerman trial is more vital to me right now; I'm burning to talk about these things.

The Zimmerman trial made me aware of something I wasn't really aware of before, which is the extent to which there might be people whose dialects are misunderstood, or who are misjudged. They're judged ***a priori***: somebody who speaks like that is probably not trustworthy. I think that's a potentially major issue, so I'd like to see us do more research on it.

The curious thing is that we do make provision in court for interpreters for languages, but not for dialects, even though the line between language and dialect is often very hard to draw. It's not a linguistic definition, but a social or socio-political definition. There are speakers of some dialects that will be as hard to understand as speakers of other languages. By and large, people may have problems understanding, but they don't say, "Well, since he's a Spanish speaker or a Japanese speaker, he's not trustworthy." And they accept the translation. Even though the translation, in fact, may be off, they don't use it to besmirch the trustworthiness or reliability of the witness. Which I think does happen to dialect speakers. That is a problem because, well, you can't pick your witnesses. It would be absurd for a prosecutor to say: "Okay, you speak Standard English, we'll take you as a witness." And when the witness responds and says, "But I wasn't there," the prosecutor insists, "Well, that doesn't matter. You talk right." And then the guy who saw the whole thing doesn't speak the right kind of English, so we say, "I'm sorry, we're not going to take you." We've got to take our speakers wherever they come from and find some way of better accommodating them in the courtroom.

Denniston: I know that Dr. David R. Lynch, the author of the textbook Inside the Criminal Courts *that I use for my Criminal Law class, talks about "educating the jury." What role might prosecutors or defense attorneys have during* voir dire *[i.e. questioning of potential jurors during jury selection] to let the jury know that this is going to be a case involving a witness speaking a vernacular, in order to both educate the jury and identify juror biases to inform their own peremptory strikes? They wouldn't want somebody who showed obvious bias against a vernacular.*

People are often unaware of their own prejudices. Even officers who are black can be subject to systemic prejudices and prejudgments against people of color, as shown in recent research on respect shown to Oakland motorists in traffic stops. They all wear the blue, so their primary allegiance is to the uniform—and they're all being socialized into that world.

I had a student, Bonnie McElhinny, who many years ago wrote a dissertation at Stanford about women becoming police officers. They're commonplace now, but around 1980 they weren't. And one of the first things they had to learn to do was to act like a cop. One of the officers that she interviewed admitted, "I don't smile a lot anymore." You have to project the whole persona of being a cop. So I don't necessarily think that she's going to be any easier on women. I don't think that the black cop is going to be any easier on a black suspect than the white cop, because he has to, first of all, project that he's a cop.

Only yesterday, I was telling my students about August Wilson, the wonderful playwright who used a lot of African-American vernacular in his plays. He left school at about 13 or 14. He wrote an essay on Napoleon. The teacher told him, "I can either give you an A or an F." He said, "How so?" The teacher said, "If you sign a statement saying that you wrote it yourself, I'll give you an A. Otherwise, I'll give you an F because I don't think you wrote it yourself." And he said, "Well, are you asking everybody else to sign statements?" The teacher said, "No," so then Wilson dropped the essay in the wastebasket and went out and never went back to school. Well, it turns out it was a majority white school. The teacher in that class was black, so he was as susceptible to systemic prejudices as anybody else.

You would think, in general, that an African-American juror would be more sympathetic. On the other hand, jurors might be falling all over themselves trying to show that they're not prejudiced, that they're impartial, upright citizens. But it's an interesting issue, what you can do at jury selection.

LeTourneau: This past Wednesday, of course, was the 50th anniversary of Dr. King's assassination. It's been over 40 years since the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) published their manifesto, Students' Right to Their Own Language, *and over 20 years since the Oakland resolution and the Linguistic Society of America's (LSA) own resolution….*

Which I helped to write.

LeTourneau: I didn't realize that.

I was telling my students about August Wilson, the wonderful playwright who used a lot of African-American vernacular in his plays. He left school at about 13 or 14. He wrote an essay on Napoleon. The teacher told him, "I can either give you an A or an F." He said, "How so?" The teacher said, "If you sign a statement saying that you wrote it yourself, I'll give you an A. Otherwise, I'll give you an F because I don't think you wrote it yourself." And he said, "Well, are you asking everybody else to sign statements?" The teacher said, "No," so then Wilson dropped the essay in the wastebasket and went out and never went back to school. Well, it turns out it was a majority white school. The teacher in that class was black, so he was as susceptible to systemic prejudices as anybody else.

I was on that exact committee.

LeTourneau: The LSA produced a resolution in support of Oakland. Do you see that progress in securing civil rights for African Americans correlates with securing their linguistic rights?

Let me say a couple of things, starting with the CCCC resolution. I'm not sure I totally agree with that resolution—maybe because I'm older and wiser, maybe because I'm a parent and a grandparent, maybe because I sometimes listen.

I had a very important mentor in college, J. Herman Blake, who would send us out to work in communities and say, "Listen to the community. Don't just go in with all your smart-aleck ideas about the community's needs. You think *you* know what they need; find out what *they* think they need." And there was a study done years ago in East Palo Alto, which is right across from Palo Alto Stanford, by Mary Hoover, "Attitudes Toward Black English." She talked to a lot of people in the community; she was from that community. The members of that community were strong supporters of Black English, of language variety. But almost all of them also wanted their kids to also learn Standard English, Mainstream English. And that's not a mainstream linguistics position.

We linguists say, "Write in your own language; society must change, not the kids." But we have never talked about replacing your vernacular or your language to learn another language. I speak English; I learn Spanish; I don't have to give up my English, French, or Japanese. My idea has always been additive: that you need your vernacular for all kinds of everyday interactions—minority identity, expressiveness, all of that—but there's no harm, and a lot of potential good, in also developing strength in another language, or language variety, in situations where you could use it. And if folks want it, then I think we should give it.

I sometimes get a little peeved when my linguistics colleagues in their idealism insist that there must never be an attempt to teach people mainstream, or Standard English, even if they want it, because "society must change." It's hypocritical. There are some famous linguists who've taken that position: "Just leave the noble savage alone." The thing that really annoys me is that the linguists who take that position often make those impassioned cases for leaving the language alone and speakers alone in Standard English! They're benefiting from the system they're deprecating. These linguists sometimes speak some version of Creole among us. But they can use Standard English, or Academic English, when it's their say.

Let me make my position clear, because I'm still working it out. I am all for embracing the variety of dialects and languages, making provision for them in the courtroom and in schools. You cannot debar witnesses because they are not speaking the right way. We make specific provisions for people who speak foreign languages, and I think the danger of not making provisions for people who speak different dialects is potentially bigger because there are more such people, probably, who enter courtrooms. Chances are bad stuff happens more in areas where vernacular and dialects are more frequent. I don't necessarily want to go into that, but societies need to be prepared to deal with linguistic versatility because it's very real.

I'll give you one last example. Years ago the pioneering sociolinguist William Labov was contacted by a woman in Chicago. She worked as a stenographer for a lawyer who did a lot of dictation and gave it to her to type up. She kept making what he was sure were mistakes. He might dictate, "She walks home," and she would transcribe, "She walk home," which is perfectly understandable if you know the structure of the variety that she speaks. But she was in danger of losing the job. The lawyer said, "Look, if you don't give me more grammatically correct things, I'll have to get somebody else." So she went to Labov and asked for help. What is she going to do? Call the lawyer a hundred names? Insist he change? He's not going to change. He's being totally straight with her, and her job is on the line.

Let me make my position clear, because I'm still working it out. I am all for embracing the variety of dialects and languages, making provision for them in the courtroom and in schools. You cannot debar witnesses because they are not speaking the right way. We make specific provisions for people who speak foreign languages, and I think the danger of not making provisions for people who speak different dialects is potentially bigger because there are more such people, probably, who enter courtrooms. Chances are bad stuff happens more in areas where vernacular and dialects are more frequent. I don't necessarily want to go into that, but societies need to be prepared to deal with linguistic versatility because it's very real.

So I come back to the point that, to the extent that people themselves want to have access to the standard, we should not be afraid or ashamed of it. I think we have a moral obligation. We have ways of being able to help kids master the use of the standard variety that are different from those used by the regular English teacher because we can offer true contrastive analysis, that is, locate points at which our dialects really differ. Concentrate on those, rather than saying, "We're going to begin English 101. This is a table. That is a chair." They know all of that already.

Denniston: Well, let me turn this back to the courtroom. Prosecutors routinely orient their witnesses before trial: "You can't repeat what somebody else said, that's hearsay. You need to be careful to answer verbally and not nod or shake your head." What obligations did the prosecutor have with Rachel Jeantel on the stand to advise her to approximate the vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar of Standard English in her testimony, knowing that the jurors are going to expect that? What duty do prosecutors have? Or is the duty on the judge to admonish the jury and instruct them on listening to the content of the testimony?

Lisa Bloom wrote a book, *Suspicion Nation*, and it has a whole chapter on Jeantel. Bloom says, and I agree, that Jeantel was very poorly prepared. It would have been impossible in that time frame to "teach her a second dialect." She just wouldn't get everything. In one respect, she changed dramatically when she went on the Piers Morgan Show because he made her comfortable. So while her attorneys could not have coached Jeantel in Standard English, they could have done other things to prepare her for how combative this whole process was going to be. They could have told her to keep her cool and just keep telling the truth, but they didn't.

The judge does play a role, and I think the public hasn't seen the whole transcript containing the sidebar discussions which don't get broadcast publicly. I have, and my impression was that in many cases when there was a question, the judge tended to side a little bit more with the prosecution than with the defense. Consider, for instance, the defense attorney, Don West. From 8-9 hours of pre-trial depositions, he had acquired a lot of information—ammunition he could use against the prosecution, including the fact that Jeantel couldn't read well. In the trial itself he would keep repeating, "Read this," and then she would struggle, and all that weakened her stature as a witness. The judge had actually specifically asked him

not to do that. But he went ahead. So Jeantel could have been much better prepared.

There are two things that sometimes strike me. One is that the average witness doesn't have any courtroom experience. The witnesses in the Zimmerman trial were all brand new. Add to that the fact that Jeantel was still shaken up: Trayvon Martin, her good friend, had died. A lot of times in the deposition she would get emotional. She would say, "I feel guilty I couldn't do more to help him." And West would ask, "What do you mean 'you feel guilty'?" He was kind of rough.

That's the other thing. By the time they come to the courtroom, Jeantel has had eight hours of interaction with Don West, through the pre-trial depositions, and she actually had become very hostile to him. Then West's family posted on Twitter or Facebook boasting, "We beat stupidity"; it was really inappropriate. So Jeantel came in showing a lot of attitude. This might've been natural for a seventeen-year-old, but it doesn't necessarily advance your case. Whenever the defense spoke about certain subjects, she got hostile. So people would say, "Well, she's just rude." But if you've read the deposition, you see that the prosecution could have done a better job of preparing her. Because, you know, the defense is trying to get under your skin. As much as I didn't like that fact, I had to, in a sense, admire the defense strategy. The defense team was much better than the prosecution.

LeTourneau: I've got another question, pertaining specifically to the transcript. In his article on sociolinguistics and the law in Blackwell's Handbook of Sociolinguistics, *Edward Finegan laments how difficult it is to produce a faithful transcription of natural speech. In the* Language *article, you give examples from other cases of mistranscribing AAVE. You said this morning that you thought that the transcript for the Zimmerman trial was pretty accurate.*

Pretty accurate. There are inaccuracies, but it would have been a lot more helpful to the jury than what was happening in the courtroom. Partly because of dialect, partly because, as the court reporter explained to me, they used a ceremonial courtroom, which has very high ceilings, so whatever difficulties jurors had with understanding your voice were exacerbated. So even though there were matters of detail in dispute, I think if the jurors had had a way to read the transcript, they would have done better.

One excerpt illustrates the problem. Rachel Jeantel says, "Now following him." Bernie de la Rionda, the lead prosecutor, repeats it. A juror puts up her hand and says, "He's now following me? I'm sorry, I just didn't hear." The judge says, "Can you answer again?" Jeantel replies. Then the juror says, "Again or still?" The judge says, "Okay, you can't ask questions." She was not a ratified participant. A juror can't engage in one-on-one interaction with the witness. The juror replies, "Okay." The judge then says, "If you can't understand the witness's testimony, raise your hand." But in fact, that had a stultifying effect, so actually, I don't think the jurors raised their hands again. Instead, they could've gone back later when they were having discussion and said, "We'd like a readback of this part. We weren't sure what she said."

But according to Bloom, who is a very important source, in sixteen hours of deliberations, they never once referred to anything Jeantel said. This is astonishing! She is the ear witness. She is the only person who spoke with Trayvon during the events in question. Other people heard things like screams, at the end, when Zimmerman and Martin are fighting. Everybody agrees that there's a little recording on the phone, but it's not enough material to go over. Besides, screams are different from speech; they're highly emotional. It really could be you screaming or me screaming. It's hard to tell, especially when it's a poor recording and it's very short. So you can't tell anything about it from that, but she was on the phone with him all the time.

Actually, somebody took the trouble to ascertain Jeantel's veracity. She did tell

some lies. Not in court, but she didn't want to go to Trayvon's funeral, so she said she was sick. And that turned out not to be true. You know how lies build on lies: "Once a liar, always a liar." But there was somebody who did an analysis showing that, fortunately, everything she said in court under oath was true and corroborated by other evidence.

LeTourneau: I wanted to ask particularly about the portion of the transcript on the handout from your talk this morning. In the discussion of the word nigger *in the article, it's transcribed "n-i-g-g-a . . . "*

Right, which is hugely different.

LeTourneau: And then it's transcribed "n-i-g-g-e-r." Jeantel says that <nigger> is a racist term, not <nigga>. But on the transcript on the handout, it looks like they're transcribed the same. Is there a pronunciational difference—a reduced vowel in n-i-g-g-a?

There is. The word is pronounced either as ‹nigger› [nɪgər] or ‹nigga› [nɪgə]. The vernacular form ***nigga*** is the common term, and it's used generally; for one thing, it often just means 'male.' It was Trayvon who said, "That nigger's behind me." He knew Zimmerman was not black. He may not have known he was Latino. Arthur Spears, Presidential Professor at the City University of New York, published an article circa 2000 in which he discussed ***nigga***, although he called it semantically bleached, since it doesn't mean a black person. I'd have to go back and see if the word is in the transcript as ***nigga*** or not. Of course, with Bernie de la Rionda, the lead prosecuting attorney, we understood he used "the n-word," so naturally he doesn't want to repeat it. But in fact, it's not the n-word. I guess we have a big generational difference. Older African Americans do not like the term in any form, whereas younger African Americans use it all the time: "Hey, nigga, what's up?"

LeTourneau: It sounds like there was, in addition to the semantic bleaching, a pronunciational change, such that you now have, really, two different lexical items.

Among African Americans, you're very rarely going to get an '–er' pronunciation. It's going to be like '-ah' [a] or '-uh' [ə]. And actually, on the Piers Morgan Show, Rachel was quite eloquent about the difference. She called the pronunciation ***nigger*** "old school," as in older people. Younger people use it very differently; older people are always getting hot and sweaty about this term, and don't use it, because it has so many painful memories. What's the big deal? Now, there's a big deal about white people using it to black people. But African Americans use it among themselves all the time.

Denniston: As somebody coming from a background in Iowa and now living in Utah, two very white states, I was struck by the fact that you described the jurors as mostly middle-aged Caucasian women. These jurors might not consider themselves racist based on skin color. Does AAVE in a way give them permission to be racist? Somebody who speaks this dialect is (by inference) uneducated, and so I'm not discriminating on the basis of race. Instead, I'm discriminating on the basis of lack of education or lack of ability to speak Standard English. I feel that's a much more difficult racial question.

It's natural to have all kinds of prejudices. We learn them societally. It's an important starting point to acknowledge that we have preconceptions and prejudices. Now, I wouldn't go so far as to say that it's then legitimate to use those prejudices, especially when you get into the important position of deciding guilt or innocence. If you tend to associate people who speak a certain dialect with being incompetent or unable, in some respects, to tell the truth, that fundamentally interferes with what you're trying to do in the courtroom, which is only to find the truth, or innocence or guilt.

We have to find a way to overcome latent racism. It's not easy figuring out how. Dialect varieties are so subtle. Even though I talk about

It's natural to have all kinds of prejudices. We learn them societally. It's an important starting point to acknowledge that we have preconceptions and prejudices. Now, I wouldn't go so far as to say that it's then legitimate to use those prejudices, especially when you get into the important position of deciding guilt or innocence. If you tend to associate people who speak a certain dialect with being incompetent or unable, in some respects, to tell the truth, that fundamentally interferes with what you're trying to do in the courtroom, which is only to find the truth, or innocence or guilt.

interpreters and how they might help, I suspect that the average dialect speaker would actually not be happy about having an interpreter. "What do you mean I can't speak English? I speak English. My mother speaks English." Of course, they might not put it quite like that: "We be speaking English all the time!" I'm not saying witnesses are going to be jumping up and down for joy. And you might instruct jurors to try not to be affected by the dialect. There's some work by William Politzer, a professor of education at Stanford, now deceased, who researched trying to change attitudes.

If you hear somebody get up in a forum and say "he walk" instead of "he walks," fight the urge to make the—probably mistaken—assumption that she doesn't know what she's talking about. Because she probably does. At the least, you shouldn't use the fact that a speaker uses a slightly different dialect as proof of ignorance. We can try—we don't have enough experience in actually trying to fight those prejudices. And I would hesitate to say that I would accept a prejudice; I might understand where it comes from, but I would still say we have to fight such prejudices.

LeTourneau: In the 2016 book you co-edited with Samy Alim, entitled Raciolinguistics: How Language Shapes Our Ideas About Race*, Alim in his introduction rejects as myth the notion of a post-racial society. In fact, he even speaks of the U.S. as hyper-racialized and offers as an antidote what he calls transracialization, a dexterous negotiation of racial identity across – and within – social contexts. We talked earlier about knowing more than one dialect – is that a linguistic analog to trans-racialization? And do you think they're both viable projects?*

I would agree with Samy that American society is not post-racial at all, as we see from all kinds of evidence. This morning I mentioned a front-page article in the ***New York Times*** about the unmet promise of equality, following up on the Kerner Commission, which had a longer title, the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders. The commission was convened because of all these riots that had happened. In fact, after the assassination of Martin Luther King, people worried that society was drifting apart into two nations—black and white—and these authors, a month ago, showed that fifty years later, we haven't really improved. Things have gotten worse since efforts to deliberately desegregate have been suspended.

Race and class overlap, and one of the things I've been intrigued by is the relative salience of race and class in the United States versus other parts of the world. I think in America race is very, very salient. By the same token, people have a sense that we don't really have classes in America, which I don't agree with. We may not refer to them as such, but there are big socio-economic disparities and almost cultural disparities.

Years ago, one of my students did a study of race and class in Barbados. Working-class

whites in Barbados speak a Creole almost as deep as, and in some cases deeper than, that of the African-American working class. So although Barbados is also a racist place in many ways, class is very salient. Working-class whites do speak vernacular dialects, but they're not the same as African-American vernacular, so race serves as a barrier. My students and I were thinking about it, and at the time I was doing some reading on American history, so I told them I think one of the things that happened here, which did not happen as much in the West Indies (because there weren't such large populations of whites) is that poor whites were socialized and politicized to see their interests as the same as white people's, regardless of income. And one of the ways this was done often was in arming them whenever there were slave insurrections. The plantation owner wasn't necessarily having coffee with the poor whites in the area, but would nonetheless call them up and say, "Arm yourselves, because the blacks are giving us trouble."

In this domain, linguists haven't done a good job. By and large we've given up on the study of class. There are only a few classic class studies in America. By contrast, race is emerging as a focus of study in sociolinguistics.

LeTourneau: What sorts of curriculum might an institution like Weber State – open enrollment, largely undergraduate, with select graduate programs – develop to advance justice for linguistic minorities?

Well, I think just the very fact that you are doing this interview together is interesting, because in a lot of places graduate programs are like silos. Oh, they'll say "Hi" to friends outside their own academic unit, but they don't have much contact. I first learned about how silo-constructed universities are when I was chair of the faculty senate at Stanford. You'd hear vastly different opinions and ways of doing things. Departments are like different cultures, and people never talk to each other. So I think in a smaller school, it might be different. My impression from the outside is that, at Weber State University, you're not in completely different silos. I think this kind of collaboration is much less likely to happen at Stanford, Yale, or UCLA.

We each have wisdom to gain from each other, and I gained a lot from an astonishing Stanford colleague, Law Professor Weisberg. He reports that juries don't usually get transcripts, though I guess it's not true in every part of the country, but that they're mainly for appeals. If you could—even with some mistakes—use the transcripts, it would help a hell of a lot.

Starting with undergraduates is wise. I love working with undergraduates because they're bright and they're less wedded to disciplinary paradigms, more open, so they can contribute a lot. Collaborative learning could make a difference. Then maybe we could produce some students.

Denniston: Do you have any final thoughts as we close?

I am increasingly struck by how little we know about dialect prejudice and dialect intelligibility in the courtroom. And I am astonished, even though we've been studying African-American English for at least fifty years, how little we know about this. I think, as Mark LeTourneau would appreciate, it's because we always approach the study of language from the point of view of production. Linguists want to understand your dialect. We'll record you, subject everything you say to all kinds of analysis of sounds, syntax, and even style. But we almost never look at the other end, which is reception, or understanding. What does somebody who hears you get out of it in terms of (A) denotation—does she understand everything you uttered literally? And then (B) connotation—does she go away with the impression that you're really smart, or not smart, or whatever? That side of linguistics is lacking, and that's what rises to prominence in the courtroom because we want to know, fundamentally, can people understand each other?

I only kind of backed into this area a few years ago during the trial of George Zimmerman in 2015. Every time I heard Jeantel on the stand, I said, "This is intriguing, because she's one of the most vernacular speakers I've ever seen in a courtroom." But I think she's just the tip of the iceberg. We started collecting data on other cases, so I think there are actually many where there could be injustices in terms of what happens with dialect speakers. And not just black speakers. There are all kinds of dialects—Southern dialects in America and England, or Scottish English—that if you heard you wouldn't understand at all.

What strikes me, too, is that so many times in courts jurors say, "We couldn't understand the testimony," but that doesn't prevent them from rendering a verdict. I'm asking, "If you didn't understand it, could you have used some help?" You've got a Scottish English speaker, an African-American English speaker, a Chicano English speaker—could we do more in the courtroom to ensure that they're understood?And that's leaving out the cases where, even at the first level, injustice may occur. Suppose a motorist or somebody who's bumped into some trouble with the law deals with the police. We don't really know yet the extent to which the officers presume guilt or innocence. We know it's partly based on race from studies that have recently been done. But we don't know the extent to which they were influenced negatively by the dialect. We should not immediately assume that somebody speaking dialect shouldn't be believed, or that their character should be impugned. I'm hoping a number of students will be drawn towards this area and that we can start to get some research that would make a difference.

Thank you your time and for this illuminating conversation.



Mark LeTourneau (Ph.D., Purdue University) is a professor in the Department of English at Weber State University, where he teaches writing, literature, and linguistics.



Mark Denniston (Ph.D., Univ. of Colorado, J.D., Univ. of Iowa) is an associate professor in the Department of Criminal Justice at Weber State University, where he teaches criminal law, laws of evidence, and constitutional rights.

MARS, VENUS, and THE ASTROBIOLOGY OF THE ANTHROPOCENE—



A Conversation with DAVID H. GRINSPOON



JOHN ARMSTRONG

David H. Grinspoon is an astrobiologist and senior scientist at the Planetary Science Institute and was the inaugural Baruch S. Blumberg NASA/Library of Congress Chair in Astrobiology for 2012-2013. His research focuses on comparative planetology, with a focus on climate evolution on Earth-like planets and implications for habitability. He has also studied, written, and lectured on the human influence on Earth, as seen in cosmic perspective.

He has published Venus Revealed, *which was a finalist for the Los Angeles Times book prize;* Lonely Planets: The Natural Philosophy of Alien Life, *which won the 2004 PEN literary award for nonfiction; and* Earth in Human Hands, *which was named one of NPR's Science Friday "Best Science Books of 2016." His most recent book, entitled* Chasing New Horizons—Inside the Epic First Mission to Pluto, *appeared in 2018.*

Professor Grinspoon visited the Intermountain Region for Earth Day 2018 jointly sponsored by the Weber State University Department of Physics and the Departments of Physics and Earth Sciences at Boise State University and Treasure Valley Community College.

I am an astrobiologist and senior scientist at the Planetary Science Institute. My research focuses on the evolution of planetary environments—Earth-like planets, climate, and evolution—with an eye towards habitability. I am interested in the question of how planets gain and lose the ability to support life.

I want to talk about your new book, all about Pluto – Chasing New Horizons.

Well, the subtitle of ***Chasing New Horizons*** is, "Inside the Epic First Mission to Pluto." It is the story of the New Horizons Mission that was launched from Earth in 2006 and reached Pluto in 2015. I co-authored it with Allen Stern, who was the leader, the principal investigator, of the mission. It is largely the backstory that answers the question, "How does something like this actually come about?" People hear about these missions, they see the pictures, and they learn about the results—we do cover that in the book, but it starts really in 1989, with some crazy grad students getting the idea that they wanted to send a mission to Pluto and they were told, "There's no way, kids, forget it," (laughs) and them deciding not to forget it. It's really that core group of people that, 26 years later, led the mission (as now middle-aged scientists) and managed to succeed in sending the spacecraft past Pluto and all the things that happened in the interim. It's a pretty amazing story. A lot happened, a lot went wrong, there were a lot of dead ends, moments when it seemed like it was over, or like it was cancelled. This mission was actually cancelled by two successive presidential administrations—Democratic and Republican administrations both cancelled it. There were a lot of crises there, things that went wrong—and yet the perseverance of Allen and his teammates was remarkable. In the end, it worked, and Pluto turned out to be tremendously interesting.

Something we never expected.

And once again, we explore a new place, a new realm, and we discover that our assumptions were wrong, and that certainly happened with Pluto. So it's really an insider's story of what happened.

It was really a once-in-a-lifetime project. We won't go back to Pluto for a while.

I wouldn't hold my breath. There are people now—now that we have seen how cool it is, how interesting—advocating for an orbiter mission. It's hard to predict how things will go in space science. Things are very non-linear; we have slow decades and fast decades. So who knows, maybe we will get a whole bunch of new missions and one of them will go back to Pluto. I wouldn't say never in our lifetime, but I certainly wouldn't count on it. It did have this feeling of "the last first." Mariners, Voyagers, and Vikings were the first to do all of these things, and then this was the first to go to the Kuiper belt and to Pluto. It had that feeling of, maybe never again, or in our lifetimes, will we have that feeling, that first encounter of a completely unknown world.

Well, certainly, the surfaces of these worlds, we have pictures of them, but that's the last fuzzy dot in our solar system. (Laughs)

Unless you want to go out to other objects in the Kuiper belt, there's always more fuzzy dots. But in terms of an object that, at least once, was considered a planet—and Allen and I argue in this book, ***is*** a planet—big, round, cool objects that were once fuzzy dots and now are known worlds with close-up images—it's probably the last of those we'll see in our lifetime.

There are people now – now that we have seen how cool it is, how interesting – advocating for an orbiter mission. It's hard to predict how things will go in space science. Things are very non-linear; we have slow decades and fast decades. So who knows, maybe we will get a whole bunch of new missions and one of them will go back to Pluto. I wouldn't say never in our lifetime, but I certainly wouldn't count on it.

So it took a long time for the spacecraft to get there, but also an extraordinarily long lead-up as well – from the inception of the mission to the actual launch. Was that atypical? Or was that pretty much a standard for a Mars, or a standard space, mission?

People go, oh, that's a long mission, 9 years to get across the solar system. But the 9 years was a small part of the whole timeline. (Laughs) It was a long lead-up, and I would say in some ways it's typical in that all of these missions have back stories that are longer than people know about, because they are not in the public eye. It's also atypical in that there are a lot of things that can go wrong with space missions before they're launched. In this one, it was like, everything that could've gone wrong went wrong—so it was an unusually long build-up. But ironically, it was a sprint-launch too, because once it got approved, there were just a few years in which to build it and launch it. There was a ticking clock for the launch window. If it didn't launch by 2006, then Jupiter would be in the wrong place in its orbit to sling-shot it onto Pluto, and then you would either have to wait another decade, or take a much longer route to Pluto. So it was one of these hurry up and wait, and then hurry up again situations (laughs) where, once it was approved, they had to really go at a breakneck speed to be ready for the launch pad.

We brought you out this week because it's Earth Day – particularly to talk about your last book, Earth in Human Hands. *Can you tell me a little bit about how that last book came about? I know there were special circumstances about why you decided to write it and how you got the time to write it.*

I've always been interested in how to connect planetary science and astrobiology with questions about our existence on Earth—a lot of people are interested in that; I'm not the first person to think about writing a book about it. In particular, there's this concept about the Anthropocene, a recent concept in geology, proposed as a new epoch in the geological timescale—the Anthropocene meaning the time of humans, meaning that we officially, geologically, recognize that humans have now become a geological force. That is a proposal that is still on the table and still to be considered by the International Committee on Stratigraphy—the official keepers of the geological timescale. It is a concept that has led to a lot of interesting debates about the human role on Earth—how we fit in with the planet. I had been thinking for a while of a book that would focus on the biological and planetary science take on the human role on Earth. So, sort of the astrobiology of the Anthropocene, if you will. But then the specific opportunity that came up, that allowed me to write this book, was a new position that was established at the Library of Congress—the Chair of Astrobiology at the

Library of Congress. In late 2012, I saw an ad for this new position, and I thought, what? Chair of Astrobiology? What's that all about? I read the fine print, and it said they were looking for scholars to apply to spend a year at the Library of Congress, working on a research project that was on the intersection of astrobiology and the humanities. I thought, maybe that would be an opportunity to write this book that I've been wanting to write. The book had been on the back burner. Being a career scientist, I was doing all of these other things. I actually had a book proposal already written that I was going to try to run by a publisher at some point. I took that proposal and modified it for the format of this proposal—they wanted a six-page proposal and I had fifteen already written. I edited it down and added some more material about how I would specifically use the collections at the Library of Congress, and submitted this proposal about the Anthropocene from an astrobiology perspective. I was very gratified to be selected as the first Chair of Astrobiology at the Library of Congress. It meant that I moved to Washington and had a year in this amazing place.

Describe it for us.

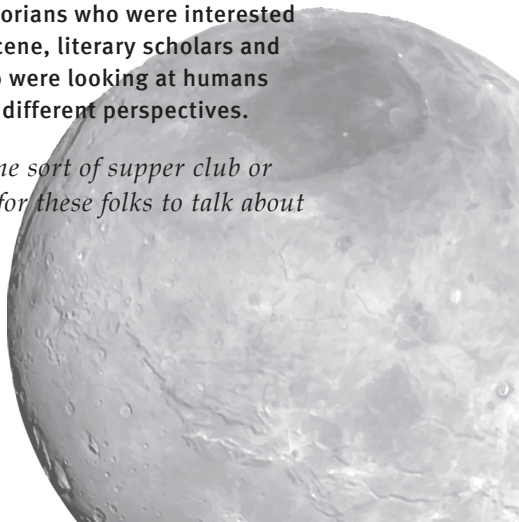
Anybody who hasn't been to the Library of Congress, next time you are in Washington, D.C., go visit it. A lot of it is open to the public and it's beautiful; it is literally a palace of learning. The building is beautifully crafted and built as a monument to ideas, scholarship, and learning. It's right across the street from Congress. Looking out the window there, you think, wow, the values that built this place don't seem to be the values that are primarily driving what's going on in that building across the street. But it was built by the U.S. Government, by the U.S. Congress, to foster scholarship, to be a depository of the world's knowledge, and to guide lawmakers with the wisdom of scholarship. It was an interesting time to be there for that reason. Also, the values with which the building was created—you walk in and you think, this was not given to the lowest bidder, to be built in a hurry and cheaply. It was built to be beautiful, and lasting, and sort of embody wisdom and the long view. So, that was an interesting wrinkle, looking out the window and going, there's Congress. And then down the street, the other way, there's my office window looking out over the Supreme Court.

The experience was tremendous, not just because you have time to write—as anybody in any kind of a scholarly position, or any position, in fact (laughs), knows—that's a rare thing. The resources are ridiculously lavish at the Library of Congress: they have everything. You sit in the office there, and there's a terminal where you can call up the collections at the Library of Congress. And literally, if you click on something, it shows up on your desk.

Somebody brings it to you?

It's somebody's job to put it on your desk. So you get really spoiled. And then, of course, it mounts up into these huge piles, and you go, "Oh my gosh, I'm not going to have time to read all these books." (Laughs) The other thing is that the other scholars who were there were so interesting to interact with. I wondered, going there, being the only scientist, if I would be off in my own corner playing by myself. But I found that we had so many overlapping interests—environmental historians who were interested in the Anthropocene, literary scholars and theologians who were looking at humans and nature from different perspectives.

You started some sort of supper club or gathering club for these folks to talk about this stuff?



We called it the Washington Anthropocene Working Group, but we weren't really working on anything other than sharing ideas. There weren't just people from the Library of Congress—there were people from the Smithsonian, and Georgetown, and NASA—it was a very interesting convergence of people who were interested in this. That, by the way, was the other thing—having moved from Denver for this appointment, I had this cynical idea of Washington. I'd have to watch my wallet, politicians, all of this (laughs). I was prepared to be cynical, but, in fact, I found that there were so many people there who were doing interesting things and trying to solve problems. You realize, yes, Washington is all that, but it is also the headquarters of the Smithsonian, and NGOs—a lot of people are there trying to do good and trying to solve problems, really interesting people working on really interesting things. It changed my tune about Washington. I stayed there when my term at the Library of Congress ended—partly because of my wife getting a job working for a different government agency. So we stayed there—I suppose I've become a Washingtonian. (Laughs)

Do you like it, though?

I do. It's a mixture of experiences. The thing I certainly miss about the West, Colorado, is the access to the mountains and the outdoors in general. Some of the clichés are true about the people in Colorado—they're more relaxed, shall we say (laughs). But there's so much going on culturally here, it's very diverse in terms of people. Also, I really like the density in a way. I never get in my car, well, on a daily basis, whereas, in Denver, you get in your car to go everywhere, it's so spread out. So between the Metro and walking, nobody really . . ..

So did you live near downtown?

Northwest, but near a Metro. If you're near a Metro, then you're near everything.

So in your book, you say – well, I don't know if you specifically say it in your book, but I've heard you say – that we are in a period of mindless climate change. Part of the trajectory of the book is looking at moving toward mindful climate change. How do you classify mindless climate change, and what do you see as mindful?

Part of what I was trying to do was look at what's happening now from a big, broad picture of planetary evolution. A lot of us know that we are having some kind of a crisis in our civilization—the fact that we are dependent on this energy source (fossil fuel) that is not healthy for our climate and for the systems that we depend upon. And I thought, well, this is an interesting new fact about the planet. How does this look from the point of view of planetary evolution? What's really new? When you look at it from that perspective, you realize we're not the first species that's changing the planet. That's happened before, even changed the planet in catastrophic ways, wiped out lots of other species and caused extinction. We're not the first to do that. What's new is that there's cognitive processes involved—to some degree, we are aware of what we are doing. By cognitive processes, I mean that interaction with our environment in which we manipulate our environment with technology, and extend ourselves through our intellect, such as it is, is changing the planet—that's new. Then, when you look at it in more detail, there are multiple modes of that. One is the sort of thing you could describe as mindless. I talk about the proto-Anthropocene and the mature Anthropocene. The proto-Anthropocene is where we are messing with the planet without realizing it—that's what we've been doing so far.

Then, there's this realization—through our modeling, our space-based observations of the earth, combining all of our knowledge of the planet—that we are changing the planet. Now the question is, what do we do with that knowledge? There is another mode, a more mindful interaction with the planet that I see us as moving towards—that's what I call the mature Anthropocene. That awareness of our planet-changing powers becomes folded into, and incorporated into, how we do interact with the planet. So there is a potential for constructive feedback there. In the book, I point out that we have that capacity. In fact, there are some examples of us interacting with the planet in that more mindful way. We haven't applied it yet to our problem with energy and climate, but there are some examples, such as the ozone layer. We realized that we were screwing it up, and after some argument about how to deal with it and a lot of discussions, treaties, all of that, we did manage to solve the problem. It's not fully fixed, but we're on track to fixing the ozone layer because of global agreements and changes that were made to technology that was harming us. There are some other examples too, examples from public health—oh, we've got this problem, can't we change our behavior and solve it? We don't have a great track record yet, but I think that we have evidence that we have what it takes. It's a way of clarifying what the problem is. We have to move from inadvertent planetary change to aware and purposeful planetary change. That's an important distinction—there's one reflex within some environmental circles that says, "Well, we just need to take our hands off of the planet and stop changing the planet." I argue, and I think it's pretty persuasive, that we can't just stop being planet-changers now, not when there are this many billions of us who want to stay alive and all of these other creatures that, like it or not, are dependent upon us. We don't have the option of not being planet-changers, but we do have the option of becoming wiser planet-changers.

Do you think that we have governmental agencies that are capable of enacting that kind of change? Or are we looking for some new type of organization that can handle that?

That, in a way, is the crux. We've identified what we need to do, but do we have the capacity to do it?

In the book you talk a lot about "we." "We can change," but who's we*? What do we mean by* change*?*

We have to move from inadvertent planetary change to aware and purposeful planetary change. That's an important distinction – there's one reflex within some environmental circles that says, "Well, we just need to take our hands off of the planet and stop changing the planet." I argue, and I think it's pretty persuasive, that we can't just stop being planet-changers now, not when there are this many billions of us who want to stay alive and all of these other creatures that, like it or not, are dependent upon us. We don't have the option of not being planet-changers, but we do have the option of becoming wiser planet-changers.

Yeah. That's a really important question. Who is this "we"? There is actually a section within the book called, "Who is This We?" It's easy to talk about "We need to do this," and "We need to do that," but who are we talking about? Are we talking about "we" as the human race? Are we talking about "we" as the privileged, middle-class Americans who are having this conversation? Are we talking about "we" as the Western industrialized powers who have put most of the carbon into the atmosphere and, therefore, you may argue, have an outsized responsibility to help solve the problem? When you look at it more carefully, I think there is a value in talking about "we" as the human race, but you have to break it down more because there are issues with environmental justice, winners and losers, differential responsibility: it's complicated. Ultimately, we need some kind of global governance to deal with our global problems.

I use the word "governance," which is different from the concept of "world government." I'm not necessarily advocating for one world government; I think in the long-run that's an interesting idea. I'm not opposed to it, but in a way, it's more of a radical change than we need. All we really need is for the powers that be to realize that it's in their own self-interest not to destroy the environment in which they live. When you put it that way, it seems like a much more achievable task. It's a weird time right now, in which there are these, sort of, backward forces in denial.

Well, since you wrote the book, there have been some pretty radical changes in the U.S. government's leadership role in all of this.

Exactly. The very fact that our government has pulled out of Paris is distressing. But at the same time, there's a huge resistance to it. A lot of individual states and cities are saying, "We're going to honor the Paris agreement." One realizes that there is a certain momentum now toward people getting on board with wanting to deal with climate change, and that it's not only the federal government that's calling the shots.

Those cities and states that you mentioned, I read that it's something like 60% of the U.S. economy – it's a lot.

Yeah, it's a lot. There's also entrepreneurship going into solving these problems. People are realizing, even from a capitalistic, self-interested point of view, ultimately, that the money is not going to be in fossil fuels. Obviously there are some vested interests whose resistance to change is the very core of the problem. But a lot of other people are realizing that the energy and conservation sectors are going to be growth industries for the rest of this century and beyond, and there's the desire, there's the economic impetus, to solve these problems. If you look at some of the biggest players—think about the Chinese, look at their own self-interest. If the Chinese burn all their coal, then we're toast, because they've got so much of it. But it's becoming very clear now that they won't because you can't breathe in Beijing anymore. They are realizing that they've got a huge air pollution problem, and if they rely on coal it's not going to go away. They are a big enough chunk of the world that they can't just ignore the world—they almost have to think globally.

They span half the globe. (Laughs)

Yeah, exactly. And population-wise—I don't know what percent they are—it's massive. I don't think they're the most benevolent government in the world, and yet like everyone else they have self-interest. It's not in their own self-interest to destroy

their environment. More and more of the big players are going to have to realize that. It's a matter of self-preservation. As much as there is this retrogressive force in our country right now—that's very regrettable, on that issue—it seems the motion is inevitably toward renewable energy. They can't bring back the coal industry, simply for economic reasons. The real way to help people in those depressed coal mining towns is to find them other things to do—like building wind turbines. That will happen even if we are in this annoying, and maybe slightly frightening, cul-de-sac. I still believe that there are larger historical forces leading us. There's a convergence of self-interest and wisdom that is coming. It doesn't matter if you're a utopian and you think of it as wisdom, or if you're a cynic and think of it as self-interest. Either way, that's the direction that the world is going.

Gives you some hope.

Yeah, absolutely.

I want to touch on one last issue. You are a unique planetary scientist in that when you talk about exploration of the solar system, you have a fondness for Venus as one of the most interesting planets, if not the most interesting planet in our solar system. When everybody wants to go to Mars, when Elon Musk is trying to get us to Mars, why Venus?

I don't have anything against going to Mars. I'm a fan of Mars exploration, but we have lacked balance. There are some destinations we've obsessed over and others we've neglected. Venus to me is one of the most interesting planets, and we just haven't sent enough missions there, certainly not recently. There is exploration that we should be doing that we're not. Venus is the most Earth-like planet. It's the closest to us physically in space. It's almost exactly the same size and mass as the Earth. It seems to be made up of basically the same stuff originally, and seems to have started off very similarly—similar in climate to Earth when it was young, and yet it has evolved in this radically different direction and became quite uninhabitable, certainly on the surface to anything that we would consider life as we know it. It's ridiculous: it's 900 degrees there and awful (laughs); you wouldn't want to go to the surface without a really good suit. But there is a mystery there in how exactly and why and when that divergence happened. We have some vague notions, some cartoon notions. We think there was a runaway greenhouse process, because it was closer to the sun. The water evaporated and then water, being a greenhouse gas, heated up more, and it was sort of a runaway process. We have a basic understanding of that, but there's so much of the detail that is a mystery. How could you not want to know—if it was this planet that was like Earth, and it became an inferno—what are the details of how that happened? What are the lessons for how Earth-like planets can evolve?

There's a lot of practical knowledge too as far as climate. We can't fully understand the climate of an Earth-like planet with just one example. We learn a lot when we look at the climate of Mars, of Venus, and these exoplanets we're finding, trying to understand the range of planetary climates and how Earth is one direction a planet can go in and all the processes are similar. You have clouds, they're interacting with radiation, and you have evaporation and condensation, gases absorbing and reflecting. These planets all share the same physics, just in different amounts and different combinations. So, every time we come to understand the climate of any planet, we can do a better job of predicting the future climate of Earth. Venus to me is haunting, because it's so Earth-like in

some ways, and yet it's just veered off in this radically different direction. I want to understand why. I think we *could* understand if we do more exploration than we already have.

Do you think we focus on Mars because people can stand on the surface? Could we send astronauts to Venus? Is that something that intrigues people?

I think the fascination with Mars comes from the fact that we can imagine ourselves going there. We probably will go there. Again, that's the "we," you and I probably not. (Laughs) We humans at some point will attempt to go live there. Also, psychologically, we can see the surface of Mars even with a telescope from our backyards. You can see markings that change over time from the surface, and you can see landforms. Venus is sort of shrouded, hidden. You can't see the surface even from orbit, unless you have radar vision. It's harder to imagine ourselves there, and even harder to imagine it as a place. In a strange way, Mars is more accessible to us. For that reason, Mars has been in our culture more, in science fiction more. Again, Mars is a fascinating place. I'd never put it down or advocate taking resources away from it, but I do think we should explore our whole solar system. Venus is a planet right next door that holds some treasure, some important knowledge that we can mine if we decide to go there and get it.

So you think that planet detection missions like Kepler and TESS (Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite, https://www.nasa.gov/tess-transiting-exoplanet-survey-satellite), as we find more Earth-like planets, as we get a larger spectrum of what those are, might increase the comparative climatology with Earth and Venus if we start finding lots of hot Earths?

I do. Because I do think that we will start finding a lot of Venus-like planets. These questions of where is the inner edge of the habitable zone, what makes a planet Earth-like, what makes a planet Venus-like, how does that change with types of stars, over time—those are questions that we are really going to have to tackle as we discover more planets near that edge. Is that a Venus, or is that an Earth? I actually already see this happening. A lot of exoplanet scientists are starting to push for Venus missions. That's really gratifying. There's this community that I've been part of that, literally for decades now, has been pushing for Venus missions and sort of getting close and then losing out to some other mission. Now I find that we are getting help from this corner we weren't expecting, and these exoplanet people are saying, "Hey, we should explore Venus." And we're going, "Yeah! Thanks, guys!" (Laughs)

We learn a lot when we look at the climate of Mars, of Venus, and these exoplanets we're finding, trying to understand the range of planetary climates and how Earth is one direction a planet can go in and all the processes are similar. You have clouds, they're interacting with radiation, and you have evaporation and condensation, gases absorbing and reflecting. These planets all share the same physics, just in different amounts and different combinations. So, every time we come to understand the climate of any planet, we can do a better job of predicting the future climate of Earth.

It doesn't hurt that Vicki Meadows, the principal investigator of the group you work with (the Virtual Planetary Laboratory Lead Team of the NASA Astrobiology Institute), used to be big on Venus.

Absolutely. It's funny, I met Vicki when we were both post-docs and we were working with some of the same people on some of the same problems—trying to understand the infrared nighttime spectrum of Venus and what it meant that it had so much water. So, yeah, I do think of Vicki as a Venus person, even though now she's the czarina of exoplanet modeling.

You've finished Chasing New Horizons. *What's next?*

Yeah, well, I have some research projects that I'm working on that I feel like I've been neglecting with all this book-writing. One is an exoplanet modeling project where we are trying to apply Earth GCM (General Circulation Models) to look at a range of Earth-like exoplanets. Take Earth and vary its parameters in different ways, and there's a Venus component to that. So I actually am working on this problem—modeling Venus like an Earth-like exoplanet and seeing where the difference is. I'm part of a team that's funded to do that, so I'm hoping to spend the rest of this year working on that. And then, I am also working on the Akatsuki mission, which is the Japanese mission that is in orbit around Venus now. I'm going to Japan this fall and will be focusing on that a little bit and trying to interpret some of that data. We are getting some data from the surface of Venus from that mission, even though it's an orbiter, and it's hard to see through the atmosphere. There are some wavelengths where you can see the surface a bit. My colleagues and I are trying to look at that data and see what we can really tell about the surface—are there active volcanoes, or recent flows? I'm also contemplating a next book. I'm trying to give myself a little time before I dive into another book. I did do these two books in fairly quick succession.

They are heavily researched.

The Pluto one was sort of a target of opportunity. Basically, Allen invited me to write this book with him, and that was a great opportunity. I'd just finished up this other one, and this one was almost too quick, but I didn't want to pass it up. Having done two books in a row in quick succession, I definitely need to slow down a bit, but I'll get the bug before too long and launch into another one.



John Armstrong (Ph.D., Univ. of Washington) is a professor of physics at Weber State University and researcher with the NASA Exoplanet System Science group. His work focuses on modeling potentially habitable worlds in advance of NASA's observations with the James Webb and LUVOIR telescopes. He teaches a host of classes, from computational physics to astronomy. He also raises dairy goats and chickens on his farm in Utah.

"POETRY is the Sound of the HUMAN ANIMAL"—

SUHASINI VINCENT



A Conversation with Suniti Namjoshi

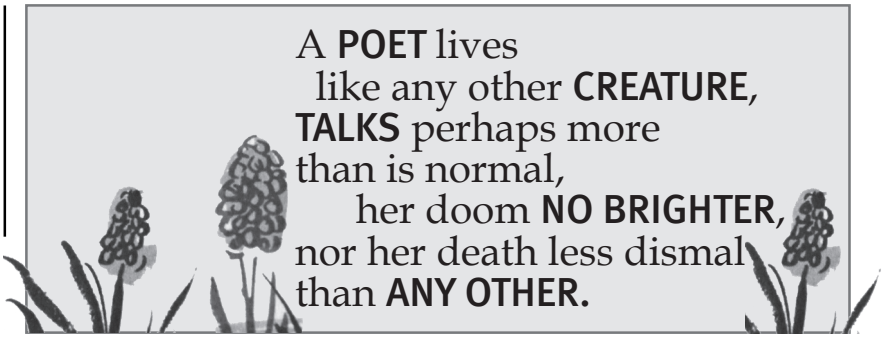
Increasingly recognized as a writer of international stature, Suniti Namjoshi is the author of numerous collections of poems and fables as well as children's books. These include Feminist Fables *(1981),* The Conversations of Cow *(1985),* The Blue Donkey Fables *(1988),* Saint Suniti and The Dragon *(1993),* Building Babel *(1996),* Goja: An Autobiographical Myth *(2000),* Suki *(2013) and* Foxy Aesop: On the Edge *(2018). Before becoming a writer, Namjoshi had worked in the Indian Administrative Service, but eventually emigrated to Canada where, at McGill University, she earned her Ph.D. with a dissertation on Ezra Pound. Her work has since been supported with several Canada Council grants. She currently lives in the southwest of England.*

What is most interesting in Namioshi's work is her ability to rework ancient Greek and Indian myths and stories from Eastern and Western traditions to create a fictional space which depicts facets of women's lives that have been ignored, degraded, or represented from the outside. In her corpus, she uses the fable form to subvert restrictive traditions and stereotypes. The conversation below discusses how she reconfigures the unstable, shape-shifting personae and plots of fairy tales, myths, and their literary progeny to expose the underlying patriarchal context and to allow more egalitarian ideas of personal transformation to emerge.

In her fable "Multcult Mart," for example, she arranges tectonic layers of word configurations to carry out an experiment on the power of language by distributing six words among six participants. The first friend thought the words were paving stones and danced on them; the second assumed they were loaves of bread and ingested them; the third decided that they were bits of art and strung them into a necklace; the fourth imagined them as globes and looked at them; the fifth decided to set the words free and let imagination capture them; the sixth tossed them into

*a sea and watched it absorb the fictional configuration. The fabulist then asks, "Are verbal art forms dependent on their medium?," whereupon the contestants reply unanimously and without hesitation, "The message is not the medium. You gave them to us. To have and to hold. All we did was recycle them" (*Sycorax *113-14). This fable may well speak for Namjoshi's postmodern endeavor. She restructures stories and fables from different sources and resets their moral lines and narratives in such a way that – like tectonic plates rearranging themselves – each fable abounds in rich intertextual allusions.*

I first interviewed Suniti twelve years ago in Paris after the release of Sycorax: New Fables and Poems *(2006). At the time, I was a doctoral candidate at the Université de Paris 3 – Sorbonne Nouvelle. This second conversation with her on May 4, 2018, highlights her craft as a fabulist. Her most recent book* Foxy Aesop *(2018) ends with the words: "The fables remain… repeated, mutated, fizzing with energy." The same could be said of her own work.*



"To Be a Poet"
The Blue Donkey Fables

Suniti, here we are once again for another conversation after nearly twelve years.

Yes, I remember we met for lunch when we happened to be in Paris on a holiday. I was very taken with the fact that you lived in a place where they produced champagne. To live in Champagne seemed very exotic! But then I live in "Wessex" —Thomas Hardy country. I suppose to somebody somewhere that too is exotic.

Yes, I still in live in Reims in Champagne-Ardenne or the Grand Est. It was a conversation on your animal fables. You've had many conversations with talking animals (Cow, Dragon, One-eyed Monkey, Blue Donkey) and nature (River, Stones). How do you choose the conversationalist in your fables? How do you set the stage for the interaction?

I don't really "choose" the creatures who have conversations with each other or with a character called "Suniti." For some reason, the animal images are vivid in my mind and they have something to say—they're eloquent. There's a podcast I did called "Unreal Animals" for *Papercuts*, an online magazine. In it I've tried to explain why animal imagery is particularly powerful for everyone— not just me. We are connected to the animals—they are our fellow creatures—and we want to establish a connection with them. We admire their valor, their swiftness, their beauty, and sometimes, of course, we want to shy away from the connection. Animal imagery allows us to take a really good look at ourselves, and perhaps that is why the "unreal," i.e. literary, animals occur so often in poems and fables everywhere.

Like many children in India, the first Indian fables I read were from Amar Chitra Katha's The Panchatantra *and the* Jataka Tales. *Did you read them?*

I read ***The Panchatantra***, also Greek myths, fairy tales, anything and everything really. My mother had a huge collection of books and later she gave me an account at a good bookstore. I was a bookworm—in those days we didn't have TV. Perhaps that's why "unreal animals"—dragons, gryphons, and other creatures like nightingales who have real counterparts, but have somehow become literary because of the stories and poems written about them—that's why these creatures seem as real to me as the ones that one can actually see or touch. I remember when I was about eight not being sure about the difference between an account of how chocolate was made from cocoa beans hanging on trees and a fairy tale I was reading. After all, which is more unlikely—chocolate growing on trees or princes and princesses riding hither and thither?

I'd opt for the fairy tale, though reality is really different.

Of course, there's a difference between writing a poem or a fable and living one's life. I don't know whether you've read the book ***Suki***. It's about my beloved cat. It took me sixteen years after her death to be able to write about her—I just couldn't get the distance for a long time. In a poem about her called "Deaf Eurydice," I say:

> This is twilight
> time, Orpheus time, Demeter time, when they
> call the long dead, and deaf Eurydice
> struggles to hear and hearing nothing falls behind
> till her footfall makes no imprint save on the mind.

An imprint on the mind is quite different from a physical presence.

Suniti, what inspired you to choose the form of a fable?

I didn't "choose" to write fables, though it's true that one of the first things I got published (in ***Shankar's Weekly***, perhaps in 1958 or 1959) was about a pensioned off lion and his daughter sitting in the rose garden sipping tea. It was highly reactionary, I'm afraid. I think I was annoyed about the way the other politicians were treating my grandfather. I was only 17. That was 60 years ago.

And did it lead to your transition from poet to fabulist?

I don't see it as a transition. A fabulist is a poet. The sense in a fable has to be embodied in the sound and in the imagery—just as in a lyric poem. And, of course, both are highly concentrated forms. As Suniti says to her friends in ***Saint Suniti and the Dragon***, "Poetry is the sound of the human animal" (29). In the early days I sometimes found I was writing prose poems. Later I discovered that the driving force of prose narrative could be very useful in reinforcing a startling conclusion.

My favorite fable "Broadcast Live" is from your collection Feminist Fables.



"The Incredible woman raged through the skies, lassoed a planet, set it in orbit, rescued a starship, flattened a mountain, straightened a building, smiled at a child, caught a few thieves, all in one morning, and then, took a little time off to visit her psychiatrist, since she is at heart a really womanly woman and all she wants is a normal life." How did you build this fable?

The fable you like works well in part because of the speed of the syntax. "Straightened a building, smiled at a child," etc. is a rapid sequence, then the slowness of "all" in "all in one morning" wraps up those activities. The phrasing of "took a little time off" is like "lassoed a planet," but different, because what is happening now is different. The fable consists of just one sentence, which both contains and juxtaposes the two contradictory aspects of her being. Syntax matters! I wish I could persuade the schools and the universities of that.

Who were your major influences?

I read Aesop, folk tales, fairy tales, anything I could get hold off and, of course, I was told stories. I think these might have been more than just influences—they entered my imagination, became a part of my mind. I remember, though, the first time I came across James Thurber's fables—my mother had bought a couple of his books. I was charmed!

You express this idea of being charmed in a Blue Donkey *poem entitled "Explanation":*

> **The cat charmed me.**
> **The tree disarmed me.**
> **And though the real people**
> **hadn't yet harmed me,**
> **I thought that they would**
> **given the chance.**

Is the intent of this poem to express the idea that people can be harmful when compared to harmless nature? Or is it a story from your childhood memories?

The former. Not that our fellow creatures, the animals, can't be dangerous, but we humans use our intelligence to carry destructiveness to new heights. A story I've used more than once is the one about the monkey and the crocodile. Goja, whom I loved dearly and who used to look after me when I was little, used to tell it to me at bedtime. It was about how the crocodile thought that the monkey's liver must be exceedingly sweet because the monkey fed on "jamboons"—I don't know what they're called in English [editor's note: white Java plums]. I didn't realize until much later that the story was from *The Panchatantra*. It's strange how that story stayed with me. The one-eyed monkey keeps recurring in my work. Goja had indeed lost an eye; I don't know whether that has anything to do with anything.

How has growing up in India affected your cast of fables?

Once, after a visit to India, my partner, Gill, said to me, "It's very strange. Whenever I ask a question I get a story instead of a straightforward answer." She didn't mind. She liked the stories. I hadn't noticed that we often say what we want to say through a story. Perhaps we do. We are, after all, a nation of storytellers. And we don't mind embroidering the stories!—I just realized that I've replied to your question with a story.

Your postmodern fables are a hybrid intermingling of the old with the new, with resonances of the East and the West. How do you weave the web of a fable?

Like any other writer, I make the new out of the old. As Pound said, "Make it New." Or, as Yeats said, we use the "monuments of unageing intellect" as well as the "rag and

Like any other writer, I make the new out of the old. As Pound said, "Make it New." Or, as Yeats said, we use the "monuments of unageing intellect" as well as the "rag and bone shop of the heart." There is no progress in literature, but a writer can't copy old poems – she would produce dead poems.

bone shop of the heart." There is no progress in literature, but a writer can't copy old poems—she would produce dead poems.

That's interesting! In your latest work of fables, Foxy Aesop: On The Edge, *Aesop asks Sprite, "Are you re-writing my fables?" Sprite replies, "No, I don't re-write them really. I just use them to make new ones" (61-62). Like Aesop the foxy fabulist, do you voice your thoughts in the guise of Sprite, a figment of the future, a TNP (third person narrator)?*

Yes, that's part of the strategy I use, especially as I'm writing about the problem of being a writer and particularly a fabulist. In this instance, the Sprite doesn't have the disinterested authority of the normal third person narrator. She's also a first person narrator and a character in the narrative—she's silly sometimes and can get quite huffy—especially when called "Sprout" by mistake.

In your other fable collections, "Suniti" often surfaces or makes her appearance in a fable. While reading Foxy Aesop, *I missed her. Was it deliberate?*

She's there in the guise of "Sprite"—the hero worshipping, yet critical fabulist from Aesop's future.

Foxy Aesop *is aptly punctuated with sketches of foxy Aesop's fables in the vineyard and lend color and ambience to the theme of living life on the edge! Would you like to comment on the artwork?*

I came across the images of the woodcuts on a website set up by Professor Laura Gibbs. I didn't know anything much about them or even how to set about getting permission to use five or six of them from the Library of Congress. Professor Gibbs was very helpful to me, though we didn't know each other at all.

As a present-day fabulist do you live by the watchwords, "Even if foxes can't write, don't take the trouble to outfox a fox"?

Are you quoting from that bit in *Foxy Aesop* where the fox steals from the honey pots and leaves a note behind?

Yes, and I find it witty for a fabulist trying to outfox a fox!

It was only a little joke about realism in fables. You are right, though, the stuff of literature isn't so much words on paper as language itself. Having grown up in India like you, I know that a strong oral tradition trains the mind!

Sprite isn't your first spirit cast in a fable! In Sycorax: New Fables and Poems, *it is Shakespeare's Ariel from* The Tempest *who has a voice. Does Sprite have a specific significance for you?*

The narrator in *Foxy Aesop* is unconnected to Ariel. When Aesop introduces her to the children and asks her to tell them a story, they don't know what to call her or what to make of this disembodied being, so they think of her as a sprite, and then Aesop and the children and some of the others take to calling her "Sprite."

Who is Sprite in the Namjoshian fable? Is she the Celtic spriggan? Is she an icon in a computer game that can be

maneuvered around the screen or in your fable with a joystick? Do you refer to the Green Woodpeckers from Suffolk? Or a lemon-lime refreshment?

I didn't know that the Green Woodpeckers from Suffolk were called Sprites. Are they different from other green woodpeckers? Alas, this particular sprite is only a fabulist from our time who is hell bent on questioning Aesop.

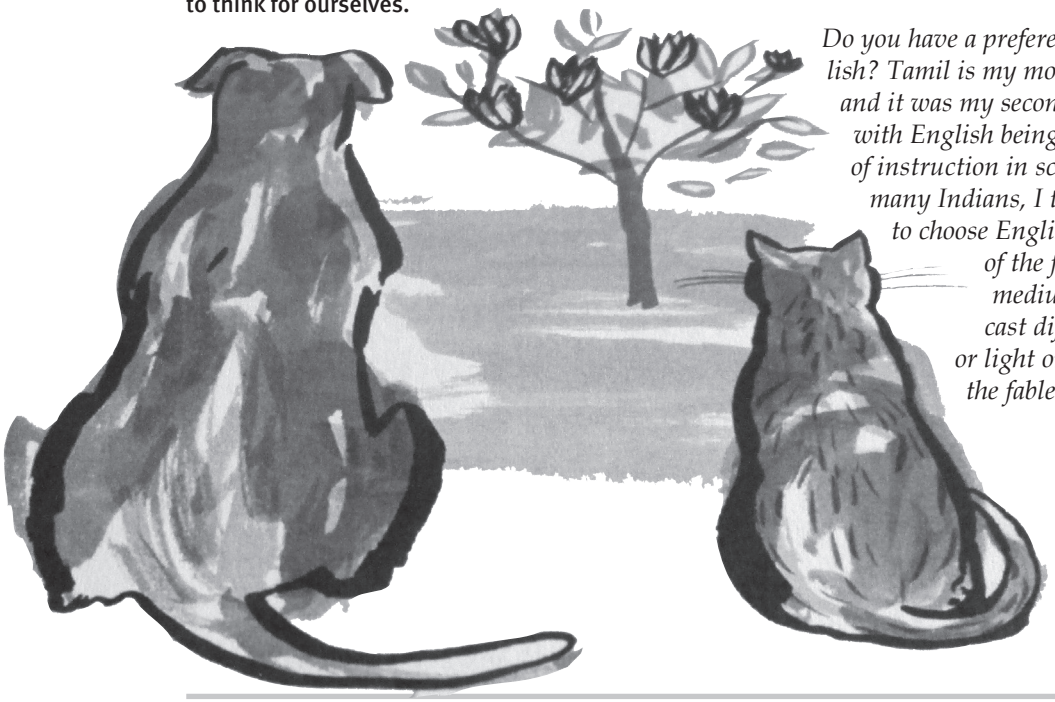
I was just wondering if you write only in English?

I was educated in English, so I think in English. When my parents sent me to an American school (as opposed to one run on the British public school model), I remember being told by them, "Learn what they have to teach you, but never become one of them." How can one learn what someone has to teach you—especially when it's an entire language—without to some degree becoming "one of them"? Being sent to the J. Krishnamurthi Rishi Valley School later was helpful. As a friend once pointed out to me, Krishnaji was one of the few philosophers who thought it was worthwhile talking to children. He wanted us to think for ourselves.

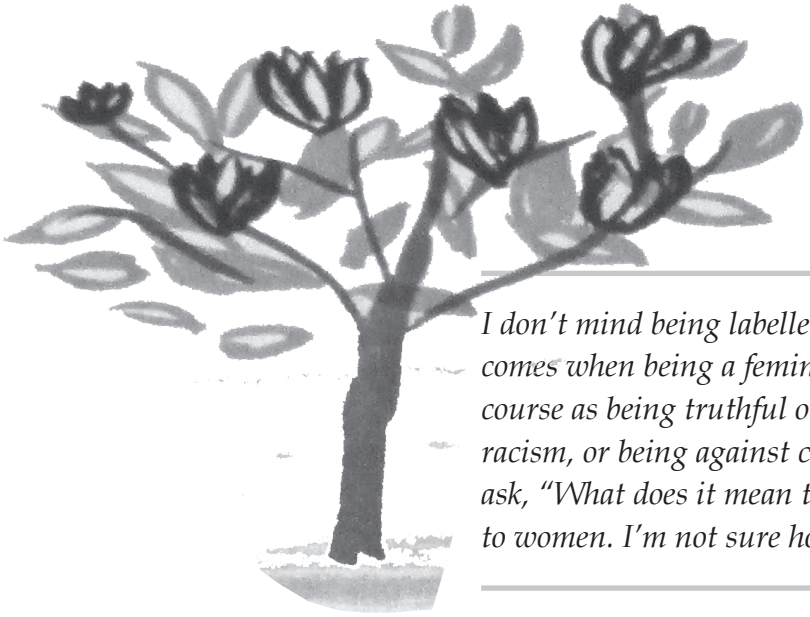
We were allowed, no, encouraged, to question everything, especially our own conditioning. And then there was Mr. Pearce, the principal. He was a very good-hearted and kind human being. Many of us still remember him and some of the other teachers for the affection they gave us. The medium of instruction was still English, but the music was Indian (South Indian classical), the dancing was Indian (Bharat Natyam), the food was Indian (idli dosa for breakfast, for example), and my fellow students were Indian. Having more than one language and more than one perspective can be useful. It allows one to set one off against the other and question both. But you know that.

Yes, like most Indians who are proud of their regional languages, I do speak Tamil to my son in France. I do all my writing in English. Would your fables have a similar cast in Marathi, which I think is your mother tongue?

Some of the fables work well in Marathi. It's a highly ironic language. And I suspect that the driving force of narrative might not be all that different in the Indo-European languages. Specifically Western references might cause a problem, because they would have to be explained, and that would spoil the concentrated impact of the story.



Do you have a preference for English? Tamil is my mother tongue, and it was my second language, with English being the language of instruction in school. Like many Indians, I think we tend to choose English. In the mode of the fable, does the medium of language cast different shades or light on the moral of the fable?



I don't mind being labelled "feminist." When the day comes when being a feminist is as much a matter of course as being truthful or honest or being against racism, or being against cruelty, it won't matter. To ask, "What does it mean to be human?" applies equally to women. I'm not sure how soon that day will come.

I don't have a "preference" for English. I don't have a choice. My Marathi just isn't good enough. Not having spent more time on Marathi is one of the things I regret in my life. (The other is ever having smoked.) And yet I think a Maharashtrian sensibility permeates my writing—the irony, the playfulness, and the highly developed sense of the absurd are characteristic of Marathi, and of some of the other Indian languages also, perhaps.

I have contemplated the idea of translating your fables into French, but have hesitated to do so for fear of losing the original texture or altering the fit of the fable, or diluting its cultural essence, in a case of "lost in translation"! Have your fables been translated into other languages? Have you considered the idea of translating them into Indian languages yourself?

For fun, you could try translating a fable into French and into Tamil and see what happens. You might find that the Tamil actually works very well. Some of the fables have been translated into Marathi, Norwegian, Italian, and so forth. The whole book, *Feminist Fables*, has been translated into Dutch, Italian, Spanish, and Korean. Not being competent in all these languages, I don't know how well they work.

I'll give it a try and will get back to you on that later. Even though your fables portray a large array of issues ranging from creation myths, good vs. evil, truth, paradox, irony, and cultural stereotypes, you've been labelled a "feminist fabulist." What's your reaction to that?

I don't mind being labelled "feminist." When the day comes when being a feminist is as much a matter of course as being truthful or honest or being against racism, or being against cruelty, it won't matter. To ask, "What does it mean to be human?" applies equally to women. I'm not sure how soon that day will come. When I first became politicized and discovered that there were other people who were questioning the patriarchy and doing so brilliantly, I felt so pleased, so invigorated. I couldn't wait to tell my mother. I was astonished by her response. She said the equivalent of, "I'll be damned if I see myself as an oppressed woman!" Of course she didn't swear, but it carried that force.

In Foxy Aesop, *Sprite muses on "how much power does a writer have?" What's your take on that? Will your fables change the world? What led to the writing of* Foxy Aesop*? You've also written a "Homage to Aesop" in* Sycorax…

I'm afraid writers don't have very much power, no single individual does. But we've got to try—the world, the planet itself, needs saving. We've made a mess. Why did I write *Foxy Aesop*? For fun. I wanted to play with Aesop, trade fables with him. I also wanted to ask him, and therefore myself, what my function was as a fabulist. After all, the fable is a didactic form. The role of the Sprite as TPN, third person narrator, was a bonus—it allowed me to demonstrate just how circumscribed such a role is.

Do you have a "pet" fable?

It changes. Perhaps my favorite is often the last one that I've been working on. Here's one about Goldilocks: The original tale tells of a badly-behaved old woman who enters the forest home of three bachelor bears whilst they are away. Here is my version: The old woman in the forest is faint with hunger, delirious with pain, barely able to stay upright as she staggers through the snow until she sees, or thinks she sees, a small cottage. The door is unlatched. It looks inviting. It's what she needs. There's porridge on the table—three bowls of porridge! She gobbles them up, stumbles over chairs and falls across a bed.

She no longer knows whether she's awake or fast asleep. She's little again, and has golden hair. The cottage is her home, the food on the table was made for her, and this is her bed. She is much loved. This is heaven possibly. She does not know whether she's alive or dead. She is discreetly dead and lying in the snow. The owners, when they return, do not have to concern themselves. Perhaps when she was young it was still a dream—who knows? It was an excellent one, and much to be desired by everyone.

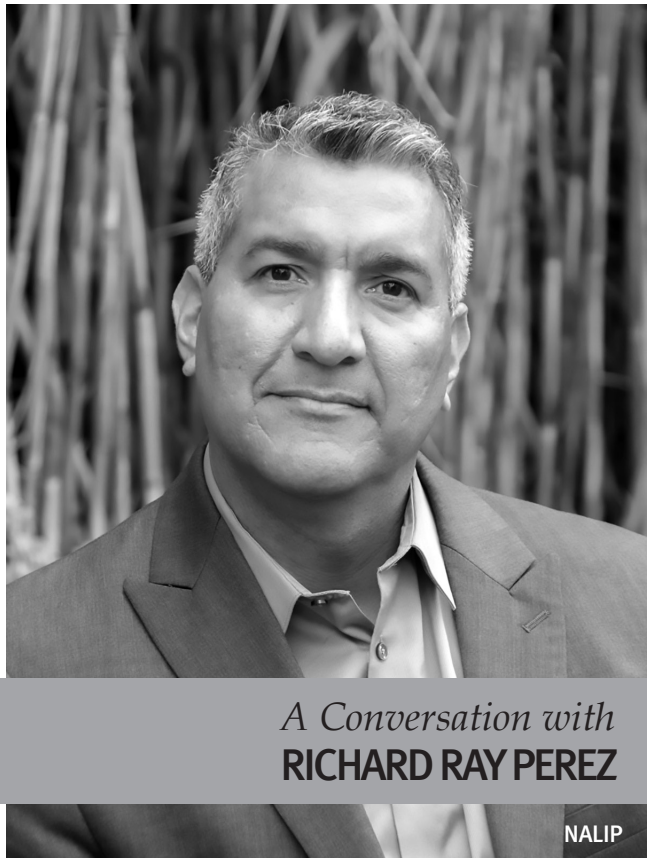
What's your next "fable" project?

I don't know. I have a manuscript consisting of a long sequence called *The Dream Book* based on the dream imagery in *The Tempest* and then various poems and fables which could be added to the book. There's a sense in which fables and poems write themselves. They have to work out their inner logic and I have to help them. It's something like that. I hadn't thought of Goldie as a person in need of a refuge. (That she can be seen as a refugee becomes clearer in later sections of the short sequence.) And yet, it's obvious—anyone seeking food and shelter is a refugee, a person seeking refuge. I've often thought that a poet or a fabulist, or perhaps any writer really, is the child saying, "The Emperor has no clothes!" It's obvious. And the obvious is devastating.



Suhasini Vincent is an associate professor of Legal English at the Université de Paris 2 – Panthéon Assas. Her research focuses on the legal scope of environmental law in postcolonial countries and explores eco-critical activism in the work of Arundhati Roy, Amitav Ghosh, and Yann Martel. She has also presented papers on Salman Rushdie, Suniti Namjoshi, Namita Gokhale, Shashi Tharoor, Anita Desai, and Kiran Desai at international conferences in Europe. Her research interests include the postcolonial dynamics of translation. She has interviewed Tamil authors like Ambai and Sivasankari, well-known translators and editors in the Indian literary scene.

ADJUSTING THE LENS—
NARRATIVE AS A TOOL FOR SOCIAL ACTIVISM



A Conversation with
RICHARD RAY PEREZ

NALIP

ADRIENNE ANDREWS

American documentarian, film producer, and director Richard Ray Perez explores the story within the story as a way to understand and engage in social activism. Known for productions including Unprecedented: The 2000 Presidential Election, Uncovered: The War on Iraq, and Outfoxed: Rupert Murdoch's War on Journalism, *among others, his greatest work to date may be* Cesar's Last Fast. *This documentary premiered at the 2014 Sundance Film Festival and provided the story behind the story of Chavez's struggle for farm workers' rights in the United States. Perez engaged in activism as a child once he began to understand the story behind the story of grapes at age five while growing up in California. Perez completed a Bachelor's of Arts degree at Harvard University in Visual and Environmental Studies.*

The following conversation occurred prior to his keynote address in October 2017 at the 19th Annual Diversity Conference at Weber State University. We would like to thank Rick for his willingness to share the power of narrative and story as tools of activism with our campus and community. We would also like to thank the Office of the President and his staff for making this visit possible.

Rick, you are a master storyteller. I hadn't necessarily thought of storytelling as social activism, or social action, and yet here I am with you and starting to understand that this is a really viable, powerful tool for activism in our community. Can you tell me how you became an activist? Because I think there's power in that narrative.

It's interesting because I don't want to say I became an activist; in some ways I *was* always an activist. And I say that because, typically, when we think of activists or activism, we think of people engaged in civil disobedience, or a very public expression, often confrontational, so the general public has a very distinct image of what activism is. In reality, however, activism really is just engaging with society and so, I guess the question is, what . . . ?

The question would be: At which point did you find yourself engaging with society?

Well, I've told the story often about when I was four or five years old in my Head Start class, when I was sitting down having lunch, and there was a university volunteer, and he came to have lunch with my fellow classmates. And part of that lunch was a fruit cocktail; this was about 1969, 1970. I noticed that he started plucking the grapes out of that fruit cocktail. And I was very curious and asked him, "Why are you plucking the grapes out of the fruit cocktail?" And he pointed to the grapes and said, "Well, because the people who own the grape fields, they treat the people who pick the grapes terribly. They pay them very little money, they make them live in shacks, they humiliate them, and if the grape pickers complain, they fire them. For that reason, I can't eat these grapes." And I remember looking down at my grapes, and all of a sudden they became very ugly, and I couldn't eat them either. So I started plucking the grapes out of my fruit cocktail.

All of the other students, my fellow classmates, were hearing that story, too, and they looked down at their grapes and couldn't eat the grapes either. And so they started plucking the grapes out of their fruit cocktails. And what we didn't know at the time was that there was a larger national grape boycott led by the United National Farm Workers. It was led by Cesar Chavez. And I also didn't know at that time that my dad had been a farm worker for 22 years, a migrant farm worker. I still had uncles, aunts, and even cousins who were working in the fields. And so that experience of the grape pickers as embodied in those grapes, and that story that university student told me, was very profound on many levels. By me not eating the grapes, I became, sort of, an activist at a very young age. But also reflecting on it, I realized the power of storytelling, and that social activism and building social movements and engaging people in positive social change is profound. Because what that university student did is, he basically told the story of the farm workers, and we as preschool students, we got it. And we then took action and changed our behaviors because of that story. And of course later on I grew up and became a filmmaker. I can't say exactly, you know, when I decided to become a filmmaker, but certainly there was a relationship between experiencing the power of story at that early age and how I view story now as a vital part of social engagement, positive social change. Activism, if you will. That there is a role and a place for it. Now that said, you know, social change really happens in a larger ecosystem of change. And so, knowing the stories of those farm workers and grape pickers alone would have been profound and moving, but the fact that it was tied to a grape boycott and there was a concrete action to take—"Don't eat grapes, don't buy grapes"—that's a vital link to a really effective social change campaign. It's not enough to tell the story—it has to be part of an intentional strategic effort.

I'm so grateful that you brought up Cesar Chavez, in part because you made the documentary Cesar's Last Fast. *How much of that early experience informed your decision to make that documentary?*

Well, it's all very fascinating because in some ways, the documentary came to me. There was this amazing sequence of events and alignment where the opportunity emerged. When I actively decided to make the film about Chavez, I think I had forgotten about that grape story, and the process unearthed that memory. So what happened was, I had worked with a mentor for years who gave me an opportunity to make many political documentaries.

What was that mentor's name?

It was Robert Greenwald. He started a company called Brave New Films. Robert was the executive producer of my very first documentary, ***Unprecedented***, about the 2000 presidential election in Florida. And Robert for years had been wanting to make a documentary about Cesar Chavez. He knew my family background and asked me if I was interested in being the producer on the project. We met with the Chavez family—specifically Paul Chavez, who runs the Cesar Chavez Foundation—and talked about it, and Robert wanted to see if they'd be willing to work exclusively with him on a documentary, which is the traditional way to ensure that you're going to get cooperation. And they said, "You know, we'd love to work with you, but we can't work with you exclusively because somebody close to the family is working on the documentary, and they have a nonexclusive arrangement." And so Robert didn't pursue the project and went on to do a couple of other films, ***Outfoxed*** and the documentary ***WalMart: The High Cost of Low Prices***.

About a month later, I got a phone call from that other filmmaker, and she said, "Hi, I'm Lorena Parlee, and I know you were working with Robert on a film, and I know Robert's moved on to other projects. I've been trying to make this film about Cesar Chavez for ten years, and in fact approached him when he was alive, and he said, 'Before I let you make a film about me, I want you to make a film about the farm workers and the pesticide issue.'" And she told me that she became a volunteer in the United Farm Workers Movement and, eventually, Chavez's press secretary. She was also his press secretary in 1998, when he undertook his famous fast. And so she had a very close relationship to Cesar, but he had passed before she got to make the film. She had collected 85 hours of Chavez-related footage, including footage of his fast and of the family's private burial service and preparations, and asked whether I'd be interested in being a producer. I of course said yes, but needed to finish a new freelance job first that was scheduled to last six months. Lorena then said that she needed somebody to help her on the film now because she was being treated for breast cancer. She also said that she could work on the film only two weeks out of the month. Of course I was taken aback and

Social change really happens in a larger ecosystem of change. And so, knowing the stories of those farm workers and grape pickers alone would have been profound and moving, but the fact that it was tied to a grape boycott and there was a concrete action to take – "Don't eat grapes, don't buy grapes" – that's a vital link to a really effective social change campaign. It's not enough to tell the story – it has to be part of an intentional strategic effort.

said that I would have to fulfill my commitment first and would then absolutely help and would work pro bono. I said that if she hadn't found somebody else in six months to give me a call.

Well, six months passed and I didn't hear from her, so I figured she found somebody else. Nine months later I got a call from Lorena Parlee's stepfather, who told me Lorena passed the month before of breast cancer, and that she had left my name in her notes for them, her mother and stepfather, to contact me to see if I would pick up where she left off and finish the film that she started. At that point, it became a multilayered responsibility, you know.

It's a story within a story within a story.

Yes, a mission. So while the story of that childhood experience in preschool wasn't front and center, it was certainly embedded in my life experience, as was my dad's story as a farm worker, and my aunts' and uncles' who had told my siblings and me about working in the fields. And I do remember as a child going out with my family to picket in front of a local supermarket in support of the UFW's historic grape boycott. All of that was very conscious. All of that was aligned with this moment and this intersection with Lorena Parlee and the story coming to me. Like I said, it wasn't like I'd actively gone out to make this film; the film came to me.

What a powerful set of intersections. Did you experience any conflict in the pulling together of the documentary? What does that look like when you're telling a story, and maybe there are counter narratives or challenges to the narrative you are producing?

One of the first things when making the documentary is taking care of all the legal elements. Once Lorena's parents had contacted me and were comfortable with me carrying on Lorena's legacy, we had to enter into a legal agreement that said I had permission to use the footage she had collected. And once I saw the footage, what she had left behind was a very rough assembly of the film she was making, which was a chronological biography with a narrator. It wasn't structured around the fast.

When I got all the boxes of tapes and started looking at stuff, there was one set of tapes that just said, Tape 1, Tape 2, Tape 3. I popped in the first tape, and the first thing I saw was a very dramatic press conference with Martin Sheen and Edward Olmos and the musician Rubén Blades. They're saying, "We're here to support Cesar's fast." He'd been on the fast for 23 days at that point. And I thought, wow, this is really intense! And so then I popped in the next tape and saw footage of Cesar's family sitting at his bedside. He's weak and tired in his fasting chamber. As I continued to pop in these tapes sequentially, it became clearer and clearer that this was very intimate footage of his fast that I didn't know existed. And it was a fast that didn't get attention because it was 1988. Cesar and the movement had ceased to have the influence that they had in the '60s and '70s, so it was largely overlooked. Every day he's getting weaker and weaker, and the family is getting more worried and trying to talk him out of the fast. The doctors come in and they're trying to talk him out of this fast. No one knows how long he's going to fast; he himself doesn't know it.

And then, ultimately, he breaks his fast in front of an audience of 5,000 people in this very dramatic moment where Ethel Kennedy, Robert Kennedy's widow, is sitting in the front row. And I looked, and I'm like, Oh my God, that was this entire journey in an arc that was so intense and emotional and historical. I don't know if anybody ever had seen that footage. And I thought: this is the emotional core of the film. This is the basis of the film. This is the story's climatic moment, the end

of the trajectory and the story of the fast is the project's narrative spine. It embodies the power of Cesar's story and illuminates a facet of Cesar's story that hasn't been told before. So I decided that's going to be the structure of the film, or the architecture, if you will, into which I'll integrate the story of Cesar and the movement. So I had to go back to Lorena's family and say, "You know, I saw what Lorena left behind, but I see a different film. I see a film about this fast and how this fast embodies Cesar's spiritual commitment to his work. This fast is an entry point into the story of Cesar Chavez and his work in the movement." And Lorena's parents gave it some thought and let me basically make the film that I saw in that footage.

Which is powerful, if you've got support there. But what about the resistance?

Well, there was some resistance in both areas. After I worked out the permission with Lorena's family, I had to get the cooperation of the Cesar Chavez Foundation, for a couple of reasons. One, the Foundation owns the largest collection of Cesar Chavez audiovisual material, so the footage outside of that fast footage I would have to access through them. Plus, they're concerned about the portrayal of Cesar Chavez. So I had to convince them that the film I wanted to make was true to Cesar's story. I had to gain their trust, and then also enter into an agreement with them. And then, you know, as the story evolves—and this film took a total of seven years—you get deeper into it, new narrative elements emerge. It became clear that I had to explore Cesar's human side and how he may not have managed the union very well after the successes of the mid '70s. There was a lot of in-fighting in the union, and people left the union on very angry terms. It's always been a very sensitive subject between Cesar's family and the people who left. I knew I would have to confront that at some point. That was the biggest source of tension because Cesar's family, his children, were witness to these events and they have very strong feelings about how these events played out. And Dolores Huerta's perception of what happened in those years was at odds with that of the union members who had left, or, as they claim, were forced out.

This is Dolores Huerta?

Dolores Huerta, during the in-fighting. And, of course, the people who left the union also had their version, and it was important for me to capture their stories. Some of the people from the Chavez Foundation and Dolores were uncomfortable about these former union members appearing in the film, and uncomfortable with me incorporating their perspective and their experience, because they strongly disputed their version of the events. That process happened later in the production stage. But it was necessary for me to hear those perspectives, because the union really struggled in success. There were a lot of bitter conflicts and I really wanted to explore what happened. I thought it was vital to get some of the voices of some of these people who left.

I think that's a familiar theme in social movements – when we see success and it's time to move forward or further, there is often dissent within the organization or organizations. What should success look like, how should we operate? Oftentimes the internal conflict gets hidden because we don't want the larger world to see that there's fragmentation within, because that becomes an opportunity to break things down.

I think what I learned through that was that it's easier to lead in battle. It's easier to lead in war. It's harder to lead in victory.

I think that is a powerful statement. In the process of making this documentary, how did you not lose the core of the story? There are all of these other pieces that sort of rise to the top, which maybe weren't even on your radar. How do you keep the focus on the story that you start with, or how much does that story change?

It's both. In fact I often lost focus when trying to raise the funds. We would apply for grants, and we typically got rejected. One particular grant we applied for four times or so, and we'd get feedback every time. I found myself modifying the film I wanted to make based on their feedback and trying to make the film they wanted for the funding. I had swayed from the film I wanted to make, and the way to free myself from that was that I had to stop applying for that grant. They were holding out this sort of carrot that was not right for the story I wanted to tell. And then when these narrative threads would come up, what I mostly had to come back to was what I call the film's emotional core. That footage and the scene of Cesar breaking his fast reflects this incredible commitment of a man who had huge challenges leading a successful union, and made some tough decisions that fragmented the union and resulted in very bitter falling outs; but at the same time he led this unique movement that for a while was hugely successful and transformed the lives of farm workers primarily in California, and to a lesser degree Arizona and the Southwest. And by his doing so, he had these repercussions that inspired non-farm workers, too. They saw a man who looked like them and challenged the powerful political and economic structures around the agro-economy, and he won. I saw what he did to my dad's spirit. How my dad had a sense of dignity even though he was no longer working in the fields. I had to come back to the net positive when I would get distracted, of saying: "Wow, that was an ugly fight they had in the union, and Cesar isn't perfect!" But I had to keep asking myself what is the net gain and the net story, and what can we learn? I also learned that we have unrealistic expectations of our leaders. We expect perfection.

We like to deify the people we follow. And then when they fail, we act as if we ourselves have been personally wronged by their humanity.

Exactly, and our expectation for perfection is unrealistic. It's an oversimplified narrative. And so I think it pointed out the frailty of our expectations for our leaders in that, you know, we expected Cesar to permanently solve the dilemma of farm workers, something that's been baked into our society and economy for decades, if not centuries. And because he didn't, some critics say he was a failure, you know. That's unrealistic.

What I mostly had to come back to was what I call the film's emotional core. That footage and the scene of Cesar breaking his fast reflects this incredible commitment of a man who had huge challenges leading a successful union, and made some tough decisions that fragmented the union and resulted in very bitter falling outs; but at the same time he led this unique movement that for a while was hugely successful and transformed the lives of farm workers primarily in California, and to a lesser degree Arizona and the Southwest. And by his doing so, he had these repercussions that inspired non-farm workers, too. They saw a man who looked like them and challenged the powerful political and economic structures around the agro-economy, and he won. I saw what he did to my dad's spirit. How my dad had a sense of dignity even though he was no longer working in the fields.

I'm going to change direction a bit. I'm curious to know – because you had access to these private videos that really created your documentary – how can we use technology today to document our stories, and how do we make sure that those materials get into the right hands?

It's fascinating because we live in an era where, you know, an iPhone can shoot broadcast-quality video. Cameras are more pervasive now than they've ever been in the history of civilization, and we're the most documented society ever. But our ability to be able to capture images and do some documentation doesn't mean you have the eye for meaning, if you will. Anybody can take a selfie, right? But can anybody see the significance beyond that socially validating experience of taking the selfie? People have to be tuned in to the story. You can conceivably shoot in prisons and places we didn't have access to before, and I've seen some amazing footage coming from a women's prison in Columbia where they have a beauty contest, you know, and all the preparations for it. So, on one hand, the tools are more available, but now what we have to think about is, how does the shot actually go beyond a selfie, a Snapchat, an interesting moment that may end up on social media, and construct a narrative that has meaning, can help us better understand our experience and can provide a form for passing along wisdom.

Currently, we see a lot of instability in the public discourse around civil rights and civil liberties. How can stories about real people's lived experience expose that breakdown? Does the individual story empower or does it marginalize?

I think that the individual story empowers so long as we're connecting it to a larger human narrative. The forces against social change, for example, want to isolate the Black Lives Matter movement, right? They say it's this group of angry, unjustified activists, when in

We live in an era where, you know, an iPhone can shoot broadcast-quality video. Cameras are more pervasive now than they've ever been in the history of civilization, and we're the most documented society ever. But our ability to be able to capture images and do some documentation doesn't mean you have the eye for meaning, if you will. Anybody can take a selfie, right?

reality, it's a national problem that affects all of us. And that, of course, all lives matter, but there's an epidemic that's eating at the core of who we are as a nation. Imagine the recent killings as—even in the best-case scenario—extrajudicial executions, if you will. The fact that what this movement is getting at is at the core of our Constitution. That's a national thing; that's not a black-white thing; that's an American thing. And so, when it comes to the individual story, the questions is, how does it connect to all of us, so that we're not different from the white voter in a Trump state? How do we connect with our common humanity and not come at it as adversaries? We're all Americans; we all want the same thing. We don't want to take something from you. I think that's how we make that connection around civility. And a lot of times it demands incredible patience. Because we may not hear what people who are not with us are saying. We may not want to feel it yet. I'll just use an example of maybe an archetypical Trump voter, a white working-class voter in middle-America. Sometimes our first response is: you're coming from a place of white privilege, and you don't know it. And they can feel that that's an assault. And they may not understand white privilege, and they may see that as a false accusation. So I think

that, first of all, we have to practice civility, and that means listening. It means feeling, and it means trying to identify. I think that's where it starts. And sure, it's sad that often it won't be reciprocated, but I guess that's when you take the high road.

Well, as we wrap this conversation up, it has been powerful, moving, and thought-provoking. Is there anything you would like our readers to know as your last reflection?

Well, I think we're living in very challenging times. And there are these sort of symptomatic things that are capturing headlines: Charlottesville, Ferguson, the deportation of the undocumented dreamers, the deportation of their parents, the rhetoric coming sadly out of Washington. In my adult lifetime—I was born in 1965—these are unique times. And they call for us to be engaged. Yesterday's keynote speaker Nubia Peña articulated the different roles we take. While we don't all have to be the person on the corner, you know, holding up a sign, there's a consequence for silence, a profound consequence for doing nothing. To do nothing is to be part of this corrosive track that we're on. And whether it's—I don't want to get too specific—choosing not to use a specific online service because of how they treat their workers, or not shopping at particular chains, or not staying at a particular hotel, we can make everyday decisions. That includes telling our friends when we're uncomfortable about how they're referring to some people. To remain silent is to be part of the problem.

I couldn't agree more that silence is being complicit in whatever happens to oppress people or continues to oppress people. To that end, thank you for being vocal and for sharing your stories, and for sharing the stories of those who are not here to tell them.

Yes, thank you, Adrienne.

Thank you very much for your time.



Adrienne Gillespie Andrews is the Assistant Vice President for Diversity and Chief Diversity Officer at Weber State University. She has two master's degrees and is completing a Ph.D. in Education Culture and Society at the University of Utah. An active speaker on social justice, consensus building, and collaborative partnerships, Andrews's research focuses on diversity initiatives and outcomes in higher education, diversity, and inclusion efforts in curriculum, and building effective campus and community partnerships with diversity and inclusion as their foundation.

SINGING THE UNSUNG, OR, RECORDING THE VOICES OF SILENCE—



A Conversation with **TYEHIMBA JESS**

SHERILYN FUHRIMAN OLSEN, WILLIAM POLLETT, COURTNEY CRAGGETT, AND ABRAHAM SMITH

INTRODUCTION

Poet Tyehimba Jess was born in Detroit, earned a BA from the University of Chicago and an MFA from New York University. He is the author of African American Pride *(2003), an inspirational study honoring the accomplishments of African-American men and women from the colonial period to the present day. He is also one of the most widely celebrated poets working in the contemporary United States. Jess was also a member of the renowned Chicago Green Mill Slam Team and has taught at several institutions including Juilliard, the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, and the College of Staten Island in New York City. His debut poetry collection* leadbelly *(2005) won the National Poetry Series award and was named one of the "Best Poetry Books of 2005" by the* Library Journal *and* Black Issues Book. *His second collection* Olio *(2016) earned The Midland Society Author's Award in Poetry, the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award, an Outstanding Contribution to Publishing Citation from the Black Caucus of the American Library Association, and, ultimately, a Pulitzer Prize.*

To talk with Tyehimba Jess about his work is to be lulled into a time where minstrel shows played on makeshift stages just outside of town, and ragtime pianists entertained in honkytonks for hours. The scope of his research, combined with his desire to introduce these largely unacknowledged entertainers to our era, prepares the stage for the show that is his poetry. At his readings, Jess urges audiences to not only read the texts in Olio *but manipulate its pages, folding them in and out, even ripping them from the spine. In this way, he showcases the multi-dimensionality of his writings while nodding to the same attribute in his subjects. Via this experiential method, black American entertainers from the late 19th and early 20th century come vividly to life.*

Jess works in partnership with his poems' subjects. Standing in as their talent agent for the 21st century, he illuminates the gifts of exploited yet successful musicians and entertainers who – working as they did in the era before sound recordings – would otherwise exist as muted ghosts on the margins of recorded history. While Jess's work exposes the racism of the past by subverting the oppression and abuse of his subjects through their artistic mastery, it also resounds with utmost relevancy in the socio-political climate of today's America.

True to its title, Olio *offers "a miscellaneous collection" of poetry forms including free verse, illustrations, prose vignettes, and his most ambitious work – masterful, syncopated sonnets. In fact, Jess dazzles most when he reads more variations than imaginable of poems such as "McKoy Twins Syncopated Star," hearkening back to the imagined performances of his poems' subjects. Left to right and vice versa, top to bottom and bottom to top, diagonally, and more – the lines interconnect with mathematical precision, while resonating with unheard-of musicality and sound.*

CONVERSATION

Olsen: If you had to quantify in percentages these four elements – research, craft, inspiration, and revision – how much would you say went into each when writing Olio*?*

You'd be tempted to say 25% each, but it would fluctuate depending on what was going on. In other words, there are times when I was completely involved with research, and that would mean not writing much—just hitting books and developing a library centered around creating this book. Trying to learn about opera terms, and what sculpture was like in the nineteenth century, and what were the medical procedures for facial disfigurement in World War I, and what were the names of burned churches. All of those things were research pieces, but then they would feed off into the idea of, well, who am I going to write about exactly, and how do I thematically approach each character, each historical figure, and how do I approximate their voice, and do I know where the poem is going to come in in their life. And that's about determining strategies for form and craft. There were many, many, many revisions. But there would be times when the inspiration would come in, and I'd say, okay, maybe I can do this, and then I'd attack it and try to make it happen. And then this way wouldn't work, and that way wouldn't work, and then I'd figure a way to actually satisfy both the poem individually and the story of each person in the book. So it was really kind of mixed up, but those are the four components. Research, inspiration, and, well, a lot of times I would come from reading other poets and figuring out how they're doing the marvelous things that they're doing—and I'd try to be inspired by that, and then the craft would take over as far as figuring out how to use form and create these forms, using contrapuntal form, trying to figure out how to make that happen, but also staying within the strictures of craft at the same time. And that's all craft work, I think. And then discovering new things within those forms that I hadn't really realized before. Now that's all craft work. So it all kind of went together. It's hard to say which one would win out or which one would get more percentage points. Ideally, form should fit function and function should fit form, so trying to strive for that yin and yang in the work is what I am going for.

Pollett: So that anti-gravitational approach – reading the text going up – would be in the craft in those different readings that you present at the end of the book. That's coming from the revision or going back over craft?

That was the result of a lot of experimentation and a little bit of an accident in the course of the experimentation, but I discovered the glitch and I made it kind of a feature, so to speak. But making it into a feature greatly complicated the whole scenario.

Pollett: You had me intrigued in talking about craft and your approach to the subject matter, but there at the end of the book you say, okay, it can also be read this way and that came about by accident –

Yeah, it was by accident, and it was just by . . . you know, being extremely obsessed with something. The appendix was put together at the very end of the book because it had to go through many, many revisions in order to follow the flow of the book, the tone of the book—there's a kind of a carnival barker quality to the introduction and the index.

Ideally, form should fit function and function should fit form, so trying to strive for that yin and yang in the work is what I am going for.

Craggett: So I'm coming at this from a fiction perspective, from thinking about accurately representing historical characters as we're rewriting their voices. How did you ensure that you were getting their voices right, or accurately representing them?

I don't know for sure. Really, it's a lot of guesswork, and that's where researching their lives came in; I was trying to approximate the way they must have felt about, for instance, all of these interview subjects—the way they might have felt about knowing Scott Joplin who, by the time he died, was kind of a raggedy leftover of the Ragtime Era. When he died he wasn't receiving a lot of acclaim. He was pretty quiet. He was pretty poor. People saw that he went out, but he had deteriorated over time because of his infection from syphilis. So in taking this proposition of someone going back and interviewing these people, I was researching—but then not all of these interviewees are real. Only, let's see, the piano player is real, Scott Joplin's wife is real. And Blind Boone is real. The other two are not real. So I did read up on those historical figures. But then it came down to trying to create a unique voice for each one. And I had some help there from Tayari Jones, who has actually just been nominated for a National Book Award. So I got some advice from her about creating conflict and how it creates a glimpse into the nature of the characters and their backstories. That's my first attempt at fiction for that sustained of a period. That took a lot. That was pretty scary, writing those.

Pollett: Tyehimba, can you tell us the difficulties with writing in so many voices and who still needs to be given a voice?

There were many, many stories I ran across while putting this book together that I could not fit in the book. I was interested in the story of black American music before the era of recording, before people could really put it on a platter and pass it to other people for them to hear.

Pollett: Like piano rolls, or before that?

Before—yeah, piano rolls really are a kind of audio recording—but I mean records. The record industry. I didn't really plan on delving that deeply into ragtime, but ragtime was inescapable at that time. I didn't really necessarily plan on exploring the minstrel show as much as I did, but that was paramount to the framing of black entertainment at the time. Or the lens through which blackness was viewed at that time. And so those questions led me into the exploration of these people. While researching their lives, I became a little pissed off that I didn't know who some of these people were. I didn't really know about Blind Boone; I didn't really know about Sissieretta Jones. I didn't know that much about the McKoy Twins. I didn't know the whole backstory with Henry Box Brown after he left the country and became an entertainer. It just seemed to me that they were fascinating stories, and I wanted to bring them from the nineteenth into the twenty-first century and to speak their names into a new generation. That was really my major drive. Nobody was paying attention to them, but they were there. There were these fantastic stories that happened right after Emancipation. And those are the dynamic stories we need to hear today. Their stories of resistance through finding an indestructibility in themselves that reaches into that creative flow that was denied and that was erased throughout the days of chattel

slavery. So it's like finding a population of people who are finding a new way, the ability to create for their own edification and their own profit at the same time. With *Olio*, I just caught a small smidgeon of all that energy being released across the country.

Smith: Y'all touched on it already, but I'll touch on it one more time, which is the appendix. The reader finishes and says, I've done it, I've finished this book. But in watching our WSU students finish Olio, *they were saying, Wait, I read it but I didn't* read *it. So the appendix produces an exciting circularity – a renewing energy or set of walking sticks for the reader to pick up and begin again, to re-see the thing again and for the first time.*

Yeah. Well, you know, I knew I needed to have some explanation for the contrapuntal poems and for the people to be able to tear them out of the book, and they needed the actual photographs for them to see how that works, and the book took seven years, and so I'm thinking about that all through the process, like, are people really going to understand how to manipulate this? Very very light paper engineering. And really the only thing that I thought would convince them is the actual photographs, and actually the index at first was much more meticulous and mechanical in its explanation.

Pollett: It's so poetic.

Yeah, well, I had to get rid of the mechanical engineering-esque language and replace it with a kind of a tone that matched the spirit of the book, which was "Step right up!," and with these kinds of rhymes which on any other occasion I would never do. And they fed into the idea for this carnival barker voice. Kind of just explaining duh duh duh duh, you do this and you do this and duh duh duh, prestidigitation, but that's how the index ended up looking the way it does. And I am glad that it provides an improvised opportunity to really go back and kind of explore the poems in a different way and then to actually tear them out of the book.

Smith: I asked the students, Are you going to do it, are you going to tear them out? And they said, I don't know, can we . . . ? (Laughs)

Olsen: Shifting gears, in what ways do you think your work, which is based on historical figures, advances the discourse of racism in America today, and how does it differ from other voices writing about race these days?

Well, I think that looking at these historical figures who are dealing with the specter of minstrelsy at a time when minstrelsy was really the number one element of American theater—looking at the ways they wrestled with preserving their humanity against that

While researching their lives, I became a little pissed off that I didn't know who some of these people were. I didn't really know about Blind Boone; I didn't really know about Sissieretta Jones. I didn't know that much about the McKoy Twins. I didn't know the whole backstory with Henry Box Brown after he left the country and became an entertainer. It just seemed to me that they were fascinating stories, and I wanted to bring them from the 19th into the 21st century and to speak their names into a new generation. That was really my major drive.

I think that looking at these historical figures who are dealing with the specter of minstrelsy at a time when minstrelsy was really the number one element of American theater – looking at the ways they wrestled with preserving their humanity against that kind of psychological warfare that was the minstrel show – is still worth looking at today because those tropes of minstrelsy still linger in many ways in the 21st century, waiting to ensnare our psyches and artistic endeavors.

kind of psychological warfare that was the minstrel show—is still worth looking at today because those tropes of minstrelsy still linger in many ways in the 21st century, waiting to ensnare our psyches and artistic endeavors. It's much more subtle, but it's still there, so I'm talking about some issues that happened in the 19th century, but they still are present. I also think these are folks in *Olio*—and I would say in *leadbelly* too—that had to deal with extreme levels of oppression but also were able to look inward and find sustenance within, and I think that's a timeless endeavor.

And so, for instance, one person I addressed directly in the canon is John Berryman. I wanted to bring that conversation about John Berryman to the forefront of our discussion of what really constitutes our poetic canon. Not that I, how should I say this, I don't have anything against John Berryman's writing in general, but I do have problems with his project *The Dream Songs* in the way that they take this engine of stereotypes and racial animus and degradation and use it to kind of pick the teeth of his midlife difficulties. You know what I'm saying? I had not really seen very much criticism of that particular stance. Not in journals, not in mainstream literature, and so I had to bring that discussion in the best way I knew how into what I think is fair ground because I'm much better at writing poetry than I am at writing essays. We have a lot of discussions about appropriation these days, and Berryman is not even really doing appropriation. What John Berryman did was more like appropriation of a kind of an African American imaginary that exists in the white American mind in order to plumb the midlife difficulties of a white college professor in 1963, '64, '65. And it's time to interrogate that. I think he says, "Let's interrogate that." Let's see what's underneath all that.

I also think there's another kind of parallel. When writing about history, I don't know that there's much of a direct address to today's current political crisis, but I see parallel lines. So, in the Black Lives Matter movement, there is the constant refrain, "say their names, say their names," and so while researching this book, the fact that I knew about black church burnings but did not know the names of the churches that had been burned occurred to me. It's one of those oversights. It's been there forever, but you just don't really think about it, and so gathering the names was not easy. I've since discovered that trying to do that could be its own PhD dissertation, just to discover the names of all of the black churches that had been burned in the United States, or even in one state, like Mississippi, or Ohio. I was able to do as many as I could and get them into this document here, and there's a kind of call

We have a lot of discussions about appropriation these days, and Berryman is not even really doing appropriation. What John Berryman did was more like appropriation of a kind of an African American imaginary that exists in the white American mind in order to plumb the midlife difficulties of a white college professor in 1963, '64, '65. And it's time to interrogate that.

and response between the idea of the destruction of black communities that has gone on historically and the way that kind of destruction is happening today. These are some of the ways *Olio* is trying to work with past, present, and possible futures.

Craggett: Related to that, what acts of justice or atonement do you think writing can offer to the past? Or specifically your own writing?

I attempt to address the idea of atonement, for one, by saying their names and, for two, trying to get these folks' stories straight. One of the reasons I wrote *leadbelly* was because I'd see people with poems out that were not historically accurate about Leadbelly, and that kind of pissed me off, you know, and with these folks in *Olio*, I knew I hadn't really heard of them and I didn't know what their stories were, and trying to reach back and humanize them and bring them into the 21st century is some kind of recompense. Some of the contrapuntal poems, made from two historical characters exchanging lines, is an attempt to give reciprocity. And when I attempt a contrapuntal poem that's slightly symmetrical, matching the words of, I don't know, one historical character against the imagined text of another, that too is an attempt to get that kind of reciprocity onto the page.

Pollett: So how can we continue to give voice to the victimized? Bring justice?

Well, you know I think that everybody's going to have their own pathway towards doing that. I tend to be drawn to historical tales. I'm more of a storyteller, so I still have interest in a lot of the figures that have been lost back around that time just before the Jazz Age. I see myself doing that again. I have some ideas of how that's going to happen. One of the efforts of the book is to realize these historical figures' humanity, beyond the idea of being victims, and to see them as people who reached past the idea of lack of agency toward the idea that they claimed their own agency. These were people who were able to take difficult situations and twist things out of them that they wouldn't have gotten before. Or bend things out of them that they wouldn't have gotten before. In the same way that they encounter the forms that they are in and bend the form in order to create something that did not exist before. The same way they took the music, the musical instruments they were given, and transformed the way they were played in order to sufficiently carry the voices, and the stories that came from that—those stories of victimization and those stories of oppression. So I think it's about the real idea of people who took control of their lives when almost everything in the world was saying they did not have control of their lives.

Smith: You've mentioned leadbelly *a couple times. Were there lessons you learned while imagining that book that you wished to carry forward or leave behind when writing* Olio*?*

Well, you know, I was a little scared of writing about music again, because I didn't want to get pigeonholed. I knew that I couldn't do contrapuntal poems the same way I did in *leadbelly*. I had to up the stakes. So that's why I went into form the way I did. And I knew it was going to be once again persona poems. The book wasn't planned from the beginning, there was no real plan for that book to get the way it looks. It kind of organically grew from an idea of, Okay, first I'm going to write about Blind Boone. Okay, done with Blind Boone, who's next? The McKoy Twins. And all of the elements of the book kind of came in as I went deeper and deeper into each one of the characters, and then it wasn't till the fifth year, fourth or fifth year, that I realized how the book was going to end.

Olsen: So how did you know how much to write about each figure, and when it was enough, and when did you think "I could use another thing here" or "There's one more piece of research that doesn't show up anywhere else"? How did you decide?

There were a few guiding principles. One was seven, so that really happened a lot because of a crown of sonnets. A royal crown has fifteen, but generally a crown has seven. So the first thing that was written as a series for the book was the Blind Tom crown of sonnets. That's seven, and then I did the syncopated sonnets, or the syncopated poems that come in between there, and so basically I ended up with fourteen, and that kind of ended up setting the max for how much I was going to spend on each of the people. So I tried to keep it close to seven most of the time. I wasn't able to do that entirely, but I tried to create sections that were seven or multiples of seven, and then that ended up being seven sections. And then there's seven sections surrounding those sections. Seven times seven is forty-nine, and forty-nine through fifty are the Jubilee years, and it ended up being finished in 2015, which is three Jubilees away from 1865. Yeah, so a lot of things kind of ended up being very incidental.

Olsen: It's a lot of arithmetic for a language guy.

Yeah, and I was also in a terrible math class all through high school. (Laughs)

Craggett: So what do you think the benefits are, particularly for this project, using poetic forms versus essay or novel or more traditional prose?

Well, speaking as a poet, we're always going to say that poetry is number one. But I do think that poetry is the building blocks and poetry is the martial art. It's one you do for the least amount of words for the most amount of energy. And in terms of using form, the good thing about form is that it lets you know when to start and when to stop and what's going to happen in between, and I needed some structure in order to make this happen. It also provided opportunities to stretch form out and give it a different voice than the way those instruments have traditionally been used. That's what I was looking into. The contrapuntal form also gave the opportunity to explore the trope of double consciousness that W.E.B. Dubois talked about in the ***The Souls of Black Folk***. And it's the idea of call and response. The idea of the book is about responding to the call of these lives of these historical figures, so that kind of fell in as well. But as far as form, I did not plan to write anything this formal at all. These are just the ideas that were there, and they really helped me get through and explore the subjects.

Pollett: I find when I'm reading, if the author is good, I can hear the author read to me, so to speak. With your work, I hear a chorus. It really is alive and I can't help

but think of the success of Hamilton *and the like. Do you see your work going to stage or screen?*

I'm trying to get a staged presentation of it right now. I'm working with somebody in New York, Janice Low, who's a very talented writer herself and a fantastic musician, so we're trying to get something happening, but it's like a whole different world. Writing is just you, and with this you have to work with a lot of other people. But we're trying to make some elements of that happen. I'm not exactly sure what it's going to look like, but hopefully we'll have it within the next year or so.

Pollett: I can't help but think that you've already got the soundtrack: just Joplin's work.

We're setting music to the McKoy twins and we'll see what else we can do, but it's a little weird because I have the idea for it but it's a lot harder translating it when it's a collaborative effort.

Smith: Wonderful. Where will you stage it?

Probably in New York somewhere. And we are going to do an Audible broadcast in December. It's going to be a live reading and a Q&A. We are hoping to take that energy and feed it into the idea of the contrapuntal parts of the book. And make it more performative with actors trading lines.

Craggett: I was thinking a lot when I was reading this, and now hearing about the stage version, of Lincoln in the Bardo *—*

There's a stage version of that now?

Craggett: It's in the works, yeah, and also there's the audiobook where they have multiple people performing it instead of just reading it.

Smith: So you cut your teeth back in the slam world, way back when. It's a place where both of us began, way back in the day.

Way back in the day. (Mimics old man)

Smith: You've got your cane out, right. (Laughs)

I can literally tell my freshmen, I was slamming before you were born.

Smith: What do you carry forward from those days? What lasts from that time in your life?

I learned a lot from slam. One of the main things I learned was to pay attention to the way people are listening. And when they're listening, and when they're not listening. If you don't have their attention in the first twenty seconds, you're pretty much done. So it made me pay attention to openings of poems, and how to keep people involved in the poem all the way through. On another level, I think Marc Smith is one of the unsung heroes of American poetry. You know Marc Smith, right? Marc Smith is the guy who invented slam, did it at Green Mill in Chicago. That's where I was on a slam team. He's still doing it today. You go there on a Sunday night. He'll be there, still being crotchety and dogged in his pursuit of the show. And the show is the slam. But look where slam is now and how many people it has drawn into the world of poetry. Look how slam poets have slowly infiltrated into academia and done all kinds of crazy stuff. Slam had a huge impact in terms of bringing back the idea that the poem isn't just something that you read dryly from a sanctified podium. It brought back a little bit of sweat into the idea that it behooves you and your poem to put some energy into it. Slam reminded people that poetry still belongs to the people—the people who are in bars and getting drunk.

Slam had a huge impact in terms of bringing back the idea that the poem isn't just something that you read dryly from a sanctified podium. It brought back a little bit of sweat into the idea that it behooves you and your poem to put some energy into it. Slam reminded people that poetry still belongs to the people – the people who are in bars and getting drunk.

Olsen: It can be a performance art and not just a literary art.

Performance art is not exactly the vibe in slam clubs; the vibe is more—well, it's changed now. I have to recognize that. It's a lot younger. In certain ways, particularly in regards to age, it's definitely not as diverse as it used to be. I think it's dominated today by mostly people under 25. But I think it's more along the lines of taking poetry off the high shelf and putting it on the bar shelf. Performance art tends to be associated with work that is not easily accessible, and accessibility is part of what slam did for poetry. It made, you know, a garbage man say, I can get up here. I can write something that's important to me, and I can move people in a crowd. Or whoever you are, you can get up there. Look at Patricia Smith, who came up though slam. She was a journalist and a hell of a columnist, but she came up through slam. She was a finalist for the Pulitzer last year, or look at Sam Sax. Great poet. He came up through slam. You could go on and on. Slam is a little less cerebral than the idea of performance art. It is a kind of performance art, but it's in a bar.

Pollett: Tyehimba, you were talking about the fiction elements of the interviews and the texts and the notes. With the interviewer, do you identify with a person collecting stories?

Probably more than anyone else in the book, yeah. I felt the other people's voices, but with the interviewer, this is a guy who is having a hard time accepting what happened to him in the war. He's having a hard time holding on to this notion of the music, which is similar to him holding on to this notion of what happened to his face. And so he's also really impacted by the loss of his family. His mother in particular. And he's searching for himself.

He was a Pullman porter, but he can't do that anymore. Now he's basically a fireman shoveling coal and he's going to crisscross the country, and he's really kind of searching for himself and he's really doing ethnomusicological research with no budget. No academic sponsors or anything like that. But he's actually based off of the first study of black music done by a black person in this country. And he's the guy it's named after. His name is Trotter. I think his name was Monroe Trotter. But Boone more or less did the same thing: he wrote about black positions across the country, but with no academic laurels; he just wanted to do it because he was documenting what his people were doing at the time. This guy's in that same vein. He's got a deep level of hurt and displacement, and he's trying to figure out where he is and who he is and what's going on after World War I. I think he's also dealing with a certain level of shellshock. Trying to adjust. And focusing on that project helps him adjust. It helps him concentrate.

Smith: And that's such a powerful moment at the end when darkness falls and he's comfortable taking off his mask in the sense that it's in doing the song that you do yourself. You know what I mean?

It's like, once he's in the song he knows Joplin in a way that tracking him across the country –

He's not going to know him like that. I mean, there were discoveries that happened while writing it that I didn't realize were going to happen. There were ways I realized that fiction can flow. There's all kind of things you can do that I wasn't able to do in a poem. You get all this space to move, but in some ways in a subtler way. And then seeing a character develop because at first he wasn't even there. At first it was just going to be the interviews, and he was really written around the interviews. First he was just some dude, and then I was like, why is this dude doing this? What is the point of him doing this? And when I started to ask this question, all kinds of things started to come into the mix. Who I wanted him to be and what I wanted his issues to be, and where he was from, and who his mama was and who his daddy was. It was a little slice of a backdrop of a story that hooks in with who was in *The Blue Front*. You remember in *Blue Front* that lynching in Cairo, Illinois? Cairo, Illinois, is basically the south.

Smith: Oh, deeper down. (Laughs)

(Laughs) Deeper down. It's like right where Mississippi, Illinois, and Arkansas meet. It's like right in the intersection between the Ohio and the Mississippi.

Smith: Thank you so much for your time.



Sherilyn Fuhriman Olsen is a graduate student in English at Weber State University and co-editor-in-chief of the journal *Segullah*. She is the author of *Searched the World Over for Elie: An International Adoption Story* and has published essays and poetry in various journals and publications.



William Pollett has studied education, folklore, and creativity at the graduate level and currently serves as the director for the Wasatch Range Writing Project. William teaches composition and song writing at Weber State University and has published poetry and short stories in *Petroglyph, Rough Draft, Street Magazine,* and *The Northern Utah Junction*. William is also the director and founder of the Free Academy for Creative Expression (FACE) and a founding member of the WRCNU (Wildlife Rehabilitation Center for Northern Utah).



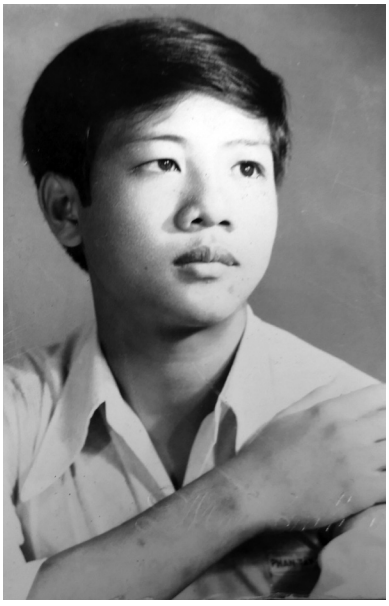
Courtney Craggett is the author of the story collection *Tornado Season* (Black Lawrence Press, 2019). Her writing appears in *The Pinch, Mid-American Review, Washington Square Review, CutBank*, and *Booth*, among others. She holds a PhD in creative writing and Mexican-American literature from the University of North Texas, where she served as the fiction editor for *American Literary Review*. She is an assistant professor of English at Weber State University.



Abraham Smith is the author of five poetry collections—most recently *Destruction of Man* (Third Man Books, 2018)—and the co-editor of *Hick Poetics* (Lost Roads Press, 2015), an anthology of contemporary rural American poetry and related essays. His creative work has been recognized with fellowships from the Fine Arts Work Center, Provincetown, MA, and the Alabama State Council on the Arts. He lives in Ogden, Utah, where he is assistant professor of English at Weber State University.

THOÁT KHỎI VIỆT NAM ĐỂ TÌM TỰ DO Ở HOA KỲ

ESCAPING VIETNAM AND FINDING REFUGE IN THE UNITED STATES—



Paul Dinh in April 1975, age 16, one week before the fall of Saigon. Photo courtesy Paul Dinh.

A Conversation with
PAUL DINH

MICHAEL WUTZ

I was privileged to meet Paul Dinh in Huế, the former capital of Vietnam and the city close to the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) during the Vietnam War, in March 2018. Paul escaped Vietnam as a teenager in April 1975 on the proverbial "last boat," and he was on his first visit back to his home country since his hasty departure 43 years ago. He kindly agreed to an interview via phone upon his return to the United States, his present home, which details the milestones of his and his family's perilous journey: his memories of the final months of the war; the political situation in Vietnam at the time; his family's fortuitous escape and journey across the Pacific; their warm reception in the United States; and his first reunion with his family members left behind in Vietnam almost half a century later. Paul, in that sense, is a witness to two ends of a fluid historical spectrum: the escape of the first wave of Vietnamese survivors, before the mass exodus of an estimated 2 million refugees collectively known as the "boat people," between 1975-1995; and the transformation of a war-torn country into a thriving regional economy.

The interview has been edited for length and clarity. I want to thank Paul for his time and generosity and the photographs accompanying this conversation.

Paul, thank you so much for agreeing to this interview. Well, to get the lay of the land, so to speak: could you tell us something about where were you born, about your hometown and your region, and what your childhood was like? Any particular childhood memories of growing up in Vietnam that still stick with you?

I might go back a little bit further so you know the story of our family, why our parents were willing to take the risk and come to the United States. My whole family—my parents, my ancestors—were born and raised in North Vietnam in a small village northwest of Hanoi. That village is now a part of Hanoi because they expanded the city after the war. My parents and my whole family were Catholic, and in those days, in 1940, when the Communist Party came into power because of World War II, the Japanese beat up on the French and took control of all of Indochina. And so, in '45, when Japan lost World War II, there was a power vacuum in Vietnam. The Communist military and Party took control of North Vietnam, most of it. So from 1945 to 1954, my parents lived under Communist rule in North Vietnam.

And that was as Catholics?

Yes, as Catholics. Historically in Vietnam Catholics and Communists don't get along. The reason was that Communists were atheists, and the Catholic Church in Vietnam—even though their numbers were small—was a strong, united people. You have to understand, too, that Catholics believe that there's no god but one god. So from 1945 to 1954 my parents lived under Communist rule and knew there would be no freedom of religion, no human rights, no freedom of speech.

And this also was when the capital had been moved from Huế to Hanoi just then.

Yes, at that time the capital, and the king, was still in Huế, but it was still under the colonial rule of the French. Hanoi at that time was not the capital. The government was still in Huế, and under French rule, but when the Communists took power, they set up the capital in Hanoi. In 1945 when they took over North Vietnam, the French came back. Remember that the French lost power to the Japanese in 1940, but when Japan surrendered and lost World War II, France came back and tried to re-establish the colony.

And with you and your family being Catholic, the Communists would associate that automatically with French rule, and your loyalty to French rule.

Exactly. When French and Spanish missionaries came to Vietnam in the 1700s, they taught Catholicism to my Vietnamese ancestors. That's how the Vietnamese converted to Catholicism. And when the French came back in 1945, they tried to re-establish their colony in Indochina. And what the French called the Indochina War, the Vietcong, the Communists, called the French War. The rest of the Vietnamese nationalists called it the Independent War.[1] At that time several Vietnamese factions were trying to gain independence for the country, but the Communist Party was the most powerful one because they got a lot of direct support from Communist China. The Communist Party became the dominant power, and from 1945-1954 there was a war between the Communist military and the French.

Would it have been easier for you and your family if you had lived in South Vietnam?

[1] Also known as the First Indochina War—followed by the Second Indochina War, commonly known as the Vietnam War (1955-1975)—the French War lasted until 1954, when French troops were forced out of the country by the Communist Viet Minh, who fought their occupier with military support from China and the Soviet Union. In 1946, with the help of British forces, the French initially re-established colonial rule over Vietnam and made a return of their former colony a condition for their membership in the NATO alliance opposing a feared Soviet expansion.

It would have been better for them at that time. Our whole village was Catholic, and for us—there were a lot of nationalist Vietnamese—we believed that to be independent we would be better off not being under Communist rule. We would be better off having help from the United States to set up an independent Vietnam. When the Communists won the war in 1954, however, they beat the French in a last fight at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu, which led to the Geneva Conference and Peace Accords among the United States, China, the Soviet Union, the U.K., North Vietnam, and France. The agreement divided Vietnam into two parts, the north and the south, right at the 17th parallel, which is probably about fifty miles north of Huế. The north at that time was totally under Communist rule [the Viet Minh] and would be a democratic republic, and the south at that time did not have a strong government.[2] The south, with the help of the United States and the United Nations, established a new government. So during that time, after the peace agreements were signed, there was a period that allowed people in Vietnam to migrate to wherever they wanted to go. If you were from the north, but didn't like the Communists, you could move to the south. Practically my whole village, and much of the North Vietnam Catholic church, immigrated to South Vietnam.

Thank you for this useful background. Any particular childhood memories that still stick with you that you think our readers would like to know about?

When you go to North Vietnam and talk to people, they say there are two big historical migrations in Vietnam. The first one was in 1954, when more than a million people migrated from the north to the south, and the majority of those were Catholic. When my family came to the south, the government helped us to establish our own town, which we named Xóm Mới, meaning "new village," about ten kilometers west of Saigon. (It's now a part of the Gò Vấp district.) It was on empty land, farmland and wooded land. And when they established the village, there were twelve Catholic parishes. I was born and raised in South Vietnam in 1961 and grew up in that northern Vietnamese Catholic community in Xóm Mới. I went to a school for northern Vietnamese students—we were all speaking Vietnamese with a northern accent. I would say that 98 percent of us had a Catholic background, so we had our own school and our own churches and were strong supporters of the anti-Communist South Vietnamese government. When I was growing up, my parents were often talking about the day when peace would come to Vietnam, the day that they would be able



Vietnam after the Geneva Accords, 1954. Photo courtesy alphahistory.com

[2] The southern zone was to be governed by the non-Communist State of Vietnam then headed by former emperor Bảo Đại. Following the partition, the Accords allowed for a 300-day grace period during which people could freely move between North and South Vietnam before the border was sealed. The Conference Final Declaration stipulated that a general election be held by July 1956 to create a unified Vietnamese state. Even though the State of Vietnam and the United States participated during negotiations, the Accords were not directly signed onto nor accepted by their delegates.

to return to Hanoi. Even when they were talking about peace, they were talking about peace with freedom. They meant that when the South won the war and peace reunited the whole country under democratic rule, they'd be able to go back to visit Hanoi freely. It didn't happen.

No, it didn't happen.

Because I was born into a northern Catholic Vietnamese immigrant family, I was strongly influenced by their anti-Communist views. All my educators were from the north, so we learned a lot about the history of Vietnam—more about patriotic history—and about Catholicism. We went to church two times a day, at least, in the early morning and evening. And on the weekends, we would go three times a day.

I was raised Catholic as well and was an altar boy. So I had to go to church most mornings.

My parents kept telling me to join the altar boys, and I got out of it because altar boys during my time had to learn Latin. (Laughs)

If you permit me to jump forward: could you briefly describe how you remember the situation in the final days of the "American War," as it is commonly referred to in Vietnam? What were things on the ground like for a South Vietnamese family (and a sixteen-year-old panicked boy) as the Vietcong were closing in on Saigon?

I have to go back a little before I answer the question, to 1968, the Tet Offensive. You heard about that, right?

Yes, I am familiar with it. Vietnam had just commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of the Offensive when we met in Huế.

The 1968 Tet Offensive was worse than in 1975, especially in my hometown, because it was a surprise attack and because the Communist soldiers actually came into my village. I saw them. I was terrified. The first day of New Year was supposed to be a happy day. I woke up, and I saw my mom was crying; it wasn't good news. Later I found out that the Communist soldiers were almost at every corner of my hometown, which was just a few kilometers west of Saigon. They were already there, trying to patrol the town. Two days later there was a big battle in my town and my parents' house burned down.[3]

The 1968 Tet Offensive was worse than in 1975, especially in my hometown, because it was a surprise attack and because the Communist soldiers actually came into my village. I saw them. I was terrified. The first day of New Year was supposed to be a happy day. I woke up, and I saw my mom was crying; it wasn't good news. Later I found out that the Communist soldiers were almost at every corner of my hometown, which was just a few kilometers west of Saigon. They were already there, trying to patrol the town. Two days later there was a big battle in my town and my parents' house burned down.

[3] In late January 1968, during the lunar new year (or "Tet") holiday, North Vietnamese and Vietcong forces launched a surprise attack against targets in South Vietnam. Traditionally a time of peace and family gatherings, the increased traffic on roadways and trains provided cover for the troop movements of South Vietnamese National Liberation Forces (NLF), who supported the Communist war effort. Eventually, over a roughly eight-month period, the U.S. and South Vietnamese militaries repelled the assault, but not before sustaining heavy losses. The Offensive played a crucial role in weakening U.S. public support for the war in Vietnam.

Seven years later, because of the Tet Offensive, the South Vietnamese government and military established more checkpoints and more controls outside Saigon. In '75, during the last days of Saigon, my hometown was quiet. We saw a lot of bombing, a lot of shelling north and east of us, but we didn't see any actual fighting, because they learned from 1968, and my hometown was protected by those checkpoints. My hometown was right next to the Saigon airport, and the U.S. and South Vietnamese Air Force, so they had to protect that.

About two weeks before the last day of Saigon, in 1975, there was news that the towns north of Saigon and farther north were falling into the hands of Communists. From the radio and TV, we heard that the Communists were moving toward Saigon. Saigon and the south of Vietnam were still very strongly under the control of the South Vietnamese government, and we were still told that there was no way we would lose the war because U.S. military support made the South Vietnam army a lot stronger than the North Vietnamese military. Later on we learned that, because a South Vietnamese general had made some tactical errors—he decided to withdraw some of his troops from central Vietnam and withdrew them too quickly—that created chaos and panic. The South Vietnamese could not establish the defense around Saigon to stop the advance of the Communists.

My oldest brother was a young officer in the South Vietnamese Navy, and he came home and told us—this was maybe two weeks before the last day of Saigon—that the Navy would transport the military and their family members to Cā Mâu, the southernmost part of Vietnam, and there they would establish a new capital and a strong point of defense if for some reason Saigon fell to the Communists. He told us to keep it a secret because otherwise it would create another panic. He said to be ready just in case we needed to evacuate. So during those two weeks, we saw a lot of bombing and shelling around Saigon, and then the last week it got close and we heard more shelling in Saigon and especially near the airport. The shelling put the airport out of commission, and then the U.S. State Department evacuated a lot of Vietnamese who were working directly for the U.S., so that created another panic. When the U.S. evacuates people, things are getting close, right? But among the families in our neighborhood, we believed that we could defend South Vietnam. Many of the generals came on TV and the radio and said they would stay and fight to the last bullet to defend Saigon. And then two days before the fall of Saigon, those generals started to disappear, even though they told the soldiers to stay and fight.

Given that back history, what, in the final analysis, made you decide to escape by boat? That couldn't have been an entirely spontaneous or easy decision, though it must have been quite quick. Are there any trigger moments that clinched that resolve for you? That escape saved your life and offered you a new beginning, but it was also potentially life-threatening, right?

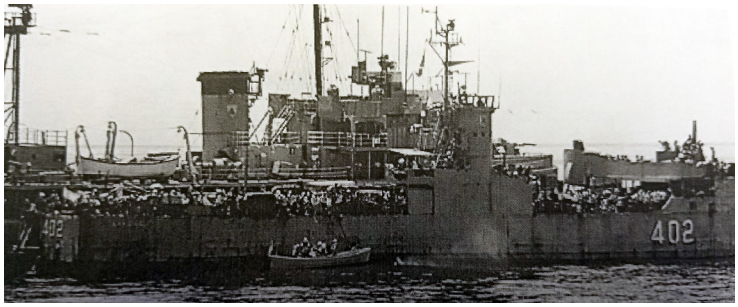
Yeah. Well, my brother was in the Navy headquarters right by the Saigon River, which has now become a tourist area. During the last few days, there was martial law, and no movement from 6 pm to 6 am. During those days nobody had a telephone, so the only way for him to let us know was to come home, but he couldn't. On the night of April 29, the night before the last day, the South Vietnamese Navy evacuated many of their people on the Saigon River out to Cā Mâu. My brother knew they were moving, but he could not come home to tell us. The morning of April 30 was a beautiful, sunny day. I was outside watching the sky over the Saigon airport, and watching the bombings and the fight around Saigon, when the then-

president of South Vietnam, Dương Văn Minh , came on the radio and surrendered unconditionally to the North Vietnamese Communists.

At that moment, my parents said we had to go, even though my brother wasn't home. What my brother did tell us was that we would need to go to the Saigon River to the headquarters where the Navy ships were. Well, my brother-in-law owned a Lambro 550 three-wheeler and transported goods from town to town to support his family. He took us to the Saigon River where this one ship (HQ-402) was, with many people going on and coming off. A Navy officer there kept telling us that this ship wouldn't go anywhere. It had been there for six months for maintenance; one of its engines had already been removed. My parents decided to get on the ship and stay on the ship, regardless. In the meantime, when the president had surrendered, my brother had returned home on a motorcycle and been told by our neighbors that we had already left, so he rode his motorcycle back to the Navy headquarters and met us at the ship. He had been stationed on an identical ship, and together with the many mechanics and military there they worked and got one of the engines going.

The ship was packed with people, and there was a Catholic priest leading people saying the rosary prayers. We believed that there would be a 90 percent chance that we would all die on this ship. If anyone didn't want to take the risk, they'd better get off, and many people did. My parents decided to stay. There were three Americans in civilian clothes. We were so happy that we had Americans on the boat, thinking that maybe they could help us if we got the boat into international waters. Because they were American, the officers hid them in the control room and asked them to man the radio. They made contact with the U.S. 7th Fleet and got aid, so they did help us.

Right at that time, the Communist tanks moved into Saigon, and one of the tanks was pointing their big gun at us. They asked where the ship was going. The officer on the ship told them that the ship was broken and that they would have to move it to the other side to create room for other ships to come in. The Navy officer told us to stay below. Everyone was in the hull, so the Communists could not see us. We had the white flag up, and all the guns were pointing down, so it looked like the ship was not doing anything. The tank commander said, "Go ahead and go," and we slowly moved away from the port into the river. Our ship had only one engine and could not go straight, and almost hit the dock. I was sitting at the very front and could see how it kept going zigzag, zigzag. (Laughs) It took almost fifteen hours to get out of the river and into the ocean. Along the way, a small Communist boat with machine guns was chasing after us. We were far away from the dock when the Navy officer manned the anti-aircraft gun at the point of the ship. I was right there, and he told me to load the ammo. And then, when we pointed the gun at the boat, it just moved away.



Refugee transport off the coast of Vietnam, May 1975. Photo courtesy www.historynet.com.

That's quite a story, Paul. It sounds like a real-life thriller.

When we got to international waters, we knew that we had almost made it. It took about two days and two nights to get to

Côn Sơn, which is an island near the southern tip of Vietnam. The U.S. 7th Fleet was out there waiting for Vietnamese ships; the night before, many Vietnamese ships had moved out there already. (Later I learned that the Pentagon did not want the ships of the South Vietnamese Navy—which were among the most powerful in Southeast Asia at the time—to fall into the hands of the Communists, which didn't have a Navy, and so they thought it would be easy to evacuate the ships.) When we saw the U.S. 7th Fleet, everyone was so happy. We were crying. We were safe and free and alive. Our ship wasn't in a condition to go any farther. After our rendezvous with the 7th Fleet, we started to get supplies right away, and then about two days later the Fleet commanders decided that the ship was no longer seaworthy. It would slow the whole convoy down. By then, the U.S. 7th Fleet had many small southern Vietnamese ships following it from Vietnam to Subic Bay in the Philippines. They decided for us to transfer to another ship, which you can see in the photo. That took about two days. There were two Vietnamese ships that still had room, and we would walk the plank from one ship to another.

My family got to transfer onto the second ship that still had room. It was HQ 6, and "HQ" stands for the Vietnamese word *Hải quân*, which means South Vietnam Navy. So it is Navy 6. When we transferred, there was a little boy and his father. The boy was maybe about eight to ten years old. He was in front of me. When it was their turn to cross the plank—and they were right in the middle of the plank—the waves knocked the ship such that the plank was moved back and forth, and up and down, and the little boy fell into the water between the two ships. I saw him disappear right away. The Navy officer was there helping, and held the father down because he was ready to jump in. If he jumped, of course, he would have died, too, because the two ships were right next to each other in the open water, and they were moving up and down, and back and forth, and created a big vortex in the middle.

What a heart-wrenching moment.

When I crossed, I got across okay, but when my youngest brother, who was about eight years old, did, my father had him hold onto his back. He was like a monkey on my father's back when they crossed. My goodness! When I look back now, I think that, somehow, everything worked out just right for my whole family to get out of Vietnam. If we left earlier, we would probably have gotten shot at by either side, because there was a lot of fighting in Saigon at that time. After the president had declared surrender, we moved—during that hour nobody was in control, but there was no fighting. When my family left our home to go to the Navy port in Saigon, there was no shooting. There

When I look back now, I think that, somehow, everything worked out just right for my whole family to get out of Vietnam. If we left earlier, we would probably have gotten shot at by either side, because there was a lot of fighting in Saigon at that time. After the president had declared surrender, we moved—during that hour nobody was in control, but there was no fighting. When my family left our home to go to the Navy port in Saigon, there was no shooting. There was chaos, there were people everywhere—South Vietnamese military running everywhere, trying to go home, North Vietnamese communists coming in. So it was a paradoxically peaceful moment.

was chaos, there were people everywhere—South Vietnamese military running everywhere, trying to go home, North Vietnamese communists coming in. So it was a paradoxically peaceful moment.

It was just the right time window for you.

That's right. That window opened because of the ship, and many people already on the ship left because it was broken, which made more room for my family to get on. Also, because of my parents' resolve that we would live or die as a whole family and that they did not want to live under the Communists, they decided to stay on that ship, and because that ship was broken, that's how my brother came home and still had time to make it back to the ship.

It was very fortunate that you and your family were able to leave right when they were willing to do so. As you are looking back on your life during these most trying of times—and having just come back from Vietnam—how do you "live" with those memories? Do recollections of that sort trigger traumatic memories and cause you emotional and mental distress?

The memories I still have to this day seem to me as if they happened just yesterday. My memories are about the good times that I had in my school or with my friends, my classmates and family. I did not have any traumatic memories in the war. I was growing up as a boy during the war. All the boys were trained and taught by male teachers. By the time I got to high school, my teachers were military officers. The officers who had a college degree had gone to school to train us to eventually become the next generation of leaders. I was prepared to become a military officer. I studied hard so I would be able to get into the military academy. I was sixteen years old. If the war had lasted one year longer, that would be my age to join the military. I prepared for all the fighting be-

My memories are about the good times that I had in my school or with my friends, my classmates and family. I did not have any traumatic memories in the war. I was growing up as a boy during the war. All the boys were trained and taught by male teachers. By the time I got to high school, my teachers were military officers. The officers who had a college degree had gone to school to train us to eventually become the next generation of leaders. I was prepared to become a military officer. I prepared for all the fighting because in 1968, as a young boy, I saw my parents' house burn down. We saw people get shot and killed, and that strengthened my resolve. So the memories that I made during the last few days of Saigon—even though I saw people dying, lying in the streets—for some reason did not create traumatic memories for me. My memories were more of the good times that I had growing up in my hometown, and how well the U.S. 7th Fleet and the American people treated us once we got to America.

cause in 1968, as a young boy, I saw my parents' house burn down. We saw people get shot and killed, and that strengthened my resolve. So the memories that I had during the last few days of Saigon—even though I saw people dying, lying in the streets—for some reason did not create traumatic

memories for me. My memories were more of the good times that I had growing up in my hometown, and how well the U.S. 7th Fleet and the American people treated us once we got to America. So it was good times, rather than traumatic memories.

It must be a mental relief to be able to remember the good times rather than the bad times. As I'm thinking about your story, it seems your brother preceded you in terms of having undergone the same training. He already had a military career, and you would have followed suit.

That's right. Because my brother was an officer, I was prepared to follow him. But because my brother had experiences with the war, his memories are more traumatic. I've been living in the United States for forty-three years now, and almost every day, especially during the first ten years, I had this dream about seeing my classmates in my high school. I would wake up in the middle of the night and had dreamed that I was back in my high school in Vietnam. We had final exams and I thought, "Oh, I've been in America for the last two months; I haven't done my homework." (Laughs) Many times I would wake up thinking, "I wasn't prepared for the final exam because I was in America." The final exam was so important because at the time I wanted to become a military officer.

In many South Asian countries, not just Vietnam, but also China and Korea, those final exams are still critically important these days. They can make or break your career. Now, Paul, thinking back on your new life in the United States, how, when, and where did you arrive? Any first or second impressions that still stick with you? Any American customs, say, that you were surprised by? How did you learn English?

We followed the U.S. 7th Fleet into Subic Bay in the Philippines, and from there they transferred all of us onto two big cargo ships, which were loaded with people. We crossed the Pacific Ocean from the Philippines to Guam Island. On the U.S. Naval Base there, they set up a refugee camp. I began living the American Dream right after I got off the boat. It was in the middle of the night, and the American Red Cross and the people of Guam lined up on both sides and handed out water, cookies, and everything to welcome us. Then we went into the refugee camp. The camp was basically an old U.S. Air Force airfield. They set up a lot of canvas military tents, and they had running water—hot water, cold water, running water, water ready to drink. I hadn't showered in two weeks, and this was the first shower I ever had under running water. We had meals three times a day: breakfast, lunch, and dinner. All day we were at the swimming pool, right on the ocean. It was like paradise—nothing to worry about. And anything we'd need—clothing, blankets—they had that available from the American people and from the Red Cross and the Catholic Church and the U.S.

I began living the American Dream right after I got off the boat. It was in the middle of the night, and the American Red Cross and the people of Guam lined up on both sides and handed out water, cookies, and everything to welcome us . . . . All day we were at the swimming pool, right on the ocean. It was like paradise—nothing to worry about. And every night they showed a movie on the beach . . . . Every few days there was a band that would come in and play for us. They'd play rock and roll, and the dancers wore bikinis. We never saw that in Vietnam when I was growing up!

Government. And every night they showed a movie on the beach, and we were free to move around. We saw a lot of burned-out bunkers and tanks and jeeps and guns left over from World War II. Every few days there was a band that would come in and play for us. They'd play rock and roll, and the dancers wore bikinis. We never saw that in Vietnam when I was growing up! I was sixteen years old. (Laughs)

The veterans who returned to the U.S. were often received poorly. Many were traumatized by the war, and traumatized further by their (non-)homecoming. Their poor reception back in the United States is legendary, and perhaps a mark of the country's own trauma after having lost a war to and in a country that was thought to be an easy enemy, at least initially. How do you remember your own and the "Boat People's" reception in the United States? Did it differ from the way returning soldiers were received?

Well, the first thing I experienced was in Guam. From there, they moved us to another refugee camp in Fort Chaffee, Arkansas. It was an old military barracks. There were almost fifty thousand of us. Every day the farmers and the people in town would drive their pickup trucks along the fences, and they would give us watermelon or fresh fruit over the fence. Then the Catholic Church in Flint, Michigan, sponsored our family because my parents signed up for Catholic community sponsorship, so we moved to Flint and the people there were so gentle and so generous. Our whole experience was good; we did not experience anything like prejudice in Michigan. However, I heard that Vietnamese refugees who moved to Louisiana experienced a lot of anti-immigration rhetoric from people there. That's what I heard from the Vietnamese who were in Louisiana. But in Michigan, in general, we didn't experience any of that anti-immigrant or anti-Vietnamese rhetoric during my time.

They sent me to a Catholic school, which was nice, because later I found out that the public school in Flint wasn't too orderly. Lots of gangs and drug dealing. I didn't have to worry about gangs or people picking on us or bullying us. Myself and my brothers, we all went to Catholic high school. I had gotten to learn English in high school in Vietnam, so when I came to the United States I was able to speak English a little and could carry on a conversation, which was helpful. But when I was in high school here, the first two years were a lot of work. I had to carry a dictionary with me everywhere because there were technical words I didn't know, so I had to refer to my dictionary. The easy classes were math, chemistry and physics; they were easy because of the numbers. The classes that were difficult for me were the ones that used lots of English: biology, American history, those were tough and time-consuming. And by the time I went to college, my English was a lot better. I finished my chemical engineering degree summa cum laude in three years, instead of four.

That's most impressive. Now, you just mentioned some of that anti-immigrant feeling in Louisiana. I understand that the shrimp industry in Louisiana is very much in control of the Vietnamese people who relocated there. That was part of their skill set, and I wonder if that resentment against them was because local Louisianans feared that they'd be losing their jobs.

That was one of the main reasons, I think, because the Vietnamese who relocated to Louisiana were from fishing villages in Vietnam. They had been fishing for generations. So when they moved to Louisiana, they settled in the community doing the same thing: fishing. The Vietnamese work so hard and are willing to do dirty jobs, all the things that the Americans there didn't want to do, and that created the perception among the locals that their jobs might be in danger.

We were very much impressed by the work ethic of the Vietnamese people we encountered. Now, Paul, you just recently returned from your first trip to Vietnam since you left forty-three years ago. How have you been able to stay in touch with your family left behind all these years, beginning with the Communist takeover in the 1970s, in the days before the internet and with limited phone and postal service, and the digital world of today?

Our family members knew that we had left, but they didn't know that we were still alive. They thought we were buried under the water somewhere, because in the first five years the Communists put a tight control on Vietnam. There was no news going out and no news coming in. After that, my parents started to write letters, but they didn't send them directly to Vietnam. They sent them to a friend in France, who then sent them on to Saigon. During the war, France had stayed neutral and had an embassy in Vietnam, so any letter coming from France to Vietnam was okay. Eventually, my uncle sent a letter confirming that they knew we were alive and in America. We were so happy, and started to communicate that way. Later on, Canada was allowed to send and ship goods and letters to Vietnam, so every few months, my parents would send packages and letters from there. We'd drive over to Windsor, Canada, and send something back to my uncle and my cousin. That was what we did until the internet came. Now in Vietnam everyone uses the internet and everyone has a cell phone; now we use that to talk to my family. So basically for the first ten years, from 1975 to 1985, we had to go through France, and then we had to go through Canada, and then later on we could communicate directly.

Vietnam certainly has an excellent digital infrastructure, and that's something you mentioned right away when we met in Huế.

If I did not see Ho Chi Minh pictures or the Communist Party flag, I would not be able to say that Saigon is in a Communist country.

Are there other observations now that you've been back, in terms of the country's transformation, its economic boom and such?

My goodness! Vietnam now is practically a thousand times better than when I was there. The Saigon of my childhood was a small town. There was a lot of farmland and trees in the areas surrounding my hometown, and now it's all developed. There's lots of buildings and roads. And downtown Saigon, near the river, it's almost like New York's Times Square. I went to Times Square in New York last summer, and this summer we went to Times Square in Saigon. I did not see any sign of unorderly behavior. I call it an orderly chaotic city, in a good way. If I did not see Ho Chi Minh pictures or the Communist Party flag, I would not be able to say that Saigon is in a Communist country.

We too couldn't help but notice the elegant architecture and the urban infrastructure. Maybe those Communists are very pragmatic. They're, sort of, red capitalists and, like China, have successfully merged one-party leadership with free-market economics.

When I visited my hometown, all the churches were a lot bigger and better and newer. I went to mass on Easter Sunday, and the church was packed. So, from that point of view, Vietnam now is a lot better off than when I was there. But when I talked to my uncle, he said that it's gotten a lot better only within the last five years. The first ten years, from 1975 to 1985, there was a lot of near-starvation. It was that bad. Then, in 1985, and especially around 1990, they

started to open the country to trade internationally, and Vietnam became a lot better.

Was it, perhaps, after President Clinton lifted the U.S. trade embargo against Vietnam, in February 1994, that the opening occurred?

Yes, I think right at that time is when they started to open up and establish diplomatic relations. It really opened up the country.

One mark of a country's cohesion is the increasing political and cultural reunion the way we witness it also gradually in, say, Germany. That's where I come from. How did you observe that merging of the, then, pro-Communist North with the pro-western South? Is that North-South division still palpable today?

I spent four or five days in Hanoi and got to talk to a lot of northern Vietnamese people. They were wondering why I was speaking in a northern accent. (Laughs) The people in the North are so happy now that there is no more war. They look at the war as a war between two different ideologies and have no bad feelings about the people in the South. And when I went to South Vietnam and talked with the people born and raised there, they too were happy that there's no war now and that the country is united. The one complaint I heard—the most I heard from either side—was of high-level Communist corruption. Essentially, the high-level Communist government is supposed to share power with people from the South, but the majority of important positions were in the hands of the officials from the North. And the people from the South only got the low positions.

A lot of documentaries about Vietnam tend to present the war from a western or U.S. point of view. I'm wondering whether some of those representations you've seen in terms of films, documentaries, or books have been true to your family's experience. Do they sufficiently acknowledge the immigrants caught in the turmoil of warfare and escape? Do you know of stories that are not in wide circulation?

There's one book I read—*A Vietcong Memoir* by Trương Như Tảng (*Hồi ký của một Việt Cộng*).

Project Yellow Dress (http://www.projectyellowdress.com/) aims to highlight the experiences of the Vietnamese "Boat People," which is in many ways as yet unwritten or not really acknowledged sufficiently in U.S. and global history. I see our conversation as making a contribution to that (what in effect is an) archive. What, in your view, should go into its collection of narratives that you have not seen as being sufficiently recorded?

I will need to look at that site to be more specific, Michael. But here's the thing: From 1975 to 1985, I would say 1 million more people left Vietnam. That's the story of the Boat People. But because we were the first



Paul (far left) and his classmates in 1975 shortly before his escape from Vietnam. Photo courtesy Paul Dinh.

wave, and got picked up by the U.S. 7th Fleet, we did not have to experience all the burdens and trauma that Boat People had after us. In 1975-1985, when the country was on the brink of starvation, the majority of the people in Vietnam wanted to leave the country. There were many high-ranking Communist officers also leaving at that time. Those are the people that got into a lot of trouble because, when they reached the ocean, they got mugged, they got raped by pirates, and some of them never made it. And some got lucky and came to America or France, Australia or Canada, or many European countries. After the first wave, all the people afterwards ran into a lot of hardship.

Let me conclude with more of a personal question, Paul. I cannot imagine what it must be like to reunite with your relatives after forty-three years. For you, not having physically seen and touched your relatives, and your home country, for almost half a century, that must have been an extraordinary emotional experience. Any moments you would be prepared to share with us?

Yes. As soon as I landed in Hanoi, I got to see my country. Every morning when I woke up I just wanted to walk around and see the country. When I got back to Saigon, it was the same thing. So I stayed in the hotel right in my hometown, Xóm Mới (which is now ten times bigger than it used to be), within walking distance to my family's house. I surprised my uncle. I looked on Google maps and still remembered the main roads and some of the dirt roads that have become paved roads. So I just followed that to my family's house. God—we were so happy! My uncle could not recognize me, but my cousin, who was my former classmate, recognized me right away. So we had a really nice, emotional reunion.

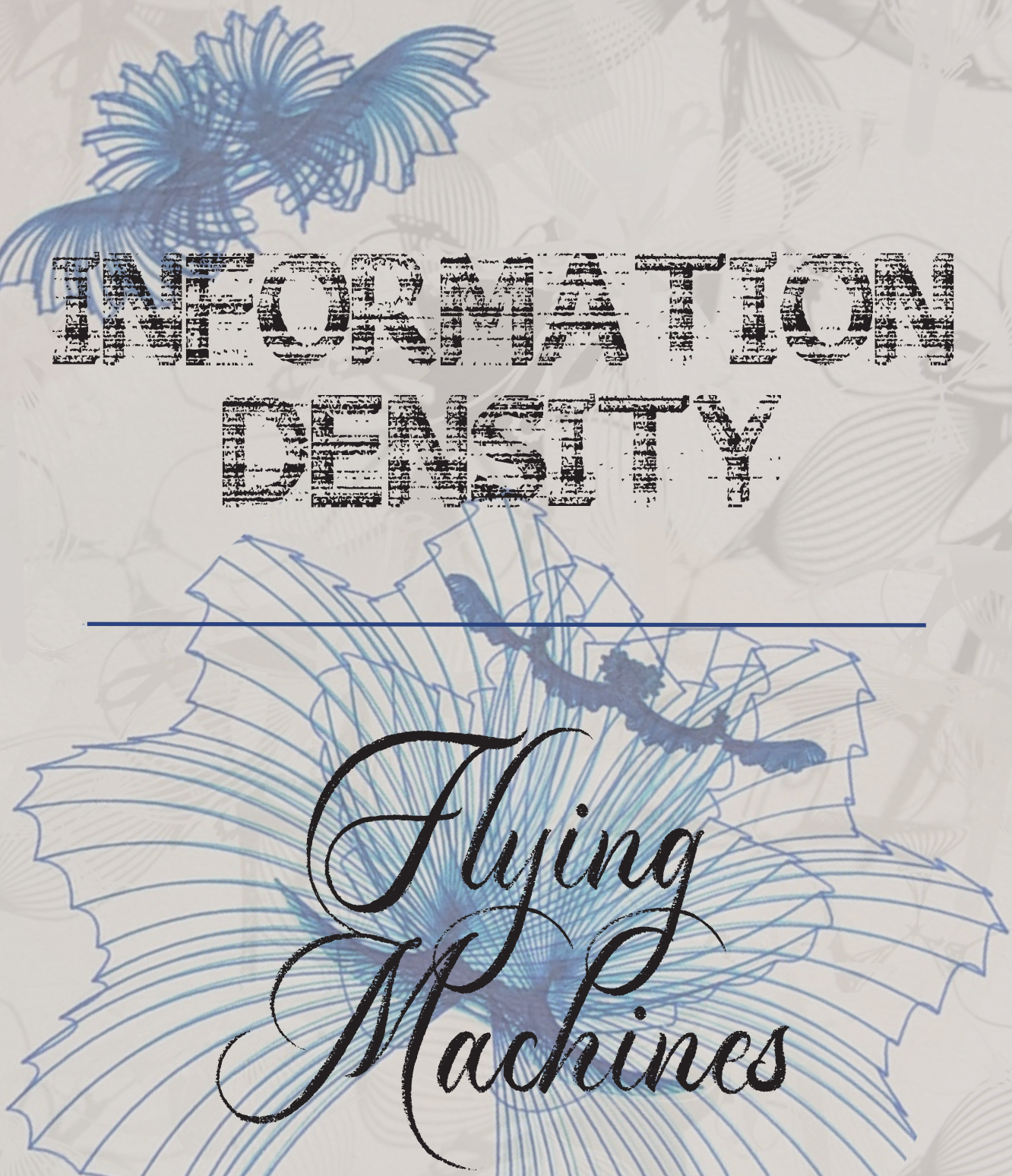
Many of my classmates could not recognize me either, but I brought a picture of my classmates that I had with me. I showed it to them and said, "Hey, I'm looking for this friend." And then, through my classmates, I found that this friend was able to get forty of my classmates together for a reunion. Back then, I was a class president, so all my classmates still remembered my name. They showed up for my class reunion to meet me.

Thank you so much for your time, Paul, and this unique insight into your extraordinary life story.



Michael Wutz (Ph.D., Emory University) is Rodney H. Brady Presidential Distinguished Professor in the Department of English at Weber State University and the editor of *Weber*. He has published in the fields of American literature, media studies, science, and the humanities. He is currently at work on a volume of original essays entitled *E. L. Doctorow, A Reconsideration* (co-edited with Julian Murphet, forthcoming from Edinburgh, 2019), and an edition of original essays by Friedrich Kittler entitled *Operation Valhalla* (co-edited with Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Ilinca Iurascu, forthcoming from Duke, 2020).

INFORMATION DENSITY



MOLLY MORIN

Information Density presents weightlifting movements, equipment, and competition results through felt sculpture, data visualization, performative drawing, and digital fabrication.

While maintaining fuzzy borders between information, mark-making, visualization and metaphor, this project addresses the sport of weightlifting as a practice in which fleshy, complicated, physical bodies are intimately connected to data sets and analysis.



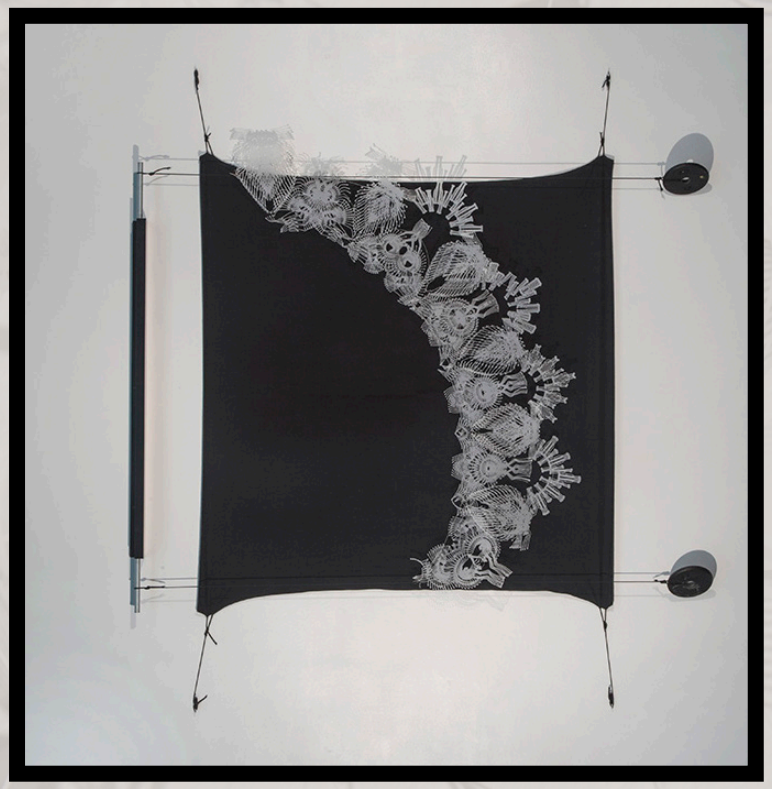


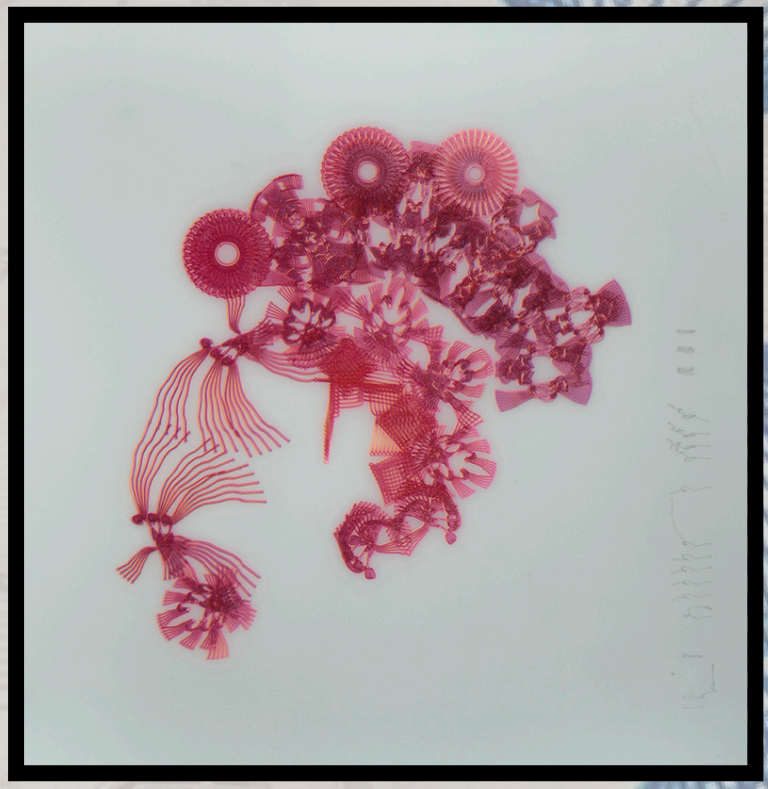
3 x 10, wool felt, steel dumbbell handle, 2019, installation view with *Training Days* drawings (photo courtesy Utah Museum of Contemporary Art).



Training Day, Audrey, motion capture of a weightlifter training, machine drawing, pigment ink on mylar, 2017.

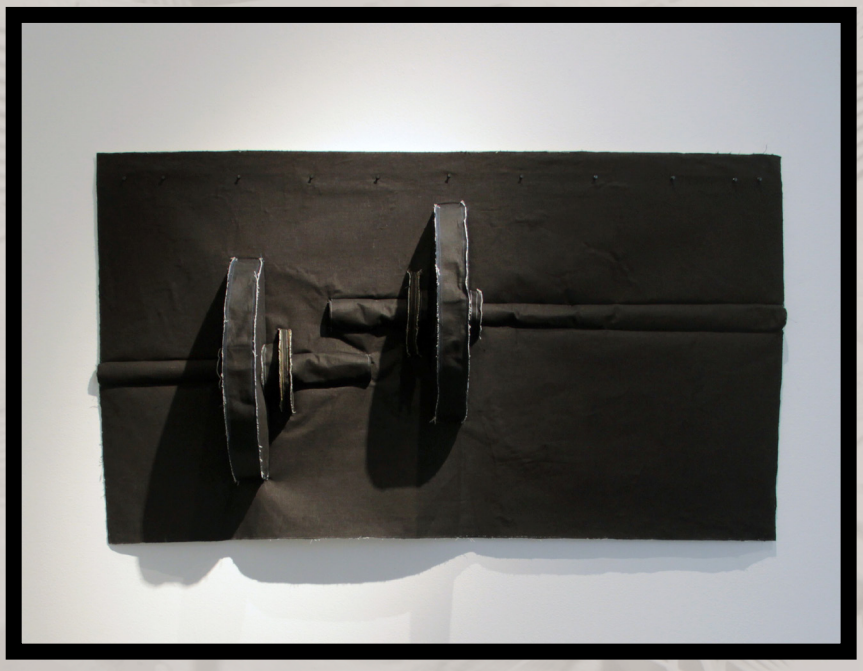
(Top) *Training Day, Audrey,* motion capture of Audrey training, potter cut mylar, linen, iron plates, 2017; (Bottom) *Training Day, Molly,* motion capture of the artist training, machine drawing, pigment ink on mylar, 2017.









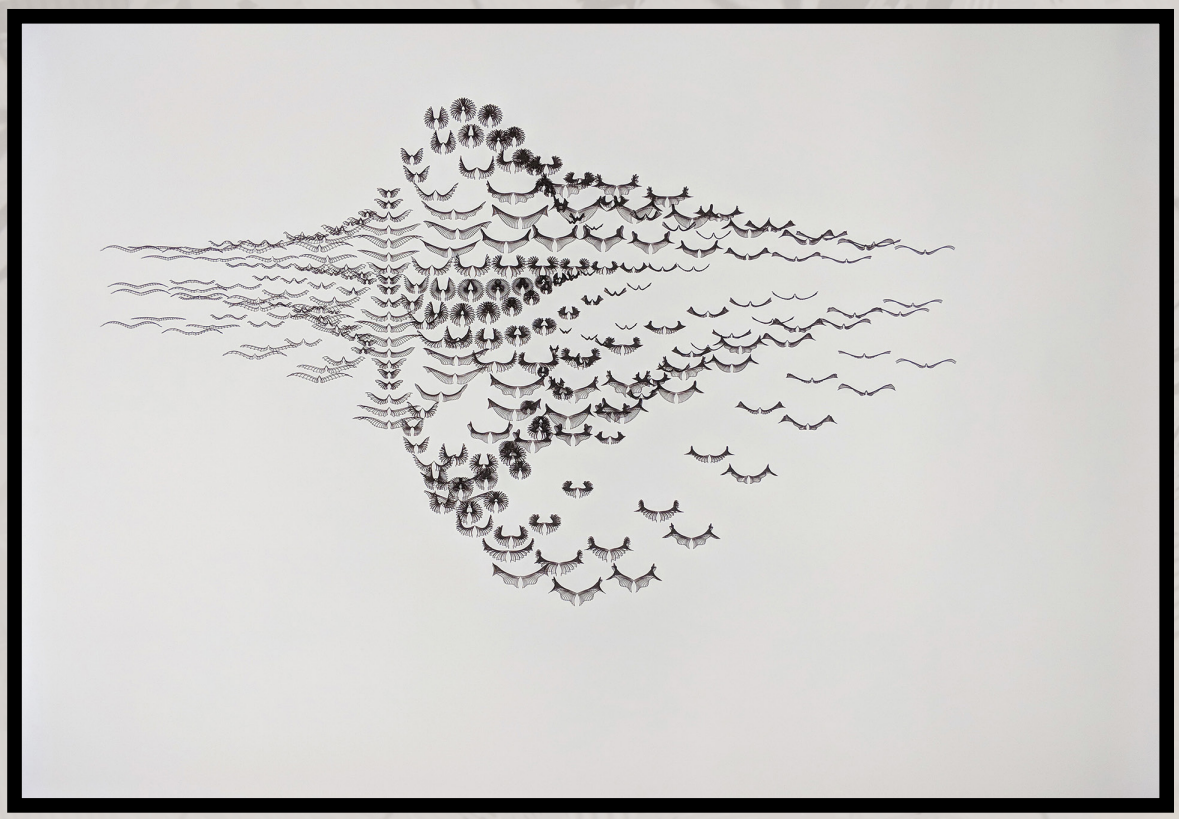


(Top left) *2 x 15*, wool felt, iron dumbbell, 2018; (Top right) *Change,* wool felt, quarter, 2018; (Bottom) *63k,* linen and cotton, 2017, as installed at Mary Elizabeth Dee Shaw Gallery.

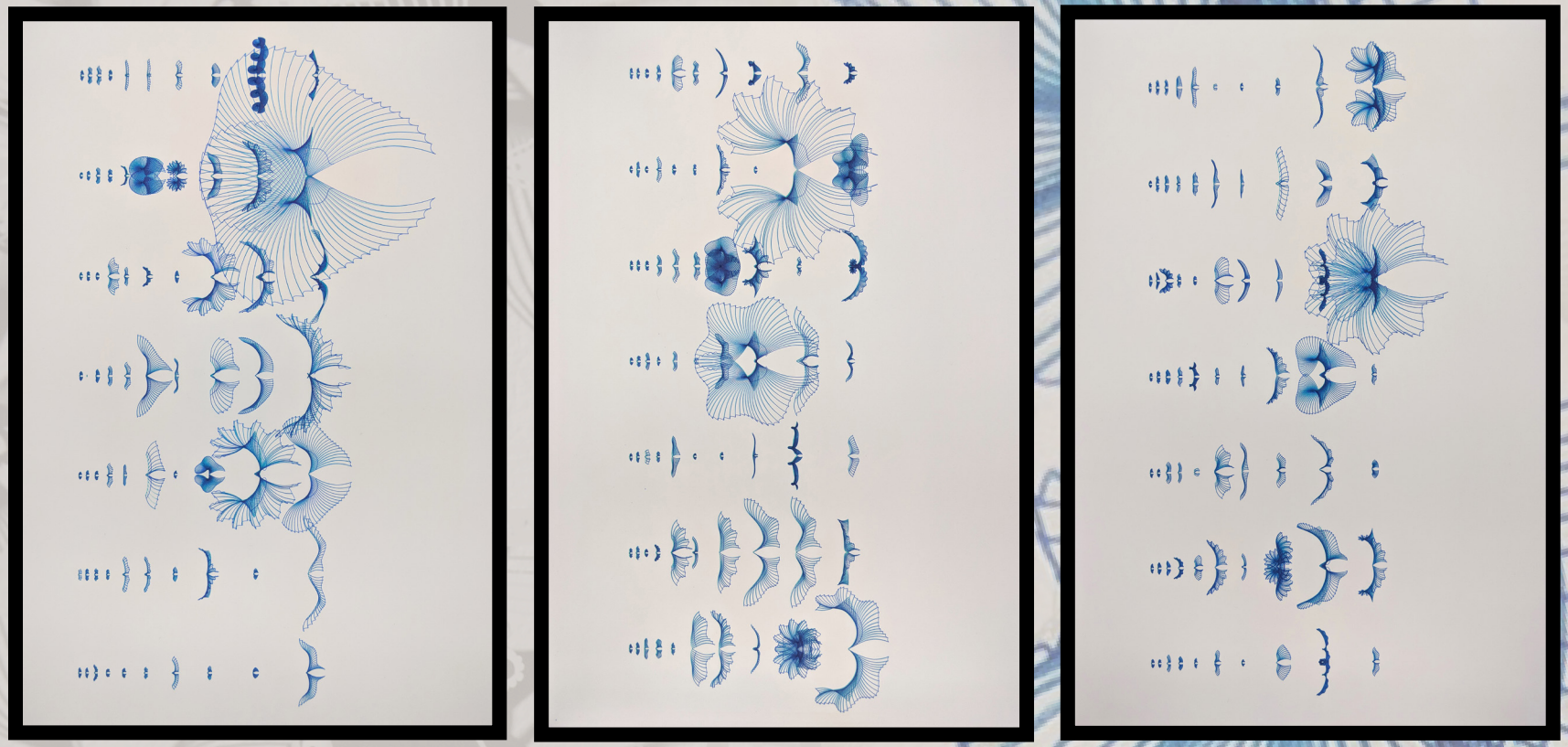


Information Density, as installed at UMOCA (photo courtesy UMOCA).

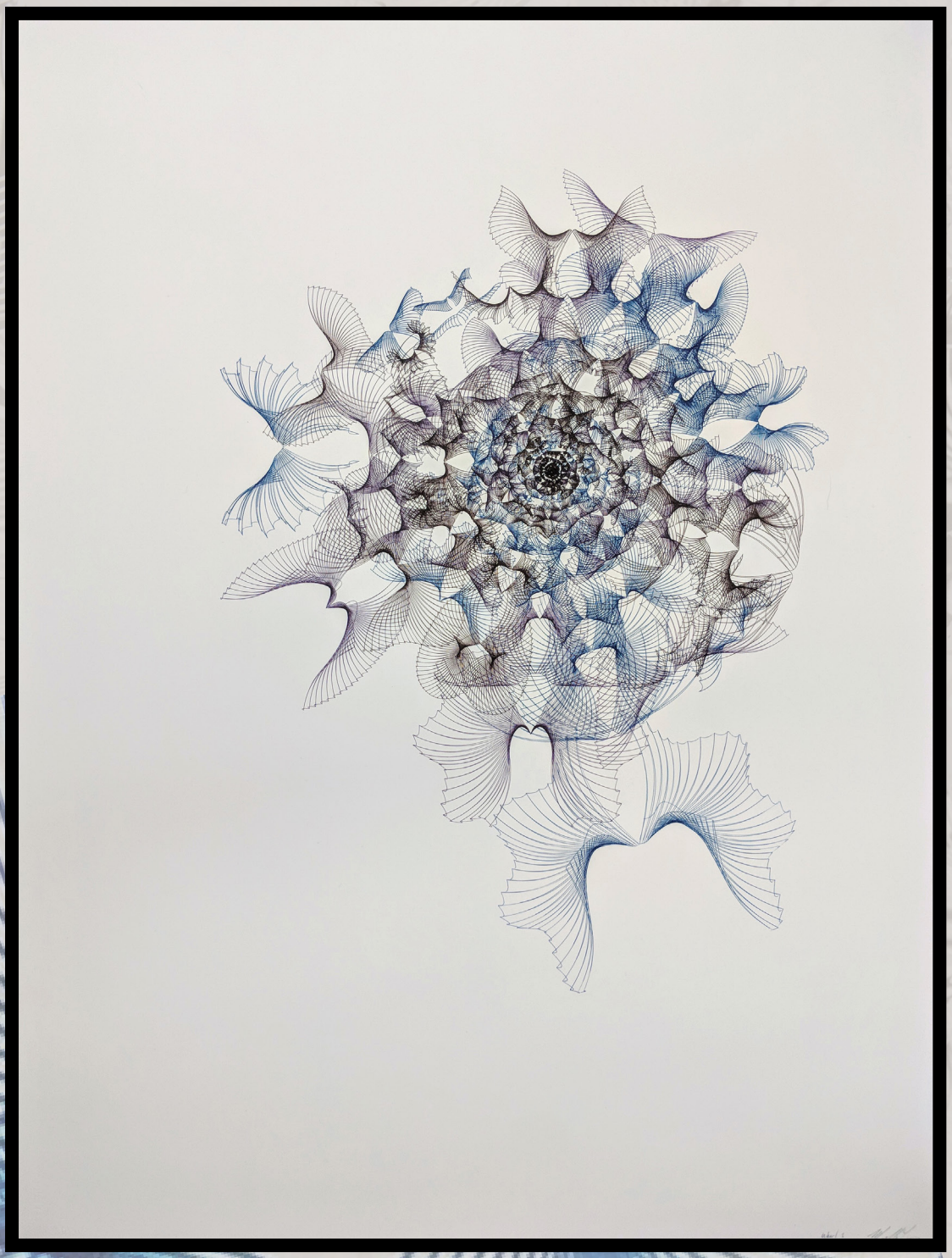
Flying Machines is an iterative computer program that generates endless variations on a wing form within a given set of parameters. The original structure of the wing is drawn from a Leonardo da Vinci flying machine sketch.



Flying Machines: Field 1, **code-generated plotter drawing in pigment ink on cotton rag, 2018.**

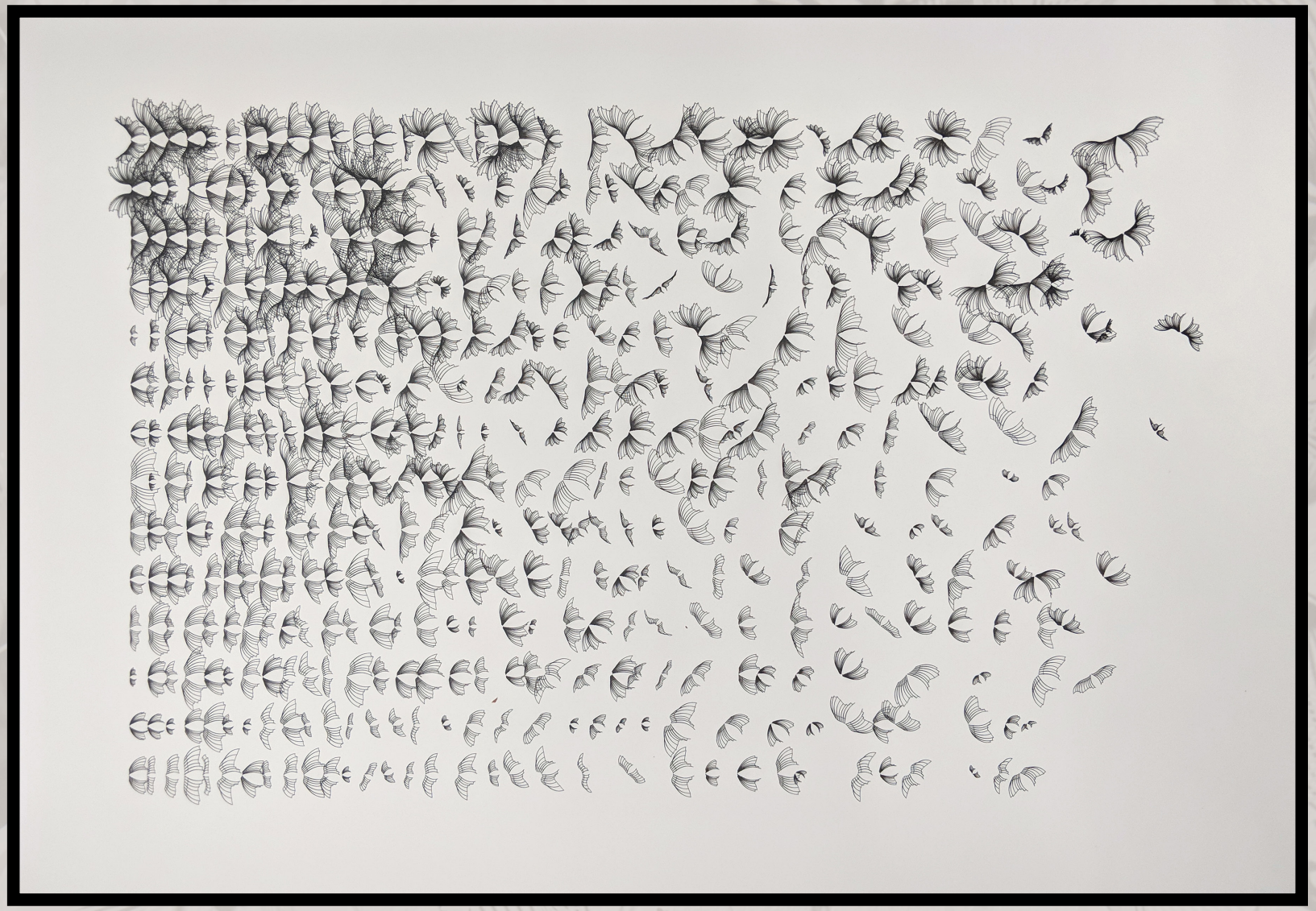


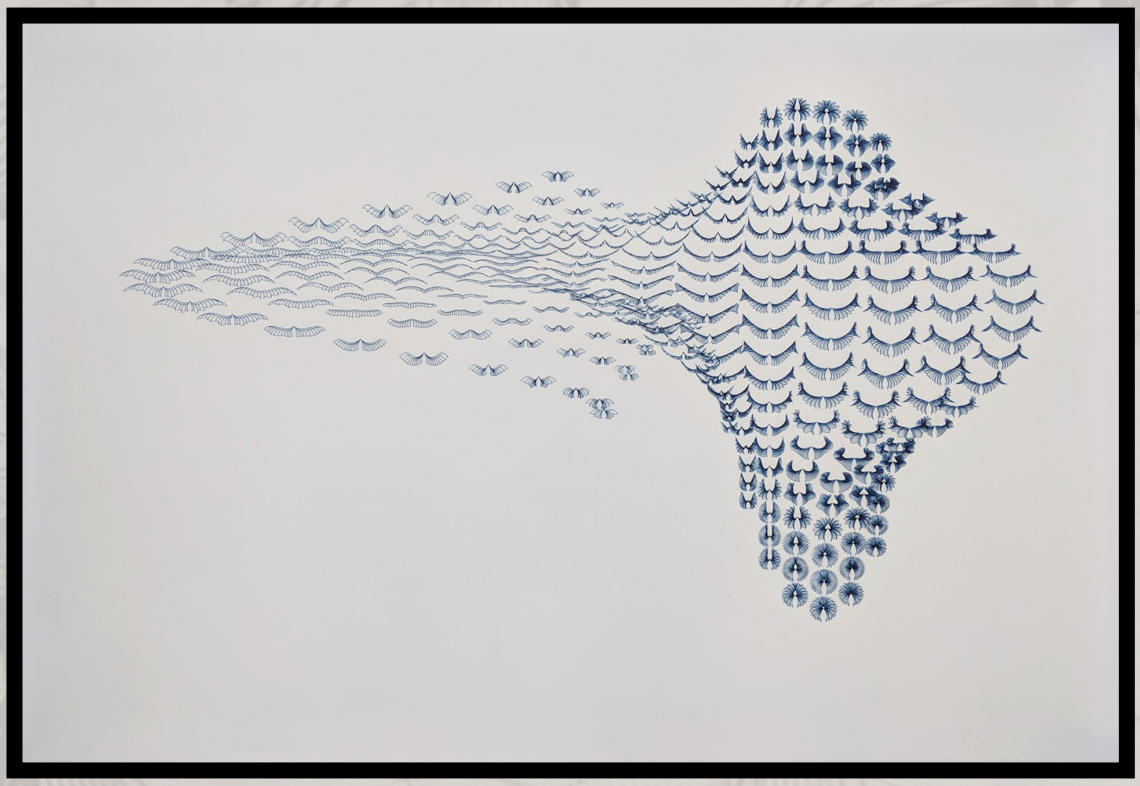
Flying Machines: Mutants, 2,4,5, code-generated plotter drawings in pigment ink on cotton rag, 2018



Flying Machines: Whorl 1, code-generated plotter drawing in pigment ink on cotton rag, 2018.

Flying Machines: Array 3, code-generated plotter drawing in pigment ink on cotton rag, 2018.





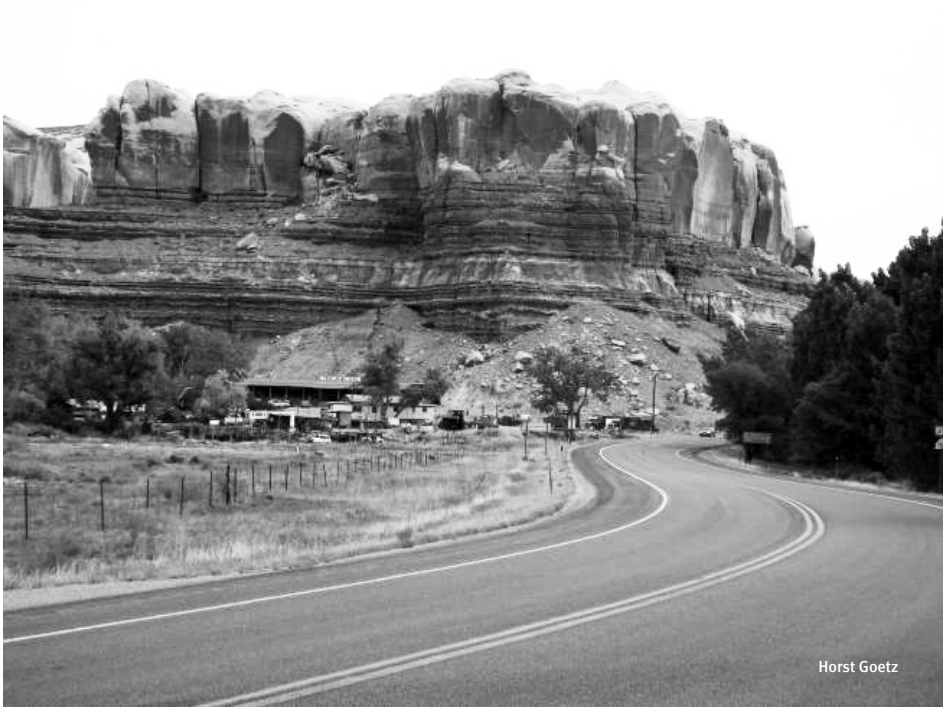
***Flying Machines: Field 3*, code-generated plotter drawing in pigment ink on cotton rag, 2018.**

Molly Morin makes material representations of information through generative drawing, soft sculpture, and digital fabrication. Through her creative practice, she develops critical and poetic approaches to making art with digital tools. Her projects investigate the embodiment of data in ways that nuance and challenge data's perceived purity as a means for communicating truth, and presumed authority for describing phenomena. While diverse in subject matter, the works included here address ideas about gravity and weightlessness and tease out ways in which bodies of information draw from and go on to shape material bodies.

Molly Morin is an artist working at the intersection of digital and analog practices. Prior to joining the faculty at Weber State University, she taught as adjunct faculty at Clemson University and Tri-county Technical College, as a visiting assistant professor at The University of Notre Dame, and as an assistant professor at Millsaps College in Jackson, MS. She has been awarded numerous grants and has presented work at venues including the Society for Literature, Science and the Arts (2013), The Collaboratory at UC Santa Barbara (2017), and the Association for Computers and the Humanities. She has exhibited at venues including the South Bend Museum of Art and the Utah Museum of Contemporary Art, and looks forward to an upcoming exhibition at Dartmouth College.

Matt Daly

Buddy's Drinking Hand



Didn't know I was missing one
'til after. Not when I woke up in a ditch,
spinning wheels, shattered glass, little rocks. Not
when I crawled off in the red clay wash, looked
up through the animal night at stars chucked
across the sky. Not even after I woke up again,
head caught between chunks of sandstone
and the splitting maul of the sun. Wasn't
'til I made it over to Bev's (was it Bertie's?)
that I saw what I'd done.

Past what should have been
lunchtime, when those rotten bluff sides go
flat bright, whoever it was creaked hinges
on the screen door, taped over with a split
grocery sack to stop some wind, looked straight
down to my side, *Where's your goddamn finger,*
Buddy? Got it in that pocket? Never get that

bloodstain out now, Buddy. It's all soaked in.
Then the other one started in, *Saw cop lights*
a while after you left us. Knew it'd be you, Buddy.
Should have listened. Should have stayed put.
Then me, *Can't change what's done, ladies.*
That finger's long gone now.
Swear I still feel it grip the side
of one of those cold bottles Bev probably still
swings down the bar. Haven't been in to see her
in more months than I want to count. Never did
hold Bertie's hand in her bright metal bed
or go see her in her grave.

Buddy Has Words with Skylar

"You look like your mother," I tell him
whenever I see him up here or down lower
by the KOA. "What's it to you, bud?" Not knowing
he uses my name. "There's nothing to it," I want to say
to him but never do, "Not a goddamn thing to it.
Just an observation I thought you might like,
you stupid son-of-a-bitch."
But I do not say that or anything more
than, "Never mind." I just like to think of her
when I see him, thought he might want to think of her.
"Well, bud, you look like a fucking raven
with that shiny can gripped in your claw."
Him sitting there on a cement table at the rest stop
across the parking lot from the diversion dam.
"You're right about that, boy," I say
as I take a long pull from the can. "Who you calling boy?"
He goes red. So I fix him with that black-eyed stare
I learned from Russ but folks in town think must
be on account of something Indian. "You, boy,
that's what I'm calling you." Before the evening
gets away from us, the highway patrol cruiser
swoops in black and chases us both away.
I feel like I run into him less and less
since those others showed up around the campground
since it got too wild down there for me. My stump
finger aches whenever I do see him. Every time,
I think of her when I see him.

Dirt Holds the Bones
(Buddy Read *Sometimes a Great Notion*)

I remember reading that story
while my stub healed up, getting used to getting by
with one less. The book, by that acid trip guy
with the bus, about those loggers, whole family
up in the rain northwest of here. Old man loses
his arm somehow.

Remember him dangling it out
the window, flipping the bird across that swollen
current churning against the foundation of the house
they tried to keep together against everything
carried by the water and everything else.

Whole story starts with that dead arm
flipping off the world. I stole the library copy.
Thought I'd find acid trips, hippy girls, free love,
all of it. Just that arm sticks with me now.

My finger is out there somewhere
by the red clay wash on that sharp bend, just bones,
like a little line of white rocks. Not hanging
from nothing, no house, no big bend in no big river
to wash its hanging place away. Still pointing
at all the people on the road.

Big rivers must wash all the bones,
each and every one, all the way to the ocean.
Out here, dirt holds the bones. Each white line
points to some memory or to something lost.
Mine is out there telling whoever finds it
just how I have felt all along.



Matt Daly is the author of *Between Here and Home* (Unsolicited Press) and the chapbook *Red State* (Seven Kitchens Press). The three poems here are included in *Between Here and Home*. Matt is the recipient of a Neltje Blanchan Award for writing inspired by the natural world and a Creative Writing Fellowship in Poetry from the Wyoming Arts Council. His poems have appeared in *Pilgrimage*, *The Cortland Review*, and *High Desert Journal* as well as the Sixteen Rivers Press anthology *America, We Call Your Name*. Matt makes text-based art independently and in collaboration with visual, performing, and literary artists.

George Moore

Iceland

for Martin Gren



We slip into the warm phase.
It's a cliché to say that ice melts.

We stand on the edge of your porch
and believe nothing exists beyond

the edge of the earth, a wet wound.
We do all we can to suture it up.

But the enemies of the earth
are its stases. A kind of thinking

that everything comes around.
Light loses its suddenness by dawn,

all night washed in ice blue.
Isolation here means something else.

The sole stone outcrop Gaelic monks
found escaping their crowded coast.

A holy truth encased in perennial ice,
on a word forged in Viking iron

sunk in cottongrass pastures, until
seeds burst open in foreign mouths.

Now, cured in chalk and slate time,
farms spot the mouth of fjords.

The scientists conduct themselves
like mice, and the island is overrun.

But you lose yourself in wine
above a pasture, watching a flying horse.

Already, it seems the valley has succumbed,
but I walk the scree, setting signal fires.

In North Country Fire Haze

Saskatchewan

Sunblaze rose simmers
on the horizon, detaches itself
from the cause, the destruction,
somewhere near Smoothstone Lake
or Lac La Rouge, and beauty
grows deeper even here,
against that natural inclination.
The aftereffect of carelessness;
a spark enhanced by accident.
Perhaps a campfire gone rogue,
wind feathering dead coals
to live again. Or a lightning strike.

Up beyond where the fighters
can drop, somewhere before the line
of tundra. Scarlet sky-set dusts
to deeper, cadmium orange
with touches of a sere yellow
and splashes of magenta.
Who's to say this is bestial,
atrocious? The destruction like
that of an entire planet? Who set
this sky on me with its bloodlines
and scars of sacred thorns?
A warm spring evening,
treetops toasted in a blind eye,
a spectral edge of conflagration,
in a dire trace of its light. And now,
the senses swim through trees
ablaze, objects reflect, twin light
detaches and gathers on the page.
The better artist would pull
beauty from the flames.



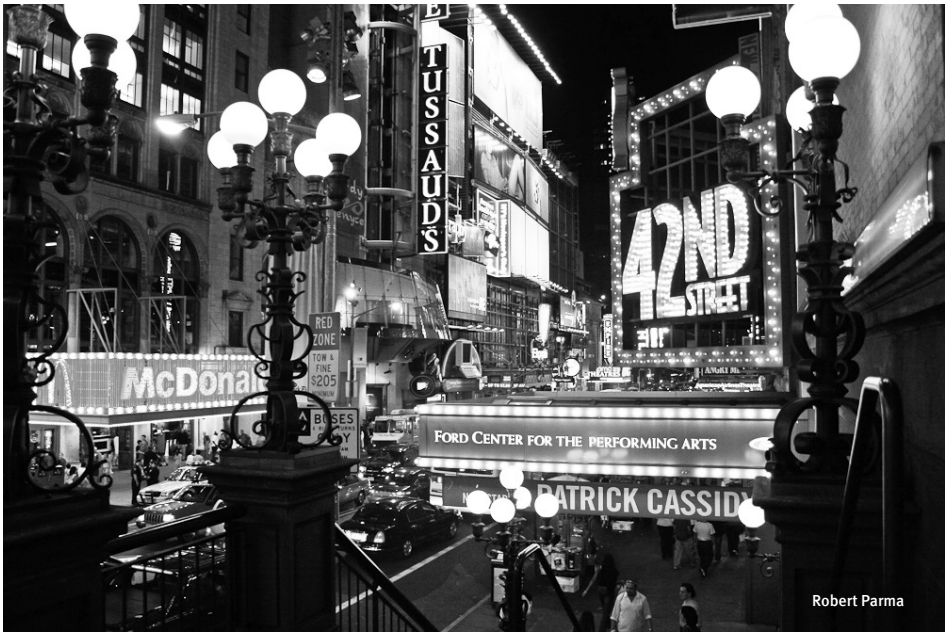
Pacific Southwest Region



George Moore's poetry collection *Saint Agnes Outside the Walls* was published with FutureCycle Press in 2016. His other collections include *Children's Drawings of the Universe* (Salmon Poetry 2015) and *The Hermits of Dingle* (FutureCycle 2013). Poems have appeared in *The Atlantic*, *Colorado Review*, *Poetry*, *Arc*, and *Valparaiso*. He has recently relocated from Colorado to the south shore of Nova Scotia.

Bibhu Padhi

Stories



They appear on the landscapes,
in between trees and bird-cries.
In this town very few know;
in New York's 42nd street;
on Ganga's waters, the Himalaya's
steadily declining snow;
in clean and clear desert places in
Africa and Siberia, where
nameless creatures build up,
unknown to themselves, our paradise.

Each seeks the others, in daylight,
but more so during the nights,
when we are enveloped by all.
And then, how quietly they move into
each other, turn broader, in sleep,
in dream, between one dream and another!

How they find their way out of our
harsh judgements, clever words!
Somewhere in the distance of earth's
growing years, we shall meet through
their generous links and suddenly
recognize ourselves as different from
what we were, when we were last here—
their vast forms humbling us to a silence
we had forgotten to use in our frenetic effort
to narrate ourselves and not listening at all.

April, Body Beautiful

3 am. And I'm the one whose sleep has now passed
into your deep-brown body, this late-April morning hour.

Do you remember the last time our bodies
were in this room, together? You said,
"Let me now offer my body to you . . .
today, please let me taste your body first."

I couldn't say no. And there you were,
with your mahogany tongue tasting me
all over as if for the first time, as if you
hadn't tasted anything like it before.

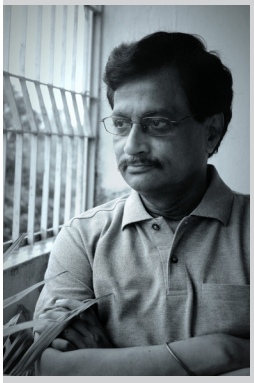
I lay quietly on the bed like a child
being sucked and salivated by a mercifully
insane mother who had promised herself
a whole afternoon of true animal splendor.

You were ending, I knew. Not a word, not a breath;
only it was my chance now. I didn't know
where to start from nor how to use myself
slightly differently. It was a different story though.

But, at this early morning hour, I wish you were
here, when sleep is everywhere except here.

Trash

Put everything down on paper.
The brain's refusal to listen
to the mind, its self-persuasions
about how to keep itself busy
in the middle of an unending time,
a vague waiting for a destination.
Put everything down on paper.
The eye's refusal to look out
and rediscover the old as if
for the first time, recognize new things.
What for does one wait except
people and places? What else?
The questions go answered, and you
keep yourself fretful with certainties—
slow time, your migraine's arrival
anytime now, the failed power
of the mind to create new things,
the feeling of being jobless.
Put all this onto paper, then
wash in soap and water, squeeze
the soap water out and toss it
into the wastepaper basket.



Bibhu Padhi, a Pushcart nominee, has published twelve books of poetry. His poems have appeared in magazines and anthologies throughout the English-speaking world. In the U.S. his poems have been published in, among others, *The American Scholar*, *New Letters*, *Poet Lore*, *Poetry*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Southwest Review*, *TroQuarterly*, *Tulane Review*, and *Xavier Review*. He lives with his family in Bhubaneswar, India.

Bill Snyder

Redundancy

Bodies come with pairs—eyes, kidneys,
ears. But if a pair is lost, that's it—no
alternatives, no regeneration.
My mother knew this in '95, that day
in her dining room, sunlight seeping in,
live oaks and moss and balcony behind her
through the wide, glass doors. It was cool
inside, where she stayed, the stairs down
to the pool too difficult, oxygen tank
too heavy, impossible to get back up if she
could ever even get it down. She was
content inside, I think—no tan needed,
a tan now, a simple matter of ego
and heart—both wound down. I know
the photo that day. Though why I took it
escapes me. And why she allowed it,
considering. I must have snapped it
out of habit, or to help her feel better,
feel alive. She looks into the camera,
resigned, indifferent even. Loose, pale, gray
skin furrowed, lined, webbed like a caul
of scalded milk. Nostrils wide, oxygen tubes
in each, mucous damp with the oxygen's chill.
Bed dress slack on her shoulders. We're playing
Scrabble. She is winning, as always. I think
she could have predicted that November
coming, as she squared a word, as she clawed
the sun-fused air above the table into the pair
she was losing, the pair she had lost.

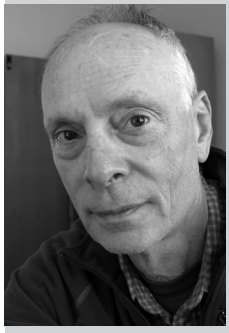
Home

I stand in North Carolina—canvas pack, beard
and hair, cord jeans—hitching down
to Florida. And it's gone well. Around D.C., through
Richmond, and here in Rocky Mount, the wait
for a second ride. Humid, mid-October, 1972,
the sun behind a Burger King, Kentucky Fried,
all the rest. Hitching to surprise. Home to see my father.

Dusk, and fourth in line, three thumbs beyond.
But a Volvo stops. *Florida,* I say. *Cocoa Beach.*
Cool, he says, *Miami. Right on my way. Help with gas?*
I say, *sure, and you can crash if we get there tonight.*

Air heavy in Georgia, heavier still through Jacksonville,
Daytona, and down, and then, the new white house
on a canal. Four a.m. I tap a bedroom window.
My brother opens a door.

I wake the next morning. Outside, pelicans air in sunrise
rows, a blue heron toes a piling post. Inside, my ride
gone, and my father then—up soon, and I
wait for him—his surprise, his pleasure. His approval.
It's been a year—the prodigal—San Francisco, Boston,
Baltimore—the need to hear music, to be in front,
to be loved. To escape this home. This father.
Loved by him, oh yes. But that love, that love.



Bill Snyder has published poems in *Atlanta Review*, *Poet Lore*, *Folio*, *Cottonwood*, and *Southern Humanities Review*, among others. He was the co-winner of the 2001 Grolier Poetry Prize and winner of the 2002 Kinloch Rivers Chapbook competition. He has also been awarded the 2013 CONSEQUENCE Prize in Poetry and the 2015 Claire Keyes Poetry Prize. He teaches writing and literature at Concordia College, Moorhead, MN.

Matt Schumacher

Ballad of a Basque Sheepherder: Shaniko, Oregon

The foreign land is a land of wolves.
—Old Basque Proverb

A drunk sheepherder in 1903
could choose between thirteen saloons.
One night a year, I'd sidle through the Pioneer or Silvertooth,
bleat my many demons, *deagru asko*, at the moon,

or throw my money to the wind and visit every one. *Buelta,*
I'd cry, then buy the whole cowtown a round
so they'd be friendly louts. The pay wasn't much anyway.
I'd watch it go like it wasn't mine, blow through it in no time

without even trying. Hell, might as well
whoop it up in the wild wool capitol of the world. No magnate
for the Columbia Southern Railroad
or rich landowner cared about my fate,

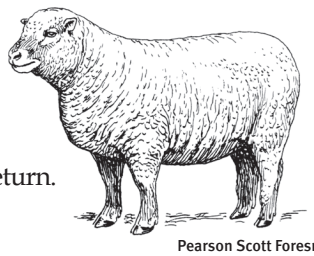
could boast a loneliness like mine. *Laga. Bakardade,*
they say in my lost language. After nearly a year of speaking to no one
but my dog and flock on the range, I'd hail the first face.
Strangers in the general store reached for their guns.

I'd talk to practically anyone, knowing full well
they were out to take my money. Too soon, I'd be
muttering *to hell with them all* at each shuttered window.
I'd long to show these petty thieves,

these dirt streets packed with ranch-hands spoiling for a fight,
and that cursing, drunkard Scotsman, Farquahar
McRae, the most honest boss to walk across bluebunch wheatgrass
and fescue, the best I'd ever worked for, what *indarra,*

what sort of fortitude and grit I'm knit from,
but I'd be wobbly as a newborn lamb,
a lost old ram, left behind wanderer from the herd,
sure prey for lynx or mountain lion, gone with the *basajaun.*

My ancestors were tireless stewards of missing and sick lambs.
Here, they say that after a full day, most missing sheep won't return.



Pearson Scott Foresman

Shaniko could give a damn. Who'd look
for a tramp sheepman if I got lost for good?

Never mind that I'd survived the Paulina sheep shooters
who pushed my flock over Sheep Rock, that *Mari*, sacred cow thief,
wild, beautiful deity, she of the red ram and the mountaintop,
brought us back to life. The townsfolk, in disbelief,

will look like they've always known who I am:
the liquor I'll be drinking, the vigilante cattlemen I'll fight.
And this town which had survived smallpox that year
and had buried their dead in unmarked canyon graves knew

I was coming. They'd been waiting like *irelu*
and weren't about to shed a tear over my kind.
To meet my sheeplike social needs I so despise, they'd readied fists
to turn me blue, barkeeps who'd sell me whiskey till I'm broke and blind.

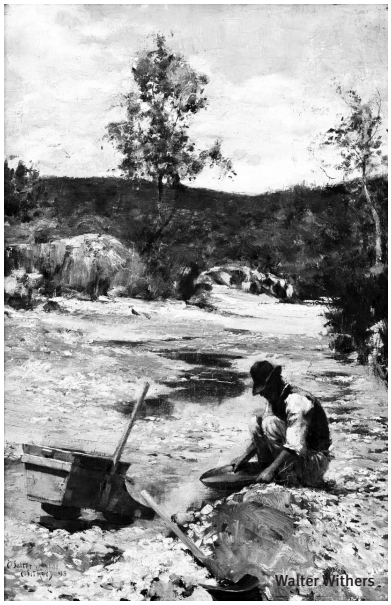
They'd like me to guard other men's property for the rest of time.
They'd like me to return next year and spend it all.
They've labeled one jail cell *the palace sleeper*
just for me and the *Gaeuko*, right behind city hall.

F. Wallace White Recites his Swindler's Soliloquy: Bourne, Oregon

Bourne has been called an open-air closet of skeletons.
—Bend Bulletin

Stunning, isn't it, how presumptuously
the average man takes advantage whenever he can,
how wind invites itself right in
and bares down on a narrow canyon.
Miners who struck gold at Cracker Creek
renamed their camp in 1895
to venerate the owner of the nearby Excelsior mine,
Senator Jonathan Bourne. Son,
that Harvard blueblood's buried in D.C.
and never lived a day in Eastern Oregon.
I was more brash than Bourne's mustache
in black and white photos of the time,
and many fold as bold, as industriously sworn to injustice

as dear Jonathan was bound to uphold the law,
daring like the dark handlebars
bristling to overtake his face and jaw.
My swindles overpowered the hour
when my time came and I was unafraid
to wash away the town's good name.
My name is F. Wallace White, and I moved in,
an opportunistic parasite, spreading, multiplying
lies like disease, publishing my spurious,
embellished version of the news,
boldly printing overestimates of the overflowing gold,
the fake profits of the slowing North Pole mine.
My schemes fleeced many an investor out east
and overseas. My genius was the ease:
the postmaster sorted out my fortune.
I didn't pan or dig an inch. I didn't flinch
but sank my pickaxe fast into these stupid dupes.
I paid thugs to brandish shotguns outside our mines
to assure buyers dreamed of richer ore.
Who'd miss the fun of spilling all their fool
New York and London lucre? Certainly not I.
I built a rustic mansion on the hill
with a rose and white quartz fireplace to rival any luxury.
Its grand staircases arose from my mail fraud proceeds.
I may have lied, but you all need to rake these tailings:
wind, water, human frailty and failing kill.
They're the scoundrels who erode. I am gold.
I breathed the good life into these backwoods,
a shrewd tycoon who cleared out years ago.
And your beloved senator has died.
Bourne, Oregon, you ruined boardinghouse, goodbye.


Walter Withers



Matt Schumacher, author of *Spilling the Moon*, *The Fire Diaries*, and the forthcoming *Ghost Town Odes*, earned a Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, an MA from the University of Maine, and an MFA from the Iowa Writer's Workshop. His poetry chapbook, *favorite maritime drinking songs of the miraculous alcoholics*, was recently published by Finishing Line Press. Managing editor of the journal *Phantom Drift*, he lives in Portland, Oregon.

Erica Waters

Marrow

Red blood cells
ascend veins, glide
through bony

bark to shed old bonds
like maples drop leaves
to preserve syrup.

Cells, how strange
to be made of cells—
of atoms.

Perhaps atoms
desire buoyancy—
to unshackle,

levitate
to a lean layer
of atmosphere—

gravity loosens. Matter
slips
from itself.

Solitude soars

as if it will never tumble

back
into re
made.

Lungs in a Rib Cage

No warmth from this kind of fire sign.
No hot proof of galloping flame, only smoke—
dense and sure—an entire sky breathless.

Hopeful torches curved by cones that crave,
Fairbanks is surrounded by black spruces
waiting like shadows in auburn air.

I overhear that fire covers hundreds of acres.
I avoid all information. I don't want to know
how addicted it must be.

Distant from quick fire, left to muck.
Orange sun makes birch bark shine yellow.
Daylight needs headlights.

The sun proves its round shape. Stabless
vibrancy flares out like a canker sore,
a wilting marigold among rafters of ash.

Engravings

Last night in Great Basin,
as sun set it seemed to rise
dripping with fresh gold.

~

Blurred hum:
wind funneling
through valley,
distant highway,
occasional jet.

~

This rock formation
looks like a finger,
that one a face, an arm,
a row of toes. Human eyes.

~

Indigo wells
from sparkling to navy.

Along the bottom
of glimmering pool,

coins, mostly pennies,
splinter algae.

~

White belly. Windshield.
Plummet. Flutter? Drop.
White belly. A mother?
White belly. Heaved wings
fall like a wilting limp.
I killed her.

~

Shop upon shop line up
to sell bones, stones, furs,
feathers, wood, clay,
horns, cacti, and fossils
to thousands of tourists
who come to experience
intact wildness.

~

I cannot define *unnatural*.

~

The baseball field's green grass
sure is noticeable in this desert town.

At night, sprinklers run
against my tent in titters.

It seems an angry rainstorm
when I wake to quivering splatters.

Softer bed than I've had in weeks.

~

Growing out of sandstone,
chamisa and silver buffaloberry
prelude a view.

Burnt reds,
oranges, caramels—desert expanse
rolls out as a longwinded mortality.

Beneath my feet,
hundreds of engraved letters
add topography to sandstone,

so I imagine:

keys, pens, and knives
shaving stone

as open palms
press down. Sand

grates into each
sweaty palm.

Sand grates
into each palm:

a name, a part
of a name, a note.

~

Last night, sun
rose – petals

fell as rusty purple.
Darkness chipped

away to stars.
Under our clothes,

we sat naked.



Works by Erica Waters appear in *The Sun* magazine, *Camas*, *CALYX*, and *The Fiddlehead*, among others. In 2011, she was a finalist for a Ruth Lilly fellowship. She is commonly spotted in Colorado where she owns and operates Held Space Healing and teaches undergraduates at Colorado State University under her maiden name, Airica Parker.

I AM A POTATO-EATER STILL— A HARVEST-TIME VIGNETTE

BRETT BUSANG



Brett Busang

For those of you who are reading this magazine in Florida, October is the time of year when the Upper Midwest hauls itself out of bed and doesn't sleep for two weeks if it's lucky—and three or four when things don't go very well. Those of us who live along the Beltway think of "the harvest" as something our grandfathers did with the sort of antiquated machinery you see on The History Channel. We see a man named Zebulon whack away at something with a scythe; we're intrigued with the spectacle of mules and horses; we like to watch people in overalls do things other than model overalls. We're attuned to the imagery of autumn: jack 'o lanterns ruling the night; golden leaves strewing the ground; hot air vaporizing out of us as we talk. We suddenly realize that we crave the tangier smells of autumn all year round; we rush into the closet to find scarves and sweaters; we lust insanely for more simple, if hardly easier, times—at least as far as lust and insanity will lead us. But: we don't really know anything except how to get things other people have made for us; it's one of the charms of living in The City. But it makes us all kind of innocent—innocent in a different way than we think of those we consider innocent. We stand in line for free concerts at the Library of Congress, which makes us sophisticated; meanwhile, we have to go and ask somebody, "What's this?," when we find something at the supermarket that doesn't have a bar code directly on it. I mean, what could this thing be? And you can just eat it as is? *As is*, huh? It's a vegetable? Get out!

This is a potato? I would see more of them soon enough.

Community

If you find yourself—as I did—in Hillsboro, North Dakota, in the middle of October, the first thing you might

want to do is check what the weather's doing. And if it's not on your mind, it's on everybody else's.

"A bit warm out today."

"Sure is. Don't know if we'll even go out."

"Supposed to cool down tomorrow."

"Supposed to, yeah."

"Weatherman said."

"Wish I had a nickel for every time 'the weatherman said.'"

Everybody in Hillsboro works the harvest in one way or another: they wake up at about four a.m. and do not attempt to remember a dream or check an email that might have drifted in at two. They set the timer on the coffee-maker the night before so they won't have to fool with it in the morning, when they're trying to remember what they did with a second set of car keys. They plunge into closets and haul out some of the nastiest-looking clothes you'll ever see on a living person. And, on the next day, they wear them. They call their friends to confirm or cancel; they run into each other at the store and notice that the sky-color isn't good; they think about what they'll do when it's over. Maybe a day off, or a mere eight hours on the job they do already.

They close ranks: grandmothers have the kids come over after school; brothers and sisters team up against chaotic family arrangements that could lead to internecine scuffles in the future. There's a whole gamut of plans and back-up plans people make to either be in the harvest or help someone else be in it. *Not* to be in it is unthinkable. It's like your mom and dad deciding not to name you. ("We've got other things to do with *our* time.") It's like the Dalai Lama asking trivial questions of the sort that might show up in *The Hollywood Reporter*. ("What's this about the new Kardashian diet? Now go in peace, my son.") No: it's like the President not making it up the Capitol steps for the swearing-in. It's something beyond betrayal and sacrilege; it's something that's *just not done*.

Hillsboro, North Dakota, stages multiple harvests. The sexiest—if such a word may apply to the rank-smelling plume of smoke that bespeaks sugar production on steroids—is the beet harvest, which seems to attract your more experienced crews and thorough-going work-people. They look livelier, dress with a flair that is monumentally absent from the other crews, and swagger about like the Alpha People who, because of Dakotan modesty, dare not speak their names. Soybeans are there too, along with an assortment of also-rans whose functionaries know how insignificant they are and look appropriately ashamed. I came to work the potato harvest, which was no more real to me than any other harvest. It was not only something *other* people did for which overalls were required, hayseed spat, and phrases gathered from Broadway musicals articulated. I was there to show my mettle to battle-hardened folk

Not to be in the harvest is unthinkable. It's like your mom and dad deciding not to name you. ("We've got other things to do with our *time.") It's like the Dalai Lama asking trivial questions of the sort that might show up in* The Hollywood Reporter. *("What's this about the new Kardashian diet? Now go in peace, my son.") No: it's like the President not making it up the Capitol steps for the swearing-in. It's something beyond betrayal and sacrilege; it's something that's* just not done.

who could care less about how I might handle myself among them. They took the work because it was the right thing to do; it was part of a noble tradition; and, all things considered, the money was nothing to sneeze at. I would work "on the line"—a place for which nothing in my previous life could have prepared me. I was given well-weathered gloves, a warm coat, and best wishes. That's sort of like telling a rock-climber not to look down. Of course, in North Dakota the slightest alarm for my person would be seen as demonstrative, and therefore out of the question. I wasn't told how tired I'd get; that I'd want to quit the very next day; who'd get under my skin and who wouldn't. Though I was an outsider, it was unthinkable . . . Let me re-phrase that: it was unthinkable for me not to do my very best because, if I failed in this regard, I might be terminated on the spot. Or, when my shabby work ethic was noticed, shunned by my fellow workers. Or traded to a harvest-team that was lower in status and worked longer hours for less money. Nobility of spirit was expected, if not stated outright. To be in the harvest was to say as little about what happens to you as is humanly possible. There are other people who have it worse than you. Like the migrant workers who stayed long after we'd all gone home. And who were already out there when we showed up the next morning.

The Machinery of a Great Operation

The "line" works like this: potatoes grow beneath the surface of the soil and have to be yanked out of it. This is done with a harvester, which functions as a sort of home-entertainment unit for the operator, who, from an air-conditioned space one might liken to a skybox, switches gears, swigs at bottles, and tries to quit smoking. A truck is driven alongside the harvester as it confounds those sneaky little potatoes and propels them upward; when they rattle their way to the top, they're shot into this truck, which seems, from a distance, to be joined at the hip to the harvester. But, lo and behold, they separate—and for a reason. The truck's full and there's no need to top it off. Another truck is always close behind.

The truck drives to the potato house, where it is backed slowly and carefully toward the wide, rubber-coated mouth of a clod-hopper, a piece of machinery so complex that if it were to show up in a NASA exhibit, I'd readily accept that it had been to the moon and helped a great nation in its race to find other, equally unappealing places in the universe.

When the truck's in place and the trap door comes down, releasing what's inside, a worker throws a switch on the hopper, which makes a terrible, terrible noise. (I describe it in slightly more unforgettable prose later on.) A sickening rabble, a million-footed throng, of potato comes at you, the worker, who, standing before a conveyer belt, notices that it is suddenly moving. It's hard enough seeing when it's still, but when it moves, everything—potatoes, potato vines, potato doo-doo, potato suicides—looks alive! Into this living landmass of agricultural residue the worker has to look with a cold, analytical eye and take deadly aim. It is his or her job to separate the chaff from the dross; the good from the bad; the kipper from the herring; the real from the wannabe. This takes a great deal of skill. But if you don't have any, you have to imagine what it would be like if you could project yourself, evolutionarily, about fifty to a hundred thousand more years in the future, and have a second—even third—pair of arms. In this way, you can almost get to half of the stuff that needs to be tossed out behind or in front of you, depending on where some of the other workers are. (If you hit them with something, they'll try to

hit you back—which just isn't fair!) When the switch is flipped again, and the clod-hopper goes off, all the stuff you managed to remove while lost in your four-armed fantasy is shoveled away, by you, from the conveyor belt so that the Bobcat'll pick it up. (And if you don't know what a Bobcat is, you won't be reading this anyway.)[1]

Then the next truck pulls in, and it starts all over. This can go on for ten or twelve hours—though I can't actually believe I've said that.

More Personal Reflections

I liked things about the harvest a lot of people, who did it every year, didn't notice anymore. I liked to watch the potato house filling up just a little more after each day: hundreds and thousands of red potatoes crowding up there beyond the conveyor belt—which was constantly being serviced—and then moved forward and away from the potatoes that were already there. (When we were finished, the conveyor belt, and the hopper that fed it, looked surreally stranded—as if they'd been locked out.) I liked to corral some of the good potatoes that slipped off the line for clandestine cooking later on. I also collected aberrant forms: potatoes that had assumed, through some sort of genetic channeling, the shape of a human or animal—or just a part of one. I admired the way the people who worked the line with me wasted no movement. When they were done, they eased themselves into clean-up position, then came out dangling a cigarette like it had been there all the time. In the Northeast people have quit smoking. Here, it seems as if they've hardly even begun. A fair number of smokers in a place that hasn't warmed up creates an intimate feeling you can experience in no other way. It was an easy thing to trade a smoke-free environment for that.

And here's another thing: In North Dakota, the best part of where you are is always underneath you. The state is infamously flat in this part of it, but there's a thrilling garnet color to the soil here that made an earth-watcher of me: a soil connoisseur. On breaks, I threw great clods at a pile of rejected potatoes, into which they settled without a trace. While I worked, I threw great clods behind me. At night, I dreamed of throwing great clods at people I didn't like, and hitting them squarely. When the dirt and the potatoes and everything else the harvester had scraped up in the fields came onto the hopper, and then at you, it sounded like a million hoof-beats. Close your eyes and you'd think you were in an old Western, with the Indians giving chase and the cowboys just yards in front of them. By the end of the day, the gloves you wore had a crust on them, a second skin tough enough to defy scraping and promote a philosophical attitude about sudden and irrevocable change. I liked those gloves so much I never returned them. Sorry, Jay.

After less than two weeks, the harvest ended. For one, I'd gotten tough enough to actually do it, and wanted to do more because I was "tough" and didn't want to waste it. On that last day, we didn't even work a full eight hours—a paltry schedule for seasoned potato pickers. We assumed our positions on the line, but after we'd devoured the half-hearted loads that were funneled into the clod-hopper, took our smoking breaks, and scanned the horizon for trucks that would never come—it was over. In other places, there might've been a whoop—or some other unified sound that suggested an ordeal was

1. I left out one part. After the potatoes are sorted for quality control, they go into the potato house, which, when full, becomes airtight and is refrigerated to retard spoilage and keep vermin away. Then they go into a processing plant, where they're sorted one last time by people who, because they work inside and are paid union-scale, can be pickier than we could. After the spuds are bagged and put on skids, they're shipped away. A few more steps on down the road, they are lowered into vats of hydrogenated oil to become French fries. Because I know how and when that happens, I'll never be able to hear "Want fries with that?" in the same way again.

over. Eschewing real goodbyes, people said things like, "Well, I guess it's a wrap," "See ya at the bar," "Seems like we started just yesterday," and they were gone. When all the cars had pulled away, there was nothing left but the Porta-Potty. A few nights later, the potato grower—an intelligent, red-faced man you rarely saw—threw us all a party at his house about three miles from town. I got to see what everybody looked like "cleaned up." Here my fellow workers sat around with their legs crossed and chattered away about babies and christenings and old people dying. I felt a sudden kinship I didn't have time for during the harvest, when it was all business and you could hardly hear a thing people were saying.


Brett Busang

I'd also come to North Dakota to paint pictures, but had not planned to work on them until after the harvest was over. Yet I managed to sneak a few sessions in during those few days when the harvest had to be shut down. A spate of unseasonably hot weather had come into the Upper Midwest and flopped all over it. Frost is not only an accessory to any harvest, it is absolutely essential. When there isn't any, the harvest is put on hold. Yet while nobody seemed to relish the work they were doing, they didn't like being out of it. The local sensibility was attuned to the catastrophic. Working wasn't the be-all and end-all; it was just better than being blown away or bent over. I didn't get it, but I'd had grit in my mouth for only a few days. Yet I'd feared, that, when I couldn't lift my right hand one evening, I'd have to tell somebody the next day. Fortunately, the paralysis passed and I was able to dream, not of having two good hands, but of extra arms and supernatural capacities.

When I exhibited my paintings in some of the banks along Caledonia Avenue, people were pleased to see them, but they wondered why I could care so much about an old silo. Or the mud-colored bricks with which the town fathers had built their hardware stores and corner groceries. What was wrong with well-paved roads and picture-perfect houses? Would it have killed me to paint some of them? If truth were known, I wanted to subvert local values, if only in 2-D. If a utility shed or a fully-raked yard represented virtue, they could have it. I was looking for the town's underbelly, which might be flipped over and rubbed the wrong way. It was a good thing to have somebody come in from the outside and train a flashlight on something you take entirely for granted. The place had done that for me; why not return the favor?

While on the line, I had not precisely distinguished myself, but I was a plodder and did what I was told. I made people realize that I wasn't just a city person come to observe, and possibly jeer at, folkways I would neither appreciate nor understand. I had broken barriers that were erected, quite sensibly, to keep out the unfit; to deter the frivolous; to maintain proper distances and appropriate cultural norms. On the day I left, the people I had come to see expressed, in the charmingly laconic manner that had irritated me at the outset, a guarded admiration for a tenacity they had not expected of me.

"You did pretty good," said my host, an orange-haired fellow whose Viking ancestry was imprinted on his mouth, which was thoughtfully belligerent; his eyes, which were icy-blue; and his gait, which was planted so firmly on the ground, it looked, when he was standing, as if it were nurturing the soil and not vice versa. It had taken a thousand years to keep him inside of a shirt; five hundred to make him stop killing people; and a few long generations to comb his hair. Yet he was a civil person by all of the standards and requisites by which civility is measured and known.

Yet he was also the sort of person I wanted to please very badly. He—to pluck him out as a symbol—was why I had tried so damned hard. My post-clodhopper performance was all that stood between me, a potential washout, and the people who had schlepped potatoes around for generations. My worn-out fingers were the hope of my race, a loosely knit group of small-time intellectuals who were dedicated to craft beer, recreational running, and the gradual diminution of x/y chromosomes. I could leave North Dakota with the sense of a job well done, the majesty of Labor validated, and a sneaking pride I had never felt—and would not go out of my way to feel again. When I got home, I would re-embrace the heresies for which North Dakotans had suspected me in the first place—and I had sought, while sorting and throwing, to keep at arm's length.

My worn-out fingers were the hope of my race, a loosely knit group of small-time intellectuals who were dedicated to craft beer, recreational running, and the gradual diminution of x/y chromosomes. I could leave North Dakota with the sense of a job well done, the majesty of Labor validated, and a sneaking pride I had never felt—and would not go out of my way to feel again. When I got home, I would re-embrace the heresies for which North Dakotans had suspected me in the first place—and I had sought, while sorting and throwing, to keep at arm's length.

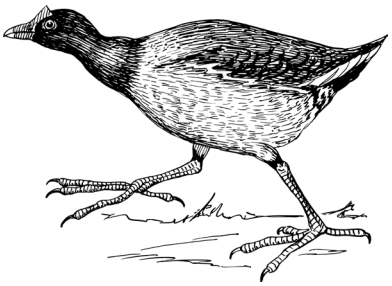
It's good to get outside of your comfort zone, though if you stay away from it for too long, you won't know who in the hell you are. In North Dakota, you work for what you get; in other places, where there isn't much "work" to be had, *you* happens in the head first and your identity gets grafted onto other parts of you. That's why intellectuals are identified so easily. They look enough like people to pass for them, but almost anybody can tell them apart.



Having given up manual labor—in part, because it has given up on him—Brett has entered into a pact with the devil, who has helped sponsor everything he's written, including a novel, *I Shot Bruce*, which was published in 2016; a play called *Two Lights*, whose world premiere occurred the following year; and *Laughter and Early Sorrow*, a collection of short stories that show him to be just as work-ethic conscious, as well as acutely dependable, as he was with all of those potatoes. His paintings, some of which illustrate the essay you have either skimmed, read, or mutilated, continue, with the devil's connivance, to support him. Like many people who choose writing as a way to both hide and seek, Brett wanted, when he was a younger person, to do something else entirely.

POISON RIVER

JOAN L. COLES



12 February, 2002

I am a stranger here, an alien. I do not know the chestnut-colored hawk with the creamy head, nor the yellow, lemon-bright bird with black back and wings and tail. Does he fill in here for the yellow-headed blackbird we have at home? Rich-mahogany birds with black necks wade and forage in the tangled grasses that stand in water now that the river is rising. Another wader with pink legs and bill and a brown-black stripe down its neck is stubbier, but reminds me of the black-necked stilt so abundant at home along the Great Salt Lake. But really, it is only the vulture that is familiar.

Here along the Equator, things are, I suppose, much as they should be, right down to the skein of egrets in flight—a skein that snakes and folds and forms again against the background of tropical forest—and the vultures that gather and circle, surely marking the next dead thing. Occasional terns scan the winding waterway for fish.

I am finding that the flu can be a blessing. Instead of walking out with our small group from this small Amazon tour boat—we are four tourists and a guide—I am left to sit under a canopy over the boat's top deck, left to observe, and reflect. Even here, there is too much to see, too much to take note of. But I do see the slender black hawk with light head, patterned underwings, high dihedral, and the hunting pattern of our own Northern Harrier. I see him, really see him, only when I finally bother to wonder why small birds, taking turns, pursue and harass him. Alert at last, I watch a sora-like bird land in the grasses and announce his arrival with a call like a small rooster, or our backyard quail. He is iridescent green and blue and violet, and his beak is red and fancy. Ah. A purple gallinule. I have seen him in books.

ss

I long for a book to give names to what else I see. The air is full of birdcalls I've never heard and cannot translate. I have been here before, not here, but *here*, in a place of not knowing what I see, not understanding what I hear. This could be my first day in a downtown school in San José, Costa Rica. I am nine years old. It is the middle of the term. My Spanish so far consists of *buenos días, adios, por favor, gracias,* and the numbers *uno* through *diez*. I follow the principal to the classroom and am handed over to the fourth grade teacher. My mother has told me that the teacher "speaks a little English." Schools are separated by gender here, and my older brother is on the other side of a high, thick wall. I will not see him until school lets out.

This is my sixth school since I started kindergarten and is the first of what will be four schools for me in San José, even though we will be here for only two years. We keep moving, but that is not the all of it. My mother is restless, constantly seeking, and not only for herself. She is always searching for something that might be better for her children, something that will make them better, or smarter, or more to her credit. On this day, in this school, my problem is familiar, and simple. As much as I love learning, a new school always goes to my gut, and I will need to find out where the girls' restroom is and how to ask permission to go there. It does not help that by now I am paralyzed by shyness in each new school. That this time I will need to find language as well.

ᔕ

Marcos, the guide, will tell us that the Amazon River has two main branches. He will say that the Rio Negro flows out of the Colombian highlands, black from its humus load of rotting leaves, and that with a pH of 4.8 the water is markedly acid, so fish and wildlife are relatively sparse. He will say that the Amazonas rises in the Peruvian Andes, and runs neutral and red with silt and nutrients, and that fish and microorganisms are abundant, as are the other animals that depend on them. He will say that these two great tributaries come together at Manaus, a major town in north central Brazil, a jungle outpost that boasts its own opera house, and that the Amazonas is also called the Solimaes, Portuguese for Poison River. I have a photograph of that coming together, of the red and muddy marbled together with the black and clear, each distinct and not yet blended. I ponder the naming, baffled. Surely the sterile, even toxic, black tributary better deserves the name of Solimaes? So, I'm not sure I believe what he tells us. Marcos may be a guide, but he lives in a backwater. He doesn't know his own geography. He's got it wrong. Five years later I will lift my World Atlas off the shelf and examine the distant heart of South America. I will find those faraway rivers that appear on the map as if seen from a great height.

Here is Rio Negro. Here is Amazonas, also called Solimaes. Marcos is right. Surely someone got mixed up in the mapping, or in the naming.

ᔕ

The mapping; the naming. My father did his share of that eighty years ago, in the 1920s, when he was a young geologist, but he was working well to the north of here in Colombia and Venezuela. Then, fifty years ago, in the 1950s he worked here in the Amazon basin and all the vastness that is Brazil. That was when Petrobras, Petroleo Brasileiro, hired him away from his long career at Standard Oil with a five-year contract and a lot of money to be their Exploration Manager. Experienced as he was at finding oil in inhospitable jungles, he was uniquely suited to the task. Hopes were high then in Brazil, and a corrupt and unpopular regime was out to cement its hold on power by bringing in the vast oil riches that surely lay just beneath the surface. The project was trumpeted throughout the land. Promises were made. The people would be rich.

After all, Colombia and Venezuela and even little Equador had already been pumping oil for more than forty years then, and my father had been part of that, hadn't he? Now it was Brazil's turn.

ᔕ

I am not here in search of my father. I am here to escape the Winter Olympics

He will say that the Rio Negro flows out of the Colombian highlands, black from its humus load of rotting leaves, and that with a pH of 4.8 the water is markedly acid, so fish and wildlife are relatively sparse. He will say that the Amazonas rises in the Peruvian Andes, and runs neutral and red with silt and nutrients, and that fish and microorganisms are abundant, as are the other animals that depend on them. He will say that these two great tributaries come together at Manaus . . . and that the Amazonas is also called the Solimaes, Portuguese for Poison River.

in Salt Lake City, where security fences and roadblocks have all but made me a prisoner in my neighborhood a short walk from the main Olympic venue. Six thousand miles to the south, I feel I have escaped the stockade. But I am here and I might as well absorb something about my father's life when he was here, when I was already an adult and not much a part of his life. I am not traveling alone, but with my daughter, Katharine, and she is here in search of my father, her grandfather. Although his exploration of Brazil took place after the time frame of the book she is writing, she still wants—what? The tropical heat, the humidity that lies on the flesh like an extra skin, the sounds of a different language in her ears, the towering ceiba trees, the parrots, the toucans, the piranhas, the orchids, the great swamps and shifting waters, the giant lily pads with the gallinules that tip-toe over them? There is no evidence that he was ever here where we are, but she wants to brush against forbs and grasses and shrubs like those he hacked with his machete as he pushed his way through the tropical rain forests. She wants to wake to the raucous dawn chorus, so clamorous and unrestrained compared to ours at home.

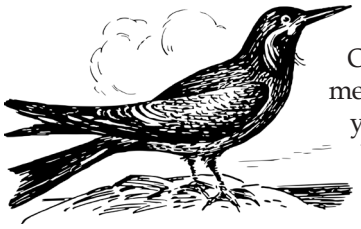
S

The flu may be a blessing, may give time for contemplation atop the boat and for reading *Memoirs of a Geisha* as I lie feverish in my cabin, but it is also a deprivation. I am missing the swim with the pink dolphins where the Rio Negro and the Solimaes flow together, and the walk into the forest with its sloths and caimans and owls, and the first two days of indigenous foods the crew serve us on the boat. And I am not yet acquainted with the two other tourists, traveling companions thrown, serendipitously, into our journey.

S

Pied lapwing. Wattled jacana. Stork. Black-collared hawk. Cacique—oh, yes, Costa Rica's *oropendula*. Marcos has been ashore, and somehow there now is a book I can hunt through for names, identities. And there is our fellow traveler, Oscar, infinitely patient and full of answers.

Oscar is a delight to travel with: bright, broadly knowledgeable and broadly read and broadly interested, and available to discuss anything—environment, art, politics, literature, history. His knowledge of birds is extensive; he is quick to identify what he sees, and also what he just hears—things I wish I could do—and I admire him. He was instrumental in founding a group for bird aficionados in Rio and has stayed involved with them. Mercifully, he is also



fluent in English. Oscar is an environmental lawyer, forty years old, who attributes his command of English to a postgraduate year at the Law School at the University of Michigan.

"I was always cold there, and people teased me about all the sweaters," he tells us. How easier it is to live where it is never cold! His brother, Pedro, is about to turn thirty-two, and the Amazon trip is Oscar's birthday gift to him.

Pedro is shy and seems like a slow learner. He may have had birth defects requiring, for example, corrective surgery on his feet. He is musical and enjoys rhythms; he lives in a group home; he has a girlfriend. A life. Clearly, his family has done well by him. At first he is quiet and reserved, but during the week we are on the boat together he gradually becomes more comfortable with us, more interactive and even playful. He knows some English, but is not fluent; it may be he just isn't a fluent speaker, in any language.

"He has some problems," Oscar tells us. Katie speculates that he is mildly Down Syndrome, and perhaps she is right.

S

When I open the album, I will not be sure I even took photos on that trip, and not sure I even printed them if I did, not sure I put them in a book. But here is a photo of four people standing together, smiling, in front of a shadowed doorway. They are framed by foliage and flowers: ginger, aloe reminiscent of the agave of our Southwest deserts, hibiscus, lianas climbing anything that will support them, and orchids like those that grow in the window over my kitchen sink. The people stand close together, touching. Look closely. My daughter, Katie, is in the middle, of course, looking stylish and pulled together in her fresh buzz cut and her customary casual black. On her left, and tallest, is Oscar, comfortably at home in his faded denims and blue T-shirt, sensitive and handsome with his dark hair, grey eyes, and fair skin. I stand on Katie's right, on the edge of things in my standard sage-green two-piece microfiber travel dress, a standard white-haired American tourist. Behind Katie and partly tucked between us is Pedro in white sweatshirt and blue jeans. He is darker and stockier than his brother, good looking and sweet-expressioned. The four of us are lately disembarked from the small and basic Amazon tour boat, recently translated by air two thousand miles from Manaus to Rio, and still bonded by the shared experience.

Here, on this day, we are part of a much larger group, a festive party that has brought the family together to celebrate Pedro's birthday. We have been included, and we get to meet Oscar and Pedro's family: their parents, Paulo and Luiza; their sister and brother-in-law and tiny niece; and Oscar's slender and striking dark-haired wife. She is a well-known artist, designer, and art teacher, and brings to the marriage two teenaged sons from a previous marriage. They hope to have a child together, and I find myself hoping with them.

Paulo, the *paterfamilias*, looks older—darker, coarser, more worldly-worn, more heavyset than the others. A man of substance. I imagine he is accustomed to having his way, to being in charge, to having an audience. He is proud of his family, and of his own accomplishments. He shows us around his mountain estate outside of Petropolis, a town high and cool two hours from downtown Rio, a town that was created by and for the rich and powerful as a refuge from the heat

and stress of Rio. As we tour the estate, Paulo points out his collection of rare varieties of domestic fowl and tells of his efforts at plant hybridization. His English is excellent, thanks to his degree from the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York.

Luiza surely was, and is still, a beauty, blonde and elegant. She was born into a political family in Sao Paulo and grew up immersed in talk of government, politics, art, and business.

She speaks English well, but not with the same assurance as her husband and son. Katie and I are welcomed into their family celebration with grace and courtesy, and they have prepared a dinner of foods typical of Brazil, especially for us.

During the introductions, during the tour, over wine and hors d'oeuvres, over dinner and dessert and coffee, the reasons for our presence in Brazil gradually unfold: my escape from the Olympics, Katie's book about her grandparents, my father's sojourn in Brazil. And who was my father? What was he doing here?

"Walter Link," I say, and in the room there is this catch of breath, this pause, before I continue, "Exploration Manager for Petroleo Brasileiro."

"*Petrobras*," from Paulo, and Oscar, and Luiza.

"You've heard of him?" Katie asks, "Walter Link?" And out it spills, the host telling the story of Brazil's dictatorial regime, the formation of Petrobras, the promises made of oil and riches, and then, in 1954, the shocking report that after six years of exploration and mapping there would be no oil bonanza for the vast and impoverished nation that occupies half of South America.

"He was called Public Enemy Number One," says Paulo. "He was hated by everyone. People made threats."

"He and his family left secretly, in the middle of the night," I say. "They were afraid."

I know this story, and now I know that this story was not just family legend, family self-dramatization. But the Links are full of themselves, and I am weary of being a Link, weary of being told how impressed I should be with my father's explorations, with the dangers he endured, with the Link family's accomplishments. Katie, too, has heard these stories, but hears them now with a difference. They have veracity, authority. They are about her grandfather. To me they are just stories about my father.

S

Over lunch the next day in Rio with Oscar and Luiza, Oscar says that this part of Brazil's history was even discussed in his high school classes, and that against the outrage of his fellow students he had considered that Mr. Link was simply reporting the facts. He says that the 1954 report, actually three letters to the Petrobras management, proved to be accurate, right down to the recommendation that the focus of exploration be shifted off shore to the Amazon delta, where some

I am weary of being a Link, weary of being told how impressed I should be with my father's explorations, with the dangers he endured, with the Link family's accomplishments. Katie, too, has heard these stories, but hears them now with a difference. They have veracity, authority. They are about her grandfather. To me they are just stories about my father.

wells are now, in 2002, coming in. That it made no sense to shoot the messenger.

Almost another decade will go by before Brazil's immense off-shore oil reserves become common knowledge, and this story is retold, with commentary, in *The New York Times* in 2011.

ᔕ

We fly home bearing artifacts: a blow gun and darts, a primitive bow with arrows that Katie bought in Novo Airao, on the river; a wall clock, left for us at the hotel desk in Rio as a farewell gift from Oscar, with a different tropical bird at each hour marker on the dial; a manuscript written by Paulo about seducing a girl when he was at Rensselaer, a story he hoped one of us would critique, or perhaps enjoy. The clock and the manuscript will end up in my hands.

Three years later I will dig the clock out of a closet, hang it on the wall in the breakfast nook, start it up, and discover to my astonishment that there is bird song every hour on the hour, specific to the bird the little hand points to. But only when the lights are on. Who knew? Two more years later I will dig Paulo's manuscript out of a file drawer because I have forgotten his name, and find again his note asking for comments from his new literary friends. Neither Katie nor I have ever responded with either thanks or the requested critique, and I say this with embarrassment and shame.

ᔕ

I wonder how I can relinquish so readily the connection with such gracious people, a connection so easily made despite disparate histories and points of view, but then I recall all the times I left, of necessity, and started over, each time as an alien, each time as a person from "somewhere else," each time more reserved and more cautious. Experience taught me that connections, even family connections, are fleeting; that belonging disappears; that when you move away ties unravel quickly; that chances are small indeed that you will ever again see those who are left behind, those who still belong exactly where they are. Yet, I wonder too at how so many I left behind are with me still. The truth is, I hold them in my mind, remembering them as I knew them. They never grow old. I carry them with me, some for nearly eight decades, even knowing it is unlikely that any of them remembers me at all.

Perhaps this is the way I learned about letting go. While my mother, even as her life was ending, was in touch with people she had gone to grade school with, this was not something that was given to me. My lot is to set aside loss, to deny loneliness, to give people I came to care about a place in my inner mind, even while I, of necessity, recognized and accepted the permanence of departure and separation in my outer life. In my experience, when you've left you're gone for good. There is no point in trying to hold on.



Joan Coles's poems have appeared in *Weber*, *Saltfront*, *Tailwinds*, the *City Art Journal*, and two anthologies. She has also published an essay in *Catalyst Magazine*. She is retired and lives, reads, and writes in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Ben Leib

I Got Nails Tattooed on My Ankles Because I've Never Left the Road Behind



Eugene, Oregon

Eugene, Oregon, proved itself to be a place to stop between Seattle and Northern California. I might have stopped in Portland, but it was more difficult to navigate the bridges and highways, rooming was more expensive, and I'd recently spent a week there.

When I pulled into the Campus Inn, I had an incoming message from Emily: "If you make your way downtown, I work at Starlight. We might be busy—we've already had someone shoot up in the bathroom. Either way, I can make you something."

I replied with concern as to the sanitation of such a predicament: "I hope you've been spared any biohazards." I didn't have too much going on, but the idea of spending an evening alone at a bar, vying with the other customers for the attentions of the bartender on duty, well, it was a hard sell, made tempting only by the fact that I otherwise might do nothing at all. Instead of committing myself, I explained to Emily that I did not drink. She seemed unfazed by the revelation: "I've been cracking out classic Shirley Temples with our homemade ginger syrup. Tasty stuff . . . ."

I wasn't at the Campus Inn, but at some other hotel out in the sticks when I made my way down to Starlight. I drove freeways through the evergreens, and got into the city just after midnight.

As I took the off-ramp and merged, a college-age kid walked in front of my car with his hands over his head. I slammed on the breaks, and the car shimmied right up to him. It was raining and the road was slick. The kid had gotten lucky. But apparently he didn't think so, because he started screaming and howling. He was blind drunk. He slapped both palms on the hood of the car, and I wondered if he'd succeed in getting himself hit before the night was over.

ᔕ

Empty on a Tuesday night, Starlight had a neighborhood feel. The folks drinking there, kids in their early twenties, knew the bartenders. The place was having an off night. It was not busy like Emily had anticipated, and the sprawling dance floor was empty. If there'd been any kind of crowd, I'd have felt smothered by Starlight.

Emily was working behind the bar. She had the thickest red hair I'd ever seen, and a pornographic silhouette—all thighs, hips, and tits. She wore a short vintage dress and bike shorts beneath it. An outline tattoo of an antique accordion was visible on her thigh.

I leaned on the bar.

When Emily noticed me, she asked if I wanted one of those Shirley Temples.

"How about something without caffeine?"

"No liquor, no caffeine . . . ." She mixed something up with sprite and ginger syrup and some lemon. She had a little time, so she mottled the lemon. Her movements were economical. She was good at mixing drinks, which made me like her because I found folks interesting who were adept at a trade.

ᔕ

The bar had no stools, and I stood there, leaning on my elbows. Emily and I didn't get to talk much. She squeaked and made noises to herself when she got busy. She would stop in front of me, wiping her hands on a bar rag, and stare and wait for me to say something offhanded and interesting. I'd come up with quips, one liners that I could interject without placing any demands on the conversation.

The patrons who knew Emily talked to her more than I did. They were drunk, and were regulars, and small talk came easier to them. One guy in his early twenties eyeballed me. Once he realized that I was there to see Emily, he didn't leave the bar again. He kept looking at me.

I was too tired and resigned to feel bothered by it. I wasn't in the mood to acknowledge any sort of competitive man-off. All I could do was stay there until she told me to leave, and be as friendly as I knew how

in the interim. She was something to behold, and because I found her beautiful, and because she was paying a bit of attention to me, I didn't feel that my time could have been better spent.

ᔕ

Emily hollered something to her coworker. It was just before 1 a.m. She said she had a twenty minute break. "Want to take a walk?"

I watched her from behind as she grabbed her jacket, and my eyes dwelt on the strength of her thighs, muscles developed at a job that kept her on her feet. I followed her out to Olive Street, and we walked a block further into town.

The Horsehead was only a block away, but we took our time getting there. I asked her about Eugene, about school and bartending, and it didn't take her long before she was opening up. Maybe she'd been waiting for that unburdening. Emily had recently ended a five-year relationship—recently enough that she was still staying on a friend's couch and saving up for a place of her own. She didn't say it outright, but it was clear he'd been the one to end it. She was struggling—with men, with money, with life—and though I was older by a decade, I didn't have any great wisdom to impart. I couldn't truthfully tell her that any one of her problems was fleeting. Rather, I said that I, too, had been through a break-up once, and that it's hell, at least until you get to the other side of it.

ᔕ

The front patio of The Horsehead was crowded—the place was busier than Starlight. The patrons, kids in their early twenties, knew Emily. I should have realized: Eugene was a metropolis but it had not lost its rusticity. Emily was a bartender downtown, which meant she didn't have the luxury of anonymity. We walked in, the bouncers waved us through, and she worked her way to the bar.

The bartender smiled at her and ignored the other customers while she poured Emily's drink. Emily got a double shot of something transparent, and a few ounces of dark beer in a tumbler. She tipped but was not expected to pay a tab. I followed her back through the bar, and the crowd parted for her as she walked across the floor. Then, as if by mutual agreement, they would reoccupy the narrow walkway through which I might have passed. This happened seamlessly, for I was never more than a single pace behind Emily.

Out front, Emily smiled and nodded to more people. We stood off behind one of the pylons at a far corner, but we still didn't get any privacy. A drunk girl who talked too loud walked up and wouldn't leave Emily alone. ". . . I'm living with my boyfriend right now, but I'm not allowed to stay there, so I have to sneak into the window every night." She turned toward me and explained, "Misunderstandings between me and the roommates."

"Misunderstandings?"

"Well, I threw a tray at Brian, and it went through a window. But then when his roommates asked about it, I played dumb. I said it could have been me, but I was blacked out."

"That sounds worse to me. I mean, whenever I've blacked out and forgotten what I did, I lied through my teeth to keep people from knowing. I'd do anything not to say, 'Yeah, I messed up in ways that damaged your property, but I was too drunk to remember a thing.'"

"I think it was better in this case—it made sense, if you know what I mean. Anyway, Emily, I'm looking for a place. You and I should find something together. We'd be besties, and fucking party forever."

"I'm staying on Tom's couch so I can save up for the deposit on a studio."

When the drunk girl walked away, Emily rolled her eyes. "I could never live with her."

"That makes sense."

"She's a great friend, and I've known her a long time, but she's a running-into friend, if you know what I mean. Whenever we make it something bigger, it doesn't work out." She took out her phone and glanced at it. "Shit. My break's over."

S

I stood at the bar. I had another Sprite/ginger drink. Even the ginger was setting my nerves on edge. I'd spent half the day in a car after a night of too little sleep. I'd been subsisting on coffee and energy drinks, and when someone brushed against me as they passed my skin recoiled like a snake's.

Two young girls ordered a couple of Long Island iced teas. They didn't tip Emily when she served them. Emily looked at me and rolled her eyes. It wasn't long before the same girls returned to the bar with their glasses a third empty.

"Need something?" Emily asked.

"These don't taste right. They're too alcohol-ey."

"I could add some syrup or some more cola to them."

"This doesn't taste like his do." The girl nodded to the other bartender working beside Emily. "Can you just make us something else? Or have him make it?"

"I'm sorry, I really can't."

"Forget about it," the one girl said to the other. "Just don't have her make you anything ever again."

S

I was talking to Emily's coworker about Matthew McConaughey movies. I told him that someone gave McConaughey acting steroids and then cast him in *True Detective*, but that the scripting turned out to be shit,

so you've got this thespian really selling some bullshit dialogue, acting out the worst clichés in a way that you almost buy it. The bartender was laughing when he climbed onto a stepstool and hollered, "Last call, folks. You got ten minutes for shots."

I stood there at the bar. I didn't have any drink left—I'd finished it half an hour earlier, then had a glass of water, and after that I just stood there with a glass of melting ice that I sloshed around from time to time. A last rush of kids crowded the bar to order shots, and Emily eyed me as they topped themselves off. "You need anything else?"

"I'm just hanging around for as long as you want me to. When you say go, I'm gone."

"Well, we've gotta close up."

I pulled my coat from the hook beneath the bar.

"One sec." Emily came from around the bar and gave me a hug. "I wish you'd showed up on a night I wasn't working."

ᔕ

I lay in the hotel room in my underwear, watching cable and sipping a bottle of water. I picked up my phone and found Emily's contact. "Thanks for the ginger drinks."

She replied quickly: "And thank God for my after-hours drink. It was fun chatting with you tonight. I never got to ask, but how long are you in town for?"

"Tonight's the night, unfortunately. I had plans to stay, but lingered too long in Seattle, and now my grandmother is threatening to die if I don't see her before I'm back to work."

"Grammas can be nice, I'm told. I have a crazy one, and another who thinks I'm a big disappointment."

"Well, you did major in literature."

"And . . . septum piercing, tattoos, bartending . . . disappointment."

"The tattoos are what won me over. You never saw mine, by the way."

"I need more. I was gonna get a typewriter in the same style as the accordion, but I can still remember the pain and I've been getting smaller pieces instead."

"The back was painful for me and it's a work in progress, so I've got more to look forward to. The traditional Thai tattoo on my thigh was the worst, though. Want to see?"

"Yeah!"

"I can only offer a live viewing."

"You're sneaky."

"The amazing tattooed sailor, in town for one night only—I feel like people would pay for this show."

"But you'd be behind bars and some creepy little person would be cracking a whip and sending an orphan around with a hat."

"That can be arranged."

"Get out of my head." I waited for a minute, and Emily messaged again. "Where are you staying?"

"I can pick you up."

ᔕ

I took Emily by the waist, pulled her against me, and kissed her hard as soon as we crossed the threshold of the hotel room. Then we started taking off clothes. I pushed her onto the bed, and unlaced my boots. She took off her shoes. I pulled off my shirt.

"Let me see," she said.

"It's a window. And that's a candle."

"And on the back?"

"Wings, a sail boat . . . . Your accordion, I like that."

"I actually play the accordion—so it's more than a silly innuendo."

I pulled off her dress, red hair falling all over her shoulders—the deep red of flames that burn in a vacuum of darkness, the luminescence you only get within an otherwise absence of light.

"Reference to *The Little Prince*."

"Skull and an ink bottle."

"You've got nails on your ankles?"

I kissed Emily hard. Her hand worked into my boxers. I reached to unfasten her bra. I pushed her back onto the bed, grabbed hold of the bike shorts that she wore for work . . . .

ᔕ

We'd worked ourselves up pretty good. Neither of us had finished and the fever was mounting. I had big plans for her. I wanted to savor that bliss. I was facing her, and her mouth was open, and she worked her hips against me.

"Come for me," she whispered. Then she said it again louder, "Come for me." She said it over and over, syncopating the words to our movements. "Come for me. Come for me. Come for me . . . ."

I clenched my eyelids shut, and focused, working hard enough to shatter that moment and that hotel room and the city, and all of the forest and trees that surround it, and the world beyond that. And I came to the edge but then my body gave out and so did Emily's.

"Fuck," I said, falling onto my side. "Just give me a little second here."

ᔕ

Emily rolled over. "Oh no, oh no, oh no."

"What?"

"I'm having a panic attack."

"Wait, what? Shit. Are you okay?"

Emily didn't say anything, she just turned onto her side and shook her body back and forth a little.

I didn't touch her. I stood, went to the bathroom sink, found a plastic cup, removed it from its plastic wrapper, and filled it with water. I returned to Emily and set the water on her bedside table. After a couple of minutes, she reached out and drank some.

ᔕ

I'd thought we looked pretty good before, but our bodies had become inelegant things. When Emily apologized, I told her it was cool, and that she should take her time. I felt like a monster. It was more than a feeling: I knew, and tried to counter that nature. I felt more monstrous naked, so I stood and found my boxers.

Emily had been nearly prostrate, but she slowly curled her body around her knees, and then began to sob.

"Oh, no. Are you crying?"

"No, not crying," she said, but she was crying. "I'm sorry. I'm not doing so well. I should have warned you."

"Shit, it's okay. I'm not angry, just . . . I don't know. I'm not feeling like a good guy right now . . . ."

"You're fine. It's not about you."

". . . I recognize this is an intense experience. I mean, I know that I'm a stranger, and I also understand that you've just gone through this crazy break up, and you're kind of in between right now . . . ."

"This has nothing to do with my ex, and it's not you, either."

ᔕ

"I have to go." Emily was not lying on the bed anymore. She was animated, manically so, dressing herself in a flurry.

I jumped out of bed and started doing the same thing. "I'll drive you."

"No, I'm going to walk. I need the walk."

"I'm walking with you."

"No, I'll be fine. I actually live pretty close to here."

I raced with her to dress myself. "Look, I understand why you wouldn't want me to walk with you. I really do. But you have to see my side of things. You seem distraught, it's very late, you've had a few drinks. I already hate myself here. I don't think it's right letting you walk out that door alone. So, for my benefit, please let me walk you."

"I live here. This is my home. I know what's going on. I'm probably safer than you would be."

"Thank you for understanding," I said. "I just need to find my socks here . . . ."

"Don't think because you're thanking me that I've given in."

"It's not a matter of giving in. You're doing me a favor. You aren't obligated to do it, but I appreciate it nonetheless."

S

We walked together a half a mile down Broadway, back towards town. I didn't touch Emily along the way.

"I could walk twenty feet or so behind you so that folks won't see us together."

It was a joke but Emily seemed to contemplate it. "No, that's okay. No one's awake anyway."

We got to the place where she was staying, her buddy's apartment. "I'm feeling better."

"Pretty sure no one saw us."

"Yeah, I think I'm in the clear." She might have wanted to laugh.

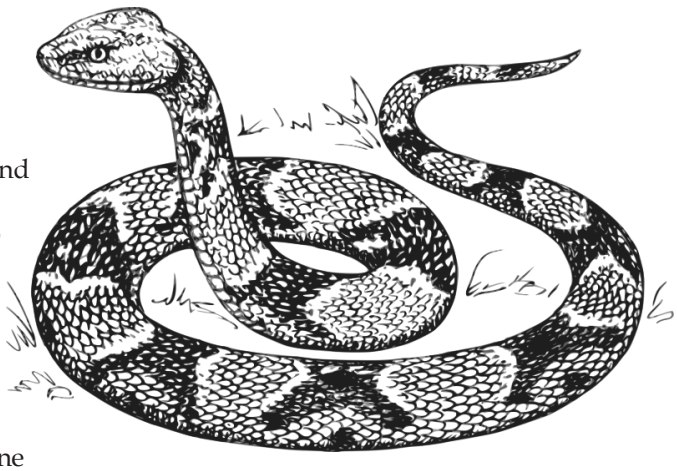
We stood on the sidewalk below the stoop of the apartment building. I didn't know what to do, and was about to leave. Hints of dawn were emerging on the horizon. Maybe the world was on fire and the inferno creeping toward us. I hadn't expected it, but Emily kissed me then. I got my fingers tangled up in flame-red curls. The night was aflame, and I would have burned myself alive and left charred foot prints on the sidewalk to prove that I'd stood there, but Eugene would forget about me as quickly as I'd arrived. And when I watched Emily ascend the stoop, and then the stairway within, I wondered if she'd forget me as well. She was alive and living and had accepted me briefly—whatever purpose I'd served would define me.



Ben Leib spent twelve years as a waiter, a student, and an alcoholic intravenous drug user. He now happily works at sea five weeks out of every ten. You can check out his publication history at benleib.com.

Franci Washburn

Copperheads



He stood on the left side of the horse looking across the animal's neck at the blotchy blue hills to the west, weaving his brown fingers in and out of the horse's mane. His hands were still strong but rough and calloused, the joints crooked with the beginnings of arthritis. He brought it to his face and rubbed his eyes—sun-faded blue eyes in a face once only handsome, now given character with the softening wrinkles of approaching middle age—resettled his battered straw hat and, with a deep sigh, shifted his trim body from one booted foot to the other. The horse tried to drop its head to nip at a single bunch of chewed grass in the sandy dirt, but was brought up short by the rein held in the man's other hand.

"All right, horse," Billy said. "Let's get on with it. Be glad you ain't nothin' but a dumb animal with a brain the size of a pissant."

He tugged the front cinch loose, unbuckled the back one and the breast strap, pulled the saddle loose, and set it on end, draping the wet saddle blanket and breast strap over the top. The horse skittered sideways a step as Billy led the animal to the hot-walker machine.

"Frisky, huh? Didn't get enough work?"

He unfastened and pulled off the hackamore, snapped the lead rope from one of the machine's protruding center bars onto the horse's halter and walked to the post outside the circle of sand that surrounded the walker. The horse stood quietly, waiting. Billy flipped a switch on the post, the hot walker made a grinding sound, and the center bars of the machine began rotating like a slow-motion upside-down egg beater, towing the horse in a circle.

"That's life, old son," Billy said. "You hook your nose up to a pole and you get dragged around and around forever and you never get any damn place. You only get off long enough for some son of a bitch like me to ride your ass."

He squinted at the sun, risen less than two hours over the roof of the small white clapboard ranch house. His eyes caught a movement at the front window and he saw Bess staring at him for a moment before she dropped the curtain.

"What the hell are you up to now, woman?" he muttered.

He glanced at the horse, stepping out quicker as the walker picked up the pace. Then he turned and limped off towards the barn and the next of six horses left to work.

From the barn came explosive *Blam! Blam! Blam!* sounds like a shotgun.

God damn that horse, Billy thought. The Arabian was kicking the walls and door of the corner stall—the one Billy had moved him into after the animal had kicked his other stall to pieces. Inside the white painted barn, Billy paused, letting his eyes adjust to the darker interior. The barn was long with a twelve foot wide corridor running down the middle and stalls on either side except for a section in the middle where a big tack room connected the two double rows of stalls. Big sliding double doors opened in front of the tack room and offered access to right or left down the corridors where fluorescent lights hung from the ceiling, over half of them with burned-out tubes. Of the forty-two stalls, only seven were in use.

Smelling the alfalfa hay from the loft, the chemical odor of the fly bait, and the permanent rich odor of horse manure, Billy turned right, walked to the end of the wide corridor and looked through the top half of the Arabian's stall. Water oozed from beneath the stall door. The Arabian had kicked over its water bucket again. The animal stood in the center, pretty as a picture, a gleaming bay, fifteen hands—tall for an Arabian. The horse's big dark eyes in the dished face looked at Billy.

"I'd like to let you out in the pasture, old fella," Billy said. "But that ain't in the cards for you. Shame to keep you stalled up, but I ain't got a say." He turned and walked back down the passage.

"Boss!" Eduardo called from the far end of the barn, where he was fitting a new door on the Arabian's old stall.

Billy stopped and looked past the skinny older man at the light colored plywood panels ready to be nailed over the broken boards of the stall walls.

"'Morning, 'Dwardo. Coming right along, I see," Billy said.

"She finished by noon. *Mira!*" Eduardo carefully set the new door down and stripped off his holey leather gloves. He stepped into the stall and brought out a lidded gallon fruit jar. It was filled with water, and inside a sinuous golden brown rope swirled and writhed. He held the jar out to Billy.

"*Mira!*"

"Jesus Christ, 'Dwardo!" Billy jumped back. "That's a god damned copperhead in that jar! What the hell's wrong with you?"

"I know, I know," Eduardo grinned. "I find her in the oat bin. She catch mouse, I think."

"What the hell you put it in a jar of water for? Kill the damned thing!"

Eduardo cradled the jar. "No, no, not yet. I want to see if she drown."

"Who cares? Just kill the damned thing!"

"No, boss. Just let me keep her in jar overnight. See if she drown!"

Billy stared at the jar full of snake. It was about two feet long, he guessed, and at the fattest part almost as big around as a beer bottle, and the same rich brown color except where the light through the water caught the scales with a bright penny-colored glitter. Could you really drown a copperhead?

"All right," Billy said. "You got until tomorrow morning. If it ain't dead by then, take it out and kill it."

"All right, boss." Eduardo carefully set the jar back in the corner of the stall.

Billy turned towards the door, turned back. "You better be careful. The saying goes that they travel in pairs, and I don't know but what that's true." He started away, turned back again. "You got that black colt saddled?"

Eduardo pulled on his gloves and hoisted the door again. "She tied outside the round pen."

"All right. Get the sorrel saddled next. The filly, not the colt. Work her on the lunge line for fifteen minutes then tie her by the round pen. And watch the colt on the walker. When he's cooled out, hose him down and put him back in his stall."

Billy untied the black and led him through the gate into the deep sand of the sixty-foot diameter round pen. The walls were seven feet tall so the horse couldn't see over the top to be spooked by anything outside the circle. Billy tied the halter rope to the saddle horn, walked to the railroad tie sunk on end in the center and picked up the six-foot whip. He sneezed three times in a row from the pollen he'd brushed off the ragweeds on his way into the pen. The young horse jerked his head and pointed his ears at Billy. Billy popped the whip behind the horse and made kissing sounds. The horse stepped out in a slow trot, and Billy reached down into a deep hole beside the hitching post and pulled out a bottle of Jim Beam.

Blam! Blam! Blam! The Arabian kicked the stall walls. After a pause, Billy heard the softer sounds of Eduardo's hammer nailing up the plywood panels, and again the *Blam! Blam! Blam!* of the Arabian's big hooves.

He unscrewed the cap on the bottle, took a long drink, recapped the bottle and put it back in the hole. Leaning against the post, he popped the whip again, urging the colt into a canter.

When he was satisfied that the colt was loosened up, Billy stopped him, slid a hackamore over the horse's nose, and stepped aboard. It was the third ride for the colt, and he took it like a settled old horse responding to Billy's light spur touches with walk out, trot, and canter first clockwise, then counterclockwise.

Billy opened the gate without getting down from the saddle and rode the black into the arena next to the round pen. It was a long rectangle with barrels set up down the middle. Billy rode the horse, weaving in and out through the barrels the length of the arena at a walk, trot, and canter, teaching the horse to rein to the left, rein to the right, changing

leads. He worked the animal on backing up, quick stops, and turns. After forty-five minutes, he rode the black out of the pen and stepped off, and then he realized that he didn't remember any of the work he'd just done with the horse.

He shook his head. You're getting stupider as well as older, he thought. One minute of wool gathering on a green horse and you could be flat on your back in the dirt with a broken leg—or worse. And then where would you be?

He pulled the hackamore off the black as Eduardo came up with the sorrel filly.

"She still lives," Eduardo said.

"What?"

"My snake. She still lives."

Billy rolled his eyes. He traded the black colt for the sorrel filly, slipped the hackamore over her head and led her into the round pen.

From the barn came the sound of the Arabian still kicking his stall.

"*El caballo es loco*," Eduado said.

Billy finished working the last of the six horses just before noon. The last one, a big sorrel colt, long as a freight train in the body, sweated heavily in the heat. Wet patches darkened the horse's flanks and both sides of his neck. Billy's shirt showed tees of sweat across the shoulders and down the middle of his back, across the upper part of his chest and down his belly. There were dark circles beneath his armpits. Dirt and sweat clung in the wrinkles of his face like a topographical map.

He led the sorrel colt past the round pen and the barn to the hot walker. Standing the saddle on end so the lining would dry out, he hooked the sorrel onto the walker across from the last horse he'd worked.

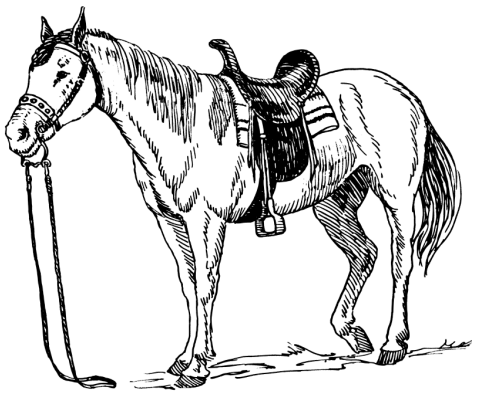
"'Dwardo! You got one on the walker ready to come off and get hosed!"

A little breeze came from the north and Billy pulled off his hat and let it play over his thick, still mostly brown, hair.

"'Dwardo!"

The little man came running around the corner of the barn bearing ahead of him at arm's length a dead snake.

"I'm coming! *Mira!*"



"So you decided to kill the thing, huh?" Billy asked.

"No! No!" Eduardo thrust the snake out and Billy backed up. "*Es otro!*"

"Another snake? Damn it, 'Dwardo, you'd better get them weeds mowed down around here like I told you to last week. We may be overrun with them sonsabitches. All I need is for one these horses to get snake-bit."

Eduardo held it up admiring it. It was of a size with the one in the jar, except this

one was minus a head. The sorrel just coming around on the hot walker snorted and danced and tried to stop, fighting the halter hooked to the extension bar. The walker groaned like an old man but kept dragging the horses around. "Well, all right, throw it away, you're spooking the horses and we got work to do."

"I take her home, skin her for hatband," Eduardo said and he carried the snake over and pitched it in the back of his old white Ford pickup hunkered in the driveway on broken springs.

After Eduardo unhooked the cooled-out horse and led it away, snorting and flaring its nostrils at the snake smell, Billy walked to the house and settled heavily in a lawn chair under an old live oak. He was hungry, but he didn't feel like going in the house.

After a few minutes, the screen door banged, and he hunched his shoulders and looked at his boots.

"Billy?"

"Yeah?" He didn't look up. He waited for more.

"Well, I just brought you some tea and some lunch."

Bess stuck a paper plate in front of him and he looked up. She reminded him of one of those white worms that you find when you pull up a rotted log—not that she was fat, no, she had lost so much weight that her legs looked like a snipe's. But her skin was blue white and translucent looking, so much like the worms that he almost expected to see her internal organs dimly through her skin. Her hair was reddish blonde; her eyes were dark brown holes in her head. She was barefoot and she wore a shapeless pale blue flowered shift that could be a dress or a nightgown—he'd seen her wear it for both.

"Aren't you going to eat?"

He took the paper plate. There was a thick bologna sandwich beside a big glob of potato salad. She set the blue plastic glass of iced tea on the ground beside his chair.

"Thanks, Bess," he said. He balanced the plate on his knee and reached for the tea.

"Oh, here's a fork," she said pulling a steel salad fork from a baggy front pocket.

Billy drank deeply, feeling the cold sugarless tea slide down the back of his throat.

The Arabian kicked his stall, *Blam!*

"Billy, I wish you'd make that girl take that damned Arab out of here," she said.

He set the weeping tea glass down and picked up a sandwich.

"Billy?" She sat down on the grass in front of him, her legs crossed beneath her. "Billy? I said I wish you'd make that girl get her damned Arab out of our barn."

He lowered the sandwich, scratched his eyebrows and rubbed his hand hard down his face. "Penny pays more every month just to store that horse than I get for training two of the others."

She barked a short laugh. "Penny? When did it get to be Penny?"

"All right," he said. "Miss Hunter."

"Well, I don't care about how much MISS Hunter pays to board that horse. It's crazy." She plucked a long grass blade and twisted it around her left index finger, untwisted it, retwisted it.

"Bess, I got to pay the bills. Even with the boarding money for the Arabian, we're not making it, you know that."

"I don't care! I'm sick to death of this place. I'm sick of–of–of those damned hills over there. Whenever I look up, those hills are there, and there isn't anything else. Billy, I've heard you say at least a hundred times that most of the land on this place isn't good for anything but holding the rest of the world together. Why don't you just sell it and move to Dallas or someplace? Jesus, I think this is the only piece of dirt in Jackson County that doesn't have any oil on it!"

"What do you want from me, Bess? I know there ain't any oil on this place. There are five hundred foot deep postholes all over this place from where my granddaddy and my daddy had test holes drilled. What do you want me to do? Eat a few dinosaur bones and crap oil?" He ripped off a bite of sandwich and chewed vigorously.

She slumped her shoulders forward and Billy saw down the front of her dress. She wasn't wearing a bra and her breasts sagged a little towards her flat stomach, what breasts she had. Her chest showed bony ribs above the neckline of her dress.

He remembered how she looked when he first saw her, five years before, leaning on the fence at the fairgrounds in Dallas watching him watch her. She was tall, but she had meat on her bones and she wore tight Levis and polished boots and a frilly pink shirt. He remembered her face and the way she smiled with her full lips in that little lopsided, sexy way. He had ridden the grand champion cutting horse that year at the State Fair and afterwards she came back to the pens to see him. When she'd run up to him, he'd turned and she ran into his arms and knocked his hat off.

"Let's get married," she said, and then she'd kissed him.

No, she didn't remind him of a white worm anymore. She looked like a picked chicken.

"I just saw in the paper that Westex brought in another well over by Possom Kingdom. Anson Cutler's land," she said.

"So? Good for old Anson. It'll give him something to talk about when he comes out next month to go dove hunting with me."

"Dove hunting! Anson Cutler's got a half dozen oil wells and you've got an old shotgun and a patch of weeds and sunflowers to hunt doves in." She threw the piece of grass away and a little breeze picked it up and placed it on Billy's sandwich. "Aren't you going to eat?" she asked.

He brushed off the grass, took another bite of the sandwich. "Why'd you want to get married, Bess?"

She leaned back, supporting her weight on one frail arm and hand. "I don't know. You had a reputation, you know. Among the women. In horse circles. The rich bachelor horseman that no one could tame. It was a lot better then."

"Am I such a bad catch now?"

"It's just different now."

"You mean because I'm not making money anymore? Because the horses I train don't win? Or is it just things in general?"

"I'm tired of being stuck out here in the middle of nowhere. I want to do things. I want to have lunch with my friends. I want to have money again. I want you to sell this place. You could buy another one closer to Dallas."

"Bess, we've been around this pole before. You know the place wouldn't bring enough to pay off the mortgage. Have some patience, will you? The horse training business goes in cycles. Some years you win and some you don't, but it comes back around. In a year or two, it'll be my turn again."

The Arabian kicked the stall. *Blam! Blam!*

Bess leaped to her feet. "It's crazy, Billy, it's just crazy." She turned and walked back into the house, banging the screen door behind her.

"I guess she tied hard and fast when she should have just dallied," Billy said.

He carefully set the plate of food on the ground, picked up the tea and drank it down. Then he walked back down to the barn.

An hour later he was helping Eduardo clean out the stalls when he heard the diesel engine of a pickup coming up the driveway. Eduardo grinned at him and looked quickly away. Billy propped the pitchfork in the corridor and hurried outside to sluice his face and hands under the water spigot by the door. He was drying his hands on his shirttail when Penny came around the corner.

"Billy, how are you?" She wore pearl gray English riding pants, the kind that puff out a little around the upper thighs, and a pure white shirt with one of those black ties. Her boots were black and gleamed in the sun.

"Hello, Miss Hunter. This is a surprise. I wasn't expecting you until the weekend."

She wagged a finger under his nose. "Now, now, now. I thought you were calling me Penny."

"Yes, ma'am," he said. "Penny."

She laughed, tilting her small head back and her reddish curls looked like Bess's used to.

"C'mon. I want to see my baby," she said, and put her arm through his and led him down the corridor to the Arabian's stall. The horse stopped banging when he heard them coming.

"He is certainly a handful, isn't he, Billy?"

"Well, he is that," Billy answered.

She unlatched the stall and went in. The horse snorted and bent his head while she scratched his forehead between his eyes.

"How's my baby? How's my baby?" She said. The horse rubbed his head against her sleeve leaving a green slimy streak of chewed alfalfa on the white fabric.

"Uh, you know, what do you think about maybe putting him to work? He's all anxious and heated up all the time being kept up in a stall like this," Billy said.

"Oh, no, Billy, I don't think so," she said.

"Penny, this Arabian is an animal. I know your father thinks of him as an investment, but you can't just store him in a stall like he's a painting or something. He needs to run around outside and be a horse."

"Well, I think you're probably right, but my father wouldn't like it. He paid a lot of money for this horse and if he got hurt or anything—well, you know."

Billy looked away. "Yeah, I understand."

She came out and latched the stall door. "Isn't he just about the most beautiful animal you ever seen?"

"He's a good looking animal, all right."

She leaned closer to Billy. "Speaking of good looking animals," she said.

Billy felt her breasts pressing against his chest and her small hand rubbing that spot on his back right above his belt. He tipped his head down with his mouth in her clean hair. She popped open the top two snaps on his shirt, touching her tongue to his chest.

"I love your salt taste," she said.

"We shouldn't be doing this anymore," Billy said. "Someday that lawyer boyfriend of yours is going to come shoot me."

She didn't answer, only stepped back and led him to the empty stall next door. He closed the stall door and through the screened window in the top half he saw Eduardo wave and go out the barn door.

He smelled the dust in the dry straw. He smelled the old manure and dry oats and horse sweat. He smelled her perfume, light and flowery like lilacs, and he wondered how she could stand to smell his sweat. She popped the rest of the snaps on his shirt and reached for his belt buckle, unzipped his pants and stepped back, unbuttoning her own shirt, taking off her boots and then her pants, folding them neatly and placing them on top of the boots. She was tanned, long legged, round breasted. She was the women he'd had twenty years ago and the women he wished he could have twenty years from now. Twenty years ago, he would have relished the attention, the sex. Now, he felt like an old worn-out stud horse—still capable, still interested, but missing something. He wondered when Penny would see him as he really was and move on, taking her horse with her.

They lay in the straw, and he didn't mind the rough scratch of it against his white skin where the sun never touched. He thought he couldn't do it, but then it was over in thirty seconds and she lay beneath him with her eyes closed, silent.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I can try again in a few minutes."

She opened her eyes and stroked his face. "It's all right, Billy boy. Next time."

When he rolled off, he heard a sound at the door and saw Bess's white face looking blankly at them through the top half of the stall door.

§

It was almost dark when he came up from the barn to the house. Cicadas whined in the trees around the house and a bat flew through the humid evening catching bugs. The kitchen light was on, but Bess had gone to bed. He lifted the corner of a dish towel on the table and saw the remains of supper—fried chicken, mashed potatoes in one bowl, and gravy with a puddle of grease floating on top in another bowl. He was hungry in his head, but his stomach said no. He opened the refrigerator and drank cold, sweet tea straight from the pitcher.

After he showered, he looked in the bedroom door. Bess wasn't there. He walked across the hall to the spare bedroom and peeked in. She was asleep on top of the last afghan of the dozen or more she'd crocheted in the last year; that and cooking were her concessions to country domesticity. She lay with her mouth partly open, snoring gently. He closed the door and went back to the other room.

§

He slept badly, waking every few minutes, hearing the Arabian kicking his stall down in the barn. Finally there was one sharp bang, louder than the others and then silence.

Maybe the bastard has kicked the door down and got out, he thought. Maybe he'll get out on the highway and get hit by a semi. He pulled the pillow over his head and slept.

He awakened at his usual time, five o'clock, pulled himself out of bed and sat on the edge, willing his aching muscles to move. Dressed, he went to the kitchen to put on the coffee and as he passed the spare bedroom, he noticed the door was partly open.

When the coffee was finished, he poured himself a cup and walked down to the barn, sipping as he went.

The door to the Arabian's stall stood open. He threw down the half empty cup as he ran. Bess sat on the straw inside the stall door, cradling his 12-gauge shotgun, the one he used to shoot doves. The Arabian lay in the stall on his side as if he were taking a nap, but half his head was gone and the remainder was blood and gore and the wall behind was a bloody mess.

"Jesus Christ, Bess, what have you done?"

She looked up at him, her face freckled with blood spatters. "I just couldn't stand it anymore, Billy. It was crazy."

His head swirled; his gut cramped. He closed his eyes, hoping it would go away. He felt the pressure of his own blood pumping, pushing against his brain, throbbing in his temples. His legs gave way and he sat down heavily beside Bess, leaning his head against the stall doorway.

Flies buzzed, circling the horse meat, fighting each other, breeding and depositing their eggs in the shattered horse head. He reached for the gun. Bess held it tightly.

Maybe he could say it was an accident. There had been a copperhead in the stall. He had shot at the snake. He missed.

"Give me the gun, Bess." She let it go and he took it from her.

"It was crazy," Bess said. "You know it was crazy, Billy."

Leaning on the gun, he stood up and then he walked down the corridor and put the gun in the tack room behind the feed bin. There was the copperhead, still moving in the jar full of water in the corner.

Billy got the gun out again, tucked it under one arm and the jar with the snake under the other. He walked outside, down the pot-holed drive and across the highway to the patch of sunflowers and weeds turning brown and dry in the August heat. He put the jar down on its side and stepped back. The sun was just coming up and a few birds twittered in the live oak behind the house. The snake was beautiful, copper-gold in the morning light through the glass jar. Why did something so beautiful have to be dangerous?

From the highway, he heard the engine of a semi truck gathering speed for the pull up the long hill half a mile past his gate. He wondered what it would be like to live on wheels, unanchored, always moving, going away, and he wondered if the driver had a little piece of dirt somewhere with a house on it and a wife and maybe some kids.

He unloaded the remaining shell from the shotgun, watched it bounce end over end on the grass. Holding the gun, he stepped forward and smashed the jar with the gun butt. The copperhead crawled out of the jar, pausing with its head up, sampling the air. Billy watched as the snake crawled away into the tall sunflowers. He knew he would never hunt doves here again.

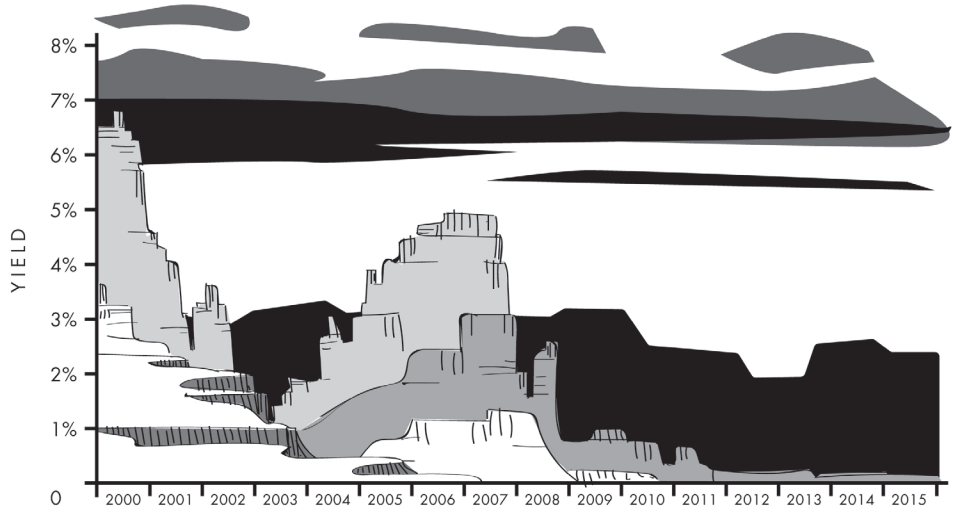
Billy heard the sound of the truck motor fading in the distance. He wondered if he could learn to drive a semi.



Franci Washburn grew up in, on, and around Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota (Oglala Lakota). She holds a Ph.D. from the University of New Mexico and has been a faculty member at the University of Arizona since 2005, holding a joint appointment in American Indian Studies and the department of English. She is the author of multiple books, including three novels with Native American themes, *Elsie's Business*, *The Sacred White Turkey*, and *The Red Bird All-Indian Traveling Band*. She is also the author of the biography *Tracks on a Page: The Life and Work of Louise Erdrich* and is currently working on a fourth Native American novel, *Endangered Species*. Rather than her publishing, however, she considers her most important work to be the many successful students who have passed through her classroom and are now serving their communities, their nations, and the world.

Glenn Stowell

The First Axiom



Danica Mitchell

Somewhere far to the east, the Federal Reserve is meeting, threatening to evaporate the dream of my house, and here, the sun is still rising, glinting the soil red. The sky is a smooth, distant blue, cirrus clouds carved in it, way up, far out, like they're the petty, insufficient remnant of something that used to be closer and far more vibrant. My knees sink in the powdery dirt as I reach forward to plant the last circular sensor, the sandstone cool beneath my hands, the arch curving high above me. A sporadic wind scrapes the rosy expanse, but the stone column splits it around me, creating a small shelter. Loose strands from my hair-tie don't even shiver as the wind passes.

I pat the dirt from my knees upon standing and look out at the park. There are uneven, crumbling ridges of red mesa in all directions, the layers of earth exposed at their bases. Every couple hundred yards, violent outcroppings of sandstone needles jut up. They resemble statues, striped up their length with the sediment of different epochs. They're like a gift from another species, or maybe a braille-like message from our futures selves, but we just haven't figured out what they mean yet. There are times I forget what I'm supposed to be doing and just find myself staring.

It's not, I guess, up for debate how they got here, geologically, but it still feels mysterious to me, at least in the morning, out here alone, like I'm the only person stranded on this strange planet, like everything's been ripped away, the mountains, the trees, and it's just me, doing what little I'm doing, to no end, causing nothing, my actions a result of nothing. It's a bit of mystery to me how anyone gets anywhere, though. Think of the way that rivers get formed: the water has no inkling as to what it's doing, carving the bed deeper for years and years. It just does the most

natural thing, which is to run downhill. To go with the flow, in a real literal way. Despite knowing this—rotely—I haven't been able to do the same for years. I can't.

I'm walking back to my little lab when it hits me again. The markets are moving! Rates are hopping! If you look at a chart of bond yields long enough, it turns into something like stalagmites. They jump around like ECG screens, but there's no heart linked to those charts, except for mine.

I've found myself dreaming of yields, waking to nightmares of cataclysmic rate-jumps: a spike like that would price us out, me and Jeff. We've been planning for a house, and to make it happen, we need a cheap mortgage, which relies on rates not moving upward. The whole process makes me long for Dramamine.

First, we need to lock down some land, and we've got to get the bank on-board and buy a variety of insurances on the construction. After all that comes building the actual house, the cost of which depends on anything from, say, the type of termites affecting pine a few seasons ago to the trickle-down of whatever capricious tariffs are being levied at some future moment. We've been hunting a plot in somewhere like Carbonville or Price, somewhere halfway between Salt Lake City, where Jeff gives lessons, and Canyonlands, where I spend my time.

But as soon as we find a few acres we could dare to call our own, and we both drive from work to see the broker, and we slam together a rough offer, another buyer has already pulled the trigger—in cash—no questions asked, no contingencies. Everyone else is so fast. Sovereign wealth funds know there's free money here at this bizarre juncture of history, and they're comfortable with spending this fast cash because it won't last forever. Meanwhile, we mere mortals are working with the stringent burdens of budget and emotion. In the time of Quantitative Easing, we're moving far too slow.

Back at my shed-lab, I put on my headphones and wake up the computer. On the screen, there are small electric-green loops emanating from the center of the screen, a bit like ripples on a pond, these visualizations of the tiny reverberations that the arches are making.

The process I've got here isn't itself new. Civil engineers of all stripes use this same equipment and approach for bridges, towers, all that jazz. Those structures bend and twist in the wind, and it's not silent: you need the right sensors to hear it but it's there, speaking to you, over and over, everything wrenching inside a range. But instead of doing health-checks on something as sterile as, say, a skyscraper, I've spent years listening to geological fixtures. In Canyonlands, it's been natural bridges and arches for me, my sacred responsibility to figure out which are in the most imminent danger.

If I had a banner above my desk, it'd read something like: all that damage needs is time and a defect. That's the truth. The first axiom they teach you in graduate structural health monitoring is that every known material has a defect. And so, assuming you can't turn back time, or

stop its march, the question I'm constantly approximating isn't *if*. By training, I'm supposedly an expert in *when*, despite what I've missed.

Whenever we're together, Jeff likes to imagine our house. "When you step inside," he said, standing in the doorway of our apartment, "it's all made of walnut. The whole thing is wood, love. Finished real dark and authentic-like."

He strode forward and jumped onto the coffee table, his arms held up like a maestro's.

"When you're in our new living room," he said, voice raised, his eyes closed, "*Oh*, it smells like a damn forest! Smell it with me!"

He opened his eyes, pointed at me.

"Smell," he said. I inhaled through my nose, and loved the man deeply.

He likes to imagine me with a big stethoscope, straddling rocks, taking their pulse. He asks if I ever sit them down and gently pat them before I say they've got six months left to live. I've told him it's not like that at all, that I spend my day waiting for data to pool, sort of like watching rain collect in a handful of buckets. I've even shown him my shed-lab, but he still gives me a hard time for sport. It's just—what his mother calls—his way. He likes to pick apart people, but also loves kids, a combination that's made being a piano teacher the most natural thing in the world for this prodigy-turned-dropout.

Our apartment bedroom is dark, which might mean he's still sleeping. In the doorway, I knock off my boots and slip into the room, shimmy off these sandy cargo pants, and hop on top of the comforter.

He's a lead weight on the mattress, anchoring the whole bed. His body is a brutal machine with square, steel angles. If Berklee had a football team, then he might've had a reason to stay. I try to fit myself into his sleeping form, inching my back up into him.

"Hey there, love," he grunts. Then: "your hair smells like the sun."

"Hair can't smell like the sun."

"It *can,* and yours definitely *does*."

His lips on the back of my neck. Then, goosebumps on my forearms. Everywhere, chains of action-reaction.

"What're we doing for my day off?" he says.

"I was thinking we could pack some sandwiches and hike out in Green River."

"Why there? Don't you try to avoid your folks like most people?"

"They're not coming with us," I say, "but there's a trail in town."

"Whatever you want," he says.

I turn my head and squint at him.

"I'm being serious," he says, and crawls over me, hops to his feet, the man standing in loose boxers and black athletic socks, his thighs striated like a deer's. He's looking down at me, hands on hips, lips pursed like he's waiting for a train.

"You should probably get out of bed."

Green River's not so far a ride, maybe forty-five minutes, and the sun flooding the dash feels glorious in my lap. I can feel it on the outside of my eyelids, which I've closed as quick-acting relief against the ache of too little sleep. Even though I'm paying for it now, I had no choice but to be up early. Out there, work is better done before the sun's been trapped for the day. It's pretty easy to resent the troposphere, this double-edged sword of carbon dioxide hanging over us.

To my left, Jeff hums softly when he exhales. It's an old man's involuntary moan. He doesn't know he's doing it, but I can hear it. When he drives, he transforms abruptly into his father, both men running hands over their matching scalps, whistling through their teeth as various motorists elicit some psychic sort of stress.

It's been a while since I've been back home to Green River. Probably going on half a year now. No problems with my parents themselves. They're lovely people, really. Pleasant, fair, rational. Beautiful in their own simple ways. It's just that just being around them, being in the house, being among photos, smells, objects—it all makes me remember that I used to have a sister, and that she was their daughter too. It makes me remember how much joy we'd all had together, the four of us, without ever knowing it fully while it was happening.

I used to be someone else. I used to have Sarah's lead to follow, and I could think less, act more. She gave me permission to just go for it. We went for a hike just about three years ago out back of the high school, where a trail snakes around the red foothills flush with rabbitbrush, those spindly yellow flowers that pop up through dry scrub. There are junipers jammed between rocks, and tufts of winterfat. Life still finds a way to unspool itself in harsh climates.

It was hot once we finally got started. She kept making fun of me for my Camelbak—I remember that barb of all things. Like Jeff, she might've been better suited for the northeast where people snip at each other for the simple joy of snipping, in a city like Boston where she went away for undergrad. She was erudite and just plain elusive, joggling from renal systems of zebras to power systems of Žižek. If you weren't paying attention, she'd lose you.

We were volleying a vigorous argument between us as we went. Not a malicious one, not shameful nor even remotely important, but it still comes back to me. Sarah argued that dogs were more admirable than humans because you could breed out defects from their gene pool entirely. She cited something to do with the genetic factor that made some dogs prone to kidney stones, walked me through case study after case study of these poor pooches pissing uncomfortably. But I kept pointing out that her "admirable" feat was only possible because dogs are so miserably inbred to start and that whom they—the dogs—copulated with had very little to do with their own free will. We had to stop walking to catch our breath. Doubled over, we laughed, maybe a little at the absurd images being painted, but probably more at the bareness of our desire to out-argue the other.



Danica Mitchell

We were past the first miles of hills and were out into the small plains where clusters of pinyon pines huddled and massive fissures separated plains from one another. The largest crack seemed to harbor its own little ecosystem, and we studied it while we sat and ate our zip-locked lunch. Thick carpet of oniongrass on its floor. Sporadic clumps of Baltic rush, that razor-grass with those hard, dark flowers. A handful of harebells with the most delicate violet petals.

Bright and scorching, it must've been nearing noon. We were about to pick up our packs and march on but then I saw it. Far north in the crevice, at the limits of my vision, a small dark tide began to spread.

Sarah could see it too. It kept creeping forward, this two-inch-thick sludge of mud and sticks. She got up from her knees as it approached. The mud slipped past us, bludgeoning the harebells, trudging on. Soon there were three inches of rushing red water in the trench. The water continued to slosh higher. Debris flashed past us: branches, roots, whole gangly bushes.

Looking up from the crevice, there wasn't a single cloud above us, only blue mesas at the very border of the sky. The ground craved water—had become caked and distorted without it—and there hadn't been a shower for weeks. Somewhere far to the north, though, it must have poured through the night. All that rain pounded down on oversaturated soil then sped across slick rocks and hurtled south. If only we had my monitoring equipment, then we could've slapped sensors onto the crevice and we would've heard it coming, that flood flashing toward us. If only I had something better equipped than my self.

Sarah inched her way to the edge, rolled up her pant legs, and dangled her feet off just enough to dip her toes into the stream. She lifted her legs as a branch came through then put them right back down. It might've been dangerous for someone else but we had high ground and I'd always trusted that Sarah was in control.

Car brakes. Motor deadens. Jeff's hand on my knee. My eyes open to the reflective orbs of his sunglasses.

Blink out the brightness, shapes solidifying, frame-by-frame becoming recognizable. A silver sedan. A brick building. We're behind the high school in a parking lot beside a paved basketball court. On a hill that rises behind the hoop, there's a *SOLD* realtor sign.

"Nice job getting us here. Sorry for the shoddy copiloting."

"Not a problem," he says. "Sometimes I like trying to find my way."

In a place without rain, the ground is rarely wiped clean. We follow the tracks of mountain bike tread along the path's unmarked entry.

There are toe-prints of rodents leading into a little hole. Maybe kangaroo rats or rock squirrels, burrowing themselves away.

"My dad's definitely starting to become one of *those* old guys," I say. "One of those absolutely docile maniacs next door. Just watering his little garden on a sunny day, and being simultaneously terrified about what Xi Jinping is up to, y'know? Too much news for him. Too much hysteria and, like, hand-wringing."

"My folks are actually going the opposite way," says Jeff, "just fading more into the sixties. My mom's very sort of libertarian now and get this: she started smoking pot."

"No way."

"Way," he says. "Can't make this stuff up. She didn't smoke in college when it was fashionable but now that they're in Colorado, it's straight-up open season. To be fair, there's nothing wrong with it—legally, morally, whatever—but it's just weird to see your mom with a glass one-hitter."

"I used to think of smoking pot as a big, like, life decision."

He laughs. "In high school, right, you could spot stoners from a mile away. Different clothes. Preposterous mannerisms. They were just trying to set themselves apart, like the rest of us, I guess. But I feel like pot being completely illegal back then added to its mystique. It sort of created a sort of barrier to entry from being like them."

"And now that it's legal in some states and in the news and well-researched," I say.

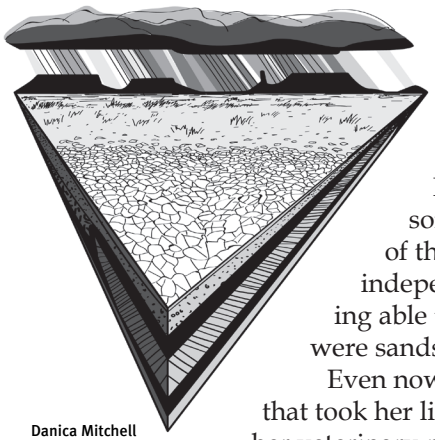
". . . now you've got my mom, man," Jeff says, "casually picking up some sativa on her way back from the grocery store."

Jeff unhinges the nozzle and siphons a sip from my Camelbak. He gulps.

In this stretch of the hike, there's winterfat that lines the right side of the path. The left side is bare. There's an embankment behind the shrubbery that must block sterilizing sun, suffocating dust, gusts of wind—whatever threat that wore the rest of this place infertile.

What'll grow from this plot of land now that it's been sold? It's anyone's guess, some of us more informed than others. Dad won't know baseball scores or blockbuster NBA trades but, by watching local-access TV every day, he's up-to-date on stoplight replacements and small-time elections. Naturally, he was the first to tell me when this space was rezoned from being open space and agriculture to being commercial.

And I happened to see in the paper this past week that it was just sold to a foreign buyer for millions. It's bizarre. I've had a real urge to share this rezoning news with Jeff, but standing here, I think I've got to wade through this—whatever this feeling is—myself. Jeff would be able to talk about it, sure, but his mind goes right to logistics. He'd be incredulous about the prospects of getting electricity and water out into whatever mini-mall might be erected here. He'd be distracted by the de-



Danica Mitchell

tails, unable to see the feelings clinging to them. I'd put two hands on my head and look at the emptiness, my mind animating it with vestiges of the past. He'd scratch his chin and wager at how much it might cost to level some foothills to build the parking lot.

Looking at this path that might soon disappear, I'm still seeing the last time I was here. I've been left somewhere in the balance of Sarah sitting on the edge of the crevice. In the mirage of her being so secure and independent, of her being the younger sister but—I felt—being able to transform herself into a harder material than me. If I were sandstone then she must've been gneiss.

Even now, I can't match my impression of her to the addiction that took her life. After our last hike, she flew back to Florida, where her veterinary practice had its roots. She seemed fine at the time, no different than other years. We were never the type of sisters to swap diaries and gush but, I mean, we did speak each week. Of course, I *could* have told her anything but, in practice, didn't.

I dropped her off at the airport then and she must've had the prescriptions in her carry-on luggage, toting them everywhere she went like all the other banal detritus of life. Gum wrappers, tampons, mints, spare keys. What we pieced together was that the Percocet must've started with her ACL surgery, and then never stopped. I'm sure she could've convinced doctors that her pain was chronic, the woman trained in discerning the suffering of animals far less articulate than she. But what can we really know now? and what good does having it right make? Some days, it feels like she might as well have been struck by an asteroid, the same absence it results in, the same gaping crater left in our lives.

Her colleagues never noticed a lapse in her work. An ex-boyfriend genuinely had no clue. None of us could offer an explanation but my parents still hounded for one. They prodded me, her friends. They paid specialists and starved for results of tests as if those reports were an answer. The world is more data than conclusion, and that can be crippling, but it's a fact..

The conclusion I've drawn, for what little it's worth, is that Sarah slipped too far one night, mixing perc-30s and wine, relaxing, winding down, and she simply submerged. On the nightstand, she left no note for us. Just an electronic clock, sounding its alarm all through the next day.

It is hotter on the plains. Jeff is mopping his forehead with a bandana, the sun a bright spec on his sunglasses. I can feel the heat through my sneakers as we stand on the caked sediment. In an earlier epoch, we'd be at the bottom of a lake. There would be humidity and crocodiles—here, in Green River. Can you believe it? I can't, but

it's true, and such a realization feels hopeful to me now—that volatility is everywhere you look, everything changing, sometimes becoming unrecognizable. Out here, alone with my partner, alone with my memories, the most pressing question is what to do with ourselves in this moment.

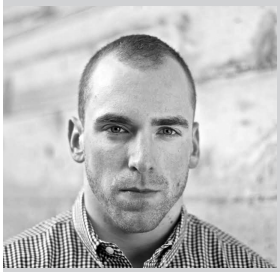
Before I can speak, Jeff breaks into a sprint, hurtling toward a crevice. Leaping, he clears the gap by three feet, tennis shoes skidding on the packed earth. He makes it look so easy.

I take a breath, a slurp of water, then jog forward. Planting both feet, I hop over the crack and come down easily. Having crossed the crevice, having made it to the other side, the distance seems less wide.

The clouds, clearer now, look to me like they're some sort of ancient hieroglyph left over from cave-times. They're telling me to go look back at the crevice, and so I do. Just inside the little ledge: Baltic rush, oniongrass, harebells that bend sideways, the weight of their lushness making them unwieldy.

I stare up north as far as I can. The trench seems calm. Taking a knee, I put my palm to the ground. Then I slide my knee out from under me and lie on my stomach for a moment, turning my head to the side, lowering my ear. There's nothing to hear, I know it. Still I close my eyes to make sure the sediment is silent.

"C'mon," says Jeff, "let's keep going, love."



Glenn Stowell manages investments for families, foundations, and endowments, and leads the breakfast shift at a center for veterans experiencing homelessness. He translated and edited *You Jump to Another Dream*, a collection of poems by Beijing-based sound artist and underground organizer Yan Jun. The collection was published by Vagabond Press in Australia.

Kirie C. Pedersen

Rules of the Wild

Alyssa Pinsker: *Do you still see yourself as the "good girl" versus the "wild" one?*
Robin Rinaldi: *I don't see myself in that polarized way anymore. I can be both "good" – domestic, wholesome, faithful, hardworking – and "wild" – angry, rule-breaking, messy, instinctual – depending on the circumstance. Giving myself permission to get wild helped me integrate that part of myself so I don't fear it anymore, and also don't feel ruled by it.. . . I want to live in a world where we all laugh at the word "slut," so I will help create that world by standing up to them.*

– http://www.thefix.com/content/acoa-sexual-adventurer

Half of all migrating birds never make it to their destination. Those arcs of geese flapping overhead? They crash into buildings. They sink into chemical-laced ponds. They are submerged in oil, feathers terminally drenched. They starve or become separated from the flock.

Almost everything Jana knows, she learned in the wilderness. She learned with her feet and fingers and eyes and mouth. From the fragrance of madrone bark that peels like paper and the way the autumn sun strikes cedars sideways as each day fades. From the susurration of waves against the basalt cliffs. From the danger and mystery of tides.

"Aren't you scared alone out there in the forest?" That's what people ask.

"Only people terrify me." Jana meant to be funny, but it was also true. Pulled from the forests and cliffs to start school, she was ignorant of the rules other children seemed already to understand. She stood frozen on the playground, wanting to hide, but there was nowhere to go. When she entered adolescence, this ignorance became perilous. In college, her advisor, an economics professor, had a theory about how monogamy evolved. Females stayed with one mate, Professor Faulkner said, so as not to be prey to others, and to survive the long mammalian gestation when the babies, too, were prey.

And wild women? What about them? Jana lacked the desire to be mother or mate. If that made her bad, that's what she wanted and that was how she wanted to be seen. When her peers talked about becoming attorneys or physicians or the presidents of corporations, Jana said, "I want to be a prostitute." Just to shut them up. She wasn't ready to lean in, but neither did she want to stick her head into an oven or fill her pockets with stones and stumble into the River Ouse.

Well, sometimes she wanted to. There was a time during those college years when, with every breath, she thought, *I want to die*. Failing to fit with the flock brought certain penalties. She couldn't always bear to pay them. But if, on this wildly circling planet, only half survive the great migrations or even birth itself, Jana vowed to stay alive. Unwilling to alter her trajectory, she fell into the arms of naughty ideas, including but not limited to those of the nineteen-year-old the night of the steel drums. And when the sex doctor told

her he wanted to break every bone in her body, ending with her face and particularly her chin, it packed an extra blow. He knew Jana was vulnerable about her chin. She told him so herself in one of those regrettable revelations after orgasm. When she was a belligerent child, precursor to truculent adolescent and wild young adult, her father sometimes hit her in the face. Perhaps he wanted to exorcise his own father from the face of his child.

Or so she told herself.

Was it true?

Could she *absolutely know this to be true*, as the SoCal seer Byron Katie later asked?

What was true was that in her one-room shack on the reservation, Jana threw a table across the room and shattered the wood carved by some painstaking hand. When that failed to have any effect on Marco, when all he said was "I want other lovers," she tossed the shellacked pieces into the fire. Time collapsed and fell forward, moment telescoping out of moment. The broken table failed to ignite. Jana retrieved it from the flames and tucked the ruined pieces into a corner near her mattress on the floor.

"I'll find other lovers too, then." Jana said. "Maybe someone who works with wood."

She was vengeful as a witch. She wanted to die. She wanted to stalk the sex doctor. She'd already heard about him. About broken hearts (the women). Drumming circles (the men). In the small community of artists who lived on the rez, word had a way of getting around.

"He has a lot of lovers," her friend Susan said. Jana and Susan were taking their daily walk along Reservation Road. The maples arched a deep May green above them. Susan suggested they drop by the sex doctor's cabin so Jana could see for herself. "Let's see if the psycho is home," was how she put it. They turned off just past Susan's own cottage, which was a cross between the prow of a ship and a fairy castle. Before Susan moved to the colony, she lived for seven years on a boat, sailing alone along the Inside Passage of British Columbia. Now, if she had to live on land, she still wanted to feel slightly adrift, as every white person on the rez seemed to be. Susan had sex with anyone she wanted and took none of it seriously. Relationships didn't drive her crazy. They weren't the focus of her life. Her carpentry and weaving were. She was like one of those dolls that bobbed back to center no matter what.

They walked along the narrow alley that accessed the Indian houses along the beach and just beyond those, the cottages built by the artists, all these deeply flawed people in one-room cabins within a mile of each other. The artists were ex-pats in their own country, or so they liked to see themselves. From every doorway, dogs emerged, but the women knew most by name, called out "good dog," and the guardians retreated to their small turfs.

"Richard doesn't have a dog," Susan said. "No worries there." As they entered Richard's driveway, they walked more slowly, as everyone did on the reservation, offering occupants every opportunity to complete a conversation or meal or assignation, or a visit to the outhouses that stood behind most cabins. This caution Jana already knew. When she hiked alone along the High

Divide or through the Enchanted Valley in the Olympics, if she came upon a black bear, particularly with her cubs, she offered every opportunity for the creatures to leap away. This had always worked. "The wildlife's afraid of us," she liked to say, showing off as always. "We're the predators."

Richard's cabin was elaborately constructed, with an arched window carved into the eave, and the porch seemed suspended over the cliff. "I don't think he's home," Susan said. She walked onto the porch. "His truck's not here anyways." She leaned her forehead against the window and looked inside. With a thrilling sense of danger, Jana joined her. In one corner, an oak table was covered with papers and books. More books lined the wall beside the sink. Near a fireplace at the far end, another lower table was strewn with musical instruments, and others hung from the walls: banjo, dulcimer, flutes, marimbas, drums, concertina, and a mandolin.

"You didn't tell me he played," Jana said. "You know I love musicians." But then everyone in the colony, Jana included, played at least one instrument, or sang, and on the weekends, most gathered at the tavern in the village to make music or listen to it and to dance, although Jana, determined to stay sober and straight, had not ventured to town at night.

"He plays all right," Susan said. "He's just not very good." In the middle of the room, a carved ladder led to an alcove. Jana imagined climbing the ladder, easily at first and then pregnant, navigating with difficulty because of her gently bulging belly. But this time Richard would have to figure out something safe if his mate was pregnant, wouldn't he?

"I hope he's good looking," Jana said. "I don't want to shack up with an ugly man."

"He's not," Susan said. "Not what you'd think, anyways, for how crazy he makes women." When Jana continued to look at her, as if waiting, she laughed. "And no, I haven't slept with him, so I wouldn't know." He had too many women already, Susan said, and she, for that matter, too many men. Although her pregnancy hadn't started to show, Susan cupped her palms around her belly.

"When Marco told me he wanted to sleep with other women," Jana said, "it felt like some primal abandonment."

"What did you tell him?"

"I screamed. And threw a table, and then I threw up."

Susan put her arm over Jana's shoulder. "You could have told him no," she said. "You could have said that didn't work for you."

"That never even entered my mind," Jana said. "I've always said I wanted to be wild, and now I have my chance. No more *dear sweet Marco*, as my mother calls him." She slipped her own arm around Susan's back, and, pressed together, they headed away from the ornate cabin. "You figure out which guy's the father?"

"Whoever's the biggest sucker," Susan said.

"That's sick," Jana said. "I'll be doula if none of the suckers shows up."

"You hate kids."

"I like teaching them. I just don't want to have one."

"You'll change your mind," Susan said. She shrugged. "Or not."

Neither of them knew, of course, that on that bright May morning, the stratovolcano the Indians called Lawetlat'la was about to spread fire and ash across their wilderness. That millions of cedar and hemlock and maple and Douglas fir, and the birds and mammals and snakes and insects and microorganisms that lived in and around the canopy would be destroyed, and men and women too, those who strayed too close or refused to flee even when the lava and mud were upon them.

Not long after that, at dawn, Jana told Marco she couldn't take the back and forth of it, the uncertainty of when he might be with someone else. He cried. "I thought we'd be together forever," he said. But now Jana had her plan, and she wasn't turning back. Over the next six months, she gained twenty pounds and lost them again, two sets of thrift store clothes hanging from hooks on her cabin door. She invited Richard over for dinner, roast chicken with tamari and garlic and ginger with juices that ran like red and golden rivers, and then she passed in and out of his attic alcove more times than she could count. Finally, she gathered Richard's other lovers, one for each day of the week, from in and around the colony. She wanted revenge on dear sweet Marco, and instead she took her revenge on Richard. The women nestled in the fragrant water of Jana's cedar hot tub and laughed so hard they howled.

"You're addicted," Susan told them. She sat on the edge of the tub because the water was too hot for the growing foetus. "Why do this to yourselves?"

"You're headed for a fall," Richard told her. Jana had invited him to her first solo concert, if you could call it that, in a tiny Portland coffee house. She could taste the dust from Lawetlat'la's latest eruption. "You're too high on yourself. I see it coming. You're going to drink or drug or die."

Three days later, as she sat cross-legged on the floor with her hammer dulcimer students, Jana leaned back as if all the blood had drained from her body. She waited until the children's parents arrived, and by the time she made it home, she'd spiked a fever of 105. She hallucinated strings of dinosaurs swinging from the eaves. When Susan drove her to the emergency room of the tiny rural hospital, she was immediately admitted into intensive care.

"Young girls like you don't get this sick," the doctor said. Jana had an unusual kind of pneumonia, he said, something usually old people got. His face soft with concern, he leaned over her. "What have you done to yourself?" When the nurses brought trays of soft food, Jana screamed with a kind of horror, as if what she'd loved was now vile. Susan smuggled comfrey she blended into juice, and she forced Jana to drink tall glasses of the stuff. Marco visited, kind and loving as always, with a bouquet of Coyote's eyes, the wild buttercup Jana loved. He was engaged, he told her, and his partner expecting. Jana hated all those words and the way they rolled from his mouth: engaged and partner and expecting. What did any of it mean?

Richard sent a note. She wasn't really sick. She was trying to manipulate him. But he was willing to take her back.

After two weeks, Jana was released with warnings her recovery would take a long time. She needed to take better care of herself. Her cabin smelled musty and stale, but the mattress on the floor was neatly made, as if for the

organized and healthy life she would now begin to lead. Susan had also repaired the broken table, and it sat in another corner with a chair Susan must have found in the village thrift shop. And she'd left a basket of fruit and cheese and homemade bread, along with a note. "Meet me at steel drums."

Although so weak she could barely stand, Jana showered and then pulled on leggings and a pale blue blouse Susan had given her after she outgrew it. "But you have to give it back," she'd said. "I plan to be sexy again the moment this thing is out of me." The blouse had ruffles and ribbons that floated as Jana moved. She French-braided her hair, and when it was dry, she released it to form a wild halo around her face. Then she drove past the native cemetery with its too-young babies and mothers and she crossed the bridge to the mainland.

In the bar beside the slough, the steel drum band from Trinidad played. As she moved across the wide wooden planks of the bar, the music pulsing and the ribbons streaming from her sleeves, Jana felt energized. She danced sensually with the women, and then, holding the hand of the youngest and most handsome man, she walked onto the back deck suspended over the slough. Almost everyone was getting high, swaying to the music. And at one corner was Susan leaning over the railing, and at the other corner Richard, dancing by himself. As if standing outside herself, Jana watched him catch sight of her and step forward, and then how his face changed as the beautiful young man dropped her hand and drifted away.

And then Richard was leaning into her face. "You're the most destructive person I've ever met," he said. "You've destroyed this community." For a moment, as if a stone had been tossed into water, the dancing bodies separated around them. Jana started to follow him. All she'd wanted was to show him the rag of his actions. To show him the dust they were breathing.

And then, instead, Susan stood beside her. "It's happened," Susan said. Jana hadn't followed Richard after all. She stood beside Susan looking back across the slough at the reservation where they all lived in their makeshift shacks and fantasies. For a moment, Jana thought Susan meant she was proud of her, that finally Jana stood up for herself. She rubbed the tight spot at the base of her neck and wondered how she'd make it through the night. Then she noticed Susan's golden skirt and the stain that spread down the front. Susan giggled. "My water just broke," she said. "Let's get out of here."

It was far too early, Susan said, to call the midwife, so Jana drove Susan home and brewed cups of chamomile tea while Susan called everyone in town. It seemed Susan had invited all of them to be doula, but that was okay. "I'll be back later," she said as people began to arrive. Outside her own cottage, she walked beside the stream with her flashlight, gathering *Rubus Spectabilis*, the Salmonberry, as her neighbor had taught her. She filled a white ceramic cup with the citrusy fragile fruit, and she listened for the Swainson's thrush with its fluting cry. "That's when you know Salmonberry is ripe," her neighbor said. Jana tucked the cup into a basket with the Gouda and goat cheese and dense sourdough Susan had left for her earlier, and then she slept on top of the freshly-made bed. Just before dawn, she headed back to Susan's.

Naked and glistening with sweat, Susan was sprawled on her mattress surrounded by the women who soaked in Jana's hot tub earlier that year. Everyone joked and told stories and ate the berries and cheeses and bread, and it felt calm and close and warm, as if they had formed their own family in this safe place. Nobody could ever hurt them here.

"Let's make bets on when it'll be here," Susan said. "I'd say within the hour."

Everyone laughed and agreed. "Maybe by noon," Jana said, and Susan frowned.

"You're such a downer," Susan said, and Jana's sense of community and family vanished in a second. "Do the pendulum," Susan said. Jana tied Susan's lapis ring to a piece of yarn and dangled it over Susan's belly. In seconds, the ring started to whirl. "It's a girl," Susan said, and then she was happy again. There was a commotion at the door. The local midwife, Judith, with her white pile of hair and skin flecked with rain from a sudden burst of storm, came bustling in. She looked at the dozen or so people crowding the room, some on the floor playing Scrabble, others eating fruit and cheese, still others trying to nap. "You've got quite a crowd here," she told Susan.

"We're quiet during contractions," Susan said.

"You want everyone here for your exam?" Judith asked. Susan shrugged. Susan's cervix, it appeared, was not cooperating, and Judith took Susan's hand. "I'm going to give you some IV fluids," she said.

And then Susan, always so calm and regal, began to howl. "I want everything natural," she wept. Jana placed her hand on Susan's shoulder, but Susan shrugged her off.

"This will give you energy," Judith said, and she went about her work. Almost immediately, Susan stopped crying and seemed to fall asleep. "You should all get some rest," Judith said. "I'll be back in an hour or so."

By the time Judith returned, Susan was awake and crying again. She had changed her mind, she told Judith. She didn't want this baby after all. "Just cut it out of me," she said. "I'm done." But as the sun reached its midday height and light streamed onto the bed through the window, finally there was Lily, a sweet pink and puckered face.

"Who cuts the cord?" Judith asked Susan, and Susan nodded to Jana. In the crowded room, the women moved in closer and began to sing.



Kirie C. Pedersen earned her M.A. in literature and fiction writing from Western Washington University. Her fiction and essays have appeared in numerous journals, with links available at kiriepedersen.com. As a citizen-activist, she has spearheaded campaigns resulting in the preservation of four forests adjoining significant shoreline habitat in Washington State.

Richard Dokey

The Veteran


Dennis Mojado

Early each morning Martin Kaymer met his friends at the Frosty Freez for coffee. He never ate breakfast at the Frosty Freez. None of his friends ate breakfast at the Frosty Freez. Breakfast was what Martin had at home with his wife, Elizabeth, who had been ill now for some time. A sign in red letters above the register read: *One cup refill, 60; One hour, 1.00; Half the day, 2.00; All day, allowing one hour to go home for lunch, 3.00.* The sign had hung there for as long as Martin could remember.

Though he had not been born in Big Timber, Martin had known these men most of his life. It was important to be at the Frosty Freez early to see if what had been done yesterday would be done that way today.

Frank Chisholm was the oldest of the friends. Usually, when Frank talked or broke into a conversation, everyone listened. Frank was ninety and had been in Sicily and at the Ardennes, but he never talked about it. Frank sat in his chair at the round table under the window. A photo of Frank hung on the wall above the chair. It was Frank's chair. If someone sat in the chair before Frank arrived, this someone immediately stood and went to another table when Frank came in. Several round tables rested beneath the front window. Each of the tables had five chairs. The tables were filled by everyone who knew everyone else. Any someone else leaned against the wall, cradling a cup of coffee, talking, waiting for a chair to be empty.

Tourists on the way to see Yellowstone Park or the Presidents' faces carved in granite, or bikers headed for Sturgis, sat in the pressed Formica booths in the back room. The walls above the booths had photos of Elvis and John Wayne glued into redwood burl. There were photos of James Dean, Marilyn Monroe, and Gary Cooper, in color and coated with urethane. John Wayne had a clock fastened to his burl. The time was stopped permanently at 3:47 in the afternoon.

A string of 45 rpm records sagged across the entrance to the booths. An American flag was pinned to the back wall, next to the doors that said *Gents* and *Ladies.* No one remembered when the Frosty Freez was not the Frosty Freez. No one knew why the spelling was F-r-e-e-z. It was Frosty Freez when Henry Wright

owned the building before the war. Henry turned it into a hamburger and hot dog stand. There was no back room then, just the counter with a few stools, the sign about coffee and the tables under the front window. Sitting in the Frosty Freez was like sitting in a time capsule or in your own kitchen. By eight o'clock the tables cleared out, and now anyone could sit under the window. People wanted to know, was this Frank Chisholm the owner of the Frosty Freez? The question made any waitress grin ironically. Everyone knew Frank had been in Sicily and at the Ardennes, and was hopelessly lazy.

Mitzy Williams and her sister Noreen owned the Frosty Freez. They had waited tables there while attending high school. They liked seeing people they always saw. They liked waiting on them and catching up on whatever needed catching up. They bought the place from Victor Ekstrom, who owned the Frosty Freez from when Henry Wright, for health reasons, went to be with his sister in Colorado. Ekstrom grew up good friends with Mitzy and Noreen's parents. Then a cancer was under Ekstrom's right arm. He permitted Mitzy and Noreen to buy the Frosty Freez, while working and giving him what they could month by month. Then Ekstrom died. In his will he forgave the remainder of the debt and declared that the Frosty Freez belonged now to Mitzy and Noreen. Except for the tourists, no one came into the Frosty Freez that they did not know. They hung a picture of Ekstrom in the kitchen.

Everyone at the front tables wore faded jeans, faded baseball caps, faded plaid shirts, and scuffed shoes. The caps were imprinted with names of the places in Big Timber where men worked: construction firms, backhoe companies, septic services, county road crews, street maintenance, anything Big Timber needed to be Big Timber. A few young men, just out of high school, sometimes sat at the tables. They wore caps like the caps the old men wore, only brighter. They did not say much. Anyone young who sat at a table this early in the morning was waiting for someone to tell him what to do.

It was a simple, clean place, the most profitable business in town, next to Grant's Department Store, owned by Cecil Grant, who had moved into Big Timber when he got out of the Navy after the war. Cecil did not wear a baseball cap, or a Stetson. Cattlemen wore Stetsons. Cecil was smart about retail, as Mitzi and Noreen were smart about the Frosty Freez. In a town like Big Timber you found something people needed, and you filled that something. Cecil understood that he would get much further along if he did not take sides.

Sometimes a man wearing a gray Stetson did sit at a table under the front window, but the cattleman had gone to the high school too and had found someone there to marry. Some of the young men wore baseball caps turned around with the names of ranches stitched into the brims. Ranchers came to the Frosty Freez to tell the young men what to do. Cattlemen wore western shirts with three pearlescent buttons on the sleeve, chino pants made by Dickey or L.L. Bean, cowboy boots, and wide-brimmed straw hats or gray Stetsons.

Martin liked very much that Cecil Grant was not a native of Big Timber and had been in the war, though Cecil never talked about it anymore than Frank did. Martin had not been in the war himself, though he was old enough to have been. Cecil liked Martin. Martin had moved into Big Timber and was not glued to everything. So one day Cecil decided to tell Martin stories about kamikaze pilots and torpedoes and explosions below deck and the sound of big guns, the smell of powder and flame and what Cecil had done through it all. Cecil was at Tokyo Bay when the Japanese surrendered unconditionally to Douglas MacArthur. Cecil told Martin all about it.

Because of Pearl Harbor, Martin believed something was good about unconditional surrender, something finished, without the possibility of ever starting up again. When they dropped the bomb, Martin was grateful, and then the war was over.

Martin asked about navy life. He asked about the different ports and the different women, how Martin felt away from land, how the ship rolled and about twelve-foot waves, and how the moon looked upon a tranquil sea. Sometimes Martin felt that he was right there, as if, actually, he felt the white caps steaming across the bow and the roll of the ship when the big guns boomed. Martin liked what he felt, though Cecil told everything so matter of factly that it seemed to Martin that Cecil was taking inventory at the store. Cecil did not understand why he wanted to tell these things that he had never told before. Maybe it was that Martin listened so uncritically that it was like kneeling in a stall as a kid and telling Father Hanlon what he had done. Martin wanted to know everything. Cecil thought that was all right.

Cecil never had coffee at the Frosty Freez, for the same reason that he never wore a baseball cap or a Stetson. Cecil had coffee at Cole's Drug, across the intersection from the department store. Martin often went into the store to invite Cecil for coffee.

"My treat," Martin always said. It was small enough payment. Sometimes in the afternoon Martin sprang for a chocolate malted milkshake, split into two glasses. They were the best malteds in Montana or anyplace else, for that matter. Martin sat next to Cecil on a swivel stool at the counter watching the metal container grind so slowly around the mixer blades. Martin always wanted the milkshake super thick, with extra malt.

Martin asked questions. Had Cecil been afraid on the destroyer? Had he been afraid about the kamikazes, the torpedoes, the violence of white-capped seas? Had Cecil ever doubted himself, that he would return, Martin meant, to be Cecil Grant again? Was Cecil different because death struck the deck of the destroyer with a fiery hammer and made blood and smoke?

Cecil told Martin what Martin wanted to know. He remained unsure about why he did this. Cecil had talked to no one about the war,

not even his children, who lived in California, not even his wife, Eloise, who had died the year before, taking with her any time he had left to tell her anything. He never spoke about Eloise's death and how Eloise was an alcoholic. Yet Martin listened so carefully, so uncritically, that Cecil, sitting on the stool beside him, the cold malt between his hands, thought, I could tell Martin everything. So Cecil stopped telling.

Elizabeth was the only one Martin told about Cecil's adventures. Elizabeth was horrified.

"Well, I thank the good lord," she said, "that you never went to that awful war. I thought I'd never be glad you were so ill, but they would have taken you for sure, Martin, and I was glad for the operation."

"The problem's gone," Martin declared.

"And it's because we have all that wonderful medicine now, dear. Medicine for blood pressure, for cholesterol, for arteries. Your stomach saved your life. I don't know what I would ever have done without you, Martin." She began to cry.

"Cecil wasn't touched," Martin said. "He wasn't even scratched. Not by a piece of shrapnel or a bit of glass or anything."

"Cecil was in the hand of the lord," Elizabeth said. "And I hope he understands that."

"The lord?" Martin said.

"Of course, dear. The lord watched over Cecil Grant. That's what happened."

"Cecil was lucky," Martin said. "He did those things and had those things happen, and then he came here, and everything was what it was, and he was just lucky. Thousands and thousands of men were killed in the war, Liz. Where was the hand of the lord for them?"

"Now let's not get started on that again, dear. What's done is done. I knew what would happen. I'm sure in my heart, Martin, that if you had gone there, you never would have come back. I prayed your stomach would be just bad enough to keep you safe. And I was in the hand of the lord too."

"You prayed for that, Liz?"

"I prayed you couldn't go. And the lord heard my prayer. You haven't been the luckiest, dear. So I prayed. And you were lucky."

Martin thought about it. It was true that, over the years, he had his share of misfortune. He lost jobs. He incurred debts. But others did these things as well. Everyone managed. Everyone found a roof and something to put on the table. In the long run, everything turned out all right. Then he thought, Elizabeth is sick. What would I do without Elizabeth?

Elizabeth died. They were on the sofa watching a black and white movie. Elizabeth did something strange with her throat, then slumped against his shoulder. She had slumped that way before. Fatigued, she napped sometimes like that. He didn't want to disturb her. He put his arm around her. He watched the images on the screen. After awhile he called the sheriff.

Martin was frightened. He was frightened to be in the house. He was frightened to listen to an empty room. He was frightened at the noise his shoes made on the hardwood floor. But he was frightened most when he lay in bed at night, and nothing lay with him.

One day, three weeks after Elizabeth was gone, Martin told about the war at the Frosty Freez. He told about the ports and about the kamikaze and what the men did. He told it the way one tells something on a stage.

Martin remembered what Cecil had said and told it just the way Cecil had told it. Martin's friends were amazed.

"Why didn't you ever say anything about it before?" someone asked.

"I don't know," Martin said. "Maybe I was embarrassed."

"Embarrassed? For what?"

"I couldn't say," Martin replied. "There wasn't any reason, I suppose. It was so long ago. They wanted to kill everyone. I didn't want to be killed, so I killed them back. I never felt that way, before or since. Wouldn't anybody be ashamed to kill anyone?"

"That's silly," Frank Chisholm said, hunched forward under his photograph, like a troll. "You do what you have to do. We all did. We did it before they did it to us. We stayed alive."

"I suppose that's so," Martin said. "I didn't want to think about it."

"Why are you thinking about it now, then?" Frank asked.

"I don't know. Elizabeth is gone. I have no one to talk to about anything serious."

After a while his friends at the table got bored. They wanted to talk about what they always talked about, and here they were, talking about a war most of them saw on a screen.

Martin became earnest. He said "I" sometimes instead of "we." Then "I" was what he said. The friends looked at him with reverence. They thanked him for his service. Martin said "I" about everything.

Martin decided that he was not ready to see the black moon rise above an empty hill. He slept better now. His appetite returned. There was no harm in what he said. He said exactly what Cecil had said. Everything was true anyway, no matter who said it.

Frank sat heavily beneath the photograph. He glared at Martin. The faces of the others were soft and open. Frank thought he was being embalmed.

One morning Frank said, "What did you say the name of the destroyer was you served on?"

"I didn't," Martin said.

"Well, what was it, then?"

Martin looked at the faces looking at him. "It's Bradley," he said. "The ship was named Bradley."

"Bradley, then," Frank said.

"What?" said Martin.

"Your ship. It was called Bradley. Isn't that right?"

"Yes," Martin said.

A few days later Frank pounded a wrinkled fist against the table.

"Kaymer, you're a damned liar!"

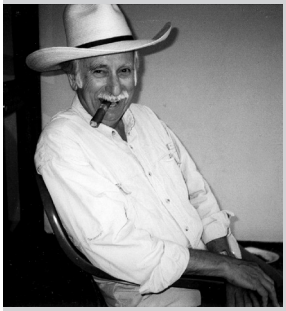
The faces looked at Frank.

"There never was any destroyer in the war named Bradley," Frank declared. "My nephew works in the naval reserve in Florida. He's a naval history buff, so I asked him to look it up. There never was any destroyer named Bradley. And you were never in the Navy. You never left Montana. You were in Dillon working on a ranch. Then you came here, and here is where you've been ever since. Kaymer, you're just a goddamn liar!"

Martin was embarrassed now to go to the Frosty Freez. He was embarrassed to go to the IGA for groceries or to the Town Pump for gas or to the post office for the mail. Martin was embarrassed to go anywhere for anything.

Elizabeth was gone. Cecil was gone. The sea and the ports, the kamikaze hurtling against a flaming deck were gone. The unconditional surrender of the Japanese in Tokyo Bay was gone. The Frosty Freez was gone. What remained was sometimes a black and white movie on television, and what everyone thought and what everyone said.

At the Frosty Freez Frank Chisholm told about how a flood, when he was boy, flushed rattlesnakes from their dens, how Dornix Park went under water and how the dead bones of cottonwood trees washed into the Yellowstone River.



Richard Dokey appears for the sixth time in *Weber—The Contemporary West*. His stories have won awards and prizes, have been cited in *Best American Short Stories* and *Best of the West*, and have been nominated for the Pushcart Prize. He has several novels and story collections to his credit, among which is *Pale Morning Dun*, published by University of Missouri Press.

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 BILLION—NOW TRILLION—TREE CAMPAIGN

Begun in 2006 by the United Nations, the Billion Tree campaign is now promoted by Plant for the Planet, an initiative begun in 2007 by a 9-year-old in Germany. This organization is working to add one trillion trees to the three trillion trees which currently exist globally. The organization observes:



These trees could capture 25 perecent of human-made carbon emissions every year. If every single person, every company, and every institution becomes climate neutral, we can save our future.

The children need help to plant a trillion trees. On March 9, 2018, 30 representatives from companies, NROs, and VIPs such as Prince Albert II of Monaco and Patricia Espinosa, General Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, signed the Trillion Tree Declaration. Felix, Yugratna, Paulina, and Sagar—members of the Plant-for-the-Planet Global Board—read the declaration onstage at the Grimaldi Forum in Monte Carlo.

Source: https://www.plant-for-the-planet.org/en/home

NO QUICK FIX

Tom Crowther, whose research revealed the three trillion tree estimate, is a climate change ecologist at Swiss university ETH Zurich and consultant for the Trillion Tree campaign. He recommends trees be planted in places where farms have been abandoned or where forests have been denuded. As reported on CNN by Mark Tutton,

"There is no doubt [Crowther suggests] that super-aggressive tree planting efforts that are not done with consideration of the historic ecosystem will be a bad investment."

He says some previous reforestation projects have targeted grasslands and savannah ecosystems that already play an important role in storing carbon . . . .

[However] tree planting is no quick climate fix. It can take 30 to 40 years of growth for the carbon storage to reach its full potential. "A more immediate benefit can come from halting deforestation," says Crowther, "which costs our planet around 15 billion trees each year."

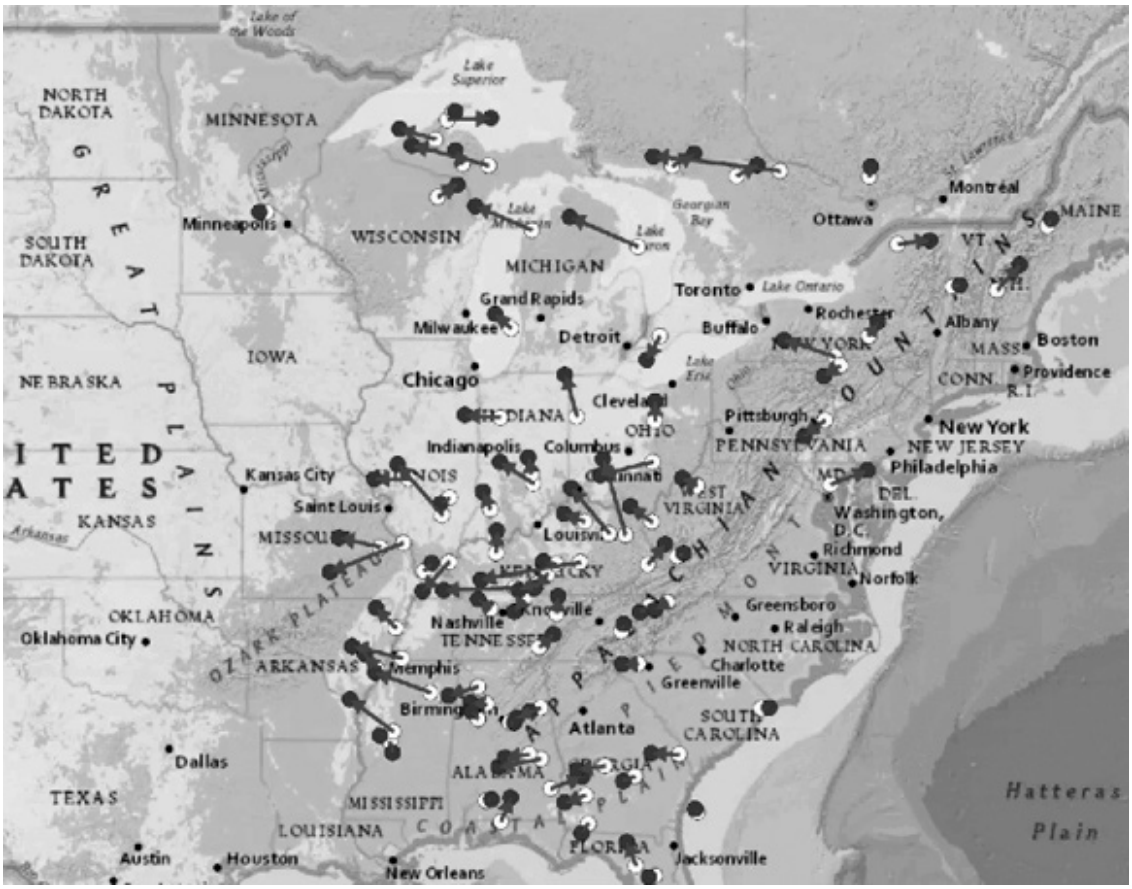
Tree planting on such a colossal scale faces significant challenges, including identifying who owns the land in question, and securing the rights to plant and maintain trees there.

Source: Tutton, Mark."The Most Effective Way to Tackle Climate Change? Plant 1 Trillion Trees," 17 April 2019, *CNN*, https://www.cnn.com/2019/04/17/world/trillion-trees-climate-change-intl-scn/index.html

TREES ON THE MOVE

Scientists studying trees are surprised that many of the tree species common in the eastern United States have moved their population centers westward over the last 30 years. This migration was not predicted in assumption models about global warming. They report:

In general, the evergreen tree species (those mostly wind-pollinated species with needles for leaves, a.k.a. gymnosperms) are moving north with the rising temperature, while the deciduous species (mostly insect-pollinated with broad, seasonal leaves, a.k.a. angiosperms) are following the increase in moisture to the west.



Shift of the center of populations of tree species between 1980 and 2015. (Fei et al./*Nature Advances*)

Source: Cimons, Marlene. "Trees Are Migrating West to Escape Climate Change," 16 August 2018, *Popular Science*, https://www.popsci.com/trees-are-migrating-west-to-escape-climate-change/; https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2017/05/go-west-my-sap/526899/

OLD-GROWTH TREES IN THE WEST

Some of the world's oldest and tallest trees are in the American West. Many are dying – and at higher rates than in the recent past. As reported by EarthWatch Institute:

Within the old-growth forests of California's Yosemite National Park and the forests of southwest Washington, some of the world's oldest and tallest trees are dying off at increasing rates. Some have attributed this to prolonged drought and the effects of climate change, but some causes of tree death aren't directly related to the climate. Scientists don't know for sure what is causing these tree deaths.

Source: "The Fall of Giants: Old-Growth Trees in the American West," https://earthwatch.org/Expeditions/The-Fall-of-Giants-Old-Growth-Trees-in-the-American-West

DYING FORESTS

During the 2000s, more than 150,000 square miles of lodgepole and ponderosa pine forests in the United States and the Canadian Rockies died in just a few years from a surge in beetle infestations, which experts said was unprecedented.

Ponderosa pine and Douglas fir forests are also struggling to regrow after wildfires in parts of the West as temperatures rise and the air and soil become drier. As reported in a recent study published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Science*, climate change in the American West may be making parts of the region inhospitable for some native pine and fir forests to regrow after wildfires:*

Climate change is increasing fire activity in the western United States, which has the potential to accelerate climate-induced shifts in vegetation communities. Wildfire can catalyze vegetation change by killing adult trees that could otherwise persist in climate conditions no longer suitable for seedling establishment and survival. Recently documented declines in postfire conifer recruitment in the western United States may be an example of this phenomenon . . .

[O]ur results demonstrate that climate change combined with high-severity fire is leading to increasingly fewer opportunities for seedlings to establish after wildfires and may lead to ecosystem transitions in low-elevation ponderosa pine and Douglas fir forests across the western United States.

Source: Davis, Kimberley T. et al. "Wildfires and climate change push low-elevation forests across a critical climate threshold for tree regeneration," 26 March 2019, *PNAS*, https://www.pnas.org/content/116/13/6193

PANDO IS DYING

As reported last year, an ancient forest considered the largest single living organism on earth is dying.

The Pando aspen is an enormous expanse of 40,000 trees, all of which are clones with identical genetic compositions, meaning they are classified together as one individual.

Thought to be up to 80,000 years old, the colony known as the "trembling giant" is a contender for the oldest organism as well as the heaviest and largest. In total, the trees, which originate from a single underground parent clone, cover 43 hectares of Utah's Fishlake National Forest.

But in recent years a tragedy has been quietly unfurling. Despite their best efforts, scientists think this natural wonder that has lasted millennia may not survive a few more decades of human interference.

. . . The forest has gradually thinned as humans expanded into it, cutting down areas that have never properly recovered. Additional pressure over the years has come from drought and the intrusion of hungry deer into the forest that have hampered efforts to restore it.



Source: Gabbatiss, Josh. "'Largest Thing' on Earth is Dying After Decades of Human Interference, Scientists say," 17 October 2018, *Independent,* https://www.independent.co.uk/environment/pando-aspen-forest-largest-organism-trees-utah-conservation-a8588791.html

EDITORIAL MATTER

ISSN 0891-8899 — Weber *is published biannually by The College of Arts & Humanities at Weber State University, Ogden, Utah 84408-1405. Full text of this issue and historical archives are available in electronic edition at https://www.weber.edu/weberjournal*

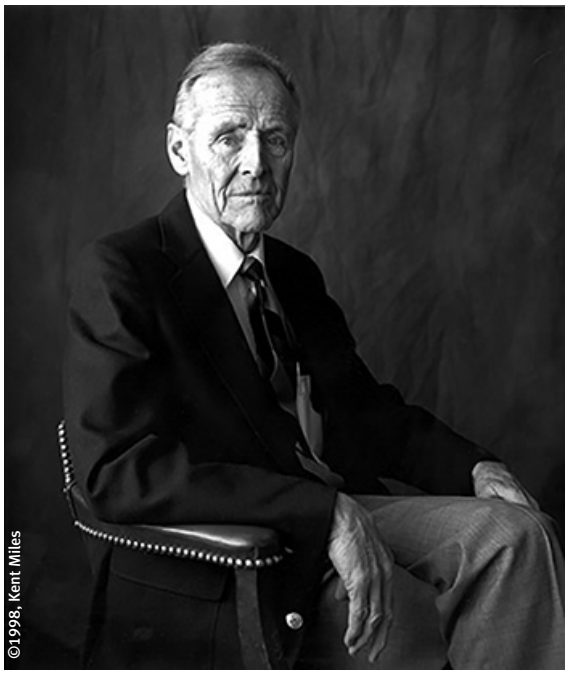
Indexed in: Abstracts of English Studies, Humanities International Complete, Index of American Periodical Verse, MLA International Bibliography, and Sociological Abstracts. Member, Council of Learned Journals.

Subscription Costs: Individuals $20 (outside U.S., $30), institutions $30 (outside U.S., $40). Back issues $10 subject to availability. Multi-year and group subscriptions also available.

Submissions and Correspondence: Editor, WEBER THE CONTEMPORARY WEST | *Weber State University*
1395 Edvalson Street Dept. 1405, Ogden, UT 84408-1405.
801-626-6473 | weberjournal@weber.edu

Copyright © 2019 by Weber State University. All rights reserved. Copyright reverts to authors and artists after publication. Statements of fact or opinion are those of contributing authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the editors or the sponsoring institution.

ANNOUNCING
the 2019
Dr. O. Marvin Lewis Essay Award



to

Bernard Quetchenbach

for

"The Man By the Fire"

in the Spring 2018 issue

The Dr. O. Marvin Lewis Award of $500 is presented annually to the author of the best essay published in *Weber* during the previous year.

The funding for this award is generously provided by the MSL Family Foundation.

WEBER THE CONTEMPORARY WEST
Weber State University
1395 Edvalson Street, Dept. 1405
Ogden, UT 84408-1405
www.weber.edu/weberjournal

Return Service Requested

Nonprofit Org
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT No. 151
OGDEN, UTAH

AN INTERNATIONAL, PEER-REVIEWED JOURNAL SPOTLIGHTING PERSONAL NARRATIVE, COMMENTARY, FICTION, NONFICTION, AND POETRY THAT SPEAKS TO THE ENVIRONMENT AND CULTURE OF THE AMERICAN WEST AND BEYOND.

FALL 2019—VOL. 36, NO1—U.S. $10

ART

Molly Morin

CONVERSATIONS

Aubrey Jones with Ken Bugul; Mark LeTourneau & Mark Denniston with John Rickford; John Armstrong with David H. Grinspoon; Suhasini Vincent with Suniti Namjoshi; Adrienne Andrews with Richard Ray Perez; Sherilyn Fuhriman Olsen, William Pollett, Courtney Craggett, & Abraham Smith with Tyehimba Jess; Michael Wutz with Paul Dinh

ESSAYS

Brett Busang and Joan Coles

FICTION

Ben Leib, Franci Washburn, Glenn Stowell, Kirie C. Pedersen, Richard Dokey

POETRY

Matt Daly, George Moore, Bibhu Padhi, Bill Snyder, Matt Schumacher, Erica Waters

https://www.facebook.com/weberjournal

WEBER STATE UNIVERSITY
Lindquist College of Arts & Humanities
http://www.weber.edu/CAH