WEBER THE CONTEMPORARY WEST

EST 1983

WEBER

THE CONTEMPORARY WEST

Fall 2021 | Volume 38 | Number 1

FOCUS ISSUE

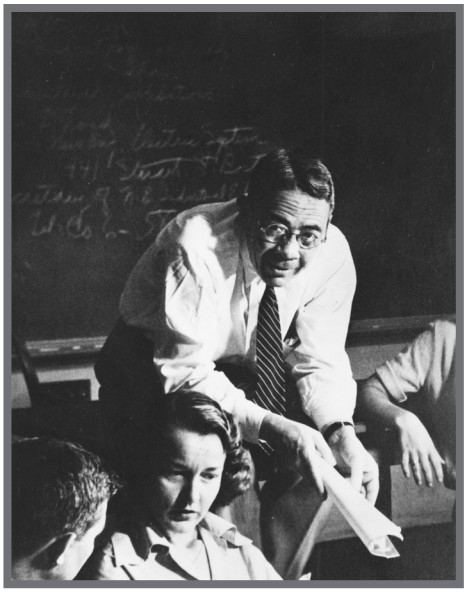
BERNARD DEVOTO



Fall 2021 | Volume 38 | Number 1

EST
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.



Bernard DeVoto surrounded by students, Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, Vermont, late 1930s or early 1940s. Courtesy Multimedia Archives, Special Collections, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah.

BERNARD DEVOTO (1897-1955)

"It is imperative to maintain portions of the wilderness untouched so that a tree will rot where it falls, a waterfall will pour its curve without generating electricity, a trumpeter swan may float on uncontaminated water—and moderns may at least see what their ancestors knew in their nerves and blood."

This issue contains a special feature on Ogden, Utah, native Bernard DeVoto, one of the most prominent American historians of the first half of the twentieth century. He was a well-regarded novelist, essayist, and teacher of fiction as well, but considered the American West and its complicated history of settlement the center of his life's work. As a native son who yet felt like an outsider, he was never shy to ruffle any feathers and wrote with gusto and aplomb. In the words of his friend and first biographer, Wallace Stegner, Devoto was "flawed, brilliant, provocative, outrageous, . . . often wrong, often spectacularly right, always stimulating, sometimes infuriating, and never, never dull."

Our focus issue wants to pay tribute to DeVoto's illustrious career and is part of a larger effort to celebrate this (at least locally) often little-known but influential writer in the city and region of his birth. We want to thank our contributors for their commissioned essays and, in particular, acknowledge the work of Sarah Langsdon, head of Special Collections & assistant professor, Weber State University, and Scott Greenwell, longtime administrator in the Weber & Davis School Districts, for their vision and support.

Front Cover: Cara Despain, *99 Claims*, cast concrete and pyrite ore, 2014



VOLUME 38 | NUMBER 1 | FALL 2021

EDITORIAL BOARD

EDITOR

Michael Wutz

ASSOCIATE EDITORS

Kathryn L. MacKay
Russell Burrows
Brad Roghaar

MANAGING EDITOR

Kristin Jackson

EDITORIAL BOARD

Phyllis Barber, author
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
Cody Kortright

EDITORS EMERITI

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

EDITORIAL MATTER CONTINUED IN BACK

VOLUME 38 | NUMBER 1

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FALL 2021

ART

65 The Art of Cara Despain

BERNARD DEVOTO SUBFOCUS

6 Gregory C. Thompson, *Recounting Little Known Family History – A Conversation with Mark DeVoto*

15 Mark Harvey, *Bernard DeVoto and the Environmental History of the West*

28 Nate Schweber, *The West Against Itself*

37 David Rich Lewis, *DeVoto's "Utah"*

47 Russell Burrows, *Rawhide Polished to Patent Leather: Bernard DeVoto's Rhetorical Flourish*

54 Val Holley, *Why Bernard DeVoto Couldn't Go Home Again*

64 Bernard DeVoto, *radio commentary on A.B. Guthrie's* The Big Sky

POETRY

77 Christian Woodard, *Agriculture* and others

79 William Snyder, *Of Love or No Love at All* and others

83 Eric Paul Shaffer, *Coffee Mugs at Camp* and others

88 Donna Emerson, *Before Mother Died* and others

91 Stephen Lefebure, *The West* and others

94 Brian Glaser, *Eleven Prayers to a Creek*

99 Taylor Graham, *Home, Fox* and others

101 James Grabill, *It Isn't Known Until It Is* and others

104 Joseph Powell, *The Hereford Heifer in February* and others

107 Rebecca Patrascu, *Mojave*

108 Angelica Allain, *Omaha* and others

ESSAY

112 Adam M. Sowards, *When You Know the Price of a Huckleberry*

121 Ralph Hardy, *Meditations on Pole Vaulting at Sixty*

FICTION

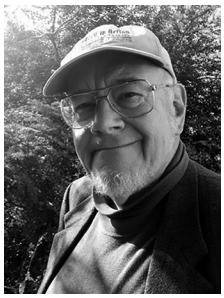
129 Scott Pedersen, *Head North*

133 Joe Farley, *Robo Mike*

140 Joseph Bathanti, *The Day John Wayne Died*

146 Connie Wieneke, *The Virgin of California*

READING THE WEST 155



Gregory C. Thompson & Mark DeVoto.....6



Nate Schweber.....28



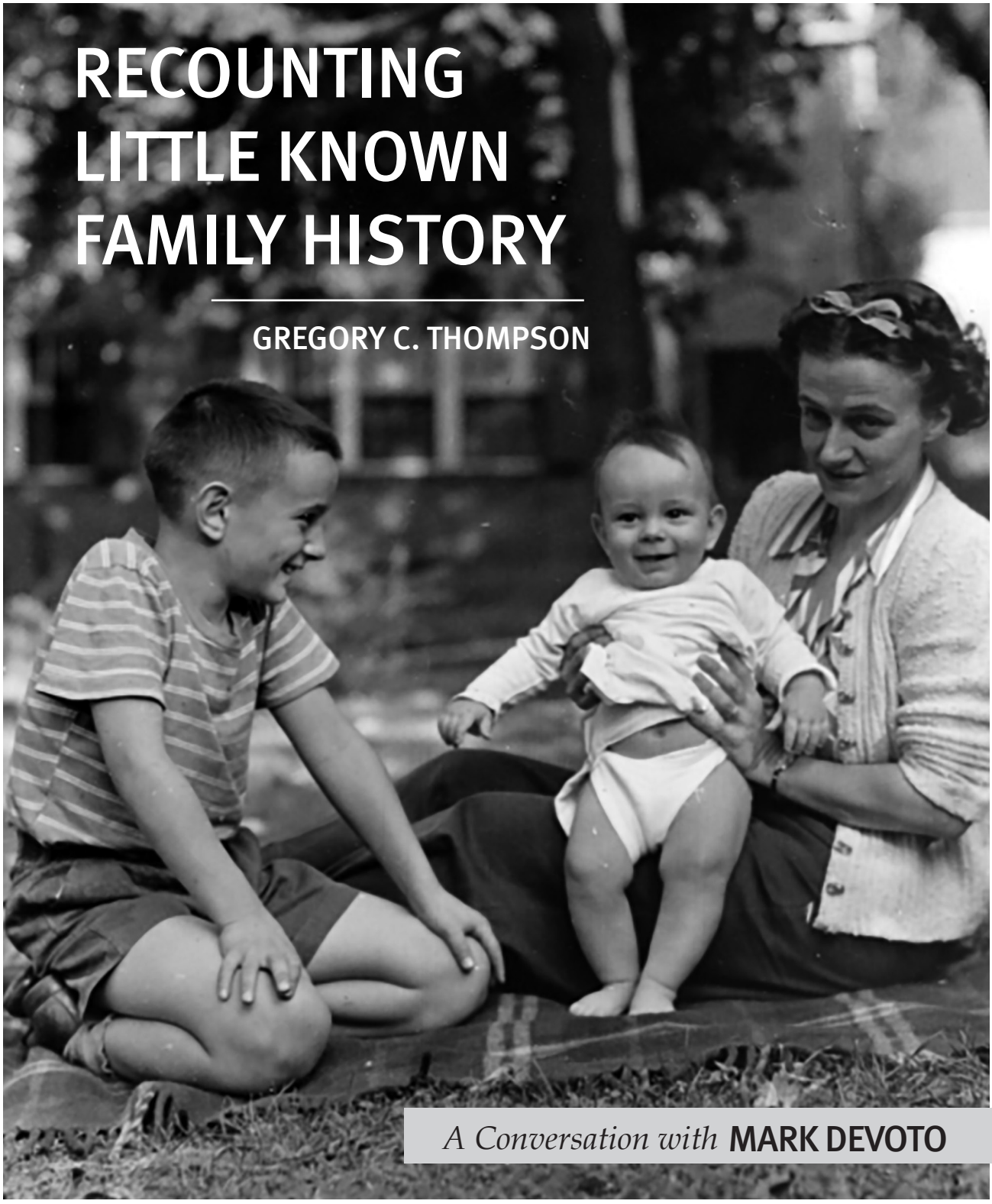
Val Holley.....54



Cara Despain.....65

RECOUNTING LITTLE KNOWN FAMILY HISTORY

GREGORY C. THOMPSON



A Conversation with **MARK DEVOTO**

Avis DeVoto with her young children, Mark (held by Avis) and Gordon DeVoto. University of Utah, J. Willard Marriott Digital Library.



Avis DeVoto and Gordon DeVoto blowing bubbles at home one Sunday evening. University of Utah, J. Willard Marriott Library.

American West, which provided Bernard with crucial research opportunities, just as it exposed the boys to the West and introduced them to their extended family located in and about Ogden, Utah.

This interview was conducted on April 9, 2021, via Skype, and has been edited for clarity and length. I want to thank Professor DeVoto and his partner, Lois, for allowing an extended interruption into their daily routines, and to the staff of the American West Center, University of Utah, for their transcription services. I also want to thank Michael Wutz and Kristin Jackson at Weber *for their commitment and dedication to this project.*

Mark DeVoto, son of Bernard and Avis MacVicar DeVoto, is professor emeritus of music at Tufts University and a staff writer for the Boston Musical Intelligencer*, with numerous publications on nineteenth- and twentieth-century music to his credit. I was privileged to conduct this first in a series of interviews focusing on Mark's early years growing up as the younger son of Bernard and Avis, and brother to his older sibling, Gordon. By the time of his birth, his famous father was well on his way to establishing himself as author, essayist, editor, lecturer at Harvard University, and historian and conservationist of the American West.*

Although Mark's life with his father was relatively short – Bernard died unexpectedly in 1955, when Mark was 15 – his recollections give the reader a glimpse into the life with his well-known parents in the Cambridge and Harvard communities. One needs only to read Bernard's The Hour: A Cocktail Manifesto *to understand that the DeVoto home was a frequent gathering place for famous authors, educators, and movers and shakers of the period. Equally important are Mark's remembrances of the family's two summer tours of the*



Bernard and Avis DeVoto in the 1930s. University of Utah, J. Willard Marriott Library.

To recap for our audience, Mark. Where were you born?

I was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in January 1940. Actually, I was born on my father's 43rd birthday, January 11. The family included my brother Gordon, who was not quite 10 years older. We lived at 32 Coolidge Hill Road in Cambridge—a place I have seen but don't remember. Because in 1941, my father bought the house at 8 Berkeley Street, which is close to Harvard and Harvard Square. That house is still there. His memoirs mention that he paid $5,000 for it in a very depressed market and spent another $5,000 on a mortgage to improve it. The house would probably sell for about 800 times that amount today in Cambridge! Well, a lot of work has been done on it, but even so, I live now in Medford, in a working-class neighborhood.

Let's talk a little bit about your parents, and then what you remember of your grandparents on both sides. Tell us about your father and where he was born?

My father was born in 1897 in Ogden. He was the only child of Florian Devoto, who had not been married before, and Rhoda Ann Dye Devoto, who had been married before. And she had one child from that marriage. So my father had a half-brother.

I'm not sure I've ever seen a reference to the half-brother.

Yes, his name was Cleveland DeWolf, and he continued to live in Ogden. I met him only once, in 1946. He had two children, a son and a daughter. My father was very fond of the daughter, who was very smart. Her name was Laprielle. But she went by the name of Dee. A couple of years ago, out of the blue, I got an email from the daughter of Cleveland DeWolf's son, whom my father had been in touch with, I guess, up through his years at the University of Utah. The daughter sent me photocopies of typed letters my father had sent to Cleveland. And a copy of his college graduation program. That was sometime in the 1930s. And I have copies of all of those.

Is the correspondence interesting and informative?

Yes, apparently. The son was trying to figure out what kind of career to go into, and my father gave some opinions on that. I never met that son, and I met his daughter only by email.

So let me switch you over to your mother and give us a little background on her.

My mother was born in 1904 in Houghton, Michigan, which is on the Upper Peninsula, home to the Michigan College of Mines. She had relatives who worked in the mines. It's still considered copper country. There's a lot of unmined copper up there still. My mother had a sister, a younger sister, who died at the age of, I think, five or six. So my mother grew up as an only child, similarly to my father, who was 10 years younger than his half-brother. Her parents were Scottish Presbyterians from Canada. My mother went to college at Northwestern University, where my father was teaching. She was said to be the brightest student in his freshman English class, and after her freshman year they got married.

Was that your father's first year at Northwestern?

After graduating from Harvard, he had spent a couple of years back in Ogden. I think he taught a year of high school. There was a family story that he worked as a sheep herder for one summer. I'm not sure I believe it.

So your father went through the school system in Ogden and graduated from Ogden High School?

That's right.

Did he ever talk to you about the experience of growing up in Ogden and being a teenager in the area?

Not really at all. He occasionally would speak about his family. His mother was one of six daughters of Samuel Dye. But in the letter to Kate Sterne, in 1936, he gave a whole family description about his aunts and his uncle, the one boy among Samuel and Rhoda Dyes' children. That was Samuel Dye, Jr. I don't think my father knew him well at all.

You're referencing The Selected Letters of Bernard DeVoto and Katharine Sterne*, edited by you and published by the University of Utah Press, correct?*

Right. There's an extensive letter in there, from February 1936, where he wrote down a whole lot of information for Kate Sterne's benefit about his mother's family. And he said all of that was based on reliable information provided by Aunt Grace, who was his favorite among the aunts. I met Aunt Grace once when she came, I think, in 1947, to visit the family. We all loved her dearly, of course. The other aunt that I remember meeting was Aunt Mat or Aunt Martha. I met her in 1953, when the family went on the western trip, and we stopped in Ogden.

Do you recall their last names?

Aunt Grace never married, but Martha married someone named Gray and had a daughter named Alice, who was a school teacher, if I recall correctly. All of this is extensively described in the letter; there's a copy of it on the Website I set up for my father, www.mdevotomusic.org.

Did your father talk fondly of his family and the extended members of his group?

Well, he was very fond of Aunt Grace and Aunt Mat. There were other aunts whom, I guess, he wasn't so fond of, or didn't know well. He knew some of their children, and he was, as I said before, fond of his half-brother Cleveland's daughter Dee. She married Gerry Boicourt, who lived with us for a while after he came out of the Army in the late 1940s. I never saw him after about 1948 or '49. I found out from Cleveland's granddaughter that Gerry had died a few years ago. Dee died very prematurely in the spring of 1955, just a few months before my father died.

What was it like growing up being a member of a distinguished family such as your mother and father represented? Was it engaging? Was there a lot of conversation over the dining room table? And what was the atmosphere like, from your perspective of growing up in your family?

Well, my brother was nearly 10 years older than I. He died, by the way, in 2009. We were sent to private schools. And I think we were basically kept away from the professional activities of the family. I know that, for me, I was usually left to fend for myself, to find friends and find things to do for myself, though there were times when my father pitched baseballs to me, and occasionally we would go out for walks after dinner.

Let me take us back and focus on what you were saying about your father in his earlier life. When did he come back to Ogden and spend a year in Ogden? So he went to the University of Utah?

He spent one year there; I think that was 1914 to '15. His advisor at the university was

We were sent to private schools. And I think we were basically kept away from the professional activities of the family. I know that, for me, I was usually left to fend for myself, to find friends and find things to do for myself, though there were times when my father pitched baseballs to me, and occasionally we would go out for walks after dinner.

the poet Wilbert Snow, who was forced to resign because of a controversy with some public utterance he had given that was unflattering to the Mormon church.

Yes, it was part of a larger issue at the time—about then-church president Kingsbury and who was going to determine the curriculum for the University of Utah, the church or the University.

And my father decided that he didn't want to continue with the University of Utah, with such an atmosphere, especially after his friend Snow had been effectively dismissed. So he transferred to Harvard. And he spent two years at Harvard, and then the United States entered the Great War. And my father, like so many others, dropped out of Harvard and went to serve in the Army and was eventually commissioned as a second lieutenant. And because he was a crack shot, having grown up with firearms on the Utah frontier, he was drafted to teach musketry and riflery at Camp Perry in Ohio. I think he may have been at one other army camp, teaching people how to shoot. But he never got overseas. There is at least one family legend that one of my father's students in riflery was the mathematician Norbert Wiener, the famous MIT professor who invented the term "cybernetics."

Would your father return to Ogden in the summers, or was he continuously living in Cambridge during his educational career there?

Well, he went off to teach at Northwestern, I guess, in the fall of 1922 and married my mother the following June. It was, I think, another three years before he went back to Ogden to show his bride to his father. It was by train then, although—while they were in Ogden—I think they did have a car, or they had the use of a car.

Did your mom ever talk about meeting your paternal grandparents and family and how she was received?

My father, like so many others, dropped out of Harvard and went to serve in the Army and was eventually commissioned as a second lieutenant. And because he was a crack shot, having grown up with firearms on the Utah frontier, he was drafted to teach musketry and riflery at Camp Perry in Ohio. . . . There is at least one family legend that one of my father's students in riflery was the mathematician Norbert Wiener, the famous MIT professor who invented the term "cybernetics."

Well, my father's mother died in 1919. So my mother would never have known her and, of course, I never did. I think she remembered meeting grandfather Devoto—Florian Devoto—favorably out there. And then of course, at some point in the 1930s, when he was an old man, he came to live with the family in Lincoln, Massachusetts.

I'd like to leapfrog to the times when your father took you and the family on their Western tours, and I assume it must have linked up in part with when he was working on Lewis and Clark. The journals project?

The first family trip with all four of us was in the summer of 1946. I had just completed the first grade. It was my first view of the West. The purpose of that trip was to do research for the book that eventually became *The Course of Empire*. So Lewis and Clark would have formed a part of that as well. But the immediate fallout from the trip was the first of the really famous conservation essays, when he picked up the information that the Western stock industry and some of the

other industries, like lumber, were going to make a major Congressional assault on the disposal of public lands. And my father wrote his first conservation essay. He had written earlier essays describing what was happening to the environment. There was the 1936 essay called "The Plundered Province." And then, in late 1946, he published the essay "The Anxious West," and then in January 1947 came the major text called "The West Against Itself." That text is on the website as well. That was what gave substance to the story of what came to be called the land grab. In 1955, in a footnote, he described how he got the information about what was being planned to execute the land grab. And because *Harper's* broke the story, it stopped the Congressional effort in its tracks. Of course, with the Trump administration, we've seen continual efforts to revive that.

Where do you think your father begins to understand and articulate the environmental philosophy that he writes of in these periods that you're talking about? Something about being born and spending his youth in Ogden wouldn't necessarily invite an environmentalist product out of the intellectual experience. I'm curious where you think that triggers his intense awareness of the environmental issues facing the West and his positioning, philosophically, as he did.

Well, I'm not really sure. Wallace Stegner would probably say more about that than I can remember, but certainly there are traces of it in "The Plundered Province." In his correspondence of the time, where he talks about the dust from the Dust Bowl making its way east, as being an example of misuse of agricultural practices, misapplication of soil preservation techniques, and abuse of the land. That certainly would comport with probably his own personal observations of things like overgrazing of the mountains above Ogden, which can lead to several disasters. Exactly when that would have become a major issue for him I don't really know.

Talk for a few minutes about his friendship with Wallace Stegner and how you saw that from your position.

Well, it would have started when my father was editing the *Saturday Review*. It was 1936 to '38 when the magazine was suffering financially during the Depression. He very often was soliciting book reviews, and somehow he came across this young writer named Wallace Stegner and solicited a book review from him; the friendship prospered after that. And then, eventually, Stegner wrote his biography of John Wesley Powell, for which my father wrote a preface. I never met Stegner until about 1988, because when he was preparing his biography on my father, he interviewed my mother repeatedly, but he didn't interview me or Gordon. Mama said she wanted to keep the family out of the book, and he honored that. That was the only thing I regretted. In that regard Stegner could have learned a few things from me. It would have been valuable in the book, for instance, to have something about the quarrel with Robert Frost. That was a considerable one, and it had gone on for a number of years, but I knew nothing about it. Nevertheless, in the summer of 1955, June 1955, shortly before my father died, he and I went on a trip around northern New England, and in Vermont we stopped in to see Robert Frost at Ripton; the meeting was entirely friendly. I remember we talked about birdwatching, and I had no inkling that there was ever a difficulty between them. That difficulty, of course, had its ups and downs. And that is plain enough, not only in the Stegner book, but in the Sterne letters. But Frost was a dangerous personality that I had no appreciation of. There's that chapter in Stegner's book called "An Incident on Breadloaf Mountain" that showed that it started with certain basic flaws in Frost's personality and the efforts of all those who admired him to try to contain those. It's quite a story, and then—it would have been five years later—my father went out to Indiana University to give a series of lectures, and Frost came there. They didn't

Frost was a dangerous personality that I had no appreciation of. There's that chapter in Stegner's book called "An Incident on Breadloaf Mountain" that showed that it started with certain basic flaws in Frost's personality and the efforts of all those who admired him to try to contain those.

see each other, but they quarreled in their correspondence, and that's all been published in the Lawrance Thompson biography and the collection of Frost's letters. And some of the letters turn up in the Kate Sterne correspondence as well. As I say, in 1955 it was entirely friendly. "Hello, Robert. Hi, Benny, haven't seen you in a long time." So forth.

Yeah. What about the other incident that is noted often in your father's writings on Thomas Wolfe and his, particularly his work The Story of a Novel*?*

Oh, yes. "Genius Is Not Enough," published in the ***Saturday Review*** in 1935.

Did he ever talk to you about that, that whole engagement experience?

No, I was too young to appreciate any literary matters, so we never discussed them. Of course, it was a big influence, but there's no way I would have read ***Moby Dick*** without having to read it in school. My father used to read poetry to me.

Did he?

Yeah. I would always listen with delight. I remember he read Chesterton's "Lepanto." He read Kipling's "Ballad of East and West." And he read, of course, Vachel Lindsay's "The Congo," which nobody could read today because it seems so totally racist, although I still think of it as very musical.

You've referred to two trips to the West.

The second one was in 1953.

Two years before your father passes away, right?

Right. That would have been a research trip for the book that he left unfinished when he died, the book that was eventually published as ***The Western Paradox***. Which my mother did not want to be published incomplete, for entirely understandable reasons. But I allowed it to be published because a lot of it shows my father at his best, even though it was in an incomplete state. After so many years, I don't think his reputation is going to be injured by having a work published that was not only unfinished, but that in places did not show him at his best.

So on that second trip you would have been how old?

I was thirteen.

By that time you're quite aware of the world around you and the environment. We didn't talk about the actual geography of your trips. On the first trip, did you go up into the Missouri Valley area and the Missouri? How did you do that trip? Then let's talk about the second one.

I remember on the first trip, in 1946, we crossed Lake Michigan on a ferry. We went through Northern Wisconsin and Minnesota, eventually meeting up in South Dakota in Pierre. That's when Wallace Kirkland, the ***Life*** photographer, joined us. Where we went from South Dakota I can't remember. I know we went to Wyoming, and we went to Montana, in what order I can't be sure. We spent some time in Great Falls. And after that we went to Oregon and through Coeur d'Alene and Idaho.

And then we went down into California, which we did not do on the second trip. That's when I saw Yosemite. And I think it would have been after California that we crossed the Nevada desert and then the Great Salt Desert. That was the trip that was done at night with me asleep in the back and my parents staying awake with amphetamines. That's when we arrived in Ogden and where I met Uncle Cleve, my father's half-brother, for the first and only time. How we got home from there I just don't remember. In the second trip, we went out through western Massachusetts, going through some of the area that had just been devastated by the famous Worcester tornado on June 9, 1953. I saw some of that damage. Then we went through New York state, Pennsylvania, Ohio. We spent a night in Urbana, Illinois. From there I'm not sure where we went, but eventually we wound up in Denver. And we spent quite a bit of time going around Colorado. I remember we saw Leadville, the Wind Rivers, Uncompahgre Peak, and Box Canyon in Ouray, Colorado. We stayed in Durango and went from there to Mesa Verde. I know that at one point we made a slight diversion so we could say we had been in New Mexico. We went a few yards into New Mexico.

On that trip you're referring to, coming from Mesa Verde, the best way to do that was to drive to the Four Corners where you could step on all four states, and you were doing this in nineteen-fifty – ?

'53. That would have been July or August 1953. I love that area. I especially love Ouray and Mesa Verde. And I've seen them again relatively recently. But from there we did go to Utah. And that's where we met Aunt Mat and Cousin Alice in Ogden.

Do you remember those engagements as fun and interesting, or just as yet another family visit?

Yeah. I also remember when we spent a week in the wilderness in the Forest Service cabin in Snyder Basin. In Wyoming, up in the mountains, the nearest town was a place called Big Piney, and it was very small, but that was beautiful. I think my father got some important writing done there. And from there, I guess we would have gone north to Missoula. And then we saw the Lochsa River near the area where the memorial Cedar Grove now is. I saw that again in 1962 when the grove was dedicated. And I've been back there three times since, most recently in 2003, when Lois and I took my mother's ashes and scattered them there. When we came into the memorial Cedar Grove, there was still snow in Lolo Pass on May 21st of that year. By the time we got into the Grove, the forest floor was completely covered with white trilliums in bloom. That's when we also saw the Calypso Orchid. Lois said, "Mark, what's this?" And we took a picture of it. It's on the website.

Did your father interact with other writers on the West, novelists or historians, other than Stegner?

Well, yeah, there was Arthur Carhart, A. B. Guthrie, and of course Edith Mirrielees. He considered her one of the great teachers of writing.

As you look back over your father and his career, has your view of him changed as you have gotten older and more aware? How do you think of your father today?

Well, I'm certainly much more able to appreciate him than when I was growing up. But more and more I begin to see that his efforts as a novelist were not of the best quality. He was always a very professional writer. His writing style is not only accurate, vivid, and efficient no matter what he was writing. But as a novelist, he just wasn't very good. As a historian, and as a propagator for proper care of the environment, he is much better.

He was visionary.

I was interested to note that he was exactly 10 years younger than Aldo Leopold, to the day. They were both born January 11th. And yet I can't find anywhere where my father mentions Aldo Leopold or where Aldo Leopold mentions him. They were clearly kindred spirits. Leopold was a poet, and my father was a brash journalist.

That's interesting, because you would have thought that their writing careers might have crossed paths.

I'm sure they must have, but I just haven't found out how. My father was very impressed by William Vogt. His book *Road to Survival* was very popular for a while and then sort of dropped out of fashion. And Vogt himself had a career that had faltered, and eventually I think it led to his suicide. But he came to visit us during the summer, I think, of 1949. Maybe it was '48. I remember how deeply impressed both my parents were with *Road to Survival*, and now Vogt is making a comeback.

Did you find him interesting and engaging?

Oh, yes. I remember him whistling to the birds and getting a reaction.

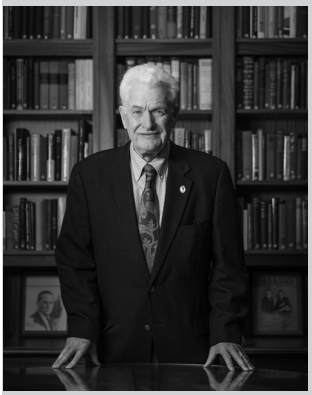
I want to spend a little more time talking about your mother because your father passes away in '55, when you're 15. I assume that Gordon is probably out and on his own by that time, but you're at home and with your mother and moving through life?

Well, certainly my father's death was the most dramatic part of my childhood. I was in 11th grade. My brother Gordon had been two years in the Army and was back in the States and staying at the VA hospital in Boston, undergoing various kinds of treatments including dental, dermatological, and psychiatric. My brother finished with all that in the spring of 1956 and then went to a technical school for a year.

Really, because the writings about your brother refer to him as a novelist and a writer.

Well, no. My brother liked to write but he kept it to himself. He wrote some very vivid letters from the Army that I remember.

Thank you for your time, Mark. It was a pleasure.



Gregory C. Thompson, Ph.D., is the associate director of the University of Utah's J. Willard Marriott Library for Special Collections and an adjunct assistant professor of history. He has published widely on the Ute tribe, including *Southern Ute Lands, 1848-1899: The Creation of a Reservation* and *The Southern Utes: A Tribal History*. Greg is a founding member of the Alf Engen Ski Museum Foundation Board and also serves on the Board of Trustees. His latest publication, with Alan K. Engen, *First Tracks: A Century of Skiing* (2001), focuses on the history of skiing in Utah. Greg is also the general editor for the Tanner Trust Publication Series, *Utah, The Mormons, and the West*. The latest publication in the series is *A Winter with the Mormons: The 1852 Letters of Jotham Goodell* (2002).

BERNARD DEVOTO AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY OF THE WEST

MARK HARVEY

Bernard DeVoto was one of the most successful popular historians of the middle decades of the twentieth century. He targeted his sweeping trilogy of the American West—*The Year of Decision: 1846* (1943), *Across the Wide Missouri* (1947), and *The Course of Empire* (1952)—at a broad cross-section of American readers hungry for compelling stories about pioneers, explorers, traders, and westward-moving Americans from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. Born and raised in Ogden, Utah, early in the twentieth century, DeVoto brought into his writing a keen knowledge of American West history generally, and of the Great Basin in particular. He wrote as an informed native son, mindful of the West's great spaces, geographic variety, aridity, and fiercely independent people. As an author mainly of fiction early in his career, he was skilled in developing his characters and filled his western histories with richly drawn portraits of fur traders, overland migrants, and explorers—lavishing special attention on his perennial favorites, Lewis and Clark. In *The Year of Decision: 1846*, DeVoto profiled Susan Shelby Magoffin, Stephen Watts Kearny,



Bernard DeVoto

the Reed and Donner families, Brigham Young, Francis Parkman, and James Clyman, a ubiquitous figure in the nineteenth-century West. DeVoto's reliance on individuals was central to his method of synecdoche, exploring the lives of key

figures to highlight the larger context and themes of the period.[1] His narratives and character sketches resonated with readers who could not resist these vividly engaging histories. In addition, DeVoto's histories had considerable appeal to readers whose lives had been shaped by the First and Second World Wars and the early Cold War. DeVoto was a second lieutenant during the First World War, stationed at Camp Lee in Virginia, where he served as an instructor in marksmanship. Although not called into service in Europe, his military training and experience at Camp Lee enabled him to write authoritatively about the role of armies and military campaigns in his trilogy and monthly column, "The Easy Chair," in *Harper's Magazine*. His books were sprinkled with military history—not only his treatment of the U.S.-Mexican War, but his description of the marches of overland trail emigrants under the command of elected leaders, eating in "messes," and keeping guard duty at night.[2]

One aspect of DeVoto's histories has garnered less attention: his focus on geography and the natural world. Whether describing Overland Trail migrants, mountain fur trappers, or continental explorers, DeVoto noted the effects of the weather, climate, and topography on people moving about the West. He emphasized how the dry lands he knew from his youth in Ogden had shaped the western past. Walter Prescott Webb asserted in *The Great Plains* that western history had been molded by the sharp drop off in precipitation that began at the 100th meridian.[3] People who crossed that line were shocked by the dry lands they encountered, stunned by the contrast to the forested and humid landscapes from which they had come. DeVoto agreed. "It was a strange land," he wrote in 1934, "and all its strangeness came from the simple arithmetic of its rainfall. A grudging land—it gave reluctant crops only. A treacherous land—its thin rain might fail without reason or warning . . . a poisoned land . . . a dry land—so that all problems returned to the master problem of how to get enough water on land for which there could never be water enough."[4] In addition, DeVoto saw the West as an immense space sparsely populated by indigenous people, two conditions that he maintained made the American conquest in the nineteenth century a certainty. In this sense too, he

Men are masters of their societies, society's will is free, and history is not geography, it is men and the events they produce. But the natural conditions in which men live help to shape their societies. They can and do live in the desert and on the Arctic ice, but on terms which desert and ice impose. A river or a mountain range will not stop a society that has a strong enough desire to cross it, or a sufficiently compelling dream. Yet there are places where the river can be bridged and places where it cannot be; a road can be built across the mountains by some routes only. Some soils will not grow wheat, steel cannot be made where iron and coal cannot be brought together. . . . In such elementary ways geography admittedly conditions history.

—Bernard DeVoto,
The Course of Empire

agreed with Frederick Jackson Turner, whose frontier thesis held that the "free lands" of the American frontier had fostered democracy, economic mobility, and American nationalism.[5]

Along with many other historians, journalists, and western history buffs in his time, DeVoto was keenly interested in the West's mountain ranges, valleys, and river basins. He understood that landforms and waterways shaped history by determining where people found natural resources and a suitable habitat. DeVoto was an early practitioner of environmental history, writing two decades before that sub-field emerged among scholars. In *The Course of Empire*, the third volume of his trilogy, he wrote:

> Men are masters of their societies, society's will is free, and history is not geography, it is men and the events they produce. But the natural conditions in which men live help to shape their societies. They can and do live in the desert and on the Arctic ice, but on terms which desert and ice impose. A river or a mountain range will not stop a society that has a strong enough desire to cross it, or a sufficiently compelling dream. Yet there are places where the river can be bridged and places where it cannot be; a road can be built across the mountains by some routes only. Some soils will not grow wheat, steel cannot be made where iron and coal cannot be brought together. . . . In such elementary ways geography admittedly conditions history.[6]

DeVoto had an inveterate interest in maps of the West, and pored over atlases spread out on the floor of his Cambridge, Massachusetts, home where he studied them closely on his hands and knees. Where exactly was "Lost Trail Pass" that Lewis and Clark traversed in southwest Montana? Which rivers in the Wasatch Range did the Donner Party cross on their way into the Great Basin? Where was the original Mormon Trail? DeVoto obsessed over such geographical and historical puzzles, and together with his many correspondents of like-minded historians tried to figure them out. Their work in determining exactly where humans had traversed was often tedious and may seem quaint, yet it was a vital aspect of Western American historical writing in the middle twentieth century.[7]

Such micro-geography helps account for the appeal of DeVoto's western trilogy. Following World War II, an increasingly mobile American population, propelled by rising living standards and paid vacations, travelled to other states and regions of the country. These travelers yearned for information about America's rivers, mountain ranges, and landmarks. DeVoto himself was among the new generation of western tourists. While he spent most of his life in Cambridge, he took every opportunity to visit the West, and rediscovered the trails and hideouts of his youth near Ogden. On two extensive visits in 1940 and 1946, he conducted research of rendezvous sites of the mountain fur trade, campsites of Lewis and Clark, and historic sites like South Pass. In 1946, he spent several weeks in Colorado, New Mexico, California, Oregon, Nevada, Montana, and the Dakotas, absorbing the West's geography.[8] Readers of his western trilogy were the beneficiaries of his thick descriptions of western landscapes.

His prose evoked the smell of sage, taste of alkali, and blinding sun. In *The Year of Decision: 1846*, DeVoto eloquently described the hardships of overland migrants during the 1840s. In narrating a wagon train that began at Independence, Missouri, he traced how migrants

encountered changes in the climate and vegetation as they moved across the plains. Upon leaving Independence, the "country was lush and fragrant" with tall grass, wildflowers, and birds. Nancy Thornton and Tamsen Donner botanized, along with "a good many other ladies of the train" who picked flowers and pressed them in their albums. Once the migrants crossed the hundredth meridian in western Nebraska, however, the pleasant environment changed. Now the land was open and treeless, "there was no place to hide in," and the sun was unremitting. Migrants fell ill from bad water and endured "mountain fever" marked by headaches from thin oxygen. Lacking trees for firewood, buffalo chips served as fuel, and they coped with

> [the] never-ending wind of the plains [that] blew up dust from the wheels in twisting columns. The tortured eyes tortured the brain. The immense sun, the endless wind, and the gritty, smothering, inescapable dust reddened and swelled the eyes, granulated the lids [and] inflamed the sockets. Dry air had shrunk the wheels too, and without warning tires rolled off or spokes pulled out and the wagon stalled [and] they were not yet to South Pass, not yet halfway to the Pacific![9]

DeVoto used the arid West as a backdrop in two of his early novels, *The Crooked Mile* (1924) and *The House of Sun-Goes-Down* (1926).[10] Then, in 1933, he published an account of his maternal grandfather, Jonathan Dyer, who migrated from England to the United States and farmed in the Weber Valley near Ogden, starting in 1862. At first, Dyer, his wife, and their children endured hardship, having settled on a sage-covered hillside with "coyotes and rattlesnakes and owls." Eventually the Dyers found, as other Mormons had before them, that turning water onto the land held the key to success. In time, his irrigated farm was rich in flowers, grain, and an orchard. "The earth was poisoned, and Jonathan made it sweet," DeVoto wrote. "It was a dead land, and he gave it life. Permanently. Forever. Following the God of the Mormons, he came from Hertford to the Great American Desert and made it fertile. That is achievement."[11] In his 1930 article, "The Centennial of Mormonism," DeVoto praised Brigham Young for recognizing that in the Great Basin, water was the vital ingredient to survival.[12] "A history of the Mormons in the West," DeVoto concluded, "would be the history of a hard, fanatical people bringing a dead land to bring forth life. Deseret was not the deep soil of the Willamette Valley with the great forests and the abundant rain . . . It was a land poisoned with alkali and dead for want of water."[13]

If DeVoto had great empathy for the migrants who made their way across the dry and hot Great Plains and intermountain region, he had none at all for older, deeply rooted inhabitants of the West, indigenous and Hispanic peoples. His portrait of Hispanic people in California in the 1840s was simplistic, prejudiced, even cartoonish, and he described them with biased and derogatory labels by which he dismissed the Mexican government's claim to legitimacy. He acknowledged that Hispanic people's "feats of horsemanship . . . were amazing even to men who knew the Ute and the Comanche," but insisted that they were "amiable, sunny, slothful, [and] in the opinion of the Americans, a lot of stinking greasers, something of a sideshow or even a zoo."[14]

His portrait of Mexican California rested in part on his depiction of its natural environment. Abundant in grasses

If DeVoto had great empathy for the migrants who made their way across the dry and hot Great Plains and intermountain region, he had none at all for older, deeply rooted inhabitants of the West, indigenous and Hispanic peoples. His portrait of Hispanic people in California in the 1840s was simplistic, prejudiced, even cartoonish, and he described them with biased and derogatory labels by which he dismissed the Mexican government's claim to legitimacy. He acknowledged that the Hispanic people's "feats of horsemanship . . . were amazing even to men who knew the Ute and the Comanche," but insisted that they were "amiable, sunny, slothful, [and] in the opinion of the Americans, a lot of stinking greasers, something of a sideshow or even a zoo."

and rich soils, its fecundity had much to offer if only humans could tap its natural wealth. DeVoto maintained that Hispanic people did not know how. "These Californians were a feckless, indolent people: their habitat permitted them to be. . . . The goodness of the earth and the fruits thereof were theirs for the taking, could be taken without effort, and could never be exhausted. Almost unaccountable herds of horses and cattle increased geometrically with only the most casual supervision."[15] But Californians had no ambition: "This languorous society," he wrote, "where no one worked hard, not even the Indian slaves, where no one set much value on wealth, industry, or sober righteousness, where the standard of living was far below the standard of manners, where progress was unheard of . . . ; there was nothing that the expansionist Yankees of the 1840's could admire."[16] In short, according to DeVoto, California had a rich natural environment, but the Hispanic inhabitants lacked the self-initiative and knowledge to make the land produce. His portrait of Mexican California was a Black Legend stereotype with an environmental twist, and it contrasted sharply to the one he drew of industrial New England where hard-working Yankees were remaking the landscape and economy. Those same Yankees were heading west, and in California they saw a place ripe for the taking. Backward, lazy Californians, they thought, must give way to enterprising Americans.[17]

In similar fashion, DeVoto exhibited little understanding of the indigenous Shoshonean people of the western Great Basin, the people Mark Twain referred to in *Roughing It* as "the Diggers." DeVoto allowed that "they were such Indians as could exist in this desert: living without shelter or in sagebrush huts, feeding on whatever was at hand, the carp and suckers of alkali-tinctured streams, sunflower seeds and the bulbs and roots of desert plants, pinon nuts, grasshoppers and black crickets." Rather than probing further into their knowledge of the environment, however, he emphasized their extreme poverty, noted their clothing of "woven grass," asserted that they had "no way of making fire and had to do without it for long periods," and were "quite unlike the tribes from which they had degenerated." Quoting Twain, DeVoto cast "the Diggers" as "treacherous, filthy, and repulsive," before adding in his own words that they were "tick-ridden . . . lousy . . . [and] theirs was the most miserable life lived in North America since the ice retreated."[18]

DeVoto's description angered one of his correspondents, Utah-based historian

Dale Morgan, who knew better. In a letter to Madeline McQuown, Morgan noted that DeVoto had learned a faulty version of Great Basin anthropology from Andy Kerr at the University of Utah in 1915, whom Morgan maintained had made no effort to keep abreast of new interpretations of indigenous peoples. Venting his anger to McQuown, Morgan scolded DeVoto for his portrayal of the Western Shoshones:

> It is pure fiction to say they had lost the use of fire. All Amerinds knew and used fire. Another point to keep in mind, and DeVoto certainly erred there—all peoples have a culture. It may not include drawing room manners and customs that have our approval. Nevertheless the tribes of the desert had a remarkable culture: they had learned to adjust themselves in relation to the ecology of the region. They knew and used at least forty indigenous food plants. There is a great confusion in DeVoto's mind on the so-called Diggers. He should disabuse his mind of the term "degenerate," avoid the prejudices of Fremont, Joe Walker, Mark Twain, and ilk. For a writer with his great understanding, breadth of learning, distaste for hypocrisy, and sense of justice I am really shocked.[19]

As Gary Topping has pointed out, "DeVoto's view was [of] an evolutionary hierarchy that placed Indians on a scale of worth according to how closely their culture resembled Anglo culture."[20] He could not conceive that native peoples had the ability or power—much less sovereign claim—to withstand throngs of white Americans flocking to the West. He thought that the biggest problem facing Hispanic people and natives was simply their small numbers. Because they resided in tiny settlements and mobile communities in a vast landscape, they must inevitably succumb to throngs of migrants coming from the East and Midwest. All of that space—"illimitable land," he called it—was a precondition of Manifest Destiny, of the settlement and conquest of the Far West by white Americans.[21]

In 1942, after *The Atlantic* published an excerpt of his forthcoming *The Year of Decision: 1846*, the anthropologist Oliver LaFarge sent his critique of the piece to editor Ted Weeks, who conveyed it to DeVoto. His response is revealing:

> Was it better to leave half a million square miles of desert to twenty-five thousand Indians, of whom

He could not conceive that native peoples had the ability or power – much less sovereign claim – to withstand throngs of white Americans flocking to the West. He thought that the biggest problem facing Hispanic people and natives was simply their small numbers. Because they resided in tiny settlements and mobile communities in a vast landscape, they must inevitably succumb to throngs of migrants coming from the East and Midwest. All of that space – "illimitable land," he called it – was a precondition of Manifest Destiny, of the settlement and conquest of the Far West by white Americans.

> four-fifths had decayed below their original culture, or to turn that area over to white men who have made it fertile, established a civilization there, and made it an integral part of our own culture? It is not conceivable . . . that anything could have stayed the progress of the American settlement of the Far West, including New Mexico and California. It is not conceivable that anything could have altered the fundamental sentiment of all Americans in relation to land . . . , the belief that the land belongs to him who occupies it, cultivates it, and makes it bring forth crops. I believe that it was our manifest destiny to acquire more or less what we did acquire of the Far West . . . ; if that makes me an imperialist, then I am one.[22]

One year earlier, DeVoto asserted in "The Easy Chair" column that Americans had not intended to make war on Mexico or its northern provinces. But they were proudly confident in their democracy and free market economy and felt sure that these must be extended to the western lands controlled by Mexican and indigenous peoples. "They had no more doubt that they had been charged with making that great emptiness American," he wrote, "than that they were under a moral obligation to provide schools for children. The logic of geography was the faith of successive generations. The continent was there, they felt that destiny bade them occupy it, and they did."[23]

The logic of geography. Here was the core of DeVoto's convictions about Manifest Destiny. DeVoto's contemporary, the historian Albert Weinberg, called this "geographical predestination," an apt description of the views of expansionists in the 1840s, and the phrase nicely captures DeVoto's views about Western history."[24] "The injustice to Mexico was slight," DeVoto wrote, "and the provinces [California, New Mexico] fell not so much as to conquest as to the geographical system of North America . . . . The conquest was determined when the first American canoe crossed the Mississippi to the Louisiana Purchase."[25] Geography, not President James K. Polk's bullying or pressures from northern merchants or southern cotton growers, explained the origins of the war.

DeVoto came to his views about geographical predestination based on two nineteenth century American writers: Mark Twain and William Gilpin. His first nonfiction book, *Mark Twain's America* (1932), was a major work in Twain scholarship in which DeVoto insisted that Twain honed his literary skills in the vibrant folk culture of Missouri and along the great Mississippi River, a place where indigenous peoples, slaves, and many ethnic traditions converged. In capturing the cultural and social forces at work on Twain, DeVoto identified the Mississippi River Valley as the source of a new American identity.[26] His understanding of the Great Valley as a center of American national identity also grew from his reading of William Gilpin, a businessman, rancher, member of Congress, and governor of Colorado. Gilpin was an ardent expansionist, preacher of Manifest Destiny, and author of *The Mission of the North American People* (1874) and *The Cosmopolitan Railway* (1890). Gilpin described the land between the Appalachians and Rocky Mountains as a gigantic bowl into which all the major rivers flowed toward the Missouri and Mississippi. The result, Gilpin asserted, was a mid-continental geography that imposed unity, in contrast to Europe's many mountain ranges and crisscrossing rivers, which divided peoples and

nations. In DeVoto's words, "this beneficent geography facilitates trade, emigration, and government. It tends to amalgamate peoples, not differentiate them. It is centripetal: it harmonizes customs and cultures, establishes a single language, accelerates the exchange of ideas, and makes for unity. In North America there is a fundamental geographical unity, a continental unity."[27]

DeVoto knew that Gilpin's analysis had its flaws. In particular, Gilpin ignored that much of the West was arid and that this condition had constrained economic and population growth. In 1944, the same year in which DeVoto analyzed Gilpin's ideas in *Harper's Magazine*, he published a short book, *The Literary Fallacy*, devoting several pages to the achievements of John Wesley Powell, explorer of the Colorado River and author of the seminal *Arid Lands Report of 1877.* DeVoto greatly admired Powell because of his grasp of the West's geography and climate, of his reliance on science to understand the region.[28] Powell grasped the climatic and geographical realities of the West, unlike Gilpin, whose judgments were clouded by his boosterism. Still, for all of his adoration of Powell, DeVoto embraced Gilpin's point that North American geography ensured that the United States would be a continental nation, that it propelled westward expansion and conquest. Here was a paradox to DeVoto's thinking: he admired the scientist who urged restraint of settlement and recognition of environmental limits, but he also embraced the booster whose portrait of North American geography helped make the case for a Manifest Destiny that was unstoppable.

What helps explain DeVoto's embrace of Gilpin was that another nineteenth-century American advanced the same point. In his second message to Congress in December of 1862, President Abraham Lincoln explained how the Civil War violated American geography. "There is no line straight or crooked, suitable for a national boundary upon which to divide," Lincoln said. "A glance at the map shows that territorially speaking [the vast interior region] is the great body of the Republic. The other parts are but marginal borders to it." DeVoto seized the point. "Lincoln was speaking the truth," he wrote to Harvard historian Frederick Merk, "the literal truth, literal as all hell, when he said, on the basis of the geographical data he summarized, that the land itself demanded Union. I believe that that is one of the basic truths of our national experience."[29]

DeVoto drove Lincoln and Gilpin's point home in the final work of the trilogy, *The Course of Empire*:

> To cross the Appalachian system was to come into the American heartland, where nothing could be separated from anything else for very long. Where all cultures and all stocks and all casts of thought and all habits of emotion mingled. Whereas Lincoln said the dividing lines were either rivers that could be ferried in a moment or the numbered abstractions of surveyors that could not even be perceived . . . this continuity and integration of the land, it must be repeated, was a centripetal force, a unifying, nation-making force.[30]

DeVoto's adherence to Gilpin and Turner underlaid his emphasis on American expansion and imperialism throughout his trilogy. Antebellum Americans, their population growing, their industry and markets expanding, their self- awareness of exceptionalism mounting, looked westward to a continent of vast space and few geographical fault lines with a powerful sense of self-assuredness and national destiny.

Vital parts of every important watershed in the West are in national forests – and stock grazing is a threat to a watershed the moment it becomes overgrazed. Many watersheds have been damaged by overgrazing, and the efforts of the Forest Service to reduce and repair the damage – in large part by reducing the number of stock grazed in areas that have deteriorated – have always met with truculent opposition by the stockmen.

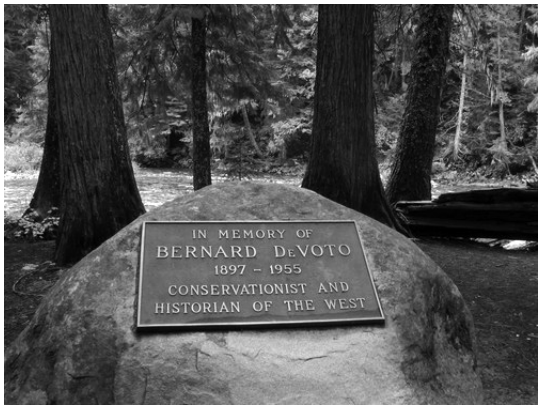
– Bernard DeVoto, "The Easy Chair"

Yet, even as DeVoto spun his trilogy of Manifest Destiny with its geographical predestination theme, he was developing another line of thought. In the last decade of his life, he found himself troubled by what he saw in the West. In the summer of 1946, he and his wife, Avis, traveled to several western states, crossed the Great Basin, and visited national parks and forests. The trip afforded DeVoto time to observe the social, political, and environmental undercurrents in the region he had once called home. Powell, it was now clear, had a greater claim on his thinking than Gilpin. He now had a new cause: conservation and defense of the fragile watersheds, the forested and mountain landscapes that held the snowpack, and water that gave life to the lowlands. And DeVoto smelled a rat. He sensed that powerful interests, including leading stockmen's organizations, were targeting the United States Forest Service and Grazing Service (renamed the Bureau of Land Management in 1947) and the regulations on grazing and fees. For the remainder of his life, DeVoto mounted a vigorous defense of the public lands and critique of what he called the "landgrab"—his label for the efforts by stockmen to pressure Congress to transfer millions of acres of federally controlled rangelands to the states and, he feared, ultimately to private hands. The implications of that prospect he thought to be dire:

> Vital parts of every important watershed in the West are in national forests—and stock grazing is a threat to a watershed the moment it becomes overgrazed. Many watersheds have been damaged by overgrazing, and the efforts of the Forest Service to reduce and repair the damage—in large part by reducing the number of stock grazed in areas that have deteriorated—have always met with truculent opposition by the stockmen.[31]

In the early post-World War II years, DeVoto's powerful articles in defense of public lands were an important facet of the emerging environmental movement.[32]

Mindful of Powell and the public lands agencies seeking to conserve national forests and rangelands, DeVoto now felt compelled to urge that western lands must be treated carefully. Those lands were fragile, had limits, and could not withstand the kind of gung-ho aggressive resource extraction that had characterized the nineteenth century. DeVoto, in contrast to the major nature writers of his time such as Rachel Carson, Sigurd Olson, or Aldo Leopold, did not hunt or fish or hike, and thus did not write eloquent descriptions of scenery. Instead, he emphasized how nature set the terms for what people could do and could not do. In the West, arid landscapes



A plaque commemorating DeVoto rests in DeVoto Memorial Cedar Grove (inside Nez Perce—Clearwater National Forest) where his ashes were scattered.

were fragile and subject to quick degradation from overgrazing and aggressive timber harvesting. In several of his essays, DeVoto connected recent flooding during the 1940s with overgrazing, highlighting the catastrophic flood in Mt. Pleasant, Utah, in 1946, when a huge mud slide "did half a million dollars' worth of damage in ten minutes" that he attributed to abuse of rangelands above the town.[33]

In short, during the same years when DeVoto's fame as a popular historian of the West reached its peak, he himself was undergoing a major shift in his thinking about western lands and the environment. This historian had devoted years to writing three major volumes on the immense spaces of the West that beckoned throngs of migrants, fur trappers, missionaries, and entrepreneurs, of countless people on the make, full of zeal for taking land and extracting natural resources. Now he was pushing back against the attitude of conquest that prevailed amongst the many characters and forces he had vividly chronicled in his historical trilogy. The western landscape, which he had long taken to be limitless, bountiful, and beckoning to Americans in the era of Manifest Destiny, had become something very different: delicate, fragile, and under threat from a new aggressive generation of entrepreneurs driven by greed and avarice. For much of his career, DeVoto had been a cheerleader for western expansion and conquest of the Far West. Now he advanced a more cautious view of the West, essentially encouraging the sustainable maintenance of its lands and waters and looking toward the region's ecological future rather than harkening to its more exploitative past.

During the same years when DeVoto's fame as a popular historian of the West reached its peak, he himself was undergoing a major shift in his thinking about western lands and the environment. This historian had devoted years to writing three major volumes on the immense spaces of the West that beckoned throngs of migrants, fur trappers, missionaries, and entrepreneurs, of countless people on the make, full of zeal for taking land and extracting natural resources. Now he was pushing back against the attitude of conquest that prevailed amongst the many characters and forces he had vividly chronicled in his historical trilogy. The western landscape, which he had long taken to be limitless, bountiful, and beckoning to Americans in the era of Manifest Destiny, had become to him something very different: delicate, fragile, and under threat from a new aggressive generation of entrepreneurs driven by greed and avarice.

Notes

1 Wallace Stegner, *The Uneasy Chair: A Biography of Bernard DeVoto* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1974), pp. 240-41. For a more critical interpretation of DeVoto's treatment of individuals, see Gary Topping, *Utah Historians and the Reconstruction of Western History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003), pp. 100-109.

2. "Anabasis in Buckskin: An Exploit of Our War With Mexico," *Harper's Magazine* 180 (March 1940), 400-410. DeVoto's appeal was similar to that of Bruce Catton, whose books on the Civil War captured a large audience in the 1950s and 1960s. See David Blight, "A Formula for Enjoying the War: Bruce Catton," in *American Oracle: The Civil War in the Civil Rights Era* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2011), pp. 81-128.

3. (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1931), pp. 7-9.

4. "The West: A Plundered Province," *Harper's Magazine* (August 1934); repr., Douglas Brinkley and Patricia Nelson Limerick, eds., *The Western Paradox: A Conservation Reader* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 7.

5. Gary Topping asserts that DeVoto "largely ignored the Turner thesis in the books about the far West" (*Utah Historians*, p. 71). Though in large part true, DeVoto fully embraced Turner's assertion that "free land" beckoned countless migrants into the West and that settlement of them transformed the nation. This is not so much a stated theme but an underlying assumption.

6. *The Course of Empire* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1952), p. xvi. Geographers have long debated to what extent geography determines human societies and some might well view DeVoto as an environmental determinist.

7. DeVoto to Bob Bailey, August 11, 1946, Box 3, Bernard DeVoto Papers, Department of Special Collections and University Archives, Stanford University (hereafter cited as DeVoto Papers); DeVoto and Dale Morgan exchanged several letters about such matters. See, for example, Morgan to DeVoto, October 1, 1941, DeVoto to Morgan, December 1, 1941, and Morgan to DeVoto, December 9 and 16, 1941, Reel #2, Dale Morgan Papers, Special Collections, The Bancroft Library, University of California-Berkeley.

8. Stegner, *The Uneasy Chair*, pp. 224-227, 287-298. See also DeVoto to Kate Sterne, July 14, 1940, in Mark DeVoto, ed., *The Selected Letters of Bernard DeVoto and Katharine Sterne* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2012), pp. 235-240.

9. All the quotations in this paragraph are from DeVoto's *The Year of Decision: 1846* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1943), pp. 157-167.

10. DeVoto, *The Crooked Mile* (New York: Minton, Balch, & Company, 1924); *The House of Sun-Goes-Down* (Chicago: The White House Publishers, 1928). See also DeVoto's article, "The Great Medicine Road," *American Mercury* 11 (May 1927), 104-112.

11. "Jonathan Dyer, Frontiersman: A Paragraph in the History of the West," *Harper's Magazine* 167 (September 1933), 491-501; repr., Bernard DeVoto, *Forays and Rebuttals* (Boston: Little Brown & Company, 1936), pp. 3-24.

12. "The Centennial of Mormonism," *American Mercury* 19 (January 1930), p. 115; repr., DeVoto, *Forays and Rebuttals*, pp. 71-137.

13. DeVoto, *The Year of Decision: 1846*, p. 469. On irrigation in the Mormons' first settlements in Utah, see also Thomas G. Alexander, "Irrigating the Mormon Heartland: The Operation of the Irrigation Companies in Wasatch Oasis Communities, 1847-1880," *Agricultural History* 76 (Spring 2002), 172-187; Leonard J. Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom: Economic History of the Latter Day Saints, 1830-1900* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1958), pp. 52-53; Donald J. Pisani, *To Reclaim A Divided West: Water, Law, and Public Policy*, 1848-1902 (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1992), pp. 78-79.

14. *The Year of Decision: 1846*, p. 73; see also p. 13.

15. *Across the Wide Missouri* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1947), p. 150.

16. *The Year of Decision: 1846*, p. 113.

17. For a careful analysis of stereotypes about Mexican people in the Southwest, see David J. Weber, "'Scarce More Than Apes': Historical Roots of Anglo-American Stereotypes of Mexicans in the Border Region," *Myth and the History of the Hispanic Southwest* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988), pp. 161-167.

18. DeVoto, *Across the Wide Missouri*, pp. 147-148; Topping, *Utah Historians*, pp. 72-73. For a recent overview of Western Shoshones and other indigenous people of the Great Basin, see Gregory E. Smoak, "The Great Basin," in Frederick E. Hoxie, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of American Indian History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 377-393.

19. Dale Morgan to Madeline McQuown, May 10, 1944, Box 2, Madeline R. McQuown Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah.

20. Topping, *Utah Historians*, p. 72.

21. "Geopolitics with the Dew on It," *Harper's Magazine* 188 (March 1944), p. 321.

22. DeVoto to Weeks, August 4, 1942, Box 2, DeVoto Papers.

23. "Manifest Destiny," *Harper's Magazine* 182 (April 1941), p. 560.

24. Albert K. Weinberg, *Manifest Destiny: A Study of Nationalist Expansionism in American History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1935; repr., Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1963), p. 43.

25. "Manifest Destiny," *Harper's Magazine*, p. 558. DeVoto's convictions about westward expansion also arose from his take on the great economic engine of industrialism sweeping the country, especially New England, in the 1830s and 1840s. In *The Year of Decision: 1846*

he asserted that factories, steam power, and interchangeable parts constituted a great force of westward expansion and national unity. Industrialism, not southern agriculture, was the force driving American expansionism. He took it as an article of faith that the northern industrial economy would triumph over the South's slave-based agricultural one, asserting that by the 1840s the slave-economy "had already passed its prime" and "had become an anachronism." It followed that in the inevitable conflict to follow, the Civil War, the Union would win; "Manifest Destiny," *Harper's Magazine*, p. 560.

26. In *The Portable Mark Twain*, DeVoto wrote: "The heartland was mid-continental and its energies were oriented toward the river at its center—and were therefore turned away from Europe, which had been a frontier of the early republic" (New York: The Viking Press, 1946, p. 2).

27. "Geopolitics With the Dew on It," *Harper's Magazine*, p. 316.

28. Ibid, p. 320; DeVoto discussed Powell in *The Literary Fallacy* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1944), pp. 124-135. See also DeVoto's introduction to Wallace Stegner, *Beyond the Hundredth Meridian: John Wesley Powell and the Second Opening of the West* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1953).

29. Lincoln's quote appears in *The Course of Empire*, pp. 401-402; see also DeVoto to Frederick Merk, July 30, 1951, in Wallace Stegner, ed., *The Letters of Bernard DeVoto* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1975), pp. 316-318, quote on p. 317.

30. DeVoto, *The Course of Empire*, pp. 406-07.

31. "Two-Gun Desmond Is Back," "The Easy Chair," *Harper's Magazine* (March 1951), repr., Brinkley and Limerick, *The Western Paradox*, p. 117.

32. DeVoto's conservation essays can be found in Brinkley and Limerick, *The Western Paradox*, pp. 45-173, and in Edward K. Muller, ed., *DeVoto's West: History, Conservation, and the Public Good* (Athens, Ohio: Swallow Press/Ohio University Press, 2005).

33. "The West Against Itself," *Harper's Magazine* (January 1947), repr., Muller, *DeVoto's West*, p. 96; see also Flood in the Desert," *Harper's Magazine* (August 1952), in ibid, pp. 154-161.



Mark Harvey is professor of history at North Dakota State University, Fargo. He is the author of *A Symbol of Wilderness: Echo Park and the American Conservation Movement* (Albuquerque, 1994) and *Wilderness Forever: Howard Zahniser and the Path to the Wilderness Act* (Seattle, 2005), and editor of *The Wilderness Writings of Howard Zahniser* (Seattle, 2014). He is at work on a biography of Bernard DeVoto.

THE WEST AGAINST ITSELF

NATE SCHWEBER

The story of how Bernard DeVoto wrote the most important article of his life was an adventure in itself.

It began in early June 1946 when DeVoto packed his old Buick sedan with maps, a portable library, notebooks, Chesterfield cigarettes, rye whiskey, and a few suitcases. Riding shotgun was his stylish, quick-witted wife, Avis. In the backseat were their boys, Gordon, 16, and Mark, 6. For the entirety of World War II DeVoto had dreamed of driving his family from their drafty Victorian house in clammy Cambridge, Massachusetts, out into the open, sparkling West, his homeland and professional obsession.



The DeVoto family at home, 1943.

The DeVotos would follow Lewis and Clark's trail to research DeVoto's next book, *The Course of Empire*, which would win the National Book Award in 1953. It was by writing nonfiction about the West that DeVoto found his true voice. In 1943 he published his first smash hit, *The Year of Decision, 1846*, telling the tale of soldiers in the Mexican-American War, of persecuted Mormons settling in Utah, and of the horrible ordeal of the Donner Party. Coming at the nadir of WWII, the book exemplified DeVoto's patriotic mission of using history to inspire his fellow countrymen. His next book—finished just before he headed west in 1946—was about mountain men and was titled *Across the Wide Missouri*. It would win a Pulitzer Prize in 1948.

But DeVoto's Western tour would not only be for bookwork. In 1935 he was given the honor of writing the monthly *Harper's Magazine* column The Easy Chair, founded in 1850, the oldest feature in American journalism. With characteristic bombast, DeVoto boasted to a friend that he was eager to begin "bellowing from a platform" and giving the public "the inestimable privilege of my literary views once a month." DeVoto planned to write at least one Easy Chair about natural resource conservation, a topic he called "my old groove," and which he first expounded on in a 1934 *Harper's* article about land exploitation titled, "The West: A Plundered Province."

DeVoto planned to collaborate with photographer Ansel Adams on a feature for the magazine *Fortune* about national parks. He also intended to write some-

thing about the U.S. Forest Service, and before he left he made a personal connection with its history. He met the service's elderly founder, Gifford Pinchot, who would die that fall. Pinchot and his partner in conservation, President Theodore Roosevelt, had created the Wasatch National Forest in the mountains above Ogden, Utah, where DeVoto was born and raised. Into that wild sanctuary, young DeVoto—already an iconoclast—brought his rifle and philosophy books. He taught himself to be such an expert marksman that when he volunteered for WWI, the Army kept him stateside to be a sharpshooting instructor. DeVoto taught himself to do with arguments the same things he did with bullets: hit bullseyes. The spring meeting symbolized the transference to DeVoto of Pinchot and Roosevelt's conservation crusade.

The DeVotos ferried across the Great Lakes and zoomed through the Upper Midwest and met Lewis and Clark's trail in the Missouri River town of Pierre, South Dakota. Immediately, DeVoto got a bad feeling. The signs became more ominous as the DeVotos followed the river to Garrison, North Dakota, and onto lands belonging to the Three Affiliated Tribes: the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nations.

DeVoto knew it was the Mandans who introduced Lewis and Clark to Sacajawea, the expectant mother who played a crucial role in guiding them to the Pacific. It was reportedly because of that kindness that the Mandans were granted some of the most fertile lands for their reservation. But when the DeVotos arrived, the tribes were mourning. Without their consent, construction had begun on what was to be the fifth-largest dam in the U.S., one that would flood out 150,000 acres—94 percent of the tribes' pasture lands and 80 percent of their homes—with an artificial lake to be named after Sacajawea. DeVoto was shocked to see "a genuine blown in the bottle Western boom."

The boom had all the contingents that DeVoto knew from history—boosterism, land speculation, political favoritism, Native American dispossession. DeVoto's studies informed him that previous Western booms—for beaver and buffalo furs, for gold and silver, for old-growth forests and cattle ranges—went hand-in-hand with great greed and huge thefts of public wealth. He thought what he was seeing might be the tip of an iceberg. Or maybe just the cliff of white hair atop the head of Nevada Senator Patrick McCarran.

DeVoto had much in common with his nemesis, McCarran. He too was a ferociously intelligent, hot-tempered contrarian and an ambitious Westerner who moved to the Northeast in pursuit of power and prestige. McCarran even hailed from the same western sub-region, the Great Basin, a place of dramatic natural extremes. Mount Whitney, the

The boom had all the contingents that DeVoto knew from history—boosterism, land speculation, political favoritism, Native American dispossession. DeVoto's studies informed him that previous Western booms—for beaver and buffalo furs, for gold and silver, for old-growth forests and cattle ranges—went hand-in-hand with great greed and huge thefts of public wealth. He thought what he was seeing might be the tip of an iceberg. Or maybe just the cliff of white hair atop the head of Nevada Senator Patrick McCarran.

tallest mountain in the contiguous U.S., rises from the Great Basin and looks down on the lowest point in the western hemisphere, Death Valley. It is an apt geographic analogy for DeVoto and McCarran.

McCarran, a Democrat, achieved his dream of being elected to the U.S. Senate in 1932 by campaigning as a steadfast supporter of Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal across a state brought to its knees by the Great Depression. Franklin Roosevelt (Theodore's fifth-cousin) acted on advice from Pinchot to mitigate the terrible effects of the Dust Bowl by expanding national forests and extending conservation protections to more than 140 million acres of unappropriated dry deserts, prairies, and canyonlands in the West. While the epicenter of the Dust Bowl was the over-plowed southern Great Plains, overgrazed cattle and sheep ranges on public lands in the West contributed to catastrophic floods and dust storms so massive that one in May 1934 soared 15,000 feet high and 1,800 miles across and dumped 350 million tons of soil on the Midwest, Northeast, and Europe. Survivors likened it something from the Book of Exodus; Oklahoma Senator Thomas Gore called it "the most tragic, the most impressive lobbyist that [had] ever come to this Capitol." But only days later, in a debate over FDR administration plans to regulate public rangelands, McCarran stood and said he would oppose the conservation expansions "so long as I have vitality." (Lyndon B. Johnson would recall McCarran as "an earth-shaking force. . . one of the controversial figures around which the storm raged.")

McCarran's best friend and biggest financial backer was a cattle baron and real estate developer from Connecticut named Norman Biltz. During the Great Depression, Biltz made a fortune consolidating busted Nevada ranches and selling them as hobby properties to out-of-state millionaires like Bing Crosby. Biltz subdivided and developed his most scenic properties, including 27 miles of Lake Tahoe shorefront. McCarran and Biltz were thick as thieves. "I wonder if you know that the greatest happiness I could have would be to do something for you, my friend," McCarran wrote him. Biltz opposed public lands protections out of fear it would cost him selling private lands.

Though McCarran did not support U.S. involvement in WWII—he was an outspoken member of the "America First" movement—he recognized Pearl Harbor as an opportunity to push his land privatization agenda. Throughout the war, McCarran held dozens of public meetings across the West, which he coordinated and choreographed with only the largest cattle and sheep associations. Small ranchers, Native Americans, and a few environmentalists were discouraged from participating, and McCarran purposefully minimized their input. For example, he dismissed reports that representatives of large associations were menacing small ranchers on ranges to keep them away; he refused to take testimony in writing from people who could not afford to attend (though he sent staff members to personally visit large ranchers); and he handpicked translators for Native Americans who would not interpret their words sympathetically. In what became an almost sadistic ritual, McCarran encouraged attendees to shout insults at invited professionals from the U.S. Forest Service. In 1945, McCarran staffer Earl S. Haskell explained that the purpose was to affect the public servants "psychologically," to "make them color up around the ears," and he promised that "it really should be quite a show."

Naturally, the most dominant livestock associations loved the McCarran Hearings. In the autumn of 1941 the secretary of the

Wyoming Stock Growers Association thanked McCarran for his "unbiased efforts to uncover the facts." A spokesman for the Wyoming Wool Growers Association praised the hearings as "the fairest and the best I have ever attended." McCarran promptly leaned on them for money.

As the McCarran Hearings continued throughout WWII, even ranchers in his own state began to fear his isolationist catering to one special interest was making their entire industry seem unpatriotic. "Nevada stockmen and Western stockmen as a whole, I believe, are particularly sensitive to the fact that it is necessary to pay for and win the present war," Walter M. Gilmer, president of the Nevada Stock Growers Association, wrote McCarran in 1943. In 1944 Nevadans nearly booted McCarran from office in a primary election. Afterward, FDR received a report that one of McCarran's wealthy backers—probably Biltz—bought the winning votes for $20 each in Las Vegas. Nothing would stop McCarran from compiling his thousands of pages of lopsided testimony.

In early 1946, McCarran used that testimony to justify slashing the appropriation for the U.S. Grazing Service, a sibling agency to the U.S. Forest Service that FDR created to protect public lands outside of national parks and national forests. President Harry Truman then combined its crippled remnants with the historically corrupt General Land Office to create a new agency called the Bureau of Land Management. A large rancher named J. Elmer Brock, a powerful member of the Wyoming Stock Growers Association and the president of its lobbying arm, the American National Live Stock Association, wanted McCarran and other Western members of Congress to introduce a suite of anti-public lands legislation. The legislation would have livestock-industry approved crews re-survey national parks and national forests and transfer any grassy areas to the BLM. As many as 236 million acres—an area bigger than Texas, equivalent to all the land Theodore Roosevelt protected—would then be transferred to individual states for the purpose of selling them at below-market rates to the West's largest livestock operations. Rumor of the plot traveled up the barbed-wire grapevine to a cowboy who decided to blow off steam in Miles City on the night the DeVotos rolled into town.

"I remember with pleasure," DeVoto wrote later, "that I got my first real tip by listening (I could have avoided listening only by going outside) to a very loud and very drunk cattleman in the Range Rider's Café in Miles City."

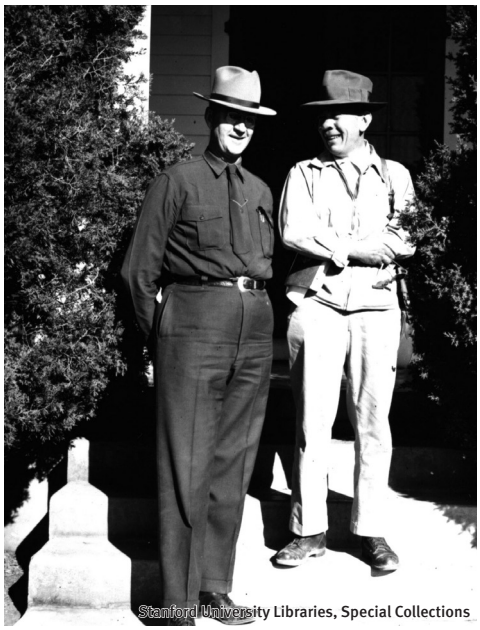
After overhearing his tip while working on a steak in the dining area upstairs from the packed bar, DeVoto immediately decided to revert back to a role he learned as a cub newspaperman for the Ogden *Standard-Examiner*: investigative journalist. He wanted to find out the precise details of the Brock/McCarran

As many as 236 million acres—an area bigger than Texas, equivalent to all the land Theodore Roosevelt protected—would then be transferred to individual states for the purpose of selling them at below-market rates to the West's largest livestock operations. Rumor of the plot traveled up the barbed-wire grapevine to a cowboy who decided to blow off steam in Miles City on the night the DeVotos rolled into town.

plot. It was fortunate that his wife, Avis, was with him, because she loved a good mystery (her job was writing reviews of detective novels for the *Boston Globe*) and she was able to make friends all across the West. The DeVotos went to Great Falls, Montana, and met with a writer to whom the general details of the plot sounded familiar. In 1943 Joseph Kinsey Howard published a classic Western book, *Montana: High, Wide and Handsome*, about corporate exploitation. As Avis charmed the bartender at a restaurant called Dempsey's, Howard gave DeVoto more leads and information. Soon, DeVoto met small ranchers throughout Western Montana and Eastern Idaho who confirmed the plot, and "bitterly resented" it. DeVoto realized if he could get the exact details, he could write an explosive story.

The DeVotos continued on to Idaho's Lemhi Valley and around the snow-bound Bitterroot Mountains. They sped west through Washington's Wallowa Valley to Oregon's Fort Clatsop, the end of the Lewis and Clark trail. The DeVotos then began a national parks tour, going south to Crater Lake, and then to Yosemite, where the DeVotos conferred with Ansel Adams, who gave the suggestion to drive all night through the Nevada desert to see a man in Ogden who could help.

Forest Service District Ranger Chester J. Olsen in the 1930s had led hundreds of Civilian Conservation Corps workers high into the Wasatch Mountains above Ogden and re-planted trees and grasses on slopes so badly clearcut and over-grazed that in the 1920s deadly floods besieged the county. DeVoto called it "the most spectacular job of restoring damaged land the West has ever seen." DeVoto found Olsen at the four-story Art Deco-style Forest Service building just downslope from the house where he grew up.



Chet Olsen, Regional Forester of the Intermountain Region, and Bernard DeVoto at the dormitory of the Desert Range Experiment Station, west of Milford, Utah, May 13, 1952.

Because of the sensitivity of what they discussed, the men's respective widows burned much of their correspondence after their deaths. But the warmest glimpse of the friendship between the two families comes from Avis, who left posterity's most colorful description of Olsen in a 1953 letter to her best friend, Julia Child, whom she would one day make into a bestselling cookbook author and star of the PBS show, "The French Chef." Avis told Child about DeVoto receiving elk steaks in the mail from Olsen, whom she called "a darling, a Mormon, completely unintellectual, a very shrewd and sweet and capable and innocent and natively intelligent and uncomplicated and shy and the kind of honest good Democrat that is the backbone of the party. His food tastes are exactly like B's, worse luck."

Olsen told DeVoto there was to be an August meeting in Salt Lake City of the West's biggest livestock associations.

McCarran was marquee speaker; Brock was key strategist. The token federal conservation invitee was one of Olsen's elderly colleagues, William B. Rice, a Forest Service supervisor. Rice, who had been made to chauffeur McCarran to hearings during the war, had a shot at getting the details DeVoto needed. Plans were made to meet again in late summer in Boise, Idaho.

The DeVotos continued through Grand Teton and Yellowstone National Parks in Wyoming. They drove north to Glacier National Park in Montana, then southeast to Rocky Mountain National Park in Colorado. It amounted to a tour of what was at stake. Meanwhile, McCarran became ensnarled in an FBI investigation into Benjamin "Bugsy" Siegel after agents heard the mobster and murder suspect bragging that he was bribing public officials to build the Flamingo Hotel on the Las Vegas Strip. McCarran traveled directly from what the FBI believed was a rendezvous with Siegel in San Francisco to the stockgrowers' convention in Salt Lake.

There, McCarran and Brock had a falling out over strategy. Brock wanted to immediately start transferring and selling all 146 million acres of BLM lands. McCarran wanted to wait until as many as 80 million acres were transferred from the Forest Service and the National Park Service to the BLM before beginning the selloff. McCarran stormed away in a huff. Brock led a private Joint Committee meeting with nine other men and devised his legislative agenda. The sale price they set per acre, at a time when some of the least valuable private land in the West cost betwen $5 and $20 an acre, ranged from a high of $2.80 per acre to a low of nine cents per acre, six cents more than President Thomas Jefferson paid in the Louisiana Purchase 143 years earlier. Buyers would have 30 years to pay at 1.5 percent interest. It was more steal than deal.



The DeVoto family in Eastern Montana, 1946.

Somehow, Forester Rice managed to get hold of a transcript of Brock's meeting. He and Olsen brought it to Boise and showed it to DeVoto, who felt vindicated and outraged. "Every newspaperman knows quite positively that if plans are being kept secret, the plot includes at least one conspirator who is captive, who opposes it but goes along because he is forced to," DeVoto remembered. "As a reporter, all I had to do was to find this man, and I found him."

Until that point, America's greatest conservation champions had similar life trajectories. Theodore Roosevelt, Gifford Pinchot, John Muir, George Bird Grinnell—all were Easterners who went West and tried to tell their home audiences about the importance of public lands. DeVoto threw in a twist. He was a Westerner who went East and wrote for Westerners specifically about the importance of their land. Which amplified the power of what he would say at the end of his 13,850-mile journey.

The double-length feature DeVoto wrote for *Harper's* was titled, "The West

Against Itself." It still reads like it was written today for tomorrow's newspaper.

DeVoto called the McCarran/Brock plot a "land grab," ultimately the biggest in American history. DeVoto put it in the context of the siphoning eastward of the West's natural resource wealth in minerals ("mining is liquidation"), oil and gas ("follow the pattern of the mines"), timber ("perpetrated greater frauds against the people of the United States than any other Western business "), and grass ("the Cattle Kingdom overgrazed the range so drastically.").

The victims of this plunder were Westerners actually trying to make permanent homes who needed those natural resources for societal stability. Likewise imperiled were American taxpayers, threatened, in the event of another Dust Bowl, with a factional fight over whether to spend astronomical sums on environmental remediation with no guarantee of success, or else allowing swaths of their country to turn into uninhabitable desert. DeVoto wrote that the bulwark against this national nightmare was wise public lands conservation, with every citizen holding a stake.

"This is your land we are talking about," he wrote.

While the West was historically victimized by Easterners, the new threat DeVoto pinpointed was Westerners themselves who saw their land through Eastern eyes. They were their own worst enemy, and DeVoto wrote that they exhibited a "psychic split." He railed at the logic of Westerners who denounced federal regulation but demanded federal resources.

"It shakes down to a platform: get out and give us more money," he wrote.

DeVoto pulled no punches in calling out the worst personification of The West Against Itself.

"Senator McCarran has been the ablest representative of cattle and sheep interest in Washington," DeVoto wrote, "against the West and the people of the United States."

DeVoto and McCarran actually agreed that the radicalness of the land grab legislation Brock devised was its greatest weakness. McCarran feared it would be exposed and thwart his ambitions, precisely what DeVoto intended to do. DeVoto calculated that the "Landgrabbers'" only shot was to introduce their legislative suite at the last minute in the upcoming session of Congress, so others would not have sufficient time to study it. Therefore, DeVoto put "West Against" in the January 1947 issue of *Harper's*, which appeared on newsstands in December when lawmakers were getting ready to go back to work.

The victims of this plunder were Westerners actually trying to make permanent homes who needed those natural resources for societal stability. Likewise imperiled were American taxpayers, threatened, in the event of another Dust Bowl, with a factional fight over whether to spend astronomical sums on environmental remediation with no guarantee of success, or else allowing swaths of their country to turn into uninhabitable desert. DeVoto wrote that the bulwark against this national nightmare was wise public lands conservation, with every citizen holding a stake.

It "fused an explosion" of public outcry, he remembered. Writer Wallace Stegner, DeVoto's friend and mentee, remembered that the article "dry gulched" the plotters. McCarran had a heart attack when the article appeared (though there was no claim it was related). No other representative dared introduce any of the legislation. A new generation of environmental leaders became inspired. "I believe no other article has stirred forest people and conservationists so much in recent years," Oregon newspaperman Richard Neuberger wrote in January 1947, seven years before being elected to the Senate on a conservation platform. Avis would brag to Julia Child, "I'm so proud of the hand my old man played in this fight."

But reaction dogged DeVoto until his death. In the summer of 1947, Wyoming Representative Frank Barrett, a friend of Brock's, led his own congressional subcommittee on a tour of the West. He tried re-creating the McCarran Hearings, but because of the spotlight DeVoto shone on public lands, people paid close attention. Meeting halls were packed with diverse crowds made up of sportsmen, farmers, city and town mayors, war veterans, Native Americans, trade unionists, and small ranchers. When Barrett tried stacking meetings with cattlemen, local papers excoriated him for being unfair. As the subcommittee wheezed to an inglorious death, Barrett and Brock responded by cursing DeVoto.

Brock grew furious. He wrote to major magazines in New York, including *Harper's* and *The Saturday Evening Post*, demanding they print long rebuttals to DeVoto's "oily ability to arouse an uninformed public." DeVoto contacted the same editors and warned them that Brock was recklessly spreading propaganda. He gave examples. Brock's most pernicious claim was that western public lands needed to be "returned" from the federal government to individual western states, though western states never owned them. Another was his claim that "overgrazing is an economic impossibility," abundantly refuted by history. Easiest to dismiss was Brock's assertion that "The Forest Service alone demands another 150 billion acres" on a planet of 123 billion acres.

DeVoto turned Brock and his cohorts into a composite character with the pulpy name "Two-Gun Desmond," whom he used as a literary foil in conservation columns. But Brock bested him. In response to DeVoto using fact-checks to keep his rebuttals out of major magazines, Brock figured out a genius workaround. He pressured the Wyoming Stock Growers Association and the Colorado Stock Growers Association to double their fees. Brock used his lobbying group, the American National Livestock Association, to invest that money in a national advertising campaign. Professional ad men boiled Brock's message down to three simple words as effective as "I Like Ike." The slogan of the first modern advertising campaign for the cattle industry became "Eat More Beef." Through decades of transitions in Western cattle associations, and evolutions in advertising, what was born as a reaction to DeVoto's "West Against" grew into the television commercial "Beef: It's What's For Dinner."

McCarran went on to become both a personal role model for and legislative partner to Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy, who viciously attacked DeVoto on nationwide television and sought to ban his writings. As the conservation fight continued, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover put DeVoto under intense investigation. Brock and his compatriots egged them all on by publishing in western journals the false accusation that DeVoto was a communist. To Hoover

personally, Brock wrote, "we would like to see Bernard hanging from a cottonwood limb."

DeVoto, harried and exhausted, had a fatal heart attack in 1955 at the age of 58. After "West Against," he dedicated the last decade of his life to conservation, climaxing with a battle to keep a giant Bureau of Reclamation dam out of Dinosaur National Monument in Utah. He never lived to see the victory. The movement DeVoto galvanized went on to win such 1960s legislative victories as The Wilderness Act, The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

In a small way, the effects of "West Against" were not only felt on Earth. One of DeVoto's friends and admirers was John F. Kennedy, who filled his administration with DeVoto disciples. In 1961, one of Kennedy's assistant Interior Secretaries, John Carver, from Idaho, gave a speech to his department. Carver wanted his charges to know that the fundamental lesson to take from "West Against" was that Americans could no longer exhaust their natural resources, and that Westerners, having the unique perspective of living closest to the old frontier, were poised to make great contributions to the governing philosophy Kennedy called the "New Frontier."

"If our society is to remain dynamic and democratic," Carver paraphrased DeVoto, "we must seek our stimuli within ourselves, within the social body which we comprise, and in new worlds of science which our intelligence creates."

The zenith of the New Frontier came a few years later when Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin stepped onto the moon. Their journey was given a boost because a writer who followed their forefathers, Lewis and Clark, kept his ears open, and in his fearless way dedicated himself to keeping humanity from destroying that beautiful blue marble in the distance.



Nate Schweber is a freelance journalist born and raised in Missoula, Montana, who now lives in Brooklyn, New York. His work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *ProPublica*, and *Preservation Magazine*. His biography of Bernard and Avis DeVoto is scheduled for publication by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt in Spring 2022.

DEVOTO'S "UTAH"[1]

DAVID RICH LEWIS



Mark and Josephine Saxton with Bernard DeVoto, Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, 1950.

What does it take to be forgotten in one's hometown? For most of us leading ordinary lives, it wouldn't take much. Over the course of a generation—maybe two or three—even a genealogically-oriented society like ours will surely relegate us to memory and then forgetfulness.

But what if you were a nationally distinguished writer, historian, and cultural commentator, the author of ten novels, four books of literary criticism, four works of collected essays, and a trilogy of prize-winning histories of the American West? What if you won a Pulitzer, a Bancroft, and a National Book Award? What if you edited over two dozen works, including the iconic journals of Lewis and Clark, and Mark Twain's papers? What if you wrote and published over eight-hundred essays, some while editor of two of the most influential national magazines of your era? What if you were inducted into the National Institute of Arts and Letters and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, served on the National Parks Advisory Board, and advised presidential candidates on the West and environmental issues? What if you taught at Northwestern, Harvard, and Vermont's prestigious Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, becoming a mentor to novelist and histo-

rian Wallace Stegner? Yes, we remember and celebrate Wally, an adopted Utahn. But his mentor. . . ? Not so much.

So, what does it take to accomplish so much and yet be forgotten in one's own hometown, even in one's lifetime? Or is ignored the more appropriate word? Forgetting is an act of omission, ignoring an act of commission that—in certain circles—persists to this day.

Bernard Augustine DeVoto (1897-1955) was born an outsider in Mormon Utah, in Ogden, a town that hadn't worn the saddle of Mormonism comfortably since the arrival of the railroad. Son of a lapsed Catholic father and backsliding Mormon mother, Bernard grew up on the socioeconomic margins of Ogden. He was educated at Catholic and public schools, versed in Latin, Greek, and the Italian epics his father loved, and he shared his father's scorn for Catholicism and prejudice against Mormonism. He found his escape in books and the nearby mountains. By the time he graduated from Ogden High School, Bernard was a complete social outsider—according to Wallace Stegner, "precocious, alert, intelligent, brash, challenging, irreverent, literary, self-conscious, insecure, often ostentatiously crude, sometimes insufferable. To Ogden he looked like a cowbird in a robin's nest."[2]

DeVoto entered the University of Utah in 1914, but after witnessing the academic freedom of his professors assailed by the political culture of Mormonism, he fled to Harvard University to study English. There he discovered both the culture he found so lacking in Utah, as well as an eastern effeteness and provincialism that was every bit as troubling as the western parochialism he had fled. In New England he became western by the same process of self-study that made him look eastward for culture as a child. After a stateside stint as an Army marksmanship instructor during World War I, DeVoto graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Harvard in 1920 and then returned to Ogden where the anxiety of being an outsider in his own land consumed him. In 1922, DeVoto escaped Utah for an instructorship at Northwestern University, but intellectually he never really left Utah or the West. Five years later, with two novels and a marriage to Helen Avis MacVicar to his credit, DeVoto quit the safety of the academy to live as a writer in Boston and then New York City.

Over the next 28 years, DeVoto pursued a distinguished career as essayist, novelist, historian, lecturer, editor, critic, and cultural observer. He moved among the eastern literary and political elite; his home was a haven for ideas, debate, and the search for the perfect cocktail, the famed DeVoto Martini. He was petulant, opinionated, and blunt, but also intellectually generous and willing to change his mind when necessary. He was an advocate for the history of the American West and a defender of our public lands, but a critic of the West's tendency to devour itself for the benefit of eastern capital. DeVoto lived his life outside Utah, loving the land and history but disenchanted with the society.

Bernard DeVoto is arguably Utah's greatest literary figure, still in print and acclaimed nationally by both historians and literary critics sixty-six years after his death at age 58. Yet he is largely invisible in the state—and especially in the city—of his birth. What did he do to be so ignored and then forgotten? All it took

To Ogden, [DeVoto] looked like a cowbird in a robin's nest.

—Wallace Stegner

was one novel and two essays, youthful parting shots at a society that already scorned him. Few Utahns then or now have read these pieces, but they were warned about this wayward Ogdenite. In fact, the novel and the first essay made little splash in Utah even though they specifically targeted Ogden.[3] But the last of these three pieces landed like a sucker-punch in the arena of national attention. It is both emic and etic, the observations of a (simultaneous) native son and outsider that reveal more about Utah and the nation in the first three decades of the twentieth century than many would like to admit. Simply titled "Utah," it appeared in 1926 in *The American Mercury*, one of the most influential magazines of that era.[4] In it, DeVoto argued that Utahns had forsaken their distinctive past and become. . . boring, normal, modern. DeVoto began:

> I had gone to a reception at the home of a Harvard professor. I was vouched for by a youth ancestrally near to the Cabots and Lowells. Later in the evening our hostess, on her rounds among the freshmen, casually asked me where I came from—and three centuries of Boston *Kultur* kept her face expressionless at my answer. Thereafter she was at pains to be kind to me, visibly shielding me from the severities of Brattle street, Cambridge. But as I left, amazement triumphed.
>
> 'So people really live in Utah!' she exclaimed.
>
> I could see pity in her eyes—and, also, apprehension. And no wonder, for she heard a noise at the gates of Harvard, yes, at the Johnstone gate itself—the bridles and scabbards of the Goths.
>
> 'But how?' she asked.

DeVoto's reply? They lived well, in a rude frontier sort of way, until 1907 when the U.S. Senate voted to seat LDS Apostle Reed Smoot and ended "one of history's most hilarious wars, the sixty years' strife between the Mormon and the Gentile." In that moment, Mormons were rehabilitated and vindicated, monotony descended, and "since then the State has never enjoyed itself."

DeVoto backtracks to take readers on a whirlwind tour of Utah history: from Dominguez and Escalante ("One wishes that the Spaniards had lingered somewhere in that vast expanse of mountain and desert"), to the courageous and skilled fur trapper ("a nervous system only a little more sensitive than that of a goat"), to the Mormons ("Pious cowherds who believed themselves capable of summoning angels to converse with them") who killed whatever frontier poetry the previous groups bestowed on the landscape. Seeking isolation, Mormons plunked themselves in the overland path of progress and fought it out with Forty-Niners, the railroad, miners, and anything resembling culture. "No poets lingered there, no musicians, philosophers, or scholars. The atmosphere was neither cultured nor urbane, but it was interesting," as a "first-rate religious war" arose amid "crescendoes of bitterness and farce." On one side were Mormons, "staid peasants whose only distinguishing characteristics were their servility to their leaders and their belief in a low-comedy God." On the other were Gentiles, "less fanatical than the Mormons and less ignorant," but also "less robust," the "unfit of the frontier" who had "given out at the first oasis—and then stayed there."

"For sixty years," DeVoto continued, "their warfare made the State a matrix of living color," catching the attention of Christians and congressmen ("these prurient fools, the worst injustice the Mormon

Bernard DeVoto is arguably Utah's greatest literary figure, still in print and acclaimed nationally by both historians and literary critics sixty-six years after his death at age 58. Yet he is largely invisible in the state – and especially in the city – of his birth. What did he do to be so ignored and then forgotten?

heresy has had to bear") who titillated their audiences with tales of Mormon murders and polygamous sex. In came the army and federal officials ("all corrupt and stupid politicians") to ride herd on the Mormon rabble, but in opposing Brigham Young "they were child-like and innocent." Brigham's words rained down on them like artillery from the Tabernacle. "The curses of God, most dreadful, and the wit of a giant joker, most obscene, took off their hide in patches. The Gentiles fumed and threatened, but Brigham ruled and ridiculed."

"Then," wrote DeVoto, "Brigham died. Pygmies succeeded him, and the Gentiles entered a bull market." Congress investigated and reformers wailed as they "stared with horror at these monsters of bigotry and licentiousness." Gentile Republican fought Mormon Democrat in Utah until the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints declared polygamy "inexpedient," and chastened leaders sought presidential amnesty. Certain that the "Mormon Question" had been settled, Congress granted Utah statehood in 1896, but polygamy and Mormon hegemony lingered beneath the surface. Without the stigma of polygamy, "its worst encumbrance," the LDS Church "progressed more in ten years than it had in the preceding sixty." It became mainstream. As the "old generation of inflexible haters and rigid doctrinaires, who had seen Joseph [Smith] in the flesh, began to die off," Mormons "set profit above principle." Freed from polygamy, the younger generation abandoned agrarian communalism, downplayed muscular millennialism, shifted their allegiance to the Republican Party, and joined Gentiles in an "era of Good Feeling for the Sake of Business." Together, in 1907, they celebrated the seating of Mormon apostle—now senator—Reed Smoot.

But this colorful history lesson was only prolegomena to DeVoto's other intent—a commentary on Utah's present. From a state peopled by "ruddy, illiterate, herd-minded folk," a state where "the very process of survival demanded a rigorous suppression of individuality, impracticability, scepticism, and all other qualities of intelligence," Utah became something worse—BORING. "How am I to suggest the utter mediocrity of life in the new Utah?" asked DeVoto. "How can I suggest its poverty in everything that makes for civilization?" No art, music, sculpture, or architecture, no novelist, poet, or educator existed noteworthy enough to be recognized outside Utah. "No artist ever lived there ten minutes after he had the railroad fare out. If the presence of one should become known, the Mormons would damn him as a loafer and the Gentiles would lynch him as a profligate." What "pictures" could be found in the state were "life-size portraits of Mormon apostles and blue-ribbon Holsteins." An "accident of birth, not residence" might mark some individual a Utahn, but the best talents left or were driven out to earn a living elsewhere.

"But the people?" They, wrote DeVoto, are "normal": a "commonwealth of green-

grocers who have lifted themselves from the peasantry"; a society of farmers no different from those in Indiana, Iowa, or Nebraska, except "a little absurd in their belief that Jesus was inferior to Joseph Smith"; a *nouveau riche* gentry "newly developed in the Babylons of Ogden and Salt Lake City" that "lead the most swinish life now discernible in the United States." Poverty was rare, morality high, and civic virtue even higher. "The state's roads, schools, per-capita ownership of Fords, patriotism, sewer system and modernity of office appliances are, in fact, well above average. Those who have no interest in social or intellectual or artistic life may live there as well as anywhere else in this best of all possible Republics." From watching their parents beget their siblings in one room shacks, this new generation became conscious of wealth, bought closed cars, learned the existence of beverages other than straight whiskey, and "experimented with golf pants for men and riding pants for women." "In short," DeVoto observed, "they became civilized."

Yet really, they weren't. Utahns thought Hoover greater than Caesar, Coolidge greater than Mozart, and ignored Gaugin, Osler, and Huxley when even the freshest Hollywood ingénue read Freud. Even the leaders of the state's university and agricultural college—those erstwhile guardians of civilization—were illiterate buffoons, accomplices to church censorship of thought and art. "Civilized life," wrote DeVoto, "does not exist in Utah. It never has existed there. It never will exist there." Utahns had become civilized, but only enough to talk about "the Prophet, hogs, and Fords."

A lack of civilization was one thing, DeVoto lamented, but "Even the ancient color of the State is gone. Mormon and Gentile dwell together in amity and Rotary." "The State," wrote DeVoto, ". . . is whooping up the fellowship with its fingers crossed." Gentile churches look elsewhere for moral missions. The *Salt Lake Tribune*, "once the archfiend of Mormon persecution, is now the guardian angel of the followers of the Prophet," and Mormon legislators repeal Mormon-backed anti-cigarette laws to please Gentiles at the behest of a Mormon governor. Gentile merchants hire Mormon clerks and refuse to sell books that poke fun at the church, while Mormon merchants hire Gentile clerks, and "uncouth Temple union-suits give way to officially sanctioned lingerie with lace and ribbons." While Mormon Utahns continue to profess that "We are a peculiar people," they also raise the plaintive cry, "We are no different from other people." And, in that desire, DeVoto opined, they had become like their non-Mormon counterparts: sadly, boringly, predictably NORMAL.

"How do people live in Utah?" DeVoto concluded. "They join the business-men's calisthenics class at the gymnasium. Or they buy Fords on the five-dollar-a-week basis. Or they yawn. Or they die."

Bernard DeVoto publicly roasted Utah as only a native could. He skewered his victims between fact and hyperbole, universalizing national perceptions of Mormon oddity and deflating how Utahns (Mormon and non-Mormon) wanted the world to see them. As a freshman at the University of Utah, Wallace Stegner recalled walking past a history professor's door as a copy of *The American Mercury* containing DeVoto's essay came flying out. Stegner recognized the exaggeration of DeVoto's rhetoric, but "If he got a few innocent bystanders, I was willing to sacrifice them for the pleasure of looking upon the more deserving corpses."[5] The essay exploded in Utah, then mushroomed as locals uncovered

Bernard DeVoto publicly roasted Utah as only a native could. He skewered his victims between fact and hyperbole, universalizing national perceptions of Mormon oddity and deflating how Utahns (Mormon and non-Mormon) wanted the world to see them.

his earlier rips on Ogden. DeVoto's essays marked him as "Utah Enemy Number One," wrote Stegner, "the contemporary avatar of all the Missouri Pukes and Illinois mobbers who had attained immortality in the Mormon memory for their persecution of the Saints."[6] DeVoto never thought much of the essay. Years later, surprised that Utahns still carried a grudge, he offered an apology of sorts, but insisted his analysis was factually correct.

Being provocative, even confrontational, was DeVoto's rhetorical style. "No point in putting a silencer on the gun when you shoot a sheriff," he advised Wallace Stegner years later.[7] As both friend and biographer, Stegner understood DeVoto's style, and suggested that if we look past DeVoto's rhetoric and "learn to discount him ten to twenty percent for showmanship, indignation, and the inevitable warping power of his gift for language. . . there remained one of the sanest, most acute, most rooted-in-the-ground observers of American life that we have had."[8] Using Stegner's metric, and considering how difficult it is for someone to see the present becoming past and the past becoming history, what remains of DeVoto's essay is a prescient historical analysis capturing Utahns in the midst of their most transformative moment.

Instead of marking the 1890 Woodruff Manifesto ending polygamy as the pivotal moment differentiating past from present in Utah's history, DeVoto chose the 1907 seating of LDS Apostle Reed Smoot as a U.S. Senator. In fact, only in the last generation have modern historians come to agree that this episode (not the Manifesto) marks the watershed moment in Utah history when Mormons truly faced their future as "Americans," and the nation decided whether Mormons could be loyal citizens given their theological distance from mainstream Protestant Christianity, their history of conflict with the federal government, and the continuation of polygamy and LDS Church hegemony.

When Provo businessman and apostle Reed Smoot was selected as Utah's Republican senator in 1903, Protestant forces nationwide rose in protest, arguing that Smoot could not fulfill his constitutional obligations to the nation while an ecclesiastical leader of an institution that condoned polygamy and dictated the social and political lives of its members. Between 1903 and 1906, the Senate Committee on Privileges and Elections investigated Smoot and the LDS Church itself. Subpoenaed to testify, LDS President Joseph F. Smith shrewdly distanced the church from institutional complicity in polygamy and denied directing state politics, while simultaneously reassuring Republicans in power that he could deliver a cohesive Mormon vote. In the process, Smith had to publicly downplay both his prophetic power and the last and most iconic revelation of Mormon founder Joseph Smith, Jr.—polygamy. Joseph F. Smith accomplished this through the "Second Manifesto" (1904), his promise to Congress to rid the

As both friend and biographer, Stegner understood DeVoto's style, and suggested that if we look past DeVoto's rhetoric and "learn to discount him ten to twenty percent for showmanship, indignation, and the inevitable warping power of his gift for language. . . there remained one of the sanest, most acute, most rooted-in-the-ground observers of American life that we have had." Using Stegner's metric, and considering how difficult it is for someone to see the present becoming past and the past becoming history, what remains of DeVoto's essay is a prescient historical analysis capturing Utahns in the midst of their most transformative moment.

church of elders still conducting plural marriages. In return, his prize was placing Smoot in a position of unassailable political power to protect church interests going forward.

Yet, Smith's strategy was not without serious risk to his authority among the faithful. Mormon identity, so bound through persecution to polygamy and the theological timelessness of revelation, was undercut by the Senate testimonies of Smith and other church leaders. As historian Kathleen Flake has so elegantly argued, Smith had to rebuild member confidence in an unchanging orthodoxy in the throes of orthopraxic change.[9] So, in the ensuing years, he shifted Mormon theological attention from Joseph Smith's last revelation (polygamy) to his first: his vision of God in upstate New York. Emphasizing this revelatory foundation of the church helped stabilize a sense of group identity, of continuity and revelation, reaffirming a Mormon "otherness" without the politically and morally explosive otherness of polygamy that once again threatened the church's very existence. Smith went on to bridge other theological discontinuities that this "modern Mormonism" entailed, transitioning church doctrines of polygamy to eternal marriage, deification to perfection, gathering to international growth, vengeance to reconciliation, economic communalism and separatism to capitalism and nationalism. At the same time, these theological compromises reassured non-Mormon Utahns, Protestants, and senators that Mormons could be loyal and patriotic citizens, that Mormonism could approach mainstream Christianity, and that the LDS Church as an institution could be effectively regulated.

"When God's ultimate histories are written," DeVoto observed, "1906 will stand out as the first vindication of the Saints." The "old warfare was over," an older generation passed on, and "Leadership and public feeling among the Saints tended to soften, to set profit above principle, to accept Gentiles as good pay. And the Gentiles began to see the necessity of compromise." That compromise, DeVoto noted, started after statehood when non-Mormons forgave Mormons the old battles and forged business coalitions to help stabilize their newfound political power. As this new political class built on economic self-interest transcended the old religious divides—"Mormon and Gentile dwell[ing] together in amity and Rotary"—Utah began to look more like the rest of the nation. So in 1907, Republican senators found the promise of a reliable block

of Republican-voting Mormons enough to overlook their other baggage. Hearing little objection from Utah's non-Mormon Republican elite, they voted to seat Senator Reed Smoot. And, from his vantage point less than twenty years later, DeVoto accurately marked this (not the Manifesto) as the true historical pivot point in the "Americanization" of Mormons: from Mormon Democrats to Republicans, from polygamists to monogamists, from communalists to capitalists, from quaintly archaic to boringly modern. That was the heart of DeVoto's analysis in "Utah."

But what about the specifics of DeVoto's critique that stung Utahns the most—that there was no art, literature, music, cultural or intellectual life in 1920s Utah? The "warping power" of DeVoto's gift for language sparkles in these paragraphs. Yet even there DeVoto isn't wrong. Utah historians have long agreed that the period between 1880 and 1930 was a culturally "fallow" age in the state. Aside from religious tracts, Utahns produced little imaginative prose or history of note. Native composers, musicians, and vocal soloists disappeared in the collective voice and limited repertoire of ward congregations and the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. Utah did produce nationally renowned visual artists, but as DeVoto pointed out, they were an "accident of birth, not residence." While some were able to live in Utah by securing teaching positions, Utah's greatest cultural talents of this era worked outside the state where their art was recognized and rewarded. Leaving Utah, DeVoto became another one of them, proving his own point.

While DeVoto's criticisms are specifically local, personal, and hurtful, it is important to understand them in the context of the larger critique of post-World War I American society by one of the greatest generations of writers and intellectuals this nation has produced. The so-called "Lost Generation"—people like Sinclair Lewis, F. Scott Fitzgerald, John Dos Passos, Ernest Hemingway, Dorothy Parker, Gertrude Stein, Henry Miller, and T. S. Eliot—criticized the conspicuous consumption and cultural conservatism of Americans; their praise of Republicans and Big Business; their small town mediocrity, unabashed boosterism, mindless Protestantism, and lack of culture. From the safety of Europe (or America's urban

While DeVoto's criticisms are specifically local, personal, and hurtful, it is important to understand them in the context of the larger critique of post-World War I American society by one of the greatest generations of writers and intellectuals this nation has produced. The so-called "Lost Generation"—people like Sinclair Lewis, F. Scott Fitzgerald, John Dos Passos, Ernest Hemingway, Dorothy Parker, Gertrude Stein, Henry Miller, and T. S. Eliot—criticized the conspicuous consumption and cultural conservatism of Americans; their praise of Republicans and Big Business; their small town mediocrity, unabashed boosterism, mindless Protestantism, and lack of culture. In 1926, from the safety of Northwestern University, DeVoto joined the rebels by using Utah as synecdoche—the part that represents the whole.

centers), these intellectuals held up a social mirror and made fun of "Main Street," "Babbitt," and "Dullness made God." In 1926, from the safety of Northwestern University, DeVoto joined the rebels by using Utah as synecdoche—the part that represents the whole. In later years DeVoto turned his opinionated wrath on the rebels themselves, arguing that they had gone too far, caricaturized too much, thrown the baby (the essence of democracy) out with the bath water (the turbulence of the American experience). But that was DeVoto, removing the silencer to shoot a new sheriff.

This, then, is the significance of DeVoto's "Utah," and why Utahns denounced, ignored, then forgot one of their most significant native sons. DeVoto pointed his cultural lens at his home's past and present. What he captured unsettled Utahns, then as it does today. (Be honest, nearly a hundred years later and my summary of that essay still stung.) Yet in large part DeVoto's observations resonate even more loudly in the current historiography of Utah and Mormonism than they ever have. He told Utahns why they were no longer exceptional and danced around the bonfire of their vanity. He put his finger on an institutional dissonance within Mormonism as church leaders were reshaping theological memory and an identity grounded in peculiarity. This tension between peculiarity and the insistence that Mormons are like everyone else remains a logical disjunction to this very day. It resonates in Utahns' continued search for some kind of exceptionalism and an identity that transcends the historic stereotypes of nineteenth-century Mormonism and polygamy.

Bernard DeVoto was right—people really did (and still do) live in Utah, but he didn't affirm how Utahns wanted others to see them. His words were difficult to swallow, making his historical observations easier to ignore than confront. His critique was prescient, grounded and acute by Stegner's metrics, yet the way it made Utahns feel (still makes us feel) led to his banishment from the pantheon.

DeVoto pointed his cultural lens at his home's past and present. What he captured unsettled Utahns, then as it does today. Yet in large part DeVoto's observations resonate even more loudly in the current historiography of Utah and Mormonism than they ever have.

In later years DeVoto wrote some poignant accounts of the Mormon experience and evocative descriptions of the landscape he loved, but that didn't expunge his original sin. It's difficult to appreciate people who tell us hard truths about ourselves; it hurts more when we're not certain they're wrong. Like him or not, believe what he had to say or not, appreciate the way he said it or not, there is a truth and vigor in DeVoto's essay on life in Utah that transcends its reception, in 1926 or today. And then consider that this is only one essay in a corpus of work that transcends time. DeVoto was and remains a major interpreter of Utah and the West for a national audience. Perhaps it's time to embrace and bring this exile home.

Notes

1. This is a distillation of a longer scholarly essay published as David Rich Lewis, "Bernard DeVoto's Utah," in *Utah in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Brian Q. Cannon and Jessie L. Embry (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2009), pp. 88-107.

2. Wallace Stegner, *The Uneasy Chair: A Biography of Bernard DeVoto* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1974), p. 7.

3. Bernard DeVoto, *The Crooked Mile* (New York: Minton, Balch & Company, 1924), and DeVoto, "Ogden: The Underwriters of Salvation," in *The Taming of the Frontier*, edited by Duncan Aikman (New York: Milton, Balch & Company, 1925), pp. 25-60.

4. Bernard DeVoto, "Utah," *The American Mercury* 7, no. 27 (March 1926): pp. 317-23.

5. Wallace Stegner, "The Personality," in Catherine Drinker Bowen, Edith R. Mirrielees, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., and Wallace Stegner, *Four Portraits and One Subject: Bernard DeVoto* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1963), p. 83.

6. Stegner, *The Uneasy Chair*, p. 65.

7. DeVoto to Stegner, 7 July 1952, in Bernard DeVoto, *The Letters of Bernard DeVoto*, edited by Wallace Stegner (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1975), p. 323.

8. Stegner, "The Personality," p. 83.

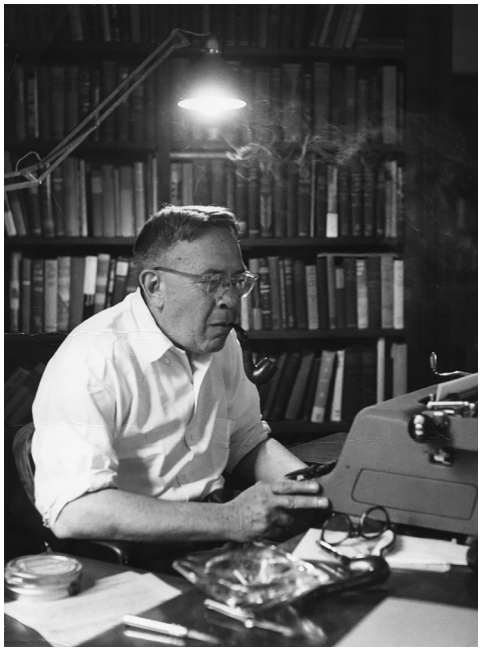
9. Kathleen Flake, *The Politics of American Religious Identity: The Seating of Senator Reed Smoot, Mormon Apostle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), particularly pp. 109-37.



David Rich Lewis is a native Ogdenite and Ogden High School graduate, and like DeVoto is not listed among "Notable Alumni" on the OHS Wikipedia page. Lewis earned his Ph.D. in American history from the University of Wisconsin-Madison (1988) and is the former editor of the *Western Historical Quarterly*. He is a professor emeritus of history at Utah State University.

RAWHIDE POLISHED TO PATENT LEATHER: BERNARD DEVOTO'S RHETORICAL FLOURISH

RUSSELL BURROWS



Bernard DeVoto at his desk, 1950.

Has anyone ever finished anything of DeVoto's without wondering about his style? Could he have worked it up on his own? Might he have bargained with the Devil? The DeVoto style may even seem an achievement by itself, his priceless content notwithstanding. For one side of the inimitable DeVoto, turn to his ironically-titled *Minority Report* (1940) and revel as he counted coup on the Modernists—the worst among them, the Marxists. *Minority*'s gathering of essays will reveal the super rhetorician, which is worth a look, because polemics will always have their uses in this rocky world. To see another side of DeVoto, the one concerning us here, turn to the work with which he won a Bancroft Prize,[1] a Pulitzer Prize,[2] and a National Book Award.[3] DeVoto's legacy still rests most securely on western American history. When making this point, I often remember Arthur Schlesinger Jr., whose singular compliment set a tone I would like to extend. Contributing the "Foreword" to DeVoto's reissued edition of *The Year of Decision: 1846* (1943), Schlesinger declared, rather emphatically: "This book remains after more than forty years a bravura piece of historical writing" (ix). Go ahead—try to find another salute with that much snap. *Bravura*, no less! It may sound quaint; it may even sound stilted. But "bravura" does seem well-chosen for Bernard DeVoto. It suggests a style whose antecedents reached a long way back.

Style is a subject with a thousand faces. One of them has an impressive heritage, which today wears an academic–*ism*. I mean parallelism. I mean to show that DeVoto made it one of his strengths. You will have run across it your own course work, hopefully. Parallelism has had a place in virtually every guide to composition since the long-gone days of the Roman, Cicero.[4] By definition, parallelism is the mandate that stylists will work a little harder to put the related parts of their sentences into the same grammatical forms. This repetition of grammatical pattern has the effect of structure reinforcing sense. More than that, grammatical parts in strict sequence—whether simple adjectives following adjectives, or more complex participles following participles—helps to make sentences enjoyable, because art will have made another of its appearances. Art denotes some human arrangement, not a natural happenstance—the difference between an expression thoughtfully set forth and the much same thing simply blurted out. Among the rhetorical arts, parallelism has been a building block, and good handbooks have always worked to lay out this principle in theory and in practice.

Take, for instance, this amusing piece of parallelism: "A kiss can be a comma, a question mark, or an exclamation point."[5] This one happens to be the lead illustration in a guide I have liked for my own teaching assignments. As a prompt for the students' imitation, it has a lot to recommend it. First, its parallelism runs to three places, technically amounting to the triptych, which seems the critical minimum for parallelism to reach its full psychological power. Second, there's the *oomph* of metaphor: those three punctuation marks stand for affections paused, or questioned, or emphasized. Love is the

Grammatical parts in strict sequence—whether simple adjectives following adjectives, or more complex participles following participles—helps to make sentences enjoyable, because art will have made another of its appearances. Art denotes some human arrangement, not a natural happenstance—the difference between an expression thoughtfully set forth and the much same thing simply blurted out.

landscape often shifting. Many a sophomore could attend profitably to this lesson on two levels—while some seasoned teachers might feel wistful during its review.

Got the gist of it—this technical intrigue of style? DeVoto made it huge. A school-guide's example of parallelism is to the sonnet what DeVoto's parallelism might be to the epic. A case in point: here's one of DeVoto's better efforts, a sentence of a hundred-and-twelve words, running parallel in six parts, in ten subdivisions (as colons and commas delineate). Incidentally, he set this scene at Independence, Missouri, one of the major gateways onto the frontier:

> All conditions of mankind were there, in all costumes: Shawnee and Kansa from the Territory and wanders of other tribes, blanketed, painted, wearing their Presidential metals; Mexicans in bells, slashed pantaloons, and primary colors speaking a strange tongue and smoking shuck-rolled cigarettes;

> mountain men in buckskins preparing for the summer trade or offering their services to the emigrant trains; the case-hardened bullwhackers of the Santa Fe trail in boots and bowie knives, coming in after wintering at the other end or preparing to go out; rivermen and roustabouts, Negro stevedores, soldiers from Fort Leavenworth, a miscellany of transients whose only motive was to see the elephant wherever the elephant might be.[6] (*Decision* 141)

Writing teachers, among whom DeVoto had long maintained his working membership,[7] will spot the strength in this passage. It lies in its active verbs (as opposed to weaker verbs, the so-called state-of-being verbs: is, was, were, am, etc.). You may already have sensed for yourself this strength in DeVoto's unusual mix of past- and of present-tenses, as I abstract them below:

blanketed, painted . . . [and] *slashed . . .*
speaking (paired against) *smoking . . .*
preparing (paired against) *offering . . .*
coming in (paired against) *preparing to go out . . .*

There is the skeleton of the sketch—which (along with its opportunistic touches of alliteration) bring the passage up to its full horsepower.

To find very much of this style, you will have to read the Classical talents, along with their Neo-Classical imitators. You will have to read Shakespeare, along with his Renaissance competitors. We moderns rarely line up our clauses one upon another, as DeVoto would his. We like our prose as lean and as tough as our steroid-fueled bodybuilders—naked of conceit—the aesthetics of our newspapers (and of our glass and steel-girdered skyscrapers). For his part, DeVoto liked those older intricacies of structure, for which we may have to press into service the by-gone terms of baroque or of rococo. The paradox is, those embellishments carry the dung, and the dust, and the rawhide of his material straight off the frontier. Nor was he above rendering some pieces of dialog in the vernacular. Read your way through this unexpected but imperishable achievement, his western trilogy: *The Year of Decision: 1846* (1943), *Across the Wide Missouri* (1947), and *The Course of Empire* (1952). They are of Voltaire by way of Sacagawea. I have found no other incongruity very much like this one. Yet DeVoto made it work. Fair warning, though—his adaptation will ask for some attention.

This picture gets bigger. No sooner will stylists surmount parallelism within sentences then they will push the principle from one sentence to the next, and on to a third sentence, and then, to a fourth

We moderns rarely line up our clauses one upon another, as DeVoto would his. We like our prose as lean and as tough as our steroid-fueled bodybuilders—naked of conceit—the aesthetics of our newspapers (and of our glass and steel-girdered skyscrapers). For his part, DeVoto liked those older intricacies of structure, for which we may have to press into service the by-gone terms of baroque or of rococo. The paradox is, those embellishments carry the dung, and the dust, and the rawhide of his material straight off the frontier.

one, and so on. And, beyond that, the agile will try to make their paragraphs run in parallel order. On occasion, the most inventive will have tried to make their chapters run parallel to one another (their tables of contents usually the first clues of what to watch for). In the sample below, DeVoto brought his powers to bear on some of the toughest pioneering of which we have record. He took up the Mormon women on their hard road to Utah, all but neglected in scholarship until he invited them into his *Year of Decision*:

> They were prodigious, the mothers of Israel. They trudged through mud or dust or, a sick child on their knees, drove teams when father had been drafted to build a bridge or [to] cut grass. They sewed, knitted, patched, spliced, while the wagons bumped and swayed. They spun and wove, and even found time to make dyes and [to] color homespun. They learned to let the wagon's jolting churn a pail of cream to butter. They learned to identify edible prairie roots and [to] make them palatable. They learned to extemporize a household economy in wagons and to maintain family order on the march. And if by night father left them after patriarchal prayer, to visit another wagon or [to] go back ten miles on the trail to where another, younger wife prayerfully awaited him, why that also was their portion[,] and they learned to live their religion. (98)

Again, the parts of speech that soar are the verbs. This passage is *lousy* with verbs, that being the back-handed expression of praise among the guys I used to chase around with. But, now, scrutinize how the last four of DeVoto's verbs, flying in formation, finish the sketch:

they learned to let . . .
learned to identify . . .
learned to extemporize . . .
learned to live . . .

Many seem skeptical of this repetition. My freshmen are openly suspicious of it: oh, our writing can't be that simple—not the same words over and over—not for an assignment in college. But the right sort of repetition can be exactly what's wanted—for the sake of grip, and of precision, and of force. Here is a summary of a lesson of mine that should help to justify this technique of DeVoto's. If his style seems idiosyncratic, compare it against Jefferson's in "The Declaration of Independence." The typically buttoned-down Jefferson went absolutely on "a tear," arranging no fewer than seventeen sentences into a pattern. Never may the present-perfect tense have served so many, so well, for so long. Yes, you will recall this from "The Declaration":

He has refused . . . (whose antecedent was the wicked King George)
He has forbidden . . .
He has dissolved . . .
He has obstructed . . .
He has abdicated . . .
He has plundered . . .
He has constrained . . . etc.[8]

Once, in fact, some while ago, when introducing this syntactical phalanx of Jefferson's, I had to stifle the unexpected impulse to cry *behold*, a *biblical*-ism I had never before wanted to use to any purpose whatever. So you see into what kinds of knots my pursuit of parallelism has sometimes tied me.

Now, for just another two minutes, indulge me in one last verb conjugation.

No study of parallelism may omit the infinitives. Major pieces on the grammatical game-board, infinitives are the odd-balls among the verbs. Infinitives will look like two words, but they are really one part of speech. We make infinitives not with suffixes tacked onto verbs, like *–ing* or *–ed*, but with the word *to* placed before the verb. Here are infinitives that all have by heart: "To be or not to be, . . . to die, to sleep, / To sleep, perchance to Dream." Alone among verbs, infinitives convey no sense of tense. It doesn't matter when Hamlet will do away with himself—neither in the present, nor in the future. It matters merely that one so favored as a prince wants to do away with himself, and he may get around to it in his own sweet time.

With this introduction (or reminder) to the infinitive, I turn to DeVoto's mountain men, whom he did in eighty-one words and nine infinitives:

> To read the weather, the streams, the woods; to know the ways of animals and birds; to find food and shelter; to find the Indians when they were his customers or to battle them from stump to stump when they were on the war-path and to know which caprice was on them; to take comfort in flood or blizzard; to move safely through the wilderness, to make the wilderness his bed, his table, and his tool—this was his vocation. (*Decision* 59)

Every infinitive is perfectly complete in its two parts:

to read . . .
to know . . .
to find . . .

The stress I lay on this perfection implies, admittedly, imperfection elsewhere—which has occasionally been the case. Some won't so carefully start each infinitive with *to*. They seem to trust our abilities to hold this grammar in our heads. With this caveat in place, consider DeVoto's treatment of the Donner Party, hacking its way through the Scrub oak of the Wasatch Mountains—this, in fifty-four words, with nine infinitives (the same as in the passage above):

> They had to dig tracks and fell trees and level off centers high up on mountainsides, pry boulders out of their course, riprap swampy patches, sometimes bridge brooks that could not be crossed otherwise, grunt and strain and curse while the oxen heaved the wagons up inclines, over ridges, and around spurs of rock. (*Decision* 342-343)

The pattern isn't perfect. The first infinitive is the only one complete in its two parts: "*to dig*." After that, would it be fair to say, he *swagged* the rest? And what to make of it? DeVoto went back-and-forth between complete infinitives and casual ones—as, apparently, his sense of style called for the deliberate treatment or a relaxed one. Others do the same. Plenty of them have. Is there a guideline? None I know of.

But let me finish on this note: when copying the passage about the Mormon women, I saw DeVoto had played his infinitives both ways: completing eight of them, abbreviating four. And what did you see me do with that ratio? I felt the great man's spirit growl from the great beyond when I dressed his four lame infinitives in their Sunday-go-to-meeting best. Well, yeah, I dared to edit in *to*'s where DeVoto hadn't written them. (Find my emendations in those four sets of square brackets). I don't know—it just felt right. So help me, the fully-formed infini-

tive reads better. One teacher's opinion.

At the outset in this sketch, I asked where DeVoto had found his style, and, for the fun of it, I dragged out the Faustian bargain. So much for getting a ball rolling. But I should end with the surmise that DeVoto developed his style in the most ordinary, old way: hard reading in preparation, hard work in composition. Drawing from Pericles' funeral oration, of some twenty-four-hundred years before,[9] Lincoln produced four very durable clauses:

that from these honored dead . . .
that we here highly resolve . . .
that this nation, . . . shall have a new birth . . .
and that government of . . . for . . . and by the people . . .

Lincoln had kept a stable of good models, and plainly, DeVoto maintained some good ones himself.

Notes

1. Annually, since 1948, the trustees of Columbia University in New York have given Bancroft Prizes for studies in American history and/or diplomacy. This distinction is named for Frederic Bancroft, a graduate of Columbia, and briefly a lecturer there, before becoming a historian for the State Department. DeVoto's *Across the Wide Missouri* (1947), his monograph on the fur trade during the 1830s, happens to have been the book that won the inaugural Bancroft Prize.

2. *Across the Wide Missouri* (1947) also happens to have been DeVoto's double-winner. It took the further recognition of a Pulitzer Prize.

3. DeVoto won his National Book Award for *The Course of Empire* (1952), his study of the exploration of North America from first European contact to the Lewis and Clark Expedition.

4. Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 B.C.), a contemporary of Julius Casear, is a name long synonymous with rhetorical study.

5. This "kissing" aphorism belongs to the popular French entertainer Mistinguett, the stage name for Jeanne Florentine Bourgeois (1875-1965).

6. "To see the elephant," oddly enough, was a frontier expression for a pioneer giving up on the West and retreating to the safety of eastern civilization. *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Second Edition, describes "seeing the elephant" in the more general sense of becoming sick and tired of something.

7. Not only did DeVoto teach at the summer Bread Loaf Writers' Conferences in Vermont; he also met composition classes at Harvard and at Northwestern University.

8. In addition to the present-perfect verb tense ("He has + a verb"), Jefferson wrote "The Declaration of Independence" with a second pattern of parallelism ("For + a gerund, which is the *–ing* suffix, but the word functions not as a verb but as a noun). Here are two examples of Jefferson's conjugations: (1) "For Quartering . . . armed troops among us" and (2) "For imposing Taxes . . ." Jefferson pushed this pattern to the length of nine sentences. In all, Jefferson filled the body of "The Declaration"

with twenty-six sentences whose parallelisms are models of this rhetorical technique.

9. See Garry Wills's "Oratory of the Greek Revival," the first chapter of his *Lincoln at Gettysburg: The Words That Remade America* (1992) for the account of Lincoln having modeled his speech on Pericles's famous funeral oration (41-62).

Works Cited

Bowen, Catherine Drinker, Edith R. Mirrieless, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., et al. *Four Portraits and One Subject: Bernard DeVoto.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963.

DeVoto, Bernard. *Across the Wide Missouri*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1947.

---. *The Course of Empire*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1952.

---. *The Easy Chair*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1945.

---. *Forays and Rebuttals*. Boston: Little Brown, 1936.

---. *Mark Twain's America*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1951.

---. *Minority Report*. Boston: Little Brown, 1940.

---. *The Year of Decision: 1846*. Boston: Little Brown, 1943. Reprint with Houghton Mifflin in The American Heritage Library Series, 1989.

Stegner, Wallace. *The Uneasy Chair: A Biography of Bernard DeVoto*. Salt Lake City, Utah: Peregrine Smith, 1988.

Wills, Garry. *Lincoln at Gettysburg: The Words That Remade America*. New York: Touchstone, 1992.



Russell Burrows is a professor of English at Weber State University specializing in American literature. He is also a contributor to *The Festschriften* and the Other Analyzed Collections Section of *the MLA's International Bibliography*, a position he has held since surviving his mandatory research and bibliography course in graduate school. He divides his free time between writing personal essays and woodworking. On weekends, he escapes to the hills, where he works as a national ski patrolman.

WHY BERNARD DEVOTO COULDN'T GO HOME AGAIN

VAL HOLLEY

The creative processes behind memorable characters in novels have always intrigued fiction fans. Literary detectives avidly hunt the inspirations for such enigmatic figures as Meyer Wolfsheim in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, Lady Ina Coolbirth in Truman Capote's *Answered Prayers*, or the Baron de Charlus in Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*.

The flip side to such amusement is the unwelcome recognition of oneself or one's friends as counterparts to characters portrayed cavalierly or even maliciously. After Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel* circulated in his hometown of Asheville, North Carolina, local outrage—"You have crucified your family and devastated mine," wrote his high school English teacher—kept Wolfe away from Asheville for eight years. The consequence to Capote of *Esquire*'s publication of his tale of Park Avenue ladies who lunched at La Côte Basque was "nothing short of social suicide." Lincoln Kirstein's first (and only) novel, *Flesh Is Heir*, moved his Boston Brahmin friends—so painstakingly cultivated while he attended Harvard—to revoke his standing invitations to posh summer retreats. Even Kirstein's family vehemently denounced him, particularly for *Flesh Is Heir*'s "reprehensible" caricature of his sister.[1]

For aspiring wordsmiths at Weber State University's English department or its National Undergraduate Literature Conference, a quintessential case study of the "thinly-disguised" hometown novel hides in plain sight. Bernard DeVoto shamelessly incorporated facets of his fellow Ogdenites' foibles into *The Crooked Mile*, published in 1924 by Minton, Balch.[2] According to Wallace Stegner, DeVoto's biographer, two principal characters resembled Ogden women DeVoto had dated. Many secondary characters were persons "whom Ogdenites recognized, or thought they recognized." DeVoto received fan mail but was also "denounced by Ogden readers who recognized their town."[3]

One would have to search item by item through the voluminous Bernard DeVoto Papers at Stanford—a feat that only Stegner, apparently, has achieved—to discover which Ogdenites felt strongly enough about *The Crooked Mile* to applaud or complain.[4] Short of making that full-blown slog through DeVoto's correspondence, this essay attempts to crack *The Crooked Mile*'s code.

The Crooked Mile's hero—and stand-in for DeVoto—is Gordon Abbey, a red-blooded but aimless young buck recently graduated from Harvard. As DeVoto was third generation in Ogden, so is Gordon in "Windsor." Gordon's

One would have to search item by item through the voluminous Bernard DeVoto Papers at Stanford—a feat that only Stegner, apparently, has achieved—to discover which Ogdenites felt strongly enough about The Crooked Mile *to applaud or complain. Short of making that full-blown slog through DeVoto's correspondence, this essay attempts to crack* The Crooked Mile*'s code.*

brittle dialogue (which annoyed a few reviewers) echoed DeVoto's own. The dead giveaway that Gordon is DeVoto, however, is peaches: "One who has not tasted, fresh from the tree, a peach grown on the eastern slope of the long valley that holds the Great Salt Lake may not speak of peaches," DeVoto wrote elsewhere.[5] In *The Crooked Mile*, Gordon aims to "grow the finest peaches in Windsor County." He rejoices at a hillside "lacquer-pink with his peach blossoms."

Gordon's grandfather and father, pioneer James Abbey and mining engineer Pemberton Abbey, feuded habitually with the powers that be in the city of Windsor. But Gordon has concluded that their fights are not his, resolving to live freely and quietly. Nonetheless, like his forebears he despises the deadening, "succubus" grip on Windsor by its principal industry, copper, and longs for a providential intervention to rescue the city.

The Crooked Mile's 430 pages narrate and resolve two dilemmas. The first is Gordon's obsession with Marcia Cartright, glamorous star of Windsor's country club set. Their romance flourishes during the summer before Gordon's senior year at Harvard, then waxes and wanes for six more years. Marcia leaves Gordon standing at the altar to elope with a wealthy businessman, but soon sours on her husband and launches an affair with Gordon. They almost run off to California, but at the last moment Gordon realizes that Marcia "in no way" feeds "the hunger of his soul. . . he only read[s] into her what was not there."

Gordon's other conundrum is what to be when he grows up. He abandons a stellar career as a Boston reporter, disparaging journalism as uplift: "singing hymns on a street corner." His destiny, he comes to believe, is restoring his grandfather's abandoned farm in Blaine (a stand-in for Uintah, where DeVoto's Grandfather Dye's farm had been). He calls himself a "horticulturist"—half scientific gardener, half contemplative egoist.

Gordon dreams of "walling off" the city of Windsor from his agrarian paradise in Blaine. But the copper colossus—personified by Pierce Dunlap, Marcia's husband—so riles Gordon that he fantasizes of disabling Dunlap's financial pipeline. A confluence of dirty tricks by Windsor bankers and a desiccated, cropless year at the farm reanimates Gordon's dormant Abbey pugnacity. He joins forces with the proposed "Windsor and Grouse Creek Railway" that, when built, will lure hordes of homesteaders to Grouse Creek Valley, theoretically emasculating Pierce Dunlap's empire. (DeVoto reminds us that homesteaders, after all, broke the tyrannies of cattlemen and bankers in the nineteenth century. Such a dethronement might be comparable to streaming services' present-day displacement of the once-impregnable Hollywood studios.)[6]

To illuminate the chasm between Gordon and the city of Windsor, DeVoto presents "the clan," an assortment of country clubbers whose fathers run Windsor's banks and smelters and rusticate in opulent canyon cottages. The clan descends from Windsor's financial dynasties: Cartrights, Hallowells, and McNamaras. It includes Philip Morrow—next to Gordon the best tennis player in Windsor, who dies of a mysterious wasting disease—and Morrow's wife, Annette (*née* McNamara), whose seduction of Gordon becomes a scandal.

The clan absorbs DeVoto's mockery of Ogdenites who had vexed him during his youth. Its sole proficiency is "in smugness." Gordon is "not at peace among the swine." When a clan daughter marries mechanic Arturo Cosetti, Gordon shrugs that her future "Italianate" children "will put an end to the clan forever and God knows any cross would improve the blood."

The worst insults, however, are reserved for "the filthiest of them all," factory magnate Pierce Dunlap. "Sober, you're a dull fool," Gordon snarls, "drunk, you're a case of stomach trouble." The "convention of adultery," which obligates Gordon to meet with Dunlap as the "potentially wronged husband," provokes his most astringent invective: "You offend me. You smell bad. Oh, I understand your cleanliness is unquestionable. I mean that I detect odors of unmentionable filth about you."

The inspiration for the country club as gridiron for repartee and dipsomania is uncertain. At first blush the Weber Club seems promising, but without evidence that DeVoto was ever a member, it recedes. He did join Ogden's University Club, but its purpose was to host intellectual gatherings, not tennis and drinking. Not only did the University Club have no quarters, it was men-only, ruling out scenes with fashionable, coquettish women. DeVoto's familiarity with country club ambience may have come during his Harvard years.

DeVoto later explained the roots of his youthful trenchancy: "[In Ogden] I was widely treated as a fool on the one hand, for it must be foolish of me to suppose that I could ever be a writer, and as a kind of pansy on the other hand, for obviously only the epicene would aspire to a career so obviously trivial and even sissy as that of writer. I resented it violently. . . . In some degree [my early writings] were acts of self-vindication, in some degree acts of revenge." DeVoto's work, Stegner wrote, exhibited "the compulsion to get even with his birthplace for personal humiliations."[7]

In September 1924, the Ogden *Standard-Examiner* duly noted *The Crooked Mile*'s imminent arrival in bookstores: "[Ogden High School] alumni of 1910-

"[In Ogden] I was widely treated as a fool on the one hand, for it must be foolish of me to suppose that I could ever be a writer, and as a kind of pansy on the other hand, for obviously only the epicene would aspire to a career so obviously trivial and even sissy as that of writer. I resented it violently. . . . In some degree [my early writings] were acts of self-vindication, in some degree acts of revenge."

—Bernard Devoto

12 are very interested in *The Crooked Mile*, a novel recently written and published [*sic*] by a fellow student, Bernard DeVoto." The *Standard-Examiner* reprinted reviews from the *New York Times* and *Boston Transcript*, but did not commission its own review. Nor did it print any survey of Ogden readers' views of the novel.[8]

According to DeVoto's father, Florian, Spargo's Bookstore in downtown Ogden sold 100 copies, "not always to satisfied customers." The local Wasatch Book Club would read and review *The Crooked Mile*—but not until June 1934, a decade later. In 1942, Jarvis Thurston, the *Standard-Examiner*'s book critic, forked over a dime for a second-hand copy of *The Crooked Mile*—previously owned by *Standard-Examiner* editor Frank Francis—at Deseret Industries. This prompted Thurston's recollection that in 1924, "many masochistic Ogdenites" had "rushed out to buy a copy and be offended."[9]

Despite the intervening century, some models for *Crooked Mile* characters are still obvious. Madame Paris, "keeper of Windsor's most refined bawdy house," and her daughter, Celestine Paris, an opera singer, are unquestionably based on Ogden's legendary Belle London and her adopted daughter, Ethel Topham—who with DeVoto was a member of Ogden High School's class of 1914. Augustus Stein, developer of an amusement park ("Glendale") with roller coaster and shoot-the-chutes, and of a railroad from the state capital to Windsor with "one rusty line of track," is Simon Bamberger, builder of Lagoon resort and the Bamberger interurban line between Ogden and Salt Lake.

DeVoto's descriptions of Augustus Stein were as unflattering and anti-semitic as those applied by F. Scott Fitzgerald to Meyer Wolfsheim in *The Great Gatsby*. Fitzgerald, of course, could not curb his compulsion to insult Wolfsheim's nose. Although DeVoto emphasizes Stein's instinctive intelligence and ascribes no criminal behavior, he is ruthless: Stein is "a horribly distorted, all but inhuman creature who had come from Munich to sell shoelaces from the gutter." (Stein was also developing the Windsor and Grouse Creek Railway, embraced by Gordon in *The Crooked Mile*'s final pages as his means of vengeance on Windsor.)

Bamberger had provoked DeVoto's ire on September 22, 1920, when the latter addressed the University Club's annual banquet. "I said we ought to let [Socialist Eugene] Debs and the political prisoners out of jail and repeal the Espionage Act," DeVoto reminisced to a correspondent. "Old Simon Bamberger [who was then governor of Utah] stood up and denounced me. . . . Quite literally, I was a dangerous person in Ogden from that night on." He said he was branded as a Bolshevik and could not get a job anywhere in Utah.[10]

Among the many romantic attachments DeVoto pursued during his Ogden youth, two—Katharine Becker and Elizabeth ("Skinny") Browning—"suspiciously" resemble *Crooked Mile* characters Marcia Cartright and Jane Littlefield, according to biographer Stegner. Both women told Stegner that DeVoto exaggerated the significance of the relationships, and both resoundingly denied ever being in love with DeVoto.[11]

A major clue to the novel's models is an October 14, 1924, letter to DeVoto from his best chum in Ogden and fellow devotee of literature, Wendell



Elizabeth Browning

("Fitz") Fitzgerald, to whom he had sent a complimentary copy, and who apparently had "occasional glimpses" of the work in progress. The confident tone of Fitz's letter implies his understanding of who had inspired the characters. "Why do the dear old people"—Fitz may have been referring to Minton, Balch's promotional blurbs—"insist on calling it a study of the generation with a mind and no will? No one ever accused LeGrande Pingree of either faculty. Probably Ogden will believe the publisher and fail entirely to see the point."[12]

Fitz went on to observe, "You give to the 'clan' more intelligence than it ought to have. At least you gave them individuality in a measure. That is not true. They have no individuality. There is no difference between James Pingree and Jack Littlefield. They are of the same stripe."

Although Fitz could see "no difference," Ogdenites James Pingree and Jack Littlefield seemed superficially to have little in common. Pingree, a well-known Mormon and polygamist, was president of several Utah banks—most prominently the First National Bank of Ogden and later the Pingree National Bank. DeVoto would not have known Pingree well, but his checkered reputation as banker and financier was widely held in Ogden. DeVoto did recall the Pingrees as "very rich" and "defensive" about being a polygamous family. (LeGrande Pingree, singled out in Fitz's letter, was one of James Pingree's many sons and the same age as DeVoto.)[13]

Jack Littlefield, a non-Mormon and son of prominent Ogden newspaperman Edwin A. Littlefield, was a World War I veteran, adjutant of the Ogden Police Department, and later city recorder. DeVoto knew Littlefield well from the American Legion, and especially—so DeVoto would claim in "The Bucolics of Decadence"—as conduit to the Legion (and to DeVoto personally) for bootleg liquor.[14]

DeVoto's principal objection to the society he lampoons is the effects of unmediated commerce on it: passionless lives, the rotting of minds, the malnutrition of souls. What Fitz (and by inference, DeVoto) found wanting in Pingree and Littlefield was imperviousness to matters of the soul. Neither man, in any case, would have been the exclusive model for any character; rather, each was a component of various characters.

Fitz claimed no recognition of himself. DeVoto had largely confined his *dramatis personae* to versions of Ogdenites he disliked. Fitz foresaw the potential for outrage in remarking that Ogdenites' missing the novel's point "will keep your Dad [who still lived in Ogden] from being drawn, quartered and boiled in oil."[15]

Curiously, DeVoto appropriated one genuine Ogden name, Littlefield,

DeVoto's principal objection to the society he lampoons is the effects of unmediated commerce on it: passionless lives, the rotting of minds, the malnutrition of souls. What Fitz (and by inference, DeVoto) found wanting in Pingree and Littlefield was imperviousness to matters of the soul. Neither man, in any case, would have been the exclusive model for any character; rather, each was a component of various characters.

as a fictional name in *The Crooked Mile*. The real Jack Littlefield, DeVoto assumed, was Irish—"short, red-headed, a fire-eater, ignorant, fanatical, shrewd, and fortunately, corruptible." The novel's Littlefields are a banking dynasty, whose patriarch, Herman, was German, formerly surnamed *Kleinfeld*. Herman is a fusion of wealthy Ogden entrepreneurs David Eccles—in his drive "to steal half a million acres of Oregon forests"—and John M. Browning, Skinny's father, in his house ornamented with sandstone horseshoes.

DeVoto seemed to have James Pingree in mind when he conceived the character of Wilbur Cartright, father of Marcia, Gordon Abbey's youthful love interest. Wilbur Cartright lost his bank following an embezzlement investigation, and "whether he can escape Leavenworth depends on the copper barons." Pingree, the year before *Crooked Mile*'s publication, was convicted of misappropriation with intent to defraud and sentenced to eighteen months at the U.S. Penitentiary at Leavenworth, Kansas. (The judge stayed the sentence and Pingree died a year later.) One of DeVoto's fictional Windsor banks carried the odd name of Porphyry (a geological term frequently linked with copper ore deposits), a possible variation on Pingree National Bank.

James Pingree may also have been a model for Stanley Littlefield, who had "saved all that remained of his father's fortune and pirated the remnants that belonged to his uncles." DeVoto did not even bother to disguise the name of Stanley's bank, First National, which had been Pingree's real-life bank.

A number of events in *The Crooked Mile* reflect actual happenings in Ogden between mid-1920 and mid-1922, the two years during which DeVoto languished in Ogden between graduating from Harvard and moving to Evanston, Illinois, to teach English at Northwestern University. The suicide of Frank Warren, commoner boyfriend of clan beauty Dorothy Hallowell, shares certain elements of the actual suicide of Jay Hemenway in April 1921: place (Ogden Canyon) and method (automatic pistol). Most trans-



James Pingree

parent is "Windsor on the March." Its real-life counterpart, "Ogden on the March," held October 1, 1920, was billed as Ogden's "first community pageant." In both events, floats and gangs of marchers represented their city's contributions to national life in such categories as industry, history, commerce, education, and recreation. Gordon writes the scenario for Windsor's version as mockery too subtle for anyone but himself to perceive. (DeVoto, in contrast, merely marched with his American Legion post in Ogden's spectacle.) Any Ogdenite who read *The Crooked Mile* in 1924 would have remembered this event as if it were yesterday.[16]

Ogden's Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd, then as now on Grant Avenue downtown, is presented without disguise. The Windsor and Ophir rivers, whose confluence lies in nearby bottom lands, stand in for the Weber and Ogden Rivers. Louis Farrand, editor of the *Windsor Herald*, may be DeVoto's variation on Lorin Farr, Ogden's first mayor.

One way in which *The Crooked Mile* did not reflect its Ogden moorings was in ignoring the long history of Mormon-Gentile conflict. Such tensions were "half disguised," observed Stegner. Perhaps unconsciously, however, DeVoto relaxed his embargo of Mormon references in *The Crooked Mile*'s last hundred pages, especially in introducing Baurak Ale Jones. ("Baurak Ale" was Mormon founder Joseph Smith's code name in the *Doctrine and Covenants*). Jones was not a stand-in for Smith but the schismatic prophet Joseph Morris, whose strange career culminated in the Morrisite War of 1862. This three-day conflict, in which Morris was killed, occurred within a few hundred yards of Grandfather Dye's peach orchard, and DeVoto speculated elsewhere that bullets "may have kicked up dust in the field," and Dye may have "climbed a cottonwood to gaze at the riot." Jones's saga comprises six pages of the novel.[17]

On the record, DeVoto was cagey on the subject of character models. "Is a novel autobiographical?" he asked in a *Harper's* essay. "Altogether and not at all, and all degrees of yes and no." He denied that any of his novels' main characters was drawn from life: "none of them represents my understanding of or comment on any friend or enemy of mine." As for minor characters—such as the *Crooked Mile*'s clan—he might have relied on "the superficial characteristics or experiences of people I know, because I had to use something to get over the ground in an unimportant passage or a minor relationship. . . . You make such time with whatever serves, the immediate material of experience, yesterday's newspaper, or any casual association with the problem at hand."[18]

Off the record, he was as curious as anyone else about character models. During the 1936 Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, cocktail party gossip turned to Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (1926). A Bread Loaf fellow revealed to DeVoto and other faculty the definitive "key" to the originals of that novel's cast. DeVoto typed out the Hemingway novel's key for a correspondent and took the trouble to do research on the originals to make comparisons with the characters.[19]

Years after *The Crooked Mile*'s publication, DeVoto had little good to say about it: "Only a very, very few people have bothered to tell me that they enjoyed the book." To biographer Catherine Drinker Bowen, he wrote,

Years after The Crooked Mile*'s publication, DeVoto had little good to say about it: "Only a very, very few people have bothered to tell me that they enjoyed the book." To biographer Catherine Drinker Bowen, he wrote, "Be warned, my juvenilia are ungodly lousy, and* The Crooked Mile *is the most terrible and amusing of them all." He told correspondent Katharine Sterne that he could justify only one boast:* The Crooked Mile *might lack style, "but by God it's not full of other men's styles."*

"Be warned, my juvenilia are ungodly lousy, and *The Crooked Mile* is the most terrible and amusing of them all." He told correspondent Katharine Sterne that he could justify only one boast: *The Crooked Mile* might lack style, "but by God it's not full of other men's styles."[20]

Reviews were less pessimistic than DeVoto eventually proved to be. Some compared him to F. Scott Fitzgerald, esteeming him as the greater writer. The *Chicago Tribune*'s Gene Markey opined that the novels of Fitzgerald and other "bright young men. . . seem but the work of schoolboys" compared to *The Crooked Mile*. (*The Great Gatsby* would not be published for another six months.) "Not Scott Fitzgerald himself," observed the *Boston Transcript*, "had revealed a madder, more senseless round of pleasure. . . . Yet behind [DeVoto's] story there is a very different feeling from that which activated Fitzgerald. [DeVoto] has a big vision. . . . He is trying to get at the root of. . . . why the generation which followed the pioneers should have dropped to such low estate."[21]

Ogden remained relatively calm after word got around that *The Crooked Mile* was an unflattering portrayal of the city. But the novel, which failed to exorcise DeVoto's demons thoroughly, proved to be just a warm-up act. DeVoto's ultimate catharsis, his inflammatory article, "Utah," came in the *American Mercury* of March 1926. Utah's outrage was comparable to Asheville's subsequent furor over *Look Homeward, Angel*. Frank J. Cannon, Utah's reviled ex-Senator, wrote, "You have superseded me in the demoniac ritual. . . . Bernard DeVoto is now the real Beelzebub." Florian DeVoto belatedly incurred some of the "boiling in oil" Fitz had predicted when *The Crooked Mile* appeared. Anonymous phone calls warned Florian that Bernard had "better not come to Ogden again." In fact, he did not go home again until 1940.[22]

In 1974, Stegner wrote that "the name of Utah's most prominent writer is still spelled in his home state with three letters: M.U.D."[23] The hatchet would not be buried until 2012, when the University of Utah Press gave its imprimatur to a handsome edition of the Bernard DeVoto-Katharine Sterne letters.

Notes

1. George W. McCoy, "Asheville and Thomas Wolfe," *The North Carolina Historical Review* (April 1953), 207; Sam Kashner, "Capote's Swan Dive," *Vanity Fair* 54 (December 2012), 200-214; Martin Duberman, *The Worlds of Lincoln Kirstein* (New York: Knopf, 2007), pp. 105-6.

2. Bernard DeVoto, *The Crooked Mile* (New York: Minton, Balch, 1924). Full text of the novel is available on Google Books.

3. Wallace Stegner, *The Uneasy Chair: A Biography of Bernard DeVoto* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1974), pp. 55, 60.

4. Stanford University's research guide to DeVoto's papers gives alphabetical parameters of correspondents' surnames, but not an exhaustive list of each one. See http://pdf.oac.cdlib.org/pdf/stanford/mss/m0001.pdf.

5. Bernard DeVoto, "The Life of Jonathan Dyer: A Paragraph in the History of the West," in *Forays and Rebuttals* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1936), p. 20. "Jonathan Dyer" was DeVoto's pseudonym for Samuel Dye, his grandfather.

6. Ben Smith, "The Month Streaming Finally Killed the Giants," *New York Times*, August 17, 2020.

7. DeVoto to Jarvis Thurston, May 24, 1943, in Wallace Stegner, ed., *The Letters of Bernard DeVoto* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1975), p. 23; Stegner, *Uneasy Chair*, p. 148.

8. "Ogden High School Notes," *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, September 15, 1924; "DeVoto Book Given Space," *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, October 13, 1924; "Ogden Author's Book Is Given Warm Praise by Boston's Famous Paper," *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, November 2, 1924.

9. Stegner, *Uneasy Chair*, p. 62; *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, June 19, 1934; February 22, 1942; Jarvis Thurston, "Bernard DeVoto Has Done West Great Service as Its Realistic Interpreter," *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, June 1, 1942.

10. "Frick Talks to University Men," *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, Sept. 23, 1920; Mark DeVoto, ed., *The Selected Letters of Bernard DeVoto and Katharine Sterne* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2012), p. 413. Bamberger's promotion and enactment of statewide Prohibition in 1917 would not have endeared him to DeVoto, either.

11. Stegner, *Uneasy Chair*, p. 55; Katharine Becker Perkins to Stegner, April 28, 1979, DeVoto Papers, Stanford University Library; Elizabeth Browning McLeod ("Skinny") to Stegner, January 9 and 28, 1972, Wallace Stegner Papers, Stanford University Library. "Skinny" did not want Stegner to use her real name in *The Uneasy Chair*. Stegner complied but scattered clues to her identity throughout: her family home, "the hideous sandstone mansion at the corner of Twenty-Seventh and Adams"—well-known as John M. Browning's home; a footnoted letter from "EBM." Stegner, *Uneasy Chair*, p. 41, p. 392.

12. Fitz's phrase, "the generation with a mind and no will," comes verbatim from the *Boston Transcript*'s review. The actual words in *The Crooked Mile* (page 193, spoken by character John Gale) were, "Nothing but a mind without a will. You and your whole generation."

13. Pingree died seven months prior to *The Crooked Mile*'s publication; see "Former Banker, Victim of Old Heart Ailment," *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, February 23, 1924; DeVoto to Sterne, January 25, 1937, available at https://collections.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6qz748k.

14. Bernard DeVoto, "The Bucolics of Decadence," *Selected Letters*, Appendix A, p. 419.

15. Wendell Fitzgerald to Bernard DeVoto, October 14, 1924, DeVoto Papers. Fitz and DeVoto were both sons of Catholic fathers and Mormon mothers.

16. "Rich Salt Lake Youth Shot to Death Here," *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, April 18, 1921; "Record Throng Enjoys Ogden's Festival," *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, October 2, 1920; "Score of Ogden Business Men Announce Firms Will Enter Procession," *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, September 28, 1920.

17. Stegner, *Uneasy Chair*, p. 62; DeVoto, "Life of Jonathan Dyer," p. 16. See Val Holley, "Slouching Towards Slaterville: Joseph Morris's Wide Swath in Weber County," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 76 (Summer 2008): pp. 247-264.

18. Anonymous [Bernard DeVoto], "On Beginning to Write a Novel," *Harper's* 173 (July 1936): pp. 181-182.

19. DeVoto to Sterne, September 1936, *Selected Letters*, p. 111.

20. DeVoto to Paul Ferris, December 24, 1924, DeVoto Papers; Catherine Drinker Bowen, "The Historian," in *Four Portraits and One Subject: Bernard DeVoto* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963), p. 12; DeVoto to Sterne, July 19, 1935, *Selected Letters*, p. 61.

21. Gene Markey, "Books and Bookmen," *Chicago Tribune*, October 26, 1924; "Ogden Author's Book Is Given Warm Praise."

22. Val Holley, "Vexing Utah: Mencken, DeVoto, and the Mormons," *Menckeniana* No. 125 (Spring 1993): pp. 1-10; Frank J. Cannon to DeVoto, March 29, 1926, DeVoto Papers; Florian DeVoto to Bernard DeVoto, April 7, 1926, DeVoto Papers.

23. Stegner, ed., *The Letters of Bernard DeVoto*, p. 19.



Born and reared in Ogden, Val Holley is an independent historian living in New York City. He is the author of *25th Street Confidential: Drama, Decadence, and Dissipation Along Ogden's Rowdiest Road* (2013) and *Frank J. Cannon: Saint, Senator, Scoundrel* (2020), both from the University of Utah Press. The Utah Historical Society recently named *Frank J. Cannon* the winner of its annual Juanita Brooks Best Book Award.

BERNARD DEVOTO, A.B. GUTHRIE'S *THE BIG SKY*

Transcript of a radio commentary by Bernard DeVoto on A.B. Guthrie's The Big Sky, *dated June 29, 1949, which aired on NBC's* University Theater *broadcast.*

Mr. A.B. Guthrie's *The Big Sky* belongs to a small, select group of novels: historical novels that exist as novels in their own right first, and seem to be historical only as an accident of setting or circumstance. Few historical novelists have ever had the endowment of first-rate novelists in full. In America, I can name James Boyd and Willa Cather, and I should hesitate before adding any other name to theirs—except Mr. Guthrie's. He is mature, has an artistic consciousness, and, as a craftsman, he lacks none of the attributes or skills of a first-rate novelist. His characters live of their own vitality, and he gives them full being as people, not as characters associated with a certain historical period. It is as people that we first know them, and as we remember them, not as people of an earlier time.

But *The Big Sky* is also superb historical fiction. It is a rare and very distinguished act of imagination. No American novelist has ever had in greater measure than Mr. Guthrie an ability, at once exquisite and masterful, to make a place and a time that are now history come alive. The novel deals with a brief, violent, adventurous, gorgeously colorful era of our past—when the fur traders were invading the Rocky Mountains. Its characters are these trappers, the men in buckskin, the mountain men who have become one of the symbols of our nostalgia and of our greatness. And with the Indians with whom they traded, drank, and battled. Seldom in any fiction does one so repeatedly experience the feeling of "rightness" that means both recognition and surprise. This is how these fabulous sons of the old Adam lived, what they were, most of all, how they felt. The artistic truth about the mountain men is here expressed in full, for the first time, in American fiction.

But, there is something that makes the book bigger. Everyone knows how deep in our American consciousness is a feeling for the unspoiled country, before the white man defiled it; how powerful an influence the virgin wilderness was in the shaping of our feelings; how the sense of being identified with it created an American mysticism; how its passing has become one of our great, tragic themes. All this gives *The Big Sky* poignancy and tragic dignity in the very greatest measure. The novel is many other things too, but most deeply and memorably, it is an elegy on the passing of the untouched West and on the passing of the beat of man to whom the West, and its loveliness and loneliness and challenge, meant more than anything else life could offer them.

Few historical novelists have ever had the endowment of first-rate novelists in full. In America, I can name James Boyd and Willa Cather, and I should hesitate before adding any other name to theirs—except Mr. Guthrie's. He is mature, has an artistic consciousness, and, as a craftsman, he lacks none of the attributes or skills of a first-rate novelist.

CARA DESPAIN



Monument, digital video still, 2020

SCULPTURE

99 Claims portrays the founder of the Mormon Church, Joseph Smith, cast 99 times from the same mold, such that each unique variant is a distortion of his visage.



99 Claims **(installation view), cast concrete and pyrite ore, 2014**



99 Claims**, detail view, 2014**



99 Claims**, detail view, 2014**



99 Claims **(detail views), cast concrete and pyrite ore, 2014**



***May 25, 5:14pm*, cast concrete and carbon residue, 2016**

Land ownership tells the story of the United States in its entirety. The American Frontier is both an icon and a case-study of a successful conquest or "taming" of the wild. It changed the landscape and displaced many peoples, replacing an entire notion of and relationship to "home" with a new one. The story of who lays claim to what territory and how it was secured/stolen/extracted is wrought with violence, oppression and achievement pageantry. National pride and the idea of "homeland" is a constructed mosaic that has destroyed preexisting notions of the same.

I've been working through issues of land use as it relates historically to settlement, expansion, resource exploitation, and the development of the military-industrial complex in the North American frontier for some time. I now feel a new urgency toward scrutinizing lineages of obscured truth and how they are impacting the landscape, climate, and our collective psyche. As I've been sorting through what it means to perpetuate iconic images of the American West as an artist, I've had to critically examine my own proximity to them and how I can strategically use familiarity and that sense of ownership to reveal harder truths. From the Romantics to the Hudson River School to John Ford, landscape has been a repository for fantasy, identity, narrative, and epic. As an aesthetic endeavor, it has often served as advertisement or propaganda—for expansionism, industry, and homesteading. I often use nostalgic tactics and depictions of land that are fueled by tourism and national pride—borrowing from the language of Western cinema, Warner Brothers cartoons, sculptural portraiture and monuments, and postcards and calendars to tap into a sense of the familiar. These romantic images reinforce notions of Manifest Destiny and instill a sense of desire and entitlement. Yet who exactly feels claims to national treasures or the spoils of westward expansion? Much of any country's cultural disposition can be attributed to the acquisition of land and, ultimately, wealth, and at whose expense they came. How the western territories were settled, tamed, stolen, mined, parceled, and managed, contain conflicting narratives of prosperity, hope, faith, disappointment, and decimation wrought with racism, classism, and sexism that persist in our national cultural identity still.

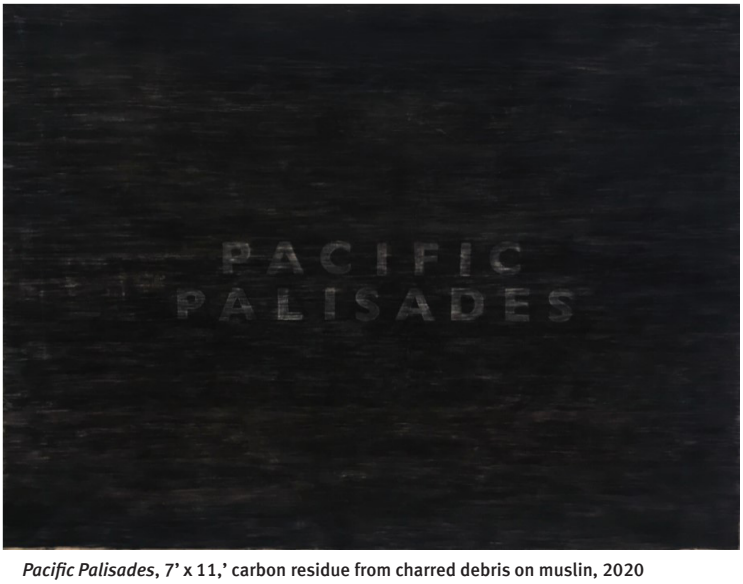


***Single Unified Artifact*, found railroad spike plated in 24kt gold, 2014. The spike signifies the advance of industrialization and foreshadows drastic changes to the landscape ahead. The "golden spike" is also the term used to describe boundaries in geologic strata that mark the change of an epoch. Objects, symbols, value—this single item unites many meanings.**



Camp Fire (Paradise), 8' x 14,' carbon residue from charred debris on muslin, 2020

CARBON PAINTINGS



Pacific Palisades, 7' x 11,' carbon residue from charred debris on muslin, 2020

For the last two years, I've been collecting charred debris from wildland/urban interface burn scars in the western United States. Using the debris as drawing tools, I created large-scale 'paintings' of pure carbon that serve as markers of a changing climate and exist in memoriam of the consequences of human habitation on the planet. I have collected from sites such as the Woolsey Fire in Malibu, California, and the Camp Fire in Paradise, California. I view these pieces as landscape paintings of the new American West—the overwhelming visualizations of a large-scale systems change.

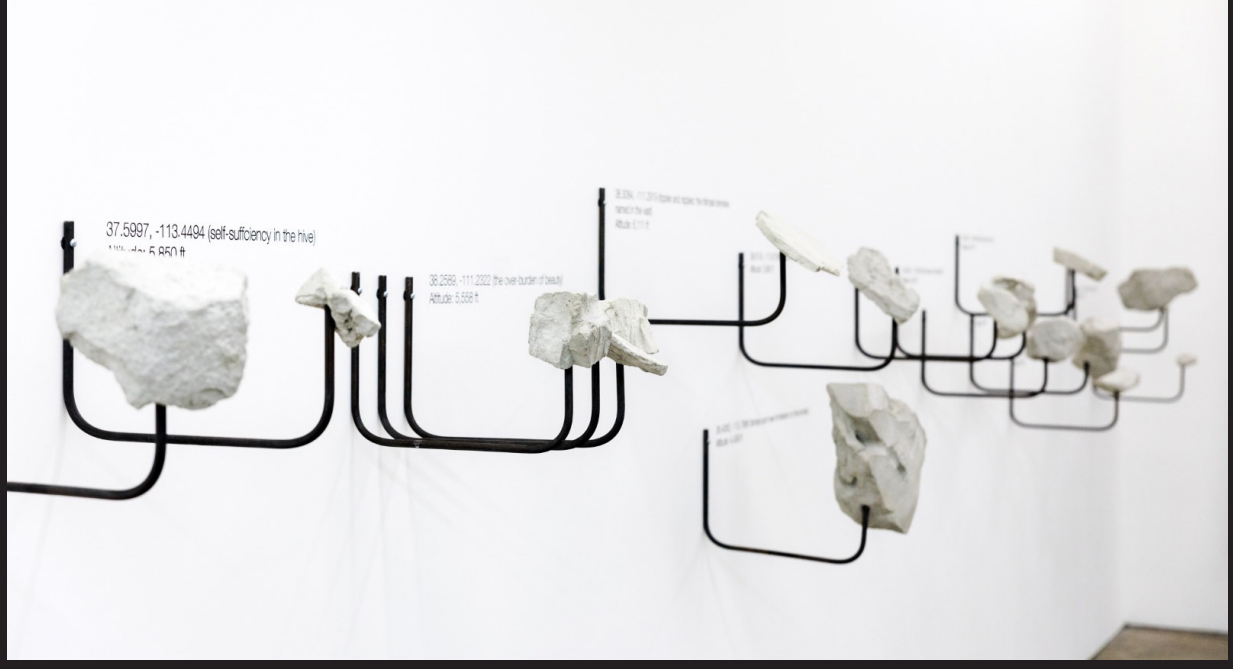
Landscape painting has long sought to idealize territories, often for expansionist purposes, and this was particularly true in the American context. The versions of paradise depicted in these paintings were both harbingers of the consequences to follow and denials of the ensuing realities of colonization and settlement, resource extraction, land management, and land ownership. The romanticized landscapes of the West have been permanently scarred and claimed, which begs the question of whether pristine wilderness and our notions of paradise exist at all. Smelling of smoke and shedding ash, these are landscape paintings of the world's new frontiers/rainforests/outback made of its spent lands.



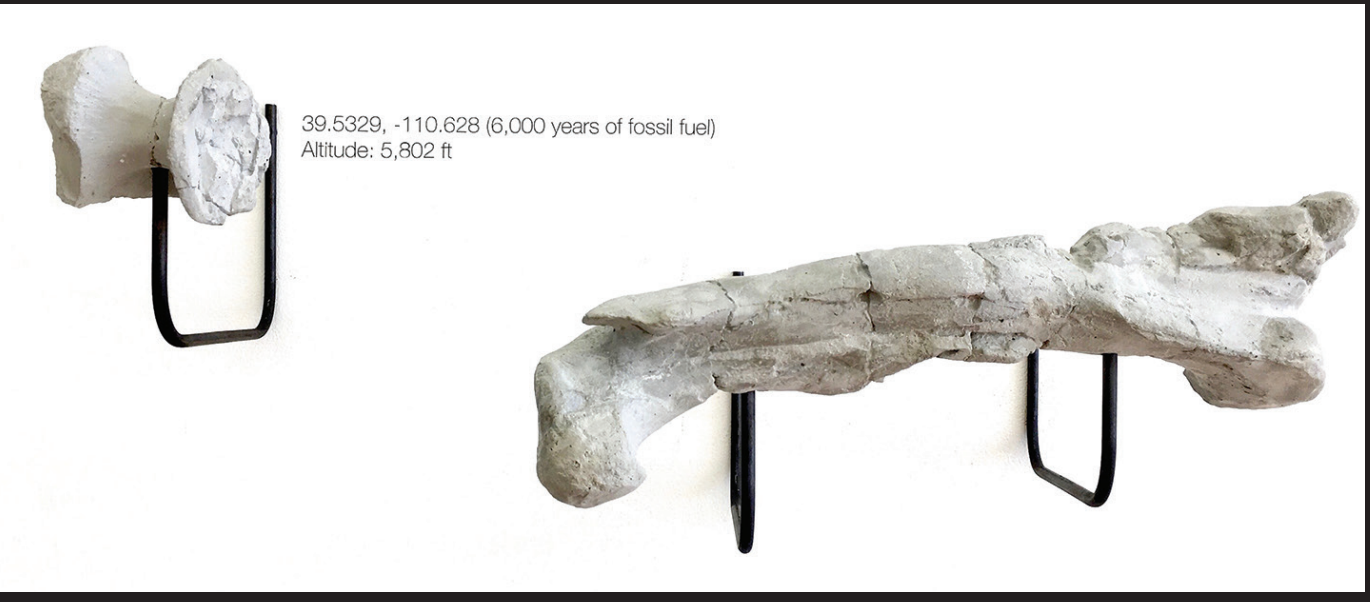


(Top) *It Doesn't Look Like Paradise Anymore*, exhibition view at Southern Oregon University, including melted acrylic pre-fab fence, 4' x 8,' 2019. (Bottom) *Seeing the Stone* and *It Doesn't Look Like Paradise Anymore*, installation view at Spinello Projects, 8' x 14,' carbon residue from charred debris on muslin, 2020

SEEING THE STONE



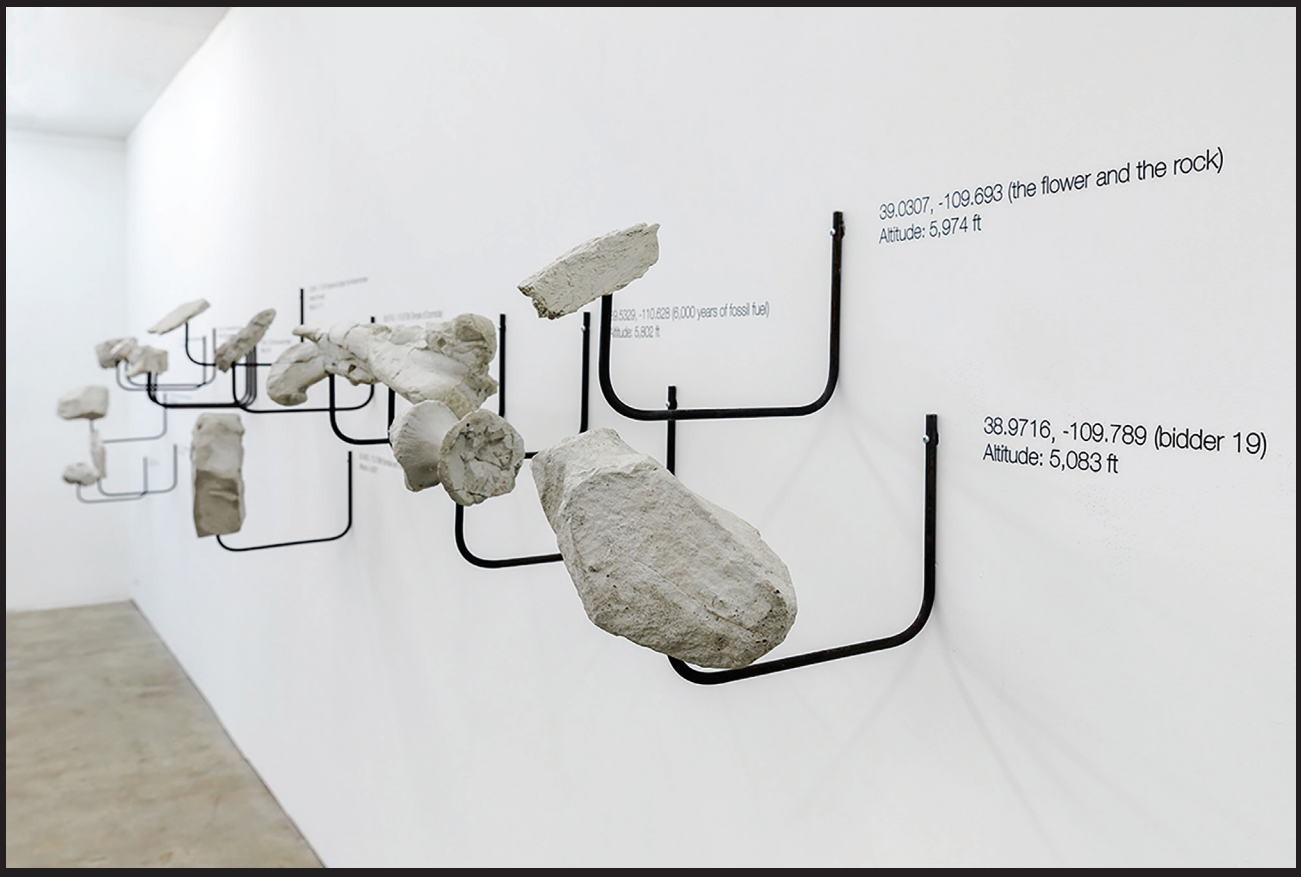
***Seeing the Stone*, cast concrete and steel brackets, installation view, Spinello Projects, Miami, FL, 2019**



***Seeing the Stone*, cast concrete and steel brackets, installation view, CUAC, Salt Lake City, UT, 2016**

When I was invited to have a solo show at CUAC back in my hometown of Salt Lake City, Utah, I was grappling with what I could put indoors that was of human-scale concerning landscape and that could say more than experiencing it directly in the state's backyard. I was interested in undermining both the romantic depictions of the West I'd grown up with ad nauseam and the approach that male-dominated Land Artists had used to contend with remoteness. I cast rocks at different sites that I had researched around the state of Utah by using the same silicone materials paleontologists use to cast bones, allowing the rocks to remain in their original location. I also consulted with scientists to gain permission to cast a few dinosaur fossils in the same fashion.

A rock is an instrument of landscape, the most direct representative of it, a fragment of a much larger, longer story. I chose sites with a loose narrative of settlement as it relates to post-colonial Utah and the roles faith, mining, and weapons development played, and how this narrative is situated in the larger quintessential story of the American West. I was able to cast everything from sandstone to petrified wood, coal, conglomerate near Cold War-era uranium mines, river-tumbled volcanic rock, and so on. The concrete surrogates were hung with their GPS coordinates according to the relative elevation of the actual rocks/sites. The collection puts together a deeply fraught American narrative using a specific territory and the lens of landscape.



***Seeing the Stone*, cast concrete and steel brackets, installation view, Spinello Projects, Miami, FL, 2019**

The purpose was to deprive viewers in the gallery of the view and encourage them to be there (and ruminate on history rather than a confined, revised portrait) by absurdly inviting them to find a single, often unimportant stone in the expanses of the desert. I authored a field guide to accompany the show and made a hashtag, #seeingthestone, so those who go out looking for my "pieces" are able to generate images at the site. This both problematically perpetuates iconic landscape images in the disconnected context of an image-based social media realm and reinforces the inclination to get to those places and author your own images.

This was a research, fieldwork-heavy project. The outdoor component of the exhibition (the original rocks in the original position) can, by nature, still be "viewed" indefinitely, and likewise the hashtag can continue to be populated.



***Seeing the Stone*, cast concrete and steel brackets, installation view, CUAC, Salt Lake City, UT, 2016**



Left to right: *URANIUM!; On the Record: Hot Milk and Yellow Cake; As Above So Below; Backdrop;* and *Hindsight* from the "Fractured Landscapes" installation at the Art and Culture Center of Hollywood, 2021



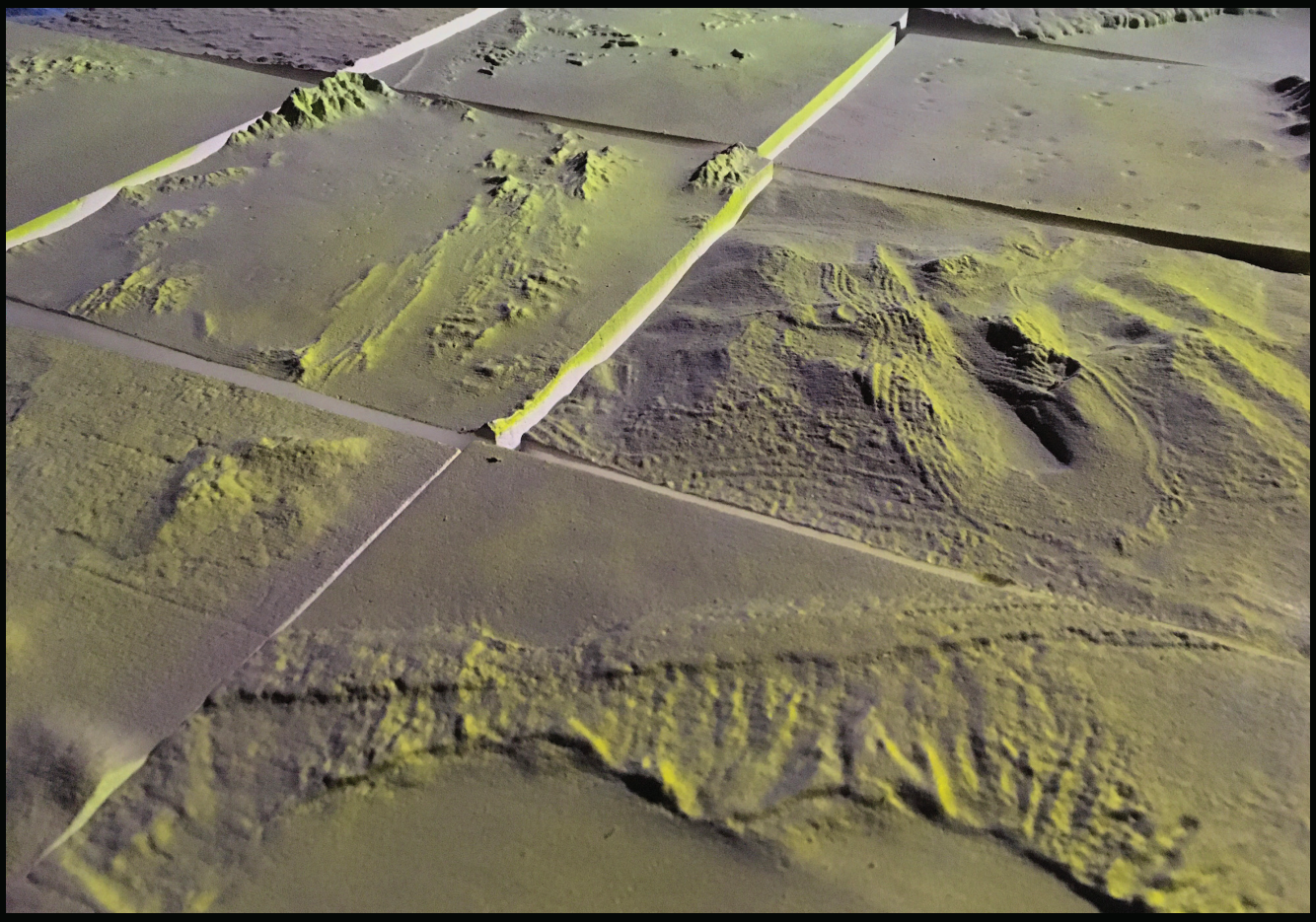
As Above, So Below, detail view. *Hindsight*, detail view, 2021



AS ABOVE, SO BELOW

As Above, So Below is a series of graduated white monoliths topped with plaster reliefs of Cold War-era U.S. and Soviet atomic test sites, uranium mines, and moon surface topography. They were created with the use of Google satellite imagery and then translated through different technologies. Each stunted tower represents a different event and location—the Trinity Test Site in New Mexico and the Castle Bravo crater that decimated Bikini Atoll. The physical indentations, tracks and pockmarks rendered serve as indelible imprints of humanity's destructive ambitions. In many cases, scars from detonations or mining are visible, in others—such as Tsar Bomba, the site of the world's largest nuclear detonation—the devastation is not physically visible, like the microscopic particles that forever changed all life on earth.

***As Above, So Below*, detail view, 2021**



***As Above, So Below*, detail view, 2021**

IODINE-131

TEST OF FAITH

The U.S. Government tested more than 1,000 nuclear weapons at the Nevada Test Site—just 65 miles from Las Vegas and about 150 miles from where my mother and grandmother grew up in southern Utah. Between 1951 and 1962, 100 of these tests were conducted above ground—some many times larger than the bombs dropped on Japan. In the push to develop a nuclear arsenal in the early years of the Cold War, the area was chosen by the Atomic Energy Commission (A.E.C.) for its presumed remoteness, which has often been read as a willful disregard for the relatively small populations that did exist in the "virtually uninhabited" regions surrounding it. Scores of people living in southern Utah, including Cedar City, suffered the often unseen and unacknowledged but gruesome consequences from radioactive fallout. Despite the desert spectacles of above-ground atomic testing, the dark history of Cold War-era weapons development and the associated uranium mining, radiation and fallout remains largely unseen. Instead, the cultivated culture of heroism and patriotism on the frontier is what sticks in the nation's psyche, letting the insidious particles that ravaged the bodies and lands near the Nevada Test Site remain invisible—the enemy from within, from dust. The radioisotope Iodine-131 is the outcome of a long chain of reactions and events leading up to the atomic weapons testing at the site, and is the title of the large cast topography I made of it. Civilians are not allowed to enter this site, but the scars from testing are visible from space.

My video *Test of Faith* (2021) also draws attention to the period of atmospheric testing at the site. Tens of thousands of films were taken of these tests on sensitive film stock to collect data and to preserve and document the development of the U.S. nuclear arsenal. The majority of these films were kept from the public eye, but in recent decades many have been digitized, declassified and released. I used some of this footage to create a more psychological abstraction—Rorschach tests of the deepest, darkest type. Like the guise of military supremacy and the patriotic appeal that was made to largely Mormon settlers in the fallout region, but also the country as a whole to support the effort and bear witness to these technological advancements in science, their splendor betrays the harm.



Iodine-131, 47" x 47," cast gypsum concrete, acrylic and reflective paint, LED lights, 2020

Test of Faith, composite of stills, 2021



Cara Despain is an artist working in film and video, sculpture, photography and installation addressing issues of land use, the desert, climate change, the Anthropocene, land ownership and the problematic of frontierism. She was born in Salt Lake City, Utah (1983), and currently lives in Miami, Florida, and works between the two. She holds a BFA from the University of Utah (2006). Her work is included in the Rubell Family Collection and the Scholl Collection as well as the State of Utah and Salt Lake County art collections. She was the Art Director for the feature length film *The Strongest Man* that premiered at the Sundance Film Festival (2015) as well as *A Name Without a Place*, which premiered at the Miami International Film Festival (2019). A short documentary about her and her work aired on Art Loft, WPBT, and PBS and screened at the Miami International Film Festival in 2016. She was selected for a 2018 Ellie's Award through Oolite Arts to produce her own first feature film and video installation hybrid, and this year will be completing a public art commission for the Underline with Miami-Dade County Art in Public Places.

Christian Woodard

Agriculture

Mission Valley, April

Across the road, where fourteen whitetails
graze the lease, and where morning goes gray behind clouds,
and where one hawthorn puts out leaves,
the bullpasture thickens with brome:
green, that first sick color when the sun comes up,
and blue-brown, clearcuts over Sabine Creek (night hanging
longer on fir and cedar), and under yellow willows
Matt Creek gathers at its wetland springs.

—

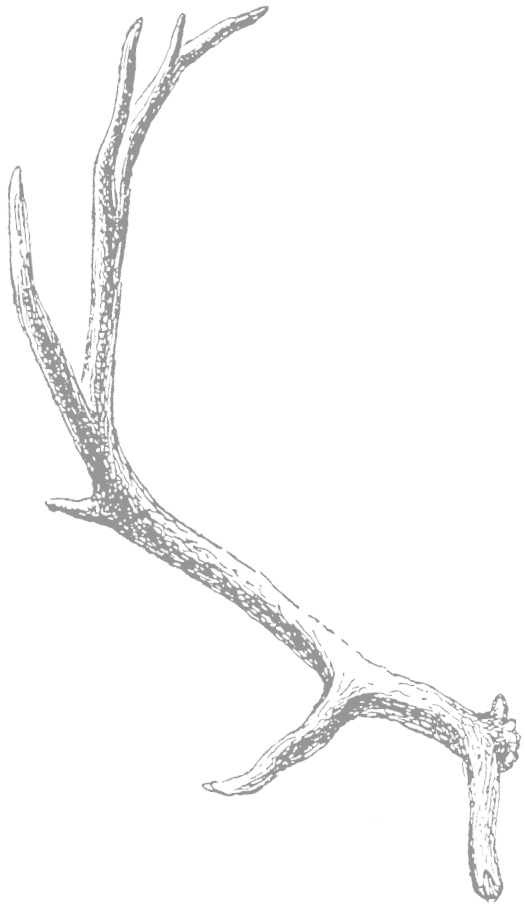
Among other things, fourteen inches annual precipitation
(most of it in winter) means that the heavy-necked bull breathes steam
and moans in frustration. It means, even in spring,
a dozen bulls on forty acres will eat it down to dirt.
He's been rubbing that fencepost
for weeks and now it breaks. Such are itches.
Such are heifers in another pasture.

Rectangular bulls, like dominoes,
and black as holes in the grass.
Eat moan wander sleep.
Companion birds rise from their backs.
Twitching eartags against the first flies
and filing through the broken fence
they are muscular and regular as freight cars.

By ten o'clock the valley is hot
and the deer bed in rosebush and hellebore.

—

Lake County.
Four cranes cross it
without moving their wings.



Bycatch

for Kip

Last night I found a shearwater, nearly dead
in a sagebrush valley far from the ocean. And hid her
in my jacket, mostly because you
used to hold half-drowned birds like that, breathing
through their nostrils.

The bird stayed warm against my chest all night, and I dreamed
she borrowed my mouth, asking all the sodden selves
we've traded for money to stand down, forever.
Telling everything to just go
back the way it was.
If I can get her to the ocean—
to your place—she might dive into whatever
the life of a sea bird means, never looking back.

There might not be a way back. Here, all I see is sage.
And a muley doe frozen to the tip of her nose, waiting
on scent for an answer. Downwind of self-reliance
it smells like diesel. There might not be any answers. Only this
desert range far from the ocean, where I've hunted
the dead-end alleys of faith, unearthed a fossilized bone
dump grown bigger than the hills, and found a lost bird.

Tonight, I dream of your raingear standing empty on the beach.
I climb into the bibs, put on the coat. You are a horde of caterpillars,
gauzing out a home through the alders of my hair.



Christian Woodard guides wilderness trips focused on human accountability to land. His writing has appeared in conservation-focused journals like *The Hopper*, *Forest Notes*, *CIRQUE*, *Pinyon Review*, *Gray's Sporting Journal*, and others. He is currently based in northwest Montana.

William Snyder

Of Love or No Love at All

I remember a fish—ladyfish, snook, mullet—I didn't know fishes—but the head chopped off, tossed away to pelican or gull. To the west—this is Florida, 1964—a hazy string of green on the near horizon, clumps of palm and live oak and orange trees before the sunset so far away.

I'd driven up to the house on the Air Force Base where I'd been living some months before, and walked to the river—I knew I'd find him there if he wasn't in the kitchen. Hi, Dad, I say. He's holding the silvery fish, drawing a long, sharp knife from chin to tail, pinkish-blue entrails spilling into a rusty bucket.

I may have come for a meal, or to see my brothers. Or to see my father, though now, I can't imagine it—I may have needed money, or help with my car. But I've found him by himself, fishing, and in a good mood, my brothers minding themselves somewhere— the salt smell of river and wind, the sky alive. *It's been very hard*, he's said, on other visits, and even before I left the house, he and I alone at breakfast, or in the car. Oh, I'd say, yes, I know—the little I had to offer him.

I did try. But with him cooking meals, making beds, worrying about prayers—brothers together nights in the living room. And worrying me about my hair, about my messy room, about, about. He'd seen my place—the sofa stains, the sheets unmade, the fuzzed-up plates on the counter, in the sink. *How can you live like this*, he'd asked.

How could I not? I wonder. And how could I have lived with him? Any longer? But how could I have left him? With my brothers, alone, like his wife had left him alone, not two years before. And now this visit, and he and I alone with this terrible, gutted fish.

Gravity*

At Liebes, the electricity goes off sometimes—
from a storm, a loose wire somewhere.
We might be between the third
and fourth, and with the car's sudden,
clanking stop, and with the utter blackness
in the little box, the women, descending
with their parcels and bags, stand rigid—
I feel their fright, hear their breathing,
smell their impatience, the coffee and scones
they ate for breakfast, the lipstick
and powder they applied for car rides
home. So when it stops mid-floor, I adjust
the crank to neutral—two deep
clicks as I draw it upward—and a woman
might ask how long this will take, how long
we will be here, I have to be at Besaws
in an hour. I don't know, I say, and I don't.
And I don't say more. I'm tired of assuring,
of calming, of being the perfect operator
in my little round cap. She wouldn't have
spoken had we descended in light—even
with the shaking metal rails and doorway grate,
the pulleys and cables above and below
exercising force and resistance.
So the elevator rises and descends, and I
control it. And with its rise each day, its
rattle to the store-top floor, I dream
I'm flying a Lincoln-Page out of Troutdale.
I hear the pistoned Curtis, feel the propeller—
and see it, round and diaphanous
as it spins through heavy summer air.
And as the pressure drops me, as the currents
buffet and shove, those women
pass away into shudder and yaw, cloud
and sun, disappear beneath the wings,
the struts and gear, the stabilizers vertical
and horizontal behind me, and I can breathe.

** In 1932, Hazel Ying Lee worked as an elevator operator at Liebes Department Store in Portland, OR. In 1943, she enlisted in the WASP, ferrying warplanes from plant to base.*

Up Against the Law

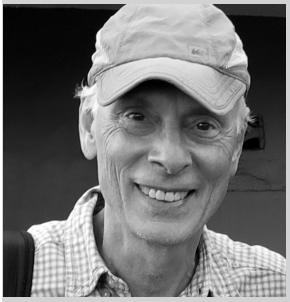
Columbia, Maryland, 1972

Early evening, the college lawn
before us, and we're pumping tunes,
festival vibes a toked up rush
we simmer in. We—bass, Strat,
drum kit, pedal steel, and me—
J-50 Gibson and a harp in A
for a blues we do in E, a slow one,
chugga chugga drums and bass.
And dancers in the spring sun
setting, hands waving, bodies
fanning, the sun firing ribbons,
tie dyes, ponytails into crimsony neon.

I hitch the Gibson to my back, dip
the A into a water glass—to swell
the narrow wooden pipes—no
wheeze, no hiss—just breath
and body for reed, for flutter,
for bend. The band on the seventh,
B7, and I cradle the harp, purse
my lips around a hole, tongue it,
taste the patina of spit
that's dried there, taste the metal sheen,
the Hohner-ness, the Marine Band
harp-ness, then exhale, suck
the chamber—reed, sound,
bend. The band snaps back to
E and I suck and hold, right palm
beating vibrato, harp bleating da-
wa-wa-wee and the drums,
the beat, the bass, the rhythm, oh.

Eyes closed, mind's ear open
to intonation, percussion, swing,
and the final bars of the long slow solo
and ready to return to vocals,
and I blow and fan, tick wood with
tongue to the beat. But the beat slows,
diddles, clunks, stops—the bass line
ending in a wallow, a sliding spurt.
The Strat and steel, silent.
The cymbals, a last dry sizzle.
A tap on my shoulder.

A sheriff—tan shirt, dark brown flaps
and cuffs. And he speaks, and they
hear him across the lawn, I think,
and out to the interstate and east
to Baltimore. *If you don't stop this
racket*, he says, *I'm gonna chunk a
warrant on you*. A car door slams
in the parking lot, a woman laughs,
a stage plank creaks. I turn to the band—
drumsticks aloft, Strat chord stiff,
bass strings slack. I want to laugh.
Oh, I do want to laugh. But—laughter
impossible in this moment so fat, so
so very, very, swollen, so ripe.



William Snyder has published poems in *Atlanta Review*, *Poet Lore*, and *Southern Humanities Review*, among others. He was the co-winner of the 2001 Grolier Poetry Prize; winner of the 2002 Kinloch Rivers Chapbook competition; The CONSEQUENCE Prize in Poetry, 2013; the 2015 Claire Keyes Poetry Prize; Tulip Tree Publishing Stories That Need To Be Told 2019 Merit Prize for Humor; and Encircle Publications 2019 Chapbook Contest. He teaches writing and literature at Concordia College, Moorhead, MN.

Eric Paul Shaffer

Coffee Mugs at Camp



The coffee mug I chose on Monday from among hundreds
on stacked trays was painted in fonts of many colors
and odd orientations parallel and perpendicular.
The words “Good Luck” were repeated forty-two times.

Yet the mug is not as important as the coffee, which draws
the eye to darkness.

Yesterday, my coffee mug was dappled
with hundreds of balloons, red, green, blue, orange, purple,
and pink, and a birthday cake. I made a wish.

This morning,
I chose a mug of one hue: a luminous, transparent aquamarine
flickering like a high-country lake between glacial moraines,
clear, cold waters to which only someone else knows the way.

Poetland

At Fuller's, we took the counter in the back corner. Anonymous
in the lunch crunch, a trio lost to each other for a dozen years

suddenly one again, we were silenced when our waitress
stood before us, paused, and pronounced, "So you're all poets."
Portland, your streets and people are magic. Her words recall

my typical typo when addressing mail: "Poetland."
As we ate, we spoke of days drifting downstream on inner tubes.

When the river carries us, we float, motionless
in motion as the world moves. Only a sturdy will and steady eye
will show us ourselves gliding silently between the banks.

Over coffee, we told the old stories, passed them hand to hand
like polished stones raised from mud the water washes

away as we lift them to the light. At a river's pace,
we spoke of today, wives, gone lovers, daughters and sons, cats,
books, everything we've meant to do and gone and done.

Outside, traffic blurs a long afternoon. We linger on sidewalks
leading away in every direction. We have work and a lazy flow

to carry us, yet the river still urges us to swim against the current.

On a Morning Long After Cache Creek

For Andy Ehrmann, 1960-2015

"The usual song is a 3-fold or double whistle; a simple call note
is typical. A more varied song is heard at dawn."
—*Birds of North America*

Andy took me to Cache Creek, and we hiked through afternoon
on a dim trail under oaks and pines. That day, he pointed
to my first and only Western Bluebird.
As the story goes, bluebirds are rare enough to be ironic,

and seeing one is luck, but Andy saw three that day. I finally saw
a bluebird on our way back. The water was low, and at sunset,
we strode across the creek bed in our boots. In the middle,
I stooped to pick up a rounded rock with a stark and striking

sedimentary pattern, and I watched my wet fingerprints fade
from the stone. I was there only once, and I realize now
there are places I am never going back, no matter how many days
the light brings. The blues songs all begin, "I woke up

this morning," and dawn bears the bad news. Beneath a red sky,
the bliss of night disappears into the darkness of our open eyes,
and the stars shine on without us, beyond the blue curtain
day draws between us and the truth. But night always returns.

As we were leaving, I heard the three notes and looked up.
Andy pointed, and the bird perched right where anyone lucky
might see. The back was blue, with a collar of rust, and shoulders
hunched beneath the coming night. I have not seen another since.

After Dawn in Mexico

In Mexico City, house sparrows walk balcony railings,
all but mine because I am always sitting outside, looking
down on the street and up to the mountain. Below,
people in the street speak another language I don't know,

and someone sits in the other chair, lying. All of the words
I hear at this moment are equal in sense if not in sincerity.
From here, I can see a green triangle of a small park
down the street, and I am amused to recognize,

even from this distance, the bounce of the American robin
in the grass. There will never be a wall,
but the seasonal migrants will never care. The words
on the street seem to be greetings and jokes and inquiries

concerning prices and locations, and those of my companion
drift into the morning, invisible and incomprehensible.
I saw my first Vermillion Flycatcher here,
brown wings, scarlet breast, and the black mask

of a Mexican bandit feared by the President. His lies
fill American avenues and airwaves, masking the deception
of the mockingbirds gracing every state with song.
This morning in Mexico, I can hear one from the crown

of a tree or a telephone pole somewhere beyond my vision.
As the lies beside me illuminate the street
and the sun climbs higher through the clouds, I consider
my own illicit relationship with language.

I've never been to Mexico City, but distracted by words,
no one will ever know when I'm telling the truth.

Women Making Bows

The women sing in the willows near the strong brown river
flushing mud from the land. They bend branches low, cutting
switches and stripping limbs as blades flash and blood drips

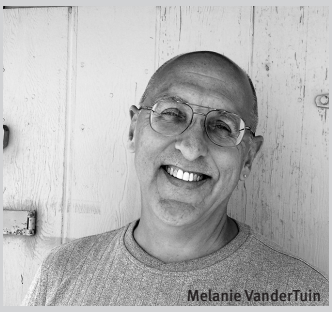
from angry slashes cut into their arms by the living flesh
of plants. Above them, the sun finally clears the cliff at noon

and shines into the darkness where they work. A knot of girls
sits among scattered leaves, cradling branches and peeling back
ribbons of bark. The sap stings fingers, and the pliant flesh within

gleams pale. Even the crash of surf crushing stones to sand
on the beach at their backs cannot dim the voices, shining
like a vein of silver in a broken granite boulder at the river mouth.

To the west, the sea aims emptiness at islands and continents
thousand of miles away, yet their eyes are on the bows

they craft, bending limbs, testing strength. Singing in emerald
light, the archers see only the moment one will draw a new bow
tight, standing on the shore with only clouds and sand.


Melanie VanderTuin

Eric Paul Shaffer is author of seven books of poetry, including *Even Further West*; *A Million-Dollar Bill*; *Lāhaina Noon*; and *Portable Planet*. More than 500 of his poems appear in local, national, and international reviews. Shaffer teaches composition, literature, and creative writing at Honolulu Community College.

Donna Emerson

Before Mother Died

She said: *pack up my boxes, put them in the basement or attic.*
Then they'll be taken away.

Mom's boxes are still in my basement.
They've sat there for sixteen years,
next to the old bookshelves.

I think of them there at night.
Sometimes I get up, go there and remove dust and cobwebs.

They settle back in, their spot where the cats sleep.
I notice they're often warm,
the cats like them too.

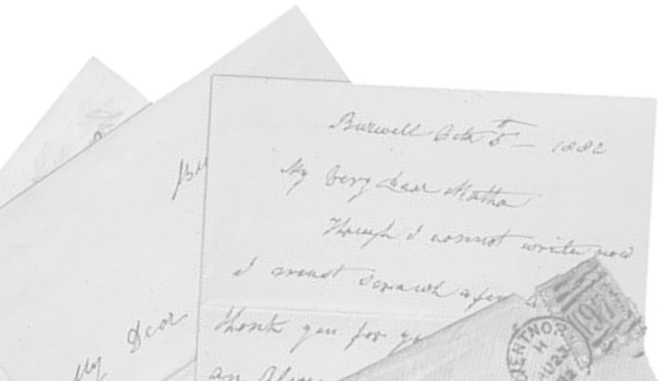
Every few months I find myself opening the smaller box.
The one with her letters, poems, journals.

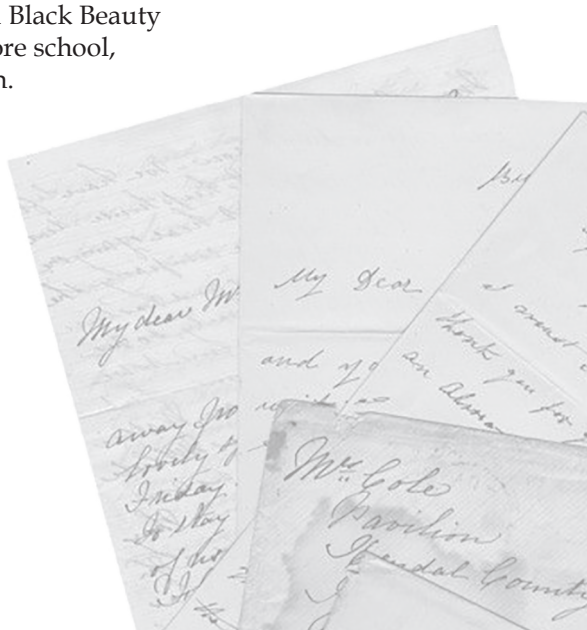
Out fly her best words, the light, lilting ones
the ones we saw most on paper, her funny stories,
the poems she and her mother mailed back and forth.

I read and cry and laugh out loud.
Once I even brought a blanket for the floor,
lay among her paragraphs and stanzas until the cats got hungry.

I felt flushed, head to toe, like I did when I read Black Beauty
by the heater in our house in Pennsylvania before school,
while Mom made scrambled eggs in the kitchen.

We won't be carrying these boxes away.
They protect the foundation of the house.





One Day at Work

The doctor and nurse call the social worker.
"Help us get her to leave," they say.
"She's been here for five hours, won't go home."

The social worker sits on a couch too low for her legs
so her eyes can meet the drowning eyes of the woman,
the small thin woman with long hair like Ophelia.

"Can you help me?" Ophelia pleads.
"I don't know if I can, but I'd like to."

Ophelia talks of the night before:

Her four month old baby boy sound asleep,
healthy, safe, pink. Winding her hair into her fist
the young mother speaks about the crib,
where she got it, the sheets,
the air temperature, the way he lay,
the way she always tucks him in,
always made him lay, his round downy head,
just sprouting hair, blond hair, her hair,

every step to his room, her sleepy footsteps
on the rug to the spot where her baby stopped breathing.
Every thought she had before and at that lurching
moment of discovery,
her frozen screams louder than jungle birds wounded
in ambush, just as she screams now, heaves herself
on the taller woman, pounds on her back,
drags herself down blouse and skirt
to the floor beside the other's feet.

"Tell me I didn't do this,"
"You didn't do this."
"They want me to go home. I can't go home."

The taller woman, tears slipping down her cheekbones,
slips to the floor beside Ophelia.

"Of course you can't go home. Your baby is here. You must stay
with your baby, he's still your baby. They can't take him away from you."

The social worker thinks about her own son, will take all the blankets
off his bed. She strokes the younger mother's hair.

Then they walk to find the infant boy.



Donna Emerson has published four chapbooks and two full-length poetry collections. Her most recent awards include nominations for a Pushcart, Best of the Net, and two Allen Ginsberg awards. Donna's work has been featured in the *New Ohio Review*, *CALYX*, the *London Magazine*, and P*aterson Literary Review*. Recently retired from Santa Rosa Jr. College, Donna spends her time between Petaluma, California, and New York. To see more of her work, visit www.donnaemerson.com.

Stephen Lefebure

The West


Caroline Dinouard

Those of us whom canyon walls surrounded,
Who poured dust from boots, climbed rocks, were bruised,
Who spilled water then drank all the rest—
All of us who had our hearts impounded
By the sunsets, wanderers who fused
Blood with Utah clay, the worst and best,
Those who hiked the Maze, got lost, confounded
By a compass, tracked the stars and mused
On the strays who fell—we pass the test
Of a land where everything is grounded
In the spirit world, all weapons used
To break trail, each way we face the West.

Statues

Stone can hold your spirit and not shatter.
Shift inside it. Stay. Become a motion
Held, as cannot ever hold, forever.
Moments are our spacetime ironed flatter.
What is marble but a white emotion
Carefully embalmed, that we can never
Feel again, encased in glowing matter?
Statues are the past showing devotion
To the future. While we try to sever
Speech from idle talk and endless chatter,
Sculptures gesture calmly at commotion.
Silences have never been more clever.

Clear Creek Colorado

If rivers are gods, and springs—and why should
We know more about such places than those
Who honored them once in the past—if so—
Let us remember small streams through the wood.
Numens departed—perhaps spirits chose
Exile, or else we coerced them to go—
Yet magic abides where goddesses stood.
Eagles coast thermals—high clifftops enclose
Nests they construct—prey animals know
The chase before starting—boy and girlhood
Remain innocent—foam races then slows
Through cascading water melted from snow.

Zoo

Each inside the cage that we assigned it. . .
How can we pretend and still ignore it,
Ignore that every major city feigns
Nature, and that the people find it
Charming, as if walls could somehow store it?
Habitat for captives, we designed it
For each creature so we could adore it,
Having cast the gods from our domains.
A mural for each animal, behind it,
Shows us wilderness, immense, before it
Dwindled to the fragment that remains.



Poetry by Stephen Lefebure may be found in his own volume, *Rocks Full of Sky*, and in *Wild Song—Poems of the Natural World* and *Going Down Grand: Poems from the Canyon*, two anthologies of nature poetry. His work may also be found in journals like *Wilderness*, *Chicago Studies*, *Bombay Review*, and *Bangalore Review*. He lives in Evergreen, Colorado.

Brian Glaser

Eleven Prayers to a Creek

1.
I don't
want to pray—my first step is away from you.
Why have you hidden

yourself across this distance, where the dust is an angel?
I have seen the hidden:
the disks of fungi together on the tree-limbs

in the green-decked creek.
Look at how those roots find the hidden water—
the signal of their success

is that the crown grows away from the hidden water,
heavenward.
They might have said to me: it is easier to grow than to heal.



2.
The ugliness of God—
like vomit,
like the time my son was sick with fever for days

and threw up standing in a doorframe in the afternoon
& was suddenly well.
On my daily walk to the creek last week, I passed a grocery cart

burdened with trash,
or what seemed to me like trash—paper, bottles, wires.
And a sodden mattress under the bridge.

Like God's vomit—
some days that's the only thing a believer can do,
accept his disgust.

3.
There are two kinds of bridges
over Santiago Creek.
There's the freeway thirty feet above the path,

from which you can't see the creek at all—
and then the railroad,
a lower bridge, from which you can see the creek

if you look out the window
at the right time.
Descartes' evidence for the existence of God—

that we can conceive of him, and—therefore, he must exist—
makes an argument of thirst.
I prefer the realism of the seasons: no water, no life.

4.
And what of the evening
my daughter ran into the house from the side-yard pool
to tell me

she had just saved her brother's life?
If I believe that water
is God, I should perhaps keep that conviction private

in the way
that I wish to keep that memory of my negligence private—
or only make art from it

like our scenic painting of a lake,
not like the handwriting on the walls above the bed
of the public creek.

5.
Eliot called the river a strong brown god:
since water is amoral,
the human project of morality would be incomplete forever.

My son learned in school
that the Tongva believe humans keep separate the realms
of good and evil

which reside above and below our earthly home.
So some who found
this creek-cut to be a boundary a thousand years ago

believed, as I do,
that morality is a purely human accomplishment—like language, mortal;
like language, a vow to a child.

6.
I saw a heron and a rabbit on my walk today
and an orange dragonfly,
not once but twice, though it wasn't the same dragonfly,

I know,
which raises the question—of the two roots in
our protolanguage

for water, one which names water as a substance
and another,
they say, named water as a spirit—

what do we mean when we say they name the same being,
except to say
we don't believe them anymore: their stone has worn away.

7.
In the dream I was a lawyer for enlisted men,
helping them desert.
Of the smells along the creek-side walk—

rosemary, dried grass, eucalyptus, damp earth—
the haunting one
is the marijuana smoke, sometimes coming from

under the oaks,
sometimes, often, from the guys at the picnic table
under the bridge.

The faithful for generations had mortal arguments about
the ritual of incense,
the legitimacy of the baptism of the young.

8.
I was raised a Catholic.
Ritual, community, sacrament, tradition, display—they are what
I believed in, too.

So I sometimes miss their authority as I worship water.
The overwhelming
comfort of the tribe. The proof one is not insane.

Today on the walk
white and bright yellow moths were everywhere,
and I know

that most moths are nocturnal—so these were day's pilgrims,
illustrating the air,
protected by heaven from the lure of electric light.

9.
In the dream she became a river
as we made love.
Today along the creek I paused in the oak's shade

to watch an archer at the range.
He studied
the distance for more than long enough

to wrestle with a doubt.
The arrow was black, was fine—I couldn't see it reach the target
once it flew.

My music was from the cloud: Shostakovich.
The clouds are for silence:
every song to them has long been said, and yet they stay.

10.
The thinker who turned me against Hegel described why
he prefers James
with a phrase spoken like a banishment: no absolute.

His eyes were mad with conviction.
Now that I have
found a way to worship water, retrospective irony

allows me to ask: what is lethal about the absolute—
is it pollution?
For, at least to me, they seem to be opposites.

To be taken out of the solvent, to be absolved—
I can't give it up, entirely—
may the disgraced solution save one who has been burned by the sun.

11.
Water is not a jealous god.
The Greek deities, who rape and punish mortals
for their sexuality,

the brooding God of Adam
who made a woman to tempt him out of paradise—
the God of the killers

who blow up the unbelievers in the controlling passion
of their jealousy—
water was the same cold clarity to me

when my son and I went fishing on the jetty in Dana Point
as she is at the creek—
as I strayed, as I cast a line from the rocks for pleasure.



Brian Glaser is an associate professor of English at Chapman University in Orange, California. He has published two books of poems, *The Sacred Heart* and *All the Hills*, and many essays on poetry and poetics.

Taylor Graham

Home, Fox



We came home unexpected in the dark.
Up sprang Fox from yesterday's abrupt
opening of the trees, Fox so brushy-tailed

low-elongate on whip-legs up the driveway.
How explain to Fox our new driveway
made by exhausting machines? Fox

already gone past our house, into dark
of newly opened woods—the whole canyon
a growl and buzz of chainsaws, chippers,

humans running scared by rumor
of pyro-storm. Fox must have a den here,
on rocky wooded hill now lessened

by our four trees felled in the name of fire-
safety. How explain our new fire-weather
to Fox? to ourselves? Fox, we're home.

Stones

Union Cemetery, Placerville, CA

Between blackouts I walk in the cemetery.
Here's the grave of the Rev. C.C. Peirce—two
headstones. Why two? A barefoot preacher,
C.C. walked all over these ridges and canyons
spreading the word. He walked because his Master
did, barefoot to save his shoes. He had little
use for money except to buy books of learning
to give out on his walks. Once a lawyer,
he couldn't bear what he saw in the courtroom.
So he chose God's law: see the good
in every person. He didn't care for creed. Minister,
superintendent of schools, he took no pay.
On his walks, he was the people's guest, talking
long into the night; gone before daylight,
taking what was laid out on the table for him—
fruit, bread. How we all complain now
when the lights go out. Refrigerators, TVs,
phones, microwaves. What would C.C. think
of the two stones his followers spent good money
on, when they might have fed the poor?
Gravestones slope away as late sun lowers
on our town. Soon there will be stars.



Taylor Graham is a volunteer search-and-rescue dog-handler in the California Sierra and served as El Dorado County's first poet laureate (2016-2018). She has an M.A. in Comparative Literature from the University of Southern California and is included in the anthology *California Poetry: From the Gold Rush to the Present* (Santa Clara University).

James Grabill

It Isn't Known Until It Is

Because won't the report on our time here be turning into soil?
Because hasn't the spectrum been spectacular beyond words?

As being evolves in being, the interdependent working cells are sacred.

Has anyone around here turned out to be a declaration of freedom?
As precise as the smallest parts of us have been, aren't we here?

In the late hours of night, the birds which turn ultraviolet are flying
in back of starlight, circling with planetary winds and the equator
that assigns each being an importance equal to that of every other being.

Because it's not well known how a house built into the open arms
of older maple trees promotes peace on behalf of the next generation.

And who hasn't given the self and its ensemble a few paths to liberation?

Aren't ecosystems calling on people every day to ask for stewardship?

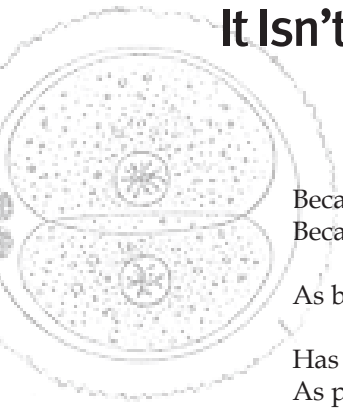
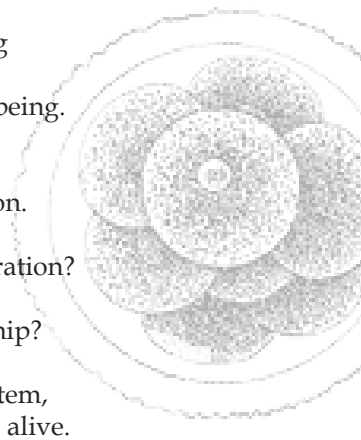
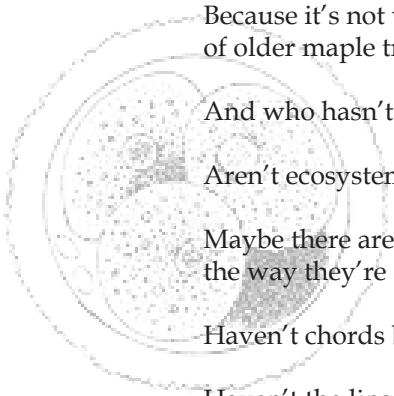
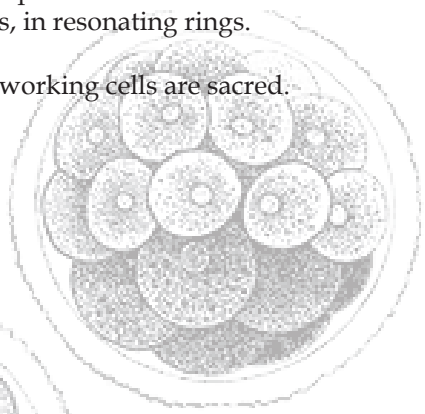
Maybe there are variations on visualizing species within an ecosystem,
the way they're distinct and yet always parts of the whole which is alive.

Haven't chords been emerging that no one in history could have heard?

Haven't the lips of two people out of sight touched like nothing before?

Because the calibrated instruments of scientists expand human senses.
Because the experience of matter around us rings, in resonating rings.

As being grows in being, the present systems of working cells are sacred.


What Is More

Person whose flesh and bone-core oneness cried out after your birth,

whose occult naming of things may have put those things behind glass,

who comes with continuing shares of misfires and bison-blooded bonds
where the fabric's been slack and yet explosive, solid and self-organized,

but whose cellular systems experience uniqueness within the sensorium,

like the clock-cracking hammer-blow shock over having consciousness,

whose nonmaterial advancement communicates between hemispheres
in the nectarine microbial overflow, where dreamtime chooses not to
stay locked behind steel doors, not with openness of day-into-night sky

or given the long-term fir needles of starlight sewing holes in the topsoil,
sparking lattices, resinking carbon in emptiness that remains a place
of beginning with mind and humbleness in the capacity to sense depth,

person whose mountain flies a red-brown bird through ecosystem-pulse

where the moment defies anyone trying to possess it, or the wind or sun,

person whose higher education was handed down split into disciplines,
if only to give you a chance to put them together yourself, to not forget
your potatoes or Mona Lisa present in negotiations over genetic markers

or the sins from before birth, around cattle looking through mammal eyes,
or physicists in a field with the coevolved microbes on which life depends,

now that great urgency roars in behind teams of gargantuan diesel engines

charging the maw which remains sacred for any long-life self-perseverance,

for plum nectar and crimson zero, or naked wings of moths one morning
when floods of yellow bloom on Italian marble of a restored railroad station.

I'll See You at the Concert of Doves

I'll see you this evening when the city floats in safety lights
that are jewels retrieved from winds and lifted from tides.

And I'll raise you shade with flashes of tropical canopy at risk,

where free parrots display deep color not seen on the road,
parrots with feathers that are indestructible, given to elevations.

There are people you've known from before you've met them,
people you've seen you never expected close to the old oaks.

I'll see you in the long afternoon in your saffron overtones
and raise you nearby animals teaching how to speak in song,

which is why I'll see you watching over the original colonies
of microbes along fungal mycelia that serve smallest root hairs

and raise mineral circuitry for the mammoth cast of characters
in the tragic play that turns out to be matter making us up
on the rigorous journey completed by individual consciousness.

When reasoning out the wound from the moment of birth,
how often is there intent in what's almost been unconscious?

A single life on a pilgrimage, light of the sun in high grasses,
mother ground, and steps of stone like nobody in the sky,

I'll see you in your liberty with camaraderie and loneliness,
trees that are persons, and undone catastrophe in the sky.


Bill Siverly

James Grabill's work has been featured in online journals such as *Terrain.org*, *Caliban.org*, *Sequestrum Ginosko*, and others. His books of ecological prose poems, *Sea-Level Nerve: Book One* (2014) and *Sea-Level Nerve: Book Two* (2015) were published by Wordcraft of Oregon. He has two forthcoming poetry collections—*Branches Shaken by Light* (Cyberwit Publishing) and *Eye of the Spiral* (Raw Art Review). For years, James taught literature and writing, focusing on global issues relative to sustainability.

Joseph Powell

The Hereford Heifer in February

February 3, 2018

She entered the swampy winter muck for a helping
of green no bigger than a bathtub ring,
sank to her woolly belly, then struggled deeper,
till mud was over her tail and up to her withers.

How long she was there, we didn't know, but say
the night and half the day. She blinked and swayed,
lay back exhausted, let us put boards beneath
her chin to rest her neck so she could breathe.

Any other aid that we devised was counter:
a rope on knobby horns couldn't help her—
she blew bubbled mud, both eyes withdrawn.
Her sinking body wouldn't see another dawn.

The rancher brought his backhoe and two chains.
Hooking links around her horns, he held her chin,
as the hoe pulled her from the watery hole.
He chained her back legs and pulled her to a dry shoal

then patted her down like a thief, and gave her hay.
We coiled up our ropes for use another day.
She tried to stand but each time fell on her face.
It took three hours to make her legs behave

and stand without a tremble. Another two to walk
on past that muddy brew, those few still-green stalks.
Inside winter's *water* is a green and burning flame
the heifer walked from, slowly and more tame.

Broken Sticks

For Mark Halperin

Your glasses on the table
where you wrote, stare blankly off,
caught in a meditation thin as glass.
Before, behind are now the same.

Your set of fountain pens,
gold nibs from far-off places,
in felt boxes, will never be pressed
into another word, nor invent
your script, that tangle of broken sticks,
never thread words to a line like shiny buttons.

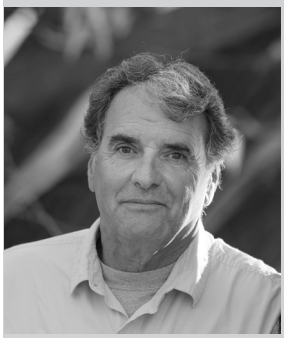
Your shoes still beside the bed,
will never be laced to an errand again.
A bowl of cherries sits in the fridge
that once you ate with such relish
we knew few things in the man-made world
could be that sweet.

And there's your fly-tying vise
still hung with half a hare's ear,
such hope enthreaded and dangling
by a string, that fish-dream deep
as life itself, its endless desires.

These hats you wore hang from their hooks,
brazenly odd in this small town,
where oddness is godless or queer,
now must imagine the limitless space
your mind roved,
like the quiet unable to invent
the sounds of your passing.

Here are your brocade vests
few men in this rodeo town
are sure enough to wear.
Red, yellow, green,
lined up in the closet
like thin life preservers
for that sea of disregard.

Here are the rest of your things
laid out and folded on the bed.
Such a small worn-out pile.
Time is written in the jeans,
the dated shirts and sweaters, slacks and socks,
your father's watch,
now ticking for your son.



Joseph Powell is a Central Washington University emeritus professor of English. He has published seven books of poetry, most recently *The Slow Subtraction: A.L.S.* (MoonPath Press, 2019). He has also co-authored a book on poetic meter called *Accent on Meter* (NCTE, 2004).

Rebecca Patrascu

Mojave

for my birth father

Jackrabbit and Joshua Tree: words in the desert's libretto.
Flick of cactus wren shadow on creosote and sand.

I may never understand what draws you to this landscape—
so barren, it's like penance for the lushest of sins.

But I think mercy's born from acts we never planned,
and blessings spring fierce from what we once had cursed.

The water from our blood could bring poppies into bloom;
the fire in the sunset could be painted from our dust.



Rebecca Patrascu's work has appeared in publications such as *Pidgeonholes*, *Bracken Magazine*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Colorado Review,* and *Valparaiso Review*. She has an MFA from Pacific University and is the author of the chapbook *Before Noon* (Finishing Line Press). She lives in northern California, works at the public library, and catches honeybee swarms in the spring.

Angelica Allain

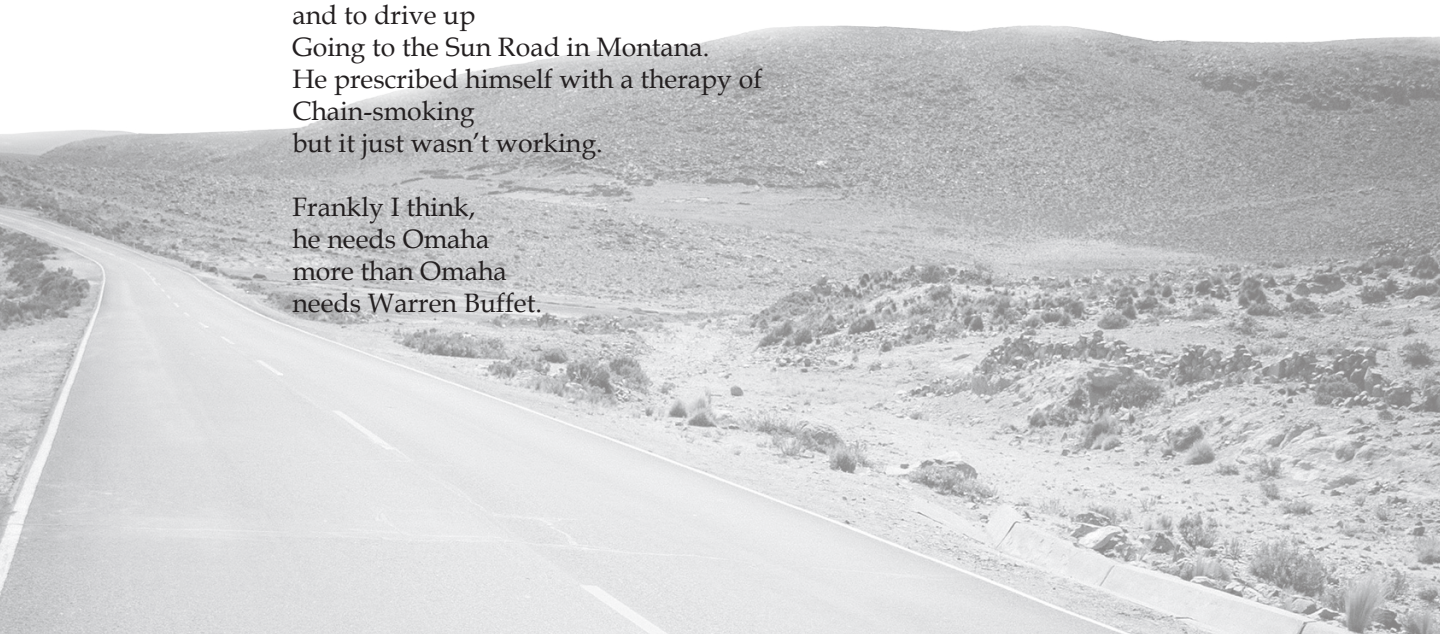
Omaha

He didn't have to tell me
I could hear it in the Waylon Jennings.
I could hear it in the metal sounds
scraping across the driveway.
I could hear the shower,
splashing like he was a boy again.

He went on the road even after
I made it clear that March was not a favorable
month for absence or for mechanics.
The car he spent two days tuning up
wouldn't make it past Wichita
and if he was going to recreate our vacation in
Jackson Hole he would need
my perfume, my cotton dress,
my shins
sticking out of cowboy boots.

The kitchen was getting swallowed by paper
and pen and he put cream in his coffee last
week, which always means he's bored
out of his mind,
body and soul.
He needed to worship cowboy crazies
and bowry blues squatters
and to drive up
Going to the Sun Road in Montana.
He prescribed himself with a therapy of
Chain-smoking
but it just wasn't working.

Frankly I think,
he needs Omaha
more than Omaha
needs Warren Buffet.



If Hades was my Husband

You're forever singing along
to the Highwaymen records.
You love the Willie Nelson lyrics
but don't have the tenor to pull them
off. Your clothes
come out of the dryer
pre-ironed—
ready to wear
and I dress you
to watch the race on pay-per-view.
You've got a lot of money
stuffed into it.
Right sleeve first,
your Western shirt
is still so warm on my nail
polish,
then your left.
The pearl snaps are like
little coins, smooth gems,
but yes, they're hard on me too,
they're glass eyes.
My ribs are clammy
with the way you remain
and I rattle
along the plain
fresh sheets in bedroom.
There's no further to go
except all the way down
the stairs.
Each step is like walking
deeper into
your Johnny Cash baritone.

Open Road of One's Own

I haven't yet suggested
that I'm jealous of you.
There's not more than
a passing phrase in our past
letters
not more than
a subject or predicate
but never both.
I am years overripe. I want
to see all the shades of orange
write of them
take photos
get them developed.
I'm fermented by now.
My dream consists of
crushing the fields of wheat
between
my thumb and forefinger.
I think Virginia Woolf was right
but I need more than a room
in our four-walled
Valentine's day ranch.
I'm going to
draw myself to fit in your jackets
and into the bed
at your favorite hostel in Utah.
That one with the geckos and
the kettle screaming
in the kitchenette,
one room over.

Wedding

O I say
Our wedding was like everyone else's
torn clothing, sweat,
and small coffin shaped chapel,
with satin overlay.
We posed at the corner of a pawn shop
for photos
and pointed at bubbling Venus in the sky.

O I say,
I was worried the heat would
eat me alive in sleeves.
I wasn't used to desert nights
but learnt they can be crisper than getting
caught in Casino fountains,
chlorine and the occasional
lonestar sagebrush.

O I say,
Elvis sang to me and to you
something about how
you are always on my mind
and joined our hands together
as High Priest bound our wrists
like they were sprained
and I think they were.



Angelica Allain is an avid traveler and writer from Salem, MA. Her work has recently appeared in *Better Than Starbucks*, *Night Picnic*, and *Levee*. She is a past poetry editor for *Soundings East* magazine and fell in love with the West after living & working in Zion National Park.


Adam M. Sowards

WHEN YOU KNOW THE PRICE OF A HUCKLEBERRY

ADAM M. SOWARDS

Every fall for the past five years, I've found myself circled up with a small group of young people talking about Henry David Thoreau. This is not that unusual for a college professor of literature, history, or environmental studies; it's practically a required ritual since the 1960s when the oddball from Concord surged into the American academy. But I'm luckier than most, because my conversation occurs in central Idaho in the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness.

My students and I often sit in a circle beside Big Creek, a major tributary that pours into the wild Middle Fork of the Salmon River seven miles from where we sit. The road nearest to us when we discuss Thoreau is more than thirty trail miles away. We might see deer fording the river during pauses in discussion. If we are especially

lucky, bighorn sheep might knock down some stones while they scramble along Horse Mountain's steep slopes.

In our circle, we don't study *Walden*, which is so big and dense and long for most students, especially those who are more likely to be natural resource majors than students of letters. Besides, our time here is short. We don't read "Walking," a lyceum address turned into an *Atlantic* essay in which Thoreau writes, "In Wildness is the preservation of the world" (239). Such a message certainly would find an accepting audience among these students who have chosen to live within the most remote wilderness in the continental United States for three months, sleeping in wall tents from August to November and studying ecology, wilderness management, leadership, writing, and history, a program at my university known as "Semester in the Wild."

Instead, we read about huckleberries. Thoreau's essay, "Huckleberries," the last of his life, stretches my mind for what it says about property. In a reverie, Thoreau tells a story of his youth when, alone or with childhood friends, he freely scattered over the hills and went "a-berrying" (491). He felt free and adventurous, liberated from the confines of schoolrooms and shops. Such freedom was gone now, he reports. Property stakes had gone up on berrying grounds; the butcher now sold huckleberries from his cart. "Such is the inevitable tendency of our civilization," he laments:

> To reduce huckleberries to a level with beef-steaks—that is to blot out four-fifths of it, or the going a-huckleberrying, and leave only a pudding, that part which is the fittest accompaniment of a beefsteak. (493)

The butcher's marketing achievement diminished the huckleberry's value by removing the town's youth from involvement; they no longer enjoyed the experience of gathering the berries, the bulk of what made them sweet.

> What sort of a country is that where the huckleberry fields are private property?. . . I cannot think of it ever after but as the place where fair and palatable berries are converted into money, where the huckleberry is desecrated. (493)

The parable is clearer than Walden Pond.

In "Huckleberries," Thoreau presents a radical critique about the dangers of commodification of everything . . . almost:

> Most men, it appears to me, do not care for Nature, and would sell their share in all her beauty, for as long as they may live, for a stated and not very large sum. Thank God they cannot yet fly and lay waste the sky as well as the earth. (497)

Today, we've captured the sky, too. My students and I often hear planes buzzing overhead while we consider this line, either backcountry planes close and cacophonous or jet airliners distant and disruptive.

Yet Thoreau offers a partial solution, proposing every town should maintain parks or forests "for higher uses—a common possession forever, for instruction and recreation"(500), and keep at least one bank of the river unpropertied as "a public walk" (497). But my students skim over Thoreau's proposal, consonant with the commonwealth

principles that bolster the public good, perhaps not sufficiently aware of its profound disjunct from the prevailing ethos of New England that supported a thriving market revolution that grasped at everything and priced it.

Instead, students zero in on Thoreau's message about education, which inspires them. Thoreau counters their experience through more than a dozen years of classrooms that squared them up and taught them nothing so much as how to follow directions, but not their hearts. "We are all schoolmasters and our schoolhouse is the universe," writes Thoreau:

> To attend chiefly to the desk or schoolhouse, while we neglect the scenery in which it is placed, is absurd. If we do not look out we shall find our fine schoolhouse standing in a cow yard at last. (500)

My students sit next to me and Big Creek, on cut logs, because they believe Thoreau remains correct a century and a half later. The universe is the classroom; schoolrooms constrain; more can be learned outside. My students take their place in a long procession of naturalists dissatisfied with education as practiced.

***

In the spring of 1938, nearly a decade into the lingering Great Depression, Aldo Leopold, a professor of game management at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, traveled south to Columbia, Missouri, to speak at the university there. He opened his speech with a story of two farmers planting tamaracks, a tree that farmers in Wisconsin had been trying to eliminate for a century. The farmers hoped to restore

My students sit next to me and Big Creek, on cut logs, because they believe Thoreau remains correct a century and a half later. The universe is the classroom; schoolrooms constrain; more can be learned outside. My students take their place in a long procession of naturalists dissatisfied with education as practiced.

wildflowers, an ecological casualty of the thorough-going economic transformation of the Midwest. So atypical was the farmers' behavior, Leopold likened it to a revolt. They devoted a corner of their land to cultivating something wild, because they had learned that a "wholly tamed farm offers not only a slender livelihood but a constricted life." Leopold mused:

> Perhaps they wish for their land what we all wish for our children—not only the chance to make a living, but also a chance to express and develop a rich and varied assortment of inherent capabilities, both wild and tame. (411)

As a father and as one who enjoys the brightening effect of wildflowers, I embrace Leopold's message. Let the wild and the tame within emerge, take form, and flourish.

I first read Leopold as a college student, but I read these words last fall. I sat outside and listened to a tributary to the Clark Fork River in Montana while golden cottonwood leaves crashed to

the ground, reminding me of the earth's rhythms. I was not in designated wilderness—in fact I was only a handful of miles from Interstate 90—but it was wild enough to heighten Leopold's insight. I would soon head back to the wilderness to teach the following week, so my frame of mind took Leopold's idea about children and twisted it into students.

In that context, I saw Leopold arguing that education ought to build skills for a job. But that's only a part, perhaps even the smallest part, of an education. A proper education creates and strengthens the capacity for something richer and more varied than job skills, something long-lasting that nurtures our inherent curiosity to explore the world and answer its questions. By contrast, training for a job, gaining a credential, is a rather singular, focused, and short-term enterprise. Beyond a good livelihood, Leopold called for good lives, punctuated with the wild and the tame alive in our minds and manifest in our actions, pulsing in the world we traverse through tamaracks and bogs, or, in Big Creek country, among the ponderosa pines and creeks spilling down off the ridges where students and I discuss their immediate academic angst and lofty life goals.

Leopold's hope for children—and my own hope for my children and students—was something beyond the oft-lauded marketable skills today's undergraduates are promised to attract them to this university over that one, this major, not that one. We discuss "Huckleberries" not because knowing Thoreau's theories of property will ensure my students a job in real estate but because being immersed in Thoreau's world jars what is comfortable. It builds links across time between our world and his and forces us to think generously when we imagine other places, values, and possibilities. Education builds empathy. Just as land in Wisconsin was worth more than what could be stripped and sold off it, our lives are worth more than our biweekly paychecks.

***

So what did Leopold prescribe? In Missouri, after telling of the farmers planting trees and starting to restore the Wisconsin bogs, Leopold championed natural history as a partial solution. Natural history was no cutting-edge pedagogical method; it was an older tradition needing recovery much like the tamarack.

Natural history, Leopold said in his speech titled "Natural History, the Forgotten Science," combined sport and science, and amateurs could pursue it and become experts. He cited examples including an "Ohio housewife" who studied the song sparrows of her garden so thoroughly that "ornithologists of all nations [sought] her counsel" (412-413). In formal education, though, this sort of careful observation of the natural world had been shouldered aside, an "eviction of outdoor studies" replaced by lab work (413). Leopold did not begrudge the insights found in the laboratory. He thought those proper for experts, those training in zoology for instance, but for the "average citizen" what was needed was "some understanding of the living world" (414). And in university curricula, natural history had lost its place. In speaking of the biology students of his day, Leopold said:

> Instead of being taught to see his native countryside with appreciation and intelligence, he is taught to carve cats. Let him be taught

> both if this is possible, but if one must be omitted let it be the latter. (414)

In Leopold's mind, a purpose of a biological education was "a means of building citizens," a purpose not being met by the existing program (414). Citizenship required students to know the world around them, something natural history prepared them to do. Most importantly, it focused on relationships between species in a place—in a word, ecology. Citizens needed to understand that they were "only a cog in an ecological mechanism," and if they failed to learn that, "then what is education for," Leopold wondered (415). His feel for natural history decentered economics, rote memorization of bones, and lists of species' names, to emphasize instead connectivity, relationships, and the whole outdoors.

It is taking no great leap to extend Leopold's logic about the ecological world to the social one. Democracy thrives when strong threads knit together the world's diversities, what we might call ecological citizenship. Knowing the names of your neighbors means nothing if you have no relationship with them. Recognizing and pursuing only your interests results in a selfish, collapsing world order. The "Semester in the Wild" students invariably learn such lessons from living together, cooking together, backpacking together, mimicking in their way Barry Commoner's First Law of Ecology, "Everything [and everyone] is connected to everything else" (33).

***

Leopold continued to mull a proper education. A few years after his Missouri speech, in 1942, a year amid a terrible global war, he spoke at the 7th North American Wildlife Conference about "The Role of Wildlife in Liberal Education." Leopold then was chair of the University of Wisconsin's Department of Wildlife Management, and if this paper was any indication, he had inherited a curriculum that dissatisfied him. Like a mountain sheared of its predators, wildlife education produced an imbalance: too many experts. Leopold proposed curtailing "sharply the output of professionals" and instead investing in "a serious attempt to tell the whole campus, and thus eventually the whole community, what wildlife conservation is all about" (466). Leopold eased, always, between the social and the ecological, between the professional and the amateur, toward the good of the whole community. One senses that specialization was anathema to him always.

Earlier, Leopold had witnessed the problems of the atomized university where specialties divided and spread apart. "All the sciences and arts are

It is taking no great leap to extend Leopold's logic about the ecological world to the social one. Democracy thrives when strong threads knit together the world's diversities, what we might call ecological citizenship. Knowing the names of your neighbors means nothing if you have no relationship with them. Recognizing and pursuing only your interests results in a selfish, collapsing world order.

taught as if they were separate," Leopold wrote:

> They are separate only in the classroom. Step out on the campus and they are immediately fused. Land ecology is putting sciences and arts together for the purpose of understanding our environment. (467)

Step onto any college campus today and you are bound to hear similar grumbles about silos that separate different branches of knowledge, followed by earnest calls for interdisciplinary research and teaching collaborations. Today's universities are likely no nimbler at changing course than they were in Leopold's time, meaning the science and arts still tend to be taught separately, students and professors unfamiliar with each other.

In his own department, Leopold proposed a different sort of education, one that would result in producing fewer professionals. Focusing on the importance of education for citizenship more than professionalism meant a student in Leopold's department would learn to "see the land, to understand what he sees, and enjoy what he understands" (467).

To see, to understand, to enjoy. Today's university programs seldom include "to enjoy" as part of their mission statements or strategic plans. And "to see" seems far too basic to most committees charged with devising aspirational phrases. Leopold acknowledged that people needed salaries, but he also thought universities should prepare people to "live a life" (466). An education served citizenship and society over salaries, or it should.

To transition toward that sort of education is to not fetishize specialization but to honor the generalist who can synthesize, the one who is aware of the webs that bind things together. By emphasizing natural history as an appropriate preparation for living in a community, Leopold aligned himself with what was widely considered an amateur pursuit. Without the pretense of specialization, there was no need to assert its authority through the typical means of peer-reviewed publications, endowed professorships, or legislative or granting agencies' appropriations. Citizenship, ecological or otherwise, needs no such trappings.

***

Even though their traditions remain far apart, Leopold's thinking brings to mind Zen master Shunryu Suzuki. His classic 1970 text, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, opens with this wisdom: "In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert's there are few" (21). Like Leopold, Suzuki points to the limits of expertise, the way ideas and experience narrow when you know the world well in narrow ways. The beginner or the amateur or the generalist enjoys a capacious vision and a freedom to imagine that far exceed the specialist. In urging us to adopt the beginner's mind and see things without preconceptions, Suzuki captured the essential contemplative practice of Buddhism that observes what is present in this moment; which is also the practice of a good naturalist: being open to the living world unfolding before us, an openness needed if we are to touch wonder and notice its effects on us.

The naturalist Thomas Lowe Fleischner explains this in his essay "The Mindfulness of Natural History," explicitly adopting the language of mindfulness, a secular offshoot

The beginner or the amateur or the generalist enjoys a capacious vision and a freedom to imagine that far exceed the specialist. In urging us to adopt the beginner's mind and see things without preconceptions, Suzuki captured the essential contemplative practice of Buddhism that observes what is present in this moment; which is also the practice of a good naturalist: being open to the living world unfolding before us, an openness needed if we are to touch wonder and notice its effects on us.

of Buddhism. "Natural history and mindfulness are two surfaces of the same leaf," Fleischner says, "a seamless merging of attentiveness outward and inward, toward the interwoven realms of nature and psyche" (7). By attending to ourselves in nature, by noticing what is in the world and how we move with it and how it works on us, we pay "heed to beauty, grace, and everyday miracles" and realize "a sense of possibility and coherence that runs deeper and truer than the often illusory commercial, social 'realities' advanced by mainstream contemporary culture" (9).

Fleischner is right to point toward the living world as an object of our attention and worthy of our intimacy. Our immersion in it, as Leopold well knew, is the best way to blunt the transitory and corrosive mindsets that erode the life systems of the planet.

To be sure, both Buddhism and natural history can seem abstruse. Each contains layers of traditions and lineages, complicated classification schemes and practices, making it all seem esoteric and difficult for the uninitiated. But they are both quite simple. Fleischner defines natural history expansively as "a practice of intentional, focused attentiveness and receptivity to the more-than-human world, guided by honesty and accuracy" (5). In fact, natural history is simple enough for a child.

***

Rachel Carson, famed biologist and award-winning author, recognized that the proper education in nature began long before college. In July 1956, Carson published a powerful essay in *Woman's Home Companion*. "Help Your Child to Wonder" ostensibly guided parents in getting their children into the outdoors for the "sharing of adventure in the world of nature" (354).

In describing her own time on the Maine coast with her young nephew Roger, Carson shared the simple pleasures found in feeling the texture of shells, watching the moon, and listening to insects buzzing—opening all the senses to the thrumming world around them. What was essential was cultivating what Carson described as "a sense of wonder," a force "so indestructible that it would last throughout life, as an unfailing antidote against the boredom and disenchantments of later years, the sterile preoccupation with things that are artificial, the alienation from the sources of our strength" (357). Parents need not be naturalists, amateur or professional, to stoke this innate sense of wonder, what E. O. Wilson dubbed *biophilia*—literally, the love of life—because, Carson explained, "it is not half so important to *know* as to *feel*" (357).

I wish I had absorbed this message earlier.

I learned early to value knowing and am still a neophyte practicing feeling. The tomes of geology confound me, the books of plants bemuse me, and the annals of animals bewilder me. I am almost wholly ignorant, unable to distinguish a junco from a chickadee, a pine from a fir until I study, or until someone tells me and then tells me again. Studying stories came easier to me than investigating species, listening to tales of ancestors bore into my mind more easily and more often than attending to local birds and bugs. Latin binomials—*Artemisia tridentata, Crotalus oreganus*—put me off, never having known a gentle teacher. Yet here was Carson, writing almost two decades before my birth, telling me across time, "The lasting pleasures of contact with the natural world are not reserved for such scientists but are available to anyone who will place himself under the influence of earth, sea and sky and their amazing life" (363).

This past year, sitting on the grass beside Pioneer Creek just 500 feet from where it spills into Big Creek, class was interrupted by a bird darting over our heads and then rising toward the flank of Horse Mountain, circling and hovering over Cliff Creek opposite us. "A golden eagle." "No, it's a turkey vulture." "I didn't see any red." "Who has binoculars?" No one, it turned out.

While the bird was riding the wind, circling before the cliff, at just enough distance to confound us and our bare eyes, I awaited confirmation from my students whose knowledge on this—and so many other natural historical details—exceeded my own. Waiting for the definitive name, I missed the lesson. I failed to recognize the greater value of the moment lay in the circling, the effortless gliding against the blue sky. Identifying the species can happen, Carson pointed out, "without ever once having caught a breath-taking glimpse of the wonder of life." What matters most in education is noticing the wonder.

***

As a college professor, I aspire to teach in a way that prompts students to see the world anew, just as my college education changed how I saw the world's contours. And just as my continued teaching here in the wilderness transforms how I understand teaching and learning, nature and culture, relationships and citizenship.

When we hike up the endless mountains, I wonder about students' wonder. When we circle the campfire, I am curious about their curiosity. We all now teach in the era of standardized testing, in the age of metrics and rubrics meant to measure student learning, intended to hold teachers accountable to accrediting bodies, policymakers, and an often hostile public. But how do you count curiosity? How do you weigh wonder?

While the bird was riding the wind, circling before the cliff, at just enough distance to confound us and our bare eyes, I awaited confirmation from my students whose knowledge on this—and so many other natural historical details—exceeded my own. Waiting for the definitive name, I missed the lesson. I failed to recognize the greater value of the moment lay in the circling, the effortless gliding against the blue sky.

Things are easily counted when we commodify them, including a bachelor's degree. Many of my students count the dollars they pay for a single class session on campus. We know how much, on average, a college education pays off, a fact routinely paraded out to parents and 17-year-olds who are on the fence about whether college is worth it. (Over the course of a working life, it's one million dollars more than a high school degree.) But counting it like this reduces and miscalculates education.

When you know the price of the huckleberry, you lose the sweetness.

Works Cited

Carson, Rachel. "Help Your Child to Wonder." *Silent Spring & Other Writings on the Environment*, edited by Sandra Steingraber, Library of America, 2018, pp. 354-64.

Commoner, Barry. *The Closing Circle: Nature, Man, and Technology*. Alfred A. Knopf, 1971.

Fleischner, Thomas Lowe. "The Mindfulness of Natural History." *The Way of Natural History*, edited by Thomas Lowe Fleischner, Trinity University Press, 2011, pp. 3-15.

Leopold, Aldo. "Natural History, the Forgotten Science." *A Sand County Almanac & Other Writings on Ecology and Conservation*, edited by Curt Meine, Library of America, 2013, pp. 411-15.

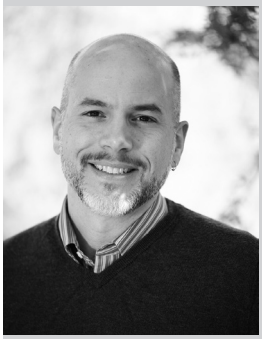
---. "The Role of Wildlife in a Liberal Education." *A Sand County Almanac,* pp. 466-70.

Suzuki, Shunryu. *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*. Weatherhill, 1970.

Wilson, Edward O. *Biophilia*. Harvard University Press, 1984.

Thoreau, Henry David. "Huckleberries." *Collected Essays and Poems*, edited by Elizabeth Hall Witherell, Library of America, 2001, pp. 468-501.

Thoreau, Henry David. "Walking." *Collected Essays and Poems*, edited by Elizabeth Hall Witherell, Library of America, 2001, pp. 225-55.



Adam M. Sowards (Ph.D., Arizona State University) is an environmental historian, writer, and a professor at the University of Idaho. He is the author or editor of several books, most recently *An Open Pit Visible from the Moon: The Wilderness Act and the Fight to Protect Miners Ridge and the Public Interest* (2020). His shorter work has appeared in *High Country News*, *Zócalo Public Square*, *Montana Mouthful*, and other publications.



MEDITATIONS ON POLE VAULTING AT SIXTY

RALPH HARDY

"I have something I want to tell you two," I said over dinner. My seventeen-year-old daughter raised her eyebrows; my wife put down her fork. "I've been thinking about this for a long time and. . . " I paused. "I want to try pole vaulting," I said, finally.

"What?" my wife sputtered.

"I thought you were going to say something important," my daughter remarked. "Like you guys were splitting up."

"Well, it's important to me. It's just something I've always wanted to do. And I've found a nearby pole vaulting club. I emailed them and I'm signed up for a beginners' class this Sunday. Besides, why would you think we're splitting up?"

"I don't know. A lot of my friends' parents are doing it."

"Well, we're not."

And so, a few days later, in May 2017, on my 57th birthday, I found myself standing behind a fourteen-year-old girl, each of us nervously clutching twelve-foot fiberglass poles, waiting for our turn to attempt to pole vault over a bungee cord strung between two standards, at the height of ten feet. Somehow I cleared it. My coach, Jose San Miguel Jr., high-fived me, and at that moment I realized I was hooked.

Although I have occasionally run races from 5k to half-marathons in distance and competed in a few sprint triathlons, the last time I competed in a track and field event was my sixth-grade field day where I ran the 50-yard dash. I think I leaned for fourth, but that was almost fifty years ago, so I can't be certain. Chronic but mild asthma and a limited attention span have always restricted my participation in the long-distance running that most of my peers enjoy. Among my friends, most of whom are in their late fifties, along with my twin brother, there are Boston marathon qualifiers, avid cyclists with multiple century rides, masters swimmers, excellent tennis players, and Ironman competitors. None of us are golfers. Or admit to it.

I have spent many hours in gym weight rooms, and I finish each workout with multiple pull-ups and pushups. In college, I took a begin-

ners' gymnastics class and enjoyed the rings and the parallel bars. I mention this because many female pole vaulters come from a gymnastics background. I also began skydiving in college and continued to do so periodically for most of my twenties, but it was an expensive hobby, so when my good friend blew out his ankle on a bad landing, and over a decade a few acquaintances died while skydiving, the sport soured on me. I've also done flips from ten-meter platforms and quarry cliffs. The point of recounting this is that it never occurred to me that I was either crazy or foolish to attempt pole vaulting at my age.

Pole vaulting is a confidence game. You can't fake it, you can't do it at half speed; you can't quit halfway through without risking a hard, unpadded landing. You have to run as fast as you can for ten to forty yards and either commit to the jump or run through without planting. Having been a skydiver, I know how to commit to a jump. We were never allowed to climb back in the Cessna if we got scared. At least I never did.

The pole vault is the most technical of all field events. As someone once said, "you're running with a stick so you can jump over a stick." That's basically true, except the stick is a long fiberglass rod designed to bend and then recoil once it loads, vaulting the jumper over a bar suspended between two standards and above a padded pit designed to break the jumper's fall. And to be successful, the vaulter must run as fast as possible on a narrow runway, with a stride that varies by less than a few inches, holding the pole at a high angle so that at the moment he or she dips the pole into the narrow, trapezoidal box, the left foot is leading and poised to push off. During the initial phase of the vault, the athlete must keep his arms extended, with a slight bend, and use his arms for leverage as he begins his kick or swing.

There are two schools of thought regarding the swing. The Petrov-Bubka method, which my coach endorses, directs the vaulter to keep the right leg bent at ninety degrees and kick up with the left leg only after the pole has loaded, adding additional energy to the recoil. When the left leg catches up to the right, the vaulter shoots both legs up, twists, and now fully upside down, pushes up and away from the pole, kipping over the bar. Bubka, of course, refers to the Ukrainian athlete Sergei Bubka, the greatest male pole vaulter of all time. Bubka set the world pole vault record 35 times, and it's claimed he received financial bonuses for each world record, so he made sure to increase his records incrementally, centimeter by centimeter.

Pole vaulting is a confidence game. You can't fake it, you can't do it at half speed; you can't quit halfway through without risking a hard, unpadded landing. You have to run as fast as you can for ten to forty yards and either commit to the jump or run through without planting. Having been a skydiver, I know how to commit to a jump. We were never allowed to climb back in the Cessna if we got scared. At least I never did.

Alternatively, there is another popular swing approach called the tuck

and shoot. This swing is accomplished by tucking both legs in toward the chest rather than leaving the trail leg extended. This method shortens the lower body about the rotational axis, making the swing faster, but lessening the pole-loading effect of the swing. Jeff Hartwig, an American pole vault deity, who is one of a handful of men to clear 6 meters (19 ft., 8 in.) in competition, and at age 40 vaulted 5.70 meters (18 ft., 8 in.) at the Olympic trials in 2008, employs the tuck and shoot method, as does Olympic silver medalist, Sandi Morris. Interestingly, Jeff Hartwig, like Sandi, is a snake collector.

Among my many technical errors in the vault, the one most difficult for me to overcome is climbing the pole. That is, I don't always keep my arms extended when I plant; instead I sometimes pull the pole toward me as if I'm doing a chin-up on it or climbing it. This, of course, prevents the pole from moving forward toward ninety degrees, which means that even if I successfully get my legs over my shoulders, when I release, I'm not very deep into the pit, risking landing on the box. At my club nearly every jump is videotaped, so the evidence is there for me to see. So I practice by planting a pole over and over into a detached box, flexing the pole and keeping my arms straight, hoping muscle memory will take over during the real vault. Sometimes it works.

Although I have primarily used the masculine pronoun for most of this essay, the women's pole vault has become perhaps the most popular women's track and field event. At Pole Vault Carolina, my coach has noted that his club has changed from one where only boys jumped to one where two-thirds of his athletes are girls. The top female pros include up-and-coming Kate Nageotte, the ophidiophile Sandi Morris, the Stanford-educated Greek Katerina Stefanidi, the veteran Jen Suhr, and the Russian, but neutral athlete, Anzhelika Sidharova. Among them, they inch closer and closer to consistent sixteen-foot vaults, while cultivating throngs of teenage admirers.

The current women's outdoor pole vault record is 5.06 meters (16 ft., 7 in.), set by Yelena Isenbayeva in 2009, and the men's record was, until recently, 6.16 meters (20 ft., 2.5 in.), set by Renaud Lavillenie, a popular French athlete and motorcycle racing enthusiast, who is still competing but had a poor season last year. His top challengers had been two Polish vaulters and the American Sam Kendricks. Kendricks is a clean cut, blond-haired, and blue-eyed lieutenant in the Army Reserves who famously interrupted an approach at the Olympics to stop and salute while the American national anthem played for another athlete. He was the 2017 world champion and won bronze at the 2016 Olympics. His PR is 6.06 meters (19 ft., 11 in.), and he routinely exceeds 6 meters (19 ft., 8 in.), the gold standard of men's pole vault.

Then there is Armand Duplantis, known simply and globally as Mondo. Mondo has a Swedish heptathlete mother and a Cajun pole vaulting father who built a pole vaulting pit in his backyard for his prodigy. Despite growing up in Louisiana, Mondo chose Swedish nationality when he began to compete internationally after a year at LSU, where he set the collegiate indoor record. A YouTube sensation, Mondo has set world records at every age, and at nineteen had already cleared 20 feet. Then, on February 8, 2020, Mondo set the world record, vaulting 6.17 meters (20 ft., 2 in.) at an indoor meet in Poland. Watch it on YouTube and be astounded. That vault actually

led ESPN's Top 10 Plays of the Day. A week later, he added another centimeter in Glasgow, with inches to spare. And, oh yeah, he's just turned twenty-one.

The pole vault evolved from the centuries-old practice of using poles to vault over canals and drainage ditches in the Netherlands and England rather than walking long distances to find bridges. In competition, distance pole vaulting was the norm, with height competitions not recorded in England until around 1843. Modern height vaulting was introduced in Germany in 1850, and the event was included in the first modern Olympic Games in 1896. William Hoyt, an American, won gold with a vault of 3.3 meters (10 ft., 9 in.), a pedestrian height these days. The event was expanded for women in 2000, with American Stacy Dragila winning gold with a vault of 5.6 meters (18 ft., 4.5 in.).

Of course, pole evolution has paved the way for significant increases in height. Vaulters historically used bamboo or aluminum poles, but beginning in the 1950s, fiberglass and carbon designs allowed vaulters to flex the pole deeper, resulting in increased energy transfer and greater heights. The current men's world record of 6.18 meters (20 ft., 3 in.) is nearly 25% higher than the records from the 50s, a greater increase in performance than among nearly any Olympic discipline. My own goal, which I've never stated publically, is four meters, or just over 13 feet.

The club where I train is called Pole Vault Carolina, founded in 2015 by Jose R. San Miguel, a native of Puerto Rico and a former elite University of Tennessee pole vaulter. With six poles, ten athletes, and a 90-day indoor-facility lease, Coach Jose has shepherded more than 30 athletes into college athletics, including his two eldest children, helping them attain hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of scholarships as well as multiple state titles. His wife, Adele, nurtures the vaulters through college application anxiety, relationship issues, and the challenges that most teenagers face. Even vaulters who have moved on to college text her regularly for support. Sometimes before practice, Coach Jose and I talk shop: pole vaulting luminaries, technical nuances, up-and-coming vaulters.

The pole vault evolved from the centuries-old practice of using poles to vault over canals and drainage ditches in the Netherlands and England rather than walking long distances to find bridges. In competition, distance pole vaulting was the norm, with height competitions not recorded in England until around 1843. Modern height vaulting was introduced in Germany in 1850, and the event was included in the first modern Olympic Games in 1896.

"I wish all my athletes were students of the sport," he tells me, shaking his head. "They have too many distractions. When I was a teenager, I trained six days a week; I can barely get my best jumpers to train three times a week," he laments. Soon the club fills with athletes: beginners and more advanced vaulters, two who are master vaulters who jumped in college. Coach Jose makes sure everyone knows each other; he's trying to build the concept of a team around a highly

individualized field event. He urges them not to run cross-country in the fall. "No pole vaulter ever runs farther than he has to," he tells them, laughing. "Run sprints, lift weights, walk on your hands." After warm-ups, he tells us what to focus on during the practice, and then we line up for drills. Soon, I've got my favorite pole in my hands and chalk on my palms. A teenage vaulter has her playlist echoing through the training center, and Coach Jose stands near the box, ready to "tap" a vaulter on the back as they begin their plant. "Run fast, attack the box, and keep my arms straight," I tell myself over and over. Sometimes it works. On my drive home after practice, I pass under a number of bridges with their clearance heights listed. I once read on a pole vaulting forum that at some point in their careers every vaulter looks at these heights and thinks, "I could clear that." One bridge I drive under after every after practice shows 12'6." I could clear that, I think. One day.

"Nice jump," I tell the teenage boy who just finished a vault. And they are all teenagers, besides me, of course.

"Thank you, sir!" The boy responds. The vaulters at my club are all very polite, hardworking middle school and high school students. The older ones are knee-deep in AP classes, college visits, and scholarship applications. They compete for their high schools in pole vault and train at Pole Vault Carolina. A busy Sunday morning practice typically sees eight to ten beginner vaulters, and the afternoon practice will have ten to fourteen advanced vaulters charging down the runway, vaulting over bungees set at three different heights, congratulating each other with choreographed handshakes. One high school senior solves Rubik cubes while he waits his turn. Over the summer, I saw a few of the kids go down with injuries: sprained ankles, shin splints, a torn thumb ligament. But these were teenagers; they healed quickly and came back strong.

I blame myself for my first major pole vault injury. I had trained all summer and my technique was slowly improving. It was early September and I was determined to compete in an official meet in the fall, so I had begun practicing every Sunday. During the week I think I strained my bicep doing weighted pull-ups, and then on Sunday, powered by Advil, I attended an early morning practice with just one other vaulter. As a result, I vaulted over and over, focusing on attacking the box and swinging hard. The next day, I had trouble lifting my right arm, and it throbbed as I wrote on my class whiteboard. But I had jumped well, overcoming a stride glitch, so I was anxious to return to practice. The following

It was early September and I was determined to compete in an official meet in the fall, so I had begun practicing every Sunday. During the week I think I strained my bicep doing weighted pull-ups, and then on Sunday, powered by Advil, I attended an early morning practice with just one other vaulter. As a result, I vaulted over and over, focusing on attacking the box and swinging hard. The next day, I had trouble lifting my right arm, and it throbbed as I wrote on my class whiteboard.

Sunday I again registered for the early morning session, and again I vaulted over and over, ignoring the now burning pain in my shoulder. After practice, I iced my shoulder, took more Advil, and said nothing to my wife. The next morning I couldn't change the radio station in my car, and simply extending my right arm was nearly impossible. In class I scribbled a few notes on the whiteboard and showed a film. That afternoon I called an orthopedist. He saw me the next day, and after a few questions, and after moving my arm several different directions and watching me wince in pain, he diagnosed a strained rotator cuff, with a possible tear.

"Let's try six weeks of twice-weekly PT and see if it improves," he said. "The insurance companies like to see that before I schedule an MRI."

Physical therapy, ice, and NSAIDS failed to alleviate the pain in my shoulder, and my range of motion barely improved, so after six weeks my doctor ordered an MRI. It showed a complete tear of my supraspinatus, the large, medial ligament that comprises part of the rotator cuff, as well as a partially torn bicep. Surgery to reattach the tendon is the only treatment, so I scheduled the surgery for mid-December, after my classes ended. At my pre-op, my surgeon raised his arm straight up over his head.

"This is the goal," he said.

"No," I replied. "The goal is thirteen feet."

"We'll see," he laughed.

The surgery went reasonably well and PT started soon after. I attacked it hard, pushing myself to rebuild my strength and flexibility. But even with my hard work, rehabbing a rotator cuff takes months, sometimes a year. At ten months I begged my wife to let me jump again, promising to focus on drills, with a hard cap of five jumps per practice. Surprisingly, she agreed to let me go back. Soon I was regularly clearing eleven feet, and occasionally brushing the twelve-foot bungee, my Everest, all while setting a hard cap on my attempts. By March, as I neared my 59th birthday, I was feeling a little cocky.

"You have the nicest swing," Maddie said, looking at me. I turned around. No one was behind me.

"Me?" I asked.

"Yeah. You really swing up hard."

"Thanks," I said. "I'm not very limber so I just have to kick as hard as I can."

Coming from one of the best junior jumpers in the state, that compliment stayed with me all through practice. What I lack in speed I make up for in rigidity. The kids all stretch before and after practice, but my muscles and tendons have no give left. I've watched hours and hours of pole vault videos, and even at slow motion, at no point have I seen the need to be excessively limber, so I eschew the stretching for upside-down pushups and hard kick-ups on the rings.

What I lack in speed I make up for in rigidity. The kids all stretch before and after practice, but my muscles and tendons have no give left. I've watched hours and hours of pole vault videos, and even at slow motion, at no point have I seen the need to be excessively limber, so I eschew the stretching for upside-down pushups and hard kick-ups on the rings.

Motivated by Maddie's compliment, I cleared 11 feet on six straight jumps, on four lefts with a 12-foot practice pole all while wearing running shoes and bifocals. Four lefts means I was taking only eight steps, which limits my speed but increases my stride accuracy. Then I cleared 12 feet, just grazing the bungee. A bar would have stayed up, I told myself. Coach said I should move up to a longer pole or move back for a longer approach. I was jazzed. That was a Sunday in March. The next Wednesday I left to go skiing in Utah with my friend Mark, a cancer survivor. By noon on Thursday I was in an ER in Ogden, getting x-rayed for a broken left shoulder. Later they found I'd torn my rotator cuff as well. The other one. I waited a few weeks until spring break so I wouldn't have to cancel too many classes and then went under the scalpel again. Six weeks with a pillow sling and then weeks of PT followed. When I'd used up my allotted visits at PT, I kept up my exercises at the gym, including hanging from a bar while my shoulder stretched and strengthened. Months passed and my pull-up reps increased from three to five to fifteen, then twenty. But by then the ban was in place, imposed by my wife, who carries our health insurance. No more pole vaulting.

Until the recent decline in life expectancy among white males due primarily to opioids and suicides—what Anne Case and Angus Deaton famously called "deaths of despair"—demographers generally expected us boomers to live longer, healthier lives than our parents. We smoked less and exercised more. "Sixty was the new forty," we all read, so more men my age competed in marathons and triathlons. We drank red wine for the resveratrol, not the buzz, and we watched three men over thirty dominate men's tennis. Even Tiger, at forty, had tricks left in his bag. Still, there is a price to pay for our longevity. Jans Barr, one of the most prominent—and few—philosophers on aging and gerontology, argues that we face the prospect of extending lives but emptying them of meaning. But what gives life its meaning, particularly if, like me, you live a secular life? Where do we find virtue?

Having published a middle-grade novel on Odysseus in 2016, I dove back into Greek philosophy about the time that interest in stoicism began to sur-

I cleared 11 feet on six straight jumps, on four lefts with a 12-foot practice pole all while wearing running shoes and bifocals. Four lefts means I was taking only eight steps, which limits my speed but increases my stride accuracy. Then I cleared 12 feet, just grazing the bungee. A bar would have stayed up, I told myself.

face. Suddenly the Greek philosophers like Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, Zeno, Cato, and Epictetus were back in vogue; their message of emotional resilience seemed to resonate in an age of polarization, anxiety, and depression. In fact, contemporary or modern stoicism links closely with modern cognitive behavior therapy, in which a central tenet holds that it is not the events in one's life that are upsetting; rather it is one's judgment about the events that lead to clinical pathology. Seneca wrote, "We are more often frightened than hurt; and we suffer more in imagination than

in reality." Epictetus, a former slave who bought his freedom and turned to philosophy, argued that "not things, but the opinion of things, troubles men." According to Epictetus, discerning between what is in one's control and what is not leads to apatheia, or equanimity. I can't control the fact that I am aging, but I can control my response to it, I told myself when I woke up stiff and sore from vault practice. The Greeks did not have NSAIDS, but I do.

I began this essay in early February 2020. At that time, a virus, no larger than 100 nanometers, was replicating in respiratory tracts in Wuhan, China. Now it has spread across the globe and more than 600,000 Americans have died, with countless more deaths expected. The United States, for the moment, is shut down, except for essential businesses employing essential workers, as well as the usual cadre of deniers. The Olympics have been postponed, as well as most track and field meets. My wife and I are going through a Tudor phase, reading Hilary Mantel and Philippa Gregory. Plagues mark nearly every page, killing without discernment; the king's court staggers on, moving from grand house to grand manor, to stay ahead of contagion. Cromwell loses a wife and two daughters to the sweating sickness, a virulent disease that began around 1485 and disappeared by 1551. His own death is much quicker, courtesy of a falling axe. Of course, the Greeks and the Romans were scourged by plagues too. Perhaps that is what led to Marcus Aurelius's message: "Think of the life you have lived until now as over and, as a dead man, see what's left as a bonus and live it according to Nature. Love the hand that fate deals you and play it as your own, for what could be more fitting?"

Normalcy, or some simulacrum of it, will return. Vaccines administered. Grieving will be suppressed by economic zeal, a desire to return to the hyper-capitalism of the recent years. A few of us will be wiser, more cautious. Pole Vault Carolina has reopened, with an outdoor pit, mandatory masks, and social distancing. Coach Jose sends home workout regimens by email. My shoulders are healing, but my foot speed diminishes daily and the ban is still in place. I'll soon be sixty-one. When the time comes, I will tell my wife that life is different now; we have all seen the end of our calendar, and so we must seize the moment. Thirteen feet still seems high, but attainable.



Ralph Hardy (BA in English, UNC-CH; MFA, Columbia College) has taught at Tulane University and at North Carolina Central University. He has published a number of short stories and novels, most recently the middle-grade novel *Argos: The Story of Odysseus as Told by His Loyal Dog* (HarperCollins). He is also a playwright. His play *Risk*, about the murder of three Muslim students in Chapel Hill, was stage-read by volunteer actors in 2017 to raise money for the charity founded in their names. *Decoherence* is a dark comedy about life, death, family, sex, and the behavior of tiny particles. His most recent play, *We Regret to Inform You that the Maple Woods Players' Spring Production of Oedipus Rex has been Cancelled*, explores the devastation of a retirement home theater group at the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. He lives in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, with his wife, Anu Kumar, and his rescue dog, Harvey. His grown children reluctantly read his texts and emails.

HEAD NORTH

SCOTT PEDERSEN

Desert roads all look the same, each one a dun-colored strip more likely to inspire inertia than travel. But I knew this one led home, which I now realized was the only place I could comfortably survive. All I had to do was take it.


Damir Spanic

Home was Rise Valley, just a hundred miles to the north, a place with green farm fields, streams, dense forest. My relatives weren't the type to give handouts, so I'd have to arrive with enough cash to get settled, but they'd have jobs to offer.

There was just one catch. They had rules, and it was one strike and you're out. These rules boiled down to three: no stealing, no lying, and, especially, no fighting.

My dad smoked cigars that came in glass tubes, gifts from the owner of the casino where he was a dealer. He kept dimes in the empty tubes. I would turn the tubes upright and see how the dimes stacked neatly, like the chips he lorded over at work.

I was just six the one time I watched him on the job. I know now that casinos are often grating places, but this one was velvet to my ears. My mother glided us over ornate carpeting toward the back room where my dad sat behind a blackjack table; he was wearing a crisp white shirt, his chest thrust outward, his thinning hair slicked back, and his hawk nose pointed slightly upward, making him look regal. I loved his deft card handling and complete control of everything that happened at the table, including, I supposed, his thoughts. How could he seem so calm and poised? At home he was always on edge and walked a bit wobbly, with a slight rotation of his right leg, due to a battle injury. I liked Dealer Dad better. I always wanted to go back and watch him again, but I wasn't allowed.

About those dimes—I stole them. Not enough to notice, but over time I felt somewhat compensated for putting up with oppressive rules. I never got caught, so in my mind I was A-OK on that rule.

Lying? All the time, but fortunately I'm very good at it—I'd even say agile. So, again, A-OK.

The third rule was my downfall. Most of my fights were with boys from school, usually a painful but quick slugfest over an imagined insult far from home. But when one easily offended boy tracked me down at my house, the ensuing brawl in our front yard got me kicked out when I was 17. My dad wouldn't even listen to my perfectly good explanation.

That started me roaming the country for several years, trying to get along and make a life. I never stopped keeping score regarding my rule-breaking. That's how ingrained it was.

I wound up living in a rented single-wide along a gravel road, a couple miles from the nearest town. I didn't even have a well, just a water tank up on a high stand, but the rent was cheap.

Sometimes I worked, on those occasions when somebody with a business wasn't too fussy to take on a shaggy-haired, vacant-eyed beanpole of a kid. But I'd decided that a better way to get money was to follow the advice of a guy in Vegas who showed me how to count cards. I'd never played blackjack before, but it made sense, especially when he said people with no gift for it can learn. You just practice, gradually getting better until you start winning. But then you have to back off a bit, or you'll get banned. Was it stealing? I was playing by the rules, so no.

With no car, I had to walk to the nearest casino, on the edge of town. Since it was always scorching during the day, I went after dark, first giving the road time to cool off, and returned home before sunrise.

If there was no moon, I'd take a flashlight with me, the long, metal kind with four batteries. I'd turn it on for a second, just to see where I was, and then turn it off. I hid it in a creosote bush behind the casino before going in.

The casino was small, with just one blackjack table. The night dealer, as poker-faced as they come, never seemed to recognize me. With a reddish flattop above his high forehead, he could be mistaken for one of the nearby buttes.

One night I was doing better than usual and feeling pretty good about it. The dealer's expression slowly changed from deadpan to grim. After a couple of hours, he looked to the side and did a quick lift of his chin. Seconds later a stocky, dark-haired man with a stippled face sidled up to him. He wore a casino-issued name tag high up on his black vest: "Bruce." They talked in low voices, glancing at me several times. Finally, the man nodded and left.

When I cashed in for the night, I was ahead 600 bucks. In what had become my routine, I made a jaunty walk to the creosote bush, snatched my flashlight, gave it a quick flip in the air, and headed up that desert road, the money tucked in my pocket feeling like a ticket home. Even the stars seemed brighter than usual as I penetrated farther into the darkness.

Then I heard the sound of a car engine. Two overlapping shafts of light on the road soon pushed ahead of me. Even though most nights I had the road to myself, this was nothing strange.

Then the car stopped. *That* was strange. I turned around. When the driver opened his door, the dome light lit up his face. It was Bruce.

He got out and started walking fast toward me, the crunch of each step on gravel sounding angrier the closer he got. I should have said something, or run, but I didn't. He shoved me in the chest, probably to show me who was calling the shots now. I stumbled backwards but caught myself from falling.

When he lunged at me again, I swung the flashlight in a wide arc, catching him hard at the left temple. I must have hit him in just the right place, because he dropped like a rock.

I crouched to press his wrist and felt a weak pulse. A minute later it was gone. I could have felt guilty about it, and my heart was racing, but it was self-defense. Was it fighting? Well, I could hardly have just let him kill me. So, no.

I looked back at the car. The headlights were pointing straight north, as if saying, "This is the road. Take it."

Stealing? I'd ditch the car a few miles south of Rise Valley, someplace where Bruce's family was sure to get it back. I'd call it borrowing.

I hopped in, started the engine and checked the gas gauge. I thought about retrieving my stuff from the single-wide, but there was nothing I would miss. I could just head north and go the whole way without stopping.

As the drone of rubber on pea gravel faded into the background of my thoughts, I imagined seeing my family again and how they would act as if I'd just gotten out of the army or something. I was sure I could follow their rules this time. I had no need to fight or steal or lie, except about what I'd been doing the past few years, but, like I said, I was a very good liar.

And then the best part. Being in my twenties now, I could saunter into my dad's casino whenever I wanted. I pictured this happening the very next day. There would be my dad, smiling at the sight of me but then suppressing it to maintain the classic dealer's demeanor.

I did go the next day and was pleased to discover that he was now the floor manager. He was glad to see me. He said I could stay at the house until I found a job and apartment. Just as I expected, everything was going great.

One afternoon, my dad seemed impatient for my mom to leave for work. As soon as she was out the door, he pulled me into the living room, one hand hooked on my upper arm and the other holding a mug of coffee. "I didn't want your mother to hear this."

"What's going on, Dad?"

He sat down and took a sip of coffee. "Most people don't know this about the casino business, but word gets around. Some of it's rumors, and some of it's true." He took another sip. "Down where you were living, there's a casino employee who nearly got killed, and his car was stolen. For some reason, he won't talk, but that's not stopping the police. Do you know anything about it?"

My heart was pounding. "No, I don't." Judging from the look on his face, I wasn't as good a liar as I thought.

He got up, took a book from a high shelf and pulled out a photo that had been placed inside. "What do you see in this picture?" he said, holding the photo in front of my face.

"It's a jungle or something. Probably from when you were in the army."

"Take another look. Lower-right corner."

I don't know how I missed it the first time. "It's a body."

"Yeah. And I'm the reason it's there." He put the photo and book away and sat next to me on the sofa. "I guarantee you I could explain for an hour why I did what I did, and you still wouldn't think it was right. That's our big dilemma."

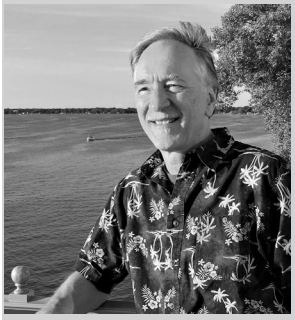
I shook my head and shrugged.

He went on. "Unless someone can go back in time and be where we were, and see through our eyes, and grip a weapon so tight it breaks the skin. . . hell, they'd need to feel the goddamn adrenaline in our veins—." I'd never seen him look at me like that before, like he was begging. All I could do was nod. That moment was the first time I ever felt my dad and I were alike.

He put his hand on my shoulder. "You say you don't know what happened, and I'm going to believe you, so there's no need for us to mention it again. And if anybody asks, we'll say I went down there and picked you up."

"Okay, Dad." I'd never heard him suggest lying before. Like son, like father. What was next, bar fights? It seemed that Dad, with the regal nose and list of rules, had more going on under the hood than I realized. I saw this as the start of a new kind of relationship for us.

He reached for his coffee and finished it off. "Just the same, don't ever let me catch you counting cards in *my* casino."



Scott Pedersen is a writer based in Wisconsin. His work has appeared in *Louisiana Literature*, *The MacGuffin*, *The Heartland Review*, and many other journals and anthologies. He received a B.S. degree in wildlife ecology from the University of Wisconsin, Madison. When not writing fiction, he enjoys performing in a traditional Celtic band.

ROBO MIKE

JOE FARLEY

Robo Mike works a corner of the 16th street mall. It's the easiest place in the city to separate citizens from their cash—which is to say still pretty hard. You need a hook, a gimmick. Those that simply went to the cardboard were looked down upon—sloths, the whole lot of them. Folks weren't simply willing to fork the bills over on faith: they craved some novelty, a bizarre story to tell their buddies at brunch. Robo Mike figured this out rather quickly, and much of his cohort figured the same. And, it wasn't an altogether terrible place for his line of work. Some liked to say the city got as much sunshine as San Diego. (This was mostly true, except it got significantly more snowfall.)



Anton Maksimov juvnsky

The most important aspect of Robo Mike's hook is that it hides his face. It's not that he isn't ashamed of begging for money (he is), but more importantly it allows him to hide in plain sight and be closer to his family—physically speaking. They don't really know he's living in the city, so his new identity gives him the time and anonymity to get on his feet.

He mostly acts like a robot. He stole the shoulder pads and football helmet from a high school storage shed. The visor on the football helmet has been spray painted a metallic black. For his lower half, he managed to get his hands on some hockey goaltender pads at a thrift store with lax security. He wears the black boots he was issued in the military and camouflage pants underneath the blocky goalie pads. His hands are covered with red batting gloves from Under Armor, and he covers the other parts of his exposed skin with silver paint. It's not anything James Cameron or Steven Spielberg would be impressed by. But, the most important part is acting like a robot, and that's where Robo Mike has the magic.

Robo Mike isn't the quickest study, but it didn't take him long to realize that most folks out here are proof that there's nothing too cruel or unusual that it cannot happen to someone, (almost) anyone.

There's Rob, a former music teacher at an elementary school. His wife overdosed on a bad batch, and they lost their kid. He had a bit of a habit too, so it was a team effort. Now he just jams for the shoppers, laying down licks so good they deserve a much better fate.

There's Scooter Steve, a big football star in high school and even college—he also made a few practice squads in the pros but never caught on with a team. The last one led him here. Years of violent head collisions and steroid abuse left him prone to outbursts and unreason—it's impossible for him to hold down a job. He spent years in cities all over the country. His dreams left him on his own, and he is mostly out of touch with family. He started using to quell his freakouts—at that point he'd tried everything, including Scientology. He's prone to saying things like "When I'm gone have them study my brain." They call him Scooter Steve because he performs acts of daredevilry on those stupid scooters that sprinkle the city.

And there's Gary. Well, Gary seems to have a different story each time he's asked. Gary's grift is moving between friends and acquaintances, siphoning some of the audience generated by their hook.

***

If they get kicked out of Confluence Park or can't get a spot at the Y or the Denver Rescue Mission (Jesus saves!), run mostly by trust fund do-gooders with little sense of humor and less life experience, they head down Larimer and cross Speer Boulevard to the ravine, which protects them from the wind and has some bridges to duck under if anything should fall from the sky. There's a pretty large community down there, and somebody usually has something to shoot or smoke—if you are feeling up for that kind of thing. Sometimes Robo Mike is, but more often than not, lately, he isn't. Like, not at all.

Tonight, they're all down there but Gary, because Gary is a bit of an ass kisser and has a warm bed. Rob hasn't been allowed at the mission in over a month (he clocked the intake kid), and just last week Robo Mike and Scooter Steve were given the two-week ban. They stumbled in hooting and whooping after knocking back a plastic jug of gin and smoking abandoned cigarettes—it was amazing what people wasted—while watching the Broncos game through a bar window, looking for a bunk. The elitist punk with the clipboard let it go to his head, told them to come back when they were in a better "headspace." *Headspace*? The fuck was that, Scooter Steve shot back. Fascist, Robo Mike added.

But it's a crisp and clear 45 degrees tonight—very manageable.

"Fuck Gary," Rob says. "He never has any money anyway."

Scooter Steve crunches an empty Coors with his boot, coughs a laugh. "Yeah, and I'm over here checking my stock dividends."

"You know what I mean," Rob says, pops another can that opens with a hiss.

"I know what you mean," Robo Mike says.

"Right? He's always like I'll get you back next time, man. Yeah? *With what*?"

They all let out a much needed howl and pull on their beers and shit on Gary a while more and enjoyed the cool night air on their beaten and scorched skin.

***

Morning next Robo Mike's at Tom's Diner on Colfax, nursing coffee, waiting for the shift change—he's almost sure she's working today. He bled the wait staff of their patience hours ago—he walked in sometime around 4 a.m.—and nobody has come around asking if he plans on ordering anything or wants a top-up for over an hour now. If he wants another cup of coffee, it's certainly COD.

"She should be here, actually," the waitress who seems to have the least contempt for him says, and plops a fat stack of pancakes a few stools down next to a haggard man who wolves them dry.

Stacey comes in late. She hurries in, apologizing to nobody in particular, perhaps the diner in general. Her keys clink wildly as she attempts to shove them into her purse; she pulls out her pad and is at once taking orders. "More coffee?"

"If you're offering," Robo Mike says.

"Sure," she says, and starts filling his mug from the stale pot on the burner. "Jesus!" She fumbles the carafe, nearly drops it before composing herself—brown grit dribbles over its ledge and muddies the aluminum countertop.

"Sorry, Sorry," he says. "I just really needed to talk to you."

She stares back blankly.

"Two minutes," he holds up the fingers like she's deaf, "Stace—"

"Hell do you want?"

"I've been calling, sending things. . . "

"And?"

A thick, port-faced woman wonders where are her fries? A man in an important looking suit clanks his mug on the tabletop, a signal of class warfare if there ever was one. Stacey stays composed, holds up a hand.

"I'd like to see him."

She snorts, wipes the residue with the back of her hand—for the sake of the customers! "You're funny."

"Why? C'mon, please w—"

"Out."

A cook and a dishwasher are out from behind the counter before Robo Mike realizes it. For a second or two, he contemplates caving in their faces but eventually decides against it. They tell him he can't keep doing this. He says he understands, really, he does. He tells her over his shoulder to answer the phone, check her mail.

Moving again, Robo Mike heads down Colfax towards the capital, where the golden dome hangs like a second sun, glinting light in a myr-

iad of directions, casting new colors on the parade of outcasts that line its lawns. They huddle around shopping carts dressed in tattered down coats and ski caps, betting that the better angels of the lawmakers who trudge past them daily like they are in a rush and can't spare a second will come to see them as fellow citizens—it tends to have the opposite effect. Robo Mike doesn't hang out down here. There are regular sweeps and it's like begging to get picked up on a petty charge.

He hangs a right and continues towards downtown, wading through the mid-morning bustle. He's late to meet Gary in this bar near Union Station—he didn't mention it to the other guys. Gary has a line on something for him, something that promises to be, well, promising. . . .

When he gets to the bar he sees Gary sitting in front of the taps, sucking on a beer and shifting around awkwardly—Gary put nearly nobody at ease. He sort of knew whatever Gary was offering wouldn't be as advertised, the man was full of shit. He was the type of guy who lied about nearly everything, things big and small. He'd lie about things that were easily disproven, things anybody could figure out, like sports scores. He thought the moon landing was staged—ask him how. When called out on his terrible inaccuracies he'd feign dumb, act like you were the one who misremembered, an incredibly annoying personality trait. But this was a common trait with many of his ilk; you didn't usually get to be so desperate without some character flaws, the most prominent being an unwavering unreliability. However, for Robo Mike, Gary was the only game in town.

"Sit," Gary says. "Want something, I know the bartender." He motions aggressively for two more beers. "*Gratis*."

"Great," Robo Mike says. "Thanks." The thought of Gary buying a round would make Rob and Steve shit, which causes a smile to split his lips.

"I say something?"

"No, no. Saw Stacey earlier, that's all."

"Yeah? How was that?"

"Wasn't really."

"Meaning? So, she knows you're. . . out here."

"Not exactly. Wouldn't talk to me. Forget her: what am I doing here?"

"You did time, right?" Gary twists his head around, searches the vacant bar like he's the target of a RICO investigation.

"I did."

***

Robo Mike didn't have a lot of offers when he got back sun blasted and strung out from Afghanistan. Clerking at a liquor store was the best he could come up with after four years of doing Uncle Sam's bidding. He got friendly with the store co-manager, Zack—an amiable burnout who moonlighted in a thrash metal band—and they devised a scheme. Their

logic was flawed from the start, so naturally things went the way things tend to go for the mightily unprepared.

It wasn't his fault he'd say. He had a 6-year-old he barely knew, addictions and piling debts and a scatter-shot mind. Zack was in charge of counting the money in the safe on Tuesdays and Thursdays (nobody counted the safe on Wednesdays), so they decided to grab it on Tuesday and put it to use down at the Meadowlands Race Track—bet big, win big, it takes money to make money, that sort of thing. They'd replace what they took that Thursday and nobody would be the wiser. They lost. All of it. The discovery of the missing money led to the discovery of the high end liquor bottles from the store's basement being absent—they'd been sneaking a few here and there for months and selling it below cost to a guy who ran a pub a few towns over. The rest came down on him with such velocity he could barely tell the story straight to somebody if they asked him today.

He did a 2-year bit and Stacey took the kid to Denver where she had cousins. From what she told him in her letters, the kid barely remembers him and let's leave it at that. He knew that couldn't be true.

***

It wasn't all that serious. It was something he could handle. He'd get in the car with the guy, back him up, and, worst case, throw a punch or two—no guns. Multiple deployments and countless scruffs on the inside made this seem like picking up morning bagels. The only thing that still nagged at him was the facilitator: Gary.

Robo Mike fingers the number and address Gary slipped him at the bar as he hikes east across the city, compelled to steal a glance at his son before he decides on a decision that's mostly been made years ago. The day couldn't be much nicer, so when he comes upon the school, the kids are actually outside basking in likely one of their last outdoor recesses till spring. They are unhinged, exploding off in all directions, a kaleidoscope of limbs and body odor. The noise is deafening, like being inside a jet cabin without headphones on just before it lurches, then speeds down the runway. Robo Mike nearly covers his ears.

Jack is standing on the periphery of the ongoing game, hands stuffed into his pockets. It's the type of game where kids stake out opposite sides of the field and toss a football into the air as high as they can, and when it comes crashing down on the opposite side they treat it like a mortar attack—they scream and wail, and if it makes contact with them and they don't catch it, they lose an arm or leg depending on the point of contact.

Robo Mike is keenly aware of himself lurking there across the street behind a tree. Without his gimmick he feels naked, exposed. You can still see some of the silver paint on his arms and neck. He feels like some skulking pervert, waiting for a kid to totter too far from the others so he can scoop him up and toss him into his windowless van. He thinks Jack

maybe sees him, but before he can see any clear recognition in his light blue, almost grey eyes, he snaps his head the other way, towards the game. Jack's skin is milk-pale and his lips are chapped and red and too big for his face, but other than that he looks healthy, taller. Robo Mike pulls his ball cap lower and turns back the way he came before anybody notices someone out of place.

Jack was a finicky baby, always sick with something or other. He cried a lot. He seemed overly sensitive, like he was already overburdened by the injustices of the world even though he was the one shitting all over Robo Mike's hands. Back in North Jersey, he would take him for long walks around the neighborhood when he got especially sick. Stacey was always worried it'd make him sicker, that he'd catch something more serious, but it was only when he brought Jack back from one of their long walks would he quiet and be able to reach sleep. Sometimes he'd even coo and reach out with his little pinkish fingers and grab Robo Mike's nose. This is something—despite what Stacey or anybody else says—he feels they both remember.

***

Robo Mike's been saving. It's very little, but it's still something. There is no guarantee on the corner, no hourly wage. He's been amazed what he's been able to scrounge together since he cut back on the booze and other questionable habits. He tries to get her fifty or sixty dollars a week, which he tucks in a copy of *Westword* and leaves in her mailbox. This is how she catches him outside her cousin's house in Five Points.

"Hey! The fuck. . . Mike—"

"Just a second." He holds up his hands, showing her the copy of the magazine. He opens it up, shows her the cash.

"What am I supposed to do with this?" Stacey is out of the house now, grabbing the rest of the mail.

"It's for him," Robo Mike says. He sees the smallness of his share, his face reddens, "And you."

Stacey looks through him, doesn't say anything.

"I've been dropping it by the house when I can. That's what I was saying back at the diner. You haven't been getting it?"

"No," Stacey says. "But here, keep it." She presses the money back into his hands. "Carlie's oldest must be finding it first—got a bit of a habit herself." She looks at him evenly this time, not without some pity. "Maybe address it to someone next time?"

"Shit, of course. I wasn't thinking." Robo Mike turns to leave, tells her he has a line on something, will have plenty more for her shortly. Tells her he wants to take Jack to a game.

"He doesn't care about sports," Stacey says.

"Well, something else then. Something he'd enjoy."

She asks him where he's staying; he says around. There is some skepticism on her face but she doesn't press him. When he gets a few houses down from her he cranes his neck to take a last look, and on the top step she remains, watching him flat-footed with the mail in her hand.

***

She stayed with him longer than most sane women would, so he feels strongly that he at least owes her this much—she is a hill he'd gladly die on. Gary's guy is late to pick him up. Robo Mike isn't surprised but the waiting is giving him time to think, and he doesn't want to be in his head; he wants to be acting, moving forward. In this way he's really never left the military.

He's a block up from Coors Field and the grandstands throw shadows over the buildings that line the street where he stands. Baseball—the sweet simplicity of the game. He remembers the buzz of the crowd and the hammering of his heart in his chest when his uncle used to take him to Yankee games, the way the stadium would feel like it was literally moving when the opening riff to "Enter Sandman" blared over the stadium speakers and the bullpen doors swung open. He ditches his spot and starts walking towards Coors Field, and when he gets close enough, he puts his hands on its walls. Maybe by spring he can take Jack to see a game here. Maybe, if he leaves now, he can reason with one of the guys and get a bed. Maybe he can talk about one of those work programs they are always droning on about. Maybe he—

"Mike?" A man in a tinted, slightly dinged sedan hangs an arm out the window, whistles.

Robo Mike studies the man. "Sorry, I'm not."

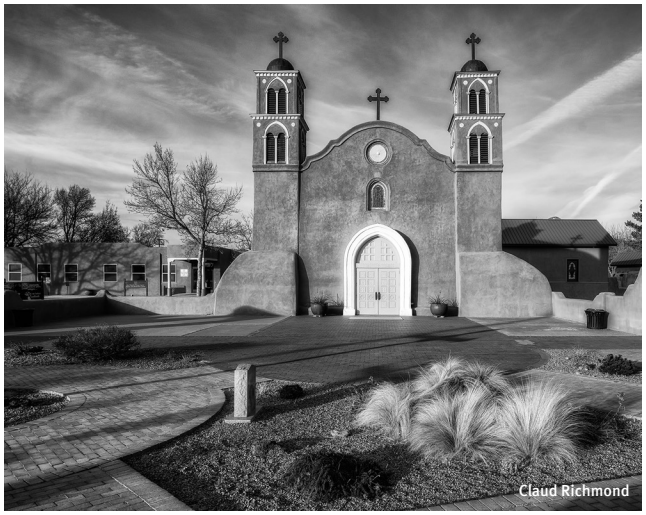
The man shakes his head and starts the car up the street towards the intersection, where he disappears into the rush hour traffic.



Joe Farley has a B.A. in journalism and literature from Ramapo College of New Jersey and studied fiction in the M.F.A program at Minnesota State University, Mankato. His fiction has previously appeared in *Bridge Eight*, *Brilliant Flash Fiction*, *and The South Carolina Review.* He lives in Denver, Colorado, where he teaches literacy and creative writing to high-need students in the Denver Public School System.

THE DAY JOHN WAYNE DIED

JOSEPH BATHANTI


Claud Richmond

On a Sunday, my parents' only day off from their nocturnal restaurant jobs, the three of us walked to the Sheridan Square on Penn Avenue and caught the afternoon matinee of *The Alamo*.

Mere days earlier, John Kennedy had narrowly defeated Richard Nixon, whom my parents despised, to become the United States' youngest and first Catholic president. Kennedy's French wife, Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy, was thirty-one, exotically pretty, and eight months pregnant. The Kennedys also had a nearly three-year-old daughter named Caroline. She and I were contemporaries; I dreamed of meeting her. My mother dreamed of having another baby.

Pittsburgh still swooned over Bill Mazeroski's epic home run to clinch the 1960 World Series for the Pirates over the mythic New York Yankees a month earlier. The last jubilant flecks of confetti and ticker-tape blew about the city—and now Kennedy on top of it. Dynasties had toppled: first the bully Yankees, then the bully Nixon. Kennedy vowed to take America to the moon.

My mother held tightly to my hand, though I would have walked obediently beside her without the tether. The shopping district of East Liberty was packed with holiday shoppers. We passed beggars and the blind, the halt and lame. From their stations on the sidewalk, they dangled tin cups, into which people, including my parents, dropped pennies and sometimes nickels and dimes. The blind offered pencils in return, but my parents politely declined. My mother believed that anything accepted from these people generated disease.

As we strolled to the movies that pretty, mild, cloudless November sabbath, five days from Thanksgiving, hope laced with smoke and ore dust from the heaving steel mills along the rivers hovered in the ether. The next day, city workers would drape glorious Christmas garlands across Penn Avenue. The future had arrived and, though my parents and I basked in its earliest moments, it would soon become apparent that no one had prepared for it.

We paid the woman in her glass ticket booth, entered the Sheridan, and bought buttered popcorn and Reymer's Lemon Blend. The theater was church-like: its dark, on-tiptoe hush; the settling of bodies; tiny slashes of illumination, like votives, on the aisle seats; ushers, with epaulets and flashlights; the immense blank screen like an altar the instant before the priest—regaled in Birettum and sacred vestments, in his left hand the chalice and veil—emerged from the sacristy into the sanctuary to ignite the sacrifice of the Mass.

Suddenly the screen burst into light. Porky and Petunia Pig, accompanied by a goofy riff of brass, piano, and xylophone, capered across it. Two minutes and forty-six seconds later, after Porky stuttered "That's all, folks," Paul Francis Webster's "The Green Leaves of Summer," scored mournfully by Dimitri Tiomkin, piped through the Sheridan its Moorish bugle call, *El Deguello*, and there was no going back.

I was ignorant of the recorded history of the Alamo, an old mission in Texas originally named for St. Anthony of Valero, the patron saint of lost things, where for thirteen days in the winter of 1836 a band of 180 rebels, seeking independence from Mexico, held out against Generalissimo Antonio de Padua María Severino López de Santa Anna y Pérez de Lebrón and his army of 4,000, until the last among them was slaughtered. The opening film credits flashed across the face of the Alamo. Upon its ramparts, a toppled cross had metamorphosed into a massive X.

The movie was typically quixotic, filled with restorative moments of comic relief, horses and swagger, guns and panoramic glory—so different from the life I sat inside, between my parents, Travis and Rita Sweeney. As the story took shape, the odds against the men in the Alamo mounted. But trouble guaranteed an authentic story: there was bound to be bloodshed and death. Righteousness, however—perhaps even rectitude—would inevitably triumph. It's what I had come to expect from the world of stories that protected me.

Santa Anna's troops appeared expendable. Their humorless, mechanized anonymity and tin soldier uniforms doomed them. And, of course, there were the stars: Richard Widmark, as Jim Bowie; Laurence Harvey, as William Travis (my father's first name was Travis); and John Wayne, as Davy Crockett, whose buckskin and coonskin cap alone guaranteed things in the long run would play out fine. At the time, I hadn't known any sad stories, even though my own story strayed into dismal, but I had neither language nor paradigm for *the tragic* that day, and for that I'm grateful.

My parents neither subscribed to an abiding order that governed the universe nor put much stock in happy endings. My mother maintained a grudging belief in God and my dad was essentially a nonbeliever. He found religion, and churchgoing in particular, irrelevant. A student of history, he had known empirically how the movie would end; there was, indeed, but one ending. In fact, I'd wager he believed in history more than anything: that the most predictable thing is that things remain unpredictable. He didn't require the fantasy, the story, that religion provided. He trafficked in facts, documents. He loved the newspaper.

My mother, however, desired the kind of optimism, the often thoroughly unrealistic cosmos, that stories tended toward; and I suppose I was more like her in that sense. My dad had given up hope of being rescued and had learned to enjoy the moment, while she thrashed desperately about the patch of earth she spent her life on, stalled between falsehood and fact, mired in the capricious vaults of memory—what *really* happened, whatever it might have been, at a precise moment in time, recorded on the palimpsest of eternity: *what he said, what she said, who's a son of a bitch*.

The plight of the rebels grew dire, then direr. Their women and children, also holed up in the mission, were evacuated. Then came the inevitable siege. Mexican troops spidered up crude ladders and over the Alamo walls. I hated them as I watched the men I had come to know and love swarmed. Shot and bayoneted, blown from the parapets—the mission ablaze, its walls powdered by cannonade—they fell one by one, in protracted, agonized pirouettes. My mother held her hands over her face. My father looked straight ahead. They had forgotten me. The theater seemed on the verge of lift-off—a B-52 with its lethal payload.

The Alamo was the first John Wayne picture I'd ever seen, yet his face was familiar, but where had I seen it? Perhaps in a dream, or perhaps in one of my mother's. She and I often wandered each other's dreams. John Wayne was an archetype, every bit as invulnerable as Kennedy and Mazeroski. He couldn't be killed.

He swatted away charging infidels with a Kentucky long-rifle and a flaming torch. His shirt was blue. A powder horn and Bowie knife depended from his belt. Santa Anna's foppish troops fell in his wake like puppets. As he leapt across a patch of dead men and horses, a Mexican soldier thrust a lance through his side, skewering him to a plank door. Arterial blood erupted onto Wayne's vest and britches. He'd lost his rifle, but swept away his assassin with the torch, gripped the protruding lance with his free hand, snapped it off, and staggered through the jamb. The bloody shaft of the lance spiked from the door. His back smeared with gore. He lurched to the threshold of the powder magazine and flung the torch among the kegs. Its flaming tongue waxed yellow among them for a long time—until the powder detonated, the walls imploded, and everything took fire.

The Alamo was a necropolis: mangled, dismembered bodies, blood and smoke. The never-ending wave of expendable Mexican soldiers trampled the corpses. They raided each chamber of the Alamo until everyone had been executed; and, finally, they discovered an indescribably beautiful blonde woman, a pretty little girl, and a little black boy secreted beneath a white tarp, behind a brace of hogsheads.

The woman, Susanna Dickinson, played by the actor Joan O'Brien, had been the wife of Captain Almaron Dickinson, killed at the Alamo. The little girl, Angelina Dickinson, named Lisa in the movie, and portrayed by John Wayne's daughter, Aissa, had been the Dickinsons' daughter, though an infant in 1836, not the girl of five or six portrayed by Aissa. One day, the real Angelina would become a prostitute; but that fact was

a long way off, and she had no idea that the torment she bore that bright, bloody, March 6 day in 1836 would stretch on unrelieved until she died in agony at age 34. The little black boy might have been Colonel Travis's slave, Joe, who had also survived the massacre, but Joe had been 21 at the time, not a little boy.

In the final scene of the movie, Susanna hoisted her half-orphaned daughter onto a sad, sable donkey, led by the little boy, maybe Joe, and paced alongside it among the carnage, through a phalanx of reverent Mexican troops at attention, as well the dashing, imperious Santa Anna, astride a pure white mount. As she passed, a Mexican peasant woman—as if she'd just beheld the apparition of the Virgin Mary—made the Sign of the Cross and bowed her head. My mother removed her hands from her face and made the Sign of the Cross too.

Santa Anna removed his plumed hat and theatrically swept it in tribute to Susanna. She was maddeningly gorgeous, even erotic—her tailored pink frock, its frilly bodice, an alabaster floor-length apron. Ramrod straight, defiant, her make-up flawless, a burnished smudge of filth on her camera-facing cheek that rendered her all the more fetchingly tragic, tendrils of flaxen hair wafting elegiacally from her French braid. A choir of seraphim had broken into "The Tennessee Babe," then imperceptibly transitioned into "The Ballad of the Alamo."

For three searing beats, Susanna halted and fixed the Generalissimo with what my mother called *the eyes*—her curse—then strode chastely by him—he was dead to her—and quite literally disappeared over a rise and into a firmament streaked with scarves of angels; and, as *THE END* bolted stoically across the screen like temple columns, the line "lie asleep in the arms of the Lord" was reprised by the choir.

The last glimpsed image was that cockeyed cross over the ruined mission.

On the street, people hustled to get home before dark. It had rained and grown cold. My dad lit two cigarettes and handed one to my mother. She held my hand again. Steam rose from the sidewalk.

"Let's get some ice cream at Isaly's," said my father.

We jaywalked across Penn Avenue. My mother stopped in the middle of it, as a car, horn blaring, bore down on us. My father grabbed her and me and guided us through the traffic.

Under Isaly's awning sat a man with no legs on a platform attached to roller skates. It had started raining again. Flecks of flurries floated down with it. Instead of begging, he rolled himself away with his hands along the sidewalk. Pigeons scurried ahead of him, dipping to scavenge filth riding the rain run-off in the gutter.

Isaly's was crowded. We grabbed the last unoccupied booth. My dad slipped off his coat, then helped me out of mine. An old woman in a green and white checked uniform and a tiny crown-like paper hat, fastened with bobby pins, waited on us. Her brittle hair was dyed blonde, like my mother's. A paste of beige foundation on her face glared under the high-ceilinged fluorescent lights, orange eyebrows penciled above her lids. My father and I ordered grilled cheese and chocolate milk shakes.

My mother hated milkshakes. She ordered a strawberry sundae. The waitress wrote our orders on a pad, placed an ashtray on the table, and called us *honey* and *dear*.

My mother asked her how she was.

"Tired," she replied, but she smiled. She asked me how old I was. I wasn't far from five—I'd start kindergarten in January—but I held up four fingers. I didn't want to speak. At the time, I thought my mother worked as a waitress. I wanted her to be as pretty as Susan Dickinson—though the archival photographs of Susanna Dickinson, who would marry an additional four times after widowed at the Alamo, portray her as haggard and matronly, nothing at all like the exquisite Joan O'Brien.

The waitress moved along the counter, looking after her other customers. Every few minutes, she dipped beneath it for her burning cigarette and took a drag. She delivered our food, and the check. The rain had given over to snow.

Alone on her side of the booth, my mother, still in her red coat, gazed past my father and me through Isaly's massive front window where the snow fell and streetcars whistled by. A bright red dab of strawberry clung to her lower lip. She was in the grip of whatever sometimes took her over, working herself up to something. As if she'd read my mind—and to no one in particular—she asked, "Why did John Wayne have to die?"

My father reached across the table with his napkin, delicately dabbed away that bit of strawberry from her mouth, and said, "I don't know, Rita," certainly to humor her, certainly because he wanted to avoid getting snarled up in an absurd conversation—or even an argument, a scene—in which he had to convince my mother that John Wayne—the living man, the actor—hadn't died. Rather, it was the historical character, Davy Crockett, whom John Wayne portrayed in a movie rendition of history, that had died—slain with his comrades at the Alamo 124 years ago. John Wayne was alive and well, likely in Hollywood, drinking beer or something manlier, smoking a cigar and enjoying the profits from *The Alamo*, his directorial debut (in which he had strangely chosen to murder himself)—not at all obsessing over us, as we sat in a dairy in an Italian neighborhood in Pittsburgh, as the snow picked up and night came on. But, of course, my mother understood this. This was about something else—the cruel world, and all that it had taken from her. She had lapsed into that other realm—of the dead—that she sometimes inhabited; she was no longer with us.

My mother smiled at my father, as if in gratitude, then smiled at me—so memorably, as beautiful as any woman—and seemed placated, even happy. She dipped into her sundae and took another bite. Then she abruptly stood and walked by us.

"Rita," my father said, turned in the booth, and said her name twice more, not loud, but by then she was through the door, into the snow, and disappeared at the edge of Isaly's window.

For a moment, my father simply sat there, then he rose and wrangled me into my jacket, clamped my hat on my head, grabbed my hand and we ran for the door.

The old waitress yelled "Hey," and came around from the back of the counter, as everyone stopped and watched. Isaly's was a place where nothing bad could happen.

We paused for a moment on the sidewalk and peered into the snow coming fast now and coating the sidewalk. Among the throng pushing along Penn Avenue, through clouds of snow, bled my mother's red coat. Then she took the right on Highland. My father didn't yell, but called "Rita"—to himself, to me. She was much too far away to hear him above the roar along the avenue: trollies and cars, winter sweeping in on what had been a placid sunny day. It was almost too dark to see.

The waitress, brandishing our check, had followed us onto the sidewalk. "Come back and pay this," she screamed. "You thieves. You lousy thieves."

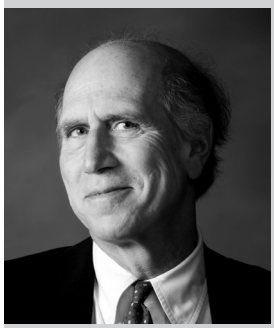
My father picked me up and ran after my mother, his breath chuffing out in white puffs. I wrapped my arms around his neck. The waitress, still screaming, and waving the check, toddled after us, then slipped on the icy concrete and took a bad fall.

My father turned on Highland and stopped for a moment to scan the avenue. Snow drilled his face. I turned away from it and looked over his shoulder. The sidewalk crowds had thinned. Merchants locked their doors and doused lights. The beggars burrowed into their rags. My father peered north into the dense white veil. As he stood there, winded, his breath a stream of fog, he shivered from the cold. He had left his coat in Isaly's.

We spied a splotch of red. "Rita," he yelled, and resumed his jog. By the time we made it to Hoeveler Street, we were the only ones out, apart from the cars and trollies sorrowfully inching along. Even Foxx's Grille and Vento's Pizza had closed shop. Snow convulsed in the streetlamp haloes.

Sirens wailed. Then, in the distance, flared a great red gash—smaller and smaller, gliding away from us—an ambulance hurtling over the Hoeveler Street Bridge —a kaleidoscope of crimson strobing the bloody flume of snow until it disappeared and even its siren faded, and we were shrouded in utter frigid silence. My father, shaking uncontrollably, stopped again. He gently set me down, then sat in the snow on the sidewalk.

I had been about to cry when John Wayne died, but I held it in. I hadn't known that you can hold it in.



Joseph Bathanti is the McFarlane Family Distinguished Professor of Interdisciplinary Education at Appalachian State University. He is the former Poet Laureate of North Carolina (2012-14), recipient of the North Carolina Award in Literature, and the author of seventeen books. A new volume of poems, *Light at the Seam*, is forthcoming from LSU Press in 2022.

THE VIRGIN OF CALIFORNIA

CONNIE WIENEKE



When the sisters agreed to meet in Havre, Robin bet her husband that Carol Lyn would be a no-show. But here she was, stepping off the Empire Builder from St. Paul, like an advertisement for travel by train. Robin felt beat down by the drive in a rental van from Boise. She knew how rumpled she must look.

The sisters' rendezvous was part of getting Dad remembered and buried, putting it together the most they had talked in years. Their family, both sides, never big on reunions or Christmas cards, had dispersed like rumors. None of that social media crap. Maybe a phone call. Robin just as happy not to muster nostalgia for what might have been missed.

Neither had seen their father in the eight years since he moved back to Havre. Before that, even with families of their own, no matter where they were living, he showed up, out of the blue, taking them "out." Most times it was coffee or lunch at a cafe he picked, one sure to have booths, the waitress in a short skirt. Once it was the bowling alley near the airport, that one with a bar, the stink of stale popcorn in the air. Always his treat. Never places with espresso or croissants, places he thought they probably liked. He was that kind of guy.

They loved hearing what he'd been up to. More often what he'd been up against. Used to be it was only their mother. Maybe after the divorce, it was easier when he faced the whole world, Robin thought, and not a wife who nagged about every place they lived, every job he had to take, what all she had to put up with, which was mainly, without.

When Carol Lyn mentioned she'd booked a sleeping car, Robin said, "You always loved trains."

"Well, I don't have the time to drive and I'm not flying in a crop-duster to Havre."

"Could have picked you up in Billings. Delta flies direct."

Carol Lyn claimed no memory of "loving" trains and Robin felt cheated of that wound-up bundle of a sister standing one side of a wire fence, the Great Northern rumbling by, not fifteen feet away. Both of them waved their arms like mad, at every car, eastbound or west. She wanted that ecstatic animal back, wondered where such wildness goes when you leave a place. Sometimes the caboose man noticed them and sounded the horn, longer than needed.

Robin almost hoped Carol Lyn would back out, but there hadn't been time to cancel plans, to fuss the details. Their father was cremated a few days after he died. There, she said it, died, not passed, not gone over to The Other Side. Dead and gone, except for what waited in an urn in Havre. The urn, something Dad's sister, Aunt Breen, mentioned a couple of times because she had bought it with her *own* money, as if she expected compensation. Though she hadn't asked for any.

"Havre's going to be an armpit," Carol Lyn said the last time on the phone. Echoing their mother's words no doubt, when her sister had mentioned their plans.

"Probably," Robin agreed. Montana that place her sister knew only as stories, mostly their mother's versions, less kind than what she wanted to remember.

The Havre station, with its brick and regimental windows, lacked the quaintness Robin had imagined: no pitch roof, wooden platforms, only concrete sidewalks and a bronze statue. She told Carol Lyn it looked like a prison or a school.

"What did you expect?" she said. "You could use a shower and a nap. Let's check out Hometown, America."

Always the cynical one, Robin thought, as she followed her sister toward the parking lot. Carol Lyn rolled an over-sized suitcase behind her and seemed to know where they were headed.

***

How Robin pictured her father's family: Brownie photos. She stared long at her favorite, the one with cousins lined up, tallest to shortest, that last reunion on Beaver Creek in the Bear Paws. Her mother, despite "hating" Montana, preserved plenty of photos in albums. Under supervision, she let them thumb the pages. The date written below that picture, 1959, shortly before their father decided to move them to the Tri-Cities and then on to Everett and from there, to the next place. What she remembered: a fortress of willows, the creek, an uncle handing her a rod to fish. What little she knew.

"That's your cousin Scott." Her mother pointed to the boy between the girls. "He was closer to your age, Robin. Probably fat now." At six he wore glasses, black-rimmed, repaired with what might have been white electrical tape. She had vaguely felt better than him because she could see just fine. Now at 56 she wore progressives: a bear to keep clean, scratched at a glance. She laughed at her old self.

And here was the real Scott, still wearing glasses but skinny as Dad had been, meeting them, as planned at 4 p.m., at the funeral parlor. Parlor made it sound cozy, like the setting for an English tea party, instead of a pewter bowl of cello-wrapped pink-and-white striped mints, a turquoise vase of plastic carnations and roses, assorted greenery, a sturdy table with the guest register open to a blank page.

Robin tried to find that six-year-old in this man wearing a well-pressed suit, his thick brown hair braided and tied with a leather cord. Made her wonder who the real Scott was: someone wanting a piercing or a tattoo, or someone wanting to impress his "city" cousins. Robin wouldn't laugh, not at the whole memorial thing, not at the whole isn't-it-nice-to-meet-you-after-a-half-century thing.

"Scott's mother didn't arrange a niche for your father," the funeral director Mr. Wallace was telling Carol Lyn.

"We're taking him with us."

Robin refused to look at her sister. They hadn't discussed this. Not on the phone, not in the motel when they had "freshened up," her sister lighting aromatherapy candles she had packed for the trip, particular in how she placed them: one between their beds and one on the back of the toilet.

Carol Lyn always kept herself to herself. Going off to get an MBA, preparing to take on the world, settling for Minnesota, taking time to get the right man, waiting to produce *precisely* two children. Robin wouldn't argue it out. *Fait accompli*, when it came to Carol Lyn. She was inclined to leave Dad here, in this place he came back for.

"That's right." She nodded at the room. "We know where he'd like to be."

"Not a problem," Mr. Wallace said. "There are legal issues, you know?" He didn't wait for an answer and went on to say that the funeral home had an excellent stereo system. "So if you brought something." The sentence trailed off.

"You're probably a better judge of what's appropriate for. . . a service," Carol Lyn said.

"Any Frank Sinatra?" Robin said.

Her sister screwed her face into a brief smirk, and let it go. Scott played the sage, expressionless, waiting, as if for enlightenment. Mr. Wallace waited, too. Robin tried to think of the perfect song for their father, something he might have liked. *My Way* or *In the Wee Small Hours of the Morning*. The whole thing reeked sentimentality.

"Some old friends of your dad's sent flowers," Mr. Wallace said, as he followed them through the door and into the late July sun. "People have long memories around here." A hot wind kicked up some dust and they all covered their eyes with their hands. "Quite lovely really. The flowers. We'll put them out."

***

"Nice bar," Carol Lyn said and swiveled around as if to look at the patrons, as if she wasn't listening to anybody's conversation, as if she wasn't showing off her legs, her short red skirt.

The Palace had a gorgeous bar back, a floor to ceiling cabinet, three shelves of booze behind glass doors book-ending a pair of stained glass pink flowers. The varnished wood retained a richness that took years, some belief in forever. Something the box stores tried to imitate. Something that would have been easy to settle into.

Robin had asked about the bar her father frequented, but Scott wouldn't go to the Elks and didn't say why. Maybe he'd been banned for life. Hard to imagine, but when they drove by the Elks, with its white painted bricks and glass door, Carol Lyn agreed.

"Thought you'd like some old time bar," he said. "Probably not many left where you girls live."

The way he said *old-time* and *where-you-girls-live* made Robin's skin creep. Scott's words seemed forced, as if he didn't believe them. Though she hardly knew him, she didn't think he normally talked this cross between Southern Hick and BBC. He was family, so she wanted to cut him slack. The cousin sort of family, wearing a suit on a Tuesday in Havre, Montana, as if he had just come from a job interview. WTF. The funeral wasn't until the next morning. She thought he wanted to get through this quick, but then he almost swooned when Carol Lyn suggested a drink after the funeral parlor visit. Robin found herself liking him.

"Mom says your dad went off to California to find a virgin."

Scott tucked his face into his beer. When he snorted some froth up his nose, he spluttered, "Sorry," and wiped it off. "That's what she says, that Uncle Matt wasn't coming back until he married his virgin."

Robin worked to make sense of her cousin's words, square them with the mother she knew, the mother who once told a neighbor she didn't intend to live for her children, the mother who made good on that by finding a new husband who made sure she didn't have that worry.

Dad had seldom spoken of desires, though it went without saying he expected a wife to be faithful and his two girls to be polite. Especially when he was drunk or having a *go of it*. He gave up telling their mother what he wanted.

Sometimes the dead do speak, Robin thought. She just didn't want her father communicating from The Other Side through her cousin. And what was the message? And did she need to listen? She took a slow pull on her beer.

"What else did Aunt Breen say? Dad never talked much about the past or anything, did he?" Robin pointed her beer mug at Carol Lyn, felt a silent *Sis* punctuating the question. The ice was melting fast in *Sis's* highball glass.

"Only when he trounced us at cribbage or pool," Carol Lyn said. She grinned into her glass. "Dad's way of *learning* us. Never cut us any slack, but he was OK. When we won, it was fair and square."

Scott said he didn't find that hard to believe. "Considering." He took a confident pull on his beer.

"Considering" hung over the table and Robin let it drift.

"Old Germans around here like to win at everything, doesn't matter what." Scott scooted his chair closer to the table, using an elbow to wipe away his beer ring. He leaned in. "Grandpa was the worst of them. According to Mom. Never could do anything right. Your dad took the brunt of that."

Robin thought about how one generation condemned the next, and the next. She couldn't let go of Dad bringing their mother home as The Virgin. Seemed ludicrous, crazy. Marrying a woman, parading her around, like a prize cow? Robin hated the whole idea. It smacked of arranged marriages, sheets hung out the morning after. Maybe he was trying to prove something to his own father. *That Old Prick*, their mother called him.

Whatever it was, for Dad, it must have made sense, and maybe, because there weren't any virgins left in Montana, he went to California for one. Or maybe he had gone to find a job?

How long did it take their father to realize he was a couple of stops along Mom's road?

***

One skinny woman wielding a cane and a couple old guys with Elks pins on their ball caps touched Robin's arm and said the usual, which brought tears to her eyes. Carol Lyn stiffened when anyone laid a palm on her jacket sleeve or bent over her.

Aunt Breen gave them quick hugs outside the funeral parlor, before and after the mostly silent proceedings. Nobody offered to say anything. The music canned. No Sinatra. Robin saw her aunt didn't bother to dab at her eyes with the handkerchief clenched in her hand, nor did she ask them to come by for drinks.

"My brother was done with the booze," Aunt Breen said, like that explained her lack of hospitality. "Had been for a long time."

Scott rubbed his nose to hide the raised corner of his mouth. His mother reminded him he was expected for dinner.

"Yes, ma'am."

When she turned to the sisters, Aunt Breen lifted her chin higher, as if she were peering over non-existent glasses. "You two look like your mom's side, I can see that."

In the van Carol Lyn leaned into Robin's shoulder. "What a piece of work. *Looking like your mom's side*. Who is she."

"Down, sister. We'll be gone tomorrow."

***

"Good crowd for your dad," Scott said over his shoulder. He was turning the key in their father's apartment door. After the memorial, he

had led the way across town in his Honda Civic. This the only processional Dad would get, Robin thought. Scott had promised the evening before to help them sort through what remained of their father's life. "A good send-off. He'd be pleased."

When they walked in, it was hard for them to ignore the over-sized painting of a nude hanging on the living room wall. As she moved around, Robin felt the woman's eyes following her. Might have been looking to escape, to push herself outside the cheap frame, to be done with the weight of those perfect breasts. On occasion their father had forgotten a *Playboy* on the floor in the bathroom of whatever apartment he was renting. Hard for teenage girls not to turn the pages, stare at the airbrushed photographs of mostly naked women. At some point during their visit, the magazine disappeared.

Why hadn't her aunt or cousin thrown out the painting, or squirreled it in a closet, for the bereaved daughters to find on their own? Made you wonder, Robin thought.

Scott said something.

"What?" Carol Lyn said.

"Some say that picture was your mother." He seemed to admire the painting.

"Don't think so," Carol Lyn said. "Robin?"

The woman in the portrait had long blond hair and *seemed* calm. A trick: the blue wash of evening, the distant lake, smooth surface promising peace, a single ray of pale yellow light. Dad must have made up stories for the gawkers. It really was a terrible painting.

"Our mother keeps her hair short," she said. "Closest she's been to blond is steelwool gray."

Carol Lyn opened a kitchen cupboard, closed it; opened another, closed it.

"I was too young to recall your mom," Scott said. "A shame." He was looking deep into the painting. What did he want?

"Definitely not her," Carol Lyn said, close to a smile. "Our mother was never that. . . that."

Virginal. What Robin wanted to say, but didn't.

"Never knew her," Scott said. "Your family moved on so quick. Aunt Bertie, it would have been, if you'd stuck around."

"Berta," Carol Lyn said. "Short for Roberta. Berta and Matt. Really rolls off the tongue, doesn't it? Now it's Berta and Bob."

"Better wrap this up in towels or a blanket," Robin said. She lifted the painting gently from the two nails that supported the twisted wire. One nail pulled free and clacked to the floor. She left it.

"You're taking that *thing*? I'd just leave it for whoever moves in." Carol Lyn stood behind her, like she was trying to decipher the artist's three-letter squiggle. "Or throw it in the dumpster."

Robin took in the oversized Naugahyde, the wall of shelves, the neat, color-coded *Time-Life* books on art and The Old West and cooking. She knew Dad actually read them. "You should read some of the history of

this country," he once said and handed her *The Gunfighters*, as if a high school girl wasn't more interested in boys. *Dad, really*.

"Scott, can you go grab those boxes in the van," Carol Lyn said and handed him the keys. She crouched down, pulled out *The Cooking of China*, set it on the carpet at her feet. "Can you see Dad making Peking duck?"

"Take what you want," Robin said. "The rest will have to go to a thrift shop. Or, like you said, throw it all in a dumpster." She walked to the one window that looked out on anything: a strip of sidewalk, weeds working the cracks, the sky cloudless above the red metal roof of a once-white house.

***

If Dad had been with them, when they pulled out of Havre, he would have said the van was like that horse. On cue, the sisters would have asked, "What horse?" and he would have said, "The one aiming for the barn."

What he really meant was *the bar*.

It turned out all along that Carol Lyn had been scheming to get a ride to Great Falls to catch a one-way flight home. One night in a sleeping car crossing North Dakota was enough. With the right company, like her husband, Jake, it could have been romantic, Robin thought. Something to be said for her second marriage. She wondered how happy her sister was.

The wrapped-up nude lay facedown on the floor behind them, and behind that three or four boxes of this and that. Carol Lyn had squeezed what she wanted into the suitcase, the maple box with Dad she'd wedged between her feet. The urn's polished brass plate listed his dates and his full name. Who knew what the W stood for.

"So, dear old Dad?" Robin said.

"Yes?"

"No niche? A closet shelf?"

Carol Lyn arched her back away from the seat, pressed her shoulders together, pulled the visor down, checked her face in the mirror, flipped up the visor, and resettled herself.

"You're the one who said you knew where he wanted to be," she said. "I did bring plastic bags. We can divvy him up."

"Kind of brutal, don't you think?" Robin said. "Divvying up?"

When Carol Lyn didn't answer, the silence felt comfortable.

The fields repeated themselves as she drove south and Robin regretted not knowing what thrived in that country. In grade-school, she heard about winter wheat and barley, how Havre was one point in Montana's Golden Triangle. A big deal, she recalled. Fields, no doubt, fed by irrigation water pulled off the Missouri, by pesticides and fertilizers trucked in. Not so different from the country around Boise, except there it was the Snake pumped out and dumped on the thirsty earth.

"How you getting the. . . box open?" Robin knew her sister had an answer.

"I brought screwdrivers."

Robin snorted the water she'd just gulped from her bottle. When Carol Lyn laughed, the curls of her permed hair jiggled, fell back into place. "Both kinds."

"What a Girl Scout," Robin said. When her sister laughed even louder, she grinned.

The envy she always felt toward her sister was about more than golden blond hair, even when she knew her sister's now came from a bottle. True confession from the night before. Her own hair, still fine and thick, razor cut a shaggy short, had settled into a platinum some thought she paid for. Vanity of vanities. They weren't so different, she thought.

Over dinner, they tried to pinpoint where *home* had been, when Robin was in second grade, Carol Lyn still toddling after their mother. The family had settled more than one place, but they were thinking about the narrow silver-and-red trailer plopped between fields. The place where they watched thunder and lightning, trembling, unafraid. The place their father stood close by.

Robin always went back to this before-place: before her parents divorced, before the fights with her sister, before her first marriage and losing a baby. Before before. As if rehashing a life made any difference, as if anyone gets to hit replay, cut and edit, shoot a new frame.

On this trip, Robin had wanted more than a memory. She didn't tell Carol Lyn any of that. If her sister had stepped back onto the train, she might have driven the backroads, headed west on Highway 2, maybe found the remains of something.

***

"Remember the combines?" They had returned to their room after the Palace drinks and Carol Lyn had ratcheted up the window blinds. She fiddled with the latch to see if she could open the slide, let in a cool breeze.

"Yep. You called them columbines."

"I did not," Carol Lyn said.

"Did, too. You were little."

Robin grew wistful, picturing her sister *bug-eyed*, straggly blond hair hanging in her face, impatient hands brushing it back. Their mother liked to braid the girls' hair, identically, pinning two woven strands on top like crowns. When angry with them, she grabbed those tight braids and tugged up. Hurt like hell.

For Robin, the combines highlighted their Montana time, bright green and yellow lumbering beasts that left grain dust in the air, a sunlit glitter that made it hard to breathe, beautiful to see. Surrounded by all that wheat, Dad had put together free rent in exchange for watching some fields. Until he got a real job, the four of them crammed into a trailer they apparently owned, two bedrooms and all. Their mother, an L.A. girl, tried to grow 100 chicks for meat and eggs to sell. That didn't work out for anybody. Red-tails, disease, a squeamishness when it came to killing.

What her father watched for across those fields, Robin couldn't have said. Skunks were what she smelled. Their dog Buddy got into porcupine, brought home quills skewered through his sad tongue. The third time Dad shot the dog. Even then she knew it was out of love. They all tried not to cry.

***

"What are you going to tell her?" Robin said.

"Mom? About Dad?"

"We could say we scattered him in the *wide* Missouri."

Her sister covered her mouth with the curve of one hand and bent forward until her head touched the dashboard. Robin thought she might be crying, but then she laughed so hard, she hiccoughed.

"We could say it's none of her business," Carol Lyn said. "We just might let him out somewhere in Montana. Mail her an empty box, with a photo of the location inside."

"And then you, you'll have to ask her about The Virgin of California," Robin said and relaxed: into the feel of the road, the drop toward the Missouri at Fork Peck, letting the van make its own way, toward the places they had made do for home, toward what came next, where their father's horse was.



Connie Wieneke's recent work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Talking River Review*, *Stand*, *Pilgrimage*, *Camas*, *Split Rock Review*, *Burningword Literary Journal*, and *High Plains Register*. Her prose and poetry is included in the forthcoming *The Artists Field Guide to Yellowstone* and *Orison Anthology*. In 1991 she earned an MFA from the University of Montana. She has received two literary fellowships from the Wyoming Arts Council and has been living in the state since 1983, where she has worn many hats.

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.

WESTERN ROAD TO 30

The Biden administration has established a goal to conserve 30% of the nation's lands and waters by 2030 for the benefit of all Americans. This goal, known as "30x30," has been recommended by scientists in order to prevent the collapse of the planet's natural systems while supporting communities across the country.

Based in Denver, Colorado, the Center for Western Priorities, a watchdog group focused on public lands in the American West, is a project of the Resources Legacy Fund, a team of about 50 people based in California and Montana. In April, it issued a report, "The Western Road to 30," in which it observed that 77% of Westerners strongly or somewhat support setting a national goal of protecting America's lands and waters by 2030. The conclusion to the report is this:

The moment has arrived to confront the climate and nature crises by working to protect 30% of America by 2030. The natural landscapes of the Western United States provide a unique opportunity to preserve our natural heritage while supporting local communities. Western states have starkly different cultures and challenges, but all have a strong conservation legacy.

The West is positioned well to lead the way in a new era of conservation. By continuing and expanding innovative work already happening on the ground, states can contribute to the bold 30x30 goal while promoting locally-led efforts and driving a wide range of benefits for taxpayers and communities. Moving forward, conservation efforts should prioritize equitable access to the outdoors, tribal sovereignty, and functional ecosystems.

Source: https://medium.com/westwise/the-western-road-to-30-696927ba0285

STATE PARKS

One of the areas focused in the above report as part of land protection mechanisms was state conservation areas, including state parks. Utah has 42 state parks managed by the Utah Department of Natural Resources. The state legislature recently appropriated money to establish two additional parks: Utahraptor State Park, located roughly 15 miles northwest of Moab, and Lost Creek State Park, located just outside Croydon in Morgan County.

In 2020, visitation to state parks soared in almost every state in the West. Colorado and Utah had the highest state park visitation, with 18.3 million and 10.6 million visitors respectively. . . .

State parks are an important tool in closing the "nature gap"—the unequal distribution of nature in the U.S. based on racial and socioeconomic factors. Strategically-planned state parks can work to close that gap, especially if states prioritize proximity to communities that have traditionally lacked adequate access to the outdoors.

Sources: https://www.westernroadto30.org/state-conservation-areas and https://stateparks.utah.gov/2021/07/08/investing-in-the-future-of-outdoor-recreation-exciting-changes-coming-to-utah-state-parks/

WINNING THE WEST

The Center for Western Priorities also issued a poll – conducted in Arizona, Colorado, Montana, New Mexico, and Nevada – which examined the importance of outdoor lifestyles to Westerners in the wake of COVID-19 social distancing guidelines. The poll

. . . shows heightened support for public lands and conservation policies among the growing "outdoor voting bloc" that is critical to winning competitive elections in Mountain West swing states.

With nearly all voters affirming they enjoyed open spaces as a respite during the pandemic, the outdoors are taking on an even deeper meaning for many. To the point, the importance of public lands issues increased during the COVID-19 pandemic for 34 percent of voters, while remaining durable for the rest. Overall, 81 percent of voters say national public lands, parks, and wildlife issues are important to them in deciding which candidate to vote for in Presidential and Congressional elections. . . .

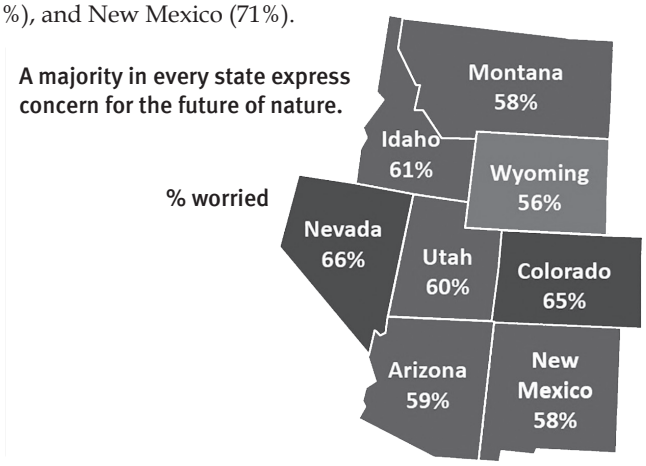
Thinking about a post-pandemic economic recovery, voters in majorities upwards of two-thirds back federal government stimulus support for the outdoor recreation industry and the types of small businesses impacted by vacation and travel cancellations to outdoor destinations. By contrast, support for stimulus payments to oil, gas, mining, and coal industries is low, ranging between 32 and 36 percent.

Source: https://westernpriorities.org/2020/06/24/new-poll-shows-importance-of-the-outdoors-to-voters-remains-strong-and-intensified-during-covid-19/

STATE OF THE ROCKIES

For the last eleven years, Colorado College has surveyed registered voters in Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming. The poll found that 61% of those surveyed were concerned about the future of air, land, water, and wildlife.

The poll found overwhelming support for several conservation-focused proposals. More than 9 in 10 respondents said that states should still find money to protect nature despite budget problems. Of those surveyed, 66% support having all energy be produced by "clean, renewable sources such as solar, wind and hydropower over the next ten to fifteen years." Support for this energy transition was even higher in Colorado (72%), Idaho (68%), Nevada (71%), and New Mexico (71%).



Source: https://www.coloradocollege.edu/other/stateoftherockies/conservationinthewest/2021/2021-State-of-the-Rockies-D2a1.pdf

A number of environmental problems we tracked from 2011 have increased as "very serious problems," especially climate change.

% Extremely/Very Serious	2011	2021	% Increase
Climate change	27%	54%	+27%
Loss of habitat for fish and wildlife	38%	55%	+17%
Pollution of rivers, lakes, and streams	42%	55%	+13%
Inadequate water supplies	40%	51%	+11%
Loss of family farms and ranches	50%	56%	+6%
The impact of oil and gas drilling on our land, air and water	31%	37%	+6%
Air pollution and smog	40%	43%	+3%

Source: https://www.coloradocollege.edu/other/stateoftherockies/conservationinthewest/2021/index.html

TRASHING OUR TREASURES

Environment America, located in Denver, Colorado, is part of The Public Interest Network, also located in Denver, which operates and supports organizations committed to a strategic approach to social change. In July, they released a report, "Trashing Our Treasures: Congressional Assault on the Best of America," which observes that, despite public lands being protected by cornerstone environmental laws, several Congressional leaders have been working to open them up to resource exploitation and development.

National parks, forests, and public lands are essential for maintaining healthy ecosystems, safeguarding our waterways, cleaning up the air we breathe, protecting wildlife habitat, and providing opportunities for Americans to connect with the outdoors. Recreation and tourism on public lands also contributes to a $646 billion outdoor industry economy that supports 6.1 million jobs. . . .

Representative Henry Waxman, who co-released a report detailing the anti-environmental track record of the current Congress, commented that "the House Republican assault on the environment has been reckless and relentless. In bill after bill, for one industry after another, the House has been voting to roll back environmental laws and endanger public health. The Republican anti-environment agenda is completely out-of-touch with what the American public wants."

The report reveals some startling numbers: in the first session, House Republicans voted 191 times to weaken environmental protections; by the end of end of 2011, there were 47 votes to weaken land and coastal protections. These votes were largely driven by powerful oil and mining industry lobbyists, large-scale developers and corporate interests. Representative Howard Berman, who released the report with Representative Waxman, said, "sadly, many Republicans in the House of Representatives have shown a clear pattern of putting business interests ahead of human interest—of protecting corporate polluters over constituents." If this trend persists, we will only continue to see bills that threaten to harm our beloved public lands.

Source: https://environmentamerica.org/sites/environment/files/reports/Trashing%20our%20Treasures%20report.pdf

CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

The Bill Lane Center for the American West is based at Stanford University. Recently, researchers there issued a report, "Conservation Easements Redraw the Western Landscape," explaining that conservation easements are less common in the western United States than in the East. However, with its higher percentage of privately held land and less open space, conservation easements may become a tool for western landowners to block mining and energy exploration under their land.

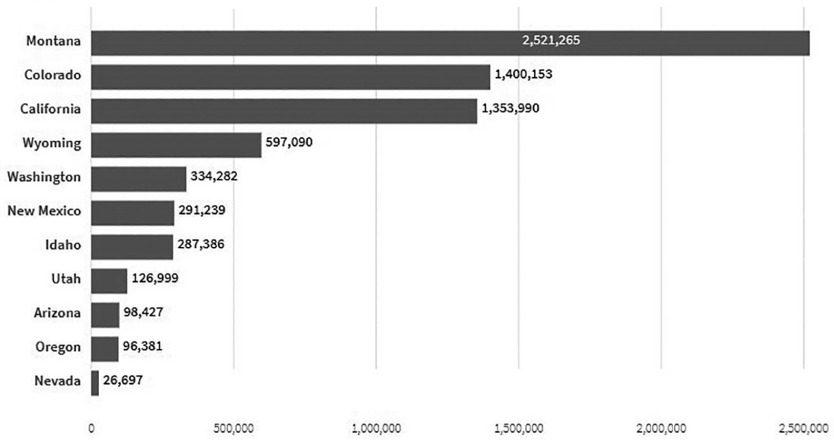
For most of the last half-century, landowners in every state have been able to use conservation easements to protect their holdings from development in perpetuity. In keeping lands free of everything from homes to factories to airports, conservation easements help to preserve wildlife habitats and rural landscapes.

But the same easy conservation option is usually precluded when the subsurface mineral rights are owned by someone else. The legal term for this mixed ownership is "split estate"; it is a common occurrence in the mineral and energy-rich lands of the American West.

A new kind of easement might change the situation. A Stanford professor of Earth Sciences, Rob Jackson, teamed up with two law professors, James Salzman from the University of California, Los Angeles, and Jessica Owley from the University of Buffalo, to propose conservation easements for subsurface areas.

"We propose a novel tool, the Mineral Estate Conservation Easement, to provide landowners with the ability to restrict hydraulic fracturing and other oil and gas subsurface activities in areas of particular social or ecological vulnerability."

Western State Conservation Easements, in Acres



Source: https://west.stanford.edu/news/blogs/and-the-west-blog/2017/conservation-easements-map

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*

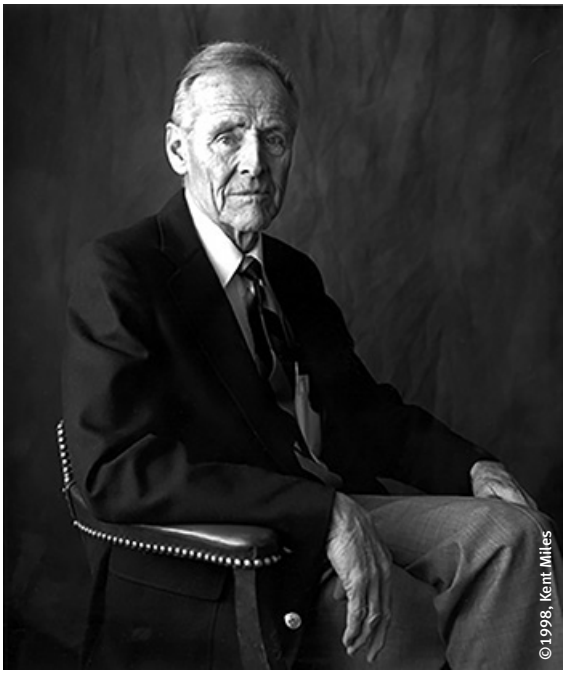
Indexed in: Abstracts of English Studies, Humanities International Complete, Index of American Periodical Verse, MLA International Bibliography, and Sociological Abstracts. Member, Council of Learned Journals.

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 © 2021 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 2021
Dr. O. Marvin Lewis Essay Award



to

O. Alan Weltzien

for

"Four Corners, a Point, and a Circle: The Seductions of Geometry"

in the fall 2020 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 2021—VOL. 38, Nº1—U.S. $10

CONVERSATIONS

Gregory C. Thompson with Mark DeVoto

ESSAYS

Mark Harvey, Nate Schweber, David Rich Lewis, Russell Burrows, Val Holley, Adam M. Sowards, and Ralph Hardy

POETRY

Christian Woodard, William Snyder, Eric Paul Shaffer, Donna Emerson, Stephen Lefebure, Brian Glaser, Taylor Graham, James Grabill, Joseph Powell, Rebecca Patrascu, and Angelica Allain

FICTION

Scott Pedersen, Joe Farley, Joseph Bathanti, and Connie Wieneke

ART

Cara Despain

https://www.facebook.com/weberjournal

WEBER STATE UNIVERSITY
Lindquist College of Arts & Humanities