

WEBER

1983

THE CONTEMPORARY WEST

Fall 2024 | Volume 41 | Number 1

EST 1983
WEBER
THE CONTEMPORARY WEST

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

On Interviews

from the editor's desk

In most interviews, both subject and interviewer give more than is necessary. They are always being seduced and distracted by the encounter's outward resemblance to an ordinary friendly meeting.

— Janet Malcolm,
The Silent Woman: Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes (1995)

I sometimes find that in interviews you learn more about yourself than the person learned about you.

— William Shatner

I do not want to talk about it.

— Don DeLillo

Sentences spoken by writers, unless they have been written out first, rarely say what writers wish to say. Writers are unlucky speakers, by and large, which accounts for their being in a profession which encourages them to stay at their desks for years, if necessary, pondering what to say next and how best to say it. Interviewers propose to speed up this process by trepan[n]ing writers, so to speak, and fishing around in their brains for unused ideas which otherwise might never get out of there. Not a single idea has ever been discovered by means of this brutal method—and still the trepa[n]ning of authors goes on every day.

I now refuse all those who wish to take the top off my skull yet again. The only way to get anything out of a writer's brains is to leave him or her alone until he or she is damn well ready to write it down.

— Kurt Vonnegut Jr.
Palm Sunday (1999)

On the personal level, winning the Nobel imposed on me a life-style to which I am not used and which I would not have preferred. I accepted the interviews and encounters that had to be held with the media, but I would have preferred to work in peace.

— Naguib Mahfouz *(1988)*

Cover art: Chin Chih Yang, ***123 Pollution Solution*****, Solo Exhibition at Tenri Cultural Institute, New York, 2010**

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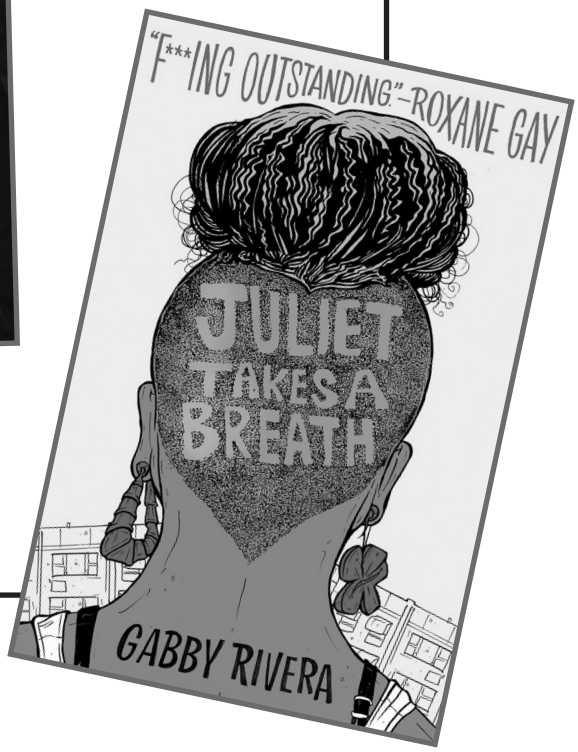
An Offering of Self-Love:
Navigating Queerness, Identity, and Politics

Heidi Thornock



Julieta Salgado

A Conversation with
Gabby Rivera



Gabby Rivera is a self-proclaimed "Writer, Speaker, Storyteller, and Latinx Culture Nerd." Much of her writing draws directly from her experiences growing up a Queer Latinx in the Bronx. Her debut novel, Juliet Takes a Breath*, received almost immediate recognition by the American Library Association and was added to the 2017 Amelia Bloomer Book List. She was later contacted by Marvel to develop the lesbian, Latina superhero* America Chavez *in her own stand-alone comic series. Rivera has written another comic series,* b.b. free*, hosted the podcast* Joy Revolution *about prioritizing joy, and made numerous media and speaking appearances, including* Ted Talks*,* NBC*,* Syfy Wire*, and at various universities and high schools. You can find a list of her activism at www.gabbyrivera.com.*

I'm excited to be here at Weber State University. I'm excited for this program and to connect with students who are reading *Juliet Takes a Breath*, which is like "the little book that could." In recent years, the book has found itself on banned books lists in many schools, throughout many states. Teaching this book is a radical act; I'm excited to meet the educators and students here who rally around the idea that storytelling can act as a way to resist and move forward.

I love that you call Juliet Takes a Breath *"the little book that could."*

Before Penguin Random House came along, I indie published the book in 2016. I was basically giving away copies on the subway and doing little promotions on my WordPress blog. I'd do promotions like, "If you buy one book, I'll donate another book to your high school's GSA [Gay-Straight Alliance]"—it was my own hustle with *Juliet*. The fact that *Juliet* is a graphic novel now—after being republished by Penguin Random House, going on a book tour, and being taught in schools—is incredible.

Juliet *is a debut novel. You've received many awards and accolades for it, which is phenomenal for* anything*, let alone a* debut *novel. Were you anticipating this kind of reception? If not, why do you think it's had such a positive response in so many ways, as well as negative responses in other ways?*

When I was writing this novel, there was no diversity or inclusion at the forefront of any of our industries, especially publishing. Growing up in the Bronx, I never imagined I would become an author. I looked at that world as though that wasn't even a part of who I was; that wasn't important to me. I didn't want to be part of their world because they didn't care about mine. I wrote *Juliet Takes a Breath* for the Bronx; for the girls in my neighborhood; for all the inner-city kids navigating queerness, identity, and politics. I wrote it in *our* language; *our* slang; *our* Spanish. I didn't care about mainstream stuff, because that wasn't for us anyway. So, I was excited when my community received it so well—Queer bloggers were talking about it; Black feminists were talking about it; high school kids were sneaking it around in class. That, to me, was the greatest success—before Penguin, before Marvel—it hit with my community. I think that's the staying power of *Juliet*—there's always going to be some little Brown Queer kid, whether they're in the sticks or in the inner city, trying to discover themselves. Here's a book that says, "Hey, you deserve love. You will live to the end of the story, and you're going to have a blast."

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Juliet *took on heavy content and language—which is off-putting for some readers. You tackle feminism, female anatomy, racism, lesbianism, and so on. Any one of those topics would be a hard stop in a lot of cases for writing. Why did you choose to take on all of them at once?*

There wasn't really a choice. I was just writing about myself, my neighborhood, and my family—it was always all of those things. I'm from New York; we grew up with mayor Michael Bloomberg who enacted "stop and frisk" policies. The whole time I was a teenager and a young adult, the police had the right to board buses and trains to yank Black and Brown men off the trains; to demand to see bus fare; to demand to see paperwork. You'd have to wait for the police and ICE to come; it was so violent. So, how am I not going to write about race and brutality? How am I not going to write about feminism when I see one version in my mother and my grandmother, and then I see a totally different version when I go to a predominantly white college? There's no choice but to take on all of it. At the same time, *Juliet Takes a Breath* is a book that says, "I don't have all the answers, and that's okay; I am going to love myself." Throughout the book, Juliet's identity, the core of her existence, is love—to love others; to love herself; and to know that she deserves to be loved.

But, you're right, there is some spicy language in the book. I don't know what teenagers are like here in Utah, but in the Bronx the language is hard, the language is aggressive, and it is very honest. So, there was no way I was going to write a book for the Bronx and sanitize the language.

There is a heartbreaking scene in Juliet*, when Harlowe is trying to offer a show of solidarity. Instead, she completely undercuts Juliet by reciting a false history that she never even asked about. While reading it, I could feel the pain; I could feel the hurt. But, I am also a white woman of privilege; I certainly don't experience microaggressions on the same level as many other people do. Beyond the fact that Harlowe spoke out about something she knew nothing about, can you define this moment? Why were her actions so hurtful and so harmful?*

Harlowe's character is exciting. She is a mentor. She is a writer. She is a wild feminist. She is a free woman in her mind. She has bodily autonomy. She is not beholden to men or the patriarchy. There's something very loving about her as well. It was important for me to pull together all of those pieces of her, because that's when microaggressions, blatant racism, or any kind of violence, hurt the most—when it comes from someone we love, like a grandmother, or a teacher at your

school, someone you look up to. The wildest and the most painful thing about Harlowe is that when she was confronted with the human idea that *your* struggle cannot represent *all* struggles, instead of owning that and dropping into vulnerability she went on the defense and held up somebody else's identity, almost like a shield. It's like if gunfire was coming your way, and you grabbed the nearest Brown kid to protect yourself, instead of just saying, "I did the wrong thing."

One of the biggest problems with white allyship is that white folks want to maintain a baseline of innocence. They say, "Please don't call me a racist. I'm innocent; I would never do that." There's no need to do that, and that statement in and of itself is a deflection; folks of color don't have that baseline of presumed innocence. The hardest thing about Harlowe was that she built this tender, beautiful relationship with Juliet—a Queer, young girl of color— but instead of defaulting to vulnerability, honesty, and respectful listening, she grabbed this girl by all her identities and threw her into the fray.

What could Harlowe have done differently? She made a mistake; how does she fix it?

We can't always fix things. That is something that allies—myself included—need to accept. I try to move in allyship with people who do not share my identity—Black leaders, Native people, disabled people, or other groups. When we are called out, it's time to acknowledge what we've done wrong. The best thing Harlowe could have done in that situation would have been to agree with Zara and say, "You're right, my feminism falls short here. I don't have a clear path on how to fix this. This is why it is important that I don't take up too much space here, that all of our voices can set the stage here." The number one thing Harlowe could have done was to work with Juliet to plan the speaking engagement and include others—artists and writers of color, with different experiences—to make it a community and multicultural event. As the adult in the situation, Harlowe could have been much more present from the beginning and encouraged Juliet to voice her opinions. I have seen more white folks in positions of power or clout who are now using their platforms to say, "I'm not the expert here. I'm going to bring in folks from my community and give *them* this platform."

Do you feel that white allyship is saying, "I have my experience; I'm opening the doors for everyone else to come join in and share their experiences with me"? What do you see allyship as?

It's like a shifting of power; deep allyship is when you are willing to shift your power. Let's imagine there's a famous writer of children's fantastical stories, who has so much money and basically has the lockdown on wizarding worlds—we won't mention any names. If we take someone like that, with that type of platform, and that type of reach, and that type of connection to generations of families, and instead of using that platform to bring in writers of vast experiences or boost books like ***Ghost Squad*** by Clarabelle Ortega, this person is using their platform to boost hate speech—that is not a shift of power. Shift your power by using some of those millions to help families, kids, writers, trans-people, and non-binary folks. True allyship is shifting your power for something good.

There's room for all of us here. Every contact, everybody I knew at Penguin, everybody I knew at Marvel, if folks wanted to get in the game—especially Black, Queer, and disabled artists—I sent emails and made meetings happen. That is the best we can do—internally and in our professional lives.

So, share opportunities instead of keeping them all to yourself.

Right.

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Let's shift for a moment and talk about America*, your graphic novel. What was your inspiration for this novel? Where did this story come from?*

America Chavez already existed in the Marvel universe before I came along. She had already been a Young Avenger for seven years; she was in the Team Brigade; she already had two moms; she was already Queer; she was already so strong that she could punch portals into other universes. When Marvel reached out to me, it was because they were looking to flesh out a solo series. Someone at Marvel had read my book ***Juliet***, and they reached out to me about doing the series. I read up on her, and I was inspired by America. ***America***, the comic series, is heavily inspired by ***Love and Rockets*** from the Hernandez brothers. ***Love and Rockets*** is a gorgeous body of work from these brothers. They write about '80s punk, Chicano-Mexican L.A. kids. They have created this whole world that includes backstories about great aunties in Mexico. The stories include future worlds where our Aunties, our ***tías***, fight crime in outer space; ***Love and Rockets*** is incredible. It is one of those comics that contain a plot, but it is so zany that anything is possible. That is the same energy I wanted to bring to ***America***. I wanted to do a couple of things: I wanted to show her in college, surrounded by a group of friends; I wanted her to have connection to her ancestors; I wanted the series to have a clear—unapologetically so—pro-hippie, pro-indigenous ancestral magic to it. Right wing Twitter, Proud Boy culture gets up in arms about these things because most of our culture is made for them. Why not have a blast and make a crazy Queer comic?

I especially love that she's finding her space in her heritage; she's claiming that and not shying away from that. I think we need more claiming your heritage, whatever it is. Claim your heritage.

That was totally intentional. In issue seven, her origin story, "Fast and Fortuna," she goes to the ancestral plane and gets to see, firsthand, the story of her peoples' history in the sky—unadulterated, unedited. Usually, histories are told by the conquerors. That scene was huge, because essentially, she's an orphan. I thought, I can't have this Latina superhero just be an orphan out there. So, what pulls her back is that she found out she had a grandmother; her grandma takes her to a place and teaches her about her history. When you're Latino, or Black,

When you're Latino, or Black, or Asian – whatever it is – and you go to an institution that only tells you the history of the country you live in from the perspective of slave owners, or the perspective of colonizers, you begin to internalize that your history isn't as important as other people's history. In America, *I said, "we're not doing that." America embraces her history from a perspective of personal experience and familial heritage; it is her destiny and legacy.*

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America is definitely a superhero. I want to know about your heroes – whether they're real life heroes, literary heroes, or author heroes. Who are your *heroes?*

Any kid who is going through some sort of struggle or heartache, who is able to tell their story, they're my hero. When you have the courage to share what you're experiencing with the world, you're a hero to me, especially when it comes at the possible expense of your family no longer caring for you, of you getting thrown out of your church. If there's incredible risk involved and you're still telling that story, you are a hero.

In Puerto Rico, there's a town called Santurce. There is an LGBTQ group there called El Hangar. Everybody there—the organizers, the curators, the dancers, the voters—are all deeply invested in mutual aid. El Hangar was very active during the earthquakes in 2019 and 2020—they gathered food, water, and generators. They did caravans to get food and supplies to all the Puerto Ricans in the mountains and in the hillsides. They did this without funding, without a giant grant, without FEMA, without UNICEF. They were just everyday Queer folks on the ground. They are my heroes. While they were doing that work, I was able to use my platform to help fundraise and send about $2,500 to $3,000 to help them during that time. All of my friends, my family, everybody on Instagram, donated what they could. As we move forward in society, we're going to dip away from celebrity worship and really dig deep into who our *community* heroes are and how can we plug in.

You write in a variety of genres – novels, graphic novels, a podcast – all different platforms. Being a writer myself, I know those all require different skill sets. Can you speak a little bit on the challenges, benefits, and experiences of trying out all these different genres?

I don't even think about them as genres when I'm writing; it's just *me* and the words that are the most important thing. A lot of young writers ask questions like, "How do I write a play?" "How do I write a mystery?" "How do I write fiction or nonfiction?" At first, it's just you and the words on the page; that's where it always starts. What is the story? Who are my characters? Where are they going?

Going from a regular novel to a comic was definitely a huge leap. I needed to read comics, study them, and ask questions. Marvel was great at providing me all the comics I could ever want to read. They connected me with folks who could answer my questions. In a book, you can use a whole chapter to

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get your mood and your theme across. But in a comic, sometimes all you have is one panel; sometimes that panel doesn't even have words. My favorite panels in *America* have no words. As a writer, that's huge; you can't leave the page *blank*. The learning experience of it was wild. I encourage everyone to write outside of what they're familiar with. The first issue of *America* was my first ever comic. And I tell you, if you go from episode one to twelve—you'll see the growth. The last five issues are my favorite—I felt like I was really getting my wings.

At the same time, I've been trying to write a *Juliet* screenplay. I was even accepted into the Sundance Screenwriters Lab—I loved it. At Sundance, I learned that I had to start all over again—in the most loving, helpful way. I need to take some classes on screenwriting. I have done my best; I'm proud of what I have done so far; it's been ten years in the making, but I have to start over. So, I would encourage other writers not to be afraid of that. Every turn just gets better. If you're not a little intimidated, maybe you're not as invested as you should be.

I love that advice – try what you're uncomfortable with. Typically, I write young adult novels. I also have a friend who plays around with flash fiction. I thought it sounded fun to try out flash fiction – oh, my gosh, it is hard; it is so hard! Flash fiction gives you very limited space to get your story, your ideas, your characters on the page – but it has made my novels so much better. I am able to focus on the content in my novels. I have more words to play with in a novel, but I'm more conscious of how those words interact. And so, I agree, sometimes pushing yourself outside of those comfort zones helps you to grow in astronomical ways.

Many of your works revolve around the idea of love and acceptance – both of yourself and of other people. In your experience, how do you feel that we can create a world of acceptance and equality?

There is so much at play in the world that wants us to be afraid of each other, that wants us to feel aggression towards each other. And that encourages us to believe in a scarcity mindset—the idea that if immigrants come into town, there's going to be nothing for *us*. If trans girls play on the team, then non-trans girls, cis girls, will never play sports again. There are always these wild binaries full of misinformation that are pumped up, purposefully, to make us want to fight each other. If everyone acknowledged that these forces are working against us, to keep us from unity, and to keep us from solidarity, you'd be doing your damnedest to work against it. For me, living in the Bronx, I can't turn away from other people's struggles. I can't say, "Oh, I'm Puerto Rican, and he's West Indian, so I'm not going to care about him." Or, "I'm a Christian Evangelical, but my neighbors are Hindu, so I'm not going to care." We are all here, trying to thrive. It's the same with books. If you read books about other people and their different experiences—Stacy Anchin, James Baldwin, Adrian Marie Brown, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston,

The Autobiography of Malcolm X—they can make you a better person. These books have saved my life. If you don't like reading books, there are comic books that'll do the same thing for you. Find the thing that allows you to open up your empathy, and your heart, and your vulnerability to other people. It will impact how you treat others and how you are treated by others, hands down.

I was listening to the audio book version of Juliet Takes a Breath *recently. I was so moved by something that Juliet's mother said that I had to stop the recording and write it down. She said, "Reading will make you brilliant, but writing will make you infinite." Can you speak to that statement?*

I wanted Juliet's mom to have one of those forever lines that you just gasp at. She's a Puerto Rican mother in the Bronx. Latino mothers are portrayed in a certain way—either they're seen as maids or immigrants fleeing—but the depth of our mothers and our grandmothers is rarely ever expressed, rarely ever elevated. And so, I thought, the mom has got to have a beautiful line, something that would spark Juliet to be a writer. I hope that this book can be a kind of offering, the kind of offering you put on an altar as a blessing and that will send you on a spiritual path to your best life. I wrote that line because I wanted to offer that to all the Queer kids who were reading the book. Read this book and then tell your story; create a universe for yourself. I wanted something dreamy like that. There have been people in my life who have told me really beautiful things; it is those moments of connection that have kept me tethered to the Earth. So, I wanted to offer that to my readers in *Juliet*.

Can you speak a bit about your writing journey. How did you come to where you are today?

I was a chubby, asthmatic, unpopular kid. I didn't get picked for sports; I didn't have a lot of friends. So, I read books and I wrote stories—this was before there was the internet. My mom was a teacher, and she encouraged me. I joined the writers and poets club in high school. I went to a predominantly white high school, so I was writing different stuff than the other girls in my writing class. They were writing about maple trees, and I was writing about somebody doing drugs on the subway—very different styles. My English teacher recommended a poetry club in the city. That's how I found the Nuyorican Poets Café. The café was started by Miguel Algarin in the 1970s as a place for radical Black and Brown folks to share their spoken word. So, there I was, a seventeen-year-old kid riding the subway down to the Lower East Side to the Nuyorican Poets Café to have my mind blown by people doing things with words that I could have never imagined. Later, I wrote for *Autostraddle*, the Queer women's website. I did everything in writing you can imagine. I joined the New York City Latino Writers' Group. I was doing open mics all over Manhattan while working two or three full-time jobs. Many of my women writer friends were getting published at the time, and one of my friends, Ariel Gore, asked me to submit a short story to her anthology; it was an anthology about Queer love in Portland, Oregon. So, I submitted a short story, and that was the first iteration of *Juliet*. It was published in that anthology. I kind of took off after doing readings, the anthology, and winning some awards. A publisher told me, "If you turn this into a book, I'll publish you." That was the impetus to write the book, *Juliet*. I ended up indie publishing, but along the way I met so many people. I've always turned to the writing community to have my back and hold my writing.

Right now, I'm working on a graphic novel called *Rapture*. It's the story of twelve-year-old Rapture Martinez, who is navigating Evangelical church and the impending End of Days. It's really about me navigating my own evangelical trauma, but in a graphic novel.

On the side of that, I'm working on my first memoir that explores being butch, Queer, and pregnant. I also have my sights set on writing a poetry book within the next two years. It will focus on falling in love, being pregnant, and getting engaged. I am almost always writing, but I'm also trying to be gentle with myself in the times when I'm not writing anything at all. I think there's this perception that to be a good writer, or a serious writer, you have to write every minute of the day. Some people do, but the majority of regular humans cannot produce at that rate. So, to anyone out there who's a writer, give yourself a lot of grace.



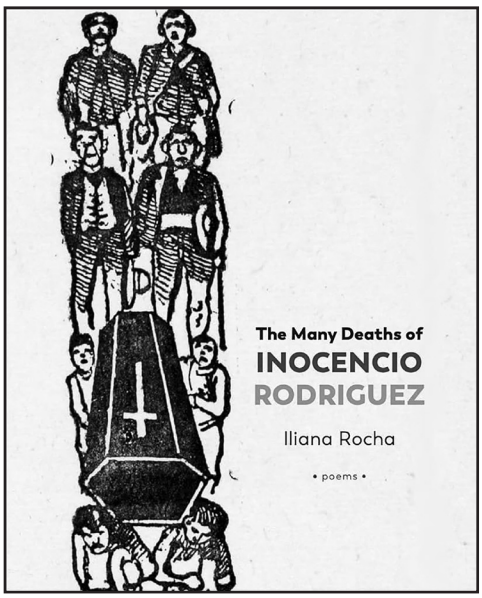
Heidi Thornock is a long-time English teacher and an even longer-time writer. She is deeply involved in the local writing community, particularly with the organization The League of Utah Writers. She has published short fiction and is currently seeking a publisher for a novel manuscript. You can follow her writing adventures at www.htwrites.com.

Intention Built on Obsession:
The Docu-Poetics of Iliana Rocha

Lamis Shaikh
Jordan Mackey
& Courtney Craggett



A Conversation with
Iliana Rocha



Iliana Rocha is the 2019 winner of the Berkshire Prize for a First or Second Book of Poetry for her newest collection, The Many Deaths of Inocencio Rodriguez. *Her debut collection,* Karankawa, *won the 2014 AWP Donald Hall Prize for Poetry (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015). The recipient of a 2020 CantoMundo fellowship and 2019 MacDowell fellowship, her work has been featured or is forthcoming in the* Best New Poets *2014 anthology,* Poetry, Poem-a-Day, The Nation, Virginia Quarterly Review, Latin American Literature Today, Oxford American, *and* Blackbird, *among others. She also serves as poetry co-editor for* Waxwing Literary Journal. *She earned her Ph.D. in literature and creative writing from Western Michigan University and is an assistant professor at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.*

The Many Deaths of Inocencio Rodriguez *is centered on the death of her grandfather, whose unsolved murder has been explained and reexplained through family fictions over the years. Her collection imagines his mysterious death in nearly thirty different poems, each one offering him some small grace or humanity. The rest of the collection explores the fine line between fact and fiction and the twisting of truth into art. She writes about the Southwest with grit and visceral realism that is so honest it often feels surreal. Her poems take surprising twists and turns and can leave you feeling disoriented in the best of ways. Justice is the primary note in Rocha's poems: justice for her grandfather and for missing and murdered women across the country, but especially in Texas. Her poems are not easy reads, and they don't aim to be. She writes unflinchingly about violence while also questioning our culture's commodification of it. Much of her work focuses on missing or murdered women and girls. It's a dark theme, but again, it conjures up the words* justice *and* grace *and* humanity. *These women deserve all three, and Rocha's poetry moves the needle in that direction.*

It was an honor to sit with Iliana Rocha and discuss her work. The following interview has been edited for clarity and concision.

(Craggett) Thank you so much for being with us today. We're excited to speak with you about your book. I would like to begin our conversation with a discussion on form and craft. Specifically, I would love to talk about the powerful endings to your poems. So many of them, like "I Watched a Bat Kill Itself in Yuma" and "Bird Atlas," incorporate a strong turn, and then they arrive at an ending that is unexpected and emotionally powerful. What do you hope your endings achieve?

I have an impulse to resist closure in a poem. I believe that my poems ask questions, but I don't necessarily want to provide all the answers—that's something that I take seriously as part of my engagement with the reader. So, I think with that impulse, there is a turn, but I'm hoping that turn doesn't feel like a bookend. I hope it feels like it leads us somewhere *different*—maybe to another possible trajectory or another opportunity to make meaning from where we began the poem in the first place. A lot of it is intuitive; I let the ideas guide me instead of trying to force an ending. I think in using that approach, there is more possibility for surprise and for risk.

(Mackey) You have such a strong command of words – whether they're in verse or in prose. Do you have a process for determining

whether a poem will be in verse versus in prose? Do you make changes as you revise, or does the concept come together in one form or another, intuitively?

I think in regard to the Inocencio Rodriguez strand of poems that I have in this book, I knew that I wanted them to appear as different wild shapes on the page. I wanted them to reflect different iterations, different tones, and different textures of the stories. I knew prose poems were going to be the commanding force in the collection. I didn't know what those prose poems were going to look like, but I knew that I was going to let myself be *wild*. As for the rest of that thread of poems, I treated them as the backbone of the collection. I wrote around them and tried to fill in some gaps. In many cases, the form guides how poems are going to look on the page—if they're going to be traditionally delineated or in prose. I have some collapsed sestinas where I knew I wanted to experiment with the received classical form. So, I used a combination of both. I intentionally chose prose poems in some places, and chose to formally play in others.

(Shaikh) You play a lot with formatting throughout your poems. How do you decide when and how you're going to format something differently than usual?

I knew that I wanted to write a series of tabloid poems in the collection. The poems had a very specific intent—I wanted them to be deconstructed villanelles. So, I already had an idea in mind of what shape I wanted the poems to have. This collection was built on obsession, and it felt natural that form was going to provide a framework and a grounding mechanism for that obsession. My collapsed sestinas, villanelles, and pantoums offer a lot of repetition. So, the obsession was literally built into the form. Once I had the thread of the Inocencio Rodriguez poems, and I had the thread of deconstructed villanelles, the book started to take shape naturally with those two guiding forces. That gave me permission to play even more with ideas of tabloids and entertainment. A traditionally lineated poem didn't seem right for that in a lot of ways, because I'm really thinking about genre and consumption. I think the poems that are traditionally lineated, for instance "Texas Seven," sort of anchors the first half of the book, and even with the content being more serious in nature, the poem still has a playful movement on the page. So, even when I'm being more traditional, I'm still thinking about ways to push the capability of what a page can do.

(Shaikh) Speaking of "Texas Seven," I noticed they had a different structure within them. Was that informed by you writing the poem? Did you research who these people were and what their personalities were like?

I did a lot of research on these men—I didn't know a lot about their personalities other than the crimes they committed, the circumstances of their crimes, and then the circum-

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stances of their escape. And I wanted to figure out a way to create a texture with the different sections of the poem. I don't think I could ever fully capture a personality on the page, but I think I can try to capture mood, and voice, and tone. It's a combination of the formal play and the formal attributes of the poems, combined with the imagery of the poem, because I was pretty intentional with how I captured their stories. I tried to handle everything with grace and empathy—I think those are two of the philosophies of the book. I wanted the reading experience combined with the form and aesthetic on the page and the imagery to also convey that.

(Craggett) "Texture" is a really good word to use to describe this book. I think it feels very textured in form due to how varied the form and the voice are within these poems. In contrast to that, I want to discuss titles. In both of your collections, you use the same title multiple times. The title of the book is used about twenty-six times. (Laughter) How do you think the repetition of the title serves the collection as a whole, or serves the individual poems?

I think it's twofold. One, I'm obsessive; I'm an obsessive poet. Both of my collections have emphasized my obsessions—either with family narratives in my first book, or with grandfather narratives in my second book—that's one. My third book, which I'm currently working on, also has similar titles. In that case, they're all called "Domestic Violence." I'm also really interested in what Gertrude Stein says about repetition with alterity. Every time you repeat something, the meaning shifts slightly. If you say "The Many Deaths of Inocencio Rodriguez" enough times, what's the effect? How does meaning change, depending on the poem? What is the feeling that it emits at the end of the book versus the beginning? Those two elements are what informed the similar titles.

(Mackey) Some of your prose poems begin almost like a news report before blossoming into something truly poetic. One example that comes to mind is "Collective Memory." The poem starts with a news clipping, and then it goes into a factual, informative intro that sets up what's going on in the poem. It leads up to this incredible line, "That's one way to describe the arrhythmia of our fumbling Americana." It is an amazing juxtaposition between a prosaic function and a poetic punch, which I think causes these moments to really jump out at the reader. I am interested to know your thought process behind this. Was this something that happened intuitively, or is this something you really are thinking about when writing?

When I'm working in this docu-poetic genre, I'm thinking about rhetorical moves between what the facts say and the underlying narrative and subtext that goes unsaid. I tried to bring those two ideas together. What is reported is usually devoid of humanity; that's why these tabloid poems are so important to me. I'm trying to write humanity back where it has been omitted. In collective memory, we report on these things, and we have the

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language of reportage and the rhetoric of it—it's very straightforward and very emotionless. I'm trying to bring back the poetic part, which is the lives that these people lived—their humanity and their tenderness. That, to me, is what is captured in the poetic language. That's what I'm hoping that some of these poems do; it's almost like a retort to the language of reportage.

(Craggett) You deal with crimes and tragedies that are fact-based. And yet, many of your poems take a surrealistic turn. The collection itself imagines the possible deaths of Inocencio Rodriguez, some of which involve time travel and sorcery. There's so much exciting work being done in hybridity and in the blending of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry right now. Can you talk about how you walk the line between fact, speculation, and genre? Why do you so often blur that line – both thematically and with genre?

I think in the case of my grandfather, we have so little fact in front of us that we, as a family, really had no choice but to fill in the gaps. And that's the fiction, right? With my grandfather, we had many fictions. I think in a lot of these cases it's like we sensationalize the juicy parts. Those are the parts that get repeated; those are the facts of the case that become the ***definitive*** facts of the case. It goes back to my previous point about writing humanity back into poems. A lot of that is dependent on the imagination, because I don't know many of the people I'm writing about. And that's why I really tried to walk the fine line of handling this with grace and care. Especially in my "Last Scene" poem, in naming these women I have a responsibility to them. I want to make sure that, again, I'm doing everything with grace.

I think that what's trending in poetry is hybridity. That's why I find this kind of work so exciting; genre lines are arbitrary lines of demarcation. I'm excited about poetry's possibility—on and off the page. I'm venturing into photography—melding image and text to create poetry videos in my next collection. I love the page; I *do* feel like the page is limitless and there are other possibilities for what poems can do to reach a broader audience as well. I think that if you have a poetry video, or if you have a poem that incorporates image, then that can reach somebody you may not find otherwise accessible. I'm also interested in the accessibility of hybridity and ways that fiction writers or nonfiction writers can come to this and have larger discussions about genre.

(Mackey) I'm always curious about how poets put their collections together. Your work has a strong central theme. Do you conceptualize the collection first, with this theme in mind, or does the collection come together more spontaneously? Did you see the book as the end goal going into it?

I did, I knew that I wanted to write this book. And I knew that the Inocencio Rodriguez poems were going to ground the collection—

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that's what I wanted everything to be ordered around. I wanted the personal to tether to the political. I knew that my goal was to write a poem for every version of his death that we'd heard over time. It was very intentional in terms of its craft, and even its order. The first section is "Bad Hombre," but I really wanted to look at masculinity and situate the reader in a context where we're interrogating it. The next section is "the place of guesswork"—that's where I have my "Texas Seven" poem. I wanted that poem to really stand on its own and provide a larger political anchor for the book. That poem looks at so much of the personal, but it also asks, "What is the role of the justice system, and can we call it that?" The section titled "Hoax" is a reference to the poem about Sherry Papini, a white woman from California who faked her own kidnapping and accused "two Latinos" of kidnapping her and holding her hostage. She has since been convicted of perpetuating that hoax. So, in a lot of ways, the sections are meant to push back on very divisive rhetoric and phenomena. And then, of course, "True Crime Addict" is the section where many of the tabloid poems are housed. And that's a place where it really feels like I'm trying to indict the self, the speaker, and the poet's participation in the consumption of true crime as entertainment.

(Shaikh) You cover different tragedies in varying amounts of detail in regard to suspense and pacing. For example, in some of the stories, we know exactly where it's going, in others they build up to something more. Is there a guideline or a particular feeling that you're trying to evoke when you're making these decisions about where you are going to put the information, and how much information you put into the piece?

I try my best not to glorify anything. It's a difficult decision to decide what to include and what to leave out. I think that's even more of an issue with my current project—I'm writing only about women who are murdered or missing—so, it's a fine line. Whatever I do include, I don't want it to be gratuitous. I want it to add to the goal of the poem. The goal of every poem is to reserve judgment and to generate empathy. So, if the details aren't helping me lead up to that, then they don't make it into the poem.

(Shaikh) Are there any big questions you ask yourself when you're discerning whether you are glorifying something or just stating the facts? Is there an ethical principle or guideline you follow?

I feel like it's an intuitive process. I am a stakeholder in the collection because it's about my grandfather. I'm also a stakeholder because I am a survivor, myself, of domestic violence and a near death assault. This collection offers a discourse about women survivors of violence. As such, I feel that I have a particular role and responsibility to protect, but also to reveal. What is revealed, though, for me, is going to be different than what I reveal about the women I'm writing about, or any of the subjects, in the book. Poetry, because it is not considered nonfiction, and because it has hybrid properties, gives us permission to do more exploring. Not that ethics are not a factor, because they always are. But I think poetry give us room that nonfiction or documentary does not. I think that's why I gravitate toward docu-poetry—it allows room for narrative to emerge. The property of language is that it allows you to put two words together and it forms a narrative—I think poetry is the best example of that. The poem houses facts, but it also has room for the imagination.

(Shaikh) You have a unique use of language. I've seen your poems compare two very different concepts and bring them together. Where does your creativity come from?

I feel like I'm a surrealist by nature and a magical realist—those are my main influences. I've read a lot of magical realism

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poetry collections and fiction. I think that has helped because I embody it, I was raised on these texts. And the poetry that I tend to gravitate toward is also very surreal. I look at the world, and I experience it in a surreal way. And so, what I'm writing down doesn't feel unexpected, or silly, or incongruent—it feels just like what *is*. I see the world for all of its magical properties. And that's just how I account and record it.

(Mackey) You've alluded to your next project already. Would you give us a few more details about what's next?

My first two books have been stepping stones for the collection that I really need to write, which, for me personally, will be the definitive book of my lifetime. It's called *Ours*. I've titled it that because it's about violence against women of color, and that violence belongs to all of us, it is all ours. There will be two running threads throughout the collection. One is of my own personal survivorhood. The other is other cases of Latinx women who have been murdered or are missing in Texas—I want it to be very localized and very specific. Most of the time, Latinx women's cases don't make mainstream media. There's a phenomenon coined by journalist Gwen Ifill called "white woman missing syndrome." Subjects like Gabby Petito generate all of the news coverage. They take up a lot of space, which is necessary—we need that too. But we also need space for the stories of women of color to be told. That was a guiding urgency for me: to be able to write towards some of these omissions in national media. When you start researching that stuff, your discoveries are wild and disheartening—it's hard to stay in joy and light. Again, this is going to be the most important book that I will write in my lifetime.

(Craggett) That sounds like an incredible book. I can't wait to read it. Thank you so much for sitting down with us today.



Lamis Shaikh is a filmmaker and artist hailing from India. Having spent most of her life in the United States, she has grown up in both cultures and speaks both English and Hindi. She received her B.A. in film studies and is currently pursuing her M.A. in professional communication at Weber State University. Lamis has always been passionate about storytelling, wanting to be a writer at even six-years-old. Keep up with all her creative work on Instagram at @lamisfilmandart.



Jordan Mackey studies creative writing at Weber State University where he is earning a Master of Arts degree. He has published several poems in *Bordertown*. His poetry and fiction often explore themes of the eroding American dream with an eye toward satirizing humor and the surreal.



Courtney Craggett is the author of the story collection *Tornado Season* (Black Lawrence Press, 2019). Her work appears or is forthcoming in *Image*, *The Pinch*, *Mid-American Review*, *Baltimore Review*, *Washington Square Review*, *CutBank*, and *Monkeybicycle*, among other journals. Originally from Texas, she now lives in Utah with her daughter, three cats, and a dog. She teaches creative writing at Weber State University.

“To Make is to Heal”

Jude Agboada



A Conversation with
MyLoan Dinh

Photo credit: Jeff Cravotta

MyLoan Dinh is a Vietnamese-born multidisciplinary artist who centers her practice around her refugee experience. She and her family fled Saigon in 1975 and stayed in refugee camps in Subic Bay and Wake Island in the South China Sea, then in Camp Pendleton in California before, eventually, settling in North Carolina. Her body of work traces her journey and healing and what it means to be "at home" in different locations. It speaks of identity, loss, memory, and recuperation.

MyLoan was formally trained as a painter, but – as in her personal journey – has experimented with and mastered other media to tell her story. An engaging storyteller, she encourages her audience to be still, meditate, and reflect upon their own personal journeys. She's meticulous in her craft and is well known for her Boom Boom *project: a pair of boxing gloves covered in eggshells and adorned with butterfly insignia, a symbol of metamorphosis, migration, and transformation. Translated as "butterfly" in Vietnamese,* Boom Boom *suggests the insect emerging from a fragile cocoon and cushioning the implied violence signified by gloves meant, not for warmth and protection, but for fighting and combat. Perhaps it is for that very reason that another work from the eggshell series, a punching bag titled* Truth, *is currently on exhibit at the Muhammad Ali Museum in Louisville, KY. It certainly represents her own metamorphosis from refugee to artist and maker.*

MyLoan was recently featured as a solo artist at Ogden Contemporary Arts. The center piece of the exhibition, "Baggage Claim," consists of a set of lightboxes made from bags commonly known as "Ghana Must Go" and gestures toward the title (and very heart) of the show: Unsettled Provisions. *This series features photographs of her and her family as they moved from place to place, and foregrounds the bags as containers of belongings and memory. Her layered performance piece* Longing for harmonies *is similarly captivating and invites reflection. Sound, video, and the use of eggshells and a variety of clothing all combine to communicate a complex narrative. For more on MyLoan's work, please visit https://ogdencontemporaryarts.org/.*



***Boom Boom Butterfly*, 12.5" x 16" x 4.5," boxing gloves, eggshells, 2019**

Thanks for taking the time to meet with me. History is an important part of our lives, and especially so in your case. With that in mind, I'd like to start from the beginning of your life as an artist. You are trained as a painter, and I am wondering whether you feel there was something growing up that drew you towards art as a medium?

When I think about why I'm drawn to art, I think of the time when my mom had to go to work. I was very little when we resettled in Boone, North Carolina. In America, you don't have time to adjust, right? We're talking about war refugees and trauma. My mom had to work and put me in daycare, and I would cry. I had major separation anxiety. The daycare women showed me the craft room, and then I stopped crying. I was immediately drawn to crafts, which helped me to deal with my trauma. I could make things with my hands and forget about everything else, even as a child. I think to make is to heal, and that has continuously been part of my life and my work. Another artist once said that making with your hands brings you closer to God, if you are religious. I agree with that.

I teach a color theory class and color psychology. We talk about when babies or young kids encounter color and crafts, or work with their hands; they are both relaxed and expressive. It is commonly seen as a form of therapy. You just made a strong statement about that: to make is to heal. Do you find that relatable to you?

Oh, totally. Now, more than ever. I think that's one of the reasons why I work with so many different materials. I'm a curious person, in general, and I felt painting just wasn't enough. I do go back to it. I smell the paint, and it's like the smell of an old lover. But I love working with different materials and experimenting and trying new things with my hands. I'm always asking, what can I do with these hands? What can I do with materials that I'm not familiar with, and manipulate them or learn from them? My husband comes from the performing arts—he is a choreographer and a dancer. Being together with him has introduced me to another medium in which I feel I can express myself, in this case through performance, rather than just material, and then combining the two. My work is constantly evolving. That is the healing part, and I think if I wasn't making art, I would be a mess.

Yes, that's an important point to make. There is value in art and art therapy. Your curiosity and the urge to explore is really what led you to that conclusion.

Yes, I totally agree. And I have all these questions, like, why does this happen? When I work through issues with my work, I'm having these conversations with myself. Not that I'm answering the questions, but somehow I'm working through them for myself.

I want to talk about your process, interpretation, and reception. Artists often state that they have no control over the interpretation of their work, since people come in with their lived and learned experiences. How do people typically receive your work? Has there been an interpretation that has surprised you? Do people in the U.S. and Germany, where you currently reside, react differently?

I love hearing about what people see in my work, and how they see themselves in my work. Oftentimes I say, "I didn't know that. Hey, you're right," and that's why studio visits are great. Because I am also trying to figure it out. A lot of my art is very intuitive, and I have no idea where I'm going with it. I kind of have a direction, but I don't have all the answers. But with studio visits, people show up and point out things I was not thinking about. That has helped me work through the why and how I am using this or that material. I can talk about how I manipulate the material. Regarding meaning, I know what my work means, to me, some of the time, but having input from other folks about what they see and how they feel about it helps. It can also remind them of some other work or another artist. People make suggestions to look at the work of a particular artist, and that's great with students. I'm a student and always learning. The new body of work with these bags—it was interesting for me to see how folks in Berlin would

react to it, because I made some mockups of them that I showed over there before I made the light boxes here in the U.S. It was very satisfying. Folks came up to me and said, "Hey, I can really connect with that. We're all immigrants; immigrants from all different places." And that's because Berlin is international. People were saying, "My mom uses those bags." Then I say, "Yes, that's the point!"

That's relatable since those bags are also called "Ghana Must Go," and I'm Ghanaian. I also have used those bags. It seems there's a universal language that all immigrants understand. From a Ghanaian context, these bags are mainly used for travel and as storage for important items. That function seems to apply to different cultures using the bags. That is a shared resource for a lot of immigrants who had to leave their homes.

I was recently looking at images of those bags in contemporary times. One of the last refugee camps for Vietnamese closed in 2000, and that's quite recent given that the war in Vietnam ended a while back. In Hong Kong, it was very controversial at the time whether to close the camps or not. The refugees who were there were in this limbo, because, you know, refugees don't have permanent residency status and have only marginal personal agency. The images from when they were getting evicted depicted all their belongings in those bags.

These bags are a shared memory that a lot of immigrants have – they represent, well, migration and immigration. I find it interesting that they always have vibrant colors, almost as if to mark a particular location. That is one form of medium you have worked with. In the span of your artistic development, has there been a particular medium that you find yourself going back to?

Good question. My work is very labor intensive. But in the studio, I can work on several projects at the same time, because it's also very meditative. I will say that eggshell is the medium for me. It takes me a while to decide the structure in which to apply the eggshell. But once I figure out the structure, then egg shelling is this meditative act that I can work on while going back to different projects. I usually multitask and add a tiny piece at a time, since the actual making is also about the healing process. Because all these broken pieces that you put together make a whole.

Eggshells are such fragile material that can easily be crushed and change form. You use this material in captivating ways to communicate fragility but also to connote strength. In your pieces where you cover tools with eggshells, you depict tension in the formal qualities of these objects. The irony of a hammer covered with eggshells is a commentary on layering. In the past, you have spoken about your connection to eggshells being from the ancient sơn mài*/lacquer technique of painting. What is the future of eggshells for you as a medium?*

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Being, eggshells, oil and acrylic on canvas, peel and stick printed canvas, 15" x 15," 2019

One of my most recent works is a small painting of hands. They are prayer hands and are in the show called "Being." It's a painting, but I eggshelled the hands. This is the first time I did that, and I was like, hey, why not? Let me see if I can paint with eggshells. Which goes back to the tradition of *sơn mài*, where you're portraying a two-dimensional traditional scene. It's usually a landscape or animals, which is beautiful work, and very pictorial. It was the first time I was mixing two media together. I would love to eggshell a large object, but I think that would be a lifetime project.

Being able to work in different media means acknowledging the limitations of materials and what best fits with a particular message. Which medium has allowed you to experiment with scale, and what has been the largest scale of your projects?

Let me first talk about eggshells for a moment. I love working with material that I can get easily. One of the best things about working with eggshells is their availability. I can also eat the inside and use the outside.

As far as scale is concerned, an installation piece called "Heaven" has probably been the largest. It was part of a project called "We See Heaven Upside Down," which was an Outreach International project that addressed the challenges of displacement and identity. It was a bunch of life vests that spelled out the word "Heaven" suspended from the ceiling. And that was big. It was a lot of logistics, of creating this bamboo structure and then putting together life jackets that spelled out readable words. I would love to fill up entire rooms with large-scale eggshell works, but I think it's mainly a matter of limitations, of workforce, and time.

Speaking more about your different media, how did you pivot into video work?

My husband, Till, was very instrumental in that because of his performing arts background. (Laughter) He trained as a classical ballet dancer, but his interest has always



Heaven, from "We See Heaven Upside Down," installation view, Ross Gallery exhibition, 2017

been beyond music and theater, which then took the form of technology and video. We've been married for twenty-nine years; we founded Moving Poets together, and we work with all different types of artists. This meant that we were always working in these various media already, and we decided to investigate their formal qualities and how we could work with them. Each type of medium speaks to a different sense in us as humans, and that is what makes performance and video work intriguing. It captures your attention and keeps you at a standstill to really embrace the work.

You are a great collaborator and have had success working on projects with others, especially Till, when you founded Moving Poets. How did that first project translate into your other collaborations? How do you pick which projects to collaborate on?

Sometimes we reach out to other artists, sometimes artists reach out to us. I think it's about having a conversation with others and being aware of current events. It's like, "Hey, I've got this idea, what do you think?" We've been doing this for so long, and our curiosity drives us to keep exploring. Also, we started out in our youth and didn't know any better, so we experimented a lot, which was key to our development as artists. There's also a form of spontaneity to it. We often come across people who have a specialty in certain fields that we also want to work with, like a choreographer working with a composer. Our message goes further when we work together, too. The most important thing for us when we collaborate is that the people are nice. (Laughter)

Given the various locations where your work has been shown, what brought you to Ogden Contemporary Arts (OCA), Utah, and how do you decide where to show your work?

Venessa Castagnoli, OCA's executive director, reached out with the opportunity of an artist residency, which I had to turn down due to commitment to my youngest child. Then I was offered a solo exhibition, and that worked out well with my schedule. One important thing I look out for when thinking about where to show my work is if the gallery or museum believes in freedom of expression and thought. I try to stay away from institutions that censor or force artists to change their message to fit their specific target group. I have noticed that curators are usually hesitant when they don't understand my body of work. They might have only seen an image, so I try to take it a step further and have a conversation. After that, if they still seem unsure, I begin to question that partnership. It should be about what *you* want as an artist. There's a power dynamic at work that I've had to learn from experience. As a young artist, it's all about exposure, but as you mature you realize you need to find the right partners. Because once you find the right partners, those become relationships that are not transactional. That is what I'm always trying to avoid, transaction.

With your current exhibition at OCA, Unsettled Provisions*, what was your*



Baggage Claim, **mixed media—polypropylene fabric, giclée print on canvas, dimensions vary, 2023**

process for selecting the pieces that fit with the theme? How did you put them together as a collection, and what is the future for this new series?

"Baggage Claim" is the name of the series and the center point of the collection. The light boxes were made specifically for the show. Upon consultation with Venessa, the eggshell pieces were also added due to their strong pull and connection to various audiences. We spoke about the importance of the performance to the show—it required the audience to be quiet, relaxed, and reflective. There is so much layering in the performance, and my hope was that people could find connections to different parts.

Carla M. Hanzal, who is an independent curator and friend, is very knowledgeable about my body of work and advised me on other pieces that could support the central piece. A big part of the entire process was piecing things together and working on the overall narrative. The oldest piece in the exhibition, from 2017, is titled "Identity," which is a U.S. passport covered in eggshells. "Baggage Claim" is from 2023, but all the pieces are having a conversation with one another as though they were part of a larger reflection. The "Baggage Claim" series will evolve to be its own show at some point. I am currently working on expanding the series to include a large-scale bag that I can potentially fit into and make a performance out of. It should be fun and I'm excited.

Thank you, MyLoan. We do look forward to your future projects.

Thank you, Jude. I really appreciate your questions and your honesty. It has been a thoughtful conversation.



Jude Agboada is a visual communication designer, educator, and branding expert from Ghana and currently assistant professor of graphic design at Weber State University. He previously taught communication design at the Sam Fox School of Design and Visual Arts at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri. Jude uses storytelling and dialogue to explore ways to encourage difficult conversations across cultures. His practice revolves around exploring how people define community, identity, and culture via multidisciplinary approaches—ranging from artist books to public installations.

Bringing Shakespeare Up to Date:

Mixing the Bard with Hip Hop

Sarah Grunnah



Jennifer Koskinen

A Conversation with K.P. Powell

A St. Louis-born actor, writer, lyricist, and stand-up comedian currently residing in Atlanta, Georgia, K.P. Powell received his MFA from the University of Houston. His regional acting credits include the Colorado Shakespeare Festival, American Shakespeare Center, Peterborough Players, Cincinnati Playhouse, Hippodrome, Alliance Theater, Orlando Shakespeare Theatre, Elm Shakespeare Company, American Stage, Theatre at Monmouth, St. Louis Black Rep, Shakespeare Festival Saint Louis, Houston Shakespeare Festival, and the Folger Theater. Some of his favorite roles include Hotspur, Benedick, Macduff, Duke Moses in Pass Over, *Feste, Floyd "Schoolboy" Barton in* Seven Guitars, *George in* Our Town, *Willoughby in* Sense and Sensibility, *and Clown in* The 39 Steps.

In the summer of 2023, I saw Powell perform in two productions of Colorado Shakespeare Festival's mainstage season, winning over audiences as both Benedick in Much Ado About Nothing *and Edmund in* King Lear. *The ease with which Powell takes the stage and speaks Shakespeare's verse might make it surprising that he wasn't always going to be an actor. A former athlete, Powell started university with the intention of becoming a physical therapist. In the end, he found his way to the stage. His especial skill with heightened language has led him to be cast in some of Shakespeare's great roles (including Hotspur in* Henry IV Parts 1 and 2, *Feste in* Twelfth Night*) at theaters across the country. As a Black actor, Powell is not the kind of person who shies away from hard conversations about race in modern performance. He was an energizing voice when he visited the Theatre program at Weber State University for two days in September 2023, teaching students about the connections between Shakespeare's language and hip hop.*

I'd like to start out by talking about how you got into Shakespeare. Is there something in particular that draws you to Shakespeare or heightened language?

It happened by chance; I like how malleable Shakespeare's work is. I like the idea of taking on characters who have always been around and having your own swing at them. The closest thing we have to it now are big superhero movies. People are always excited to have the chance to play the villain, to play James Bond, or to play the Joker. People want to have a chance to play those big characters. Shakespeare's works have their own club. When you go to rehearsals, people will say things like, "I've played Hamlet; I've been that guy; I've gone on that ride." It brings out the competitive athlete side of me. There is a lot of Shakespeare being done at any given point, and I seem to book those characters more than I do others.

There is a measurability to Shakespeare. I'm thinking of your background as both an actor and an athlete here. There is verse to work with in Shakespeare, and syntax, and word choice. Can you talk about how your skills align with the language and verse of Shakespeare, and also in your work with hip hop and as a rapper?

It makes me scrutinize the words I use. Anybody who's ever written anything that they expected other people to see or view—a song, a short story, a novel, or a paper—you scrutinize the work. Do I want this to be two sentence fragments? Do I want to add the word "and" so that it's just one sentence? Do I want to add a semi-colon? Do I want to cut something out? Do I want to add this word? Do I want to say this first? It's like when you're writing a song, you change the wording until it fits exactly how you think it should fit in your mind and in your body. Then, when you come to somebody else's writing, you look at it with that same kind of eye. Shakespeare didn't write a first draft, send it in, and it was done. He made revisions. If someone were to come in and attack the lines and change them, I would be upset because I spent nine months working on the thing; I stressed over those lines. I want the words to be "But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?," not "But soft, what light breaks through yonder window." Some people might say it means the same thing, but it doesn't; it doesn't sound the same, and I want it the other way. I want the last word of the phrase to be "breaks" for a specific reason.

I'm learning a lot by asking myself, "Why is it so important for that specific word to be in that stressed position? Why does he say that word first? Why did he choose to do it that way?" If I can find a reason behind those choices, the character will be illuminated in a better way. It's easier to play the character to the audience if I have thought about the psychology of why this person speaks the way they do. There are a lot of people out there who just memorize words and then say the words with "feeling," but I know audiences are savvier than that. Audiences might not always care enough, because there are plenty of times they just want to be entertained, but even those of us who just enjoy being entertained by a movie still know when we stumble onto something and think, "That was different; that was special."

Even a Disney animated movie can do that for us. When *Coco* came out, I thought there are some poignant things that landed in this movie. I'm sure they thought over, and over, and over again about how the movie looked and sounded. So, when I deal with this dead poet's words, I need to give them that same amount of care and scrutiny. I need to consider why this person says this thing, right now, in this way, and that kind of dissection makes your character feel more human. Even if you don't cognitively make any choices from it, just the fact that you know the words makes them come out of you as though it is

believable—the audience will recognize that this person is talking, rather than it sounding like this person is speaking in verse.

When you visited Weber State, you led a fantastic workshop on the overlaps of Shakespeare and hip hop. Can you talk me through a bit of your methodology behind that class?

The simple answer is that I was on tour with the American Shakespeare Center and we taught a range of workshops that places could choose from while we were there—workshops on costume design, stage blood, etcetera. Teaching these workshops to high school or college students led me to put my own twist on things, because there were times that students wouldn't be interested in what we were doing, so I would try to figure out how I could make it more interesting. Some of the topics were just framed in a way that I couldn't make it interesting, or I, myself, was not interested in it. Then I thought, plenty of people casually listen to hip hop on the radio, and people talk about one rapper being better than another. How do we all know that? It's because there's popularity and then there's skill; popularity is different than skill. I feel like it's the same for playwrights—Ben Johnson, Marlowe, and others—why did Shakespeare stick around? When I thought about it, I realized it's a lot like hip hop—he understood what people cared about. And so, when I was building that out, I realized hip hop is an interesting and relatable way to talk to people nowadays. Even if you don't like hip hop, you understand how it works in the same way that plenty of people don't like hip hop but like ***Hamilton***. If there's a measurability to the fact that you can make people enjoy this type of art without them ever being a fan of it before, well, Shakespeare did that for me. I never thought, as an inner-city Black kid, that I would be doing Shakespeare for most of my life. I wanted to share that passion with people, and I felt like that was the easiest way I could connect. When I think about these rhythms, I think about them like I'm a rapper who doesn't have any music backing him. We've all seen rappers, in battle rap especially, rap acapella. So, these monologues are just somebody rapping about their internal struggles, acapella. I know about that—Nas has done that; you can find a million videos of people talking about a day in their lives, like Ice Cube's ***Today was a Good Day***—it resonates with so many people. And so, I thought, Shakespeare could resonate with more people, if they knew that it was available to them. There are plenty of people who think they can just jump up and rap—you see it all the time—but it's not that easy. I wanted to showcase that it is that simple, but it's not that easy; hip hop seemed like the easiest way for me to do that.

Can you talk a bit about strategies for how we can reappropriate Shakespeare in telling stories of the global majority/BIPOC individuals?

We need to start by looking at the broader parts of people's identities. For a long time,

I never thought, as an inner-city Black kid, that I would be doing Shakespeare for most of my life. I wanted to share that passion with people, and I felt like that was the easiest way I could connect. When I think about these rhythms, I think about them like I'm a rapper who doesn't have any music backing him. We've all seen rappers, in battle rap especially, rap acapella. So, these monologues are just somebody rapping about their internal struggles, acapella.

it has been mostly white people who get to direct, cast, and change any of those things—and those changes automatically change the play. Even those changes are different depending on if they are coming from a twenty-five-year-old white person, a forty-five-year-old white person, or if the person is white but also identifies as Queer. Asking people to cast outside their own sensibility is not always about their tastes; it's about what we haven't seen or explored yet. These changes could be as simple as casting a Juliet who is taller than her Romeo. People who are in relationships where the woman is taller than the man could say, "Oh, finally, I feel like I'm seeing myself on that stage." Instead, the director says, "Oh, no, she's too tall, it won't work." Why are you already saying it won't work? Is it just because you don't like that scenario? Well, then you can't be upset if they stop using you as a director, because you haven't adapted. It's the same as if you were to cast an all-Black *Twelfth Night*—it doesn't mean that you now have to set it in Africa or the Caribbean; you can just set it in Salt Lake City or Los Angeles—it just so happens to be an all-Black cast. And let's see how it just looks and sounds different because all of those people are from different backgrounds than you. Just starting there is simple enough; it's a starting point to see real change.

I think the way I've seen this work the best is when someone has thought their concept all the way through. We've all seen Shakespeare set in the '70s. They come out and they do the show, but why are we in the '70s? Is it for the costumes? I don't see anyone doing any fun dances from the '70s; there's nothing about the play that is being illuminated by the '70s. There was a great *Othello* that was done by The National with Adrian Lester and Rory Kinnear. It was modernized and set during one of the wars of the Middle East. In the scene where he usually has a seizure, it was happening in a bathroom. When Othello walks in, there are people in the bathroom, and he makes them get out—those are things that aren't usually in the play, but it makes audience members understand that the General has power, so he makes the others leave the bathroom. He's having a mental breakdown, and Iago comes in: Instead of Othello having the usual seizure, he gets so fraught that he runs into a stall and you just hear him start vomiting, and then Iago turns and does his monologue. We all know what that's like, so that's where we can connect, as opposed to the alternative of, well, now we're in military costumes, and we're just going to perform the play normally.

I feel like people are not putting enough thought into a concept from beginning to end. Some directors will choose a moment to put Romeo and Juliet in and make it modern, but then no one even has a cell phone. Why is that? They don't want to have to deal with cell phones in this time period because it becomes a problem. I would say, think around the problem and find a solution. Why can't Romeo, when he's waiting for news from the Friar, be out on stage moving around with his phone, acting like he has no service, waiting for bars or a message? You can find a way for it to be modern, for cell phones to still exist, and for the play to still move forward. I feel like we run away from those problems as opposed to toward them, and by doing that, we create a stale version of Shakespeare.

We can watch anything, from any time period. So, if you're going to do it, and do it in a time period that is closer to mind, please illuminate it. If you're going to do it in the '90s, I want '90s references; I want '90s clothes; I want '90s dances; I want someone to have a Walkman on with big cushioned headphones; I want them to have to pull the tape out of the Walkman and turn it to the other side to keep listening to the music—all of those things that make you go, "Oh, this feels real." When the nurse comes in and says, "Oh, Juliet, your mother's coming," what does she have to hide? Anything that makes us say, "Oh, this feels like a child hiding something from their parent."

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One of my favorite adaptations of *The Taming of the Shrew* was set in a 1950s bowling alley. It reminded me of the sitcoms I watched when I was young—*All in the Family* and *I Love Lucy*—they set up that world and suddenly it all made sense. I could see it like an episode on one of those sitcoms I grew up watching; it made the play feel so much more alive. It made me wonder why people told me I couldn't understand those works—I understood everything about that. *The Taming of the Shrew* was just like the sitcoms that I watched with my mom and dad. The play may have been four hundred years old, but it felt so real.

Can you talk through some of the approaches that have been successful in reckoning with Shakespeare's topics that aren't landing well on the twenty-first-century stage, such as the misogyny, the racial slurs, the stereotypes, the sexism?

Uncomfortable themes like racism and misogyny, parts that feel outdated today, should be cut when it doesn't make sense for them to be there. For example, when there's anti-Semitism in a play that isn't something like *The Merchant of Venice*, it's just random. In *Much Ado About Nothing*, there is a joke about Jews that is usually cut out now. There is no reason for it to be there other than, at that time period, people liked to laugh at Jewish people. Outside of random occurrences, like attacking a specific race, I think people run away from these themes, as opposed to incorporating them into the three-dimensional parts of these characters. Recently, I saw *Killers of the Flower Moon*. In the movie, white men are shown stealing land and property from Native Americans. Those characters were racists; we shouldn't hide from that.

There was a time when I was performing in *Much Ado About Nothing*. It was set in the South, during WWI. I played Claudio, and, toward the end, there was a moment where Antonio says to Claudio, "Come, follow me, boy. Come, sir boy, follow me. / Sir boy, I'll whip you from your foining fence" (5.1.93-95). The play is all about defending Hero, but with a southern dialect, it ended up sounding a bit racist. Should we have changed it? This was WWI, we knew the time period. Why wouldn't that person do those things? I happen to be Black, he happens to be white—this fits the setting. Do we think it's going to take away from the story or add to it? If it's going to add to it, we should do it. There is not enough exploration into these things—maybe

the character is misogynistic, maybe one is homophobic, maybe one is racist. Not that we should be shoehorning those things in where they don't belong and say, "Now, *Romeo and Juliet* is all about homophobia"—that's not what the play is about. But that doesn't mean that there can't be some in there. Tybalt specifically makes a joke about Mercutio and Romeo being gay lovers in order to try to egg them on into a fight—don't run away from that, lean into it! Some of the most successful shows—*Succession*, *Breaking Bad*—all have people saying and doing subversive things. In *The Sopranos*, Tony Soprano is constantly racist and constantly misogynistic—it's one of the most famed and talked about shows of all time. I think Shakespeare was really good at illuminating how dark humans can be. And we too often try to, as you said, for the elitism of it, brush that aside because it makes us feel uncomfortable. Shakespeare has come to be known as something everyone can come and see and feel good about. But, especially in his tragedies—Richard the Third killed children—why do we try to put a rose-colored filter over it? Instead of saying, "It's Shakespeare, it's okay," should we be saying, "Doesn't this feel like now?" Especially with the level of media coverage we have of everything now, the amount of human tragedy you hear and read about today is overwhelming. Why are we not trying to learn from these plays by watching people be bad? Shakespeare was writing for everyday audiences, but we don't direct it for those audiences. The more directors do that, and recognize that, the easier it will be to get people excited about seeing Shakespeare again. We must look for those human elements and not be afraid of the nasty. It almost destroys people that it's not *just* in *Titus Andronicus* where all the nasty, awful things happen. In *Twelfth Night*, they really bully Malvolio—that can be funny and also nasty. Orsino says to a woman in disguise, "Women don't know anything. They don't know how to love." That woman then has an opportunity to defend women. There are so many moments like that that could be poignant, and still be funny, if we lean into them. For contemporary audiences, Orsino could be played as a character who is redeemed by changing his misogynistic thinking. Orsino would undergo a lesson, and then an audience could feel like, "Oh, wow, I never really connected to *Twelfth Night* in that way before." They haven't, because it's always directed as: look at how funny this is. Funny always comes from truth, and I feel like we've gotten away from telling the truth. Sometimes the best theater experiences are the ones that make you uncomfortable because you leave wanting to talk about it. There have been adaptations of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that have left me saying, "Wow, I never really thought about it that way." For example, when Helena is really upset and she says, "Why are you all pretending like you love me? That's not funny." I never really saw that illuminated in that way. Now I'm much more interested in the play, because you showed me something human.

We live in such a fragile world, full of trigger warnings. Is the key to have these conversations with the artists, actors, and creatives behind these difficult choices, but to still make the difficult choices in the end?

When you do something that requires intimacy, you don't just cut it, you have a conversation about it. You explore the scene and think about why this is happening. And if it gets uncomfortable, we don't run from it, we examine it. That's the whole point of art: to examine life and then report back to audiences so that they can witness it.

Why should we still do Shakespeare today?

We don't have to; that's the honest answer. Why do we do anything? There are plenty of people who shouldn't be doing Shakespeare anymore because they have plateaued; they haven't moved forward.

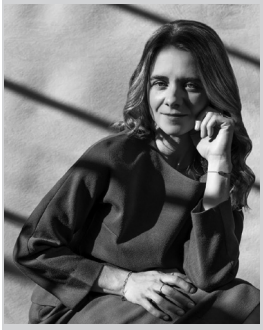
Why are you trying to do anything if you have nothing to say? Why are you trying to do

Hamlet if you have nothing to say? You can cast a Black person as Hamlet or a woman as Hamlet—great, then what? Then you're going to direct it in the same way? What are you trying to examine about _Hamlet_? What are you trying to examine about _Romeo and Juliet_? We've all seen these plays a million times. The truth is, I'd love for a lot of places to stop doing them until they find directors or producers who have a passion for it. Because what I feel we're missing from all types of entertainment right now is passion. There's a reason why people love Taylor Swift. Whether you like her or not, there's an authenticity and a passion behind what she does. There are so many artists who aren't real artists. They've got a studio behind them; they use auto-tune music, they pop out a hit, and they go sell it. We can all feel that in the music—it isn't passionate. And then along comes some little indie band like Punch Brothers, or Wood Brothers, or Avett Brothers, and you can hear in their music that they care about what they've done—it makes me want to participate. I have seen a lot of theater lately that has no passion. I don't care if it's bad, as long as there is passion. We all love seeing something bad because you can talk about it. I hate boring theater more than bad theater, because there's no passion. Stop doing Shakespeare if you don't have a passion for it.

What a great statement to end with. Thank you so much.

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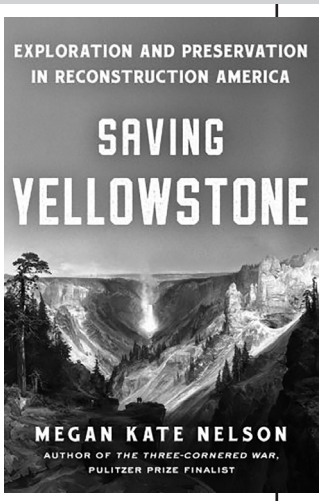


Sarah Grunnah is a dramaturg, translator, theatre historian, and filmmaker with research interests in early modern Spanish-language drama, Shakespeare in performance, and translation/adaptation. She is currently assistant professor of theatre at Weber State University. She holds a Ph.D. in Modern Languages from the University of Oxford (UK) and an MFA in Dramaturgy from the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

Making the Past Present:
The Art and Practice of Writing the American West


Sharona Jacobs

A Conversation with
Megan Kate Nelson



Sara Dant

The American West has long been an enigmatic region. Its history provides endless fodder for films, novels, art, and fashion, all of which blend myth and reality into compelling stories that provide iconic and sometimes wildly inaccurate portraits of its landscapes and people. But the West has also been deeply influential and rejuvenating for the nation and all who have called it home. The writer Wallace Stegner concedes that "If I had not been able periodically to renew myself in the mountains and deserts of western America I would be very nearly bughouse" – he called the wild places of the West the nation's "geography of hope."

Historian and author Megan Kate Nelson was born and raised in Colorado and has found the region inspirational – indeed, the West itself acts like a central character in both of her recent books: Saving Yellowstone: Exploration and Preservation in Reconstruction America *(2022) – winner of the 2023 Spur Award for Historical Nonfiction, and* The Three-Cornered War: The Union, the Confederacy, and Native Peoples in the Fight for the West *(2020) – a finalist for the*

2021 Pulitzer Prize in History. Nelson's career trajectory seemed typically academic – a B.A. from Harvard, Ph.D. in American Studies from the University of Iowa, tenure-track faculty appointments – until she made a major, personal pivot to full-time writing with obvious success.

In September of 2023, Nelson came to Weber State University to give the inaugural Sadler American West Lecture entitled "Saving Yellowstone: The Creation of a National Icon." Endowed by former history professor and dean of the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Richard Sadler, and his wife, Claudia, Nelson's lecture examined Yellowstone's history as a crossroads of Indigenous trade and travel, its exploration by American scientists, and the debates about its designation as the world's first national park. The story she tells is uniquely compelling because it is situated within the history of Reconstruction, and neither the Civil War nor this period tends to feature the West as an important theater. Yet as Nelson's talk and books demonstrate, this is a significant historical oversight.

Dr. Nelson is every bit as delightful and charming in person as her photograph conveys. I had the opportunity to spend time with her during her campus visit and to continue a correspondence over the ensuing months. Our conversation below captures both of these elements.

Thanks so much for talking with me about your career, your "process," and your most recent book, Saving Yellowstone: Exploration and Preservation in Reconstruction America. *I'd like to start big-picture and have you tell us about your career trajectory and the major pivot points you've experienced. I'm particularly intrigued by the jump you made from academia to full-time writing. That's a frightening leap for some to contemplate. How did you make the decision, and what insights do you have to share with others who might be wondering if a similar move is advisable for them?*

Ah, yes, the leap away from academia! It was definitely a leap of faith. One important thing to know is that I had been successful on the job market after earning my Ph.D. in 2002 and had been in two tenure-track positions, in Texas and California. And then, for family reasons (which is often the case in academia), I had to figure out how to get back to Boston, where my husband was living. I took a research leave in 2008-2009 (for my second book, *Ruin Nation*), figuring that I could go on the market that year and find a position somewhere in New England. But in the fall of 2008, the banks imploded, and the market crashed, and all the academic job searches were canceled. So, I had a choice: stay in Boston and jump off the tenure-track for a year or two, or go back to California by myself and do the bicoastal long-distance family thing. I chose the former. I was able to teach at Harvard as an adjunct for the next few years, which was lovely. But what I did not anticipate was that publishing *Ruin Nation* in 2012 and going on the market as an adjunct with two books made me unhireable. I was too experienced for an assistant professor position, and no department would give me tenure off the adjunct track.

I had been thinking about the project that ultimately became *The Three-Cornered War* for a few years and thought it might be

a trade book. But honestly, I didn't really know. I discussed it with my husband, and we decided I should give two years to researching the Civil War in the Southwest, writing up the proposal, and trying to get an agent to sell the book. If that didn't work out, I would go find something else to do. Politics, probably. But much to my surprise, it did work out. (I should note that I could only do this because I live with a great deal of financial privilege; we were able to pay the bills while I researched and wrote. This is not a possibility for many people, and I am very aware of that.) I always advise graduate students to be thinking of *all* the possible jobs they might want, early on in grad school. Humanities programs train students to do a lot of useful things that are transferrable to other fields. Depending on what you find most fulfilling and enjoyable, you can write, edit, research, advise, or teach. And you can stand up in front of people and talk (and run meetings!), which are rare skills. Although academia often convinces us that there is only one viable future for people with Ph.D.s in the humanities (the professorial track), that is not true.

Let me, as a follow-up, ask, why did you decide to be a writer, and why history? For someone who might be new to you and your work, how would you describe your style? Who has influenced your writing, both topically and stylistically? Was there a particular author or book who/that rearranged the furniture in your head? Riffing on John Cusack in High Fidelity*, what are your top five books of all time?*

I had always been interested in writing, and when I surveyed my skills and asked myself what I liked most about the academic life, I realized that it was writing that I enjoyed the most. I also wanted to break free from the rather rigid expectations for academic writing. I thought that trade history would allow me to experiment more and write in a narrative mode, which I had never done before. It is *so* fun, and I love it. My Ph.D. is in American Studies, which trained me in history, literature, art history, and landscape studies. Before I started writing my dissertation, I decided that cultural and environmental history would be my focus of study and writing. I have always been interested in places that most Americans have often seen as "strange," and that has driven my research interests: swamps, ruins, deserts, and geothermal fields.

I would describe my writing style as narrative history rooted in the lived experiences of nineteenth-century Americans. I like to put readers down on the ground with individuals so they can follow them through space and time. In this way I am also a biographer and an environmental writer. I am also really inspired by fiction writers and their experimentation with style. I wrote *The Three-Cornered War* as a multi-perspective narrative after reading many novels written in that particular

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style (including, weirdly, *Game of Thrones*). Reading Isabel Wilkerson's *The Warmth of Other Suns*, too, was a revelation for me. She wrote about three people who never met one another but who all participated in the Great Migration in different ways, and she situated them so beautifully in time and space—I was just in awe the entire time. The structure of that book is also really wild. She mixes biography and context in short chapters and in really fascinating ways. I wanted to see if I could do something similar in my current book project, but it didn't work. Maybe someday, with another type of narrative.

Oh, my top five! That's so hard. I am interested in so many different fields of study that it is difficult to compare and choose. But here goes: John McPhee, *Uncommon Carriers*; J.B. Jackson, *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape*; Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*; Patty Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest*; Jennifer Price, *Flight Maps*.

I've never been a particular fan of the saying that those who fail to learn history are doomed to repeat it, but I firmly believe that the past provides invaluable insights into the present and possibilities for the future. In this maddeningly post-factual era in which we seem to find ourselves today, what would you say is the "value" of history? How is the past relevant in the modern world?

I absolutely agree that the past provides insights into the present. One of the values in knowing history is that it helps us to see how we got to this current moment. We cannot address the current climate crisis, for example, without understanding the successive waves of eighteenth— and nineteenth—century industrialization that changed the way Americans worked and lived—and polluted the air and the water. And we cannot understand the nation's amazing scientific achievements without knowing the history of education, the history of federal institutions like the Smithsonian, and the political history of the Cold War.

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As an environmental historian myself, I find your incorporation of this field into your work particularly compelling. How would you explain this line of inquiry to someone who might be unfamiliar with it? Thinking about your two most recent books, The Three-Cornered War *(2020) and* Saving Yellowstone *(2022), what unique insights did this approach provide that more traditional methodologies might have "missed" or left out?*

I think of myself as a "landscape historian" in that I am interested in peoples' relationship to the natural world and also to the built environment. As a humanist, I am interested in peoples' beliefs about different kinds of landscapes, as well as their material and

consequential interactions with their surroundings. These interests drove my first two books on swamps and ruins, and my more recent projects that focus on the Civil War and Reconstruction. The field of Civil War environmental history is still quite nascent—it is a tiny sub-field with just a handful of scholars with published works. Ditto with Reconstruction environmental history.

In Civil War environmental history, most of my colleagues are interested primarily in warfare and nature, rather than built environments. Given that wars were fought outside (obviously), there is abundant material in the records related to this. And there is a lot we still don't know about the impact of Civil War actions on particular landscapes and the ways that natural forces have shaped battle strategy/tactics and logistics. Traditional Civil War historians tend to acknowledge the role of nature in the conflict but then move on, or just ignore it all together. But to me, landscape studies is one of the topics that bridges military history and social history in Civil War studies—two fields that have often been at odds in the historiography.

We don't have a lot of Reconstruction environmental histories either. Most Reconstruction scholars focus solely on political history, and on the U.S. South. I would love to see more work on the literal reconstruction of the South, and the ways white and Black southerners rebuilt their lives and homes and created new landscapes in the wake of warfare. It was so interesting for me to think about the creation of Yellowstone National Park as a Reconstruction policy—it positioned the park in a history that never really gets mentioned in conservation stories. And it gives Reconstruction scholars a new way to think about the federal government's approach to the U.S. West during this period as well.

Traditional Civil War historians tend to acknowledge the role of nature in the conflict but then move on, or just ignore it all together. But to me, landscape studies is one of the topics that bridges military history and social history in Civil War studies – two fields that have often been at odds in the historiography.

Focusing more specifically on Saving Yellowstone*, what was it about this place in this particular historical "moment" that compelled you to write about it? I'm always fascinated by the connections authors find between one project and the next. Was there something in* The Three-Cornered War *or perhaps some earlier work that inspired* Saving Yellowstone*? And did these books lead you to a next project? If so, can we have a sneak-peek?*

I always find my next book project when I am in the middle of writing my current book. There is a protagonist in *Three-Cornered* named John Clark. He was the surveyor-general of New Mexico Territory and a Lincoln political appointee. As I was researching the history of surveying, I ran across the Ferdinand Hayden expedition to Yellowstone in 1871. This was around 2018, so I realized that the 150th anniversary of his expedition and the Yellowstone Act that followed was coming up in 2022. And so, I thought a book published in conjunction with that anniversary would be a great idea. Of course, lots of conservation historians and historians of the U.S. West have written about Yellowstone, and so I needed to figure out why my approach to that story would be new. Given that I was already writing a book that was encouraging readers to see a well-known conflict like the Civil War from an unexpected place (the Southwest), I had that lightbulb moment: what if we see the

Reconstruction period from an unexpected place (Yellowstone)? How might that tell us something new, or something that historians have ignored, about the early 1870s?

I also like to think of *Saving Yellowstone* as a sequel to *Three-Cornered*, in a way. Hayden would not have made it to Yellowstone in 1871 and back again to lobby for the Yellowstone Act if the events that I detailed in *Three-Cornered* did not happen. The fact that U.S. troops retained control of the Southwest after their battles with both Confederates and Mescalero Apache, Chiricahua Apache, and Diné (Navajo) peoples was vital for the federal government's subsequent assertions of control in the region, including Hayden's survey and the Yellowstone Act itself.

I am currently writing a book called *The Westerners*, which is a history of the emergence of the "U.S. West" in the nineteenth century, as told through the lives of eight people—only one of whom is a white man from the East (a "pioneer"). The idea for that book did not come from *Saving Yellowstone* but from the conversations about the enduring pioneer myth that emerged with the publication of David McCullough's final book, *The Pioneers*, in 2019. As someone who grew up in the West (Colorado) but then moved to the East, I have always been interested in what Americans across the country define as "Western," and how understanding who these Westerners were and are can help us understand both regional identity and the history of the United States.

One of the compelling features of your writing is your literary use of character-driven narrative. Can you talk about each of the three primary protagonists who carry Saving Yellowstone *and how you came to choose them? As a writer, do you ever develop an emotional connection to the people and events you write about? If so, how do you balance objectivity and empathy?*

Ferdinand Hayden—as the leader of the 1871 expedition into Yellowstone, Hayden had to be a central protagonist (if not the central protagonist) in the book. He was also kind of fun to write about, given that he was polarizing. Some people really hated his ambition and his aggressiveness, while others loved his drive. He was also unusual in the context of mid-nineteenth century science: he grew up in poverty and had a hardscrabble life, unlike many of his fellow scientists, who came from elite families. He was trying to make a name for himself in Yellowstone, and this part of his story was, to me, really compelling. Jay Cooke—I was really fascinated by Cooke's role in the whole Yellowstone project, and in his disastrous decision to take on the financing of the Northern Pacific Railroad. He was a brilliant man who made a huge error in judgment that ended up launching the country into the panic and depression of 1873. When I found out about the connection between his Yellowstone aspirations and that catastrophic moment in Reconstruction history, I knew I had to write about him. Sitting Bull—some readers may find Sitting Bull's connection to Yellow-

We often think of those who lived in the past as a bit like their photographs: black and white, and two-dimensional. But when we think about them as actual living, breathing humans with complicated emotions of their own and motivations that are often problematic (for their own time as well as ours), I think we can come closer to understanding why past events happened in the way that they did.

stone a bit tenuous, but as one of the leaders of the Hunkpapa Lakota, Sitting Bull was invested in defending his peoples' territory from the Missouri River to the Apsaalooké lands north of Yellowstone. And he asserted Lakota sovereignty in multiple ways, including several fights against Jay Cooke's Northern Pacific Railroad surveyors. I found it interesting that he was emerging as a major leader not only of the Lakota but of a larger group that included Cheyenne and Arapaho allies during the early 1870s. The book argues that for Sitting Bull, conflicts over the Yellowstone River Valley led to the Battle of Greasy Grass (the Battle of the Little Bighorn) in 1876.

We often think of those who lived in the past as a bit like their photographs: black and white, and two-dimensional. But when we think about them as actual living, breathing humans with complicated emotions of their own and motivations that are often problematic (for their own time as well as ours), I think we can come closer to understanding why past events happened in the way that they did. I prefer it when the person I am writing about is complicated. John Baylor (in *Three-Cornered*), for example, was a self-aggrandizing, violent, racist narcissist. He also wrote his wife love poetry and confessed in his letters to being depressed. All those things made him who he was. My job was to help the reader understand who Baylor was and why he did what he did. I don't think of this as "excusing" him for his behavior, but explaining it in a way that brings us closer to the lived experience of the past. I don't really fall in love with my protagonists, but I do sometimes get mad at them. I am still outraged that Louisa Canby—known as the "Angel of Santa Fe" for her compassion toward sick, wounded, and freezing Confederate soldiers in New Mexico in 1862—did not write a journal or an autobiography. She had such an interesting and wide-ranging life, and it would have been incredible to hear about her adventures in her own words.

Reading such a rich and obviously deeply-researched book like this one always inspires the question: what kind of sources did you utilize to build your narrative? And how did you decide what sources you needed, in the first place. I guess what I'm asking is, especially on behalf of other researchers and writers, what is your M.O.? Is there a source or an archive that more people really ought to know about? Anything that surprised you?

As an interdisciplinary scholar, I use everything and anything that will help me understand the past: manuscripts (journals and diaries, letters), government documents, newspapers, magazines, photographs, illustrations, material culture, the landscape itself. I wrote almost all of *Saving Yellowstone* during the pandemic, so I was not able to do as much material culture and landscape research as I had planned. But thank goodness for digital resources! I had access to all kinds of manuscript and print materials produced in 1871-72 that I used to track the Yellowstone Expedition, the debates over the Yellowstone Act, the press surrounding the Northern Pacific Railroad, and the rise of Sitting Bull as a Lakota leader. A Twitter friend who I had met while giving a talk a few years before gifted me access to the *U.S. Congressional Serial Set* for three weeks; that was an invaluable resource for understanding federal government officials' evolving views of Sitting Bull and Yellowstone. If you don't have a subscription to newspapers.com, go get one! I promise they don't pay me to promote them. Their digitization is crystal clear, and you can clip articles and convert them to PDFs that include the citation, including the page number. And they are word, location, and newspaper searchable. It's an amazing archive for newspapers across the nation. They don't have everything, but they have a tremendous amount of material for historians.

This period at the end of the Civil War in American history also marks the real emergence of corporate capitalism. During the postwar period, big business began to consolidate power and economic might in the hands of an oligarchic few, and nowhere was this more evident than with the railroads. As you reveal, the histories of the park and the roads are inextricably intertwined, particularly in establishing the commercial "value" of Yellowstone, so essential in its path to becoming a park. Can you explain the connections?

I was really surprised at the extent to which the railroads shaped the 1871 expedition. Hayden secured free passes for his team on the Union Pacific from Omaha to Ogden, Utah. The speed of the transcontinental line made his survey possible. Previously, any team coming from the east coast would not have been able to make it to Yellowstone for more than a week or two before the snows drove them out. So that railroad was vital to Hayden's project in Yellowstone. And Jay Cooke, the man raising funding for the Northern Pacific Railroad—whose track would run through what is now Livingston, Montana—was very interested in Hayden's discoveries in Yellowstone. He sent the painter Thomas Moran to join Hayden and received twelve watercolor images of the rivers, mountains, and geothermal features of Yellowstone in return. He was going to use these as promotional artworks for Northern Pacific advertisements and try to bring tourists out to Yellowstone once he had built the track. It was Jay Cooke's PR man who wrote to Hayden about inserting a note about preserving Yellowstone as a national park in his report to Congress about his expedition. Hayden had not been thinking of this possibility at all. But when he read the letter, he immediately knew this was a great idea. And Cooke and his brother Henry helped Hayden lobby for the park legislation in November of 1871. As I've already noted, Sitting Bull was not about to let the Northern Pacific move right on through Lakota territory, and his leadership in asserting Indigenous sovereignty in the region was an important element that shaped U.S.-Indian relations and policy during the 1870s.

Yellowstone National Park is such an iconic place in America – the nation's first national park. Yet as you observe, this "'best idea' required Indigenous dispossession." In Yellowstone *(and* Three-Cornered War*), you are admirably careful and direct in addressing the "at what cost" question of Yellowstone National Park – the good, the bad, and the ugly of seminal events leading to its historic protection in 1872. In the spirit of land acknowledgment and in recognition*

It was important for me to remind readers that all national parks are Indigenous land, and that Indigenous peoples continue to live near (and in some cases, within) their boundaries. Tribal nations have always conceived of parks like Yellowstone as part of their historic and present homelands. Knowing and acknowledging this adds more historical complexity to our understanding of park history – Yellowstone's as well as others. And it forces us to acknowledge that some achievements that Americans often take for granted have a much more complicated, and often a darker, history than we have been willing to admit.

of the diverse Native peoples who were the traditional stewards of this land and whose relationship endures to the present, could you talk about the Indigenous groups who occupied the Yellowstone region in the mid-nineteenth century and those who still call this land home? As a writer, how does telling the story in this way enrich and complicate the narrative? What made you want to return to this point in the epilogue?

There are twenty-seven tribal nations that have established relationships with Yellowstone National Park. All these peoples moved through the park on their way to and from the bison hunting grounds of the Great Plains. They hunted bison, elk, and other animals in the park itself. They quarried Obsidian Cliff to create spear and arrow points, along with other tools for their own communities and for trade. And they gathered plants and conducted ceremonies there. No one Indigenous group claimed Yellowstone as their singular territory; it was a shared landscape. Those Indigenous groups who lived in close proximity to Yellowstone used it the most: the Tukudika Shoshone, who lived and herded sheep in the western mountain ranges of the Basin; and the Shoshone-Bannock, Apsáalooké, Eastern Shoshone, Northern Cheyenne, and Northern Arapaho. Part of northeastern Yellowstone was included in the 1851 Apsáalooké reservation, but U.S. officials moved that boundary when they severely reduced the size of the reservation in 1868. It was important for me to remind readers that all national parks are Indigenous land, and that Indigenous peoples continue to live near (and in some cases, within) their boundaries. Tribal nations have always conceived of parks like Yellowstone as part of their historic and present homelands. Knowing and acknowledging this adds more historical complexity to our understanding of park history—Yellowstone's as well as others. And it forces us to acknowledge that some achievements that Americans often take for granted have a much more complicated, and often a darker, history than we have been willing to admit.

You've argued that the story of Yellowstone is a "metaphor for America." Can you elaborate on this point? Has writing about the past, particularly the convulsive period of the Civil War and Reconstruction, affected the way you see the country today?

One of the major questions I had at the start of the project was, "Why Yellowstone?" Why not preserve Yosemite, which was already set aside and managed by the state of California? Why not Niagara Falls, which had long been acknowledged as one of America's great natural wonders? I was thinking about this question while I was researching Reconstruction history, and the federal government's campaign against the KKK, which occurred at the same time Hayden was exploring Yellowstone and fighting for its preservation. I was also writing about it around January 6, 2021, when protesters stormed the U.S. Capitol to halt the certification of the results of the presidential election of 2020. That was a shocking moment for a lot of Americans, and a lot of historians as well. And it made me think about how much hatred and violence had just been sitting beneath the surface of society until the election of Donald Trump in 2016 unleashed it. It was not a big leap, then, back to Yellowstone. Hayden and his survey team were constantly surprised and unsettled by the fact that the land beneath them was often hollow and that when they lay down to go to sleep, they could hear the water boiling beneath their heads. I argue in the book that this is one answer to the question, "Why Yellowstone?" Not only were its geothermal features unique in all the world, but Yellowstone—unlike Yosemite or Niagara Falls—seemed like an apt representation of the nation itself. It was amazing and wonderful and threatening and violent. It sustains all

these elements in tension. I see the United States of 1871-72 as doing just that; I also see those conflicts and tensions in play today.

Thank you so much for your time and these wonderful insights, Megan.

Thank you so much for this conversation! It has been wonderful.



Sara Dant is a Brady Presidential Distinguished Professor Emeritus and former chair of history at Weber State University in Ogden, Utah. Her work focuses on environmental politics in the United States with a particular emphasis on the creation and development of consensus and bipartisanism. Dr. Dant's latest book is *Losing Eden: An Environmental History of the American West,* published in June of 2023, with a foreword by former New Mexico Senator Tom Udall, son of Stewart Udall. She is also an advisor and interviewee for Ken Burns's *The American Buffalo* documentary film that premiered on PBS in October 2023; the author of several prize-winning articles on western environmental politics; the author of a precedent-setting Expert Witness Report and Testimony on Stream Navigability in Utah; and co-author of the two-volume *Encyclopedia of American National Parks*.

Keeping a Different Kind of Goal:
Advocating for Neurodiversity

Stacy Bernal & Tim Crompton

Tim Howard is an American soccer legend with the most wins of any goalkeeper in United States soccer history. He has played in three World Cups and holds the record for the most saves by any goalkeeper in a single World Cup game in World Cup history. Tim played thirteen seasons in the English Premier League, including three at Manchester United, followed by a decade at Everton FC. During that time, he won a Football Association Challenge Cup title, was named the Premier League goalkeeper of the year, and became one of the most beloved players in Everton's history. Howard is also the first U.S.A ambassador for the Everton football club. He started his career in Major League Soccer (MLS) with the New York Metro Stars and returned to MLS in 2016 with the Colorado Rapids, retiring from soccer at the end of the 2019 season. Tim has been named an MLS All Star, All League, and Humanitarian of the Year.

Tim was diagnosed with Tourette syndrome at a young age. As an adult, he has volunteered countless hours to the advocacy of Tourette-related disorders. He works with several Tourette



Tim Howard speaks with Tim Crompton and Stacy Bernal at Weber State University during the 25th Annual Diversity Conference on September 29, 2023.

A Conversation with Goalkeeper Tim Howard

Association organizations and continues to be a role model off the field with his philanthropic work. Recently, Tim published an autobiography, The Keeper: A Life of Saving Goals and Achieving Them, *chronicling his career and life with Tourette syndrome and OCD. Tim is now a full-time studio analyst for*

NBC Sports *for its English Premier League broadcast.*

This conversation took place during Weber State University's 25th Annual Diversity Conference where Tim Crompton, Weber State University's athletics director, and Stacy Bernal, founder of Awesome Autistic Ogden and the DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion) manager of the Utah Jazz, had the opportunity to speak with Tim about his experiences as a neurodivergent individual and his contributions to the neurodiversity community.

(Bernal) Welcome to Weber State, Tim. I'd like to kick this interview off with a few heavy-hitting questions. I've had the opportunity to read The Keeper: A Life of Saving Goals and Achieving Them. *From the very first chapter, it was clear that there were many pieces of your life that I could relate to. I am biracial. My father was an immigrant. My mom was a single mom. We have a lot of similarities, although it stops at athletics. (Laughter) Can you speak to some of your experiences while growing up?*

I grew up in New Jersey in a working-class family. My father was a truck driver of African American descent; my mother was a Hungarian immigrant. I had a really good childhood. I lived in a semi-safe neighborhood where I rode my bike, played with my friends, and walked to school. It was what you'd think growing up in the '80s would look like. When I look back at my childhood, I was always just *different*. And I think I was different, in part, because I was biracial. What that meant, even in the '80s, was that I had friends who didn't look like me. In the end, it was still a great childhood. I was allowed to be myself, and I credit my parents for that. My mom is the most amazing woman in the world. She came to America in 1956, after the Hungarian Revolution, when she was six years old. She grew up in America during the '60s, and she is a free, loving, wonderful woman who believes in the golden rule—treat people the way you want to be treated. Thankfully, in that sense, I had a good grounding.

(Bernal) As the parent of a child with a special-needs diagnosis, I love your mom, because she is so fierce. She did a good job of making sure that she helped to advocate for you.

She still does, even though I can handle it on my own now. She's the one who leads that charge.

(Crompton) You are, by most accounts, the greatest goalkeeper in the history of U.S. soccer. Many exceptional athletes have written their own biographies, or their own books. Oftentimes, they discuss their career and answer questions people want to know about, such as "What was Alex Ferguson like?" (Ferguson was the longest-serving manager of Manchester United.) At what point did you decide that you needed to go further and tell your journey? What made you decide to share that story?

I've been surrounded with a small inner circle of great people. My agent and the people around me have been wonderful. I had a meteoric rise in soccer—I came out of high school to play professionally. The MLS back then wasn't what we know it to be now—I didn't play a lot in the beginning. I had a few games

here and there when I was about nineteen or twenty years old. Then, all of a sudden, I went to Manchester United—it was a big jump. When you go to a place like Manchester at twenty-two, people want stories; they want you to write books. But my agent said, "Pump the brakes. Your story hasn't been written yet." He legislated for me. I went on to play for about fifteen years and won three World Cups. At that point, we thought maybe it was the right time—given my performances in the World Cups and where I was in my career. At that stage, I was thirty-five-years-old and had spent over a decade in the Premier League. I also had two children at the time, so there was a lot there that felt complete and whole, and I wanted to talk about it.

(Bernal) I appreciate how you speak openly about being diagnosed with a disability. You've talked about navigating school and about how it was such a struggle to even sit still. My son just graduated in May, and it was a feat to get him to that graduation line.

I had a really good childhood. I lived in a semi-safe neighborhood where I rode my bike, played with my friends, and walked to school. It was what you'd think growing up in the '80s would look like. When I look back at my childhood, I was always just different. *And I think I was different, in part, because I was biracial. What that meant, even in the '80s, was that I had friends who didn't look like me. In the end, it was still a great childhood. I was allowed to be myself, and I credit my parents for that.*

Can you talk about how we can destigmatize the conversation around disabilities? Sometimes, people are afraid to talk about it. What advice would you give for how to normalize that conversation and how to approach people with disabilities?

The word "understanding," for me, is the beginning of the journey when it comes to destigmatizing disabilities. The ability to understand who you're talking to—to understand their struggle and their journey—that's a starting point for any conversation.

I was born in 1979. At about nine years old—so we're talking late '80s— my mom said, "What the heck is going on with my son?" I was twitching; OCD had kicked in. I counted every single thing. Anything that I could count I was trying to count. I had to touch my mom before I could talk to her. My mom said, "This isn't the same kid from the last nine years; this is different." So, she decided to go to the library to figure out what was going on. For some of you in the room, you know what a library is, others don't. (Laughter) And I mean that respectfully. This was the '80s— when you walked into a library, there were just books. There were no computers that allowed you to google a question. There were no cell phones. There were just books. She spent countless hours researching what was going on with me. She had clues—my ticking and twitching, my OCD symptoms. She put those symptoms together and used them as a starting point. She then went into the psychology section of the library and took out as many books as she could. She found out that it could be Tourette syndrome. Once she had that nailed down, we went and saw a medical professional and they confirmed that it was Tourette syndrome. Sometimes, I think, wow, here we are, thirty-some-odd years later from the day my mom walked into that library, and we're still so far behind. Maybe that's why I'm motivated to continue to do what I do today.

I hated school. I didn't hate the information; I hated that I couldn't sit still in a chair and that I had to go to six periods—it felt like an eternity to me. I love knowledge; I love exploration; I love travel, but it was very difficult to harness that as a young kid growing up with OCD and Tourette syndrome—it was consuming.

Advocating in schools is important. It's important to put your child in the right school, make sure that you're front facing for your family, and let educators know about their needs. Educators often just don't know. Sometimes you don't know what *you* don't know—it seems like a silly phrase, but it's true. There have been a lot of roadblocks—for my mom, and for myself— when going into schools and advocating for a child with Tourette syndrome. Some people will scoff at it and say, "Just get on with it. It's not really that big a deal." But we know it is. I even see it with my own children. My son wasn't really into school, but we got him over the finish line, and now he's at a junior college trying to figure out what his passion is. It takes certain children longer than others to get where they're going. My daughter is a bookworm. She's got it all figured out, and she was raised in the same household and given the same opportunities—they just learn at their own pace. I think going back to the beginning and working to understand what each child needs is essential. For a child with a disability, there isn't a *normal* path. "Normal," we'll chuck that word out—forget about it. Everyone's path is as exciting as the next. Sometimes it takes longer, sometimes it's more accelerated, but we have to understand where people are.

(Bernal) I want to piggyback on that and say how grateful I am to have people like you who can share their story. Everyone has potential, and that potential can be scaled on different levels. I know for my son, his trajectory will be very different. It will be nontraditional, but that doesn't make his story any less important or significant. It's important to normalize differences in our culture and in our society. Approaching those differences with kindness and understanding is a major point.

Comparison is the thief of joy. One person's journey to success might take a different road than another's. We're so used to success being a straight line when we hear about success stories—it's not always the case. Everyone gets to where they're going in their own time, and it doesn't make their journey any less successful. In my world, my family harps on that, there is no comparison—comparisons don't matter. What matters is: What's important to you, and how do you get there? How can I help you get there? That, for me, has been a big deal.

(Crompton) You've been lucky enough to have a good team around you. How did you build that team?

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Growing up, my mom would always say, "It takes a village to raise a child." That village can consist of your family, mentors, advocates, or people who you trust. When we talk about the word "understanding," we also need to talk about trust. I believe it's important—particularly with issues surrounding neurodiversity and mental health disabilities—that we have people we can trust around us, who can advocate for us. It does not have to be a big team; I believe in keeping circles small because of that trust factor. It's important—whether we're the person with a disability, or the people who are advocating for someone with a disability—that we are selective and that we make sure we bring in people who are like-minded, who are compassionate, and who want to give rather than take. I've been fortunate to have so many people on my "team" who are givers. When I finished playing soccer, I felt like I'd been taking for the last twenty years— I was the one playing; I was the one traveling; I was the one who couldn't show up to things. Everyone was always showing up for *me*. I remember having a conversation with my two best friends—we've been best friends since middle school, and still are today. I remember breaking down and crying. I said, "You guys have given me everything over the last twenty years. I feel like I've been the worst friend in the world because I haven't been able to give back to you. I've missed your weddings and your anniversaries. But yet, you've been to every World Cup to come see me play." I believe in the power of giving to a cause, rather than taking from it. I hope that speaks a little bit to how important it is to have a good team around you.

(Crompton) In The Keeper, *you mention that mental health is something we talk about a lot more now, especially in athletics. You also wrote about how, when you first got to Manchester United, you were being written about in the press. It can be pretty hard overseas, especially for U.S. players, because they don't think we can play the sport. (Laughter) What was that like for your mental health? What resources did you have available to you that you didn't know about before you got there?*

At my full-time job with *NBC Sports* covering the Premier League, mental health has been brought to the forefront over the last five years. NBA player Kevin Love has spoken about mental health. There have been a few Premier League players who have talked about mental health. At some point, inside the locker room of a professional team—at

Growing up, my mom would always say, "It takes a village to raise a child." That village can consist of your family, mentors, advocates, or people who you trust. When we talk about the word "understanding," we also need to talk about trust. I believe it's important – particularly with issues surrounding neurodiversity and mental health disabilities – that we have people we can trust around us, who can advocate for us. It does not have to be a big team; I believe in keeping circles small because of that trust factor. It's important – whether we're the person with a disability, or the people who are advocating for someone with a disability – that we are selective and that we make sure we bring in people who are like-minded, who are compassionate, and who want to give rather than take.

least with men—it becomes a dog-eat-dog world. You don't speak about anything that ails you or that hurts you. You should only focus on playing, playing well, and impressing others. We're taught that if you don't do that, you don't play. And if you don't play, you don't get a contract. No contract means you don't earn a living—it just snowballs. You can become very hardened during that process, because you want to be successful. Everybody in that room wants to be successful. Now, with athletes coming out and talking about their struggles with mental health, it has opened a new door.

When I got to Manchester United in 2003, my hiring was reported in the tabloids that play on the news and sensationalize nearly everything. When I signed my contract, a tabloid headline said, "Manchester United Signs Retarded Goalkeeper." As you can imagine, that's pretty newsy to people in England. But for me, reading it, I thought, "Well, that's not *me*. I'm just a kid from New Jersey who happens to have Tourette syndrome. That doesn't identify me at all." But, that's what I dealt with on day one.

To answer your direct point: I was so high on the fact that I was signing for Manchester—this was the most amazing thing to happen to an American soccer player in a long time—that I brushed the comment aside. I talked about it later, and it was part of the reason why I do my advocacy work—ignorant newspapers, ignorant journalism, and ignorant editors putting something like that on the page. It wasn't who I was. It didn't just make me angry, it motivated me. I said to myself, "This is just someone else in my way, on my path, who needs to be educated." After about thirteen years of playing in Premier League, I think I educated them.

I don't think you'll see me tic or twitch much today. You might hear me clear my throat, though I don't do it often because I've found a way to control it. But in moments of really high anxiety I allow myself the space to do so. There's no time more nerve-racking than right before kickoff at a Premier League game. There were times in the locker room when I knew I was feeling unsettled and felt my tic coming out. So, I'd go into a bathroom stall, close the door, and I'd tic and I'd twitch. I talk in my book about one such moment in the bathroom when I was coughing or clearing my throat, and my goalkeeper coach alerted another staff member about it. He said, "I think there's something wrong with Tim. He's in the bathroom making all kinds of sounds." This is the type of thing you deal with as an athlete, as does anybody with a disability. It was challenging, because I couldn't be myself in front of my team. Eventually, I had to speak to the manager and explain the situation. If we were to collectively destigmatize these situations and allow people to be who they need

I was so high on the fact that I was signing for Manchester – this was the most amazing thing to happen to an American soccer player in a long time – that I brushed the comment aside. I talked about it later, and it was part of the reason why I do my advocacy work – ignorant newspapers, ignorant journalism, and ignorant editors putting something like that on the page. It wasn't who I was. It didn't just make me angry, it motivated me. I said to myself, "This is just someone else in my way, on my path, who needs to be educated." After about thirteen years of playing in Premier League, I think I educated them.

to be, if we let people live their lives as they normally would, things could be different.

(Crompton) In The Keeper, *you talk about a song that Manchester United fans made for you. How long after signing to Manchester United did they come up with your song? Can you sing that song?*

Given the audience, I probably shouldn't. (Laughter) In England, every player who's halfway decent gets a song sung about them. The fans in England, for all their downsides, are pretty amazing. They sing songs during the whole game, and I was fortunate enough to have a song made for me. The song is sung to the tune of "Chim Chim Cher-ee" from ***Mary Poppins*** and ends with a swear word—insinuating that everybody with Tourette syndrome swears or curses, because that's how Hollywood portrays it in movies. The song was an ode to me and to the love that the fans had for me. Based on the lyrics, you would think that they were making fun, but they weren't really, because they were my own Manchester United fans. They were showing love and appreciation for me. Again, when I am in the public eye and have to perform in front of millions of people, Tourettes was the last thing I was concerned with because there was so much pressure everywhere else. It is part of what you deal with on a mental health level. Athletes often don't talk about the fact that when we come home from a bad game, we tend to go into a shell, and it's not a fun place to be. Most athletes don't talk about it, but slowly more are beginning to speak of it.

There were times in the locker room when I knew I was feeling unsettled and felt my tic coming out. So, I'd go into a bathroom stall, close the door, and I'd tic and I'd twitch. I talk in my book about one such moment in the bathroom when I was coughing or clearing my throat, and my goalkeeper coach alerted another staff member about it. He said, "I think there's something wrong with Tim. He's in the bathroom making all kinds of sounds." This is the type of thing you deal with as an athlete, as does anybody with a disability. It was challenging, because I couldn't be myself in front of my team.

(Bernal) I am the first-ever Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) manager for the Utah Jazz. The world of DEI is currently under attack across the country. As a major player in the world of professional sports, what do you feel is your responsibility in regard to the organization of professional sports? What do you feel is your role in advocating for diversity, equity, and inclusion?

I believe that major sports organizations and teams have the biggest responsibility. They do everything for these players. When I was playing at the highest level in England, nothing was missed by these clubs. The bottom line was to get the players on the field and to focus on soccer. If your boiler broke at two o'clock in the morning, and your wife and young child were cold, you didn't stay home to fix it. You called in, and they said, "Get your butt to training." They made sure the boiler was fixed within thirty minutes, the tea was warm, and the wife and kid were fine. These clubs do everything for the players, which is amazing. But they missed the boat completely when it comes to mental health; they don't preempt the conversation, and they're not prepared when a player is desperate to have a conversation. Recently, there was a player who played for my team, Everton, named Dele

Alli—a twenty-year-old superstar kid who burst onto the scene at Tottenham. He had a bit of a lull, including some injuries, and managers came and went and didn't play him. Then, he went to Everton on loan. Obviously, I have inside sources at Everton because I played there for thirteen years, but it didn't really work out for him. He went to another club in Turkey, called Beşiktaş, that didn't work out for him either. He came back to Everton and did an exclusive interview about the hell—hell is probably a much nicer place than where he actually was—that he'd been through for the last seven years. Anybody who was a soccer fan could see it. If you're an analyst, like myself and my colleagues, you could see it. This kid was special, he was a superstar, but his body language didn't look right—it was impossible to miss. Three major clubs missed it and sent him away. If they saw what you and I saw on the television, the club itself should have realized that something was different, and said, "Maybe we sit down with him." You have to figure out a way to employ a staff member who speaks to the players confidentially, who has an understanding—we go back to those terms "trust" and "understanding"— for players who are closed off. In sports, we want to have success. We don't want anything to stand in the way of that. If you don't trust somebody to come into your inner circle, into the dressing room, into the clubhouse, you're not going to speak with them. You're not going to give them what you yourself can't even talk about—your fears, why you're not able to perform, why you can't get out of bed. And so, to bring the question all the way back: it 100% falls squarely on the shoulders of the clubs and the leagues.

(Crompton) You've played in much of the world, and, in many of those instances, there's pressure from the Premier League. Of all of the places you've played, what was the most difficult environment?

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In soccer, there is not a player born in any country who won't tell you that the greatest day of their life—certainly, the greatest day of their career—was the first time they pulled on their national team jersey and heard their national anthem at the beginning of a game. Everybody desires to play with their own country, even if their country is small or not very good. I've seen players who've played for AC Milan, Bayern Munich, Madrid, and Manchester—who originally come from a really small country—and they still want to play for their own country. Representing their family, their culture, and their country is everything. It's no different for me. I can still remember the first time I pulled on that shirt. It was in Birmingham, Alabama, at Legion field, which is a famous American football field. I was twenty-two years old. Most athletes will tell you that the chal-

lenge is what gets them out of bed in the morning. The bigger the challenge, the more fear, but the more possibility for success.

When you are an American soccer player, you're often judged by how you play versus Mexico. Mexico and the U.S. have an amazing rivalry in soccer. It's intense; it's passionate. There's love, respect, hate, every emotion you can imagine. The players on the field, the coaches, the fans, the country—everything about the rivalry is special. Some of the greatest and most difficult nights of my career were at Azteca Stadium in Mexico City. Azteca Stadium holds 120,000 people—the stands go straight up, and the air is thick. It's a hunk of concrete that is just as vast as you can imagine. There are tunnels under the stadium with concrete steps leading to the locker room—which is essentially a room with a really low ceiling and concrete seats. Your jerseys are hung on a nail or a peg. You're not supposed to win there as an American player. We'd never won there until an amazing night in 2012. It was the first time we'd ever beaten Mexico *in* Mexico. That particular time is etched in my mind.

I'm a New York Giants fan and a New York Knicks fan. When you turn up to a game, there are people who are high-fiving and walking in through turnstiles. When you get to San Pedro Sula, in Honduras, you have to get there two hours before the game. You walk down a long dirt road with nothing but fields on either side. You can see the stadium off in the distance, and people are walking with their children, or stacked in pickup trucks to go into the game. When you get to the game, there's not a seat to be had—it's full; it's loud; it's vibrant. And so, you realize that when you play in some of these other countries, this is their national holiday. This is their World Cup final. This is everything to them. In those moments, you realize how few people are afforded that type of joy, fear, and excitement. When you're an athlete at that level, you get to do that. It's pretty special.

(Bernal) In The Keeper*, you talk about the sacrifices your mom made. There were expenses and costs around becoming a soccer player. When I started Awesome Autistic Ogden, it was with the goal to make Ogden a kinder, safer, more inclusive place for people who are neurodivergent. I, too, have had to be a fierce advocate every now and then. Earlier, you said that you feel you've been a taker; you wish you could give more. Can you tell us about your foundation, what you do, and some of the great things that you've been able to achieve through your foundation?*

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The Tim Howard Foundation started about a year ago. As an advocate for Tourette syndrome, I gave of my time in terms of being present for people, whether it'd be through charity organizations or signings. I initially wanted my board to consist of my financial advisor, my best friend, and my personal assistant, who had been with me for ten years—all people who were down for the cause, who understood what it meant. The issue with nonprofits and charities is that you're banging your head against the wall if you're bringing people on board just for the sake of it. There has to be a desire for them to be there and an understanding of the cause. When we formed the board for the Tim Howard Foundation, our mission was to form a collective of people who *understood*. I wanted to consolidate my time, so, instead of giving my time to everybody else, I wanted to give it to my own cause, or to causes that were special to me. When we were brainstorming our mission, we wanted to streamline the mission in order to get everybody to understand what it was we were trying to do. Ultimately, we wanted to enrich the lives of young people—whether they had disabilities physically, mentally, or financially—and give them opportunities that they wouldn't otherwise have.

I started Howard's Heroes when I was in Denver. My mailbox at the training ground was full of letters from amazing families and children with Tourette syndrome. At first, I signed cards and wrote letters to people. Then, we came up with this idea to bring families to the game and give them an experience. Instead of writing a letter, they could meet me and I could meet them. It turned out to be amazing. I have to take my hat off to the MLS, because everywhere we went, we extended an offer to the visiting club to have a Howard's Hero be present. Every single one—hook, line, and sinker—paid for a family to come and meet me, even at away stadiums. The families got to watch the game; they got to meet me, and I got to meet them. It was so enriching because there were stars in their eyes. But here I am, in awe of this young boy or girl, telling me their stories.

When I go up on stage at assemblies and talk about Tourette syndrome, I tell kids my story. I say, "When I was your age, I was at the lunch table scared and hiding. If I ticked and someone asked me if I was okay, I'd say 'Oh, it's nothing, don't worry.' I didn't have that strength to share what was happening to me." And so, we'd have shared commonalities. Howard's Heroes is part of that, giving children game day experiences. The Tim Howard Foundation has partnered with the U.S. Soccer Foundation to build mini pitches and soccer fields. We install these fields in underserved communities so that kids can play free—it's just like a pickup game of basketball or tennis. We put the pitch down, and we have an unveiling where we allow the kids to come play. We opened our first pitch in Yonkers, New York, last year. We have more slated for Las Vegas, Denver, and a bunch of other cities. The mission is to enrich kids' lives.

One of the issues that we have in America is running soccer. We don't have enough time today, this week, or this month to figure out America's pay-to-play scale model. I went through it thirty years ago with my mom—not being able to pay for it. I'm going through it with my daughter. The amount of money that we pay for these young kids to play is mind-blowing. It excludes way too many Black and Brown children in America. It also excludes way too many Black and Brown families from being able to coach. This is one of the things that we've gotten wrong in this country. We have these incredibly wealthy youth teams go into underserved communities and pick up one or two really good players—which, on the surface, seems amazing—but they're only giving an opportunity to one or two players; they haven't solved the problem. My foundation goes *into* those underserved communities and gives them opportunities, as opposed to bringing a few players into *our* communities and giving them opportunity. This problem won't be fixed with one mini-pitch, and it

won't be fixed with two, but creating more opportunities for underserved youth is a mission of mine. Throughout my career, I've always said, "I have the best job." I have the easiest advocacy in the world when it comes to Tourette syndrome. Every Saturday morning for twenty-five years, I was on television, and I would tic and I would twitch—that's who I am. I can advocate for the Tourette syndrome community by doing nothing at all, by just being myself. In that reframe, I had the easiest job. The Tim Howard Foundation is something that is a huge passion of mine.

(Crompton) You've talked about teamwork; you've talked about diversity; you've talked about how you handle pressure. If you were to leave us with one message, what would it be?

I think when we look at neurodiversity, and mental health in general, I truly believe that we're all directly or indirectly affected by it in some way. Ultimately, everybody around us is dealing with something on that level. If it's not ourselves, it's our brother, or sister, or coworker, or friend. We see it now more than ever, particularly because of social media. I don't want to just blame social media, but the numbers are there. Our world pulls us in so many more directions today than it ever has before. We need to have compassion for ourselves. We need to give ourselves and others the space to breathe. When you look at the field of neurodiversity, we need to have more understanding, more compassion, and we have to be willing to have conversations about it. As someone who has lived a life of ridicule, with all the highs and the lows that come along with that, I know that my best moments have always been the ones where I can sit and talk about my feelings—whether that means giving myself a safe space, or somebody who I love giving me a safe space, to be who I want to be. Those are the days that I live for, that I yearn for, that I try my best to endeavor to have—every day.

(Crompton) Thank you so much.



Stacy Bernal is the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion manager for the Utah Jazz, as well as a TEDx speaker and DEI Trainer at See Stacy Speak LLC. She graduated summa cum laude from Weber State University with a B.A. in communication and earned a certificate for diversity & inclusion from eCornell University. In 2018, inspired by her neurodiverse son, she founded Awesome Autistic Ogden, an annual autism appreciation event turned community resource. Her book, *The Things We Don't Talk About: A Memoir of Hardships, Healing, and Hope* (2019), chronicles her life of triumph and transformation.



Tim Crompton (B.A., M.A. Weber State University) is the director of athletics at Weber State University. He has also served as the head coach for women's soccer for fifteen years. During his coaching career, Crompton was named the Big Sky Coach of the Year three times and led the Wildcats to three regular season titles and three trips to the NCAA Tournament.

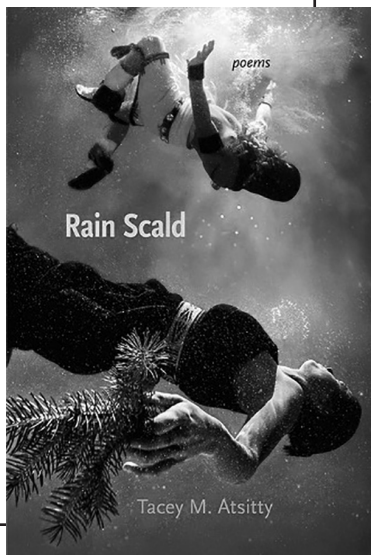
Poetry and the Culture of Memory

E'ool'į' Binahjį' Bee Haniihgo Saad Ndaach'ąąh Dóó Hadadilne'

Susan McKay



A Conversation with Tacey M. Atsitty



Tacey M. Atsitty is Diné (Navajo) of Tsénahabiłnii *(Sleep Rock People) and born for* Ta'neeszahnii *(Tangle People). Her maternal grandfather is* Tábaahí *(Water Edge People), and her paternal grandfather is* Hask'áánhadzóhí *(Yucca Fruit Strung-Out-In-A-Line People). She grew up and received her early education in New Mexico, benefitting from home and school environments which emphasized literacy and nurtured her young efforts in writing. She received many enriching opportunities for travel and practical learning during her high school years, which broadened her perspectives and cultural experience.*

Her formal post-high-school education was at Brigham Young University, the Institute for American Indian Arts, Cornell University, and Florida State University, from which she earned a Ph.D. She is now assistant professor of creative writing – poetry at Beloit College in Wisconsin. Her poems and prose pieces have been published in prominent journals and in three collections of her own: in 2009, a successful chapbook entitled Amenorrhea, *of which she sold all copies except her own; in 2018, a critically acclaimed volume entitled* Rain Scald; *and in 2023, a second collection entitled* (At) Wrist, *for which she was awarded the*

prestigious 2023 Wisconsin Brittingham Prize for Poetry.

Dr. Atsitty's poems explore a diverse array of "spaces" and "landscapes"—personal, natural, cultural, and mythical—all with great depth of emotion, immersive richness of detail, and dazzling virtuosity in the use of language—its sounds, rhythms, words, syntactic structures, and poetic forms. Her poems both challenge and reward readers from multiple directions all at once and leave us thinking, wondering, and wanting more.

In the acknowledgments page of your poetry collection Rain Scald*, you express your gratitude for your "passion and love for language and for the power of language." That makes me wonder what your linguistic world was like when you were growing up. Part IV of your poem "Ach'íí" talks about your dad's time in the LDS Church's Placement Program. Was he able to maintain his fluency in Navajo during his time in the program? Can you speak a bit about that?*

My dad was eight years old when he went into the Indian Student Placement Program. He was there until he turned eighteen, but he came home every summer. He said that it was very difficult for him to be put into an English-speaking society and then to dip back to Navajo—back and forth. Even today, he feels like he hasn't really mastered Navajo or English. He was a Navajo language teacher for Kirtland Middle School, Shiprock High School, and Kirtland High School. He also was an adjunct at San Juan College in Farmington, New Mexico, for a little time. Fundamentally, he knows how to read and write Navajo. He's definitely more fluent than I am. He has kept some Navajo, but he does feel that he's not as fluent in either English or Navajo as he would like to be.

I think the feeling of being between the spaces of two languages is something a lot of bilingual people experience. Was Navajo the language you used at home when you were growing up?

English was our household language. Since my dad felt that he hadn't been able to really master either language, he said, "Okay, my children will only learn English." And so we grew up speaking English in the home. It wasn't until I went into high school at Navajo Preparatory School that I learned to read and write Navajo fluently. Navajo was a mandatory class at that school. In other public schools in the area, it is usually an elective. I still don't speak Navajo fluently—I understand more than I speak.

Were your grandparents primarily speakers of Navajo?

Yes.

So, you had at least enough of the language to converse across the generations?

Yes.

I think that is always so fortunate at both the family level and the broader linguistic and cultural level. Do you ever write poems in Navajo?

Not entire poems. I integrate Navajo words every now and then. I may include lyrics of songs or chants. Sometimes, if the word has a particular meaning that doesn't exist fully in English without a long description, then I'll use those words. Or if the word is especially meaningful, as in a familial relation, such as the word "shidá'í" for aunt, "shádí" for older sister, "shimá" for mother, "shizhé'é"

for my father. I will use Navajo words to refer to those individuals. The Navajo words hold a greater precision and a different feeling of love. It is more authentic for me than just saying "mother" or "father."

Would you share with us some of your personal journey toward becoming a poet? Were you drawn to language at a young age? Do you have any early memories of that?

When I was young, my mother taught us to write well. There were four of us children. She wrote in a journal for each one of us when we were growing up. Even when we were very young—two or three-year-old babies—she wrote in our journals. While she was writing in each child's journal, she would give us each our own journal and let us draw until we could write. And so, we would keep our own little journals. We were fostered that way with language and being creative early on.

We lost my mother when I was three. After she passed away, my grandmother really supported me. I started writing stories sometime between the third grade and the fifth grade. My grandma let me borrow her typewriter to type out my stories. She sent one of my stories in for a contest—I was so young; I had no idea. After that, my dad saw that she was supporting me in my writing. He noticed that I was a good writer, so he bought me my own typewriter. It was an electric typewriter, and I was so excited to use it.

So that's how it started. I have also kept journals of my own, though I don't journal as much now, which I feel badly about. I think it has something to do with social media. I once had twenty journals, and now I think I've had one journal for about three years.

Once I entered fifth or sixth grade, we had writing assignments in school. I loved writing poems when we had poetry assignments. They weren't great poems, but I loved writing already. When I started high school, Navajo Preparatory had a poetry team for slam poetry. The team teacher was Scott Nicolay (who I mention in *Rain Scald*'s Acknowledgments). He came from Chicago, which is where poetry slam was born. He got a team together, and I had a great time being a part of it. We wrote poems, memorized them, and performed them. We traveled to the National Poetry Slam competitions for high schoolers. We traveled to Connecticut, Albuquerque, and San Francisco to compete. I was producing quite a lot outside of school assignments. I really enjoyed it; I loved writing poetry. I found it to be a good way to express what I was feeling—processing different experiences.

The high school you went to, Navajo Preparatory Academy, it's in Farmington, New Mexico?

Yes. It used to be a Navajo mission in the early 1900s. Then, it changed to Navajo Methodist, and then it became a Bureau of Indian Affairs school before becoming the Navajo Preparatory School.

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Before attending Navajo Prep, did you encounter any little alphabet books or little story books in Navajo?

No, only later. Not until I got into high school. I grew up mostly in Kirtland, New Mexico, which is about 10-15 minutes away from Farmington. Everything there was in English. *Everything*. But because my dad was teaching at the college level, he did have some Navajo literature that happened to deal with witchcraft and such. I don't think he knew I was reading those scary stories at my young age, but I remember my imagination going wild. I noticed that the stories were in English and also in Navajo, so I knew that there *were* things being published in Navajo even though I couldn't read Navajo at that point.

I read your collection Rain Scald. *It's an impressive work, with amazing variety within and among the poems. Could we talk a little bit about your writing process and how some of these poems came to be? Many of them seem to have a specific occasion or a specific topic, for instance, "The Playground at Sunset" or "Razed." How do those occasions, those individual incidents, make it into a poem? How does a poem become a poem?*

In terms of "a poem becoming a poem," I think *Rain Scald* came from place and memory. For example, "Vail Her Stallion" comes from a mystical story that I heard growing up about an area up in the mountains, a summer camp, where my grandparents and great grandparents would take their sheep. We still have family reunions up there.

I remember being told, "Stay away from the ponds; stay away from where the water collects." We were never allowed, as hot as it was in the summer in Arizona, to go play in the ponds. I never really understood why until later on, when I heard that there was a little girl who drowned there. I spoke with my dad's cousin about it, and he opened up about the day that it happened. It was his neighbor's child who drowned; she is "the Brownhat girl" in my poem. My dad's cousin explained to me what happened. He was crying, even though this had happened fifty years ago. Also, just down the road from that area lived a big, strong stallion. The same thing happened to that horse. He waded into a pond to drink and got caught and died too.

The imagery that was created for me through my relative's storytelling is what stuck in my mind. The vines in the pond kind of held her, caught her, and trapped the horse also. And so, for me, writing the poem was me trying to understand and process this space, this horrific story, and the areas and places of taboo and death.

As a funny corollary, around the same time, I was learning how to make jams. I didn't have money for a lot of berries or anything, so I found a mint jelly recipe to use. There's a lot of mint that grows around those ponds, and so I made a huge batch of mint jelly. Navajos don't eat mint jelly. We eat mutton, but we don't eat mutton with mint jelly. (Laughter) I wanted to gift the mint jelly to my family members. But as soon as they smelled the jelly, they knew exactly where it was from. They would close the jar and push it back to me. They said that the mint smell was a memory of death, of fear, and of that space. I hadn't even told them where I got the mint; they just knew it.

It certainly is a memorable poem, both in its imagery and in its emotional impact.

On the other hand, we have a poem like "Rain Scald," which was really sort of marvelous in the way that it came to be. I wrote most of it in my mind—something which has not happened before or since. I remember being in the Gorges, right on campus at Cornell University. It was rainy; it was a soft rain, much like today. It was dark, though; it was probably eight or nine at night. There was a heavy feeling in the air because there had been several deaths of students who had jumped into the Gorges and killed themselves. For me, the poem

embraced that particular moment, and what I was feeling and experiencing while I was standing by that waterfall and the Gorges.

I love its wonderful first line: "When standing (in rain) for so long, you no longer hear or feel it falling – you believe it's stopped." I admire the creative use of parentheses in this poem. The elements in parentheses create an alternative text depending on whether the reader includes them or not. How did this volume come to be titled Rain Scald*?*

I wanted to call the collection something related to flooding. But then, as I thought about it and talked about it with my professors, we figured ***Rain Scald*** would be great. According to Navajo cultural teachings, when you have an imbalance with the weather—for example, if you have too much rain—then something is out of balance. Too much rain causes rain rot to your animals; they lose their hair. Too much rain causes overgrowth that the land is not used to, which causes an increase of certain types of rodents, which leads to more snakes, which brings more diseases. The expression "rain scald" encapsulates an imbalance. Acknowledging that imbalance gets us to a space where we can move forward with healing. But it's not healing—not yet. "Scald" also references heat, burns, and destruction. It encompasses all of that.

Like "Rain Scald," many other poems in this collection incorporate sophisticated formal devices. There are shifts in parts of speech and syntactic order and arrangements. There are abundant and innovative visuals, such as italics, lines within lines, parentheses, and unexpected spacings on the page. In addition, there are complex fixed forms like the villanelle and the sestina as well as a variety of prose poem structures. So in regard to syntax and word play, do you, perhaps, rough out the content first and then incorporate the devices later? Does it all come out in one piece? Or is it different for each poem?

It's different for each poem. There are certain lines that just come to me, and I grab them, write them down, and then I elaborate them into a poem. "Hand Trembler," for example, was kind of fun in its origin. I was a student at the Institute of American Indian Arts when I wrote the poem. We were doing an exercise in one of my classes where we wrote lines, and then we printed them out and cut them into little lines or partial lines. Someone had a roll of chicken wire, balled up. I put the pieces of the poem within the ball, rolled it across the desk, and the papers came out in a certain order, and that was the poem.

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It's like the poem was writing itself.

It *was*! I read it, and I thought, "Oh, my goodness, this is what it wanted to be." It was like it wasn't me composing; it was the poem itself; that's how it wanted to be laid out on the page. I think it made sense for me because it was like a location that was trying to be found—there was something that needed to be located. There's this sense of wandering within the poem, in a way. And in this particular poem, it ends up *not* being found.

One among several poems where the words themselves attracted me was "Evensong" in the last section in the book. I loved the unconventional juxtapositions: "uvular angles," "leaf-tongue," "fallen mouth"; the creative phrases like "veins in roots" and "rain-beaded blossom"; the coinages "creek-cut" and "word-spill"; and the use of the unusual word "descant." I imagine that those amazing elements just come to you, right?

When they come, I don't realize that they come that way. I had a poetry teacher who said, "There are poets who just create, and then there are *craftsmen*." I think I'm somewhere in between. I like to do both. A lot of things just come to me, and I don't realize that I'm creating a language on the page until somebody tells me that I am. I'm a little more aware of it now.

While you were at university, you workshopped your poems, right? Now, as a professional writer, do you send pieces off to colleagues and friends before you're ready to publish? Do you still use that kind of approach?

Not as much anymore. I did when I was at Cornell, and I enjoyed it; I got good feedback. As a Ph.D. student, I spent my first two years workshopping. I wouldn't say that I don't need that anymore, but I think I know my work well enough now that I know what I'm looking for. I can see things now that, as a younger poet, I didn't see. I know how to shape my poems in a way that I didn't know earlier.

As I thought about what we might talk about today, I thought as well about what would be my choices as favorites among these very rich and varied poems. Let me share three of them:

First, the prose poem "Sunbeam," though left unspecific, has a strong air of tragedy about it, and the details are such a powerful and accurate rendition of how very young children experience, process, and remember tragedy. I found it very moving.

Second, another poem that really resonated with me was "Razed." The contrast between rebuilding the old corral fence and the destruction and loss embodied in the title is striking. Also, I was drawn to the wordplay involving coral/corral/choral, *the repetition of the words* nails, drop, fall, *and other patterns. It is verbally ingenious.*

Third, my very favorite poem of all, for lots of reasons, is "In Strips." It is a remarkable construction of three-to-five-syllable mini-lines arranged in three columns across the page. It was so intriguing that it took me a moment to figure out if I should read it vertically down the columns, horizontally across each row, or maybe a bit of both. Did it "write itself" too? It seems to me to be, at least partially, about fiber arts. It reminds me of weaving.

That's definitely what it was. I was thinking of weaving. And I was thinking about the stories that are woven together with the land and thinking about our creation stories and about how the land holds these stories. When I pass a certain mesa, or pass a certain hill, I can remember that my grandparents lost a baby, and that's where they buried her because they only had wagons back then. That's the story for that piece of land for my family. There is also the general creation story while looking at the land—pulling these stories

apart and putting them back together—trying to figure out how they work together. Sound was definitely a big part of this poem too.

Do you have a favorite poem in the collection?

I don't like to say that I have favorites, but I do have certain poems that I read more than others. For instance, I really like "Nightsong" because I feel like it was the epitome of me trying to understand and figure out who I was as a member of my community while at Cornell.

I had come from the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe. There, when someone passed away, we would build a fire on campus and keep up the fire for three or four days. Somebody would always stay with the fire, because you knew the one who had died; they were a part of your community. I would cook for the people who were tending the fire to make sure they had something to eat because they had to be there all night. You could go there and just sit and sing with people or not have to say anything; it was known that you were grieving.

When I went to Cornell, there was a bigger community, and I didn't know these people who were passing away, but I still felt a sense of responsibility and even a little bit of accountability. Because I was teaching there, I felt accountable to my students. I felt responsible for knowing who they were and making sure that they felt seen and could ask for help or attention. "Nightsong" is dedicated to the Gorge dwellers. It has this slow rhythm, and then it picks up. I like the sound of the lines [reads aloud]: "Fall Creek throat. / Repeated repeated loss. / Thirst-in almanac / of the gorges. Litany/Of wrists. Look/ down at your wrists, / down here where the thick laps/the lips. Where you/ haven't been taught." There is also the last part, where it says, "When days fall into days, night falls into night." Sometimes we feel like every day is night, you know? Sometimes we feel like there is no coming out of it.

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The rhythm and the breaking of the lines within the poem is beautiful. I can understand why you like speaking aloud those beautiful lines. They remind me of rippling water.

Earlier you said that as a child, you used to write stories, and you have several exquisite prose poems in Rain Scald *that I very much admired. Have you thought about moving into different genres? Maybe fiction or just mini-fiction?*

I have a handful of prose poems that I wrote last year that will be in my new manuscript. I also have a handful of short stories—one has been published. It is called "To the Whirlwinds" and appeared in ***Prairie Schooner*** some years back.

It's funny, I've wanted to write fiction, but at the same time, I'm a little scared. I feel like I don't remember how to write prose. (Laughter) I think fiction writers feel the same way, sometimes, when they need to write poems. There are a lot of things I want to write about, but poetry, for me, is my safe space. I feel confident when I'm

writing poetry, because it's challenging. Prose is different in the ways of composition; I haven't quite grappled with that yet.

Your new collection, (At) Wrist, *appeared last year. Are there any particular themes or influences in the new book?*

This book is full of sonnets. The final part is a poem called "Lacing." It's fifteen sonnets, and each of the fourteen lines from the first sonnet recurs as the final line of the subsequent sonnet.

Wow, that is a tour de force!

It was hard. It took a few years to write, but it turned out really beautifully. I was working with language and images in a different way than I was used to. I was introduced to form by visiting professor Jim Barnes at Brigham Young University. His whole class focused on form. I felt like all my poems were junk, but it was a good experience because it helped me with the constraints and limitations of language and images. I grew to love form, and now I've been writing sonnets for ten years.

A lot of these poems are about love. I took Rilke's ***Letters to a Young Poet*** to heart. He said, "You're a new poet; don't write about love." (Laughter) Everyone writes about love, and it's all about the same. I took that to heart for many years; I didn't write about love in that way.

The cover of the book is provocative and beautiful. It is by photographer Kara Romero, and the piece is called "Two Virgins." The book talks about familial love, the limitations of love, unrequited love, and love not working out. The book is about cherishing moments, beautiful times with people, and meditating on moments. It is thematically and formally quite different from ***Rain Scald***.

Thinking about your poetic journey and how you got to where you are, I wondered why you chose Cornell and Florida State for your final two university degrees? I admire you for stepping outside of your western background and choosing those two wildly different universities, places, and cultures. How did you make those choices?

It wasn't as hard as you might think. When I was a student at Navajo Prep, I had a lot of great support in terms of summer programs there. Also, I went away to summer programs in Albuquerque and then in Danville, California. The program was called Camp Startup; it was for women because they wanted to promote women business owners. Then, I went to Brigham Young University (BYU) for a program called Summer of Academic Refinement, and I also had an internship in Washington, D.C., for a few summers while there. The following summer brought me an experiment in international living; I went to Northern Ireland and Scotland. I also went to Phillips Exeter Academy in Exeter, New Hampshire. All of this was during high school. By that time, I had quite a bit of travel under my belt. I'm adventurous in that way. Then, I went to BYU for college, and then to Taiwan after that, to teach English for a year. When I came back, I went to the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe for one year, where I prepared a portfolio for my MFA. Then, I served a mission in New Jersey for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. After that, I sought out other locations and more opportunities for graduate school.

We have covered so much ground. I thought we could end with two broader – and, I think, important – questions. First, people in the public eye – writers and other creatives, scientists, athletes – often chafe at the idea of being categorized by their background. They may not want to be known and described as, say, a Samoan American opera singer, or a Hmong American neuroscientist, or a Filipino American NBA star. They want to be seen and recognized for their work and for their expertise. Understandably, they don't necessarily want to be the standard-bearer for their culture or ethnicity; they don't want

to be "the first" anything. But in your work and in your life too, it seems, you embrace your heritage and rejoice in it. At this point in your career, what are your thoughts about being both Navajo and *a poet?*

I've never said, "Don't call me Navajo; don't call me a Navajo poet." I have other friends, other Navajo poet friends, who have said, "I'm not a Navajo poet; I'm *just* a poet." I understand that too. But I feel like, for most of my life, I have had to take on and bear that responsibility—at BYU, in Taiwan, in Ithaca, and in Florida. Even so, I kind of understand that it goes with the territory. I *am* Navajo; I embrace who I am and where I come from. I am a practicing member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, but I also recognize that my ancestors—my parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents—have a certain way of life, certain beliefs and traditions. This is all something to be cherished and something to be proud of.

You are a real trailblazer. What would you say to a little boy or girl in Shiprock or Kirtland who wants to do what you have done? What advice would you give them?

I always say, "Your voice matters; your life matters." Sometimes we think our lives compared to other people's lives—whether it's through what we're reading in the newspapers or on social media—are not anything special, but they *are*. That's why I love traveling; I love to see and experience other people's *normal*. I don't need to see everything—the tourist places—I want to just experience what *normal* is for them in their everyday lives. Young writers need to know that their stories matter; their experiences matter. That's what I mean when I say their *lives* matter. As boring as they think their lives might be, there is always something there. I thought about myself as a kind of nerdy Navajo girl who just loved to read, write, get good grades, and ride her bike to the local pool to eat free lunches. There's nothing special about that, right? But, there *is*. I think everyone has beautiful stories and beautiful lives, as mundane as they think they might be.

I've never said, "Don't call me Navajo; don't call me a Navajo poet." I have other friends, other Navajo poet friends, who have said, "I'm not a Navajo poet; I'm just *a poet." I understand that too. But I feel like, for most of my life, I have had to take on and bear that responsibility – at BYU, in Taiwan, in Ithaca, and in Florida. Even so, I kind of understand that it goes with the territory. I* am *Navajo; I embrace who I am and where I come from. I am a practicing member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, but I also recognize that my ancestors – my parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents – have a certain way of life, certain beliefs and traditions. This is all something to be cherished and something to be proud of.*

Very eloquently said. Thank you. One final question: Of the many things that readers will feel, learn, and take away from your work, what to you is the most important? How would you like to be seen and remembered?

I think, for me, I'd like people to remember my work as the work of a human being.

One of my great purposes when I write is to transcribe and to share feelings and emotions that I have experienced. When I can transfer that, and other people can feel that, then they can know that *I* am human, and they can know that *they* are human. Even if they're not Navajo, or if they're not *whatever* I am, they know that *we're* human.

I think it took me a while to understand why Joy Harjo was always saying, "We're human. We're human." I think it's because when we don't know someone—when we don't know another ethnicity—we push them away. We're afraid because we don't know them. But really, what we need to understand is that we are all human. We all experience the same things. We all love, we all grieve, we all lose and gain. I think that's a big part of why I write—to share that connection.

What a wonderful thought to end with! Thank you very much, Tacey, for this inspiring and instructive hour and for generously sharing your experiences and your work with us.

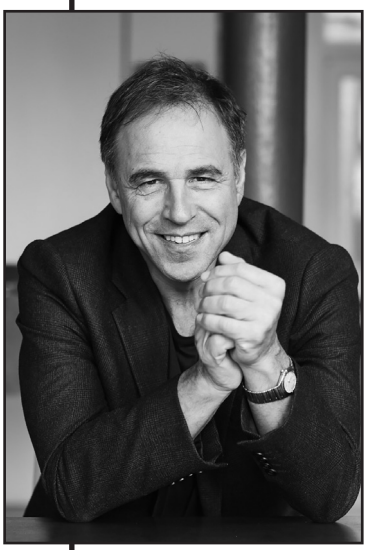
Thank you as well. It has been my pleasure.



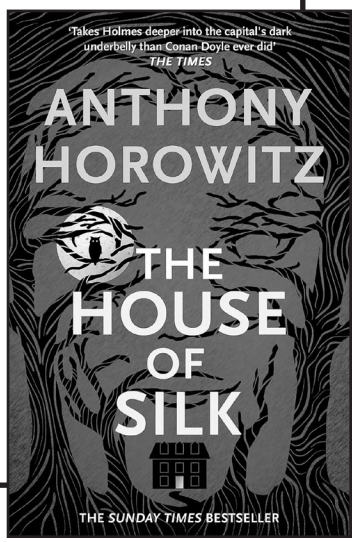
Susan McKay (Ph.D., University of Utah) holds advanced degrees in French language and literature (with special interests in drama and poetry) and in linguistics (with special expertise in linguistic analysis, syntactic and stylistic analysis of French and English, and historical linguistics). Graduate coursework on analyzing Indigenous languages and on understanding the interface between language and culture instilled in her an abiding interest in Indigenous voices and in recognizing and preserving the languages and cultures which those voices represent.

All Roads Lead to Holmes

Mikel Vause



A Conversation with Anthony Horowitz



*I am one of the luckiest of people in that I have been able to follow Robert Frost's injunction and "unite" my avocation and vocation: I have made my living reading and talking about literature. Many times in conversation, I've been asked what kind of books I teach, and I always respond with "*Frankenstein, Dracula, *or Sherlock Holmes," which often comes as a surprise to the conversant.*

Well, to me, even to this day – and after many rereads – the stories of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's famous detective are still my favorite. I was introduced to the Holmes canon as an early teen, when my parents gave me The Complete Sherlock Holmes *for my birthday. Doyle's writings were an instant addiction, leading to a sixty-year habit I've been unable to kick (not unlike Doyle's own dabbling with various substances). Like most addicts, for the last forty years of university teaching, I've tried to entice many young minds to "just try it" – in my case, a literary drug, of sorts.*

In 2008, I gave a talk at the annual meeting of The Baker Street Irregulars held in Salt Lake City on what was the 125th anniversary of the publication of A Study in Scarlet. *Later that same year, I attended the international meeting of The Baker Street Irregulars held in the Union Club in New York City. What a great experience it was to spend time talking*

shop with hundreds of Holmesians who love Doyle's idiosyncratic detective as much as I do. So, when the opportunity arose to meet and interview Anthony Horowitz, another famous lover of all things Holmes and the author of several well-received Holmes novels – not to mention an impressive body of work that encompasses more than fifty novels – it was an offer I couldn't refuse.

Anthony came to Ogden, Utah, as the featured speaker of the 2023 Ogden School Foundation's Fall Author Event. In support of Weber State University and its journal Weber, *the foundation kindly arranged for me to visit with him. I want to express my profound thanks to the foundation and to Anthony for their time and generosity. The following conversation has been edited for clarity and length.*

I read an interview of yours recently, and your comments about social media are dead on. I think that social media is ruining society.

I feel social media is responsible for a great deal of the unhappiness and divisiveness we feel in my country. However, as you may have heard me say, as troubling as it is, social media does have its value. There's nothing created by technology that is *purely* bad; social media *does* have the ability to bring us together. Many people read, write, or communicate with people through social media. But, social media has also turned everything into black or white, yes or no, right or wrong. Social media doesn't understand that there is a vast territory in between—the gray area—where we begin to examine an argument and look at different layers of agendas; social media can't do that. Social media says, "It's either-or, you're right, or I hate you." It brings out strong emotions. Twenty years ago, when people got angry, they sat in their chairs, and they drank beer, and they threw something at the TV screen. Now, we have a huge platform that we can use to vent our anger all over the world.

Thoughts posted to social media are there forever; you can't get rid of them. During the presidential election when Donald Trump was first elected, I wrote some of my thoughts on social media. A woman who I'd grown up with told me that if I drove through her neighborhood, she'd shoot me. She said that she was a Second Amendment Republican, and she'd shoot me because I'd said that Trump didn't tell the truth and a few other things. After that, I quit using social media altogether.

The public forum is a dangerous one. Especially when one looks at American politics, one can see that there are people who are using it to dangerous ends.

I'd like to talk about Arthur Conan Doyle. He's been a hero of mine for most of my life. As a child, my folks gave me The Complete Sherlock Holmes *set; I re-read it every few years. When did the two of you first meet?*

I'm assuming you and I both near the same age and likely both came across Sherlock Holmes and Arthur Conan Doyle at about the same time; I found him in my mid-to-late teens. My father gave me the complete set

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of short stories and novels for Christmas one year, and I fell in love with the stories almost immediately. Not just because of the crime aspect of them, but because I lived in a rather dull suburb of London. It was a quiet place, and I was somebody who yearned for adventure. I loved the stories and the way that the suburbs of London were depicted, places like Norwood—as an American, you may not know that these are dull parts of London—who knew they could be the home to some of the greatest stories ever written. I loved the idea that a temple in Agra, or a conspiracy in the plains of America, or Muhtar, could reach out and find me where I was living. Suddenly, adventure was all around me. That's what ***Sherlock Holmes*** did for me.

Which story fueled your imagination first?

The story I've always loved most is "The Devil's Foot." There was a Jeremy Brett production of it on television, which terrified me. I couldn't have been that young when it started, but, nonetheless. Jeremy Brett, to my mind, is still the greatest actor to play on ***Sherlock Holmes*** by far. I also loved the story called "We're Going to Texas." Holmes stays stationary for pretty much the entire story, lying in bed. The first part of that story is a deception. I love stories where Moriarty takes up a full spot.

That's an interesting story that has to do with medicine and tropical diseases.

Joseph Bell, one of Doyle's professors at university, ingested drugs himself in order to test them. He also tested medicines on his students. The idea of sitting in a room and imbibing a poisonous substance to see what happens is very much at the heart of Doyle's DNA of life.

That kind of experimentation was very much so a British tradition. An 18th century British surgeon named John Hunter was the focus of a book called The Knife Man *by Wendy Moore. He would inject himself with poisons and even infected himself with syphilis to see if he could cure it.*

You're correct; it is a part of the medical tradition in Britain.

With that in mind, how do you respond to Doyle's obvious mistakes within his stories, particularly when having to do with scientific topics?

One of the things that I loved Doyle for was the mistakes he made within his stories. I make mistakes in my books; I've written over fifty-five novels, and people regularly write to tell me that I've made a mistake about a time period, or a name, or about something else I should have known which I didn't. Part of me kicks myself and thinks that I should work harder and be more precise, but then my books are edited two or three times before they reach book-form, so it's not entirely my fault. But even so, I find it consoling to know that Doyle made mistake, after mistake, after

mistake—some of them critical mistakes. Some of my favorite mistakes are in "The Adventure of the Speckled Band." The story is still one of his greatest in many ways; it is quintessential Sherlock Holmes. In the story, the killer uses a pipe or a flute to attract snakes. One snake climbs a rope to get out of the room they are in; that is a physical impossibility. Another mistake occurs in "The Adventure of the Priory School," in which Sherlock Holmes follows bicycle tracks made in the soft ground, which, again, you can't do because you can't possibly know which way the bicycle was going. There are other simple mistakes like getting names wrong—is it James or John Moriarty? The name changes once or twice. Where was Watson shot, the shoulder or the leg? These mistakes tell me that the greatness of Doyle is not in the detail; it's in the world he creates; it's in the language; it's in the characters; it's in the imagination. If you make little mistakes, it shows you are human, not a bad writer.

Doyle did not particularly like writing Sherlock Holmes. He knocked them out with powerful imagination and wonderful writing, but I don't think he ever pored over those manuscripts, checking for mistakes, because he had his eye on a bigger prize: romantic history.

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Sherlock Holmes was a payday for him.

He wasn't being paid very much at first; he only earned five pounds for his first book. But that money grew very quickly.

Hundreds of pastiches have been written based on Doyle's stories. Some of the stories that I like best are by Adrian Conan Doyle and John Dixon Carr. And then you've got The Seven-Per-Cent Solution *by Nicolas Meyer.*

I liked that story very much; it includes Dr. Freud, doesn't it?

Yes. The way he introduces the story is by stating that he found the manuscript in a chest in the attic of a woman's home in Minnesota.

It was a clever idea and very well written. It was quite a good film, too, for that matter.

It was nominated for a few Oscars. And then, there was The Italian Secretary *by Caleb Carr.*

I really like Billy Wilder and ***The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes***. I've always thought it to be a good film pastiche.

Right. And then, of course, your book, The House of Silk*, is great. How was it to deal with the Conan Doyle Estate while working on that novel?*

When I was asked to do the Sherlock Holmes novel, I didn't use the word pastiche. I find the word pastiche to be inaccurate because I don't think what I was doing was pastiche. It was more of an homage—if you'll forgive the difference between them—it was more of a ***continuation*** of the novel. Pastiche suggests to me that it's sort of a rip-off or comical interpretation of the

original—in the way that ***Austin Powers*** is a pastiche of ***James Bond***, but that's just me.

How was dealing with the estate? Well, when I was commissioned to write the first book, I did two things. The first thing I did was to say that I would only sign the contract if I took no notes from the estate at all, which may sound like arrogance, but I was very nervous about being interfered with during the process. I wanted to immerse myself and do the book my way. The second thing I said was that I wouldn't sign the contract until they'd read the first chapter of the book. I wanted them to see that I could do it. Sherlock Holmes is one of the most beloved characters in literature. There are whole organizations built around him, one of them being The Baker Street Babes. There are societies you can belong to; you can be a Sherlockian or a Holmesian. I believe in America you are a Sherlockian, and in Britain you are Holmesian.

I've been to the Reichenbach Falls with the Shakespeare Society; I've spoken in The House of Parliament for them as well; I'm very immersed in that world, and so one thing I didn't want to do in ***House of Silk*** was to offend or annoy anybody. If you write a book about a great character, about a great writer, you risk spoiling people's pleasure by making it into a pastiche—it would make you want to fling the book across the room. The reader would think, "he would never say that; he would never behave that way." It makes me so cross because it damages the dream we all carry; the love we all have for these books.

The Doyle Estate was absolutely fine; they're not an estate like the Fleming Estate. They're not people who meet every week and control the books; they're on a copyright anyway. They are the descendants, but they didn't interfere. I did get notes from them that said they loved the book—it was a joyous right.

Are you familiar with Robin Campbell by chance? He's is a professor of psychology at Stirling University, and he's written a handful of Holmes short stories. One story in particular, "The Case of the Great Grey Man," features Holmes as he works to dispel the myth of The Great Grey Man of Ben Macdui. Ben Macdui is the second-highest mountain in Britain.

John Norman Collie, the great British chemist who invented the neon tube, was also a mountaineer. He claimed to have seen The Great Grey Man. He talked about the experience at a mountaineering conference later on in his life, and he said that he never went back to Ben Macdui again because it was such a frightful experience. That's Campbell's story, which was published in The Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal.

I haven't read many continuations outside of Doyle's novels because Doyle is enough for me. I re-read his stories every now and then; I re-read ***The Exploits of Brigadier Gerrard*** and his other books too. I am such a fan for Doyle and for other 19th-century writers

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who I read. My reading time is limited, and therefore I tend to stick with the originals.

There is one story I'd like to write, which I haven't yet done. There are a great many stories inside the books that Watson mentions but hadn't been written. The one I would like to write is ***The Giant Rat of Sumatra***. What is it and how does it rear its ugly head?

Nicholas Meyer tried his hand at that, but it didn't turn out very well.

I might try and do better.

I think it'd be great. I recently read some books in your Hawthorne & Horowitz mystery series, and I saw things that could reflect back to Holmes's stories in their theme.

There is a bit of Holmes in Hawthorne, which I shouldn't write, because I know it is kind of like stealing from the master, but I just enjoy doing it. Occasionally, when he says something like, "I see you've just come to the country and you've got a new dog," I do enjoy doing that. Even the other day, as I was walking through this very town of Ogden, I was by myself and I was thinking about a sequence in Hawthorne; I was walking up a street and being able to tell where somebody has been and what they've been doing just by looking at them as they walk towards you, taking in your surroundings; I could do that here.

Was it by accident or intent that you established your home in Suffolk?

I live in Suffolk because it is two hours from London in the right direction. And it's somewhere I love and, in fact, I wrote ***The House of Silk*** there.

Have you read Rodger Garrick-Steele's book called The House of Baskervilles*? In the book, he accuses Doyle of having killed Burton Robertson.*

I did read it a long time ago; it wasn't an old book, was it?

It's maybe fifteen years old. It showed up in all the magazines: The Independent*,* The Daily Mail*, and* Newsweek *carried articles about him accusing Doyle of plotting with Robertson's wife, who he was having an affair with, to kill Robertson by giving him doses of laudanum until he died.*

I have heard this story somewhere else. My love of Holmes and Doyle has inspired a great deal of my own work and my writing, because I love them so much. I knew I wanted to be a writer, then I read Doyle, and suddenly I wanted to be a ***crime*** writer. But, I haven't pursued Doyle in the same extreme way that perhaps you have. It is something which I love, but which I have channeled into other things, and those other things have taken me in different directions. That's why I haven't read, for example, that self-published story about Doyle, and I have much less knowledge about the man than you do—about the character anyway.

You said that you like to read 19th century novels. I do, too.

My life has been an immersion of 19th-century literature, which really helped me when I came to write ***The House of Silk*** and ***Moriarty***. But, you know, I've read the whole of Dickens ***twice***. I've read most of Trollope, Jane Austen, Thomas Hardy, George Orwell. George Gissing is one of my very favorites; I've read everything of his; no one reads him anymore. I rec-

My love of Holmes and Doyle has inspired a great deal of my own work and my writing, because I love them so much. I knew I wanted to be a writer, then I read Doyle, and suddenly I wanted to be a crime *writer.*

ommend reading George Gissing's *New Grub Street*. It's one of the greatest novels about what it's like to be a writer ever produced. It's about the world of writers and writing. It is the book that inspired George Orwell to write *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*; it was his favorite book. Gissing is out of favor because his books are so bleak. He's slightly later, between Dickens and Doyle is where you'll find Gissing. He helped me very much in the creation of that world. Just exploring the 19th century has taken years of my reading life.

In 2002, I was the chair of the Boardman Tasker Mountain Literature awards. That year happened to be the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the award, and the Queen was the patron of the Boardman Tasker. As part of the event celebrations, we had dinner with the Queen at St. James Palace. During the event, the Queen shook my hand and said, "What do you like?" I said, "Nineteenth century." She said, "Which one?," and I said, "Thomas Hardy." She said, "Which novel?" And I said, The Mayor of Casterbridge. *She patted my hand, smiled, and said, "Mine too."*

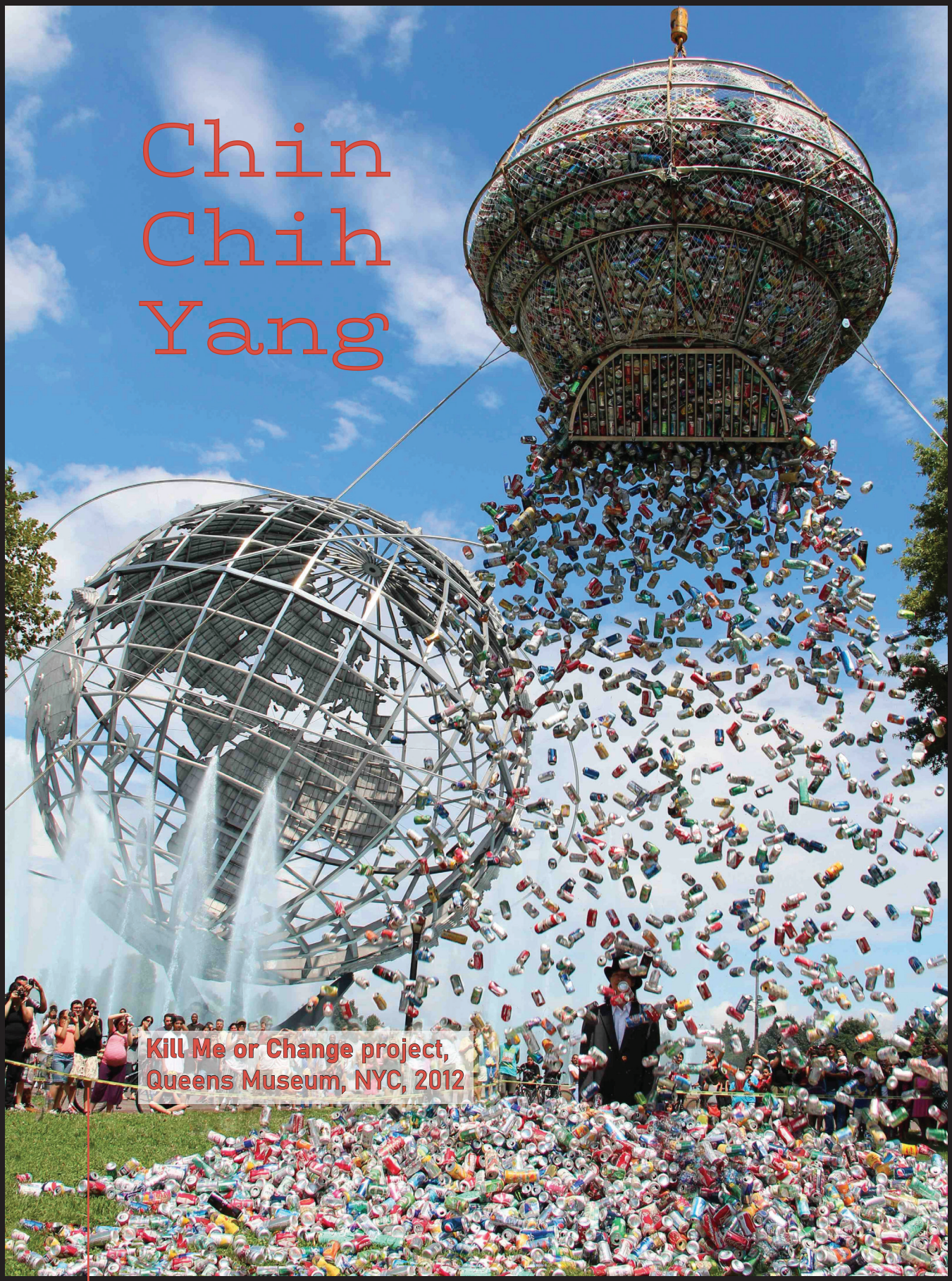
I'm fascinated that the late Queen liked *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. I re-read it recently and it's a brilliant though very sad novel. I did meet Queen Elizabeth II—but we never had such an insightful exchange! That said, I have been working with our current Queen who is very involved in literacy and reading, and thanks to her I visited the Great Library at Windsor Castle. In the library, they have a miniature book written by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. I held the original in my hand and I'm very proud of that. Better still, they are producing a new Queen Mary's Doll's House and they've commissioned me to write a short story for it: it's called "A Tiny Ghost Story." You have no idea how happy this makes me.

How wonderful. It was so nice to talk with you.



Mikel Vause (Ph.D., Bowling Green University) is a Brady Presidential Distinguished Professor Emeritus at Weber State University. He is author of numerous articles, short stories, and poetry collections, and the editor of six volumes of prose. His poem "What said the Thunder" was nominated for a 2016 Pushcart Prize. He is a member of the Alpine Club (UK), the British Mountaineering Council, and the American Alpine Club. He has also served on the board of the Boardman Tasker International Mountain Literature Awards.

Chin Chih Yang



Kill Me or Change project,
Queens Museum, NYC, 2012

Trash King

Artels Creative Center
Finland, 2014

Multidisciplinary artist Chin Chih Yang was born in Taiwan and has resided for many years in New York City. He studied at Parsons School of Design (BFA, 1986) and graduated from Pratt Institute with a Master of Science in 1994.

In 2022, Yang was inducted into the New York Foundation for the Arts Hall of Fame. He has participated in residencies at Art OMI, Santa Fe Art Institute (2020), Bogliasco Foundation (2022), Taipei International Artist Village, and Governors Island (2023).

Yang has performed and exhibited internationally, including shows at Taipei MoCA, Performa 19, Art Basel Miami, the Taipei Art Fair, the Five Flavours Film Festival in Warsaw, and MASS MoCA Studio. He has also participated with major institutions in Hong Kong, the ACM International Conference in Singapore, and Exit-International Arts Festival Taipei (2022).





Trash King, Hudson Valley MOCA, 2019



Half Masked

Art OMI,
NYC, 2020

Yang's art installation **Half Masked** features over 1,000 aluminum cans. Yang and his assistant cleaned, cut, sorted, and prepared the cans at his workspace in Taipei. Each can was carefully sliced into hundreds of thin 20-foot strips.

123 Pollution Solution



123 Pollution Solution, installed at the James Baldwin Library at the MacDowell Colony, New Hampshire, 2017

Yang aims to increase public awareness of environmental issues by creating upcycled sculptures and works of wearable art from discarded aluminum cans and other found materials.



123 Pollution Solution (detail), installed at the James Baldwin Library at the MacDowell Colony, New Hampshire, 2017



Kill Me or Change

Queens Museum, NYC, 2012 and MOCA, Taipei, 2016



Scan the QR code to watch Kill Me or Change **in action**



"This intentionally playful and provocative project was my attempt to bring to light the effects of overconsumption. 30,000 is the number of aluminum cans one person will throw away in a lifetime. By showing, quite literally, the suffocating effects of one person's individual pollution habits, this piece serves as a call to action for the public to examine their habits of consumption."

— Chin Chih Yang



Art OMI, NYC, 2020





Yang integrates current events and human rights issues—most recently, women's rights and free speech—into his work. He also involves the unhoused population of New York in his art projects, interviewing individuals who are living and surviving on the streets of Manhattan. Yang aims to bring their stories to light and to employ them. His audience consists of people from all walks of life.

Scan the QR code to watch Who Cares?













Video compilation 2020

Who Cares?

Conversations with Harlem residents about their neighborhood and current issues. This project is related to **Watch Us: Together We Can Do It**, an interactive performance by Yang.

Scan the QR code for more information on Watch Us: Together We Can Do It


The
Secret
of XS
Tribes Gallery,
NYC, 2008

123 Pollution Solution



Solo Exhibition at Tenri Cultural Institute, NYC, 2010



Solo Exhibition at MOCA Taipei, 2016

COVID-19 performance

Connect & Protect

Manhattan, NYC,
March 20, 2020



Part 1
The Mobile Quarantine House

Which is worse, the sickness or the fear?

Yang performs a mock demonstration against COVID-19 fears. Literature about COVID-19 was distributed at the event.



Part 2
Dream for Fresh Air

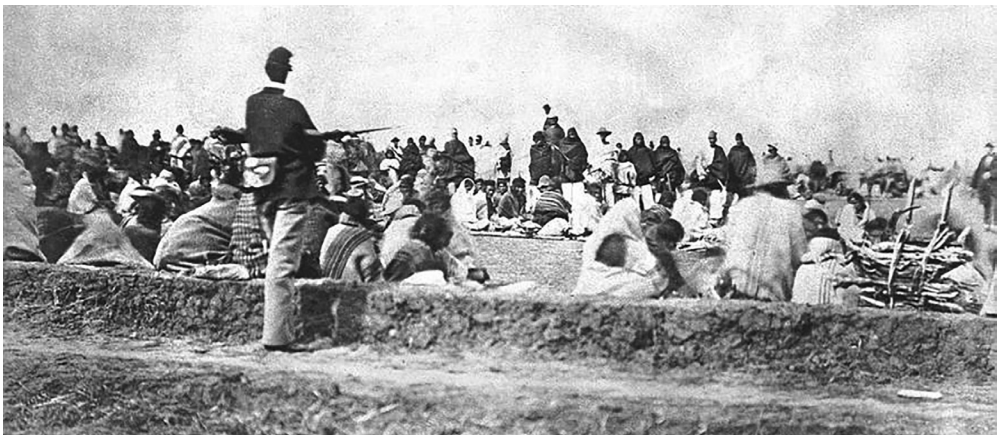


This demonstration was intended to remind passersby about the rules we should follow to keep ourselves virus-free, but also to retain a touch of humor without diminishing the virus's seriousness.

Part 3
Free Money

Tacey M. Atsitty

IX



Navajo people under guard at Fort Sumner, New Mexico, 1864.

It's taught that bad always comes when we Diné leave the boundary of our four sacred mountains—no matter what the reason. Of course, it's even worse when we were driven out, the elderly, the sick, the pregnant women, the children, all pushed out to walk the few hundred miles to Apache country. Pushed through the Rio Grande and lost because we are a desert people and learning to swim was unnecessary. Babies pushed to death before even being born in their mothers' bellies because they couldn't keep up. And the elderly too, my másání said. "But my grandpa was a child during this time, and he made it back. This is our story."

In 1863, General Kit Carson led the scorched earth campaign against the Navajos, killing their livestock, burning their fields, and rounding up the Diné to be forcibly removed. For the next several years, he led more than 10,000 Navajos on what is now called the Long Walk. Men, women, and children walked 250-450 miles from Diné Bikeyah to Bosque Redondo in Fort Sumner, New Mexico, where they were held prisoner for four years, before being released after signing the Treaty of 1868.

While visiting the Billy the Kid Museum in Fort Sumner, New Mexico, a few years back, my dad and I went to look at "The Kid's" gravestone. A cage surrounded it, like they still wanted him incarcerated. We imagined what the town may have looked like with him and his regulators, imagined what the land looked like when our ancestors had come through—it doesn't escape me that I'm writing this in Tallahassee, Florida, where I am studying to obtain my doctorate degree, where I reside with my husband outside of the realm of the protective shield from Sis Naajini, Tsoodil, Dook'o'osliid, and Dibe Ntsaa. I know my story, but someday people will think our stories myth—that Hweeldi never existed, that rivers never ran.

Back Passage at Gamarra

It's the water that sticks
with you the most; it stains
memory of a man sleeping
in the back of a cart, curled
up like a baby at your waist
as you brush by his blanket.
You don't even realize he's there
until you feel the wool against
your wrist, the scratchy kind
with coils and balls that hasn't
been washed in some time.
I stay close to my sister-in-law
through the narrow passage.
Nearby, a woman dozes in tandem
with the flies. Somewhere, you know,
there is blood; it's why they've come
and why they stay. Her body stirs
to their buzzing, and her braids
fall over her shoulders like rope
holding up her torso and neck.
She was supposed to be selling her
papaya, manzanas, and pina.
Supposed to be touching
and weighing her fruit.

It's the smell of flesh that stays
with you, on the soles of your shoes,
the longest. It permeates the cloth
of your mask and keeps there—
a jar of small headless snakes,
the feti of some unknown
animals hang like wind chimes.
Ofrendas, the vendor says, *a la tierra*.
A Pachamama, I offer, not
really knowing if she's the same
Mother Earth I know.
He nods his head, but we don't ask
the price or dare touch the embryos.
We nod, *Gracias* and leave the man
in the shadows of his booth.

There were flowers nearby
that reminded me of home, the kind
with white-petaled heads and yellow
centers, simple and green. But I try
not to look because they watch
nothing but our eyes. The woman
grabs a bunch at the stems, offering
them to me with her yellow eyes.
No gracias, Abish says as she tugs
at my arm. Not two steps later, *Tell me*,
a vendor woman shouts, *what are you*
looking for? Abish says a man has been
watching us, that we'd better buy
some onions or something. So, I ask
for a kilo of red onions. Abish chooses
the best ones and puts them in a small
black bag while I stare at the handwriting
of the prices, scribbled with permanent
marker on cardboard, standing erect
among those that remain.

Later, when we're safely out of the back
passage, I notice the onions are already
molding and Abish asks me wide-eyed
if I saw that, *esa brujeria*. No. I say, *but I felt it.*

Tesoro

A year ago today, we hit the ground stumbling, coming in from Peru
on different days, different flights, different buses, same miracles:

Form I-130 Petition for Alien Resident, USCIS $535 filing fee to pay
for page after page of hand-scrawled memories: bosses, their numbers,

their addresses, your addresses, your pay. And took a breath—
after our marriages: civil and eternal. Then heard from others in our boat

due to the pandemic, processing times were taking up to 2 years,
2 years of scraping away dog feces and washing away urine, clipping

their hair and nails—no matter how cute—2 years in Lima, thought
then prayer, fasting and logic: F1 student visa, $510 filing fee, SEVIS

fee $350, form-form-form then apply to CIES ($120 fee) at FSU, where
I am a doctorate student in poetry. Then $995 for international student

health insurance comes later, but at this point we didn't know/weren't
certain we'd be spending that money. Meanwhile, we Airbnb the house

back home in Tallahassee: $127 here, $265 there, and where are we?
Running on faith still back in Lima. The lawyer says there's no chance

in hell the embassy will give you a non-immigrant visa when you've already
applied for an immigrant visa, the aforementioned I-30, and its fee

still fresh in our minds. But I don't tell you about what the lawyer said,
I don't want to worry you because we've felt we need to try anyway.

I'm having to take deep breaths right now, just to wade through it all again:
now that we're here (after miracle after miracle after miracle),

it's time to find you a bike (yard sale $15), learn the bus routes, buy you
a waterproof back pack for hurricane season (Amazon $35), a waterbottle,

a helmet. You're using my old Macbook from ten years ago. It still
barely runs, but we like to listen to Camilo's "Por Primera Vez" on repeat

because it reminds us of our time in Lima, when our love was fresh,
like the sheets you're now stretching across the bed, and the dishes drying

in the rack, or our lawn you've just cut in 100-degree weather. Thank you, Amorcito, for studying the scriptures with me every day since you knelt

down in front of me, clasping my hands between yours, there at the oceanside in Miraflores, for shouting your joy to the heavens and passersbys when I said, *Si*—

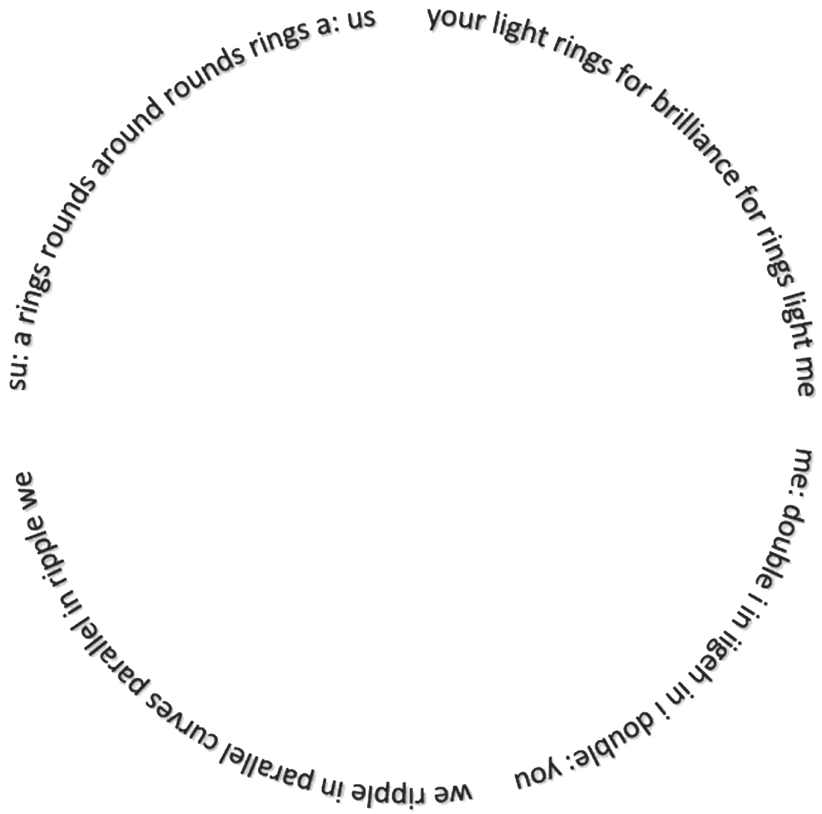
Crape Myrtle

hurricane rains come
through, weigh down branch & petal
until gray clouds bid

heavy morning: bye
my husband's back already wet
from the humid air

we rip bark, curling
leaf buds & knobs, we lose sight
of an infant frog

Your Light Rings




Mandi White

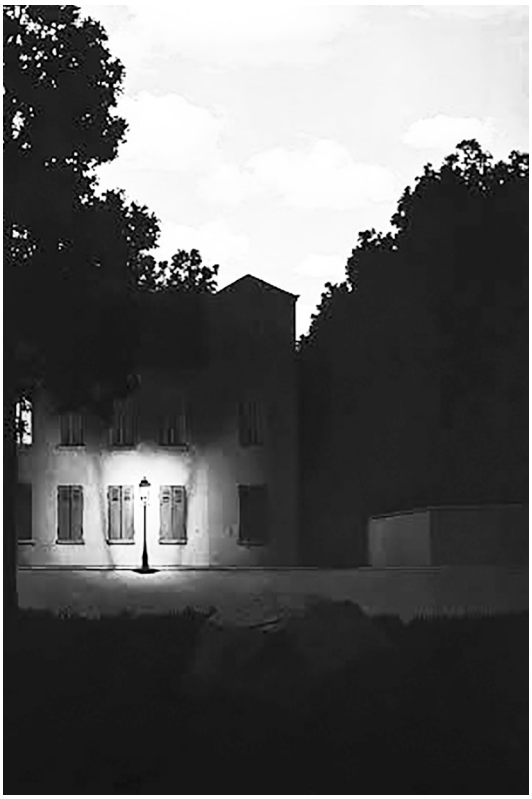
Tacey M. Atsitty is of the Diné tribe. She is Tsénahabiłnii (Sleep Rock People) and born for Ta'neeszahnii (Tangle People). She holds bachelor's degrees from Brigham Young University and the Institute of American Indian Arts, and an MFA in Creative Writing from Cornell University. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *EPOCH*, *Poetry Magazine*, *Kenyon Review Online*, *Prairie Schooner*, *New Poets of Native Nations*, and other publications. Her first book is *Rain Scald* (University of New Mexico Press, 2018). Her second book, *(At) Wrist,* appeared from University of Wisconsin Press in 2023. She is the director of the Navajo Film Festival, a member of the Board of Directors for Lightscatter Press, a member of the Advisory Council for Brigham Young University's Charles Redd Center for Western Studies, and the founding member of the Advisory Board for the Intermountain All-Women Hoop Dance Competition.

Debasish Lahiri

The Empire of Light

On the painting by René Magritte, 1953

Evening
Loomed like God.
Wounded light
Died,
Darkly,
On the boughs of tall trees.
The street light
In its hermitage of moths
Pondered the sky
And made a porch
Full of shadows.
Only the sky,
Like a painter's eyes,
Having learnt defiance
From God
Refused
To let light pass.
The street light
Muttered
The rhyme-rules of night,
Badly memorised,
Hastening evening
On its luminous errand.



René Magritte, *Empire of Light*, 76 15/16" x 51 5/8," oil on canvas, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice, 1976.

Gaspar's Dream

On the "Dream of the Magi" by Gislebertus, c. 1120-30 in the Cathedral of Saint-Lazare, Autun, France



Gislebertus, *Dream of the Magi*, stone carving, Autun cathedral, France, 1120-1130

So much dust!
Even the name of this place
is lost in dust
and my memory holds on,
as I hold on
to this cup of wine
in this caravanserai,
hoping
he will hold his breath
through this cavalcade of camels
and tell me
why I chose to hear the sun's threnody
and the moon's pale aubade
so far from home,
where the wood of my house
burns in my nose like incense.

There is dust in the wine
that remembers
a dust inside the grape,
a dust that blows
inside a dream about a man of dust,
as real as the slap of dust
on the cowering eyelids.
Better to seek the dust then:
I shall get nowhere
and remain
at home
with the trail.

If you ask me
why I am here,
I shall tell you
that I do not know, like a philosopher.
I will make you wonder
how much ignorance
cast in a womb—
murk in murk—
can bear light that brightens
nightmare,
between bed and door.
Through the dust I hear
the reek
of Greek and Latin
festering in the sun's throat.
My grip on the empty cup
Grows tenacious like a dream;
I cannot prise away
My cup of wine
From my own hands.

A last drop of wine
gathers in the mortar of my palm.
Pestle fingers dream
of pressing blood and dust into loam.
Three beggars,
Three thieves,
lie in the loam—
as you can
only in a dream—
and dream of their births.
Is it that birth I have travelled to see?

Earth growls like the unhappiness
of a volcano's innards,
the sky moans like a mosquito.
What is it that needs to be born?

***

Starlight!
O dream
that has fallen short of dawn
by a few fathoms!
My fellow kings,
Melchior and Balthazar,
snore and splutter among the camels,
a lone mosquito plays its plaintive recorder.
Perhaps, they are dreaming too.

The angel is late.
The shining star misread the chart
and is serenading a sleeping nymph
on a tree outside Baghdad;
the camels have cramps in their shanks:
usual delays
while you journey
to meet God.

I, Gaspar,
awake,
afraid,
lest I fall asleep again
and seek a saviour in the dust,
tell you,
silence is dust
and dream of dust
is stone.



Debasish Lahiri's poetry has been published in the original and in translation in leading journals in the UK, USA, France, Romania, Italy, Austria, Portugal, and India. He has published eight books of poetry, the most recent being *Legion of Lost Letters* (2023). Lahiri is currently on the editorial boards of *Gitanjali & Beyond* (Scottish Centre for Tagore Studies), *The Riveraine Muse*, and *Migrating Minds* (Georgetown University). He was shortlisted for the Rabindranath Tagore Literary Prize in 2023 and is one of the recipients of the 2019 Naji Naaman Literary Prize.

Alixa Brobbey

Antelope Island


Jamie Hagan

On the day we visit, Antelope Island
is bald. We are the only grunting
creatures for miles. The sky is gray,
and sits on our shoulders. The sand
sprawls before us like a promise.

It is a funeral, of sorts, this last
goodbye before we fling ourselves
to opposite corners of the globe.
Two of us are in love, and planning
for the rest to hold sparklers at their wedding.

Years later, and I still taste the salt
that licked our cheeks that day.
The letters on the sweatshirt I wore
are peeling off, flaking my room
like glitter.

Now the two in love are married
to other people—a stranger and
the girl that skipped the drive for homework.
At the first wedding, the bride folded
herself over the toilet and left
before they handed out sparklers.

The second wedding, inviteless, I spent,
the night with strangers. We haven't
breathed the same air,
the five of us, since that day

when we stood on that bald island
carving hearts into the tan. Unaware
how many clouds would stoop our shoulders,
we made promises grainier than the sand,
so thin they slipped between our hands.

The Forgotten Men

After Maynard Dixon

The Forgotten Man's wife grew up drinking
ketchup soup. Packets diluted with water,
tangy, one-note sips. The man's father
stuffed his son in a room full of Pepsi. Locked
the door for three days. The man stuffed
himself with soda, stuffed the bottles with
his urine. To this day, he can't drink sweet
things without gagging. He grew up
to sit on a sidewalk, pockets empty and
ragged. Shoulders slumped. Leg trembling,
outstretched. The callouses on his hands
soften. His palms itch for a toolbox.
The Forgotten Man's daughter dilutes
her milk with drops of water so it lasts.
Duct tapes her backpack. Stuffs tissues
inside her shoes, two sizes too big.
Practices her excuses. Struggles through
slush on her bike. Watches a church mom
offer the other girls a ride. At home,
they play board games in the dark and
search for pennies in the sofa. Outside,
people rush past the man, like water
over pebbles, sometimes banging
their bags against his body. Instead of
driving lessons, a physics book for Christmas.
Wings instead of car keys. His daughter
takes these and grows up to be inside
skyscrapers and red brick libraries and
multi-level galleries. Takes law school
tests in a room with Dixon on the wall.
And never forgets the men sitting
on the sidewalk, limbs bent. Atlas
shoulders, and heads full of visions
for their daughters.

The Deer

The night is navy, you are pale,
and my hands are rattling.
The asphalt bends out of sight,
folding into the night. Your car,
pink eye blinking, is parked
off to the side. The deer is center
stage, a mess of origami limbs.
A stranger asks for a gun,
tells us to back away. Drags
the folded creature off stage,
its nose weeping blood, sticky.

After a lifetime, it unfurls and
leaps towards us, legs unstretched
like a thin crane neck. He is gone,
and you are still pale and beside me.
My hands rattle faster. Navy
gives way to black. The blood
smeared across your white car,
we douse it in soda and prayers.
Begin the drive back home silent,
and then at once, a crack—
here come the flowing bubbles.
We lock eyes and smile. Tonight
we are young and battered. But
morning beckons hazy and bright.



Alixa Brobbey spent portions of her childhood in The Netherlands and Ghana. She has a B.A. in English and J.D. from Brigham Young University, where she won the Ethel Lowry Handley Poetry Prize in 2020. Her work has been featured by *The Blue Marble Review*, *Segullah*, *Inscape*, *The Albion Review*, *The Susquehanna Review*, *The Palouse Review*, *The Exponent II*, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, *Rattle*, and others. She has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

Matt Zambito

Nearly, Almost: A Full Moon



The slightest moondust disturbed from stillness by a
comet crash is a regolith
visible and revisable, and isn't at all
noticeable by any earthly eye
at this ridiculous distance from which to call an object "ours."
There's a credo
somewhere, one just *waiting* to be discovered and having
to do with the difference between owning
something and getting
a blessing, a motto to live and die
and live by. And if the Moon weren't, then we wouldn't
be: no different than if missing that one star spotlighting
our planet's satellite, that old cold rock
covered in our giant steps and our small leaps.
As it is, even the neighbor's
rescue Shih Tzus won't stop
their barking skyward. Don't get me started
on the despondent wolves
howling their version of the loss found
in "nearly," found in any "almost."

All Together Now

Quite how we came to have such a large Moon on an inclined orbit is a puzzle still occupying teams of astronomers around the world. But it seems we are getting closer.

And that's very important, because discovering the Moon's history is a key step in understanding how likely such events are in the wider universe. This in turn might help us answer a much bigger question: whether we are alone in the universe.

—Colin Stuart, from *All About Space*, Issue 107, August 2020

Even if the only creatures crawling
elsewhere in the whole intergalactic shebang
are random bacteria—teeming in pockets
on planets, asteroids, natural satellites—
that could each do in, minus animus, every
species on Earth (especially humanity,
especially-*er* my enemies), we are not
alone: dream deeply on each meteor
zooming and rushing and thrusting through
the vacuum until it hits something: in
the nothing, despite the entropy, things
still combine, as with the transmitters
through our minds, where we can think
about the Moon, and how even when
it's clouded over and out, we can know—
in the blood our bones build—solidarity.


Anne Campbell

Matt Zambito is the author of *The Fantastic Congress of Oddities* (Cherry Grove Collections) and the chapbooks *Guy Talk* and *Checks & Balances* (Finishing Line Press). Other poems appear in *Painted Bride Quarterly*, *Common Ground Review*, *Soundings East*, *Pembroke Magazine*, and elsewhere.

Benjamin Bartu

Australian Shoulders, American Dream


Dan Meyers on Unsplash

it's the one where i'm my father
begging my wife against the children

again. the environment is germane
to the plot, so every time it rains

new bones come up. look at how i paw
at the ruins of the kingdom of what happens.

how our bodies tell the truth
our tongues are too heavy to move.

the lights go out in the houses
so that the generators can come on.

we're to be married, the houses and i.

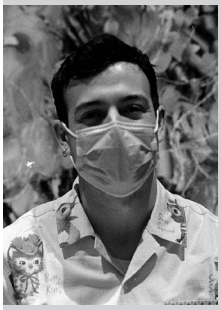
in the dark, i look through the windows of the rich.
in the dark, i look like the windows of the poor.

what i love about art is that wherever i am at in life, whatever else is going on, when i am engaging with it thoughtfully it is a place i want to be and my life in that moment is my life as i want it to be

life isn't always, being that wantless way.
with me tonight the raindrops castigating the leaves
are a sound cobalt had to be mined to produce.
photograph a tuft of wild brown hair. the fleshy baby
ripening beneath it, within the father-arm. stranger
arm. farther the photographer, ripe with second baby
kin. proof of me, one kodak moment. the proof of me
fingers dust off twenty-four years in a moment. in
the waking room, walls the color of holes in the clouds.
canvasses. light and brush let tell when a painter glows
or glowers, overworked. the father-arm an as of glove
around his work. my callous hives that love to brush
a thing in light *like* what could be. bearing this worn-out
frame to every honeyed mouth to quench the hunger started.
here in my rough hand an evidence of his presence.
what this troubles about my childhood according to me
is what troubles me to touch wood tonight. beyond the edge
of the frame, the quiet years lie waiting like cicadas
in the grounds of coffee that once told my tale. i am sorry
or don't worry, this means they have told your tale, as well.
nothing that was then speaks now. it rises toward god until
it becomes the harmony again. then-him has an arm
around me. then-me clutches some familiar thing,
an action figure. then-you can't speak, mother.
he's wearing your favorite white shirt. a scent
wafts off it, another off you.

Tempo di Menuetto

Particulate vastness scattering the matter that rises above
The canopy, eighteen, gorgon-tongued, fruits of the rose
Family turn to stone against your buccal cavity's bacchanal.
You are imagining a kind of handholding through the spell
That is your life. More nearly, you cannot imagine a horizon
To holding, to truths you've always known. You step past
A termite mound and the sea, wild and terrible, is groveling
On the beach. The waves bow and scrape against the sand.
How shall I describe the tincture of the waves? White for miles
In all directions with the crashing and what the state calls
A zero-tolerance immigration policy. Kookaburra clicking
in the trees, an isthmus emerging like a whitehead from
The brush. You eye the camel's eye, locked lanes of tide
Corroborating their stories to the sea. Nearby the bark
Of a weeping gum bleeds, cracks. Maxine lifts a stick up
Off the ground and leans on it like a premise the proof
Of one's own goodness depends upon. Tall the grasses
That part before your breasts. Saunter in your summer
Towards the sandbanks, gnats kicking off each other
In the failure of the meteorologist. But look! Two women
Await you there, on the primordial glass. They have a van.
You load into the back, next to their child. They've turned
The key and you're off, sailing far from fire season, far
From the sun-bleached bodies of the kangaroos, you're
On the highway. Out the window the weather seems
To be changing, but no, it's already changed. The landscape
Blurs, cabbagepalm saltbrush and ghostgum colored.
Their child is giving you the stink-eye and kicking your shins
And keeps screaming how you are a shallow and stupid man
But don't worry, the kid's not really a kid, he's just you, so you
Know nothing he says counts anyway. You lean your weight back
On the seat and drift, rocks in your mouth, a boy in your head.



Benjamin Bartu is a poet and disability studies researcher. He is the author of the chapbook *Myriad Reflector* (2023), which was a finalist for the Poetry Online Chapbook Contest. His poetry has been nominated for Best of the Net and has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Journal*, *Sonora Review*, *Bellingham Review*, *HAD*, *Nat.Brut*, *Guesthouse*, and elsewhere. He lives in Oakland, California.

Matthew Friday

Coyote Still Running



I see you, Coyote, on desperate legs,
your body moving like a fleeing wave
as you scale the old cinder cone
in the midday, mid-summer heat.

My wife and I watch you in wonder
as you wind up Pilot Butte. A man
on a shuddering bike stops and says,
"That's just an itty-bitty coyote."

So it is with the Second People.
Still diminishing the First People,
turning triumph and myth into toys,
fencing you all in tiny scraps of land.

Now I see
why you
are
still
running.

Ukiyo-e in Oregon

The Canada Geese know Hiroshige's
signal: that shock of first snow
that pastes the Cascades. They wheel

around the Deschutes river, practicing
floating formations, feeling the wind
for the resistance to leave, cleave

into V's of grief. The first formation
line up uneven necklace over the strung
outline of the peaks, perfectly composed.

The next day, ducks stir up in chaotic
copying. A rare morning full moon
hangs between Batchelor and Broken Top.

Its stained pearl eye winks at Vincent
and sinks into the gulping Pacific, permission
for all to leave and arrive elsewhere.

Pilot Butte

Only three US cities have this:
a suburb ringed cinder cone.

This is Bend's true North Star,
history orientated from its axis.

Native peoples first storied the land,
Coyote calling life out of names.

Oregon trailers scrabbling for safe
crossing over the Deschutes.

Loggers planted this city to branch
out west from the Butte.
Today

my wife walks me to the top. Past
life bubbling back: childhood strolls,

teenage make-out spots, training runs
for marathons. The Century Club:

those who've ascended 100 times.
Near the top she sees a legendary

PE teacher, 75, still in pigtails
and political slogans, waving a hand-

puppet. Thirty years have rooted out
old neighborhoods with new estates,

nothing a logger or my wife knows.
The peak reveals a view that journeys

an active past: the weary shoulders
of Newberry Volcano, the Cascades

singing in a storm of snow and cloud,
the open mouth of Central Oregon.

A Winter Storm in Bend

Did long dead children run
out while the slaughtering
knife hung over the barn
and famine honed the hills?

Did they shout at the sparkle
and sheen of blanketed trees
as parents hurried the hearth
afraid of ice and coffin wood?

When the white winks came,
did adults offer invisible tokens
or remember a few years ago
when they ignored briefness?

Hands and tongues held out,
catching whirling crystals,
a precious journey paused.
The smell of roasting pork.

No need for weather apps.
No travel plans to cancel.
We had not yet lost kinship
with the deeply expectant sky.



Matthew Friday is a British-born writer and teacher. He has an M.A. in creative writing from Goldsmith College, University of London. He has had many poems in U.S. and international journals. His first chapbook, *The Residents* (Finishing Line Press), appeared in July of 2024. He has published numerous micro-chapbooks with the Origami Poems Project. Other poems are forthcoming in *The Oregon English Journal* and *The Amsterdam Quarterly* (NL). Matthew is a Pushcart Prize-nominated poet.

Debasish Mishra

Neighbors

Around us, the sky, suffused with the sun, broadening
its reach into facts and fences and walls
carved cartographies with clarity, telling which
is his thorn, which is mine, which flower
belongs to whom—that rose is his
and this marigold is mine—the collective aroma
wafts in the air, knowing no boundaries

My mellow apples and his fresh mangoes dangle
from the respective boughs with the names of the devourers
written clearly on their skins like birthmarks
Conifers and bushes and grasses glisten
on both sides, with the same tint of green,
united by the parent soil that homes them



Greg Jewett on Unsplash

The gates are strong enough with an additional
warning for trespassers beside the nameplates in Helvetica
There's a dog behind my gate, another behind his,
different breeds for different pockets
But my window admits the sun and smells
His window would too That's the universal

rule of windows, the inherent indiscipline
in their genes I carefully prune my creepers
before they crane to the other side of the wall
and chide at him when his creepers cross the line
We respect the borders, *the uncoded pacts*
of co-habitation and compromise

Boundaries are, in fact, sacrosanct
My neighbor and I, distinguished by surnames,
cultures, are met with the impossibility of dividing
certain commonalities—our shared scientific name and history—
which tell we have both speciated from apes,
shedding our tails and memory like leaves

Becoming/ Unbecoming

By nature, we want to become what lies
before us. Call it demonstration effect or otherwise!

As a child, following the tyranny of a forced
siesta, in hot April afternoons, I dreamt
I was the ceiling—tantalizing but always
beyond reach—that romanced with the fan
who fluttered her skirt in close proximity.

Outside the house, while the other boys
jumped and kicked each other in
a strange sport, I dreamt I was the tree
near the playground where a hundred birds
made their nests and laid their thousand eggs.

I was also the outer wall of the classroom
insulated from the need of attention,
the tedium of endless classes.
When I had to leave my hometown,
I dreamt I was the whole house
with its old faded walls and a musty smell—
and also the speckled lizard which meandered
all around with a deep sense of belonging.

Now, after my dad's death, I'm the barren
crematorium and the fire
which burns his body. Also the cold
breeze which assuages the fire.
The tears. The loss. The longing.
I'm a panoptic view of everything.
And also, I am a chunk of nothing,
which holds nothing.

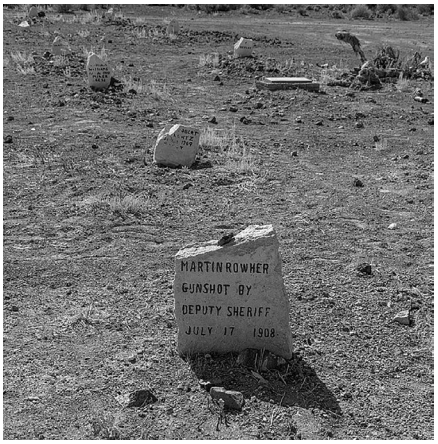


Debasish Mishra is a Senior Research Fellow at the National Institute of Science Education and Research, India. He has prior experience working at United Bank of India and Central University of Odisha. He is the recipient of the 2019 Bharat Award for Literature and the 2017 Reuel International Best Upcoming Poet Prize. His recent poems have appeared in *Arkana*, *Apricity*, *Hawaii Pacific Review*, *York Literary Review*, *Dash Literary Journal*, and elsewhere. His first book, *Lost in Obscurity and Other Stories*, was published by Book Street Publications in 2022.

Justin Evans

Decisions

All important decisions should be made in a cemetery
—Suzanne Roberts



Goldfield Cemetery, Nevada. Photo credit: samiamx.

When I go home I sometimes sit with the dead.
I sit with my camera and with my notebook
waiting for something inside me to shift towards
the future. There are days when the dead speak,
others when I am left to myself in the type of silence
it takes to dream. I do not believe I take the dead
with me when I leave, nor do I leave some part of
myself for them. Our communion, if there is any,
is enough for me to be one breath closer to
understanding how the world has lumbered along.

If you travel to the cemetery in Goldfield,
Nevada, you will see the causes of death listed
on every grave marker: *Suffocation, drowning,*
being shot, or *kicked by a horse*. This kind of reportage
makes hay for the lore of the Old West, adds to the
appeal of story and seeking out one's own kind
like salmon returning to the shallow creek beds
to spawn the coming generation. But there is
no Wild West anymore, and there is no more
imagination in the way we process death.

Listen

There is no end to this desert
Or the playfulness of blackbirds

flying in tandem through the Russian Olives
at the edge of the distant arroyo where

we wait for Spring rains in March.
Have you ever seen the lurching momentum

of a flash flood, debris rolling off the
mud tongue of runoff, too lazy to run?

Every year word reaches us someone
has been claimed by this phenomenon

and we all wonder what slowed their retreat
in reverence or fear from the force

bearing down on them. Some challenge
the river, and some refuse to listen

for its approach. Let me warn you now:
There is no shame in running away, no

lie you have to tell for being afraid. We
are all supposed to jump.

Prime

Sunrise Point masked—
a giant gunwale of gray
storm clouds creeping in
beneath the darkness
scraping along the high plateaus
in search of earthly thirst.
First light paints from within
the undersides of clouds,
girth stretching high above the horizon.

*

No color lives behind those clouds.
Not yet. The world of
new moon and the still-dark west
swallows everything even as
morning arrives.

*

Along the eastern slopes
storm dissolves into iron rich
red soil; the steep rise of sandstone
adding to the day an archetypal dimension
of childhood dreams.

*

The light dazzles for a few moments
against the cathedral of El Greco painted rock—
knowing any movement will break this spell
shaking the earth free from this silent tableau.

*

Day begins.

Evergreen Cemetery

First is the bitter taste of unripe persimmons
like witch hazel staying with your mouth so long

as you keep insisting on doing things your way.
You can taste it in every season; the taste is

always the same. Most of my family is buried
here but it is not where I expect to be put into the earth,

laid to rest as the locals say—what I would have said
before I left Springville as a young man never to return

for more than a few days. Geese are always going
somewhere else more important. High up

pine needles are greener than those low to the earth
as if to make an argument for how nature works

but I am here to get my bearings, orient myself with
the topography of grave markers and seasonal décor—

nothing like the reasons many of my cousins wish for me.
If I can gain some sense of this place and how to

keep my tongue, I know I can rest here long enough
to at last indulge in the forgotten taste of honeycomb.

American Sonnet in Which I Consider My Sons and Re-write Greek Mythology

In this version of the myth Icarus doesn't
plunge into the ocean. This time he falls into
a stand of Aspen trees that have been set on fire—
his wings fanning the flames as he lands,
not crashes. He soon dies from exhaustion and
the weight of those manufactured wings,
as most children must, beneath the burdensome
expectations given to them by their parents.

In this version, caution is no longer a virtue
where flame becomes curious over a lifetime,
but rather a sudden conflagration of yellowed
coin-like leaves, fluttering with the fury of
wild abandon, a thrashing with the fervor
once reserved for a hero's storied final battle.



Justin Evans was born and raised in Utah. After serving in the U.S. Army, he returned for his education. He has lived in Nevada for the past twenty-four years with his wife and sons, where he teaches English and history at the local high school. His work has recently appeared in *Collateral*, *The Quarter(ly)*, and *Sugar House Review*. His book *Cenotaph* (Kelsay Books) appeared in early 2024. He is a two-time recipient of an Artist Fellowship from the Nevada Arts Council (2021 and 2023).

Sandra Marchetti

Anniversary



What is to be said
for the whole,
the curve meeting
the line of its
beginning?

What you and I
have seen
is unspeakable
but common.

There is no secret
to what we have
endured.

The grasses grow
like hair on the birch
forest's floor,

peeled bark lies
like skin
on the ground.

Turkey

Beside a grassy path
the pear-sloped
body—blue, red,
brown—peels off
through the mossy stones,
the inevitable woods,
clucking toward disaster.

Yesterday, you shot
inside my mouth
with the urgency
of impending silence.
Save, live. Let this
air between us stretch
as far as it must.

A blackbird flails straight
up, as if bounced
off a trampoline—
once, then again.
Cabbage whites skate away
undisturbed. The skirmish
dissolves into silence.

Whitecaps

Water spills
from the lake

into the street,
a chop up

to my waist
and each

wave surprises.
How high

will I rise?
Can I skip

this rope?
The surf

does not
remember

its impression
of me.

The warm
water shallows

scrambled
with sand.

Crown

The moment steam rose
from the river's jag,
I gleaned the three states—
snow lipping a valley
around the icy mouth,
water chasing an animal
ahead, pulling breath
from the scarred motion.

It was as if you arced
into that hard C, pushing
up toward me—hot
air filling the room
and suffusing us each
as I reached my finger
down to trace a line
the length of your
chest's split frame.



Sandra Marchetti is the 2023 Winner of *The Twin Bill* Book Prize for Best Baseball Poetry Book of the Year. She is the author of three full-length collections of poetry, *DIORAMA* (forthcoming from Stephen F. Austin State University Press in 2025), *Aisle 228* (SFA Press, 2023), and *Confluence* (Sundress Publications, 2015). Sandy is also the author of four chapbooks of poetry and lyric essays. Her poetry and essays appear widely in *Mid-American Review*, *Blackbird*, *Ecotone*, *Southwest Review*, *Subtropics*, and elsewhere. She is poetry editor emerita at *River Styx Magazine*. Sandy earned an MFA in creative writing—poetry from George Mason University and now serves as the assistant director of academic support at Harper College in Chicagoland.

A Guide to Reading Dante's *Divine Comedy*

Daniel R. Schwarz



Bartolomeo di Fruosino, *Inferno, from the Divine Comedy by Dante*, 14.37" x 10.43," tempera, gold, and silver on parchment, National Library of France, 1430-1435.

Introduction

A great source of pleasure the past year or so has been discovering the joys of *The Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) by reading and rereading the erudite three-volume Hollander translation with its wonderful notes.[1] Dante's masterwork is composed of one hundred cantos divided into three parts, or canticles: *Inferno, Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso.*

Writing in the vernacular Italian that built on the Tuscan dialect rather than the more literary and refined Latin which only a relatively few—the clergy and nobility—could read, Dante more than anyone else laid the groundwork for the modern Italian language. By making his work accessible to a wider audience, Dante was making a statement of what literature should be. Written before Gutenberg invented the printing press in 1441, the poem's verses are in *terza rima*, a form in which the first and third lines rhyme while the second line rhymes with the first line of the following stanza. This form made it easy to memorize at least some lines. Using only the word *Commedia*—the Italian word for comedy—for the title, Dante evoked classical distinctions in which comedy was a genre with a narrative moving towards a happy ending, which of course is the case in *Paradiso*. Later in 1555, because of its recognition as an important religious work, the title became *The Divine Comedy*. What follows are some suggestions for how to approach a 700-year-old work that at first might seem dauntingly illusive, elusive, and allusive.

Taking us on an intellectual and spiritual journey, *The Divine Comedy* is shaped by Dante's strong sense of purpose, namely, the discovery by the narrator of God's geographic and moral plan. *The Divine Comedy* opens its narrative on Maundy Thursday in April 1300 shortly before dawn of Good Friday, and ends the Thursday after Easter. The narrator—who is both Dante's surrogate and a character in the imagined world Dante has created—comes out of Hell, into which he descended on Good Friday, at the base of Mount Purgatory at sunrise on Easter Sunday, and rises into Heaven, which exists outside time, mid-day Thursday.

Analogy is crucial to Dante's technique. His comparisons come from classical myth and the Bible; the established science and cosmology of the 14th century; the past and recent history of Italy, especially Florence and the Church; and most of all from his personal experience and observation. No doubt Dante's self-dramatization as a wanderer needing direction derives from his years in exile, beginning in 1302 until his death, due to political turmoil in Florence. Dante's bitterness about his banishment and exile informs his reading of political and clerical history. *The Divine Comedy* is a Jeremiad in which the narrator lashes out at those responsible for the decline of political and clerical institutions, and prophesies disaster if appropriate corrections are not made.

Basic Structure

The structure of *The Divine Comedy* focuses on how what we are reading came to be. That is, Dante's narrator ostensibly takes a retrospective view of his personal physical, moral, and spiritual journey: "But to set forth the good I found, I will recount the other things I saw" (*Inferno* I.8-9). Dante dramatizes the evolving narrator on a dynamic journey through space within a clearly defined time period.

As a student of narrative, I respond to the epic poem's dialogue and characterization, especially to Dante's self-revealing narrator and the narrator's relationship to Virgil, who serves as his guide-teacher-mentor. But Virgil must leave at the end of *Purgatorio* because, as a virtuous pagan who lived before Christ, he lives in limbo and thus cannot enter Paradise: "I have brought you here with intellect and skill/. . . . No longer wait for word or sign from me./ Your will is free, upright, and sound" (*Purgatorio* XXVII.130, 139-40). Virgil represents reason. Toward the end of *Purgatorio* Beatrice, based upon Dante's idealization of a young woman whom he loved from a distance as a young man, replaces Virgil as the narrator's guide; she represents beatitude and can lead him to heavenly bliss.

Compelling, too, is the physicality of Dante's choreography as he traces the steps of his narrator's challenging descent in Hell and ascent in Purgatory—a journey which gets easier with each level—and finally his arrival in Paradise. In an almost cinematic movement, Dante describes the narrator's harrowing journey with Virgil in *Inferno*.

Dante's view of Hell is shaped by his understanding of contemporary Catholic theology. At death, damned souls went to Hell, those needing to be purified went to Purgatory, and those deserving of bliss went to Heaven. At the Last Judgment, which occurs at the end of time—after the resurrection of the dead, after the return of Christ, and after the arrival of angels who will judge everyone—those who are in Hell will continue to be damned. They will be joined by those still living on Earth but whose behavior consigns them to Hell. Those in Heaven will remain there and be joined by the still living who deserve to be in Heaven. Those in Purgatory will rise to Heaven. Thus, the Last Judgment is a dynamic yet final process.

What we learn with Dante's narrator is that punishment reflects what those in Hell are there for. An example is canto V of *Inferno*, which takes place in the second circle of Hell. Francesca da Rimini was married in a political alliance to the deformed Giovanni, but she fell in love with Paolo, Giovanni's handsome younger brother. They are forever together as former lovers, but unable to connect physically because they have not had time to repent before being killed by Giovanni after he discovered Francesca's adultery. Their perpetual punishment is to be buffeted about by winds because they had been overcome by intemperate passion, self-indulgence, and lust.

Purgatorio is no different from *Inferno* in that the necessary suffering before ascension to Heaven is proportionate to the crime. In Heaven, as *Paradiso* makes clear, there are hierarchies of blessedness, represented by Dante's medieval conception of Heaven as a series of concentric circles surrounding the earth, circles which are associated with the angelic hierarchy.

Dante's narrator plays two self-conscious roles: that of the pilgrim making his odyssey through Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven, and that of the poet recalling it. He is very much aware that he is recording a journey about which others will read and that his role is to teach readers of the miracle and omnipresence of God: "O vengeance of God, how much /should you be feared by all who read /what now I saw revealed before my eyes! " (*Inferno* XIV.16–18).

The Divine Comedy has a polemic and devotional aspect. We need to remember that it is Dante, not God, who

places the characters in their places. Dante's use of the preterite—the past tense—underlines that the narrator is recounting his miraculous journey after he has returned to earth. Like Moses, he has brought down from the mountain something he believes we need to know; he wants to share with his audience what he has learned: "Reader, so may God let you gather fruit /from reading this" (*Inferno* XX.19-20). Later, in *Paradiso* when specifically addressing the reader ("lettore" in Italian), he calls attention to his writing down what Beatrice tells him.

Synchronicity

Synchrony has been used to describe the uncanny, including inexplicable, coincidental, or simultaneous occurrences of events, similar thoughts of people who seem to have little in common and might not know even each other, or unexpected events that seem not to be logically explained by causes. Without disregarding its ties to the uncanny, I want to use synchrony here as a concept to explain a process that relies upon specific formal rhetorical decisions an author uses to arrange the narrative and thus shape the reader's response.

The Divine Comedy is an ideal example of synchrony because Dante is examining the significance of his narrator's past experience now, even as he retrospectively narrates a spiritual odyssey which takes us back in time to the amazing week in which the narrator experienced the events he describes in the sites of the *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso*. Rendering this experience as a sustained flashback, the narrator tells the story of his past odyssey and explains his understanding of that journey. Thus, the reader has the uncanny sense of living simultaneously in two worlds, the then of what happened and the now of the telling. Put another way, the past shadows the present and becomes part of it, so that the journey Dante is describing is shadowed always by our knowledge, beginning with canto I of the *Inferno,* of his past experience. In another example of synchronicity, we measure the spiritual journey of both Dante the pilgrim and Dante the narrator in the context of what we know of contemporary Catholic theology, especially the arc of Christ's life from inception to crucifixion and, finally, resurrection.

The Divine Comedy *is an ideal example of synchrony because Dante is examining the significance of his narrator's past experience now, even as he retrospectively narrates a spiritual odyssey which takes us back in time to the amazing week in which the narrator experienced the events he describes in the sites of the* Inferno, Purgatorio, *and* Paradiso. *Rendering this experience as a sustained flashback, the narrator tells the story of his past odyssey and explains his understanding of that journey. Thus, the reader has the uncanny sense of living simultaneously in two worlds, the then of what happened and the now of the telling.*

The energy of the *Inferno* derives in part from Dante's and our fascination with evil. As his narrator gets deeper into the nine circles of Hell, he finds increasingly outrageous behavior generating increasingly horrible tortures. And that calls for a change of language. In *Inferno* the narrator more and more turns to graphic and even vulgar language to describe the figures he meets. Conversely in *Paradiso*, as he moves closer to his vision of God, the narrator uses more allegorical and less realistic language. He presents fewer speaking voices and less visual dramatic action.

As a human, Dante the pilgrim feels sympathy and empathy for those he meets in the *Inferno*. Indeed, his caring for people is an attractive feature that draws readers to him. Even in the depths of Hell, he responds with some sympathy and empathy to the plight of the damned: "The many people and their ghastly wounds /did so intoxicate my eyes/that I was moved to linger there and weep" (*Inferno* XXIX.1–3). When Dante stops because he sees a relative, Virgil counsels: "Trouble your mind/no more because of him" (*Inferno* XXIX.22-23).

Let us recall another important example of how Dante reminds us that his narrator, like the reader, is all too human. Does not the narrator show the sin of pride in *Paradiso* XXV? Are we not to see irony in his demonstrating the sin he had renounced by referring to "this sacred poem/to which heaven and earth have set their hand," and by his making claims for his stature as a poet: "[S]hall I return a poet and, at the font/where I was baptized, take the laurel crown?" (*Paradiso* XXV.1, 8-9)? Yet this burst of pride and self-confidence in his prowess humanizes the speaker.

Dante and Painting

Another important aspect of synchrony is intertextuality—that is, when we respond to an artistic work in the context of other works we know. Such intertextual interventions will vary with each reader. Thus, within the context of reading *The Divine Comedy*, paintings of Giotto and Duccio accompany my reading and are present synchronically in my mind as I read.

Dante defines characters—even Biblical and mythic figures—by their earthly setting and circumstances. There can be no doubt that he was influenced by contemporary paintings of Heaven and Hell and that his scenes are visually shaped by his knowledge of painting and, to a lesser extent, by illuminated manuscripts. These sources were an essential means of communication within the Catholic tradition. The church frescoes were available for illiterate worshippers, while the illuminated manuscripts and devotional paintings were treasures owned by the wealthy. In this culture, the Biblical narratives—and in particular the life of Jesus—were a living text which offered viewers, readers, or listeners spiritual and ethical instruction.

For his original audience, Dante's allusions to paintings and sculptures played three complementary roles: (1) They illustrated what he is presenting; (2) they added a devotional and to an extent iconographic perspective to his language; and (3) they evoked, for most readers, a well-known and more accessible cultural context because they knew about the roles of Christ and the Virgin Mary from church paintings.

Beginning with Cimabue (1240-1302), Duccio (1255-1260 to 1318 or 1319), and Giotto (1267-1337), painting

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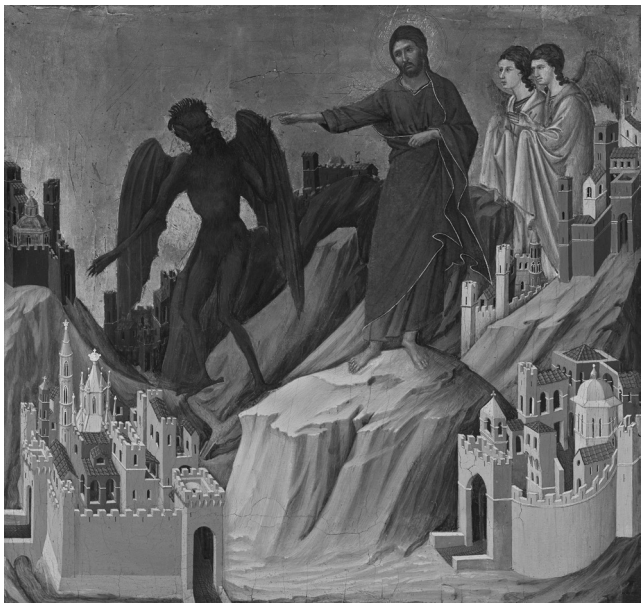
emerged from medieval iconography to a world where even traditional Biblical scenes with devotional purpose included human models with human expressions of feeling. Dante mentions Cimabue and Giotto in *Purgatorio* XI.94-96: "In painting Cimabue thought he held the field/ but now it's Giotto has the cry,/so that the other's fame is dimmed." Because, according to a medieval perspective shared by Dante, human events replicate what happened in the past, we need not differentiate between recurring themes and current particularities. Medieval artists—and I am including Cimabue, Duccio, and Giotto—do not render what they see in the world, but try to imagine what God sees. Medieval paintings reflect the view that God, Christ, and the Virgin Mary, as well as the angels and saints, are eternal and omnipresent in our consciousness, and they are what matters. Individual humans come and go, and human behavior, except for those who scrupulously model their lives on Christ's teaching, remains more or less constant.

Dante's focus on essential ways that humans interact on Earth derives from contemporary painting. Much of what Erich Auerbach describes as "earthly historicity" is anticipated by changes in painting (193). A fundamental change in painting, even before the advent of three-dimensionality in the Renaissance, is the interaction between divine figures and the way they look at one another. This change, as we shall see, carries over into Dante's text, and specifically his relationship with Beatrice while in heaven.

What we see in the relationship between Mary and the Christ Child in Duccio's paintings is a powerful gaze that goes beyond the mutual attentiveness that is essential to traditional iconography where the image directly summons something to be venerated,



Duccio Di Buoninsegna, ***Madonna and Child***, 9.3" x 6.4," tempera and gold on panel, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1300.



Duccio di Buoninsegn, *The Temptation of Christ on the Mountain*, 16.9" x 18.1," tempera on poplar panel, The Frick Museum, 1308-1311.

such as Christ or the Virgin Mary. Take, for example, *Madonna and Child* at the NY Metropolitan Museum where the Madonna, with full knowledge of what will occur in the future, sadly looks down on Christ, who pushes the veil from Mary as if to indicate that she should not hide her divinity. Christ's hand movement and his rapport with his mother represent the humanity of Christ as well as their shared knowledge of his divinity and his ensuing sacrifice.

What Dante takes from Giotto and Duccio is this balance of the human with the eschatological, as well as the Biblical version of history stretching from Genesis to the Last Judgment. Dante's focus on light and dark, including shading, may well have been influenced by painting. Quite possibly the light in the heavenly section on the right of Giotto's *Last Judgment* in the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua shapes Dante's description of heaven.

Duccio's depiction of the devil may also have influenced Dante. In the small Duccio's *Temptation of Christ on the Mountain* (painted 1308–1311)—now in the Frick Museum but originally on the back of the altarpiece in Siena Cathedral—Christ refuses to worship Satan in exchange for all the kingdoms of the world. The simple visual lesson—strongly emphasized in *The Divine Comedy*—is to follow Christ in resisting earthly temptation.

With his strong interest in a narrative and in solving spatial problems related to how to create a three-dimensional world on a two-dimensional surface, Duccio, anticipating Dante, created a dark, threatening, monstrous figure, but one with a recognizable human shape except for the wings. As if to emphasize the stakes, the two huge figures dominate the three-dimensional setting. What is most striking is the dramatic moment when Christ dismisses Satan's offer. Duccio's traditional lesson is that we all must actively reject Satan's prominent presence. Dante's Satan follows Duccio in this tradition of a huge Satan with human features dominating the setting, but his Satan has three heads.

The source for what Duccio and Dante depict is Matthew 4:8-11: "Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them." Borrowing from both traditional and recent innovative visual sources, Dante in canto XXXIV of the *Inferno* depicts a monstrous three-headed Satan trapped in ice. He is not only huge, but accentuated with color.

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His front face is red, the right one is "whitish yellow," and the left has a tint which I take from the description "like the people/living at the sources of the Nile" to mean Black Nubians (*Inferno* XXXIV.43-45). Beneath the heads with six eyes and a mouth "drooling blood-red saliva" are three sets of "massive," "featherless'' wings resembling those of bats (*Inferno* XXXIV.48-49, 54). Clearly, Dante is aware that bats fly without feathers. It is almost as if the visual element of Dante's literary imagination "painted" Satan based on knowledge gleaned from observation of extant visual sources.

Let us consider Giotto's influence on Dante. We can be reasonably sure that Giotto's depiction of the Virtues and Vices in the Scrovegni Chapel (1305) influenced Dante, who visited that city. In the chapel, Virtues are on the right, Vices on the left (Lackey 551-572). Anticipating Dante's pilgrim, Giotto places his viewer in between Virtues and Vices to emphasize that the viewer—a metonym for all of us—needs to make choices. That Giotto has replaced the standard sins of Pride, Avarice, Lust, and Gluttony with Folly, Inconstancy, Infidelity, and Injustice may have influenced Dante's choice and depiction of sins.[2]

What Duccio and Giotto do and what is essential to Dante is the dramatization of motion. More than their predecessors, they emphasize potential gestures of hands moving and heads looking up or down. In *Inferno* XXX, Dante's graphic descriptions of the pains suffered by the tortured souls of those who have deceived others recalls Giotto's narrative frescoes in the Scrovegni Chapel, especially *The Last Judgment.*

While using the visual vocabulary of painting, Dante's narrator often refers to the inadequacy of his words. Now that he is in Heaven, he has left the world of thought, and hence a world that could be described in the evidentiary terms humans use. This self-deprecating language has begun earlier because Dante wants us to understand that the further the narrator ascends, the more difficult *Paradiso* is to describe. Yet Dante stresses that the narrator is a pilgrim who "expects to tell his tale" when he gets back to earth (*Paradiso* XXXI.43–78).

The Odyssey of Reading *The Divine Comedy*

In Dante's cosmology, preparing oneself for the birth of the eternal soul upon death by getting close to God was an essential part of earthly life. Developing an intimate relationship with God by following the righteous path and acknowledging His presence through the sacraments of the Church—most importantly, Baptism,

Confirmation, the Eucharist, and Reconciliation—as well as prayer, defined this preparation. As *The Divine Comedy* makes clear, following the Church's specified Virtues and avoiding the defined Vices was necessary, but not always sufficient, if one had not also followed Church sacraments.

The narrator is aware that the earthly world in which humans live their lives—and in particular the world of Italy and Florence populated by humans with their strengths and failings—is changing and cannot be fully understood, no matter how much he would like to believe in—and revert to—a vision of life as a simple vertical progression from Hell to Purgatory and, finally, Heaven. Such a vision is exemplified in his description of Beatrice towards the climax of *Paradiso*: "The beauty that I saw transcends/all thought of beauty, and I must believe/that only its maker may savor it all" (*Paradiso* XXX.19–21).

In addition to its allegorical component, Dante's narrative has an often quite modern realistic quality. What Dante makes clear is that he is interested in his characters' grammar of motives and the ensuing complexities of where to consign his characters. He ponders how to judge behavior of ambiguous intent and what weight should be given to the effects of characters' behavior on others. These grey areas take modern secular readers into a novelistic space where we can draw a circumference of judgment around the presentation of Dante's narrator, including questioning and even resisting the characters' placement in Hell and Purgatory. Should, we might ask, Ulysses, hero of the *Odyssey*, be consigned to the eighth circle of Hell for giving false counsel (*Inferno* 27)?

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For believing Christians, Dante becomes their Virgil and Beatrice, teaching them how to get to Heaven and love God. After rebuking the narrator for pursuing the wrong path, Virgil says to him: "I think it wise. You follow me/I will be your guide" (*Inferno* I. 113-114). These lines echo what Christ said to Peter, "Come, follow me" (*Luke* 18:22; see also *Matt* 16:24; *Mark* 1:17; *Luke* 9:23). Dante speaks not just to those who accept his theology, but to all of humanity. He implicitly urges, "Come, follow me," and we respond. Simply put, to return to the first canto of *Inferno*, if we have "lost" our way and are in a "wood, savage, dense and harsh," we need to

follow where he leads (*Inferno* I.3-5). What Virgil and later Beatrice are to him—guides and teachers—Dante is to us.

We modern readers of *The Divine Comedy* who are not believing Christians, and specifically Catholics, are still caught up with Dante's narrator in his human situation of wanting a major change in his life. At times are not all of us in the metaphoric dark woods of anxiety, self-doubt, and depression as well as other emotional cruxes brought on by disappointments, illness, and loss of loved ones? Our contemporary experiences that roughly parallel those of the narrator include overcoming depression and trauma, as well as showing resilience, resourcefulness, and resolve in the face of terrible setbacks.

As Dante's narrator ascends toward Heaven, he loses his human imperfections. *Paradiso* is about knowing, but a particular kind of knowing that eschews reason and logic. What is learned by the narrator cannot, when he returns to the human world, be completely retained or transformed perfectly into words. His knowledge is based on medieval Catholic theology, the four cardinal virtues (prudence, justice, fortitude, temperance) and the three theological virtues (faith, hope, charity).

In *Paradiso,* chronological time is suspended. Heaven's inhabitants, as well as for a time the visiting narrator, live in *kairos*, or significant time, rather than *chronos*, the tick-tock of passing time, which is suspended. Even those of us who are skeptics and unbelievers are aware of being present in a different world than the one we live in. Indeed, it is a world in which we want to stay. Such reading experiences as *The Divine Comedy* bring insight and pleasure to each day and far more than repay the time invested. Reading complex literary works becomes the poetry of life when we lose ourselves in imagined worlds of other times and other places. That is what major art does, making us aware, as the American poet Wallace Stevens puts it in "The Idea of Order at Key West," of

> Words of the fragrant portals, dimly-starred,
> And of ourselves and of our origins,
> In ghostlier demarcations, keener sounds.

Notes

1. *The Divine Comedy*. Translated by Robert and Jean Hollander, with introduction and notes by Robert Hollander. Anchor, 2000-2008; I quote from this edition.

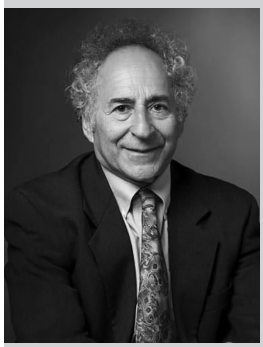
2. See Lackey, "Giotto in Padua": "The grey frescoes of the bottom cycle have a humbler task: their job is to instruct" (552).

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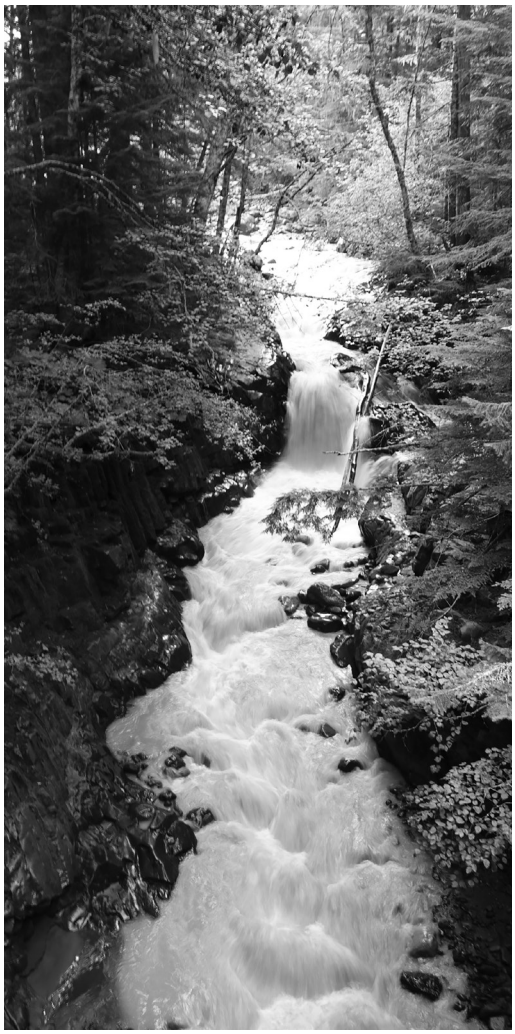
Four Rivers

Neil Mathison

Rivers and Me

I love rivers. I love their never-ceasing motion, their twists and turns, the surprises that greet you as you round each bend. I love their colors: cutglass clear, mud-heavy, pea-green, milk-white. I love their sounds: an eddy's murmur, the rapid's thrum. I love the chill surge of water around my ankles when I wade in their flow. I love what they carry: an autumn-yellow leaf, a green cedar branch, a white blossom, the silver-and-red flesh of a spawned salmon, clues to where they began and where they've been and even where they may be going. I love how rivers connect: mountain to desert, desert to delta, delta to sea. I love their vagaries, each unique in its character.

But what defines a river's character? The length of its run? The volume of its flow? The square miles of its watershed? The land it passes through? The flora and fauna that mark its course?



The White River (Puyallaup River), Washington. Photo Credit: Mount Rainier National Park, Tumblr.

The White—A Glacial River

Glacial rivers have intemperate characters.

Along Washington State's Salish Sea, where I live, the major rivers begin as glacial rivers. Born in melting snow and glacial ice, they drain the

watersheds of the Cascade Mountains, especially its volcanos. Baker. Glacier Peak. Rainier. Adams. St. Helens. Most bear (much-Anglicized) names of the Salish peoples who first walked their banks, waded in and floated upon their waters. The Nooksack. The Skagit. The Stillaguamish. The Snohomish. The Puyallup. The Nisqually. The Deschutes. The Skookumchuck. The Cowlitz. The Toutle.

The White, a tributary of the Puyallup, is especially dear to me. Boyhood to adulthood, I camped on its banks and I hiked through its glacial moraine. From the White River Campground, in Mt. Rainier National Park, a hiker can follow the river to where it begins at the toe of the Emmons Glacier. It seems to me that the White's trailside riverscape expresses its volatile character. Gray, looming, truck-size boulders. The omnipresent roar of rapids. The tossing, milky, rock-flour-laden water. The rock-fall debris underfoot. The ice-ground silt dusting your hiking boots. The chill wind off the glacier. The Emmons terminus black with glacier-ground basalt. No white-and-blue ice here.

If you drive higher up the mountain to Yakima Park, Sunrise, and the Emmons Vista, you will comprehend the scale wrought by the White River and Emmons Glacier. Ice flowing down from Rainier's summit. Valley walls cut through black lava rock. The braided flow as the river descends into the foothills.

Lower still, on Highway 410, past the turnoffs to the Crystal Mountain Ski Area and the Dalles Campground, the river gathers the first of its several tributaries, The West Fork, which also originates from a Rainier glacier, then the Greenwater, followed by the Clearwater. Because the White is entering the lowlands, its nature changes. Silt and gravel fill its riverbed making it shallow. The river meanders, creates sandbars, forms logjams where tree trunks and wood debris collect; the shallowness and debris trigger floods during winter rains and spring snowmelts; a shallow river holds less water than a deep river.

Were the White left alone, its character might have remained the same until it discharged into the Salish Sea. But it wasn't left alone. Dikes. Levees. Flumes. Flood control dams and catchment basins. River redirection. Narrower. Deeper. Straighter. Greyish-white water changing to greyish-green. Riverbank Douglas fir, cedar, and spruce giving way to riverbank farms. Runs of salmon, Chinook, coho, pink, and steelhead abating. Where it once flowed into the Green River, (which becomes the Duwamish emptying into what is now Seattle's Elliott Bay), early twentieth-century hydro-engineers redirected the

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White south into the Puyallup River. The idea was to mitigate flooding of the fertile Kent Valley farmlands that ran east of the Salish Sea and north from Tacoma to Seattle. The paradox was this: the fertility of the valley was due to the soil deposited from volcanic, glacial till, laid down by the seasonal floods.

I grew up west of this valley, on the ridgeline between it and the Salish Sea. I fished (unsuccessfully) for steelhead in the Green River waters, picked beans in the valley truck farms, golfed in the valley golf courses, biked (in later years) on the bike trails that now track the river's sinuous course. If the Green was less dear to me than the White, it was also a greater part of my early life. The valley farmland that hydro-engineers sought to preserve is mostly gone now, replaced by shopping malls, housing developments, warehouses, and Boeing aerospace plants.

The White, subsumed by the Puyallup, has since flowed into the Salish Sea at Tacoma's Commencement Bay, now site of the Commencement Bay Nearshore/Tideflats Superfund site, intended to cap (with some success) the poisons from the Asarco Smelter (lead and copper), the Tacoma Tar Pits, and various other polluting enterprises.

The EPA's report? Its Superfund website posts this: "Condominiums, restaurants, and stores, as well as the waterfront walk, are now open on site."

What does the White River evoke for me? Wildness preserved in a National Park. The agency of humankind. Hope engendered by reclamation. And that rivers, especially glacial rivers, have an intemperate character.

The Colorado—A Desert River

Desert rivers are dichotomous rivers.

"Dichotomous." A word derived from ancient Greek, perhaps a little awkward, applied to rivers or deserts, but I like its underlying sense: two things, not each other, next to each other, often contradictory to each other. The essence of a desert and river.



Horseshoe Bend of the Colorado River, Arizona.

Of the two great river systems that drain the Intermountain West, the Columbia and the Colorado, the desert river is the Colorado. The Columbia, and particularly its tributary the Snake, drains the high, dry shrub steppe west of the Rocky Mountains, but steppe is not true desert. The Colorado flows

through three of the four American deserts, runs fourteen-hundred miles from its origin in Rocky Mountain National Park to its egress at Mexico's Gulf of California, collects seven major tributaries, drains seven U.S. states and two Mexican states, provides water and power to four major desert metropolises, and derives its name from the reddish hue of its water (although, over time, hydroelectric dams have made the red less prominent). It's a river in peril and it warrants a longer and more detailed investigation than I intend here, especially with respect to its future. What I intend here is to write about the river's place in my life.

In September, 2011, my wife, Susan, retired as a Microsoft executive. "I want something dramatic to mark the milestone," she insisted. What she chose was to raft the Colorado through the Grand Canyon.

Within a week of her final Microsoft day, we found ourselves in Utah, at Lees Ferry, in Marble Canyon, on the banks of the Colorado River preparing to board wooden dories and rubber rafts for what would be a twenty-day voyage through the Grand Canyon.[1] We would pass through portions of the Great Basin, Mojave, and Sonoran deserts. We would camp on sandbars less than twenty feet from a robust, full-flowing river, while upland a hundred-feet or so, it would be desert dry with black creosote bush, green barrel cactus, and golden teddy-bear cholla. We didn't realize it then, but our voyage would inaugurate a decade-long engagement with the Colorado.

By 2013, we had purchased a sixteen-foot Airstream Bambi travel trailer and began a multi-year, Zen-trailering exploration across the American West. (The Bambi is so small, with so little storage, and so few appliances, Zen attitude is a prerequisite for travel contentedness.) We camped on the Colorado in Rocky Mountain National Park and Grand Junction in the state of Colorado, at Lake Powell in Arizona, and Lake Mead in Nevada. At Lees Ferry in Utah. On the tributaries Green, Gunnison, Verde, and Little Colorado. In Zion and Grand Canyon National Parks. At Lake Havasu and Buckskin Mountain State Parks in Arizona. We followed the river along what the Arizona State Park System calls "the West Coast of Arizona." We became accustomed to its two faces of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Water in the river. Aridity ashore.

In Dinosaur National Monument, after a long, dry desert drive from Salt Lake City, we camped on the Colorado's Green River tributary. Willows and cottonwoods shaded our campsite. The Green flowed clear from a rock-face ravine called Split Mountain. We

A desert landscape is hard, harsh. You see the raw ridgelines of mountains, how bajada gravels fan into dry basins. What vegetation exists – the pinyon pines, the junipers, the prickly pear, the cholla cactus, the ocotillo, the creosote bushes, the sagebrush – is as spiky, hard, and mean as the land that nourishes them. Nothing softens the view. Nothing is soft. Until you get to the river.

listened to its murmur as we sipped wine around our campfire.

At the Black Canyon of the Gunnison, we woke early in order to see the morning sun illuminate the Gunnison's narrow, obsidian-black canyon and its ancient Precambrian rock.

At Lees Ferry, we camped on a bench above the Marble Canyon launch ramp, below canyon walls layered vermillion, rose, and ivory, listening to the frisson of excited rafters beginning their own Grand Canyon voyages, recalling our own.

At Big Bend of the Colorado, we camped in a sandy, sere Nevada State Park where the Colorado, a quarter-mile from our trailer-site, flowed cool and clear. The opposite Arizona shore was populated by palm trees and side-by-side, pastel-hued, riverbank mansions.

A desert landscape is hard, harsh. You see the raw ridgelines of mountains, how bajada gravels fan into dry basins. What vegetation exists—the pinyon pines, the junipers, the prickly pear, the cholla cactus, the ocotillo, the creosote bushes, the sagebrush—is as spiky, hard, and mean as the land that nourishes them. Nothing softens the view. Nothing is soft. Until you get to the river. Time and again, our long desert drives culminated on a river bank. Cottonwoods dusty leaved, willows greening the shore, frond-draped desert palms. The blues, mud browns, and reds of the river. The whisper of an eddy, a rapid's thunder. The coolness of the air. Like the Nile. The Tigris. The Euphrates. Surely the Garden of Eden owes its genesis to river and desert.

The Colorado is a river in peril. A long-enduring drought. Overconsumption. Vanishing sediment (due to ill-conceived or ill-designed dams). But amid the cacophonous negotiations and difficult compromises necessary to save it, shouldn't we pause, look at its colors, listen to its sounds, wade in the weight of its flow, feel its coolness around our legs? People have endangered the river. Only people can save it.

The Dosewallips—A Small River

West of the Salish Sea, in Washington State, between the Kitsap and Olympic Peninsulas, a blue fiord cuts south into the Salish Sea's lower reaches. The fiord is called Hood Canal. It was carved by ice-age ice and feels almost one-sided, because the east side, the Kitsap side, is low elevation while the west, Olympic side, rises abruptly to the six-thousand-foot-plus snow-white summits of the Olympic Mountains. From the Olympics, a series of fast-flowing, short-run rivers drain into the Canal. The Skokomish. The Hama Hama. The Dukabush. The Dosewallips. The Big Quilicence.

These are chum salmon rivers, clam, geoduck, and oyster rivers, where shellfish thrive on the rivers' outflow beaches. The rivers gather in the high snowfields and valleys of the Olympics and run clear and cold and silt-free as they descend into narrow, steep-sided canyons, overhung with yellow-green Hemlock and blue-green Douglas fir and, at lower elevations, big-leaf maples and alders that turn russet and gold each fall. They are shallow rivers. In autumn's heavy rains, they often flood.

I first visited the Dosewallips in the mid-fifties. The state park system had purchased two homesteads at the Dosewallips's mouth. Undeveloped then. No campsites. No picnic tables. In those years, the park system was expanding.



Tidal shoreline near the estuary of the Dosewallips River, Dosewallips State Park, Hood Canal, Washington.

My father insisted on reconnoitering each new park, at least those in Western Washington. An old logging road ran from the river's Hood Canal outflow up to a gated boundary to Olympic National Park. I don't remember if we drove up the road. We probably did. My father, an outdoorsman and avid driver, couldn't resist a mountain road, especially a gravel road. In subsequent years, the road washed out, although hikers and mountain bikers still use it to reach the National Park gate.

What attracted me to the Dosewallips? Its name as much as anything. It is a Twana name, with tumbling syllables, like the river's tumbling water.

The Twana, an indigenous people, lived in the area and named the river after a legendary man, Dos-wail-opsh, who ran afoul of the gods and was turned into a mountain. But I also think the Dosewallips and its sister rivers are approachable and clear-running, unlike the tumultuous, silt-gray, glacial rivers descending the Cascade volcanos. Kid-friendly rivers. Wadable rivers.

To get to Dosewallips from the south, you begin in Olympia, the Washington State capital, and follow US-101 to Hood Canal. The highway turns north, tracking the Canal and clinging to a shelf at the foot of the fiord's west side, widening only where the rivers empty into the sea. Lowland forest—Douglas fir, hemlock, red cedar, orange-barked madrone, alder, big-leaf maple—rise in layered canopy on both sides of the highway. You can't see the Olympic Mountain peaks. The foothills are too steep, the forest too dense. The route continues through Potlatch, Hoodsport, and Lilliwaup. Shellfish towns. Second-home towns. Motel and RV park towns. Even outside the towns, vacation homes occupy most of the shore. These are small buildings, white or gray or beige, on small lots, with just enough room for a weathered cabin and a black-asphalt parking spot. 1930s, '40s, and '50s vacation homes. Middle-class. Many passed generation to generation within families.

Hood Canal has summer-warm water, at least warm for the Salish Sea. The water is warm because the Canal is long and narrow and shallower than most of the Salish Sea. Tides flush it less; water mixes less top-to-sea-bottom. Which is why shellfish prosper. Why vacation homes were early here. Also, why the Canal faces environmental challenges. With less tidal flushing, toxins accumulate; with less vertical circulation, seawater oxygen depletes.

There is good news. Chum salmon runs have rebounded from 1980s lows. Chum differ from other salmon in that they spawn in the lower, estuarial por-

tion of the river. Here habitat restoration arrested their decline. Log jams rebuilt to moderate the river's current and protect the salmon fingerlings. Meanders and channels reestablished. The gravel beds necessary for spawning protected. Shellfish harvests have also strengthened due to new regulations and habitat restoration.

Susan and I often follow US-101 along the Canal in both directions. We like the green and blue beauty of the mountain-sea nexus. We like avoiding urban traffic on the Seattle side of the Salish Sea. We like overnighting in its state parks.

One of our favorites is Dosewallips.

The park consists of two parts, separated by US-101. The Hood-Canal side, with its gray-cobbled beaches and glass-clear river outflow, is a picnic area, popular with recreational shellfish harvesters, hikers, and beachcombers. The mountain side has camping and cabins: loops in open meadows, RV sites with black-asphalt parking pads, electricity and water, Lincoln-log brown cabins.

On this late May trip, I'm remembering now, all the RV sites are full. Susan and I choose a non-electric site, distant from the loops, on the bank of the river.[2] It has been raining. The flow is up. Our campsite is mud brown. So is the river bank. We park the trailer close to the river, the river less than thirty feet from our door. The sky is slate. Rain falls, off and on, a tearing, misty, gray rain. It's cool but not cold, and we open our trailer door and see the black eddies and rills and the yellow cobbles over which the Dosewallips flows, and we hear its song and don't feel like we're in a campground at all because there are no other campers near us, and because we see a river, not other RVs, and we hear a river, not a highway, and we imagine ourselves as first people on the river, as Salish people, as the Twana people. And the river flows, and flows, and flows, in one place but always going someplace else, one of the elements I most love about rivers.

All rivers.

Especially small rivers.

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The Skagit—A Delta River

Surely the Skagit River Delta in spring is one of the most beautiful in the world, golden with daffodils, crimson with tulips, pale green with fields of winter wheat.

Susan and I are camped with our Airstream Bambi travel trailer at Blake's RV Park and Marina on a levee



Eldorado Peak and Skagit River seen from North Cascades Highway near Rockport, Washington.

of the North Fork of the Skagit River in Washington State. A late-evening May, peach-and-gray clouds, sky still silver bright—we're approaching the summer solstice, and at 48-degree-north latitude, light will linger until after 10 p.m. The river flows muddy green due to glacial rock flour mixed with lowland rainwater and alpine snowmelt. We're on Fir Island, only a mile or so from the river's discharge, the island scribed by two Skagit forks and Skagit Bay, but it doesn't look like an island. The opposite bank is a conifer-clad hummock. On our side, beyond the levee, muddy farmland, flat as Kansas, runs south, east and west. The land is flat because the land is a delta.

The term "delta" derives from the shape of the Greek letter Δ, its shape the shape of a river delta. Here river and sea consummate. Flow slows. Sediment plumes and deposits. Water turns brackish. Tides mitigate and aggregate the river's rise and fall and the speed of its flow. A riparian ecosystem transforms to estuarian. Knotweed, sea rocket, morning glory, bluegrass, sedge, and beach pea anchor river-deposited gravels, soils, and sands. The river grows its own delta.

Not all rivers have deltas. The Columbia, the great continent-draining river of the Pacific Northwest, because it drains the fast-rising (by geological measure) North American plate and empties into a plate-boundary deepwater trench, does not. The Mississippi, the Nile, the Rhone, the Danube famously do. Like the Columbia, the Skagit flows fast, but unlike the Columbia it empties into the shallower and less violent Salish Sea, rather than the storm-prone North Pacific. Thus, the Skagit has a delta. Not a pristine delta. Agriculture, flood control, and electricity generation have shaped its course; its eponymous tributary is dammed three times. But it has been spared heavy industrialization and urbanization. So far.

For Susan and me, for four decades, the delta has been part of our lives. We moored my sailboat here when we first got together. We purchased a San Juan Island vacation home, and the delta became the front porch to our island lives. Being here is a homecoming.

In clear weather, Mt. Baker, an eleven-thousand-foot, ice-and-snow-clad volcano, presides over the delta. Mountain ranges—Washington's North Cascades, the Canadian Cascades, and Washington's peninsular Olympics—can be seen in three directions, the summits of several San Juan Islands in a

fourth. The delta's flatness is unique for Salish Sea topography. Here, flat is rare, a topography shaped by volcanoes, plate tectonics, ice-age ice, and alpine ice. Hillocks, crowned by Douglas fir, rise above the river-and-channel-laced fields. In winter, black-and-white trumpeter swans and ivory-white snow geese flock over fallow mud. In March, golden daffodils give way to April's crimson tulips. In summer, the delta flourishes with blueberries, raspberries, strawberries, green cucumbers, blue-blossoming potatoes, Jonagold apples, lawn turf, and vegetable seed. In fall, heavy rains fill the river so it overflows its levees and floods the fields, leaving behind black, glacial, and volcanic soil.

Today, when we leave Blakes's, we'll cross the North Fork and ascend the hummock that runs northwest above the delta, where a few late-blooming tulip fields may still quilt the farmland with red, yellow, and purple patches. If the clouds clear, we may see Mt. Baker shimmering white above the North Cascade crest. When the road dips down to the delta plain, we'll turn west through several mud-brown fields, their tulips just plowed under for summer crops, skirt a dairy where Holsteins graze on shamrock-green grass, and pass several current and former white-stained farmhouses whose bottom stories lift the main house above the flood-prone delta. Such floods were common in my boyhood, but are now less likely due to Skagit and tributary dams. We'll lunch in the small, one-time fishing-and-farming, now tourist town of La Conner, which borders the natural Swinomish Slough that connects the north Salish Sea to its southern reaches, the slough's winding course long-ago dredged and straitened for marine traffic. After lunch (the brew pub is our favorite), we'll cross the slough on the Rainbow Bridge, a graceful orange-painted steel arch that connects La Conner to the Swinomish Tribal Reservation. On the Swinomish side, aluminum gill-netter boats will be beached under two-story stacks of crab traps. The province of delta ends here. We'll enter the province of the San Juan Islands, will already be on an island, Fidalgo Island, by some measures the first of the San Juans. In the town of Anacortes, twenty minutes away, we'll wait for a ferry to our San Juan Island home.

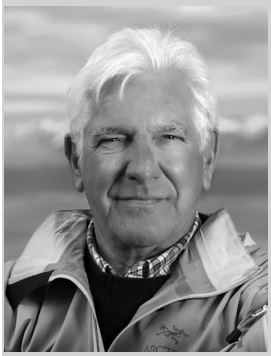
But for now, this night on the North Fork levee, we celebrate the Skagit. We celebrate how it reveals the elements endemic to the Salish Sea. Silver waters. White-frothed tidal currents. Conifer-capped islands. Snow-whitened mountains. Green, fast-flowing rivers. Volcanoes.

Our Eden.

Notes

1. I have also written of this adventure elsewhere: "Rafting off the Grid." *The Rappahannock Review*, vol. 1, no. 3, 2013, www.rappahannockreview.com/issue-1-3/neil-mathison/.

2. While writing this piece, Susan and I returned to Dosewallips for a one-night stay, where we discovered that our former riverside campsite had been displaced by a river habitat restoration project designed to recreate the original chum salmon spawning meanders and channels.



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bakri, the badluck daughter

Jaspal Kaur Singh



Administrative Divisions map of Burma (present-day Myanmar).

The small town of Taunggyi—which literally means big mountain—in the Shan State of Burma is ablaze with pink cherry blossoms adorning the mountains. The cherry and pine trees, stirred by a fresh breeze blowing from the Greystone Mountain, whisper, and then getting excited, shout the news from the Shan people to all the others in lower Burma, especially to those dwelling in the hot capital, Rangoon—*Taunggyi go la khe ba! Come to Taunggyi!* The Crag, the rocky mountain of Shan, is looking at the valley with a benign eye while *Taung Chun,* the sharp mountain with its *Phaya Taung* pagoda, looks away to

the east. The lovers' lane, *Mee Chaa Lun,* calls to all the youngsters with passion in their hearts and hope in their souls, escaping their parents' eagle eyes to break taboos and steal kisses. This borderland separates the mountains from the town, which is verdant with tropical trees, bamboo, *padauk*, and weeping fig, while mauve, pink, white, and yellow orchids cling between tree trunks and branches, as if finding a cozy place to rest.

I transplant these orchid plants from the cool shade of the mountains by gently prying them apart from the low-hanging branches. When I get home, I place them in coconut husks tied together with coir twines, then hang them from the avocado tree branches and the eave of the tin roof over the wooden veranda of our home. I tend to these colorful transplants very carefully, fearful that they might not survive away from their home. Each morning, I wake up early to water the plants, careful not to drown them, and then gently touch them with my fingertips, one by one. My paternal grandmother Laaj, who hails from Rawalpindi in Punjab, and who has a beautifully lined forehead, like dried rivers, scrunches her eyes, her white chunni slipping from her white-haired head, and scolds me for touching them: *The oil from your fingers will discolor them; they will lose their beauty, first from having them transplanted from the mountain, and now from you touching them with greedy and dirty fingers!* But luckily for me and my family, they always manage to survive, blooming brilliantly to brighten our tinroofed home in the Shan States.

Our house is built:
of cement and golden teakwood
the upper wooded floor slatted and crocheted
and the lower cemented level surrounded by an interlaced
fenced veranda while its corrugated tin roof—becoming a musical
instrument during monsoon seasons—hangs low to mossy grounds: the song
raindrops lullabies for us to burrow in bed during dreamy Shan mornings or snuggle and
fantasize in homemade quilts during balmy tropical Burmese nights in the land of greenghosts

The house sits a little high in the Forest Quarters, kitty-corner from the Income Tax Office and opposite to the income tax officer's house, and away from the Indian part of town. It is surrounded by blue jacarandas, avocadoes, plums, pine, and oak trees. The garden Laaj plants is full of jasmine vines, dahlias, roses, and gladioli. Behind the kitchen in a patch of land, she grows corn, chayote squash, chili, cilantro, and tomatoes. She says she remembers her father's farm in British India in the far reaches of Punjab where she used to live until the age of thirteen. Although the farm was green and productive, they barely had enough to eat as the taxes were high and they had many mouths to feed in the family. She was married off early to my grandfather Meher and came to live with him in Burma. As a young bride, she says, she used to dream of the malevolent Burmese *nats*, the green ghosts, the spirits of those whose lives were violently cut off in their prime, and the Shan canni-

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bals, but over the years, she mostly forgot about these ideas. When Laaj was newly married, Meher used to work as a driver's apprentice, a spare, for his maternal uncle's transport business. His uncle had two lorries, and they went back and forth from Rangoon to Delhi carrying Indian-made goods, such as cloth, lanterns, bicycles, and other perishable products, like pulses and grains, for the local markets. That was a long while back, before the 1947 Partition of India, before they lost everything, before Meher died of a broken heart.

Laaj misses Meher and her other home in Punjab, so she tries to recreate the feeling of a farm in the little patch of land behind our house, especially planting okras and bitter melons. Meher used to love these okras and melons, especially when she stuffed them with crushed onions, garlic, ginger, spices, and a piece of tamarind, and would shallow-fry them on the tava on low heat for hours until they were crisp and golden.

Our home was not so lush and lovely before I was born in 1951. Laaj and Meher, along with their firstborn, my father Joth, and his brother, Ishar, used to live in the little shack behind Meher's small shop on the main road, next to the beer bars and in front of the small Sikh temple. Grandmother often told me about the small place, how they all slept in crammed quarters behind the shop. It was there, she said, on the main road, near all the Indian community members, many of them petty traders, tailors, and street cleaners, that her sons grew up speaking Burmese and Shan, their Punjabi stilted and odd to her ears.

Joth and Ishar were enrolled at the American Baptist Mission School through the help of their priest from the *gurudwara* where they learned to speak yet another language, English. But their education was disrupted due to the Japanese occupation of Burma in 1942. Adding to their many tongues, which Laaj had a hard time deciphering, they learned Japanese from their occupiers at their school. She loathed the Japanese soldiers, who were mean and rough with Joth and Ishar, but were particularly horrible to Meher at his shop. Most of the time, she used to tell us, they would take things without paying

for them. Once, on our evening walk around the Taunggyi water reservoir by the mountain, she said to me, *Palo, I try not to remember those terrible days, but they often creep into my dreams! Meher wakes me up, saying, Laaj, Laaj, you are safe. Sub theek hai!*

My mother Tej, when she was newly married to my father Joth, used to cook in the little kitchen with a wood stove, which she constructed from mud and cow dung mixed with chopped-up gunny sack smeared on to three big concrete blocks. My older sister, Bubbly, was born during the Japanese occupation. Even though she was a girl, Laaj made a big show of making sweets and distributing them to our relatives to celebrate her birth; but when I, the second badluck daughter, was born a few years later, Laaj refused to visit my mom, who was lying at the unsuitably named "Son Born Hospital," or to see me for almost a week. She said she felt redeemed at least because my brother, Happy, was born a few years before my arrival, so she could lift up her head in the Sikh community. She celebrated his arrival with not only *laddoos* and *punjeeri*, but even got a *halwai* to make fresh *jalebees* for the Indian community!

We have a special bond, Bubbly and I, as she pays special attention to me, for both our *chi*, according to her, are strong. We are like our father. When Joth was a young boy, he got his long uncut hair stuck to the bottom of the muddy river and was believed dead, only to reappear, hours later, transformed. He grew up fast, and wise, after that moment. Bubbly said we both take after him. Ishar, she said, has a weak *chi*. And Happy, I asked? *He is a mixture of both Joth and Tej, a strong chi, which he inherited from Joth, and a calm and quiet chi, which he inherited from Tej, our soft-spoken mother.*

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However, that was years later, after my parents fled to India and had to return to Burma during the Partition once Happy had been born. Their flight occurred due to the Japanese occupation. A year after Bubbly was born, Joth and Tej hid in the jungles of Shan States to escape the constant bombings conducted by the Allied Army on Japanese installations. Tired, hungry, and fed-up, they persuaded Laaj to return to Punjab and her home in Rawalpindi. Tej was pregnant again. The Japanese had been brutal to all the Burmese during the occupation. Joth was mistreated and beaten by the soldiers in his father's

shop. Ishar had to march with the Japanese and with Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's Indian National Army for many awful and brutal months during the 1944 Quit India Movement.

When he was just nineteen years old, Ishar was recruited by Bose, who beseeched all the sons of Mother India, particularly the firstborn in Burma, to free India from British rule. He made his fiery speech in Taunggyi and asked Indians to march to Delhi to fight the Brits—*Delhi Chalo*! The Japanese coerced or forced, one way or the other, the sons of India in Taunggyi and other parts of Burma to join the march. Joth was exempt from the army because he was married. Ishar went in his stead. Joth never forgot his brother's sacrifice, nor the shame of having failed Mother India, he told Tej. *I owe him*. Ishar became a *coolie* for the Japanese and Indian officers. He would often describe the torturous hikes in the jungles with heavy loads on his back, while the Japanese or Indian officers prodded him as if he were a donkey, especially if they thought he was slacking off. He returned home after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, exhausted, sick, demoralized, and unnerved. If the U.S. had not dropped atomic bombs on the cities, where thousands upon thousands of Japanese died, Ishar would have been marching and carrying loads for them for many more years! Ishar often mused if his lone life was worth saving. He would talk for hours about karma and dharma, wondering if he was a sage in his last life.

It was in 1946 when Laaj, Meher, and her children arrived at my grandfather's hometown, Peeyan, in Punjab. My mother, pregnant, and with a small daughter, had much trouble with her health on the ship to Calcutta! The trainride was long and arduous, but when they arrived in the village, they were heartened by *diyas* set out by their Hindu and Muslim neighbors along the walls of their house to welcome them back. Within a few months, after Happy was born, however, Hindu-Muslim violence and slaughter began due to the imminent Partition, and the family had to run for their lives in the middle of the night. They heard the roar of *Allah hu Akbar, Har Har Mahadev,* and *Jo Boley So Nihal,* followed by torturous cries through many nights while they cowered in their grain room. They—my grandmother, my parents with two small children, and Ishar—had to walk for miles in the middle of the night. Meher refused to leave his home and stayed back, but Joth returned with an army truck and rescued him a few days later, as many Sikhs had already been slaughtered in the melee. Meher was hidden in a grain storeroom by his Muslim neighbors and was thankfully

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safe, although he never recovered from the violence he witnessed, nor from losing his home once again. A few days later, as they were leaving Lahore, their train was attacked. Men threw rocks and rattled their doors and windows, but miraculously they escaped all the way back to Burma. They lost their home and friends, and left with only their two small children and a couple of bundles of valuables. Laaj carried the key to her house for decades, mourning her lost home, her locked trunk with her good woolen shawls, embroidered *phulkari* bedspreads and *chunnis* which she had handwoven and handstitched as a young bride, and her few good silver dishes. Tej carried her children. She almost lost Bubbly along the way when the child dropped from her unfeeling hands as she tried to juggle the few warm sweaters she'd knitted and three salwar kameez she'd stitched for her daughter. Ishar stumbled on the small whimpering figure, picked her up, and carried her the rest of the way. *I often wondered if Ma meant to leave Bubbly behind in Punjab*. Joth carried a small cloth bundle with the few bits of jewelry they had and a few thousand rupees. Meher, who left with empty hands, started to drink heavily, succumbed to depression, and died soon after due, as Laaj would say, to his shattered kismet. Joth somehow managed to build a small shack on the main road of Taunggyi, and they began trading again by selling grandmother's gold bangles and purchasing goods from the borders of China and Bangkok to sell in the five-day market.

The next place they lived in was built mostly of bamboo with wooden stilts—my very first home. The Shan winds blew from the mountains to the deck below the house during brutal winters. Some nights, I woke up to wild dogs, which I could see below between the wooden slats of the floor, howling. My cousin Kul and I, Ishar's firstborn and my agemate, used to hide under there during hot summer days. We could hear Ma and the beautiful Meeto Maci, my mother's little sister who was married to Ishar, complaining about Laaj and her constant comparison of them to other higher-caste Sikh women in the community. *What a fraud Laaj is, believing in jaati and paati and dares to call herself a Sikh!*

A few years later, we moved to this beautiful home with a cemented lower half, a wooden second floor, and a tin roof! Ma constructed another woodstove from cow dung, chopped gunny sack and mud, and three concrete blocks. We used to burn wood to cook our food on clay pots. Ma and Meeto Maci used the ash from the woodstove to scrub pots, pans, and dishes with coconut husk. I, the second badluck daughter, was always roped in to wash the dishes in cold water, or to crush onions, garlic, and ginger in the stone mortar and pestle for the daily curries.

Today, as I sit in the tiny kitchen crushing the ingredients, I mutter under my breath—*Why don't you ask Bubbly to wash the dishes? Why don't you ask her to crush the onions?* I already know her answer, *Oh, but Bubbly has so much homework as she is in the ninth grade*. Ma, gentle but mostly exhausted from the daily household chores, hears me muttering and, managing a slight laugh, calls me a goat, a *bakri! Why a goat, of all the creatures, I mutter!* Chuckling, she says, *because you, who help me the most, are like a goat who provides us milk, but who always manages to shit in the*

same bucket! It's true, I do help Ma with the household chores, ironing clothes, washing dishes, sweeping the floor, but that's because I'm always hovering around her for attention while Bubbly goes off reading novels or playing basketball! And Ma always praises her, saying what a good scholar she is! So, when I crush the onions, I pound them real hard, and mutter under my breath, scattering the onions and garlic on the floor, or sweep the dirt from one room to another, scattering the dust all over the house! Bakri, indeed!

Every month, a lorry-load of wood was delivered to our house. Papa would pay a few kyats to the brawny tattooed Paoh men who'd come down from the mountains on market day looking for odd jobs to have them chop up the wood. We children would then stack them in the woodshed. If we'd slack off when stacking, we'd get a caning from Ishar, the self-proclaimed disciplinarian of the family. The ones Ishar felt slacked off (do we really slack off, or does he only think we do, like the Japanese and Indian army officers thought he did?) he would line up against the garage door. It was mostly me, the muttering child and second useless daughter, or my brother Happy, the star and light of the Singh family, who would bear the brunt of his anger, especially if he could not locate Bubbly, his special target. Ishar told Ma he found Bubbly too feisty and too bold, wearing brightly colored dresses and makeup, or even worse, slack pants, ostensibly to practice basketball at her school, St. Anne's Convent. He was sure she really went to flirt with Donald, or Victor, or what's his name, Ko Ko Aung! *Those guitar-twanging convent high school boys who think they are Elvis Presley, or worse still, the Beatles! Sickening! All this English Shinglish teaching,* he'd say! *He was fed up with it!*

At the beatings, we'd have to stand with our faces to the door, lift our frocks and expose our buttocks, or, in the case of Happy, lower his shorts. If Ishar couldn't find a cane, he would simply take off his leather thongs, the ones he always wore that distinguished him from our father, (who always wore polished black boots), and whack them on our buttocks and thighs!

Today, it is Sunday, so I loiter around Ma and Meeto Maci, who are preparing dinner. I am roped in to help them, as usual. After I finish crushing the onions, garlic, and ginger for the curry, I, along with Kul, Happy, and Bubbly, help stack the chopped wood in the woodshed. I hate it because I always manage to get splinters in my hands, but Bubbly and Happy are good and swift. Bubbly sings "*Chahey*

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koi mujhe jungle kahay!" in her musical voice, as she had just seen Shammi Kapoor's film *Junglee* a few weeks ago. Happy follows with a loud *yahoo*! We all laugh, trying to imitate Shammi Kapoor. Ishar, who had been in his room above the back veranda, resting after his lunch, suddenly appears and catches hold of Bubbly, slams her against the woodshed door, lifts her skirt up and exposes her flowered homemade panties—the ones Ma sewed. Ishar whacks the Slazenger badminton racquet on her flower panties, her buttocks, and thighs. I cringe and mutter, calling him a *shaitan* for hitting my older sister, but we are all too afraid to openly confront him. Ma is cooking in the kitchen, which is housed in a little hut next to the woodshed and separated from the house by a little drain. When she hears Ishar hitting us, she sprints toward him and wrestles the racquet from his skinny but strong hands, telling him to stop—*bus karo*! Ishar, still angry but aware of her sharp voice, surprisingly backs off, and Ma, dragging the stoic but bruised Bubbly to her room, carefully applies soothing salve on her bruised skin, saying, *Why doesn't he ever hit his own son, Kul? Why my children, for Waheguru's sake?* Bubbly's dark eyes are staring out the window to the far-off mountains, her lashes damp, and she says to Ma, *One day I will show him.*

In the evening when Joth returns from the shop, Ma complains to him about Ishar, but all he says is, *Ishar learned the discipline as a soldier from the late Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose when he was in the Indian National Army, and from the British who taught him the adage, "Spare the rod and spoil the child," in the American Baptist Mission school. He is just doing his duty by us and teaching our children discipline and morality. Never forget, he took my place in the army and suffered for our sakes. I owe him. We owe him.*

I miss Bubbly every day. She left for Rangoon to become a doctor when she was eighteen after passing her matric exam. Whenever she comes home during her summer breaks, I no longer recognize her, especially after the 1962 military coup and Ne Win's Burmese Road to Socialism. On the 7th of July 1962, she had taken part in the student demonstration against Ne Win's rule, which was suppressed and thousands of students were slaughtered. She had managed to escape with Aung Gyi, her classmate. He had literally dragged her from the scene, as she had stood there shattered and shocked. The next day, the military blew up their student union building—RUSU, the Rangoon University Student Union—and buried students' bodies in shallow graves around the city. When classes temporarily resumed, she was stunned, she

The next day, the military blew up their student union building—RUSU, the Rangoon University Student Union—and buried students' bodies in shallow graves around the city. When classes temporarily resumed, she was stunned, she told us, to see the body of Doris Lu Bu, her classmate, as a medical cadaver. She recognized her due to her curling and long eyelashes. Bubbly said, I will never forget that face as long as I live.

told us, to see the body of Doris Lu Bu, her classmate, as a medical cadaver. She recognized her due to her curling and long eyelashes. Bubbly said, *I will never forget that face as long as I live.*

Bubbly is back home from Rangoon, as Ne Win closed all the universities for four months. In her room, separated by the living area where I am reading a comic book borrowed from the school library, I hear her talking to Shirley, her classmate, about the underground student activism they are participating in. I think of how gentle Shirley and Bubbly are, but also about the new look in their eyes, eyes turned inward, steely and resolute.

Ishar, when we are eating together in the kitchen at the low round teakwood table, averts his eyes as Bubbly speaks about the demonstration. Joth says, patting Bubbly's hand, *What they did to the student demonstrators was terrible! And unforgivable!* Then he looks at Ishar who stares steadily at him, chewing his roti slowly. *And I hope they do not come to Taunggyi to nationalize our shops and our schools. We will become poor overnight – again*. There have been rumors. Ishar warns us, the younger ones sitting at the table, about the military. *They can crush your spirits.* Bubbly, looking directly at Ishar, narrowing her dark eyes fringed by curling lashes, her round face stoic, says, *Or they can make you stronger, bolder, and a leader. Fear itself can act like a prisoner, so to be free, we will have to let go of fear.* I look at her beautiful eyes and calm face, but hear the steel behind her voice. Ishar, who is taking another bite from his roti and chicken curry, drops the bite on his steel plate, gets up, hurriedly washes his hands at the tap, and walks out from the kitchen into the dark starless Taunggyi night.



Jaspal Kaur Singh, professor emerita, Northern Michigan University, teaches English Literature at Oregon State University. Her monographs, anthologies, and poetry books include *Exiles and Pleasures*, *Taunggyi Dreaming* (Finishing Line Press, 2023), *Violence and Resistance in Sikh Gendered Identity* (Routledge, 2020), and *Representation and Resistance: Indian and African Women Writers at Home and in the Diaspora* (Calgary, 2008), among others. Jaspal was born and raised in Burma, lived in India and Iraq, and now resides in Portland, Oregon.

Adjustment

Henry Hughes



Lower Metolius River, cane fly rod, and the Bunse Wonder Dun. Photo collage by Rick Hafele and Richard Bunse.

My buddy was gonna guide him, but his wife went into labor and he had to make some "adjustments," he said, to his fishing schedule. "Congratulations," I sang into the phone. "Sure, I'll take him." It's not every day you get to fish with a celebrity like Sylvester Nemes.

I'd read Nemes's *The Soft-Hackled Fly* and used his patterns. They were deadly impressions of some emerging mayfly and caddis species, and the coarse dubbing of possum hair trapped air bubbles, just like you'd see in nature. Baby seal fur worked even better, but my girlfriend put a stop to that. A lover of history, Nemes wrote that soft hackles represented a centuries-old method of tying and fishing that got lost in the States. *Spiders*, the Brits call them—a Yorkshire favorite that was fished throughout the isles. He was stationed in Hampshire during World War II and fell in love with everything around him—chalk streams, Sealy hooks, Hardy reels, Barbour hats, and excessive stream etiquette. And that's where he met his English wife, Hazel.

My girlfriend, Karen, did me a favor and picked Nemes up at the airport in Bend and drove him to my camp amid the pines above the Metolius River in Central Oregon. "He's a real gentleman," she said, when I leaned into the car to kiss her a big thanks. "And his friend asked me out."

"What?" I looked over at the younger guy unzipping his gear bag.

"Call me, okay?" Karen asked.

"I'll try." It was peak fishing season and hard to think about much else.

Nemes smiled warmly and shook my hand. "I admire your girlfriend's concern over South Africa," he nodded solemnly. It was 1986 and things were coming to a boil in Pretoria. "I hope they find peace," he said. "I'd like to fish there someday." A slightly built man of about 60, he had a neatly trimmed full head of graying hair and a tight mustache. He wore glasses, a maroon L.L. Bean sweater over a collared shirt, and khaki trousers. Dapper. His friend, Travis, was about my age, early thirties, laid back in acid-washed jeans, a cowboy shirt, and a baseball cap. "That was your girlfriend?" Travis asked with a pinch of embarrassment.

The Metolius is a spring creek flowing from Black Butte in the Deschutes National Forest. We suited up and jammed into my rusty Toyota pickup for a rough ride. The old logging road was washed out in places, and maples swept across the doors and windshield. Jouncing and juking our way down the canyon, we spooked a coyote off a clearing and parked above the river.

June is prime Green Drake season with regular hatches around three in the afternoon. "That's convenient," Nemes said. "I'd like to call my wife from the store before we turn in." *He's that kind of guy*, I thought to myself. Always checking in with the missus, even when he's fishing. He and his wife had recently moved from the Midwest to Bozeman, and he was going on about their views of the Gallatin Valley and his favorite rivers—the Yellowstone, Madison, and Missouri. I told him how much I admired his writing. He said he had a new book coming out, *Learning to Fly Fish in a Day*, and promised to send me an autographed copy. I chuckled and told him it might prove useful.

That lower stretch of the Metolius was fast and boiling, but the pocket water and eddies held fish. "Here," I said, giving Nemes the best spot and a handful of Bunse's Wonder Duns.

"I'm not much for foam," he said, referring to the synthetic material, his mustache twitching like a poked caterpillar. Reaching into his Filson vest, he pulled out a mahogany-inlay fly box, but seemed reluctant to add my flies.

"My friend ties them," I said. The foam was sculpted to imitate the body of a mayfly. Nemes held it up for a moment, the deer hair wing splayed out above his fingers. "They're super buoyant," I added. "And trout love 'em."

"Sounds good to me." Travis reached out and grabbed one.

"Just dead drift them. You'll see," I smiled. We heard the loud curplunch of a feasting trout. Big bugs fluttered on the surface and another voracious fish bolted up and devoured one. "Hot damn," Travis hailed each rise, tying on the foam drake. "Good luck, Syl," he waved, starting down the trail.

I showed Travis the second-best spot, a hundred feet away, giving Sylvester plenty of river.

Travis could cast fine, but he was dragging his fly across the water. "You want it to look like one of those," I said, pointing to a giant mayfly riding the current. "You know how to mend, right?" I asked him.

"Yeah," he said. "But this water's really fast."

"Go on." I drew a quick circle with my rod tip. "Pick up that line." Travis was unassuming and eager—and he flirted with my girlfriend—so I didn't mind giving him orders. He lifted and rolled a big loop back up stream and his fly relaxed. A few seconds later a huge fish crushed it. He played a gorgeously spectacled 18-inch rainbow to the bank and I netted it.

"Awesome. Thanks, man." When he smiled I could see he had a tooth missing and a scar at the corner of his mouth.

Nemes looked over and nodded.

Travis pulled a notebook and pen from his pocket. "I'm writing an article," he said. "That was a good lesson in adjustment."

The icy, roiling river raced over and around big rocks, forming short, green slicks where I could sometimes see trout. A woodpecker hammered an old tamarack, blooming honeysuckle filled the cool air, and butterflies fluttered around the lush grasses. Green drakes were popping everywhere and the fish went wild, rocketing up from the depths to gobble one bug after another. Wading down river, I caught three large trout—one hulking rainbow over 20 inches, its deep red spawning colors like hot coals against the mossy rocks. Travis cheered me and landed a couple more. Nemes was blanking.

I walked up to Travis and rolled my eyes upriver. "Nothing?"

"He doesn't see so good," Travis said. "They wouldn't let him fly in the war. And he hates fishing dries."

"I thought he hates bead heads."

"Hates those, too. Says he might as well be spin fishing. He loves soft hackles."

"Well, shit, I know that. But that's not what's working." I shook my head and scratched under my hat.

Soft-hackle methods were effective in many situations. But Nemes was dragging and skating the half-sunk foam drake in a way that didn't look right to these fish. These insects had emerged upstream, and unlike other mayflies, they unfold their wings a few inches below the surface. Maybe up at Wizard Falls his Partridge Green Drake Soft Hackle would do just fine. But down here the mayflies were on top drying their huge wings. Surely, a master fly fisherman could see that and make the adjustment.

I wasn't a guide, just somebody helping out a friend, but I walked upstream and watched Sylvester for a few minutes. He used a 9-foot, 4-weight graphite rod, made graceful casts across the river, and never deviated from his soft hackle swing. He shuffled a few feet against the strong current and shot a couple tight-looped roll casts directly under a maple snag. Impressive. But he never got the river off his back, and his fly plowed across the water in a v-wake that might've excited a tuna, but not these selectively feeding rainbows. I climbed up the bank and carefully

walked behind him, approaching out of his backcast. "Hey, boss. How's it going?"

"I'm not impressed with these foam drakes."

"Travis and I are doing okay with them. Try mending a bit more. Dead drift them, you know."

"I know how to fish," he said flatly. He snipped off the chubby fly, stuck it in the sheepskin patch on his vest, opened his mahogany fly box, and plucked out one of his sparsely tied soft hackles. I shrugged and walked back to Travis who was experiencing yet another realm of bliss, leaning back on the warm rocks, smoking a joint.

"Your mentor doesn't want to catch fish today," I said, sitting on a log.

"Oh, he does. But it's the *how* that matters." Travis offered the joint.

"Maybe later," I said. "After I get this guy safely back to camp."

Travis smiled and exhaled. "I admire his focus, his singular intensity."

"Are you kidding me?" I smirked.

"No, dude. I'm telling you. We were fishing the Deschutes during the salmon fly hatch. Holy shit. His doctor friend and me caught a bunch of big redbands. You know damn well those fish are only looking up. But Syl swung soft hackles all day. Nothing. Finally, we convinced him to cast a giant stone imitator and, wham, he hooks a terrific fish. You know what he says? 'Okay, enough of that,' and goes back to what he loves."

"Loves? I love catching fish. Looks like you do, too. What happened to 'adjustment'? Didn't you put that in your notebook?"

"Totally, man. But for Sylvester it's a romance more than anything. It takes him back to the old days, Britain, fly fishing the Test. It's all wrapped up with Hazel and their first child."

"You seem to know a lot about his family."

"They've helped me through a rough time. And Greg was my age, so that's part of it."

"Greg?"

"You don't know? Their son, Greg. He committed suicide last year."

There are moments of quiet solemnity one feels even on a roaring river. Like you suddenly got something, or missed something, or got that you missed something. I took off my sunglasses and rubbed my eyes. Travis nodded. "Yeah. He doesn't talk about it. How do you adjust to that one?"

For a moment, I wondered what kind of dad Sylvester was. Dedication to an art form can take some ego. I thought of my own father's stubbornness, how it made me angry and resentful when he wouldn't budge on something. But I knew he loved me.

"You just gotta keep going," I said after long pause. "Gotta keep fishing."

"Yup. And if a certain way feels righteous, well then, you know—."

We watched Sylvester cast and cast. The action was cooling off, and maybe a few stalled or sinking mayflies would put him into a fish. But it didn't matter.

"Tomorrow we'll go up river and swing soft hackles," I said. "I'm sure Sylvester could teach me a thing or two."

"You bet he can. And he'll give you a bunch of his flies. He's very generous."

I smiled and stood up. A single merganser flew fast and low over the river, its white-flashing wings like an old newsreel playing down the canyon.

"Hey, man," Travis said. "That's a nice girlfriend you got. Smart. She really knows what's going on in the world."

"Yeah, Karen pays attention, she cares," I said. "Haven't seen much of her in the last few weeks. Should call her tonight. When Sylvester's had enough, we'll drive up to the store and make some calls."



A past contributor to *Weber*, Henry Hughes is an Oregon Book Award-winning poet and the author of *Back Seat with Fish: A Man's Adventures in Angling and Romance*. His short stories and essays have recently appeared in *Anglers Journal*, *Flyfish Journal*, *Harvard Review*, *Seattle Star*, and *Queen's Quarterly*. "Adjustment" is a work of historical fiction based on conversations with the legendary Oregon fly angler and artist Richard Bunse.

READING THE WEST

read-ing [from ME reden, to explain, hence to read] – vt. 1 to get the meaning of; 2 to understand the nature, significance, or thinking of; 3 to interpret or understand; 4 to apply oneself to; study.

THE GREAT SALT LAKE AND THE PACIFIC FLYWAY

The Great Salt Lake Strategic Plan was submitted in January by Brian Steed, Great Salt Lake Commissioner (appointed by Utah governor Cox last May). He noted the following:

Birds rely on the lake, a critical link in the Pacific Flyway between North and South America. Every year, ten to twelve million birds from 338 species come to rest, eat, and breed during migrations of a thousand miles or more. With the decline of other lakes, the Great Salt Lake is increasingly important to these species. . .

There are at least seven species of shorebirds and waterbirds that rely very heavily on brine shrimp and their eggs or brine flies and their larvae and pupae at the lake during the fall or winter months, including Wilson's Phalarope, Red-necked Phalarope, Eared Grebe, Northern Shoveler, Green-winged Teal, Common Goldeneye, and California Gull. Even the Snowy Plover, a species of greatest conservation need in Utah (according to the Action Plan developed by Utah Division of Wildlife Resources), which frequents the open mudflat areas and shallow water interface, utilizes brine flies as a food source.

THE PACIFIC FLYWAY



Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. "Migratory Flyways of North America: Pacific Flyway." *Texas Parks and Wildlife*, 2024, https://tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/wild/birding/migration/flyways/pacific/.

Source: Steed, Brian. *The Great Salt Lake Strategic Plan*. Office of the Great Salt Lake Commissioner, 2024, Great-Salt-Lake-Strategic-Plan-1.pdf. See also: Utah Wildlife Action Plan Joint Team. *Utah Wildlife Action Plan: A plan for managing native wildlife species and their habitats to help prevent listing under the Endangered Species Act.* Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, 2015. Publication number 15-14. https://wildlife.utah.gov/pdf/WAP/Utah_WAP.pdf.

PHALAROPES

Most of the world's population of Wilson's Phalaropes use North American saline lakes as migratory staging sites. They double their fat reserves by eating brine flies and molt before migrating to South America.

The International Phalarope Working Group was formed in 2019 to coordinate research and conservation actions for phalaropes across the western hemisphere. Scientists monitored the Great Salt Lake (Utah), Mono Lake (California), Lake Abert (Oregon), Owens Lake (California), south San Francisco Bay (California), and Chaplin Lake (Saskatchewan). The scientists concluded that the Great Salt Lake hosts the vast majority of phalaropes compared to other sites.



Walter Raine (1861-1934), "Wilson's Phalarope and Nest," from *Bird-Nesting in North-West Canada*, 1892.

. . . . As saline lakes continue to be threatened by water diversion and climate change across the interior west of North America, it is increasingly important to monitor phalarope populations to understand their response to rapidly changing habitat. Phalaropes are a bell-weather indicator for the network of saline lakes, and the near-future is a crucial time in the effort to protect saline lakes.

Source: Carle, Ryan D., et al. *Coordinated phalarope surveys at western North American staging sites, 2019-2022.* Unpublished report of the International Phalarope Working Group, 2022, https://www.oikonos.org/wp-content/uploads/2022-phalarope-report_final_3.8.23.pdf.

WILSON'S PHALAROPE IS WORTH SAVING

In March, hundreds gathered at the Utah State Capitol to advocate for a petition which calls on the federal government to protect Wilson's Phalaropes by listing it on the Endangered Species list. In turn, this might add further protection for Great Salt Lake. Utah writer and naturalist Terry Tempest Williams joined scientists, physicians, artists, and environmental advocates in calling for a threatened species listing.

"Today is a threshold moment," Williams said from the steps of Utah's Capitol during a rally Thursday. "The future of Great Salt Lake is no longer confined to being a local concern, or a state concern, but a national priority with global implications."

Wilson's Phalaropes are among the Great Salt Lake's most charismatic visitors. They completely molt, regrow their feathers, and double their weight during their stopover there. Unlike most bird species, phalarope females are larger with brighter plumage. They court the males, then the males tend the eggs and raise the chicks.

"They are a progressive species," Williams joked. "The female engages in polyandry, the female equivalent of polygamy. A bird worthy of our respect, especially in Utah."

Phalaropes also have a unique feeding pattern. They spend most of the day in the water, spinning in circles and creating vortices that help them gobble up brine flies and brine shrimp.

Those key food species nearly collapsed when the Great Salt Lake hit its lowest recorded elevation in 2022. Other salty systems that phalaropes depend on aren't faring much better. Lake Abert in Oregon has dried up multiple times in the last decade. California's Mono Lake received some protection after a band of scientists and students sued the state, but in three decades, it has not managed to rise to a mandated minimum elevation.

. . . . At the Great Salt Lake, which hosts more Wilson's Phalaropes than any other U.S. saline system by far, populations have declined by 36% since the 1980s, the petition document notes. At Great Salt Lake, Mono Lake, and Lake Abert combined, populations have dropped by 42%.

. . . . Williams called the Endangered Species Act an act of love and compassion. She called the Wilson's Phalarope Utah's "canary in the coal mine."

"There is no separation between a healthy phalarope population and a healthy human population along the Wasatch Front," she said. "Both of our lives are threatened by a shrinking Great Salt Lake."

. . . An endangered or threatened listing gives the federal government authority to fine or even imprison people and water users who harm the phalaropes, even if it is unintentional.

Source: Larsen, Leia. "How a Tiny Bird Could Trigger a Federal Response on Great Salt Lake." *The Salt Lake Tribune*, 29 Mar. 2024, https://www.sltrib.com/news/environment/2024/03/29/threatened-species-listing-tiny/.

GREAT SALT LAKE – HEMISPHERIC IMPORTANCE

The Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network was organized in 1985 by folks doing aerial shorebird surveys of coastal South America and the International Shorebird Surveys being done by folks at the Manomet Bird Observatory in Massachusetts. In 1991, the network declared the Great Salt Lake a site of "hemispheric importance," the highest such designation.

Salt Lake receives the largest percentage of the world's population of migrating Eared Grebes, nearly one-third of Wilson's Phalaropes, more than half of American Avocets, and 37 percent of Black-necked Stilts. The lake's shoreline, playas and mudflats also support 21 percent of the North American breeding population of Snowy Plovers, a species identified as one of greatest conservation needs by Utah's Wildlife Action Plan.

Source: "Great Salt Lake." *Western Hemispheric Shorebird Reserve Network*, 2019, https://whsrn.org/whsrn_sites/great-salt-lake/. See also: Castellino, M., et al. *Conservation Plan for Wilson's Phalarope (Phalaropus tricolor).* Version 2.0. Manomet Inc., 2024, https://www.oikonos.org/wp-content/uploads/plan_wiph_2024_final_en.pdf.

PELICANS RETURN

Biologists with the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources have rediscovered American white pelicans nesting on two previously abandoned islands at Great Salt Lake—Hat Island and Gunnison Island.

. . . . However, due to low water levels, neither island has actually been an "island" for many years, and predators like coyotes have gained access to the islands via land bridges. Because pelicans are extremely susceptible to disturbances while nesting, eventually the birds stopped nesting at Hat Island—with the last confirmed reports of nesting there in 1943—and biologists believe they abandoned the Gunnison Island nesting colony last year due to repeated disturbances from predators.

. . . . Because monitoring surveys are still ongoing and the pelicans are continuing to arrive at the nesting colonies, the DWR doesn't yet have a final count of how many pelicans are nesting on each island. However, initial estimates are around 800 birds on Gunnison Island and around 1,300 on Hat Island. The average number of nests at Gunnison Island over the last ten years was 4,290, with 8,580 breeding adults. In 2022 and 2023, the Gunnison Island pelican colony only had about 2,900 nests, with roughly 5,800 breeding adults—the lowest number since the 1970s.

Source: "DWR confirms pelicans nesting on Hat Island for first time since 1943." *Utah Division of Wildlife Resources,* 6 May 2024, http://wildlife.utah.gov/utah-wildlife-news/1884-pelicans-nesting-on-hat-island-for-first-time-since-1943.html.

SNOWY PLOVER PROJECT

This year, the Tracy Aviary in Salt Lake City is offering a new community science project to monitor Snowy Plover nests at several sites on the Great Salt Lake South Shore. This project is a partnership between the Aviary, Audubon Rockies, and the Saline Lakes Program at the National Audubon Society. Volunteers include:

- *Nest Monitors: Full site survey for new and existing nests, nest checks near estimated hatch dates.*
- *Camera Crew: Help set up nest cameras and retrieve SD cards. Retrieve camera assembly from hatched and lost nests.*



"Snowy Plover." G. C. West, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

- *Rec Team: Recreational Use Surveys, education/outreach for south shore visitors, installing cameras to monitor the nests and determine nest fate, and doing surveys and outreach for visitors to these sites to better understand the recreational impacts these birds face.*

Source: "Snowy Plover Project." *Tracy Aviary Conservation*, 2024, https://tracyaviary.org/conservation/projects/snowy-plover-project/.

EDITORIAL MATTER

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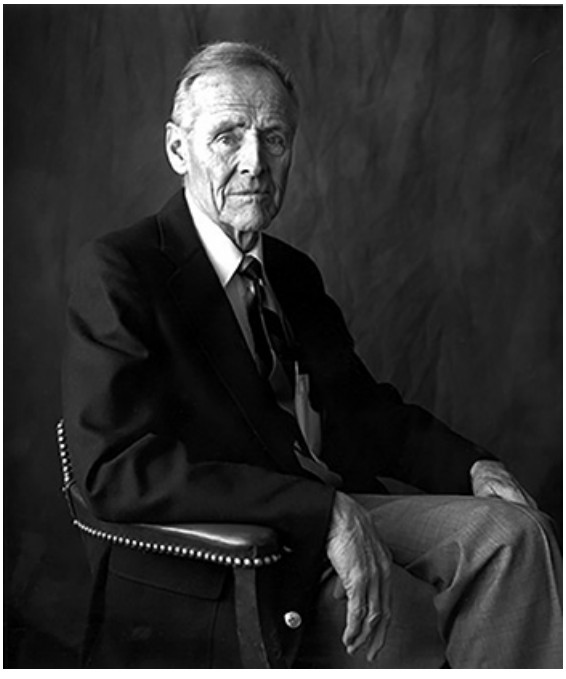
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